Guide to Early Childhood Education

I would like to dedicate this textbook in loving memory of my father, Jimmy Allen Cook and my dear mother, Beverly Gaye (Lord) Cook, who instilled within me the greatest desire to educate myself and learn.

It was my father's passion for reading and an understanding toward a real significance of historical events, coupled with my mother's desire to learn through reading a variety of literary books which conveyed in me a hunger for learning. Thus, I am able to appreciate all aspects of educational learning from both of my endearing parents.

Guide to Early Childhood Education:

Development – Design – Diversity

Edited by

Pamela R. Cook, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this textbook, *Guide to Early Childhood Education: Development—Design—Diversity* to all of the educators, teachers and students as my friends from Belize, Central America. Your teaching of young children has always provided a bright spot in my mind, a smile on my face, and so much gratitude in my heart for knowing all of you.

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I would like to dedicate this textbook to my family which includes: sister: Koleen R. Schlatter and brother-in-law, Mark L. Schlatter, nephew Kristian and niece Jennie Schlatter with nephews Benjamin and Adam Schlatter from the State of Indiana, USA and niece Laura Schlatter from the State of Illinois, USA. Also, Aunt Carol and Uncle Bob VeltKamp with cousin Mark VeltKamp from the State of Michigan, USA, with also cousins Clark and Ellen VeltKamp from Windsor, Ontario, CANADA.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I – DEVELOPMENT

PART III – DIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child—Maria Montessori

Seeing all those happy faces of young children displayed throughout this textbook will always put a smile on my face. Those images will be engraved in my mind for years to come and remind me over and over again that this is what "teaching" is all about. The importance and understanding of happy and safe young children will continue to help our school administrators, caregivers, educators, and teachers realise the rich benefits of, "happy schools" in the event of raising "happy children" for our nations to come (A. August, personal communication, Belmopan, Belize, February 2015).

Having said that, the real purpose for writing this textbook is to provide a true form of knowledge and understanding toward child development, early learning classroom design, and further aspects of diversity in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE). This textbook will not only offer information for the developmental aspects of growing and learning; it will also provide ways to design the ECE classroom learning environment, inside and out. It will help to give a better perspective and understanding of diversity and differences that may help teachers deal with so many of these challenges in their own teaching situations.

The articles and essays provided in Parts I, II, and III, have been written from several experts that will discuss various topics including additional insights and resource information (e.g. activities, examples, links, media, photos, etc.); for those working in the field of ECE including elementary and primary education. Essentially, the materials and information provided will be beneficial for teachers working in ECE to help utilise Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) with other types of methodologies to be effective in offering ways to accommodate diverse learning styles in an academic, applicable, and appropriate manner. Many of these methods, instructional strategies, and classroom techniques can be easily integrated into all subject areas of the learning environment.

These tactics may work best in levels of preschool to grade three or four which will meet most academic curricula, benchmarks, mandated standards, and other related school foundations and policies. Illustrations and various internet links have been provided in chapter nine to offer up-to-date thoughts, ideas, and resources for all those professionals working in an ECE learning environment.

On a more personal note and from my own encounters and observations of most ECE programmes, I find the critical point here is that young children simply desire adults to work with them and not against them. For example, let me explain:

> *One day, while I was preparing tea for a five-year-old child, I opened the cupboard door to find a selection of colourful plastic cups with lids and a number of clear glasses on two separate shelves. I asked this child which cup or glass she would like her tea poured into. She quickly pointed to the top shelf of the plastic cups with screw lids, all standing in a line. I began asking her several times which particular cup she wanted. Within a few minutes she scrunched up her nose, squinted her eyes, moved a chair beside the counter, climbed up onto the chair, stood with her hands on her tiny little hips, and pointed to the plastic cups. And then, with an exasperated tone in her voice, said to me, "Why do you have to be so complicated!"* (K. August, Belmopan, Belize, personal communication, 10th February, 2015)

It is so true that this incident is hilariously funny and a very good example from facing today's reality within the scheme of things while working with young children. Nevertheless, that child was right because she knew that plastic cups with screw lids were better as plastic does not break and screw lids keep all the liquid in. So, why didn't I think of that? After all, I am considered an expert ECE educator of Child Development, and I should have offered her "choices" of plastic screw lid cups. Why do we as educators try to make our teaching and learning experiences so very complicated while working with young children and causes frustration? Let me share another experience:

