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# The Thinking TEACHER

**A Framework for Intentional Teaching  
in the Early Childhood Classroom**



**Sandra Heidemann, M.S.  
Beth Menninga, M.A.Ed.  
Claire Chang, M.A.**

**Foreword by Carol Brunson Day**

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*Praise for The*  
**Thinking**  
TEACHER

“Offers a valuable guide to new and experienced teachers. As they read and do the exercises, early educators will be able to reflect on their practice, their goals, and their career. This book can be used individually or with a study group of colleagues meeting to share their passion for a profession that is as challenging as it is rewarding. In the end, the children will benefit from their intentional teachers.”

—Angèle Sancho Passe, early childhood education consultant and author of *Evaluating and Supporting Early Childhood Teachers*

“A must read and excellent educator guide about reflection and relationships. *The Thinking Teacher* gives teachers multiple, concrete resources and support for how to reflect on the complexities of a teaching life. As the authors state: “The changes are not just coming at you; they are happening inside you.”

—Tamar Jacobson, Ph.D., author of *Don't Get So Upset! Help Young Children Manage Their Feelings by Understanding Your Own*



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## Dedication

We want to dedicate this book to two groups of people who were instrumental in our success: the trustees of the F. R. Bigelow Foundation, who courageously championed our efforts for our community, and the teachers, coaches, children, and families who participated in our professional development initiatives. The teachers, especially, taught us way more than we were able to share with them. They inspired us, and this book is really the story of their journeys.

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Our partner programs were willing and ready to engage in the process of learning together about early literacy and math. They helped us problem-solve schedules and logistics and supported their teachers as the teachers attended trainings and analyzed data. Our partner programs include the following Head Start programs: Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties, Heartland Community Action Agency, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Northwest Community Action, Three Rivers Community Action, West Central Minnesota Communities Action, and Community Action Partnership of Scott, Carver, and Dakota Counties; preK programs at Community of Peace Academy and Independent School District 622; and the following child care programs: Community Child Care Center (Saint Paul) and Wilder Child Development Center.

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We thank our spouses and children for supporting, feeding, and encouraging us as we worked. We are sure they sometimes wondered how we were going to get the book done. But we did, thanks to their confidence that we could.

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# FOREWORD

*by Carol Brunson Day, Ph.D., past president of the NAEYC Board and CEO of Brunson, Phillips & Day Consultants*

It is an extraordinarily timely event for a newly published book in 2016 to call itself *The Thinking Teacher: A Framework for Intentional Teaching in the Early Childhood Classroom*. As evidenced just last year by the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) newly minted mission statement—which, for the first time since its founding in 1926, identifies advancing the profession as a core component of its work—we are at the dawn of an intentional movement in the field of early education focused on teachers.

Although a timely and exciting topic, the idea of intentionality in teaching is not new. This notion of a teacher being in full awareness of what she or he is doing, and thoughtful and mindful about teaching and learning with children and families, is a well-established ideal for what we want all teachers to be. However, how to achieve this in today's world, where the distractions of changing curriculum models and assessments abound, continues to beg for answers.

Sandra Heidemann, Beth Menninga, and Claire Chang bring their vast firsthand experience working with hundreds of teachers over fourteen years as they explore and analyze intentionality and contribute a unique perspective for today's early education scene. In their own words, they seek to “demystify how to support the full development of teachers.” Sounds simple, yes? But their approach to professional development is deeply analytic and subtly unique. And it arrives at an important moment, one in which there is a seeming explosion of effort to provide early learning initiatives, mainly focused on increased content knowledge and improved interactional teaching strategies with and for children. These authors take a different approach, zeroing in on the teacher's professional

development as a teacher. Though the distinction is subtle, it is clearly a shift away from the *how-tos* and the *to-dos* in the classroom with materials to the *who-am-Is* and *why-am-Is* in the teacher's role with children and others. As you read, you will come to understand and feel the shift.

As we try to learn new things, we often want specifics. But sometimes specifics become recipes that teachers feel compelled to copy or mimic. This volume manages to avoid that formula. That is, while it is full of specifics—stories from teachers and about other teachers, stories about children in classrooms, recommendations about interactions with parents—the specifics are used in ways that open up new possibilities for thinking about *how to think about* who one is as an early childhood education professional. The authors achieve this by always keeping the teacher in the active role of constructing his or her own practice. As they coach their readers through thinking, reflecting, analyzing, and struggling to understand in new ways, they always convey a sense of confidence in teachers' efficacy to achieve the desired result.

