Karen VanderVen

Promoting Positive Development in Early Childhood

Building Blocks for a Successful Start

Springer

Promoting Positive Development in Early Childhood

The Search Institute Series on Developmentally Attentive Community and Society

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Series Preface

This new volume in the Search Institute Series on Developmentally Attentive Community and Society represents a milestone in Search Institute's signature work on the Developmental Assets that children and adolescents need in their lives to succeed. Through the research behind this book, Karen VanderVen links this strength-based, community-based approach to human development to early childhood development and practice. In doing so, she advances a long-term vision of understanding child and adolescent development not merely as a series of discrete stages, but as a trajectory of development in which experiences in each phase of development link to, reinforce, or redirect experiences in other aspects of life.

To be sure, VanderVen explores with both breadth and depth a particularly critical time in child development: the early childhood years, ages 3–5. The latest research in numerous fields has only increased our understanding of how important it is for communities to attend to children's developmental experiences in these crucial years. Positive development in early childhood leads young people on a path to a healthy adulthood; and a lack of positive development in early childhood has a blunting effect that extends into elementary and secondary schooling years.

The true measure of our society's attentiveness to young children, however, is not increased awareness; instead, it is, as VanderVen states in her introduction, "how well we actually *do* something to ensure that young children develop in positive ways." Yet many children's developmental needs are not being met, despite the burgeoning research on appropriate interventions.

One of the basic premises of Search Institute's work in Developmental Assets is that all members of a community can play an important role in meeting young children's developmental needs in whatever sectors they work and live. To address the gap between knowledge of positive early childhood development and the daily practice of those in all sectors of society charged with meeting the needs of children ages 3–5, VanderVen provides a new framework of Developmental Assets for this age group, guidelines informed by current, credible research, and practical suggestions for application in practice in schools, child-care centers, and family homes. *Building Blocks for a Successful Start* presents the framework and its theoretical, research, and practice underpinnings, then describes how the framework can help all those who work with young children better build their Developmental Assets in real life.

As editor of this series, I welcome this significant contribution to the literature on early childhood and positive development, and join my wishes with

those of the author, that this comprehensive, direct, and practical resource "can be a strong force in creating a holistic, systemic, more effective network of supportive child development efforts." May it help us all in ensuring that all our children develop the strengths and skills that enable one to grow and even thrive throughout the unpredictabilities of life.

Peter L. Benson, Ph.D.
Search Institute
Series Editor

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About the Author

Dr. Karen VanderVen is a Professor of Psychology in Education in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh where she has served as a Coordinator of the M.S. program in Applied Developmental Psychology. She has worked directly with both normal and exceptional children, and families, in a variety of settings including early childhood programs. Her interests include early childhood care and education, play and curriculum for young children, professionalization of direct work with young children, youth and families; leadership, and life course development.

Dr. VanderVen developed the Early Childhood Developmental Asset Framework (ECDAF) as Senior Visiting Fellow at Search Institute. In addition, she has been a Visiting Scholar at the Harvard Graduate School of Education focusing on child and youth development. She is on the Editorial Board of 8 professional journals and is the author of over 300 publications. Dr. VanderVen has lectured worldwide and has presented frequently at the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Annual Conference and Expo and Institute for Professional Development. She has served as a consultant to numerous early childhood programs such as Head Start and is a certified early childhood trainer for the Pennsylvania Quality Assurance System.

Introduction: Early Childhood Today and the Developmental Assets Framework

> In recent years [the] message—that early education isn't something that should be left entirely to families; that the government has the obligation to improve the lives of young children—has started to resonate with parents, voters, and taxpayers ... [F]irst experiences ... become building blocks for what happens next in children's lives.
>
> —David L. Kirp, *The Nation* (November 21, 2005)

We read statements such as the preceding one from David Kirp every day. Indeed, the significance of positive development during the early childhood years for later school achievement, for successful interpersonal relationships, and for positive adult citizenship is underscored and more irrefutable than ever. Voices from the federal to local governmental levels, from policy makers to direct service providers, all recognize this importance and look, not always successfully, for ways to provide young children and their families with what they need during these crucial years. We want to prevent "blunting," an effect on young children whose early experiences are not growth promoting and hence leaves them lacking the resources necessary to take optimal advantage of later experiences (Bloom & Wachs, 2005).

The real problem is not our awareness of the importance of early childhood development. Rather, it is how well we actually *do* something to ensure that young children develop in positive ways. Although we *know* about the importance of sound development for young children, and about the early childhood years as the time to begin laying the groundwork for healthy adulthood, there is a huge discrepancy between our burgeoning knowledge base, well stored away in journal articles and professional books, and what is being done with and for children in daily life, as embodied in comments such as the following from Head Start experts: "A lot is known about intervention, but some of this knowledge has been slow to work into daily practice" (Zigler & Styfco, 2004, p. xix).

Despite the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107–110), millions of children *are* not only left behind but also left out. They are not prepared to undertake the demands of school, nor do they have the emotional and social skills that contribute to harmonious relationships and to inclusion in an ever widening array of activities. Many families in our communities do not have adequate resources to ensure for themselves and their children the conditions that contribute to positive growth. They must rely on makeshift alternative

care arrangements that compromise their children's sense of security that is so related to positive development.

Although more and more young children are in out-of-home care facilities, the ability of those programs to properly meet children's developmental needs continues to be questionable. Child-care centers and preschools, especially in low-income areas, frequently lack the resources, both human and financial, for providing the kinds of experiences that promote cognitive, physical, social, and emotional competence.

Communities may offer little direct and systemic support for young children and their families, perhaps because young children tend to be less visible and overtly attention seeking than school-age children and adolescents. With rapid changes in society, there are emerging areas of development and conditions for successful participation, even for our youngest members, requiring that communities be more directly responsive to their presence.

Fortunately, many people from all walks of life are concerned about this situation and are becoming energized to address it—to *do* something. But basic questions persist: What specifically needs to be done? How can we do it? Where do we start?

It therefore would seem as if some guidelines for providing at least a general sense of focus for everybody concerned with and involved with young children would be useful if those guidelines were informed by current, credible research that both justifies them and gives practical suggestions concerning their application.

The Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework

The early childhood Developmental Assets framework, reflecting Search Institute's asset-focused, strengths-focused approach to child development, offers a research-based, comprehensive, practical resource. The framework consists of 40 specific assets—building blocks of healthy development—organized in two major categories, *external* and *internal*. Within each category are four subcategories, and within each of the subcategories, there are clusters of assets—central activities or indicators—that support the intent of the category. (See Display 1.)

External assets are environmental actions or factors that provide young people with an array of ingredients that encourage their positive growth. These developmentally supportive qualities are offered by parents, caregivers, teachers, neighbors, and a wide variety of people who are part of young children's extended community. *Support* assets address the ways in which children are cared for, nurtured, affirmed, and invested in by their families and other adults in the extended family and community. Needless to say, support is perhaps the most crucial of all of the external asset categories for young children. *Empowerment* assets are opportunities children of *all* ages need to feel valued and to make meaningful contributions to others at their own level. *Boundaries-and-expectations* assets describe the interpersonal context

and structure for encouraging appropriate and successful behavior in various settings. *Constructive-use-of-time* assets refer to involvement in meaningful, developmentally oriented activities that encourage learning and provide a basis for acquiring the social and emotional skills that are so important for later school success.

Internal assets are psychological and developmental capacities and perspectives that take shape in young children over time with the assistance of the adults, peers, neighborhoods, and communities that make up children's world. As with the external assets, there are four categories of internal assets. *Commitment-to-learning* assets refer to curiosity and investment in one's own education. *Positive-values* assets govern children's values-based choices with a focus on prosocial and widely shared societal values. *Social-competencies* assets are those interpersonal skills children need to develop positive relationships and are crucial to setting the pathway for positive adult living. *Positive-identity* assets pertain to children's emerging sense of who they are and their place in their world.

Interventions that can address the complex factors that shape development may have an effect by encouraging change and connection with other causative factors. The Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework can help establish mutual goals and focus all constituents toward their attainment, harmonize and coordinate disparate activities, and thus influence those multiple conditions that are related to positive child development. Building on people's interests, commitment, and energy, the framework can be widely applied. All members of a community can play an important role, whether bringing up, working with, working on behalf of, or having incidental contact with young children; whether in direct-care settings, in neighborhoods, or communities. In broader contexts, at the systems level, legislative bodies and local, state, and federal departments can be supported in focusing on the well-being of young children.

The purpose of *Building Blocks for a Successful Start: A Comprehensive Approach to Understanding and Promoting Early Childhood Development* is to present the early childhood Developmental Assets framework; explicate its theoretical, research, and practice underpinnings; describe how the framework can address a multitude of developmental needs of young children; and show how everybody can be an asset builder.

Special Features of the Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework

More detailed information concerning the framework's content or scope of coverage, as well as its utility and applicability, follows.

Content Features

- *Respects and is predicated upon the significance of early experience for setting positive pathways for later development*. This is perhaps the fundamental

contribution of the early childhood Developmental Assets framework. The absolutely essential role that early experience, and the quality of that experience, plays in setting a course toward a productive and happy adulthood is compellingly established.

- *Represents breadth of research and practice support.* Too often, "rules of thumb" or everyday practices for dealing with children are based on "common sense" and one's own experience as a child: "That's the way I was brought up, and it should be quite good enough for the children I'm working with" (see, e.g., Chesebrough, King, Gullotta, & Bloom, 2004, p. vi).

Such practices are much less likely to result in healthy children than are those that are based on the most extensively accepted theoretical rationales, empirical developmental research, and on evidence-based practices.

Although the literature on early childhood development and early childhood education is voluminous (a comprehensive review of it has been made in the preparation of the early childhood Developmental Assets framework), the asset framework synthesizes it into guidelines that can readily be applied in the real lives of young children and their families.

- *Emphasizes thriving, strengths, and resilience.* The early childhood Developmental Assets framework reflects the tremendous recent transformation in the field of psychology from focusing on pathology to emphasizing strengths. The framework supports strivings toward positive growth of young children and enables everybody concerned with young children to recognize and build upon strengths in children and families. The original Developmental Assets framework similarly grew out of the recognition of approaches that emphasized positive aspects of development rather than exclusively focusing on problems.

Furthermore, the Developmental Assets framework promotes the qualities that make young children resilient, even when they encounter situations that put them developmentally at risk.

- *Focuses on relationships.* The framework represents the crucial role of relationships in promoting positive development, but goes even further by showing the role of *intentional* relationships between adults and children, as well as among peers.
- *Recognizes the importance of activities.* Activities such as play and appropriate physical, cultural, spiritual, and community activities are often underemphasized and supported as major contributors to developmental progress. The Developmental Assets framework shows what, why, and how activities must be included as essential developmental ingredients.

- *Addresses the ecology and systems that affect the child*. Asset building is considered to be a continuous process from earliest childhood on as a result of transactional interaction between both "nature" (genetic inheritance and constitutional, "present at birth" characteristics) and "nurture" (the environment). The environment is complex and includes not only all of the people who directly interact with young children but also those settings, societal institutions, and values that exert a strong influence on the nature of children's experience. In other words, multiple experiences across a variety of settings play crucial roles in promoting thriving, strengths, and resiliency. Approaches to development must address all of these settings in which development is situated and influenced.

The Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework offers a set of ideas and practices around which settings such as *neighborhoods* and *communities* can organize to address all of the factors along with direct interaction with significant adults that influence the well-being of young children and their families: health care, housing, employment, transportation, safety.

- *Connects age ranges with a practical, unified approach*. The early childhood framework, while adapted specifically to the characteristics of young children, connects with the Developmental Assets frameworks for middle childhood (grades 4–6) and adolescence. Since other approaches focus on specific age ranges, the early childhood framework provides the first practical approach to serving young people that connects age ranges and hence resonates with the reality of developmental progression along thematic pathways from early childhood through adolescence. Furthermore, by providing a coherent model for cross-age-group intervention, the early childhood framework meets the research-supported premise that the longer an intervention is continued, the more likely initial effects are to be sustained.
- *Promotes smooth transitions*. The asset framework encourages the development of all the skills established by research as needed by young children to successfully make perhaps the most important transition in their life: to enter primary school with all of the attributes necessary to learn. These capabilities are holistic and include not only cognitive skills but also physical, social, and emotional qualities associated with positive school achievement.
- *Allows interconnectedness*. There is an interconnectedness among the assets: between the external and internal assets; among the asset categories; and among the assets within categories. This inter-relatedness leads to synergistic effects: The presence of a particular asset encourages the presence of other assets. Thus, an effort to develop even one asset may lead to positive effects in the domains of other assets.

Utilization and Application Features

The Developmental Assets framework was constructed with a view toward ease of use and application, as evidenced by the following features:

- *Offers a clear, easy-to use format*. The Developmental Assets framework is clear and easy to understand. Any individual, group, or program can choose an asset or cluster of assets to start with and plan actions and activities needed to get the process under way. The descriptions in this book are intended to enable users to understand the nature of each asset and why it is important for development, as well as present some concrete ways to build each asset for and with young children.
- *Empowers everybody to be an asset builder and to be intentional in their actions with and on behalf of children*. The early childhood Developmental Assets framework can be used by anyone who comes into contact with or whose activities affect young children. Early childhood professionals will certainly find the Developmental Assets framework useful in all aspects of their work. But assets can also be promoted by everybody in young children's daily lives: extended family, neighbors, peers; community figures who work in such areas as leadership, legislation, transportation, food service, religion, law enforcement, maintenance; and many others. Indeed, the asset framework represents the adage "it takes a village to raise a child."

The framework, in its comprehensiveness and directness, encourages everybody to be aware that they have a role in promoting positive development in young children and offers encouragement and guidelines for specific, targeted involvement. This increased energizing can be a strong force in creating a holistic, systemic, more effective network of supportive child development efforts.

The asset framework relates to current approaches to providing quality in relationships, activities, and family support to young children, while offering, in addition, a comprehensive profile that focuses equally on all the systems that affect children's development: home, family, neighborhood, care or educational setting, and the wider community.

The Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework benchmarks well with accepted expositions of crucial aspects of positive child development, such as America's Promise (www.americaspromise.org), the widely quoted *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), and *The Irreducible Needs of Children* (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000). The framework supports, extends, and offers concrete approaches to attaining the goals of the National Association for the Education of Young Children's developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) and of Head Start (e.g., Mehaffie & Fraser, 2007).

- *Extends a previously established effective approach*. The basic structure for the early childhood Developmental Assets framework was directly

derived from Search Institute's research-based and -tested Developmental Assets framework, which was developed more than 20 years ago to address the need for a strengths-based model for guiding youth development. This was a new approach in contrast to deficit- and problem-focused approaches, which had been relatively unsuccessful owing to their failure to take social context into account (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Research on the generic Developmental Assets framework (e.g., Scales & Leffert, 1999) has shown that possession of assets is related to positive developmental outcomes, and that the greater the number of assets reported, the greater the positive outcomes. (See the benchmark charts in Chapter 9.)

- *Developed in consultation with early childhood professionals.* Several years' work went into reviewing and summarizing the theory, research, and practice base of early childhood development, care, and education. This work was relied on to describe each asset category and all assets, as well as to provide their rationale and justification. Feedback was sought and taken into account throughout this process from individual and group meetings and presentations with recognized experts in early childhood care and education and child development, as well as Search Institute staff. (Additional information on the development of the early childhood Developmental Assets framework is in the appendix.)

- *Offers a detailed rationale and explanation of each asset.* Because of their clarity and brevity, the assets can have great heuristic, or practical, value. However, where there are guidelines or synthesized premises for a particular activity, it is always a challenge to ensure that they are properly understood with attention to their rationale, and a textured and detailed explanation of how they can be put into practice in different contexts to avoid the possibility of misapplication. The discussion of each asset offers a definition, a rationale derived from the most current professional literature on the subject, and some practical know-how for actually building the asset.

- *Can be used as targets for encouraging particular activities and as developmental indicators.* The early childhood framework offers a developmental map for organizing and reviewing deliberate efforts to promote positive development. It can also be used, however, as a way of determining and assessing both the quality of environments and the progress of children's development.

Parts I and II describe the 40 early childhood Developmental Assets, organized under the major categories of external and internal assets. A general descriptive introduction is given for each of the eight asset subcategories, focusing on its significance and major themes, which are then considered in more detail with the description of each specific asset: a rationale/explanation, showing the evidence supporting the asset, its significant in early childhood development, and the practices that promote the asset. Some assets are discussed in terms of how they relate to or support relevant guidelines or

early childhood program purposes such as Head Start. Similarly, there is cross-referencing to other assets that are supported by or are linked in some way to the asset under consideration.

There are three information sources for these evidence-oriented rationales: empirical evidence (e.g., results of research studies); theoretical explanations and concepts; and synthesized perspectives in which scholars and established authorities have reviewed evidence and used it to present their own reasoned viewpoints. This approach seems to best reflect the nature of the knowledge base of early childhood development and applied practice. For example, early childhood approaches such as developmentally appropriate practice tend to be theory based. Developmentally appropriate practice states that it draws heavily on such theorists as Erik Erikson, Lev Vygotsky, and Jean Piaget (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

This is somewhat in contrast to Search Institute's approach to Developmental Assets for older children. *Coming into Their Own: How Developmental Assets Promote Positive Growth in Middle Childhood* (Scales, Sesma, & Bolstrom, 2004) almost solely uses empirical studies, rather than theories, to explain the assets for that age range. In general, however, the practice literature for school-age children is not as substantial as that for early childhood care and education (which is voluminous); much of this early childhood literature is based on an eclectic combination of theories, empirical studies, and practice-based observation and experience. In line with this precedent, and reflecting available information, *Building Blocks for a Successful Start* follows the same approach.

Display 1
The Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework
EXTERNAL ASSETS

Support

1. *Family Support*—Parent(s) and/or primary caregiver(s) provide the child with high levels of consistent and predictable love, physical care, and positive attention in ways that are responsive to the child's individuality.
2. *Positive Family Communication*—Parent(s) and/or primary caregiver(s) express themselves positively and respectfully, engaging young children in conversations that invite their input.
3. *Other Adult Relationships*—With the family's support, the child experiences consistent, caring relationships with adults outside the family.
4. *Caring Neighbors*—The child's network of relationships includes neighbors who provide emotional support and a feeling of belonging.
5. *Caring Climate in Child-Care and Educational Settings*—Caregivers and teachers create environments that are nurturing, accepting, encouraging, and secure.

6. *Parent Involvement in Child Care and Education*—Parent(s), caregivers, and teachers together create a consistent and supportive approach to fostering the child's successful growth.

Empowerment

7. *The Community Cherishes and Values Young Children*—Children are welcomed and included throughout community life.
8. *Children Seen as Resources*—The community demonstrates that children are valuable resources by investing in a child-rearing system of family support and high-quality activities and resources to meet children's physical, social, and emotional needs.
9. *Service to Others*—The child has opportunities to perform simple but meaningful and caring actions for others.
10. *Safety*—Parent(s), caregivers, teachers, neighbors, and the community take action to ensure children's health and safety.

Boundaries and Expectations

11. *Family Boundaries*—The family provides consistent supervision for the child and maintains reasonable guidelines for behavior that the child can understand and achieve.
12. *Boundaries in Child-Care and Educational Settings*—Caregivers and educators use positive approaches to discipline and natural consequences to encourage self-regulation and acceptable behaviors.
13. *Neighborhood Boundaries*—Neighbors encourage the child in positive, acceptable behavior, as well as intervene in negative behavior, in a supportive, nonthreatening way.
14. *Adult Role Models*—Parent(s), caregivers, and other adults model self-control, social skills, engagement in learning, and healthy lifestyles.
15. *Positive Peer Relationships*—Parent(s) and caregivers seek to provide opportunities for the child to interact positively with other children.
16. *Positive Expectations*—Parent(s), caregivers, and teachers encourage and support the child in behaving appropriately, undertaking challenging tasks, and performing activities to the best of her or his abilities.

Constructive Use of Time

17. *Play and Creative Activities*—The child has daily opportunities to play in ways that allow self-expression, physical activity, and interaction with others.
18. *Out-of-Home and Community Programs*—The child experiences well-designed programs led by competent, caring adults in well-maintained settings.
19. *Religious Community*—The child participates in age-appropriate religious activities and caring relationships that nurture her or his spiritual development.

20. *Time at Home*—The child spends most of her or his time at home partic-ipating in family activities and playing constructively, with parent(s) guiding TV and electronic game use.

INTERNAL ASSETS

Commitment to Learning

21. *Motivation to Mastery*—The child responds to new experiences with curiosity and energy, resulting in the pleasure of mastering new learning and skills.
22. *Engagement in Learning Experiences*—The child fully participates in a variety of activities that offer opportunities for learning.
23. *Home-Program Connection*—The child experiences security, consistency, and connections between home and out-of-home care programs and learning activities.
24. *Bonding to Programs*—The child forms meaningful connections with out-of-home care and educational programs.
25. *Early Literacy*—The child enjoys a variety of pre-reading activities, including adults reading to her or him daily, looking at and handling books, playing with a variety of media, and showing interest in pictures, letters, and numbers.

Positive Values

26. *Caring*—The child begins to show empathy, understanding, and awareness of others' feelings.
27. *Equality and Social Justice*—The child begins to show concern for people who are excluded from play and other activities or not treated fairly because they are different.
28. *Integrity*—The child begins to express her or his views appropriately and to stand up for a growing sense of what is fair and right.
29. *Honesty*—The child begins to understand the difference between truth and lies, and is truthful to the extent of her or his understanding.
30. *Responsibility*—The child begins to follow through on simple tasks to take care of her- or himself and to help others.
31. *Self-Regulation*—The child increasingly can identify, regulate, and control her or his behaviors in healthy ways, using adult support constructively in particularly stressful situations.

Social Competencies

32. *Planning and Decision Making*—The child begins to plan for the immediate future, choosing from among several options and trying to solve problems.
33. *Interpersonal Skills*—The child cooperates, shares, plays harmoniously, and comforts others in distress.

34. *Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity*—The child begins to learn about her or his own cultural identity and to show acceptance of people who are racially, physically, culturally, or ethnically different from her or him.
35. *Resistance Skills*—The child begins to sense danger accurately, to seek help from trusted adults, and to resist pressure from peers to participate in unacceptable or risky behavior.
36. *Peaceful Conflict Resolution*—The child begins to compromise and resolve conflicts without using physical aggression or hurtful language.

Positive Identity

37. *Personal Power*—The child can make choices that give a sense of having some influence over things that happen in her or his life.
38. *Self-Esteem*—The child likes her- or himself and has a growing sense of being valued by others.
39. *Sense of Purpose*—The child anticipates new opportunities, experiences, and milestones in growing up.
40. *Positive View of Personal Future*—The child finds the world interesting and enjoyable, and feels that he or she has a positive place in it.

I
The External Assets

Since the early 1990s, we have seen an unprecedented interest in the area of early childhood education and development at all levels.

—Gregg Powell (2004)

High-quality early childhood education is one of the best investments a nation can make in its young people.

— National Center on Education and the Economy (2007)

No longer are children considered "blank slates" upon which their environment writes a developmental prescription. Today we recognize that each child has her or his own special temperament and way of relating to the world. At the same time, there is growing compelling evidence that the child's environment—especially the interpersonal environment of relationships and the activities that are mediated through those relationships—is absolutely crucial for healthy development and for engaging individual tendencies in a positive growth-producing direction.

Thus, the 20 external assets show the bedrock developmental ingredients that can help set all young children on a positive course as they leave the preschool years and enter elementary school. These assets describe actions that all of us who are connecting with or otherwise involved with young children can take, one at a time, in clusters, or all together to create healthy contexts for the growth of young children.

1 The Support Assets

For young children, the support in terms of nurturing they receive from key adults in their lives is crucial for their positive development as human beings. The support assets deserve priority emphasis; in fact, they are probably the most significant assets of all. The primary support that enables attachments and relationships to form and be sustained, and investment to be made in the activities offered by the environment, is the fundamental enabler of successful development in the preschool years.

Ensuring the presence of the support assets is not easy in today's society. Many challenges, such as living in poverty, undermine adults' abilities to provide the necessary nurturance and support to young children. A number of other external assets address these areas that encourage the provision of supports to families, assistance that in turn enables them to support their children.

Although many young children are cared for in traditional heterosexual two-parent families, many are not. There are single-parent families and families in which close relatives, such as grandparents, are the major caregivers. There are gay and lesbian families in which both parents are of the same sex. Thus, the support assets refer to a "primary caregiver"—whoever it may be—who has major responsibility for young children's care. Those children who have at least one adult, and preferably more, who care deeply about them, who invest a great deal of attention and energy in them, will thrive and also be supported in developing other assets. Such a relationship ensures attachment formation, which is the underlying process that forms children's working model of relationships and the degree to which relationships are supportive or not. The issue of attachment and connectedness pertains to children from all socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Although it is sometimes thought that children in low-income families or minority children are more likely to experience attachment problems, new research indicates that it is a major concern for children in affluent families as well (see, e.g., Luthar, 2003; Shaw, 2003).

Family support means that there is predictability and consistency in children's immediate experience of caregiving. This does not mean, of course, that everyone in young children's immediate world behaves the same way, but rather that young children do not experience continued fragmentation and displacement, as would be exemplified by having multiple caregivers daily. Similarly, patterns of caregiving adapt to the developmental characteristics and temperament of the individual child so that he or she experiences the relationship as supportive and harmonious with her or his own style of interacting with the world.

Coinciding with the presence of stable primary relationships in a family context, children need to be exposed to and relate to others in a gradually expanding world of diverse people and environments. A major task for young children is to learn that there are people with different perspectives and ways of being in the world; this sense is acquired by interacting with nonfamilial adults in a context of family support. In fact, in this age of increasing mobility, young children more than ever need a broader range of adults whom they can trust; the presence of trustworthy adults can contribute to children's resilience.

Positive communication between children and their caregivers is crucial. Such communication conveys caring by being responsive to the way young children view and construct the world. Both the content and the affect of messages young children receive are highly influential in how children construct their growing sense of self, and whether or not that sense is positive. During current unpredictable and often scary times, adults need to communicate openly with young children about things that may frighten or puzzle them, so that they do not construct an interpretation that is at odds with the likelihood of disastrous events and contributes to anxiety and stress. Where a disaster is a reality, adults need to be prepared to reassure young children.

Feeling and actually being safe within the immediate neighborhood, while crucial for young children, is decreasingly the reality today in all too many neighborhoods where poverty and various forms of violence reinforce children's fears of dangers outside the neighborhood. Caring neighbors, whom children know through being present when their primary caregivers interact with them, can add a great deal to children's sense of safety and security—of being protected. Such neighbors may periodically drop by and be outside when the child goes out so that informal exchanges take place. In fact, informal networks of neighbors and members of the extended family serve to promote resilience in young children.

Alternative caregivers, such as staff in child-care centers and preschools, like other adults in young children's worlds, need to be accepting, nurturing, and sensitive to developmental and environmental issues that affect children's feelings and behavior in the setting. Where there is disruption in children's home environments and patterns of caregiving, alternative caregivers and teachers take on heightened developmental significance as sources of stable and nurturing relationships.

It is well established that when parents and alternative caregivers and settings are in frequent communication, and where parents are directly involved in the activities of the setting, young children are supported developmentally in that parents increase their understanding and sense of empowerment, and children have a more integrated experience of care (see, e.g., Bowman, 2003; DiNatale, 2002; Durlak, 2004; Fiese, Eckert & Spagnola, 2006).

The support assets, particularly the first one, "support" or underlie all of the other assets. Conversely, the presence of other assets can enhance children's experience of family support, but the asset must be present to some extent in the first place.

Family Support

Parents(s) and/or primary caregiver(s) provide the child with high levels of consistent and predictable love, physical care, and positive attention in ways that are responsive to the child's individuality.

This asset refers to a "primary caregiver" who has major responsibility for a young child's care. Usually, but by no means always, this person is the child's mother. Those children who have at least one adult, and preferably more, who care deeply about them, who invest a great deal of attention to and energy in them, will have the potential to thrive and also be supported in developing assets in related categories.

Perhaps the words of Brazelton and Greenspan (2000) best sum up this asset: "the need for ongoing nurturing relationships" (p. 1). These authors maintain that while "consistent nurturing relationships with one or a few caregivers are taken for granted by most of us as a necessity for babies and young children, often we do not put this common belief into practice. The importance of such care has been demonstrated for some time" (p. 1). In just the past few years, however, in almost an "aha" response, "sharp recognition" of the significance of attachment in designing child-care practices for young children has surfaced (e.g., Howes & Ritchie, 2002; Mardell, 1999; Watson, 2003). It is the growing concern with "challenging" behaviors that is fueling these childhood practitioners' recognition of attachment dynamics as the source of many of these behaviors and causing them to completely reconfigure their inter-pretation of the behaviors and the ways in which children handle them (e.g., Watson, 2003). Providing further grounding is the finding of Vondra, Shaw, Swearingen, Cohen, and Owens (1999) that "there is evidence that the presence of at least one caring, supportive adult can be critical for children's competence under conditions of social stress" (p. 164). These authors go on to point out that "when the mother–child relationship is problematic, the presence of another supportive relationship is most critical" (p. 164). This finding is an indicator of how this asset is crucial in developing resilience.

Such a relationship ensures attachment formation, which is the underlying process that forms a child's working model of relationships in general and the degree to which these relationships are supportive. The concept of the "working model" has been fundamental in attachment theory and practice in recent years. A working model is the way children represent relationships in their mind based on their actual experience with relationships (Bretherton, 2005). This "working model" sets the tone for patterns of relationship formation and maintenance for years to come; "working models not only *reflect* but also *create* relational realities" (Bretherton, 2006, p. 39). Preschool children hopefully will enter the age range of 3 to 5 years old having formed a secure attachment to another adult whom they trust, who will respect their developing sense of self, and who they recognize will be available as they continue to explore and interact with the increasingly expanding and complex world around them. Love and stability imply unconditional acceptance and understanding even in the face of

difficult and inconveniencing behaviors that may be within the normative range for preschool children.

Some accounts of crucial developmental issues for young children today focus on social issues (e.g., violence, poverty, inadequate health care, exposure to drugs), but make clear that the effects of these are felt right at the nexus of parent and child and the ability of the parent to mediate their effects and meet the child's fundamental emotional needs (e.g., Isenberg & Jalongo, 2003). Where children have experienced these conditions, "as many as 80% ... have insecure rather than secure attachment with their primary caregivers at home" (Howes & Ritchie, 2002, p. 14).

Attachment refers to the making of a sustained bond or connection with a primary caregiver (e.g., Berk, 2002). Attachment has been considered a major component of development for many years, but the focus has been on attachment formation and related practices beginning in infancy. Where the attachment is secure, the child has a strong basis for development to move forward. When the attachment is insecure, a situation in which the child is uncertain as to the caregiver's devotion and predictable presence, or is an avoidant one in which the child does not let himself or herself form an attachment because the caregiver is indifferent or unpredictable, the outcomes may color, often negatively, the pathway of development from then on (e.g., Grossman, Grossman, & Waters, 2005). The relationship of attachment to any number of puzzling, challenging, and sometimes unproductive behaviors of young children is much less apparent, however. Any influence on child-care practices needs to build in recognition of the significance of attachment with regard to all domains of development, and to surface behavior whose under-lying meaning may reflect attachment issues. The significance of attachment as a dynamic affecting young children is compellingly stated by Mardell (1999) in his account of "Miss T," a young girl in a child-care program whose upsetting behavior, which was resistant to traditional methods of control, was finally recognized as related to attachment issues.

The old nature–nurture debate has now been resolved with the recognition that interaction between children and environment is transactional—that one affects the other in a continuously evolving cycle (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The research on basic temperament, generally referred to as individuality (e.g., Thomas & Chess, 1977), suggests that some children are "easier" than others if they have a certain configuration of temperament dimensions; for example, if they are adaptable, readily approach a new situation, maintain a positive mood, and the like; while those at the other extreme of the dimension may be "difficult." This finding has several implications that relate both to the asset of family support and to other assets. Warm, stable, and consistent support may be all the more important for more "difficult" children; at the same time, it is more difficult to obtain automatically. If a child becomes embarked on a negative relational trajectory, the very attachment that he or she needs may be profoundly jeopardized. This idea relates directly to the need for parent education in under-standing the developmental characteristics of children and their individuality, and for practical behavior management strategies. The fact that attractiveness

and appeal to others have been found to contribute to resilience further supports the need for understanding the influences of basic temperament on relationships. Children who have positive temperaments elicit supportive responses from caregivers, which in turn provide strength (Werner & Smith, 1992).

In many child-care programs today there are children whose often challenging behaviors—inattentiveness, aggression, hyperactivity, impulsivity, among others—are related to attachment issues. Regretfully, these behaviors are often responded to with inappropriate and even punitive practices that are counter to the needs children are expressing in these situations. While the work is controversial, extensive research by Belsky (2005) indicates that children who spend more than a certain number of hours a week in substitute child care are likely to be more aggressive and have other behavior problems when they enter school (see also Berk, 2002). This phenomenon could be related to attachment issues. These hours obviously interfere with the children's security and interrupt their attachments.

The significance of attachment is underscored further when considering the role of the *internal working model of attachment* in children's expectations and hence behavior in relationships: with parents, other caregivers, peers, and teachers, not only during the earliest years, but throughout their lives (e.g., Kane, Raya, & Ayoub, 1997).

While American society in general still assumes that mothers will be the primary caregivers and hence primary attachment figures, as has been stated, many young children grow up today in a variety of family structures. It is therefore important to consider the roles of males in general and grandparents.

Developmentally, fathers play a crucial role for young children. They can serve as primary caregivers in much the same way mothers do, although their styles of playing and other approaches may differ from those of women, with, however, great variations and overlap within each gender. Father presence allows young children to experience a counterpart to a mother, and to not only relate to each, but to relate to the relationship between the two of them. Ideally, a child's relationship with both parents will be secure, with such a situation leading to the best outcomes (Bretherton, 2005). Both together provide a sense of stability and security, as long as their relationship is reasonably harmonious. Furthermore, research shows that higher levels of father involvement are related to more positive outcomes for children, including fewer behavior problems and higher achievement (Gadsden & Ray, 2002). Since more and more children have their fathers as primary caregivers while their mothers are working or continuing their education, the issue of supporting fathers and men in their involvement with young children takes on added significance. In recent years especially, formal programs have been implemented for fathers, offering a range of services from parent education and father networks to specific guidance in life management (e.g., financial planning and employment seeking).

Recognizing the significance of fathers in young children's development, preschools as well are now trying to be "father friendly," by, for example, avoiding stereotyping of the kinds of participation fathers might have in school activities. Only 3% of the early childhood workforce are men (Sanders, 2002),

a fact that can deprive many children of crucial male presence in their lives. The suspicious attitude toward men in early childhood, the female-dominated "culture" of early child care (Sanders, 2002), and low pay all contribute to this situation. One of the greatest challenges to the early childhood field in the future will be to ensure male presence in the lives of young children both by supporting fathers and by promoting the conditions that bring men into early childhood work and keep them there.

In recent years, kinship care—the full-time responsibility of relatives for child care when there has been a legal separation from parents, usually because of abuse and neglect (Johnson-Garner & Meyers, 2003)—has necessitated that grandparents and other relatives become primary caregivers. Research studying resilience in those children who were successful in kinship care showed that where there was clear role differentiation in kinship care families, the children fared the best. The resilient children viewed the kinship caregiver as "parent" (p. 264), since the kinship caregiver was able to assert the necessary parental authority (including mediating the role of the birth parent). Clear boundaries were important, which is pertinent both to the asset of family support and the boundaries-and-expectations assets.

Young children do not have to be in formal kinship care for other familial adults to play significant roles in their development. For many young children, the presence of "extended family" in their lives can be an important primary support. For example, the presence of grandparents in the home is associated with greater competence for African American children (Vondra et al., 1999).

Recent world events further support the need for young children to be given sensitive care and support. The rise in extended overseas deployment places stress on military families. Teachers and schools as well can play a special role by providing emotional support in a variety of ways. These include recognizing children's feelings, which might include anger, fear, and guilt, and encouraging them to express them. Adjustment problems, such as problems in concentrating, must be understood as well (Allen & Staley, 2007).

Positive Family Communication

Parent(s) and/or other primary caregiver(s) express themselves positively and respectfully, engaging young children in conversations that invite their input.

According to Bretherton (2006), "Secure and supportive parent–child relationships in which there is open communication not only encourage the construction of well-organized working models so that memories of emotional experiences can be openly retrieved and openly discussed with relative ease, but they also help to *generate* environments that are optimizing and enhancing for both children and parents" (p. 39).

Family communication is considered one of the primary factors, along with adaptability to change, in enabling families to produce resilient children with successful outcomes (e.g., Johnson-Garner & Meyers, 2003). Just as attachment begins in the family, so does communication. Communicative interaction is

directly connected to the relationships that are so significant in the lives of young children. Communication emerges from, creates, and defines an ongoing relationship between child, caregiver, and family.

While there are different forms of communication—ways of conveying messages—language is the fundamental medium. Language is more than the representation of objects, thoughts, and other content of human discourse, although it certainly is that and is, of course, essential for young children to develop. But what is fundamental here is the metasignificance of language: the way in which *relationship* is formed by and shaped by communicative language.

Language is what makes us social beings, able to have communicative exchanges with each other, and it is the relationship with caregivers in the earliest years and hearing the human voice that enable young children to develop language (e.g., Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000; Gopnik, Meltzoff, & Kuhl, 2000). Furthermore, "young children's earliest representations of personal experiences, self and relationships are shaped in the context of shared discourse with others." Caregivers' communicative interaction with young children helps them make meaning of and integrate their experiences (e.g., Dettore, 2002; Thompson, 1999).

Communication is related to how children construct their sense of self, further underscoring the significance of communication in development. Where communication is positive, and developmentally attuned to a child's individuality and the context of a situation, a positive sense of self is supported. However, where communications are critically framed as parents give feedback on adequacy of a child's performance, children develop emotions that reflect this labeling and that are damaging to their sense of self (Berk, 2002). These self-perceptions (e.g., "I'm bad" or "I'm stupid") become part of young children's working models and later become associated with maladaptive behaviors, such as aggression (Berk, 2002) and lack of motivation for achievement, since the child feels it is futile to try.

At the same time, while communication needs to be supportive of young children, it is important that they not be "overpraised" for what they do. Praise is commonly thought to promote self-esteem and help control children in that they will seek to do what adults want in order to receive praise. On the other hand, *injudicious* praise encourages children to conform, sometimes to make less and less effort and simply to seek more praise (Kohn, 1993, 2001, 2005). Kohn indeed offers a strong analysis of "praise dynamics" and numerous practical suggestions. In an article titled "Five Reasons to Stop Saying 'Good Job!'" (2001), he shows how continued praise can reduce a child's pleasure in an activity, encourage loss of interest, and actually lower achievement. This does not mean, of course, that adults should never praise children. Kohn (2005) suggests that adults say nothing, report what they see (e.g., "You put your shoes on by yourself"), or "talk less, ask more" (e.g., "What was the hardest part to draw?") (p. 28).

In the broader family context, intrafamily communication, as well as that between primary caregivers and children, must also be open and harmonious in general. In families where there is poor communication between parents, there

is likely to be acting out or other upsetting behavior on the part of children (e.g., Butz, 1997). Where there is loud and abusive language, name-calling, labeling ("you're just like your father"), an anxious climate almost tantamount to emotional abuse can occur since it intersects with the child's emerging sense of initiative. Similarly, these family dynamics can lead to withdrawal, which, as LeBuffe and Naglieri (2003) have pointed out, is a risk factor. Moreover, where there is a high level of aggressive fighting and yelling by parents, young children tend to reflect this by becoming more difficult and aggressive, and thus emerges a vicious circle (Berk, 2002). Berk further points out that television as a form of communication (a role numerous studies support) is highly instructive to young children in aggressive behavior.

Being able to know and communicate one's current emotion is an important resilience factor for children. They cannot learn to do this without direct support and guidance from adults in identifying and understanding the circumstances that lead to emotion, and how others respond to the form and content of its expression. This notion directly underlies many practice premises offered for guiding young children, particularly those with needs in the areas of self-regulation and social skills (e.g., Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003). Denham and Weissberg (2004) suggest ways that adults can support "socio-emotional learning" in early childhood. Not surprisingly, they point out that such important skills as self-regulation and self- and social awareness can be learned "most readily when young children have caring adults to whom they can turn (i.e., one or more secure attachment relationships)" (p. 23).

Positive family communication is related to the Constructive-Use-of-Time assets. Communication is directly related to play; children's play is considered one of the major ways in which they communicate and make meaning of their world (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2001). To the degree adults provide children with the contexts, materials, and implicit support for play, they enable children to express themselves and, in some circumstances, to give cues that enable adults to pick up on something of great significance to the child. Furthermore, young children's communication skills are related to their ability to make friends, which is one of the major internal assets. Strong language skills and being able to recognize the role of communication in forming relationships will have an important bearing on children's ability to develop and sustain positive relationships.

Other Adult Relationships

With the family's support, the child experiences consistent, caring relationships with adults outside the family.

Once primary attachments are established in early childhood, it is a major task for young children to form strong attachments to other caring figures. In fact, it is a crucial step on the road from separation to individuation that

others outside the family support young children's striving for autonomy and independence.

Positive interactions with nonfamilial adults not only enrich a child's network of relationships and experiences, they also serve as a protective factor, especially if the child's relationship with a parent is problematic (Werner & Smith, 1992). There is some feeling that where a young child is living in a single-parent family or in a family configuration other than with a father and mother, if the child has a counterpart relationship with a person outside of the household, this contributes balance to the child's pattern of relationships.

Although consistency is often touted as important for young children in making the transition to being able to relate to new people outside the primary family unit, through opportunities to interact with different people young children begin to learn one of life's most important lessons: that different people have different personalities, styles, and ways of responding to situations. From this, children learn social strategies needed to relate positively to the inevitable human differences. In fact, we might say that these contacts enable young children to begin to develop and to test what Goleman (1995) refers to as "emotional intelligence," which some consider to be even more important than IQ as a determinant of success in life (Stern, 2003). The components of emotional intelligence include empathy, self-regulation, social development, and developing and managing relationships. In order to do the last, there must be a counterpart in the relationship. Nonfamilial adults, along with peers, play a crucial role in serving as partners in the process of developing relationships. More about emotional intelligence and its characteristics is presented in Part II, with particular reference to the Social-Competencies assets.

