Theme Issue on
The Changing Role of the Early Childhood Practitioner

- Teacher Praise
- Diversity in Classrooms
- Children with Disabilities
- Learning About ESL
- Supporting Children in an Uncertain World
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Florida’s early childhood community applauds our Governor, Jeb Bush. On Friday, July 9, 2004, Governor Bush vetoed a bill that would have negatively affected Florida’s 4-year-olds.

Two years ago the citizens of Florida passed an amendment to have a high-quality, voluntary, universal prekindergarten program. Leaders of the early childhood community were an important part of the planning team and the Governor’s Advisory Council, headed by the Lieutenant Governor, presented a plan that included:

- Class size: 1:10 teacher/student ratios
- 6-hour days
- Credentialed teachers with a bachelor’s degree by 2013
- Florida’s Gold Seal Quality Care accreditation

Unfortunately, the Senate chose to reduce the requirements and the Florida Legislature passed a bill that proposed a program that did not meet the high-quality standard originally requested. The early childhood community felt that the bill was not in the best interests of Florida’s 4-year-old citizens and their families.

In lowering the proposed program requirements, the Florida Legislature disregarded these important principles:

- Research has shown that a high-quality preschool education can firmly increase a child’s chances of success in school and in life.
- Children who attend high-quality pre-K programs with qualified teachers are more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to get into trouble.
- Early learning and attention provides children with both cognitive skills and social-emotional skills.
- The years of rapid brain development and growth are from birth to age 5. During this period a child’s brain reaches 90% of its adult size and that development is aided by interaction and education.

As a kindergarten teacher, I know that children who start behind often stay behind. Let’s hope that the Florida legislature will take the time to consider what is best for children and introduce a bill in 2005 that meets the recommended quality standard. I hope that other states that are proposing a universal pre-K program will take a look at Florida’s experience and ensure that a high-quality pre-K program is proposed.

To Governor Bush, the Southern Early Childhood Association, the "Voice for Southern Children," applauds your decision and thanks you for standing up for our young children and our state’s future.
America and Texas were different culturally and linguistically when Laverne Warner began to teach in the early 1960s. Port Arthur, Texas, was predominantly white. The children who came to her first grade class were expected to learn in much the same directive teaching style that their teacher had learned in college.

Twenty-five children responded effectively to the standard instruction, but one did not. Greg probably had a learning disability, which prevented him from being able to read. Looking back, his disability most likely was related to visual memory problems, although at the time educators did not know how to diagnose specific learning problems.

In the 1970s when Sharon Lynch started to teach, educators knew much more about children with special needs. Her special education assignment in Houston, Texas, included 18 children with two teaching assistants. However, these 18 children had very different needs, and the program was located in a segregated school where all children had disabilities. Even on this special education campus, children with significant medical needs were excluded.

As we both look at education in the United States in 2004, we observe a number of changes important to teachers when they enter classrooms of young children:

- teaching techniques are more hands-on and exploratory and less teacher directed;
- curriculum is more specific and usually related to state and national standards;
- school/family relationships are encouraged;
- teaching develops within the context of community;
- all children with disabilities are included;
- family composition is more diverse and dispersed geographically, virtually globally;
- teachers recognize and teach to children who are both culturally and linguistically diverse; and
- technology use is widespread and efficient.

The threat of terrorism and violence also affect the roles teachers play in classrooms.

This theme issue on The Changing Role of the Early Childhood Practitioner is designed to explore and explain how the early childhood teacher’s place in society has changed within the last generation. Although we cannot address all of the issues listed here, we hope that the articles contained in this theme issue of Dimensions of Early Childhood will promote understanding of the changing world that educators face in current society and in the future. The articles were chosen to show the breadth of concerns regarding the changing role of the early educator.

Guest Editors

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Sharon A. Lynch, Ed.D., is Associate Professor of Special Education, Department of Language, Literacy, and Special Populations, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.
Teaching practices within the classroom also have undergone changes in the last 40 years. In addition to the obvious addition of technology, teachers’ responses to children require more expertise and sensitivity. Wolfgang presents alternatives to automatic praise as a reaction to children’s accomplishments in his article “Teacher Praise: Make Informed Choices.” Rather than reinforce children with continuous praise, current best practice guidelines recommend that teachers acknowledge children’s actions and engage them in dialogue about their achievements. This is a far different response from the automatic praise statements of “good work” or “great job!”

Brown, Fitzpatrick, and Morrison, in “Valuing Diversity in Classrooms Through Family Involvement” define diversity and encourage teachers to learn more about children’s cultures. Culturally responsive instruction by informed teachers, coupled with parental involvement and support by school personnel, are essential for offering learning opportunities that lead children to academic success. This article describes skills and support needed to encourage family involvement within diverse classrooms.

A generation ago, before the implementation of federal laws prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities, children with chronic health problems did not typically attend schools. Medical personnel worked independently of educators in health care settings. Children who would have died a decade ago are now living full lives, thanks to advances in medicine.

Webb and Bromer discuss the collaboration of medical professionals, families, and educators to help meet the needs of children with ongoing health problems in their article “Professional Collaboration and Children With Disabilities: Put Families First.” While this collaboration is not an everyday occurrence in contemporary classrooms, the teacher’s role is changing as schools open their doors and ramps to children with special health care needs.

Sheffer discusses the specific needs of children who are second language learners in her article “Teachers Can Learn (Almost) Everything They Need to Know About ESL From Kindergarten.” She avows that many of the early childhood practices teachers have used for many years are appropriate for children who are struggling with the English language. Hands-on learning and concrete experiences are standard practice in the early childhood field, and these strategies, coupled with sensitive and nurturing teachers, are effective for English Language Learners (ELL) in English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms.

Simpson and McGuire in their article “Are You Ready? Supporting Children in an Uncertain World” underscore the importance of addressing children’s needs following a traumatic event such as the destruction of the World Trade Center. A generation ago, this type of terrorism was inconceivable; most terrorism was easy to explain as “only a TV show.” Terrorism was an event in faraway places. Today’s teachers must assume the role of facilitators in helping young children to cope with the reality of terrorism on U.S. soil.

Jones and Worley’s article will appear in the Winter ’05 issue due to space restraints. They will focus on building relationships in educational settings by developing respectful acceptance of all cultures. Trust is critical for families to become involved in their children’s school activities as these authors point out in “Build Trust With Diverse Families and Communities.” Empowering families and significant adults enables them to form connections that meet children’s needs and improve their abilities to learn.

The landscape of early childhood education has definitely changed during our careers in the field. We are aware that we have not addressed all of the challenges and issues facing early educators today. Our hope is that we have included articles in this journal that will provide a springboard for dialogue and discussion among teachers of young children. We also hope the articles and ensuing discussions alleviate anxieties and pressures educators feel about their expanding roles as they work with young children.
Sabina has spent nearly an hour drawing, coloring, and pasting an art project. When she finishes, she brings her treasure to her teacher. Holding it up to the teacher’s face, she proclaims, “Mrs. Anderson, see what I did.”

This is a very important teachable moment and requires a skilled response by the teacher. What will she say? Will it be something like, “Oh, Sabina, I like it. What a beautiful painting!” Or will Mrs. Anderson comment: “Well, you sure did work hard on that this morning! You must be so proud of what you have done. I would like to hear about your project.”

Many teachers (and parents) use hundreds of praise statements daily that are much like Mrs. Anderson’s first response. These adults might be surprised and even shocked to learn that many psychologists and educators have found that this type of response can actually harm children’s development (Bailey, 2000; Brophy, 1981; Faber & Mazlish, 1999; Gordon, 1988, 2003; Nelson, Lott, & Glenn, 1997; Wolfgang, 2004; Wong & Wong, 2001).

Teachers and parents who frequently say, “I like it” are using what is known as automatic praise. These adults have been called “praise junkies” (Canter, 2001). They may ask, “but aren’t we supposed to catch children being good and praise them?” This article looks at why the second type of response, which has the effect of encouraging children to succeed, is more effective in promoting children’s long-term development.

**A Continuum of Praise: From Controlling to Automatic**

Ideas about praise statements can be placed on a continuum from non-controlling to controlling (see Figure 1). Some experts feel that praise by an adult is inappropriate. They believe that praise should never be used (forbidden) because it is a controlling device for the adult and disrupts authentic relationships (Gordon, 1974, 2003).

Moving across the continuum of praise as control, one finds acknowledgement or encouragement (Albert, 1996; Dreikurs, 1964; Dreikurs & Cassel, 1972) as another perspective. With this strategy, children make their own judgments about what they have done. Next on the continuum is specific praise (Brophy, 1981), when the adult points out exactly what the child has done correctly.

The method of applied behavior analysis may use praise as a form of positive reinforcement to maintain or speed up adult-defined and -desired child behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2002). Finally, with automatic or institutional praise, the adult intuitively acknowledges the child’s need for attention with an automatic praise statement.

Each of these strategies is widely used by teachers and family members and deserves a closer look.
Praise Forbidden

Gordon (1974, 1988, 2003) takes the strongest position against praise, even forbidding it. Gordon believes that the process of communication is central to the teacher-child relationship.

Praise, agreeing, or giving positive evaluation (Gordon, 1974, 2003) is defined as one of the 10 roadblocks to effective communication. Teachers who use praise place themselves in an evaluative, superior position in relationship to children. Eventually, children become dependent on adults to determine whether what they have done is worthy or not.

If Mrs. Anderson used Gordon’s ideas to guide her response to Sabina’s art, she would respond without praise and might state, “Sabina, I see your drawing. Would you like to tell me about it?” (door opener).

Sabina might reply, “Yes, it’s my dead cat! Daddy ran over it last night when he came home from work!”

If Mrs. Anderson used automatic institutional praise, such as “Oh, Sabina, I like it. What a beautiful painting!” she would have missed the real communication that Sabina was expressing in her painting. Sabina might, or might not, have responded with any details about her creation.

On the other hand, if Mrs. Anderson used a “door opener” statement such as Gordon suggests, Sabina could express her feelings in words with a nonjudgmental, supportive adult. After hearing Sabina’s description of the scene, Gordon would advise Mrs. Anderson to engage in active listening (verbal encoding of the child’s feelings). “It sounds like that made you very sad.” And Sabina would have the opportunity to describe how she felt about the loss of her pet.

