

# Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings

THE BLENDED PRACTICES APPROACH

SECOND EDITION



Kristie Pretti-Frontczak  
Jennifer Grisham  
with Lynn D. Sullivan

# Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings

## The Blended Practices Approach

Second Edition

by

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Dr. Pretti-Frontczak, is a highly sought-after speaker, accomplished author, and educators' educator. She began her career as an early interventionist and then spent 16 years as a tenured professor at Kent State University. While at Kent State, she directed 13 federal grants, mentored hundreds of graduate students, and authored many articles, chapters, and books related to supporting young children in inclusive settings. Dr. Pretti-Frontczak was one of the original co-creators of the Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children and, alongside her mentor Dr. Diane Bricker, pioneered research related to embedding instruction into daily activities. She also played a primary role in conducting one of the first treatment validity studies on authentic assessment and worked extensively to validate standards for rating the quality of early childhood assessments. She is a past president of the International Division for Early Childhood and a recipient of the Merle B. Karnes Award for Service to the Division. She has conducted research and written extensively on the topics of tiered interventions and how to support systems change in early care and education. Over the past decade, her work has centered on raising the emotional intelligence of educational leaders, including those forging a bridge between preschool and kindergarten. By raising the emotional intelligence of educational leaders, kinder, more inclusive, and more creative schools are built. Since 2013, she has followed her true passion for designing and delivering transformative professional development as a social entrepreneur. She currently partners with Dr. Julie Causton from Inclusive Schooling to create schools where all students flourish and educational systems, practices, and spaces are reimaged. To date, she has accumulated over 50,000 hours of helping educators and leaders work from a place of compassion, hope, and love in locations from Cincinnati to Singapore.

**Jennifer Grisham, Ed.D.**, Professor, University of Kentucky, Lexington

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Lynn D. Sullivan is currently a private consultant in the areas of special education, early childhood, and interagency collaboration. After a first career in social work, she spent 35 years as the early childhood consultant for one of 20 regional technical assistance centers in Texas. In that career with Education Service Center (ESC), Region 11, Ms. Sullivan provided consultative and technical assistance to local school districts, charter schools, and community agencies in the development and improvement of instructional programs and services for students with disabilities ages 3, 4, and 5. She planned, facilitated, presented, and coordinated regional training for educators (including pre-K and kindergarten teachers), speech-language pathologists, diagnosticians, and campus and district leaders of preschoolers with disabilities. These were based on federal, state, regional, and local data sources along with anecdotal patterns, trend lines in longitudinal data analysis, and school district priorities. In conjunction with Drs. Pretti-Frontczak

and Grisham, Ms. Sullivan developed a multi-year, data-driven project to support and sustain best practices in meeting the needs of young children with disabilities in small and rural communities. This collaboration involved ESC staff, campus and district leadership, and a national research team. The national research team incorporated design and lessons learned in several published materials. It was during that project that the curriculum framework elements of the ASAP acronym (assessment, scope and sequence, activities, and progress monitoring) and umbrella visual were created. Ms. Sullivan also co-developed with Dr. Grisham a multiyear project to inform, support, and sustain research-based Tier 3 strategies on targeted campuses. This project involved the use of face-to-face sessions, asynchronous resources, and online conferencing platforms. The project coordinated efforts across ESC staff, university researchers, and campus teams in several counties who provided services for young learners with IEPs. Ms. Sullivan served as the Part B representative on the Texas Interagency Coordinating Council for Early Childhood Intervention for 18 years and is currently a member of CEC and DEC, having served as Texas DEC president from 1994 to 1996. In 2007, she was honored to be a Curriculum Section co-author for the DEC resource *Promoting Positive Outcomes for Children with Disabilities: Recommendations for Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation*. More recently, she co-edited the 2014 DEC publication *Blending Practices for All Children* (Young Exceptional Children Monograph Series No. 16).