> *While visiting friends in Canada; one of my ole doctoral colleagues has a delightful four-year-old daughter. She is very active and enjoys sorting and working things out to problem solve on her own. While observing her colour, I simply asked if she needed my help to push the metal clip back to fasten her colouring book onto the clipboard? She looked straight in my eyes and said, "Yes!" As she paused--thought again—and then paused again, she said to me, "I can do this myself!"* (A. Gupta, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, 24th June, 2016)

When we build friendships with children and also try to establish relationships with children it will certainly make more sense to, "listen more" and "talk less." Conversing *with* children and not *to* them will definitely lighten the load for many ECE teachers and help to make their work so much easier. Let us all try to learn how to help make teaching simple for ourselves and the young children within our care.

My desire is for school administrators, educators, directors of preschool programmes, teachers, and all other school personnel that work in the field of ECE learn how to adapt to the world of a young child. This can be done simply by reading through this textbook to find encouraging words, thoughts, ideas, and many numerous resources for ways to cope with a variety of teaching issues and situations.

Respectfully,
~Pamela R. Cook, PhD

PART I

DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

ARTICLE 1.1

THE BACKGROUND OF EARLY LEARNING

BY

PAMELA R. COOK, PHD

The most effective kind of education is that a child should play—Plato

Introduction

The educational systems of ancient civilisations began more than a century ago and their roots are much older (Martin and Fabes 2006). Historical research into the developmental domains often showed that both Aristotle and Plato appeared to have appreciated the importance of early education. The Greeks and Romans valued the importance of the development of the body and mind to witness the greatness of *play*. Plato believed that socialisation and the environment were both critical factors in child development, and that the developmental process was simply a continuous process (Ibid.).

Adults that lived within that period were strongly encouraged to observe and watch children while they were playing as a way of learning more about them. Valuable research regarding *play* of the 1930s was demonstrated through the famous studies of Mildred Parten (1932). Parten's research was strictly based on her contributions to the development of social participation in *play*. The features of her observations included: studies of leadership, nurturing, and the cooperative behaviours of young children within groups (Martin and Fabes 2006). Parten's observations indicated that children were considered the *on-lookers* to those that played in *solitary play* mode, and for other children who enjoyed *parallel play* with the addition of *associative* and *cooperative play* groups (Van Hoorn 2003). In essence, it was the actual observations of Parten that demonstrated the aspects of *play* within the growth and

developmental stages that increased the ability to coordinate a child's own perspective of learning (Martin and Fabes 2006).

In the past, developmental educationalists primarily focused on the learning themes that grew out of the basic needs or concerns for a child's welfare (Schwebel, Plumert, and Pick 2000). However, research studies in later years have become focused on factors that may relate to the diverse ways a child learns (Martin and Fabes 2006; Cook 2012). These factors may include: transferring of skills in communication, collaboration, and investigation of the ability to learn, which essentially strengthens all aspects of the learning and growing process (Abbott 2001). Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) formulated his way of thinking as:

> In the very first days of the child's development, his activities acquire a meaning of their own in a system of social behaviour and, being directed towards a definite purpose, are frequently refracted through the prism of the child's development. This complex human structure is the product of a developmental process. (Vygotsky 1978, 30)

The main differences in reaching developmental milestones are related to the values and expectations expressed by a child's social and cultural community. The colleagues of early learning included: Rogoff, Mistry, Goncu, and Mosier, who all agree that the, "Goals of development vary according to local practices and values" (1993, 151).Vygotsky argued that, in order to accurately match the instructional strategies to a child's developmental ability, it is not only through actual development, but also the *level* of potential of development (Tappan 1998). Furthermore, a child's developmental changes are essentially influenced by educational methods that include both learning manipulatives and movement (Martin and Fabes 2006; Cook 2012).