Gordon’s view of praise is that it leads children to be dependent on the teacher, makes a value judgment about the child’s products and actions, and does not foster full communication. When children look to adults for acknowledgement of their efforts and activities, they are not seeking a value judgment. Instead, at a deeper level, children show adults their artwork, for example, because they want to connect with someone, in this case their teacher.

Teachers who throw up roadblocks by using automatic praise lose the opportunity to truly know children and their needs. Thus, Gordon discourages praise and instead offers a host of nonjudgmental, supportive techniques to develop an authentic relationship with children.

Encouragement vs. Praise

Dreikurs, (Dreikurs, 1972, 1999; Albert, 1996) believes that all people, including children, are motivated by the desire to belong—to be found socially acceptable to others. Children cannot find belonging, they begin to have an excessive need for attention and power, and develop feelings of rejection. They may seek revenge and retreat into helplessness.

Dreikurs believes that praise is not a desirable way to promote children’s healthy development. He suggests the use of encouragement, a much broader concept. He states,

Unfortunately, even the well meaning and sincere educator may often fail to convey much-needed encouragement if [s]he tries to express [her]/his approval through praise.... Praise may have a discouraging effect in the long run, since the child may depend on it constantly and never be quite sure whether [s]he will merit another expression of special approval and get it. (Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 1963, pp. 98-99)

Children who need an excessive amount of attention and get it through a teacher’s automatic praise may conclude that, although they were successful in getting praise once, the praise may not be repeated. Children may even interpret their recent success as a threat to their future ability to succeed (Albert, 1996).

Perhaps worse, automatic praise often conveys to children that they are worthwhile only when successful. This is especially true for many gifted children. Praise and other forms of rewards seem to heighten children’s anxiety about always having to “measure up.” Praise can place constraints on children who feel such pressure. These children...
may feel comfortable only when they are successful.

At the same time, discomfort with being successful can further discourage children from feelings of being accepted. They may feel accepted only when they are successful. Socially adjusted people learn to accept themselves as individuals capable of both success and failure and who, despite outcomes, are still worthy of being loved and accepted by others (Albert, 1996; Fay & Fay, 2000; Fay & Funk, 1995).

Children who depend on being rewarded by praise are in a bind when it comes to taking risks. Children who are learning how to belong must be encouraged to try new ways of behaving. Children who learn that it is safe and rewarding to be meek and passive will not easily venture into the unknown by being assertive and active. They are not likely to venture into untried areas. This is the danger of having “failure-proof” programs or “praise-laden” teachers.

Effective teachers, then, according to Dreikurs, must not stress the concept of success but, instead, should always accept children as worthwhile. Teachers do this by using encouragement rather than praise.

The examples in Figure 2 contrast praise with encouragement. Praise focuses on the teacher being pleased by the child’s achievement of a completed product, thus giving an external evaluation. Conversely, encouragement focuses on children judging their own actions and the process of trying.

Praise is an external value judgment about how a behavior pleases the speaker (usually someone in a superior position such as a teacher or parent) as to the “goodness” or “badness” of another, usually dependent person’s (a child’s) actions.

Look again at Sabina’s presentation of her painting to the teacher. Automatic praise, “that’s a beautiful painting,” signals that the teacher is the one whose judgment is important. Sabina has pleased someone in authority upon whom she is dependent.

Perhaps the painting is of Sabina’s neighbor’s house, which she saw burn to the ground, an injury to a favorite pet, or a drawing of a drive-by shooting. Thus the painting expresses a horrible experience and to the child this might be an “ugly” painting.

Encouragement helps children to recognize their own efforts. Encouraging statements place the locus of control not externally, on the teacher, but internally, within the child: “You sure did ____. You must be proud.” Encouragement does not focus on evaluation of an end product, but rather on helping children recognize their own efforts.

Encouraging statements invite children to evaluate and explain their work as they see it, not as the teacher sees it (“I would like to hear you tell about this”). Simply stated, encouragement is a teacher statement that enables children to make self-judgments about how they are changing and learning. Encouragement spotlights the process and children’s efforts rather than the end product.

Finally, praise can be a two-edged sword, which is why some experts have characterized praising adults with the unflattering label “praise junkies,” meaning that the adults are causing children to be addicted to praise. Children may receive mounds of praise from their teacher for performing in a certain way. The next day, the teacher is busy and does not praise the same action. Some children begin to wonder, “Did I do something wrong today?” Other children will want absolutely everything they do to be praised on
every occasion, and they will aggressively pursue the teacher, giving her no peace until they get the excessive attention as praise.

**Specific Praise**

The concept of *specific praise* was developed from controlled research done in elementary and secondary schools. Researchers (Brophy, 1981, Good & Brophy, 1986) were attempting to find why some teachers were effective with student learning activities while others were not. The amount and kind of praise that teachers used was measured. Students in classrooms with teachers who used unspecific, automatic praise had far fewer academic gains than those in classes with teachers who either did not use praise or used *specific praise*.

Automatic praise was found to be ineffective in two ways.

1. Automatic nonspecific praise was stated in such a global manner that it left many students guessing as to what they were being praised for or what they had accomplished. This automatic global praise failed to target the student’s specific desired actions and thus was seen as ineffective (Canter, 2001).

2. Automatic praise was ineffective because the teacher dispensed so much automatic praise that the students became saturated with it and were desensitized to its effect.

Also, all forms of public praise by teachers were found to be an unmotivating and even punishing behavior for elementary-age boys, especially if the teacher was female (Brophy, 1981). Girls seem to accept and appreciate specific praise, but middle childhood boys who were spotlighted by the teacher with any form of praise were embarrassed and fearful of scorn and teasing by their peers.

There is mounting research discouraging automatic praise (Brophy, 1981; Good & Brophy, 1986; Albert, 2003). If a teacher chooses to use praise, it should be specific, telling children exactly what new skill or behavior they have mastered. Even specific praise might best be given in private, without a peer audience, especially when dealing with older boys.

**Praise as Reinforcement**

A second justification for praise used by teachers like Mrs. Anderson is that they feel that behavior analysis (Alberto & Troutman, 2002) provides a scientific and theoretical justification for using praise as a positive reinforcer. This is a misinterpretation and over-simplification of behavioral theory.

Simple statements such as “catch them being good” and “praise each child once a day” do not adequately represent the rigorous behavioral process of using positive reinforcement. This process requires teachers to gather a great deal of scientific data, set target goals, and measure their effectiveness.

The basic view of behavior analysis is that human behavior—both *good* behavior and *misbehavior*—is learned and occurs as a result of consequences of the child’s actions. Behavior that is followed by a desired consequence—for that particular person a positive reinforcer—tends to be repeated and thus learned. Behavior that is followed by an unpleasant consequence—a punisher—tends not be repeated and thus is not learned.

Reinforcement is a behavioral principle that describes a direct relationship between two real events: a behavior (an observable action, such as staying seated during story time) and a consequence (a result of the act, the child gets a treat at the end of the story). Behaviorists take great care through stated behavioral objectives and measurements of behavior to determine if teacher actions, such as social praise (“Oh, Sabina, I like it. What a beautiful painting!”) are really effective reinforcers.

If a third-grade teacher praises Jarod with the same statement about his painting, the other boys in the class may roll their eyes and tease him, “you’re a teacher’s pet.” Teacher praise would not be a reinforcer for him. For Jarod, praise would be punishing, as it well may be for many other children.

In fact, if one were to gather and analyze data one might discover that praising teachers are not actually shaping children’s behavior. Rather, the children are shaping their
teacher’s behavior. The “praise junkie” teacher has unknowingly been conditioned to dispense praise on any child who is not misbehaving.

If praise is to be used as a reinforcer, this time-consuming process must be done with a full understanding of the steps and procedures required to put behavioral theory into practice.

**Institutional Praise**

Adults learn many behaviors by drawing on memories of how adults responded to them when they were children. People tend to parent the way they were parented (Erikson, 1950). Praise, which on the surface looks supportive of the individual who is receiving it, is an acquired automatic behavior that many adults use daily without giving it much thought.

Most praise statements used by people (waiters, hair stylists, sales people) are automatic recognition responses that work in situations where workers deal with many people day in and day out. These workers use pat phrases such as “have a nice day.” These “institutional” behaviors maintain a functional, distant relationship with strangers, and are made with the intent to be courteous.

Even so, customers may become irritated with institutional responses when they need the service person to truly consider their problem. Consumers want a thinking response, and if they do not get an authentic answer but receive a scripted response, they are not pleased.

Although teachers work with many children, day in and day out, the nature of teaching is more intimate. Teachers are required to truly listen to children who are attempting to communicate something meaningful. If Mrs. Anderson responds to Sabina with “what a beautiful painting!” and then ushers her quickly off to another activity (and then gives other children this same automatic praise), she is maintaining an impersonal distance with her students. Children quickly understand that this praise is meaningless and is simply a way of dismissing them without truly attending to their ideas.

**How to Respond?**

With this understanding of the continuum of praise as control, it is time to reflect on how Mrs. Anderson could respond to Sabina, who states, “Teacher, see what I did.”

- Will she take a Gordonian view, withhold all praise, and work to understand Sabina’s deeper communication?
- Will she encourage Sabina with statements that value her effort, not the product, and enable her to judge for herself the meaningfulness of her work?
- Will she give specific praise, helping Sabina see what she has done correctly?
- Will she begin a process of behavioral change that targets Sabina with reinforcers as praise?

When Sabina, Jarod, or their peers say, “Teacher, see what I did?” skilled teachers reflect on their actions and make informed choices. A request for praise or acknowledgement by a child is one of the most important, if not the most important, of all teachable moments (Bailey, 2000; Wolfgang, 1996, 2001, 2004).

**Subjects & Predicates**

Children quickly understand that automatic praise is meaningless and is simply a way of dismissing them without truly attending to their ideas.

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How can early childhood educators improve opportunities for children’s academic success? Learning about and valuing diversity and interacting informally and formally with families are essential.

Valuing Diversity in Classrooms Through Family Involvement

Karon Brown, Tamecca S. Fitzpatrick, and George S. Morrison

After the Hernandez family settled into their modest apartment, Nevara quickly enrolled her daughter Maribel in an early childhood program. The school assured Nevara, who speaks no English, that Maribel would be helped to learn the language. The school also assured the Hernandez family that they would be partners in Maribel’s educational experiences.