As discussed with regard to the asset of family support, a continuing issue and concern in early childhood is the role of men in the development of young children, especially in these days of the prevalent nonnuclear family models, which includes the single-parent family often with a female head of household. Insufficient attention has been given to the role of men because of the traditional expectation that women will be the primary caregivers, as well as the predominance of women as teachers and caregivers in early childhood settings (e.g., Gadsden & Ray, 2002). Male presence can be brought into the lives of young children through contact with other adults, for example, through intergenerational programs.

Caring Neighbors

The child's network of relationships includes neighbors who provide emotional support and a sense of belonging.

As young children's social and physical boundaries expand, their neighbors can play a positive role, but generally young children's sense of safety and trust in adults is extended if they have met the neighbors through their parents: within the framework of the parents' (or substitute/alternative caregivers') friendships or through other informal proximity in which the parents are

present. This follows the attachment concept of exploration from a "secure base" (e.g., Berk, 2002, p. 271). Safe, predictable neighbors not only can be accepting "test sites" for young children's emerging social skills but also can be an important part of the social fabric that supports both children's and families' well-being.

Given the well-acknowledged decline of extended families during these times of high mobility, this role of neighbors becomes all the more significant. Similarly, when there is no extended family available at times of emergency, neighbors can play a significant role—especially in those neighborhoods where poverty, disorganization, and violence might be salient. A trusted and caring neighbor who can serve as a babysitter when a mother is unexpectedly called upon to work overtime, for example, can be a wonderful resource and reduce the familial stress that can also affect the degree to which parents can offer warm support to their children. Where there is family stress, caring neighbors can function as buffers in line with the findings in resilience research that a relationship with another caring adult serves as a protective factor when family members are not able to meet children's needs for support (e.g., Gopnik et al., 1999).

Extensive research led by Harvard's Dr. Felton Earls and colleagues (the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods; see, e.g., Earls & Buka, 2000; Hurley, 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) offers significant insights into the role of neighborhoods and neighbors in promoting positive child development. A fundamental notion is "collective efficacy" (e.g., Fraser, 2002; Hurley, 2004; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997), a term that refers to the extent of social cohesion and interconnectedness in a neighborhood, the degree to which neighbors share mutual values, can trust and count on each other, and "the extent to which neighborhoods can count on each other to monitor the behavior of others, particularly children and adolescents" (Fraser, 2002, p. 7). This "informal social control" exerted by neighbors—"their willingness to act, when needed, for one another's benefit and particularly for the benefit of one another's children" (Hurley, 2004, p. D1)—is related to reduction in violence and criminal behavior. Activities to help neighbors recognize the significance of their role in attending to the behavior of the young children nearby would certainly promote this asset.

Relevant to this asset, and helping also to operationalize and justify it, is the growing number of intergenerational programs. These are organized efforts that bring older adults and younger children together around a common theme or interest for their mutual benefit. These might be looked upon as conducive to building "social capital" for their ability to contribute to positive developmental outcomes. Roehlkepartain (1996) has connected the intergenerational concept with both the Developmental Assets framework and the building of community. Among the research-supported benefits of intergenerational relationships, not to mention encouraging greater acceptance of older people, is, not surprisingly, the reduction of stress (e.g., Kuehne, 2003b). Similarly, an older caring adult can provide an attachment figure when primary family members are not able to function in that capacity (Kuehne, 2003a).

Intergenerational relationships (i.e., "intergenerational interdependency") can also exist within extended families and serve as a protective factor for children who may be at risk given instability in their own families (e.g., Johnson-Garner & Meyers, 2003). This is reflected in the current emergence of "kinship care," including the growing number of grandparents raising grandchildren, in which relatives formally assume child-rearing responsibilities.

Caring Climate in Child-Care and Educational Settings

Caregivers and teachers create environments that are nurturing, accepting, encouraging, and secure.

As more and more women have entered the workforce over the past few decades, the accompanying increase in out-of-home child care has surfaced a great interest in determining the extent to which substitute or "alternative" child-care arrangements affect the development of young children. Alternative care in itself is not necessarily detrimental to the well-being of young children; many other factors—the caregivers themselves, the amount of time spent in care, the nature of the primary parent–child relationship, and the quality of the alternative caregiving—are involved.

The key term to consider as it is used in early child care and education is "quality." High-quality early care and education hold the promise of helping children start school "ready to learn," greatly enhancing their chances of enjoying success in the classroom and later in life (Groark, Mehaffie, McCall, & Greenberg, 2007, p. xx). Cryer and Clifford (2003) offer a core definition of quality, three of its premises being "positive interactions with adults," "encouragement of individual emotional growth," and "promotion of positive relationships with other children" (p. 33).

The crucial nature of quality (including all components that interact with each other) is further underscored when considering the growing body of compelling research indicating a direct relationship between the quality of child care and positive developmental outcomes. Studying three major international child-care programs, including Head Start, Love et al. (2003) report that "quality is an important influence on children's development" (p. 1021), with contextual factors as well mediating the particular nature of the effects.

Directly related to quality and the ability particularly to meet the social and emotional needs of young children is the professional grounding of caregivers in child development knowledge and skills. Preparation for the work and positive developmental outcomes are directly related (e.g., Almy, 1988; Goelman, 1992; Hyson, 2003). Hyson (2003) sums it up: "As researchers describe how early childhood education can best effect positive outcomes for children from birth through age 8 ... one finding stands out. *Teachers are the key* .... It is through caring, committed, and competent early childhood professionals that young children and their families experience the excellent curriculum, the appropriate teaching strategies, the thoughtful assessment practices, the supportive services, and the effective public policies" (p. 1). One can assume that such preparation,

in enabling caregivers to understand the needs and dynamics of young children, can best provide them with the understanding and relational support that are essential for their development. Where a young child's relationship and degree of secure attachment to a parent are tenuous, then the existence of a positive caring relationship with an alternative caregiver can play an especially important role.

Also relevant to this asset is the way in which primary caregivers (generally parents) and alternative caregivers relate to each other so that there is both consistency and adaptation; ensuring this interaction and communication is one of the primary reasons given for emphasizing parental involvement in early care and education. Developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) offers guidelines for alternative caregivers, especially in group settings, to connect with parents and to respect their particular values toward, and style of, child rearing.

This asset relates to and supports a number of the other external assets, and one can hypothesize, in line with both the additive and inter-relational features of the Developmental Assets framework, that the greater the number of assets present in young children's lives, the stronger the outcomes for those children. This asset also can serve as a systems "attractor": Where other factors are not highly present or developed, the child's positive relationship with a caring alternative person can be particularly influential.

Parent Involvement in Child Care and Education

Parent(s), caregivers, and teachers together create a consistent and supportive approach to fostering the child's successful growth.

There is no doubt that there has been a sea change over the years in the conception of the role parents and families play or should play in their children's schooling from one of separation—somewhat like church and state—to a close relationship. The wide array of family arrangements young children experience today might help explain the centrality of home–school relationships, and parent involvement in particular. Evidence continues to mount of the significance of parent involvement in early care and education and its relationship to children's attachment formation, emotional development, learning, school readiness, and later school achievement. Home–school collaboration, in fact, constitutes a significant force in positive development. However, the involvement has to be integral and meaningful, rather than consisting simply of awareness (Lee, 2006).

As Powell (1998) puts it, "Collaboration with parents and working within family contexts" enables early childhood programs to be "family support systems that function as modern-day versions of the traditional extended family" (p. 60). In DiNatale's words, "An early childhood program is a community of families, teachers and neighborhood residents accepting mutual responsibility for sustaining and enhancing relationships that promote children's success" (2002, p. 91). The mandate of early childhood quality

programs is to serve as "family support systems" analogous to the function of the older "extended family" (Powell, 1998, p. 60). The position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children concerning developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) calls for programs to be family-centered, with special attention to the particular interests, context, and cultural background of the family.

Parent involvement in early education, even more than socioeconomic status and parental education level, is a key influence on children's ability to achieve in school (e.g., Comer, 2001; DiNatale, 2002). From the famous Comer model for directly involving parents in schools to national programs such as Head Start, which include parent involvement mechanisms, the configuration of parent involvement programs becomes a strengthened support system for young children. Federally funded Head Start programs must collaborate with families in developing goals for children and involve families in decisions that affect the program (DiNatale, 2002). Comer suggests that for marginalized families, the social networks that provide mentors and role models for positive development have broken down, and thus it falls to schools to re-create them (Maholmes, n.d.).

As with many aspects of early childhood care and education, there are cultural differences related to parent involvement that must be considered if it is to be truly effective. Despite its recognized value, parent involvement, or participation, means different things to different people. For the growing numbers of people, such as recent immigrants, for whom English is not their native language, becoming involved in their children's education can be a challenge. Such parents may feel "wary" and "reluctant" (Lee, 2006, p. 18). It is not just language differences that may lead to these feelings; it can be sensitivity about whether other cultural differences are recognized and appreciated. Lee indicates that simply recognizing this issue does not produce solutions and suggests several activities that may help. One is for schools and communities to reexamine their practices and to ensure that those practices do not solely reflect hegemonic, white, middle-class values. On a more practical side, sharing actual activities, such as books and projects, provides a bridge between schools and parents.

With the importance of home–school connections and parent involvement established, how is it then actually implemented? Comer's parent involvement model involves three levels for forming home–school connections: general participation (such as getting parents to attend school activities), organizational involvement (e.g., participation in parent organizations or working with students), and representation on the school management team as a "voice of their peers" (Maholmes, n.d., p. 5). The ultimate purpose of all the activities in the Comer model is the support of six crucial domains of child development: cognitive, psychological (feelings, self, and other perspectives), speech and language, ethical (respect for self and others, socially acceptable behavior), physical, and social. These domains serve as a focal point for all adults to work together to promote the overall well-being and development of students. Such

involvement also has a positive effect on program and on staff, who themselves feel greater respect for their work and have higher morale (DiNatale, 2002).

Parent education is another form of parent involvement. In recent years the approach has changed. Once professionals were the "experts" passing on knowledge. Now there is a reconfigured model in which professionals are much more attuned to what parents feel they need; rather than being "experts," professionals view themselves as supports and resources. Furthermore, there is much more attention to approaches to parent education that really encourage parents to apply what is taught in the actual context of the home setting, rather than simply being receptacles for information. Home visits, Web sites, and "parent areas" adjacent to classrooms with resource materials are among the ways parent education is offered today. Similarly, there is more attention to culturally related practices in child rearing, with effective parent educators taking into consideration family values as they intersect with developmentally encouraging child-rearing practices.

DiNatale (2002) offers a number of steps and activities for starting parent involvement programs, including needs assessment, planning, and specific ways parents can be involved in various learning centers and activities. Activities can be "sent home" for parents to do with their children. Another major form of parent involvement is participation in program governance by serving on boards, parent advisory councils, and the like.

While extolling the real benefits of parent involvement, it is important to bear in mind that a parent group may be subject to the same dynamics as is any other group. There can be a status hierarchy or a spokesperson who can seem to be the voice of everybody when that is not actually the case (e.g., Hu, 2007). It is important for teachers and other staff to be alert to this and to ensure that indeed all parents have an equal voice and opportunity to participate.

2 The Empowerment Assets

Empowerment is a sense of mattering and of being effective, whether in bringing about change or achieving a desired goal. By the very fact of being young and small, preschool children may not feel empowered. This is part of development, and many activities of young children enable them to compensate for these feelings by attaining a sense of mastery.

Empowerment is supported by developmental theory and research and refers both to young children's feeling of efficacy—of being able to make things happen—and to their sense of being needed, of contributing. Empowerment is a psychological backdrop that affects one's overall view of life and specific approaches to its challenges. Efficacy begins to appear before the preschool years and contributes to children's resiliency. For example, their basic sense of being valued or needed by others—even as preschoolers—could serve as a coping mechanism in times of particular stress.

Nurturing young children certainly requires giving them special attention, warmth, and closeness. But it also means supporting their strivings toward independent personhood and providing a secure base as they move out in the world, following their interests and responding to attractions in the environment. Even the youngest children are strengthened by knowing they are valued and can do something that others value.

A great deal of popular press coverage these days emphasizes the potential value to society of young children and urges that they be provided with the resources they need to be ready for school. The "hype," however, is at odds with reality for millions of young children who live in poverty and other development-compromising circumstances. Indeed, American culture, like some other cultures, does not value its children in ways that would ensure the well-being of all. Many families do not have what Urie Bronfenbrenner (1974) has described as "those conditions which are . . . necessary for the family to function as a child rearing system," including "health care, nutrition, housing, employment," a lack that essentially disempowers them. Communities must do more than tolerate young children. They must show that they *cherish* them by ensuring that their families and caregivers have all of the essentials for a positive child-rearing system. They can do this by the legislation they enact, the financial support they provide that ensures the necessary resources are developed and obtained, and by the specific messages they send regarding the significance they attach to young children.

There is often consideration of how communities can be more responsive to older children by developing youth-friendly facilities and programs, but there

is much less for young children, who are less demanding. Yet those community institutions that might convey to children the community's caring may be lacking or inappropriately designed. Parks, stores, shopping malls, museums, and religious institutions all in their way should offer facilities that give positive messages to young children and opportunities for them to engage meaningfully with their offerings.

Before young children can feel valued and valuable, they need to feel both physically and psychologically safe, since these two perceptions are intertwined. Children's anxiety and worry exert a constraint on their sense of initiative and efficacy, and they thus hesitate to take the outward steps that lead to challenge and continued growth. Their strivings for autonomy and their taking of the initiative to learn new things need to be supported so that they feel able to make things happen and get what they need. Resources should be sufficient in number so that young children do not have to share all the time, or wait inordinately long for access to a resource.

Adults feel more effective and valued if they are contributing to their homes, neighborhoods, and communities. So also will young children, and there are many developmentally appropriate ways in which young children may be contributors, especially in ways in which their presence brings pleasure to others, and in ways that their simple actions may contribute to a more orderly or pleasant home or community setting. Visiting people who are isolated; doing basic chores in their homes such as helping to set the table, feed the pets, or weed the garden; making pictures to be displayed in a community setting: There are endless such activities young children can perform.

The relationship of economic factors to the quality of life and the potential of positive development for young children is central and the responsibility of the community to provide. Inadequate funding for caregiver salaries, program resources, and for family support (so that a family has what it requires to meet its own and its children's needs) exerts a pervasively toxic effect that is disempowering to say the least. Frequent turnover of caregivers, poorly prepared caregivers, and shabby and poorly maintained facilities compromise the entire potential course of optimal development.

Physical safety includes receiving not only special health services but also daily care that promotes physical health and well-being, as well as protection from unsafe and even dangerous events. Physical development is no longer seen as separate from the other domains of development in the social, emotional, and cognitive spheres but rather as an inexorable force affecting how well development proceeds. If the nation is focused on ways to encourage learning and school readiness in young children, it must recognize that there is an established relationship between cognitive development and physical well-being. Proper nutrition, dental care, immunizations, and regular physical examinations are absolutely essential. Similarly, neighborhoods that are free of violence and of adults and other young people doing frightening and dangerous things are essential for physical and, therefore, psychological safety.

Fortunately, early childhood programs that once considered themselves to be solely child focused, with little concern for the family context, have

completely reconceptualized their orientation, and most now consider children and their families as their clientele. National guidelines, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), and programs such as Head Start (e.g., Zigler & Styfco, 2004), have a specific agenda for family involvement. This fact in itself is empowering, for this orientation not only increases the effectiveness of the family as a child-rearing unit, it also includes families in any advocacy efforts made to gain resources to improve overall program quality.

The empowerment assets address community factors that are not always attended to strongly in early childhood activities and programs but that are now recognized as having the potential to be a strong influence on development.

Community Cherishes and Values Young Children

Children are welcomed and included throughout community life.
Although there are many ways to integrate children into community life, probably the main way communities show their true caring—or lack of it—is through their investment in child care and family-oriented education agencies.

"In most other developed countries, public investment in families with young children has become the norm" (Lombardi, 2003, p. 71). The crux of this statement is a fact that will be reiterated throughout this book: Where early childhood care is of good quality, young children thrive.

This is not the case, however, with much early childhood care in the United States. Joan Lombardi (2003), writing about the Cost, Quality and Child Outcome Study concerning center-based care in four states, reports the study's finding that "child care in most centers was poor to mediocre, with only one in seven centers showing a level of quality that promoted healthy development" (p. 60). She also cites a study of child care in other types of arrangements (e.g., family day care, relatives as caregivers) that found that "less than 10% of the homes were giving care of good quality" (p. 60).

What is the connection between good-quality child care and children's sense of efficacy? How does good child care make a difference? The relationship is complex, but it exists. All the developmental evidence that has been presented here indicates that positive outcomes for young children include a sense of competence, of initiative, of making a difference. These contribute to young children's self-esteem (asset 38). The relationship between the development of these attributes and factors related to program quality, as defined particularly in the support and constructive-use-of-time assets, has also been documented. Where there are services and programs of good quality, children thrive and sense that they matter and that their strivings toward growth make a difference.

It has often been said that children are aware of much more than they let us know. This could certainly be true of young children's perceptions of how their community views them. Whether or not they articulate these perceptions, the impact of the degree of community effectiveness and resources offered to support young children and their families is compelling indeed.

Regrettably, this is where differences in income enter. Middle-class families and suburban families may have much more community support than do inner-city and low-income families. Significant community institutions that support young children's development include museums, zoos, aquariums, historic sites, libraries, houses of worship, and playgrounds and other recreational centers. Children's exposure to these enhances their learning by enabling them to make meaningful connections between a real experience and a more abstract consideration (e.g., Stipek & Seal, 2001). Faith communities, fortunately, are strong institutions in the lives of many lower-income and inner-city families, and provide them with a sense of belonging.

The significance of *community* in development and some specific connections with child development and children's own growing sense of self and efficacy is becoming increasingly articulated. Since employment and employment characteristics (e.g., job held, work schedules, and working conditions) are an integral part of any community, the relationship between these and child-rearing practices and parent–child interaction is important to scrutinize. VanderVen, Cullen, Carrozza, and Wright (2000) found that while maternal employment considered both in preschool and adolescent years is not related to delinquency, authoritarian work settings are. Similarly, Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) state that where working mothers lack autonomy in the work setting, the family climate is less supportive of young children.

Another finding pertinent to this asset is that "neighborhood disorder" has a more negative impact on children than does maternal employment per se, and this of course is reflected in the organization, stability, offerings, and overall supportive climate of any neighborhood or community institution.

It is important that community services and resources be accessed by parental initiative rather than "done to parents" (McCall, Larsen, & Ingram, 2000) so that parents feel instrumental, respected, and supported in decision making.

Despite the significance of socioeconomic status and its relationship to early childhood development, there is evidence that the quality of parent–child interaction is an even stronger influence on positive development than socioeconomic status (Epps & Jackson, 2000).

Berlin, Brooks-Gunn, and Aber (2001) point out that as useful as it is to focus on individual children and families in programs geared toward intervention, the effects of such programs could be strengthened by attending more to community factors, or "CCIs" (community comprehensive initiatives), "neighborhood-based efforts that seek to improve the lives of individuals and families *as well as* the conditions of the neighborhood" (p. 9). The early childhood Developmental Assets framework focuses attention on community factors as well as individual, familial, and neighborhood influences.

Aber and Nieto (2000) describe community social organization theory as it relates to the strengths-based aspect of the Developmental Assets framework, acknowledging that there are ways in which "neighborhood structures and processes might influence psychological wellness" (p. 185). These authors

encourage a look at how social organization theory, initially developed to explain pathological functioning, might now take into account "positive neighborhood characteristics" (p. 197). Furthermore, an exploration of the neighborhood characteristics that can serve as protective factors and promote resilience segues well into the application of the risk and resilience paradigm as a theoretical underpinning for child and youth development. Aber and Nieto (2000) point out that the risk and resilience model has been considered primarily at the individual level and that it is time to examine the "neighborhood contexts" (p. 209) that contribute to it. They advocate a "pluralistic neighborhood theory" that embraces consideration of the interaction of individual and neighborhood factors in resilience by "focusing attention on the social functions that neighborhoods serve for their residents and the social interaction among them, a wellness-oriented neighborhood research agenda can help to provide an antidote to the problems of individualism in psychology" (p. 219). The theory proposes a transactional rather than the traditional unicausal approach and indicates that we need to study neighborhoods themselves, rather than coming with already formulated ideas of their deficiencies. It would seem as if all aspects of this approach are in synchrony with the purposes and philosophy of the Developmental Assets framework, and can be adapted to strengthen the definition and supportive activities for the crucial role of community and neighborhood in early childhood development.

The Search Institute's concept of "developmentally attentive communities" (Mannes, Foster, Lewis, Hintz, & Nakkula, 2002) offers a number of much-needed strategies for community organization and is in alignment with the "comprehensive community initiatives" concept cited by Berlin et al. (2001) that could and should be considered as well for adaptation into the early childhood field. According to Mannes (2001), the Developmental Assets framework "is intended to have practical significance for the mobilization of communities around positive child and adolescent development; the forty assets . . . can be readily understood by members of a community" (p. 135).

This formulation is harmonious with the tenets and perspectives that are discussed throughout this book for an early childhood approach, in that it is ecological, working across different sectors of a community; "socially constructed," in that common meanings are generated as action and interaction proceeds; and "emergent" and "self-organizing" (in line with the concepts from nonlinear dynamical systems theory), indicating that community efforts evolve in ways unique to their own sources of energy and their own circumstances.

Community and civic participation is often discouraged in minorities and poor people by organizations in, and purporting to serve, the particular community. Neighborhood processes can contribute to resiliency for some of its residents. Where there is "social capital" (see, e.g., Putnam, 2000) in a neighborhood, it can encourage "collective socialization," whereby adults informally look after each other and their children (Berlin et al., 2001, p. 5). This notion offers a strong rationale for intergenerational activities (as discussed elsewhere), since such activities directly involve available and invested adults.

Children Seen as Resources

The community demonstrates that children are valuable resources by investing in a child-rearing system of family support and high-quality activities and resources to meet children's physical, social, and emotional needs.

National news coverage demonstrates that the United States is far from addressing this crucial asset, as reflected in Goodman (2003), who discusses how mothers of young children are continually stressed by the lack of proper child care and having to put together makeshift arrangements. The mothers interviewed emphasized that this effort leaves them little time and energy to advocate politically for what they need—and are not getting—in the way of support.

Perhaps as much as asset 1: Family Support, asset 8 plays an absolutely fundamental role in promoting well-being and thriving in young children. In his seminal monograph *A Report on Longitudinal Evaluations of Preschool Programs* (1974), Bronfenbrenner made the following statement in a discussion of ecological intervention as a principle of early intervention: "The first and most essential requirement is to provide those conditions which are necessary for life and for the family to function as a childrearing system. These include adequate healthcare, nutrition, housing, employment, and opportunity and status for parenthood. These are exactly the conditions that are absent for millions of disadvantaged families in our country" (p. 55). The contemporary term for activities intended to empower families by giving them the resources they need to function as a child-rearing system is "family support," according to Heather Weiss, director of the Harvard Family Research Project. Weiss (2003) urges that it is time to extend our conception of family support beyond that of parent education (although that is necessary, too) into communities and community action by using family support to gather information that can lead to action to achieve collective as well as individual goals.

A family's income is particularly significant when considering children's behavior. A study conducted by Duke University psychiatric epidemiologist Dr. E. Jane Costello (see O'Connor, 2003) articulated a direct relationship between family income's raising the family beyond the poverty level and a decline in children's acting out and other challenging behaviors.

Poverty and its effects on children are consistently discussed in early childhood literature as profound concerns and are cited elsewhere in this book as major issues in the field of early childhood. The number of children living in poverty in the United States is more than two to three times higher than in most Western nations; in 2000, 12.4 million American children lived below the poverty line (Helm & Beneke, 2003). Poverty has a relationship (although not unilateral or as a one-to-one causative factor) with many of the other factors that put young children at risk for difficulties in all domains of development: family dysfunction, attachment disruption, and lack of social and cognitive stimulation, to name just a few. "Cumulative stressor exposure," such as poor housing, violence, and family upsets, is related to problems in self-regulation

(the significant emotion in school readiness) and overall socio-emotional difficulties, as found by Evens and English (2002).

In a famous and groundbreaking study, Hart and Risley (1995) show a compelling relationship between parental economic status and development of the language skills such as vocabulary that are crucial for later reading. According to these authors, some children become resilient in the face of poverty and its accompanying impacts, but that is not the case for most. Despite its problems, Head Start, the comprehensive program for young children in poverty, with its health care and family supports, still offers profound promise of needed intervention for the millions of children who live in poverty. In fact, Head Start, with its focus on family and community factors in development, seems to resonate with the intent of the Developmental Assets framework.

The focus on community considerations in promoting development raises a fundamental issue: economic factors. Recently, Ethel Tittnich, who for years has been integrally connected with the early childhood arena, commented, "The field doesn't have enough money" (personal communication). This pithy observation indeed expresses the "bottom line" of early childhood and its complex problems and challenges. Similarly, Joan Lombardi (2003) points out in *Time to Care* that "our current system of financing is outdated and underfunded, short-changing both children and families" (p. 166).

There are two sides to this economic coin, so to speak. One is the relationship between early intervention activities and the other is inadequate funding of the delivery and infrasystem of early childhood.

First, let us look at the relationship of the economic status of families to the development of young children. As the National Institute of Child and Human Development's study of early child care and youth development emphasizes, "One of the most consistent findings in the developmental literature concerns the association between childhood poverty and negative developmental outcomes" (quoted in Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2005, p. 140).

The study explored the relationship between levels of income and developmental outcomes. It found that where there was an increase in family income, there was a corresponding heightening of developmental progress.

Considered as an intervention, there could be potential economic benefits of implementing a Developmental Assets framework. If a relationship could be demonstrated between outcomes promoted by Developmental Assets for young children, and later social occurrences with costly interventions or other economic losses, such as have been demonstrated by the High/Scope programs for young children (e.g., reduction in teenage pregnancy, placement in special classes, school dropout rates, juvenile crime), the effort will have been well worth it. The more general notion of "social capital" mentioned earlier in this chapter (e.g., Putnam, 2000) is a compelling challenge for the early childhood field to address those problems that have such profound significance for the quality of life of young children. More competent children and families certainly represent significant social capital.

The chronic overall underfunding of the infrasystem that attempts to provide support to children, families, neighborhoods, and communities has

pervasive effects. Just one example is that of welfare and welfare-to-work practices. Working mothers must have proper child care and support if they are to both get off welfare and continue to develop their ability to make a living wage and attend to their families. An upsetting trend is for states with budget constraints to solve them by cutting back on child-care subsidies, thus placing parents in a totally untenable position (e.g., Minneapolis StarTribune, April 18, 2003).

This is not to mention the minimum wage salaries that detract from hiring high-quality staff (and when high-quality staff are associated with positive outcomes for children) and the costly results, to child development and to program quality, of the resultant turnover. A widely adopted model such as the Developmental Assets framework, in that it would touch and involve communities, could address these issues as well.

Who can doubt the significance of the family in early childhood? Yet when it comes to formal efforts to provide family support to those families who lack resources to serve as a "child-rearing system," or to encourage participation by families in early childhood programs, there is much less concern than there is with, say, the quality of such programs or the particular curriculum they use. Developmentally appropriate practice for 3- to 5-year-olds mentions that parents should be involved in the transition from preschool to kindergarten, and that there should be "reciprocal relationships" with parents, so that teachers and caregivers communicate with them, but these premises are somewhat general and are not ecologically oriented (they don't necessarily need to be; this is not the purpose of developmentally appropriate practice). Highly effective intervention models that focus on parent support and involvement, such as the famous "Comer Process" (Maholmes, n.d.), have been given less attention in early childhood than they have in middle childhood. Where there have been significant family support programs, they have been primarily in programs serving low-income children (not to say that that isn't a compelling need to continue such efforts) and may have been more oriented to a deficit model than a wellness and promotion model that stresses thriving, as embraced by the Developmental Assets framework (Mannes, 2001).

The *family support* movement is highly relevant to the Developmental Assets framework, and, in fact, when the assets are coupled with developmentally appropriate practice, family support principles begin to emerge. Family support centers in numerous communities offer needed services to families in an ecological framework and might be considered analogous to the "full-service school" concept (e.g., Dryfoos, 1994) in which schools serve a community-oriented function by offering not only education but also offices for, an array of social and health services a family might need. Family support philosophy is "a set of beliefs and an approach to strengthening families and communities." Family support itself is a "type of grassroots, community-based program designed to *prevent* family problems" (Family Support America, 2003, p. 2). Family support activities focus on building harmonious and respectful relationships, improving families' ability to obtain needed services and resources, affirming cultural diversity, actively involving families in support activities,

and using strengths in the service of attaining change (Family Support America, 2003).

Service to Others

The child has opportunities to perform simple but meaningful and caring actions for others.

Erik Erikson (e.g., 1950) pointed out many years ago that in other social orders, young children are not only valued but expected to make contributions to the family in accordance with their ability—an ability that could exceed what many of us might think. Today in impoverished societies in Africa, South America, and Asia, children are required to work—or labor—on their own and with adults, to help provide minimal sustenance to the family. This does not mean that we should impose child labor on young children. It does mean that we might rethink how we enable young children to begin to feel at a young age that they can make a positive contribution to their family and community—whether it is by putting the dishes away, picking up litter in the yard or playground, or going to visit elderly people in a nursing home, special paintings made for the occasion, in hand. Thus, we might think of "community service" for preschool children.

While there may be little literature specifically supporting the notion of young children as contributors, there is some encouraging work in the area of habit development as an approach to school readiness. This is likely to be embodied in general curricular approaches that require such qualities as curiosity, persistence, and cooperation. Activities that are relevant to children's culture and families are more likely to be of interest to them than those that are more abstract (Helm & Beneke, 2003; Helm & Katz, 2001). One example is the project approach, in which young children work together to investigate a topic usually of their choosing that is goal oriented and encourages problem solving. Project work not only encourages the attributes related to resiliency, such as "social responsiveness" (Helm & Beneke, 2003, p. 5), but also embodies overall approaches to sustained tasks. Early childhood curriculum should occur within a "caring community" that promotes cooperation (Helm & Beneke, 2003, p. 7). Projects are varied, but it is certainly possible that some might include activities that directly benefit others. For example, Curry and Johnson (1990) mention having children put on a play for others, or planning a meal.

A common strategy for teachers is to have a child who is having difficulties, social or academic, help in a special way. This "tried and true" method is designed to convey a sense of worth and social acceptance to the child; there is no reason why this principle can't be applied with groups of young children as well. While much of the focus of early intervention efforts and concern with developmental issues such as school readiness is on children in low-income families, there is increased recent concern with the development of children in high-income families as well (e.g., Shaw, 2003). It seems that there are developmental pitfalls for young children at both ends of the income spectrum. Children

in high-income families, interestingly, may have too much given to them and done for them. As they grow older, this detracts from their development of many of the positive-values and positive-identity assets. It has often been said that adolescents do not feel productive or able to make a meaningful contribution to society (among the reasons for the adolescent asset of Youth As Resources). The resultant sense of alienation and lack of commitment can be related to misbehavior as adolescents search for some way of gaining attention and recognition. Early childhood is the time to encourage children, in a developmentally appropriate way, to feel that they can make a contribution to the world, however "small" that contribution may be.

Safety

Parent(s), caregivers, teachers, neighbors, and the community take action to ensure children's health and safety.

In recent years, physical safety has become a major issue in early childhood development. There are two concerns. One is the unpredictable and uncontrollable occurrence of natural disasters, which of course have profound consequences for young children and their families (e.g., Hurricane Katrina). Given predictions of increasingly extreme weather in the future, it devolves upon both families and the community to ensure that protective mechanisms are in place (e.g., guidance for families in having a disaster plan that includes communication procedures and a supply of food, water, first aid items, and the like). Similarly, community disaster plans need to consider both the physical and the emotional needs of young children and their families after such events. Post-traumatic stress syndrome, resulting from intense and sustained emotional distress, can have a negative impact on development for years to come.

Fortunately, after Katrina special efforts were made to provide support for devastated early childhood programs to rebuild and reopen, and to use special materials to help children cope with their experience. While it is most unfortunate that such devastation must take place for more preparation efforts to be made, Katrina has served as the impetus for early childhood programs to have not only emergency response plans but also recovery plans (Grace, Todd, & Darling, 2006).

The other concern regarding safety in early childhood development is the conditions in particular neighborhoods where disorganization, economic disempowerment, and violence prevail.

Throughout this book's discussion of the 40 early childhood assets, violence has been alluded to as a major detractor to child development. Concern with the powerful negative effects of violence on young children sparked the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) establishment of a panel on violence that developed a position statement on violence in the lives of children. The statement points out the frequency of a variety of violent acts to which all children are exposed every day. Children are exposed to shootings, killings on television, abuse, domestic violence, and bullying. The NAEYC's

position statement includes several profound comments, two of which come from Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund: "Adults have failed dismally in our most basic responsibility—to protect our society's children from violence" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1993, p. 1); and, "This country has committed itself to a national goal—by the year 2000 all children will start school ready to learn. Achieving this goal will be impossible unless the country also simultaneously breaks the cycle of violence that grips so many children and families" (p. 3).

The impact of violence on development is pervasive. The basic need of children to feel safe and protected is compromised. Exposure to "chronic community violence" results in numerous negative effects: anxiety, sleep disturbances, regression, autonomy, aggression. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms have also been related to young children's exposure to violence (Osofsky, 1995).

It has been pointed out, significantly, that a strong support system, particularly if composed of close relationships with parents, good-quality child-care programs, and a safe place in the neighborhood, can promote the resilience that reduces the toxic effects of violence (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1993; Osofsky, 1995). Osofsky (1995) calls for a "family-centered and community-centered approach that builds on strengths within communities" (p. 786). The Developmental Assets framework emphasizes the developmental supports that can encourage this approach. Opportunities for play, especially expressive play, offer young children the chance to articulate and master concerns about safety, or recent traumatic events, with the supportive comments of adults.

A significant related issue is television watching, particularly adult programs with violent themes that not only have a negative impact on children's developing cognitive and emotional abilities but also encourage violent play as young people try to make sense of and master the intense feelings such themes generate. Violent play may provide release, but it also can feed on itself, further frightening young children. A highly reasoned perspective on handling issues of violence with young children, including the preceding point, is found in a 1995 symposium in *Young Children* (see Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1995; Greenberg, 1995; Klemm, 1995; Kuykendall, 1995).

An ecological/systems approach is recommended to address the issue of violence given its complexity (e.g., VanderVen & Torre, 1999); the Developmental Assets framework has the potential to provide young children crucial support in dealing with the violence that surrounds them, since it can address both factors internal to children and external factors that pertain to the neighborhood and community.

"Physical protection" is one of the "irreducible needs of children" (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000). In this category of need Brazelton and Greenspan include violence but also more: exposure to toxic substances, including prenatal and postnatal exposure to alcohol and drugs; and the "toxic" effects of television content and too much television watching. These and a variety of other negative influences put large numbers of children at risk.

Another physical risk is "inappropriate use of psychiatric medication" when children do not need it and where attention to relationships, structure, stimulating activities, and the like might better serve as attention-focusing interventional strategies.

Health care, as we continue to emphasize, plays a major role in promoting positive child development. Young children who are not healthy, and whose health problems—be they nutritional or otherwise—make them passive and listless, will not be able to make the energetic transactions with the environment that are necessary for relationship development, positive peer interactions, and overall learning. Recognition of the significance of good health is reflected in the priorities and programs of major early intervention efforts (e.g., Smart Start, a program in North Carolina, and Head Start).

Although the current "obesity epidemic" has been well documented, including the fact that obesity now affects preschoolers, there is more to its impact than being overweight, unhealthy as that may be. There is a tight relationship between young children's ability to learn to read and their own kinesthetic sense. The relationship is even tighter when considering the interesting connection between the ability to use symbols (i.e., to recognize that one thing can represent another) and one's kinesthetic sense and development (e.g., Voght, 2003).

As the child's physical skills, both small- and large-muscle, become more refined during the years from 3 to 5, physical movement opportunities and nutrition become inexorably linked with the child's attainment of important social and cognitive abilities. Maintenance of safety, both physical and emotional, of course is a primary function of any caregiving activity.

As with all age groups, it is now increasingly recognized that physical development and health status are integrally related to positive development and to all of the inter-related domains of development (e.g., the relationship between physical experiences and the ability to learn to form symbols; Marcon, 2003a). Physical movement enables development of a sense of body presence, body capacity, and directionality. Recognition of this principle is the rationale for some early childhood curriculum initiatives such as "Alphabet Fitness" (Voght, 2003). In this program, children form letters with their bodies, thus providing an internal kinesthetic awareness of the relationship between physical movement and symbolic representation. There is also a highly articulated relationship between physical development, including height and weight indicators, and cognitive development. Physically well-developed children function better cognitively (Marcon, 2003b). "Misnourishment" (not eating a suitable diet) is increasingly affecting the physical well-being of American children and in turn their social development. Children lacking physical robustness may have less energy for "social and exploratory" activities, and for positive interaction with caregivers (Marcon, 2003b, p. 84), which sets up a vicious circle: The environment surrounding such children becomes less supportive of development of the very qualities they need.

It has been pointed out how important it is for children to feel safe both physically and emotionally within a *direct care setting* (Lamm, Groulx, Hansen,

Patton & Slaton, 2006). Citing work by Diane Levin, in which Levin indicates that all children need to feel that their bodies, feelings, thoughts, and work are safe (p. 24), Lamm et al. emphasize how the physical environment of a classroom can promote such a sense of safety. Soft surfaces, soothing music, and sensory materials are among the supports that can be provided. A "Peace Place" (*not* a time-out spot) where children can go to use various appropriate materials to help them interact in ways that enable them to solve problems and conflicts is another helpful device. Lamm et al. point out that families can successfully adapt the Peace Place concept as well.

The physical safety of children, the provision of opportunities for physical activity, and the delivery of proper health care are community responsibilities that can be addressed through such activities as parent education, family resource programs, and early intervention programs (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000). Furthermore, many components of Bronfenbrenner's "exosystem," the institutions of society necessary for living, need to be brought into play to maintain safety: Sufficient law enforcement officers and adequate housing and employment are closely related to community safety.

3 The Boundaries-and-Expectations Assets

Boundaries are clear limits that help teach acceptable behavior; and expectations—beliefs conveyed to children that they are capable of doing well at any reasonable task or endeavor—are an important part of overall development. Both qualities contribute toward children being harmonious participants in the social order and their engagement in continued growth and learning through meeting challenges. Furthermore, both qualities contribute toward a child's acquisition of a sense of identity—an awareness of her or his particular capacities and competencies applicable in an ever-expanding world.

Boundaries and expectations, as is true of the other assets, support resilience. Certainly young children need to know what behavioral limits are. This knowledge must be conveyed in ways that are understandable and reasonable given individual temperaments and stages of development. Warm and supportive relationships, and structured environments in which there is a predictable schedule of routines and times for various activities, all in a positive way communicate limits and boundaries, which in turn contribute to children's sense of safety and security.

Early childhood settings can provide ideal environments for children to learn appropriate social behavior, through the relationships, structure, and activities such settings offer. However, where there are poorly prepared caregivers who have high rates of turnover, the potential for this implicit learning to take place is compromised. In recent years, poor practices designed to punish rather than teach have filtered down to early childhood settings. Yelling and shaming, negatively comparing children, moralizing, physical punishment, isolation, and other destructive behaviors have no place in any early childhood setting and are patently unprofessional. Similarly, the increasingly pervasive reliance on time-outs to address behavioral concerns only reinforces the conditions that may be contributing to the behavior in the first place: insecure attachment or anxious attachment, insecurity, inappropriate expectations (and children's ability to understand and to meet them), and poor quality of activity. Time-out alone rather serves to incubate anger, reinforces a sense of isolation and shame rather than the behaviors adults desire, and contributes to the tendency of peers to shun and tease a child. Young children need a caring adult to point out to them why their behavior is unacceptable, help them find positive and alternative ways to behave,

and provide them support as they test out these better ways (e.g., Robbert, 1994).

The traditional notion of discipline—*learning* acceptable behavior by having it modeled and by receiving positive guidance—is different from *punishment*, in which an aversive consequence is applied as a result of a misbehavior. It is important not to expect young children to be perfect; young children learn by exploring, trial and error, and even testing the boundaries. The responses they receive in the process enable them to adjust their behavior accordingly. For children to be responsive to adults (to limits), it is important that they have positive relationships with them. Young children generally appreciate approval from adults and will want to adjust their behavior to please them in the context of these relationships.

Because of economic challenges, fragmentation, and other issues that confront many families today, neighbors and others in the extended social environment take on new significance for providing social support and positive guidance. Neighbors as well as families thus can support young children in developing acceptable behavior. Neighbors can convey to young children that they care for them enough to show their concern when children's behavior is troublesome or dangerous to themselves or to others. Neighbors can gently correct inappropriate or unconstructive behavior, again identifying why the behavior is troubling, showing the child an alternate way of handling a situation, and supporting her or him if possible in following through.

Young children's peer relationships are a crucial force in their positive development. Young children need help and support in developing skills in relating to peers. It is important, though, that these peers offer acceptance. A corrosive influence on children's development is peer rejection. It can begin in early childhood and later lead to anger, alienation, and aggression; recent research has shown that the brain actually responds to rejection and that the rejected person feels physical pain (Beckman, 2003; Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). Continued pain, of course, leads to defensive responses, and over time the cumulative effects may be conducive to counteraggression and other asocial behaviors, not to mention interference with school learning. Adults must ensure that peers do not exclude young children from informal contacts and play opportunities, while also helping all children develop the qualities that make them attractive playmates.

