Reaching Potentials: Appropriate Curriculum and Assessment for Young Children

Volume 1

Sue Bredekamp and Teresa Rosegrant, Editors

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The National Association for the Education of Young Children attempts through its publications programs to provide a forum for discussion of major issues and ideas in our field. We hope to provoke thought and promote professional growth. Chapter 2 of this volume represents an official position statement of NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education. The views expressed or implied in the other chapters are the opinions of the authors and are not necessarily those of NAEYC nor of NAECS/SDE.

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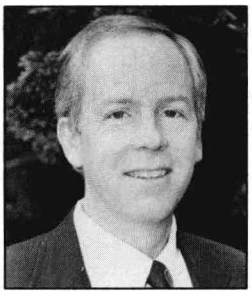

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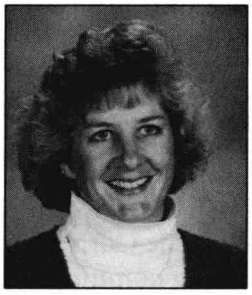

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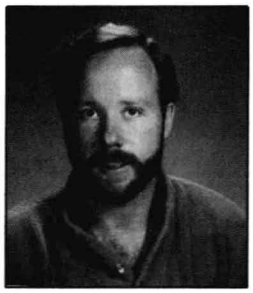

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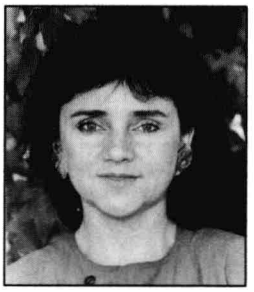

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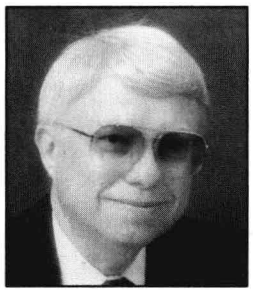

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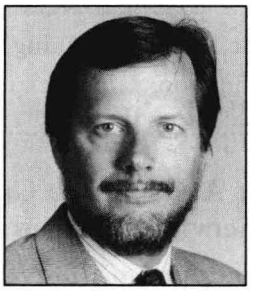

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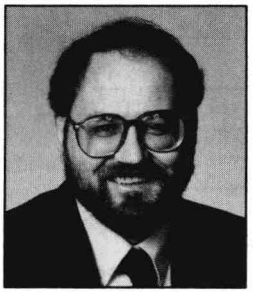

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SECTION

I

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CHAPTER 1

Reaching Potentials: Introduction

Sue Bredekamp and Teresa Rosegrant

Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines: Some historical perspective

As with so many things in life, this book and its companion volume are the result of a developmental process. The purpose of this book is to operationalize—that is, make meaningful—the Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment, developed jointly by NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) (1991; see pp. 9–27, this volume). Those guidelines are the culmination of more than a decade of work defining best practice for early childhood programs. Much of this activity has been guided by NAEYC, beginning with the development of criteria for accreditation of early childhood programs (NAEYC, 1984, 1991), which led to the development of position statements defining developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987), which in turn led to position statements on testing and other relevant policies (NAECS/SDE, 1987; NAEYC, 1988). Each of these activities met one need while identifying a subsequent one; such is the nature of all developmental processes, and standard setting is also developmental.

By tracing the evolution of the Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines back one decade, we do not mean to oversimplify the lengthy history of early childhood education that includes many initiatives to define best practices (e.g., Davis, Johnson, & Richardson, 1930). It is important to put this work in more complete historical perspective. To do so, we include here an excerpt from a history of standard setting for early childhood education programs in the United States by Dorothy Hewes (1991):

