Effective Practices in Early Childhood Education

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BUILDING A FOUNDATION

Sue Bredekamp

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in Early Childhood Education
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Sue Bredekamp

Early Childhood Education Specialist and Independent Consultant

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Dedication

To Joe Bredekamp, for a lifetime of love, friendship, wonderful memories, and tolerance of craziness.

About the Author

Dr. Sue Bredekamp is an Early Childhood Education Specialist from Washington, DC. She serves as a consultant on curriculum, pedagogy, developmentally appropriate practice, and professional development for organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Head Start, the Council for Professional Recognition, state departments of education, and universities. Her seminal work on NAEYC's best-selling publications on *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* has had a major impact on the education of young children and teacher preparation for more than 30 years. As NAEYC's Director of Accreditation and Professional Development, she developed and administered their national accreditation system for early childhood centers and schools, and wrote standards for curriculum and assessment, and teacher education.

Dr. Bredekamp is a frequent keynote speaker and author of numerous books and articles on professional practice. She has been a visiting lecturer at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia; Monash University in Melbourne; New Zealand Tertiary College; University of Alaska; and University of Hawaii. Dr. Bredekamp holds a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction and an M.A. in Early Childhood Education from the University of Maryland. In 2014, the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University recognized Dr. Bredekamp with its Visionary Leadership Award.

Dr. Bredekamp serves as Chair-Emerita of the Board of HighScope Educational Research Foundation. She served on the National Research Council's (NRC) Committee on Early Childhood Mathematics which produced a landmark report, *Mathematics in Early Childhood: Paths toward Excellence and Equity*. She co-authored *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children* and was the content developer and on-air faculty for *HeadsUp! Reading*, a live satellite television course on early literacy disseminated to more than 10,000 early educators. For more than 45 years, Dr. Bredekamp has worked for and with young children toward the goal of improving the quality and effectiveness of early childhood education programs.

About the Contributors

Dr. Kathleen (Kate) Gallagher is the Director of Research and Evaluation at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska. Dr. Gallagher is an educational psychologist and early childhood professional, with more than 30 years of experience teaching, home visiting, and leading early childhood programs, including early intervention and inclusive preschool programs. Her research, evaluation, and teaching focus on practices, programs, and policies that support the development and well-being of young children 0–8 years and their families, particularly in the contexts of poverty, disability, and cultural diversity. Her recent work is focused on how organizations can implement policies and practices to support the well-being of early childhood professionals. Kate holds a doctorate in educational psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, a master's in education from Marquette University, and a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and special education from Cardinal Stritch University. Kate has presented two TED talks on the transformative power of early childhood education, and has published extensively on children's early language and literacy, social-emotional development, and early intervention.

Dr. Gail Joseph is an associate professor of Educational Psychology and Early Childhood and Family Studies at the University of Washington. She teaches courses, advises students, provides service, and conducts research on early learning and equity, child care quality, teacher preparation, early childhood mental health, and school readiness. She is the Founding Executive Director of Cultivate Learning at the University of Washington and was the Director of the Head Start Center for Inclusion and Co-Director of the National Center for Quality Teaching and Learning funded by the Office of Head Start. At Cultivate Learning she oversees the quality ratings system for all licensed child care and pre-K programs in the state, and is the creator of numerous professional learning resources such as *Circle Time Magazine* and the *Meaningful Makeover* series. Additionally, she is the Founding Director of the EarlyEdU Alliance. The EarlyEdU Alliance is improving the quality of programs for more than 30,000 children nationwide by making relevant, affordable bachelor's degrees accessible to the early childhood workforce. Using the latest research on optimizing child outcomes and adult learning, the technology-powered pedagogy of EarlyEdU creates degrees that make a significant contribution to individuals and the field. To serve as an innovation lab, Dr. Joseph led the development of the University of Washington's first online B.A. completion degree in early childhood education which was just ranked #1 in the nation. Dr. Joseph is the 2018 recipient of the the David R. Thorud Leadership Award at the University of Washington.

Megan Schumaker-Murphy has worked in early childhood education for 15 years as a special education teacher, early interventionist, and teacher educator. At last count, Ms. Schumaker-Murphy worked directly with more than 300 families and more than 150 teachers and early interventionists serving more than 1,000 young children across those settings. She is a doctoral candidate and instructor at DePaul University in Chicago where she lives with her family and two adorably naughty cats.

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My motivations for writing the prior editions of this book were both personal and professional. I began my career in early childhood education more than 45 years ago as an unqualified child care teacher. During the intervening years, I've often wished that I had known even a fraction of what I know now about child development, and effective teaching and learning so I could have been a better teacher. I initially wrote this text to help ensure that new teachers get off to a better start than I did and that the children do, too.

My professional motivations emanate from the current explosion in research that should be informing our practice to a much greater extent than it is today. Neuroscience and research on child development, teaching, and curriculum provide considerable guidance about effective practices and what children truly need to be physically and mentally healthy and successful in school and life. In addition, I continue to feel the responsibility to clarify and explain what *developmentally appropriate practice* really means—that it is not ages and stages but rather a complex decision-making process on the part of teachers that is embedded in social and cultural contexts.

As I wrote this fourth edition, I reflected a great deal on my entire career. I had the privilege of spending time and videotaping at the Center for Young Children (CYC) at the University of Maryland, my alma mater. I'm proud of the fact that the CYC is NAEYC-accredited because I developed and directed the accreditation system. When I visit the program and many others like it in our country, I see what we early childhood professionals continue to envision for every child—a caring community of enthusiastic learners, effective teaching, engaging and challenging curriculum, and developmentally appropriate practice implemented as it is intended. My mentor, Dr. Carol Seefeldt was one of the visionaries whose work influenced the design and curriculum at the CYC. I feel her presence there and in my work every day.

Many parents, policy makers, economists, business leaders, and researchers now consider early education essential for long-term success in life. Our profession has a deep responsibility to meet these lofty expectations. But the power of early education depends on the quality of teacher-child interactions and the effectiveness of instructional practices. To achieve their potential, children need and deserve highly competent, well-educated, well-compensated teachers. But most of all, we have a responsibility to ensure that young children have safe, secure, and joyful childhoods. Only then can we fulfill the promise that lies within every child.

New to This Edition

- A new cross-cutting theme of the entire book is the importance of developing children's executive function, self-regulation, and positive approaches to learning. Every chapter and many established features, such as *Becoming an Intentional Teacher and Promoting Play*, present examples of effective curriculum and teaching to promote these goals for children.
- New *What Works* features in 10 chapters discuss executive function, self-regulation, approaches to learning, or brain development.
- The revised Chapter 13 is a STEM chapter with discussion and examples of engineering and increased emphasis on science standards and teaching practices in addition to mathematics and technology.
- Chapter 1 is updated with discussion of new policies, changing demographics, and new research on child development and effective early education. The chapter addresses both trends in the field and challenging issues such as adverse childhood experiences, stress in children's and families' lives, the opioid crisis, threats to children's play, bullying, and social media.
- Chapter 3 is updated with a discussion of new research and ongoing issues such as the importance of situating decisions in cultural context, scripted curriculum, and academic rigor and developmentally appropriate practice. The reorganized chapter includes learning materials with environments.
- Updated research and new strategies for dealing with toxic stress and challenging behavior appear in Chapter 8 and Chapter 14.
- The updated Chapter 2 includes the history of Reggio Emilia and discusses Loris Malaguzzi as a major historical figure.
- New *Promoting Play* features in six chapters emphasize protecting children's right to play, especially in kindergarten.
- Chapter 1 and Chapter 16 provide a discussion of NAEYC's *Power to the Profession*.
- Updated culture and language lenses are provided on culturally responsive curriculum, teaching, and learning, as well as discussions on professional ethics in challenging times.
- New examples of developmentally appropriate digital media for children, teachers, and families appear throughout the text.
- New artifacts of children's work appear throughout.

Book Organization Continues to Reflect *Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice*

This book is designed to teach the concept of *developmentally appropriate practice* for students, because an understanding of its principles is the foundation on which to build early childhood programs and schools for children from birth through age 8. Chapters are organized according to NAEYC's guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice, which I have coauthored for more than 30 years.

Part 1, "Foundations of Early Childhood Education," describes the current profession and the issues and trends affecting it today (Chapter 1), the rich history from which developmentally appropriate practices evolved (Chapter 2), and an overview of its principles and guidelines, which are described in depth in later chapters (Chapter 3).

Part 2, "Dimensions of Developmentally Appropriate Practice," includes chapters describing the key factors teachers must consider as they make professional decisions. Chapter 4 presents an overview of current knowledge about how all children develop and learn. Chapter 5 addresses the unique, individual differences among children, including children with diverse abilities. Chapter 6 discusses the critical role of social, cultural, and linguistic contexts on all children's development and learning and how teachers must embrace a diverse society to help every child succeed in school and life. Though addressed in different chapters, these three dimensions are integrally connected.

Part 3, "Intentional Teaching: How to Teach," describes the role of the teacher in implementing developmentally appropriate practices. Each of the interconnected aspects of the teacher's role is addressed in separate chapters: building effective partnerships with families (Chapter 7), creating a caring community of learners and guiding young children (Chapter 8); teaching to enhance learning and development (Chapter 9); planning effective curriculum (Chapter 10); and assessing children's learning and development (Chapter 11).
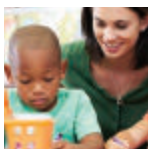
Part 4, "Implementing an Effective Curriculum: What to Teach," describes both *how* and *what to teach* children from birth through age 8 in language, literacy, the arts, STEM, social-emotional development, social studies, physical development, and health. Each chapter demonstrates how the continuum of children's development influences decisions about curriculum content and intentional, effective teaching strategies for children of different ages.

Early childhood educators join this profession and stay in it because they believe their work can make a difference in the lives of children and their families. But to make a lasting difference, our practices must be effective—they must contribute to children's learning and development. This book reflects this core goal by building on the basic framework of developmentally appropriate practice while going beyond to emphasize intentional teaching, challenging and interesting curriculum, and evidence-based, effective practices for a new generation of early childhood educators. Each of these key themes is discussed on the following pages.

