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Developmental Perspectives and Educational Practice

Viewing Children and Teachers in the Big Picture

Window Into Practice

Charlotte was a new first-grade school teacher in an urban school. She was bilingual and looked forward to working with children from diverse backgrounds. She received her multiple subject teaching credential from a respected university; the focus of the program was on building children's literacy skills and family-school connections in the early grades. She knew that she faced a challenge teaching mostly children from lower income households who had little preschool experience and spoke mostly Spanish. The kindergarten teachers told her that only a few children could read words in either English or Spanish, and they expected some would have difficulties adjusting to the longer school day. Charlotte also understood some of the

strengths the children brought to the classroom. For example, she expected that most children would have positive attitudes toward school and abilities to cooperate with each other on schoolwork; these approaches were learned within their families. Her first year was tough. Being constantly on alert, preparing lessons, dealing with difficult children and parents, and participating in afterschool events demanded so much time and energy. She was always tired. She was particularly haunted by difficulties with Miguel's aggressive behavior. But she was also satisfied with her progress, particularly because she had formed such positive relationships with her students. They continually shared smiles, hugs, and events with her, even after leaving her classroom. She also saw tremendous growth in children's literacy skills and was quite proud of her success in creating learning stations where small groups of children worked on different assignments while she assisted one group with reading in English and Spanish. One of her unanticipated challenges was teaching math; she realized that she had obtained less education in this area and she had difficulties with creating interesting learning activities for children (few manipulatives were available in the classroom), often resorting to giving children worksheets to work on together. Her mentor pointed out that children were simply providing each other with answers, particularly to subtraction problems—a common difficulty for this age group—so collaborative learning was not effective. With her mentor's assistance, she read a bit more about children's developing mathematical abilities and then ordered and created appropriate math materials, revised lessons, and reorganized the afternoon learning centers. She ended the school year with many new ideas for improving math instructional practices in the future. She also vowed to communicate with parents earlier in the school year, so that she might create positive relationships before she had to discuss difficulties with children. Charlotte also wanted to add suggestions as to how parents might support children's learning at home. She discovered too late that many parents deliberately disengaged from children's reading activities at home because they thought they would interfere with the teacher's instruction. Rosa's mother helped her understand this point of view; simply providing some specific suggestions about what to do would inspire parents to support their children's education.

Charlotte is an example of a teacher with an **ecological perspective** on children's development and learning in school. She considers how to interact with children in terms of their previous experiences at home and in school and communicates with parents and previous teachers. She also

expects children to arrive with some common developmental needs and competencies, such as the need for secure relations with teachers, high interests in learning, and emerging abilities to get along with others and control their behavior, as well as some individual differences in their temperaments and academic skills. She creates a semistructured classroom environment with a range of learning activities based on this knowledge. But most of all, she attends to her own interactions with children because she knows that the first-grade transition is difficult, trying to listen carefully to children and show warmth and acceptance toward all.

This chapter establishes the foundation for subsequent chapters by providing a brief introduction to some contemporary perspectives on child development. It begins with a discussion about ecological models of development and general implications for educating young children. Educators with ecological perspectives recognize how children's developing qualities and experiences in different settings influence each other and affect their learning in the classroom. Next, we describe major developments in children's thinking, feeling, and regulated behavior between 4 and 8 years of age and how typical changes in environments for children between these ages might contribute to or hinder their development. (The following chapters look at children's development of thinking processes and relationships in more detail and offer specific recommendations for practice.) Finally, we attend to teacher perspectives on child development and education and how their beliefs influence their interactions with children and classroom practices.

ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

As biologists study relationships between organisms (plants and animals) and their environments, developmental scientists study children's relationships and interactions with others in multiple environmental contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). From this view depicted in

Figure 1.1, the child at the center of the ecological model is born with particular characteristics (e.g., sex, temperament, mental and physical capabilities) that influence behavior in immediate settings (microsystems), especially home, school, peer groups, and neighborhoods. Developmental scientists also examine connections between the different settings (mesosystems), such as how parents, teachers, and peers relate to one another. Interactions in these multiple settings shape the child's development, and as the child changes, the interactions change. In addition, researchers consider how elements of the broader social and cultural contexts affect these interactions (exo- and macrosystems not shown), for example, how the No Child Left Behind Act influences school practices, and in turn, teacher-child interactions in the classroom.

