The following tables summarise normative development:

### Holistic development: the first month

#### Normative physical development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross Motor skills</th>
<th>Fine motor skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ The baby lies supine (on his or her back).</td>
<td>■ The baby turns his or her head towards the light and stares at bright or shiny objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ When placed on his or her front (the prone position), the baby lies with head turned to one side, and by 1 month can lift the head.</td>
<td>■ The baby is fascinated by human faces and gazes attentively at carer’s face when fed or held.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ If pulled to sitting position, the head will lag, the back curves over and the head falls forward.</td>
<td>■ The baby’s hands are usually tightly closed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Normative communication and language development

| Babies need to share language experiences and cooperate with others from birth onwards. From the start, babies need other people. | The baby quietens when picked up. |
| The baby responds to sounds, especially familiar voices. | The baby makes eye contact. |
| The baby cries to indicate need. | The baby may move his or her eyes towards the direction of sound. |
## Holistic development from 6 to 9 months

### Normative physical development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross motor skills</th>
<th>Fine motor skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The baby can roll from front to back.</td>
<td>The baby is beginning to use pincer grasp, with thumb and index finger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The baby may attempt to crawl, but will often end up sliding backwards.</td>
<td>The baby transfers toys from one hand to the other and looks for fallen objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The baby may grasp feet and place them in his or her mouth.</td>
<td>The baby explores everything by putting it in his or her mouth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The baby can sit without support for longer periods of time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The baby may ‘cruise’ around furniture and may even stand or walk alone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The baby is very alert to people and objects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Normative communication and language development

| Babble becomes tuneful, like the lilt of the language the baby can hear (except in hearing-impaired babies). | The baby repeats sounds. |
| The baby begins to understand words like ‘up’ and ‘down’, raising his or her arms to be lifted up, using appropriate gestures. | The baby continues to do everything he or she did in the first 6 months. |

### Normative cognitive development

| The baby understands signs – for example, the bib means that food is coming. Soon this understanding of signs will lead into symbolic behaviour. | of sight, even under test conditions. This is called the concept of object constancy, or the object permanence test (Piaget). The baby is also fascinated by the way objects move. |
| From 8 to 9 months, the baby shows that he or she knows that objects exist when they have gone out | |

### Normative emotional and social development

| The baby can manage to feed him- or herself using his or her fingers. | The baby is now more aware of other people’s feelings. The baby cries if brother cries, for example. The baby loves an audience to laugh with him or her. The baby cries and laughs with others. This is called recognition of an emotion. It does not mean that he or she is really laughing or crying, though. |
| The baby is now more wary of strangers, sometimes showing stranger fear. | |
| The baby might offer toys to others. | |
| The baby might show distress when his or her mother leaves. | |
| The baby typically begins to crawl, and this means he or she can do more for him- or herself, reaching for objects and getting to places and people. | |
## Holistic development from 4 to 6 months

### Normative physical development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross motor skills</th>
<th>Fine motor skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ The baby is beginning to use palmar grasp and can transfer objects from hand to hand.</td>
<td>☐ The baby now has good head control and is beginning to sit with support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ The baby is very interested in all activity.</td>
<td>☐ The baby rolls over from back to side and is beginning to reach for objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Everything is taken to the mouth.</td>
<td>☐ When supine, the baby plays with his or her own feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ The baby moves his or her head around to follow people and objects.</td>
<td>☐ The baby holds his or her head up when pulled to sitting position.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Normative communication and language development

| ☐ The baby becomes more aware of others, so communicates more and more. | ☐ The baby begins to use vowels, consonants and syllable sounds – for example, ‘ah’, ‘ee aw’. |
| ☐ As the baby listens, he or she imitates sounds he or she can hear, and reacts to the tone of someone’s voice – for example, the baby might become upset by an angry tone or cheered by a happy tone. | ☐ The baby begins to laugh and squeal with pleasure. |
| ☐ The baby continues to do everything he or she did in the first 3 months. |