Nevara quickly discovered that a partnership would be difficult. She and her husband speak Spanish with Maribel at home, she reads to her in Spanish, and they sing songs in Spanish. When books came home from school for the family to read together, Nevara could not help, because the books were in English. When they attended school programs, there was no one to translate. Fortunately, they found Project Successful Start, a family education program that helps parents become more fully involved in their children’s formal education.

Children entering schools in the United States today are not like the children of yesterday, nor will they be similar to the children of tomorrow. The faces of families in the country are changing, according to findings from the 2000 U.S. Census.

- More children live in single-family homes than ever before.
- More young mothers are entering the workforce.
- Between 1995 and 2000, the population of Latino Americans rose from 22 million to 34 million.
- From 1995 to 2000, the Asian American population rose from 7 million to 10 million.
- There are more than 500 Native American tribal groups. Among these groups, there are more than 200 languages spoken. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

Classroom demographics are changing along with the population shifts. Children who were once considered to be in the minority are now the majority in many schools. When children change, the roles of classroom teachers change as well. Figure 1 lists many of the dimensions of diversity that teachers encounter in their classrooms.

Figure 1. Dimensions of diversity.
Types of diversity that are continuously changing.

- age
- educational background
- ethnicity
- family status
- gender
- income
- geographic areas of origin
- physical and mental abilities
- race
- sexual orientation
- social class
- spiritual practices

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Tamecca S. Fitzpatrick, M.A., is a Diversity Scholar at the University of North Texas in the Early Childhood Education doctoral program. Passionate about working with diverse populations in the public school setting and community activities, she has had experience in early childhood settings through public education and university programs.

George S. Morrison, Ed.D., holds the Velma E. Schmidt Endowed Chair and is Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of North Texas. He is the author of numerous textbooks and articles about teacher and parent education and the education of young children. He also is the creator of the Success For Life Programs for Early Childhood Education, which reaches out to parents and teachers to assure the success of children in school and life.
What Is Diversity?

Diversity is typically defined in terms of human differences that play an important role in culture and daily life. Culture includes the customs, assumptions, beliefs, values, rules, norms, practices, art, and skills that define families and communities (Archer, Hauge, Miller, & Smith, 2001).

School culture affects how educators promote diversity and acceptance of each student and family (Bowman, 2003). Diversity must be used to bring people together, not as a way to divide people (Dozier, 1997).

When teachers promote tolerance and respect for people, diversity also creates opportunities for children’s character development (Archer et al., 2001). Teachers initiate the celebration of diversity in their classrooms by learning about their students’ homes and cultures.

As indicated, the most recent census figures confirm that the United States is much more complex and diverse than ever before. Working within cultures and communities requires a concerted effort to become aware of the many dimensions of cultural diversity.

Schools in the United States have been challenged to raise achievement levels of students who are of non-European backgrounds, whose families live in poverty, and who speak a first language other than standard American English (WCR, 2003).

Educators in programs such as Project Successful Start at the University of North Texas can help all children learn by building upon the history, cultures, and experiences of students and their families. These programs...

**Figure 2. How teachers can learn more about children’s cultures**

Teachers discover more about their students’ cultures when they:

**Learn...**
- about students’ cultural backgrounds
- how various cultures view teacher and school roles
- from children when they share insights about their cultures

**Locate...**
- people in the community who can serve as teachers’ cultural guides
- community agencies that can help with parenting and family issues within the context of families’ cultures

**Visit...**
- with children and their families in their homes, if families are comfortable in doing so
- with other teachers and programs that have a history of success in working with diverse families

**Why Understanding Diversity Is Important**

As indicated, the most recent census figures confirm that the United States is much more complex and diverse than ever before. Working within cultures and communities requires a concerted effort to become aware of the many dimensions of cultural diversity.

Schools in the United States have been challenged to raise achievement levels of students who are of non-European backgrounds, whose families live in poverty, and who speak a first language other than standard American English (WCR, 2003). Educators in programs such as Project Successful Start at the University of North Texas can help all children learn by building upon the history, cultures, and experiences of students and their families. These programs...
believe that all children have the capacity to learn and that all families should have access to resources that enable them to support their children’s development.

High-quality family education programs like Project Successful Start provide parents with skills and understanding in areas such as:

- school expectations
- developmental milestones
- language and early literacy
- health and safety
- number readiness

As families become more aware of the key role they play in their children’s development, they can become more effective partners with educators in their children’s education.

**Effects on Parent Partnerships in Schools**

Educational programs working with diverse families and communities that strive to address specific community needs and issues have a much better chance for success if they mirror, understand, and make the most of the communities’ cultural diversity (Archer et al., 2001). Parents are a valuable resource to educators.

Families, children, and the educational program are all part of the partnership process (Morrison, 2003a). Involving parents in their children’s education often enables everyone involved to get beyond cultural stereotypes and helps alleviate any fear parents have of losing their children to someone else’s cultural values (Dozier, 1997).

Encouraging parents to become meaningfully involved entails helping family members share their talents with their children both at home and at school. In this process, teachers recognize each family’s strengths in order to help them feel comfortable as partners in the educational process (Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitvanichcha, 2001). By acknowledging and learning about cultural differences, early educators can break down walls, re-examine values, and become personally enriched as they come to understand others.

While children benefit academically from learning in effective classrooms, educators must keep in mind that children’s success or failure depends heavily on what happens to them at home and in their community (Dickinson & DeTemple, 1998).

Teachers who want children to learn new things begin by building on what children already know. Informed educators recognize the role culture plays in learning. They seek to understand the social environment that shapes children’s daily experiences and sets the stage for learning.

Effective early childhood education programs are aware of cultural attributes and create programs that function within a context familiar to children and families. Culturally responsive teaching is one method that builds upon children’s cultural diversity in an effort to improve their academic performance. It encourages teachers to adapt and adjust their teaching strategies and content to meet the learning needs of children in the group (WCR, 2003).

Teachers who incorporate culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms:

- Acknowledge their students’ cultural heritages and understand how that heritage affects children’s learning,
- Encourage communication between home and school to build bridges of meaning between social and academic settings, and
- Use a variety of instructional strategies to meet children’s learning styles (Gay, 2000).

Knowledge about a child’s family and community is an invaluable resource for designing culturally sensitive programs.
Children are validated as individuals when educators incorporate their heritages into the curriculum through literature, songs, multimodal activities, and meaningful experiences. This approach also helps families and schools build trust and understanding of one another.

Findings About Family Involvement

Research indicates that parental involvement not only increases students’ academic achievement but is also a strong indicator of later academic success (Lopez et al., 2001). Studies consistently show a high correlation between parental involvement and children’s academic performance.

Lopez and colleagues (2001) also suggest that parent participation enhances children’s self-esteem, improves parent-child relationships, and helps parents develop positive attitudes about schools. In addition, their studies report that creating a welcoming environment promotes an open, active dialogue between parents and families. They found that the primary criterion for successful parental involvement is an unwavering commitment to meet the multiple needs of families.

Active parent involvement in children’s educations usually means a combination of experiences: families helping children with school work, talking with their child, communicating with the teacher, monitoring and participating in activities at school, and guiding their children’s development. Parent involvement is a commitment the school and teacher make to the parent and the child (Lopez et al., 2001).

The Home School Study, conducted by Dickinson and Tabor (2001), reports that parents and family members want to be involved in their children’s education. Their involvement is successful when families have abundant, relevant opportunities to be positively engaged with teachers and schools in a variety of ways.

How Schools Can Meet the Challenges of Diversity

Early childhood programs that strive to encourage family involvement can begin by identifying the learning opportunities various cultural and family situations can offer (Bowman, 2003). Schools often define parent involvement as either a way to support student academic achievement or in terms of participation in functions. The most successful programs go far beyond these beginning steps.

While traditional practice has been to increase participation in parent advisory groups and committees, teachers and school administrators are urged to increase opportunities for informal interaction available to parents. In addition to meetings and conferences, individual efforts to communicate, through telephone calls and personal

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**Figure 3. Ten Areas in Which Schools Can Help Bridge Gaps Between Home and School**

When families are committed to the following principles, they are better able to help their children succeed in school and life:

1. Understand the expectations of schools for successful learning
2. Comprehend the role that children’s development plays in their ability to learn
3. Connect language to literacy development
4. Analyze the effects of nutrition on learning
5. Determine how a safe and healthy environment encourages learning
6. Develop an understanding of early literacy skills
7. Examine the process of early math learning
8. Use science and social studies as a way of exploring the world
9. Integrate music and art with learning activities
10. Know where to get the resources necessary to encourage learning in the home (Morrison, 2003b)
contacts, for example, are often greatly appreciated (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

The rapport that parents and families establish with teachers through these informal contacts is vital, especially when dealing with unfamiliar aspects of education or any difficulties the child might experience. Programs that bridge the gap between formal and informal parental involvement activities begin by building on each family's cultural values, beliefs, and economic position (Lopez et al, 2001).

Successful programs that encourage parent involvement focus on increasing participation in the school and encourage various activities at home and in school that improve children's academic outcomes. Project Successful Start (Morrison, 2003b) has identified 10 areas that, when families are given guidance about them, can impact the academic outcome of their children (Figure 3).

Teachers can take the initiative to guide parents by emphasizing daily environmental activities with children. As children's language skills increase, parents with limited educational and financial resources may begin to feel that they are less capable to help their children in school.

Early childhood education programs can help decrease these feelings of inadequacy by always treating parents with respect and recognizing parents' roles as their children's primary educator. Effective early childhood educators frequently express to parents that they, the parents, are the real experts regarding their children. Both formal and informal interactions with families provide opportunities to reinforce the value of involvement and maintain parents participation in their children's educations (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001).

Successfully working with diverse children requires regular professional growth and support for 21st-century educators. Educators must actively seek knowledge and understanding of the diverse backgrounds of the children, families, and communities with whom they work (UND, n.d.). Much of the required knowledge can be obtained through reflective teaching and learning from others, as shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Supporting Staff as They Learn and Discover the Value of Diversity**

Skills and supports that encourage family involvement in diverse classrooms.

