Preface

The Infant and Toddler Years: Foundations for Reflective Practice is a book about infants, toddlers, and the remarkable journey of early development. During the first three years of life, children experience extraordinary growth as they learn to communicate, build relationships, explore their environments, and develop a sense of who they are. Although developmental patterns provide a useful framework for understanding young children, no two children are exactly alike. Each child develops at their own pace and brings unique strengths, interests, experiences, and ways of engaging with the world.

Understanding infant and toddler development requires more than knowledge of milestones and theories. Effective educators observe carefully, respond thoughtfully, and build meaningful relationships with children and families. The earliest years are shaped by interactions, environments, culture, and lived experiences. As a result, infant and toddler educators must be prepared to support development while recognizing and honoring the individuality of each child's family.

This text provides a foundation for understanding and supporting infants and toddlers in a variety of early childhood settings. Drawing upon research, theory, and evidence-based practices, the chapters that follow explore child development, responsive caregiving, family partnerships, learning environments, health and safety, curriculum, observation and assessment, inclusion, and professional responsibility. Throughout the chapters, readers are encouraged to engage in reflective practice; examine their own beliefs and assumptions; and consider how relationships, culture, equity, and inclusion influence their work with young children and families.

At its core, this book is grounded in a simple belief: Every child deserves opportunities to learn, grow, and belong. Every family deserves respect and partnership. Every educator deserves the knowledge and support needed to foster positive outcomes for young children. Together, these principles provide a framework for creating nurturing, responsive, and equitable environments where all children can thrive.

Most importantly, every child matters. All means **all**.

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About the Authors

Lynn Marie Lubecki, Ed.D., is an early childhood educator, author, and professor at SUNY Empire State University. Her career spans family child care, integrated early childhood programs, executive leadership, higher education, and statewide systems-building initiatives. Throughout her work, she has remained committed to improving outcomes for young children and families through relationship-based practice, professional development, and cross-sector collaboration.

Dr. Lubecki specializes in infant and toddler development, inclusion, social-emotional learning, and early childhood systems change. She served as a New York State Pyramid Model Master Cadre member and Regional Coordinator, supporting statewide implementation of evidence-based practices that promote social-emotional competence and inclusion. She currently serves as Public Policy and Advocacy Chair for the New York Association for the Education of Young Children (NYAEYC) and Secretary of the New York State Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NYSECTE). She holds the New York State Infant and Toddler Credential, was selected as a 2026–2027 LiberatED National Fellow, and is a frequent presenter at local, state, and national conferences. In recognition of her leadership and contributions to the field, she received the National Pyramid Model Champion Award in 2018 and was named a Rochester Business Journal Women of Excellence honoree in 2026.

Dr. Lubecki would like to acknowledge Christina Schweitzer, Barb Pollock, Susan Salvador, and Ella Renckert, whose mentorship, encouragement, and belief in her made a lasting difference throughout her professional journey. They challenged her thinking, supported her growth, and often believed in her before she fully believed in herself. Their influence continues to shape her commitment to young children, families, educators, and the profession she loves. She is also grateful to the many colleagues, mentors, friends, and family members whose guidance, support, and encouragement helped shape her journey along the way.

She would also like to thank her children, John and Angela, who made her a mother and inspired her lifelong passion for understanding, supporting, and advocating for young children and families. Their presence shaped not

only her personal journey but also the educator, leader, and advocate she became. She is also grateful for her four grandchildren—Benny, Artemis, Autumn, and Sofia Mae—whose growth, curiosity, and unique personalities continue to deepen her appreciation for the remarkable journey of early childhood.

Tracy Galuski, Ph.D., is an early childhood educator, author, and professor at SUNY Empire State University. Beginning her career in child care as a toddler teacher, child care administrator, and education specialist, she has dedicated her work to supporting educators who serve young children and their families. Her current work focuses on program development, student learning outcomes, and fostering reflective leadership, professional growth, and continuous improvement across the early childhood workforce.