### Normative cognitive development

| ☐ By 4 months, the baby reaches for objects, which suggests that he or she recognises and judges the distance in relation to the size of the object. This is called depth perception. This also suggests that the baby is linking the immediate perception with previous ones and predicting the future, which is an early concept of dimensional objects. | ☐ The baby knows that he or she has one mother. The baby is disturbed if he or she is shown several images of his or her mother at the same time. The baby realises that people are permanent before he or she realises that objects are. |
| ☐ The baby prefers complicated things to look at from 5 to 6 months. The baby enjoys bright colours. | ☐ The baby can coordinate more – for example, he or she can see a rattle, grasp the rattle, put the rattle in his or her mouth (the baby coordinates tracking, reaching, grasping and sucking). |
| ☐ The baby can develop favourite tastes in food and recognise differences by 5 months. |

### Normative emotional and social development

| ☐ The baby shows trust and security. | ☐ The baby is disturbed when shown several images of his or her mother at the same time. |
| ☐ The baby has recognisable sleep patterns. | |
| ☐ By 5 months, the baby has learned that he or she only has one mother. | |
Normative physical development

Motor skills

- The baby can roll from front to back.
- The baby may attempt to crawl, but will often end up sliding backwards.
- The baby may grasp feet and place them in his or her mouth.
- The baby can sit without support for longer periods of time.
- The baby may 'cruise' around furniture and may even stand or walk alone.
- The baby is very alert to people and objects.

Fine motor skills

- The baby is beginning to use pincer grasp, with thumb and index finger.
- The baby transfers toys from one hand to the other and looks for fallen objects.
- The baby explores everything by putting it in his or her mouth.

Normative communication and language development

Babble becomes tuneful, like the lilt of the language the baby can hear (except in hearing-impaired babies).

The baby begins to understand words like 'up' and 'down', raising his or her arms to be lifted up, using appropriate gestures.

- The baby repeats sounds.
- The baby continues to do everything he or she did in the first 6 months.

Normative cognitive development

The baby understands signs – for example, the bib means that food is coming. Soon this understanding of signs will lead into symbolic behaviour.

From 8 to 9 months, the baby shows that he or she knows that objects exist when they have gone out of sight, even under test conditions. This is called the concept of object constancy, or the object permanence test (Piaget). The baby is also fascinated by the way objects move.

Normative emotional and social development

The baby can manage to feed him- or herself using his or her fingers.

The baby is now more wary of strangers, sometimes showing stranger fear.

The baby might offer toys to others.

The baby might show distress when his or her mother leaves.

The baby typically begins to crawl, and this means he or she can do more for him- or herself, reaching for objects and getting to places and people.

- The baby is now more aware of other people's feelings. The baby cries if brother cries, for example. The baby loves an audience to laugh with him or her. The baby cries and laughs with others. This is called recognition of an emotion. It does not mean that he or she is really laughing or crying, though.
Holistic development from 9 to 12 months

Normative physical development

Gross motor skills
- The baby will now be mobile – may be crawling, bear-walking, bottom-shuffling or even walking.
- The baby can sit up on his or her own and lean forward to pick things up.
- The baby may crawl up stairs and onto low items of furniture.
- The baby may bounce in rhythm to music.

Fine motor skills
- The baby’s pincer grasp is now well developed, and he or she can pick things up and pull them towards him or her.
- The baby can poke with one finger and will point to desired objects.
- The baby can clasp hands and imitate adults’ actions.
- The baby can throw toys deliberately.
- The baby can manage spoons and finger foods well.

Normative communication and language development

- Cooperation develops further from the early proto-conversations of fatherese and motherese – for example, when adults wave bye-bye, or say ‘show me your shoes’, the baby enjoys waving and pointing.
- The baby can follow simple instructions – for example, kiss teddy.
- Word approximations appear – for example, hee haw = donkey or, more typically, mumma, dadda and bye-bye in English-speaking contexts.
- The tuneful babble develops into ‘jargon’, and the baby makes his or her voice go up and down just as people do when they talk to each other. ‘Really? Do you? No!’ The babble is very expressive.
- Neuroscientists are finding that the baby’s brain develops to think better if he or she is spoken to in a warm tone of voice, rather than in a sharp, shouting one. Intonation is important.
- The baby is already an experienced and capable communicator by this time.
- The baby is using emergent language or proto-language. It is nothing short of amazing that all this happens within the first year. The baby knows about facial expressions, combined sounds (hee haw), gestures, shared meanings, persuading, negotiating, cooperating, turn-taking, interest in others, their ideas, their feelings and what they do.
- The baby knows that words stand for people, objects, what they do and what happens. The baby is taking part in the language of his or her culture.