A major assumption of the ecological model is that these various subsystems change over the course of development. Change can originate within the child, as when a 6-year-old learns to better regulate his behavior, or outside the child, as when there is a school change from preschool to kindergarten.

Figure 1.1   Dynamic Ecological Model
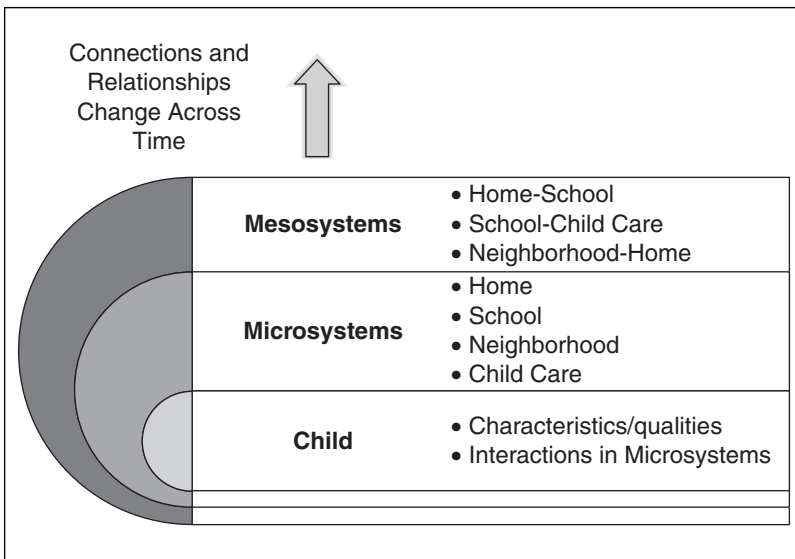
Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) proposed a more specific Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, for example, to explain how children's participation in a dynamic network of relationships (within home, school, peer, neighborhood, and other settings) influences their transition to school both directly and indirectly. The authors argued that these relationships predict subsequent relationships and either support or challenge children's adjustment and learning in school. Their adapted model emphasizes how relationships among these contexts change over time; this view is represented in Figure 1.1 by the arrow. From this view, Charlotte's relationships with her students and their parents and previous teachers create the potential for meaningful interactions to foster children's development. Recommended practices and school reform efforts based on these models, such as Comer's School Development Program (SDP), are mentioned in the following chapters.

Next, we briefly describe some of the major changes within the developing child from 4 to 8 years and then describe some changes in school contexts for children within this age range.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL SHIFT FROM EARLY TO MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

Children's thinking, behavior, and relationships change dramatically from 4 to 8 years of age, particularly between 5 and 7. These changes are partly due to biological changes within children around this time period, such as reorganization of the frontal lobes, which has implications for many aspects of psychological and behavioral functioning. In addition, monumental changes occur in the important contexts of their lives at home and school, the authority figures, the number and kind of peers and friends, the activities, and the rules. In other words, "almost everything changes"

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(Haith & Sameroff, 1996, p. 437). Consistent with the ecological perspective, researchers explain that 7-year-olds emerge as "different" from 5-year-olds as a result of the dynamic interplay between their developing abilities to make sense of their thoughts, feelings, and changing worlds, and the ways in which these worlds stimulate and respond to them. Teachers who are aware of these dynamics are in a better position to understand and respond to children in the early years of school. This section focuses on a few important developmental changes occurring in children from 4 to 8 years and their school worlds. (A more complete list will be detailed in Table 1.1, p. 22.) These changes together promote the shift from early to middle childhood toward reason and responsibility, simply referred to as the "**5 to 7 developmental shift**."

Changes in the Child

Major changes in children during the 5 to 7 shift include advances in (1) self-regulation abilities, (2) memory capacities and strategies, (3) self-reflective skills, (4) reasoning and logical thinking, and (5) perspective-taking. Each of these related abilities is discussed in turn.

