Preface

A Letter to the Reader

Dear Reader:

The real-life story told by this book is dedicated to all early childhood teachers of diverse learners. I hope you enjoy reading this story and find the philosophical and pedagogical principles and multiple teaching strategies described and exemplified in this book useful. To tell my story, I have used many real-life classroom teaching and learning experiences of young, diverse children, their teachers, and their families.

THE CONTEXT FOR THE STORY TOLD BY THIS BOOK

Before telling my story, I have to give you some contextual information. About nine years ago, I moved from Texas to Ohio to work as a professor at the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) program at the College of Education, a department of the University of Cincinnati. At the time, I was the first (and only) Hispanic faculty member in this particular, almost 100-year-old, college of education.

My move to Ohio followed some demographic changes in minority representation in this Midwest medium-size city. Historically, Ohio had experienced diversity only as a racial issue represented by African American minorities or by low-socioeconomic-status (SES) Appalachian white populations. The exception was Cleveland, with a constant influx of immigrant, diverse groups (pretty much like any other large city). Until the early 1990s, cities like Cincinnati typically showed overrepresentation of African American children in low-SES, inner-city public schools and low-SES, Appalachian white children in suburban public schools. In the last decades, Cincinnati has experienced periods with some presence of middle- to upper-class international families (mostly from Asian and Latin American countries) brought by transnational corporations.

In the mid-1990s, a new immigration wave started in the medium-size cities of the Midwest, comprising Hispanic, eastern European, African, and Asian families. Some of these diverse families were new immigrants to this country, but most families were migrant groups moving to unsaturated smaller cities in search of better jobs and salaries. During the mid- to late 1990s, culturally and linguistically diverse immigrant families started to settle in low-SES neighborhoods and

attend public schools in Cincinnati. This new wave of diverse immigrants challenged public schools because of their English-as-a-second-language (ESL) educational needs. In addition, the new immigrant groups created racial and ethnic tension with the African American community because together with Hispanics and Asians they were categorized as historically underrepresented groups and competed for the same federal and state resources for housing, education, health care, and other services.

These immigrant families were attracted to Cincinnati because of the traditional presence of industry and service jobs, lower cost of living, stronger unions pushing for higher salaries in blue-collar jobs, and less saturation of social institutions and services, such as public schools and health care. However, at the same time, minority immigrants had less support from an established ethnic community and minority leaders that advocated for their social needs. The situation for ESL educators was privileged because of the *fresh* attitudes and less *saturation* of social services for immigrant, diverse families, but at the same time, it was challenging because of the need to establish new partnerships and institutionalized services in social institutions, such as the school system. The advantage of a community such as Cincinnati was the tradition of ESL German immigrant settlers that entered America through Ellis Island during the mid-1800s to early 1900s. These German settlers succeeded in maintaining their German language and culture, together with English bilingualism, until the Anti-German sentiments brought German media and schools to an end around the start of World War I. Between the early to mid-1990s, many generations of monolingual English descendants had forgotten about their ESL and German roots established by earlier German settlers.

THE STORY TOLD BY THIS BOOK

Now, we go back to our story. Consider the real-life story that depicts my experience as a cultural bridge and mediator between the mainstream school system and Hispanic families and their young children. During a typical morning in my new office, my phone rang. It was an administrator from a suburban mix-income public school district (including schools located in low-SES to middle-class neighborhoods). She wanted to meet with me to discuss ways we could collaborate to serve the new Hispanic, Asian, eastern-European, and African immigrant low-SES children and their families at the preschool level. She explained that some educational services were in place, as mandated by the federal government, to serve the elementary and secondary ESL students (including Hispanic, eastern-European, and Asian groups), but there was no ESL program for the three- to five-year-old children who had started to show up in the last few years. However, she had some funding from Head Start to serve the low-SES mainstream and diverse preschool children within a mainstream setting. She asked me if I would like to visit and discuss ways we could reach out and adapt the educational services to the ESL, low-SES immigrant children and their families.

