



RESEARCH METHODS FOR STUDYING YOUNG CHILDREN

EDITED BY OLIVIA N. SARACHO

Research Methods for Studying Young Children

A Volume in
Contemporary Perspectives in Early Childhood Education

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Olivia N. Saracho
University of Maryland

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Editor

Olivia N. Saracho
University of Maryland



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PART I

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH METHODS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Olivia N. Saracho

Research is largely described as a methodical collection of data that are analyzed and used as evidence to improve and promote knowledge in any topic. Its process applies systematic procedures to discover responses to logical and real-world questions. Several researchers think of it as a process where scientists shift from the known to the unknown similar to a journey of advancement. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary (2023)* defines research as a

studious inquiry or examination, *especially*: investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws.

In sum, research is the pursuit of knowledge through an unbiased and methodical process to find a resolution to a problem, which generalizes and develops a theory.

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Research in early childhood education captures an international perspective and demonstrates that its methodology is simultaneously related to cultural and theoretical interpretations of early childhood abilities and educational goals (Flewitt & Ang, 2020).

Researchers can use a critical and philosophical approach to well-known and groundbreaking research methods in early childhood education to support their research with theory.

STATUS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS

For several decades early childhood education programs have expanded throughout the world. Various countries faced many difficulties and trepidations with these programs. In the United States, society has recognized the importance of young children's learning. This is apparent in the growth in enrollments in early childhood education programs. Despite the present economy, enrollment in early childhood education programs has rapidly increased during the previous decade, and quality standards continue to increase in several states despite various declines in funding. In 2011–2012 enrollment in early childhood education programs continued to increase at a remarkably high rate (Barnett et al., 2012). In the year 2020–2021, it was projected that this population would increase to 37.4 million students (Aud et al., 2011).

Unfortunately, the 2020–2021 school year was the first school year that was completely obstructed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic generated problems including health risks, closed classrooms, and remote preschools that interrupted previously fragile systems. Enrollment deteriorated by 18%, which was the first reduction in preschool enrollment in 20 years. Preschool costs also diminished, although not as severely because numerous states protected preschool funding despite lower enrollments and maintained capacity for a recovery in enrollment. States also used federal funding, containing pandemic relief funds to support preschool classrooms. Quality was an issue because the majority of the states distributed insufficient money for each, which affected the high quality of the program and states lessened their standards throughout the pandemic (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021). Thus, advancement in state-funded preschool programs decelerated, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, which inflicted enormous holdups on preschool. Across the states' growth was irregular and amplified inequality in children's access to high-quality preschool.

The following year the state of preschool had motives for both hopefulness and worry. After the COVID-19 pandemic removed a 10-year period of enrollment growth in state-funded preschool, enrollment in many of the states was on the recovery. Numerous states were once more attempt-

ing to become a universal preschool. However, many states continued to offer far from high-quality, full-day preschool to even half of 3- and 4-year-olds. [Friedman-Krauss et al. \(2021\)](#) report irregular growth nationally and state by state. During 2021–2022 state-funded preschools experienced partial recovery. Since nearly all states had removed all COVID-19 restrictions, 1,526,116 children were enrolled in preschool programs, which was an increase of 180,668 children, up 13% from the 2020–2021 school year. Enrollment increased in most states except for seven.

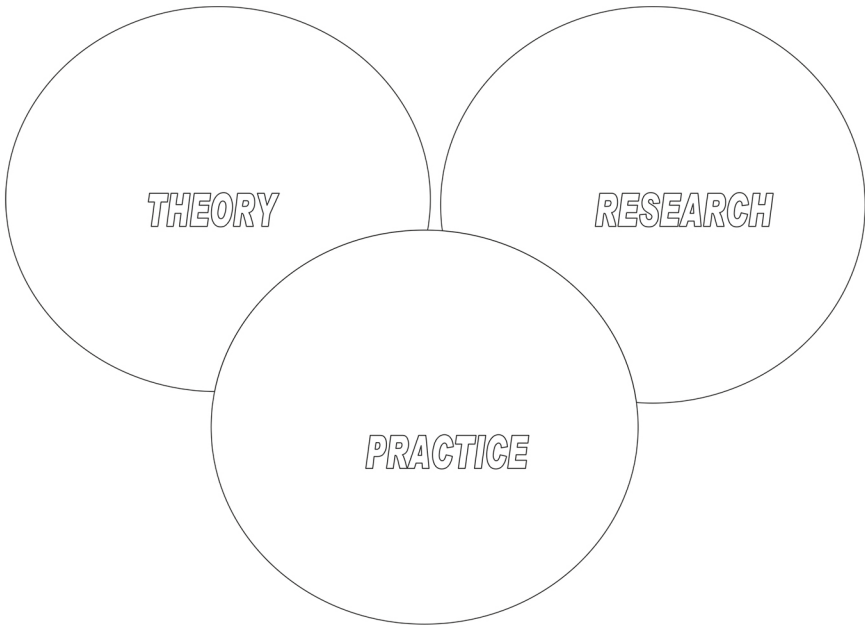
Most states removed all COVID-19 restrictions and paid approximately \$10 billion on preschools in 2021–2022 including \$9.51 billion in state funds and a minimum of an added \$393 million in COVID-19 relief funds. This is a rise of \$825 million (9%) from 2020–2021. The pandemic made enrollment and spending drop in limited states where funding was established by the previous year for preschool enrollment instead of the existing enrollment. States spent three times more than when COVID-19 relief funding in the previous year (2021–2022). Federal, state, and local spending exceeded \$11.5 billion, up \$634 million (6%) from 2020–2021. States made scarce deviations to policies associated with program quality in 2021–2022, although various states have departed from prepandemic execution of policies involving continual quality enhancement. Even more prevalent was that numerous state-funded preschool programs increased the use of waivers to teacher degree and training requirements to solve the teacher shortage difficulties ([Friedman-Krauss et al., 2023](#)).