Intentional Teaching of Young Children

This text builds on the framework of developmentally appropriate practice emphasizing that effective teachers are intentional, thoughtful, and purposeful in everything they do.

Intentional teachers know not only what to do with children but also why they are doing it and can explain the rationale for the decisions they make to other teachers, administrators, and families. To help students understand this concept, **Becoming an Intentional Teacher** features reveal what teachers are thinking in classroom situations, *how* and *why* they select the strategies they do, and challenge students to reflect further on these scenarios.

Becoming an Intentional Teacher

Expanding Children's Experience

Here's What Happened The preschool I work in is located in a rural community. Our curriculum is based on the Bank Street approach. At the beginning of the year, the children were very excited about riding the bus to school for the first time. They had so many questions that I decided we should pursue the topic. The children interviewed the bus driver, who is one of the children's mother. They drew pictures of the bus, sang "Wheels on the Bus," and played school bus. Based on the children's keen interest, I decided to introduce the idea of drawing maps of their bus routes. Some children have lengthy rides from the country while others live closer by.

Here's What I Was Thinking The basic premise of the Bank Street approach is to begin the curriculum study in the "here and now" and expand children's experiences and learning from there. The school bus study began easily enough with the initial enthusiasm of riding to school. But I anticipated that these rides would soon become boring. Distracted preschoolers might create unsafe conditions on the bus. I decided to enhance the learning experience with the challenge of mapping their routes. This required keen observation and focused attention on the children's part. It also introduced them to geography and mapping skills.

Reflection Many schools today are given a curriculum that prescribes certain topics of study such as *seasons* or *animals* that may not reflect the lives and experiences of the children. If you were a teacher in such a situation, how could you apply the principles of the Bank Street approach to make the experiences more meaningful?

Current Research on Effective Practices

In an era of expanding research on child development and learning, Common Core State Standards, Early Learning standards, accountability, and rapid change in the field, the text makes research understandable and meaningful for students and illustrates the connections between child development, curriculum content, assessment, and intentional teaching.

What Works features present research-based practices in action, including descriptions of demonstrated effective practices such as strategies to develop executive function and using relaxation techniques to prevent challenging behaviors.

What Works

High Quality Programs Promote Executive Function

The most frequently used observational measure of preschool quality is the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). This tool assesses three aspects of program quality: the emotional climate, classroom organization, and instructional climate. Research shows that children in classrooms with higher scores on each dimension have positive outcomes in academic subjects such as literacy and mathematics, but notably in executive function, which facilitates learning across all areas. Teachers' positive, responsive relationships with children predict working memory, impulse control, and mental flexibility—that is, their executive functioning. The more emotional support teachers provide children, the better they are able to focus their attention, control their behavior, and engage in learning.

In addition, well-organized classroom routines promote executive functioning and positive approaches to learning. In such classrooms, children are more eager to learn, behave appropriately, pay attention, and persist at tasks. CLASS scores on instructional climate measure how well teachers support children's higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and language development. These teaching strategies have been found to help children behave more positively because they control negative impulses and use language and reasoning to solve problems rather than quarreling or fighting. Research in early elementary classrooms has similar results. For example, scores on classroom organization in kindergarten positively affect children's self-control, work habits, and engagement in learning.

Most standards for both program quality and child outcomes—NAEYC, Head Start, and state early learning guidelines—address these key elements of quality for a reason. They work in children's best interests.

Sources: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2017. *Executive function and self-regulation.* Retrieved November 5, 2017, from https://developingchild.harvard.edu; Teachstone, 2017. *Effective teacher-child interactions and child outcomes: A summary of research on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Pre-K–3rd Grade.* Charlottesville, VA.

Language Lens

Preparing to Teach Dual Language Learners

Eight different languages are spoken among the children in Natalia's kindergarten class. Natalia and two of the children are the only ones whose first language is English. Natalia works hard to create a caring community where all the children comfortably experiment with learning English while also developing their home languages. She strives to communicate with the parents by using translators. Last year, Natalia's class also included eight languages—but some of them were different from those spoken this year.

The number of languages represented in Natalia's classroom may seem extreme, but linguistic and cultural diversity is now the norm in our nation's schools. In the next 20 years, the biggest single child-related demographic change is predicted to be an increase in dual language learners. Most of these children speak Spanish as a home language, but many others speak Asian, Middle Eastern, and African languages. California, Florida, and Texas continue to have the largest percentages of Spanish-speaking families, but the Hispanic population grew in many regions of the country. In fact, Georgia's Hispanic population more than doubled in two decades.

In the past, most teachers could safely assume that they would never encounter a language other than English in their entire careers. Today, Natalia's experience, or something like it, is not so very rare. New teachers may find it beneficial to learn another language themselves, but learning eight languages is not a reasonable expectation. What can new and experienced teachers such as Natalia do? They can start by remembering some important principles about dual language learners:

- People who speak the same language, whether Spanish or another language, are not all alike—they come from a variety of countries and cultures.
- Learning two or more languages does not confuse children as some people think, but rather enhances brain development.
- Dual language learners can better focus attention because alternating languages requires intense concentration.
- Supporting home language development is essential because children can learn many skills in their home language and apply those skills as they learn English.
- Teachers need to intentionally teach English vocabulary and provide lots of opportunities for children to play together and practice their developing language skills.
- Communicating with families is essential regardless of the effort required.

The children of today must be prepared to function as citizens of a global society. Speaking two or more languages is an important skill for the 21st century. When children enter early childhood programs speaking a language other than English, the foundation is already there on which to build.

Sources: Flores, 2017. *How the U.S. Hispanic population is changing.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center; National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017. *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; Bialystok & Werker, 2016. The systematic effects of bilingualism on children's development. *Developmental Science*, 20(1).

Lens features present insights on culture, language, and including all children. These features discuss practice through diverse *lenses*, expanding the sources of information teachers use to make decisions and helping them look at questions or problems from broader perspectives. Widening the lens with which teachers view their practice is a strategy to move beyond the persistent educational tendency to dichotomize difficult or controversial issues into "either/or" choices, and move toward "both/and" thinking.

Connections between Curriculum and Child Development

Unlike many early childhood texts that focus on child development only, this text shows how child development and curriculum content knowledge are connected.

In the **Developmental Continuum** feature, the text provides an overview of the continuum of learning in the areas of language, literacy, mathematics, and cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development and describes how child development is linked to curriculum planning for children from birth through age 8.

Developmental Continuum
Literacy in Kindergarten and Primary Grades

Age/Grade Level	Widely Held Expectations
Most kindergartners	• Enjoy being read to, retell stories and what they've learned from information books • Experiment with and use early literacy skills • Respond to open-ended questions that require inferences about a story and connections to events beyond the story • Begin to track print when listening to book • Use language to describe and explain what is read • Recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters automatically and make most letter-sound matches • Demonstrate phonemic awareness, blend and segment syllables in words, and blend and segment onsets and rimes • Write letters and high-frequency words • Recognize some words by sight, including common ones (a, the, me, you, is) • Use phonemic awareness and letter knowledge to write with invented spelling • May read emergent literacy texts conventionally by the end of kindergarten
Most first-graders	• Make the transition from experimental to "real" or conventional reading • Read aloud accurately and with reasonable fluency texts appropriate for beginning grade 1 • Use letter-sound associations, word parts, and context to decode and identify new words • Use strategies when comprehension breaks down (picture and context clues, rereading, predicting, questioning) • Use reading and writing for various purposes on their own initiative ("I want to write a Valentine for my mom.") • Sound out and represent all substantial sounds when spelling a word • Identify an increasing number of words by sight, including common irregularly spelled words such as said, where, and two • Write various kinds of texts about meaningful topics (journals, stories) • Use some punctuations and capitalization correctly
Most second-graders	• Read more fluently and write various text forms using simple and more complex sentences • Use word identification strategies to figure out unknown words • Use strategies to aid comprehension more efficiently, such as rereading, questioning, and using context • Read with greater fluency • Identify an increasing number of words by sight • Write about a range of topics for different audiences • Use common letter patterns to spell words • Punctuate basic sentences correctly and proofread their writing • Read daily and use reading to get information on topics of study
Most third-graders	• Read fluently and enjoy reading • Extend and refine their reading and writing for various purposes and audiences • Use a range of strategies to make meaning from unfamiliar text • Use word identification strategies appropriately and automatically when encountering unknown words • Recognize and discuss elements of different text structures • Write expressively in various forms such as stories, reports, and letters • Use a rich vocabulary and complex sentence structure • Revise and edit their writing during and after composing • Spell words correctly in final drafts

Sources: Based on O. McAfee, D. Leong, & E. Bodrova, 2016. *Assessing and guiding young children's development and learning* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson; and C. E. Snow, M. S. Burns, & P. Griffin (Eds.), 1998. *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.* Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

- Chapters 12 to 15 help early childhood teachers understand right from the start that there is content in the curriculum for young children. They describe the goals for young children's learning and development that predict success in school and life. Each of these chapters includes examples of effective strategies such as teaching children of diverse abilities in inclusive classrooms or ways to promote dual language learning.

The **Promoting Play feature** presents current research on the important role of play in development and effective strategies to help children learn through play or protect their right to play. These features address play across the full age range, from birth through age 8. Discussions of play are also integrated in each chapter throughout this book as an effective means to support all domains of development and promote learning in all curriculum areas. Today, many people are concerned about how the standards movement is negatively impacting play. We often hear statements such as "We can't let children play because we have to teach literacy," or "We don't have time for outdoor play in primary grades because we have to get children ready for standardized tests." Play should not be treated as a separate part of an early childhood program or day that can be cut if someone deems it unimportant. Therefore, you will find a discussion of play in every chapter of this book.

Promoting Play

Protecting Play in Kindergarten

Early educators often say, "Play is a child's work." But play and work are really two different things, as most kindergartners will tell you. With increased emphasis on academic standards and testing, play has disappeared from kindergarten, which has become much more like first grade. Kindergartners are often in for a shock. Rather than having child-choice or center time, they are expected to pay attention during long periods of whole group literacy and math instruction, then sit at desks doing worksheets. One mother reported that her son did 70 worksheets during the first 15 days of school. Little time is devoted to the arts that children love. Even in full-day programs, there is less physical activity or outdoor play. After school, play is also threatened because 5- and 6-year-olds now have homework.

