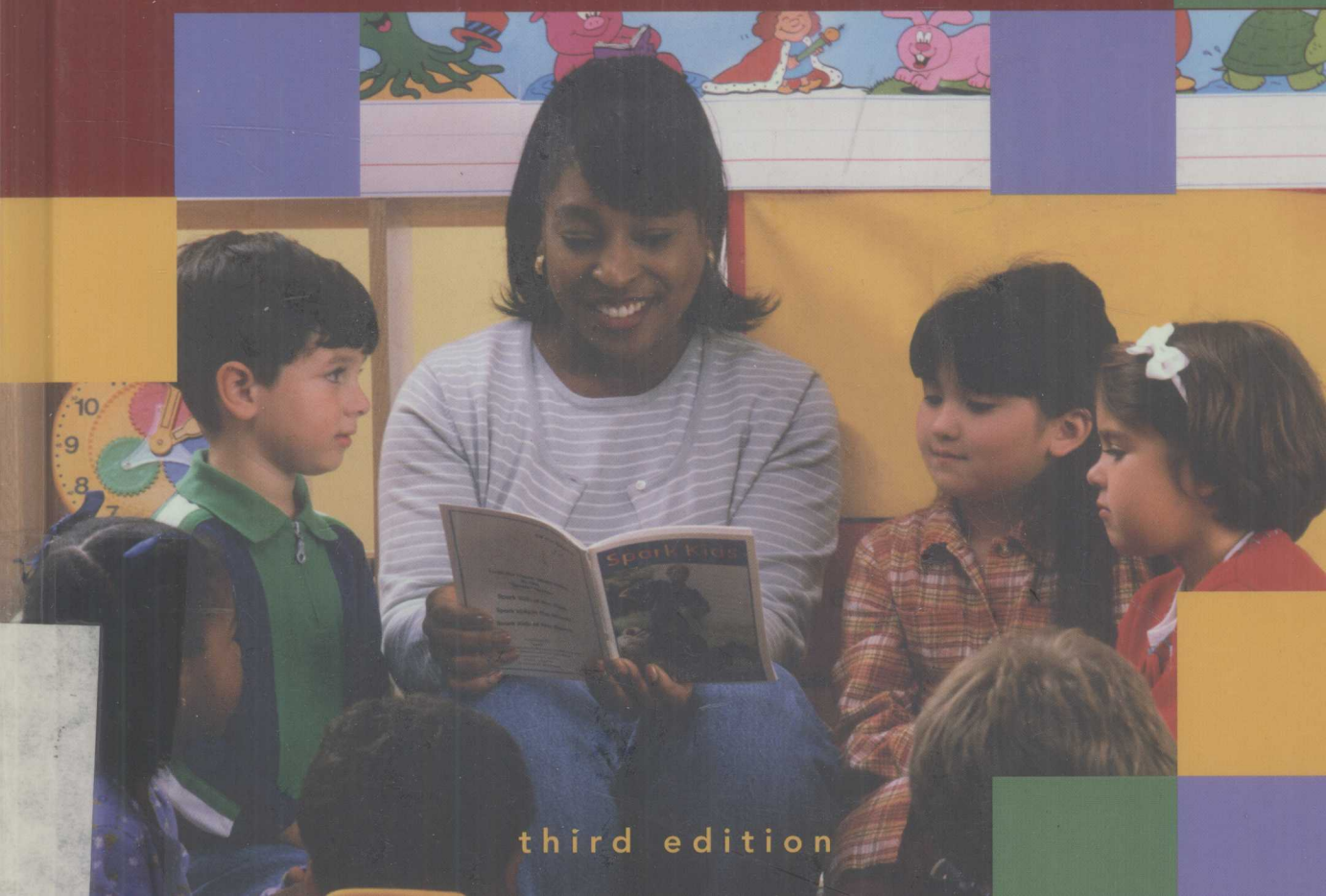
Janet Gonzalez-Mena

foundations of early childhood education

teaching children in a diverse society



third edition

Foundations of Early Childhood Education

Teaching Children in a Diverse Society

Third Edition

Janet Gonzalez-Mena

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To Frank Gonzalez-Mena

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PREFACE

This book is unique in many ways. It takes an unusual approach for an early childhood education introductory textbook. As an advocate for diversity, I tried to reconceptualize early care and education from different points of view. Diversity issues appear right away and are threaded throughout every chapter. Further, the perspective of students who are already working with children is addressed immediately and gives those students practical advice wedded to theory throughout the book. A goal is skill-building with a solid theoretical base. Though the book has many elements of a practical approach, everything is always based on sound theory, which is explained throughout. The aim is to address the needs of students who are with children while studying early childhood education—either as practicum students, staff in early care and education programs, or family child care providers.