Self-Regulation

Researchers suggest that many of the behavioral changes we see in children around this period of life are partly due to maturation of the brain, particularly the reorganization of the frontal lobes (e.g., Blair et al., 2007; Janowsky & Carper, 1996). These changes rouse memory, attentional, and self-reflection processes or "executive functioning" skills, which in turn enhance a number of other abilities, in particular, self-regulation (e.g., Blair, 2002). Teachers and researchers agree that **self-regulation skills** are critical for children's school readiness and later achievement. Self-regulation refers to children's ability to manage their emotions, focus their attention, and inhibit some behaviors while engaging in goal-directed behavior. Teachers often ask children to follow a series of steps in sequence that

involve self-regulation. For example, teachers routinely direct children to do things, such as "put your reading books away, get your things ready for PE, and line up at the door." Self-regulation is involved as children inhibit their dominant response (keep reading) and substitute another response (get ready), demonstrating control of thought and action. Teachers also direct children to do things that involve emotional control as well as attentional, cognitive, and behavioral control. Children may need to control feelings of anger, frustration, and enthusiasm, for example, when they wait to raise their hand to respond to the teacher, take turns to participate in favorite activities, and stop engaging in desired activities when it is another child's turn. Suggestions for identifying and promoting children's self-regulation skills are included in Chapter 2.

Memory Capacities and Strategies

Children make important advances in memory capacities and use of strategies for encoding and retrieving new information between 5 and 9 years of age. (They have already developed remarkable memories for familiar activities and topics of great interest to them.) Children's short-term or working memory may expand, allowing them more "slots" for bits of information; for example, children typically recall four items (numbers or letters) at age 5 and six items at age 9 (e.g., Schneider & Pressley, 1997). Children's speed in processing information also increases substantially during this period; thus older children recognize and name objects more quickly than younger children (e.g., Kail, 2000). Their developing abilities to focus attention and reduce interference from irrelevant information (part of self-regulation) contribute to these abilities to remember new information (e.g., Pressley & McCormick, 2007). It is important for teachers to be aware of children's developing memory capacities during the early years of school; the amount of information children can process at one time may be limited (one to three "slots" fewer than adults). Teachers often support children by breaking down tasks into parts that are less demanding, such as providing a few directions or details at a time (e.g., put your jackets away, go to

your desks, get out your books, move to your reading groups) until children have had time to "chunk" this related information or create a familiar script about the transition from recess to reading time.

Children's thinking and learning is also advanced by their emerging use of deliberate and effective **memory strategies** during these years. A strategy is defined as a conscious plan of action designed to achieve a goal perceived as under one's control (e.g., Pressley & McCormick, 2007). Preschoolers can use simple strategies to encode and recall things in familiar surroundings, such as looking at or naming a favorite toy that they want to play with later. They also demonstrate impressive abilities to recall information—about toys for example—when they elaborate or create stories about and interact with toys in pretend play. However, children before age 5 or 6 rarely use these strategies *intentionally* to encode information, and the strategies that they do use are often ineffective (Pressley & McCormick, 2007; Siegler & Alibali, 2005). This oversight may be partly because they do not recognize limitations in their memories; preschool and kindergarten children often predict that they can remember "everything" (all 20 items) when they are presented with recall tasks. Therefore, preschool and kindergarten teachers often need to provide cues for children to encode and retrieve information from memory. For example, teachers often help children find their "lost" belongings (an everyday event) by asking them about their previous activities (e.g., "Did you leave your jacket on the playground? Did you leave it in the lunchroom?"). They also frequently ask children to recall previous events in stories to aid their comprehension (e.g., "And then what happened?").

Children begin to use strategies to remember new information spontaneously around age 6. Simple rehearsal strategies are the first to develop (e.g., Siegler, 1998). For example, children might say the names of objects or digits to themselves over and over if they are told that they need to remember them. This is one example of how children's developing abilities to use language as a tool helps them regulate their thinking and behavior (e.g., Nelson, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Children this age

also begin to use more sophisticated strategies, such as elaboration or organization strategies, *with cues and hints from adults* (e.g., Schneider & Bjorklund, 1998). For example, teachers can help children learn associations between words and their meanings through telling stories (elaboration) and categorizing information (organization), but they should not expect children to use these strategies on their own or monitor their effectiveness until the later school years (Pressley & McCormick, 2007). Interestingly, elementary children also begin to recognize their dependence on external aids to remember to do some things, and they commonly describe strategies such as "ask my mom to remind me" or "write a note."

