

The Quest for Social Strategy

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Sometimes the most profound ideas are simply expressed. So it is with the thoughts of the late Julius Richmond, who, in tackling the complex matter of social change, succinctly summarized its three accelerants: the prevalence of a well-researched knowledge base, the existence of political and public will, and the presence of a codified social strategy. He should know. A scholar, physician, and former surgeon general of the United States, Richmond is widely credited with spearheading the global cessation of smoking and with strategizing poverty reduction through the establishment of the landmark Head Start program. Clearly, he tackled big issues, demonstrating his keen understanding of what it takes to engineer social reform.

INTRODUCTION: THE RATIONALE

This volume is about social reform, specifically that which affects young children and their families throughout the world. Without much fanfare, but with remarkable alacrity, countries' understandings of the potency of the earliest years of life are shifting, and with them, the investments that are made and the policies that are invoked to alter the nature and amount of services provided for young children. This volume, then, tells the story of just how such remarkable social change has come to pass.

To do so, this book takes a particular slant. Guided by Richmond's dictum, it acknowledges that the notable advancements in both policies and services for young children owe their existence, in part, to two elements of Richmond's trilogy: the production and popularization of a rich research base, and the use of that research base to generate and energize public will. Catalytic research emanating from neuroscience, economics, and the evaluation sciences has catapulted early childhood to the attention of policy-makers and the public, dramatically increasing social concern about, and attention to, the field.

Despite these notable advancements, this volume contends that Richmond's third accelerant, the development of a social strategy, has

lagged significantly. In the frenzy to do right by young children, countries around the globe are enacting chaotic policies and services that, lacking coherent planning and structures, often compromise quality and efficiency. Social strategy, as the third dimension of the Richmond formula for social reform, is often neglected in the rapid press to launch services. However robust the efforts, full understanding and management of the social strategies that presage them is lacking. But social strategy matters greatly, so a good grasp of its nuances and intricacies needs to be far more widespread if the desired social changes on behalf of young children are to be fully implemented and realized.

This is where *The Early Advantage* comes into play. Composed of two volumes, *The Early Advantage 1: Early Childhood Systems That Lead by Example* and this volume, *The Early Advantage 2: Building Systems That Work for Young Children*, the set examines how jurisdictions that are well along in their quest to advance children's well-being and developmental outcomes are strategically and inventively designing and implementing early childhood policies and services. In addition to chronicling what exists for young children, the volumes provide informed, and perhaps profound, analyses of why and how these strategies came to be. While according homage to the abundant research base and the remarkably strong public will that exists, the volumes are squarely positioned to dissect, and hence to shed light on, the social strategy that is propelling policies and services for young children. Driven by the desire to round out the Richmond trilogy of available information, this volume focuses specifically on social strategy.

Beyond emerging from need, the volumes emanate from urgency. Given the mounting momentum for action and the massive reforms for young children that are already under way, the quest to understand social strategies that work could not be timelier. Social change is inevitable. The question at hand, then, is how to marshal that change to evoke improvements in the quality, equity, efficiency, and sustainability of services for the young children of today and tomorrow. Enhanced understanding of social strategies that work is needed, and needed now, if meaningful and durable social reform of early childhood services is to be realized.

To understand the history and mechanisms associated with such positive change, the authors examined six jurisdictions (Australia, England, Finland, Hong Kong, the Republic of Korea, and Singapore) that are making significant headway in both their social strategy for, and in the outcomes that are accruing to, young children. Grounded in solid documentation and validated analyses, *The Early Advantage* addresses serious gaps in the field's strategic implementation knowledge about practices and policies for young children, precisely at the time when such information can be utilized by countries across the globe.

But why a set of volumes? As this is a unique analysis that seeks to enrich the literature regarding social strategy, there is a lot of experience on which to draw, and there is a great deal to learn. The first volume, *The Early Advantage 1: Early Childhood Systems That Lead by Example*, tells the individual stories of the six jurisdictions, focusing on understanding the whys and whats of their efforts for young children. Penetrating and poignant, these narratives evolve in six different policy contexts and reveal six remarkably distinct rationales and approaches to policy construction and service delivery.