**Professional preparation**
- Develop awareness and appreciation of the many attributes of cultural diversity
- Understand how to nurture and support culturally diverse families

**Recruitment**
- Seek inclusion of all the community's cultures

**Communication**
- Use verbal communication: listen to what is being said, invite others to participate, and be clear and fair
- Adjust non-verbal communication: learn and respect various cultural beliefs about eye contact, posture, touch, and physical distance

**Appreciation**
- Recognize that respecting both differences and commonalities are essential for effective relationships

**Commitment**
- Create partnerships to support children's success

**Leadership**
- Encourage, demonstrate, and understand the dimensions of diversity within the school and community

Children’s success depends on what happens at home and in their community.
As children and families in early childhood education programs become more diverse, all educators must broaden their knowledge and skills in order to bring about closer home-school connections. Knowledge about a child’s family and community is an invaluable resource for designing culturally sensitive programs. With this knowledge, families, communities, and programs can increase every child’s chance for academic success, regardless of cultural background, socio-economic status, or primary language.

References


The SECA Board of Directors is working to ensure that we enhance member benefits while curbing their costs. As our postage and printing costs increase, we’re facing significantly higher costs to distribute newsletters through the mail. Our ability to expand the scope of our newsletter, provide additional features, and add information to help you professionally is dictated by our budget.

In order to meet our goals of 1) enhancing member services and 2) curbing our expenses so that we can return more of your membership fees to you in services, we’ve decided to post the SECA Reporter on the SECA Web site. (We’ll continue to mail your Dimensions of Early Childhood and our annual conference information.)

What are the benefits for you?
• No delays in receiving the newsletter through the mail. It will be online whenever you want to read and/or print it out.
• The ability to print only the articles/pages you want, copy them, and distribute them to anyone who is interested. We try to include articles that will be helpful to you as a professional.
• More information. Some things we’re considering as additions: parent pages, curriculum tips, and research articles. Adding these extra pages would not be feasible if we were to continue to print and mail the newsletter.

Read your 2004 SECA Reporter at www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org
I first became aware of Heifer International while watching "Oprah." She explained how the organization brings hope to families living in poverty, especially children, in Third World countries. Heifer International provides livestock and training in their care to families. The family then passes on their gift animal’s first female offspring to another low-income family, thus helping the community. As a soldier who had been deployed to Mogadishu, Somalia, I was instantly interested in the program.

St. Mark’s, where I taught 13 first graders last year, is a private school that is very involved in community outreach. Each class was given the task of becoming involved in a service project. After sharing my personal experiences of living in Africa with the children, I posed two questions to them:

“Do you think that it is fair that the children live in such poor conditions?” They all shook their heads and responded with a resounding “No.”

“Would you like to do something to help them?” Instantly and happily they all replied with “Yes.”

Thus began our adventure with Heifer International. After contacting the organization (www.heifer.org), we quickly received a box of materials, including ideas for fundraising; stickers; Beatrice’s Goat, a beautifully illustrated children’s book; and a child-friendly video.

We read the book and discussed all that changes that occurred in Beatrice’s life after the goat was given to her family. The children were so excited that they would also be able to help someone. Their enthusiasm made every aspect of the project rewarding. Together, we decided that we would raise money to purchase a goat for a family. Each morning, the children began praying for “the family who was going to get the goat.”

Our school has a wonderful reading program, so although Heifer International has a “Read to Feed” program, we took an alternate route. We had a muffin sale that gave children another type of hands-on experience. First, they surveyed other classes to find out whether the favorite muffin was blueberry or apple. We graphed the results on a chart, and found that blueberry won by a landslide.

Just before Valentine’s Day, order forms were sent home for Valentine Muffins. Families could order either a single muffin for their child or a dozens muffins for the class or office. Our marketing angle was to encourage families to write a message to the person who would receive the muffin. By the end of the first week we already had enough money to purchase one goat!

I had never been in charge of a fundraiser, so my plan was to bake all of the muffins with the children.

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Katherine E. Vanoy teaches first grade at St. Mark’s School in El Paso, Texas.
the day before delivery. Thankfully, Kathy Johnson, the director of St. Mark’s Early Education, suggested that “the children bake a couple of dozen.” She volunteered her staff to bring in muffins, reminding me that Jesus fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish (NIV Matthew 5:17-22). Amazingly enough, our muffin sale was much like that!

The morning we were to package the muffins, the children entered the cafeteria to see dozens of jumbo muffins. The children decorated white bags with red heart stickers and placed a muffin in each bag. They worked together efficiently and spontaneously broke out into songs about muffins. Their faces lit up with smiles as they filled the bags.

Thanks to the support of our school, the help of wonderful parents, and the children, our involvement with Heifer International was a huge success. The children were thrilled to learn that we raised enough money to bless three families with goats! For several weeks after the fundraiser, the children still were saying a prayer each morning for “the families who are going to get the goats.”

I strongly encourage other classes or groups to participate in Heifer International. There is no greater reward than knowing that you can make such an impact not only in the lives of children thousands of miles away, but to see the change that occurs in the hearts and minds of those providing the gift.

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**Grants from SECA**

The SECA Division for Development will award two grants of $1,000 each in 2004 to support staff and curriculum development, parent education and involvement, or leadership development. Individual members and SECA affiliates may apply.

For an application packet, please call the SECA office at (800) 305-SECA.

Deadline for submitting proposals is January 1, 2005.

Recipients of the 2005 grants will be announced at the SECA Conference in Dallas, Texas, March 3-5, 2005.
As our society becomes more varied and culturally sensitive, early childhood educators must become more diverse in their work with children, including curriculum planning and implementation. As family structures change, early childhood educators are called upon to understand and address the differing needs of families that may consist of a single parent, grandparent, or other individuals as primary caregivers.

With the increase of inclusion practices, more children with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) are enrolled in early childhood programs. Many early childhood educators are thrust into roles for which they have neither been prepared nor have prior experiences. They often are asked to collaborate with special educators, medical professionals, therapists, and others to meet the needs of young children. They are expected to possess the interpersonal skills to function on a collaborative team and the knowledge to be a significant contributor to and receiver of information on these children.

Early childhood education and special education teams try to blend recommendations about best practice for each child. As legislative demands for education accountability increase, early childhood educators often are asked to partner with researchers to develop evidence-based practices that are applicable to all young children. Above all, early childhood educators continue to address the range of children’s needs by viewing children within the context of their unique family and culture.

Guided by research and direct experience over the past three decades, best practice in services to young children with special needs usually includes a family-based approach (Mahoney et al., 1999). A family-centered care philosophy

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If optimal developmental outcomes are to be realized for children and families, medical intervention and educational support must be provided simultaneously. This article identifies components of a program developed collaboratively by early childhood educators, physicians, family-centered care hospital personnel, and community leaders.

**Professional Collaboration for Children With Disabilities:**

*Put Families First*

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Nancy Webb and Billi L. Bromer

As our society becomes more varied and culturally sensitive, early childhood educators must become more diverse in their work with children, including curriculum planning and implementation. As family structures change, early childhood educators are called upon to understand and address the differing needs of families that may consist of a single parent, grandparent, or other individuals as primary caregivers.

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Billi L. Bromer, Ed.D., is Early Childhood Education Specialist with the Columbia County Board of Education in Georgia. She has worked with families of children with disabilities from birth through the preschool years as a special educator, inclusion consultant to general educators, and parent educator. She currently serves as the President of the Georgia Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children and is a Parent Advocate for the Early Childhood Special Education Program.
supports the exchange of complete and unbiased information between professionals and families in a supportive manner,
understands that family is the constant in the lives of children, and
makes certain that services and support systems are comprehensive, flexible, and accessible (Madigan, Donaghue, & Carpenter, 1999).

Specifically developed to serve families of children with special needs, the Early Childhood Special Education Project (ECSEP) is an effective and well-tested model that other similar service providers may want to emulate.

Why Family Support Is Necessary

Children’s medical conditions or disabilities are often diagnosed in hospitals. It is also likely that children’s medical conditions will affect their ability to learn. Research in early intervention indicates that outcomes for children are optimal when appropriate intervention is provided at the earliest possible time (Dunst, 2002).

During the past 30 years, researchers have found that teaching parents certain strategies intended to enhance their children’s development can be effective (Kaiser & Hancock, 2003). Providing information and support to families of children with special needs leads to greater satisfaction with services, more positive emotional well-being, and less stress (King, King, Rosenbaum & Goffin, 1999). Nevertheless, when intervention is required, maintaining a typical family life can be challenging for families.

To ensure that the best medical and educational practices are followed and that the overall well being of families is supported (see Figure 1), children’s hospitals must view the medical needs of children and their ongoing educational requirements as linked to each other (Kaplan-Sanoff & Nigro, 1988).

Medical personnel and educators must work together to address the needs of children with health and disability needs (Kaplan-Sanoff & Nigro, 1988). “To work with families receiving . . . intervention, professionals must develop helping relationships that are likely to promote increased involvement of parents and their children and provide them a sense of empowerment” (Judge, 1997, p. 473).

Offer Helpful Support to Families

Family-focused support that adequately fulfills the needs of families must be carefully and continually crafted (McWilliam, Tocci, & Harbin, 1998). These are some basic considerations for professionals to incorporate in devising a program and in evaluating its effectiveness.

- Offer specific strategies that influence parenting capabilities in a positive and effective manner.
- Ensure that services provide high-quality support to parents.
- Assess services periodically to assure that they are effective and useful for individual families.
- Select the most effective provider of care. Choose an individual whom the family trusts and with whom they are comfortable.
- Adopt a transdisciplinary model that facilitates communication,

Medical personnel and educators must work together.

Figure 1. Characteristics of Beneficial Support to Families

- Programs are organized around the needs of families and strengthen family functioning.
- Pediatricians are knowledgeable about services for children with disabilities.
- Counseling is offered on special needs issues.
- Information is complete, unbiased, and presented in a supportive way.
- Resources allow families to make major decisions about their children’s well being.
- Information is offered about parenting, special education, early intervention, assistive technology, and the IEP and IFSP process.
- Guidance is available on how to obtain and work with an advocate.
- Information is readily available about applicable laws (ADA, IDEA).
- Families have opportunities to speak with other families.

Jan Bostian, Lincoln Intermediate Unit

Providing information and support to families of children with special needs leads to greater satisfaction with services, more positive emotional well being, and less stress.
collaboration, and shared responsibilities among all involved. As the ECSEP continues to expand, a transdisciplinary approach becomes increasingly critical.

- Share specific information and unique perspectives about the child with other service providers (see Figure 2).
- Share information in a unified way to families, which is as beneficial to families as the information itself (Seitz & Provence, 1990).
- Communicate collectively and collaboratively as a single voice with families (McCormick & Goldman, 1979).
- Minimize the confusion some families experience when many disciplines provide isolated services.