Normative cognitive development

- The baby is beginning to develop images. Memory develops. The baby can remember the past.
- The baby can anticipate the future. This gives the baby some understanding of routine daily sequences – for example, after a feed, changing and a sleep with teddy. This thinking is very linked to people and objects.
- The baby imitates actions, sounds, gestures and moods after an event is finished – for example, imitate a temper tantrum he or she saw a friend have the previous day, wave bye-bye remembering Grandma has gone to the shops.
- The baby ‘catches’ the moods and feeling of other people – for example, sadness, joy. This emotional contagion is the beginning of sympathy for others.
Holistic development from 9 to 12 months (continued)

Normative emotional and social development

- The baby enjoys songs and action rhymes.
- The baby still likes to be near to a familiar adult.
- The baby can drink from a cup with help.
- The baby will play alone for long periods.
- The baby has and shows definite likes and dislikes at mealtimes and bedtimes.
- The baby thoroughly enjoys peek-a-boo games.
- The baby likes to look at him- or herself in a mirror (plastic safety mirror).
- The baby imitates other people – for example, clapping hands, waving bye-bye – but there is often a time lapse, so that he or she waves after the person has gone.
- The baby cooperates when being dressed.

Holistic development from 15 months to 2 years

Normative physical development

Gross motor skills

From 15 months:
- The baby probably walks alone, with feet wide apart and arms raised to maintain balance. He or she is likely to fall over and sit down suddenly a lot.
- The baby can probably manage stairs and steps, but will need supervision.
- The baby can get to standing without help from furniture or people, and kneels without support.

From 18 months:
- The child walks confidently and is able to stop without falling.
- The child can kneel, squat, climb and carry things around with him or her.
- The child can climb onto an adult chair forwards and then turn round to sit.
- The child can come downstairs, usually by creeping backwards on his or her tummy.

Fine motor skills

From 15 months:
- The baby can build with a few bricks and arrange toys on the floor.
- The baby holds a crayon in palmar grasp and turns several pages of a book at once.
- The baby can point to desired objects.
- The baby shows a preference for one hand, but uses either.

From 18 months:
- The child can thread large beads.
- The child uses pincer grasp to pick up small objects.
- The child can build a tower of several cubes.
- The child can scribble to and fro on paper.
### Holistic development from 15 months to 2 years (continued)

#### Normative communication and language development

**From 15 months:**
- The baby begins to talk with words or sign language.
- The baby adds more and more layers to everything he or she knows about language and communication in the first year. Look back and remind yourself of what children can manage at this stage.

**From 18 months:**
- The child enjoys trying to sing as well as listening to songs and rhymes. Action songs – for example, ‘Pat-a-cake’ – are much loved.
- Books with pictures are of great interest. The child points at and often names parts of the body, objects, people and pictures in books.
- The child echoes the last part of what others say (echolalia). One word or sign can have several meanings (holophrases) – for example, C-A-T = all animals, not just cats. This is sometimes called extension.
- The child begins waving his or her arms up and down, which might mean start again, or I like it, or more.
- Gestures develop alongside words. Gestures are used in some cultures more than in others.

#### Normative cognitive development

- The child understands the names of objects and can follow simple instructions.
- The child learns about things through trial and error.
- The child uses toys or objects to represent things in real life – for example, he or she uses a doll as a baby, or a large cardboard box might become a car or a garage.
- The child begins to scribble on paper.
- The child often ‘talks’ to him- or herself while he or she is playing.
- The child tends to focus on one aspect of a situation. It is difficult for the child to see things from different points of view. The way people react to what the child does helps him or her to work out what hurts and what helps other people. The child begins to understand, typically from 18 months, that other people might think differently from him or her – for example, they might like biscuits and dislike broccoli. This is called developing theory of mind. It leads to having empathy for others.