This, too, is a remarkable achievement: the way the authors exude such confidence in the power of teachers not only to participate in the transformation of their own practice but also to have an impact on the institutions in which they work. In reading this book, I was convinced that as teachers we can tackle the common and perhaps inevitable roadblocks to change (no money, too busy, too much resistance, don't think we should do that right now) without letting them overwhelm us, turning them instead into "opportunities to become more innovative thinkers and doers." In many ways, the authors place teachers in a position of power over their own professional development. They offer specific tactics, like "Think about ways you can influence those who plan your staff training," and complex strategies, like uncovering the dynamics of one's own professional growth.

Moreover, as a result of their rich professional lives, Sandra Heidemann, Beth Menninga, and Claire Chang are able to share many illustrative stories that bring their points to life. Writing simultaneously *about* teachers and *for* teachers, they have used a captivating style and format that are full of emotion and life.

So what are my favorite parts? Since I have always thought that struggling with contradicting ideas helps people think better, I love the way the

text treats wrestling with dilemmas as rich opportunities to become more conscious of your values and priorities about teaching. Defining a dilemma as arising when you have to choose between two competing or contradictory ideas, the authors encourage working through challenges like feeling stuck as part of the *process* of resolution and as a *means* to it. They encourage us to accept the discomfort that comes from making mistakes and being in disequilibrium—really important for teachers to hear!

As I read, I felt a certain joy and pride as an early childhood education professional in today's world. The way in which the authors write tells so much about who they are as persons. Sensitive. Observant. Creative. Caring and committed enough toward everyone in this world to discuss culture and family engagement in meaningful ways, and to write about disenfranchised communities as models of strength. These are the kind of people we as a profession should want to tell our story. And although I know only one of the authors (Claire Chang) personally, I feel confident saying that all three represent the best that we possess as an early childhood education profession.

These authors have done a splendid and exciting job of identifying how to face the challenges that change presents. As you read their work, you will feel you're being walked through the ideas with your hand held every step of the way by someone who has been on this journey before.

**Carol Brunson Day**



# INTRODUCTION

Your development as a teacher is important not only to you, but also to your students, their families, and your whole community. When you *want* to be the very best teacher you possibly can be, everyone benefits.

Sometimes you might feel lost, marginalized, or forgotten in the midst of quality and accountability trends. Regulations, assessments, student-teacher ratios, and environment do contribute to quality and accountability. But it's the better teachers who create better outcomes. Your ability to reach for your best grows when you're able to define for yourself how you came to teaching, what you learn from teaching, and how you can grow as a teacher while vigilantly keeping children's success as your focus.

This book provides a framework for teacher-directed professional development—regardless of your length of time in the field, your stage of teacher development, or the age of your students. It is a tool not only for you and your fellow teachers, but also for the supervisors, directors, managers, coaches, and principals who guide and inspire your work. You can use this tool to help you take control of your path as a professional committed to facilitating learning for every child.

## Why Intentionality?

The word *intentional* means “made, given, or done with full awareness of what one is doing.” We propose that when teachers teach with a full awareness of what they are doing, better learning is the result. Children not only have better academic outcomes, they also have better social and emotional outcomes.

We learned about the power of fostering intentionality in teaching through two distinct projects. The first project focused on how to increase literacy and kindergarten readiness in a Midwestern state among children of color, children whose families had low income, and children whose



home language was not English. In the second project, we worked with children who had these characteristics to achieve early math outcomes needed for success in school and life.

In both cases, we collaborated with preschool programs in our local community, including Head Start, nonprofit preschools, nonprofit child care centers, and preK programs operated by a school district and a charter school. In both projects, children achieved statistically significant growth in reading or math. In some cases, children's gains doubled, tripled, or even quadrupled their initial scores. This occurred despite program variations in curriculum, teacher credentials, student demographics, program structure, and composition of teaching staff. People often ask us about the secret to our success.

This book unveils our secret. We found that when we invest in teachers' intentionality, teachers change. They stand taller, speak more clearly, assert their knowledge and experience, and advocate for their students.

