Third Edition

Approaches to Early Childhood Education

Jaipaul L. Roopnarine & James E. Johnson

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Preface

From a growing body of national and international research, there is agreement that the quality of young children's experiences in early education and child development programs depends in large measure on the formal educational preparation and professional development of those who teach and care for them. Central to educational preparation are (a) acquiring and digesting core knowledge pertinent to the many dimensions of the field of early childhood education (ECE) and (b) receptiveness to the range of opportunities for practitioner/practicing professional development in the multitude of domains in the ECE field. In aggregate, dimensions of the core body of knowledge in ECE include but are not limited to the content domains (i.e., core knowledge domains) of normative and non-normative child growth and development; family, community, and cultural context; health, mental health, safety, and nutrition; curriculum planning and implementation; teaching, task-structuring, and child management strategies; and professionalism (e.g., understanding ethical codes that guide the field, organizational affiliation, commitment to lifelong learning, lobbying and advocating for children and families, etc.). As they advance in their careers, developing ECE professionals should continually seek to integrate their understanding of these domains of core knowledge into practice and to translate their beliefs and values into positions on policy issues and into action. Indeed, as Sharon Kagan[1], the current president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), has cogently commented, we must strive to connect pedagogy, practices, and policy as this is a necessary task for the committed professional on ECE in our times.

There are constant reminders on just how vibrant ECE is in our postmodern world. David Elkind[2], in his recent book *Reinventing Childhood,* notes the shift from modernism to postmodernism and discusses how we need vital programs, schools, and families to serve well the biological and psychological needs and interests of children. We have witnessed massive and profound changes in society and in our views of childhood, and ECE-related topics and stories dominate print and electronic media, popular culture, politics, and the marketplace. Elkind opines that the most obvious result of the postmodern turn has been the gargantuan leap in importance of ECE. Similarly, others have commented that, next to the computer industry, the second fastest growing area of the economy is ECE[3].

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[1]Kagan S. (1999, March). Going beyond "Z". *Young Children,* 54(2), 2.

[2]Elkind, D. (1998). *Reinventing childhood: Raising and educating children in a changing world* (pp. 173–174). Rosemont, NJ: Modern Learning Press.

[3]Decker, C., & Decker, J. (1997). *Planning and administering early childhood programs* (6th ed., p. 26). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Indeed, this is a most exciting time for ECE as it grows by leaps and bounds—seemingly worldwide. Simultaneously, ECE is a most intellectually exciting field of education, one in which it is required to be both something of a specialist with in-depth expertise within one or more niches in the overall professional landscape (e.g., home-based child care, kindergarten teacher, etc.) and to be something of a generalist with a view toward the overall "lay of the land" (e.g., different approaches to ECE pedagogies, ECE practices and policies, and how they are all intertwined). Blending specialized knowledge with general knowledge of ECE is a critical occupational developmental task for all of us as we seek to avoid becoming too narrowly focused in our own professional niche. We need to eschew ECE fragmentism and embrace piecing together the "big picture" of ECE in its present state, even while we hold to and nurture our more particular areas of competence.

As we conducted the final editing for this book, our thoughts turned to its title. We pondered whether we should abandon the title, which ends with the singular noun *education*, and replace it with the plural noun *educations*. Is our subfield of education, ECE, cut of one cloth, or more than one cloth?

In seeking to preserve the integrity or wholeness of our field and discipline, we envision an ECE cube, a three-dimensional model. Along one dimension are the core knowledge domains mentioned in the opening paragraph of this preface. Along the second dimension are the major ECE settings or program types: Head Start and its variants (Early Head Start, etc.), early intervention, child care, and public and private preschool and kindergartens. Each of the categories along this dimension has subcategories (military child care, inclusion, Montessori kindergarten, etc.). Along the third and final dimension of this ECE cube are descriptors of various types of families and children served by particular ECE programs, defined by ethnicity, socioeconomic class, geographic region, and family structure, among other sociodemographic factors. Clientele for any given program can be homogeneous or heterogeneous to varying degrees and represent admixtures of these different family variable categories. If there are four categories of family types, four ECE setting types, and six core knowledge domains, inside the ECE cube are 96 discrete cells representing variables of three dimensions. The overall ECE whole is indeed well differentiated! An implication is that our ECE professionalism/practice with respect to any domain (e.g., curriculum planning and implementation) can hypothetically take on a different flavor or interpretation depending on the ECE setting (e.g., early intervention) and kind of clientele served (e.g., low income or families with children with disabilities).

As you peruse the different chapters of this text, try to see how well these cells in the ECE skeletal cube become fleshed out. Can we venture to think at least "three sentences deep" in each cell? How are pedagogy, practices, and policy coming together? Much, no doubt, will be missing, because a single volume cannot cover all of the diverse topic areas in the ECE field. However, a good deal is accomplished, and the exercise shows the kind of course that postmodern ECE is taking: multifarious yet a singular field, ever changing to respond to the diversity, irregularities, and particularities that characterize postmodern society. We hope this book and such an exercise aid in achieving the intended outcome.

FEATURES OF THE THIRD EDITION

The third edition of *Approaches to Early Childhood Education* contributes to this daunting and challenging professional imperative by making available within one volume an impressive array of rich and up-to-date information about

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important issues and contemporary trends and progressions in ECE. New to this edition are chapters devoted to the expanding field of Head Start and federal social policies affecting young children and their families, the phenomenal success of Reggio Emilia worldwide, and constructivism as applied to children's museums. New authors have contributed chapters on the Montessori and Bank Street approaches to ECE. All chapters have been substantially revised for this third edition: Topics range from history and child care, to broad approaches to ECE such as the project approach, behaviorism, the Eriksonian approach to working with infants and toddlers, The Family Center Model, and mixed-age programming, to specific models such as High/Scope, Portage, Ausubelian, and Educating the Young Thinker. Issues such as inclusion, diversity, and antibias education are given expanded treatment in the concluding chapters of the book.

All chapters cover the interlapping knowledge domains of ECE and efforts to combine pedagogy, practices, and policy. An important goal in reading this volume is to construct not only breadth of awareness of various approaches to ECE programming and service delivery but also to start to build a coherent and integrative conceptual outlook on our ever-moving and evolving field of education, a field whose internal professional dynamism is matched only by its outward expansion, affecting innumerable children and adults in public sectors in this country and abroad.

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To take advantage of these and other resources, please visit the *Approaches to Early Childhood Education* Companion Website at **www.prenhall.com/roopnarine.**

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Part One

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