#### Normative emotional and social development

- The child begins to have a longer memory.
- The child develops a sense of identity (I am me).
- The child expresses his or her needs in words and gestures.
- The child enjoys being able to walk, and is eager to try to get dressed – ‘Me do it!’.
- The child is aware when others are fearful or anxious for him or her as he or she climbs on and off chairs, and so on.
Holistic development from 2 years

**Normative physical development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross motor skills</th>
<th>Fine motor skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The child is very mobile and can run safely.</td>
<td>The child can draw circles, lines and dots, using preferred hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child can climb onto furniture.</td>
<td>The child can pick up tiny objects using a fine pincer grasp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child can walk upstairs and downstairs, usually two feet to a step.</td>
<td>The child can build a tower of six or more blocks (bricks), with longer concentration span.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child tries to kick a ball with some success, but cannot catch yet.</td>
<td>The child enjoys picture books and turns pages singly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Normative communication and language development**

- Researchers used to say that by the age of 2 years, the child is using a vocabulary of 50 or so words, but that he or she understands more. Modern researchers do not use vocabulary counts so much; they simply stress that the child is rapidly becoming a competent speaker of the languages he or she experiences.
- The child overextends the use of a word – for example, all animals are called 'doggie'.
- The child talks about an absent object when reminded of it – for example, seeing an empty plate, he or she says 'biscuit'.
- The child uses phrases (telegraphese) – for example, ‘doggie gone’ – and calls him- or herself by his or her name.
- The child spends a great deal of energy naming things and what they do – for example, 'chair' – and as the child goes up a step, he or she might say 'up'.
- The child can follow a simple instruction or request – for example, 'Could you bring me the spoon?'
- The child is increasingly wanting to share songs, dance, conversations, finger rhymes, and so on.
- The child also names movements – for example, 'up', 'gone'.

**Normative cognitive development**

- The child has improved memory skills, which help his or her understanding of concepts – for example, the child can often name and match two or three colours (usually yellow and red).
- The child can hold a crayon and move it up and down.
- The child understands cause and effect – for example, if something is dropped, the child understands it might break.
- The child talks about an absent object when reminded of it – for example, the child may say 'biscuit' when he or she sees an empty plate or bowl.

**Normative emotional and social development**

- The child is impulsive and curious about his or her environment.
- Pretend play develops rapidly when adults foster it.
- The child begins to be able to say how he or she is feeling, but often feels frustrated when unable to express him- or herself.
- The child can dress him- or herself and go to the lavatory independently, but needs sensitive support in order to feel success rather than frustration.
- By 2 years 6 months, the child plays more with other children, but may not share his or her toys with them.
Holistic development from 3 years

Normative physical development

Gross motor skills
- The child can jump from a low step.
- The child can walk backwards and sideways.
- The child can stand and walk on tiptoe and stand on one foot.
- The child has good spatial awareness.
- The child rides a tricycle, using pedals.
- The child can climb stairs with one foot on each step, and come down stairs with two feet per step.

Fine motor skills
- The child can build tall towers of bricks or blocks.
- The child can control a pencil using thumb and first two fingers – a dynamic tripod grasp.
- The child enjoys painting with a large brush.
- The child can use scissors to cut paper.
- The child can copy shapes, such as a circle.

Normative communication and language development
- During this period, language and the ability to communicate develop so rapidly that it is almost like an explosion.
- The child begins to use plurals, pronouns, adjectives, possessives, time words, tenses and sentences.
- The child makes what are called virtuous errors in the way he or she pronounces (articulates) things. It is also true of the way the child uses grammar (syntax).
- The child might say ‘two times’ instead of ‘twice’, or ‘I goed there’ instead of ‘I went there’. The child loves to chat and ask questions (what, when, who).
- The child enjoys much more complicated stories and asks for his or her favourite ones again and again.
- It is not unusual for the child to stutter because he or she is trying so hard to tell adults things. The child’s thinking goes faster than the pace at which he or she can say what he or she wants to, and this can quickly become frustrating.

Normative cognitive development
- The child develops symbolic behaviour. This means that:
  - the child talks
  - the child pretend-plays, often talking to himself or herself while doing so
  - the child takes part in simple, non-competitive games
  - the child represents events in drawings, models, and so on.
- Personal images dominate, rather than concrete images used in the culture – for example, writing instead of ‘pretend’ writing.
- The child becomes fascinated by cause and effect. The child is continually trying to explain what is going on in the world.
- The child can identify common colours, such as red, yellow, blue and green – although he or she may sometimes confuse blue with green.

Normative emotional and social development
- Pretend play helps the child to de-centre and develop theory of mind. (This means the child begins to understand how someone else might feel and/or think.)
- The child is beginning to develop a gender role as he or she becomes aware of being male or female.
- The child makes friends and is interested in having friends.
- The child learns to negotiate, to give and take through experimenting with feeling power having a sense of control, and through quarrelling with other children.
- The child is easily afraid – for example, of spiders – as he or she becomes capable of pretending the child imagines all sorts of things.
Normative physical development

Coarse motor skills

- The child can build a tower of bricks and other constructions too.
- The child can draw a recognisable person on request, showing head, legs and trunk.
- The child can thread small beads on a lace.