Dr. Galuski develops and teaches online courses across the department in areas such as child development, curriculum and environments, infant and toddler education, and child care administration. She is the co-author of *Open-Ended Art for Young Children* (Redleaf Press) and *School's Out: Challenges and Solutions for School-Age Programs* (Gryphon House) and has contributed numerous professional articles to the field. She currently manages a five-year Equity in Action grant and leads efforts to increase upward mobility for early childhood paraprofessionals through scholarships and targeted academic support.

She has held a variety of leadership roles with the Association for the Education of Young Children of Western New York (AEYC of WNY) and the New York Association for the Education of Young Children (NYAEYC) and previously served as a member of the New York State Infant Toddler Consortium and Community of Practice. She currently serves on the NYAEYC Professional Development and Preparation Committee and holds a New York State Early Learning Trainer Credential, Level III. In 2025, she was recognized as a NYAEYC Early Childhood Leader. She is also proud to support several community and volunteer organizations, including the Western New York Leadership Advisory, American Field Service (AFS), and 4-H.

Dr. Galuski's work is grounded in a commitment to supporting educators as they create engaging, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate experiences for young children. Through teaching, writing, and professional development, she continues to advocate for high-quality early childhood education and the professionals who make it possible.

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The authors and publisher wish to thank the following industry and teaching professionals for their valuable input into the development of *The Infant and Toddler Years: Foundations for Reflective Practice*.

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Acknowledgments

The author and publisher would like to thank the following companies, organizations, and individuals for their contribution of resource material, images, or other support in the development of *The Infant and Toddler Years: Foundations for Reflective Practice*.

Herb Covington
Assistant Professor
SUNY Empire State University

Tamar Jacobson
Professor Emeritus
Rider University

The National Association for the Education of Young Children

Barb Pollock
Lecturer
SUNY Empire State University

Features of the Textbook

The instructional design of this textbook includes student-focused learning tools to help you succeed. This visual guide highlights these features.