Positive expectations can be a major force in the healthy development of young children, just as they are for older children and youth. Young children thrive on challenges that they can master with the help and support of others. When young children are compartmentalized or labeled, whether inadvertently or deliberately, they begin to internalize these negative messages, bringing into play an evolving process of self-fulfilling prophecy. Similarly, even within a framework of positive expectations, there needs to be room for individuality so that young children feel they have opportunities for self-expression or choice. However, with adult support, guidance, and instruction, young children enjoy learning new approaches to activities and can raise their level of competence.

Family Boundaries

The family provides consistent supervision for the child and maintains reasonable guidelines for behavior that the child can understand and achieve.

Family boundaries is, of course, a significant asset, as many feel that it is the responsibility of the family not only to nurture the child but also to provide an essential socialization experience so that when the child enters school, he or she is ready to be a member of a larger community in which behavior acceptable to others is a requirement.

As was stated earlier, one of the irreducible needs of young children (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000) is for limit setting, structure, and expectations. Interestingly, one might say that structure and expectations are two developmentally suitable ways of setting limits.

It is a major developmental task of young children to learn to comply with reasonable requests and directions from adults, since later school engagement and success certainly are predicated on such an ability. A relevant and well-studied concept is that of parenting styles.

Curry and Johnson (1990) describe Coopersmith's attributes of parenting that support self-esteem in children: Almost total acceptance, "clearly defined and enforced limits, and respect and latitude for individual action within these limits" (p. 42) are indicated.

Baumrind's well-known triad of parenting styles is relevant here. *Authoritarian parenting* is arbitrary and controlling and thus opposes children's natural strivings for autonomy and initiative (Erikson, 1950); indeed, it contributes to oppositional, noncompliant children. Such "coercive interactions between parents and children set the stage for aggressive, disruptive behavior in classrooms and peer interactions that can lead to peer rejection and academic problems and eventually for some children, to association with deviant peers who encourage further antisocial behavior," say Masten and Coatsworth (1998, p. 209), referring to research by Patterson.

There is also *permissive parenting*. This extreme style also does not contribute to compliant and competent young children; rather, children reared permissively demonstrate behavior that increasingly becomes unrestrained and unregulated as they have no sense of structure, expectation, or behavioral requirements.

Here again, there are class differences that might relate to how this asset would be addressed. In some lower-class families, there could be more "authoritarian" parenting, with direct commands given without explanation and interpretation, and with instant and unquestioning compliance expected. Conversely, more permissive parenting may be found in some upper-middle-class and upper-class families. Sometimes it is an accompaniment to a form of neglect in which children receive many material goods, but neither parental nurturing nor structure.

The most positive parenting style is called *authoritative* (Berk, 2002), referring to Baumrind's concept. Authoritative parenting combines warmth and

sensitivity to an individual child's temperament, abilities, and interests, with structure and clearly stated rules and expectations.

Rules for safety are usually the first to be firmly established by parents, followed by more general expectations for behavior within that particular family and cultural framework (e.g., Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Individuality, or a child's basic temperament (e.g., Thomas & Chess, 1977), once again, is a major factor in how parents set limits. For a "difficult" child, the task is more difficult than it is for an "easy" child, and parents may need special support in understanding and guiding such a child. As Brazelton and Greenspan (2000) indicate, young children "need" experiences "tailored to individual differences" (p. vii).

In a study of factors contributing to the resilience of young children in kinship care (Johnson-Garner & Meyers, 2003), more than any other factor (such as communication and cohesion), "more structure, clear boundaries and well-defined roles" led to greater resilience (p. 255)

Boundaries in Child-Care and Educational Settings

Caregivers and educators use positive approaches to discipline and natural consequences to encourage self-regulation and acceptable behaviors.

The rationale for asset 11 applies in many ways to boundaries in settings out of the home. As young children get older, they begin to experience some differences in the requirements for acceptable behavior at home as contrasted to school or other community settings. In general, parents and other family members may be more tolerant of lapses in the home, while not abnegating their fundamental role in socialization, whereas there may be, of course, more stringent requirements and expectations in out-of-home group and public situations.

There has been an ominous trend in recent years for "behavior modification" methods instituted for older children (not that they are any more appropriate for them) to filter down into early childhood so that handling misbehavior tends to be based not on developmental understanding, the individuality of the child, and the particular situation, but rather on arbitrary approaches such as "time-outs" (Robbert, 1994) and "earning privileges and rewards" (e.g., Kohn, 2001).

It is continually underscored in clinical and developmental literature that serious and continued misbehavior of young children has meaning beyond simple willfulness or defiance. It means there are strong psychological or possibly overwhelming physical needs (e.g. Curry & Arnaud, 1995; Gartrell, 2002). Many of the psychological needs involve attachment issues in which lack of or poor-quality attachment to a meaningful adult has led to overwhelming anxiety and distrust.

Gartrell (2002) indeed points out that the most seriously misbehaving children often are the ones who most need a significant accepting and nurturing relationship with an adult. The veracity of this is illustrated in the case history of

"Miss D," profiled in Mardell (1999), whose upsetting behavior finally led adults to recognize that its source was attachment related and that her attachment needs had to be met.

In this context, the customary "time-out" is particularly damaging and inappropriate (time-out as differentiated from an adult gently removing a child from a troubling situation and sitting with her or him for calming down, talking about the feelings elicited, and helping the child find a way back into the group). Young children often do not understand the reasons for time-outs—they may not make the connection between something they "did" and being moved to a time-out spot. Children with attachment and separation issues that affect their behavior may be both the most likely to be sent to "time-out" and the most damaged by it, since being isolated only heightens their anxiety.

Young children in "time-out" thus not only feel singled out and punished, they also do not learn anything positive from the experience except perhaps that adults are untrustworthy and punitive. Children who repeatedly go to time-out come to be seen by others as "bad"; they are rejected by the group and are set on a negative spiral for a self-fulfilling prophecy of difficult behavior.

Teachers and caregivers today can use so many other approaches, such as communication, personal proximity, engaging and relaxing activities, and developmentally appropriate behavioral management strategies to help children develop internal controls. As just one example, if one child hits another and an altercation ensues, the adult can approach, talk with the children about what is happening, and encourage each child to recognize the situation that generated the strong feelings and to use other ways to express these feelings. This is a very different approach from snapping, "You're fighting, go to 'time out.' "

Many adults today feel that behavioral issues with young children are increasing. Fortunately, there has been a response in terms of thoughtful and research-based books and articles that detail a variety of ways to understand and handle these issues. Particularly noteworthy is the work of Dan Gartrell (e.g., Gartrell, 2002, 2004) and Charles Wolfgang (e.g., Wolfgang, 2004). Marion Hyson (2004) describes a complete curriculum that is emotion centered and helps children develop the understanding of feelings that contributes both to self-regulatory and learning abilities.

Neighborhood Boundaries

Neighbors encourage the child in positive, acceptable behavior, as well as intervene in negative behavior, in a supportive, nonthreatening way.

The relationship between neighborhood experience and child development is complex. However, some comments can be made that support the healthy notion of neighbors contributing to the guidance of young children they encounter.

More and more young children today are spending time with adults who are not their parents (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). This means that neighbors

who come into contact with children can be important developmental supports, reinforcers, and modelers of prosocial behavior, just as parents are. Neighborhoods in which parents and neighbors interact more frequently "are more likely to monitor the behavior of ... children." Contact among neighborhood parents, say Shonkoff and Phillips (citing research by Klebanov and colleagues), may lead them to share ways of dealing with the "problem behavior of their children, ... connecting to community health and other resources, and organizing neighborhood activities" (p. 330). The concept of "collective efficacy" of neighborhoods includes "the degree to which neighbors trust each other and share common values ... and the degree to which neighbors can count on each other to monitor and supervise youth" (p. 333).

In recent years, as neighborhoods have deteriorated owing to high rates of mobility, violence, economic downturns, and a rapid increase in families in which both parents are employed, the more old-fashioned notion of neighbors serving both to protect children and support their socialization—often as the first nonfamilial adults young children interact with—has gone by the board. However, as is described in asset 3, Other Adult Relationships, neighbors and similar adults can play extremely important roles in the lives of children, not only to encourage positive behavior when they see it, but also to guide it in a more acceptable direction.

Adult Role Models

Parent(s), caregivers, and other adults model self-control, social skills, engagement in learning, and healthy lifestyles.

Adults serve as more than attachment figures in the lives of young children, as important as they are. They also serve as role models—a significant developmental contribution indeed. Adults—parents, caregivers, relatives who serve as positive role models contribute to resilience in young children (Werner & Smith, 1992). Positive role models "in the family, the school or the community" were important factors contributing to successful outcomes in case studies of young children who participated in the Perry Preschool Program (Crissey, 1984, p. 198).

"Young children ... learn to support each other—especially when adults model prosocial behaviors such as empathy, friendliness, and generosity" (Koralek, 2002, p. 8). Developmental and role theory has continually stressed that young children learn what they are exposed to through a process of *modeling* (Berk, 2002). Learning by modeling others is one of the major premises of the *social cognition* theory Albert Bandura espouses (as cited in Thomas, 2000). Bandura describes the process of modeling, meaning that a child incorporates new ways into her or his repertoire by imitating what he or she sees others doing, particularly those who are closest to the child. In other words, children "reproduce what they observe" (Thomas, 2000, p. 209).

Although Bandura's theory is not in the mainstream of early childhood practice theory, nonetheless it is generally respected in the field of psychology. Certainly, learning theory has long supported imitation as a significant form

of learning. Furthermore, learning by imitation includes *explicit* learning (learning that is the result of specific instruction) as well as *incidental* learning (behavior that is incorporated in the ongoing process of exposure without being considered formal instruction). Many adults in proximity to young children probably do not realize how every aspect of their behavior represents a learning opportunity through imitation.

Modeling is the way adults demonstrate their beliefs and values, including problem solving and honesty (Stone, 2003), primarily through their behavior. If adults are arbitrary, punitive, or humiliating toward children, children will either learn to imitate this behavior or will become oppositional, overtly or covertly.

Because of their "egocentricity, immaturity, and inexperience," young children especially "need modeling and guidance" (Stone, 2003, p. 41) from adults who show them respect. If adults convey this respect, then children will want to model them, a process that is crucial if they are to become socialized and productive. Stone points out that children often hear "disrespectful language": patently contemptuous "commands, scoldings and criticisms." It is difficult for children to be empathic when nobody is sensitive to their feelings. It is hard to be interested in learning if adults eschew it. These premises have been borne out in research and are described with regard to other assets, for example, asset 6, Parent Involvement in Child Care and Educational Settings, and asset 26, Caring.

It is interesting to note that children perceive adult role models to be more salient and worthy of emulation when they see those adults as having some power conferred on them by their place in a hierarchy. Unfortunately, for both parents and teachers, this is frequently not the case, and children are aware of it. As Stone (2003) points out, adults who feel "worn down" are less likely to be able to treat children with courtesy, respect, and sensitivity. Similarly, teachers who feel oppressed and who have little voice in their organizations or systems—who feel "overwhelmed by troubles in their lives" (p. 42)—are more likely to speak hostilely and insensitively to children, thus diminishing their effectiveness as role models.

As will be discussed with regard to assets that address acceptance of those who are different, children who do not have positive role models for interacting with and understanding people of different cultures will be less likely to do so. According to Curry and Johnson (1990):

Adults so unwittingly can perpetuate stereotypes and model destructive attitudes:

- We may permit boys to denigrate girls . . .
- We may overlook or even allow racial denigration . . .
- We may patronize a child with disabilities. (p. 114)

An example of these attitudes—unfortunately just one of many—is the stigmatizing response that some adults have toward African American boys, as has been documented in research in early childhood settings (Barbarin &

Crawford, 2006). Among the practices that were primarily experienced by African American children were isolation, hostile attitudes, and disparately assigned rewards and punishment. These practices contributed to a child's development of a sense of himself as "bad" and coming to act in the way he had been treated. In the meantime, among Barbarin and Crawford's recommendations are improving home–school communication, more direct training, and even supervisors' confrontation of teachers who are using stigmatizing practices, and providing support for teachers in understanding and dealing with what they perceive as challenging behavior. Barbarin and Crawford very rightly point out that we must discuss "what to do to better protect children" (p. 80).

There are specific strategies that adults can use to *engage* children in learning experiences, both in school and out. Engagement behavior includes "concentration, investment, enthusiasm and effort" (Jablon & Wilkinson, 2006, p. 12). The significance of engagement, which involves more than children "being on task," is related to actual levels of school achievement. Those working with young children can apply these strategies to promote engagement. They include asking a child what he already knows about something, giving choices, encouraging collaboration and group interaction, and promoting independent thinking (Jablon & Wilkinson, 2006).

The empowerment assets that enable all of the adults in children's lives to feel valued and effective contribute incisively to their ability to serve as positive role models for young children.

Positive Peer Relationships

Parent(s) and caregivers seek to provide opportunities for the child to interact positively with other children.

Acceptance by peers is crucial for young children. Peer relationships are significant in learning, problem solving, self-regulation, conflict resolution, and general well-being. Thus, it devolves on those concerned with the positive development of young children to engage in practices that support the formation of positive relationships among young children. Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) also point out how important it is to understand peer relationships of young children and "why some children negotiate this changing landscape more easily than others" (p. 165). As family size has decreased, these authors point out, the significance of the peer group has grown.

However, with the increase in troubled and needy children in early childhood classrooms, there can be strains and unhealthy peer influences if adults are not highly attentive to group dynamics, the climate they create, and how they handle such situations as conflict. Adults need to offer guidance for "social problem solving" (Gartrell, 2002). Without such guidance, peer rejection is a risk factor for those children who receive such rejection (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Aggression in both boys and girls is increasingly an issue. While some aggressive incidents are related to preschoolers' developing sense of self as they assert themselves (Berk, 2002), many are not, especially if they are frequent.

Even in early childhood classrooms there can be bully–victim dynamics (e.g., Gartrell, 2002). Another area can be gender stereotyping and intimidation of one gender by another. Boys tend to be more overtly aggressive than girls. In recent years, however, the concept of "relational aggression" has entered developmentalists' vocabulary to refer to a form of aggression especially observed in girls. Such comments as, "We don't like you," or "You can't play here," characterize this kind of aggression, and it is present even in preschoolers (Berk, 2002).

Once a child has been established as a "victim," he or she becomes vulnerable to future attacks and scapegoating (Gartrell, 2002). With recent research indicating that social rejection can actually be felt as physical pain in the brain (Beckman, 2003; Eisenberger et al., 2003), the need for adults to address both the individual and group issues that lead to rejection is crucial.

The characteristics of children's playmates make a difference: "The experience of children in peer groups depends in good measure on the nature of the other children with whom they interact" (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 163). Adults therefore need to take responsibility for providing healthy contacts for their children and monitoring how the interactions are proceeding.

Adults have a significant role to play in helping children with peer problems. It is not surprising that poorly attached children have relationship-building problems. Parents can help provide play situations for their children, since peer relationships are formed and tested in the context of play, and support them in developing the ability to play harmoniously. Without being intrusive, parents can monitor their children's peer contacts; one study shows that children's peer relationships improved over time when mothers were neither over- nor underinvolved in arranging peer contacts (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). These authors suggest that training parents in helping their children with peer relationships could be helpful.

Teachers and caregivers also can play a key role in helping young children develop the kind of emotional understanding that gives them the relationship skills that contribute to positive peer relationships. Marion Hyson (2004), in a well-known work, gives a detailed description of an integrated curriculum focused on promoting such emotional understanding and emotional regulation. With regard to "promoting peer interactions" (p. 90) in a classroom, Hyson, pointing out how children can have strong emotional effects on each other, comments that peer rejection for lack of emotional regulation gives children a "powerful though painful incentive" to modify their behavior. She further maintains that there are interventions adults can offer in emotionally charged situations involving children.

The emerging notion of building a "classroom community" in which everyone "belongs" psychologically, or a "community of learners" based on common interests (Mardell, 1999), has utility for adult roles in encouraging positive peer relationships. Vivian Gussin Paley's famous book, *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (1992), stressed classroom practices that would not permit a child to be rejected from group play. Curricula such as *Starting Small* (Teaching Tolerance, 1997) stress fairness, friendship, inclusion, and diversity, among other capacities.

Teaching methods such as cooperative learning and the Project Approach (Helm & Katz, 2001) provide structured ways, which some children need, for developing harmonious relationships with other children. Using an activity or theme as a focal point, these practices mediate interactions, tending to keep them focused on "the business at hand" rather than allowing them to slide into the asocial or provocative.

It is clear that if young children are to have the positive benefits of peer relationships, adults must have a grasp of group dynamics and know how to use the group process to build a sense of community and acceptance. Resources on building a community in classrooms can be helpful to this end (e.g., *Young Children's* 1998 theme issue on classroom community building). Strategies are addressed that are transferable beyond specific classroom settings. Logan (1998) describes strategies for reframing the exclusionary actions in her class (e.g., same-sex play partnerships, the preference of one group for a certain play area, fear of playing with certain children). She encourages parents to invite new children to play with their children, had a discussion of how children themselves felt about how they would like to be treated, and ended with an "include everyone" agreement, which integrated all activities along nongender lines, and encouraged teamwork through such activities as preparing projects. Similarly, McClurg (1998) held community meetings to problem solve around the area of exclusion based on Paley's principles that children who excluded another child had to say why, while excluded children needed to listen and try to change alienating behaviors.

There is frequent discussion of the relationship between peer rejection and tragic incidents such as school shootings where excluded adolescents act out the cumulative pain of these rejections. Given the significance of peer acceptance, this asset and adults' role in addressing it should be given a great deal of attention.

Positive Expectations

Parent(s), caregivers, and teachers encourage and support the child in behaving appropriately, undertaking challenging tasks, and performing activities to the best of her or his abilities.

Positive expectations involve communicating, both implicitly and explicitly, that a child will be able to meet a particular standard for behavior or performance (a standard that is within her or his ability to achieve with the child's compliance) (VanderVen, in Starkman, 2002). This asset underscores the crucial role of adult involvement and investment in children's learning in a way that supports it without excessive control or direction.

Brazelton and Greenspan (2000), as previously mentioned, include "expectations" as one of the "irreducible needs of children." Parents "expect" that children will care about others, learn, set goals, and so forth. These expectations for children are based on adults' modeling them and contribute toward children's internal self-regulating abilities as well as planning and setting

meaningful goals for themselves. This external asset relates to the internal asset of planning and decision making.

The role of others in establishing expectations includes respecting individual differences as the expectations are conveyed and providing support in attaining the expectations while making sure they are within the capacity of the child to perform (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000).

The rationale for positive expectations can be provided by a consideration of the tenets of Vygotsky, named earlier as one of the main contributors to the theory of early childhood education. According to Vygotsky, knowledge is socially constructed, and it is through interaction with others that new knowledge emerges. Perhaps best known of Vygotsky's developmental constructs are the *zone of proximal development* and *assisted learning*. (The latter construct is often referred to as *scaffolding*.) Children have a zone of proximal development that is related to their ability to do various tasks. At the lower end are those tasks a child can do without assistance or guidance from adults or more skilled and knowledgeable peers. At the higher end are those tasks the child can accomplish with the direct support and instruction of the adult. The function the adult thus plays is to "scaffold" the child into a higher level of competence. This is an ongoing dynamic process that continues to increase the child's range of knowledge and skill. It is interesting to note the contrast between Piagetian and Vygotskian conceptions of development. Adults play a much more significant role in Vygotsky's estimation (Berk, 2002), a premise with significant implications. Perhaps the most embracing concept of development would be one that considers the combined benefits of self-determined action and activities directly guided by adults. Positive Expectations, however, is an asset that can be enacted by adults as they identify higher level behaviors that children can perform with their help. They offer this help using *encouragement* rather than praise (which does not always serve to enhance performance; see, e.g., Kohn, 2001), and without psychologically corrosive negative labeling, which is internalized by young children and sets up a negative self-valuing process with implications for attaining many other assets.

4 The Constructive-Use-of-Time Assets

The rapid rate of learning of which young children are capable is directly supported by the degree to which their daily lives are filled with opportunities to participate in engaging and stimulating activities, both at home and increasingly out in the community. Such activities serve to integrate the child into family and community, as well as develop the array of social, emotional, cognitive, and physical attributes necessary for school readiness (commonly defined as the degree to which young children are prepared to make the transition to more formal schooling in kindergarten and grade 1).

Indeed, evidence is strong that the ideal medium in which to promote young children's learning and preparation for school are experiences rich in play. Play in its various forms (sensory, exploratory, constructive, dramatic, and sociodramatic) develops language, knowledge of the physical world, the capacity for symbolism (understanding that one thing represents another, a precursor of reading), flexible ways of interacting with those around them, and social skills, among others. Play also provides children with a means for expressing their feelings that enables them to master both anxieties and challenges. Such mastery can send young children to school "ready to learn."

Preschool children must spend a good portion of time in and about their own homes with primary caregivers with whom they have a strong bond. This time must be quality time in an environment in which there is structure, such as a daily schedule, a time for individual and special attention, and an array of comfortable and pleasant family-centered routines and activities.

Television viewing and computer games *in excess* can deprive young children of the active transactions with the physical and human environment that give them the developmental tools to be ready for school. Furthermore, spending large amounts of time watching television exposes young children to images of violence, which contribute to aggressive behavior and lack of empathy. Constructive-use-of-time ensures that television viewing is limited to well-conceived programs designed exclusively for young children. Concomitant with reduced television viewing, young children need to have opportunities for physical play, to develop both small muscles (as in manipulating playthings) and large muscles (e.g., climbing, running). Such play develops kinesthetic awareness, which in turn enhances the ability to learn to read.

While some may think preschoolers are too young for organized religious activities or those activities focused on religious beliefs, in actuality, religious affiliation, faith, and spirituality have their origins in the early years. Religious affiliation and beliefs have been established as strong builders of

resilience and sources of family meaning making, and although "religious upbringing" is a matter of individual family choice, nonetheless young children already think about religious issues. Religion, particularly in the realm of faith and spirituality, therefore should be recognized as a positive contributor to preschool children's development.

Play and Creative Activities

The child has daily opportunities to play in ways that allow self-expression, physical activity, and interaction with others.

"Play under siege" and "the current attack on play" are opening phrases in *Children's Play: The Roots of Reading* (Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004, p. 1). In recent years, a variety of forces have converged to reduce public recognition of the utterly crucial role play holds in promoting the positive development of young children. These include the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), with its emphasis on accountability and "high stakes" testing, even at the preschool level. Despite compelling evidence that "make[s] clear the connection between healthy early childhood play experiences and outcomes most of us would want for children: verbal and mathematical literacy, organizational skills, intrinsic excitement about learning, school readiness, creativity and more" (Zigler et al., 2004, p. v), play is threatened. Even articles in the popular media bring up concerns, for example, "The New First Grade: Too Much Too Soon" (Tyre, 2006), with a header saying, "Kids as young as 6 are tested, and tested again, to ensure they're making sufficient progress. Then there's homework, more workbooks, and tutoring" (p. 34).

Yet there is so much overwhelming evidence for the developmental benefits of play, and for its place in all aspects of the lives of young children, that play must be accorded a significant place in any model, approach, or framework concerned with them (e.g., Fromberg, 2001; Frost et al., 2001; Smilansky & Sheftaya, 1990; VanderVen, 1998a, 2005b; Zigler et al., 2004). Play is the way in which young children make meaning of their world, increasingly come to understand how it works, develop relationships with peers, express and regulate emotions, increase physical awareness and coordination, and form concepts.

In early childhood education, *play* is considered the prime medium for delivering or "situating" a constructivist learning model (e.g., Berk, 1999). Constructivist theory, developed by famous theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky, is used to consider how young children actually learn and thus how they might best be taught. One of the major discontinuities in cognitive development theory between the preschool years and the school years concerns conceptions as to how children learn. In early childhood education, the *constructivist* theory of learning and cognitive development has been well articulated and widely accepted. Constructivist theory (e.g., Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Fosnot, 1996) contends that children construct knowledge by an "organic process of invention rather than a mechanical process of accumulation." In constructivist

classrooms, then, teachers consider the learners' points of view, offer activities that challenge previous suppositions, pose relevant problems, encourage learner investigation, and promote integration and a view of a larger picture, rather than fragmentation (Brooks & Brooks, 1999). Play, of course, is the medium for this.

Constructivist philosophy has been translated into a number of well-known early childhood programmatic curricular efforts, both implicitly and explicitly (e.g., Kamii & DeVries, 1993; Trister-Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002), and, of course, developmentally appropriate practice. When considering the crucial transition between early childhood and elementary school education, constructivism is a crucial concept to bear in mind in that the contrast between the constructivist model of teaching (and the concept of learning on which it is predicated) and the traditional elementary school pedagogy is sharp. Recently, new pedagogical practices such as the Project Approach (e.g., Helm & Katz, 2001) show how a constructivist underpinning can extend into academically oriented work in the primary grades.

One of the common "rhetorics" of play is that of "play as frivolity" (Sutton-Smith, 1997). This term refers to the contention of many, including numerous educators and parents, that play is indeed frivolous, meaningless, and not worthy of being taken seriously as a medium for learning and development. In the past few decades, however, extensive empirical research by Sara Smilansky and colleagues (e.g., Smilansky, 1968; Smilansky & Sheftaya, 1990) has provided a compelling challenge to this rhetoric. It also provides grounded insights into the key issues of the role of adults in children's play, the kinds of play that lead to specific developmental outcomes, and how play specifically can prepare children for school entrance. In her groundbreaking work *The Effects of Sociodramatic Play on Disadvantaged Pre-School Children* (1968), Smilansky describes several forms of early childhood play (functional play, constructive play, dramatic play different from sociodramatic play) and games with rules, but the focal point of her research is sociodramatic play. This kind of play has six identifying characteristics: imitative role play, make-believe with regard to objects, make-believe with regard to actions and situations, a theme, interaction (two players must interact for at least 10 minutes), and verbal communication. Since the evolution of play in the child follows a developmental process, with changes in form and complexity, sociodramatic play does not emerge until the preschool years (ages 3–5).

Smilansky proposed two radical notions. One is that many children do not automatically play or "play well," in a way that attains the benefits traditionally associated with playing. The other is that adults should not necessarily assume the traditional role of benign observer of playing children. An adult can and should use active strategies to facilitate sociodramatic play. These include suggesting a role, taking a role, suggesting a theme, making suggestions to extend a play episode, and selecting props that support the play.

The ways in which sociodramatic play contributes to preparation for school includes symbolic representation, language, abstract thought, factual information, self-regulation, cooperation and collaboration, respect for another's perspective, physical coordination (all qualities recognized and discussed

elsewhere in this book as assets) as related to school readiness and success (e.g., Zigler et al., 2004). Furthermore, recent studies are providing some support for the contention that play is directly related to the development of literacy skills, such as offering contexts that encourage literacy activities and language experiences that encourage "connections between oral and written modes of expression" (Roskos & Christie, 2005, p. 116).

Sociodramatic play needs to be accorded particular attention in a Developmental Assets framework for young children, because, as in the Developmental Assets frameworks for other age groups, it is a practice theory: It includes specific guidelines for use in practice. Furthermore, the developmental capacity for sociodramatic play is characteristic of the 3–5 age range to be addressed by the Developmental Assets framework. A particular challenge today is to be aware when young children, even when they are "allowed" to play, are unable to use "pretend" or imaginative play. Bodrova and Leong (2004) suggest that among the reasons for this is that children spend more time with age-mates rather than older children, the academic demands of preschools and kindergarten, and the lack of open-ended playthings that encourage imaginative play. They point out that manufacturers are increasingly making "realistic" toys that have limited options for imaginative play.

The sociocultural learning theories of Lev Vygotsky and his disciple Daniel Elkonin are often used as a rationale for play and especially for strategies for promoting play abilities in children. These include actually "helping children create an imaginary situation" in which to "act out various roles" and to "plan their play" (Bodrova & Leong, 2004, pp. 8–10).

Vygotskian theory supports another breakthrough rationale for the role of play in preparing young children for school. Recent research shows that a new curriculum called "Tools of the Mind" (Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, & Munro, 2007) promotes crucial cognitive "executive functions" and, as do other developmental theories, supports the employment of "mature dramatic play" (Diamond et al., 2007, p. 5) among the curricular tools to do this. This type of play encourages planning and role taking, which itself encourages inhibition (such as remembering rules) and attention (to what the role calls for) (Diamond et al., 2007). Such play, interestingly, sounds as if it is a combination of Smilansky's sociodramatic play (e.g., Smilansky and Sheftaya, 1990) and of High/Scope's inclusion of planning in its approach (e.g., Epstein, 2003).

With reference to this asset it is appropriate to mention the High/Scope research results that found a positive relationship between the nature of young children's early childhood classroom experience and later developmental outcomes. Where the curriculum was play based rather than "academically" oriented, youth showed more positive development.

Obviously this evidence indicates that it is the responsibility of adults to promote the Play and Creative Activities asset by advocating for play in the early childhood curriculum, by providing the conditions and settings that nurture play, and by specifically promoting and facilitating play. It is also crucial that adults avoid falling into the false "play versus academics" dichotomy. Again the evidence shows that rich play supports all of the knowledge, skills,

and attributes required for academic school success—when children are developmentally ready.

Out-of-Home and Community Programs

The child experiences well-designed programs led by competent, caring adults in well-maintained settings.

Despite widespread and even comprehensive attempts to provide high-quality developmental experiences for young children, the fact remains that the quality of early childhood care and out-of-home care and educational programs lags far behind our theoretical and practical knowledge of those interventions and experiences that promote positive development. That many young children are served by poor-quality or inadequate programs and other experiences has been well recognized for years among practitioners, scholars, legislators, policy makers, and parents and is definitively confirmed by the work of Shonkoff and Phillips (2000).

A "theory-based practice" model, developmentally appropriate practice has been the seminal intervention developed by the early childhood profession to address issues of quality. How quality is actually described is important to consider at this point. According to Helm and Beneke (2003), quality includes "rich preschool experiences filled with stimulation—talking, interacting with adults, reading books, solving problems and getting to know their world. The preschool experiences of other children, however, could be described as haphazard, inconsistent, and boring, thereby adding barriers to school success" (p. 4).

Other definitions of quality in early childhood programs address the physical setting (with interest areas and opportunity for large-muscle activity), group size (with low adult–child ratios), activities (enabling choice and self-direction with adult facilitation), adult–child interaction (in which positive guidance is used), teacher qualifications (including specialized preparation in child development and early childhood pedagogy), parent involvement (parents participate and interact with teachers and caregivers), and licensing and/or accreditation. Accreditation, such as by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), is more stringent than licensing, although the latter is certainly crucial to ensure that safety standards are met. It is relevant here to point out the difference between "preschool" and "child care." A preschool may enroll children for limited time periods (e.g., just mornings or afternoons), whereas "child-care" programs are designed to care for children while their parents work or otherwise cannot supervise them and are open for much longer hours (e.g., from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.). Legitimate child-care centers are licensed by their state. In general, however, licensing supports only minimal standards for program quality in line with the criteria cited earlier. A center may be licensed in terms of cleanliness and safety, but be inadequate and of lesser quality in terms of richness, stimulation, caregiver–child relationships, and the like. Berk (2002) properly

points out that "good child care is not simply a matter of keeping children safe and adequately fed. It should provide the same high-quality experiences that an effective preschool does" (p. 352). Obviously, child-care centers as well as preschools must strive to attain the highest program quality.

In recent years, interest in promoting the positive development of young children has led to the development of standards for quality programs (see, e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2003a). The major activity in early childhood care and education designed to enact standards for practice is the accreditation project of the National Association for the Education of Young Children already mentioned (1998). The intent of "the world's largest and most widely recognized accreditation system for early childhood programs in centers and schools" (p. 5) is to endorse early childhood programs offering both care and education according to established criteria. These criteria are "the profession's recognized standards for practice" (p. 5). The criteria are related to developmentally appropriate practice but also cover more systemic factors that are necessary to run a program. The criteria are as follows:

- Interactions among teachers and children
- Curriculum
- Relationships among teachers and families
- Staff qualifications and professional development
- Administration
- Staffing
- Physical environment
- Health and safety
- Nutrition and food service
- Evaluation

The NAEYC's accreditation monograph reports results of considerable research that relates improved quality of practice across a number of domains. The report significantly points out the relationship between accreditation, the NAEYC's criteria, and both professional development and compensation (funding) in early childhood. The accreditation process is considered "dynamic"—that is, subject to continual evaluation and change—and is currently under review again. Because the entire accreditation process is seen as a major force for positive change, it could be considered how the Developmental Assets framework might "flank" the accreditation activities in order to be part of this force.

Community experiences or enrichments that are usually part of the lives of middle-class children set them on a track that values adult investment in out-of-home activities and is translated by the children into more confident engagement with institutions such as schools (Lareau, 2003), whereas poor children begin to take an attitude of distance and distrust. In Lareau's comparison of middle-class and working-class families, children in the latter experience much more "unstructured" time as is characteristic of their families'

"natural growth" approach to child rearing in which many fewer activities are arranged for children.

Lareau points out that the advantages don't all accrue to middle-class children and that there are real benefits attained by working-class children as a result of their parents' more "hands-off" approach. It might be suggested that the optimal approach would be one that combined adult intent to provide an array of activities through utilizing community resources, a good rationale being multiple intelligences. This would offer the opportunity to discover a talent or "intelligence" through exposure to an activity that embodies it—with more freedom of discovery for the "overscheduled" upper- and upper-middle-class children by at least reducing the number of activities to which they are exposed.

Several community institutions are particularly supportive of young children's development. Parks and recreation facilities are adapting to the need for family-oriented play in response to "a decade marked by television addiction, poor fitness" (Brock, 1994, in Patton, 1998, p. 285). There has been a great growth in the number of children's museums, which are now the most "popular" form of out-of-home family activity (Patton, 1998, p. 285). These museums are not only becoming more family friendly, the exhibits also are increasingly interactive, reflecting the application of developmentally appropriate practice concepts. Toy libraries are family centered and usually focus on toy lending. Other community activities now include mall and supermarket play areas, as well as public playgrounds. Given the significance of community activities in child development, it is crucial that they be supported as a form of family support.

It has been pointed out that low-income families may not use such community programs owing to lack of access and resources, including lack of neighborhood safety and proper transportation. Transportation issues underscore the significance of Bronfenbrenner's (1974) exosystem concept of providing families with the "institutions of society," among them, transportation.

Religious Community

The child participates in age-appropriate religious activities and caring relationships that nurture her or his spiritual development.

Spiritual development is moving closer to becoming a recognized domain of development (Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006). "Religious and spiritual practices consist of intentional efforts to connect with a higher, deeper, more valued reality beyond what appears to the senses. ... Spiritual development is an integral part of normal, human cognitive-developmental mechanisms and processes" (Johnson & Boyatzis, 2006, p. 212). While there may be some skeptics who cannot see the relationship between religion and positive early development, there is considerable evidence that religious tradition in a family serves as a developmental force. One developmentalist who maintained that faith itself played a strong role was no less than Erik Erikson, who

"gave unprecedented attention to the potential role of religion and spirituality in development" (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006, p. 7) and considered faith an outcome of the establishment of early trust (Myers & Martin, 2003). The virtue of hope, associated with early trust, later emerges as mature faith, "allowing one to believe without evidence that the universe is trustworthy" (Roehlkepartain et al., 2006, p. 7).

The significance of spiritual development for young children is further underscored when we consider its relationship to attachment (Granqvist & Dickie, 2006). While children's primary emotional connections are with primary caregivers, they are developing a concept of God (Granqvist & Dickie, 2006, p. 201) that is related to their internal working models of relationships and as a being who can also serve as an attachment figure. To some extent, according to research cited by Granqvist and Dickie (p. 201), children perceive God as more "loving" if they have secure parental relationships.

Classrooms that promote a sense of trust and worthiness of each child are those that support children's sense of faith. Where children talk about specific religious concepts and differences, we try to help them both "learn about religious differences ... and ... nurture the foundations of faith" (Myers & Martin, 2003, p. 154).

While trying to avoid judgments, an exception could be when religion assumes such dominance in daily life that it excludes exposure to generally humane values and common activities or achieves cult status; or when it blatantly encourages highly inappropriate or punitive child-care practices that make it impossible for primary caregivers to focus on the needs of children or provide them with emotional support.

It is now well documented not only that religious experiences are related to the development of positive values of caring and concern for others but also that they contribute to the development of resilience (e.g., Johnson-Garner & Meyers, 2003; Rhodes & Brown, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1992). For African American families, the church is a form of social support, and caring for children has always been a traditional focus of religious institutions, regardless of the denomination; thus religious institutions are a vehicle for modeling caring attitudes. In recent years, there has been a surge in "faith-based" programming for children, leading us to ask how "faith" translates into concern for young children.

Some very interesting research makes a connection between brain development, the formation of faith, and faith-based early childhood experiences (Morgenthaler & Lass, 2003). Rituals (repeated events and sequences), reliable and developmentally appropriate caregiving environments, and nurturing and interactive relationships contribute to faith formation. The intent of faith, construed as a form of relationship, is to encourage children to feel a sense of belonging to something larger than themselves. Ongoing brain development (as discussed earlier) encourages children's spiritual growth (Morgenthaler & Lass, 2003). Brain development is supported by all of the practices documented in this book: trust and trustworthiness, attachment and bonding, positive relationships, awareness of and sensitivity to others. Faith communities support families, a fact that in turn, of course, encourages these attributes in children.

Time at Home

The child spends most of her or his time at home participating in family activities and playing constructively, with parent(s) guiding TV and electronic game use.

Given the current situation of many families in which there are young children and both parents work, the nature of children's time at home, both quantitative and qualitative, is highly significant. There is research support for the idea that spending time at home is connected to less stress experienced by young children, as measured by physical indicators (Gilbert, 2003). Gilbert reports that researchers at the University of Minnesota's Institute of Child Development found that for 3- and 4-year-olds, cortisol (a stress-related hormone) rose during full days in child care, but was lower on days spent at home. Where stress is present, the incidence of behavior problems such as defiance and aggression increases.

But it is not sufficient just for young children to "put in hours" in their own homes. The conditions in the home are crucial as well, including such factors as the family's socioeconomic status and the primary caregiver's emotional availability and support. The latter factor has been shown to be major in young children's attachment formation and ability to form relationships. In fact, where there is "maternal insensitivity" at home, alternative caregivers become important mediators. As has been stated elsewhere, young children need the opportunity as they enter their preschool years to develop relationships with nonparental adults. This is important for all youngsters but assumes particular importance where there is a problematic parent–child relationship.

Home visit-based early intervention programs promote positive parent–child interactions, encourage the provision of developmentally appropriate stimulating activities, and in general serve to enable families to provide children with growth-oriented home environments (e.g., Epps & Jackson, 2000). Luthar's (2003) findings that lower-income families are less focused on providing activities that explicitly are developmentally oriented have implications here, since this asset may suggest that such families might benefit (as they actually have in the past) from such programs. Conversely, the quality of home life and activities can be a concern in some high-income homes where there can be "overprogramming" or insufficient parental attention. The nature of the intervention in these cases might be different.

There must be concern with the amount of time young children spend watching television, and with what they watch. The evidence continues to mount that American young children spend too much time watching television. Helm and Beneke (2003) cite a study done in 2001 by the American Academy of Pediatrics that found that children watch television on the average of four hours a day. This deprives them of the opportunity to participate more actively in relationship building, physically healthy and learning activities, as well as exposes them to models of violence and world conflict that they are ill-equipped to understand, certainly without the support and guidance of caring adults. Indeed, research is now showing that the more violence children view on television, the more likely they are to have problems with aggressive behavior

when they are older (Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger, & Wright, 2001; Fraser, 2003; Helm & Beneke, 2003). Conversely, research has shown that children who watch programs like *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* have positive outcomes, especially in self-regulation but also with regard to sympathy for others, greater emotional expressiveness, and greater cooperativeness (Fraser, 2003). The building of this asset for and with young children ideally should contribute to stronger parental control of television viewing, both the amount and the content, in favor of more interactive and physically active occupations.

II
The Internal Assets

The internal assets refer to "within-child" developmental processes as the input from the child's environment interacts with the unfolding capacities of the child—a dynamic, continuous, transactional process. Sometimes the nature, quality, and meaning of these internal states can be inferred by observing the actual behavior and the daily functioning of young children. Often they are described in terms of domains (i.e., social, emotional, physical, and cognitive). In recent years, there has been consideration of adding new domains, such as spirituality. While the trajectory of development in reality represents an integrated interaction of all of these domains, rather than as separate entities growing separately, for pragmatic reasons it can still be helpful to view them separately.

The internal assets in general reflect these four established domains. The asset categories, which are the same as those of the Developmental Assets framework for youth (e.g., Scales & Leffert, 1999), enable not only longitudinal continuity of development but also a way of bringing to light less emphasized aspects of development in early childhood while still embracing those of traditional emphasis.

A relationship between well-being and strengths in internal psychological development and the external environment is integral in child development. Actions by the primary people and contexts of a child's life significantly affect the course of internal development. Hence the internal asset categories are arranged analogously to the external asset categories on the general premise that external actions may be likely to encourage internal development in the analogous area. However, the relationship between external and internal assets is a complex one. External actions certainly may affect similar internal processes, yet they may affect other seemingly less-related domains as well. Similarly, progress in one internal asset category may affect progress in others.

All of these features enhance the overall utility of the Developmental Assets framework.

5 The Commitment-to-Learning Assets

The evidence is extensive that it is important for young children to have an *interest* in learning and that this interest is even more crucial to early school success than knowing specific letters, shapes, and numbers. "Learning" for children is not grounded in the more formal "teacher-learner-classroom" context that school-age children experience. Rather, preschool children learn constantly through their relationships, their interactions with materials, and all of their daily experiences. All settings in which young children are cared for need to provide the materials, physical environments, and adult support that encourage curiosity, investment in and persistence at a challenging task, and energy; all indicate that young children are acquiring appropriate attributes for undertaking later academic work. Young children actually gain pleasure from interacting with different situations to the extent that they result in attaining a desired outcome. This sense of mastery is an important aspect of their further motivation to learn.