## About the Contributors

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As an academic, adjunct, consultant, coach, parent of children with special needs, and advocate, Ashley Lyons-Picard is dedicated to exploring and identifying solutions to the complex issues that face the field of special education, particularly that of early intervention and early childhood special education (EI/ECSE). Having benefited from an education and work experience in the field, and subsequently raising children who are twice exceptional, Ashley has a strong and unique perspective that she brings to her research, writing, delivery of preservice and in-service professional development, and advocacy. Ashley previously served as the Division for Early Childhood Children's Action Network Coordinator, Chair of the DEC Policy and Advocacy Council, and CAN Coordinator for the Ohio

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**Julie Harp Rutland, Ph.D.,** Associate Professor, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond

Julie Harp Rutland, Ph.D., is Associate Professor in the College of Education and Applied Human Sciences at Eastern Kentucky University. Julie has experience in many roles, including that of a teacher, administrator, researcher, and early interventionist working directly with young children and their families. Julie has authored chapters and articles, and presents at both state and international conferences annually, with a focus on early intervention, sibling intervention, and working with families. Currently, she serves the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children at both the state and national level. In addition to her professional roles, Julie is a parent of four children, with one having multiple disabilities. The combination of these experiences has provided a unique lens with which Julie views early childhood education.

**Lin Zhu, Ph.D.,** Assistant Professor, Eastern Washington University, Cheney

Lin Zhu is Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at Eastern Washington University. She earned her doctoral degree in special education from the University of Kentucky.

## Foreword

I am honored that the authors asked me to write this foreword for *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach, Second Edition*. I have had the privilege to study under Dr. Pretti-Frontczak as a graduate student and the opportunity to collaborate and learn from Dr. Grisham for many years. As an early childhood consultant in Iowa, where many teachers were transitioning from traditionally segregated classrooms to those utilizing a blended model, the first edition of this book was crucial in supporting my work as a consultant and coach. The contribution these authors have made and their ability to make space for open and honest conversations about these complex topics has allowed practitioners to be vulnerable and open to learning new skills. As a teacher, consultant, and coach of adults, I am thankful for their research, passion, collaboration, and friendship.

My own understanding and implementation of inclusive practices has been transformed by *Blended Practices for Teaching Young Children in Inclusive Settings* (Grisham-Brown, Hemmeter, & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005). During the transition of moving to blended classrooms, the difficulties have been evident. Teachers have struggled to know how to provide instruction, assess all students with differing needs, and meet various program requirements based on funding. The first edition of this book came at a time when teachers needed support and a path to follow. Authentic assessment resonated with many teachers, as the message of play and simultaneously providing instruction was a strength. The ability for teachers to play, instruct, and observe using authentic assessment concurrently changed their world. Teachers were previously completing several standardized assessments because they were required; however, they rarely afforded teachers information on child strengths or how to plan developmentally appropriate activities for the children. Authentic assessment allows teachers to observe children during play while also documenting what they know and what they still need to learn. Authentic assessment allows teachers to focus on functional skills that young children need to navigate their daily routines and activities.

It is the responsibility of all who support young children to be consumers of research to ensure the assessments they are using with young children are appropriate and useful in developing goals, guiding instruction, and increasing the positive outcomes for children and their families. Readers will find Pretti-Frontczak and colleagues have provided early care and education providers a tool



to support them in developing their understanding of the technical adequacy of assessments they use. Teachers can now feel empowered to ask questions about the purpose of the assessments to ensure they are validated for their stated purpose.

Assessment practices in early childhood once looked very similar to the K-12 system; however, authentic assessment has played a key role in reshaping the assessment landscape. Observing children to make instructional decisions and using curriculum-based assessment in early childhood have given teachers the information they need to make curricular decisions, plan for groups and individual children, and confidently embed new learning into the daily activities and routines of the children. Young children learn through repetition; the more opportunities teachers can provide throughout the day for a child to practice functional skills in meaningful ways, the quicker the child will learn.

This book should be required for every new teacher working in early care and education environments. It supports them in navigating the complexities of teaching and assessment in a blended classroom while also providing real-life examples and solutions to situations that arise across many programs. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from these transformational authors.