Thus, children learn to better regulate their own thoughts as well as behaviors and emotions during this shift from early to middle childhood. Children become more strategic learners throughout the elementary and later school years, but they initiate these approaches to learning with sensitive guidance during the early years of school. Practical ideas for fostering self-regulated and strategic learning are included in later chapters.

Self-Reflection

Children's abilities to regulate their behaviors are enhanced by their emerging abilities for **self-reflection**. For example, the ability to ask oneself, "Am I doing this right?" "What else should I be doing?" creates opportunities for more adaptive functioning (e.g., Sameroff & Haith, 1996). Harter (1996, 2006) referred to the "I" self developing during this period, taking the "me" self as the object of evaluation. Advances in reflective abilities also create opportunities for children to better understand their own attributes and emotions. Children from 4 to 8 years

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typically shift from describing themselves in concrete or observable terms with a focus on physical characteristics (e.g., "I am tall, have brown hair . . .") or preferences and activities (e.g., "I like to build things") to describing qualities or trait generalizations based on behavior that are not immediately observable (e.g., "I am smart, honest . . ."). Children also begin to acknowledge that they can hold positive and negative attributes and feelings *at the same time* during this period. Thus, they often shift from describing themselves as "paragons of virtue" having mostly positive attributes to becoming more self-critical and describing both their positive and negative attributes (e.g., smart in reading, dumb in math; Harter, 1996). Scott depicts a child in transition (see *The Child's Window* at the end of this chapter). These shifts in self-understanding have enormous implications for children's motivation to learn in school. A theme is that children gradually develop the ability to make negative self-evaluations, which partly explains some of the typical declines in motivation observed at the end of primary grades (e.g., Dweck, 2002; Stipek, 2002). Children who believe they are less capable tend to shy away from challenging learning activities in some circumstances. Studies suggest that implementing developmentally appropriate or learner-centered practices, such as those recommended throughout this book, should prevent or discourage children from adopting negative self-views as learners and maladaptive motivational patterns in the later elementary years.

Reasoning and Logical Thinking

Children also make related advances in their reasoning and logical thinking during this period. Some researchers explain this change as a shift from "one- to two-sided" thinking (e.g., Cole, Cole, & Lightfoot, 2005). These characterizations of thinking derive partly from Piaget's well-known descriptions and explanations of the transformation from prelogical or preoperational thinking to logical or concrete-operational thinking in children from 5 to 7 years (e.g., Piaget, 1926, 1960). Reasoning in early childhood is characterized as

one-sided (or egocentric) because children tend to focus or center on one perspective or one attribute or aspect of a problem or event at a time. During this period, children begin to consider two perspectives *simultaneously* or hold one attribute or aspect of a problem in mind while comparing it to another. We have seen how children's self-understanding reflects this cognitive shift. Children's abilities to reason about physical events can also be explained by their abilities to shift focus. For example, children come to understand that aspects of objects, such as size, length, density, and number, remain the same even though other aspects have changed. Piaget's famous conservation tasks reveal typical developments in children's thinking between 4 and 8 years (current research suggests that even very young children show budding conservation skills on simpler tasks). For example, 4-year-old children often claim that the amount of liquid increases or becomes "more" when it is poured into a taller glass. Presumably, children center on one quality, often its appearance. Children master conservation by around age 8, when they rely on their logic (e.g., "It's the same. It just looks different!") and can explain that the height of the glass is offset by its width (can coordinate and compare these changes). Other tasks are included in the *Practice Exercises* to reveal age-related changes in children's logic and reasoning.

Other significant changes related to advances in logical thinking or concrete operations are seen in children's abilities to classify and plan, both of which are important for school learning. Preschoolers are quite capable of classifying things; we are all probably familiar with young children's special collections of objects such as rocks, bugs, stuffed animals, and superhero toys. However, 4-year-old children tend not to organize their collections in hierarchies and according to multiple criteria like older children. Researchers explain that younger children have difficulty attending to superordinate classes (e.g., bugs) and included subclasses (e.g., grasshoppers) simultaneously; although there are notable exceptions to this rule when children spend a great deal of time learning about a subject (e.g., dinosaurs) and become "experts."