> When the International Kindergarten Union (IKU) was established at the National Education Association annual conference in 1892, one of its stated purposes was to elevate the standard of professional training for kindergarten teachers (Hill, 1942). Between 1903 and 1909, during the early years of scientific research studies, the IKU Committee of Nineteen explored diverse ideas about early childhood curriculum and methods. The Committee of Nineteen evolved into 3 subcommittees with overlapping memberships. The Committee maintained a tenuous but amicable debate between groups identified as liberal and conservative. The eventual report (Wheelock, 1913) consisted of three parts: the lengthy conservative statement authored by Susan Blow, an explanation by Patty Smith Hill of what was called the liberal point of view reflecting the influence of progressive education, and a third section by Lucy Wheelock representing a compromise position. To add to the confusion, many committee members signed more than one position statement, and some of those who signed included objections to certain points. Maria Krause-Boelte, for example, one of the few remaining immigrant Froebelians, signed the conservative report but objected to advance scheduling for the year because it interfered with the teacher's ability to respond to children's interests, so she also signed the compromise report which incorporated a more spontaneous program. While much has been made of the differences between liberal and conservative factions within the IKU, all remained Froebelian in their basic philosophy. However, the Committee of Nineteen failed to accomplish the assigned goals of setting standards or establishing clear curriculum guidelines for early childhood education.

We relate this particular event in history because we find it so relevant to our current work. Like the Committee of Nineteen, NAEYC and NAECS/SDE also struggled with the challenge of setting standards for curriculum. The original goal of the curriculum guidelines was to more specifically address the questions of what and when to teach that had not previously been tackled. In fact, the idea for the project originated at a Wingspread Conference on the content of the kindergarten curriculum. NAEYC and NAECS/SDE agreed to work on curriculum and assessment guidelines because each group had identified the need to be more specific about curriculum through attempting to implement developmentally appropriate practice.

When NAEYC produced its position statements on developmentally appropriate practice, they did so in response to specific, identified needs. First, the shorthand phrase *developmentally appropriate* was used throughout the NAEYC accreditation standards. When the accreditation system became operational, it was clear that a more specific definition of developmentally appropriate was needed. A second converging trend that necessitated defining developmentally appropriate was the trend toward more formal, academic instruction of younger and younger children—what has come to be called *downward escalation of curriculum* (Shepard & Smith, 1988). The call for developmentally appropriate practice was in many ways a call for kindergarten and primary grade practices that better reflect what is known about how children develop and learn (what is age appropriate) and practices that are more sensitive to individual and cultural variation (what is individually appropriate). In short, those position statements were designed to meet a specific purpose—to define developmentally appropriate practice, the "how" of teaching young children.

The guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice were not intended to address all aspects of early childhood education programs, and they are relatively silent on what to teach and how to assess. NAEYC realized that the field of early childhood education needed to pay more attention to curriculum and assessment. Through the accreditation experience NAEYC had observed all sorts of curriculum in preschool and child care programs described as "developmentally appropriate" simply because it involved hands-on activity or child choice. At the same time, NAEYC and NAECS/SDE observed kindergarten and primary grade classrooms in which the curriculum objectives were very clear but not appropriate for the age or experience of the children. The Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines were designed to address two basic problems: the "early childhood error" (inadequate attention to the content of the curriculum) and the "elementary error" (overattention to curriculum objectives, with less attention to the individual child).