Preschool children are not yet formally committed to "learning," nor do they cognitively recognize that they are "learning" as they construct new knowledge from their ongoing experiences. However, healthy preschool children learn constantly through their relationships, observations, and daily experiences. Well-developing preschool children will constantly be engaged in activities from which they will learn. Children will be physically and psychologically able to be open to new information from the environment, to engage in interactive transactions with it, and to integrate the information into their current repertoire. Basically, the child must have an adequate energy level indicative of physical health and a feeling of psychological safety to be open to the continuous learning opportunities available in the immediate environment of daily experiences and interactions.

A preschool precursor to the more formal homework of the elementary years is exchanges between parents and preschools concerning developmentally appropriate activities. These can enable families at home to support curricular areas and emphases in school. Sharing ideas for activities and children's responses to experiencing them both at home and in school can be a harmonious way for teachers and parents to interact and contribute to children's sense of adults' mutual investment in their learning.

In recent years, approaches to early literacy have emerged to ensure children's readiness for learning to read and school achievement. Although there are a variety of research-based approaches, always cited is the relationship between language—the degree of frequent and rich oral exchange in a

family; a child's being read to—and the development of literacy skills (e.g., symbolic representation). Specifically, reading to young children represents a major form of language enrichment and helps with the development of phonemic awareness (how sounds combine to form words), as does extending involvement with reading through library visits and similar activities.

Motivation to Mastery

The child responds to new experiences with curiosity and energy, resulting in the pleasure of mastering new learning and skills.

Motivation is a significant factor in positive human development, and as with so many, has its foundation in the early childhood experience. "Motivation, the child's ability to be activity involved with their environment . . . is a critical aspect of competence and resilience" (Bloom & Wachs, 2005, p. 23). To develop competence (already described as fundamental in the development of successful school-age children and adolescents), motivational systems must be in place. Motivation is encouraged by the close and supportive relationships that are described throughout this book, in interaction with the child's basic temperament. Motivation thus leads to the need for mastery.

Mastery is "the drive to explore, manipulate, persist and derive pleasure in mastery-related behavior and achievement," according to Robert White (as quoted in Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 152). Also referring to White, Masten and Coatsworth (1998) describe his "mastery motivation system" (p. 208) in human development as "readily observable in the inclination of young children to actively engage with the environment and to experience pleasure (feelings of efficacy) from effective interactions" (p. 208). Fortunately, most children feel that they can do what they are confronted with (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

The ideal way to encourage mastery is through play, according to Erikson (e.g., Erikson, 1977; Roazen, 1997). "Play in childhood provides the infantile form of the human propensity to create model situations in which aspects of the past are re-lived, the present re-presented and renewed, and the future anticipated" (Erikson, 1977, p. 44). Enabling such mastery of a particularly difficult situation is part of the rationale for play therapy, although play's role in enabling children to master their ongoing experience does not require a therapeutic frame to occur. All children can, and do, use play developmentally to help them in their overall developmental growth and strivings. The "arousal modulation" theory of play, which holds that stimuli from the external world motivate children to play (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005), further underscores the role of play in energizing and engaging children in productive transactions with their environment.

There are "dispositions" (e.g., Helm & Katz, 2001) that encourage engagement in learning that in turn lead to mastery. Such "dispositions" include curiosity. While temperamentally some children may be more inclined to approach new learning situations with energy and curiosity, adult support and offering of new and challenging activities (within the child's ability to attain

with guidance) are in line with Vygotsky's concepts of the zone of proximal development and scaffolding (e.g., Wertsch, 1985).

Health status, and hence access for all children to proper health care, plays a role in motivation to mastery. Obviously, children who are inadequately nourished, or have chronic health problems that lower their energy level, will not be able to invest themselves in learning to the extent that healthier children do. Health is related to cognitive development with a major contributory factor being activity level. "Less active exploration of the environment" associated with poor nourishment is in turn related to young children's "missing out on valuable opportunities to acquire new skills across developmental domains" (Marcon, 2003b, p. 84).

This asset is related to external assets, particularly those dealing with keeping children safe and healthy and feeling supported in relationships; and to other assets in this category.

Engagement in Learning Experiences

The child fully participates in a variety of activities that offer opportunities for learning.

Almost to a word, the phrase "active participation in learning experiences" describes the way in which young children learn. The recognition that young children learn by acquiring concrete information in real situations in which they interact directly with the environment is the seminal contribution of Piaget. While young children ages 3–5 can think in a more complex and organized way than do toddlers, and are developing the ability for symbolic representation (having one object represent another; "pretending"), they still do this in direct interaction with their environments (Berk, 2002). Thinking and problem solving are based more on what children see or hear directly than on abstract concepts and situations.

There are long-term benefits when young children experience environments that respect their developmental way of learning. Learning through hands-on involvement is underscored as an effective prevention strategy for risk (Nation et al., 2003). Strong support for the premise that young children must be able to *actively* participate in learning experiences is supported by the High/Scope findings that those children whose preschool curriculum focused on active learning opportunities versus more controlled, "academic," or *totally* teacher-directed activities actually had better outcomes in adolescence, being less likely to be involved in delinquency, to drop out of school, and the like (e.g., Schweinhart & Weikart, 1980). Similarly, Helm and Beneke (2003) cite other research showing that "academic" preschool curricula may lead to short-term results but in the long run do *not* encourage school achievement.

Being able to make choices is empowering to young children. Developmentally appropriate play with an array of materials is an ideal way for them to make decisions. One can hypothesize that the High/Scope findings supporting the developmental classroom might be explained at least partially

by the "decision" factor. Where children feel they have some control over what they do, they become more engaged with learning and motivated to attempt further achievement.

One aspect of constructivism is children's learning through their own actions and from the feedback that results from these actions. Through these dialectic environmental transactions, children *construct* knowledge of themselves and the world. These constructions build on what they already know, become connected to it, and serve to generate further constructions.

Young children actually learn by "trial and error"—by making "mistakes" and correcting them themselves. They cannot engage in this learning without the opportunity for the type of experiences that allow divergent responses. We can venture a hypothesis that supports the frequent contention that social and emotional development are integrally related to interest in and ability to learn. Where the activities in an early childhood program are predominantly child initiated and discovery oriented, children feel empowered, which further encourages their curiosity and engagement. This kind of learning environment also allows for more interaction with others, with all of the social learning and benefits already described.

Application of constructivist learning theory is embodied in Bredekamp and Copple's developmentally appropriate practice (1997), which by popular summation is regarded as advocating for, and showing how to implement, early childhood curricula and activities that activate and allow young children to learn in the way best suited to their developmental capacities. Active participation and interaction with the environment represent the constructivist way young children learn (e.g., Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Fromberg, 2001; Frost et al., 2001; Smilansky & Sheftaya, 1990). In early childhood programs, these experiences are—or should be—a combination of child-initiated, teacher-directed/-initiated, and "teacher–child-mutual activities" (McCall et al., 2000). This approach is in contrast to elementary education, which focuses more on academic skills.

The issue involves more than being afforded opportunities to participate in activities that facilitate an active approach. There is the additional and very significant factor of degree of engagement in the activity. The concern is with "how young children become active seekers and appliers of knowledge" (Blair, 2002). Blair indicates that "high levels of motivation and self-regulation are clearly associated with academic achievement independent of measured intelligence" (p. 111). This is in line with recent research on "executive functions" (e.g., Diamond et al., 2007) that are related to the notion of self-regulation. Executive functions include "inhibitory control," which in essence means avoiding response to temporary distractions that may be more tempting than the task at hand. Deficiencies in executive functions of schoolchildren include more frequent dropouts, use of controlled substances, and delinquency (Diamond et al., 2007).

Other assets with their documentation may offer some insights here as well. Adult investment in a child's activities, and the kind of security and structure that contribute to self-regulation or inhibitory control, exposure to interesting and attractive activities—all could contribute.

Adult actions as described for the support and empowerment assets contribute to children's ability to learn through constructivism by using strategies that engage the children.

Home-Program Connection

The child experiences security, consistency, and connections between home and out-of-home care programs and learning activities.

Long hours spent in child care or out of the home, as discussed elsewhere, can be stressful on young children, compromising their sense of security. Interestingly, where longer hours are spent in child care, parents tend to behave less sensitively and promptly to distress signals from their children (Ahnert & Lamb, 2003). This tendency is mediated to some extent by children's attachment to caregivers where such attachment exists. Positive relationships with out-of-home caregivers are associated with school readiness and social competencies in the school setting. Similarly, positive social relationships at home that include, but are not limited to, a primary caregiver are associated with better social functioning in the early years of school (Vondra et al., 1999), particularly for boys. Sibling relationships are also relevant: Positive school socialization is associated with a positive relationship with a sibling, fewer siblings in the home, and not being a "problem" sibling. The complexities of relationships in the home, with siblings and parents, contribute to children's ability to form positive relationships during the early years of school. Greater agreement by parents and caregivers regarding care practices is associated with fewer behavior issues with the children (Ahnert & Lamb, 2003).

A crucial factor in a positive home–school connection is some congruence between the culture of home and the culture of the child-care center or school (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2003b). Children experience more stress when there is discontinuity imposed by school and home differences. This occurs, for example, when a behavior that is customary at home is viewed as unacceptable or even as a sign of disturbance by teachers and out-of-home caregivers. These differing perspectives are confusing and even threatening to children, who may not have the cognitive capacity to reconcile them.

It would seem as if dual actions of both reducing children's time in out-of-home care, and specific efforts to adjust ways of handling children to be consistent and congruent with children's cultural backgrounds, would provide children with needed security and reduced stress. The parent involvement philosophies and approaches described for the external assets support children's sense of a connection between home and school.

Bonding to Programs

The child forms meaningful connections with out-of-home care and educational programs.

Being increasingly able to function with enjoyment in the absence of one's primary caregiver is part of the separation–individuation process that characterizes development in the early years. Given that more and more children today spend a substantial amount of time in out-of-home care or with nonparental caregivers, it is particularly important that they experience a positive connection with these programs and people. Child–teacher attachment is important as well and is related to later school achievement (Howes & Ritchie, 2002).

To bond to an out-of-home program, a young child must feel secure in the first place through a primary attachment, and have a sense that the opportunity for attachment can be replicated and supported in the new setting and by the primary caregiver. Attachment to primary caregivers then enables young children to step outward, a process called "exploration from a secure base" (Waters & Cummings, 2000), both to form attachments to new caregivers and to be open to the exploratory and interactive opportunities of a new setting. An "insecure attachment" to a primary caregiver prevents these "transfers" from taking place.

Young children carry internalized images, or "mental representations" (Mardell, 1999), of primary caregivers (sometimes referred to as "object permanence") when they are not with them so that they realize their caregivers still exist and will return. "Transitional objects," the ubiquitous tattered stuffed animals, dolls, and "blankies" from home contribute toward young children's being comfortable in the absence of the primary caregiver.

Individual qualities of children affect how well they respond to out-of-home care. Temperament, a child's individual behavior style and way of approaching the world, influences how he or she responds to any situation (e.g., Clark-Stewart & Allhusen, 2005). Age also plays a role. Interestingly, it has been indicated that it is actually easier for 3- than for 4-year-olds to enter out-of-home care (Clark-Stewart & Allhusen, 2005).

Many young children enter out-of-home care programs as "difficult to manage" (Howes & Ritchie, 2002, p. 1), a quality that does not bode well for making a positive adjustment. The road to positive management of this quality is not one of rigid discipline but rather one of rearranging relationship patterns. Children who are "missing their parents," as Mardell (1999) puts it, need a special responsiveness from their alternative caregivers and teachers (p. 71). While serving as important connections for the young children, alternate caregivers must not do this at the expense of diminishing the relationship with the primary caregiver. Out-of-home caregivers and teachers need to recognize the need to relate not separately to the child and to the parent, but to the relationship between parent and child. Children's anxiety will be reduced, and trust of others will be increased, if they are not torn between loyalty to one attachment figure and another. This notion also has implications for home-based caregivers, for example, the live-in nannies that care for some upper-middle-class and upper-class children. Such an approach to relationships is in line with young children's needs to gradually extend close ties with people beyond primary caregivers. Bonding with another person will not incur the rejection of the primary caregiver.

While the bonding that occurs between children and out-of-home care programs occurs "within" the child (including strength of attachment, the degree to which children have internalized images of caregiving figures, their sense of time, and basic temperament), a number of external factors contribute to the formation of this bond and its strength. One is the amount of time spent in out-of-home care and education programs, as has been described elsewhere: Too much time spent in out-of-home care, or in multiple out-of-home environments, yields increased anxiety and behavior problems.

Attention to the concept of "goodness of fit"—the relationship between a child's temperament and the adapted aspects of the environment—is relevant here (Berk, 2002). Children who are slow to warm up to new situations, for example, may need more time and parental support than do others when entering a new environment. This respect for individual difference in being able to enter an unfamiliar situation does not, of course, mean abandoning the notion that "parenting ... makes firm but reasonable demands for mastering new experiences" (Berk, 2002, p. 269).

This asset might also be framed as "readiness" for participating in out-of-home programs (Graue, 1998). There are a number of ways in which adults can facilitate the bonding process, many of which are known to top-notch preschool teachers and are reiterated by Graue: having a home visit, making a gradual transition into the program, keeping communication between parents and teachers focused on the mutual goal of helping the child bond to the program, and considering whether a particular setting is the best fit. Graue emphasizes that it is *practices* that help determine the child's successful transition into a program as contrasted to a lack in the child. Temperamental sensitivities are not necessarily a lack but rather should be taken into consideration when individual practices are designed.

Early Literacy

The child participates in a variety of pre-reading and writing activities, including adults reading to her or him daily, looking at and handling books, playing with a variety of media, and showing increasing interest in pictures, letters, and numbers.

With the No Child Left Behind campaign, early literacy has become a salient goal in early childhood. While aspects of the campaign may be controversial, encouragement of young children's literacy development is not. Literacy, over recent years, has been a focal point in early childhood programs. Head Start, for example, has adopted a strong literacy platform (e.g., Tabors, 2002). The emphasis is on those experiences and activities, with print and spoken language, and development of phonologic awareness (the ability to make the connection between spoken and written sounds), that will bring children to school, if not ready to read and write, then ready to do so very soon. *Language*, of course is fundamental in literacy development, and in this context it is crucial to bear in mind that it develops in the context of relationships—being spoken to, hearing

speech, being encouraged to express oneself in words—and thus is not only a cognitive function. Its development is intertwined with an array of other domains of development. Thus, literacy skill development involves much more than rote learning of the alphabet.

In fact, for preschool children, literacy development is an outgrowth of a complex combination of factors reflecting, as does the entire framework of Developmental Assets for young children, the ecology of the child (Morrison, Bachman, & Connor, 2005). These factors include both proximal (near to the child) influences such as parenting that is both warm and nurturing and that includes provision of structure and guidance for positive behavior; and distal (farther away from the direct setting of the child) influences, such as school administrators' attitudes toward certain instructional practices, that are mediated through proximal influences.

More specifically related to literacy development, arguably the most important literacy attainment for preschool children is developing the *ability to use symbols*. To learn to read and write, a child must be able to have one thing represent another, and know that an abstract symbol can reflect and describe something real. There has been little controversy about this. There has been much more as to the type of experience necessary to enable symbolic representation to develop. There has been the "drill and worksheet" camp, which has advocated such activities as practicing and memorizing letters and numbers. There has been, and still is, the "play" camp. This perspective recognizes that *pretense*, the ability to have one thing stand for another, as developed through dramatic and sociodramatic play, is indeed best encouraged through both spontaneous and guided, or facilitated, play opportunities (Smilansky &Sheftaya, 1990). Often cognitive competence is promoted, and assessed by, such skills as seriation, sequencing, understanding cause and effect, and time (e.g., Harms & Clifford, 1980).

According to Owocki (2001), literacy develops by multiple means. First of all, it is a "social and cultural practice" (p. 6). This aspect of literacy, Owocki points out, is not covered by packaged curricula or legislative fiat. It develops through the discourses children hear in their own homes and neighborhoods. When these discourses differ from the dominant culture's construction of literacy, this denies children the opportunity to learn by using their own legitimate experiences. Literacy also develops through "hypothesis testing" (p. 7), in which what children know and think about written language is modified when they test a new piece of information against what they already know.

Unfortunately, there are class differences in language development, as described in the groundbreaking research of Hart and Risley (1995). These researchers found that the crucial literacy ingredient of language, which, of course, is composed of words and the opportunity to use and learn them, is connected with the quantity of spoken language experienced by young children, and that this amount is related to economic differences in families. There was simply more spoken language in homes where income was higher. The authors make the point that language competence (vocabulary size, ability to use

language reciprocally in interaction with others, and other factors) is not learned through a single exposure. Rather, "opportunities for learning are enhanced when children engage in many and varied interactions with other people, and individual families tend to be consistent in the opportunities they provide their children for such interactions over the crucial early years of language learning" (Hart & Risley, 1995, p. xi).

Literacy development also requires "careful planning and instruction" (p. 5). A diversity of strategies can and should be used to promote literacy. Reading aloud is universally considered a major activity to promote literacy. Dramatic and sociodramatic play enable children to apply literacy to the themes they enact (Smilansky & Sheftaya, 1990). A little-recognized, but crucial, relationship holds between literacy development and physical activity. Verbal games, such as rhyming and skipping chants, have been acknowledged for promoting literacy. "Alphabet fitness" (Voght, 2003), in which young children model letters with their bodies, encourages a kinesthetic awareness of symbolic representation that is built into large-muscle memory and precedes fine motor learning.

Given that there is a tendency to view formal academic instruction (e.g., drill, flashcards, "teaching the alphabet") as the direct route to literacy, the importance of play in developing literacy, and the adult role in facilitating play, cannot be overstressed. Careful observation of young children in rich play reveals not only their literacy development but also their ongoing development and practice of literacy skills. Such play nurtures the skills involved in continued literacy development (e.g., thinking) and various ways of knowing, whether procedural, factual, problem solving, and so on (Roskos & Christie, 2002).

The significance of literacy development is underscored by the fact that the National Association for the Education of Young Children has developed a special statement about developmentally appropriate literacy practices (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). Underscoring that "learning to read and write is critical to a child's success in school and later in life" (p. 3), the position statement, based on extensive research on literacy development, makes some valuable points, including that literacy development must not wait until children are formally in school, but that teaching practices to promote it are different for young children than they are for older children and adults. The latter approaches, inappropriate for preschoolers, include "whole-group instruction, intensive drill, and practice on isolated skills" (p. 5). This position, of course, is in line with the discussions supporting the constructive-use-of-time and commitment-to-learning assets that constructivist, play-oriented approaches are the most "developmentally appropriate" way to equip children with the full array of attributes and skills needed for school learning.

In more recent years, there has been a transition from computers in the business environment to the home computer and computers in early childhood classrooms. Literacy today necessarily includes computer literacy. As was reported by Clements and Sarama (2003), computer-centered activity supported the development of play, language, and literacy skills. At the same time,

over-reliance on computer and other passive activities, to the exclusion of opportunities for active, exploratory, and imaginative large-muscle play and exercise (which is related to the development of the representational ability that is fundamental to reading; e.g., Voght, 2003), may inhibit overall literacy development. The issue is to maintain an appropriate balance.

6 The Positive Values Assets

In the same way that children need adults to care for them, they can begin to develop attributes and values related to caring for others during their early years.

For healthy development, awareness of how others are feeling and responding empathically and sympathetically not only are social skills but also are part of a larger value system that, when internalized, will help set the course, even at a young age, for a prosocial lifestyle and serve later as a resilience factor to prevent lapsing into risky and even asocial behavior.

Following development of empathy and expression of sympathy comes an awareness that others may be in difficult or unhappy situations, sometimes because they are different. It is crucial, of course, that adults role-model positive and accepting attitudes toward people who are different and encourage children also to have generous and accepting attitudes toward others.

Integrity, or a moral sense of expressing distress and protest on behalf of those who experience discrimination, disenfranchisement, and disempowerment, under way by the early childhood years as even the youngest children, with the help of adults who themselves demonstrate integrity, are made aware of the negative messages that society too often conveys about people who are different. As children are helped to recognize discrimination and disempowerment, they will express their rejection of these biased attitudes and practices by various means, including verbally and through play.

There is moral value attached to being honest. Young children have some sense of what is true and increasingly grasp the social value of truth telling, although this is modified by their ability to construct reality.

Responsibility is an attribute that supports positive values. Young children perceive that others will be let down or disappointed if they do not complete or follow through on simple tasks that can be helpful or beneficial.

Developmentally undergirding all of the positive-values assets is the attribute of self-regulation. Youngsters cannot care about others unless they can understand and handle their own emotions. Socially and emotionally developing the ability to modulate one's own behavior in the face of frustration or a difference with somebody else is a key task of the early childhood period. The ability to self-regulate is built upon close and nurturing relationships with supportive adults who can help children understand their emotions and accept guidance in managing them.

Caring

The child begins to show empathy, understanding, and awareness of others' feelings.

"The development of individuals who respect the rights of others, treat all individuals with dignity, and act in compassionate ways toward all" (Koc & Buzzelli, 2004, p. 93): this wording reflects the meaning of this asset, a key aspect of which is "social awareness," defined as "the recognition and identification of feelings in others" (Denham & Weissberg, 2004, p. 19).

Social awareness evolves as a developmental process. A great deal of research shows that young children, as part of their evolving sense of self, learn that they are separate from their environment and that other people as well have feelings that may be different from theirs. By the preschool years, children can "read" various emotions, including negative ones, from watching others' expressions and behavior (Denham & Weissberg, 2004).

As young children's social awareness and ability to recognize emotions increase, they develop empathy—the ability to sense and respond to the feelings of others, especially when those others are troubled or unhappy. Play episodes often reflect empathic responses, such as when a doll falls and a child pats it and tries to "make it feel better."

Interestingly, when children feel guilt as a result of some action, as long as the guilt is not accompanied by shame, it can serve to promote positive behavior, perhaps as Berk (2002), referring to research by Tamara Ferguson and June Tangney, states, "because guilt helps children resist expressing harmful impulses. And when children do transgress, guilt motivates them to repair the damage and behave more considerately in the future" (p. 373).

It is important to recognize that empathy and sympathy are not the same. Where children have been treated punitively by parents, their response to others in distress models what they have seen their parents do, and consequently they are insensitive. Similarly, and not surprisingly, where children have experienced warm and caring parenting and relationships with other adults, their sympathetic responses to others in distress increase (Berk, 2002). Self-regulation is also related to the ability to be sympathetic as well as empathetic, and thus support for that asset will encourage greater caring responses from young children, once again demonstrating the need for supportive adults who can help children differentiate emotions, lower their stress levels, and model the prosocial qualities that they value.

There is a close relationship between social and emotional factors and moral development, as morality for young children implies the ability to be sympathetic and empathetic toward others, qualities that are present in young children (Turiel & Neff, 2000). Moral development, which is viewed as encompassing caring, can occur in early childhood (e.g., Turiel & Neff, 2000), and it is connected with the development of such attributes as relationship-building ability and self-regulation (e.g., Emde, 2003).

Equality and Social Justice

The child begins to show concern for people who are excluded from play and other activities or are not treated fairly because they are different.

One may initially ask, "Aren't preschool children too young to be involved in social justice?" Not only is the correct reply, "By no means is this so," but there also is a developmental trajectory whereby young children arrive at an understanding of social justice and equality, and ways of encouraging that understanding.

The concepts of equality and justice fall under the domain of moral development. As with other assets in this category, moral development is an organizing construct that embraces such areas as fairness, justice, rights, and right and wrong (Turiel & Neff, 2000). As Williams and Cooney (2006) put it, "Social justice exists where there are equitable rights for all" (p. 75).

Young children are capable of moral judgments, and "moral and social judgments develop through children's reciprocal social interactions and are connected to a variety of social experiences" (Turiel &Neff, 2000, p. 271). The play activities of young children in which they interact over materials contribute to their ability to develop a sense of justice and fairness (Berk, 2002). Studies show that young children can experience empathy, show sympathy, and act prosocially and fairly toward others (Turiel & Neff, 2000).

In youth development in recent years, there has been a great deal of concern with and hence emphasis on ways in which youth might be enabled to develop a sense of social justice. One approach to this has been to encourage youth participation in community governance or civic life (e.g., Zeldin, Camino, & Calvert, 2003). The qualities that youth have that relate to social justice are rooted in the opportunity to participate in decision making. For young children, feeling empowered, not only by decision making but also in being encouraged to develop their own perspectives, contributes to their moral sense of justice and fairness toward others (Berk, 2002).

Over the past decades, recognizing diversity among children and families, and trying to initiate child-rearing and curricular approaches that respect diversity, have been major forces in the early childhood field. This trend has been reflected in revisions of the National Association for the Education of Young Children's developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) to include premises governing *culturally appropriate* practice in addition to the original "age" and "individually" appropriate practice. Culturally appropriate practice urges respect for and knowledge of "the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 36). It has been reflected as well in the seminal *Anti-Bias Curriculum* (Derman-Sparks, 1989) that acknowledges the bias that "declares a person inferior because of gender, race, ethnicity or disability" (p. ix). Derman-Sparks makes the point that children are not too young to perceive the negative messages that can be conveyed, both implicitly and explicitly, as they

are constructing their identity. Highly relevant for the Developmental Assets framework is the notion that children should be encouraged to "speak up when they believe something is unfair" (Derman-Sparks, 1989, p. 36): a "practice of freedom" that helps them stand up in the "face of injustice." In this way, children are "becoming empowered" (p. ix).

A further example of ways to promote children's sense of justice and social change are "activism projects" to address "unfairness" in such areas as homelessness and peace, which can involve both children and parents (Pelo & Davidson, 2003). Pelo and Davidson point out that it is crucial to attend to families' values concerning these issues, since they may differ from those of the teachers regarding inequality and injustice but certainly affect children's own values about these issues. Older preschoolers are aware of unfairness, which provides adults with an opportunity to encourage reflection on how they perceive unfairness and how they handle it.

Moral development can be promoted by "moral education," which can focus on three areas: fairness, human welfare, and human rights. These are best conveyed by daily practices and with attention to the values that drive them, although some programs actually follow a formal moral education curriculum (Koc & Buzzelli, 2004).

For example, Vivian Paley's well-regarded book *You Can't Say You Can't Play* (1992) stressed classroom practices that did not permit a child to be rejected from group play, thus supporting prosocial, character-related values. *Starting Small*, which is concerned with teaching tolerance in preschool, considers such qualities as fairness, prejudice, friendship, diversity, inclusion, and loss (Teaching Tolerance, 1997).

The significance of moral development in young children, and moral education, is underscored by the amount of attention it has received recently, and by the connections between moral development, other assets (both internal and external), and later prosocial behavior.

Integrity

The child begins to express her or his views appropriately and to stand up for a growing sense of what is fair and right.

This asset is perhaps the most unusual one for preschoolers. One doesn't usually consider integrity to be a growing attribute of a 3- to 5-year-old child. Yet, it is a significant developmental construct. Integrity—having a sense of living a coherent and meaningful life—to Erikson (1950) is the major developmental theme of old age. More recent thinking about Erikson's work suggests that all of his developmental themes are present to some extent in development at all ages.

Integrity, like many other assets in the categories of positive values and positive identity, is a combination of other assets. Integrity for young children may mean first of all that they experience an integrated (following the meaning of the word "integrity") and coherent sense of self, and that they feel confident

enough to have and express a viewpoint. This confidence is related to the possession of positive self-esteem: The young child "knows what he/she wants; trusts own ideas," and "asserts own point of view when opposed" (Curry & Johnson, 1990, p. 62).

Integrity is highly intertwined with other assets. If there is no specific apparent empirical support for the asset, it can at least be described and justified with an integrated consideration of the relevant developmental literature. A young child with integrity has a sense of the true worth of her- or himself and of others that has developed in a context rich in other assets, all of which support the child's growing positive sense of self and her or his place in the world. Young children actually have a sense of justice and injustice, according to Curry and Johnson (1990), who cite research showing that preschoolers perceive that moral transgressions against other persons are more serious than are transgressions against objects and materials. In early childhood, too, quoting William Damon's 1988 work, *The Moral Child*, Curry and Johnson indicate that "there is a growing awareness of justice and injustice" (p. 61). This is also in line with the comments cited elsewhere of Williams and Cooney (2006), who describe preschool practices that support children's development of a sense of equity—of what is fair and right—and of their ability to advocate for it.

For young children, whose worldview is still somewhat limited, to be able to express their evolving perspective requires once again accepting adults and a developmentally appropriate classroom where *community*, rather than a collection of individuals, is the focus. In this way, there is a relationship between this asset and other external and internal assets. For example, the internal asset of Resistance Skills is connected to integrity. Children who have a strong sense of integrity will have the resilience to withstand being tempted into dangerous or asocial behavior that is hurtful to others and themselves.

Honesty

The child begins to understand the difference between truth and lies, and is truthful to the extent of her or his understanding.

This asset might best be viewed in the context of *moral* development, an increasingly acknowledged domain of development for older children. Contrary to some common viewpoints, moral development does begin in early childhood (Berk, 2002). A sense of honesty and its meaning begins to emerge in early childhood out of children's growing ability to understand relationships, expectations, and acceptable and unacceptable behavior. For younger preschoolers, honesty is rooted in the degree to which they understand and make meaning of their world, or, as the phrase goes, are learning to differentiate fantasy from reality. When young children describe "what they see" or what they "remember," they may not be deliberately dissembling but rather showing magical thinking (e.g., Rosengren, Johnson, & Harris, 2000).

Such meaning making is a subtle process, according to Wellman (1990), whose work on children's theory of mind shows us that preschoolers are

capable of much more than we usually think, as young children actually have a "rich" theory of mind (as described earlier, an awareness of mental processes in themselves and others). Conventional child development wisdom leads us to think, for example, that young children do not understand the meaning of lying and deception. Rather, they can detect and participate in deceptive acts. Lying also figures in the development of young children, and by the end of the early childhood period, children know what "lying" is and can evaluate it in terms of prosocial or antisocial intent. Furthermore, they are even aware of the value of a "social lie," in which the truth is not told in favor of a higher moral value or modesty. Preschool children place a negative value on lying to cover up antisocial transgressions that violate others' rights (Berk, 2002, p. 384).

This asset may serve to encourage adult understanding of the development of honesty and morality in young children and help them to see it both as a value and as a slowly emergent process related to young children's ongoing development.

The external assets point up the role of adults in the development of honesty in young children: They serve as positive role models; they communicate in a way that encourages children to give their own perspectives; they help children understand situations and their own behavior in them rather than applying unilateral punishment. Supporting moral development does not mean being critical and punitive when young children "seem" to be "lying." Even if they are lying, and know it (if they are older preschoolers), the lie might have a meaning that is important to uncover before becoming judgmental.

As children mature and observe adults being honest in the course of everyday affairs (as well as develop the subtleness of perception and social skill of telling a "social lie"), they then come to appreciate the contribution honesty makes to positive relationships. As with so many attributes having to do with moral development, valuing honesty and trying to practice it will be directly related to young children's sense of psychological and physical safety and the degree to which they trust the adults around them to be understanding, sensitive, and responsive to the context of a situation, rather than punish and shame them for "not telling the truth."

Responsibility

The child begins to follow through on simple tasks to take care of her- or himself and to help others.

Although many do not consider the possibility that responsibility really can begin in early childhood, in fact the roots of this capability do and can be nurtured. According to the famous High/Scope studies (e.g., High/Scope, 2005), successful people who had participated in quality early childhood education programs in general developed what might be called responsible behavior, ranging from greater motivation and commitment in school to avoidance of unhealthy, risk taking behaviors in adolescence and violence and crime in adulthood.

This asset is actually a combination of two others (Motivation to Mastery and Positive Expectations) reflecting important attributes: that children can develop good work habits even in early childhood and can recognize that others value their industry and growing competence.

For young children to learn a sense of responsibility within their emerging capacities is to set the stage for an approach to life that will be based on an internal perception of being capable and of mattering to others. Responsibility is a way of truly operationalizing "self-esteem": By encouraging it we promote children's "inner sense of significance and value" (Curry & Johnson, 1990, p. xi). Such beginning responsibility enables children to see themselves as "valued and competent individuals." Guilt is part of learning to be accountable for one's own behavior (e.g., Berk, 2002). It is crucial that this guilt not be overwhelming, as it then contributes only to negative self-esteem—a feeling of not mattering, of "being bad," and of being unaccepted and unacceptable.

On occasion, *competence* is cited as an important attribute for young children (e.g., Fromberg, 1995). As is the case with some attributes, however, despite its developmental significance, the term is not a major part of the early childhood professional discourse, perhaps because it implies "product" rather than "process."

Competence is the ability to do something well and is conceptually related to resilience (e.g., Wyman, Sandler, Wolchik, & Nelson, 2000). Competencies described for young children include physical health, motor skills, language and cognitive ability, communication skills, the ability to pay attention and take turns, to cooperate and show empathy toward peers, enthusiasm, and positive relationships with parents and other adults (Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Masten & Coatsworth (1998) puts competence in a resilience context and relates such attributes as self-regulation, attachment, and social skills to the development of competence and success in general.

Classrooms that are actually communities in which everybody is valued and contributes to the overall climate and focus support this asset. Whether it is helping to take care of a small animal, picking up scraps from the floor so there is less for the tired custodian to do, or passing around napkins for snacks, such efforts help children feel valued by the adults who encourage this participation. Children's sense of independence, as well as their competence and responsibility, are promoted in this way.

Self-Regulation

The child increasingly can identify, regulate, and control her or his behaviors in healthy ways, using adult support constructively in particularly stressful situations.

The ability to recognize one's emerging emotions is a key one in early childhood; this ability includes both positive emotions, such as joy and happiness, and negative ones, such as "sadness, anger, and fear" (Hyson, 2004, p. 9). Adults and emotionally supportive environments are necessary for this capacity to develop.

Probably the most salient emotional task of early childhood is the development of *self-regulation* (e.g., Brooks-Gunn, 2003). The introduction to this section has already indicated the foundational contribution of self-regulatory ability to a child's development of prosocial values and caring for others. Furthermore, self-regulation is increasingly being linked to school readiness (Hyson, 2002) and to overall competence (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). As Denham and Weissberg (2004) put it, "An important task of early childhood, then, is ...the coordination of and self-regulation of emotion, cognition, and behavior." More specifically, these self-regulatory capacities include "maintenance of attention, social problem-solving skills, frustration, tolerance, and management of affect" (p. 15).

Leaders in early childhood education increasingly stress self-regulation as a key ability for preparation for kindergarten (Bronson, 2000; Daniel, personal communication, January 2003). This is particularly important for children of color, states Daniel, a former president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and a former consultant to the National Bureau of Head Start. As development proceeds, children develop an increased ability to plan, use strategies, inhibit inappropriate responses, delay gratification, and control and manage ongoing activities (Bronson, 2000, p. 33). Preschool and kindergarten children "can focus attention for longer periods ...[and] can increasingly act cooperatively with peers" (Bronson, 2000, p. 35). Bronson points out that it is increasingly important for caregivers to "model positive behavior" and "minimize exposure to violent or anti-social models" (p. 36)

Self-regulation develops in line with a combination of warm parenting that is sensitive to children's temperament but that also conveys family rules and standards for behavior (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Masten and Coatsworth also document a relationship between lack of self-regulation or compliance and aggressive, asocial behavior in classrooms that leads to peer rejection and problems in later life.

Similarly, the ability to focus on a task, showing self-regulation of attention (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), is related to the development of social skills needed later in school. Although there is variation in attentiveness as a function of basic temperament (e.g., the dimensions of persistence and distractibility), preschool children preparing for formal school entrance obviously need to be supported in developing this attribute. Attentiveness is encouraged by the opportunity to play with certain types of materials (for example, some children seem to be more engaged by plastic media such as clay, dough, and water, along with specific facilitation methods that serve to extend involvement in a particular play activity or episode; see Smilansky & Sheftaya, 1990). Similarly, attentiveness is encouraged by adult support of different kinds, such as timely comments that serve to refocus the child's interest in what he or she is doing and perhaps suggest a variation or different approach.

Two indicators of difficulty in self-regulatory ability in young children are high levels of aggression and inattention. Aggression is more and more a concern for those who work with young children. According to Shure (2002), it is among the attributes of young children related to being at risk for later

behavior problems. Many preschool teachers and caregivers are concerned with how to manage blatant aggression, which may include throwing things, hitting, and bullying. Some degree of inattentiveness is characteristic of young children and can vary temperamentally among children. Where there is extreme inattentiveness and overactivity, and a formal diagnosis is made, children may be considered to have attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Since there is a tendency today to quickly move to medication for children purported to have ADHD (e.g., Ritalin, which can have unanticipated negative side effects), it is important that as many children as possible experience environments that modulate their behavior without recourse to medication.

Appropriate caregiver or teacher behavior and environmental design can modify both aggression and inattention. Given the propensity to conclude that some young children have ADHD, a possible misdiagnosis that may lead to unnecessary medication, it is important to consider that where children have trouble attending there may be inappropriate expectations that fail to take developmental status and temperament into account. Along with this may be a lack of attention to environmental factors (e.g., availability of play materials and space arrangements) that either encourage attention or do not require it for a sustained period of time. Curry and Johnson (1990) give such an example of a classroom in which circle time required children to sit still and listen for a long time. When some children grew inattentive, the teacher became punitive. Later the same children in this observation were able to be deeply involved in a developmentally appropriate task. The same is true for aggression. Where the environment is caring and supportive, where there are sufficient activities and space, there are few opportunities for conflict. Relaxing play media such as water and clay are often helpful with aggressive and inattentive children (Hartley, Frank, & Goldenson, 1952). As has been discussed elsewhere, the amount of time spent in out-of-home care can contribute to increased aggression in young children.

The importance of self-regulation as an attribute of young children is underscored by the fact that it is one of the "seven irreducible needs" and is a cornerstone of both Head Start and the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment program. As with so many other assets, Self-Regulation relates to other assets, particularly the assets of the support and constructive-use-of-time categories. These assets all provide the nurturing ground for the development of self-regulation.

7 The Social-Competencies Assets

Along with the external asset category of support, the social-competencies assets are perhaps the most fundamental asset set for young children. Young children need to develop the social skills that, as much as cognitive abilities, will affect the degree to which they later are successful in school, at home, in other settings, and in life in general. Social skill sets are highly linked to resilience and the ability to maintain a positive course under risky or stressful conditions. Among the major social competencies are the abilities to control one's emotions; make friends and play with them; plan; be sensitive to those who are different in terms of culture, race, gender, physical attributes, and ability. To resist temptation into asocial and unhealthy behaviors, solve problems, and handle conflict are other important social competencies.

When young children have experienced nurturing and supportive care—an external asset—they are then equipped to learn to relate positively to adults and to other children. By playing with peers, young children experience a crucible for developing key social skills. They gradually come to recognize not only that they are separate from other people but also that other people have feelings just as they do. They begin to show understanding of other people's perspectives, a key attribute for ongoing emotional development and positive social relationships.

"'Wanna Play?' The most popular question of my childhood!" (Chenfeld, 2006, p. 34). Indeed. In recent years, play has been under threat as the press for earlier and earlier academic achievement has become salient. Yet, as has already been emphasized, strong and compelling evidence continues to provide support for play as a fundamental ingredient in preparing young children with the attributes needed for achievement in school and in life. Through playing, children learn to understand their world, to recognize the feelings of others, to develop the capacity for give-and-take, and to regulate their own feelings, among other benefits. Play with peers encourages young children to learn to share, not just objects but ideas and thoughts as well as the children carry out mutually agreed upon and ever-evolving play themes. Such play also encourages a spirit of cooperation as young children decide what to play with, what themes to enact, who will have which roles, and how the theme will be carried out. All of these are "friendship" skills that are conducive to harmonious and productive interactions with others.

Self-regulation is continually endorsed as one of the most important attributes that young children should develop. It enables their learning to be productive as they increasingly can attend to and focus on a task or situation;

and it prepares them to have growth-producing and harmonious relationships with others as they increasingly use social skills rather than sudden impulses to direct their responses. Self-regulatory ability is an outcome of individual temperament and other attributes, attachment, boundaries and expectations, and positive play and learning experiences. Adult support and guidance, along with understanding children's individuality, contribute toward young children's increasing self-regulation.

While the ability to plan has not traditionally been viewed as a valued attribute in young children, it is now increasingly recognized that being able to form a choice or an intent to pursue a simple goal is an ability that is characteristic of positive development and that can be encouraged. Since planning ability is integrally related to the development of thinking and problem-solving skills, caregivers and child-care programs now feature planning and problem-solving abilities as desired curricular outcomes related to the development of thinking and reflection.

As they develop, young children begin to recognize that others are different with regard to various attributes, such as gender, race, and physical and mental characteristics. Thus, attitudes and practices that enable them to understand and adapt to cultural diversity and exceptionality need to be featured at home, in alternative forms of care, and in the neighborhood and community. These practices, striking a balance between enabling children to feel a sense of connection to and belongingness to their own cultural group and its values, and to be sensitive to people of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, therefore need to be sensitive and relevant to a variety of cultural contexts.

Planning and Decision Making

The child begins to plan for the immediate future, choosing from among several options and trying to solve problems.

Problem-solving ability increasingly is identified as an attribute for preschool children that is essential for developmental progress in all domains—social, emotional, and cognitive (e.g., Helm & Beneke, 2003). Problem solving and planning are identified as desirable outcomes for a number of curricula in early childhood education (e.g., Epstein, 2003), as well as a characteristic of the well-functioning adult of the future who is today a child. High/Scope's well-known "plan, do, review" early childhood curriculum model is designed to promote problem-solving ability and its long-term benefits, which have been identified in High/Scope research (Epstein, 2003). Epstein summarizes years of research on the importance not only of planning but also of reflection, which is a means for young children to access their own experience.

Resilience and information-processing theory are two more recent comers to the early childhood scene, and both provide justification for the developmental significance of problem solving.

Viewing environmental information taken in (*input*) and cycled through the mental structures with changes in the configuration and meaning of the information, along with resultant actions (*output*), is the major tenet of *information-processing* theory. Information processing is often related to problem solving, and the processes of problem solving as information flows through the internal mental structures can be represented in a chart showing the various steps of the problem-solving process. Information processing is helpful in that it gives insight into mental processes. Crick and Dodge (as cited by Berk, 2002) describe an information-processing approach to children's social problem solving that would appear to have some utility given the emphasis on social skills in early childhood development.

