Preface

It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.

Albert Einstein

My early memories of childhood experiences are the ones when I was busy playing, doing art projects, going to the library, and building things with blocks and Legos. Einstein's quote is one of my favorites because I believe creative expression and knowledge begin at a very early age in a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Susan E. Israel

*E*arly Reading First and Beyond is a book about prekindergarten literacy skill development, which research shows plays a key role in a child's later success in reading achievement. The U.S. Department of Education's response to this research is the Early Reading First initiative—a program that emphasizes the importance of educating teachers who work with emerging readers. Based on the report of the National Reading Panel, Early Reading First is part of the No Child Left Behind act. The primary goal of Early Reading First—the development of literacy skills from birth to kindergarten—is the focus of this book.

What motivated me to write this book was my love for small children—all small children, not just a few—who deserve to have opportunities during vital developmental moments in their lives for those rich literacy engagements that lead to success later in life. This book provides the tools and resources for early childhood educators to unlock children's creativity to inspire them to develop readiness skills for kindergarten based on the Early Reading First initiative.

The goal of all teachers serving our young children should be to be highly qualified in their area of expertise. In addition, each teacher needs a willingness to engage in professional development for continued growth. It is my hope that by reading this book, early childhood educators will benefit from my research, experiences, and understanding of the time in a child's life from birth to kindergarten. This book will be useful as teachers reflect on their own professional development needs.

LEAVING NO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR BEHIND

This book was written to meet the needs of educators at the emergent level who work to develop literacy for early primary grade children. The responsibility of scaffolding early primary grade children toward future literacy success does not rest in the hands of only a few people. Those who will benefit from reading this book include the following:

- Early childhood educators
- Administrators in early childhood
- Undergraduate or graduate-level professionals who teach early childhood courses in literacy and education
- School leaders who wish to engage in professional development
- Literacy coaches
- Early primary reading specialists
- School district curriculum developers
- Policymakers who work in early childhood
- Librarians who engage in literacy development activities
- Most important, parents of young children who desire to understand and implement Early Reading First goals

THINKING CREATIVELY ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

This book offers the field of literacy a format that will appeal to those working with early childhood–age children or those who want to construct early childhood programs of excellence. It also provides teachers and parents with creative teaching that will guide their instruction related to the key components of Early Reading First. Table 0.1 provides an overview of research and strategies you will find in this book.

Detailed current research-based strategies with literacy instruction that integrate the key components presented are as follows:

- Oral language
- Alphabetic knowledge
- Phonological awareness
- Print awareness

Each chapter includes unique features to aid in developing a deeper understanding of the chapter contents for the readers. The unique features provide a consistent reading path throughout the book, making reading comprehension more efficient for the reader. These unique features are as follows:

Vignettes: An opening vignette illustrates the chapter contents and highlights key aspects of experiences in early childhood. Vignettes are provided to stimulate the reader's background knowledge on the topic.

Table 0.1   Matrix of Early Reading First Research, Strategies, and Benefits

Read This Chapter to Learn . . .	You Need to Know . . .	This Should Be Important Because . . .	The Research-Based Strategies You Can Learn About Are . . .	To Increase Home-School Connections You Can . . .
Chapter 1: Early Reading First	Goals	Pathway to change	How to self-assess	Host information workshops, listen to ideas
Chapter 2: Oral Language	How oral language develops	Oral language can be nurtured	Dialogic discussions, scaffolding statements, functions	Teach storytelling, prompts, rereading, and discussions
Chapter 3: Alphabetic Knowledge	Letter-sound connections	Predictor of later reading achievement	Mnemonic literacy, integration, reading ABC books and wordless picture books, coaching strategies	Communicate resources that are effective, teach how to use books to develop letter-sound
Chapter 4: Phonological Awareness	Segmentation, blending	Children need to master one or two skills	Multisensory approaches, elements of teaching vowels and consonants	Read-aloud strategies, teaching tips
Chapter 5: Print Awareness	Functions of a book	Increase reading prior to kindergarten	Overview books, awareness function cards	Use predictable books, watch the TV show *Between the Lions*
Chapter 6: Early Literacy Classrooms of Excellence	Cognitive, social, and emotional aspects	Impacts motivation and learning	How to use literacy tools effectively	Share talents, weekly newsletters, home service activities

Research That Early Childhood Teachers Need to Know: This section is designed to present background knowledge about each component of Early Reading First legislation or other scientifically validated components.

New Classroom-Proven Research-Based Practices: In this section, validated instructional practices address the goal of the literacy domain discussed in each chapter.

Early Reading First Assessment Tools: To meet the goals of Early Reading First, every chapter provides concrete methods that teachers can use as a screening tool for students who might be at risk for reading failure. The types of assessments recommended are brief, easy to use and interpret, administered individually or in small groups, and used to identify at-risk children. The recommended assessments are not meant to track children but to identify those at risk and to provide intervention prior to kindergarten.