Fine motor skills

- The child may be able to walk along a line.
- The child can catch, kick, throw and bounce a ball.
- The child can bend at the waist to pick up objects from the floor.
- The child enjoys climbing trees and frames.
- The child can run upstairs and downstairs, one foot per step.

Normative communication and language development

- The child can be taught to say his or her name, address and age.
- As the child becomes more accurate in the way he or she pronounces words, and begins to use grammar, the child delights in nonsense words, which he or she makes up, and jokes using words. This is called metalinguistics.
- The child swears if he or she hears swearing.

Normative cognitive development

- Being able to sympathise and empathise makes this an important time for.
- The child often enjoys music and playing sturdy instruments, and joins in groups singing and dancing.

Normative emotional and social development

- The child can wash and dry his or her hands and brush his or her teeth.
- The child likes to be independent and is strongly willed.
- The child shows a sense of humour.
- The child can undress and dress himself or herself except for laces and back buttons.

About age 4, the child usually knows how to count – up to 20.

- The child also understands ideas such as ‘more’ and ‘less’, and ‘big’ and ‘small’.
- Social images dominate, rather than conventions in the culture – for example, writing is ‘stend’ writing.
Holistic development from 5 to 8 years

**Normative physical development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross motor skills</th>
<th>Fine motor skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From 5 years:</td>
<td>From 5 years:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child can use</td>
<td>The child may be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a variety of play</td>
<td>able to thread a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equipment – slides,</td>
<td>large-eyed needle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swings, climbing</td>
<td>and sew large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frames.</td>
<td>stitches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child can play</td>
<td>The child can draw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ball games.</td>
<td>a person with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child can hop</td>
<td>head, trunk, legs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and run lightly on</td>
<td>nose, mouth and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toes and can move</td>
<td>eyes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhythmically to</td>
<td>The child has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music.</td>
<td>good control over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sense of</td>
<td>pencils and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balance is well</td>
<td>paintbrushes. He</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developed.</td>
<td>or she copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child can skip.</td>
<td>shapes – for ex-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 6 to 7 years:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child has</td>
<td>The child has</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increased agility,</td>
<td>increased agility,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muscle coordination</td>
<td>muscle coordina-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and balance.</td>
<td>tion and balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child develops</td>
<td>The child develops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>competence in</td>
<td>competence in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>riding a two-</td>
<td>riding a two-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wheeled bicycle.</td>
<td>wheeled bicycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child hops</td>
<td>The child hops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>easily, with good</td>
<td>easily, with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balance.</td>
<td>good balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child can jump</td>
<td>The child can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>off apparatus.</td>
<td>jump off apparatus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Normative communication and language development**

- The child tries to understand the meaning of words. The child uses adverbs and prepositions. The child talks confidently, and with more and more fluency.
- As the child becomes part of his or her culture, he or she becomes aware of the roles of the language(s) he or she speaks.
- The child uses language creatively. The child adds vocabulary all the time.
- The child’s articulation becomes conventional.
- The child is an explorer and communicator; he or she begins to be able to define objects by their function – for example, ‘What is a ball?’ ‘You bounce it.’

**Normative cognitive development**

- The child begins to move into deeper and deeper layers of symbolic behaviour. Communication through body language, facial gestures and language is well established, and opens the way into literacy (talking, listening, writing and reading).
- Personal symbols still dominate until 6 or 7 years of age.
- Cultural conventions in writing, drawing, begin to influence the child increasingly. There is a balance in the way the child uses conventional symbols, he or she is de creative. Lack of creativity is linked with personal symbols. Colouring in templates discourages the child from develop personal symbols.
Why Children's Dispositions Should Matter to All Teachers

Denise Da Ros-Voseles and Sally Fowler-Haughey

Early childhood teachers guide young children's learning in ways that support their development. Traditionally, foremost in teachers' minds is what knowledge and skills children should acquire. Today, however, many teachers are becoming aware of the pivotal role of dispositions in the education of children.