For an understanding of the historical significance of Early Childhood Education (ECE), the epistemological educational pendulum of early learning pedagogy appears to swing back and forth from behaviourism to social-constructivism, a theoretical framework in existence for over two decades (Cook 2009; 2012). Banks (2004) contended that a theory based on child-initiated activities or social-constructivist methods may not sufficiently support academic success. This may have been the case in the past; however, current studies are beginning to focus on factors that relate to a child's "individual differences". These factors have been influenced by a variety of approaches, methods, strategies, and techniques (Wardle 2005; Martin and Fabes 2006; Cook 2009; 2012).

Interestingly enough, ECE researchers of one particular study developed a comparative and qualitative triple case study that was conducted in three semi-rural early childhood programmes in Canada, India, and South Africa. The purpose of this four-year study was to provide an understanding of the ways that culture, practice, and theory may intersect in a semi-rural context. This primary focus of the study was the organisational use of the classroom learning materials in the preschools as a means to examine the interplay between the indigenous cultural norms. The manipulatives and materials utilised related to the educational trends toward the globalisation of best practices in ECE learning (Prochner, Cleghorn and Green 2010; Cook 2010, 2012).

Therefore, for those working in the field of ECE, it is critical to gain a better understanding of the theoretical framework in early learning pedagogy from the past and current philosophies of ECE methodologies. This knowledge may be acquired by obtaining a perspective of the significance of the historical roots of several ECE theorists. These simple philosophers were able to grasp a rich concept of *child development* from an ECE standpoint.

Historical Significance of Behaviourism and Social-constructivism

Behaviourism

Behaviourist movements led thinkers toward a long series of instructional strategies for schools, including: goals and objectives, outcome-based education, and teacher performance evaluation systems (Jones and Brader-Araje 2002). A few of the behaviourist reformers were theorists like Skinner, Locke, Thorndike, Engelmann, Freud and Watson (DeVries and Kohlberg 1990; Forman and Kuschner 1997).

Educational reformer and theorist B. F. Skinner (1905–90) was considered the founder of "radical behaviourism," and was primarily concerned with how the environment shaped the behaviours of people. Behaviourists believed that it is only when the environment is changed that real behavioural changes occur. Thus, "learning based theories" that focus on particular factors determine how behaviour is changed when in response to everyday occurrences (Martin and Fabes 2006). Consequently, it was the behaviourist philosophy that dominated the educational systems until the early 1970s (Codrington 2004). Later on, "cognitive processing"

took precedence and was primarily based on Jerome Bruner and Lev Vygotsky's research, indicating that, "Learning occurs as the individual interacts with the environment" (Ibid., 178).

Cooper (2004) contends that, in schools in general, the failure of the policymakers was in recognising the significance of the *affective*, which has led to oppressive examinations and testing regimes over the years. Furthermore, newer findings from neuro-science research reaffirm that an emphasis was placed on the *affect* through the psychological literature, which strongly suggested that *all* learning is *affective* in nature.

However, current behaviourist instructional strategies continue to plague the mind of school administrators and educators, who are only concerned with high-stakes testing as teachers are looked upon as puppets or robots, rather than decision makers (New 2003; Cook 2009; 2012). How can teachers implement different approaches, methods, instructional strategies, and techniques in a diverse learning environment that will be conducive to the growth and development of young children? More importantly, how can teachers continue to meet all of the structured academic curricula and mandated standards (Cook 2009; 2012)?

Noddings advises, "Formative assessments may be emotional and cognitive, personal and academic" (1995, 14). However, differentiating a child's learning experiences may need to include both academics and development (Tomlinson 1999). Tobin recommends that differentiated learning in classrooms must call for more, "flexibility, divergence and confidence" (2005, 196). For the most part, teachers that begin to visualise the "differences" in a learner, so as to create, design, and provide ways for that particular child to learn appropriately, are quite beneficial. Administrators and teachers that choose differentiated learning may indeed require a balance of academics and diverse developmental learning activities and experiences (Noddings 1995; Tomlinson 1999; Tobin 2005; Cook 2009; 2012).