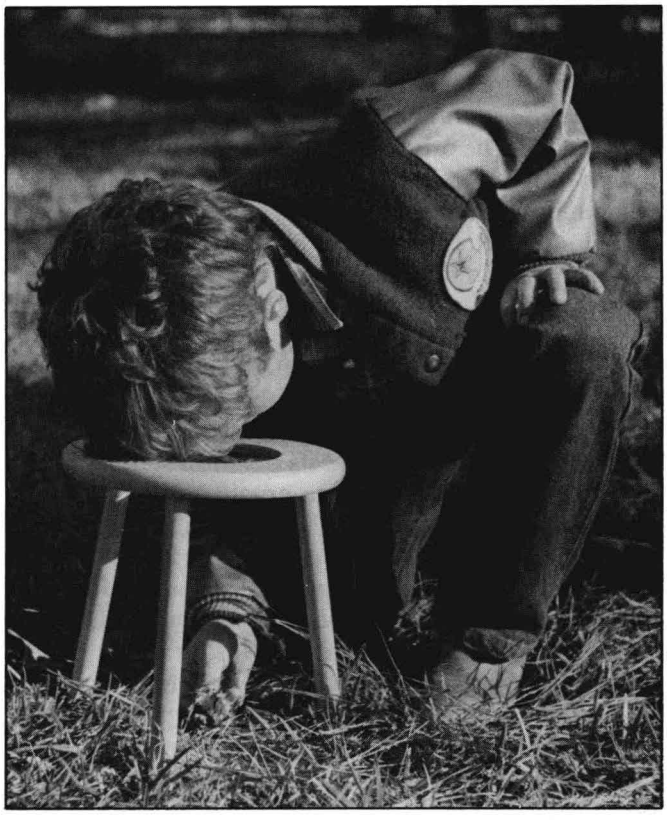
Standards grow and change in response to new knowledge, the result of learning from the shared experiences of and interaction among professionals. The process that NAEYC uses to develop guidelines and position statements is a consensus-building, peer-review process. Literally thousands of early childhood professionals have had the opportunity to review and provide input into the development of the documents listed above. The results do not necessarily reflect the views of every early childhood practitioner (Walsh, 1991), but the documents result from a consensus-building process and reflect the views of the leadership of the Association at the time of the documents' adoption. Because knowledge expands and changes over time, the Association's positions are reviewed and revised periodically to ensure their currency and accuracy. For example, the accreditation criteria were reviewed and revised in 1991, and the positions on developmentally appropriate practice are currently undergoing review. Throughout all this work, NAEYC has tried to heed the caution of our predecessors regarding standard setting: "It is undesirable . . . that details and practices should become crystalized or even that objectives and standards should be fixed" (Davis, Johnson, & Richardson, 1930, p. 1; quoted in Hewes, 1991).

This brief look at our history demonstrates that the development of the Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines is only part of a long history of discussion within our profession about issues of content and practice. Exploration of the history of curriculum theory in the larger field of education is of equal interest and relevance to this discussion and is well presented elsewhere (Kessler, 1991). To be accurate, we would also need to relate our indebtedness to John Dewey and many others (Greenberg, 1987, 1992). The guidelines certainly reflect this broad historical perspective, but they were also influenced by more recent history—observations of interpretations and misinterpretations of the position statements on developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987), a discussion of which follows.

THE CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES WERE DESIGNED TO ADDRESS TWO BASIC PROBLEMS: THE "EARLY CHILDHOOD ERROR" (INADEQUATE ATTENTION TO THE CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM) AND THE "ELEMENTARY ERROR" (OVERATTENTION TO CURRICULUM OBJECTIVES, WITH LESS ATTENTION TO THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD).

Correcting misinterpretations of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)

NAEYC's purpose in defining developmentally appropriate practice is described above. Response to the document was both overwhelming and surprising. The document was met with considerable interest within and beyond our profession; more than 300,000 copies have been distributed. The construct that early childhood educators have owned for more than a century has been widely adopted (although sometimes misunderstood) by curriculum developers, equipment manufacturers, and even test publishers. While, on the one hand, we celebrate NAEYC's successes in raising public awareness about good programs for young children and advocating for change, we also recognize that misunderstandings are common and myths about developmentally appropriate practice perpetuate (Kostelnik, 1992). Developmentally appropriate practice has also been the subject of thoughtful criticism within the field (Swadener & Kessler, 1991). A few of the issues raised as well as the most common misinterpretations are presented and discussed here because these issues provide some of the context in which the Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines were developed.



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1. *DAP is not a curriculum, nor is it a rigid set of expectations.*

Developmentally appropriate practice is not a curriculum; it is not a rigid set of standards that dictate practice. Rather, it is a framework, a philosophy, or an approach to working with young children that requires that the adult pay attention to at least two important pieces of information—*what we know* about how children develop and learn and *what we learn* about the individual needs and interests of each child in the group.