This article examines types of dispositions, their link to children's effective learning, and classroom practices/environments that support them. We emphasize that dispositions and learning experiences are equally important and that teachers can encourage certain dispositions.

Defining dispositions

Dispositions are frequent and voluntary habits of thinking and doing. These habits of mind are not to be confused with mindless habits, such as stopping at a red light (Katz 1993a). Lilian Katz has pondered, spoken, and written about the role of dispositions in children's education for nearly 30 years. She defines "a disposition as a pattern of behavior exhibited frequently...in the absence of coercion...constituting a habit of mind under some conscious and voluntary control...intentional and oriented to broad goals" (1993b, 16).

Another important characteristic of children's dispositions is that they are environmentally sensitive—meaning they are acquired, supported, or weakened by interactive experiences in an environment with significant adults and peers (Bertram & Pascal 2002). These significant adults obviously include teachers in early childhood settings. For example, in Reggio Emilia-inspired schools, teachers purposely integrate materials from nature into activities. A large, ordinary tree branch can become the core for cooperative ribbon

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Beyond the Journal Young Children on the Web September 2007
weaving. The project’s centerpiece supports children’s dispositions, such as cooperation, creativity, problem solving, and inventiveness.

Educators can further delineate dispositions as desirable or undesirable. Children’s desirable dispositions, such as resourcefulness, curiosity, and persistence, can be strengthened. Conversely, teachers can help diminish undesirable dispositions, such as selfishness, impatience, and intolerance. No doubt we all could list dispositions we would like to personally strengthen or diminish and foster in the children we teach.

Katz and Raths (1985) provide clarity to the concept of dispositions by contrasting it with the concepts of attitudes, habits, and traits. Briefly, attitudes can be thought of as “pre-dispositions to act positively or negatively with respect to a particular phenomenon” (Katz 1993a, 10). Having a particular attitude does not necessarily result in the display of an accompanying behavior—for example, a child may have a particular discriminatory attitude about children who are obese but may not exhibit discriminatory behavior. Habits and traits are behavioral patterns performed without conscious attention (Pazzmore 1972), as seen in some children who approach an art activity with great enthusiasm and vigor or while other children approach the same activity tentatively and with considerable forethought.

There are three broad types of dispositions:

**Inborn dispositions.** Innate curiosity is one disposition that parents and teachers can readily see in typically developing babies’ need to explore and learn. The ability to bond is another inborn disposition.

**Social dispositions.** We value some social dispositions, including “the tendency to be accepting, friendly, empathetic, generous, or cooperative” (Katz & McClellan 1997, 7). Conversely, adults tend to view bossiness as an undesirable social disposition.

**Intellectual dispositions.** These dispositions include making and checking predictions, solving problems, surmising about cause-and-effect relationships, to name a few. In a science center in a kindergarten classroom, a poster features a portrait of Albert Einstein. “Being a Scientist” is its bold heading, followed by a list of ideal dispositions for science: being curious, investigating, collecting and recording precise data, cooperation, communication, seeking answers, asking new questions, and persistence.

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**Classroom practices/environments that support dispositions**

In a public preschool, a four-year-old approaches his teacher with six sheets of paper stapled together in a booklike fashion. Each sheet contains recognizable letters written with a different colored marker. When the teacher asks the preschooler to share a story, he eagerly reads six stories, one on each page. The child not only displays emergent literacy skills but, just as important, the disposition to read and to write.

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This teacher, a knowledgeable, thoughtful, and conscientious educator, however, feels as if she isn’t effective in her teaching, that she isn’t doing enough early literacy instruction. Her school district’s assessment tool measures four-year-olds’ abilities to make sound and letter associations as well as to recognize letters. But although the children are gaining knowledge and skills, she believes their dispositions are equally important.

All the children in her classroom—half of whom are English-language learners—engage in meaningful activities that support integrated learning of concepts and skills. The children invent play scenarios at a blanket-covered table labeled Cave for Hibernating Bears. They expand their creativity in the art center, investigate how body fat keeps bears warm by using a lard-covered rubber glove and a pall of ice in the science center, and read books depicting classmates engaged in classroom and field trip activities in the library center. All these activities demonstrate how this teacher is encouraging dispositions to explore, make predictions and check predictions, and communicate with others, which assessment does not measure.