Consequently, the desire for the "behaviourist-oriented teacher" may be to consider an exchange of knowledge learning directed by the teacher to meet the individual needs of specific learners through diverse instructional strategies in the environment (Cook 2006; 2012). This may be important for ECE teachers to take note of in learning new ways to blend theoretical methodologies that will work best for diverse learning styles. Gupta explains this correlation well: "There are aspects of behaviourism and constructivism that are both useful, such as breaking

down tasks into parts and having clear goals, on the one hand, and appealing to the cognitive needs of the learner, on the other" (2009, 24). "And, the positive correlations of Piaget, Vygotsky, Skinner and Watsons' work have all had great impacts on learning" (Gupta, 2009, 27).

Katz commented that one of the major concerns regarding the historical squabbling over goals and methods is that both sides in the struggle may overlook the curriculum and teaching methods beyond the traditional dichotomy. Katz believed that:

> Both sides under-emphasize and undervalue a third option—namely, curriculum and teaching methods that address children's intellectual development as distinct from the *instructivist* emphasis on academic learning and the *constructivist* emphasis on children's play and self-initiated learning. (2000, 3)

Jones and Brader-Araje (2002) suggest the role of the "individual child," and the importance of learning is essentially thought of as "meaning making," which in essence is the active role of the learner. Perhaps in return, as behaviourist and social-constructivist methodologies are interwoven together, there will be diverse instructional strategies that will match the developmental levels of ECE learning. Essentially, this is the best way to create a classroom learning environment that will meet the individualised learning styles of young children (Katz 2000; Cook 2009; 2012).

Social-constructivism

The social-constructivist theoretical framework displays a philosophical meaning that includes diverse theories from a context hinging upon the nature of *knowing* from the active role of the learner (Jones and Brader-Araje 2002). Social-constructivism or non-traditional frameworks of early learning may be seen as, "Strong educational alternatives to traditional education that are sources of inspiration for progressive educational reform" (Edwards 2002, 58).

Apparently, the real success of the social-constructivist approach for early learning methodologies may be due to frustrated ECE educators and teachers utilising only a behaviourist approach (Jones and Brader-Araje 2002; Cook 2006; 2012). However, within a social-constructivist learning environment, children take on a role that is active, mobile, and works with hands-on approaches through their own learning processes (Jones and Brader-Araje 2002; Branscombe et al. 2003; Cook 2006; 2012).

Methods of social-constructivism allow children opportunities to interpret for themselves what is at stake from the ideological differences that surround them (Giroux 2004). The social-constructivist theoretical framework is known to be child-centred and displays philosophical meaning from theorists of diverse contexts that hinges upon the nature of "knowing" and the active role of the learner (Jones and Brader-Araje 2002; Branscombe et al. 2003; Cook 2010). In essence, social-constructivism is simply the role of a child who chooses to develop their own understanding of learning (Morrison 2004; Cook 2006; 2012).

Current early childhood educationalists that choose to take on an epistemological stance and embrace a social-constructivist theoretical framework may base early learning pedagogy on "theory and practice." Early childhood experts suggest that social-constructivist teachers document, interpret, observe, make decisions, record, study, take notes, and reflect upon the nature of a child as a learner; rather than begin with a school's desired curricula (Branscombe et al. 2003; Cook 2006; 2012).

Early Learning Theorists

Swiss educator Johan Pestalozzi (1746–1827) and French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) were early ECE philosophers and thought all educational experiences were based on sensorial impressions. They trusted it was through these experiences that children were able to achieve their full and natural potential. Pestalozzi established several schools for abandoned, neglected, and impoverished orphan children (Morrison 2004). Like Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), who had been referred to as the "Father of Kindergarten," strongly believed the educator's role was to observe a child's *natural unfolding* toward development. Froebel thought it was appropriate to provide activities that would allow children to learn when they were ready. Froebel's design of "gifts" or small wooden toys of manipulation offered many learning opportunities for children (Morrison 2004).

Caroline Pratt (1867–1954), a distinctive leader from the progressive education movement, believed that it was vitally important for teachers of young children to be active participants and engaged in play with children. Pratt, like Parten, also believed in the importance of the play-based learning environments. Pratt often thought that children learned best when they were able to use their imaginations, conduct experiments, take field

trips, and participate in a variety of sensorial activities (Martin and Fabes 2006).