Melanie Reese  
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## REFERENCE

Grisham-Brown, J., Hemmeter, M. L., & Pretti-Frontczak, K. (2005). *Blended practices for teaching young children in inclusive settings*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

## Foreword

# Assessment Equity in Inclusive Settings

What does equity mean within assessment in inclusive early childhood special education? Imagine that inclusion and equity are birth rights, that assessment is truly about highlighting strengths and determining what is needed to provide access, supports, and participation. With grounding in these areas, equity should be a concept we embrace *before* considerations about assessment. Through focusing on systems, we can address each layer related to assessment to consider how it can be more equity centered. My colleagues and I assert that equity-empowered systems take an asset-based focus on disability in young children (Blanchard et al., 2021). This means that there are ways to prepare for assessing (within systems and individuals) and ways to interpret and use assessment information that focus on assets, access, participation, and supports while also acknowledging the ways racism and bias impact systems and institutions (Iruka, 2022). Here are a few decision points that can support equity in assessment:

1. Policies around eligibility: How is information gathered to determine eligibility? Which instruments are used? Settings of assessment? How is the family/caregiver voice elevated? When and where does assessment occur? What languages are included or available? Based on the answers to these questions, how are these decisions made and how often are they reviewed or revised? Is there equitable access for young children and families?
2. Beyond policies and system-level decisions, individuals should start with their own positionality around assessment and the focus of assessment to support equity. In other words, what are your biases around assessment, the child or setting? How do those on the team acknowledge and minimize the impact of their biases?
  - a. When interpreting results and/or making diagnoses, how is family voice and perspective represented? How are potential diagnoses viewed through a cultural lens to understand the microcultural differences in development and consider alternative understandings of development?

3. For child progress monitoring, when, where, how, and by whom is child data collected? How is progress determined and data interpreted? What are the ways that individualized instruction is planned to support progress? How are different ways of expression and knowing documented to acknowledge progress?
4. When assessing for program planning, what measures or assessments are used and how are these decisions made? Are there areas you feel are not capturing through the selected measure(s) and, if so, how will you gather this information from a wide range of children? How is the information gathered used for individual and group planning? What accountability strategies and methods are used and how does this inform a feedback loop and programmatic, classroom, or other changes?

Equity within assessment is not a passive pursuit. It is an important step in advancing equity for all young children, their families, and society, especially for children with disabilities. Without intentional awareness, effort and action, we decidedly reinforce entrenched practices that may pathologize certain children and underserve others. We have a responsibility to make equity a priority for all our children.

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## Foreword

Like the first edition, this new edition of *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach* is a must-read for professionals who want to develop their practices according to current scientific evidence. The implementation of authentic evaluation practices in early childhood programs is a complex process due to the trajectory that has existed for decades of evaluating children's deficits through the application of standardized tests. Thanks to the teachings that this book gives us, professionals feel accompanied during the process. From the description of the concept of authentic evaluation practices to each of the recommendations presented, the authors make the reader feel motivated to apply the proposals in their professional practices.

With the first edition of this book, many of us professionals learned what authentic assessment means and, above all, how to develop new skills to be able to carry it out in our daily practice. *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach, Second Edition*, will help professionals not only further improve the quality of their assessment practices but also provide service delivery models to support all young children in inclusive early education settings.

I want to express my gratitude to the authors for introducing "Recommended Practices for Assessing Children Who Are Dual Language Learners or Multilingual Learners" as Chapter 10 in this edition. In my professional experience in Spain and many Latin American countries, professionals are making efforts to improve their practices toward an approach focused on the strengths of children and their families and with interventions in their natural environments. However, early childhood educators need support to assess and meet the needs of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Diversity enriches us, and the evaluation cannot adhere to the standardized patterns of child, family, and environment with which professionals feel identified. Chapter 10 provides strategies for focusing on language skills and cultural practices of families and for allowing children alternative responses.

Thanks to the generosity of the authors, I learned the true meaning of authentic evaluation and, above all, how to make it a reality in different countries, regardless of our culture and the country we come from. *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach, Second Edition*, invites us to

continue reflecting on the quality of practices and motivates all of us who yearn for authentic assessment practices to become a reality that allows all children and their families to continue advancing.