Soon after, I paid her a visit and observed some Head Start classrooms located in a primary school full of eager, young, diverse learners. I was encouraged by the experience of meeting some open-minded school administrators and teachers! who had a genuine interest in better serving ESL youngsters. I was happy to see that Cincinnati's administrators had a fresh attitude, much more positive and open-minded than other states, where ESL students have a historical presence and are perceived by many educators with a *saturated* attitude. When I moved to the Cincinnati community, ESL minorities were portrayed as the "news" in the local newspapers and television programs. This visit also made me realize that school administrators in the Cincinnati community were charging me with an important social responsibility: to act as a liaison, cultural bridge, or mediator between the school system and the newly immigrated diverse ESL families and their children.

Soon after my visit, my phone rang again; it was a director of a nonprofit community-based speech pathology organization, who was offering me a former preschool classroom to start a preschool program for ESL youngsters in collaboration with his organization. Again, I went on a field trip. It was a-dream-come-true situation! There, I found a beautiful facility. The large classroom was complete with furniture, educational materials, its own restroom, kitchenette, and adjacent computer room. Best of all, the director and her colleagues had very positive, fresh attitudes toward language-minority groups and were eager to put their facilities to use. They explained to me that recently they had lost their mainstream preschool clientele because of competition with public schools expanding early childhood special education services for youngsters with speech and hearing handicaps and language disorders. The director asked me, "Would you be interested in leading the effort of recruiting and implementing an ESL preschool program in collaboration with us?" Again, I was perceived as a liaison between diverse children and their families and a mainstream organization.

Soon after, my phone rang yet again. By now, I was getting used to meeting educational administrators and being perceived by them as an advocate for diverse children and their families. It was the director of a regional Head Start program, who was offering me financial support to serve ESL preschool children and their families. His regional Head Start program had started to collaborate with some inner-city public schools to diversify their service to minority families and children, from the historical African American groups to the new immigrant ESL families. They had recently approved the implementation of some Head Start classrooms in an inner-city school, but they had been unsuccessful reaching and recruiting ESL families. Though they tried hard, he explained that they sent many fliers, translated to their native languages, to potential ESL parents and posted some ads in community papers, but so far, they had received little to no response. He asked me if I would help them recruit diverse ESL families and their children for these inner-city Head Start programs, and if I would be interested in starting some Head Start classrooms to serve ESL children and their families. I paid him a visit; his large office was located in a suburban public school, and I was happy to meet more administrators with fresh attitudes who were interested in funding preschool services for ESL children and their families.

Back in my office, I reflected about my visits with educational administrators, and I felt overwhelmed by the social and moral responsibility of establishing so many partnerships between schools, organizations, and diverse families. But I also felt overjoyed by the fresh attitudes toward diverse immigrant families and their children. After some thought, I decided to put together this enthusiastic group of individuals and form a collaborative consortium, in which we would collaborate to serve ESL children and their families. This is how the Bilingual Preschool Development Center (BPDC) was established, as a partnership among inner-city and suburban public schools, a regional Head Start center, a nonprofit community organization, and faculty and students at the University of Cincinnati. I was to serve as a cultural bridge or liaison between diverse ESL children and their families, a leader in ESL preschool curriculum development, a recruiter and trainer of ESL student teachers from our graduate ESL program at the university, and a recruiter and advocate of diverse ESL families and their children. Funding was committed in different forms by the participating organizations. These funds were used to pay for student teachers, children's school transportation, consumable educational materials, and snacks.

Finally, after about nine months of hard work and many meetings, we were ready to open our doors for the upcoming school year. All that we needed now were children. But we hit a wall; we advertised; we waited, and nobody came, exactly as the Head Start programs in inner-city schools had experienced. We met, we worried, and we wondered why diverse ESL parents were not coming. I felt committed to continuing with this initiative, but I was puzzled. How could I serve as a liaison for recruiting diverse children? I wondered about possible strategies for solving this puzzle. By analyzing the situation in light of research literature, I realized that formal channels of communication were not working because many diverse immigrant groups rely on traditional oral communication styles, and therefore, church was a trustworthy community organization they attended. This eye-opening experience made me a true advocate and led me to announce to my colleagues with renewed confidence, "I will bring you diverse families from their church communities; please plan open houses at our preschool classroom and provide transportation on Sundays."