Shure (2002) points out the close relationship between problem-solving skills in young children and resilience. She has defined four areas of problem-solving skills as a cluster in her Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving model for children:

- Alternative solutions—the ability to think of alternative solutions in an interpersonal problem;
- Consequential thinking ability—the ability to anticipate what might happen next if an interpersonal act were carried out;
- Social perspective taking—the ability to recognize another's feelings that may be different from one's own; and
- Means-end thinking—sequential planning toward a goal. While preschoolers may not be capable of sequential planning, they are capable of simpler planning, such as what they might want to do soon. Furthermore, as discussed elsewhere, they do have the ability to anticipate the future in some ways.

Lack of problem-solving and planning skills, as reflected in physical and verbal aggression, an inability to wait and to tolerate frustration, lack of empathy, and social withdrawal are related to high-risk behaviors as assessed from preschool through grade 6, according to Shure's research (2002, p. 5). Research further found that specific interventions, such as properly designed preschool activities, have served to promote development of these problem-solving skills. Preschool children who received the activities while not showing the problem behaviors were found later not to develop them, whereas nontreatment controls were more likely to.

Interpersonal Skills

The child cooperates, shares, plays harmoniously, and comforts others in distress.
Being able to establish and maintain relationships with other children is one of the major developmental tasks of young children and is viewed as just as important for school readiness and school success as "pure" cognitive ability (Hyson, 2004; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). In considering interpersonal skills,

Denham and Weissberg (2004) point out how affect underlies the social and emotional abilities that are "critical to academic, social and personal outcomes" (p. 15). For the interpersonal skills named in this asset, which are observable behaviors, key emotional attributes underlie their attainment.

In line with the holistic approach supported by the Developmental Assets framework, Denham and Weissberg point out how these skills by definition are heavily affected not only by "within-child" abilities but also by multiple levels of influence that go as high as the "broader social/political context of the child's world" (p. 15).

Developmentally, the processes underlying the emergence of social skills are related to "theory of mind"—children's notions about mental states in themselves and others. The emergent understanding that others besides themselves have emotions, desires, and beliefs is a major developmental task of the preschool years (Lillard & Cureton, 2003) and not surprisingly is integrally related to social or friendship-making skills. To have a sense of others' wishes and feelings is fundamental in building relationships.

The development of *empathy* is salient: the ability to understand that others have feelings as well as oneself and to act accordingly (i.e., to have a sense that another child who feels sad might like to be treated with special sensitivity) (Kane et al., 1997). A similar interpersonal skill is the developmental process of *perspective taking* (e.g., Selman, Watts, & Hickey Schultz, 1997), which involves being able to see things from somebody else's viewpoint. Other researchers (e.g., Shure, 2002) underscore the importance of this ability in young children.

Borrowing a leaf from Howard Gardner and his multiple intelligences, Daniel Goleman (e.g., Goleman, 1995), adapting work from Yale psychologist Peter Solovey, proposed the notion of *emotional intelligence*. As mentioned elsewhere here, emotional intelligence has not been incorporated into the theoretical thinking in early childhood to the degree multiple intelligence theory has. However, given that the theory embraces many of the significant emotional concepts that are central in early childhood development, it is worthy of mention and can serve as an organizer and theoretical rationale for the assets that support these emotional aspects of development.

Emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognizing one's own feelings and those of others (for young children, empathy) and for managing emotions in ourselves (for young children, self-regulation) and with others (for young children, social development, developing and managing relationships). Emotional intelligence can be useful as another theoretical stream that can connect various age ranges (early and middle childhood). Its ascendance is now marked by such terms as "EQ" and by comments that emotional intelligence is even more important than "IQ" as a determinant of success in life (Stern, 2003).

The ability to make and have friends is related to young children's self-esteem and sense of self-worth, which in turn are related to their engagement in learning, their ability to communicate, and their place in the group (whether they are accepted, victimized, scapegoated, leaders, etc.) (Curry & Johnson, 1990).

A particular strength of *play* is that it encourages the emotional development prerequisite for the formation of these interpersonal skills. For example,

self-regulation is developed through participation in sociodramatic play (make-believe play around a theme, involving more than one player, and lasting a given time period) (Smilansky & Sheftaya, 1990). A particular player must adjust her or his responses to the ongoing tenor of the play. Play enables the *expression* of feelings, the understanding of the nature of various feelings and emotional states, and the mastery of such feelings (e.g., Bergen, 2002; Landreth & Homeyer, 1998).

A number of other assets contribute to the ability of children to have friendship skills; from the external asset categories, the support assets are particularly relevant; from the internal assets, 17, Play and Creative Activities, and 31, Self-Regulation (discussed in Chapter 6), are also contributory.

Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity

The child begins to learn about her or his own cultural identity and to show acceptance of people who are racially, physically, culturally, or ethnically different from her or him.

As emphasized throughout this book, diversity has been for some years a primary concern in the early childhood field; its guidelines and mission emphasize its significance and ways of encouraging acceptance and understanding of those who are different. Diversity is reflected in persons from varying cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and in children with disabilities; today, most early childhood classrooms contain a widely diverse group.

It is helpful to recognize how children develop and express awareness of cultural, physical, and other differences. Young preschoolers are aware of racial and gender differences and may ask questions about them. As they continue to grow, their perceptions become more differentiated. They can see themselves as embracing the perceptions and practices of their own families and thus begin "classifying" others into different groups, although they may not understand the groupings completely.

To state that it is a multicultural world does not sufficiently capture the importance of helping young children become aware and accepting of others whom they may see as "different" along a variety of dimensions. One compelling reason is that when children who are not members of the "dominant culture" are shamed or mistreated, they cannot develop or sustain trust (Howes & Ritchie, 2002). How children negotiate this asset may have a bearing on how they view peace and conflict as adults. According to Eidelson and Eidelson (2003), there are "five dangerous ideas" that can be held both as individual worldviews and as collective group views: superiority, vulnerability, injustice, helplessness, and distrust. These powerful adult ideas originate in early childhood.

Much has been written about the development of racial stereotyping, its destructiveness, and ways to prevent and address it. It is important to recognize that young children are very aware of racial differences (Ramsey, 2003), first in terms of physical characteristics and then in terms of social meanings they

perceive as ascribed to them. Children identify strongly with their own racial group. White children show more biased and same-race preference than do African American children. The degree to which children become racially biased is related to their own social environment and the values it inculcates.

Life circumstances also put young children in a position to experience nonacceptance through such behaviors as ridicule and scapegoating. This can occur when they are different in a way that reflects unfortunate circumstances or differences along domains that are socially devalued or controversial. These domains include, but are not limited to, poverty, homelessness, migrancy, multiracial parentage, being adopted or in foster care, and having same-sex parents (e.g., Copple, 2003).

A recent and unsettling related research finding is that young children ages 5–7 prefer other children who appear to be "lucky" and have experienced "lucky events"; in other words, children of these ages favor peers who have had greater fortune in life (Hodder, 2007). Reporting on research done by Kristina Olson, Hodder comments that this preference could explain the "persistence of social inequality from one generation to another" (p. 20). Children come to accept the world as it is, feeling that others deserve their misfortune.

Today, cultural awareness and sensitivity will include acceptance of gender and sexual orientation differences. Issues concerning gender appear early on in early childhood classrooms, including gender stereotyping and differential power relationships (e.g., Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001). Other unproductive aspects include circumscribing friendships, which in turn affect self-concept (Curry & Johnson, 1990), and promoting homophobia (Chrisman & Couchenour, 2005). How children view themselves as sexual beings, and that they do so even as young children, is influenced by the messages, both explicit and implicit, that parents and other adults convey.

Parents, caregivers, and teachers may be concerned when young children behave in ways considered by mainstream culture as more appropriate for the opposite sex, feeling this may be leading the way toward homosexuality, even though "there is no research evidence that nontraditional gender behavior creates homosexuality" (Derman-Sparks, 1989).

There are many activities teachers and parents can do that convey their nonacceptance of gender stereotyping (e.g., Derman-Sparks, 1989), as well as address other areas of diversity (e.g., Williams & Cooney, 2006).

There has been an increase of children with disabilities in inclusive class-rooms (Allred, Briem, & Black, 2003). While inclusion may be considered good practice, as well as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, it presents many challenges to teachers, parents, and children. "Typically developing" children in preschools have some awareness of the nature and types of disability (Diamond & Stacey, 2003), although emotional problems and mental retardation are more difficult for them to understand than physical disabilities. Children in inclusive preschools do learn more accepting attitudes and interestingly are more helpful to other children if they have been in an inclusive program (Diamond & Stacey, 2003). However, children with disabilities are not included in group activities to the same extent their classmates without disabilities are. If

there is not inclusion in interactive play, there is parallel play. Role modeling on the part of adults is particularly important, as are the structure and climate of the classroom. These factors foster the inclusive behaviors that are reflected when children show awareness of their classmates with disabilities by, for example, waiting for them to "catch up" (Diamond & Stacey, 2003, p. 139). Enabling parents of children with disabilities to share information with others, including other children, promotes acceptance of these children.

Inclusion thus provides an ideal context for young children to experience others who are different physically and perhaps developmentally, and to develop sensitivity and acceptance. Inclusion gives adults an ideal opportunity to serve as positive role models and to demonstrate concrete ways of including these children in the interactions and activities of the setting.

Many of the external assets, such as Adult Role Models and Play and Creative Activities, contribute to young children's development of cultural awareness and sensitivity.

Resistance Skills

The child begins to sense danger accurately, to seek help from trusted adults, and to resist pressure from peers to participate in unacceptable or risky behavior.

Statements about developmental tasks and activities for young children typically do not emphasize "resistance skills," which are usually considered attributes for older children. The roots for such skills, however, actually—or need to—take hold in early childhood. Resistance skills are now a critical safety factor in a world that at least for some young children is fraught with danger.

Regrettably, many young children today live in unsafe neighborhoods (e.g., Shonkoff & Philllips, 2000). The everyday lives of all young children have the potential for exposure to threats ranging from animal attacks to abduction to traffic accidents. The ability of young children to discriminate between real and imagined danger requires a great deal of adult guidance, understanding, and support.

As young children develop a greater awareness of self as differentiated from the external environment, and of the reality of the world around them, they become more aware of dangers. Their still evolving "reality testing" ability may make them both exaggerate the probability of some dangers and be unaware of dangers that may be more likely. These include risky events, both natural and human-made, and "invitations to trouble" introduced by other people. Thus, actions that support the development of reality-testing skills so that children learn when to seek adult help when presented with a real danger, and so that they can resist the imprecations of those who might put them at risk, are reflected in this asset.

An important contributor to the acquisition of resistance skills is language development, described in other assets. Since language plays a role in the development of self and understanding the self, according to Harter (1999), as

language develops young children are "better able to symbolically represent parental rules and standards and their own ability to meet them." This then enables young children "to resist temptation in situations where the caregiver is not present" (Harter, 1999, p. 32). This, of course, is not to mention the crucial cognitive and school readiness aspect of various language skills (e.g., Hart & Risley, 1995).

This asset is supported, therefore, when adults do several things. It is important for parents and other adults to sense when children are anxious, to acknowledge their feelings and to help them sort through what is legitimate and what isn't. Children are actually less anxious when they receive an honest assessment rather than having their anxiety glossed over. This is called giving "authentic feedback" (Curry & Johnson, 1990). More specifically, teachers and caregivers in group settings can help make children feel both physically and emotionally safe. Adults need to show children what they do not condone (for example, aggression and destructive behavior) (Curry & Johnson, 1990). Where children come into a classroom from unsafe homes and neighborhoods, teachers have a special responsibility to extend this protection by, among other things, articulating rules for treating each other safely that are enforced with supportive actions. Children may bring the realities of unsafe neighborhoods into classrooms, for example, by pretending to play with guns; teachers need to have discussions about guns and why they are unsafe, and to explain why even pretend gun play is not allowed in the classroom—if that is the case (Howes & Ritchie, 2002).

By creating safe classrooms and similar settings, teachers and caregivers can ensure a climate that reduces the tendency of some children to tempt others into dangerous acts or misbehavior while simultaneously building resistance skills. The group process for young children can involve many of the dynamics common to any group: leaders, followers, scapegoats, victims, and the like. Some children may bully or reject other children, and those children hoping for greater acceptance may join in. Similarly, some children may encourage misbehavior of various kinds and with varying degrees of seriousness, ranging from a wave of group "toilet talk" to refusing to go along with a general rule or procedure to overt bullying in the form of rejection, name-calling, spreading falsehoods about others, and the like (Howes & Ritchie, 2002). Without adult guidance, modeling, and a "community"-oriented classroom climate, these destructive dynamics can prevail.

Peaceful Conflict Resolution

The child begins to compromise and resolve conflicts without using physical aggression or hurtful language.

Younger preschool children inevitably get into conflictual situations as they and their peers try to get their individual needs met and before they have learned to understand the perspectives of others (Selman et al., 1997). These incidents may be followed by an awareness of the other's needs and

perspectives, but with failure to adapt to them. It is therefore clear that the ability to resolve conflict and to adjust one's response in a conflictual situation develops over time. It is important to note that conflict resolution strategies may include "all give" or "all take" (Selman et al., 1997), neither of which could be optimal. The growth challenge thus is not only in seeing another person's perspective but also in being able to make the compromise.

Conflict in children's relationships "is now a topic of great interest in the field of early childhood education and development" (Arcaro-McPhee, Doppler, & Harkins, 2002, p. 19). These authors continue to explore the important issue of how adults can support children's social growth as they learn how to handle and resolve conflicts, and how adults can help children be better problem solvers in conflictual situations. Referring to Piaget's work, Arcaro-McPhee et al. suggest that children "construct more mature social skills when given the opportunity to actively participate in the resolution process" (p. 19). However, they point out, adults simply try to end conflictual situations rather than using them as an opportunity for promoting social growth, and fail to recognize that children can learn to settle many disputes on their own without interference from adults. Not only that, but the inevitable conflict that arises in play situations challenges children to try to work things out, especially if they are friends (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2002). This suggests, not surprisingly, that an overall climate in early childhood settings that encourages positive friendships can also be a positive force in helping children learn to solve conflicts.

The relationship between children's independent conflict resolution and a constructivist approach to teaching is significant, for it shows once again that where there is an overcontrolling situation, either in the lives of parents or of children, there are negative side effects. Children actually trust adults more because they respect the children's ability to manage themselves, except in those situations in which the children truly can't do so. Then the adults step in.

Gartrell (2002) points out that the traditional approach to conflict is to punish the child who initiated a situation, often aggressively. Instead, according to Gartrell's model of guidance for young children, a social problem-solving approach rather than punishment can be employed. The needs of both the "victimized" and the "perpetrating" child are addressed in this way. The victimized child is encouraged not to remain vulnerable and a continued victim by being "rightfully assertive" (p. 37). The aggressor may learn alternative behaviors in the context of not being viewed as "not nice" by the adult.

The issue of children's development of strategies for effective problem solving is further extended in a practical way with the concept of "creating environments for peaceful problem solving" (Lamm et al., 2006). Lamm and colleagues point out how crucial it is for children to be able to interact harmoniously with others so that they can "peacefully engage in play and learning" (p. 22). A practical "steps" model helps children resolve conflicts. Children are encouraged to learn how to describe their emotions and feelings. This approach requires adults to respond in ways that encourage children to state what occurred and to participate in negotiation.

8 The Positive-Identity Assets

We generally consider identity formation to be the province of adolescence. But the foundations of positive identity are set in early childhood in relationship to the development of all of the assets. Identity formation contributes to children's sense of who they are, their capacities, their value and meaning to others, and their own sense of growing into a positive and enjoyable future. As with many assets, an internal sense of personal identity serves as a factor in resilience.

If we can pose a connection between positive identity in young children and ethical development, then the positive-identity assets, not customarily accorded high emphasis in early childhood development, assume some significance in that children who form "responsible and respectful attitudes and values about self, others, work, health and community service" (Weissberg, Kumpfer, & Seligman, 2003, p. 429) are less likely to engage in risky behavior. These attributes thus serve a preventive function, especially if inculcated in early childhood so that they exert an influence as children get older.

The caring for and valuing of young children that proceed from parents and primary caregivers to neighbors, peers, and the community confirm an internal sense in young children that even though they are small, they have attributes that are attractive to others and that secure positive affirmation.

Positive identity, furthermore, is rooted in a child's cultural context. How this identity is conveyed to children, both through the family, programs, community, and mass media, affects how they construct their sense of self and how they value themselves.

Self-esteem, which is children's sense of their own personal value, is frequently touted as a positive attribute of young children that serves to give them confidence to go forth in the world, to try new things and, within their understanding of time, to look forward to the future. Even young children have an emerging sense of purpose and can actively strive toward creating their own immediate future. Ceremonies such as birthdays and graduations are significant in the lives of young children, for they contribute to their awareness that they are growing and that there will be new, exciting, growth-producing events in their lives and challenging experiences for them to look forward to in the future. This awareness confirms a sense of purpose that continues to energize and focus them.

Personal Power

The child can make choices that give a sense of having some influence over things that happen in her or his life.

Personal power for young children? On first blush, this might seem to be an attribute that some would question.

Philosophically, we might say that all human beings must have a sense of personal power—that they matter and that they have instrumentality. This is the ability for people to be able to work to satisfy their own needs and indeed to make something happen that matters to them.

Young children, it turns out, are no exception. Thus, the concept of power can be unpacked and framed so that it fits them as well. The appropriate term to apply, then, is to view them as developing a sense of *efficacy*. Efficacy emerges as a result of self-development, a task that of course is highlighted throughout this book.

We can begin with Eriksonian theory. The themes of early child development in both toddlerhood and preschool years pertain specifically to children's sense of efficacy. In toddlerhood, the developmental task is to develop a sense of autonomy—of being a person separate from the environment who has ideas and perceptions of her or his own, as evidenced by the tradition of saying no as a means of asserting personhood and separateness. In the preschool years, the task is to develop a sense of initiative. This extends young children's sense of themselves as being persons in their own right.

They now have a sense of purpose that governs their choices and actions. They plan what they want to do and they do it. According to Erikson, however, at this point in development, as conscience begins to form, young children need to consider adult and societal values regarding those actions that are acceptable or unacceptable.

Recent years have seen a growing interest in the development of self (Harter, 1999). Language plays a crucial role in the development of self, that is, the process by which young children construct a sense of themselves: a "working model" of self (Harter, 1999). The application of labels by others, however, can lead to the internalization of a negative self-concept or working model of self. Child-rearing practices, including how children are cared for in general and are talked to, are obviously crucial to how a child constructs her or his sense of self. The presence of the external assets, such as Family Support and Positive Family Communication, can play a large role in ensuring that such construction is a healthy one.

As the self emerges, so too does the degree to which one feels a sense of efficacy. In line with Erikson's work, this sense of efficacy begins in toddlerhood (Harter, 1999). Albert Bandura's concepts of agency and efficacy define this process (Landy & Peters, 1991; Sesma, 2002; Thomas, 2000). "Self-efficacy" refers to children's sense of confidence that they can attain a given goal. A sense of efficacy underlies agency, acts that are actually accomplished with intentionality. A shift to the concepts of self-efficacy and agency for young children creates

continuity between the early childhood and school-age asset frameworks, since self-efficacy is subsumed by the latter (Scales, Sesma, & Bolstrom, 2004).

Efficacy is associated with self-esteem and a sense of worth. Efficacy, in turn, is related to the ability to solve social problems (Curry & Johnson, 1990). It is not surprising, actually, to learn that one's positive sense of self is related to having social skills that enable one to negotiate challenging situations. Since this ability is so crucial for success in school and life, the significance of asset 37, Personal Power, in the sense discussed here, is underscored.

Play, once again, is an important contributor to young children's sense of initiative, or efficacy. According to Erikson, as well (1977), among the crucial benefits of play is that it enables children to master a situation of concern, which can include their own perception of being small and vulnerable, by re-creating the situation and controlling it in play. Rivka Eifermann's "conflict enculturation hypothesis" also proposes that through play that replicates adult scenarios, children can feel more powerful and effective (Herron & Sutton-Smith, 1971). As with so many assets, the opportunity to play allows development and practice of both social and activity competencies. In that it is the representation of children's inner world, play gives a perspective on how children are constructing and viewing themselves in, for example, the roles they assume in play. Are they the aggressors? The victims? The caregivers? There are power differentials in play, sometimes drawn along gender lines, and adults need to be sensitive to the fact that while children may be empowered by play, some can also be oppressed. Adults should act to ensure that this disparity does not continue by play facilitation and redirection methods.

Accompanying a sense of efficacy is a sense of competence that continues to grow in a social context. Cultural factors are related to positive identity. One's culture is a vital part of one's self-concept (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2003b). Children construct their identity or self-concept—their sense of who they are—from knowing their own culture and having it respected by others.

This asset is connected to many others, both external (e.g., Positive Family Communication, Play and Creative Activities) and internal (e.g., the social-competencies assets, Engagement in Learning Experiences, Self-Esteem, Sense of Purpose).

Self-Esteem

The child likes her- or himself and has a growing sense of being valued by others.

The concept of self-esteem takes on major significance only if it is viewed with regard to its interconnection with asset 37, Personal Power, as well as with many other assets.

In recent years, there has been a revived interest in self-esteem in child development, although, like many constructs in human services, it can be, and has been, looked upon as a panacea for many problems and then misinterpreted and misapplied. The "self-esteem movement" went astray, perhaps, when it

was seen as implying that children needed to be praised for *everything* despite, as discussed with reference to the asset of Positive Family Communication, evidence indicates that praise is not always effective in encouraging growth and better performance, and ultimately can even lower self-esteem. The benefit of the self-esteem movement, however, is that it has led to increased sensitivity to children's feelings and to the impact of criticism, labeling, and shaming on their developing sense of self and of being good persons. Also, and not insignificantly, in the context of their functioning as protective factors, self-esteem and a sense of efficacy (as described in asset 37) combine to contribute to children's ability to persist and maintain hope in the face of stressors and risk factors (Vondra, 1999).

Self-esteem, as are many other attributes, is socially constructed in interaction with internal developmental processes. Children's "actual" selves influence their behavior, and responses to this behavior shape how they construct their own sense of self; research shows that young children around age 3 already have a sense of themselves and a general perception of their self-worth (e.g., Harter, 1999; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2003).

Still, self-esteem is related to children's feeling valued (Curry & Johnson, 1990). This writer (VanderVen) defines self-esteem as "a sense of having made an accomplishment that is recognized by others." Given that part of our self-concept is constructed out of the perception of how others view us, this perception of accomplishment leads to a personal understanding of being valued. Because for young children, how they are viewed and valued depends both on other adults and on peers, the social-competencies assets again come into play.

Rather than increasing positive performance, the practice of praising everything children do actually discourages their persistence with difficult tasks; they become more hesitant to take the initiative, tend to lose interest in the praised activity, and are hampered in learning to evaluate their own work. Children then become "hooked on praise," only doing something to get a positive response from an adult. Furthermore, subsequent work tends to be less well done, since children, feeling pressured and perhaps less invested, may almost deliberately lower the level of performance (Kohn, 2001).

Criticism, when constructively framed, is useful and not devastating to the self-esteem of young children (Curry & Johnson, 1990). Nor is it always destructive for children at times to feel "bad" about themselves if they have performed an unsocial act—as long as they are not excessively chastised and labeled for it, and realize that they have the potential to change their response should a similar situation arise. In line with resilience, young children need a "resilient" ego—one that can resonate with the reality of a "bad" act and recover.

However, stigmatizing children by indiscriminately labeling them as "bad," or singling them out for treatment that easily conveys to other children that this is the adult's perception of them, does *not* promote their positive self-esteem. As has been described elsewhere, it is particularly challenging for adults to ensure that they have a healthy awareness of cultural differences so that they neither deliberately nor inadvertently single out "different" children for

negative labeling. Such children internalize this definition and come to act—and act out—accordingly, in line with the messages they receive from significant adults, as is also described in asset 14, Adult Role Models.

A review of these perspectives on self-esteem indicates that perhaps what really develops this attribute are adult approaches that ask questions rather than make judgmental comments, encourage skill development, and provide explanations.

Sense of Purpose

The child anticipates new opportunities, experiences, and milestones in growing up.

Having intent, or a sense of purpose, is an attribute of young children. Even young children can set goals as long as they have other relevant assets, such as Positive View of Personal Future and Self-Esteem.

The ability to set such goals—wanting to work for something exciting—is a powerful developmental tool. Young children with well-developed self-esteem are "able to set goals independently" (Curry & Johnson, 1990, p. 60). Specific well-conceived early childhood curricula, such as the well-known High/Scope "Plan, Do, Review" approach, promote the development of the ability to plan (e.g., Epstein, 2003; Fewson & De Sousa, 2004), which encourages young children to take the initiative toward a desirable goal.

However, a great deal of care needs to be taken that the educational system approaches its task in a way that maintains these strengths. Developmentally, young children enter kindergarten feeling there is something exciting and grown-up about going to school "with the older kids" and about learning to read and write. However, if children encounter a lockstep, purely academic atmosphere (rather than the developmentally appropriate encouragement of literacy development that builds on preschool experiences and includes child-initiated activities), they are likely as they continue their schooling to lose their excitement about learning (e.g., Stipek & Seal, 2001).

The issue of school readiness, including that of "high-stakes testing" for school admission, is a "hot" one in early education today, as reflected in a statement that "as a nation, we have adopted school readiness as our number one education goal, but public investment in preschool education remains very limited" (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2003). There is continued recognition of the fact that many young children arrive for kindergarten or first grade not "ready to learn" and lacking the attributes needed to adapt to and succeed in the classroom. Some place the blame for this on schools themselves, maintaining that they focus too much on formal academic work as represented by knowing the alphabet, numbers, colors, and the like, and that the fact that many children may not be "ready" for this type of "instruction" is not justification for delaying their school entrance.

School readiness and transition are major issues in discussions of *quality*, in that at the same time researchers are documenting the relationship between

early education (of high quality) and positive developmental outcomes and school achievement, they are also finding that the quality of "most day-care, center-based programs ranges from mediocre to poor" (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2003).

Relevant to school readiness and transition is the controversial research on the effects of early childhood day-care attendance on adjustment to kindergarten. A pioneering series of studies by Jay Belsky, supported by further findings from the National Institute of Child Health and Development, suggested that those young children who spent too much time in out-of-home child care had more adjustment difficulty (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005).

Positive View of Personal Future

The child finds the world interesting and enjoyable, and feels that he or she has a positive place in it.

Preschool children's capacity for imagining possibilities supports the development of this asset. They can identify positive emotional states. For example, a young preschool child quoted by Harter (1999, p. 37) describes himself as "always happy," indicating an ability to identify and hold such self-evaluative emotions. Although young children's sense of time obviously is not highly developed or differentiated, they increasingly have an awareness that there is a future. Furthermore, the attribute of hope—the conviction of good things to come, so to speak—is an outcome of the Eriksonian first developmental stage of trust versus mistrust, so well-developing preschoolers can actually hold a hopeful perspective toward their own future. Indeed, children as young as age 2 may possess "hope" (Morgenthaler & Lass, 2003).

In general, young children may be "buoyantly optimistic about themselves" (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 152) when they can perceive how competent they have become in the short amount of time that they can remember. For this optimism to develop, of course, young children must have the experiences that enable them to feel competent in their relationships and in their emerging skills and abilities. Children who have not had these opportunities may experience "learned helplessness," particularly in achievement-oriented situations (Shonkoff & Phillips. 2000, p. 153). These negative feelings toward their abilities affect their later sense of their potential to achieve in school. For some children, basic temperament may modulate their optimism, depending on whether they are predominantly positive or negative (e.g., Thomas & Chess, 1977).

Young children's sense of the world as being positive or hostile is highly dependent on the quality of their peer relationships (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000); the support and guidance all children receive in forming and maintaining harmonious relationships thus have a good deal to do with how they view their world. There is increasing evidence that even young children can feel depressed and without hope. Such withdrawal (LeBuffe & Nagieri, 2003) is a risk factor for

young children. Withdrawn and depressed children have low affect and interest in relationships with others or in play activities, with a negative impact on all domains of development. Thus, it devolves on adults to give these children the attention they need (which might include seeking special or outside help) to encourage their development of more positive affect and engagement.

There is still considerable consensus that the transition from early childhood, from spending time either at home, in preschool, or in child care, is a major aspect of development, serving as a turning point and challenge that can be either positive or negative. There have been attempts to define the kinds of early experiences and program configurations that contribute to a successful transition.

In the meantime, we need to be concerned with providing young children with the experiences and supportive guidance and relationships they need to maintain their optimism, positive self-esteem, and goal orientation, while helping them to be competent in the emotional, social, physical, and cognitive attributes that contribute to learning and overall development.

III
The Conceptualization of the Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework

> "It is the totality of a child's experience that lays the foundation for a lifetime of greater or lesser competency."
>
> —Ramey and Ramey (2003)

> "It takes a system to teach a child."
> —Advertisement for the Creative Curriculum, Young Children (January 2006)

All well and good, the reader may be saying, but what's behind this early childhood Developmental Assets framework? What's the evidence to back it up? What theory, research, and practice experience informed it? How can it address those areas related to positive development in today's world?

The following discussions describe how the early childhood Developmental Assets framework in general can enhance early childhood development, how it is responsive to current issues and needs, and how its premises even further justify rationales already offered for asset categories and individual assets

Today the early childhood field is "a multidimensional domain of theory, research, practice, and policy" (Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000, p. xvii). These are the knowledge sources that undergird the conceptualization of the early childhood Developmental Assets framework and are integrated into the subsequent discussions, which have three components: (1) the framework and intervention with an emphasis on its theoretical and knowledge base; (2) issues in theory and practice; and (3) future considerations.

9 The Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework as Intervention: Theoretical and Knowledge Base

In the human services, when we wish to take action that affects the course of development, we consider the concept of "intervention." Intervention is an action or group of actions, programs, services, and activities intended to influence or alter the course of development in a positive direction, including encouraging competence, minimizing deleterious influences, and promoting familial effectiveness (e.g., Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000).

For more than three decades, based on evidence of the significance of early experience, it has been recognized that focused interventions could enrich and modify the major domains of child development. In more recent years, the principles of intervention—those features that make interventions effective—have been defined. They include:

- Developmental focus: respecting the significance of early experience and current developmental issues;
- Comprehensive or ecological focus: multiple interventions addressing a complex problem in multiple settings and contexts (e.g., family, neighborhood, community) (breadth);
- Prevention focus: attempting to intervene in unhealthy processes before they become entrenched;
- Integration across age groups: supporting developmental outcomes in a consistent approach that spans multiple age ranges;
- Long-term effectiveness focus: the attainment of outcomes that persist beyond the immediate application of the intervention at a point in time (continuity and alignment);
- Theory-driven focus: showing a strong relationship between intervention practices and valid source theories;
- Promotion-oriented focus: encouraging better than a minimal level of acceptable functioning;
- Competence focused: including relational and activity (academic and play) skills; and
- Family-supportive focus: including sociocultural relevance to families and community support (e.g., Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; McCall et al.,

2000; Nation et al., 2003; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; VanderVen, 1998b; Wandersman & Florin, 2003; Weissberg et al., 2003).

The following section will discuss these topics with their implications for and reflection in the early childhood Developmental Assets framework (ECDAF) in the same order as presented above.

Developmental Focus

Not surprisingly, the interventions designed to promote child development, including the early childhood Developmental Assets framework, are based on developmental knowledge and theory. The developmental focus enables framing interventions in a positive, nondeficit approach and taking salient and current developmental issues into account. Because the developmental background is so substantive, the discussion of it is necessarily a major portion of this chapter.

By addressing the major domains of development (commonly, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical) with the intention of moving the developmental processes forward, a developmental focus allows a reframing of the "deficit" orientation that has not been productive in the past (e.g., Ginsburg, 1972).

For many years, early childhood and youth work were dominated by a "deficit" approach in which specific lacks were identified and actions brought to bear to "correct" or "make up for" the deficits. A deficits-based model implies that if there were no "problems," development would be acceptable. This is not necessarily so: The absence of problem behavior or indicators does not mean that development—a dynamic, growth-oriented process—is moving forward or that children are thriving. Similarly, a developmental model, with its positive flavor, is attractive and engaging, especially for those who have "everyday" rather than solely "professional" dealings with children.

However, the nature and "spirit" of the field are very receptive to a positive approach. As Sue Bredekamp, designer of the famous developmentally appropriate practice model in early childhood education, has stated, the early childhood practice field maintains its energy through the hope and optimism held by many of its direct practitioners (personal communication, October 2003). This stance, of course, supports the amenability of the early childhood field to a strengths-based approach and thus the encouragement to use the early childhood Developmental Assets framework. The framework furthermore targets areas of risk for positive action so that possible negative outcomes may be averted.

Today's educational climate, as is discussed elsewhere in this book, is increasingly infusing an "academic" approach into early childhood education and kindergarten, goaded on by the increasing emphasis on accountability, high-stakes testing, and the influence of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. An academic approach includes such pedagogical methods as formal instruction and teacher-directed learning; and practices such as use of work

sheets, memorization, and specific focus on academic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics, without attending to developmental readiness to learn these subjects or to the ways in which developmentally appropriate activities (e.g., various forms of play such as sociodramatic play) encourage the development of skills and attributes necessary for formal academic learning.

The issue of "academic" versus "developmental" approaches to the schooling of young children, although contentious, is not completely dichotomous (e.g., Russell, personal communication, January 2007). The degree to which an educational experience is provided depends on other variables such as teachers' belief systems, prevalent values, and the like. All of the reviews conducted to create the early childhood Developmental Assets framework lean toward an *emphasis* on a developmental, play-based educational approach, while recognizing that the issue of academic and developmental approaches is indeed not dichotomous, and that there are shadings and combinations in actual experiences of children that blend or incorporate both.

Benchmarking is a way to compare a newer entity with another one, often one that is older and better established. If there is an observed congruence or at least some recognizable overlap and commonality between the two entities, then that provides support and veracity for the newer one.

Cross-walk charts, in which a component of each entity is juxtaposed alongside a common criterion for comparison, provide a visual means of conducting the benchmarking process.

The framework, while representing a unique approach to promoting positive development, is supported not only by research directly related to individual assets and the framework as a whole, but also by major efforts to identify positive developmental factors that in themselves are supported by research. Thus, it is helpful at the outset to establish the relationship between such works and the early childhood Developmental Assets framework.

In recent years, several seminal works have articulated both the scientific knowledge base about early childhood development and the essential needs or domains of need of young children that must be met for healthy development to occur.

The first of these works is *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Child Development*, edited by Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah Phillips (2000). Table 1 shows how the early childhood Developmental Assets framework relates to the major findings presented in *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, which Shonkoff and Phillips designed to "update scientific knowledge about the nature of human development and the role of early experiences" (p. 3), with the purpose also of using that knowledge to devise practices ensuring "the health and well-being of all young children" (p. 3).

The second seminal work is *The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn, and Flourish*, by T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley Greenspan (2000). Polly Greenberg, when serving as editor of the journal *Young Children*, stated in an interview with Brazelton and Greenspan (2001), "I can't imagine that anyone in our profession—caring for and educating young children—would disagree with your seven bottom-line basic needs of children

TABLE 1. Benchmarking the Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework with *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*

Major Topic Areas of *From Neurons…*	Early Childhood Developmental Assets
Nature and Tasks of Early Development (Analogous to Internal Assets)	
Acquiring Self-Regulation	Self-Regulation
Communicating and Learning	Engagement in Learning Experiences
Getting Along with Peers	Positive Peer Relationships
The Context of Early Development (Analogous to External Assets)	
Nurturing Relationships	Family Support (high levels of nurturing)
Family Resources	Children Seen as (and receive) Resources
Growing Up in Child Care	Caring Climate in Child-Care and Educational Settings
Neighborhood and Community Boundaries	Caring Neighbors (and neighborhood). Community Cherishes and Values Young Children
Promoting Healthy Development	Safety
through Intervention	Out-of-Home and Community Programs

… but you take each of them further … Your book … pushes us to think at the frontiers of what we believe. And you urge all of us, including policymakers, to act on our beliefs" (p. 6).

Table 2 shows the congruence between the *Irreducible Needs of Children* and the early childhood Developmental Assets framework with reference to specific asset categories and assets, both external (E) and internal (I).

The classifications shown in Table 2 support the contention that the two major asset groupings—support and social competencies, and constructive-use-of-time and commitment-to-learning, closely followed by empowerment and positive identity—are primary categories addressing the most fundamental developmental domains of early childhood, while the others are both contributory (their presence supports the others) and combinatory (they represent working combinations of other assets).

The third seminal undertaking is that of America's Promise, the Alliance for Youth (americaspromise.org). America's Promise is a national set of partnerships and "voices" focusing on helping children and youth build five "promises" essential for positive development. As with the Developmental Assets framework, which was conceived as a downward extension from asset frameworks for older children and youth, the Five Promises were initially prepared to address older children and youth. A recent project (Scales, 2005), to which this author contributed, included the development of measurable indicators for the Five Promises based on a benchmarking to the early childhood Developmental Assets framework (VanderVen, 2005a) (see Table 3).

The Significance of Early Experience

The unswerving acknowledgment by authorities of the importance of, or the significance of early experience, in setting a positive course for child

TABLE 2. A Comparison of *The Irreducible Needs of Children* and the Developmental Assets Framework

The need for ongoing nurturing relationships	Support Assets—Family provides high level of love and support; positive communication (E)
The need for physical protection, safety, and regulation	Empowerment assets—Home and other settings are safe (E) Social-competencies assets—Resistance practice (I) Boundaries-and-expectations assets—The parent models healthy lifestyle (E)
The need for experiences tailored to individual differences	Attention to children's individuality (temperament) supported by several assets (E)
The need for developmentally appropriate experiences	Constructive-use-of-time assets—Child participates in creative activities; time at home involves predictable, enjoyable routines (E) Commitment-to-learning assets—Child has access to stimulating activities; child is read to daily (I) Social-competencies assets—Child is exposed to different cultures; child makes simple choices and decisions (I) Boundaries-and-expectations assets—Child is encouraged to achieve and develop unique talents (E)
The need for limit setting, structure, and consequences	Boundaries-and-expectations assets—Family, other adults have realistic expectations for development at this age (E)
The need for stable, supportive communities and continuity	Support assets—Caring neighborhood, out-of-home climate (E) Constructive-use-of-time assets—Child interacts with children outside family; family attends religious and other events with child's needs in mind (E)
Protecting the future	Positive-values assets—Parent encourages expressions of caring (E); Parent values and models integrity (E); Positive Identity—Child has a positive view of personal future (I)

development offers another compelling rationale for the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework.

Certainly early experience is strongly grounded in the quality of relationships and activities a child has. However, such experience is situated in the context of society, in all of its complexity, and directly exerts a strong influence on the course of development. This section will discuss the relationship between early experience and such factors as caregiver characteristics, stimulation, and a variety of societal influences (e.g., violence, economic status, diversity, physical and health status, etc.). Given these multiple influences, the section ends with a consideration of comprehensiveness, reflecting the premise that the more influences there are on development, the more these areas must be targeted by multiple actions if they are to be modified so as to influence development positively.

The Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework is concerned with improving the quality of early experiences for young children for positive child development (e.g., Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). With the evidence regarding the aspects of early experience that are related to the attainment of positive developmental outcomes, an intervention can pertain to those areas that are

TABLE 3. Benchmarking The Five Promises to the Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework

The Promises (Foundational)	The Asset Categories
Promise 1: Caring Adults	Support
Ongoing relationships with caring adults—parents, mentors, tutors, or coaches—offer communication, youth support, care, and guidance	1. Family Support 2. Positive Family 3. Other Adult Relationships 4. Caring Neighbors 5. Caring Climate in Child-Care and Educational Settings 6. Parent Involvement in Child Care and Education
Promise 2: Safe Places and Constructive-Use-of-Time	Constructive-Use-of-Time
Safe places with structured activities during nonschool hours provide both physical and emotional safety for youth	17. Play and Creative Activities 18. Out-of-Home and Community Programs 20. Time at Home Empowerment 10. Safety
Promise 3: A Healthy Start	Empowerment
Adequate nutrition, exercise, and health care pave the way for healthy bodies, healthy minds, and smart habits for adulthood	8. Children Seen as Resources 10. Safety
Promise 4: Marketable Skills	
Effective education helps youth navigate the transition from school to work	17. Play and Creative Activities 18. Out-of-Home and Community Programs 20. Time at Home Social Competencies 32. Planning and Decision Making 33. Interpersonal Skills Part of Positive Values 34. Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity 36. Peaceful Conflict Resolution Commitment-to-Learning 21. Motivation to Mastery 25. Early Literacy Positive Identity 35. Sense of Purpose
Promise 5: Opportunities to Help Others	Positive Values
Opportunities to give back through service enhance self-esteem, boost confidence, and heighten a sense of responsibility to the community	27. Equality and Social Justice 30. Responsibility

connected to attaining these results. Referring to the Developmental Assets framework, this would indicate that as asset categories and their respective assets are addressed, they can support actions that evidence indicates lead to better development.

Ever since the pioneering National Day Care Study (Almy, 1988) found that positive developmental outcomes of child-care programs were related to caregiver preparation in child development, low child–caregiver ratios, and developmentally oriented program features, research has continued to yield similar results. Most famous perhaps are the outcome studies of the High/Scope Foundation and its Perry Preschool Program (e.g., Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1984; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1980) that not only demonstrate specific outcomes but also identify the kinds of experiences connected to them.

These experiences include family- and community-centered practices, developmentally oriented practices, having caregivers and teachers knowledgeable in child development and skilled in developmental methods, low ratios between children and caregivers, and certain practices such as ensuring developmentally oriented classrooms rather than primarily "academically" oriented classrooms and child-directed learning experiences (e.g., Marcon, 2003a). The implications are that practices in children's environments that offer attention, encourage motivation, and are developmentally appropriate have ongoing positive effects.