### Build Effective Partnerships

Six components have been identified as necessary to create effective partnerships among families and professionals (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, and Beegle, 2004):

- **communication**—positive, respectful, and comprehensible
- **commitment**—faithfulness to the family and child and a conviction in the value of the goals pursued for them
- **equality**—a prevailing sense of equity among members of the partnership
- **skills**—members of the partnership provide approaches that follow “recommended practice” guidelines for families and children
- **trust**—reliability and dependability
- **respect**—members view each other with esteem, are nonjudgmental, and support the value of the child. Even returning phone calls promptly is significant in successful collaborations (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

Although family support often begins in the hospital when medical diagnoses are made, the need for medical or hospital services may move in and out of the lives of children with disabilities. For some families, a hospital becomes the milieu for children who require continued occupational, physical, or speech therapy. Support must be available to families immediately upon leaving the hospital for as long as families require assistance. For families of children with disabilities, the hospital can logically become and remain a source of information and assistance.

### Assure Continuity of Support

In accordance with the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), children with special needs from birth through age 21 are often eligible to receive special educational services. Special educators who provide instruction to children with disabilities rarely have opportunities to collaborate with medical professionals, although they may also provide ongoing services to children or have specialized information about them. In providing truly family-focused services (see Figure 3), these links need to be connected.

**Facilitate communication, collaboration, and shared responsibilities.**

Continuity of support is a key component in enhancing families’ abilities to sustain their children’s developmental progress. Discontinuity of support can be disruptive to a family’s routines, can result in a change of expectations of parents and staff, and can even delay a child’s progress.

### Figure 2. Individuals who may share information about a young child’s medical or educational program

- physician
- special educator
- early childhood or elementary educator
- occupational therapist
- physical therapist
- speech therapist
- recreational therapist
- social worker
- mental health professional
- family advocate

**Figure 3. Components of Family-Centered Care**

- Focus on both child and family outcomes.
- Help families understand their individual child’s needs.
- Provide ways for families to develop competencies in meeting their children’s needs.
- Respect the families’ individual “rituals.”
- Regularly evaluate the quality of intervention and its usefulness to families.
- Modify the intervention if it is not beneficial or welcomed by the family.
- Use a transdisciplinary approach to intervention and support.
In general, children’s hospitals have a broad range of medical specialists, serve a broad geographic region, and provide in-depth evaluation and therapy services (Case-Smith & Wavrek, 1998). When families, children’s hospitals, and community-based intervention programs work together, transitions from the hospital to early intervention or early childhood education programs are more likely to be continuous.

Developmentally appropriate practices as defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and Recommended Practices from the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) include elements of family-centered intervention and education.

One component of NAEYC’s position statement on developmentally appropriate practice is the need for caregivers to possess “knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 9).

DEC’s recommended practices even more strongly urge all service providers to consider carefully the manner in which care is provided to families (Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2000). If families are to become stronger, the resources and supports provided to them must be family centered and offer continuity.

The ECSEP Model

The ECSEP is both a family-focused and transdisciplinary model that was developed at the Medical College of Georgia Children’s Medical Center and has served thousands of families in the region. The project was developed during the course of 3 years and is the product of perspectives from a broad spectrum of stakeholders:
- parents of children with disabilities

Characteristics of Effective Caregivers

- Positiveness—think the best of families without judgment
- Sensitivity—try to “walk in the parent’s shoes”
- Friendliness—maintain a pleasant but professional stance
- Responsiveness—do whatever needs to be done if it helps families
- Respectfulness—treat the family as primary decision-maker

As emerging needs were recognized, new programs were developed or adapted to address those needs. Parents, medical professionals, educators, and community leaders were involved in creating and structuring each component.

The ECSEP evolved from an early childhood perspective, not a medical model. In the past, it was unique for a hospital-based program to effectively collaborate with educators (Kaplan-Sanoff & Nigro, 1988). It is even more notable for a
A hospital-based program to emerge from an early childhood educator perspective and to continue to actively engage the participation of other educators.

The ECSEP has effectively and creatively linked pediatric medical services and early childhood education, and has boldly demonstrated effective collaboration and true systems change. The way in which the ECSEP currently links several individual components is identified in Figure 4.

“Family support principles are statements of beliefs about how supports and resources ought to be provided in a family-centered manner” (Dunst, Johanson, Trivette, & Hamby, 1991, p. 116). These beliefs include, but are not limited to, enhancing a sense of community, organizing resources and supports, sharing responsibility and teamwork, increasing family functioning, and defending family integrity (Dunst, et al., 1991).

Developers of ECSEP were mindful of these principles and made efforts to embrace them as these project components were created: Wee Wisdom, Project LINK Community Lecture Series, Project LINK Family Advocates, Project LINK Mini-Clearinghouse, Sibshops, Reach Out and Learn, Parent Networks, and the Kids on the Block puppetry program. All components of the ECSEP are open to the public and free or low cost with scholarships available.

**Wee Wisdom**

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, “The early childhood years present a singular opportunity to influence lifelong development and to prevent or minimize developmental problems in children with disabilities or at risk of developing disabilities” (2001, p. 1155).

Wee Wisdom is a weekly one-hour education program for parents of young children. The program respects families and supports the concept of parents as the child’s first and most important teachers. In an effort to individualize the program to address family priorities, concerns, and cultures (Bailey, 2001), the Wee Wisdom program grew from an initial series of five topics to 12 topics covering typical as well as atypical development.

Community leaders, early childhood educators, hospital personnel, and parents are responsible for weekly topics. For example:

- A hospital nutritionist guides a discussion on nutrition.
- A parent whose child has experienced multiple hospitalizations and surgeries coordinates a session on raising a medically fragile child.
- Early childhood educators, including the first author, present topics such as discipline and keeping children healthy, while a pediatric occupational therapist talks about children with behavioral disorders.
- The inclusion coordinator of the area child care resource and referral agency offers her expertise on language development in children with special needs, the Americans With Disabilities Act, and finding child care for children with special needs.
- The Medical College of Georgia School of Medicine and School of Allied Health faculty oversee topics such as pervasive developmental disorders, discipline, or working with children with physical challenges.

When families, children’s hospitals, and community-based intervention programs work together, transitions from the hospital to early intervention or early childhood education programs are more likely to be continuous.
Project LINK Community Lecture Series

Project LINK (Learning Information, Networking, & Knowledge) was designed to offer information to families on topics related to the special needs of children with disabilities. Many studies suggest that most parents consistently indicate the need for information as a priority (Westling, cited in Singer, McMenamy, & Perrin, 2001).

The Project LINK Steering Committee meets annually to determine topics for each lecture series and to identify possible speakers. Sessions have been designed to offer information about specific disabilities, legal issues, developmental delays, financial planning for children with special needs, assistive technology, and special health concerns. Faculty, pediatricians, and community leaders provide the sessions, which are held one evening each month.

Project LINK Family Advocates

These advocates are individuals recruited from the community who are available to meet with families upon request to answer questions and offer information. The family advocates are special educators or parents of children with special needs who have gained in-depth knowledge through their experiences.

Sometimes families of children with disabilities want to talk to other knowledgeable adults to learn more about the disability, school expectations, services available, or to become more knowledgeable about the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) process. Family advocates have filled this role, serving hundreds of families by offering knowledge, information, and insight.

Project LINK Mini-Clearinghouse

This clearinghouse was developed by the Project LINK family advocates so families with children with special needs could access information about their children’s diagnosis, connect with appropriate support groups, find out how to interface with schools, and learn about available resources.

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that pediatricians maintain a “medical database containing diagnostic and consultative information” (2001, p. 1156). By providing information on more than 250 topics in a self-help format, conveniently located in the hospital’s Family Resource Library, the clearinghouse does just this.

Reach Out and Learn

This program was designed to connect families with hospitalized children to resources such as national disability associations, Parent to Parent, and the National Dissemination Center for Children With Disabilities. At this weekly educational program led by the pediatric early childhood educator, families also learn about special programs such as Hilton Head Heroes, Songs of Love, and Make-a-Wish Foundation.

All families of hospitalized children are invited to attend informal sessions that are held in one of the waiting areas in the hospital. The atmosphere is relaxed, light refreshments are served, and families leave with a suitable children’s book as a gift.

Kids on the Block

Kids on the Block is a patented puppetry program. Performances from these programs are presented in the children’s hospital as well as in community settings such as schools, churches, and outdoor events. The programs are appropriate for adults and children, ages 5 and up.

The Kids on the Block program offers a comfortable way for children and adults to talk about sensitive issues such as learning disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy, or childhood cancer. The ECSEP has purchased 19 programs from the Kids on the Block, Inc. that focus on health, disability, or social issues. Puppeteers are volunteers and include professors, community leaders, and high school students. The pediatric early childhood educator coordinates the program and strives to honor each performance request. In 2003, the puppeteers performed for audiences totaling more than 2,100 children and adults.

Sibshops

Sibshops (Meyer & Vadasy, 1994) is designed for the brothers and sisters, ages 7 to 14, of children with disabilities. As developers of the program suggest, “For the adults who plan them and the agencies that sponsor them, Sibshops are best described as opportunities for brothers and sisters of children with special health and developmental needs to obtain peer support and education within a recreational context” (Meyer & Vadasy, 1994, p.1).

Siblings often have issues and concerns that are different from those of their parents and, therefore need a different type of support. Also, siblings generally have a longer-lasting relationship with their brothers and sisters with special needs than their parents.

A primary goal of Sibshops is to offer siblings an opportunity to meet other siblings of children with special...
needs in a casual, recreational setting (Meyer & Vadasy, 1994). At the Medical College of Georgia, the program is held quarterly and is hosted by the hospital's child life specialists and their interns. The sessions are a lively mix of both high-spirited and reflective activities, lunch preparation, and a shared meal.

Parent Networks

Two parent networks have been established, one for parents of children with autism and another for parents of children with Attention Deficit Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. These groups meet monthly in the hospital library and are a source of support for families. They also provide opportunities for families to network. At times, arrangements are made for invited speakers to offer their expertise. Most of the time, however, families discuss their own issues and obtain feedback from other families.

Components of Successful Programs for Families

The ECSEP model at the Medical College of Georgia reflects the strengths, skills, and knowledge of community leaders in this region and the specific needs of its population. Creators of the model realize that family units are complex, and that different family members have different needs.

3. Family-centered programs intended to lead to positive parental well-being are designed to help family members gain control over their situation and feel competent as caregivers.