Some of the misinterpretations of developmentally appropriate practice result from attending to only one dimension of the definition. For example, some people think that NAEYC advocates one right way to structure a program and wishes to move toward a rigid view of practice in which all programs look alike. This interpretation of the position overemphasizes age appropriateness as a source of the program, an error that might lead to more uniformity than most educators find comfortable; however, good early childhood programs must adapt for individual diversity of all kinds, including the identified special needs of children; the cultural values of children's families and communities; children's varied interests; and the individual variation in growth, development, and learning (in both rate and style) among different children. Because developmentally appropriate classrooms are not only age appropriate but also individually appropriate, they cannot all look alike, nor will the children within those classrooms all have the same experience. Some children will need more structure and adult guidance than others. Some will enter school as quite able decision makers, while others will need teachers to help them learn to make choices. Any teaching approach that is applied to all of the children in the same way without any adjustment for individual differences will fail for at least some of the children.

Part of the concern about the potential rigidity of interpretation may be a by-product of the format of the statements. Positioning inappropriate and appropriate practices as though these were polar opposites with no mid-points (of which there are many) on a continuum may have contributed to the either/or interpretation of developmentally appropriate practice and the concern of some people that the documents tend to narrow the standards of good practice (Spodek, 1991). Narrowing options was not NAEYC's intent. In fact, the goal was to "open up" the curriculum and teaching practices and move away from the narrow emphasis on isolated academic skills and the drill-and-practice approach to instruction. NAEYC chose to use both negative and positive exemplars as a strategy for enhancing concept development among a diverse audience and for protecting children from negative experiences.

2. *DAP does not mean that teachers don't teach and that children control the classroom.*

Another frequently heard misinterpretation of developmentally appropriate practice is that the children control the classroom and that teachers don't teach. This view equates child-initiated learning with chaos. It would be naive to pretend that there are not some classrooms that claim to be developmentally appropriate in which teachers abdicate responsibility and chaos does ensue, but these classrooms are *not* developmentally appropriate. The truth is that good early childhood programs are, of necessity, highly organized and structured environments that teachers have carefully prepared and in which teachers are in control. The difference is that children are also actively involved and assume some responsibility for their own learning (the teachers' perspective on this issue is presented in Chapters 11 and 12 of this book).

3. *DAP does not reject goals and objectives; curriculum does not emerge only from children.*

An aspect of the chaos argument is the notion that early childhood educators reject goals and objectives and let the curriculum emerge solely from the child's interests. Because NAEYC rejects narrow drill-and-practice on academic skills does not mean that they reject goals and objectives. All effective educational programs have clearly stated objectives (or outcomes) toward which the teacher plans and works with children to achieve. The difference in developmentally appropriate classrooms is that those goals are appropriate for children's age levels and individual patterns of learning and development; respectful of their needs and interests; and address all areas of human functioning, not just narrowly defined basic skills. The worst misinterpretation of developmentally appropriate practice is that if teachers just let children play, at Grade 3 they will emerge literate. Yes, play is important; it is essential for children to develop high-level social strategies and other important learnings. However, teachers must know why, when, and how they can help play become an enriching, meaningful learning experience, and they must also know what experiences and specific strategies children need to become literate.

4. *DAP is for all children.*

One of the most frequent and disturbing misinterpretations of DAP is that the position statements apply only to certain types of children, usually assumed to be typically developing, White, middle-class children. This issue is more thoroughly addressed in the third section of this book and is obviously an area in which much more work is needed, but in the meantime some clarifying statements can be made. By definition, to be individually appropriate requires that programs attend to individual and cultural variation among the children they serve. It is clear that more work needs to be done to ensure that programs are culturally as well as developmentally appropriate (these issues are discussed by Barbara Bowman and Liz Wolfe in Chapters 9 and 10). Perhaps the most potentially destructive iteration of this interpretation is that rejecting inappropriately formal instruction with very young children equates to rejecting intervention strategies for children with identified special needs (this issue is addressed in greater detail in Chapter 7 by representatives of the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children). Again, this misinterpretation ignores the critical dimension of individual appropriateness in the definition. A developmentally appropriate program must attend to the individual needs of all of the children. NAEYC and NAECS/SDE believe that good early childhood programs derive from children's *needs* and interests; neither aspect can be neglected in a good program.

