Second Edition

Foundations of EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Teaching Three-, Four-, and Five-Year-Old Children

Bernard Spodek - Olivia N. Saracho - Michael D. Davis

Bernard Spodek
University of Illinois

Olivia N. Saracho
University of Maryland

Michael D. Davis
Virginia Commonwealth University

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Preface

Early childhood education has always been an exciting and dynamic field. It has continued to maintain its dynamism in the four years since the first edition of this book was published. The knowledge we have gained in the recent past about how children learn and develop, our awareness of the positive results of enrolling young children in early childhood education programs, and the increased acceptance of early childhood education by the American public make this a particularly opportune time to study early childhood education and to prepare to become an early childhood education professional.

Foundations of Early Childhood Education is an introductory text for students preparing to teach children ages three through five. It is intended to provide basic knowledge about the field of early childhood education, about the work that practitioners do with young children, and about the ideas that underlie that work. It can be used in undergraduate courses in four-year colleges and universities as well as in community colleges. Because of the wealth of resources included in this book, students will wish to keep it as a reference as they begin their teaching.

This book presents a realistic view of the field of early childhood education. It integrates theory with practice so that the reader can understand not only what things happen in schools for young children, but why they happen as well. The book is written in a clear, concise style using understandable language. Concepts are carefully explained. Practical examples and appropriate illustrations are provided throughout so that even the most complicated ideas can be understood.

The book describes the historical traditions of the field of early childhood education as well as contemporary early childhood institutions and programs, the types of practitioners in the field, and the requirements for different

practitioner roles. It also presents basic theories and knowledge of child development that are so vital to teaching young children. The text provides the basis for planning the physical and social environment for teaching, for using different forms of educational evaluation, and for working with parents. A separate chapter is included for each curriculum area to help the reader focus on the specifics of program planning and implementation.

Within each topic, basic theory and research are related and integrated with practical knowledge gained from classroom teaching. Careful attention is given to provide the most up-to-date research and to address emerging issues in the field. Examples, practical applications, and guidelines for practice as well as verbal and visual illustrations are generously used to help students explore the implications of the concepts, ideas, and theories presented throughout the book.

The material throughout this textbook has been expanded and updated. More current facts, illustrations, and references have been provided as appropriate. New topics have been added, including a discussion of public school programs for four-year-olds, child advocacy, and the emergence of literacy in young children.

We wish to acknowledge our debt to the many persons who have contributed to the development of this text. Much of the knowledge we have gained over the years and that is reflected in this book comes from the many contacts we have had with others in the field: teachers, undergraduate and graduate students, and parents and children. We wish especially to thank those who reviewed our manuscript at various stages and provided helpful suggestions, criticism, and comments. These include Professors Nita H. Barbour of the University of Maryland (Baltimore County), Judy Campbell of Parkland College (Illinois), Jacqueline Blackwell of Indiana University (Indianapolis), and John Cryan of the University of Toledo.

We also wish to thank the staff, parents, and children of Martin Luther King Jr., George Washington, and Thomas Paine Elementary Schools in Urbana, Illinois, especially those in Sandra Beak's, Melanie Turnspeed's, and Jane Maehr's kindergarten classes, of the Garza Elementary School in Brownsville, Texas, and of Early Learning Children's Center in Champaign, Illinois. The bulk of the photographs of children in school were taken in these classes by Bernard Spodek.

Most important, we wish to acknowledge the support and encouragement we have received from our families during the period we were writing this book. Without the love and support of Connie, Meg, and Sally Davis, of Francisca S., Pablo J., Saul Villareal, and Lydia Gonzales, and of Prudence Spodek, this book would not have been possible.

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1

Introduction

OBJECTIVES

After completing this introductory chapter, the student will be able to:

1. Define early childhood education.
2. Describe early childhood programs in different settings for children ages three to five, including: nursery school, child care center, Head Start program, prekindergarten, private kindergarten, and public kindergarten.
3. Identify the social forces that influence the field of early childhood education.
4. Specify the educational effects of preschool programs on children.
5. Describe recent trends in early childhood education.

The early years in children's lives have long been considered among the most important. Children learn a great deal at this age, and what they learn has long-term, significant consequences.