4. Programs support families and promote high-quality relationships among all family members.

5. Major stakeholders, including families of children with disabilities, are included on all program planning committees.

6. Programs must appear safe and supportive to families in order to encourage their participation.

7. Especially during times of economic challenges, committed and well-trained volunteers are critical.

8. Volunteers must be selected carefully and screened for their maturity, knowledge of special education issues, availability, and capacity to communicate and empathize with parents.

9. The most desirable paradigm is one that is based on the needs of the community, represents the expertise of community members, and is a dynamic model.

10. In general, programs that are designed to supplement, not supplant, other community resources are appreciated.

By creating a model such as the one described, a community can build stronger support for its families and improve their lives. In a study that explored perspectives about intervention and inclusion (Wesley, Buysse, & Tyndall, 1997), families indicated a need for services that

- emphasized strengthening and empowering families
- were continuous and consolidated
- were provided by competent and caring professionals
- offered an easy way to retrieve research findings
- provided a current and extensive list of available services

The ECSEP has addressed and fulfilled these needs. This project demonstrates that educators, families, community leaders, and medical personnel can work collaboratively and effectively to support children with special needs and their families in unique ways.

The task of early childhood educators is to continue to reconceptualize collaborative partnerships in order to develop programs that empower and strengthen families. The ECSEP demonstrates one successful strategy. Other communities would benefit from developing similar programs involving the medical community.

As Schwartz and Rodriguez (2001) suggest, “Although we often develop lasting relationships with families, we need to remind ourselves that it might be in their best interest if we help them depend less on us and more on resources that will still be available after their child turns 3 or makes a transition to the elementary school” (p. 20).

References


**MEMORIALS**

Contributions in memory of the following individuals have been made to the Southern Early Childhood Association.

**Dr. Alma David**
By Sharon Reynolds
Elva Brady
Susan Gold

**Rich Scofield**
By Margaret Puckett
Ann Levy
Suzanne Gellens

**Jim Cowles**
By Margaret Puckett

**Josephine Gutierrez**
By Pam Schiller
Paula Jones
Dianne Hill-Patterson

**Susan Speight**
By Pam Schiller
In Memorium

Dr. Alma Williams David, Professor Emeritus of the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida, died on April 18, 2004. Dr. David graduated from State Teachers College, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in 1938. She served in the WAVES during World War II and earned her Masters and Ph.D. from Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. Her goal in life was to improve the quality of care given to young children.

In 1953 Dr. David joined the faculty of the University of Miami where she developed the university's first courses in early childhood education. In addition, she later became the director of Supplementary Education for Head Start. During her career, she visited early childhood programs in Israel, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and China. She took slides of classrooms, playgrounds, and children's learning activities to show to her students and early childhood groups. She retired from the university in 1981.

Dr. David was very active in the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Southern Early Childhood Association (formerly SACUS), and the Early Childhood Association of Florida. She served as the president of SACUS in 1969 to 1970 and also served as president of the Early Childhood Association of Florida. She was an active member of OMEP-US National Committee, a unit of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education.

Dr. David was loved by all who worked with her, by her students and her advisees. Alma David was my mentor, and I will always appreciate her encouragement and support as I completed my Ph.D at the University of Miami.

—Wanda M. Slayton, Ph.D.

The Southern Early Childhood Association mourns the loss of one of its staunchest supporters. Rich Scofield, the creator of School-Age NOTES, died unexpectedly in August of 2004; and the early childhood profession lost a true advocate.

Richard Tremont Scofield was born in Hartford, Connecticut. From the time he was a child, Rich loved swimming, boating, and fishing. Most of all, he loved telling stories and helping other people to be the best they could be. He graduated from the University of Connecticut in 1970 and received his master's degree from Peabody College in 1979.

Rich was founder and publisher of School-Age NOTES and for 27 years, and was a recognized leader in the field of school-age care. He was the founding vice-president and long-time board member of the National School-Age Care Alliance and served on the board of directors and in various positions for the Tennessee School-Age Care Alliance and the Southern Early Childhood Association.

Rich was co-chair of SECA's 50th Anniversary Conference that was held in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1999. When a keynoter was unable to make travel connections that year, Rich pulled a keynote address from his back pocket and provided one of the most memorable keynote addresses ever given at a SECA conference.

He was married to Bonnie Johnson for almost 20 years. They shared a love of children, their neighborhood, the natural world, and spending time with their children, Tara, Susie, Quintaria, and Joel.

When those of us who love Rich find ourselves remembering the excitement he showed during teachable moments, we are inspired by his life work of advocating for nurturing environments for children. His passionate personality and commitment to children will be greatly missed.

Diane Neighbors of the Tennessee Association for the Education of Young Children contributed to this memoriam.
Wondering how to work most effectively with young children who are learning English as a second language? The best kindergarten teaching strategies are ideal for ESL classes, too!

**Teachers Can Learn (Almost) Everything They Need to Know About ESL From Kindergarten**

Cherie Satterfield Sheffer

English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in bilingual kindergarten classrooms often use traditional children’s poetry and nursery rhymes in English to connect with Spanish language arts themes. During a study of farm life, the children in one group learned the nursery rhyme “Jack and Jill” and drew pictures in response.

Jorge, a native of El Salvador, drew a very involved picture with a number of characters including Jack, but there was no Jill. When questioned about his picture, Jorge answered that he was drawing a picture of himself getting water at his grandfather’s house in El Salvador. After further discussion, the teachers learned that many students had firsthand experiences with pails and wells, just like Jack and Jill.

The connections created that day developed into an in-depth ESL unit on farm life. During that unit, children moved from the initial superficial experience of learning animal names to a project in which they created their own farmhouses. They worked in small groups using modeling compound and plastic animals, and spoke English as they worked.

As illustrated by this example, first- and second-generation students who attend U.S. schools possess rich cultural and linguistic capital. In many cases, however, the cultural capital they bring is not the same as that required for success as defined by this country’s schools. As one ESL teacher stated, “Teaching this curriculum to foreign-born students is like trying to fit a square block into a round hole: It just doesn’t fit.”
How Schools Mirror Society

In 2000, there were approximately 31.1 million foreign-born people living in the United States, more than 10% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). That number is twice the percentage recorded in 1970. Another 10% of the population (27.5 million people) is comprised of second-generation Americans, those whose parents immigrated to the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

As all educators know, schools mirror society and, as a result, the number of English Language Learners (ELL) in public schools has risen along with the population at-large. In fact the number of school-aged children of immigrants is expected to rise from 5 million to 9 million between 1990 and 2010 (Council of Great City Schools, 2003). With changes in demographics a fact of life in U.S. schools, the role of the early childhood educator must change, as well, to remain responsive to the needs of the community.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Lau v. Nichols (1973) that ELL students have a right to instructional practices and materials that meet their distinct educational needs. Simply providing all students with the same instructional materials, curriculum, and teachers does not mean that all receive equal education.

Some schools answered this call by instituting bilingual education programs and specialized ESL classrooms with certified ESL teachers. However, many children still do not receive these services, especially in preschool, where there are very few programs for ELL students. Some might not participate in such programs because funding is not available, teachers are not available, or their parents opt out of the programs (National Association for Bilingual Education, 2001). This leaves ELL students in some mainstream classrooms with a bewildered teacher who may have little or no preparation for teaching ESL learners.

Teachers are responsible for meeting the needs of all of their students as well as for learning appropriate strategies for teaching their special-needs students. The task is not as daunting as it may appear, however, because almost everything teachers really need to know about ESL they can learn from the most effective kindergarten teaching strategies.

Kindergarten teachers are masters of making learning playful and fun.

Kindergarten is a place where children learn to be students. They continue to learn to read, count, and do simple arithmetic, the foundations of all future study. Despite all that children learn in kindergarten, most still remember their days in kindergarten as carefree and fun. This is due to the well-known fact that kindergarten teachers, along with the majority of early childhood teachers, are masters of making learning playful and fun.

Kindergarten teachers, and most early childhood educators, know that young children may well be less interested if learning activities are not engaging and pertinent to each child. Children have not yet developed the tact, sense of propriety, or brain development that would enable them to sit and listen to a boring book or lesson or play a game that does not interest them. Based on their knowledge of children’s development, kindergarten teachers prepare a learning environment that is distinct from more formal upper grades in order to meet the very unique learning needs of kindergartners.

What do teachers do in kindergarten?

Primarily, kindergarten provides a learning environment in which the focus is on learning by doing. Good kindergarten teachers use a child-centered teaching style, and create a fun, interesting, and engaging curriculum.

What can teachers learn from kindergarten?

Kindergarten is often a child’s first structured learning experience. Many children have had high-quality prior learning experiences, but kindergarten is the first setting in which teachers are expected to cover a specific, wide range of skills, which are very reading and math intensive. In fact, many states provide teachers with an exhaustive list of essential knowledge and skills for kindergarten that is assessed through benchmark testing every marking period.
Kindergartens are usually full of learning centers that offer children a variety of activities from which to choose including puppet theaters, dress-up and dramatic play centers, music centers, and many more, all of which are designed to help students develop oral language, critical thinking, and other academic skills.

Children are still learning vocabulary in their own language in the early grades, so teachers use props, puppets, pictures, realia (actual objects), manipulatives, and dramatic representations to teach new concepts. Teaching is likely to be unit based and the subjects are integrated to provide a greater depth of learning.

Also, kindergarten teachers make a point of helping children make connections with prior experiences by encouraging them to share personal stories and experiences with the group. Parents are important partners in education, as well, and family life is a ubiquitous theme in kindergarten.

Social interaction with the teacher and other children is a large part of learning in kindergarten. Children increasingly learn to work and play together in groups and in pairs. Furthermore, although learning is assessed, in most cases grades are not given and there is not yet competition with others. Creating a sense of community by accepting differences, valuing all people, and developing children’s positive self-images as people and learners are primary goals of kindergarten.

Effective ELL Teaching Practices

ELL and kindergarten classes share a common goal: language development. Both programs are designed to help students master English language skills. Current thought on best teaching practices focuses on the idea that second language acquisition should follow the same natural process as native language acquisition (Krashen, 1987).

Thus, the strategies for enhancing oral language and literacy development in a second language should mirror those used in kindergarten and earlier to develop primary language skills. Regardless of age or developmental level, meaningful and permanent language acquisition always occurs through experience in using the language (Krashen, 1987).