Intentional teachers use resources wisely. They share their perspective and

When teachers teach with a full awareness of what they are doing, better learning is the result.

knowledge with others. Often intentional teachers become champions for continuous improvement and advocates for educational equity. As teachers grow more intentional, they shift from asking "Why?" to asking "Why not?" They have the capacity to wrestle questions and debates with a mix of what they've learned from their own experience

and from books, journals, and other publications. Intentional teachers may benefit from guidance and supervision, but they require less monitoring, because they monitor themselves.

Our focus on intentionality emerged as we reviewed the abundance of curricula, classes, books, and environmental props flooding the educational marketplace. It seemed to us sometimes that the ever-increasing number of educational materials aims to take the wisdom of teachers out of the teaching process. One teacher commented that some materials limit the teacher's role to delivering a "boxed" lesson. Another teacher referred to this trend as making teaching "idiot-proof."

We believe that teaching is so much more than that. It is an art and a science. We believe that a great teacher can compensate for limited materials

and curriculum and imperfect environments. Conversely, even the best curriculum, materials, or environment may have only limited success if the teacher's skills and abilities are limited.

This book is informed by the sense that many of the resources aimed at teachers cater to materials and the environment—the tip of the teaching iceberg. The saying *the tip of the iceberg* refers to the obvious aspects of an object or situation, the part we can easily see. The saying implies that there is much more to an iceberg than its tip. What lies beneath the surface is wide, deep, and often undetected.

This book demystifies how to support the full development of teachers. It will help you see and address the whole teaching iceberg. If you are a teacher, the chapters can guide your journey of self-discovery and self-determination. If you are supporting the development of teachers, this book can help you guide teachers toward creating and maintaining time for reflection, coaching, mentoring, and leveraging appropriate resources for the greatest good.



Adapted from Sylvia Guinan, "Why Do Teachers Teach?" August 15, 2013, [www.wiziq.com/teachblog/why-do-teachers-teach](http://www.wiziq.com/teachblog/why-do-teachers-teach).

## The Importance of Intentional Teaching in Early Childhood

Intentional teaching as a framework for teacher-directed professional development is fairly new to the early childhood field. We acknowledge

that professional development can be challenging for early childhood educators. The field of early childhood education is broad and sometimes undefined, which makes development and implementation of effective professional development seem like an overwhelming task.

In early childhood, educating and caregiving are intertwined. When you toilet train children, you are educating them. When you count up to ten with children, you are caring for them.

Early childhood teachers may enter the field through education or through caring for children in their homes. They work in a wide array of settings: child care centers, family child care homes, workplaces, churches, and schools. In each of these settings, teachers have varying time schedules, work patterns, resources, and leadership structures. Each setting has its own set of requirements, from Head Start performance standards to state licensing standards to teacher certifications and licenses.

A teacher in early childhood may work with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, early elementary students, or all of these. Each age group requires specialized understanding of child development and age-specific instructional strategies.

In the past, early childhood education as a field has often seemed to have an artificial division between care and education. You can hear this in job titles of employees in the field. An early childhood educator could be called a child care worker, a teacher, a caregiver, or a provider. Meanwhile, all early childhood educators in all settings are involved in caring for and educating children. With young children, it is essential that teachers provide a nurturing relationship *and* an intellectually stimulating environment.

Some may believe a teacher's purposeful planning is more associated with children's intellectual development. With this view, some may feel that a discussion of purposeful instruction doesn't belong in early childhood professional development. However, teachers working with the whole child must use intentionality in all the areas of child development in order to be effective teachers. In addition, they do well to remember that in early childhood, educating and caregiving are intertwined. When you toilet train children, you are educating them. When you count up to ten with children, you are caring for them.

Given the diversity of settings, the broad array of job definitions, and the complexity of the job itself, it is imperative to address how early childhood teachers grow and develop in their profession. How do they learn to be more effective in their work with young children? Many current efforts in the field promote new content knowledge and teaching strategies. However, such efforts do not often address the development of each person's professional identity as a teacher. We see this as a missing element in the ongoing professional development experience for early childhood educators.

With evidence supporting the importance of the early years mounting, and with funding and attention increasing, discussion about early childhood professional development can't wait until the field is more standardized, more defined, or less conflicted. Young children need thoughtful, reflective, and purposeful teachers in all settings *now*, not at some indefinite point in the future. We hope this book serves you as an ally in your effort to become more thoughtful in your teaching—whatever your setting and job title may be.