Positive developmental outcomes of similarly positive early experiences include higher school achievement during the primary and middle school years, as well as reduced school dropouts and higher high school graduation rates and employment. There also are reduced teenage pregnancy, less juvenile delinquency, and better outcomes for children of poverty and those with disabilities.

The longer into the school years an intervention takes place, and the earlier it begins, the more likely its effects are to be maintained (Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Epps & Jackson, 2000; McCall et al., 2000), an important consideration for the early childhood Developmental Assets framework, since the structural and developmental connection between it and the frameworks for older children provides a means for coherent intervention along the trajectory of development from early childhood through adolescence.

In recent years it has been recognized that there is a strong relationship between essential brain development, the quality of early experience as described previously, and overall psychosocial and cognitive development. Although a technical treatise on brain development is not indicated, the relationship of the essential or global features of brain development to the early childhood Developmental Assets framework still needs to be both clarified and understood, for it further justifies the framework. Stated simply, early experience and the quality of that early experience affect the brain, the part of the human organism that governs its increasingly complex thoughts and actions, or its intelligence—the ability to successfully adapt to the environment and the challenges it poses. The degree to which the brain is well developed, particularly the extent to which it has plasticity (its ability to grow and change with the human being that houses it), has to do with developmental factors relevant to the Developmental Assets framework.

Of particular significance is that a great deal of brain development occurs during the first five years of life and that during this period, there are particular periods of sensitivity for optimal brain development to occur (e.g., Berk, 2002;

Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). It has already been stressed that the foundations of competence, so crucial in resilience and thriving, are established in early childhood. Subsumed in the concept of competence are such abilities as "development of motor skills, language, self-confidence, play and problem solving abilities" (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998, p. 16), and underlying these in turn is the "developing brain" and its plasticity. The quality of experience that supports brain development supports the emergence of these crucial skills reflected in the early childhood Developmental Assets framework.

Fundamental to promoting brain development is *stimulation*. However, appropriate stimulation is not just *any* stimulation. It is important that the stimulation be mediated either by its structure and source, or by a human buffer. Thus, there is a close relationship between the role of the human caregiver or attachment figure in the lives of young children and whether the stimulation they receive is properly mediated to resonate with their individuality and needs, or whether it turns out to be understimulation, disorganized and difficult to integrate stimulation, or overstimulation. The pragmatic relationship between brain development and environments for young children is clarified by Rushton (2001), who states that the classroom environment in an early childhood setting affects brain functioning. In general, environments that provide high stimulation and low stress are optimal. In a classroom where adults cause children to feel threatened (e.g., by making embarrassing or critical comments that cause fear of failure or by failing to protect children from bullying and rejection), there is potential to interfere with brain functioning. Where children have understanding and accepting teachers, experiential activities that allow choice and promote feelings of empowerment, and where what is taught and the teaching practices are *meaningful* in terms of the developmental capacities of young children, brain functioning is supported. Many of the assets support actions that provide appropriate levels of stimulation, encourage empowerment, and promote positive and accepting ways of communicating with young children, among others.

Societal Influences on Development

Today, many societal issues directly influence the quality of early experience and, hence, child development. These must be taken into consideration as major contextual forces when designing any contemporary model for promoting positive development. Because the Developmental Assets framework is applicable in all of the systems that influence child development (to be discussed later), it has the potential to address these social issues, which will be discussed generically here and referred to as appropriate when presenting individual assets.

Violence

Violence, which occurs at all levels of social interaction and development, is a major detractor to child development. Concern with the powerful negative

effects of violence on young children prompted the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to establish a panel on violence, which issued a position statement on violence in the lives of children (1993). The statement points out the frequency of a variety of violent acts to which many children are exposed daily, including shootings, killings on television, abuse, domestic violence, and bullying.

The impact of violence on development is pervasive and compromises the basic need of children to feel safe and protected. Exposure to chronic community violence will result in numerous negative effects: anxiety, sleep disturbances, regression, reduction of autonomy, aggression. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms have even been related to young children's exposure to violence (Osofsky, 1995).

The position statement includes several profound comments. Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund, for example, says, "Adults have failed dismally in our most basic responsibility—to protect our society's children from violence" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1993, p. 1); and, "This country has committed itself to a national goal— by the year 2000 all children will start school ready to learn. Achieving this goal will be impossible unless the country also simultaneously breaks the cycle of violence that grips so many children and families" (p. 3).

It has been pointed out, significantly, that a strong support system, particularly if it is composed of a close relationship with parents, high-quality child-care programs, and safe places in the neighborhood, can promote the resilience that reduces the toxic effects of violence (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1993; Osofsky, 1995). Osofsky calls for a "family-centered and community-centered approach that builds on strengths within communities" (p. 786). The Developmental Assets framework emphasizes the developmental supports that can encourage this approach.

A significant related issue is television watching, particularly adult programs with violent themes, which not only have a negative impact on youngsters' developing cognitive and emotional abilities but also encourage violent play as children try to make sense of and master the intense feelings these programs generate. Such play may provide release, but it also can feed on itself, further frightening young children.

Sadly, there is now violence even among very young children. Bullying is recognized as beginning in the preschool years, according to a study done by Snyder and colleagues (2003). Children at age 5 were observed to be both victims and victimizers, with behaviors such as hitting and threats being targeted at the victims, who show their distress. More bullying therefore ensues in a reciprocal process, and for boys there are longer-term negative effects, such as depression and increased antisocial behavior.

An ecological-systems approach is recommended to address the issues of violence (e.g., VanderVen & Torre, 1999); the Developmental Assets framework has the potential to provide young children crucial support in dealing with the violence that surrounds them, since it can address both internal and external factors in the neighborhood and community.

Economic Status

The economic status of young children's families, as has been emphasized throughout this book, has a profound effect on the course of development. But children in poor families are not the only ones at risk. There is a growing concern with children at the opposite end of the economic scale: those whose families are solidly middle or upper class (e.g., Lareau, 2003; Luthar, 2003; Shaw, 2003). Thus, both these aspects need to be considered.

Lareau's (2003) landmark study shows how different approaches to child rearing as practiced by middle-, upper- and lower-class families affect how children then interact differentially with the established institutions of society. Poor children's families hold the view that childhood proceeds as an "accomplishment of natural growth" (p. 3). In this style, children have long periods of unguided free time, clear boundaries between children and adults, and more interaction with members of their extended families. Middle-class parents play a much more active role in planning their children's development, trying to stimulate it by providing activities, encouraging their interests, talking with them more, and encouraging their input. These differential practices, only summarized here, allow "transmission of differential advantages" (p. 5) to children whose families are economically better off, which in turn cultivates attributes that enable those children to interact more positively with schools and other major institutions. They have, for example, larger vocabularies and skills for interacting with authority figures. Over the long haul, they develop a sense of entitlement that makes them more comfortable in out-of-home settings. Children of lower-income families, on the other hand, develop a "sense of constraint" and overtly try to be less influential in these external and important settings.

Given these characteristics, it might appear that some assets will be differentially important for children according to their socioeconomic status. Certainly the empowerment and positive-identity assets will have special significance for children of lower-class families, and perhaps a serendipitous contribution of the asset framework is to bring these areas into greater prominence.

Poverty and its effects on children are consistently discussed in early childhood literature as a profound concern. The poverty rate of children in the United States is more than two to three times higher than that of most other Western nations; in 2000, 12.4 million U.S. children lived below the poverty line (Helm & Beneke, 2003). Poverty has a relationship (although not unilateral or as a one-to-one causative factor) to many of the factors that put young children at risk for difficulties in all domains of development: family dysfunction, attachment disruption, and lack of social and cognitive stimulation, to name just a few. "Cumulative stressor exposure," such as poor housing, violence, and family upsets, are related to problems in self-regulation (the significant emotion in school readiness) and overall socioemotional difficulties, as found by Evens and English (2002).

As is stated elsewhere in this book, some children become resilient in the face of poverty and its accompanying impact, but that is not the case for many.

Head Start, the comprehensive program for young children in poverty, with its health care and family supports, with whatever problems it may have, still offers profound promise of needed intervention for the millions of children who live in poverty. In fact, Head Start, with its comprehensive focus on family and community factors in development, is a program resonant with the intent of the Developmental Assets framework. There is so much necessary emphasis on poverty that another increasingly recognized deleterious influence on child development is affluence, which is related to teenage problems such as anxiety and depression (e.g., Luthar, 2003). Interestingly, children in affluent families may face the same developmental challenges as do some children in poor families, for example, attachment issues that arise as a result of preoccupied, overworked, or unengaged parents, who may fail to establish appropriate limits and expectations, thus interfering with their children's ability to develop self-regulation, empathy, and caring for others (e.g., Shaw, 2003).

Many of the assets, particularly those in the boundaries-and-expectations and positive-values categories, may relate to encouraging these capacities in children in well-to-do families.

Diversity

Over the past decades, diversity (recognizing cultural, ethnic, physical, and racial differences among children and families and trying to initiate child-rearing and curricular approaches that respect these differences) has been a major focus in the early childhood field. The concern with diversity is reflected in two areas: culturally appropriate practices and inclusion.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) has been revised to include premises governing *culturally* appropriate practice, in addition to the original "age" and "individually" appropriate practice. Culturally appropriate practice urges respect for and knowledge of "the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families" (p. 36). It has been reflected as well in the seminal *Anti-Bias Curriculum* (Sparks & the A.B.C. Task Force, 1989), which acknowledges the bias "that declares a person inferior because of gender, race, ethnicity or disability" (p. ix). The authors (1) make the point that children are not too young to perceive the negative messages that can be conveyed both implicitly and explicitly as they are constructing their identity; and (2) discuss the implications for curriculum and activities for young children. Highly relevant for the Developmental Assets framework is the notion that children who experience anti-bias curriculum and are encouraged to "speak up when they believe something is unfair" (p. 36)—a "practice of freedom" that helps them stand up in the "face of injustice"—become empowered (p. ix).

Attention to diversity means more than emphasizing mutual respect, as important as that is. There is a profound and recognized need to "promote academic and social success among African American children" (Tucker & Herman, 2002, p. 762). The disparity in achievement between African American

children and European American children is substantial: "Growing research evidence indicates that African American children are disadvantaged by peer and teacher biases in the classroom.... [T]eacher behaviors may disproportionately interfere with the academic engagement of African American children.... [T]eachers tended to interact less with ... low-income and ethnically diverse students" (p. 763). These authors recommend "culturally sensitive" theories (in contrast to "cultural deficit" theories). In their research, Tucker and Herman found that self-control was more important than self-esteem for adaptive behavior and academic achievement and proposed "self-empowerment," which is an "internal sense of having control and influence over desired outcomes in one's life" (p. 766). There are success-oriented behaviors that can be taught; culturally sensitive family, school, and community support is crucial for the promotion of social and academic success.

Closely related to diversity is the increasing inclusion in early childhood programs of children with disabilities and handicapping conditions. Supporting this was the 1992 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Inclusion gained momentum following the enactment in 1975 of Public Law 94–142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, which requires the education of all children and has built upon the earlier practice of "mainstreaming." Among children who have special needs are those with mental retardation, autism, developmental delays, cerebral palsy, chronic illness, abusive or neglectful parents, and the like (e.g., Aronson & Spahr, 2002). Inclusion has been acknowledged to have many mutual benefits: For children with disabilities, being in normative and stimulating environments promotes their optimal development; for "normal" children, inclusion encourages such prosocial attributes as acceptance of difference, empathy, sympathy, cooperation, and adaptability.

Physical and Safety Factors in Development

In just the past few years or so there has been a growing concern with physical aspects of development, as well as the ongoing recognition by some of the overall significance of physical health and proper health care for optimal development. The acknowledgment that a growing percentage of children, including young children, are obese, placing them at greater risk for health problems, has spearheaded some of this focus.

As a child's physical skills, both small and large muscle, become more refined during the years from 3 to 5, physical movement opportunities and nutrition become inexorably linked with the attainment of important social and cognitive abilities. Maintenance of safety, both physical and emotional, of course is a primary function of any caregiving activity.

As with all age groups, it is now increasingly recognized that physical development and health status are integrally connected to positive development in all of the inter-related domains (Marcon, 2003b). For example, it is increasingly recognized that there is a relationship between physical experiences and the ability to learn to form symbols. Physical movement enables

development of a sense of body presence, body capacity, and directionality. This principle is the rationale for several early childhood curriculum initiatives such as *Alphabet Fitness* (Voght, 2003). In this program, children model shapes of letters in a sequence of movement activities, thus providing an internal kinesthetic awareness of the relationship between physical movement and symbolic representation. There is also a strong relationship between physical development, including height and weight indicators, and cognitive development. Physically well-developed children function better cognitively (Marcon, 2003). "Misnourishment"—not eating a suitable diet—is increasingly affecting the physical well-being of American children and, in turn, their social development. Children lacking in physical robustness may have less energy for "social and exploratory" activity, and for positive interaction with caregivers (Marcon, 2003, p. 84), which sets up a vicious circle: The environment surrounding such a child becomes less supportive of the development of the very qualities the child needs. Despite this evidence, there are many problems related to young children, especially children of low-income families, receiving the care they need.

Perhaps foremost is the systemic need for children to receive adequate health care through access to appropriate services, including screening examinations, immunizations, and other preventive measures, as well as treatment for specific conditions. Children of low-income families are the ones who are least likely to receive proper health services, often owing to lack of health insurance. Fortunately, in the past several years, there has been a decrease in the rate of uninsured children, although lack of coverage is still a profound concern and there is the possibility that the lowering rate may not continue (Lewit, Bennett, & Behrman, 2003).

Insurance, however, is not the only problem. There is difficulty in gaining access to primary care, especially for children of lower-income families (Hughes & Ng, 2003). Moreover, an unpredictable source of care is less than optimal since, when the source is stable, there is greater satisfaction, more accurate diagnoses, and fewer hospitalizations, as well as lower costs. Factors such as transportation, hours that accommodate work and substitute care schedules, and language barriers also interfere with children's access to such stable care (Lewit et al., 2003).

Closely related to physical development, health status, and health care is the issue of safety, both physical and psychological. A core function of any early childhood enterprise is to ensure the physical safety of participating children (Aronson & Spahr, 2002). However, psychological safety is now a major concern. The observation of violence in the neighborhood and on television challenges young children's sense of psychological safety. Cognitively, they do not have the ability to assess the extent to which they are really in danger. The resultant stress and uncertainty have a subtle but pervasive effect on their sense of trust and security in their world. For some this may be reflected in the reluctance to separate from parents even to try exciting new experiences.

When considering a developmental paradigm connecting three broad age ranges, it may be appropriate to view the development of sexuality in a more

pragmatic way than is done in the more abstract conceptions of psychoanalytic theories, especially since the issue arises frequently in early childhood programs. This concern is explored in *Healthy Sexuality Development: A Guide for Early Childhood Educators and Families* (Chrisman & Couchenour, 2005).

Another important contribution in this area comes from *Making a Place for Pleasure in Early Childhood Education* (Tobin, 1995), in which scholars examine rigid practices regarding bodily functions and the avoidance of touching (both of which detract from positive development). When young children need comforting and nurturance from physical contact, adults are wary of providing it lest their actions be "misunderstood" and they be accused of child abuse. A paradoxical result of the child abuse prevention and intervention movement, as necessary as it was and is, has been to generate a new form of child abuse, namely, the deprivation of children of needed physical contact (VanderVen, 1994a).

Physical and safety factors have implications for the early childhood Developmental Assets framework, particularly in the empowerment category of external assets, since it is the community's responsibility to ensure that its young children are protected and supported in their growth, and it is clear that when children are not healthy, their social, emotional, and cognitive functioning, as well as their physical functioning, is compromised.

Early and Emergent Literacy

Literacy, in recent years, has been a focal point in early childhood programs. Head Start has adopted a strong literacy platform (e.g., Tabors, 2002). The emphasis is on those experiences and activities, with print and spoken language, and the development of "phonologic awareness" (the ability to make the connection between spoken and written sounds), that children will bring to school so that if they are not yet ready to read and write, they will be very soon. Given the foundational aspect of literacy to all of development, a consideration of activities and practices that support its inception in preschool children is crucial. According to Owocki (2001), literacy develops by multiple means. First of all, it is a "social and cultural practice" (p. 6). This aspect of literacy, she points out, is not accomplished by packaged curricula or legislative fiat. It emerges through the discourses children hear in their own homes and neighborhoods. When what children hear in their environment differs from the dominant culture's construction of literacy, then they are denied the opportunity to learn by using their own legitimate experiences. Literacy also takes shape through "hypothesis testing" (p. 7) in which what children know and think about written language is modified when they test a new piece of information against what they already know.

Underscoring the significance of literacy development is the National Association for the Education of Young Children's research-based position statement concerning developmentally appropriate literacy practices (Neuman et al., 2000). Emphasizing that "learning to read and write is critical to a child's

success in school and later in life" (p. 3), the statement makes some valuable points, including that literacy development must not wait until children are formally in school, and that teaching practices to promote it are different for young children and older children and adults. Practices inappropriate for preschoolers include "whole-group instruction, intensive drill, and practice on isolated skills" (p. 5). At the same time, literacy does not occur spontaneously. It requires "careful planning and instruction" (p. 5). Diverse strategies can and should be used to promote literacy. Reading aloud is universally considered a major activity to promote literacy. Dramatic play comes in to enable children to apply literacy to the themes they enact. A little-recognized relationship holds between literacy development and physical activity. Rhyming, word, and skipping games have been acknowledged to promote literacy. The *Alphabet Fitness* curriculum (Voght, 2003), in which young children model the ABCs with "body letterings," encourages a kinesthetic awareness of symbolic representation that is built into large-muscle memory and precedes fine motor learning.

Technology

The technological age, featuring television and computers, has not left young children unaffected. With television, there are two issues to consider: the content of the programs viewed, and the amount of time spent viewing (Anderson et al., 2001). From the inception of *Sesame Street*, which was intended to serve an interventional function by encouraging letter and number recognition through an attention-getting format, coupled with the gentler, more developmentally oriented *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, television has been a major, and sometimes controversial, experience in the lives of young children.

A primary concern has been the viewing of violence by young children. Anderson and colleagues (2001) report that where children watched television and identified with television characters, they were more affected by violence. They were also more aggressive as adolescents and had lower grades. *Sesame Street* was found to be associated with positive activities such as better school performance and more time spent reading. As with so many developmental variables, the degree and nature of influence are determined by individual and contextual characteristics. Anderson et al. conclude that "because children appear to benefit from watching educational programming and may suffer from watching violent programming, it is important that educational programming be available for them to view and that parents be able to screen out programming that is potentially harmful" (p. 133).

In more recent years, computers have gone from a place in business to the home and the classroom. Given the salience of technology, especially computers, but not excluding television and video games, it is important to consider the research on the subject. Reviewing research on the relationship between social, emotional, and cognitive development and the use of computers, Clements and Sarama (2003) present some interesting, and counterintuitive, findings. First of all, rather than encouraging children to be solitary, computers spearhead

"positive social interaction and emotional growth" (p. 34) by encouraging collaboration and discussion. Computer-centered activity also was found to support high levels of play, language development, and literacy skills, both linguistic and mathematical. Given the increased inclusion of children with special needs in early childhood programs, it is important to note that computer technology is very supportive of all domains of their development when children are provided with individualized, well-structured tasks and receive feedback.

However, there is a class and economic differential between the availability of computers, both in schools (which are more likely to be underfunded in poorer communities) and in homes. Given that fewer low-income homes have computers, it would seem extremely important for any developmental approach to provide a sufficient level of computer accessibility as one of its goals. Clements and Sarama (2003) point out that "there are inappropriate uses of computers, such as playing violent video games, doing mindless drills, or using any material of poor quality" (p. 39).

The Developmental Assets hopefully would support both parents and communities in making positive use of television and in making computers available to all. The contemporary social and developmental issues described here that affect young children and their families have been further elaborated upon where rationales are given for specific assets in earlier chapters. While this may be repetitive, it will be important to see which assets (and combinations of assets) specifically address these issues.

Comprehensive or Ecological Focus

Successful interventions have to be multisystemic; that is, they must target an activity in each "system" that may affect the child. This means that they are "comprehensive": Offering specific services that go beyond those that are delivered face-to-face to the child in a program such as a preschool or child-care center is underscored by many authorities on intervention science. In the field of child development, including early child development, the term "ecology" is characteristically used to refer to these various systems and the interactions among them that situate development. Most specifically, Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1977) breakthrough ecological systems approach offers a comprehensive framework for understanding multiple interacting influences on child development and for designing approaches and practices that, by addressing these influences, support child development (Hamilton, Leidy, & Thomas, 2002).

Bronfenbrenner's *microsystem*—a child's immediate environment, or the direct setting containing a child—has six components:

- The people (who is in the setting);
- The physical setting, including furnishings (e.g., for a classroom, equipment and supplies);
- Activities (what people do);

- Timing (the time allotted or used in various activities; in a classroom, a schedule);
- Rules and norms governing behavior; and
- Roles (what functions people play and how they relate to each other).

A well-designed microsystem might be considered "developmentally appropriate," following the National Association for the Education of Young Children's conceptualization of quality practice in direct settings (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

The *mesosystem* is composed of the relationships among microsystems and their immediate contexts; for example, the family and the neighborhood are mesosystems. It could be considered that organizations that situate and govern microsystems are also mesosystems (e.g., in a school, the administration and the organizational design could be mesosystems). These could be considered "developmentally attentive," following Search Institute's perspective on asset-building communities. The *exosystem* includes the institutions of society in the community, such as health care, employment, economy, mass media, housing, and transportation. The point has been made (and was emphasized in the descriptions of the assets)—not only by Bronfenbrenner himself (1974) but also by researchers on risk and resilience as is described in a subsequent section discussing thematic theories—that to function as a child-rearing system, a family must have these supports adequately in place. The *macrosystem* is society's overarching values toward children and could be considered "developmentally valuing."

The Developmental Assets framework allows a comprehensive or multi-systems approach in that the assets are applicable across the ecological systems that affect young children. Since the predominant early childhood approaches to practice (e.g., developmentally appropriate practice) do not focus *in detail* on *all* of the systems that have an impact on development, the asset framework can contribute by extending systems on which attention is focused. Similarly, consideration of the ecological perspective might enable areas for greater emphasis and prioritizing.

In early childhood, as has been stated, developmentally appropriate practice is a widely accepted and well-conceived model for programs and, with some consideration, for parents and families from a programmatic perspective. The early childhood Developmental Assets framework can complement and support developmentally appropriate practice, while encouraging more specific and focused attention on the mesosystem (neighborhoods and community resources) and the exosystem: those systemic supports children and families must have in their lives to function well. While the early childhood Developmental Assets framework does not specifically address the macrosystem, it might be proposed that taken as a whole and when applied across systems, the framework may actually serve as an influence on society's macro values toward children. The comprehensive ecological model as embodied by Bronfenbrenner's schema also is *fractal* or self-similar at the various levels (following

the dynamical systems concept), thus bringing coherence into any approach that reflects it (VanderVen, 1998b).

Person–environment practice, which refers to "the social ecology of inter-personal helping" (Kemp, Whittaker, & Tracy, 1997), can be relevant to considering an ecological approach to the Developmental Assets framework. Developed within the social work profession, the intent of this practice model is to bring a more holistic, ecological, systems orientation into the traditional individually centered model of practice. The rationale for this approach includes notions that also serve as a basis for the Developmental Assets approach: Assessment involves looking for strengths, rather than weaknesses, in clients; building in and supporting resilience by eliminating risk factors, and raising understanding of the relationship between individual problems and the abilities of families, neighborhoods, small groups, and the like to modify them through environmental change. The early childhood Developmental Assets framework resonates with the person–environment practice notion and translates the concept into specific actions.

Preventive Focus

One of the major rationales for attending to conditions of child rearing for young children is a preventive one. If we can provide the proper condi-tions for growth, then we may prevent the later development of unhealthy and unproductive behaviors that are both socially and financially costly. Risky adolescent behaviors (such as juvenile delinquency) and unproductive ones (e.g., lack of commitment to schooling) are increasingly recognized as connected to early childhood experiences (e.g., Schweinhart & Weikart, 1980), along with the notion that an effectively designed early childhood experience can serve a preventive function. Prevention as a significant concept in child development is embodied in an issue of *American Psychologist* (Vol. 58, 2003) focusing on the topic. Thus, it is appropriate to consider the preventive role of the early childhood Developmental Assets framework.

Many are familiar with the "primary, secondary, and tertiary" prevention model adapted to human services from public health. Referring to Robert Mrazek and Patricia Haggerty's 1994 report on the Institute of Medicine (IOM)'s Committee on the Prevention of Mental Disorders, which emphasized the scien-tific respectability now held by the area of prevention, Weissberg and colleagues (2003) suggest instead "universal preventive interventions," which are focused on large groups not identified as at risk; "selective preventive interventions," which focus on targeted populations at risk; and "indicated preventive inter-ventions," which focus on specific populations at high risk (p. 426). The early childhood Developmental Assets framework has the ability to affect all popula-tions despite the degree of risk or whether there are identifiable symptoms present. For children at risk without being at high risk, the framework, if applied, addresses areas that serve as protective factors.

For the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework, prevention is germane to its ecological, multisystemic focus in that major category areas in the framework, such as empowerment and social competencies, are firmly grounded in community contexts (Wandersman & Florin, 2003, p. 441). Similarly the assets' focus on family-centered practices, competence development, and sensitivity to sociocultural factors is associated with successful preventive programs (Weissberg et al., 2003).

Integration and Alignment across Age Groups

Responding to the widespread recognition of the effectiveness of the Developmental Assets framework, Search Institute initiated the First Decade Project, designed to adapt the Developmental Assets framework to be applicable both to school-age and early childhood populations.

With Developmental Assets frameworks that span commonly recognized age groups (early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence), the early childhood Developmental Assets framework will for the first time provide a concept that reduces the traditional fragmentation in working with different age groups (e.g., VanderVen, 1996) and will offer a coherent thread that reflects the integrated trajectory of development along established domains throughout childhood and youth. The Developmental Assets framework represents sensitivity to the characteristics and dynamics of the age range while identifying and addressing common themes that connect and integrate age groups.

Even though developmental theories emphasize ages, stages, and phases of development, it is well established that development actually occurs in a longitudinal way, with domains of development not only linked to each other but also proceeding to develop and change (but without losing their core role in the developmental process) over the life span. This is not to say that there are not windows at various ages at which a shift in developmental emphasis might take place, or what can be considered a *transitional* or *sensitive* period in development (e.g., Sesma, 2002). Despite the continuity in development (including the transitional phases that actually connect one discrete age range with others), programs, interventions, and the like have rarely taken this fact into consideration. Most are age and stage specific with rigid boundaries, a fact that contributes to fragmentation of experience and less support for children during transitional times. An example, discussed here, is the discontinuity experienced by young children as they go from preschool to kindergarten. Interventions that are "long term," as well as "continuous," and include "a series of socioculturally appropriate and coordinated programs for each particular stage of development: prenatal, infancy, toddlerhood, preschool years, elementary school years, middle childhood, and adolescence" (Weissberg et al., 2003, p. 429) serve as effective preventive programming. To be most successful such intervention must begin earlier and be more intense (Weissberg et al., 2003). The early childhood Developmental Assets framework, added to the middle childhood

and adolescence frameworks, contributes just such early beginning and ongoing continuity.

Because the Developmental Assets frameworks already developed and or significantly under way address middle childhood (e.g., Scales et al., 2004; Sesma, 2002) and adolescence (e.g., Scales & Leffert, 1999), it is highly appropriate to follow the usual trajectory in which advances are made in child-related issues: downward. So the early childhood assets for children ages 3–5 follow this usual pattern. Were developmentally appropriate practice to extend its "coverage" beyond year 8, it, along with the early childhood Developmental Assets framework, would provide guidance and support in the important developmental transition period of 5–8 (Sesma, 2002).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's pioneering *lattice* approach to conceptualizing professional development could be applicable in the articulation of continuity. The lattice represents both lateral and vertical directions and connections, and it can be represented by a grid rather than a line (Johnson & McCracken, 1994). The concept could reflect the congruence and complementarity between developmentally appropriate practice, the Developmental Assets, and both models together as an embracing model to guide development of preschool children, children in the middle years, adolescents, and eventually, adults and the elderly.

This leads, then, to consideration of the relationship of the Developmental Assets framework to a major issue in early childhood and primary years: school readiness, or more specifically, the transition to kindergarten.

There are a number of issues surrounding the transition of young children into kindergarten, whether or not they have been in a formal preschool program. These include developmentally inappropriate utilization of assessment (with reliance on formal testing), more retention, failure to admit qualified children, special "transitional" classes, and an overemphasis on homogeneous groupings, according to a position statement developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2001).

The issue of school readiness, including that of "high-stakes testing" for school admission, is a "hot" one in early education today, as reflected in a recent statement that "as a nation, we have adopted school readiness as our number one education goal, but public investment in preschool education remains very limited" (www.pewtrust.com). There is continued recognition of the fact that many young children arrive for kindergarten or first grade "not ready to learn" and lacking the attributes needed to adapt to and succeed in school. Some place the fault for this at the doorstep of schools themselves, saying they focus too much on formal academic work as represented by knowing the alphabet, numbers, colors, and other basics, and that the fact that many children may not be prepared for this type of "instruction" is not justification for delaying their school entrance.

School readiness and transition are major issues of *quality* in that at the same time researchers are documenting the relationship between early education (of high quality) and positive developmental outcomes and school achievement,

they are also finding that the quality of "most day-care, center-based programs ranges from mediocre to poor" (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2003).

Relevant to this is the controversial research on the effects of early childhood day care attendance on kindergarten transition and adjustment. A pioneering series of studies by Jay Belsky (e.g., 2005), supported by further findings from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (e.g., Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2002), suggests that those young children who spent too much time in out-of-home child care had more adjustment difficulty with reference to self-regulation, attention, and aggressive behavior (simply experiencing out-of-home child care, however, did not have a compelling relationship to observed behavior problems).

There is still considerable consensus that the transition from early childhood, from spending time either at home, at preschool, or in child care, is a major aspect of development, serving as a turning point and challenge that can be either positive or negative. There have been attempts to define the kinds of early experiences and program configurations that contribute to a successful transition.

Relevant to and supportive of the Development Assets framework are systemic programs such as North Carolina's Smart Start early childhood program (www.ncsmartstart.org). With a holistic focus, Smart Start emphasizes five domains of development: health and physical development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development and communication; and cognition and general knowledge. The systemic approach is apparent in Smart Start's contention that teachers, curricular and instructional strategies, school environments, administrators, and families and communities all must work together to provide the experiences that support the five domains of development and hence promote school readiness.

What, then, can the Developmental Assets framework contribute to the issue of transition from early childhood to kindergarten, or to the primary years? First of all, it offers a consistent way to sustain developmentally supportive approaches in all areas of a child's life space at the time of an "artificial" transition (i.e., a radical change in place and style of approach, such as the contrast between, say, a developmentally appropriate preschool and an academically oriented kindergarten). The application of the asset framework might not only modify the contrast in these but also help young children be better prepared and more resilient, and in general convey the variability that exists and needs to be accepted in the nature of young children and their environments.

Long-Term Effectiveness Focus

For there to be long-term effectiveness of an intervention, it is important that the intervention be continued over time, at least in some form that supports the intent of the intervention (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Weissberg et al., 2003). For that to happen, the intervention must somehow embrace issues that emerge at points of transition, either to reduce the amount of contrast before the

transition and after, or to increase the ability of the person to cope with the challenges of the transition. Furthermore, the intervention must be "coherent"; that is, it must have a sufficiently embracing structure and content that it can resonate and still apply to changes that occur over time. The early childhood Developmental Assets framework offers for the first time the possibility of an approach that does these two things.

Benson and Pittman (2001) call for a cohesive strategy for preparing young people for adulthood and indicate that this strategy would involve a "paradigm shift" of "broader goals," since one approach (e.g., competence, school reform), as valuable as it may be, is not enough. Not only should youth development be a "public idea," it must also transform the traditional one-focus ideologies and interventions. Development of an embracing Developmental Assets framework covering early childhood through adolescence, along with extending developmentally appropriate practice, would fit the vision of broader goals and provide a comprehensive, ecological means of striving toward those goals, addressing all systems that influence development.

Theory-Driven Focus

Successful interventions are "theory driven": They have strong and well-articulated theoretical underpinnings (e.g., Nation et al., 2003). The field of early childhood and early childhood practice is shaped by the overall notion, already described, of development and uses developmental theories put forth by a variety of individual, and groups of, theorists. As Raines and Johnston (2003) put it, "Developmentally appropriate practice draws heavily on a family of theoretical perspectives that focus on the whole child … Essential theorists whose work undergirds Developmentally Appropriate Practice include Dewey, Piaget, Erikson, Vygotsky, Rogoff, and Gardner" (p. 88).

The following section will describe these theories that drive both developmentally appropriate practice and the early childhood Developmental Assets framework. These theories will be presented in two categories. One is "thematic" theories: conceptual schemas that are generated by the work of a number of researchers (e.g., strengths-based and resilience theory, attachment theory, individuality, activity theory). The other category consists of theories that are associated with specific people. In early childhood, major source theorists whose ideas serve as underpinnings for various practice approaches and curricula (including developmentally appropriate practice) are Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Howard Gardner.

The fact that there is differential emphasis in the theoretical bases of developmentally appropriate practice and of the early childhood Developmental Assets framework further strengthens the potential of the framework in that the theoretical sources are more extensive and comprehensive. Together, all of these theories will serve as sources and underpinnings for the early childhood Developmental Assets described in the next chapter.

Thematic Theories

Strengths-Based and Resilience Theory

Search Institute's Developmental Assets frameworks for adolescence and middle childhood are grounded in strengths-based and resilience theory, or as it is also called, risk and resilience theory. Although other theories have been more predominant in early childhood development and early childhood education, strengths-based and resilience theory is just now being moved closer to the forefront in recognition of its relevance to the lives of young children. As early childhood educators and authorities Stephen White and Joan Isenberg (2003) state, "The study of resiliency may be the most important research in children's development in postmodern times, for it represents a shift in viewing children's development from one of remediation to one of prevention and from one of deficit to one of strength" (p. 16). The early childhood field is now "ready" for a strengths-based model, according to Helm and Beneke (2003). In their book on the current project approach in early childhood education, they make the comment, "[W]e focus on challenges in order to help teachers break away from a deficit view of children and families" (p. 4). The early childhood Developmental Assets framework, by aligning itself closely with the resilience theory-based asset frameworks for other age groups, thus represents the intent and justification of strengths-based and resilience theory.

As stated earlier, the notion of promoting resilience in young people involves identifying and building on their strengths to increase their resistance to developmental risks, rather than focusing (at least exclusively) on deficits (e.g., Maton, Schellenbach, Leadbeater, & Solarz, 2004). This approach looks at the potential of "individuals, families and communities," giving "primary attention" to such capacities as coping, competence, and efficacy (Maton et al., 2004, p. 5). The resilience paradigm is consonant with *positive psychology* (e.g., Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), a strong trend in mainstream psychology that also underlies the Developmental Assets framework. Positive psychology is concerned with such issues as "what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities. Positive psychology should be able to help document what kinds of families result in children who flourish" (p. 5). A strengths-based conception of development focuses on "how healthy development occurs, especially competence and resilience" (p. 4). Masten and Coatsworth (1998) also stress the significance of competence in successful development. Resilience is sometimes considered in a model conceptualized as "risk and resilience." Children who are resilient show strength under adversity (e.g., Werner & Smith, 1992); among the traits that lead to such resilience are appeal (a quality that attracts positive attention and engages adults with a child), social skills, responsibility, and competence. Being resilient also means that children are less vulnerable to the impact of risk factors, of which there are many in their lives (White & Isenberg, 2003)—poverty, violence, poor health care, poor-quality child care. Failure to withstand the threat of these factors is related to problems in adolescence.

The asset framework was initially developed as a strengths-based, resilience-building approach to youth development, and communities, schools, families, and policy makers nationwide have adopted and applied its principles. For the early childhood community, the strengths-based approach builds upon the positive tradition in approaches to early childhood care and education, as well as addresses the emergent recognition of resilience as a necessary capacity.

There are findings showing how young children, particularly members of minorities and of low-income families, become competent despite extreme adversity (Mendez, Fantuzzo, & Cicchetti, 2002). Attributes such as problem solving, self-control, and persistence are contributors. Furthermore, and crucial in the conception of the Developmental Assets framework, is the "supportive role that members of proximal systems to the young child—namely family and school—can play" (p. 1085).

Related to strengths-based and risk and resilience theory is the notion of *thriving*, referring to a level of development extending beyond the minimum baseline to the optimal (e.g., Sesma, 2002). In agreement with other wellness and health promotion and positive psychology concepts, thriving is defined as going beyond being "problem free" and embracing qualities such as prosocial behavior and happiness. The idea of thriving takes on further significance when it is conceptualized as a lifelong attribute (Pearsall, 2004): that one can lead a "thriving life." Thrivers manage to use "disequilibration," cited as a "dissonance between what our life theory predicts should happen and what actually does" (p. 60).

Thriving should be a concept amenable to early childhood practitioners, since most are familiar with the term "failure to thrive," which refers to infants who for sometimes puzzling reasons do not grow and develop. According to Sesma (2002), there are three key features to thriving:

- Thriving indicators should be "unipolar"—that is, the absence of a particular indicator in a particular child is not necessarily negative;
- Thriving indicators are focused on *outcomes*, rather than predictors of development. The indicators thus describe children's behavior in a way that enables assessment of the functioning of a particular child with reference both to a normative group and to her or his own growth trajectory over time; and
- Thriving is also a means of framing the current emphasis on "outcomes" in a way that those who are uncomfortable with identifying specific outcomes for young children might be more likely to accept.

Is it possible that a comprehensive approach to early childhood development such as the asset framework could support development that would go beyond attaining expected developmental milestones, reframe the discomfort that surrounds outcomes in early childhood and early childhood interventions, and, in the ongoing support of a positive approach in early childhood, promote *thriving* in young children?

TABLE 4. Comparison between Traditional Deficits-Based and Current Strengths-Based Approaches

	Deficits-based	Strengths-based
Knowledge	Understand how problems develop	Understand how healthy development occurs, particularly competence
Development	Focus on negative emotions, cognitive gaps, etc.	Focus on attaining positive outcomes, positive emotions, cognitive abilities, etc.
Prevention	Prevent discrete problems	Promote healthy development
	Provide clinical / therapeutic services	Build competencies and capacities to prevent later emergence of problems
Intervention	Follow governmentally prescribed programs	Empower individuals and communities to develop their own programs
Causality	Ignore role of social context	Strengthen and transform social context
	Blame parents	Empower and support parents
Education	Track and remediate	Expect and help all children too succeed
Diversity	Isolate and marginalize family and cultural differences	Respect cultural diversity and recognize strengths in diversity and various family configurations

Two of the cornerstones of successful interventions, relationships and competence, are supported by two other theory streams: attachment and activity, which will be subsequently discussed. Although successful attachment is integrally related to relationship formation, and while competence is supported by participation in activities, there is also an interactive relationship between the two (e.g., VanderVen, 1999b) that further enhances the utility of the Developmental Assets framework in that relationships and competence (encouraged by the external asset categories of support and constructive-use-of-time) are major features of the framework.

Table 4 compares the traditional deficits-based approach with the strengths and thriving approach supported by the early childhood Developmental Assets framework.

Attachment Theory

Attachment refers to the making of a sustained bond or connection with a primary caregiver (e.g., Berk, 2002) and to close relationships: their formation and developmental benefits. Attachment has been considered a—or rather *the*—major constituent of development for many years based especially on the earlier seminal work of John Bowlby and Mary S. Ainsworth (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969). From them have come concepts reflecting the nature and meaning of the attachment bond. Where the nature of attachment is secure, the child has a strong basis for development to move forth. When it follows an "insecure," "avoidant," or "anxious" trajectory, the outcomes may color the pathway of development from then on. More recently, there have been

new advances that need to be taken into consideration. Although initially the concern in attachment was primarily with infancy, now it is considered in the years beyond. Other key emergent issues are continuing to consider the concept of a secure base from which to explore, views of attachment development, and the roles of family, culture, and life span as attachment contexts (Waters & Cummings, 2000, p. 164).

The significance of attachment is underscored further when considering how children develop "working models" of relationships based on earliest and ongoing attachment factors. The working model affects children's expectations and behavior in relationships with parents, other caregivers, peers, and teachers, not only during the earliest years but throughout their lives (e.g., Kane et al., 1997)

With preschool-age children, the relationship of attachment to any number of puzzling, challenging, and sometimes unproductive behaviors is much less apparent. Any influence on child-care practices needs to build in recognition of the significance of attachment in connection to all domains of development, and to surface behavior whose underlying meaning may reflect attachment issues— and increasingly does (e.g., Watson, 2003). Ben Mardell (1999) compellingly states the significance of attachment as a dynamic affecting young children in his account of "Miss T," a young girl in a child-care program whose upsetting behavior was resistant to traditional control methods and was finally recognized as related to attachment issues.

Today in many child-care programs, there are similar children whose often challenging behaviors—inattentiveness, aggression, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, among others—are related to attachment issues. Regretfully, these behaviors are often handled with inappropriate and even punitive practices that are literally counter to the needs children are expressing in these situations. Extensive research by Jay Belsky (2005) and others finds that children who spend beyond a certain number of hours a week in substitute child care are likely to be more aggressive and have other behavior problems when they enter school (see also Berk, 2002), a phenomenon that could be related to attachment issues. The support assets all relate to promoting positive attachments, with the effects influencing the internal assets, particularly social competencies, but the others as well.

Individuality Theory

The necessity for tailoring any approach to the individuality of young children is continually underscored and reflected in descriptions of these approaches (e.g., Brazelton and Greenspan as quoted in Greenberg, 2001) and in developmentally appropriate practice. Developmentally appropriate practice includes the stipulation that any approach must be not only "age appropriate" but also "individually appropriate," taking into account the child's individual interests and style of approaching the world (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Understanding basic temperament (e.g., Thomas & Chess, 1977) is particularly significant in enabling young children to develop positive relationships with nonfamilial caregivers, especially those who spend a considerable amount of time with them.