Then, I embarked in a series of Sunday visits to churches serving the new immigrant, diverse families in town. I started with a Catholic community center that offered masses in Spanish to hundreds of new Hispanic families. I asked for the support of the priest and nuns, and with their permission and endorsement, at the end of several Sunday masses, I announced, in Spanish, our open house in the preschool classroom. After each mass, I talked in Spanish with mothers and fathers and won their trust and friendship, and I established rapport and empathy by using language and culturally appropriate behaviors as a member of their Hispanic community. Through establishing rapport, I persuaded them to board our bus and visit our preschool classroom on Sunday afternoons. I realized the power of face-to-face interaction for establishing trust and respect with diverse families following an oral tradition of social relationships.

I also realized the differences between the cultural values of diverse families and the mainstream school culture, such as minority parents being unaware of the

need for preschool education. Low-SES minority parents parents from a traditional cultural background, such as Hispanics, consider that their three- to five-year-olds are still babies and do not need to go to school yet. I explained to them that these young children need extra time to learn English, to continue to develop their Spanish, and to develop school readiness to start kindergarten in the mainstream school system. In the open-house meetings, we arranged for parents to meet teachers and fill out registration paperwork in their native languages, and soon, we realized that many were not literate or could hardly read or write in their first and only language. We had to arrange for volunteer university students to serve as mediators for diverse parents so the parents could fill out paperwork in their native language.

We also realized that many parents came with their extended family to the open house, and soon, we received some referrals for children of relatives and neighbors. I repeated the mass visits every weekend for the rest of that summer, in different parishes and communities. By the end of summer, we were ready to start with our first group of young, diverse children, and we were featured in the local newspapers and TV programs as the first bilingual English/Spanish preschool classroom opening in Cincinnati's history. With this advertisement, we also added some middle-class children from diverse immigrant and international families and other minority children (African American, Asian), whose parents were interested in an ESL preschool program. As time went by, other diverse preschool classrooms opened in the Head Start locations on the west side of town, which had a large proportion of low-SES Appalachian children. So rather than isolating the diverse children, we adopted an integrated model. In each preschool classroom, we balanced the number of monolingual English Appalachian children with the number of diverse ESL children. This integrated instructional model worked beautifully, as the diverse children started learning English much faster from their mainstream peers rather than from their teachers only.

As the BPDC story depicts, the effort to serve newly immigrated, diverse families resulted from the fresh and caring attitudes of a group of local educators who took social and moral responsibility and an advocacy position toward young, diverse children and their families. This book will use this real-life story for illustrating the ethnic-educator philosophy, assumed by the BPDC educators, and the pedagogical and assessment model and strategies that emerged from the implementation of pilot preschool classrooms serving young, diverse children throughout a four-year period.

THE STORY TOLD BY THIS BOOK ENDORSES AN ETHNIC-EDUCATOR PHILOSOPHY FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DIVERSE EDUCATION

This book endorses an ethnic-educator philosophy and a *pluralistic* view of education and schooling, which includes different languages and cultural backgrounds as part of America's educational values and beliefs, processes, and products. This book's philosophy endorses integration and *transculturation* (leading to multiple