Because of the practical aspects of this text, guidance strategies appear in more than just one chapter. Anyone working hands on with young children is anxious for ideas about how to manage out-of-bounds behavior. They can't wait half way through the course to get to a chapter on guidance. They need to know right away how to keep children safe and healthy.

Another unique feature is a whole chapter devoted only to caregiving routines. Why would those who work with children older than three need such a chapter? Physical care is important for anyone who works with young children of any age, especially when full inclusion is a goal and value. All early childhood professionals must know how to provide physical care in ways that promote relationships, learning, and development.

The fact that many aspects of this book are unconventional relates to my goal of trying to get everybody to think "outside of the box," as the expression goes. For example, I'm taking a whole different track when I devote two chapters to adults modeling behavior for children. The purpose is to help readers see that when adults are focused outwardly on teaching children, they often ignore their own behavior and the unspoken messages it gives. That's why this text puts such an emphasis on modeling. To those who are used to a more traditional approach to early childhood education, those two chapters may feel confusing unless they read them with the idea that everything in those chapters relates to the subject of children picking up adult attitudes and behaviors.

The result of this unique approach is that ages and stages information is farther back and the familiar chapters about physical, cognitive, social-emotional domains have been reconstructed into new forms. Those using the book who

have a more traditional approach to early childhood education are challenged to open their minds and readjust their thinking so the organization makes sense to them. That's not to say that developmental information is minimized. One of the basic glues that holds our profession together is the general agreement about the value of developmental research. The Program Standards for the NAEYC Accreditation uses the word development 19 times in their 10 standards. The words we use show our values and our perspectives; the same is true for organizations. Developmental perspectives are important parts of this text, but they are not universal. Many people in the world have different ways of explaining why and how children grow and change. That fact doesn't invalidate NAEYC's standards, it just reminds us that respecting diversity means honoring multiple perspectives on even the most basic well-researched concepts, such as developmental patterns.

THEMES OF THE BOOK

Examples, Anecdotes, Scenarios

In this book students gain an overview of what goes on in early childhood programs, both up front and behind the scenes. Ideally, students should have many opportunities to watch master teachers on the job before they work directly with children; nevertheless, many students miss such opportunities to observe. To address this reality, the text uses anecdotes to transport readers to early childhood classrooms and family child care homes. Students "watch" how early educators effectively facilitate the teaching-learning process and handle all sorts of situations. These examples are designed to help readers put themselves in the educator's shoes, examine their own reactions, and anticipate how they might handle similar experiences.

Parents-as-Partners Approach

The book emphasizes the importance of the partnership between parents and early childhood professionals. This topic is discussed in Part 1 rather than being treated as a postscript. Although early educators play a prominent role in the care and education of young children, they cannot ignore what parents want for their children. They must take into consideration the diverse backgrounds of the families that are a part of their programs, and they must work to clearly understand parental goals and values—both individual and cultural. What's at stake is children's identity formation and connections to their family. This emphasis on parents' goals and values reflects the vision of a pluralistic society—one in which diverse cultures exist side-by-side, with no one dominating the others. If this vision is to become reality, early childhood professionals must work to preserve home culture and to help children and parents understand and respect differences. This viewpoint is quite different from a "let's-study-diversity"

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approach to multicultural curriculum. This book teaches students to use an *antibias* activist approach.

Critical Thinking Skills

Because taking a diverse approach to early care and education is so complex, there is no formula for "correct" behavior in every situation. For that reason, this book encourages students to use critical thinking along with self reflection rather than looking for somebody else's "right answer." To do this, the text sometimes provides a particular viewpoint, but then asks students to use it as a backboard off of which they can bounce their own ideas. Following NAEYC's advice in the *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* book, students are urged to make decisions about what is best for each child and family based on child development principles as well as the child's and family's individual and cultural background.