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## Acknowledgments

Working on a second edition, by some measures, is a rather straightforward process. For us, however, most things are never straightforward. We started working on the second edition in 2019, and for at least the first year, the work that was accomplished was by a group of graduate students from the University of Kentucky, including Cameron Tyrrell, Chen Quinquin, Lindsay Johns, and Ndaru Prapti. Without their help, we wouldn't have been able to update all of the research and assessments covered in this book. We would also like to express a special note of gratitude to Toni-Ann Rusiana, who worked across chapters to fix APA citations, located key evidence to support recommended practices, and wrote a number of sections to ensure practical application. We would also like to express our gratitude to Ashley Lyons-Picard, who contributed to several chapters in the book, helped to edit across the book, and helped us to bring this book to completion. Last, we wish to acknowledge the long-term impact Lynn Sullivan has had on our work around blended practices. We've worked directly with Lynn for more decades than we wish to count, and because of her leadership, her wisdom, and her passion for inclusive and authentic assessment, we have honed practices around the curriculum framework described in this book and other publications. We have also come to better understand what teams need by way of support and have grown in our own knowledge around supporting systems to implement blended practices in early childhood settings. We are forever grateful for her friendship and her contributions to this book.

*To all educators and leaders who work  
tirelessly to achieve inclusive educational systems for all.*

—Kristie Pretti-Frontczak

*To my husband Daniel Halbert and son Kendall Brown, who  
sustained me during the time I was writing this book, and to the memory  
of my mother, Nancy Grisham, who motivated me more than I ever realized.*

—Jennifer Grisham

*To my husband Mark, who has always had faith  
in me and has been there for almost all of the journey.*

—Lynn D. Sullivan



## SECTION I

# Recommended Practices (Assessment Processes)

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

Jennifer Grisham and Kristie Pretti-Frontczak



## WHY A SECOND EDITION

*Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach, Second Edition* is intended to once again provide practical guidance to teams on how to engage in authentic assessment practices for all young children. The specific purpose of this book is to provide detailed information on the reasons for, and structures associated with, performing assessment for young children and their families. As is the case with most educational practices, the purposes for which assessments are conducted expand with time, recommended assessment practices are refined, and the contexts for conducting assessment continue to evolve. As such, the second edition of *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach* aims to include the most up-to-date recommendations for how to assess young children as established by research, our professional organizations, and governing bodies and through our collective experiences. This edition dives deeply into the most common reasons assessment is conducted with young children (e.g., program planning, progress monitoring), while acknowledging that teams need strategies and support as they engage in other assessment purposes such as identifying children for special education services, tiering instructional and behavioral supports, and assessing children's readiness for kindergarten. The focus of this book continues to be on blending assessment practices and service delivery models to support all young children in inclusive early education settings. In this edition, we also intentionally name system-level policies and practices that continue to marginalize families and children and cause harm by using outdated models of disability. The issues related to system-level inequities, from how we identify children for services to how we monitor performance over time, are deep and wide. We, the authors of this edition, also recognize that we have much to learn and much more work to do. We recognize that the existing systems of power and privilege associated with several of our key identities (i.e., we are all Caucasian, English is our primary language, we live in affluent neighborhoods, we are considered neurotypical, and we have advanced education) afford us many advantages and benefits. We must do more than identify inequities; we must work together with families, early educators, institutions of higher education, and policy makers to change how we support young children and their families. In writing this book, we are advocating for a systemwide change when it comes to assessment practices and young children.

In *Blended Practices for Teaching Young Children in Inclusive Settings* (Grisham-Brown & Hemmeter, 2017), the companion to the present book, a curriculum framework is described for conceptualizing how to support young children in inclusive early childhood settings. The curriculum framework is designed to: 1) link assessment to instructional practices, 2) serve as a foundation for curriculum design in blended early childhood programs, and 3) provide a process for decision making for teachers who teach diverse groups of children. The curriculum framework consists of four elements: 1) assessment, 2) scope and sequence, 3) activities and instruction, and 4) progress monitoring. Whereas Grisham-Brown and Hemmeter place emphasis on Elements 2 and 3, *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach, Second Edition*

focuses on Elements 1 and 4, with an expanded conceptualization of the term *assessment*. Together, the two books provide teachers in blended classrooms with information on how to plan, implement, and evaluate instruction and programs for young children with and without disabilities.