John Dewey (1859–1952), a progressive educator, shared the philosophies of Maria Montessori (1870–1952) that introduced education as child-centred and interactive, involving the social world of the child and the community (Mooney 2000; Cook 2009; 2012). Like Dewey and Montessori, Jean Piaget (1896–1980), Loris Malaguzzi (1920–94), and Jerome Bruner (1915–) all believed that children learned best when their curiosity was not fully satisfied. Dewey thought a child's curiosity actually drove a child's ability to learn (Mooney 2000).

Howard Gardner (1943–) provided a contribution to the social-constructivist theoretical framework for ECE educators through knowledge of the "Multiple Intelligences" (MI). Gardner's research of the MI is very diverse and includes bodily/kinaesthetic, spatial, linguistic, musical, logical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic aspects, with a ninth being existentialism for those philosophical thinkers (Morrison 2004).

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), Russian psychologist and social-constructivist theorist, outlines an educational framework from a socio-cultural psychological perspective (Wertsch 1985). Vygotsky's influential theory simply introduces the relationships of teaching, learning, and development that may be considered social origins of mental functioning (Tappan 1998). The work of Vygotsky generated a foundation from a theoretical framework for social-constructivism within a variety of educational settings. These perspectives and viewpoints were influenced by literacy, problem-solving, mathematics, science, second-language learning, and peer collaboration (Ibid.).

Vygotsky's social-constructivist framework is being radically transformed around the world as ECE educationalists continue to explore even in the most remote places using innovative ways to meet individual learning styles. During an International Educational Conference in January 2008 in Oahu, Hawaii a university professor presented several positive teaching outcomes from a small village orphanage school in Kitui, Kenya, East Africa. Apparently, the teachers were implementing a social-constructivist teaching framework in their current instructional strategies from the structured primary school curricula. It was quickly discovered that most of the children that attended the school had been orphaned and were suffering from the AIDS pandemic. Interestingly enough, through

several teacher observations, the children showed drastic academic improvement. The students became overly zealous when they experienced learning through the use of a variety of diverse learning activities and materials. The teachers indicated that the success of learning was due to their lesson plans becoming less structured and teacher directed to more open-ended and child directed (Nickerson 2008).

The characteristics that constitute a social-constructivist approach may be represented as:

- Children construct their own knowledge through roles created by their cognitive development
- Children understand concepts as they construct, rather than be instructed
- Mental and physical activity is crucial; knowledge constructed is built by a step-by- step process
- Children explore objects within the context of their own environment
- Problem solving and socially engaging with others occur during the learning process
- Children learn through experiences that are of interest
- Cognitive development is a continuous process (Branscombe et al. 2003; Morrison 2004, 114; Cook 2010)

In addition, Vygotsky endorsed that, "The human structure is the product of a developmental process deeply rooted in the links between individuals and social history" (Vygotsky 1978, 30). The emphasis on the role of the social context drove educationalists to re-examine the extent to which learning is an *individual* process. Building relationships inter-personally with children may allow teachers to have the ability to understand each child's *individual* level of development and potential. Vygotsky suggested that, "To study something *developmentally* means to study it in the process of change" (Ibid., 64–5). Moreover, Vygotsky refers to a pedagogical change that says, "Pedagogy must be oriented not to the *yesterday*, but to the *tomorrow* of a child's development" (Ibid.).

Conclusion

When gaining a perspective of a balanced ECE programme, it is necessary to look further into early learning philosophical methodologies. They are diverse, similar, and historically significant, and may provide ways for a

strong theoretical framework in quality ECE programming.

An example of this type of balanced ECE programming may come from a private orphanage school in a small village of Belize, Central America. This particular private school was motivated to investigate and research three world-renowned philosophies that were similar to the school's methodology in regard to high-quality ECE programming. The approaches explored were initially founded by Dr. Emmi Pikler, Dr. Maria Montessori, and Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the "Reggio Emilia" approach to early learning. All three of these philosophies were implemented to facilitate a rich developmental and pedagogical early learning experience for children living in an orphanage school from the perspectives of a developing country. Please see chapter 1.2 for more insights on these three philosophies and their benefits for early learning pedagogy (Cook 2010; 2012).

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