Reducing Violence in the Society

This book takes a stand on working toward violence reduction in our society. By modeling pro-social skills and alternative ways to resolve conflicts, early childhood educators equip young children with a good foundation for using nonviolent approaches to problem solving. Those skills can help children through difficult teen years and into adulthood. Of course, changing violence in our society isn't simple. But if every early childhood educator were dedicated to teaching children—and parents—non-aggressive tactics for handling aggression, things would change.

A Broad View of Early Care and Education

Reflecting the changing needs of today's families, the focus covers a broader age range than the traditional preschool population of three- and four-year-olds. Although some students will work in half-day preschools, most students in the field will work in full-day early care and education programs, after school programs, kindergarten, or primary. For this reason, these students require comprehensive information about the needs of children from birth through age eight, including those with challenges, disabilities, and other special needs.

Reader-Friendly Style

The text is easy to read but not patronizing. It explains theory in such practical ways that students can take sophisticated information in stride and understand its usefulness right away. The book talks directly *to* the student *from* the author, person-to-person. A feature of each chapter is *A Story to End With,* in which I share my own experiences as an early childhood practitioner.

ORGANIZATION AND PROGRESSION

The books starts out traditionally with some history, theory, and information about early childhood education as a profession. Then it leaves background material and goes straight to how to supervise children in a program. Students who study and work at the same time can't dig into which theorist said what while two young children are fighting over a toy in the corner. They need to know how to respond! The next 5 chapters focus on the skills that adults need to work effectively with children. Though focused on practice, in each chapter practice is vitally tied into the theory behind it. The chapters of Part 1 can be thought of as unwritten curriculum that stresses the adult's role in both planning and spontaneity with the goal of enhancing *all* children's learning, including those with special needs. Unwritten curriculum includes the modeling effect as adults increase their awareness that children imitate them. Because biases show up in behavior and because children pick them up, antibias approaches are included in Part 1.

Unwritten curriculum includes planning, which depends on observation to be effective for arranging the environment, supervising groups, interacting with individuals and making appropriate interventions when needed. Students need to learn to do informal assessments on children, so they know when and how to interact with them effectively. Though the information on more formal records and assessments comes later, observing is a constant feature of Part 1.

The chapters in Part 2 focus on curriculum by first looking at the role that the environment plays in planning for learning in early childhood education. The environment is made up of the visible aspects such as the physical set up, including equipment and materials. There is also a less visible aspect of the environment related to the social, emotional, and cultural conditions present. Though this aspect of the environment is sometimes ignored, it is equally important to plan for nurturance, respect, protection, responsiveness, and cultural sensitivity. Those qualities of the social-emotional environment are foundational to development and learning according to brain development research. Culture and inclusion are two subjects that need special consideration when studying both the physical and social-emotional environment. They are also included in Part 2.

The information on developmental ages and stages is presented in Part 2. It is placed relatively far back in the book because I wanted students to observe children for a long time before looking through the lens of developmental stages so they don't get locked into stage theory and ignore diverse perspectives. Effective observation depends on looking at children with an open mind, rather than only through a developmental framework. At the end of Part 2 students are ready to learn about how to use observation for more formalized assessment. Because this is an introductory text, the focus is mostly on the kind of ongoing assessment that helps students plan and report on the kinds of experiences that relate to both individual needs and interests as well as those of the group.

Part 3 gives students a chance to look at curriculum in still another way and suggests that using commonly understood terms makes it easier to explain to

those outside the field. Further, using terms such as math, science, art, music, and social studies to explain the subject matter shows that early childhood curriculum is the foundation of courses taught in later grades. The cement of those foundations is the language and literacy that children gain in the years before language and literacy become formal subject matter. Language has always gotten a good deal of attention by early childhood educators. Now literacy has joined it as a subject of great interest. Literacy is interwoven in every aspect of the early curriculum.

Though Part 3 looks at curriculum in terms of traditional educational disciplines, students aren't taught to create "lessons" in math, science, language, literacy, art, music, or social studies. Rather they look for ways to provide children with first hand experiences with the subjects. Most programs use the environment as a teacher and the adults become facilitators of the teaching-learning process. The environment is usually set up with "centers" or areas equipped and organized so children can have hands-on, interactive experiences with materials, individually or in small groups. A program may also have a more formal approach to teaching something like math, such as addressing math concepts during small group activities or during circle time. Many programs have a "math table" with manipulative materials on it. Those obvious math activities however, should not take the focus off the mathematical opportunities of many other experiences that occur in the block corner, dramatic play area, play dough table, or sandbox. Though these areas were explored earlier as part of the physical environment in Part 2, they reappear in Part 3 as well.