## Scope and Organization of This Book

This book is organized as a journey, starting with your first steps as a teacher.

### **Part 1: Starting the Journey**

In Chapter 1 we explore the stages of teacher development, core beliefs on teaching, and how teachers change over time. Chapter 2 discusses intentionality and how it can help you navigate mandates, changes in expectations, and increased accountability.

### **Part 2: Change Brings Intentionality**

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of a growth cycle that includes the following phases: Teachers Learn, Teachers Practice, and Teachers Share and Model. It lays the groundwork for Chapter 4, where we explore the first phase of the growth cycle, Teachers Learn. Chapter 4 also introduces the dimensions of teacher learning. Chapters 5 and 6 outline the next two phases of growth, Teachers Practice and Teachers Share and Model. How you balance observation and feedback with the realm of research, data,

and standards—and the conflicting feelings that arise in the process—is at the heart of Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Purposeful and mindful instruction builds your teaching skills, confidence, and competence. It helps you achieve a balance in your practice. Chapter 6 outlines how you, armed with increased confidence, can create bridges to peers and families through modeling, presenting, and coaching.

### Part 3: Getting What You Need

To continue your journey as an instructional leader, you must be equipped with the necessary tools. These tools include knowing yourself as a learner. In Chapter 7 you'll explore your learning styles and preferences so you can meet both your needs and those of the children in your care. Chapter 7 also explores the value of having support from a learning community or community of practice, mentors, and resources.

Chapter 8 addresses the questions, challenges, and problems you may face as you travel on your journey to intentionality. It begins with an approach to problem solving and follows up with an exploration of common problems. Chapter 9 discusses the importance of reflection and continuous improvement, and it features one teacher's journey to intentionality. It closes with a few words of encouragement from us to you.

Each chapter also includes:

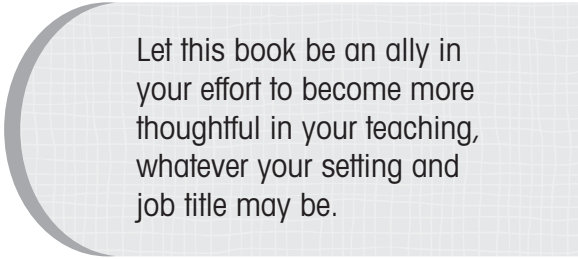
- ▮ **Teacher stories.** These stories relate the experiences of teachers as they have gone through the changes we describe in the book. Some are direct quotes; others are composite stories. We appreciate the willingness of teachers to share their voices with us and illustrate our observations.
- ▮ **Reproducible forms.** We include forms at the end of chapters to help you explore your own personal reaction to the material. You can use these forms for reflection, to document and see progress and change during your journey, and as planning tools for the future. You can use the forms on your own, or you can use them with a peer teacher or mentor teacher, to discuss what you are learning. You can use and reuse the forms to notice where you are and how you are changing and growing or to set some direction for yourself when you are feeling confused or unsure. Please feel free to use these forms as you see fit.

You can access them from the book or download them as printables (see page x for details).

A note on language: When we use the term *teacher* in this book, we are referring to every adult in all early childhood settings—not only those with the “teacher” job title, but also family child care providers, assistant teachers, educational aides, paraprofessionals, and anyone else who comes into contact with the children in early childhood programs. Children benefit when all the adults who care for them become more intentional in their interactions and teaching activities.

Throughout this book, from example to example, we alternate between male and female pronouns to denote teachers and students. We recognize and value that both men and women are early childhood educators. And, of course, we acknowledge the gender diversity of children.

Finally, you will note that many of the examples we share from our own experiences relate to math learning. We use these examples to illuminate the concepts of intentionality. But of course, fostering language development, social-emotional learning, and other areas of learning also readily apply.



Let this book be an ally in your effort to become more thoughtful in your teaching, whatever your setting and job title may be.

## How to Use This Book

This book is a guide to help you recall how you came to the journey of teaching and to help you identify where you are in that journey. You’ll find chapters dedicated to the twists and turns in the journey that may challenge you to rethink your choice of profession or your place in it.