Children age 8 and older develop more sophisticated classification systems for their collections, such as organizing baseball cards according to players' teams, positions, and ranks. Children's learning about a range of academic subjects is influenced by their developing classification skills.

Children's abilities to plan their activities also depend to some extent on their abilities to decenter and attend to multiple aspects of a problem. To make a plan, children must keep in mind their present condition, their goal for the future, and what to do to get from the present to the future. Preschoolers vary widely in their abilities to plan ahead (Hyson, Copple, & Jones, 2006). Children's emerging planning skills are often revealed while they are engaged in play. Between 4 and 8 years of age, children often make partial plans in advance (step-by-step), but they continue to have difficulties making systematic plans toward goals without assistance (Siegler & Alibali, 2005). Early childhood educators are able to help children improve their planning skills in programs such as *Tools of the Mind* (Bodrova & Leong, 2007), which is introduced in Chapter 4.

Perspective-Taking

Cognitive advances such as perspective-taking have obvious implications for children's abilities to understand and interact effectively with others. For example, they gradually become better able to consider and practice the Golden Rule, which has positive implications for their social behavior. In addition, two-sided thinking relates to advances in children's abilities to compare their observable behavior and skills with others during this period. These comparisons sometimes influence their evaluations of self and others as well as their performance behavior. For example, children might begin to dwell on perceived inadequacies and expect less of self and/or others. Children also advance simple abilities to compare their own unobservable thoughts, desires, and beliefs with others, developing more sophisticated "theories of mind."

Children's developing **theories of mind** have been extensively studied in the past two decades, demonstrating that by

4 years of age, children have a good head start toward understanding the minds of others. For example, they can recognize that others believe or know different things than they do, like where a toy is hidden. Thus, they are sometimes able to identify false beliefs to make sense of unexpected behavior, such as their teacher's search for a book in the wrong place. They understand that their teacher believes it is somewhere else and that this belief is different from their own. Researchers propose that during the 5 to 7 shift, children advance from merely acknowledging that people have different beliefs about the "real world" (a copy view) to beginning to understand that people also fit the real world to their beliefs (an interpretive or constructivist view; Chandler & Lalonde, 1996). For example, in a clever experiment with Raggedy Ann and Andy puppets, Chandler and Lalonde (1996) found that 7-year-olds were more likely than 5-year-olds to report that Ann and Andy would disagree about an event because of their different dispositions and explain that the characters would not "think with the same brain." We cannot overstate the tremendous influence of these social cognitive advances for children's behavior and interactions in school and elsewhere. The implications for working with children in classrooms are discussed in subsequent chapters.

Summary: Changes in the Child

In sum, from the modern scientific view, children *do* think, feel, and behave quite differently at age 7 or 8 than they did when they were 4 or 5. However, this does not mean that 5-year-olds cannot do some of the things that 7-year-olds do; they just don't typically do so. Current researchers explain this shift in different ways, but many point to the important role of children's developing abilities to reflect on their thoughts and experiences that coincide with neurological changes, as well as changes in their social worlds or ecologies. Changes in children's school worlds are highlighted next.

The contemporary view of the child implied in these descriptions of developmental change is consistent with

constructivist or social-constructivist theoretical perspectives, as well as ecological approaches to understanding development. These perspectives emphasize the role of children as active participants in the physical and social worlds that propel their own development. Constructivist perspectives and classroom practices are described in Chapter 4.

Changes in School Contexts

Children from 4 to 8 years experience significant changes in their social environments, or ecological shifts, most prominently at home and school. Researchers argue that virtually everything about children's lives change when they move from primarily family contexts to school contexts, even for those with preschool experience (e.g., Kagan & Neville, 1996; Ladd, 1996; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Consequently, children's roles, responsibilities, and relationships (the other three R's) change dramatically and impact their development.

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Typical changes from preschool to kindergarten to the primary grades involve increasing emphasis on academic skills, independence, and social interactions with a wide range of peers, often accompanied by a reduction in opportunities for families to provide a secure base for their children to face these enormous challenges. In other words, the goals, demands, and the nature of the classroom environment change, along with the ecology surrounding the new environments (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Children are thrust into these new environments when they reach certain ages, not necessarily when they are "ready." Some children adjust well to their new environments, and some do not; the next chapter focuses on how school environments affect different children's adjustment, future relationships, and learning.