Basic temperament theory was a profound breakthrough in understanding how young children development. Basic temperament, or "individuality," is constitutional, that is, "present at birth." It refers to behavior style, how each young child approaches and constructs the world in a way unique to her or him. With the advent of basic temperament research (Thomas & Chess, 1977), many of the prevailing and conventional ways of viewing development were challenged. Development was emphasized as being a continued transaction between the child and the environment, with the child affecting and shaping the nature of her or his environment as much as the environment shaped and influenced her or him. While there have been other descriptions of dimensions of temperament, that of Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas, and of another of their collaborators, Herbert Birch, is the most extensive and continually referred to when considering developmental issues. The dimensions include activity level, threshold of stimulation, rhythmicity, distractibility, approach/withdrawal, attention span and persistence, quality of mood, intensity of reaction, and adaptability. Different configurations and combinations can reflect an "easy" or "difficult" child.

It can be difficult to put consideration of individuality into practice. However, the notion of essential temperament provides empirically based definition to individuality. Temperament is especially significant in that it is related to resilience. Children of positive temperament elicit supportive responses from caregivers, which in turn provide strength (Werner & Smith, 1992). Acknowledgment of the role of temperament in development and behavior of the preschool child, including adult practices, will be reflected in the rationales for relevant early childhood Developmental Assets.

Activity Theory

While activity theory as a theoretical base is rarely discussed as an early childhood "mainstream" rationale, a large body of "activity" theory is increasingly considered with reference to school-age children and to constructivist pedagogy. Activity theory (e.g., Barab, Barnett, Yamagata-Lynch, Squire, & Keating, 2002) focuses on "doing" as it occurs in a sociocultural context. Activity theory (simplifying considerably) is "concerned with how informal learning—particularly skill development—takes place in the context of social interaction with others" (VanderVen, 1999b, pp. 136–137). Activity is not undertaken just to do something; rather there is intent "to transform something." In activity theory, relationships between actor and object are mediated by a variety of factors. These factors comprise an "activity system" in which tools, objects, the roles of others (division of labor), and rules all interrelate and interact dynamically (Barab et al., pp. 78–79).

Gallimore and Goldenberg (1993) describe literacy development in an activity context and reinforce the notion that literacy develops where there are materials for literacy development, especially in the home. They underscore "culture as the shaper and sustainer of activity settings" (p. 331). Given the current emphasis on literacy development, or "emergent literacy" ["literacy development during a child's early years" (p. 316)] in early childhood, this theory and applications of it warrant considerable attention, especially when considering the underpinnings for the Developmental Assets framework. The emphasis on the relationship between activity, culture, and cultural elements— "personnel (people), tasks, beliefs, motives, tasks, scripts, goals/beliefs" (p. 331)—not only has an ecological flavor but also places appropriate emphasis on supports for parents and others in the lived contexts of children.

Given the significance of "acting" and "doing" in the daily lives and learning of young children, activity theory is a useful perspective to bring to bear on early childhood. Relationship formation is often emphasized as a central developmental task. Activity theory reminds us that relationships develop in the context of activities, and vice versa, in a transactional process.

Theory of Mind

Underlying many young children's developmental processes is their "theory of mind," according to Henry Wellman (1990), a pioneer in this area. "Theory of mind" refers to the phenomenon that young children actually hold knowledge and beliefs about mental activities such as desires, fantasies, "remembering, thinking and dreaming" (p. xii), which is quite different from the external material world. Contrary to some prevailing developmental beliefs, young children, including 3-year-olds, have this "theory of mind" and can distinguish between physical and mental entities and refer to them in their discourses. Their "theory of mind" is constructed in the course of development and is significant in their learning to understand the "social world" (Wellman, 1990, p. 1). Three-year-olds are aware of others and their particular worlds of beliefs that can explain their actions, and they recognize that other people may have different preferences. Angeline Lillard and Stephanie Cureton (2003) acknowledge that children understand emotions very early, with happiness being the first one, followed by anger, sadness, and fear. Children may not realize until later that emotional expression is not necessarily congruent with the internal feeling. Children tend to understand others in terms of what they might want ("desire psychology," according to Wellman, 1990). Toward the end of the preschool years, children come to understand beliefs and realize that people have ideas about the world that shape what they do.

The notion of children's theory of mind challenges some common concepts, for example, that children's ongoing development moves them more toward scientific and rational thinking. Rather, magical thinking (the counterpart of rational thinking) requires some basic rational concepts and knowledge, and both magical and rational thinking can coexist (Rosengren et al., 2000).

Religious and spiritual issues are sometimes taken into account in considering young children's theory of mind. Young children do think about religious issues (Turiel & Neff, 2000), which relates to asset 19, Religious Community. Religion is also connected to moral development regarding such concepts as justice, fairness, and right and wrong.

Theory of mind has a number of implications for the Developmental Assets framework. When children have developed a "theory of mind," as Lillard and Cureton (2003) state, "an understanding that others have feelings and desires and beliefs[·] … they are likely to engage in more positive interactions with others" (p. 48). These researchers point out that activities, including the opportunity to participate in pretend play, provided to children at home and in school, promote this social development. It is also important to understand how culture shapes theory of mind and to accept that we need to be sensitive to the fact that children of different cultures may have different theories of mind.

Major Early Childhood Theorists

Erik Erikson

Eriksonian theory has been and remains a major influence on thinking about and practice with young children. Eriksonian theory may be considered "neopsychoanalytic"; that is, it maintains the dynamic aspects of psychoanalytic theory but places development in much more of a sociocultural context. It is helpful to view Eriksonian theory as it describes development for infancy through school age, to better understand its construction of the preschool phase of development. In infancy, a baby, if cared for in a sensitive and nurturing environment by a stable caregiver, develops a view of the world as a good place in which her or his needs are met: This perception constitutes "basic trust." If the infant experiences lack of attention and indifferent and inconsistent caregiving from multiple persons, he or she is more likely to construct the world as an uncertain and uncaring place: The child comes to "mistrust." Moving on to the toddler years, the developmental results can be either "autonomy" or "shame and doubt." The upright child further explores the physical world around her. At the same time (this is the psychoanalytic aspect of Eriksonian theory), pressures for toilet training are imposed, confronting the child with the issue of who controls his body and its growing capacities. If the training is accomplished in a way that enables the child to feel her growing powers, then she develops a sense of autonomy—of increasing independence and control. If not, she then feels "shame" and "doubt," a lack of acceptance and of confidence in her abilities and freedom to move forth. Some feel that a sense of self is really born in the toddler period of development and that the traditional toddler "no" is a way of affirming the emerging sense of self.

Prior to entering preschool (ages 3–5), the phase of development children are in is "initiative versus guilt." As children continue to move beyond

toddlerhood, they acquire even newer physical, cognitive, and social capacities and are beginning to develop imagination. In line with the psychoanalytic tradition of Eriksonian theory, such imagination includes developing sexual feelings toward the parent of the opposite sex along with identifying with the same-sex parent; this phase also sees the inception of a conscience or more what today we might call "self-regulation." The child internalizes the values of the same-sex parent. A conflictual situation is thus set up, with the child, on one hand, wanting to use "new locomotor and mental power" (Erikson, 1950, p. 255) and, on the other hand, feeling constrained because of the perceived powers of the opposite-sex parent. If these feelings are handled sensitively, the child feels empowered to take new steps toward independence—to acquire a healthy sense of initiative. If the child's feelings are misunderstood and quashed by parents and caregivers, a sense of guilt and constraint can result. For older school-age children, a positive resolution is a sense of *industry* (Berk, 2002; Erikson, 1950; Thomas, 2000). Beyond having the sense of "doing" that characterizes the late preschool years, school-age children can develop a sense of competence, or doing well at the tasks of middle childhood, both in and out of school. If family, school, and peers do not support the child, however, he or she develops a sense of *inferiority*—of not being up to what is expected of her or him and to what others seem to be doing better.

Whether or not one accepts the psychoanalytic flavor of Eriksonian theory, it has great heuristic value in applied developmental psychology. The themes it has posited for each phase of development somehow seem to be "so," and to have such a theme at hand has provided many developmentalists a way to organize their thinking about more specific developmental processes within a particular age range.

Jean Piaget

Beginning with President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" in the 1960s and the rise of early intervention programs designed to prepare preschool children for academic schooling, Jean Piaget has been a major theorist whose thinking has governed an array of early childhood practice guidelines and curricula even though recently the theory, which might be described as developmental-cognitive, has come under criticism for its lack of attention to the social contexts of development. Piagetian theory as actually detailed by Piaget in a large number of books is thus extremely broad, as well as complex, and most people rely on good secondary interpretations. Basically, Piaget holds that young children act on their environment and as they do so they develop their own mental models of the world, or *schemas*, which become more complex as they grow and take in new information. Schemas are modified through a process of adaptation, which itself is composed of two well-known processes: *assimilation* and *accommodation*. In assimilation, new information is taken in through the use of cognitive structures already in place. With the new information, these structures must change, resulting in accommodation. This is a

continuous, rather than periodic or discrete process, moving toward greater cognitive complexity, as schemas then become connected and organized into a system (e.g., Berk, 2002; Thomas, 2000).

In Piagetian theory, infancy is a *sensorimotor* stage of development in which learning is based on sensory input whereby babies gradually come to know that they can have an influence by their own actions and intentionality. Preschool children are in the *preoperational thought* period (Thomas, 2000). To summarize, problem solving and thinking are based more on what children see or hear directly rather than on the abstract manipulation of symbols, although by age 3 young children are developing the ability for symbolic representation (having one object represent another; "pretend"). As they mature into the school-age years, children move into the stage of *concrete operations*, in which they think in a more complex and organized way than in early childhood, but can only do so with concrete information (Berk, 2002).

One is the concept of children being *active* in their environment and learning through their own actions and the feedback that results from these actions. Perhaps the most relevant and adopted Piagetian concept is that of *knowledge construction*. Through their activity, children *construct* knowledge of themselves and the world. These constructions build on what they already know, become connected to that knowledge, and serve to generate further constructions. *Constructivism*, an approach that can be traced to Piaget, as will be seen later is a major philosophical and pedagogical influence on preschool practice (e.g., Brooks & Brooks, 1999; Fosnot, 1996).

Obviously the preceding summary is a profound oversimplification, but the major ideas are what have heuristic value when considering the Developmental Assets framework; these powerful notions of development are reiterated in many other early childhood activities and practices that will be described.

Lev Vygotsky

More recently than Piaget, the developmental theories of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky have been adopted by the early childhood professional community. Interestingly, a fundamental Vygotskian concept is *mediation*; however, widely disseminated early childhood writings don't usually mention it. To Vygotsky, mediation is the main process in learning and development (e.g., Karpov & Haywood, 1998; Wertsch, 1985). In mediation, all "higher mental processes" are mediated by "psychological tools such as language, signs and symbols. Adults teach these tools to children in the course of their joint activities, the children internalize them, and these tools then function as mediators of the children's more advanced psychological processes" (Karpov & Haywood, 1998). The description of mediation indicates some other major Vygotskian concepts.

Piaget proposed that knowledge is actively constructed. From Vygotsky comes the contention—a significant one, indeed—that knowledge is *socially* constructed. Knowledge is situated in and shaped by a particular culture, and

it is in the interaction of children with adults that knowledge is thus transmitted. The nature of this knowledge, embracing the values, beliefs, customs, and skills of a social group, is therefore heavily rooted in the culture and shaped by it. Language as the means of communication conveys the messages of the culture, and thus language is extremely important (as it is, of course, in early childhood and overall human development). Activity shapes thinking, rather than thinking primarily shaping activity. Perhaps best known of Vygotsky's developmental constructs are *the zone of proximal development* and *assisted learning*. (The latter construct is often referred to as *scaffolding*.) Children have a zone of proximal development that is related to their ability to do various tasks. At the lower end are those tasks that a child can do without assistance or guidance from adults or more skilled and knowledgeable peers. At the higher end are those tasks that the child can accomplish with the direct support, instruction, and "coaching" of the adult. The function the adult thus plays is to act as a "scaffold" to support the child as he or she "climbs" to a higher level of competence.

This is an ongoing dynamic process that continues to increase the range of knowledge and skill of the child. It is interesting to note the contrast between Piagetian and Vygotskian conceptions of development. Adults play a much more significant role in Vygotsky's thinking (Berk, 2002), a premise with significant implications. Perhaps the most embracing concept of development would be one that considers the combined benefits of self-determined action and activities directly guided by adults and with continued adult presence.

Further, a recent acknowledgment of the significance of Vygotsky's theories on early childhood development and education is the "Tools of the Mind" curriculum, which is based on Vygotskian theory and promotes the "executive functions" (inhibition, working memory, and cognitive flexibility) that are related to school success (Diamond et al., 2007). As does the work of so many other theorists already discussed, Vygotskian theory and the "Tools of the Mind" curriculum support the crucial role of quality dramatic play in developing the attributes needed for academic learning and school success.

Howard Gardner

The concept of multiple intelligences, made famous by Harvard developmentalist Howard Gardner (e.g., Gardner, 1999), is beginning to infuse downward into early childhood education, making this a useful theory (it might be considered a midlevel theory, with practice implications but not explaining development). It is beginning to be applied in elementary school and in after-school programs (e.g., VanderVen, 2000b) and seems to be a viable model not only for segueing into current notions of early childhood curriculum but also for guiding family and community practices. Volumes have been written on multiple intelligences, but what is relevant here is the major premise that there are more ways than the traditional "academic" or "used in school learning" ways to be "smart." While the intelligences as identified by Gardner seem more

like talents, the theory still has extremely pragmatic implications and can serve as a linking concept between early and middle childhood, and between educational, neighborhood, and community settings.

To Gardner (1999), intelligence is "a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture" (pp. 33–34). These intelligences, as he has defined them to date, are linguistic and logical-mathematical (both are associated with "school" tasks and learning); musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial (the ability to organize and manipulate the patterns of both wide and confined spaces), interpersonal, and intrapersonal (self-understanding). More recently, Gardner has added naturalist, existential, and spiritual. To Gardner, the multiple intelligences provide the fullest conception of the richness and capacity of human cognition, and each human being has a unique configuration of them. It is interesting to consider the relationship between the forms of multiple intelligences and the well-respected early childhood curricula (e.g. High/Scope, Creative Curriculum), in which curricular components, implicit and explicit, relate to multiple intelligences. Even though the connection between them, or the presentation of multiple intelligences as a theoretical rationale for early childhood curriculum, is rarely made, nonetheless the multiple intelligences concept offers great continuity as a linking theory between early childhood and elementary school, in which some of the intelligences are supported both by school curricula and out-of-school activities (VanderVen, 2000b).

Family-Centered Practices in Early Childhood

Who can doubt the significance of the family in early childhood? Theorists, researchers, and developers of practice models all underscore the fundamental place of the family in nurturing and enabling growth in young children. A recent example is the "Supporting Teachers, Strengthening Families" initiative of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Yet when it comes to formal efforts to provide family support to those families who lack resources to serve as a "child-rearing system," to encourage participation by families in early childhood programs, or to provide interventions that improve parental functioning, the amount of concern is not matched either by guidelines for action or by action itself.

Furthermore, where there are family-oriented programs, they may not be implemented in an effective way (e.g., Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003). Family-related practices for youth (and we might extrapolate to younger children) can promote resilience and protective factors. Protective factors include, not surprisingly, "positive parent–child relationships, positive discipline methods ... and communication of prosocial family values and expectations" (p. 458). These qualities have strong implications for the early childhood Developmental Assets framework, since numerous assets focus directly on parents and families and these aspects in particular. Kumpfer and Alvarado indicate that precursors to

youth problems can be addressed by family-centered interventions that occur early on (that is, in early childhood) and serve to improve family functioning.

Developmentally appropriate practice for 3- to 5-year-olds mentions that parents should be involved in the transition from preschool to kindergarten and that there should be "reciprocal relationships" with parents so that teachers and caregivers communicate with them, but these premises are somewhat general and are not ecologically oriented (they don't necessarily need to be) in line with the programmatic focus of developmentally appropriate practice. Highly effective intervention models that focus on parent support and involvement, such as the famous "Comer Process" (Comer, 2001), have been given less attention in early childhood than they have in later years. Where there have been significant family support programs, they have been primarily in programs serving children in low-income families (not to say that there isn't a compelling need to continue this service) and may have been more oriented to a deficit model than a wellness and promotion model that stresses thriving as embraced by Search Institute's asset framework (Mannes, 2001).

The ongoing incidence of child abuse and neglect is, of course, another compelling reason for family support. Concern with these issues forms one of the platforms for the National Association for the Education of Young Children's "Supporting Teachers, Strengthening Families" initiative (2003b).

A million children during 2000 were reported as confirmed victims of child abuse and neglect. Describing common types of child abuse and neglect in three categories, physical/sexual, educational, and emotional, the NAEYC urges prevention, building on family strengths, building reciprocal relationships with families, and providing them support in dealing with challenging behaviors.

The *family support* movement is highly relevant to a Developmental Assets framework, and, in fact, when family support is coupled with developmentally appropriate practice, an ecological approach to young children clearly begins to emerge. Family support centers in numerous communities offer needed services to families in an ecological framework and can be considered as analogous to the "full-service school" concept (e.g., Dryfoos, 1994), in which schools not only provide education for children but also are the locus for an array of services that support their families.

The family support philosophy is "that the most effective way to insure the healthy development and growth of small children is by supporting the families and the communities in which they live ... so that they can foster the optimal development of children, youth, and adult family members" (Family Support in Allegheny County).

The following principles apply to family support programs:

> [F]amily support is governed, designed and improved by participants and community members; family support is relationship based, fostering respectful partnerships between and among parents, peers and professions; family support is strengths based, building on existing individual, family, community and cultural abilities and vitalities; family support services are designed by and for participants to meet their priorities and are collabo-

rative among agencies to insure easy access and use; family support reflects, respects and enhances the cultures of the neighborhood through the staff it hires, the materials and activities it provides; family support services are enhanced through program evaluations that reflect family support principles and that contribute to continuous program improvement; family support services are based in the community, serve the entire family without eligibility requirements, and are voluntary. (Family Support in Allegheny County)

Practices include "child development, parenting education, self-sufficiency, case management, community organization, parent involvement/leadership, and responsive to community needs" (Family Support in Allegheny County).

A significant factor in early childhood development is *parent involvement* in schools (e.g., Comer, 2001; DiNatale, 2002). Parent involvement takes various forms, ranging from providing direct support to children to working with policy. Several early childhood Developmental Assets embrace the role of parent involvement in institutions, especially schools. Programs and activities that support effective parenting are also part of family support, and there is evidence that when they are well-designed and -delivered, they have positive effects in strengthening families (e.g., Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003). As with other interventions that have a greater impact when they are evidence-based, effective family-oriented programs include "behavioral parent training" and "family skills training" (in which both parents and children practice the taught skills together (Kumpfer & Alvarado, 2003, pp. 460–461). Such program characteristics as intensity, comprehensiveness, early beginning, sociocultural sensitivity, and developmental appropriateness are associated with effectiveness—not surprisingly, as these are the effectiveness criteria for any intervention.

Community Needs in Early Childhood

That the community plays a significant role in the development of young children is self-evident. As Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) suggest, there is great veracity in Hillary Clinton's elaboration on the African notion that "it takes a village to raise a child." Numerous scholars have affirmed the significance of community (e.g., Aber & Nieto, 2000; Berlin et al., 2001; Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1997; Communities United to Help Kids Succeed; Mannes et al., 2002; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Community resources (along with family support and child characteristics) can serve, in line with resilience theory, as protective factors in the lives of young children (LeBuffe & Naglieri, 2003).

Before considering the implications of this for the Developmental Assets framework for preschool children, some of the essential ways in which communities and neighborhoods are integrally related to positive child development need to be considered.

Parents, if they are financially able, try to select neighborhoods with resources that enrich the lives of their children, such as parks, special programs for children, museums, schools, and the like. Safety is a major concern

(Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). This is, of course, with good reason, since neighborhood violence and crime, which are frequent and high-stress factors for children and their families, can literally be life threatening; as mentioned, violence is a primary concern of the professional early childhood community.

Since greater involvement in the neighborhood is the first developmental step toward independence away from parents, family, and home that young children take, the significance of a supportive neighborhood cannot be overemphasized. Less considered, but still an important factor in rearing young children, is the fact that if a mother does not work outside the home, child rearing can be a lonely, isolated affair; the United States is one of the few nations in the world in which young mothers may be alone in a house all day with small children. When parents are working (which is increasingly the case), the issue of substitute or alternative care for young children arises. Not all young children are in center-based or even organized family day care. Who are the caregivers for these children, and what does being in alternate care imply for the development of the child? For all situations, what neighborhood and community supports are available?

Poverty (not to mention toxic dangers, homelessness, substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, mental health problems, teenage pregnancy) is considered a salient factor in community influence on young children. There is evidence that even in a poor neighborhood there can be a supportive community organization (Aber & Nieto, 2000). Where such "social capital" is present, it contributes to "collective socialization," the process whereby adults informally look after each other and each other's children (Berlin et al., 2001, p. 5). On the other hand, in poor communities, participation in organizing efforts may be discouraged. Despite the significance of community, in the networks of early childhood practice, from direct line teachers and caregivers to academics, there does not seem to be nearly as much attention paid to the community and neighborhood aspects of early child development as there is to the availability of care and the curricula of early childhood programs. As Berlin et al. (2001) state, "[E]arly intervention programs tend to focus on individuals and families and not on community characteristics" (p. 3). Thus, it is extremely timely to consider how to define community practices that support young children in just as studied and widely disseminated a way as developmentally appropriate practice applies to early childhood programs.

This consideration might begin with a conceptual approach and then with a review of relevant concepts, finally emerging with a "practice theory" of community development for early childhood as could be implemented by the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework. An immediate concern, then, is how to further support community initiatives already under way and how to develop new ones that are sufficiently effective. There might be several ways to start. A paradigm for conceptualizing a community-based early childhood approach might be taken from two major themes from Bronfenbrenner's work. The first is that there are multiple influences on development and that to encourage positive development, as many of these influences as possible must be addressed. These include, using his ecological model,

the immediate setting containing a child, but also the family, neighborhood, community, institutions, and values of society. The other is that in order to function as a "child-rearing system" (Bronfenbrenner, 1974), a family must have the components described in the exosystem: health care, employment, financial stability, transportation, and housing. "Comprehensive community initiatives," such as those described by Berlin et al. (2001), to provide developmental and family-oriented service reflect this ecological perspective to some extent but may not reach as deeply into the organizational and social dynamics of neighborhoods and communities as they could.

Community social organization theory (as described by Aber & Nieto, 2000) is pertinent to the strengths-based Developmental Assets framework, since there are ways in which "neighborhood structures and processes might influence psychological wellness" (p. 185). Aber and Nieto encourage a look at how social organization theory, initially developed to explain pathological functioning, might now examine "positive neighborhood characteristics" (p. 197). Furthermore, the consideration of the neighborhood characteristics that can serve as protective factors and promote resilience segues well into the application of the risk and resilience paradigm as a theoretical underpinning for child and youth development. Aber and Nieto point out that the risk and resilience model has been considered primarily at the individual level and argue it is time to look at the "neighborhood contexts" (p. 209) that contribute to it. They recommend a "pluralistic neighborhood theory" that embraces consideration of the interaction of individual and neighborhood factors in resilience; by "focusing attention on the social functions that neighborhoods serve for their residents and the social interaction among them, a wellness-oriented neighborhood research agenda can help to provide an antidote to the problems of individualism in psychology" (p. 291). The theory proposes a transactional rather than the traditional unicausal approach and indicates that we need to study neighborhoods themselves, rather than putting forth already formulated ideas of their deficiencies. It would seem as if all aspects of this approach are in synchrony with the purposes and philosophy of the Developmental Assets framework and can be used in the early childhood adaptation to strengthen the definition and supportive activities for the crucial role of community and neighborhood.

Search Institute's concept of developmentally attentive communities (e.g., Mannes et al., 2002) offers a number of much-needed strategies for community organization and initiatives. Indeed, the role of the community is crucial in promoting positive development. This orientation is harmonious with the tenets and perspectives that have already been discussed for an early childhood approach in that it is ecological, working across different sectors of a community; "socially constructed," in that common meanings are generated as action and interaction proceed; and "emergent" and "self-organizing" (in line with the concepts from nonlinear dynamical systems theory) indicating that community efforts evolve in ways unique to their own sources of energy and their own circumstances. The notion of "change pathways," an approach for enabling access to various community-situated ingredients for positive

development (e.g., Benson, 2003b), can, of course, be applied to the introduction of the Developmental Assets framework into the early childhood community (including the professions dealing with early care and education and the services they provide).

The organizations in, and purporting to serve, particular communities often discourage civic participation by minorities and poor people. Neighborhood processes can contribute to resiliency for some of its residents. Where there is social capital (e.g., Putnam, 2000) in a neighborhood, it can encourage "collective socialization" whereby adults informally look after each other and their children (Berlin et al., 2001, p. 5). This offers a strong rationale for intergenerational activities (as discussed elsewhere), since it directly involves available and invested adults.

The focus on community considerations in promoting development raises a fundamental issue: economics. Recently, Ethel Tittnich, who for years has been integrally connected with early childhood scholarship, commented, "The field doesn't have enough money" (personal communication, 2003).

This pithy statement indeed expresses the "bottom line" of early childhood and its complex problems and challenges. Similarly, Joan Lombardi (2003) points out that "our current system of financing is outdated and underfunded, shortchanging both children and families" (p. 166).

There are two sides to this coin: the relationship between early intervention activities and the underfunding of the delivery and infrasystem of early childhood. Considered as an intervention, there could be potential economic benefits of implementing a Developmental Assets framework. If a relationship could be demonstrated between outcomes promoted by Developmental Assets for young children and later social occurrences that require costly interventions or other economic losses, the effort will have been well worth it. Examples of areas in which costly interventions later on in life have been considerably reduced for young children who experienced developmentally oriented early intervention include reduction in teenage pregnancy, placement in special classes, school dropouts, and juvenile crime (e.g., High/Scope, 2005; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1980).

Robert Putnam's (2000) more general notion of social capital is a compelling challenge for the early childhood field to address the problems that have such profound significance for the quality of life of young children. More competent children and families certainly represent significant "social capital": "ties that bind individuals into communities, resulting in increased trust, caring for one another, and mutual assistance" (Powell, 2003, p. 9). Indeed, Putnam reports in *Better Together* (2003; cowritten with Lewis Feldstein) that the decline in neighborhood activity he describes in *Bowling Alone* is reversing itself.

The relevance of social capital to early childhood and an approach such as that of the early childhood Developmental Assets framework is obvious: "Social capital is seen as essential to the proper functioning of society because high levels of social capital result in schools supported by engaged parents, neighbors who know each other, and neighborhoods that resist blight and crime" (Powell, 2003, p. 9). The significance of relationships and relationships

built through working together to achieve group goals and the importance of face-to-face communication—features of the Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework—is stressed in the consideration between more "togetherness" among people, and real cohesiveness as they work to improve their environment.

As social capital is developed, so also may it serve to generate economic capital, with both processes hopefully interacting synergistically. The dire economic situation in early childhood hopefully might be addressed through people acting on those assets contributing to neighborhood and community strength. With reference to the overall underfunding of the infrasystem that attempts to provide support to children, families, neighborhoods, and communities, this chronic problem has pervasive effects. Just one example is that of welfare and welfare-to-work practices. Working mothers must have proper child care and support if they are to get off welfare and continue to develop their ability to make a living wage and attend to their families. An upsetting trend is for states with budget problems to solve them by cutting back child-care subsidies, thus placing parents in a totally untenable position.

This is not to mention the minimum wage salaries that detract from hiring quality staff (and when quality staff are associated with positive outcomes for children) and the costly results, to child development and to program quality, of the resultant turnover. In that it would touch and involve communities, a widely adopted practice model such as the Developmental Assets framework could address these issues as well.

10 Emergent Perspectives on the Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework

Chapter 9 looked at how the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework can serve as a comprehensive intervention in early childhood and at how it is supported by widely accepted major theory streams and knowledge areas that provide an eclectic, multiperspective underpinning for the Developmental Assets. It is not sufficient to stop there, however. Rather, it is important to reflect on how these intervention criteria will relate to the pragmatic (practical) value of the Developmental Assets framework. In other words, we are concerned with some of the ways in which the framework can actually be applied. It is common in human services and social sciences to derive "practice from theory." But how is that done? And how do the application guidelines relate to their theoretical contributors? This chapter will consider issues in theory and practice with implications for both the construction and the application of the early childhood Developmental Assets framework.

In recent years, there has been a shift in social sciences regarding what constitutes legitimate knowledge, from the "rational-empiricist" paradigm borrowed from the natural sciences several decades ago, when the only legitimate knowledge was what resulted from controlled scientific experimentation. In the days of the rational-empiricist paradigm in social sciences research, the only legitimate way to justify an approach to a human issue or problem would have been attempting to apply the results of empirical studies following some kind of synthesis of these studies. Today, as a result of postmodern influences that have questioned the validity, utility, and meaning of this knowledge, there is greater flexibility regarding what constitutes legitimate knowledge. This bodes well for the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework, for it allows it to be considered both for its scientific grounds as well as for its broader meanings. Germane to these considerations are new perspectives on how the well-established domains of development relate to each other and thus on how the Developmental Assets relate to each other. The recently evolved sciences of chaos theory and complexity theory, often referred to as "nonlinear dynamical systems theory," can address some of these issues when used as a lens for viewing the Developmental Assets framework.

On its surface, the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework appears to be the quintessential "modern" approach to child development: Simply apply it and get predictable results. Yet, as already described here, the

framework is intended for organizing and guiding, rather than as a matrix to be invariantly imposed on dynamic individuals.

There are two major areas for consideration: how the Developmental Assets framework relates to the recent emergence of pragmatic psychology and how it relates to nonlinear dynamical systems theory. Both these areas have crucial implications for the understanding of and application of the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework.

An intervention needs to be theoretically grounded. But there is more to it than that. It also needs to show how the theory is translated into programmatic terms and specific premises. As Ramey and Ramey (1998) state, " general phrases" to describe interventions are widely used and are not "a specific action plan." They do not provide an "operational description" of what programs actually do (p. 113). We propose, based on years of experience with Developmental Assets, that the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework is indeed that: a guiding framework for action that can enable application. The congruency of the framework with other approaches, models, and both theoretical and empirical knowledge, increases the probability of effectiveness.

New Paradigms and the Developmental Assets Framework

In recent years the social sciences and human services fields have been affected by the postmodern paradigm or organizing perspective that has called into question the nature of and sources of truth. In postmodern thought there is considered to be no absolute truth, a notion that challenges the rational-empiricist research tradition. Rather, knowledge is viewed as a product of the social context in which it is generated and is shaped by the values of those who produce it. Postmodernism thus respects or encourages multiple voices, especially those of the vulnerable or disenfranchised, such as minority groups and persons of different cultures. There are three forms of postmodern effects that may be relevant to the Developmental Assets framework: pragmatic psychology, nonlinear dynamical systems theory, and the early childhood reconceptualizing movement.

Pragmatic Psychology

Pragmatic psychology emphasizes how psychology can best solve the problems and issues of its clients (clients being individuals, groups, organizations, and the like) without discarding the rational-empiricist, positivist approach to research and practice (Fishman, 1999).

The pragmatic approach might be described as midway between the empiricist research designed to test theories and the hermeneutic approach. The empiricist approach in general uses experimental designs to gather and analyze data; the results of this research are usually reported in professional journals. The knowledge thus generated frequently does not make its way

"down" to the level of practice, and if so, the translation of the findings into practice implications may be erroneous. The hermeneutic approach, focusing on social constructivism (the premise that knowledge is constructed by people in interaction), interpretation, and context, thus is in contrast to empiricism. The pragmatic approach, as stated earlier, integrates both ways of generating knowledge. It would focus much more on context, without discarding empirically derived knowledge. As described by Fishman (1999), the goal of the pragmatist is to "search for the set of concepts and activities that will best serve the needs of those who are stakeholders" (p. 218). While oversimplifying the nature of pragmatic psychology as described in this book, what could be a stronger rationale for the Developmental Assets approach with its focus on directly improving practice? The asset approach offers a conceptual schema derived from multiple knowledge sources that is focused on providing activities that meet the needs of young children. In addition, pragmatic psychology provides a generic model for adjusting and adapting not only the Developmental Assets but also any similar developmental-psychological paradigm designed to provide a credible, valid, outcomes-oriented and easily applied approach to improving the human condition.

Using the "disciplined inquiry" approach to "professional activity" begins with the client, and is followed by the guiding conception, experience and research, assessment and formulation, and action (Fishman, 1999, pp. 188–189). This is in a loose sense the approach implicitly described in this book. Future versions might adopt the method more formally.

Nonlinear Dynamical Systems Theory

In recent years, nonlinear dynamical systems theory (chaos theory and complexity theory, including the concept of complex adaptive systems) has been applied to issues in human and child development; best known, perhaps, relevant to the development of young children, is the work of Esther Thelen on motor development (Berk, 2000); Fromberg (2001) and VanderVen (1998a) have articulated nonlinear dynamical concepts as they apply to play. Some consider the discovery of chaotic and complex phenomena in physical systems and the application of representative concepts to the social sciences to be a postmodern shift in approach to science. In "modernism," the scientific method prevailed, with psychology and other social sciences attempting to be like the physical sciences in their use of empirical and experimental methods (e.g., Masterpasqua & Perna, 1997). In postmodernism, uncertainty and unpredictability prevail.

A complex adaptive system is composed of multiple and connected subsystems that evolve in open interaction with the external environment. As the systems take in information from the environment, the systems themselves change; when there is a pressing accumulation of information, a particular system may be pushed toward bifurcation, at which point there can be a profound shift within the system and the inter-relationships among the subsystems. This shift enables the classic domains of development—social,

emotional, physical, and cognitive—to be recognized, intertwined, and inter-connected. The nonlinear dynamical approach to development offers the potential to reframe both "ages and stages" and "domains" of development into an integrated conception of development as a complex adaptive system.

There are many variations in developmental within a given age range: Development has multiple causative agents and may follow many pathways; it is recursive (developmental outcomes are "fed back" into the ongoing process of development). Learning is not a linear, sequential process, if only because not all information is linear and sequential. Rather, it is "fuzzy" and "ill structured."

A dynamical systems approach might be further investigated for its relevance to articulating the relationship between the Developmental Assets frameworks for different age groups and the relationships among different assets (which might have implications for grouping). Furthermore, a recent paper, "Theoretical Contributions of Complex Systems to Positive Psychology and Health: A Somewhat Complicated Affair" (Schuldberg, 2002), acknowledges a shift in the health paradigm from a pathological focus to a positive focus as reflected by the frequency of such terms as "wellness" and "quality of life." This perspective, which describes the characteristics of dynamics in "healthy" systems, is analogous to the shift from a deficit model (for some children) in early childhood to a strengths-based model as represented by the Developmental Assets framework. For example, "outcomes" can be coupled—the contention is made here that individual assets and asset categories have transactional relationships with each other rather than operating independently. In the paradoxical aspect of dynamical systems, negative emotions and conflict can be positive (Schuldberg, 2002, p. 339). The potential of "healthy chaos" is noted, the point being made that health emerges from nonlinear dynamical systems. A dynamical systems approach challenges the traditional notion that systems at rest or in equilibrium are the healthiest. Rather, those that are disequilibrious are healthier because they are poised to change in a continual exchange of information with, and adaptation to, the environment. Perhaps a view of early childhood positive development in the context of nonlinear dynamical systems theory would help identify some of these processes and lead to adjustments in the Developmental Assets framework as it evolves.

At first glance, the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework would impress one as being completely linear, with its sequential format, formally named categories, organized sequences within categories, and direct statements. However, one feature of dynamical systems is that where there may seem to be linear, surface features of a particular model, underneath there may be multiple, intersecting relationships that enable synergistic effects. From a developmental perspective, the inter-relationships among assets are quite obvious. For example, one asset describes the significance of the opportunity to play. Play activity as represented in that asset reflects not only play itself but also the contributory input (entrainment) of any number of other assets, both internal and external, thus reframing play as a complex adaptive system in a child's development. With multiple causative strands (the related assets), play and the outcomes of playing become salient forces (e.g., attractors or drivers) in the child's development, being at any point both a process and an outcome.

The principles of "sensitive dependence on initial conditions" and "complex adaptive systems" can help explain how the interconnections work. In general, sensitive dependence on initial conditions means that a small input into a system can reverberate and multiply, leading to large outcomes. Thus, addressing *any* asset with a specific intervention could have an effect by encouraging movement in other, related assets exceeding that of the particular asset. A complex adaptive system is open to information from the environment, and as it is entrained (connected to, taken up by) in the original system, the system adapts and grows. The enactment of any asset therefore sets an environmental exchange in motion, initiating a complex adaptive system. Of course, the effects might be the strongest on those assets most closely related, but over time, as is true in a complex adaptive system, the effects could ripple far. For example, support could lead to greater competence in learning and social skills, which in turn could lead to a family involvement in a community activity that would end up connecting the family to needed additional community resources.

The assets thus might be considered to reflect both linear and dynamical systems approaches to development. Rather than dichotomizing by seeing one aspect as advantageous over another, the contrast between the linear and dynamical systems approach in developmentally related subjects suggests that both have merit and that any aspect under consideration may have the greatest effectiveness when both linearity and nonlinearity are applied (VanderVen, 1998a).

The "developmental systems" approach that is characteristic of the work of Search Institute recognizes that development does not take place according to the reductionist "nature–nurture" dichotomy but rather that development is emergent, becoming increasingly complex over time as a result of autopoietic interaction (internal) and among external interactions with the environment (e.g., Benson, 2003a).

One of the key features of a chaotic system is "sensitive dependence on initial conditions," meaning that in an open system, a very small perturbation or input very early on in its evolution can reverberate through the system over time and lead to a major effect and change. One of the fundamental premises of the Search Institute assets model is that "everyone can be an asset builder." As Peter Benson, president of the institute, says, every person who works to make a difference really can make a difference—demonstrating the "power of one." Considering the phenomenon of "sensitive dependence on initial conditions," this is highly likely. The notion of sensitive dependence on initial conditions also suggests that the greater the number of assets targeted with an action of some kind, the more powerful will be the effects set in motion.

The Early Childhood Reconceptualizers

The consideration of the Developmental Assets framework within a postmodern perspective, and within that, nonlinear dynamical systems, takes on significance when the views of the "early childhood reconceptualizers" are examined. A defined group in child development and early

childhood education, the reconceptualizers question traditional and widely used child development theory and empirical information, as well as developmental psychology, models that attempt to prescribe or describe guidelines and standards for practice (e.g., developmentally appropriate practice) and empirical or quantitative research. As we consider the current context for application of the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework, it would seem important to bear in mind the general concerns of the "reconceptualizers," even if we may not totally accept them.

The notion of quality has come under particular scrutiny (e.g., Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). To these authors, "quality" is a discourse—a culturally determined frame that influences, sometimes unconsciously, how an issue or concept is constructed, viewed, and applied. They relate the notion to "gaining control" and the role of "experts" in deciding what constitutes good "quality" and whether or not we are getting it. "Developmentally appropriate practice" has thus come into question as the dominant paradigm for governing early childhood education.

While one may not necessarily agree with these views, it is important to keep in mind those issues within the early childhood field regarding which there is skepticism and debate. The reconceptualizers do bring needed scrutiny and tension into the unilateral acceptance of some of the eternal verities and stereotypes (especially seen in practice) that have been present in the early childhood field for years.

However, to bring coherence and meaning into any entity, there needs to be some definition that can be obtained by compiling an organized schema. Without developmentally appropriate practice, the field of early childhood education would be diffuse, unfocused, and, if an opposite of quality may be imagined, such would prevail much more than it does now.

Developmentally appropriate practice, with the early childhood Developmental Assets framework, might be seen as reflective of the dynamical systems concept of self-organization in which coherence in a system emerges without strong external forces. In the dynamical systems perspective, the act of applying a conceptual schema such as the Developmental Assets framework and developmentally oriented practice encourages system growth and bifurcation—in other words, change. It might be added that the Developmental Assets framework similarly can energize the early childhood practice field, along with developmentally appropriate practice and the many people who could be brought into it by the Developmental Assets framework, as it addresses more subsystems in the universe of direct and indirect influences on child development.

In nonlinear dynamical systems theory, an "attractor" is the governor of a system to which the system reverts. The focus on "quality" is a major driver or attractor in early child care and education, and looking ahead it does not seem likely that this is going to change soon. Trends as described in this book indicate that there is an increase in the very same actions that the postmodernists decry: Efforts to define and measure quality precisely, to focus more on results of empirical research to develop programs that reflect quality, and so forth, are

only intensifying. The challenge will be to frame these efforts in ways that are specific enough to address particular developmental issues, but "loose" enough to enable some flexibility and variation. Being careful not to discard completely an earlier paradigm (modernism and empiricism) in the fervent pursuit of a newer one (despite the major contributions it can make) may be empowering—both can be embraced simultaneously (e.g., VanderVen, 1998a). That, in fact, is the meaning of the early childhood Developmental Assets framework. It can be based on theoretical, empirical, and practical knowledge, integrated and interconnected, and used to set developmental events into motion and ongoing evolution.

The Assets as Processes, Outcomes, and Guidelines

When viewing the asset framework, the potential user may ask: In addition to the obvious fact that the external assets are in a child's environment and the internal assets are "inside" the child, then, how do the concepts of processes, outcomes, or guidelines apply?

As defined by Search Institute (2000), Developmental Assets are "positive experiences and qualities that all of us have the power to bring into the lives of children and youth" (p. 1). Because of the nature and rapidity of development of young children, even within a narrowly circumscribed age range (3–5), it is important to offer further scrutiny. In this perspective, the assets may be seen as "processes" whereby experiences that encourage and shape the trajectory of development are supported.