No matter what the subject matter or the label, the curriculum is still holistic. Its holistic nature becomes a grand finale when the student is shown how to create a topic web as one way to plan curriculum.

NEW TO THE THIRD EDITION

- **Expanded Focus on Cognition and Learning.** In previous editions cognition and learning wove through all the chapters. In this edition they are more clearly highlighted in each chapter so the students don't miss the fact that they are studying about how children think and learn. In addition the research on how the brain develops gives some specifics on what's needed for cognition to blossom.
- **Expanded Focus on Diversity.** Diversity information and examples have always been a major feature of this book. Sometimes they were so embedded that they barely showed. This edition adds new information and makes what was already there even more visible in increased number of Diversity boxes and additional headings.
- **Expanded Coverage of Children with Special Needs.** Coverage of children with challenges, disabilities, and other special needs is greater than before. It shows up in sections titled Focus on Inclusion with a

subtitle that pins down the subject as it relates to the chapter. Although issues and information around inclusion have been in the text from the beginning, inclusion takes an even more prominent place in this edition.

- **Keyed to the NAEYC Program Standards.** New this time are key standards integrated into the text and a full-listing of the standards are on the inside front cover of the text. NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards developed for the accreditation process are now highlighted and integrated throughout. The standards correspond to NAEYC's description of how early childhood programs consistently promote positive learning and developmental outcomes for all young children, including children with disabilities. Five of the draft program standards focus on children and their learning and development. The others focus on the elements needed to foster excellent programs—teaching staff; family and community partnerships; and leadership and administration.
- **Expanded Connection to Theory.** The *Theory Behind the Practice* boxes are a new feature that helps students understand how practice and theory are integrated.
- **New Reflection Questions.** Provocative reflection questions at the end of each chapter are designed to help students to self-reflect making it easier for them to use their own experience to understand children better.
- **Updated Scholarship.** Increased scholarship shows in the updated information on brain research, cognition, inclusion, and diversity and is reflected in the end notes, *For Further Reading* section, and the references.
- **Expanded Observation Resources.** Increased information on observation skills are reflected in two new sections in the early chapters and augmented throughout. In addition there is now an observation guide and activity book as supplements to help students become effective observers.

FEATURES

- New **Part-Opening Introductions** provide readers with an overview of the chapters to follow and how each informs the larger message of the part.
- A **Chapter Outline** begins each chapter to lay out the key topics.
- The ***In This Chapter You Will Discover*** provides readers with a listing of what they should learn by reading the chapter.
- **Marginal links** key content to the **NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards.**
- ***Focus on Diversity*** boxes allow readers to understand differences in new ways.

- ***Points of View*** boxes provide two sides of an argument or idea.
- ***The Theory Behind the Practice*** presents expanded coverage of theory.
- ***A Story to End With*** concludes each chapter with a brief scenario related to the chapter's topics to show the reader the theory in action.
- A **Summary** provides a conclusion to each chapter.
- ***Online Resources*** remind the reader of the study materials available on the Online Learning Center at *www.mhhe.com/gonzalezfound3e.*
- ***Reflection Questions*** encourage students to consider and apply the chapter's topics.
- ***Terms to Know*** lists key terms discussed in the chapter.
- ***For Further Reading*** presents a listing of suggested related readings.

SUPPLEMENTS

For the Instructor

Instructors' Resource CD-ROM. The text is accompanied by an IRCD that includes the instructor's manual, test bank, and computerized test bank.

Instructor's Online Learning Center. Located at *www.mhhe.com/gonzalezfound3e,* the Instructor's area of the Online Learning Center includes the password-protected instructor's manual and other resources.

For the Student

Resources for Observation and Reflection. Packaged for free with new copies of this text, ***Resources for Observation and Reflection*** includes an Observation Guide with guidelines and forms for observing children, Reflection Questions to accompany each chapter of the text, extensive listings of journal, books, video and Web resources, and the NAEYC Standards and Position Papers referenced in the text. If not purchasing a new copy of the text, students can purchase a copy of this guide by calling McGraw-Hill customer service at 1-800-338-3987.

Online Learning Center. Located at **www.mhhe.com/gonzalezfound3e,** the Online Learning Center includes a student study guide with quizzes and Web links.