This book is also a resource meant to encourage you to use a developmental framework when examining your professional growth. As a teacher, you are an adult learner, and your teaching knowledge and skills develop over time. *How* you learn affects what you are able to learn, revise, retain, and master. When you understand yourself as an adult learner, you can name what you need to learn. This leads to being able to ask for what you need and to being clear about what you don’t find useful. It helps you be focused.

In this book we do not define or outline what you should do. The book is meant to be used for your own self-development as an educator. You need not read straight through it in order to benefit from it. You can sample it as you like, using the table of contents to guide your reading. You might skip around to chapters that help you at any given time or simply read the chapters in the order that interests you. Or you may want to explore the reproducible forms before reading the book. We encourage you to use this as a resource in a way most helpful to you. Whether you are a seasoned professional, a newly certified teacher embarking on your first tour of duty, or an educator somewhere in between, you'll find a wealth of reference materials, self-assessments, and conversation guides to appeal to a range of learning styles and levels of experience.

You may also use this book in your partnerships with other early childhood practitioners. If you participate in a learning community or community of practice with other early childhood educators, you may use the reproducible forms as individual reflection tools that can lead to group dialogue on approaches to teaching and learning. If you work with a coach or mentor, you may use tools from this book with your coach or mentor to deepen your understanding of each other's stories as you focus together on your teaching practice. If you are a program coordinator, you may wish to use some of the forms to stimulate conversations about the relationship between program philosophy and individual beliefs and practices.

However you use our book, we would love to hear your stories, thoughts, and comments. Tell us about your experiences and how you have developed as a teacher. Please contact us at [help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com) or at [www.facebook.com/theThinkingEarlyChildhoodTeacher](http://www.facebook.com/theThinkingEarlyChildhoodTeacher).

Welcome to the journey.

**Sandra Heidemann**

**Beth Menninga**

**Claire Chang**



Part 1

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# Starting the Journey





# 1

## TEACHING IS A JOURNEY

Here are several ways in which your development as a teacher is like a journey:

- ▶ It requires planning.
- ▶ It may be rocky at times.
- ▶ It may require adjustments to new environments.
- ▶ It may require learning a new language.
- ▶ It may involve detours or take unexpected twists and turns.
- ▶ It requires maps and assistance from others.
- ▶ It involves taking risks.

However, there is one big difference between your professional journey as a teacher and any physical journey you might take. A physical journey has a destination. But as a teacher, you are not really looking ahead to a specific destination. Instead, you are a lifelong traveler. You are constantly learning and improving as a teacher.

Teachers begin their journeys in a variety of ways, and their subsequent paths follow different routes. But all teachers develop skills, gain experience and knowledge, and form a philosophy of teaching as they travel along. The journey of teaching can bring you great rewards. You form deep relationships with children. You see how your daily efforts contribute to children's future success. You form partnerships with families to meet the needs of their children.

Teaching young children is a multifaceted task. You have to understand child development and curriculum content, pay attention to how children learn best, and evaluate the results of your work.<sup>1</sup> In one study of an early childhood professional development initiative, researchers found two striking phenomena. First, they found that effective early childhood instruction is more complex than most people think. Second, the researchers found that despite this complexity, many teachers are capable of learning it.<sup>2</sup> Your path as a teacher is more difficult than you may have thought, but it is also more accessible and more gratifying.

This chapter explores several factors that influence your teaching journey. First you'll think about how you began it. You'll look at the stages of teacher development to understand how your teaching experiences influence your professional development. You'll think about your core beliefs about teaching and learning. Once you have articulated your core beliefs, you'll explore the numerous changes you are asked to make in your work. What happens to your journey when, for example, you encounter a new curriculum, increasing standards, or an early literacy initiative?

As a teacher, you are a lifelong traveler. You are constantly learning and improving.

## The Journey Begins

Dionne had just received her child development associate (CDA) certificate and was proudly showing it to her family. She thought about her start in teaching. Her daughter had been in Head Start as a four-year-old, and Maria, the director, suggested she apply to be an aide in the classroom. Dionne didn't know if she could work with young children all day, but decided to apply. She found she was really good with young children and just kept working her way to assistant teacher. Now she wants to get her associate's degree at the community college.