School and classroom environments typically change from preschool to elementary school in the ways listed in Table 1.1 (e.g., Ladd, 1996; Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007). Children move

from smaller settings with higher adult-child ratios to larger settings with lower adult-child ratios. Children often travel in different ways to these settings (e.g., walk, ride school buses) and have to find familiar people in larger playgrounds and their classrooms in larger buildings. They also participate in increasingly "formal" schooling activities, spending more time working on structured academic tasks and less time in semistructured activities such as play as they move across grade levels. In addition, many new external rules and regulations are introduced to manage their behavior and time.

Children also spend more time with peers and less time with adults. Opportunities for interacting with peers of different ages decrease as they move from preschool to age-segregated elementary classrooms. In addition, they receive more critical feedback about their skills and behavior and are increasingly compared with their classmates and evaluated according to performance standards. Thus, children are gradually more pressed to "achieve among equals" (Ladd, 1996) across the primary grades.

Relationships with teachers also change as children compete with more classmates for their time and attention. In addition, relationships with peers change as composition of peer networks change from grade to grade (especially from preschool to kindergarten). Thus, children often need to figure out how to join new groups and make new friends with unfamiliar children from backgrounds very different from their own.

Furthermore, children's parents become less involved in their school activities as they progress through higher grade levels. Although parental involvement is relatively high in the early school years, it typically drops off between preschool and kindergarten and gradually declines thereafter if schools have not made efforts to encourage involvement a priority. Thus, teachers need to be especially cognizant of the critical role they play as *the* adult providers of security for young children during the many hours they spend at school. This role is discussed in Chapter 3.

Table 1.1 summarizes some typical developmental shifts in contexts and children.

Table 1.1   The Developmental Shift From Early to Middle Childhood (4–8 years)

Biological/Physical	• Reorganization of the frontal lobes • Refinement of fine and gross motor skills
Cognitive/Social/ Emotional/Behavioral	• Increase in memory capacity and strategic remembering • Increase in control of attention, behavior, and emotions (self-regulation) • Increase in self-reflection • Increase in logical and two-sided thinking; classification • Decrease in egocentrism; improved perspective-taking • Enhanced "theory of mind"
Social Contexts (in general)	• Increased participation in peer groups • Deliberate instruction in many areas • Play without direct adult supervision • Golden Rule morality • Increase in social comparison • Increase in expectations for independent and responsible behavior • Changes in relations with caretakers
School and Classroom Contexts (in particular)	• Lower adult-child ratios • More time with same-age, unfamiliar peers; changes in peer networks • Larger physical environments to navigate • New classroom and playground rules and regulations • Increase in critical feedback about skills and behavior based on standards and comparisons with classmates • Changes in relations with teachers

Researchers, educators, and policymakers recognize that these dramatic changes in school contexts present tremendous challenges for children in a phase of life fraught with potential. Children can be guided toward positive routes through school, or alternatively, onto negative ones. Thus, a great deal of current attention is given to promoting high quality relationships and instructional practices in classrooms based on contemporary perspectives and aligning practices across preschool and the early grades of school to create smooth transitions for children (e.g., Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; Pianta et al., 2007). The following view depicts a child who has adjusted well to first grade but continues to need a great deal of support for his developing competencies. Scott's description also illustrates typical ways of thinking and behaving of children in the midst of the 5 to 7 shift.

The Child's Window

Scott is 6 years old. He describes himself as "a boy with brown hair. I have a dog and a bike and a new videogame at home. I like to play soccer, but sometimes I get hurt. . . ." He has been in first grade for "a long time." He likes his teacher because "she is nice and teaches me stuff." He likes sharing what he's learned in reading with his parents at home because "they like to listen." His favorite activities in school are reading, recess, and "following the snail trails on the sidewalk." He still misses kindergarten where he was able to "ride bikes and build things."

When asked to rate his competencies, he indicates that he is very smart ("my mom says"), pretty good at reading ("I can't read all the words and the long books"), very good at math ("I just know!"), and good at art. When asked if he had friends at school, he said "yes" and described yesterday's activities with two boys. In response to, "What do your friends James and Enrique think of you?" he exclaimed, "I don't know what they think about!"