Teachers feel pressured to teach formal reading and prepare children for standardized tests. Parents lament that their 5-year-olds who loved preschool have tummy aches or are reluctant to go school. Many hold their children back a year so they will be older and better able to handle the demands.

So what's to be done? Resist the debate about play vs. academics. It is not an *either/or* choice. There is abundant research about developmentally appropriate, meaningful ways to promote literacy, language, and mathematics learning without lengthy didactic instruction or worksheets. At the same time, play opportunities in kindergarten should not be a free-for-all. Playful social interaction is necessary for language and social-emotional development. Neuroscience demonstrates the importance of self-regulation and executive function. These capacities are developed during teacher-supported play and may be impaired in stressful kindergartens. Children's approaches to learning—their enthusiasm, motivation, engagement, curiosity, and creativity—are strengthened when various kinds of learning-full play are both protected and provided.

Sources: Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016. Is kindergarten the new first grade? *AERA Open, 1*(4), 1–31; Abbott, 2017. Keeping the "kinder" in kindergarten: Developmentally appropriate practice in New York. *Preschool Matters Today.* Retrieved from NIEER.org; Brown, 2017. *All work and no play needs to change for kindergarteners. Here's why.* World Economic Forum blog.

- The emphasis on effective curriculum reflects current trends such as the goal of aligning prekindergarten and primary education, NAEYC accreditation and CAPE professional preparation standards, and enhanced expectations for teacher qualifications as described in the 2015 report, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth through Age 9: A Unifying Foundation* by the Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council, the 2018 report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), *Transforming the financing of early care and education*, and NAEYC's Power to the Profession initiative.

My life and work continue to be inspired by Patty Smith Hill, founder of NANE, whose vision for early childhood education laid the foundation for NAEYC's commitment to developmentally appropriate practice.

I would also like to thank the many reviewers who contributed to the development of this book. They are:

- **Tracey Bennett Carter, Vance-Granville Community College**
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Continuity and Change in Early Childhood Education

Learning Outcomes

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1.1 Describe early childhood education.

1.2 Explain the reasons for becoming an early childhood educator.

1.3 Explain high-quality early childhood education and how it is measured.

1.4 Report research about the positive effects of early childhood education.

1.5 Analyze the current trends and issues affecting children, families, and teachers.

Case Study

At Cresthaven Primary School, teachers, children, and family members of all generations are viewing children's work and sharing memories during the year-end celebration. Cresthaven is located in a community that has adopted a birth-to-age 8 approach to education and child development. The public school serves children from pre-kindergarten to grade 3, and works in partnership with the local Head Start and Early Head Start programs. A nearby child-care program, the Reed Center, serves infants to 5-year-olds and provides before- and after-school care. The school principal, program directors, and teachers are committed to ensuring seamless transitions and aligned learning experiences for children. All are invited to the celebration.

Children who will attend Cresthaven next year get to see the building and meet teachers. The preschoolers are in awe of the "big school." Parents see children's work displayed in the hallway. "Look, Mommy! Here's my painting of the yellow fish," cries 4-year-old Amber as she tugs on her mother's hand. "See where I wrote my name. And here's Brenda's picture. She's my new best friend." Amber's mother smiles and tries to read what her daughter wrote: "I lk fsh." The teacher, Ms. Engels, comes up and says, "Amber knows a lot about writing and letters. She can write her name, and she is starting to write the consonants she hears in words." Mario, who attends Head Start, reminds his mother that he can write too.

For several years, Cresthaven School has been involved with its neighbors and the other early childhood education programs in a community garden project. In each class, the teachers connect the larger curriculum—especially science and social studies goals—to aspects of the garden project. Six-year-old Sergio and his grandmother walk down the hall to find the list of all the meals the kindergartners prepared with the vegetables they harvested. A Spanish-speaking teacher, Mrs. Zapeda, greets Sergio's grandmother and makes her welcome. Sergio explains, "And tonight, we get to eat strawberries!" Meanwhile, first-grader Mathias quietly explains to some parents, "Me and my friends made this graph. It shows the vegetables the kids liked most." Third-grader Carola describes her class project to her father. "You'll like this, Dad. For social studies, we're figuring out where food comes from and why it costs so much."

The second-grade teacher, Ms. George, gets everyone's attention. "Our class is going to present their video of the garden project in 15 minutes." Seven-year-old Kelsey takes 75-year-old Mrs. Carrero by the hand and invites her to see the show. The children share most of the food raised in the garden with elderly neighbors such as Mrs. Carrero. "I'll read you the story I wrote about the garden too," says Kelsey.

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Four-year-old Cooper, who has autism, has been in Ms. Watson's Head Start class for two years. His mother comes up and quietly whispers to Ms. Watson, "I wanted you to know that Cooper got invited to Martie's birthday party. I never thought that would happen, but he's made more progress than I ever imagined."

As she's leaving, Nicky's mom stops to thank Isela and Evan, who are finishing their first year of teaching 2-year-olds at Reed Center. They remember their struggles with Nicky's tantrums as he hugs his mom's leg and playfully peeks around at Evan. She says, "I know he is growing up and has to move to preschool, but we are really going to miss you two." ■

Listening to these children, parents, and teachers, some new to the field and others with many years of experience, reveals the most exciting—as well as challenging—dimensions of early childhood education. Teaching young children is hard work. It takes energy, physical stamina, patience, a sense of humor, and a wide range of knowledge and skill. But early childhood professionals soon discover the rewards of their efforts. Nothing is quite as exciting as making a baby smile and giggle, seeing a toddler's grin as he climbs the stairs on his own, or observing a preschooler's serious look as she comes to the rescue as a pretend firefighter. And what can compete with a first grader's feeling of utter accomplishment that accompanies learning to read?

Early childhood education is a rewarding profession for many reasons. We describe the diverse field of early childhood education and discuss its rewards in this chapter. We also discuss why high-quality early education is now widely recognized as critically important for our country. We examine current trends and issues in the field and larger society that present both opportunities and challenges. We also describe how, in a period of rapid change, the early childhood profession continues to be shaped by its enduring values. Above all, early childhood educators enter and stay in the field primarily for one reason—they know that their work makes a difference in the lives of children and families. ■

🏠 What Is Early Childhood Education?

early childhood education Education and child care services provided for children from birth through age 8.

professionals Members of an occupational group that make decisions based on a specialized body of knowledge, continue to learn throughout their careers, and are committed to meeting the needs of others.

Early childhood education is a highly diverse field that serves children from birth through age 8. During these years, children participate in many different kinds of care and education settings. Regardless of where they work or what their specific job titles are, however, early childhood teachers are **professionals**. This means that they make decisions based on a specialized body of knowledge, continue to learn throughout their careers, and are committed to providing the best care and education possible for every child. The opportunity to make a difference in this exciting field has never been greater.

How Early Childhood Education Is Valued

In recent years, early childhood education has achieved increasing public recognition, respect, and funding. In a time of political polarization, a national bipartisan poll found that 79% of voters—equal proportions of Republicans and Democrats—believe that the federal government should improve the quality of child care and preschool, and make it more affordable for parents (First Five Years Fund, 2017). The same poll found that 85% of voters oppose cutting funding to programs, 74% believe that early education prepares children for school, and 69% agree that it leads to a more skilled workforce. Regardless of party affiliation, voters agree that the federal government should provide funds to states to improve access to high-quality programs for both low- and middle-income families, increase tax credits to help all families pay for child care, and increase Head Start funding.

Forty-three states—as diverse as Oklahoma, Georgia, New Mexico, New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Florida—provide funding for prekindergarten programs (Barnett et al., 2017). Continued funding even in challenging economic times reflects growing public recognition of the benefits of early education, especially for children at

risk of later school failure, but also for middle-class children. A great many policymakers, parents, and researchers now consider early childhood programs essential for fostering school readiness and long-term success in life (Garcia, Heckman, Leaf, & Prados, 2016; Pre-kindergarten Task Force, 2017).

A national, bipartisan nonprofit organization, Council for a Strong America, is a coalition that includes law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, coaches, and athletes who strongly support the value of high-quality early education, especially for children from low-income families. They believe it prevents crime, builds stronger families, and is necessary to prepare a qualified workforce for the military and economic prosperity (Council for a Strong America, 2017). A prestigious group of America's police officers and prosecutors call themselves "the guy you pay later" because America's failure to pay for quality services for children increases the costs of the criminal justice system (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2017).

Nobel Prize–winning economist James Heckman is a powerful advocate for early education. His research demonstrates that investing in early education is a cost-effective strategy that will improve education and health outcomes, strengthen the economy, help solve America's social problems, and produce a more capable, productive workforce (Garcia et al., 2016).

Several factors have contributed to the rise in status of early childhood education. These include an impressive body of research on the positive effects of early childhood programs and concerns about the persistent achievement gap in our schools. Next, we examine the overall landscape of the field, including the types of settings where children are served.

The Landscape of Early Childhood Education

Although early childhood terminology is not uniform across diverse settings, throughout this text we will use vocabulary that is consistent with that used by the **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** and that we believe best represents the present and future of the field. NAEYC, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is the world's largest professional organization of early childhood educators. Founded in 1926, NAEYC's mission is to promote high-quality early learning for children birth through age 8 by connecting practice, policy, and research; to advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession; and to support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.

One way the association achieves its mission is by establishing standards for teacher preparation at the associate, baccalaureate, and graduate-degree levels (NAEYC, 2011). NAEYC's standards have considerable influence in the field; it is likely that the course you are now taking is designed to meet the association's professional preparation standards. NAEYC (2017) also administers an accreditation system for high-quality early learning programs for children and provides resources such as publications and conferences to support teachers' continuing professional development.

Given NAEYC's definition of the field—birth through age 8—early childhood teachers work with various groups:

1. *Infants and toddlers:* birth to 36 months
2. *Preschoolers:* 3- and 4-year-olds
3. *Kindergartners:* 5- and 6-year-olds
4. *Primary grades 1, 2, and 3:* 6-, 7-, and 8-year-olds.