## MAJOR THEMES OF THIS BOOK

In preparation of the second edition of *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach*, we conducted a thorough review of current early childhood recommended practices (i.e., Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Division for Early Childhood, 2014), legislative initiatives (e.g., Preschool Development Grants, 2014), and accreditation and practice standards (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2018; Head Start). From this review, two important findings emerged. First, early childhood educators are required to address multiple mandates, standards, and processes that blended programs must address related to assessing young children. Those are summarized in Table 1.1. Second, our review yielded

**Table 1.1.** Early childhood standards for various early childhood programs and associated accountability mandates

| Program standards                 | Child care   | Head Start  | State-funded pre-K                          | Special education   |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| Program quality standards         | State licensing standards (49 states)  | Federal program performance standards                             | State program standards (39 states)         | Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) regulations<br><br>State program standards |
| Assessing local program quality   | Stat Quality Rating & Improvement Systems (QRIS) (14 states + 29 pilots)<br><br>State licensing visits | Federal Program Review Instrument for Systems Monitoring (PRISM)  | State program monitoring (30 states)        | State program reviews   |
| Standards for children's learning | State early learning guidelines (49 states)  | Federal child outcomes framework                                  | State early learning guidelines (49 states) | Three functional goals (federal)  |
| Child assessments                 | No current requirements  | Progress toward Head Start outcomes reported three times per year | State pre-K assessments (13 states)         | States report percent of children in five categories  |

From Schultz, T., Kagan, S. L., & Shore, R. (2007). *Taking stock: Assessing and improving early childhood learning and program quality* (p. 18). National Early Childhood Accountability Task Force; adapted by permission.

Key: IDEA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (PL 101-476).

four major themes: 1) authenticity, 2) collaborative partnerships, 3) utility, and 4) educational equity. These themes are highlighted in a number of ways throughout the book, by being either featured as a chapter or embedded across chapters. Below are descriptions of each theme.

## **Authenticity**

Authenticity refers to the way in which early childhood assessments are conducted. Assessments should be conducted within the context of a child's daily activities and routines by adults with whom the child is familiar, keeping in mind that even if we conduct assessments in early care and education classrooms, these settings are not authentic for all children's experiences; there is often a cultural mismatch between the child and the context. This mismatch needs to be part of the consideration as assessments are conducted, data are analyzed, and the information is used to make important decisions. Authenticity also refers to the skills that are assessed. Functional skills that children need in order to participate in daily activities and routines should be the focus of the assessment and should be assessed using materials that are part of the child's environment. In addition, the skills that are assessed should encompass the totality of what young children need to learn, representing a comprehensive assessment that examines the whole child. Due to the fact that early development is interrelated, gathering information about young children in their natural environment is preferable to assessing skills in isolation, as is done when conventional assessment practices are implemented. In addition, conventional assessment often results in a deficit approach for describing young children, rather than a supportive approach that is characteristic of authentic assessment practices. As evidenced by a large-scale study by Bagnato et al. (2014), authentic assessment is highly valued by early childhood providers and preferred over conventional assessment practices.

## **Collaborative Partnerships**

Collaborative partnerships, consisting of professionals, paraprofessionals, and nonprofessionals, should gather assessment information and make decisions about the children with whom they work. These teams may include a teacher, an assistant, an administrator, and volunteers who support the entire class. For individual children, team members may include medical personnel (e.g., neurologist, nurse), therapists (e.g., physical, occupational, speech), and itinerant teachers (e.g., vision, hearing). Regardless of the team's composition, each member should be involved in the assessment process, and the child's family and other familiar caregivers should guide each team. Throughout the book, team roles and models of assessing children are discussed. Central to each discussion is the notion that team members need to cooperate (i.e., create collaborative partnerships) with each other by sharing information, being willing to step outside of their traditional roles, and making meaningful contributions to the decision-making process. Although the teacher is recognized as the

professional instructional leader in early childhood settings, it is essential for all who work with young children to participate in the assessment process. The value for collaborative partnerships is one shared by those who identify recommended practices for the field (i.e., Division for Early Childhood (DEC), 2014; NAEYC, 2018).