languages and cultural identities) and opposes *assimilation* (leading to enforcing the mainstream culture and language only), both educational processes for immigrant students. The ethnic-educator philosophy endorsed in this book strongly stands behind an *integrated* approach to the linguistic and cultural adaptation of young, diverse students and their families, in which they can maintain their diversity while becoming American. In this book, I invite readers to become aware of the fact that the value of schooling lies in teachers serving as *liaisons* to facilitate young, diverse children's cultural adaptation, access, and integration, to middle-class America. I am hoping to inspire early childhood teachers and *awaken* their ability to *make a personal connection to young, diverse children and their families,* and by doing so, develop rapport, commitment, and advocacy to nurture, mentor, and mediate the cultural and linguistic adaptation processes among the increasing numbers of young, diverse children who populate preschool classrooms in the United States today. The four main philosophical principles of the ethnic-educator approach, with its embedded pedagogical principles, form the core of the BPDC curriculum presented throughout chapters in this book. The Appendix presents the summary of the ethnic-educator philosophical principles aligned with its pedagogical principles that the reader can use as an advance organizer or map for this book.

The most forceful message throughout the chapters of this book is that early childhood teachers need to rethink and rediscover the *learning potential* of young, diverse children and endorse and demonstrate through their classroom practice that *high-quality teaching can make a difference.* The diverse theoretical and philosophical approaches, pedagogy, and instructional and assessment strategies proposed in this book represent best educational practices that committed early childhood teachers can use to develop academic skills in young, diverse children. Best educational practices need to include and value the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds of young, diverse students, in relation to content areas and methodologies used. The recommended educational practices have a core message to stimulate early childhood teachers to become *committed advocates* for helping young, diverse students in their *cultural adaptation process* to achieve at higher developmental levels.

I hope that this book will inspire early childhood teachers to develop *social and moral responsibility* and to become *committed advocates* for young, diverse students. I hope that this book will inspire readers to engage in personal reflections about the philosophical orientation that they use the most in their practice (based on an Erikson's concept of searching for a professional identity). In the *pluralistic school environment* that I have envisioned in this book, early childhood teachers and parents collaborate as partners to increase young, diverse students' achievement and developmental levels though high-quality education and parental involvement, which transforms research-based knowledge into educational practice in the classrooms.

I hope that the story I tell in this book becomes engaging, inspirational, and useful as a handbook for solving real-life challenges when teaching and facilitating learning for young, diverse children and building a partnership with their families and communities.

THEME AND OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

The central theme of the book is the ethnic-educator philosophy and its derived pedagogical models and strategies, which link assessment to instruction, actual lesson plans, and alternative assessment tools. The book presents an insider's perspective on diverse early childhood education by unveiling a real-life story of a successful school laboratory for diverse preschoolers that the author established: the BPDC.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I includes the first two chapters and establishes the ethnic-educator philosophical and theoretical framework. Part I provides a context for understanding the pedagogical models introduced in this book and its unique features that interface cognition, language, and culture to meet the educational needs of low-SES young, diverse children (preK through Grade 3). These *young, diverse* children may come from *language-minority groups,* who have English as a second language (ESL), such as Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders, or from *sociohistorical minority groups*, such as African Americans, or who may be *mainstream* in terms of ethnicity but share the *low-SES* background with such minority groups as Appalachian and other white children.

Chapter 1 introduces the ethnic-educator philosophy. This educational approach and its pedagogical principles endorse advocacy and moral responsibility in teachers acting as liaisons and cultural bridges between the mainstream school culture and young, diverse children and their families. The central idea in the ethnic-educator philosophy is that the teacher's personality is the most important tool for the assessment and instruction of young, diverse low-SES children. Based on the ethnic-educator philosophy and some evidence from research (see Gonzalez, 2006; Gonzalez, Brusca-Vega, & Yawkey, 1997; Gonzalez & Yawkey, 1993; Gonzalez, Yawkey, & Minaya-Rowe, 2006), there are multiple factors embedded in teachers' personalities (i.e., attitudes, expectations, cultural beliefs and values, knowledge level, and level of familiarity with diverse languages and cultures) that affect their instruction.

Chapter 2 presents a pedagogical model that follows the ethnic-educator approach, which is based on research evidence (Carnegie Task Force on Learning in the Primary Grades, 1996; National Research Council, 1999a, 1999b). This ethnic-educator pedagogical model has been pilot-tested with young, diverse children in the BPDC. This pedagogical model is *holistic* because it integrates developmental areas (i.e., cognition, language, social, and emotional) with content areas (i.e., language arts, math, science, and social studies) across concepts represented by themes and topics in the curriculum.