Because early childhood is defined so broadly, the field encompasses child-care centers and homes, preschools, kindergartens, and primary grade schools. Figure 1.1 provides an illustration of the various settings where young children are educated and receive care. Young children are always learning, and they always need loving care. Therefore, it is important *not* to distinguish child care from early education, but rather to ensure that all children have access to programs that are both caring and educational, regardless of the length of day or who provides the service.

Child Care   The term *child care* typically refers to care and education provided for young children during the hours that their parents are employed. To accommodate work schedules, child care is usually available for extended hours, such as from 7:00 a.m. to

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) The world's largest organization of early childhood educators whose mission is to promote high-quality early learning for children ages birth through 8 by connecting practice, policy, and research; to advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession; and to support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.

Schools

Kindergarten to 3rd grade
Public schools
Charter schools
Private schools

Head Start/Early Head Start

3-, 4-, & 5-year-olds in centers
    & home-based programs
Infants/toddlers & families
Income-eligible families

Types of Early Childhood Settings

Preschools

3-, 4-, & 5-year-olds
Private or public
Prekindergartens
Parent cooperatives
Laboratory schools

Family Child Care Homes

Birth through school-age
Caregiver's home
Individuals and groups

Child Care Centers

Infants/toddlers
Ages 3, 4, & 5
Before- and after-school for
    school-aged children
For-profit or nonprofit

FIGURE 1.1 Types of Early Childhood Settings Early childhood education is a diverse field because young children's care and education occurs in a variety of settings, as depicted here.

Child care center Group program that provides care and education for young children during the hours that their parents are employed.

family child care home Child care in which caregivers provide care in their own homes for a small group of children, often multi-age groups.

preschool Educational programs serving 3- and 4-year-olds delivered under various sponsorships.

parent cooperative Preschool program owned, operated, and partially staffed by parents.

laboratory school School operated by colleges and universities that usually serves children of students and faculty and also acts as a model of excellent education for student teachers.

6:00 p.m. In some settings, such as hospital-affiliated child care centers, care is offered for longer hours to accommodate evening, weekend, or even night-shift employment.

Child care is typically provided in two types of group programs: **child care centers** and **family child care homes**. In either setting, children's care may be privately funded by parent tuition or publicly subsidized for low-income families. Child care centers usually enroll children from infancy through preschool-age children, and many also offer before- and after-school care for primary grade children. In family child care homes, caregivers provide care in their own homes for a small group of children, often of varying ages. Family child care is the setting of choice for many parents of infants and toddlers because of its home-like atmosphere.

Preschool   As their name implies, **preschool** programs serve 3- and 4-year-olds prior to their entrance into kindergarten. As of 2016, 42% of 3-year-olds and 70% of 4-year-olds attended preschool (Friedman-Krauss, Barnett, & Nores, 2016). These programs may be operated by community organizations or by churches, temples, or other faith-based organizations and also by **parent cooperatives**, which are run and partially staffed by groups of parents. Preschools often operate half-day, although extended hours—the school day— are becoming more common. Some colleges and universities operate **laboratory schools**, which usually serve children of students and faculty and also act as models for student teachers.

Preschools are called by various names, including *nursery schools* and *prekindergartens*. To further complicate matters, child-care centers are also called preschools. Preschool programs are both privately and publicly funded. Those that are funded by parent tuition primarily serve middle- or upper-income families. Two particular types of preschools are designed primarily for children from low-income families: public prekindergarten and Head Start.

Public Prekindergarten The term **prekindergarten (pre-K)** usually refers to preschools that are funded by state and local departments of education. Public prekindergarten is in the news media regularly and is the fastest-growing sector of the field, with enrollment increasing enormously in recent years. In 1980, 96,000 preschoolers were served in public elementary schools; in 2017, enrollment had increased to 1.5 million children across 43 states (Barnett et al., 2017).

The primary purpose of prekindergarten is to improve **school readiness**; that is, to prepare children for kindergarten. Although some state officials narrowly define readiness as literacy and math skills, the early childhood profession uses a broad definition of school readiness that describes the whole child (Head Start, 2017):

- Approaches to learning
- Social and emotional development
- Language and literacy
- Cognition, including mathematics and scientific reasoning
- Physical development and health

This multi-faceted definition of readiness was first promulgated by the National Education Goals Panel (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995). At that time, approaches to learning was a loosely defined construct. However, current research demonstrates that *how* children learn, their **approaches to learning**—enthusiasm, interest, motivation, curiosity, initiative, and engagement—affect all other areas and strongly predict their success in school and later life.

The majority of public prekindergarten programs are designed for children from low-income families or those who are considered at risk for school failure due to conditions such as low levels of maternal education or speaking a language other than English in the home. However, a growing number of people are calling for funding of **universal voluntary prekindergarten**, the goal of which is to make these programs available to families of all income levels that choose to use them. Publicly funded prekindergarten has contributed to the field's growth; today, the number of 4-year-olds in state prekindergarten programs exceeds the number enrolled in Head Start (Barnett et al., 2017).

Head Start **Head Start** is a federally funded, national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children ages 3, 4, and 5.

Early childhood education includes child care centers, preschools, prekindergartens, family child care homes, and schools. But every high-quality program provides both loving care and education for young children and support for their families.

prekindergarten (pre-K) Educational program serving 3- and 4-year-olds, usually in public schools.

school readiness Children's competencies related to success in kindergarten, including physical development, health, and well-being; social-emotional development and learning; cognitive development and general knowledge such as mathematics and science; positive approaches to learning such as curiosity and motivation; and language development and early literacy skills.

approaches to learning Behaviors or typical patterns that children use in learning situations that include both how they feel about learning—their level of enthusiasm, interest, and motivation—and how they engage with learning—their curiosity, initiative, and creativity.

universal voluntary prekindergarten Publicly funded preschool, usually for 4-year-olds but sometimes 3-year-olds; available to any family that chooses to use it.

Head Start Federally funded national program that promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children ages 3, 4, and 5 through providing educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to the nation's poorest children and families.

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Early Head Start Federally funded program serving low-income pregnant mothers, infants, and toddlers that promotes healthy family functioning.

early childhood special education Services for children with disabilities or special needs who meet eligibility guidelines that are determined on a state-by-state basis according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Federal law governing provision of services for children with disabilities and special needs.

early intervention Services for infants and toddlers who are at risk of developmental delay and their families.

inclusion Participation and services for children with disabilities and special needs in programs and settings where their typically developing peers are served.

kindergarten Typically considered the first year of formal schooling; serves 5- and 6-year-olds.

primary grades First, second, and third grade; sometimes includes kindergarten.

Head Start provides educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to the nation's poorest children and to families whose incomes fall below the official poverty level (Head Start, 2017). Head Start's goal is to improve school readiness by supporting all areas of children's development and learning needed for later success. In addition to these comprehensive services, parent involvement is a special focus of the program. Parents volunteer in the classroom and serve in governance roles with the goal of empowering families to move out of poverty. In fact, 23% of Head Start staff members are parents of current or former Head Start children (Head Start, 2017). Children with disabilities make up about 12% of Head Start's enrollment (Head Start, 2017).

Head Start programs are quite diverse. Most Head Start children are served in classroom-based preschool programs, although in rural or remote areas, a home-based option is available. One of the smallest serves 30 children on the Havasupai reservation in the Grand Canyon, accessible only by helicopter or donkey, while the largest programs serve over 22,000 children in 400 centers across Los Angeles (Head Start, 2008).

The families represent all the racial and cultural groups in the United States (Head Start, 2017). About 44% of the children are White, 37% are Latino, and 29% are African American. A sizable number of families—10%—report that their children are biracial or multiracial. In addition, the program has a special focus on serving American Indians, Alaska Natives, and migrant and seasonal workers. About 30% of the children speak a language other than English at home. Of these, 85% speak Spanish, but 140 other languages are spoken.

In response to brain research and concerns that age 4 or even age 3 is too late for services to be effective, the government launched **Early Head Start** in 1995. Early Head Start serves low-income pregnant mothers, infants, and toddlers, and promotes healthy family functioning in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (Head Start, 2017). Research on Early Head Start (Vogel, Yange, Moiduddun, Kisker, & Carlson, 2010) demonstrates that it achieves its promise of lasting positive effects on children and families.

Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education   **Early childhood special education** serves children with disabilities or special needs who meet eligibility guidelines that are determined on a state-by-state basis, according to the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**. In addition to serving children with identified disabilities, some states provide **early intervention** services for infants and toddlers who are at risk of developmental delay and their families.

Federal legislation enacted during the past three decades has fundamentally changed the way early childhood services are organized and delivered to children with disabilities and special needs (Division for Early Childhood & NAEYC, 2009). These children, including children who are at risk for disabilities or who exhibit challenging behaviors, are far more likely to participate in a typical early childhood program than in the past. This trend, called **inclusion**, is defined and described in the feature *Including All Children: What Does Inclusion Mean?*

Kindergarten and Primary Grades   Most 5- through 8-year-old children attend public schools, although many attend secular or faith-based private schools funded by parent tuition. Typically considered the first year of formal schooling, **kindergarten** has traditionally been designed for 5-year-olds. States establish varying dates for the legal entrance age to kindergarten, but 44 states require that children who are entering kindergarten must have their fifth birthday before the end of September or earlier (Workman, 2014). This means that today's kindergartens enroll many 6-year-olds. By contrast, in 1975, only nine states required that children be age 5 by September (Colasanti, 2007)

First, second, and third grades are the **primary grade** years of school (6 through 8 years of age). These grades are especially important because

Including All Children
What Does Inclusion Mean?

Mark and Monique Berger operate a family child care program in their home. Their state permits group homes such as theirs to serve up to 12 children. The licensing agent informs them that they are required by law to serve children with disabilities and special needs. One mother, whose son Barry has cerebral palsy, has inquired about enrolling him in the Bergers' program. Mark wants to be sure that they abide by the law, but Monique is a little unsure about what it means to include a child with a disability in her child care home.

Although full inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs has been the law of the land for many years, Mark and Monique are not alone in being unsure about what it means. To guide them and other professionals like them, the DEC & NAEYC (2009) jointly developed a statement defining early childhood inclusion:

> Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential.