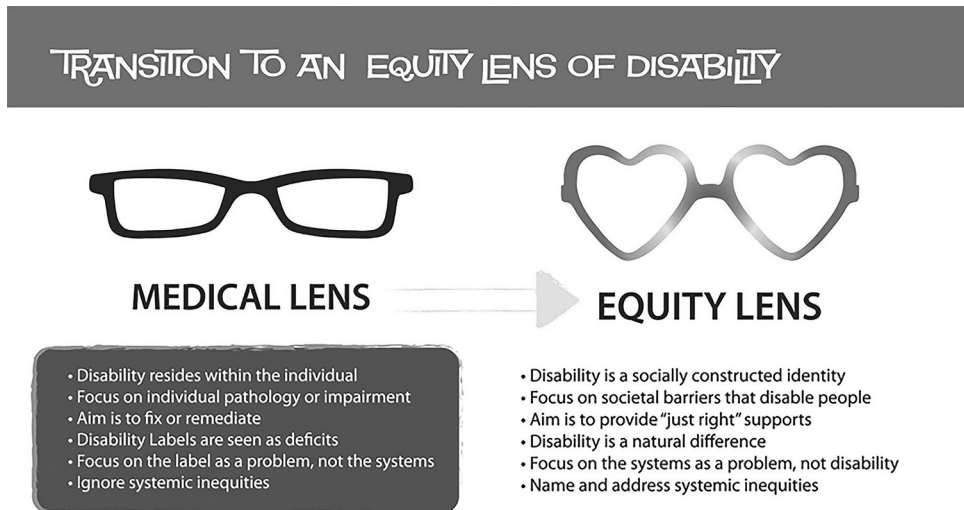
## Utility

Conducting any assessment with young children should have a purpose. In particular, the assessment information gathered should be useful in developing goals and guiding the development of instruction that results in positive outcomes for children. The process of learning how to use data that are collected to guide instructional decisions is a major focus of this book. Although state and federal agencies require data collection for data reporting and accountability, the data collected for those purposes are secondary to the need to know how to use assessment information to improve outcomes for young children. No purposes are ignored in this text, but they are not the central focus. As authors and advocates of reducing testing requirements so that teachers can collect assessment data needed to make sound instructional decisions, we offer ideas for how to use assessment information to answer multiple assessment questions. When assessments provide information on what to teach, where to teach, with what to teach, and how to teach, they have good utility, which is a recommended practice valued by all (DEC, 2014; Copple & Bredecamp, 2009; Thum & Kuhfeld, 2020).

## Educational Equity

When assessment practices aid in ensuring “every child is seen for who they truly are and their unique interests and gifts are surfaced and cultivated” (Bright Morning, n.d., para. 5), we are working on educational equity. When assessment practices allow some children to succeed or fail based upon social or cultural factors (e.g., ability, race, gender, socioeconomic status, geographic location, citizenship status), we are not. Instead, systemic inequities are perpetuated, particularly for children and families from traditionally marginalized groups and identities. Currently, most educational assessment practices are steeped in inequity, where ability in particular is seen through a medical lens, as described by Causton and Pretti-Frontczak (2021). As depicted in Figure 1.1, a medical lens focuses on individual child deficits, sees “normal” as something that is true or real, seeks to fix or remediate the individual, and largely ignores systemic inequities and societal barriers that disable children and marginalize families. Throughout this book, intentional efforts are taken to notice, name, and then alter practices away from a medical lens and transition assessment practices to an equity lens. It is up to each and every early educator to examine and change “practices, policies and approaches to ensure every child gets what they need every day” (Cohen, 2020, para. 3).





**Figure 1.1.** Depiction of the medical lens of disability as well as the mindset and practice shifts that are needed to transition to an equity lens. (From Causton, J., & Pretti-Frontczak, K. [2020]. *Transition to an equity lens of disability*. Inclusive Schooling; reprinted by permission.)

## OVERVIEW OF MAJOR BOOK SECTIONS

The overarching definition of *assessment* used throughout the book is that it is a process of gathering information for purposes of making decisions. This definition provides the foundation for the organization of much of the book. Because the first part of the definition refers to a process and the second part to a purpose, the first two sections of the book correspond with those themes: Section I: Recommended Practices (Assessment Processes) and Section II: Reasons for Conducting Assessment (Assessment Purposes). In addition, there are important contemporary issues associated with assessing young children that bear special attention. For that reason, the revised edition of this book includes Section III: Special Topics in the Assessment of Young Children. Below, we describe each section.