5. *Curriculum is not child development.*

Among the criticisms of DAP has been that it implies that child development is the curriculum or is the only determinant of curriculum or the only justification for appropriate practice (Kessler, 1991; Spodek, 1991). Emphasis on child development knowledge in determining appropriate teaching practice may have overshadowed the other principles that need to be considered in curriculum decisions. The Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines address many more considerations in addition to child development knowledge. Just knowing child development does not enable teachers to help children reach their potentials as individuals or as citizens of a democracy (Greenberg, 1990, 1992; Kessler, 1991). At the same time, child development knowledge and curriculum must be integrally linked, as illustrated in the analogy that follows.

The relationship of child development knowledge and curriculum theory: An analogy

Child development knowledge and curriculum theory are two important and, it is hoped, intersecting strands of work within the field of early childhood education. The goal is to bring these disciplines more closely together through implementation of the guidelines; this effort is essential if children and schools are to reach their potentials. The following analogy illustrates the potential of this intersection between curriculum and child development knowledge.

Children's clothing is an entire industry that successfully applies child development knowledge. The construction of clothing is based on its own knowledge base, the intricacies of tailoring, that is analogous to curriculum theory; but when the product of the tailor is a piece of clothing for a child, knowledge of child development must be activated. First, the tailor must know what is age appropriate. The basic size dimensions of the typical client are determined by typical growth patterns. Similarly, the tailor must be aware of the client's other developmental needs. For example, the fine-motor development of toddlers prohibits zippers, just as their diapering needs dictate snaps along the legs. The range of options in children's clothing, similar to the breadth and depth of curriculum, is influenced by children's development in general. Occasionally a designer applies child development knowledge with brilliant results, such as using Velcro™ to fasten preschoolers' shoes.

For clothing to actually sell and be functional, it must also be individually appropriate. Some children, despite the growth charts, are much larger or smaller than average. It is not sufficient to know a child's age to purchase appropriate clothing; one must also know the individual child's size, cultural background, and preferences. While overalls may be the most developmentally appropriate clothing design for active 3-year-olds, an individual 3-year-old may prefer dresses—and only dresses in lavender. Knowledge of clothing construction and design as well as knowledge of child development are essential, but still inadequate. Knowledge of individual and cultural differences must be activated by the responsible person (usually the parent) if the clothing is to be worn, appreciated, and practical. Similar connections must be made between child development knowledge and curriculum if programs for young children are to reach their potential. The link between child development and curriculum is described in much greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Where we want to go: Reaching potentials

Having seen where we've been, we turn to the question of where we want to go. That question drove the development of the Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines and eventually led to this book—*Reaching Potentials.* What does it mean to reach potential, much less to reach multiple potentials? The title of this book, like much of its content, has several layers of interpretation and implication. First and foremost, the potentials addressed here are the virtually unlimited potentials of young children. Unless they suffer serious abuse or neglect or are severely disabled, children under the age of 8 have almost unlimited potential to become. Every preschool and kindergarten class contains future artists, writers, musicians, mathematicians, scientists, and athletes. Perhaps more importantly, each of these individuals has the potential to become a healthy, sensitive, caring, and fully contributing member of society. Even in most cases of individuals with identified disabilities, given appropriate intervention and support, damage can be alleviated and greater potential can be achieved than is sometimes predicted. The goal, then, of early education is to ensure that children acquire the foundation of healthy development and learning necessary to achieve their potential in the future—and to prevent the all-too-common situation in which early school experiences serve to limit and restrict future accomplishments.

CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 8 HAVE ALMOST UNLIMITED POTENTIAL TO BECOME. PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY, EACH OF THESE INDIVIDUALS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME A HEALTHY, SENSITIVE, CARING, AND FULLY CONTRIBUTING MEMBER OF SOCIETY.

But the potentials of children are only one of the potentials we wish to address in this book. All teachers of young children have the potential to be caring, creative, professional decision makers; too many teachers, however, find themselves to be technicians or taskmasters. Whether teachers achieve their full potential is the result of many factors, including their own commitment and motivation, but the curriculum and assessment practices of the program or school in which they are employed can help or hinder the potential professional and personal development of teachers.