The statement describes the key features of high-quality inclusive programs, which are (1) access, (2) participation, and (3) supports.

A defining feature of high-quality early childhood inclusion is *access*, which means providing children with a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, and environments. In inclusive settings, adults also promote belonging, *participation*, and engagement of children with disabilities and their typically developing peers in a variety of intentional or purposeful ways.

Finally, an infrastructure of inclusion *supports* must be in place to ensure a foundation for the efforts of individuals and organizations that provide inclusive services to children and families. For example, Mark and Monique will need access to ongoing professional development and support to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to effectively meet Barry's needs and contribute to his development. In addition, specialized services and therapies for Barry will need to be coordinated and integrated with the other activities they offer the children.

Source: Division for Early Childhood and National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009 *Early childhood inclusion: A joint position statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).* Retrieved November 4, 2017, from www.dec-sped.org/position-statements

during these grades, children are expected to acquire the fundamental abilities of reading and mathematics, along with the foundations of other academic disciplines including social studies, science, the creative arts, technology, and physical education. In first to third grade, children are learning to read; after that, they are expected to read to learn (Hernandez, (2011)). Therefore, if a good foundation is not laid during the primary years, children are likely to struggle in later years.

Forty states and the District of Columbia permit funding of public **charter schools**. Charter schools are independently operated, publicly-funded schools that have greater flexibility than regular schools in meeting regulations and achieving goals, but they must also meet accountability standards. They are operated under a contract with the state or district. In school districts in which charter schools are an option, parents have a choice of where to send their children. However, competition for spaces often means that families do not have meaningful choice. More than 3 million children attend charter schools, and the percentage is increasing (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2017).

charter schools Independently operated, publicly funded schools that have greater flexibility than regular schools in meeting regulations and achieving goals.

How Early Childhood Education Is Expanding

Participation in early childhood programs has increased steadily for many decades as more children participate in group programs at younger ages. In 1965, only 60% of 5-year-olds

went to kindergarten, whereas today about 95% do (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). A similar but steeper growth trend is apparent for younger children. In 1960, only 10% of 3- and 4-year-olds were enrolled in any type of early childhood program. By 2015, 38% of 3-year-olds, 67% of 4-year-olds, and 87% of 5-year-olds attended a program prior to kindergarten (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Growth in Early Childhood Program Attendance All types of early childhood programs have seen growth over the years, including private preschools and child-care centers, state-funded prekindergarten, preschool special education, and Head Start (NCES, 2017; Head Start, 2017).

A fundamental change in preschool participation was apparent in the findings of the landmark *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort* (Jacobson Chernoff, Flanagan, McPhee, & Park, 2007). That study revealed that preschool, rather than kindergarten, is now seen as the first year of school for children. The percentage of children who attend center-based preschools is approximately the same whether or not their mothers are employed. This finding indicates that the growth in preschool enrollment is related to increased demand for early education as much as increased need for child care.

Child Care for Employed Families Expansion of the early childhood field is directly related to the demand for child care for employed families. Two-thirds of children under age 6 have parents or their single parent in the labor force (Bishop-Josef, 2017). Infant and toddler care is a particular need, because 58% of mothers of children under age 1 are in the workforce. The likelihood of children being cared for by a non-family member increases with age: 21% of infants are cared for by non-relatives compared to 65% of 4-year-olds (Bishop-Josef, 2017). Almost 80% of school-agers need care for some hours of the day.

Recognizing how important good child care is to maintaining a productive workforce, some employers sponsor on-site child-care centers or subsidize child-care expenses as an employee benefit. Employers find that support for child care can reduce absenteeism and turnover.

In addition, the federal government provides child-care assistance through **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**. The TANF program provides temporary financial aid but requires recipients to move into the labor force or schooling, further increasing the demand for child care. The **Child Care and Development Block Grants (CCDBG)** program allocates funds to states for low-income working families to purchase their own child care. In 2014, Congress reauthorized the CCDBG for the first time since 1996, with significant bipartisan support. The new law significantly improved provisions designed to protect children's health and safety, and to improve the quality of care.

Access to High-Quality Early Education

Despite the overall increase in the number of children attending preschool, access varies considerably depending on family income and other factors. In fact, the children who are most likely to benefit from high-quality programs are the least likely to participate in them.

Consider the following statistics (NCES, 2017; Friedman-Krauss et al., 2016):

- Young children who live in poverty are less likely to attend high-quality preschool than children from higher-income families.
- African American and Hispanic children have less access to high-quality programs than White children.
- Head Start and state-funded prekindergarten programs increase the participation rates for low-income families, but insufficient slots are available to serve all the eligible children.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
Federally funded program, more commonly known as Welfare to Work, that provides temporary financial aid but requires recipients to move into the labor force or schooling.

Child Care and Development Block Grants (CCDBG) Federal funds allocated to states for low-income working families to purchase child care.

- Families with moderate incomes face the greatest hurdle because they are not eligible for subsidized programs and cannot afford private ones.
- Preschool participation varies considerably depending on the mother's education. Children of college-educated parents attend preschool at higher rates than children whose parents are high school dropouts. Again, the children who need preschool the most—those whose mothers are less likely to provide educational experiences at home—are the least likely to get it.

How Early Childhood Education Is Changing

Recently, several major transformations in the United States have had significant impacts on early childhood education—changing demographics, economics, and families. The nation is becoming increasingly diverse. At the same time, economic hardship and poverty—including homelessness—are affecting increasing numbers of families.

Changing Demographics In the last few decades, the population of young children in the United States has become dramatically more diverse, as depicted in Figure 1.2. From 1990 to 2017, the white population of children declined from 69% to 50%, while the percentage of Latino children increased from 16% to 26% (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017a). Relatively soon, the majority of young children will be children of color—members of groups currently identified as minorities. In many school districts, this is already the case. For example, 52% of young children in California are Latino (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2017a).

Many of these children are **dual language learners** because they are learning to speak two languages at the same time—their home language and English. These demographic

dual language learners
Children who simultaneously learn two languages: the home or first language as well as English or another second language.
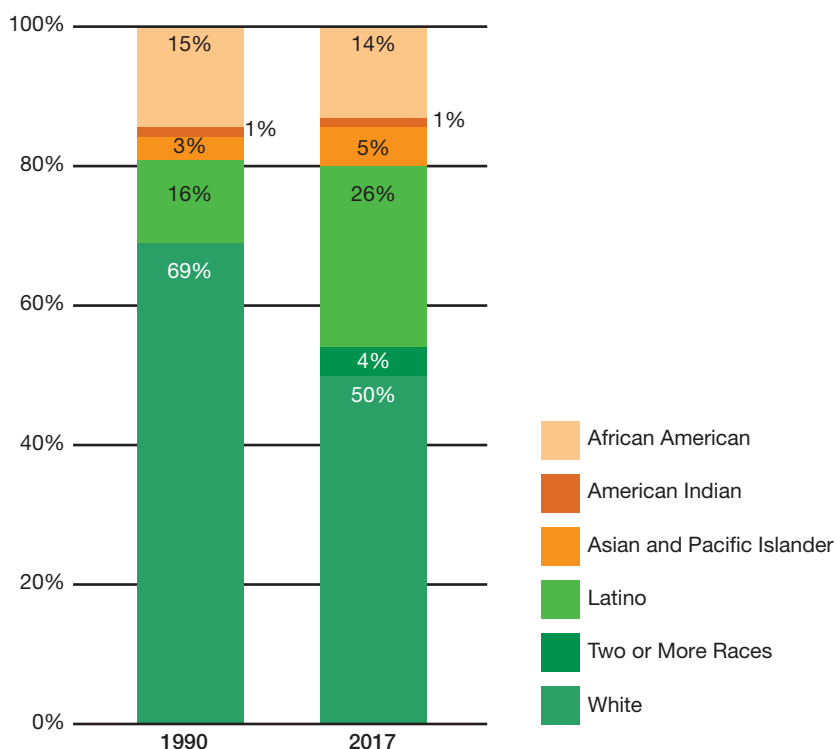
FIGURE 1.2 Child Population by Race and Ethnicity In the last two decades, the population of young children in the United States has become more ethnically and racially diverse.

Source: Based on Annie E. Casey Foundation, (2017). *2017 Kids Count data book: State trends in child well-being.* Baltimore: Author. Retrieved November 9, 2017, from www.aecf.org/2017

shifts have important implications for early childhood educators, as discussed in the feature *Language Lens: Preparing to Teach Dual Language Learners*.

Economic Challenges Despite an economic recovery since the 2008 recession, poverty is widespread. Of the 23 million children under age 6, 23% live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level, which is about $24,000 for a family of four with two children (Jiang, Granja, & Koball, 2017). Considering that families actually need twice that income to cover basic expenses, an additional 23% of all young children live in low-income or *near-poor* families. About 70% of these children have at least one full-time employed family member.

Poverty disproportionately affects children of color. Nearly one-third of African American and America Indian children and one-fourth of Hispanic children are poor, compared to one in nine White children (Children's Defense Fund, 2017). Most alarming, 6 million children live in extreme poverty—half the federal poverty level. Nearly 1 in 30 children experience homelessness, which occurs in every city and state in the nation (National Center on Family Homelessness at American Institutes for Research, 2015).

Language Lens
Preparing to Teach Dual Language Learners

Eight different languages are spoken among the children in Natalia's kindergarten class. Natalia and two of the children are the only ones whose first language is English. Natalia works hard to create a caring community where all the children comfortably experiment with learning English while also developing their home languages. She strives to communicate with the parents by using translators. Last year, Natalia's class also included eight languages—but some of them were different from those spoken this year.

The number of languages represented in Natalia's classroom may seem extreme, but linguistic and cultural diversity is now the norm in our nation's schools. In the next 20 years, the biggest single child-related demographic change is predicted to be an increase in dual language learners. Most of these children speak Spanish as a home language, but many others speak Asian, Middle Eastern, and African languages. California, Florida, and Texas continue to have the largest percentages of Spanish-speaking families, but the Hispanic population grew in many regions of the country. In fact, Georgia's Hispanic population more than doubled in two decades.

