



THIRD EDITION

Building Blocks

for Teaching Preschoolers
with Special Needs

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Foreword by Mary Louise Hemmeter

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by

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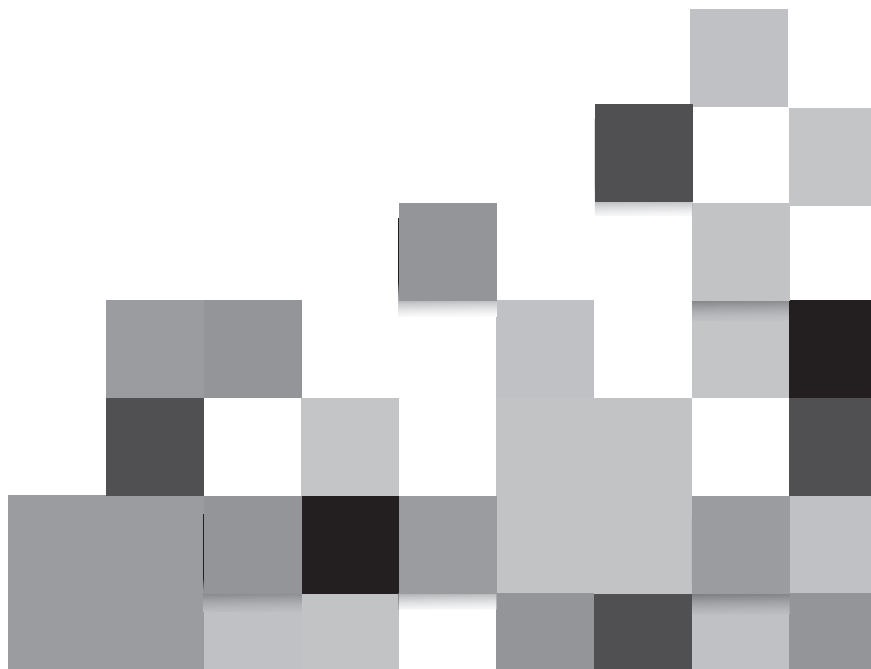
Education Sciences research projects. She coordinates the KU early childhood education (ECE)/ECSE blended undergraduate and graduate educator and leadership preparation programs. Dr. Horn currently serves on the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) executive board in the presidential line.

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SECTION **I**

Using the Building Blocks Framework



Building Blocks are the basis for planning for and providing individualized support and instruction for children with disabilities and other special needs within their early childhood classrooms. The framework grew out of extensive experience with teachers attempting to address the wide variety of children's learning needs within active, busy classrooms. The Building Blocks framework also grew from our experience as researchers with the Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion.

In this section, we describe the Building Blocks framework and provide an overview of the evidence that informs the essential components of the framework. The foundation for all children is participation in a quality early childhood program. Key ingredients for a quality early childhood program include promotion of children's active engagement, participation, and learning. Quality programs also recognize and support the importance of relationships. Quality programs create a caring environment. Nonetheless, for some children or for some of their learning needs, this quality foundation, while necessary, is not sufficient. The Building Blocks framework offers levels of support that differ in intensity and specificity to help teachers and teams address children's learning needs. For many needs, curriculum modifications and adaptations will provide appropriate levels of support. If modifications alone are not effective in helping children accomplish their learning objectives, then teachers and teams can use specially designed instruction. Such instruction can be embedded within learning opportunities that occur in typical activities and routines in the classroom, home, and community. Specially designed instruction can also occur at greater levels of intensity that we call *child-focused instruction*. Two additional components are necessary to make the framework effective. One of these components is ongoing data collection to monitor individual children's progress and to make instructional decisions. The other essential component is collaboration. Collaboration is at the heart of effective inclusive programs that ensure that engagement, participation, learning, and belonging occur for all children and their families. The first four chapters of the book give you, the reader, an understanding of the Building Blocks framework and outline the steps so that you can use the framework in your program.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs, Third Edition, provides examples of educational practices that support and enhance the inclusion of young children with disabilities and other special needs in community-based classrooms and early learning programs. It is designed for two primary audiences. First, teachers, caregivers, and other team members who work in community-based programs that include children with disabilities and other special needs will find the book useful for planning and teaching. Second, consulting teachers will find the book useful in their work with teachers in the community.