### Section I: Recommended Practices (Assessment Processes)

Section I describes the **process** for conducting assessment of young children in blended classrooms. The process is guided by recommended practices described by professional organizations that represent young children, expert committees that direct policy related to early childhood issues, and/or legislation enacted to oversee programs for young children. Recommended practices are highlighted in Chapters 2 through 5. Chapter 2 defines authentic assessment and differentiates it from conventional assessment. The chapter describes the advantages of authentic assessment, as well as its evidence base. Chapter 3 focuses on the importance of family involvement in the assessment process. The chapter describes the legal mandates for involving families in assessment, approaches for involving families in assessment, and considerations for



doing so. Chapter 4 highlights the importance of determining the technical adequacy of assessment instruments. The chapter defines terminology associated with technical adequacy, describes differences between various types of early childhood assessments, and explains strategies for interpreting conventional assessment instruments. Chapter 5 describes the elements of a critical decision-making process for using assessment information. Details on the five steps of the process—gathering, documenting, summarizing, analyzing, and interpreting—are discussed and examples are provided.

## **Section II: Reasons for Conducting Assessment (Assessment Purposes)**

Section II, Chapters 6 through 9, focuses on the **purposes** for conducting assessments with young children. Chapter 6 includes information on how to collect assessment information to plan programs for young children in blended classrooms. Information on how to select curriculum-based assessments as well as specific information on commonly used assessment tools for program planning are described. In Chapter 7, how to gather holistic information on children for the purpose of monitoring progress is emphasized. The chapter describes a tiered progress monitoring framework to guide the type, frequency, and amount of data collection teams should consider. Chapter 8 is concerned with the identification of young children who have special needs, emphasizing the processes of Child Find, screening, and diagnostic assessment. Recommended practices for conducting screening and diagnostic assessment are highlighted, and examples of instruments that can be used are provided. Finally, Chapter 9 discusses issues with assessment for the purpose of evaluating early childhood intervention programs. The chapter describes reasons for conducting program evaluations as well as the strategies for doing so. Issues associated with accountability assessments also are discussed.

## **Section III: Special Topics in the Assessment of Young Children**

New to the second edition are Chapters 10 through 12, which address important topics that require special attention. Chapter 10 presents issues associated with assessing children who are dual language learners, including what to assess and how to assess this population. A comprehensive list of assessment tools that might be used with children who are dual language learners is provided. Chapter 11 covers topics associated with assessing young children who have multiple disabilities. Along with guidance on what and how to teach, the transdisciplinary assessment process is highlighted, as well as specific assessment tools for use with the population. Finally, Chapter 12 addresses issues specific to assessing children in kindergarten. While the practices discussed elsewhere in the book are appropriate for this age group, issues associated with kindergarten readiness, curricula focused solely on academic achievement, and response to intervention have impacted how children in kindergarten are assessed. Chapter 12 emphasizes how to use recommended assessment practices in light of these developments.

## INTENDED AUDIENCE AND USE

The intended audience for this edition, similar to that for Grisham-Brown and Hemmeter (2017) and the first edition of *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings*, is individuals seeking initial certification to teach young children, primarily in blended certification or licensure programs. Students in blended certification programs take coursework in both early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood special education (ECSE). Their degree allows them to work with children with and without disabilities. Although many states now have some form of blended certification program, others do not. Blended certification may not exist in all states, but all states support inclusive education and early childhood programs that serve children with and without disabilities in the same setting. Therefore, both *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach, Second Edition* and *Blended Practices for Teaching Young Children in Inclusive Settings, Second Edition* remain appropriate for licensure programs that offer only ECE or ECSE certifications. The information in *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach, Second Edition*, will remain pertinent to future teachers in either certification program.

A second, and equally important, audience includes teachers and other educational professionals who are currently working with young children on a day-to-day basis. The information contained in this book is helpful for those striving toward more inclusive education for all children. For example, teachers with general and/or special education training and responsibilities will learn how to create collaborative partnerships, conduct assessments within the context of daily activities, and plan instruction based upon the strengths and needs of the diverse children they serve. Similarly, consultants, principals, and technical assistance providers will find the book useful in their work to support teachers in inclusive programs. For example, they will find helpful information for designing and delivering professional development, for leading systems change efforts toward inclusive education, and for understanding what inclusive early childhood education looks like in practice.