In the past, most teachers could safely assume that they would never encounter a language other than English in their entire careers. Today, Natalia's experience, or something like it, is not so very rare. New teachers may find it beneficial to learn another language themselves, but learning eight languages is not a reasonable expectation. What can new and experienced teachers such as Natalia do? They can start by remembering some important principles about dual language learners:

- People who speak the same language, whether Spanish or another language, are not all alike—they come from a variety of countries and cultures.
- Learning two or more languages does not confuse children as some people think, but rather enhances brain development.
- Dual language learners can better focus attention because alternating languages requires intense concentration.
- Supporting home language development is essential because children can learn many skills in their home language and apply those skills as they learn English.
- Teachers need to intentionally teach English vocabulary and provide lots of opportunities for children to play together and practice their developing language skills.
- Communicating with families is essential regardless of the effort required.

The children of today must be prepared to function as citizens of a global society. Speaking two or more languages is an important skill for the 21st century. When children enter early childhood programs speaking a language other than English, the foundation is already there on which to build.

Sources: Flores, 2017. *How the U.S. Hispanic population is changing.* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center; National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017. *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press; Bialystok & Werker, 2016. The systematic effects of bilingualism on children's development. *Developmental Science, 20*(1).

These statistics are alarming given that the youngest children have the highest poverty rates. Growing up in extreme poverty can have potentially devastating impacts on health, brain development, and learning. These children are most in need of high-quality early childhood programs and good teachers. And yet, too many families do not have access to subsidized programs and cannot find affordable child care (Flores, 2017).

The effects of the economic downturn on children and families are real. However, increased political support for child care and early education at this difficult time in the nation's history is solid evidence of its broad support and the recognition of its value.

Diverse Families Young children's families today are a rich tapestry. Not only are they ethnically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse, the composition of families varies widely. More children are growing up with single mothers or fathers. Same-sex couples can now legally marry, creating loving families for their children. And grandparents are increasingly the custodial parents of their grandchildren. Many children live with large extended families that include aunts, uncles, and/or cousins as well as siblings. There is no such thing as the "typical" American family.

Why Become an Early Childhood Educator?

Choosing to teach young children, like every career decision, involves weighing many factors. Prospective teachers need to be familiar with what the work entails and the possible career options. Most important, they need to determine whether the demands and rewards of their chosen profession are a good match with their own strengths, dispositions, and personal goals (Colker, 2008).

The Joys of Teaching Young Children

Working with children demands patience and the willingness to care for and about other people's children, even or especially the least lovable of those children. Teaching young children is truly rewarding work, even when it is most challenging (Colker, 2008). Each day brings new discoveries, accomplishments, and joys for children and teachers.

Picture a 4-year-old child. What are the first thoughts that come to mind? Is he or she curious? Eager to learn? Excellent early childhood teachers take advantage of young children's deep desire to actively engage with and make sense of the world around them. Recall the sense of satisfaction you felt when you mastered a difficult task such as learning to read or ride a bike. Children gain great pleasure from the sense of mastery that comes from learning something new or overcoming an obstacle.

Another word that comes to mind when thinking of children is *fun*. Yes, early childhood programs prepare children for success in school, but they also provide them with joyful learning experiences every day of their young lives. Children should have fun in child care centers and homes, preschools, and schools. They love to joke, tease, and be silly; to sing, move, and dance; to play by themselves and with friends; to know that adults care

Intentional teachers are purposeful, but they are also playful. How can teachers keep the fun in childhood while helping children achieve important learning goals?

for them; to wonder about and explore the natural world; and to generally enjoy living. When teachers create a safe and supportive place for children to experience the unique joys of childhood, children will thrive—and their teachers will also.

Dimensions of Effective Intentional Teaching

One overarching theme of this book is that effective early childhood practice requires teachers to be intentional in everything they do. **Intentional teachers** have a purpose for the decisions they make and can explain that purpose to others (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Epstein, 2014). However, we believe that intentional teaching involves much more. Intentional teaching is a multifaceted, multidimensional concept that conveys many of the personal and professional qualities of an early childhood educator. Consider how well your own aspirations and dispositions fit with our description of the dimensions of intentional teaching that appears in Figure 1.3.

For an example of intentional teaching, read the feature Becoming an Intentional Teacher: Modeling Positive Approaches to Learning.

intentional teachers Teachers who have a purpose for the decisions they make and can explain that purpose to others.

Career Options for Early Childhood Educators

Now that we have described both the dedication and the delight that teaching young children entails, we turn to an overview of the job opportunities in the field. As the field of early education grows, so do the potential career options and opportunities for early childhood professionals. At the same time, however, the field is experiencing a shortage of qualified teachers (IOM & NRC, 2015). Even as a large percentage of the current teaching staff is nearing retirement, teacher qualification requirements are being raised in many sectors of the field.

Because the early childhood field is so diverse and covers such a broad age range, early childhood educators have many possible career choices. Careers tend to fall into two categories:

- Working *with* children involves daily interaction and direct responsibility for children's care and education, and includes positions such as classroom teacher or family child care provider.
- Working *for* children involves work that supports children's development and education, whether in proximity to the children, such as being a child-care center director, or at a further distance, such as being a teacher-education professor.

Over the course of their careers, many early childhood professionals move back and forth between these types of jobs. However, we believe that success in working *for* children is greater if an individual has actually worked *with* children. No one in the early childhood community can do his or her job well without knowing what life is like in an early childhood setting (Colker, 2008). This experience informs decisions at every level.

Working *with* Children Early childhood teachers are usually the first to admit that they aren't in this profession for the money. It is the satisfaction they get from working with children that is deeply rewarding. For many of them, the fact that they make an impact

- **Caring and committed.** They recognize that developing a personal, positive, warm relationship with each child is the foundation for everything they do. Their commitment to children means putting children's needs before their own and recognizing that teaching young children is less a job than a calling.

- **Enthusiastic and engaged.** They genuinely enjoy being with young children however messy or challenging they may be, and share in the excitement of their discoveries. They become energetically and intensely involved in children's activity, whether it means getting down on the floor to play and talk with a baby or thinking through the solution to a problem with a kindergartner.

- **Curious and creative.** They are eager to learn, just as children are. Young children want to learn all sorts of things that teachers themselves may not know—what's inside a bug, why the sky is blue, how an airplane flies. Intentional teachers model an inquisitive attitude. They want to find out along with children, and they approach questions or problems in new, imaginative ways.

- **Respectful and responsive.** They value and treat children, families, and colleagues with dignity and esteem. They respond thoughtfully to diversity in all of its forms: language, culture, race/ethnicity, ability/disability, age, gender, and sexual orientation. They are open and accepting of perspectives that are different from their own.

- **Passionate and patient.** They bring into their work their own emotions and deep interests, such as a passion for music, painting, or poetry; a preference for belly laughs or quiet smiles. At the same time, they recognize that children have their own intense feelings that can spill over into anger, frustration, or fits of tears. Intentional teachers respond calmly and thoughtfully, without becoming upset or annoyed themselves.

- **Purposeful and playful.** They have important goals for children—to help them make friends, regulate their emotions, control their bodies, learn to read and write—and they plan carefully to help children achieve their goals. But along the way, they joke and laugh with children, accept silliness, encourage and support play, and make learning itself playful. A sense of humor is a necessity.

- **Focused and flexible.** They are like cameras that can scan the entire classroom and then narrow their attention to meet one child's need or respond to her question or idea. They can be teaching a reading lesson with a specific goal in mind and switch gears when a child starts talking about his brother's illness.

- **Aware and accountable.** They are self-aware, they reflect on and evaluate their own performance, and they strive to improve. But their judgments are not made in isolation; they compare their performance to a standard of excellence. Intentional teachers are willing to be accountable; they accept responsibility for their actions.

- **Informed and effective.** They know how children develop and learn; they know how to teach and what to teach. They use research-based teaching practices that lead to positive outcomes for children and help children make sense of the world around them. Intentional teachers also regularly check to see if what they are doing is actually working. Are children making progress toward developmentally appropriate goals?

- **Listening and learning.** They realize that the more they learn about children, the more they need to know. They understand that choosing to teach is choosing to be a lifelong learner. Intentional teachers learn from children every day; they listen to children, and they pay close attention to all of children's cues. They stay up to date about new knowledge and continue to grow as professionals.

FIGURE 1.3 Characteristics of Professional Intentional Early Childhood Teachers Intentional teaching involves a wide range of personal and professional qualities, such as those listed here.

on the life of every child they encounter is a powerful incentive and the reason that, once they enter the field, they are there to stay (Colker, 2008).

Early childhood teachers work with different age groups from infancy through primary grades in a wide range of settings. The qualifications and required certifications for specific jobs will vary, but a broad-based education in the field is necessary preparation.

Becoming an Intentional Teacher

Modeling Positive Approaches to Learning

Here's What Happened   One wintry morning in my Head Start class, I brought in my guitar and started playing and singing happily as the children arrived. This was a surprise for them because I usually greet them at the door and help them with their coats. Instead, they managed on their own, began to gather round me, and asked lots of questions. "I've been learning to play guitar, and I just love it," I said. "It takes lots of hard work and I make mistakes, but as long as I keep trying, my songs sound better." Nico enthusiastically danced along to the music. Wide-eyed Elena concentrated very hard on my fingers as I changed chords. "Can I try?" she asked hopefully. "Later, I will let each of you have a turn, but first I'm going to play a song I made up, and I want you to make up some new words for it," I replied. The children laughed at the challenge and agreed that would be fun.

Here's What I Was Thinking   As a Head Start teacher, I have a responsibility to help children make progress on important early learning outcomes, including a strong emphasis on approaches to learning. I used my personal passion for playing guitar and writing songs to intentionally model my enthusiasm, interest, and creativity. I also talked about hard work to demonstrate my motivation, initiative, persistence, and engagement. Young children often want to be like their teachers, so I think their curiosity about the guitar and writing songs will promote positive approaches to learning but also their language as they attempt to compose songs and their fine motor development as they pluck the strings.

Reflection   Reread the Characteristics of Professional Intentional Early Childhood Teachers in Figure 1.3. Which ones are the same positive approaches to learning that children need to develop? What other ways could this teacher intentionally support children's enthusiasm and engagement?