The conceptual framework presented in the Part I will support the actual educational applications of the ethnic-educator approach presented in Part II, which includes Chapters 3 through 8. These five chapters will present (a) how to implement the pedagogical models through the derived instructional strategies, (b) how to develop lesson plans that integrate standards across developmental and content areas, (c) how to implement the classroom-based assessment tools for

linking assessment with instruction and meet pedagogical and accountability purposes, and (d) case studies and lesson plans illustrating the recommended praxis.

Chapter 3 presents four main clusters of pedagogical strategies that follow the ethnic-educator pedagogical model presented in Chapter 2, which are research-based and meet the educational needs of young, diverse children. Then, Chapter 3 translates the ethnic-educator approach, with its philosophical principles, into an actual praxis or clusters of pedagogical strategies that build a curriculum. Examples of teachers using the ethnic-educator pedagogical strategies at the BPDC are provided to portray the unique educational needs of young, diverse children.

Chapter 4 integrates the pedagogical strategies of the ethnic-educator approach with academic content standards for young, diverse children. The first section of this chapter explains how pedagogical strategies link assessment to instruction through *classroom-based assessments* (observations and evaluation tasks) that represent academic content standards endorsed by Head Start and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL, 2005). The second section of this chapter discusses the instructional purposes of assessment and presents the rationale explaining why classroom-based assessments are alternative measures that are more valid and reliable when assessing young, diverse children. The third section presents an integration of the ethnic-educator approach with TESOL academic content standards in the BPDC curriculum. Finally, sample lessons of the curriculum used in the BPDC are presented as examples of integration of the ethnic-educator curriculum with TESOL academic content standards and links to classroom-based observations.

Chapter 5 presents developmental tasks as alternative strategies of the ethnic-educator approach for assessing academic content in young, diverse children. Developmental tasks link assessment and instruction and provide teachers with classroom-based assessments that tap verbal and nonverbal mental processes and behaviors in young children. A case study is used for illustrating the implementation of this alternative assessment for young, diverse children.

Chapter 6 presents storytelling developmental tasks as an alternative tool for assessing semantic development (i.e., the intersection of cognition, culture, and language) in young, diverse children. Storytelling developmental tasks are classroom-based assessments that represent the philosophical and pedagogical principles of the ethnic-educator approach. As a developmental method of assessment, storytelling tasks link assessment to instruction and provide early childhood teachers with measurement tools that tap verbal and nonverbal mental processes and behaviors (i.e., semantic development) in young, diverse children. The storytelling developmental tasks presented in this chapter complement the classroom-based observations presented in Chapter 4 and the developmental tasks of academic content presented in Chapter 5. All the alternative methods of assessment presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are classroom-based assessments that can be used by early childhood teachers for instructional purposes with young, diverse children.

Chapter 7 presents an ethnic-educator approach to alternative reading instruction for young, diverse children. These pedagogical reading strategies represent academic content standards endorsed by TESOL, which (1) support reading instruction through reading fluency interventions and the guided-reading approach; (2) are based on a socioconstructivistic, theoretical framework, centered on schema theory and proficient-reader research; and (3) support family involvement for increasing reading skills in young, diverse children. Some examples of the application of the guided-reading strategies are provided for the language arts content area as well as concluding remarks about best reading instruction practices for meeting the educational needs of young, diverse children.

Chapter 8 presents excerpts of interviews with teachers who were participants in the BPDC project and in ESL graduate-level courses and with parents of BPDC children. These interviews illustrate patterns and transparent conclusions for the book. The teachers' and parents' interview excerpts represent the topics covered throughout the chapters of the book. The main objective in Chapter 8 is to represent the teachers' and parents' end-of-the-school-year reflections on their teaching and parenting experiences and their feedback about some lessons learned from praxis.