Previous editions of both blended practices books have been used by teachers, consultants, and administrators for group studies in their school districts and agencies. For example, teachers read one or two chapters each month and met to discuss the implications in their program, or teachers read chapters and discussed implications for practice in threaded discussions and blogs. Although the main focus of the book is children who participate in center-based early childhood programs and who are between the ages of 3 and 5 years, the basic tenets of the book are appropriate for the broader range of young children. In this edition, specific information is provided for how to design an assessment system in kindergarten that adheres to recommended practices for young children. Programs serving children from birth to age 3 and ages 6–8 will find that the principles advocated in *Assessing Young Children in Inclusive Settings: The Blended Practices Approach, Second Edition* are relevant as well. Therefore, universities and programs that emphasize teaching children from birth to age 5 or birth to age 8 will find the book worthwhile.

## DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

In an effort to ensure consistency across chapters and between this book and Grisham-Brown and Hemmeter (2017), common terms are defined in the sections that follow. In some cases, an explanation is provided for why one term is used instead of another. In defining key terms, an attempt is made to ensure that early childhood professionals from traditionally ECE or ECSE backgrounds will be comfortable with the terms used.

### Assessment

Assessment is defined as a process of gathering information for the purposes of making decisions. Often educators talk about “giving tests,” “administering assessments,” or “using an assessment tool or measure.” Each statement relates to the broader activity or process of gathering information about children (e.g., through direct testing, observations, interviews). These are discussed in Section I. As well, educators may say, “We’re collecting portfolio entries,” “We’re trying to see if \_\_\_\_\_ can get special education services,” or “We’ve got to test all of the children because Head Start requires it three times a year.” These statements relate to the reasons or purposes assessments are conducted (e.g., to monitor progress, determine eligibility, evaluate a program), as discussed in Section II. Recognizing that assessment is a process that happens for various reasons is essential to understanding the tenets of the book. Assessment, defined broadly, is a process of getting to know a child or a group of children for a variety of purposes. This book discusses the major purposes for conducting assessments and associated recommended practices. Within the curriculum framework, however, the term assessment is used as described for engaging in authentic program planning (see Chapters 2 and 7).

### Blended Practices

In Grisham-Brown and Hemmeter (2017), blended practices are described as “the integration of practices that can be used to address the needs of all children in inclusive settings” (p. 7). Blended practices imply the merging of theories and philosophies from ECE and ECSE to support diverse groups of young children. Throughout the book, when we refer to groups of children who are diverse, we mean children from a broad age range (birth to 8, with an emphasis on the preschool years) who have multiple and intersecting socially constructed identities including but not limited to ability, race, gender, language, physical health, mental health, ethnicity, geographic location, citizenship, class status, etc. Conversely, when we use the phrase diverse children, it is not shorthand for children who are diverse from the default of White, English speaking, and neurotypical. We mean the full range of children who are served in early childhood programs. The current book emphasizes strategies for gathering information about diverse groups of young children that 1) combine recommendations from professional organizations that represent the broader fields of ECE and ECSE, 2) consider the importance of gathering authentic and

meaningful information about all children regardless of ability, and 3) take into account the need for common assessment practices, versus different practices for different groups of children, to better support inclusive programs.

## Teacher

Although the strategies presented here are designed for use by all early childhood professionals, there is generally one professional who has primary responsibility for a child's education. That person may be referred to as the provider, educator, or interventionist. In this book, that professional is referred to as the *teacher*, a term that was selected over other commonly used terms in early childhood education for two reasons. First, *teacher* implies a level of professionalism that other terms do not. Given the importance of children's early years, it is imperative that staff who work with young children have the same educational credentials as staff who educate older learners. Using the term *teacher*, it is hoped, makes a statement about the importance of the work. Second, *teacher* is used because the focus of the book is on how to assess young children in inclusive educational settings within the context of daily activities and experiences. Whether trained as a general education or special education teacher, or even a related service provider, the term *teacher* is used throughout in reference to the professional who is most closely associated with planning and revising instruction for young children in a group, center, or district-based early education program.

## SUMMARY

This book is intended to guide early childhood teachers in implementing high-quality assessment for children with and without disabilities. A thorough understanding and implementation of the practices discussed in the book should result in improved services for young children and their families.

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