Now, in this second volume, *The Early Advantage 2: Building Systems That Work for Young Children*, the focus shifts away from individual narratives to key strategic constructs that transcend the selected jurisdictions. The aim here is to describe how early childhood systems are created and supported. Using a thematic approach, this volume analyzes the social strategies that have accompanied these herculean changes. And indeed, despite significant differences among the jurisdictions, the analysis suggests that five “pillars,” or domains of effort, each composed of three building blocks, emerge as essential and strategic correlates of an ECEC system. Although not all jurisdictions have perfectly implemented all the building blocks, each has made significant progress on most of them. In essence, then, the pillars are aspirational but represent the distilled learnings about social strategies that can evoke policies and practices, and ultimately systems, to support young children and their families. As such, this volume provides concrete tools for action.

Stated differently, if the first volume sought to reflect on the stories of six individual jurisdictions, this volume seeks to affect social change in scores of nations. If the first volume addresses the whys and whats of early childhood social change, this volume focuses on the hows. If the first volume sought to analyze ideas and phenomena, this volume seeks to catalyze action. Although distinct, together the two volumes form a duology that advances inventive frameworks, narratives, and strategies designed to improve policies and services for young children and their families.

Studying such a complex phenomenon as social change is in itself a huge task, made even more complicated by the rapidity with which such change is occurring in the six selected jurisdictions. To carry out the study on which both volumes of *The Early Advantage* are predicated necessitated strong support from the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE); from Teachers College, Columbia University; and from the institutions represented by its principal investigators: the late Collette Tayler (Australia), Kathy Sylva (England), Kristiina Kumpulainen (Finland), Nirmala Rao (Hong Kong), Mugyeong Moon (Republic of Korea), and Rebecca Bull (Singapore). Their work made this journey into the realm of social change exhilarating.

BACKGROUND: THE SCOPE AND DESIGN OF THE WORK

The work of shedding light on a phenomenon as ambling and complex as social change, at a time of immense activity across six dramatically different jurisdictions—each replete with its own cultural, political, social, and economic context—is an immense undertaking. Spanning continents, languages, and perspectives, this comparative analysis demanded coherence in scope and design. Without burdening the reader with overly detailed information, we wish to aid understanding of this volume’s content through a brief review of the basic study scope, design, and methodology.

Scope of the Work

To frame the scope of the work and delineate its boundaries, three sets of definitions follow: (i) the age of the young child, (ii) the breadth of services, and (iii) the nature of systems.

Defining the Age of the Young Child. Traditionally plagued by multiple and often confusing definitions of the precise ages included in the nomenclature, “young child” definitions abound, frequently framed by the disciplinary orientation of the speaker. For example, developmentalists, whose work is grounded in psychology, historically defined the years of early childhood as spanning the period from birth to ages 6–8. Alternatively, members of the medical community, noting in utero development, cited the early years as embracing the prenatal period as well. Early educators, who deal with implementing programs in a space that is distinct in governance, funding, and structure from primary schools, often consider the early years to terminate at age 5, or whenever formal schooling commences. In fact, all of these are correct; they simply reflect different lenses through which the young child is regarded. *The Early Advantage* volumes take a broad view, defining young children as spanning from the prenatal period to the earliest years of formal school.

Defining the Breadth of Services. Not unexpectedly, addressing the needs of children in this wide age span involves multiple services. Reflecting immense variation, these services are labeled differently in different countries and by different international organizations. For example, some consider these services broadly to include health, nutrition, education, and social protection, ascribing them the appellation early childhood development (ECD). Others, describing the same services, term them early childhood development and education (ECDE) or simply early childhood services. Complicating matters is the need to distinguish these broad services from more narrowly defined care and education services, a subgroup of services that is described with a similarly variegated and complex set of titles including early childhood

education (ECE), early care and education (again ECE), early childhood care and education (ECCE), and early childhood education and care (ECEC).