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Following are some of the options and opportunities available for interesting and rewarding work:

- *Head Start* teachers can alter the life trajectory of young children and their families who are most in need. They help ensure that children from low-income families receive an excellent education and comprehensive health, nutrition, and other services.
- *Early Head Start* teachers intervene early with mothers and their babies to help set them on a course of healthy development.
- *Child-care center* teachers provide loving care and education to children for extended periods of time each day, and help employed parents feel secure about their children's care so they can do their jobs. Careers in child care offer the option of teaching various age groups: infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children before and/or after school. Although teaching in child care pays less than does teaching in other settings, many teachers relish its flexible and creative environment. Conditions also vary by administrative agency; for example, an employer-sponsored child-care center may offer more benefits and higher compensation than a community-based one.
- Teachers in *family child care homes* literally open their doors to small groups of children from infancy through school age, providing a home-like atmosphere of care and education. Family child care means being your own boss, but requires administering a small business as well as caring for children.
- *Preschools* vary a great deal—public, private, faith-based, and so on—each with its own benefits that will appeal to different teachers' interests and match their goals. A public prekindergarten, for example, may provide better salaries, whereas a private one may be more flexible about curriculum and expectations for children.
- A teacher in a *parent cooperative preschool* has the opportunity to develop particularly close relationships with families but also needs the ability to work with parents as co-teachers, an acquired skill.

- Teachers in *public schools* have the option of teaching different age groups from kindergarten through primary grades. Schools are bureaucracies with regulations and an established curriculum and tests, but as professionals, teachers make hundreds of classroom decisions every day. Salaries and benefits in the public schools are the most secure of any sector in early childhood.
- *Early childhood special educators* and *early intervention specialists* are qualified individuals who work with children with special needs in various settings such as in school systems, Head Start, or child care. Inclusion of children with special needs means that early childhood special educators work closely with regular classroom teachers. In fact, in some states, the same teacher education program prepares teachers for certification in both fields simultaneously.
- *Mentor teacher* is an evolving career option for more experienced, outstanding professionals. It is helpful for new teachers to work with a mentor teacher to improve their skills or to get help for children with particular learning challenges. Mentor teachers are becoming more common in elementary schools, preschools, and child care programs.
- The need for *bilingual or multilingual teachers* and those who are qualified to teach dual language learners is growing. As the population becomes ever more diverse, these qualifications will be useful in any early childhood setting.

Given the variety of careers available, early childhood teachers have many options. Even when an entire career is spent teaching the same age group in the same workplace, teachers will always encounter new challenges and new experiences. I once asked a former teacher who had taught for 40 years, "Didn't you ever get tired of teaching first grade?" She looked stunned and replied, "Never, because every group was different." Having been a child in her class at one time, I clearly understood what she meant—that every child is different and unique, and that being a teacher never loses its fascination.

Working *for* Children   At some point in their careers, all early childhood professionals should work with children in order to understand firsthand how educators help shape our young children. However, there are many opportunities for early childhood educators to pursue positions working *for* children. With additional education, specialized training, and experience, a background in early childhood can lead to positions such as these:

- *Director* of a child care center or preschool, or school principal (with additional course work in administration)
- *Curriculum developer* for an individual school, network of schools, or publisher
- *Home visitor* or *family services worker* in Head Start, Early Head Start, or another community agency
- *Policy staff* at local/state/federal agencies, associations, and organizations
- *College faculty* teaching teachers and/or conducting research
- *Writer/producer of resources for children* such as children's book author, technology developer, children's museum staff, or media performer

In previous sections, we discussed what it means to be a professional intentional early childhood teacher. These definitions reflect the profession's core values and beliefs, a topic to which we turn next.

The Culture of Early Childhood Education

A key theme of this book is the important role that culture plays in development and learning. Broadly defined, **culture** comprises the rules and expectations for behavior of members of a group that are passed on from one generation to the next. These rules determine to a large extent what group members regard as important and what values shape their actions and judgments.

culture The explicit and implicit values, beliefs, rules, and expectations for behavior of members of a group that are passed on from one generation to the next. These rules determine to a large extent what group members regard as important and what values shape their actions and judgments.

Like other professional groups, the early childhood profession has its own culture. This culture is transmitted both explicitly and implicitly from more experienced, competent members to new initiates in three ways: through formal education, through on-the-job experiences, and through mentoring in either setting. New teachers may become confused or flustered when the cultural rules transmitted in one setting, such as their college classrooms, do not seem to match the expectations for behavior in another, such as their first teaching assignments.

Cultural groups define themselves in many ways, including through the language they use, how they identify themselves, the values they share, and their fundamental beliefs. We discuss these topics in the following sections.

Shared Vocabulary One aspect of early childhood culture is a shared vocabulary. Shared language facilitates communication and minimizes misunderstandings within groups. The profession gives particular meaning to terms such as *developmentally appropriate*, *play*, *relationships*, *comprehensive services*, or *inclusion* (all of which are defined in this book). Their definitions are tailored to our profession, and may not mirror how these words are used in other professions or everyday life.

An essential part of joining a profession is learning its language. For example, although the larger society uses the term *day care*, within the profession, the accepted term is *child care*. We believe that saying *child care* is more respectful of children and a more accurate description of the setting and the job.

Shared Identity Most professionals feel a sense of belonging to their group. They identify themselves as members of the profession, whether it is as a doctor, a lawyer, or an accountant. In early childhood education, it is often harder to "name" ourselves. The profession itself has been called by many names—*early care and education*, *child care*, *early education*, and *early development and learning*. In this book, we refer to the field as *early childhood education*. We prefer this term because it contains the word *child*, which is an ever-present reminder of the primary focus of our work. We also believe that the term encompasses the key elements of caring, development, and learning.

Another challenge to establishing a clear identity is what to call the role itself. Infant/toddler teachers and teachers in center-based care are often called *caregivers*. In family child care, adults are called *providers*. But we embrace the term *teacher* because it is the broadest term, it captures most of the job responsibilities, it commands society's respect and potentially increased compensation, and it is, after all, what children usually call the adults who care for and educate them no matter what the setting.

Shared Values The early childhood profession is committed to a core set of values that is deeply rooted in the history of the field. NAEYC (2011) articulates these core values in its code of ethical conduct:

We have made a commitment to:

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

Early childhood educators are members of a profession that shares knowledge, values, and beliefs about children and their work. Meeting with more experienced teachers is one way of becoming a professional. Can you think of others?

I often take informal polls of teachers during speeches at education conferences. A question I always ask is: "What are your values as an early childhood educator?" Most of the core values just listed are mentioned. Yet there is one that is always stated emphatically and is usually first—"play!" Early childhood professionals strongly value play as essential for children's development and learning. Because play is so important in early childhood, we will revisit the topic throughout this book. Political and economic forces threaten these values at times, but they nevertheless endure.

Shared Beliefs   Although early childhood culture shares many beliefs, a few dominate:

- The strong belief in the potential of all children, regardless of their life circumstances and individual abilities or disabilities.
- The belief in the power of **developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)** to produce positive results for children. Developmentally appropriate practice is teaching that engages children's interests and adapts for their age, experience, and ability to help them meet challenging and achievable goals.
- The belief that early childhood teachers are professionals who make informed decisions about what is developmentally appropriate for each child in each situation.
- The fundamental belief in the potential of our work to make a real and lasting difference in the world.

This is the final justification for joining the profession: the opportunity to make a contribution to children's lives. Many professions exist primarily to solve problems. Doctors and nurses treat illnesses. Firefighters put out fires and rescue people. Insurance agents help people recover from losses or catastrophes. The work of early childhood professionals, on the other hand, is to prevent problems from occurring. Our job is to set children on a positive course from the beginning. The proven effectiveness of early intervention when young children face difficulties creates room for optimism and hope.

developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) Ways of teaching that engage children's interests and adapt for their age, experience, and ability to help them meet challenging and achievable learning goals.

Early Childhood Program Quality and Measuring Effectiveness

Growing attention to early education primarily results from impressive research demonstrating its effectiveness in improving outcomes for children. All of the research that has influenced policy, however, finds that the key ingredient in the effectiveness of early childhood education is the quality of the program for children. But what is quality?

Setting Standards for Quality

Earlier in this chapter, we described different types of early childhood programs. Various kinds of programs must meet different sets of standards, which are intended to determine the program's quality. Early childhood educators have been instrumental in setting standards for quality that, in addition to research, reflect the profession's core values and beliefs.

Child Care Licensing Standards

Child care licensing standards Minimum requirements legally established by each state for a child care program to operate.

Child Care Licensing Standards Child care centers and, in some states, family child care homes, are regulated by each state's **child care licensing standards**. These set minimum requirements for a program to operate legally. Such standards usually establish a minimum number of teachers required per child (teacher/child ratios), teacher qualifications, and health and safety requirements.

Quality Rating and Improvement Systems These standards, designed to ensure children's protection, vary considerably from state to state. For example, one state requires 1 teacher for every 4 infants, whereas another permits a ratio of 1 to 6. Child Care Aware of America (Dobbins, 2017) evaluates state licensing standards and monitoring of centers' compliance. They find that many states' standards fall short of minimum protection for children's health and safety, and support for their development.

quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) State-operated tiered systems that evaluate and rate the quality of child care programs according to achievement of benchmarks beyond those required for minimal licensing, such as having more highly qualified teachers or better ratios.

Because licensing standards vary and represent minimums, the quality of child care also varies considerably. Some licensed programs exceed the required standards, whereas others barely meet them (Child Care Aware of America, 2017). To address this issue and help parents make informed decisions, many states now operate **quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS)**. These tiered systems rate program quality according to achievement of benchmarks beyond those required for minimal licensing, such as having more highly qualified teachers or better ratios (BUILD Initiative, 2017). The state recognizes centers that meet higher standards with more stars and pays higher reimbursement rates for children served. In some states, achieving accreditation is the highest level. QRIS also helps families make informed decisions about choosing child care.

accreditation system NAEYC's voluntary system for identifying high-quality early childhood centers and schools serving children from birth through kindergarten.