This book contains the Building Blocks framework—a set of educational practices designed to help teachers do a more effective job of including young children with disabilities and other special needs in early childhood classrooms and programs. The framework provides teachers with a variety of methods and strategies to ensure that children learn important skills in their early learning environments. These practices can be used to complement the curriculum teachers currently use. For example, these practices fit nicely with widely used curricula such as *The Creative Curriculum* (Dodge, 2010; Dodge, Rudick, & Berke, 2006), *The HighScope Preschool Curriculum* (Epstein, Hohmann, & HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2012), and the second edition of the *Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System (AEPS®) for Infants and Children* (Bricker, 2019) and support individualization within each curriculum.

The Building Blocks framework is based on research on early childhood inclusion and effective early educational practices (Odom, 2001). For all children, but especially for those children with special learning needs, teachers and teams can and

should use educational methods and strategies that are matched to the needs of the individual child. The methods and strategies vary in terms of intensity and specificity. The Building Blocks framework is designed to help teams select the appropriate level of assistance for children. The theoretical and empirical evidence supporting the Building Blocks framework is described in Chapter 2.

IMPORTANT TERMS

The Building Blocks framework uses a vocabulary that may already be familiar to many teachers; however, it is important to clarify what these terms mean in the context of the framework. This section defines several important terms that are used throughout the book.

Inclusion

Inclusion is often defined as the active participation of young children with and without disabilities in the same classroom (e.g., Head Start, child care, preschool) and in community settings. But it is more than that. Inclusion is about ensuring that all children, staff, and families who participate in a program feel supported in that program. In other words, inclusion means that children, teachers, and families feel that they belong to the program and its community. A less traditional way of defining inclusion is to say that inclusion is the celebration of diversity put into action. An inclusive program celebrates what every individual brings to that program and provides each person with the support to be a successful member of that program. Inclusion is defined in a joint statement by the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC):

Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports. (2009, p. 1)

Children With Disabilities and Other Special Needs

The term *children with disabilities and other special needs* refers to children who are eligible for special education services and who have individualized family service plans (IFSPs) or individualized education programs (IEPs). It also refers to children who, for a variety of reasons, are struggling in the classroom and need additional help or attention from their teachers.

Individualized Family Service Plan

An *IFSP* is a document developed by the family and the team for a child age birth to 3 years who is eligible for early intervention (EI) under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (PL 108-446). Each plan includes the following: 1) the child's present level of development; 2) a statement

of the family's resources, priorities, and concerns; 3) the planned child and family outcomes; 4) the specific EI services to meet the outcomes; 5) a statement regarding natural environments; 6) the length, duration, frequency, intensity, and delivery method for the services; 7) the name of the service coordinator; and 7) the steps toward transition at age 3 years.

Individualized Education Program

An *IEP* is a document prepared for any student, ages 3 through 21 years, who is eligible for special education services. IEPs are required by IDEA 2004. Each IEP states the following: 1) the child's present level of educational performance, 2) the child's annual goals and short-term objectives, 3) the special education and related services to be provided, 4) the extent to which the child will participate in the general education program, 5) the way in which the child's progress will be measured, and 6) the date of initiation and projected duration of services. The IEP also contains a plan for making the transition from high school to adulthood no later than age 16.

Community-Based Classrooms

The term *community-based classrooms* refers to the types of early childhood classroom programs children typically attend. These include child care centers and homes, public school programs, Head Start programs, state and city prekindergarten (pre-K) programs, and private and cooperative preschools. Community-based classrooms do not include specialty clinics, laboratory classrooms, or other specialized schools.

Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded, comprehensive early childhood program that serves children from families with low income. Early Head Start programs serve infants and toddlers younger than age 3 years and their families, and pregnant women. Head Start programs reserve at least 10% of their enrollment for children with disabilities.

Related Services

Related services include physical, occupational, and speech therapy; psychological services; and others that a child with a disability may require to receive the greatest benefit from his or her education. Such services are provided by or under the supervision of certified or licensed individuals (e.g., speech-language pathologist, school psychologist).

Team

Special education and related services are provided by a team. The team consists of family members and professionals who work together to plan and implement the child's educational program.