The curriculum itself has many potentials; it is not static and predetermined, but rather a dynamic, developing entity that changes as we acquire new knowledge and apply it differently to individual children and groups. Early childhood curriculum has the potential to be challenging, engaging, and interesting; but curriculum for young children can also be boring, trivial, and meaningless. Curriculum potentials are almost as unlimited as the potentials of children and teachers; whether curriculum achieves these potentials depends on the vision and motives of curriculum developers and implementors.

Like curriculum, assessment tools and procedures also have potentials. Assessment can be used to ensure that individual children's needs are met and that each child benefits from educational experiences; unfortunately, assessment can also be used to harm children—to label, track, or deny children opportunities. Similarly, assessment can be used to inform and enhance curriculum or to narrow and limit curriculum. Assessment has the potential to improve teaching or to impoverish it.

The many potentials of children, teachers, curriculum, and assessment are interrelated. When curriculum and assessment practices are optimum, then children and teachers will more likely reach their potentials. This book is designed as a tool to help reach all of these many potentials.

The guidelines presented in this book (pp. 9–27) are principles to guide decisions, both theoretical and

ASSESSMENT CAN BE USED TO ENSURE THAT INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN'S NEEDS ARE MET AND THAT EACH CHILD BENEFITS FROM EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES; UNFORTUNATELY, ASSESSMENT CAN ALSO BE USED TO HARM CHILDREN—TO LABEL, TRACK, OR DENY CHILDREN OPPORTUNITIES.

practical, about what should be included in curriculum for young children and how their learning should be assessed. Development of the guidelines was a challenging task involving the input of literally hundreds of people. A few of the critics pointed out that the guidelines are not specific enough to help curriculum developers determine what content is appropriate and when; to make optimum use of the guidelines, it is necessary to possess a level of expertise in child development and current views of best practice in early childhood education. In developing the guidelines NAEYC and NAECS/SDE hesitated to be more specific because it would not have been appropriate to be prescriptive, but we do want the guidelines to reach their potential of influencing curriculum and assessment decisions; hence, we offer this two-volume book in which various authors offer their perspectives on applying the guidelines.

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Overview of the book

This book is published in two volumes. The foundation for both volumes is the Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content and Assessment in Programs Serving Children Ages 3 through 8, a joint position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). Volume 1 has four parts:

1. *Reaching Potentials Through Appropriate Curriculum and Assessment*

Section I includes the complete list of guidelines and includes background information and a brief description of the theoretical framework on which the guidelines are based. Although the guidelines can stand alone, implicit in the position statement is a large body of knowledge and experience; to fully and effectively implement the guidelines requires access to additional information. Sue Bredekamp and Teresa Rosegrant discuss the guidelines in more detail, offering conceptual frameworks for interpreting and applying them with different age groups. Tynette Hills describes the exciting potential of improving assessment by elaborating on the assessment guidelines and illustrating their potential with concrete examples.

2. *Reaching Individual Potentials*

These chapters address the child in the curriculum, defining and clarifying what child-centered curriculum really is and offering a new paradigm for conceptualizing curriculum derived from the guidelines—transformational curriculum. This model addresses the relationship of child development and curriculum, providing examples of age-appropriate and individually appropriate curriculum decisions. In developing their vision of appropriate curriculum and teaching, NAEYC and NAECS/SDE assumed that the same guidelines apply to programs serving all children, including children with special abilities and children with disabilities. This assumption is discussed for the population of children with special needs by Mark Wolery, Phillip Strain, and Donald Bailey.

3. *Reaching Potentials of All Children*

These chapters address the culturally appropriate dimension of appropriate curriculum and teaching. Louise Derman-Sparks applies the guidelines to antibias, multicultural curriculum in general; Barbara Bowman addresses the issue of developmentally and culturally appropriate programs for minority children; Liz Wolfe applies the guidelines to programs serving children who speak languages other than English; and