Krashen (1981) developed a theory of second language acquisition. His model for teaching ESP parallels current best practices in kindergarten and early childhood. Three of Krashen’s ideas pertinent to this discussion are the

- Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis,
- Affective Filter Hypothesis, and
- Comprehensible Input.

Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Krashen’s Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis states that second language learning occurs in two ways. The “acquired” process takes place through meaningful interaction in the target language. In school, this can take the form of dramatic pre-
sentations, puppet shows, and group projects that require social interactions with mixed language-ability groups.

The emphasis here is on “meaningful interaction in the target language—natural communication—in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding” (Krashen, 1988, p. 86).

The “learning” facet of this component is often seen as direct instruction in the target language, a strategy that is discouraged in most kindergarten programs. Rather, children learn when the teacher models behaviors through shared and interactive reading and writing. Krashen holds that the “learning” portion of language acquisition is not as important or useful to most children in terms of producing and understanding language on a day-to-day basis. Krashen (1981) captured this idea by explaining that “Conscious learning does have a role, but it is no longer the lead actor in the play” (p. 34).

**Affective Filter Hypothesis**

Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis is also extremely important to teachers who are developing children’s second languages. This hypothesis states that in order for a second language to be learned, children must be in a safe learning environment. Learning a second language requires risk-taking. So an ELL student must have self-confidence and a feeling of security in the environment in order to be able to take the required risks of learning English.

The affective filter also refers to a student’s motivation to learn the target language. Teachers must have a priority to create a sense of community, value all students, and provide interesting and motivating activities that encourage children to be engaged in their learning.

**Comprehensible Input**

Another important component of Krashen’s theory is comprehensible input: the amount of information presented by teachers that children can actually understand. Krashen holds that one cannot put children in a class that is completely conducted in a foreign language and expect them to learn anything because there is simply not enough comprehensible input for the children to understand. The teacher must provide input that is understandable to the children.

Because many ESL teachers do not share a common language with all of their students, a number of strategies have been developed to provide comprehensible input without the use of a common language. The primary strategy is to allow students to learn by doing.

Teaching by children’s doing, is of course, a fundamental concept of early childhood practice. One important tool is the use of real objects (realia). Any real teaching tool that can be observed by children and used to help teach a concept without requiring a lot of Eng-
lish vocabulary is realia.

Teachers who use realia bring real objects into class to help children expand their vocabulary. For example, a teacher might bring in a toy stuffed chicken to discuss chickens or as a prop in telling a story. The use of realia provides children with a linguistic anchor from which they can develop vocabulary. When they have an object that they can physically hold to associate with the word, it is much easier to retain the information and make the connection between target language (English) vocabulary and primary language vocabulary.

Realia is as entrenched in kindergarten as it should be in ESL classes. Story props such as puppets, flannel board stories, picture cards, and other manipulatives are a great way to provide comprehensible input for ELL students, and they are fun as well.

**Total Physical Response**

The Confucian saying “What I hear I forget. What I see I remember. What I do I understand.” is very true of language acquisition. For this reason, total physical response (TPR), is a commonly used ESL strategy (Asher, 1982; TPR World, n.d.). TPR provides students with comprehensible input by engaging students physically in language acquisition.

In this strategy, students physically respond to language. An example of this would be playing a Simon Says game in which students respond to commands as part of a lesson teaching body parts. Similarly, the song “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes,” in which students touch the parts of the body while singing, is excellent. Children can also chant numbers or colors while playing patty-cake or jumping rope.

Any activity in which children respond physically to verbal commands is a TPR activity. The physical response provides children with the opportunity to monitor their own understanding by watching other students’ and teacher’s responses. They become familiar with vocabulary and phrases quickly.

An extension of TPR and realia is the use of science observations and experiments and the use of manipulatives in math. These experiences enable students to use physical objects to explore materials that may be difficult to understand because of the higher-level vocabulary involved. TPR in all of its forms is a great tool because it allows language to be learned and used in a non-threatening, fun atmosphere (Asher, 2001).

**Connections and Scaffolding**

Unit-based curricula are also widely used in ESL classes to help students gain a deeper understanding of new material. The subject matter remains constant long enough to allow students to make connections with their prior knowledge and expand their familiarity with the topic.

Most unit-based material has built-in language scaffolding as the unit progresses, providing students time to grasp new vocabulary. Language acquisition is a process that takes time. Unit-based instruction offers the chance for children to experience a few things in depth for true understanding.

Most importantly, Krashen’s theory reflects the necessity for a child-centered, inclusive, and safe learning atmosphere, all staples of a good early childhood classroom. In the ideal ESL class, students are involved in a variety of engaging, interesting activities. Teachers focus on useful and pertinent experiences, and children learn by interacting with their teacher and with peers.

Learning a new language requires children to take risks, so it requires a lot of self-confidence. Some children may feel discouraged or believe that the target language is not necessary because they do not need it to function in their community. It is important for teachers to not only help them learn, but to help them want to learn. Good teachers do this by tapping into children’s interests and making it desirable and fun to learn English—as well as by providing them with emotional and academic support.

**Implications for the Classroom Teacher**

The teaching philosophies and methods that help shape effective kindergarten classes are also found in effective ESL classes. Both value the use of realia as teaching tools,
authentic experiences as a vehicle for language acquisition, and the importance of a safe and nurturing learning environment.

Furthermore, effective ESL and kindergarten teachers recognize that students need to be interested and motivated for learning to take place. Both use unit-based learning and allow students to respond physically to language by using TPR, manipulatives, science experiments, and other strategies that assure children move about and use hands-on materials. Finally, both ESL and kindergarten teachers understand that a student’s positive self-image can be the key to success.

The demographics of U.S. society are rapidly changing, as are the educational needs of students. As educators and as ambassadors of American culture, teachers must recognize the changing needs in communities and prepare to meet all students’ needs. A good place to start is with sound kindergarten teaching principles.

References

Visit the SECA Website

Have you visited the SECA website lately? Go to www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org to find our new pages that are dedicated to helping you as an early childhood professional. We’ve added:

• Curriculum Ideas-A page with ideas for your classroom and home.
• Parent Pages—Handouts on early childhood development for your parents. Two of them have Spanish versions.
• Public Policy-Summaries about the latest in public policy developments in the South and nationally.

We’ll be adding to these pages regularly, so make visiting the SECA website a weekly activity. We hope you’ll enjoy these resources. If there’s something you’d like to see added, give us a call and we’ll see if we can find that resource for you and your colleagues.

www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org
“You Have to Like Me!” Our Legacy for Children

Nancy P. Alexander

Four-year-old Ashley’s father recently related a humorous but noteworthy event. He had told Ashley that she could not go outside. The child ignored his explanation that there was lightening outdoors and that it was not safe for her to go out then. She could get hurt and that would be very sad indeed.

Ashley was not happy with any agreement to let her go outdoors the very moment that the rain stopped. She saw no logic in the explanation about safety. She knew only that her new bicycle with the training wheels was calling to her — and she wanted to answer the call. Besides, in her 4-year-old mind, the rain simply made it more appealing to be outdoors.

“I don't like you!” she declared, angry with her father for denying her the desired activity. “I don't like you at all! Not at all!” she stated with the determination that only a 4-year-old can have.

“Wait, Ashley,” countered her father. “What if I said I didn’t like you? You wouldn’t like that would you?” asked her father in an attempt to guide her to see that her comments were not appropriate.

“But you have to like me!” Ashley replied empathetically. “I’m your daughter. You have to like me! You have to love me, too!”

In hearing this story, I could not help but marvel at the confidence that Ashley displayed in her statement. She understood that she was to be loved simply because she was who she was. And this person who belonged to her as a father was indeed required to give her the affection to which she was entitled.

What is the message in this scenario? Simply that to support children, they must have the confidence that we like them and accept them just because they exist—although we occasionally may not like their behavior, we have to like them. What a wonderful legacy we would have if all of the children whose lives we touch consider that “We have to love them” and know that we do.

Nancy P. Alexander is Director of Northwestern State University Child and Family Network in Shreveport. She has a baccalaureate degree from Centenary College and a master's degree from Northwestern State University. She conducts workshops and other training sessions for the early childhood field and frequently contributes articles and photographs to professional publications. Her book, Workshops That Work: The Essential Guide to Training and Workshops, was published by Gryphon House.

Permission to copy this article for parents or other educational purposes is given as long as credit is given to Nancy P. Alexander and to SECA.
Adults had a great deal of difficulty coming to grips with all three of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 (Greenman, 2001). In the rush to try to make sense of such acts, and in their efforts to deal with similar traumatic or emergency situations, adults may unintentionally overlook children’s needs. When adults are prepared in advance to respond to children, any stressful situation—from the death of a pet to responding to severe weather warnings—is likely to be less upsetting for all involved.

Young children are more likely to be able to deal positively with changes when they have the support of their parents and teachers. During times of crisis, parents and caregivers naturally want to protect children not only from the physical harm, but also from psychological harm. For example, adults can help children understand the images and rhetoric to which they are exposed (Coufal, 2002).

Although it has been 3 years since the September 11 attacks, children continue to be exposed to media messages that alert people to new threats or heightened levels of concern (Levy, 2001). Early childhood professionals must continue to help children and their families to find ways to deal with the aftermath of terrorism, weather emergencies, and other frightening events.

There is no single best way for adults to best cope with unexpected trauma or its aftermath, but there are ways to provide children with the support they need to deal with their feelings and their fears (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). All children react differently within their own realm of experience, so there is no right or wrong way to approach the issue (Greenman, 2001).

Parents often are at a loss as to what to tell their children, and may decide to say nothing. However, if parents and teachers do not attempt to provide children with accurate information about their concerns, it is unlikely that others will do so (Lavoie, 2002).

For this reason, teachers in childcare centers and schools are encouraged to identify resources, offer child development information, facilitate open communication, and hold parent meetings to look at ways adults can deal with uncertainty. Additionally, a child psychologist or other specialist may be asked to provide specific recommendations.

Recognize Children’s Fears

When helping children express their concerns and overcome their fears, it is important to consider how events affect their families, both immediate and extended (Alat, 2002; Dettore, 2002; Massey, 1998). Children must always be viewed as individuals within the context of their families.

Children may not show obvious symptoms of anxiety or stress immediately after being exposed to violence or reports of terrorism. Depending on the child and the family, the symptoms of anxiety may be delayed, but they are no less significant (Shapiro, 2001).
Symptoms of anxiety that have been noted in children (and often in adults as well) may include:

- nightmares
- excessive worry
- anxiety about being away from home or school
- anxiety about going to school or work
- stomachaches, headaches, or other recurring physical complaints
- a sudden change in eating or sleeping habits (Shapiro, 2001).