***Diversity in Early Care and Education Programs,* 4e by Janet Gonzalez-Mena.** This briefer text focuses on diversity in early care and education programs.

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About the Author

Janet Gonzalez-Mena was on the faculty of the Child and Family Studies Program at Napa Valley College for 15 years where she taught academic classes and also worked in partnership with campus child care as a practicum teacher. She has experience as a preschool teacher, home visitor, child care director, family child care coordinator, and supervisor of a pilot program of therapeutic child care for abused infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. She has a special interest in diversity, equity, and parent/provider partnerships. Recently she has been learning more about full inclusion programs and has been part of a training project called *Beginning Together* designed to promote inclusion of children with disabilities and other special needs in early care and education programs. Janet has written a number of books and articles about early childhood education and parenting, including *Diversity in Early Childhood Education*. In her spare time Janet writes occasionally for *Child Care Information Exchange* and *Young Children*. She recently wrote a book with Anne Stonehouse called *Making Links* which is about planning and practice in partnership with parents. She has also been part of a project called *Bridging Cultures in Early Childhood* designed to help early childhood professionals understand cultural differences. Janet has a Master in Arts Degree in Human Development from Pacific Oaks College.

Brief Contents

Part 1

Foundations of the Teaching–Learning Process: The Role of the Early Childhood Educator 1

1 Early Childhood Education as a Profession 3
2 First Things First: Health and Safety through Observation and Supervision 33
3 Communicating With Young Children 55
4 Facilitating Young Children's Work and Play 77
5 Guiding Young Children's Behavior 109
6 The Teacher as Model 135
7 Modeling Adult Relationships in Early Childhood Settings 165

Part 2

Foundations of Curriculum: Planning for Learning 192

8 Setting Up the Physical Environment 195
9 Creating a Social-Emotional Environment 229
10 Routines 253
11 Developmental Tasks as the Curriculum: How to Support Children at Each Stage 279
12 Observing, Recording, and Assessing 309

Part 3

Foundations for Formal Education: Planning for Learning 336

13 Language and Emergent Literacy 339
14 Providing Developmentally Appropriate Experiences in Math and Science 367
15 Integrating Art, Music, and Social Studies into a Holistic Curriculum 393

CONTENTS

PREFACE xv

Part 1

Foundations of the Teaching–Learning Process: The Role of the Early Childhood Educator 1

1 Early Childhood Education as a Profession 3

FOUR THEMES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER TRAINING 4
- The Value of Reflective Thinking 4
- A Multicultural Perspective 4
- A Holistic Approach 5
- Professionalism 7

CHILD-DEVELOPMENT HISTORY 13
- Historical Trends and Figures 13

CHILD-DEVELOPMENT THEORISTS AND THEIR THEORIES 15

PIONEER EDUCATORS 22
- Brain Research 24

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PROFESSIONAL 25
- Legal Responsibilities 28
- Code of Ethics 29

A STORY TO END WITH 29

SUMMARY 30

ONLINE RESOURCES 30

TERMS TO KNOW 31

FOR FURTHER READING 31

2 First Things First: Health and Safety Through Observation and Supervision 33

OBSERVATION AND SUPERVISION 34

OBSERVATION SKILLS FOR BEGINNERS 34

SUPERVISION SKILLS FOR BEGINNERS 37
Focusing on Individuals and the Group 37
A Crash Course in Guidance 39
Conflict as a Safety Issue 44
Risk Taking as a Safety Measure 46
Helping Children Learn from Their Experiences 47

A SAFE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT 47
Developmental Appropriateness 47
Maintenance as Prevention 48
Sanitation Procedures 49
Program Policies and Procedures for Health and Safety 50
Stress and Frustration as Health and Safety Issues 51

A STORY TO END WITH 52

SUMMARY 52

ONLINE RESOURCES 52

REFLECTION QUESTIONS 53

TERMS TO KNOW 53

FOR FURTHER READING 53

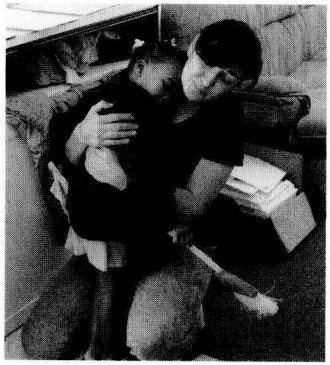
3 Providing for the Child's Emotional Growth and Well-Being through Communication 55