Lauren had gone to college and majored in sociology. She wasn't sure what she would do with her degree and floundered when she got out of college. Finally, she found a job in a child care center as an aide. She found the work challenging and decided to take courses toward a degree in early childhood education. She loved the enthusiasm of the children and appreciated how hard the other teachers worked at the center.

Pedro entered college knowing he wanted to work with young children. Despite several people telling him he wouldn't earn enough in that profession, he chose a major in early childhood education. He graduated and found work in a kindergarten readiness program through a public school. He was excited to start his job, meet his new students, and plan instruction for the new school year.

These stories illustrate how teachers begin their careers in unique ways. While some of us realized at a young age that we wanted to teach, others were “accidental tourists” who meandered into the classroom and decided to stay. However you began your teaching career, reflecting on your beginnings gives you perspective on how important this work is to you, how invested you are, and where you are on your journey. Here are a few questions to ponder while reflecting on how you began:

- ▶ When did you first know you wanted to become a teacher?
- ▶ How did you feel at first, when you started teaching?
- ▶ What stands out about that first year (or month)?
- ▶ What did you learn about teaching young children that first year (or month)?
- ▶ What did you learn about yourself as a teacher that first year (or month)?
- ▶ What made you stay in early childhood education?

Fill out the reproducible form “Reflections on Beginning My Teaching Journey” at the end of this chapter (pages 22–23). Think about who you were when you began teaching and what you wanted to accomplish. When you think back, you may appreciate how many changes you have undergone since then. Even if your first experience was only six months ago, you will benefit from revisiting your early days.

## Stages of Teacher Development

As you think back to your earliest days as a teacher, what pictures come to mind? You may remember a special child or a mentor who supported you. You may remember some lessons that did not work or times when children

got excited about a book or science experiment. These memories are just the beginning of your story. Each year you teach, you have a distinctive experience with the children, your setting, your colleagues, and your own changing practice—all of which influence how you develop as a teacher.

To help us understand how teachers develop their skills and professional identity, let's examine two models. In the 1980s, Stuart and Hubert Dreyfus developed a five-level model of how professionals acquire skills.<sup>3</sup> In this model, the Dreyfus brothers break down the activities involved in acquiring skills and how these activities help professionals advance their technical and professional capabilities. In the second model, Lilian Katz examines how preschool teachers develop as they move through their careers.<sup>4</sup> Teachers go through stages in their careers that help determine what kinds of supervision, training, and support they need in each stage.

### Dreyfus Five-Level Model

Think of all the skills you need in order to teach young children. You need to know how to set up an environment, choose materials, lead a group, manage transitions, write effective lesson plans, and do ongoing assessment. No one walks into an early childhood setting knowing how to do it all. If you envision teaching as a set of skills teachers learn in order to teach effectively, the Dreyfus model helps you break down the steps of that learning process. Breaking down the steps is helpful for teachers because it gives a clearer view of how teachers will reach their goals. It's helpful for supervisors, trainers, and instructors because it offers a way to match a teacher's training to what the teacher needs at each stage. The Dreyfus model outlines five levels through which a learner moves from novice to expert.\*

- ▶ **Novice level:** The learner needs explicit rules and directed guidance.
- ▶ **Advanced beginner level:** The learner still needs rules to follow but now understands the context from considerable experience.
- ▶ **Competent level:** The learner knows the skills well enough to design goals, a plan, and strategies for when and how to apply rules and procedures.

\*Gloria Dall'Alba and Jürgen Sandberg, "Unveiling Professional Development: A Critical Review of Stage Models," *Review of Educational Research* 76, no. 3 (2006), 383–412. Reprinted with permission of *Review of Educational Research*. All rights reserved.

- ▶ **Proficient level:** The learner is able to assess each new situation against a backdrop of previous experience.
- ▶ **Expert level:** The learner can identify problems, goals, plans, and actions; does not rely on explicit rules; and can help others learn the material.

These five levels track how a learner gains both skills and confidence. Think about your first day as a student teacher or an aide in a classroom. You may have felt like a novice. You probably remember wanting someone to just tell you what to do. Maybe the lead teacher asked you to work with an individual student or gave you a book to read with a small group. Eventually, with more training and experience, you become more able to address a wide variety of students and content areas. You can predict student reactions and responses based on what you have observed in the past. Your planning incorporates these observations and experiences and, more than likely, you successfully engage children in the activities you plan. As you reach the expert level, you can become a mentor to younger or less experienced teachers.