In both volumes of *The Early Advantage*, we have elected to use and distinguish between two terms: the first, comprehensive early development (CED) services, is broader and embraces the second, early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. CED, as it is used throughout this volume, is composed of two categories, general health and welfare services and ECEC services. General health and welfare includes a wide range of services to young children and their families, including prenatal, perinatal, social welfare, and protective services. ECEC specifically encompasses home- and center-based services that are developmental and educational in nature. This volume addresses CED services generally, particularly in Chapters 2 and 3, but predominantly focuses on ECEC services.

Defining the Nature of Systems. Steeped in the reality that CED spans diverse disciplines and is operationalized in programs and services that are administered by multiple ministries or departments, this study adopted a systems framework as an analytic approach. Beyond encompassing such multidisciplinary orientations, a systems approach acknowledges that the provision of direct services alone cannot evoke anticipated outcomes if such services are not supported by an infrastructure. Thus an ECEC system, as the term is used in this volume, embraces the direct services received by children and families *and* the infrastructure that supports those services. Indeed, the formula “8 minus 1 equals 0” suggests that, in addition to children’s direct services (the first element of the system), seven elements of the infrastructure (governance, finance, pedagogical quality, transitions, workforce development, data-driven improvement, and engagement) must be in place for a high-performing system to exist (Kagan & Cohen, 1996). Lacking any one element, the system is compromised. Using a systems orientation, this volume examines how ECEC systems emerge and shape the lives of young children and their families.

Design of the Work

Armed with definitions that delineate the scope of the study and this volume, we turn to a discussion of the design of the study: (i) the research questions, (ii) the Theory of Change, and (iii) the methodology.

Research Questions. Three sets of research questions guided the inquiry and analysis: descriptive, comparative, and explanatory questions. Descriptive questions aimed to evoke understandings of “whats” (e.g., what systemic elements are in place; what governmental structures and frameworks have been established; what conditions precipitated CED and ECEC efforts). Comparative questions addressed ways the jurisdictions are similar and different in terms of ideologies, policies, services, practices, and

priorities. Finally, explanatory questions aimed to extract the rationale for and the strategies that support the ways jurisdictions deliver, monitor, and improve services for young children.

Theory of Change. Theories of change, as predictions of how social change takes place, are helpful *formatively* in crafting the research questions and framing the study design; they are also helpful *summatively* in reflecting on how, why, and to what end such change took place. Often presented as a somewhat stylized picture of how change is speculated to occur, such theories have limitations in that, by design, they condense complex phenomena. However imperfect, the theory of change that undergirds this study was originally posited by Kagan and Gomez in 2015; augmented by Kagan, Araujo, Jaimovich, and Aguayo in 2016; and further refined for this analysis. As described in Figure 1.1, it currently suggests that positive child and family well-being (F) are predicated on systemic outputs (high-quality, equitably distributed, sustainable, and efficient services) (D) and family supports (E), which are achieved only in the presence of an effective system (C). Such a system is based on a clearly delineated infrastructure (B) that supports diverse programs (A), sometimes linked by boundary-spanning mechanisms (BSMs) that integrate programs and services across ministerial boundaries. All malleable, these factors are encased in both economic-political (e.g., demographics, social thinking/movements, governmental leadership, funding) (G) and sociocultural (e.g., values, beliefs, heritages, religions) (H) contexts.

Methodology

Three components explicate the study and its methodology: (i) jurisdictional selection; (ii) data collection, analysis, and validation procedures; and (iii) limitations.

Jurisdictional Selection and Identification. Two data sets guided the selection of the six jurisdictions that participated in the study: (a) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) performance rankings for mathematics and (b) ECEC performance rankings for quality. More specifically, this study divided the top 30 PISA 2012 countries into three groups (high, 1–10; medium, 11–20; and lower, 21–30), ranked according to their mathematics results (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2012). To discern the quality of ECEC programs, the study used composite scores from the 2012 Economist Intelligence Unit's *Starting Well* report, which examined four criteria of ECEC systems: (i) social context, (ii) availability, (iii) affordability, and (iv) quality. The top 30 countries from this report were then divided into the same three groups (high, 1–10; medium, 11–20; and lower, 21–30). Ultimately, the constructs and each of their three categories were cross-mapped to form nine cells, in which overlapping countries were listed (Table 1.1).

to be interviewed were used. Each country's research team conducted no less than 12, and sometimes as many as 35, multihour interviews. Typically, multiple interviewers were present, who each took and compared notes as a means of avoiding misinterpretations. All respondents were provided with summaries of the interviews for validation before the data were consolidated into country-specific field notes.