Early Childhood Education

In this book, *early childhood education* (ECE) refers to educational programs and activities for young children prior to their formal school entry. The ECE teacher is an individual with training and preparation in child development and other content areas related to the education of young children. This individual may have certification in general ECE.

Early Childhood Special Education

In this book, *early childhood special education* (ECSE) refers to educational programs, activities, and services for children with known or suspected disabilities who are ages 3–6 years. ECSE is guided by the requirements of federal and state policies as well as by research on effective educational practices. The ECSE teacher is an individual with additional specialized training and preparation for working with young children with disabilities and other special needs. This individual may work directly with children or in a consulting role. Special certification or endorsement is often required.

Early Intervention

EI refers to services and supports for children with established conditions, developmental delays, and, in some cases, children at risk who are younger than age 3 years, and their families. EI is guided by federal (Part C of IDEA) and state policies as well as research evidence. EI professionals include teachers as well as therapists. Services and supports occur in a variety of settings, with a preference for natural environments.

Universal Design for Learning

The *universal design for learning* (UDL) approach guides teachers in designing learning environments from the very beginning for the widest diversity of learners. UDL encompasses three principles: 1) multiple means of representation to give learners a variety of ways to gain access to information and content, 2) multiple means of engagement to gain and maintain learners' interest, and 3) multiple means of expression to provide learners with a variety of ways to demonstrate what they know (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).

Specially Designed Instruction

Specially designed instruction is essentially what special education is all about. This instruction includes organized, planned, and individualized instructional activities needed by a child to accomplish IFSP outcomes or IEP goals and to help the child gain access to the general education curriculum. Specially designed instruction may include changes or adaptations to the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to meet the child's unique needs.

Tiered Supports

Education has adopted a promotion, prevention, and intervention approach from the field of public health. Such a tiered approach helps to organize teaching and

learning for all children in ways that promote development and learning through a high-quality program and research-based curriculum (Tier 1), deploy effective practices to prevent (pre-)academic and behavioral problems (Tier 2), and provide intensive, individualized intervention practices if needed for children who struggle (Tier 3). Universal screening and progress monitoring and collaborative problem solving are key components as well. *Response to intervention* (RTI) and *positive behavioral intervention and support* (PBIS) are other names for tiered supports. Building Blocks is a tiered system of supports (Sandall & Schwartz, 2013).

THE CHILDREN

The stories of five children and their teachers enrich the descriptions of educational practices in this book. The stories help to illustrate the diverse children and families who participate in ECE and also illustrate some of the many ways in which ECE programs are organized.



Nghan is a 4-year-old boy who receives special education services because of delays in language and social skills. He attends a child care center 5 days per week from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. His parents speak both English and Vietnamese. Both parents work outside their home. Nghan and his brother and sister were cared for at home by their Vietnamese-speaking grandmother until Nghan was 2 years old. He then began attending the child care center. His child care teachers became concerned about some of his behaviors and recommended to his parents that he be evaluated. He was identified as being eligible for special education and related services when he was 3 years old. He continues to attend the child care center, and the school district provides an ECSE teacher and a speech-language pathologist who visit the classroom once per week. There is one other child in Nghan's classroom who has an IEP, and another teacher comes to visit that child. Nghan's child care teachers use *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool, Fifth Edition* (Dodge, 2010).



Tina is a 4-year-old girl with a medical diagnosis of Down syndrome and mild to moderate delays in most areas of development. Tina has been enrolled in special programs since she was 2 months old. When she was an infant, home visitors came to her home to provide services. As a toddler, she attended a program at a child development clinic. When she turned 3 years old, she went to a preschool class at a public school. This year, her mother transferred her to the Head Start classroom at the neighborhood center. This is the same program that her older brothers attended. There is one other child in Tina's classroom who has an IEP. An ECSE teacher and a speech-language pathologist visit the classroom and work with the two children and the teachers once per week. A social worker also works in the program. Tina's teacher, Dolores, has taught in Head Start for several years. All of the classrooms and teachers in this program use *The HighScope Preschool Curriculum* (Epstein et al., 2012).