Differentiating for Early Learners With Individual Needs: This unique feature describes how to make adaptations and differentiate instruction for preschool children with special needs. Chapters focus on strategies that guide teachers on how to differentiate activities.

Teaching Tips That Increase Home-School Connections: Since the inclusion of parents is a vital element in the early childhood years regarding literacy growth, this unique feature can be found in a gray box in each chapter. The tips focus on content-specific approaches that teachers can share with the parents of children in their classroom that can easily be implemented in home environments.

Literacy Treasure Chest: This unique feature can be valuable for teachers who want new ideas on specific literature that supports chapter contents.

Facilitator's Guide: At the end of the book is a helpful guide for those who want to use this book in professional development sessions or study groups. Helpful resources include Tips for Facilitators, Needs Assessments, Reproducibles, and Children's Book Lists

This book is also organized around specific standards set forth by the International Reading Association (IRA). A matrix that shows how this book connects with the IRA standards is included in Table 0.2. This table is valuable to educators working with preschool children because the specific areas of professional development you are focusing on provide you with a quick reference to specific chapters that support a standard.

In conjunction with the standards set forth by the IRA, the contents of this book answer the following questions:

Questions About Knowledge Function

What is Early Reading First, and how do I implement the components into my curriculum?

What does current research say about oral language, alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, and higher-level thinking?

What are stages of language development and reading acquisition, and what can I do to facilitate growth?

Questions About Instructional Strategies and Curriculum

What are effective research-based strategies I can use today?

How do I respond to critical issues in early childhood programs?

What type of literature helps develop Early Reading First components, and what are some popular titles that children will enjoy?

Questions About Assessment, Diagnosis, and Evaluation

How can I evaluate my beliefs about individual aspects of Early Reading First components?

Table 0.2   Early Reading First and Beyond Chapter Correlations With IRA Standards

IRA Standard 1: Functional Knowledge	*Chapters*
Element 1.1 Knowledge of psychological and linguistic foundations of reading and writing processes and instruction	2, 3, 4
Element 1.2 Knowledge of reading research and histories of reading	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Element 1.3 Knowledge of language development and reading acquisition and the variations related to cultural and linguistic diversity	3, 4, 5, 6

IRA Standard 2: Instructional Strategies and Curriculum Materials	*Chapters*
Element 2.1 Use instructional grouping options as appropriate for accomplishing given purposes	2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Element 2.2 Use a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, and methods, including technology-based practices for learners at different stages of development and from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds	2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Element 2.3 Use a wide range of curriculum materials in effective reading instruction for learners at different stages of reading and writing development and from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds	2, 3, 4, 5, 6

IRA Standard 3: Assessment, Diagnosis, and Evaluation	*Chapters*
Element 3.1 Use a wide variety of assessment tools and practices that range from individual and group standardized tests to individual and group informal classroom assessment strategies, including technology-based assessment tools	2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Element 3.2 Place students along a developmental continuum and identify students' proficiencies and difficulties	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Element 3.3 Use assessment information to plan, evaluate, and revise effective instruction that meets the needs of all students, including those at different developmental stages and those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds	2, 3, 4, 5, 6

IRA Standard 4: Creating a Literate Environment	*Chapters*
Element 4.1 Use students' interests, reading abilities, and backgrounds as foundations for the reading and writing program	1, 2
Element 4.2 Use a large supply of books, technology-based information, and nonprint materials representing multiple levels, broad interests, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds	2, 3, 4, 5
Element 4.3 Model reading and writing enthusiastically as valued lifelong readers	2, 3, 4, 5, 6

IRA Standard 5: Professional Development	*Chapters*
Element 5.1 Display dispositions related to reading and the teaching of reading	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Element 5.2 Continue to pursue the development of professional knowledge and dispositions	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Element 5.3 Work with colleagues to observe, evaluate, and provide feedback on each other's practice	1, 6
Element 5.4 Participate in, initiate, implement, and evaluate professional development programs	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

What assessments are appropriate to use with primary children?

What should the goals of assessment be in early childhood centers of excellence?

Questions About Creating a Literate Environment

What environmental factors influence early literacy growth?

How do I integrate components of early reading first in early childhood environments?

What types of home-school connections will enable higher levels of reading achievement?

Questions About Professional Development

Where can I obtain information about Early Reading First?

What are suggestions for grant writing?

What are some recommended professional development resources that will help me learn more about Early Reading First components?

After reading this book, if you have a deeper understanding of the critical developmental aspects of the key components of this book—oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, alphabetic knowledge, and enriched early literacy environments—the goal of this book will have been achieved.