Outcomes are considered demonstrable results of an intervention with indicators for attainment, and the concept now figures largely in early childhood (e.g., the National Head Start child outcomes; see Table 1). No longer does the old notion of "just let development take place naturally" prevail in early childhood education. With an impetus from the recent political scene, most particularly the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and "Good Start, Grow Smart" (the early childhood initiative outlined in President George W. Bush's January 2002 State of the Union address), the focus is now on encouraging and measuring attributes or "outcomes" of early childhood education that will prepare young children with specific skills that have them "ready to learn" in school. The "outcomes" movement is tied to standards and testing: Outcomes are assessed by tests that are related to standards. Schools that do not meet the standard (that do not attain sufficient outcomes as determined by the tests) will be held accountable. The focus of this effort is literacy development (Ohl, 2002).

While many early childhood developmentalists would endorse the acquisition of literacy, they would not do so at the expense of social and emotional foundations. And, while the literature on "Good Start, Grow Smart" emphasizes that literacy should be "taught" in a way suitable for preschool children, some fear that the emphasis nonetheless would turn away from child-directed, teacher-guided, play-oriented curricula toward teacher-directed, "packaged,"

TABLE 1. Head Start Child Outcomes Framework and the Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework: Similarities and Differences

	Search Institute Assets Framework	Head Start Outcomes Framework
Conceptual Base	Early child development Strengths and resilience Family and community Ecological / Systems	Early child development Strengths and resilience Family and community
Format and Applications	Assets Asset Descriptions Guidelines Indicators Outcomes	Domains Domain descriptions Outcomes / goals Indicators
Content	Eight Asset Categories EXTERNAL ASSETS -Support -Empowerment -Boundaries-and-Expectations -Constructive-Use-of-Time	Eight Domains -Language Development -Literacy -Mathematics -Science -Creative Arts -Social and Emotional Development -Approaches Toward Learning -Physical Health and Development
	INTERNAL ASSETS -Commitment-to-Learning -Positive Values -Social Competencies -Positive Identity	
Common Elements	Specific Assets Early Literacy Self-Regulation Safety Community Values Children Motivation to Mastery Engagement in Learning Experiences Play and Creative Activities Positive Family Communication Early Literacy	Domains Literacy Social and Emotional Development Physical Health and Development Approaches Toward Learning Creative Arts Language Development

academic instructional activities. Outcomes-oriented research has been undertaken with a focus on Head Start (Kuhns & Chazan-Cohen, 2002), and a study in Pennsylvania found that Head Start programs far exceed other types of early childhood programs in quality (Governor's Task Force on Early Childhood Care and Education, 2002). This result supports the strong relationship of the Head Start model to the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework. What aspects of Head Start intersect with the asset categories? Where there is congruence, there is consensual validation; where there is not overlap, these areas, when used in combination (Head Start and the asset framework), could be a truly comprehensive and balanced approach to promoting positive development.

It is possible that stated outcomes for young children do not necessarily have to prescribe rigid, nonindividualized approaches to attaining those outcomes. That said, it can be suggested that it might be possible for the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework to serve as outcome statements, following the precedent set, for example, by Head Start. Also in line with Head Start, outcomes can serve to suggest standards for programs. As has been stated, however, the asset framework is not only for programs; it is for everyone—family, neighborhood, and community members—to try to make a positive difference. Here there may be a more tenuous relationship: How can a particular asset statement, if construed as an outcome, have standards for encouraging it when application may be informal and contextualized?

Considering this issue, it could be suitable to view many external assets as guidelines for those who would serve to implement them. Guidelines are a bit looser and less prescriptive than standards, while still indicating a direction and style in which efforts might proceed. The internal assets, by their very nature, cannot directly serve as guidelines or as standards. However, they can certainly be seen as *indicators* of thriving and positive development.

If a child possesses the qualities and attributes described in the asset, then at least in that aspect of the domain containing the asset, the child is progressing. However, and difficult to capture in an asset, the internal presence of an asset in the child might be quite different for a 3-year-old than for a 5-year-old. In this way, early childhood assets might be considered to be "emergent": that is, the asset quality emerges more sharply and complexly as the child grows within the represented age range, while in its more generic aspect the asset refers to all children, and the degree to which a child experiences the asset can be determined on an individual basis, taking age, personality, and contextual factors into account.

The inter-relationships among the assets can reflect the notion of a surface structure (the asset framework) as the manifestation of a deeper structure in the inter-relationships, which may combine to support a particular asset more intensely; and a particular asset may address several deeper processes. This rationale undergirds the rearranging of the early childhood asset categories from the generic asset framework upon which the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework is based (see Table 2).

The literature review conducted to create the developmental landscape incisively revealed relative emphases in the developmental significance of

TABLE 2. Possible Reordering of Developmental Assets Categories

External Assets	Internal Assets
Support	Social Competencies
Constructive-Use-of-Time	Commitment to Learning
Boundaries-and-Expectations	Positive Identity
Empowerment	Positive Values

certain processes and occurrences, with particular significance for early childhood. It seems important, then, that the asset framework reflect not only the key influences on the multiple domains of development but also the relative significance of these influences and these internal processes. Thus, the external and internal assets can be arranged in a way that resonates with the temporal and inter-related processes of young children's development and attempts to reflect the dialectic, transactional relationship between external and internal assets. Absolutely primary in young children's well-being is support—the relationships with families and caregivers that ensure attachment and encourage social competencies; the abilities needed to get along with others. For young children, their environment and the activities that structure their use of time constitute a learning laboratory that leads to engagement in learning and readiness for school and thus the constructive-use-of-time assets are next in line after the support assets. Boundaries and expectations offer the sense of place and structure that situate and influence the support and learning experiences that lead to positive identity. Empowerment, enabling young children to perceive that they matter and can make a difference, contributes to their development of prosocial attitudes toward others, including those who are different from them. This attainment, of course, is significant, but it is less likely to take place in the absence of those influences that tightly intersect with the immediate unfolding of developmental processes.

As children receive support and caring from primary caregivers, their own sense of self emerges and they become more social beings. There is a close relationship between the quality of nurturing and care and the emergence of prosocial skills in young children. Hence, there is a loose connection between support and social competencies. Similarly, there would be a relationship, but not a one-to-one relationship, between constructive-use-of-time and commitment-to-learning. Adults provide the environments, materials, and personal support for learning activities, and as a result, children develop the commitment-to-learning assets. These relationships underscore the premise that the asset framework is transactional, with relationships both between within-category assets and with categories.

Construction and Application

Developmental Landscape and Epistemology

To conduct an activity that involves deducing premises from a huge collection of knowledge, it is necessary to identify the scope of that knowledge and its sources, as well as access and then synthesize it. In order, then, is a description of the developmental landscape of early childhood—one that is complex indeed. The major features of that landscape include not only the developmental processes and characteristics of children from ages 3 to 5 but also a consideration of how the external world views and treats children—from their families, to the neighborhood and community, to specific programs and services.

The other consideration is the epistemology of early childhood so to speak: the scope and nature of the knowledge about young children. What is it, where is it, how is it organized and expressed, and, most especially, how is it used? One feature is the differentiation between *early childhood development* as embodied in theoretical and empirical information about the processes of development in young children, and theories that describe how these occur and what they mean; and *early child care and education* , which is concerned with providing *high-quality* experiences for young children so as to promote their optimal development in domains identified by the theory and, to a lesser degree, empirical research.

The knowledge thus consists of developmental theories that describe young children, empirical research, and practice guidelines found in early childhood care and education literature: an identifiable but somewhat loose trilogy of sources. The review quickly showed that there are prevalent theories of early child development that have strongly influenced the way "quality" direct practice in programs is conducted. Some of these theories, of course, are based on empirical findings, but in general, and perhaps differentiated from other human service fields, including those that focus on children and youth, the early childhood field seems to rely more on salient developmental theories rather than meta-analyses of empirical findings, when developing practice guidelines.

Thus, the creation of the developmental landscape needed to consider the *theoretical approaches* to early childhood development, the relevant empirical research on *early childhood development*, and the theoretical and practice literature of *early childhood education and care*, since the early childhood Developmental Assets framework is ultimately intended as a guide for practice. As guidelines, the assets suggest how everyone involved with young children can serve as positive influences on them and the conditions that affect them: In other words, everyone can function as a change agent in young children's lives.

Relating the Developmental Landscape of Early Childhood to the Generic
Search Institute Developmental Assets Framework

With the developmental landscape of young children and their ecology described from a developmental and a practice perspective, the challenge was to translate this compendium of information into a Developmental Assets framework suitable for application to young children. To accomplish this, Search Institute's main *generic* framework (2000) was used as a template. The main challenge was whether one could "adapt" such a framework developed primarily for older children so that it is responsive to and expresses what is known about the factors that promote positive development in young children. If the answer were yes, then we would offer the *first* knowledge- (theory and empirical research) based *practice guidelines* that would cross and connect age ranges (early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence). With this intent, and recognizing that major developmental processes (e.g., attachment) follow trajectories (albeit complex) vertically upward through the ages, it seemed not

only feasible to do so but also that it would make a new contribution to practice for all children and youth in general.

Viewing the task after the fact, the adaptation appears not only not to have violated the premises of sound early childhood development but also to have highlighted influences on and domains of early child development that have a foundation in these years and play a significant role in overall development. The presence of the asset Religious Community for youth spearheaded an investigation into the place of religion in early childhood development and enabled the finding that it plays a much stronger role than has generally been thought.

There are other influences on development (e.g., various cultural factors) that are widely accepted in the early childhood community. These influences are not always translated into practice terms, however. For example, the general notion stemming from Eriksonian theory of encouraging children to take the initiative is accepted. Yet in practice, there may be few opportunities provided for children to demonstrate initiative.

The results of this effort offer interesting insights into the asset framework. The reordering of the asset categories from the original model showed that for the external assets, the support and constructive-use-of-time assets, in terms of pure quantity, have tremendous backing in the early childhood literature. Boundaries-and-expectations assets have some backing, particularly those concerned with family guidelines for behavior and peer relationships, whereas individual empowerment assets have somewhat less variation; for example, Safety, an empowerment asset, receives considerable attention with the current concern with violence in the lives of young children (e.g., Klemm, 1995; Kuykendall, 1995; Greenberg, 1995; Carlsson-Paige, & Levin, 1995). Similarly in the internal assets, the social-competencies and commitment-to-learning assets are confirmed by a tremendous focus in the early childhood literature, whereas positive-values and positive-identity assets have received considerably less attention. Within these categories, there is a good deal of support for individual assets—for example, Peaceful Conflict Resolution and Self-Esteem—but little for Honesty, Integrity, and Responsibility. This discrepancy can be interpreted in two ways: (1) the particular asset does not operate strongly in early childhood development; or (2) the asset is underconsidered and in fact deserves more attention. Striking a compromise between these two factors, the asset categories and assets were organized hierarchically, with those with the greatest support being placed higher up. It is possible that while many common themes in development emerge very early on as significant trajectories (e.g., social competencies), others that are more abstract and require more complex functioning, such as concern for equality and social justice, emerge later, out of combinations of other, more fundamental assets. This contention is supported when we think about the major domains of early childhood development: social, emotional, cognitive, and physical. Moral development, under which are placed such Developmental Assets as Honesty and Responsibility, while considered a domain of development by some, receives less attention.

This leads to the suggestion that while we consider all assets as playing a role in early childhood development, we view those higher in placement as

more significant, especially for children at the younger end of the age range. Thus, we will identify the pairing of support (external) and social-competencies (internal) assets and the constructive-use-of-time (external) and commitment-to-learning assets (internal) as "primary" assets, meaning that these assets are fundamental in development and profoundly necessary early on for development to proceed positively. Next are the boundaries-and-expectations assets coupled with the positive-values assets. These are significant, but perhaps like the empowerment and positive-identity assets, they become more key in development as children become older and move more closely to the transition into the middle childhood years.

11 Pathways Toward the Future and the Early Childhood Developmental Assets Framework

Having presented, explained, and justified the early childhood asset framework, there remains the opportunity for reflection and commentary on some significant implications of the framework that may have been previously mentioned, but now may be further highlighted.

This final chapter will focus on two areas: (1) some common ways of thinking and making decisions about young children, with illustrative examples of some current key issues in early childhood; and (2) the relationship of the asset framework to attributes that people will need to live productively in, and adapt to, the complex, rapidly changing world of the future.

When we get right down to it, how well we succeed at promoting positive development ultimately depends on how we "think" about children, their needs, and the issues they and we face in life. The early childhood Developmental Assets framework provides guidelines to help us shape our thinking in constructive and energizing ways. We are more likely to take action when we have a sense of direction and guiding structure. Furthermore, the assets enable us to be *mindful* in our thoughts and *intentional* in our actions, by identifying important practices, giving evidence for them, and suggesting ways in which they can be implemented. Thus, we can avert some of the common errors in thinking about children. Still, there are pitfalls in thinking that can affect how we relate to children, how well we actually respond in a developmentally informed way, and how we make decisions that affect them.

The following discussion will provide some examples of early childhood situations that asset builders will face and will show how some typical thought processes determine our response to these situations. First we will review common approaches to thinking about children. If we are aware of these processes, we can take both their advantages and their pitfalls into consideration.

Common Ways of Thinking about Children

Categorical Thinking

Categories are essential, of course, in that they set a direction and some boundaries for focusing on an issue. The categories of the asset framework

name crucial areas of development so that our efforts can have some definition. Categorical thinking enables us to think about and discuss complex entities. However, categorical thinking is more effective and a better fit with the reality of situations when we "deconstruct" and contextualize the category so that we can see its applications more specifically. This is why we have provided supporting and descriptive details about each asset. It is important that this information be consulted and hopefully discussed with others and that asset builders move forward in taking the actions that reflect the external assets and promote the internal assets.

This approach can help operationalize concepts so that their applicability possibilities are more transparent and they thus become more effectively connected with the reality and context of any particular situation. There are many examples in early childhood. One is "individualizing." We always say that we should "individualize" our responses to children. But how do we do that? If we are familiar with the dimensions of basic temperament and their combinations, as discussed earlier, we have an actual platform on which to mount such an effort. Still another example is play. When we discuss the significance of play, a complex construct, what do we mean? The asset categories constructive-use-of-time and commitment-to-learning allow us to become focused; the review and reflection help us expand our working model of the meaning of play and select our actions accordingly.

"Either–Or" or "Dichotomous" Thinking

Another common process regarding early childhood involves "either–or" thinking: If one thing is "true," then its counterpart cannot be. This approach to decision making has on occasion resulted in compromised practices, so it is important to see the potential for this occurring and understand how the asset approach can help avoid it. In this area falls as well "single cause" thinking. If an effect is observed, the observer concludes that there is one "logical" cause. For example, Joey appears upset today. "Something must be going on at home," decides the preschool teacher. Of course, this could certainly be true and should be investigated, but it's possible that Joey was bullied on his way to school, that he is hungry, that his best friend is absent today, or any other number of reasons.

Although it is not scientific, the yin-yang concept, in which there is a harmonious and balanced relationship between opposites, is relevant here. Both aspects of a situation can be true. It's a matter of emphasis rather than only one side. The asset framework helps us address several aspects of development simultaneously.

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking helps us realize the extent to which we can control something and perhaps aids us in seeing ourselves as influencing rather than

controlling. Certainly in child rearing, many of us wish to be in control—to have children behave and turn out the way we would like them to; or to more easily create and maintain those conditions and services we think they will need. We find in reality, of course, that while we can certainly have some influence, we simply cannot mandate and control every action and every outcome. With their qualitative and qualifying descriptions, Developmental Assets can help us take action, but in a way that discourages those control efforts that often lead to paradoxical outcomes—that is, when strong efforts to control lead to more of the exact phenomenon we were trying to prevent in the first place.

A corollary of systems thinking is that when we do too much—or too little—of something, the results usually backfire. That is true when dealing with young children. Too much punishment or restriction, for example, and the child, rather than feeling penitent, becomes angry and looks for more ways to aggravate his associates. Too little guidance and structure, and the child's behavior lacks self-regulation.

Following are some perspectives on common issues in early childhood—there are many more than the examples given—that reflect how adult thinking approaches affect child-rearing decisions and practices.

Common Issues in Early Childhood

Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder

The term attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) comes up frequently today in any setting where there is concern and conversation about children. The context for forming attachment has changed radically over the past several decades as working mothers have become an accepted fact of life and as cultural practices and parenting styles have changed, among other factors. One interesting phenomenon is the rise in diagnoses of ADHD. There are specific criteria for such a diagnosis, and for some children, certainly, there may be a physiological or neurological basis for it and a judicious diagnosis based on carefully established diagnostic criteria. But the category of attention deficit disorder too often becomes an easy categorical fallback to "explain," and deal with, iatrogenic behavioral issues, that is, ones that are caused by poor practices.

The body of research on individuality is pertinent here. Dimensions of temperament, particularly activity level and distractibility, are relevant. Is a particular child with a high (but within normal limits) activity level "seen" as overactive and hence ready to be placed in the "attention deficit disorder" box?

Observations in many preschool classrooms show that the nature of the program and the curriculum, the structure (or lack thereof) in daily activities, and the interpersonal approach of some staff set the stage for young children to have difficulty concentrating and to "seem" to be overactive.

Here again we can look at the "lenses" through which children's behavior is evaluated. To what extent do staff members bring their own childhood

memories and expectations into viewing the children in their care now? Do they have the requisite knowledge of development, including individuality (basic temperament)?

We suggest here that in some cases, poor concentration and what seems to be "overactivity" are a combination of individual temperament, anxiety, inappropriate programming, and expression of normal developmental needs. Are there available enough developmentally appropriate activities that allow for large-muscle activities such as running and climbing? Are children expected to sit for long periods for "circle time" and for academic instruction and drill? Until these questions are answered, then we need to be circumspect about the diagnosis of ADHD.

When a child is at home, is there a predictable schedule of routines and activities? Are meals on time so that the child can know when to expect to be fed? Is there a bedtime to ensure sufficient sleep? Do children spend long hours watching television or playing electronic games?

Placing children in a diagnostic category has both its assets (so to speak) and its liabilities. Placement in a category can help get a child supportive services that he or she really needs. So if a child truly has ADHD, then this is a good thing. Parental support and guidance, accommodating adjustments to daily activities and routines, even medication, can be provided. But what if it's a matter of a difficult or challenging child having been hastily assigned to an easy explanatory concept or category? Then there are pitfalls. One is labeling, which usually privileges those who don't carry the label. Another is medication, which should not be given, certainly to young children, if there is no condition justifying it.

Because the Developmental Assets address many of the environmental areas that could impinge on children's behavior, the asset framework discourages the tendency to think categorically about a high level of activity and low level of concentration in children and draw a conclusion without looking at context. When these areas are attended to, then we may have a better basis for determining who really has ADHD and requires the special interventions that can address the disorder.

Violence and Superhero Play

Violence has been discussed as a fundamental safety issue. Certainly violence is disempowering. How can young children feel empowered in the face of various threats?

One of the great concerns of parents and caregivers is whether children should be allowed to play with toys and games that suggest violent themes, and part of this concern has to do with whether adults should try to control children's free choice of play themes. This includes "superhero" play—pretending to be "Spiderman" or a similar figure; or play with toy weapons such as guns. Seeing young children in superhero play (for example, a group of energetic boys bursting into a preschool room, quickly picking up their

Superhero play where it left off yesterday), an observer will get the gut impression that somehow these children *have* to play this way. And indeed, this is so. We recall that in looking at various assets, one of the main purposes of play is to enable young children to master difficult situations and their sense of being small and powerless. Bearing this in mind perhaps puts our attitudes and actions toward pretend weapons and superhero play in a different perspective.

In this way, it may not be a good idea to try to prohibit such play. Children must be able to meet their need to feel powerful in some way. If we apply nonlinear dynamical systems thinking, we may recognize that there is evidence that attempts to control—or overcontrol—a component of that system actually leads to the creation of more of the very aspect that one wished to control in the first place. So to try to disallow gun and superhero play is to risk creating not only an even greater need in young children for it but also the tendency for them to enact such playing where it is less apparent to adults. Further, such covert play may be even more violent than what is enacted in front of adults.

Adults' discomfort with gun and superhero play does not mean that they can place no limits on it. Certainly, adults such as preschool teachers can suggest a time limit ("Finish the battle, because it's going to be time for our snack") or a location ("There's not much room in here. Let's take this outside"). Of course, adults must ensure that all children feel safe within the play. It's one thing for Spiderman or Superman to be saving a beleaguered maiden, and quite another for him to be kidnapping the shyest child in the room. Adults also need to ensure that the play is "pretend" (and four-year-olds have the ability to "stand outside" their play and be aware that it is pretend).

Nutrition, Obesity, and Treats

Some of today's actions in response to the obesity crisis reflect several of the thinking approaches described, particularly the sense that one can control a complex system. Emphasis on sensible nutrition for young children as a major means of preventing obesity is strong today. However, obesity is not a simple issue that can be properly addressed just by restricting the consumption of sweets and junk foods. Certainly children need to be offered nutritious meals and snacks. If their entire diet is fast food, soft drinks, sweets, and salty, fatty snacks, there is reason for concern. But there is a danger that the nutritious foods movement can be taken to extremes, creating more, rather than less, interest and desire on the part of young children for non-nourishing food. For example, we hear that in some settings, children can no longer bring cupcakes to celebrate birthdays. The snack every day is carrot and celery sticks. Juice, for years the mainstay of preschool snack time, has gone the way of the dinosaur. Instead, perhaps we should think about reinstituting that old-fashioned idea of sweets and snacks as a treat, something to be looked forward to as special, rather than an everyday automatic occurrence or something to be totally prohibited. In this context, certainly there could be cupcakes at the occasional birthday party—not only as a treat, but also as a customary ritual at a party or celebration. Fast foods

and the like are now a part of our culture. Children know they exist, whether or not they have access to them. Treats give children something to look forward to, while prohibition of any child-attractive food creates longing that they will somehow find a way to solve, again showing us that attempts to overcontrol may backfire. Sneaky eating, of course, is not healthy emotionally and could create real eating problems both immediately and down the line.

A greater issue in the obesity epidemic may be the lack of opportunity for active exercise. We might give increased attention to providing young children ample chance for large-muscle, outdoor play. This may require community attention to playgrounds and the provision of safe streets and active play opportunities for children of all economic classes. Those whose families have greater income may even at an early age be in structured athletic activities. These are fine but should not totally replace free active physical play in a safe spot such as a playground with appropriate equipment. Families with less income, particularly in urban areas, may have challenges in providing open, safe outdoor spaces for their children.

Childhood obesity indeed is an area in which it seems we need systems thinking and to avoid "either–or" thinking. Implementing multiple assets can address the multiple influences on childhood obesity and help us avoid the overcontrol that could lead to unanticipated outcomes.

Attending to the Need for Attention

"She [or he] only wants attention, and we're not going to give it!" Thinking that withholding attention from young children is a way of decreasing their need for it is another common belief system in early childhood that undermines the building of assets. Such an approach sounds petty and self-righteous as well. Somehow people feel that if they offer attention to children who are misbehaving, they are "spoiling" them (a concept that should be expunged from developmental language) and that they are totally relinquishing their more powerful role as adults. This misguided thinking leads to actions that tend to create more of the same, in line with the thinking approach concerned with attempting to control complex systems.

It is possible today that there is an increase in attachment problems (i.e., the incidence of children who are poorly or insecurely attached), with the resultant propensity to problems with self-regulation. Over the past several decades, admittedly simplifying the complex intertwining of possible causative factors, there has been an increase in substitute care for the very youngest children, along with families in which both parents work, not to speak of all the societal factors that challenge families to provide stable caregivers to young children. The point here is to encourage us to see "attention seeking" behavior as related to attachment issues so that our approach may be more in line with the developmental needs of children.

The belief regarding attention is also based on a misguided application of a reinforcement principle: namely, that if people go to a child who is misbehaving,

they will "reinforce" that behavior—increase the likelihood that it will occur again. This may sound like common sense, but common sense is not always the best approach to selecting the ideal response to young children's behavior. An "acting out" child is likely to be distressed and anxious and actually *needs* attention. When the adult takes a supportive, soothing approach, the anxiety level of the child goes down. If we look at this situation in terms of needs, we can understand that *unmet* needs continue to exist and may even increase. Needs that are met, of course, decrease in salience. Thus, we meet the child's need by going to her or him and providing supportive responses as we help the child understand what is going on and how he or she can deal with the situation. What happens? The child's need for attention decreases, as does the likelihood of similar behavior recurring. If we wish to encourage independence in our children, we will also attend to them when they need us. The assets encourage this response.

Bullying

When children feel understood, valued, and attended to, they are building the foundation for the development of lifelong social and relationship skills. The connection between early childhood development and development in later stages (e.g., elementary school age and adolescence), and between the early childhood Developmental Assets framework and asset frameworks for later ages, has been stressed. Everybody knows what a disturbing issue bullying is among older children. Bullying actions have become cruel and violent, and have gone way beyond the "normal" teasing and give-and-take we might remember from our own childhoods. Bullying does not suddenly emerge when children start elementary school. The seeds begin to sprout in the early childhood years, and its precursors can be seen in many early childhood classrooms and informal play groups. "You can't play with us"; "You look funny"; "Go away, you're not our friend": these and similar comments are all too often heard today. The point to be made here is twofold: that this behavior from young children is related to their own sense of being loved and accepted (or not) and that adults must not let it pass. They must be proactive in trying to prevent "prebullying" behavior. This perhaps is where the challenge lies. It's one thing for children to scapegoat other children; it's another for adults to do the same, which in point of fact does occur in many early childhood programs today, sometimes unwittingly, but always unacceptably.

The reason the issue is being brought up here is not to point out that preschool children reject and scapegoat their peers. That has already been discussed. Rather, the point being made now is to emphasize the *connection* between such behavior among young children, its continuation through the elementary age and adolescent years, and its potential to create real danger.

What can adults do? First of all, they must be careful not to make comments that downgrade, reject, or label a child who is being "difficult"; for example, "Oh, that's just Jim again. Let's ignore him"; or, "She's being her unpleasant self

again. No wonder nobody wants to play with her." Other children pick up on adult rejection and eagerly join in to further reject and exclude a child.

Here is where adults as well might look back into their own childhoods to recall how they were treated as youngsters. It is well established, yet infrequently considered in training and education programs for caregivers, how one's childhood influences one's adult "working model" of relationships and underlying values toward a wide array of child-rearing practices. Does the practitioner remember being bullied, rejected, or the target of negative labeling? Does the practitioner remember being not a victim but a perpetrator, perhaps currying acceptance by others by joining in the rejection of a peer? Uncovering and examining these old memories—perhaps with adult peer support and in supervision—can help caregivers step back and see how their responses may be shaped by their past experience.

Understanding development as well as communication skills is crucial as caregivers can reframe their responses. Fortunately today, there are numerous resources that offer practical guidance for developing the social skills in young children that are related to specific "prebullying" behavior (Gartrell, 2004; Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2003a; Wolfgang, 2004). Play facilitation skills as described earlier also apply to this issue, since guidance of play is one way in which adults can promote inclusiveness and acceptance of all children.

The links among all of the boundaries-and-expectations assets are obvious when looking at the dynamics of "prebullying." Shaming and isolating, following a control of systems thinking approach, are exactly those behaviors that either scapegoat or encourage bullying behavior. Adult role modeling of empathic, supportive, and fair responses is essential.

Play and Activity

It can't be emphasized too much that play *must* be moved to the center of the platform of initiatives for promoting positive development in early childhood. Like attachment, the external asset Play and Creative Activities is a basic glue that holds all other aspects of development together and shapes forward progression.

Many of the positive benefits of play and their relationship to such issues as academic learning have already been reviewed. Here it is interesting to present a perspective on some more subtle issues, including those relating to how play intersects with development on into the school years. Given that constructive use of time is a category of external assets, it refers to actions of adults in the lives of children.

One issue is the amount of structure and content that can be supported in early childhood play—and perhaps it is more than we think. A stereotype about preschool play is that if we *ever* present a model of something that might give young children an idea as to ways of using a new medium, it will "stifle their creativity." This is a categorical and either–or perspective, when we examine the concept of creativity (a very important one) in more detail. Creativity does

not emerge from a vacuum. To create, or innovate, usually involves making a variation or elaboration upon something already existing (following Hofstadter, 1985). One must have both skill and knowledge in an area—in fact, in more than one area—to effect a change. So we might avoid the "either–or" thinking about models and consider that under some circumstances they can enhance, rather than limit, creativity. Related to this is the contention that anything that asks children to stay within lines—such as coloring books—similarly "stifles creativity." Practical experience, however, leads to the question, "Whoever saw a child who didn't like coloring books?"

The idea is that a child's menu of activities should not consist of). only one approach. This reflects the "yin-yang" notion of complementarity in opposites. An exclusive diet of coloring books, models with precut parts, and staying within the lines—no. Only finger paint and clumps of Play-Doh as daily activities—probably no as well. A varied diet of media, with adult involvement ranging from moderately directive and instructional to being a "potted plant" in the background—perhaps. This would be somewhat akin to the summer camp idea of "morning" and "afternoon" swimming. In the morning would be the invariant instruction and skill development. In the afternoon would be "free swimming": the opportunity to apply and build on the fundamentals acquired during the instructional period. We can consider that "afternoon swimming" is a lot more meaningful to children if they have a skill base: More strokes, more dive options become possible, whereas without instruction they might not be able to swim at all.

Related to this issue is the question, "What is the role of formally scheduled activities in the lives of young children?" In 1981, David Elkind, a proponent of the value of play for children, first published *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*. In that book he properly worried that many children were "overscheduled" as they were shuffled from one activity to another (e.g., from ballet to soccer) and did not have time simply to devise and carry out their own play initiatives. As with all well-taken premises, this one was subject to misinterpretation in that some then concluded that *none* of these content-rich, structured, adult-guided activities had value. Today that perspective is changing, and recent research finds that most children and youth are not overscheduled.

If we extend this either–or thinking downward, we encounter a similar perspective: the belief that *all* play should be "free," with adults playing an unobtrusive role, and the notion that play of any kind has little place in an early childhood curriculum. In this case, preacademic work, including direct instruction in letters, numbers, object identification, and the like, is the focus. The middle-range approach would involve a combination of relatively "free" play, facilitated play, and even a whiff of "formal instruction." With regard to the latter, some older preschool children enjoy being taught simple skills by interested adults. Where issues are controversial, such as the play versus academics debate, or the free play versus structured activities debate, individuality and context are crucial. Some children need a greater emphasis on facilitated play, such as school readiness-oriented sociodramatic play. The asset framework provides guidelines that not only highlight the crucial role of play in early child

development but also help people "think through" the various dichotomizing issues that surround it, so that they can ensure that each *individual* child is accorded her or his maximum benefits.

Emerging Areas of Development

One of the exciting aspects of undertaking the development of the early childhood asset framework was the discovery of a considerable number of developmental surprises: aspects of early childhood that are significant but that do not get as much attention as others. The comprehensiveness of the early childhood framework, as well as its articulation with asset frameworks for older children, ensures that all important elements of development are considered, both the well-known and accepted for preschool children and those that quietly set the pathway for positive development in the elementary age and adolescent years. These will have implications as well for how the asset framework is used. In a sense, these are interpretations of the asset justifications that were derived from a comprehensive literature search, interpretations that also use some of the lenses for viewing development that we have discussed. Certainly there has been recognition that internal development does not proceed in domain pockets, but rather is an integrated, transactional process in which activity in one domain can be both cause and effect with activity in another.

This is one reason for looking at the inter-relationships among the asset categories, as was suggested in the preceding chapter. But there is another reason: considering what attributes will be needed in the future by adults who will be successful in adapting to, and contributing to, a very complex and rapidly changing world. (These attributes are based on earlier work done by this author; see VanderVen, 1998a, and supported by more recent works in the business sector, e.g., Pink, 2005.)

In the future we may all be called upon to be "Protean selves," to use Robert Jay Lifton's concept—persons who can readily adapt to unpredictability, global interconnectedness, and an essentially chaotic world? Can the early childhood Developmental Assets framework contribute to developing some of these abilities?

Clearly, an asset approach to encouraging thriving and development of strengths will promote the resilience that enables one to rise well to the adversities and unpredictabilities of life. It may help develop other useful attributes as well.

Pattern Perception

We don't often hear about the ability to see orderly connections and relationships in a diverse group of stimuli, yet many futurists and scholars of the application of chaos and complexity theory to development are clear about the importance of this capacity. Thinking about it as adults, however, we can

see in any of the situations we are confronted with daily how our ability to put together diverse pieces of information to get a sense of trends or common aspects is valuable. How do young children develop pattern perception? Certainly the opportunity to participate in an array of play activities is crucial. It is almost amazing how many basic pattern-related aspects, including the opportunity to create meaningful patterns, are embedded in the common play activities of young children (block play is just one of many examples). Social competency development and problem solving, as encouraged by various play activities, encourage young children to observe characteristic patterns of reactions in others and adapt their own responses to these.

Representational Systems

A representational system is a way of displaying or representing one's perception and interpretation of the world. Formerly, it might have been sufficient for one to read and write. In the complex world of the future, those who can express themselves competently in more than one medium will have an advantage. Howard Gardner's *multiple intelligences* theory (e.g., Gardner, 1999) explicates multiple domains in which one can represent one's experience and perceptions. Thus, in the future those persons who are competent not only in linguistic expression, but also in spatial, numerical, artistic, musical, and physical modes, may have an advantage. The roots of such competence lie in early childhood experiences. The more broadly based the exposure of young children to these various root domains of activity, the greater their strengths will be as they grow throughout childhood and into adulthood.

Dynamic Thinking

We have already discussed some common pitfalls in thinking and decision making that limit effective practices with young children, and we want to avoid inculcating or modeling those thought processes with young children. Rather, we want to provide them with the kinds of early experiences and education that enable them to increasingly understand the complexity of the world so that as they mature they will be able to adapt to the unpredictability, paradox, surprise, and interconnectedness of disparate elements that they will increasingly encounter. Once again, play in particular can promote the ability to understand change, the nuances of interaction.

Playfulness

Speaking of play—again: Compelling research shows that the ability to play and be playful is a strong factor in adult resilience. Adults who can play and have a playful spirit are healthier physically and mentally and live longer

(e.g., Snowdon, 2001; Vaillant, 2002). To be able to play as an adult in general means that one developed play skills as a child and learned to use play not only as a means for "having fun" (which is important) but also as a general approach to life through which to generate engagement, energy, interest, and connections with others.

Creativity

It is becoming increasingly acknowledged that creative thinking will be the major requirement in the workplace in years to come, more valued than the logical and analytic abilities needed in a manufacturing economy (e.g., Florida, 2002; Pink, 2005).

The connections that young children are helped to make by caring and positive adults who provide an array of stimulating activities set the groundwork for the enhancement of creativity. In fact, this is another argument for an array of play activities for young children in early childhood programs, as contrasted to academic work for which they are not ready. Rather than developing analytic ability, not to mention creativity, premature academic work has the potential to turn children off to learning. The empowerment assets also encourage the provision of an important ingredient: health and a community that gives families the resources they need. A "mean," hardscrabble life experienced by a family does not encourage creativity in general—rather, energy is focused on daily survival.

Networking

The ability to make connections with others with whom one can collaborate, cooperate, and exchange resources so as to better attain one's own goals is widely touted in the business community as well as a skill required for the future. Nobody accomplishes anything all alone. The roots of networking are set in the earliest years, with the development of social competencies as a result of the multiple influences as embodied in the external assets.

One Last Note: Talking and Being Spoken To

Sometimes in human development, when findings from two age ranges are viewed together, a powerful synergy emerges. Throughout the early childhood Developmental Assets framework, language development and communication are emphasized. We have discussed the breakthrough research of Hart and Risley (1995), which highlighted the utter importance of being spoken to for the development of vocabulary, more complex knowledge of relationships, cause and effect, ongoing experiences, and the ways of the world. Smilansky's earlier contribution of relating sociodramatic play to language development and school

readiness further supports the significance of experiences that encourage early childhood language development (see, e.g., Smilansky & Sheftaya, 1990).

These findings are in themselves necessarily surprising. However, if we juxtapose them against research on successful aging, we find some very interesting connections that heighten the significances of those early experiences of being spoken to and hearing spoken language that were discussed previously. The findings of David Snowdon's "Nun Study" (2001) became nationally renowned. In his research with happy, energetic, productive, and healthy nuns ages 74–106, Snowdon found that linguistic complexity, or as he called it, "idea density" (p. 114), in early life as reflected in written accounts, was related to this positive functioning in old age and seemed to serve as a protective factor against Alzheimer's disease.

What could be more compelling a rationale for promoting those assets—and there are many of them—that encourage talking, discussion, examination of situations, play and playfulness, than setting young people on a positive pathway toward a long, healthy, and productive life?

Appendix: The Construction of the Early Childhood Developmental Asset Framework

The Developmental Assets Framework Approach to Positive Child and Youth Development

The early childhood Developmental Assets framework is based upon Search Institute's Developmental Assets framework for promoting positive development in youth, which was developed more than 20 years ago to address the need for a strengths-based model of youth development, rather than the problem- and deficit-focused approaches that had been relatively unsuccessful due to their failure to take social context into account. Research on the generic Developmental Assets has shown that the experience of assets is related to positive developmental outcomes, and that the more assets are experienced, the greater the degree of positive outcomes (e.g. Scales & Leffert, 1999).

Search Institute's Developmental Assets framework focusing on adolescents (youth ages 11–18) identifies empirically based experiences, resources, and opportunities essential to young people's healthy development and has the characteristics mentioned above. This research has been extensively described by the Search Institute in a wide array of publications that cover its conceptual underpinnings, supportive findings, and applications (e.g., Benson et al., 1999; Leffert et al., 1997; Scales & Leffert, 1999; Sesma, 2002).

The Developmental Assets framework for adolescents establishes an overarching conceptualization of developmental well-being, articulates a set of benchmarks for development, and stimulates practice methods and strategies for both professionals and the general public that help produce healthy, caring, competent, and responsible young people. This Developmental Assets framework is being applied by hundreds and hundreds of communities and organizations nationwide to create supportive environments and crucial relationships that enable youth to thrive. Given the immense size, diversity, and pressing issues of quality in the field of early childhood care and education, as well as the developmental significance of early experience, it would seem that an approach such as the Developmental Assets framework, if constructed to reflect the special needs and characteristics of young children and their families, as well as the communities and larger systems that affect them, could bring much-needed cohesion and direction into these activities. Such a framework would also intersect with the recognition that the early childhood field today reflects tremendous change just over the past several years. "The knowledge base has expanded substantially since the mid-1990s," as have also the contexts for child development (Hyson, 2003, p. 19), suggesting that practices must adapt to these.

The *First Decade* Project: Toward Connecting Age Groups

Today's "system" of services for children and youth of all ages and their families is incredibly fragmented, including that of early childhood (e.g., Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 2003). There are few if any connections between age ranges. One set of philosophies and approaches may be employed with one defined age range; another, for a different age range. There is not only a lack of awareness and connection among professionals and others focusing on children or youth of different ages, but also a lack of integration of the conceptual and applied approaches utilized with the traditional age groups: infancy (birth–18 months), toddlerhood (18 months–3 years), preschool (3–5 years), school age or middle childhood (6–11), and adolescence (12–20). Some break the school years down into "early middle years" (5–8) and "later middle years" (8–12), allowing greater specialization but also increasing the discontinuity (e.g., VanderVen, 1996). A coherent and cohesive delivery system both within the early childhood field and that connects the various age groups of childhood and youth, is needed.

Search Institute's *First Decade* project was designed to adapt and apply the Developmental Assets framework to younger age groups—middle childhood and early childhood (3–5)—and encourage its use by the early childhood community, including professionals (e.g., direct practitioners, administrators, supervisors, trainers, teacher educators), families, neighborhoods, and community organizations and services. The *First Decade* Project, funded by the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, is designed to adapt and apply the Developmental Assets framework to children in developmental periods across the first decade. For each of these periods, Search Institute is using theoretical, empirical, and practical sources of information to map the developmental landscape, to describe the assets based on these developmental understandings, to generate and promote application of practice guidelines, and to suggest directions for future research on asset development. *Coming into Their Own* describes this work for middle years (Scales et al., 2004). *Building Blocks for a Successful Start* covers the years from 3 to 5.

This book is concerned with the relationship of the Developmental Assets framework to early child development (education and care). It has set forth a rationale and plan for generating the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework that can be used by the early childhood community and that is suitably based on the "developmental landscape" of the age group and of the individuals and needs of groups concerned with them, greater cohesion and connection with the entire range of early and middle childhood, and adolescent, supports, programs, and services. This follows the statement with reference to the asset framework for older children that "the framework's intellectual foundations are rooted in empirical studies … as well as the more applied literature of prevention, protective factors, and resiliency. … The Developmental Assets were also conceived to reflect core development processes. They encompass the kinds of relationships, social experiences, social environments,

patterns of interaction, norms and competencies over which a community has considerable control" (Mannes, 2001, pp. 134–135).

In *Full-Service Schools* (1994), as described by Weissberg and colleagues (2003), Joy Dryfoos suggested that there are three major issues surrounding the well-being of children today: (1) Many children will not grow successfully into contributing adulthood unless there are major changes in the way they are "nurtured and taught" (Weissberg et al., 2003, p. 426); (2) families and schools have traditionally shared responsibility for raising children, and they now "require transformation" in order to do this well; and (3) different kinds of community resources are required to support positive development of young people.

The Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework, in tandem with the assets frameworks for other age groups, addresses these areas spelled out by Dryfoos.

Construction Process

The initial phase of construction of the early childhood Developmental Assets framework began in the summer of 2002 and is brought to fruition with the completion of this book. The steps during this six-year process included:

- Preparation of a description of the "developmental landscape" of early childhood development, to serve as a backdrop against which to view existing asset frameworks developed by Search Institute;
- Construction of a "rough" Developmental Assets framework to provide a basic structure for a review and input process;
- Gathering of a group of experts offering various perspectives on early childhood for an all-day meeting at Search Institute to review the draft and make other suggestions (fall 2003);
- Modification of the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework using input from the all-day meeting;
- Various presentations of the framework to gather additional input;
- Preparation of initial book draft presenting, explaining, and justifying rationale for the Early Childhood Developmental Assets framework;
- Final revision of the framework; and
- Revision of the book manuscript based on final revision of the framework.

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