Samisha is a 5-year-old girl with cerebral palsy who lives with her parents, grandmother, and three older siblings. She is learning to use a walker and, when motivated, can move quite quickly. In the classroom, she tends to move around by scooting on the floor. Samisha is very social, and she loves to be the center of

attention. Her language skills are slightly delayed, and she does not demonstrate any cognitive delays. Although she is very interested in other children in her class, she is not very successful in peer interactions. She has a difficult time taking turns and sharing materials. She has good dramatic play skills when she suggests the story but has trouble changing her behavior to conform with a plan suggested by another child. Samisha attends a public school pre-K classroom that is team-taught by ECE and ECSE teachers Gia and David. Samisha receives physical therapy once per week in the classroom. The classroom is composed of 15 children: 9 are typically developing and 6 qualify for special education services. The teachers identify their curriculum as teacher created and use their vast collection of ECE activity books as resources.



Drew is a 3-year-old boy who lives with his parents and two brothers, one older and one younger. At 30 months, Drew was diagnosed with autism. His cognitive skills are near age-appropriate levels, but he has significant delays in social and communication skills. He has an extensive vocabulary and can use multiword sentences to express wants and needs, but he rarely makes comments or engages in social conversation. Drew can play independently for a long period of time with a few preferred toys. His favorites are trains, Disney figurines, and markers. He has little interest in and few skills with other materials. Some people consider his play to be repetitive or stereotypical. Drew is also not very interested in his brothers or the other children in his classroom. He is very attached to his mother, however, and seeks her out for comfort and when he wants something.

One of Drew's major challenges is his tendency to have tantrums. He has a very difficult time following even simple adult directions and will often start to have a tantrum if anyone says "no" to him. Drew attends an integrated preschool classroom in a public school and an extended day program specifically designed for children with autism at the same school. The head teachers in both classrooms are trained in ECSE. There are 15 children in Drew's preschool class; 9 children have disabilities and 6 are typically developing. This classroom configuration has been called reverse mainstreaming (explained in more detail in Chapter 3). The extended day program has eight students with autism and four staff members. Between the two programs, Drew is at school for 25 hours per week.



Mateo is an almost 2-year-old boy whose family has a complicated school and work schedule. He is enrolled in a family child care home with six other children who range in age from a few months to 5 years, with a few older children joining for after-school care. The lead teacher and owner, Dara, has operated her child care home for more than 10 years. Mateo's parents, along with Dara, noticed that he was not meeting his early developmental milestones and alerted his pediatrician before his first birthday. He was then referred to the county's EI program and became eligible for services. Although Mateo's global developmental delay does not have a name, he has low muscle tone and does not yet walk. He is attentive to adults and peers but rarely initiates interactions. He uses a few gestures and vocalizations to communicate. Mateo's mother drops him off early in the morning and his dad picks him up in the late afternoon. The visiting early interventionist, Kate, visits every other week at the family child care home and makes an evening visit at

Mateo's home on alternating weeks. Mateo also sees a physical therapist at the EI center once per month. Mateo's older sister receives after-school care at Dara's home. Dara draws from a variety of curricula, state standards, and her own knowledge and experience to create learning activities for the children.

You will learn more about Nhan, Tina, Samisha, Drew, Mateo, their teachers, and their classmates as you use this book. Their stories and the practices described in the book are offered to provide you with support, guidance, and practical suggestions for including children with disabilities and other special needs in your classroom, which can enhance the development and learning of all young children.

Expanded with timely new content and consistent with DEC Recommended Practices, the third edition of this bestselling book will fully prepare a new generation of early childhood educators to teach and include every child. Like the groundbreaking previous editions, this updated **Building Blocks** guide gives pre- and inservice teachers three types of practical, evidence-based inclusion strategies: **curriculum modifications, embedded learning opportunities, and child-focused instructional strategies.** Educators will learn how to apply these three strategies for the benefit of all children; review the latest research that supports the Building Blocks framework; and find ready-to-use tips and guidance on key topics, such as fostering friendships, encouraging independence, and promoting positive behavior. Reproducible forms help with planning and assessment, and seven new comprehensive training modules make it easy to teach the Building Blocks framework in college courses and professional development sessions.

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Department of Special Education,
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- Applying the Building Blocks framework to math, science, and art
- Applying the framework to challenging classroom behavior
- Extending the framework to infants and toddlers

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