Accreditation Standards The early childhood profession under the leadership of NAEYC (2016) is committed to raising the overall quality of early education for all children. Toward this end, the association sets high-quality standards and administers a voluntary **accreditation system** for all types of early childhood centers and schools serving children from birth through kindergarten. The standards that programs must achieve to obtain accreditation are listed in Table 1.1. These standards apply to any early learning program regardless of length of day or sponsorship. NAEYC accreditation standards are designed to answer the question: "What is high quality?"

TABLE 1.1 NAEYC Early Learning Program Standards

NAEYC's accreditation standards describe all the key elements of a high-quality early childhood program.

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

Source: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2016. *Overview of the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards.* 2016, by National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC, retrieved from http://www.naeyc.org/academy/files/academy/OverviewStandards.pdf

To understand what we mean by *quality*, it is important to see the relationships among the standards rather than see them as a discrete list. In the accreditation system, the primary focus is on *children,* as described in the first five standards: relationships, curriculum, teaching, assessment of children's progress, and health. The other five standards address teachers, partnerships with families and communities, and administration, including the physical environment, leadership, and management. Meeting these standards establishes a supportive context that makes it possible to achieve and maintain the quality of life for children described in the first five standards.

Head Start Program Standards Quality is also a critically important issue in Head Start, particularly because it serves the nation's most vulnerable children. Head Start programs are regularly monitored for compliance

with the national **Head Start Program Performance Standards**, which were significantly revised recently (Head Start, 2016). The new standards take a birth through 5 year old approach to reflect the process of children's development, and reflect the continuum of services from Early Head Start through preschool programs. These standards are similar to accreditation standards, but they also address the comprehensive services that are part of Head Start's mandate.

Military Child Care Act   The largest employer-sponsored child care system in the world is the U.S. military. Its voluntary workforce of men and women depends on the provision of high-quality child care. In 1989, Congress passed the Military Child Care Act to ensure consistently high standards of quality in these programs. The act required that centers seek NAEYC accreditation, and also included provisions for teacher training and a career ladder tying compensation to increased professional development. The Military Child Care Act resulted in significantly improved quality and learning outcomes for children that have been maintained for decades (Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014). In addition, the military child care system is now seen as a model for providing a universal child care system in the United States (Covert, 2017).

Measuring Quality in Early Childhood Programs

The early childhood field defines quality as having two dimensions: structural and process (Minervino, 2013). **Structural quality** includes features such as maximum group sizes, teacher/child ratios, and teacher qualifications, which are relatively easy to quantify and measure. **Process quality**, on the other hand, refers to the quality of the relationships and interactions among teachers and children, and the appropriateness of the materials, learning experiences, and teaching strategies. These features are more difficult to evaluate, and yet are the key aspects of the quality of children's experiences. They describe what life should be like for children in a program, how they should be treated, and how their learning and development should be promoted.

structural quality Features of an early childhood program, such as maximum group sizes, teacher/child ratios, and teacher qualifications, that are relatively easy to quantify and measure.

process quality The quality of the relationships and interactions among teachers and children and the appropriateness of the materials, learning experiences, and teaching strategies occurring in an early childhood program.

Structural quality and process quality are interconnected. For example, well-qualified teachers are needed to plan and implement an engaging curriculum and teach effectively. Similarly, positive relationships between teachers and children are more likely to be established when the size of the group and ratio of adults to children is relatively small. An age-appropriate, well-equipped, and organized environment is needed to protect children's health and safety, and to promote active learning.

The most difficult challenge is determining how to measure compliance with quality standards. To see if a program is meeting requirements, it is relatively easy to examine transcripts of teachers or count the number of children in a group. But it is much harder—especially for an outside evaluator—to decide if teachers have positive relationships with each child and family or if they are using effective teaching strategies. These standards can be assessed only by directly observing what goes on in classrooms.

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Preschool and elementary classroom observational instrument that assesses the quality of teachers' relationships and interactions with children and the instructional strategies used to support children's learning.

To provide consistent ways of measuring quality, researchers have developed observation tools. The most widely used observational measure is the **Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)**, with versions for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and primary grades (Hamre, La Paro, Pianta, & Locasale-Crouch, 2014; La Paro, Hamre, & Pianta, 2012; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). The CLASS assesses the quality of teachers' relationships with children, the instructional strategies they use to support children's learning, and how well the classroom is organized. More than 150 studies demonstrate that how well classrooms and teachers score on these measures predicts how well children score on measures of language, literacy, mathematics, social-emotional, cognitive abilities, and engagement in learning (Teachstone, 2017). The CLASS is required as a tool for monitoring quality in Head Start, as well as some state prekindergarten programs and QRIS.

Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-3)
Observational instrument used to rate program quality on a seven-point scale from inadequate to excellent.

Another widely used program quality assessment is the **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-3)** (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2014) with versions for preschool, infant/toddler, family child care, and school-age programs. ECERS is used by many state QRIS systems.

The overall conclusion of all the research on the effectiveness of early education is that what teachers actually do with children is the most important determinant of the quality of children's experiences and their learning outcomes. After decades of research on quality in early childhood programs, one thing we know for certain is that teachers matter. If children are to reach their full potentials, professionals must also reach theirs.

Measuring Effectiveness

As we have seen, program quality is usually defined and measured in terms of "inputs"—the environments children experience and their interactions with teachers. However, program effectiveness is usually defined in terms of "outcomes"—the effects of these experiences on children's development and learning. As a result, effectiveness is measured against specific, usually age- or grade-related goals.

Children from Birth Through Age 5   The most common source of outcome goals for the youngest children are state **early learning standards** or guidelines, which describe what children should know and be able to do before entering kindergarten. All 50 states have comprehensive learning guidelines for preschool children, and virtually all have guidelines for infants and toddlers (National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance, 2017).

early learning standards
Guidelines that describe what children should know and be able to do before entering kindergarten.

Head Start   Head Start has established its own set of comprehensive goals for children—the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework (ELOF). Head Start programs are required by law to periodically assess children's progress toward the framework's goals. The ELOF includes approaches to learning; social and emotional development; language and literacy; cognition; and perceptual, motor, and physical development (Head Start, 2017).

Public Schools   State departments of education establish outcome standards for children from prekindergarten through primary grades. Children's progress toward these goals is often measured by statewide standardized testing programs, usually beginning at third grade. Each state sets its own content standards for learning, which leads to great variability. To address this issue, in 2010, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governor's Association (NGA) released the **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)**, which are rigorous national standards in English language arts and mathematics for kindergarten through 12th grade.

Common Core State Standards
Rigorous national standards in English language arts and mathematics for kindergarten through grade 12 developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governor's Association (NGA).

The Common Core began as a bipartisan effort but became politically controversial. Some view it as a federal intrusion on state control of education. Others criticize the standards for being unachievable, narrowing the curriculum to two areas, and leading to overreliance on standardized tests for which students and teachers are not prepared (Carlson-Paige, McLaughlin, & Almon, 2015). Although the standards do not apply to preschool, like many elementary school initiatives, they have a "push-down" impact on younger children. Despite these concerns, the Common Core is used in 35 states and the District of Columbia. In other states, even though Common Core is technically not used, their standards are very similar.

The Positive Effects of Early Childhood Education

We began this chapter by citing ways that early childhood education is a field on the rise. The positive attention and support that the field has garnered is to a large extent the result of an impressive body of research on the importance of the early years and the lasting benefits of early childhood programs.

Brain research demonstrates the importance of early childhood education, especially for infants and toddlers.

Brain Research

Among the most exciting achievements in neuroscience in the past century were new insights into how the brain grows and functions during the earliest years of life. Brain research, which had previously been confined to laboratories, is now reported regularly in popular newspapers and magazines. Technologies such as positron emission tomography (PET) scans and functional magnetic resonance imagery (fMRI) reveal the inner workings of babies' brains to policy makers, educators, and the public.

Major conclusions from brain research have significantly lifted the profile of early childhood education—especially the importance of experiences in the first three years of life (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, n.d.):

1. Early life experiences build the architecture of the brain.
2. Positive experiences in the early years—especially warm, responsive, caring, and conversational relationships—literally grow babies' brains and lay the foundation for later learning.
3. Negative experiences such as prolonged stress, neglect, physical or sexual abuse, or exposure to violence can have dire and long-lasting effects on brain capabilities.
4. Early intervention, including intensive early education and comprehensive support services for families—the earlier and more intensive, the better—can ameliorate negative effects.

Dramatic evidence, along with powerful visual images of brain scans, has raised awareness of the vital importance of early experiences. For example, brain scans of maltreated children provide striking evidence of smaller brain volumes than those of children who have not suffered maltreatment, with more negative effects the earlier the abuse began and the longer it lasted (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.). Findings such as these demonstrate the critical importance of early intervention.

Brain research has also elevated the importance of children's approaches to learning, particularly their self-regulation and executive function abilities. These terms are often used interchangeably, which can be confusing. Generally, **self-regulation** is defined as the ability to adapt or control behavior, emotions, and thinking according to the demands of the situation, control impulses, and delay gratification—aspects of social-emotional development. On the other hand, **executive function**, sometimes called cognitive self-regulation, refers to mental abilities that enable children to remember, think flexibility, focus attention, plan, and think ahead. Although less easily measured than specific academic skills, self-regulation and executive function are very important indicators of a program's effectiveness because they enable children to learn in all areas. Read the feature *What Works: High-Quality Programs Promote Executive Function* to learn more about the connection between quality and effectiveness.

self-regulation The ability to adapt or control behavior, emotions, and thinking according to the demands of the situation, control impulses, and delay gratification (sometimes called executive function).

executive function Mental abilities including working memory, mental flexibility, and inhibitory control that enable children to remember, think flexibly, focus attention, control impulses, plan, and think ahead (sometimes called self-regulation).

Lasting Benefits of Early Childhood Education

A large body of research demonstrates that high-quality early childhood programs can have long-lasting positive consequences for children, especially children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and can be cost-effective (Pre-kindergarten Task Force, 2017). Three well-designed longitudinal studies—the Perry Preschool Project, the Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention Project, and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers—followed children from early childhood into adulthood. The findings of these studies are largely responsible for increased investments in early education.