LISTENING: AN IMPORTANT SKILL 57

COMMUNICATION, RELATIONSHIPS, AND THE COGNITIVE CONNECTION 56
Listening and Giving Feedback Are Valuable to Communication 57
Listening and Responding to Different Situations 59

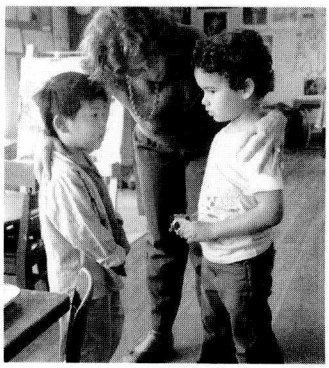
HOW TO COMMUNICATE CLEARLY 65
Ask Real Questions, Not Rhetorical Ones 65
Validate Feelings and Perceptions Instead of Discounting Them 65
Address Uncomfortable Situations Instead of Ignoring the Obvious 67
Be Congruent; Avoid Incongruence 68
Watch Out for Double-Bind Messages 68
Use Redirection Instead of Distraction 69
Be Sensitive about Questioning Children 71

USING OBSERVATION AND REFLECTION TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION 72



A STORY TO END WITH 74
SUMMARY 74
ONLINE RESOURCES 74
REFLECTION QUESTIONS 74
TERMS TO KNOW 75
FOR FURTHER READING 75

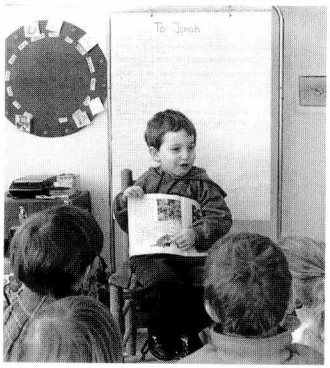
4 Facilitating Young Children's Work and Play 77
WHO'S IN THE SPOTLIGHT—ADULT OR CHILDREN? 78
The Teacher as Director and Star 79
The Teacher as Responder, Protector, and Facilitator 80
PLAY, COGNITION, AND LEARNING 80
FOCUS ON INCLUSION: Making Play Available and Appropriate for All Children 83
Playing to Get Smart 84
Is Play Always Fun? 85
How Does Play Differ from Work? 85
Types of Play—Cognitive and Social 86
Benefits of Play 90
WORK: A WAY OF LEARNING 91
Adult Attitudes toward Work and Their Effect on Children 92
Children's Observations of Adults at Work 93
Two Views on Child-Centered Learning 93
The Project Approach to Learning 93
THE ADULT'S ROLES IN CHILDREN'S WORK AND PLAY 94
The Adult as Observer 95
The Adult as Stage Manager 97
The Adult as Teacher 98
The Adult as Encourager 100
A STORY TO END WITH 104
SUMMARY 104
ONLINE RESOURCES 104
TERMS TO KNOW 105
REFLECTION QUESTIONS 105
FOR FURTHER READING 106



5 Guiding Young Children's Behavior 109
APPROPRIATE BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS 110

PUNISHMENT, INCLUDING SPANKING, IS A NO NO 111
What's Wrong with Punishment? 111
Side Effects of Punishment 114
GUIDANCE ALTERNATIVES TO PUNISHMENT 114
Time-Out 115
Learning from Consequences 116
Setting Limits 117
Redirection 122
Teaching Children to Express Their Feelings 122
Modeling Prosocial Behaviors 123
FOCUS ON INCLUSION: Children with Special Needs 126
INTERPRETING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR 128
A STORY TO END WITH 131
SUMMARY 132
ONLINE RESOURCE 132
REFLECTION QUESTIONS 132
TERMS TO KNOW 133
FOR FURTHER READING 133

6 The Teacher as Model 135
MODELING NONVIOLENT PROBLEM SOLVING 137
Seeking Information 139
Recognizing Alternatives 140
Considering Consequences 142
The Many Roots of Violence 143
MODELING SELF-ESTEEM 144
Modeling Virtue 144
Modeling Power 146
Modeling Significance 148
Modeling Competence 150
MODELING EQUITY 151
MODELING LEARNING 153
The Importance of Observation 154
Creating an Emergent Curriculum 155
A STORY TO END WITH 160
SUMMARY 161
ONLINE RESOURCES 161
REFLECTION QUESTIONS 161



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