When program expectations focus primarily on knowledge and skill acquisition, important dispositions are often ignored. When a teacher relies on drill and decontextualized activities to achieve mandated learning outcomes instead of fostering skill development through meaningful integrated learning, the dispositions that children need to use their skills will likely diminish (Hatch 2002). A prime example of decontextualized activities is the often inane letter-of-the-week task, such as having children glue rice on the letter R. More meaningful, effective activities include using children’s names as a springboard to learn letters and promote early literacy (Kirk & Clark 2005; McNair 2007).

Practices that undermine the development of positive dispositions jeopardize the likelihood that children will become lifelong learners (Bertram & Pascal 2002). To be effective, teachers need to pay more attention to nurturing children’s dispositions.

The link between dispositions and effective learning

Bertram and Pascal identify three core elements of effective learners: “dispositions to learn, social competence and self-concept, and social and emotional well-being” (2002, 246). The researchers argue that a primary focus “on subject knowledge, particularly language and mathematics competency” (p. 241) is insufficient, and they urge teachers to focus on wider outcomes to sustain the development of young minds.

Four dispositions are indicative of the effective learner, according to Bertram and Pascal (2002). Below, an explanation of each disposition is followed by an example (from one coauthor’s classroom or program) showing what a teacher can do to nurture the disposition.

1. **Independence**—the “ability to be self-sufficient, to self-organize, and [to] self-manage” (p. 248).

   After a month of modeling daily classroom routines, procedures, and tasks, Sally begins assigning chores to the four-year-olds. The children have witnessed her daily upkeep of their room and are eager to help. Nicholas says, “Mrs. Haughey, we are the teachers now.” Helping children feel responsible allows them to become self-sufficient.
2. Creativity—"characterized by those children who show curiosity and interest in their world... The creative child is imaginative, spontaneous, and innovative" (p. 248).

   Sally avoids cookie-cutter art projects and instead encourages open-ended art activities. She periodically provides different media and schedules time for children to fully explore each art material and to complete their projects. As a result, children make their own decisions in the creative process.

3. Self-motivation—enabling "children, independently, to become deeply involved and engrossed in activities and challenges" (p. 249). Motivated children expend the necessary energy to achieve their goals.

   Instead of worrying about Hector spending too much time with blocks, his teacher provides additional materials to support his continued exploration and elaborate block constructions. Hector is an English-language learner, and his block-building talent enables him to bridge the language barrier and invite his peers to join in his play. His teacher, Sally, knows that blocks are rich with opportunities to enhance social, cognitive, language, and physical development. She encourages individual interests and wants the children to experience the deep satisfaction of achieving a goal.

4. Resilience—evidenced by children's ability to bounce back "after setback, hindrance, or frustration and retain temperament, personality, and spirit" (p. 249).

   When teachers approach each day as a fresh opportunity and see children in a new light instead of dwelling on the previous day's events, the children can feel comfortable in the classroom environment. In Sally's room, Jimmy, a four-year-old whose hands, feet, and eyes constantly go in all directions, has little sense of boundaries. At times he is a danger to himself and others. He darts here and there as the children walk down the hall and during outdoor play. Cognitively, Jimmy doesn't understand what it means to be part of a group; he has to physically experience being a group member.

   Sally accepts this spirited boy and gives him opportunities to learn how to be part of the class. During transitions, she often gives him something to carry or offers him her hand. She also works with his family to establish limits at home. In this culture of acceptance, Jimmy relaxes and develops the social skills needed to participate in the classroom community.

   With an understanding of what children need to be successful learners, teachers can set the stage for learning. This knowledge of needs compels those involved in the education of children, and future teachers alike, to advocate for broadening the goals of desired child outcomes.

**Supporting desirable dispositions**

   When people describe good teachers, they mention dispositions such as being accepting, stimulating, and encouraging. Conversely, they describe poor teachers "in terms of such dispositions as impatience, remoteness, being rejecting, cold, and so forth" (Katz & Raths 1985, 305). One teacher educator routinely asks preservice teachers to reflect on their education experiences and describe their teachers' positive and negative characteristics. Inevitably, the students describe such dispositions as caring, welcoming, considerate, and engaged versus aloof and impatient.
In children

Effective early childhood teachers recognize their roles in strengthening desirable dispositions in children. They know their actions and attitudes send implicit messages. When teachers display curiosity and creativity and value the same dispositions in children, these are likely to flourish in the classroom.

