and improved learning experiences for children across preschool and kindergarten/primary levels. As with any statement of public policy, however, some people ignored it and others misunderstood it (Kostelnik, 1992).

Similar misunderstandings have arisen within the current standards movement (Hatch, 2002). These misunderstandings can result in implementation of teaching practices that cause many children to fail or that do not sufficiently challenge children to reach their highest potential (Katz, 1987). Misunderstandings also result when teachers cling to familiar ways of knowing and resist the opportunity to improve learning settings based on what the profession is coming to know about how children grow and learn.

Currently accepted best practices for working with young children are based on a newer synthesis of viewpoints about growth and learning. This synthesis transcends the maturationist view (children will only learn it when they are ready), the behaviorist/cultural transmission view (children will only learn it if we directly teach it), and/or a marriage of the two.

The unfortunate result of the marriage of readiness and behaviorist perspectives is that people adopt a “they can’t learn it until they are ready” and “they won’t learn it until they are ready” view of young children’s capacity to learn and grow. This causes some educators and members of the public to think that setting high learning standards and then accepting children into programs only when they are “ready” to achieve in them is the way to “elevate” achievement.

Responsible teachers do not wait until the whole class is ready in order to create learning opportunities for individual children. Highly qualified teachers provide additional direct instructional support to those children who may not yet be clear about a particular skill or concept. They provide challenges to rapidly developing children and protect more slowly developing children from experiencing failure (the individual dimension). Teachers know, for example, that learning subtraction is an expectation for primary children in U.S. schools (the cultural context). This is the meaning of setting challenging, but achievable expectations for children (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; NAECY & NAECES/SDE, 1991).

Competent teachers approach the reach for high learning standards for all children by using both strategies. Standards must never be applied in ways that cause any young child to experience repeated failure. Failure is the antithesis of achieving high standards. Young primary-age children are especially vulnerable to negative long-term consequences when they experience repeated school failure.

Responsible practitioners ensure that expectations remain high, but that teaching practices are adapted to suit the range of capacities of young learners, so that repeated success leads each child toward higher and higher achievement. Appropriate practice is about how children learn and how highly qualified and competent teachers teach. Standards are the target. One does not abandon good practice to lead children toward the achievement of high standards. Doing so results in the opposite outcome.

**Good teachers do not abandon good practice for high standards.**

**Persisting Misunderstandings and Ineffective Practices**

In reaction to the adoption of preschool and early elementary learning standards by most states and many local school districts, some practitioners are returning to practices that were shown to be ineffective in the past. These practices, such as those described in this section, continue to be ineffective and continue to have unintended negative consequences. Responsible teachers will do nothing to improve children’s achievement (Meisels, 1992; NAECES/SDE, 2000).

**Increasing Age of Entrance to Kindergarten**

One response to concerns about children’s capacity to be successful in kindergarten has been to tinker with the age of entrance. In states with early fall kindergarten-entry dates, concerns about children who are perceived to be unready are expressed in the same terms as those states that have late winter dates. During the past two decades a number of state legislatures have responded to pressures to raise the entrance age (i.e., cause children to be older when they are able to enter kindergarten). After experience with this practice in a few states, the date was moved back to the beginning of the summer. Others are now working to reinstate fall entry dates. Leaders in those states have discovered that expectations remain high, but that teaching practices are adapted to suit the range of capacities of young learners, so that repeated success leads each child toward higher and higher achievement. Appropriate practice is about how children learn and how highly qualified and competent teachers teach. Standards are the target. One does not abandon good practice to lead children toward the achievement of high standards. Doing so results in the opposite outcome.

**Authors**


Nearly two decades ago inappropriate influences from earlier educational reform movements coupled with the need to define best practice for the rapidly growing number of prekindergarten programs led to the development and dissemination of the Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC, 1997) for the early childhood field and beyond. Now, nearly 20 years later, misunderstanding about the purposes of standards setting, arising from the most recent reform movement, is having similar negative influences on the early childhood settings of the early 21st century.

Continuing misunderstanding about the nature and purpose of developmentally appropriate practice has persisted, often resulting in early childhood settings that are “experientially rich” but “content poor.” This is just as unacceptable as inappropriate application of learning standards in programs for young children.

The early learning years can provide rich experiences that
\begin{itemize}
  \item offer high-quality content,
  \item are appropriate for the learning capabilities of the children,
  \item and lead children to achieve high standards.
\end{itemize}

High learning standards can be implemented and achieved at any level only through the application of teaching practices that are appropriate to the diverse learning needs of the children (Nebraska & Iowa Departments of Education, 2001).

Achieving High Standards and Implementing Developmentally Appropriate Practice – Both ARE Possible

Harriet A. Egertson

Nearly two decades ago inappropriate influences from earlier educational reform movements coupled with the need to define best practice for the rapidly growing number of prekindergarten programs led to the development and dissemination of the Early Childhood Curriculum (ECC, 1997) for the early childhood field and beyond. Now, nearly 20 years later, misunderstanding about the purposes of standards setting, arising from the most recent reform movement, is having similar negative influences on the early childhood settings of the early 21st century.

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The original documents defining and describing developmentally appropriate practice influenced the field far beyond what developers expected—many influences were positive and some were not. A large number of teachers, administrators, and teacher educators embraced the intent of the statements and reexamined this article should be addressed to Harriet A. Egertson, 33163 Fox Road, Temecula, CA 92592.

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