Scott was attentive throughout this 20-minute "interview"; he occasionally moved off-topic and became fidgety toward the end of the session. Earlier assessments of his behavioral regulation indicated that he was on course with his peers, and his teacher described his attentional skills as typical for a boy his age. His teacher rated his early academic competencies as "average." She is working with him on reading comprehension; she wants

to see him ask more questions and make more connections to what they read in class together. She describes him as "a little immature" and nonassertive, especially in groups. In general, she reports that he is "well adjusted" to school and eagerly participates in most class activities. She has no serious concerns.

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON DEVELOPMENT AND PRACTICE

Teachers' understandings of child development are important because their beliefs influence their intentions and plans for educational practices, their actual interactions with children, and in turn, their students' adjustment and learning in school. Unfortunately, studies show that not all educators embrace contemporary views of children's development based on dynamic models and current research outlined in this book. Instead, many harbor views of children's development based on more traditional perspectives, such as simple behavioral or bio-maturational views of development, focusing on *either* how the teacher impacts children's learning and behavior through reinforcement (behavioral) *or* how children's already developed competencies affect or limit their learning and behavior (bio-maturational). (See Table 1.2, pp. 26–27, for sample descriptions of contemporary and traditional views.) Some studies suggest that teachers with contemporary views are more likely to endorse and consistently implement practices that foster children's development and learning than teachers with traditional or mixed views (e.g., Daniels & Shumow, 2003; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Stipek & Byler, 1997; Wang, Elicker, McMullen, & Mao, 2008).

Educational and developmental psychologists have derived principles and practices stemming from current theoretical perspectives and research on child development and learning that have guided studies on teacher beliefs. Two efforts made by major professional organizations to bridge the gap between current knowledge and classroom practice are noteworthy. An earlier American Psychological Association

taskforce (APA, 1997) produced "**learner-centered**" principles from psychological research that have inspired professional development practices and research (e.g., McCombs & Whisler, 1997). The National Association for the Education of Young Children periodically updates "**developmentally appropriate**" belief statements and sample practices to guide programs for children from birth to age 8 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). (See Resources) The beliefs and practices endorsed by these organizations are similar to those referred to as "child centered" or "student centered." Table 1.2 provides a few sample descriptions of developmentally appropriate or learner-centered beliefs consistent with contemporary theoretical perspectives and research and some sample descriptions of developmentally inappropriate or non-learner-centered beliefs aligned with more traditional beliefs. These descriptions or items are adapted from several measures used in research on preschool and primary-grade teacher beliefs (e.g., McCombs, Daniels, & Perry, 2008; Smith, 1993; Stipek & Byler, 1997). Classroom practices based on contemporary developmental perspectives are described in the following chapters.

Chapter Summary

The *Window* into Charlotte's classroom at the beginning of the chapter provided us with a brief view of a teacher who practiced what she preached and believed. Her intentions to implement practices considered developmentally appropriate were based on her studies of contemporary theories and research on children's development and learning in graduate school; her program of study also emphasized learning about children's home cultures and languages. She struggled and made some mistakes her first year as all teachers do, but she developed caring, respectful relationships with her students and (most of) their families to create a positive classroom climate. By midyear, her classroom appeared to be managed almost entirely by her first graders. Thus, she could devote most of her time to intentional instruction, and her students learned to read in two

Table 1.2 Contemporary and Traditional Teacher Beliefs About Children's Development and Learning: Sample Descriptions

Contemporary Beliefs	Traditional Beliefs
• Addressing children's social, emotional, and physical needs is just as important to learning as meeting their intellectual needs.	• The most important job as a teacher is to help students meet well-established standards; basic academic skills should be the teacher's top priority. Children should be retained if they have not mastered basic skills at grade level.
• One of the best ways children learn is through active exploration in an environment prepared by teachers.	• Children learn best through repetition and practice.
• Children's enthusiasm for a task is more important than how well they do.	• Teachers should emphasize quality in final products.
• Seeing things from children's perspectives is key to their learning and good performance in school.	• Giving rewards and extra privileges for good performance is one of the best ways to motivate children to learn.
• Creating caring relationships with children is critical for their learning.	
• To maximize learning, teachers need to help children reflect on and discuss their thoughts and feelings.	• During a lesson, children should not be able to interrupt a teacher to relate personal experiences.