Parents of children with disabilities must also recognize their children may demonstrate some of these same symptoms. Again, it is important to take into consideration individual needs and levels of emotional and developmental maturity (National Association of School Psychologists, 2002).

For example, a child who is in a wheelchair may face fears that non-disabled peers may not. He or she may develop a fear of going into buildings with elevators. This fear may be due to the perception that something will happen to the building, or more specifically, the elevator, and the child would not be able to return to the first floor. Alert adults should be prepared to recognize these fears and develop a plan for alleviating the child’s anxiety.

Suggestions for Assisting Preschool Children

During the preschool years, children can more clearly vocalize their concerns and express themselves through their actions and behaviors. Often, feelings of anxiety and tension can be detected by watching children as they play with one another.

Adults working with young children may find these strategies helpful when dealing with uncertain situations (Alat, 2002; Greenman, 2001; Jackson, 1997; Massey, 1998; Oddone, 2002; Shapiro, 2001; Wallach, 1994).

- Be sensitive to every action because infants and toddlers can sense an adult’s anxiety through body language.
- Stay calm when working with young children.
- Maintain normal routines whenever possible.
- Shield infants and toddlers from media reports and adult discussions of the situation as much as possible.
- Support each other with understanding.
- Inform families about precautions and procedures that were followed with their children.
- Share helpful information with each other, including suggestions for dealing with the situation gleaned from other sources.

Ways to Support Infants and Toddlers

Infant and toddlers may not fully comprehend what is occurring, but they do sense that something is amiss. That is why it is so important that parents and teachers deal with their own concerns, issues, and understandings of traumatic events.

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School-age children need comfort and reassurance, too.

2001; Massey, 1998; Oddone, 2002; Robinson et al., 1992; Shapiro, 2001; Wallach, 1994):
- Acknowledge that something scary has happened.
- Let children know that adults will respond to the situation.
- Give children plenty of hugs and physical reassurance.
- Try to maintain a normal routine.
- Prevent continuous or disturbing media exposure.
- Provide additional comfort, especially at naptime and bedtime.
- Do not push children to talk.
- Be ready to listen and let children know they can talk with you when they are ready to do so.
- Accept children's attempts to communicate their feelings.
- Answer children's questions simply and honestly.
- Avoid adding information to what children know unless their families have given permission to do so.
- Watch children's body language in an effort to understand and support their play and their "language of grief."
- Provide ways for children to help others in need.

**Recommendations for Working With School-Age Children**

School-age children are generally much more aware of the stressful situation. Some families may view school-age children as young adults and assume that they possess the same abilities to deal with stress and grief as adults do. This simply is not the case. School-age children need extra comfort and reassurance during crisis, too (Hall, 2001).

Possible strategies to help alleviate stress with elementary children might include the following (Alat, 2002; Greenman, 2001; Massey, 1998; Oddone, 2002; Robinson et al., 1992; Shapiro, 2001; Wallach, 1994):
- Acknowledge that something terrible occurred.
- Realize that school-age children have some awareness about what is happening.
- Be honest when you discuss the situation.
- Tell them the truth in simple terms without exaggerating.
- Emphasize that everyone is doing what they can to keep people safe.
- Let them know that adults are working to find a solution to the problem.
- Limit TV and radio coverage.
- Continue with normal routines.
- Set aside time to communicate with children and to listen to their concerns.
- Provide children with opportunities to take part in community support efforts.

In order for children to make sense of any crisis, they need information that will enable them to think critically about the implications of the situation. With time and support, they can begin to resolve highly emotional and unexpected changes in their world (Friehe & Swain, 2002).

**How to Support Children With Special Needs**

When interacting with children who have special needs, adults need to adjust their responses depending on the child’s disability. For children with limited cognitive abilities or children with emotional disturbances, these tasks become more complex (Squires, 2002).

Children with mild to moderate disabilities may have more questions and may exhibit less extreme changes in behaviors than their same-age peers without disabilities. Children with moderate to severe disabilities may pose fewer questions and be less aware of the circumstances (Friehe & Swain, 2002).

Regardless of the child’s disabilities, families and caregivers are urged to exercise caution in dealing with traumatic situations. Some suggestions offered by the National Association of School Psychologists (2002) include:
- Prepare children for even small changes in routines.
- Discuss traumatic events in a safe and familiar setting.
- Give choices in activities, to the extent possible, so children have a sense of control in their lives.

**Subjects & Predicates**

Often, feelings of anxiety and tension can be detected by watching preschool children as they play with one another.
Use concrete language to describe events and check that children, especially those who have disabilities, understand.

- Minimize distractions and sources of agitation during a time of crisis.
- Maintain predictable and consistent routines for children who are likely to display a heightened level of disruptive behaviors during a crisis or emergency situation, such as children with conduct or behavioral disorders.
- Use concrete language to describe events and verify that children understand as best as they can.
- Be sensitive to the fact that children with visual impairments may feel insecure about their ability to move to a safe place in the event of an emergency. Orientation and mobility training may need to be increased if this poses a threat to the physical or psychological needs of the child.

These suggestions offer the first steps in preparing children for changes, and to learn about how important it is to reach out, help others, appreciate their lives, and learn to live in peace and dignity.

Families and caregivers can regularly check children for indications that they are not dealing with an event effectively. Teachers who believe children are having difficulty coping are urged to encourage their families to seek counseling. Mental health organizations in nearly every community can assist families in meeting the needs of children (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Other resources available to families and teachers include Web sites, children’s resources, and printed materials (Alat, 2002; Greenman, 2001; Shapiro, 2001). The National Center for Children Exposed to Violence provides an extensive list of such resources as well as recent media releases at www.nccecv.org/violence/children-terrorism.htm.

Adults and growing children alike live in a world that is unpredictable, uncertain, and unfamiliar. Well-informed adults can help children make sense of, and find ways to deal constructively with, the ever-changing world.

References


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Patience versus understanding, misbehavior versus mistaken behavior, and discipline versus guidance are some important concepts Gartrell explores. The merits of each are defined in this book, which is a compilation of 11 chapters of articles that have previously appeared as articles in the journal Young Children, published by NAEYC.

In addition, there is new material in two of the chapters, as well as information that comes from two of Gartrell's other books: A Guidance Approach for the Encouraging Classroom (Delmar Learning, 2003), and What Kids Said Today: Using Classroom Conversations to Become a Better Teacher (Redleaf Press, 2000.) Two other authors have also made significant contributions toward the development of this book, Nancy Weber and Margaret King.

A unique feature of this book is that the articles are placed chronologically, which gives the reader a chance to analyze the progression of the early childhood field's reflections about guidance practices over the past 15 years. Another feature is the use of anecdotes and reflections within the chapters that apply actual situations to theoretical concepts. Gartrell takes a positive approach to using guidance in the classroom. However, his approach is realistic related to the challenges one faces in guiding children in their quest to gain self-control over their behaviors.

The first chapter, Patience or Understanding, explores the concept of understanding as a more appropriate approach to positive guidance in the classroom, while patience could truly be labeled as an undesirable teacher attribute. From using guidance as opposed to discipline (Chapter 1), creating family/teacher partnerships (Chapter 4), and building an encouraging classroom to avoid the use of timeout (Chapter 5), Gartrell covers most of the issues in balancing the needs of children, managing different behaviors, and empowering children to be self-confident human beings. He even addresses specific techniques that may be needed in teaching boys in the early childhood classroom (Chapter 8).

A consistent theme runs throughout the book about distinguishing guidance from discipline. Gartrell believes that traditional classroom discipline too easily slides into punishment of children for making mistakes in their behavior. Guidance rejects the pain and suffering involved in punishment. Through guidance, children learn to solve problems, rather than being punished for having problems they cannot solve. Guidance teaches children to learn from their mistakes rather than “disciplining” children for the mistakes they make.

As a director of an early childhood program, I see this book as a “must read” for all of my staff, as well as having a prominent place on my parent resource shelf. Gartrell’s book is easy enough to read to be used as a text book, training manual, or even a resource guide for specific issues facing any early care and education professional, novice or seasoned.

—Monica Mowdy
Director, Jacob’s Ladder Child Development Program
Cookeville, Tennessee


Young children have an abundance of questions about their physical world. They are born with the need to explore, question, and manipulate. Through these methods, children are continually adding to their store of knowledge. How can adults use this “need to know” to assist children in gaining meaning from their experiences? This newly revised book helps teachers and parents use simple science activities to develop new concepts. There is an emphasis on teaching both basic survival skills and the conservation of resources.
With the present-day pressures to teach literacy and math, science is sometimes approached in a haphazard way in preschool. However, science can be integrated into many areas of the curriculum. For example in the area of motor development, instead of providing commercial puzzles for children to put together, a puzzle can be constructed by dividing a carrot or turnip into several pieces. Putting vegetables together allows children to understand how parts make a whole.

In another activity combining science and language concepts, children collect leaves from different plants and make a book with a page for each type of leaf. Each page can be labeled with the name of the plant. A social development activity related to seasons helps children learn the kinds of appropriate clothes to be worn in each one.

This book has information about how to set up a science center, the kinds of small equipment needed, and a list of inexpensive materials to collect for teaching science. Most of the book consists of activities, each one on a page, that contain the principles to be taught, materials needed, words to discuss, and the steps in the experience. On each page there is also an explanation for the adult with a brief bit of scientific background for the activity.

Topic sections include experiences on Air, Animals, Environment, Plants, Senses, Water, and Miscellaneous (transportation, colors, and food). At the end of each section, children's books are listed to extend the information. At the end of the book, there is a list of teacher resource books.

Brown’s book translates the world of science into fun activities that young children will enjoy. It is an excellent resource for adults working with young children, whether they have a background in science or not.

—E. Anne Eddowes
Tucson, Arizona

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**SECA Elects New President**

Terry Green of Kentucky is the new President-Elect of the Southern Early Childhood Association. We congratulate Terry as she assumes her new position with the Association and say a special “thank you” to Nancy Coghill of Louisiana and Donna Castle Richardson of Oklahoma for their commitment to the Association as candidates in the 2004 election.

Following is Terry’s statement that defines her vision for the future as she begins her leadership role with the Association.
Available December 1, 2004

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