The increase in enrollment led to the expansion of early childhood teacher education programs at the community college and university levels. Similar to this growth is the increase in knowledge in early childhood education that may be due to the broad-spectrum knowledge outburst in our society and throughout the world. This development has led to an increase in early childhood education research studies, research journals, research associations ([Spodek & Saracho, 2003](#)), and government funding.

This sudden increase in knowledge and related research outcomes in early childhood education requires that researchers contribute to this knowledge. Such requirements motivated the development and publication of the volume on research methods. The volume can be an important guide to researchers who conduct studies in the early childhood education field.

RESEARCH AND THE KNOWLEDGE BASE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Knowledge in early childhood education derives from theory, research, and practice. Although these areas usually give the impression of being isolated from each other, they are interrelated. The process of generating

FIGURE 1.1. Interaction Process

knowledge is *cyclical*, instead of being deductive (top-down) or linear (one step continuously go after the other). All forms intersect. The process typically is initiated with a problem or issue that must be investigated through research, which is motivated by theory and practice. The outcomes also affect theory and practice, which then offer guidelines for forthcoming research studies. [Saracho and Spodek \(2012\)](#) use [Figure 1.1](#) to illustrate this cyclical process.

This volume focuses on research techniques that can be used to conduct studies that will contribute to the knowledge of the early childhood education field. Published research outcomes in early childhood education contribute to the field's knowledge, theory, and practice. They also guide future early childhood education research studies. The research techniques in this volume are some examples of the ones that are available and will be a good beginning for novice researchers. The editor acknowledges that research is only possible because of the theoretical work and the research studies that have been conducted in the past. As researchers, we very much “stand on the shoulders of giants” ([Spodek & Saracho, 2003](#)). However, in the early childhood education field, there has been a considerable amount of new theory building as well as the development and use of new research

paradigms to conduct research in early childhood education. These are acknowledged here.

Present social and historical situations have also stimulated a more energetic focal point on the prospective for practical effects of the methodical investigation of early childhood education. These conditions have guided numerous early childhood education researchers to take action by concentrating their research on practical problems, such as developing teaching strategies and increasing the children's educational and intellectual development. Empirical examinations in these problem areas have influenced both theoretical and practical foundations. Drawing on previous knowledge and integrating it with contemporary knowledge can provide a better understanding of early childhood education and help the researchers, teachers and children who participate in it.

ENVIRONMENTS THAT ENCOURAGE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION RESEARCH

Scientists interact to form a scientific community, which consists of numerous "subcommunities" that conduct research in specific scientific areas within institutions. They also engage in interdisciplinary and cross-institutional research experiences. Several environments in early childhood education promote research. These environments

1. make it possible for research studies to flourish;
2. nurture and or allocate ways for research to develop;
3. provide financial support for research to be conducted;
4. facilitate the dissemination of research to help researchers communicate and share their work with others (e.g., researchers, practitioners, administrators, policy makers); and
5. motivate a cadre of well-trained researchers who are knowledgeable of their field to form a scientific community.

Universities lead most of the research in the United States. After World War II numerous state and teachers' colleges became multiuse colleges and ultimately full-fledged universities. As a result, in this period several paths were generated where the output of research increased and flourished in many disciplines except in early childhood education.

DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Since early childhood education was a small field well into the 1960s, there were no public kindergartens in the southeast or the central areas of the United States. In addition, only a small number of teacher preparation programs in colleges, universities, or community colleges were available. At the beginning of 1970, kindergarten education and the whole field of early childhood education expanded, which established and increased early childhood education programs in colleges and universities. Simultaneously there was an increase in early childhood education doctoral programs and PhDs who were prepared to conduct research to complete the dissertation requirement. Furthermore, most universities require that their faculty conduct and publish research.

Research Journals

While the development of research in early childhood education expanded in the United States, there were restricted means for disseminating that research. During the previous years, several professional American organizations started to support research journals. The *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* began its publication in 1986. It was sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and initially published by Ablex, but it is presently published by Elsevier. Concurrently, the *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* was originally published by the Association of Childhood Education International and is presently published by Taylor & Francis/Routledge. Over the years other research journals in early childhood education were established. These journals included *Early Child Development and Care* published by Taylor & Francis/Routledge, *Early Education and Development* published by Taylor & Francis/Routledge, and *Early Childhood Education* published by Springer Verlag. These journals have become more scholarly and research-oriented.

Research Professional Organizations

The Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) are two other professional organizations that assist early childhood education researchers in disseminating their research in early childhood education. The Society for Research in Child Development is a professional organization that concentrates predominantly on child development research. In re-