Let's examine one essential skill for early childhood teachers, *group instruction*, and see how it develops according to this model. Early childhood teachers need to be able to lead large groups of fifteen to twenty children in singing, learning concepts, or discussing various classroom issues. Group times cannot be too long or the children lose interest. But group instruction needs to be long enough to cover the material adequately. The chart on page 15 illustrates how the Dreyfus model breaks down the process of a teacher who's growing increasingly skilled at leading groups.

## Katz Model of Teacher Development

Lilian Katz looked closely at how early childhood teachers develop over the course of their careers. She identified four stages through which teachers progress. She described each of the four stages and outlined the kinds of training and professional development most helpful for each stage.<sup>5</sup> Her descriptions fit closely with many teachers' experiences. Following are Katz's four stages.

- ▶ **Stage I—Survival:** Teachers in this stage may wonder, "Can I get through the day? Can I get through the year?" They feel anxiety and confusion and they doubt their abilities. They may wonder about their

Group Instruction Skill Development: Dreyfus Model			
Level	Teacher's Behavior	How Teacher Learns Skill	Support Needed
<b>Novice</b>	Doesn't lead large group	Assists during group time Works with individual children	Directions on how to help children during group Activities to do with individual children
<b>Advanced beginner</b>	Doesn't lead large group	Assists during group time May help individual children listen during group, using a variety of techniques, such as sitting close to child, holding child on lap, and bringing attention to an activity	Nonverbal cues from teacher to know when to help a child Discussion with teacher about children's behavior and what helps them
<b>Competent</b>	Leads a section of a large group	Leads a segment of a group activity that is planned and time-limited, such as reading a book or leading a song Finds it hard to adapt to change in plan	Discussion with teacher about what book to read or song to sing, ensuring the book or song is enhancing the curriculum
<b>Proficient</b>	Leads whole group	Will plan and lead large group Can adapt plan if children lose interest or want to go deeper into material	Collaboration with fellow teachers to discuss goals and activities
<b>Expert</b>	Leads large groups Trains and supports others as they learn to lead large groups	Plans and leads large groups, easily adapting to changes Leads group instruction with consistently high quality Constantly finds ways to improve children's learning through this learning format	Encouragement to train others Collaboration with others to discuss goals and plans

competence. At this stage, teachers need support and encouragement. They should receive on-site instruction in specific skills.

- ▶ **Stage II—Consolidation:** Teachers use the knowledge they gained the first year to form a foundation. They are more able to see beyond the immediate daily demands to future needs. They often seek out information and support to help them serve individual children who are having difficulty. On-site training with a wider array of information and resources continues to be valuable. For example, teachers may find a meeting with a speech therapist to discuss the needs of an individual child very helpful.
- ▶ **Stage III—Renewal:** After a few years of teaching, teachers begin to tire of doing the same things over and over. They begin to ask questions about current trends and ideas. They seek out new resources for instruction by attending conferences, meeting with colleagues, and sharing ideas.
- ▶ **Stage IV—Maturity:** After three to six years of teaching, teachers reach the stage of professional maturity. At this stage, they feel confident in their abilities and are asking deeper questions, such as “What is my philosophy of teaching?” and “How can I teach more effectively?” Teachers at this stage do well if they can attend professional conferences, participate in a professional learning community or community of practice, or form a close relationship with a mentor, a supervisor, or a small group of fellow teachers with whom they can discuss these deeper questions.

After reading the description of Katz’s model, which stage do you think you are in right now? Teachers can move forward and backward between stages when circumstances change. Sometimes even teachers with many years of experience can get thrown into the survival stage again. For example, in past workshops we, the authors, have presented Katz’s framework to teachers and asked them what stage they thought they were in. One teacher shook her head and said, “I’ve been teaching a long time, but I just started in Head Start and I feel like I am back in the survival stage.” Another teacher said she felt she was back in the survival stage because she had a group of children who were very active and challenging her authority.

## Reflection and Transformation

Although the Dreyfus and Katz models do not align with each other exactly, if you place them side by side, you get a fuller picture of how you develop as a teacher. The chart below merges the two models.