From infancy on, children develop physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. Much of this development is related to maturation. The ability of young children to walk, to talk, to think logically and to function as part of a group is dependent upon maturation, but it is also influenced by their experiences. Education begins at this early stage. Parents teach children to walk and to talk. They teach children self-caring skills, manners, values, and a host of other things. Parents and other family members become the children's first teachers, stimulating children's physical and mental growth. Parents generally do not study how to teach their children. They naturally and spontaneously interact with children. Their teaching skills grow out of living with their children throughout the day. Although it is informal, the instructional role of parents is critical in the lives of young children.

The child's home provides an important context for learning. In many ways, the school supplements the home. Young children's experiences in school are no less natural then their experiences in their home child-rearing environment, although often they can be planned with greater care. It is the integration of education in and out of school that is important.

We generally assume that children will be raised in a good home—one that will provide for all the needs of the young child. This is not always the case, however. Many families lack adequate resources to provide all the complex requirements of rearing children within our society. Families are not always able to provide the best conditions for the development of their children. Poverty, isolation, and the demands of earning a living can limit what may be available. Early childhood programs work hand in hand with families to provide the necessary basis for the children's development, supplementing parents' child-rearing efforts and increasing the support to allow children to assume their role in society successfully. Many of the programs offered in schools or centers function in isolation from the home. But educational programs can be brought into the home as well. Such home-based educational programs, involving parents as well as children, are especially effective for very young children.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early childhood education is generally defined as the education of children from birth to age eight. It includes programs for infants and toddlers, nursery school, child care, and preschool programs, as well as kindergarten and primary grades. Sometimes the term *early childhood education* is used to refer to those programs serving children under the age of six. Sometimes it is used to refer just to programs for children below kindergarten age. The material in this text will focus only on three- through five-year-old children who are educated and cared for in kindergarten and prekindergarten settings, such as nursery schools and child care centers.

Children in their early childhood years are served by many kinds of institutions. The majority of children from ages five through eight are educated in the kindergarten and primary grades of the public schools. Some are educated in private institutions: religious and parochial schools as well as private secular schools. Most programs for children below age five are in private institutions, and are operated either for-profit or not-for-profit. These institutions serve fewer children than do the public schools, and often enroll groups that are alike in economic status, ethnicity, or some other group trait. Child care centers differ from nursery schools. They have longer daily hours and are concerned with caring for as well as educating children. No one program or setting can meet all the needs of all young children and their families.

Public schooling in the United States usually begins at age five or six, with enrollment in public school kindergarten or first grade. This situation, however, is changing. A number of states are beginning to include four-year-olds in public education. Also, while compulsory school attendance is not required in most states until the age of seven, some states are beginning to require attendance as early as age five. Other states are requiring kindergarten attendance for admission to first grade.

As kindergarten became part of the public school system, it was often considered as something different that was grafted on to the elementary grades. Public school educators often seemed unsure as to whether kindergarten really belonged. Early childhood education has now become more widely accepted as part of public education. Increasingly, public schools are accepting responsibilities for educating children below the typical kindergarten entrance age of five. Four-year-olds are being enrolled in public school prekindergarten programs in many communities, and schools are beginning to educate children even younger than age four. Still, most children below age five are not in the public schools. They are educated in nursery schools, day care centers, and Head Start programs, as well as private kindergartens. These institutions are similar in many ways. They also differ in some ways, including varied institutional settings, services offered, program goals, and even psychological theories that underlie the programs.

Nursery Schools

The original nursery school, described in Chapter 2, was based on a philosophy of nurturance: a concern for the child's social, physical, emotional, and intellectual needs. The nursery school teacher bathed children, dressed them in clean outfits, provided them with food and rest, saw that they received sufficient fresh air, and also educated them. The children were taught self-caring skills (such as washing oneself and tying one's shoelaces) and taking care of plants, animals, and the school environment. They were involved in music, language, reading readiness, writing, mathematics, and science activities. Play was an important part of the program, which flowed freely indoors and outdoors. The children were provided with opportunities for art construction, water play, playing with sand, and other nonstructured activities.

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