Chapter Opening Materials

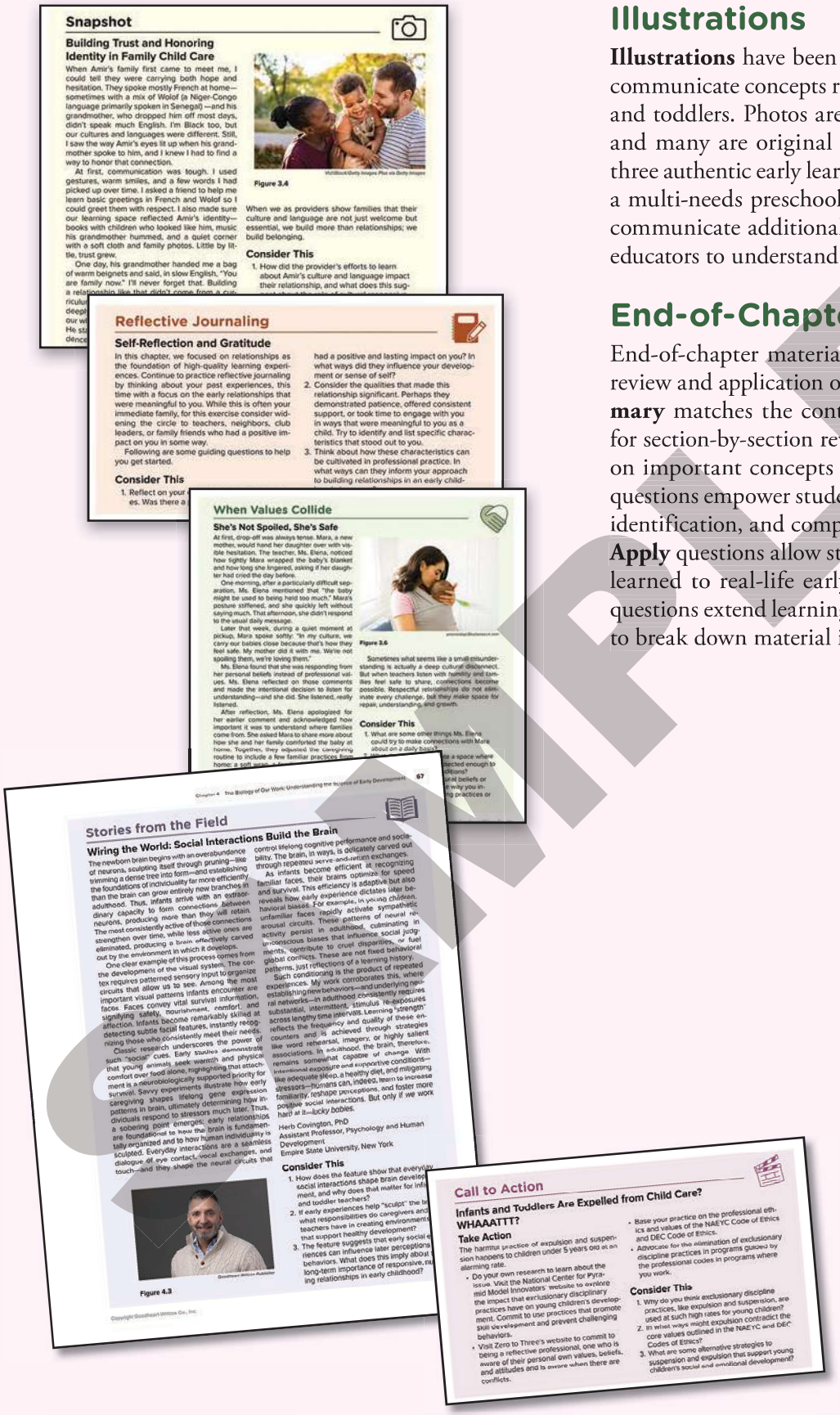
Each chapter opener contains a list of learning outcomes, a list of key terms, a relevant scenario, and a list of standards covered in the chapter. **Learning Outcomes** clearly identify the knowledge and skills to be gained when the chapter is completed. These outcomes are labeled and correlated to related assessment elements to facilitate reporting and remediation. **Key Terms** list the key words to be learned in the chapter. **A Powerful Story** provides an introductory scenario that is relevant to the topic of the chapter. **Standards** are an important part of preparing for a career. This feature provides students with an understanding of what key standards are covered in the chapter.

Additional Features

Additional features are used throughout the body of each chapter to further learning and knowledge. **Checkpoints** support reflection and knowledge after major chapter sections. **Videos from the Field** showcase original G-W videos, filmed in authentic, developmentally appropriate early learning environments that highlight topics or concepts discussed in the text. **Did You Know?** presents issues of current interest in the field. **Snapshot** presents students with scenarios they are likely to encounter in their careers as early childhood educators, then challenges them to think critically about how they would handle those situations. **Reflective Journaling** provides prompts to encourage contemplation of the concepts presented in each chapter. **When Values Collide** challenges students to examine relevant issues in the field, both past and present, through the lens of people from diverse backgrounds and characteristics. **Stories from the Field** highlights experiences and advice from early childhood education professionals who are experts on infants and toddlers. **Call to Action** encourages students to get involved or advocate for infants and toddlers and their families in ways that are meaningful.



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Illustrations

Illustrations have been designed to clearly and simply communicate concepts relevant to working with infants and toddlers. Photos are diverse, colorful, and helpful, and many are original images that were captured in three authentic early learning environments—including a multi-needs preschool classroom. Charts and tables communicate additional useful information for future educators to understand the chapter concepts.