Teacher Development Models: A Comparison		
Katz Model	Dreyfus Model	Differences and Similarities
Survival stage	Novice and advanced beginner levels	Katz's stages begin with first-year teachers; the Dreyfus model begins with staff at entry level in the field, such as aides and assistants.
Consolidation stage	Competent level	Both models describe teachers comfortable with teaching but needing support to keep developing skills.
Renewal stage	Proficient level	Katz describes teachers needing more professional development or a challenge to renew their interest in teaching; Dreyfus describes teachers who are more proficient because they have gained more skills.
Maturity stage	Expert level	Both models describe teachers as mature professionals willing and able to share their expertise with others.

Considering both of these models can help you identify your own stage of development. Reflecting on what stage you are in right now can help you make sense of your feelings and identify your needs. For instance, you might realize that a new set of expectations is making you feel like a beginner who needs everything spelled out. These models also show you that such a reaction to learning a new skill set is natural. You may feel like an expert or a mature teacher in one area of your practice, and that you are still becoming competent, or consolidating your practice, in another area.

Moving through the five levels or four stages of teacher development requires more than just gaining additional information and experience. It is a process of reflection and transformation. This transformation is not a simple linear line from one step to the next. It requires reflecting on how you think and feel about a content area, about children's learning,



and about how best to engage children. Researchers and teacher educators Jörgen Sandberg and Gloria Dall’Alba describe how teachers develop within the context of changing expectations:

- ▶ You change how you see your role as teacher and how you teach.
- ▶ You change your beliefs about how children learn.
- ▶ You change how you interact with your environment and tools, such as your classroom setup and materials.
- ▶ You change your relationships with your coworkers, families, and supervisors.<sup>6</sup>

Moving through these stages can be stressful at times. However, reflection on your growth and the changes you have experienced also makes teaching a fascinating profession. Use the reproducible form “The Stage I’m In” on page 24 to reflect on the stages of teacher development you’re in and how they affect your teaching practice.

## Core Beliefs About Teaching

As an adult, you have many facets to your identity. You may be a mother, a father, a daughter, a son, an uncle, or an aunt. When someone asks you, “What do you do for a living?” you likely answer, “I teach” or “I am a teacher.” Being a teacher is a major facet of your identity.

Identifying your core beliefs about teaching is key to understanding who you are as a teacher. Your core beliefs are the inner values that help you make ethical decisions, plan lessons that engage children, and decide what will be in your learning areas. You form your core beliefs through your education, your training, your mentors, and most importantly, from your observations and experiences with children. Sometimes your core beliefs come from your own education as a child or deeply held values from your family. Then you build on core values from your childhood through your ongoing educational experiences.

It’s a sign of healthy identity development when children bring their full selves to school every day: their home language and culture, their whole family, their community, their joys, their worries, all of it. When you as a teacher bring your whole self, including your beliefs and values, to work every day, you model authenticity to your students and their families.

What are your core beliefs? How do you stay true to your beliefs while honoring the diverse values of the children in your care and the program you work in? The reproducible form “My Core Beliefs” (on pages 25–26) will help you define what your core beliefs are. Knowing what makes you tick as a teacher provides an inner compass to help you steer on the road ahead.

## How Have You Changed?

It takes time, experience, and reflection to become a skilled teacher. And teachers continue to grow and develop, because they learn as they teach. If you have been teaching for more than a few years, your core beliefs may have changed over time. You may have changed the way you lead groups or organize your transitions. You may intervene more quickly if you see a child with special needs or intervene less quickly when children are having a conflict during play.

Many factors shape your teaching practice, core beliefs, and working knowledge over time. Some influences are so gradual that you hardly notice them. Others are abrupt and often brought about through outside initiatives or a big change in how your workplace is run. Here is a list of factors that can trigger changes in your beliefs and practice:

- ▶ a change in your workplace
- ▶ new experiences or experiences that contradict your expectations
- ▶ responses from children
- ▶ watching or working with other adults
- ▶ observations or assessments
- ▶ partnerships with families
- ▶ standards for teaching and learning
- ▶ input from supervisors, mentors, or coaches

Core beliefs have a powerful hold on how you teach. You may not even realize how deeply you hold these beliefs until they are challenged.

When you as a teacher bring your whole self, including your beliefs and values, to work every day, you model authenticity to your students and their families.