Good teachers acknowledge and appreciate children’s efforts. They provide specific feedback, such as “You used a lot of colors,” instead of making general statements, such as “Good job.” They refrain from using extrinsic rewards like prizes or food. In addition, the teacher who establishes a classroom ethos that values cooperation instead of competition creates the conditions that support and encourage children to get along as they play and work together.

Through families

Teachers can influence parents’ perceptions of their children’s dispositions. For example, during parent-teacher conferences, a teacher might reframe parental concerns in terms of dispositions. One mother worried that her daughter exhibited characteristics not typical of four-year-olds. Amanda was unusually sensitive to the emotions of her classmates. When Amanda began preschool, she often overreacted to children’s responses to her by sulking, withdrawing, and refusing to participate. In response to these negative behaviors, Sally offered Amanda various art media, which she turned into flowery, tiny books that conveyed emotion. Next, Sally wrote Amanda’s words in the books. In so doing, she could use the books to share her emotions in safe ways.

Sally allayed the mother’s fears by pointing out that Amanda was a perceptive observer of her environment and sensitive to others’ emotions. What Amanda’s mother considered abnormal and worrisome, Sally viewed as strengths. Her affirming alternative viewpoint highlighted Amanda’s positive dispositions: her deep curiosity about the world around her and her uncanny ability to accurately perceive others’ emotions. She said Amanda’s insights continually amazed her, and that with guidance and encouragement, Amanda now felt safe sharing herself and her feelings with her classmates. Many times she organized and began special projects such as building huge block constructions.

Sally vividly recalled when Zack, a shy boy, transferred to her morning class midyear. Zack would not participate in any play activities and often hid under a table. On the first day that Amanda joined the morning session instead of the afternoon class, she invited Zack, who was hiding under the table, to “come play with me. You are my new best friend.” Zack emerged, and in response to Amanda’s “I’m the mom,” he spoke for the first time, declaring, “I’m the dad.”
Instead of comparing Amanda with her peers, her mother began seeing her as resourceful, insightful, intuitive, observant, articulate, curious, and creative. She left the conference feeling relieved and empowered to support her daughter’s dispositions.

**By using good practice**

Teachers sometimes inadvertently weaken children’s positive dispositions. The increased emphasis on early literacy in some schools has resulted in the use of inappropriate teaching strategies and a decrease in children’s eagerness to be readers and writers (Neuman & Roskos 2005). Katz (1995) calls this situation the damaged disposition hypothesis. For example, when a teacher asks a four-year-old to write the alphabet on lined paper, odds are the child will not enjoy writing because many children, especially boys, have not developed the fine motor control to complete this task.

Regrettably, educators have paid scant attention to the damaging of children’s desirable dispositions. Katz and Chard (2000) propose two reasons for this lack of attention: first, dispositions are rarely assessed in early childhood programs; and second, direct instruction in reading readiness activities yields better outcomes on some standardized tests—no matter that heavy reliance on formal instruction methods can harm young children (Hart et al. 1993). Overreliance on drill can increase test scores at the expense of dispositions.

**With children our focus**

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the teaching profession’s accrediting body, now requires documentation of how preservice teachers use, nurture, and assess children’s dispositions. Evidence of dispositions is required in three of the six NCATE standards (NCATE 2006). Clearly, the field is giving more attention to the nature and role of dispositions in children’s learning.

**Conclusion**

Teachers can diligently plan learning experiences that help children acquire skills and the disposition to use those skills. Our university preservice students, who sometimes are mothers of elementary school children, often tell us in exasperation that their children have stopped reading for pleasure. This anecdotal evidence may indicate that some educators, while trying to
create proficient readers, damage children’s disposition to read. The unintended outcome is *alternate* children—that is, children who can read but don’t want to or avoid reading (Noyes 2000). Knowledge and skills and the disposition to use them are inextricably connected.

Early on, Lilian Katz cautioned, “Dispositions are always more or less influenced by experiences in early childhood education programs, whether by intention or by default” (1977, 66). Does placing too much emphasis on conformity and uniformity undermine the disposition to be creative? How does insisting that children change learning centers every 15 minutes affect children’s dispositions to become deeply absorbed in an activity?

Effective early childhood teachers consider whether their behaviors empower or undermine children’s dispositions, then alter their practices accordingly. We have the power to open up the world for children and their families. Let’s not miss opportunities to reframe children’s behaviors into positive dispositions.

References