• Subject areas should be related to each other and children's real experiences and participation in concrete activities.	• Instruction should be clearly divided into separate subject areas.
• Children are able to participate in setting classroom rules.	• One of the most important things to teach children is how to follow rules and to do what is expected of them in the classroom.
• Children should be able to choose alternative ways of approaching planned activities.	
• Curriculum should respond primarily to individual differences in ability and interest.	• Curriculum should respond primarily to grade-level expectations.
• Opportunities for interacting with peers and teachers in small groups should predominate over whole group and individual experience.	• For most of the time, children should be expected to work quietly on their own and in teacher-led small reading groups.
• Teacher observation and informal assessments are the most valid way to gauge children's learning and performance.	• Tests are the most valid way to assess children's performance.
• Teachers should deal with parents mainly informally, encouraging them to participate in the classroom and at home.	• Teachers should deal with parents mainly through formally scheduled meetings and conferences.

languages! Just as important for her students' future development was the fact that many of their parents learned to be more comfortable and involved at school. Rationales and suggestions for creating developmentally appropriate (or learner-centered) relationships and classroom practices like these are presented in the remaining chapters of this book.

Questions to Ponder

1. Think about yourself as the child in the middle of the ecological model in Figure 1.1. How would you explain your own adjustment to school in the early grades (if you can recall) or later grades in terms of your skills and dispositions and multiple contextual influences (e.g., home, school, neighborhood)? How did experiences in these contexts influence you?

2. What are your beliefs about child development? Do you support more of the contemporary or traditional belief statements in Table 1.2 or some combination? Why? How do your beliefs relate to how you might implement activities in the classroom?

(Note that these questions are intended to promote self-reflection, not provide a valid assessment of beliefs.)

Practice Exercises

1. **Interviews.** Invite children ages 4 or 5 and ages 7 or 8 years to participate in an "interview" with you. Tell them this will help you learn more about how they think and feel. Ask a series of questions to reveal their understandings of self and others; samples are provided here. Compare responses of older and younger children. Do their responses reflect typical developmental changes noted in this chapter? (Note: Do not be concerned if the younger children reveal very little in words.)

   a. Tell me about yourself. What are you like? What kind of person are you? What are you not like?

Sample probes: Can you tell me something about the way that you look? Feel? Think? What are you good at? Not so good at? What would your mom or dad say about you? What would your friends say? What would your teacher say? Do you agree with what _____ might say?

b. Tell me about one of your friends. What is his/her name? What is he/she like? Sample probes: How is he/she different from you? The same as you? Can you tell me something about how he/she looks/feels/thinks different from you?

2. **Piagetian-Like Conservation Tasks.** Invite individual children ages 4 or 5 and ages 7 or 8 years to participate in a brief activity with you. To examine the child's understanding of conservation of mass, show two equal balls of playdough or clay and ask, "Do both balls have just as much clay/dough?" When the child agrees that they are the same, then roll one of the balls into a hot dog shape as he observes. Then ask, "Now do the balls have the same amount of dough or are they different? Why did you say that they were the same/different?" To examine the child's understanding of conservation of number, show two lines with the same number (5–7) of small objects, such as candies or pennies, equal in length. Ask if the lines are the same. When the child agrees that they are the same (some will move the objects a bit to line up), spread out one line in front of the child so that it looks longer than the other one. Then ask, "Now do the lines have the same number of candies/pennies or are they different? Why?" Compare older and younger children's responses and check to see if they correspond to typical changes in children's thinking described in this chapter.

3. **Games**. Invite children of different ages to play a familiar board game with you. Before you begin, ask them to explain the rules to you (tell them you don't remember). Their explanations are likely to reveal something

about their abilities to take your perspective, think about several things simultaneously, and plan ahead. Then play the game, periodically asking questions about their strategies and observing their abilities to attend and regulate their behavior. Again, compare older and younger children's behaviors and consider whether they reflect typical developmental shifts.

Key Words

Ecological perspective

5 to 7 developmental shift

Self-regulation

Memory strategies

Self-reflection

Theories of mind

Learner-centered principles and practices

Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP)