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A Curriculum Framework for Reflective Teaching

To enter into a style of teaching which is based on questioning what we're doing and why, on listening to children, on thinking about how theory is translated into practice and how practice informs theory, is to enter into a way of working where professional development takes place day after day in the classroom. —Sonya Shoptaugh

When teachers go about their daily work with curious and questioning minds and see themselves not as disciplinarians or mere transmitters of information but as researchers learning alongside children, then new knowledge is always under construction. As Sonya Shoptaugh suggests, this way of working leads to ongoing professional development for teachers and creates meaningful outcomes for children. This new edition of *Learning Together with Young Children* is a curriculum framework intended to bridge the gap between credible educational theories and research, and the everyday practices of early childhood teachers. While it is important to pay attention to learning domains and standards when planning curriculum, the process involves far more than that. We recommend that teachers take a comprehensive approach to curriculum development that keeps brain development in mind and not focus solely on school readiness. More than just learning how to plan activities or lessons, teachers who follow the tenets of this book will understand how they can draw on their philosophy and values, along with pedagogical theories, to create a vibrant classroom culture focused on relationships and inquiry. They will design the physical and social-emotional environment with great care. This initial and ongoing work is the foundation or core of our curriculum framework.

From this hub, a wide-ranging repertoire of teacher actions spirals outward, ensuring important learning will take place in daily moments as well as in long-term investigations and projects. As children explore relationships, materials, and activities in a thoughtfully planned environment, both indoors and on the playyard, teachers move through a continual observation/reflection/action cycle, what Paulo Freire (1970) calls *praxis*. Teachers observe and collect descriptive details, photographs, and samples of the knowledge children have been expressing and investigating. They spend time talking with the children, help them see what others are doing, and describe how the activity is related to other experiences, domain knowledge, and academic standards. They offer additional materials, model dialog and conversation to extend vocabulary, coach children to acquire useful skills, and continually challenge children to go deeper with their learning. At each juncture, teachers ask themselves the following questions (and others) to critically reflect on what they are seeing and the documentation they are collecting. The process of self-inquiry becomes a thinking lens for uncovering possibilities for action and decision making.

- What details stand out that I can make visible for further consideration?
- What in my background and values is influencing my response to this situation and why?
- How might issues of culture, family background, institutionalized bias, or popular media be influencing this situation?
- Where do I see examples of children's strength and competency?

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- Where do I see examples of children's strength and competency?

- How do I understand the children's point of view in this situation?
- How are the environment and materials affecting what's unfolding and what changes could be made?
- How are my actions affecting this situation?
- What learning domains am I addressing here, and what other learning domains could I address?
- What theoretical perspectives, child development principles, and brain research could I draw on to inform my understanding and action?
- What values, philosophy, and goals do I want to influence my response?

Because we believe teachers are creative, competent, and eager to help children learn, our curriculum approach offers a wide berth for their autonomy. Of course, teachers, like children, need others to believe in them, support them, and mentor them into their full potential. For their creativity to flourish and for their continued professional development, teachers deserve collegial work environments with the time, tools, and technology to support reflective practice.

We know teachers work in a variety of settings, each with its own complex web of concerns that should be taken into account in the curriculum-planning process. If your early childhood program has a centralized, top-down set of mandates, standards, and assessment tools, our curriculum framework will guide your thinking as you translate these requirements into specific and meaningful experiences for the children.

On the other hand, if your program offers you little in the way of philosophical or pedagogical guidance, our framework will help you clarify your values and beliefs about the teaching and learning process, and will offer a structure for responding to children and planning a curriculum that reflects your values and learning goals, and the children's interests. Our goal is to engage your mind in the dynamic process of teaching and learning, which, in turn, will strengthen your skills and confidence as a reflective teacher. Curriculum for children can't reach its potential for deeper meaning and learning without teachers engaged in their own learning process.

Learning Together with Young Children: The Curriculum Framework

Our curriculum framework comprises six critical core practices, which are discussed in detail in chapters 2 through 7. Each chapter provides specific principles to guide you in adapting that core practice for your setting:

- Chapter 2—Create a Nourishing Classroom Culture
- Chapter 3—Enhance the Curriculum with Materials
- Chapter 4—Expand Opportunities for Children to Use Their Active Bodies
- Chapter 5—Bring Yourself to the Teaching and Learning Process
- Chapter 6—Coach Children to Learn about Learning
- Chapter 7—Dig Deeper to Learn with Children

Two of our earlier books, *Designs for Living and Learning* and *The Art of Awareness*, are focused respectively on designing physical environments and mastering observation and documentation skills. These core practices are referenced as part of the *Learning Together with Young Children* curriculum framework but not given their own chapters as curriculum core practices here. Neither is the topic of assessment. Tools for assessing children are prolific throughout the early education field, and we don't intend to introduce yet another. The assessment approaches compatible with our curriculum fall under the rubric of authentic (Meisels et al. 1994) and are based on documentation data from children's

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everyday work (Horn-Wingerd 2002). In this regard, we value formative assessment (low stakes, providing ongoing feedback) over summative assessment (a high-stakes evaluation against benchmarks). We particularly favor the approach to assessment used in New Zealand with the tool referred to as “learning stories” (Carr 2001; Carr and Lee 2012) and hope it will become more widely used in the United States. In New Zealand, assessments are viewed as another way we help children construct an identity, a goal and process very compatible with the core practices explored in this book. Throughout *Learning Together with Young Children*, you will find examples of an observation and documentation process that can easily feed into existing assessment tools and address educational standards.

Planning curriculum that is responsive to children’s lives and learning styles requires far more of teachers than simply choosing a set of lessons or activities to offer. By the same token, it is far more rewarding. Rather than mandating a step-by-step protocol to follow, *Learning Together with Young Children* offers a framework for thinking. When you continually cycle through the questions we offer for reflecting on your observations and actions, this reflective thinking process will become second nature to you, just as protocols for diapering and handwashing do. We’ve come to describe this protocol for reflection as the Thinking Lens.®

As you internalize the principles in each of the core practices of our curriculum, we believe you will become excited about making them your own. While teacher-proof curricula overlook teachers as the most important element in children’s learning, our curriculum framework recognizes your critical role and asks you to bring yourself fully into the planning and implementation process.

Chapter 2 Core Practice: Create a Nourishing Classroom Culture

If you are clear about the ideas and values you want to guide your teaching, the next step is to make sure



Tots Corner



Family Room

these values are reflected in the learning environment you create. Our earlier book *Designs for Living and Learning* offers many examples of how programs have gone about this task. If you aren’t familiar with this resource, consider reading it as you begin using the ideas about curriculum we offer here. In some ways, *Learning Together with Young Children* is a sequel to *Designs for Living and Learning*.

Once you have created an environment that reflects your philosophy and values for children and families, then what? Your next step is to use those same values in creating a classroom culture—a set of expectations, routines, and ways of being together. This often requires rethinking some of the usual ways teachers organize time for children; how you spend your time

as a teacher; the language and systems you use for communications; and the ways you come together, see each other, and negotiate your ideas, desires, and different points of view.

Chapter 2 will introduce you to a set of principles to guide your work in creating a classroom culture that demonstrates respect for children as capable learners and members of families and communities. You'll also find guiding principles for forming respectful partnerships with children's families, from first encounters through ongoing communications and gatherings. This chapter includes ideas for bringing democratic ideals, culturally responsive teaching, and anti-bias goals into your classroom routines, and for fostering relationships and a sense of belonging and responsibility. And all of this is brought to life with specific examples from actual teachers across North America, Australia, and New Zealand.

You will find inspiring examples of classroom cultures that help children see themselves as learners and resources to one another. And, finally, there are ideas for creating memory-making rituals and celebrations that go beyond birthday parties and graduation ceremonies. Creating a classroom culture involves continually thinking about your values, being willing to experiment and take risks, and constantly paying attention to relationships and the learning environment. This is the core practice of our curriculum framework—all other teacher actions flow from this foundation.

Chapter 3 Core Practice: Enhance the Curriculum with Materials

Having an environmentally based curriculum means you pay attention to the environment on both the macro level (the room or outdoor design and setup) and the micro level (the materials that are available and how they are presented to children). Again, your values and images of children and the teaching and learning process influence which materials you offer. Our curriculum approach suggests you reconsider many of the typical learning materials. Of critical



Children First

importance is thinking about which materials and equipment you can offer to encourage children's brains to develop through large-motor physical activity, not only outdoors but within your classroom as well.

We encourage you to see yourself as an inventor of new combinations of materials. You'll find it engaging for yourself as well as the children to draw on your philosophical foundation, your observations of what children enjoy doing, and your knowledge of brain research, child development, and schema theory to put together interesting groupings of materials for children to explore. Your choices will also be influenced by the dispositions, relationships, and learning outcomes you have in mind for children and the pervasive or subtle biases you want children to overcome.

Chapter 3 offers numerous principles for selecting and offering materials to children. With the kinds of



Earlwood Children's Centre



Fairwood Children's Centre

play (Piaget 2001), schema theory (Piaget and Inhelder [1969] 2000; Van Wijk 2008), and the developmental themes (Curtis and Carter 2011) reflected in children's ongoing play in mind, you can begin to offer combinations of materials that allow for these open-ended approaches. Learning some basic principles for combining and presenting materials as "invitations for learning" will help you encourage children's exploration and enhance their ability to focus. With the children actively engaged, rather than dependent on your instructions for investigation, you will be able to stand back, observe, and make deliberate choices about your next actions. When you design open-ended invitations with particular schema or learning domains in mind, you create more possibilities for gathering documentation to reflect the learning, help in planning next steps, and add to your assessment process.

Chapter 4 Core Practice: Expand Opportunities for Children to Use Their Active Bodies

Children are sensory/motor beings. They bring their bodies to every experience. The newest brain research suggests that children are not getting enough opportunities for active play in their neighborhoods, early childhood programs, or schools, and because of this, they are developing a host of challenges.

At home, many children spend hours every day

in front of a screen and enjoy very limited time outdoors—a place that provides the freedom of movement and physical adventures that children crave. Teachers, increasingly focused on academic skills for young children, are creating small spaces for sitting quietly to learn. Many of the current assessment tools and curriculum approaches require specific areas in a classroom to focus on each academic domain, from math to science. As teachers use these approaches, they are dividing their often very tiny classrooms into smaller and smaller spaces, filled with tables, chairs, and shelves. The resulting lack of space not only limits children's opportunity to be active in their bodies; it also makes it difficult for them to pursue big ideas. Indeed, if you have only a 2' x 3' space for block building, you are restricting children's bodies as well as their ability to think big.

Consider the following quote on how unrestricted outdoor play makes for strong, competent, capable children from a 2015 *Washington Post* article by Angela Hanscom (who later wrote a book, *Balanced and Barefoot*, on this topic):

If children are not given enough natural movement play experiences, they are more likely to be clumsy, have difficulty paying attention, have trouble controlling their emotions, utilize poor problem-solving



Burlington Little School

methods, and demonstrate difficulties with social interactions. We are consistently seeing sensory motor and cognitive issues pop up in later years because of inadequate opportunities to play and move in the early years.

Chapter 4 discusses the warnings from this research and helps you examine your own current practices that may limit children's active playtime. The chapter offers information about children's sensory/motor systems and the vital importance they play in the brain development that leads to self-regulation and focus. You will be invited to study children as they seek out these sensory/motor experiences and be offered examples of teacher documentation highlighting the skill and competence children have when moving their bodies.

You will also learn how your own reactions to children's risk taking and physical challenges can affect the opportunities children have to develop these essential skills.

Chapter 5 Core Practice: Bring Yourself to the Teaching and Learning Process

A good deal of pre-service teacher education and ongoing professional development is focused on what and how to teach, leaving out of the equation



Clifton School

who is doing the teaching. In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer (2007, 4) reminds us that this constitutes a fundamental deficiency for teachers.

The question we most commonly ask is the “what?” question—what subjects shall we teach?

When the conversation goes a bit deeper, we ask the “how?” question—what methods and techniques are required to teach well?

Occasionally, when it goes deeper still, we ask the “why?” question—for what purposes and to what ends do we teach?

But seldom, if ever, do we ask the “who?” question—who is the self that teaches? How does the quality of my selfhood form—or deform—the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world?

Chapter 5 describes a core way that our curriculum framework addresses this dilemma for teachers. If you don't know yourself well, if you feel powerless in your job, how can you be an effective teacher? Bringing yourself, not just your teaching goals and techniques, to your days with children requires that you recognize how you instinctively react to things that unfold with children. You can begin to develop this insight by asking yourself these questions:

What past experiences influence who you are as a teacher?

What do you value and want to pursue with the children you teach?



Martin Luther King Jr. Day Home Center

What do you bring from your cultural or family background that influences your work with children and families?

What anti-bias practices do you want to strengthen in yourself?

When you reflect on your observations, what do you see as significant and why?

Your answers to these questions can help you define the opportunities you can offer children. Even if you are required to use a certain curriculum—or perhaps we should say, *especially* when you have such a mandate—you can claim your power to make your days meaningful and joyful. Remembering that curriculum is everything that happens in your time with children, your keen eyes and ears must tune in to how to support what is significant to them. In addition to principles for self-awareness, we offer ideas for cultivating a mind-set of receptivity and an ability to notice details. In this book, you will find principles to help you think through possible actions to take. These include staying alert to personal or institutional assumptions that might reflect undesirable biases, seeking the children's point of view, extending conversations, and bringing awareness to how you are becoming a group of responsible, competent learners.

Chapter 6 Core Practice: Coach Children to Learn about Learning

Begin by creating a classroom culture that fosters respectful relationships and an eagerness to explore the provocative materials you make available. Next, develop a repertoire of possible teacher actions that will increase your ability to co-create a curriculum that goes beyond the superficial into the exciting process of constructing knowledge. Co-creation is the operative idea here. Until recently, the early childhood education field juxtaposed two possible approaches to curriculum: teacher-directed and child-initiated. Proponents of one view tend to think negatively about the other. Though our profession's definition of *developmentally appropriate practice* (Bredekamp and

Copple 2009) rejects a drill-and-recitation approach, that was never intended to mean that teachers should play a passive role. While teachers may not be directing children's recitations, they are continually playing the role of stage and prop manager, coach, model, and improvisational artist helping children learn as they play (Jones and Reynolds 2011).

There are many things children can learn only with instruction and support from more experienced people. Studying Vygotsky's theories of scaffolding and the zone of proximal development will help you see the vitally important role adults can play in enhancing children's learning (Berk and Winsler 1995). When young children demonstrate an excitement about the learning process, how do teachers use their skills and knowledge to support them without taking over? The challenge is to foster eager learning dispositions in children, helping them gain skills and resources in order to understand and take more responsibility for their own learning. Chapter 6 offers specific principles to help you and the children see that learning is a process with specific strategies you both can use. Teachers become aware of cognitive learning styles, often culturally influenced, and try to match these in a culturally appropriate way (Hammond 2015). They provide direct coaching when particular skills, tools, or know-how would be useful to the children. With careful observation and listening, you can formulate questions that help children uncover their curiosities, theories, and own questions. You show them how to turn to



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their friends, reference materials, and stories to take charge of their own learning. You continually reinforce a self-identity in children that they are competent learners who are able to research, think through challenges, and solve problems.

Chapter 7 Core Practice: Dig Deeper to Learn with Children

A popular sentiment in the United States is that “more is better” and, in early childhood education, this often translates into superficially exposing children to a wide range of curriculum topics. Brain research suggests that children are drawn to new things, so they will easily go from activity to activity (Gopnik 2009). Yet they also like repetition and immersing themselves in their current passions. Teachers can provide experiences with different approaches to the same idea along with appropriate materials to help children go deeper in their pursuits rather than looking for the next entertaining activity.

When trying to use an observation-based, emergent approach to curriculum, teachers often think they should wait until the children express an interest in something and then plan a unit around the topic. For example, if children’s play is repeatedly centered on dinosaurs, then teachers plan a series of lessons related to dinosaurs. How does jumping in with this emergent curriculum “theme” differ significantly from a preplanned version of a dinosaur curriculum project? What might your teaching goals be with such a project? If the curriculum is primarily teacher driven and remains superficially focused on the names and habits of different dinosaurs, the children may acquire some more information, but deeper investigation or significance is limited.

A more engaged approach to co-creating curriculum with children’s emerging pursuits involves careful observation, analysis, and meaning making. You are guided by an awareness of your values and curiosities. You work with intention but aren’t constrained by predetermined outcomes. You put your heads together with those of the children, their



United Way Bright Beginnings

families, and your coworkers to study the outcomes your documentation reveals and the possibilities that could deepen learning. At times you stand back, while on other occasions you take action, allowing time for joy and meaning to unfold and build. You invent ways of demonstrating how your curriculum meets educational standards, revealing courage and a willingness to be different.

Young children have many modes of learning, which Howard Gardner (1999) describes as “multiple intelligences” and the educators of Reggio Emilia (Edwards, Gandini, and Forman 2012) refer to as “the hundred languages.” By offering a wide range of materials for children to use in thinking through and expressing their feelings and ideas, teachers can counter the prevailing educational trend to focus only on verbal linguistic modes. This fuller, more complex view of teaching and learning is a reciprocal process where adults learn as much as the children. Reggio educators liken this to a dance or a game of catch. Everyone has an active role in the teaching and learning process. Children are learning about the world, their own competence, how to work with others, and the contributions they can make. If we are open to it, they teach us to see the world with fresh eyes. By challenging children to go further with their learning, you learn more about the dynamics of teaching as you support children in expressing their thoughts, feelings, questions, and discoveries.

As soon as teachers and children become fully engaged in learning, they don't want their time chopped up into little curriculum boxes. Teachers come to recognize that children deserve time for fuller investigations, and teachers deserve time to reflect on how to support that inquiry. With this understanding, you work to identify particular studies to take up with the children in a more focused and extended way. The question shifts from "What can I think of to do tomorrow?" to "What focus should I choose from the many possibilities unfolding?" Your choices are guided by your values, your program context, and your desire to integrate meaningful experiences with learning domains and assessment standards.

Chapter 7 focuses on this core practice of our curriculum framework—going deeper into the possibilities for learning. Principles here guide you in using the wide range of children's natural learning inclinations as a springboard for multiple intelligences to come alive. This includes music, drama, drawing, stories, and big-body activities. Central to this process is an understanding that whenever you invite children to express the ideas they are pursuing in a variety of ways, they are challenged to consider new perspectives and clarify their thinking. Using your

documentation directly with children provides a mirror for further reflection and illumination.

Chapter 8 Core Practice: Adapt the Curriculum Framework for Different Settings

As your teaching begins to incorporate the principles for the core practices of the *Learning Together with Young Children* curriculum framework, you will find ways to adapt the curriculum for different settings.

Most early childhood programs lack the resources and working conditions necessary for the reflective teaching and professional development Sonya Shoptaugh describes in the opening of this chapter. Administrators haven't understood the remarkable advancements their teachers could make if they would reconceptualize their in-service training systems and allocate their dollars accordingly. Carol Brunson Day (2006) describes how this revamping could affect curriculum practices:

The economics of paying teachers for five hours of planning time each week seems daunting for Americans, but rather than rejecting this strategy as too costly, it would be instructive to determine what is



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spent by school systems and Head Start on other forms of in-service training that do not as directly affect classroom practice and do not transform performance. Head Start actually has an ideal staff structure for easily transforming their programs. Education coordinators could become what Reggio educators call *pedagogisti*. Instead of bureaucrats, they could be teacher educators-in-residence. The rich practice we see in Reggio grows out of the continuous exchanges within and among the teaching teams, the analysis and re-analysis of the daily classroom experiences with input from people who have various levels of experience and expertise. The yield is the power to create a personalized, culturally responsive curriculum at the center level. (personal communication)

Whatever the constraints or strengths of your early childhood setting, you can take the curriculum core practices we offer and make them your own. To guide you in translating our framework into your program, we offer numerous examples, each with a principle to inspire your own adaptations. In chapter 8 you will read how teachers in part-time programs with different groups of children and teachers with the challenges of sharing a space use their documentation to create connections among the children. Teachers describe how they are inventing new ways to meet requirements and expand possibilities for using prescribed curriculum. There are principles for documenting experiences that meet standards and make assessments relevant and meaningful. Maybe you are lucky enough to be working in a program that includes paid time for planning or collaborative reflection on your documentation. If so, our principles for using children's ideas to pursue extended investigations, working with different perspectives, and learning from conflicting ideas will help you make the most of the support your program offers you.

Each time a provider or teacher discovers a way to put one of our principles into practice, they expand the possibilities for our profession. With

our curriculum framework, outcomes for teachers involve lively daily interactions with children. Outcomes for children include the satisfaction of generating their own learning, rather than being the target of someone else's lessons. Unlike the experience of working with many prescribed curriculums, education with these outcomes offers an experience of living fully now, not only preparing for the future. There are also outcomes for the future, to be sure, because teachers and children become hungry learners and knowledge-seekers, eager to invest their time in further education.

Chapter 9 Core Practice: Claim Your Responsibility to Live Fully and Teach Well

As you conscientiously practice the different possibilities for teacher actions outlined in our chapters, you will find a natural rhythm and intuition about which to use when. This curriculum approach uses the Thinking Lens® Protocol and a methodology for growing yourself as a teacher, along with in-depth curriculum experiences for children. It is important, however, that you not do this work in isolation. Working alone will ultimately leave you frustrated, discouraged, and headed for burnout. Here's a story about Margie's grandson, Coe, when he was six years old. Coe's beloved first-grade teacher, Grant, had a car accident and was unable to return to work. Coe and his classmates endured a revolving door of substitute teachers, which caused an increasing amount of unrest among the children and their families.

By February, Coe's ideas about teachers sounded like this: "These teachers don't know what they are doing and should be fired. They are just too mean to help us really learn." When April arrived, he had some additional ideas: "We need to kill these teachers' techniques by just being nice ourselves so they'll calm down and let us do some fun things." As the school year was coming to a close, Coe's insights deepened: "Teachers need to find someone to talk to. It's really lonely being a teacher."

Finding colleagues to discuss ideas with, cultivating

and satisfying mandates are essential elements of developing yourself as a reflective teacher. The final chapter of this book offers examples of early childhood educators stepping outside the doors of their minds, classrooms, and programs to engage with others in creating new possibilities for themselves, their students, and their students' families. The principles offered in chapter 9 remind you to see children's competence, find collaborators, take risks, visit inspiring programs, and continually explore "why?" in order to challenge your thinking. You will find examples of how to strengthen yourself as a growing leader and change maker.

include a range of materials to help you implement the ideas in this book. For instance, you'll find sample self-assessment forms, experiments with curriculum documentation to meet requirements, more resources on using the Thinking Lens®, learning stories, and anti-bias practices. We've also included examples of organizational structures that support administrators and teachers to be reflective and responsive to children and families, including ways programs have used this book for professional learning for their staff. Finally, we include resources on important advocacy efforts that hold promise for expanding possibilities for early childhood education.

Understanding the Structure of This Book

Learning Together with Young Children is a curriculum guide but not an ordinary one. We have not written this book as a prescriptive, scope-and-sequence curriculum. Our curriculum approach is based on a wide, eclectic body of research, particularly from those working to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It draws on neuroscience and academic as well as action research. Most curriculum books are about what you do to and for children. They do not present the teaching and learning process as a dynamic, collaborative experience where the teacher is learning about teaching and learning while also facilitating children's learning. Curriculum books rarely discuss how a teacher's values, ideas, reflections, decisions, and ongoing learning are central to her ability to guide children's learning. In this curriculum book, you "hear" the children's voices and the thinking that influences the teacher's actions. *Learning Together with Young Children* not only promotes a philosophy of praxis—observation, reflection, action—it also brings forth the voices of family providers, Head Start, pre-K, and child care teachers, administrators, coaches, and teacher educators

engaged in this actual practice. Here is the opportunity to learn right along with them and the children. You will find components of other curriculum books here—materials to use, activities to try, questions to consider—but rather than presenting the core practices in lists and directions, they are revealed in principles with stories, photographs, and challenges to make them your own. Each chapter begins with a quote, often from outside the early childhood field, but with pertinent wisdom for the curriculum core practice at hand. We recommend you read each quote several times and consider what it means to you before you read further. When you come to the end of each chapter, you might revisit the quote again to see if it provokes more reflections for you.

After the opening quote is an overview of that chapter's core practice of the curriculum framework, followed by a list of principles to guide your thinking and practice. The stories within each principle offer you a description of how it could look. Teacher stories are a powerful professional development tool (Patterson, Fleet, and Duffie 1995). Most of the time our stories are followed by a section called

“Listen to (name),” which will contain a quote from the provider or teacher that offers a window into his or her thinking. Each story concludes with a section entitled “Reflect,” which provides more guidance for uncovering the possible learning within the story. Sprinkled throughout each chapter are spotlight vignettes, which highlight more examples of how providers and teachers have translated our principles into action.

Throughout the book we have included two ways to practice the reflective process. We call them Your Turn and Use the Thinking Lens® Protocol. In each chapter you’ll find specific assignments under the heading Your Turn that will help you practice an aspect of the curriculum framework. Unless you

are reading this book as part of a class, it might be tempting to just read these activities and skip over the actual task. We strongly recommend you make time to accept our invitation to construct further understandings for yourself. Ideally, you would do these activities with your colleagues.

The second opportunity we regularly offer for you to practice the cycle of observation/reflection/action will appear in the Use the Thinking Lens® Protocol sections. Here you will find questions on one or more of the areas for reflection to consider before taking action. The more you practice cycling through this Thinking Lens® Protocol, the more instinctive and natural this reflective process will become in your teaching.

My Eyes Have Changed

Family provider Kelly describes her professional development as she’s begun using our curriculum framework:

“I am not the same teacher I was when I started this work. The way I think about what I do has changed. I am more comfortable challenging myself to take on different roles with the kids. I have doubled my efforts to strengthen my relationships with my kids so they have that foundation to take risks and to fail and to rebound together. I have made a point of trying new things in front of my kids, so they can see me fumble—authentically fumble and fail—and we can rebound together.

“My eyes have changed. What I pay attention to has changed. I look for multiplicity now. How many different ways can I understand what I am seeing? I am not so timid about voicing what I see my kids doing. I am getting better at uncovering what they are thinking about as they work. I view multiplicity



Burlington Little School

as a gateway to complexity, whether it is being able to use a craft stick in twelve different ways or revisiting the ‘same’ idea and uncovering a new way to understand that concept.

“What I love, though, hasn’t changed. The children show up every day expectant of the wonderful things we will create together. It is what drives me to do this work with such thoughtfulness and intention.”

Use the Thinking Lens® Protocol

Kelly's story "My Eyes Have Changed" offers a model of being a reflective practitioner. She tells us what it looks like to be self-aware and open to new perspectives. She describes new practices she is learning: taking on different roles with children, valuing the complexity of different perspectives, and being authentic while fumbling and failing at things. Use Kelly's story as an opportunity to practice your own reflections with our Thinking Lens® Protocol. For each area for reflection in the Thinking Lens®, we offer you some sample questions to consider. As you become more familiar with this protocol, you will find it natural to come up with additional questions.

Area for Reflection: Know yourself

- Do you appreciate complexity or prefer to keep things simple?
- How comfortable are you fumbling or making mistakes in front of children?

Area for Reflection: Find the details of the children's competencies that engage your heart and mind

- How often do you see things in children that delight you or spark your curiosity?
- What do you specifically pay attention to as you seek to uncover children's thinking and skills?

Area for Reflection: Examine the physical/social/emotional environment

- How do you plan your environment to foster relationships?
- What do you do to deepen your relationship with each child?

Area for Reflection: Seek the child's perspective

- How natural or challenging is it for you to accept that children have perspectives different from yours?
- What strategies do you use to seek children's perspectives?

Area for Reflection: Consider other perspectives

- What child development principles do you draw on when planning for or responding to children's learning?
- How might cultural or family background issues influence the roles you want to play in guiding children's learning?

Area for Reflection: Consider opportunities and possibilities for action

- What values, philosophy, and goals do you want to influence your work with children?
- What learning goals do you have for yourself at this time?

With this snapshot of what is to come, you are now ready to move through the chapters of *Learning Together with Young Children*. Each chapter builds on the next and, depending on where you are in your teaching journey, you will likely spend more time

with some chapters than others. Returning again to the words of Sonya Shoptaugh, you are embarking on a way of working where professional development takes place day after day in your classroom.