End-of-Chapter Content

End-of-chapter material provides an opportunity for review and application of concepts. An expanded **Summary** matches the content to the learning outcomes for section-by-section review. This helps students focus on important concepts presented in the text. **Review** questions empower students to demonstrate knowledge, identification, and comprehension of chapter materials. **Apply** questions allow students to relate what they have learned to real-life early learning scenarios. **Expand** questions extend learning and develop students' abilities to break down material into its component parts.

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Introduction

Over 15 years ago, our professional paths crossed through our shared work in early childhood education. What began as a collegial relationship grew into a partnership grounded in a common belief: the earliest years of life matter profoundly, and the professionals who care for infants and toddlers deserve far greater recognition for the critical work they do every day.

As we reflect on our own journeys in the field, we are reminded of the mentors, colleagues, and leaders who showed up when we needed them most. They challenged our thinking, encouraged our growth, helped us navigate difficult moments, and reminded us why this work matters. Their guidance shaped the educators and advocates we have become. In many ways, this book is a reflection of those relationships. We are especially honored that some of the mentors who influenced our own professional journeys have contributed their voices and expertise to these pages. Their presence is a reminder that our field grows stronger when we learn from one another and when experienced professionals invest in the next generation of educators.

We carry their lessons with us every day, and we hope this book serves as that kind of support for you: a trusted companion that informs, challenges, and encourages you throughout your professional journey.

Throughout our careers, we have worked alongside educators, children, and families in a variety of settings. We have witnessed the extraordinary dedication of infant and toddler teachers as they comfort children through difficult separations; celebrate first steps and first words; build trusting relationships with families; and create environments where young children feel safe, valued, and loved. We have also seen how often this work is misunderstood or undervalued.

Too often, infant and toddler educators are viewed as caregivers rather than educators, even though they are shaping children's development during one of the most sensitive and influential periods of life. Every interaction matters. Every response to a cry, every shared smile, and every moment of connection contributes to a child's understanding of themselves, others, and the world around them.

This book was born from our desire to elevate the profession and support those who have chosen this important work. We believe infant and toddler educators need more than knowledge and skills. They need to understand the significance of their role and the lasting impact they have on children, families, communities, and society as a whole.

At the heart of our work is a commitment to relationships. Relationships are the foundation upon which learning, development, and well-being are built. When educators create responsive, nurturing, and respectful relationships with young children, they help establish the conditions for lifelong growth and success.

High-quality infant and toddler education also requires us to examine ourselves. The way we view children, families, and communities is influenced by our own experiences, values, and assumptions. Reflective practice challenges us to consider how culture, identity, lived experiences, and implicit biases shape our interactions and decisions. As professionals, we have a responsibility to engage in ongoing reflection so that every child and family feels seen, respected, and valued.

We are equally committed to the principles of equity and inclusion. Every child deserves opportunities to learn, grow, and belong. Every family deserves respect and partnership. We believe that all children are our children, and that our responsibility extends beyond individual classrooms to creating systems and communities where every child can thrive.

Throughout the chapters that follow, you will explore the foundations of infant and toddler development, the importance of relationships, responsive caregiving practices, learning environments, health and safety, curriculum, observation and assessment, family partnerships, inclusion, and professional responsibility. Each chapter is designed to connect research and theory with practical strategies that can be applied in real-world settings.

As you engage with the content, we encourage you to view yourself not only as a learner but also as a reflective practitioner. The knowledge, skills, and dispositions developed through this book are intended to support your growth as an educator who is prepared to nurture, advocate for, and learn alongside young children and their families.

Whether you are beginning your journey in the field or continuing to build upon years of experience, we hope this book deepens your understanding, strengthens your practice, and reminds you of both the significance of your work and the value you bring to the lives of young children and families.

The children in our care deserve educators who are knowledgeable, reflective, responsive, and compassionate. They deserve professionals who recognize the power of relationships and the importance of creating inclusive environments where every child belongs.

Thank you for choosing this profession and for investing in your growth as an infant and toddler educator. We are honored to join you on this journey.

Lynn & Tracy

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