Working as a collaborative team to analyze the data, the co-principal investigators from each country collaboratively discerned key practice trends and convergent/divergent themes, and ultimately 15 building blocks, grouped into five pillars, were identified as providing the essential foundation for high-performing ECEC systems. The pillars and building blocks emanate from the systems framework and elaborate upon it. Providing strategic details, they are the result of thoughtful debate and ultimately consensual decisionmaking by the co-principal investigators. The pillar and building block definitions, a product of this overall study, are explicated in this volume and form its structure.

Throughout the process, three types of external validation were employed. First, final drafts of each of the country case studies were subjected to a thorough review for content accuracy by knowledgeable ECEC country experts who were not affiliated with the study. Second, all emergent themes, including the pillars and the building blocks, were validated by external reviewers who understand systems theory and practice. Third, the study in its entirety was reviewed by external experts from the staff and board of NCEE.

Taken together, the definitions, revised Theory of Change, and comprehensive and validated comparative analytic design provided an inventive and necessary structure to produce the data for *The Early Advantage* volumes.

Limitations. Despite these efforts to maintain accuracy and consistency, like any analysis of complex social phenomena, this work has limitations. Many of its challenges emanate from the fact that the subject of its focus, the CED and ECEC landscape, is rapidly changing. Often, the policies, practices, and services discussed in the volume are being altered as it goes to press. As such, one limitation is that despite every effort to render the content current, it is potentially constrained by changes in policies that have taken place after December 2017, the cutoff date associated with this work. Any policy changes past this cutoff date that are included in this volume have been clearly noted as such. Second, because CED transcends disciplines, systems, bureaucracies, and a wide age range of children, relevant data are not only broad, but highly inconsistent across data sources within given countries, not to mention variable across countries. To that end, there will be some omissions, possible contradictions, and even potential errors of fact, despite every effort to render accurate, comparable data within and

across countries. Third, and consistent with the above two limitations, terminology varies within and across countries. Where feasible, common or generic terms are used, accompanied by clear definitions. Despite this, there may be lexical confusion, so the reader is warmly encouraged to heed the definitions and pay more than usual attention to the abbreviations list, footnotes, and other explanatory material. Given these limitations, the authors accept responsibility for any errors of fact.

Finally, germane to both study parameters and study use, the jurisdictions included in this analysis are not representative of all jurisdictions worldwide. Notably, they are all high-income countries, reflecting just a tiny minority (just under 2%) of the world's population.¹ And critically important to acknowledge, throughout the world, only 18% of children are born in high-income countries, with the vast majority instead living in low- and moderate-income countries (UNESCO, 2015). Hence, the generalizability of data developed from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic ("WEIRD") societies (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010), while useful, must be regarded with caution. Having noted this important limitation, however, lessons drawn from this analysis can be helpful as diverse countries aim to establish ECEC systems that are aligned with their unique contexts.

THE LEARNINGS: THE RANGE AND IMPORTANCE OF NEW NARRATIVES

The Early Advantage volumes have emerged amid a rapidly changing social context that is according policy priority and attendant increased investments to young children. Predicated on social justice, economic, and developmental rationales, in some jurisdictions ECEC is now being regarded as a right for all children. Broadly, it is lauded because it not only supports parental (particularly maternal) employment and advances economic growth; through high-quality services, it also yields developmentally adept and socially and intellectually agile children. Indeed, contemporary CED and ECEC are not the same today as they were even a decade ago.

This new zeitgeist coexists with a set of narratives that both define and frame the contemporary context. The last chapter of the companion volume, *The Early Advantage I: Early Childhood Systems That Lead by Example*, presents these three fundamentally new narratives. The first relates to new understandings of the transcendent and multiple influences of context, the second affirms the essentiality of diverse systems thinking, and the third suggests that desired outcomes of contextually driven systems need to be reconsidered. Each critically important and discussed briefly below, these three narratives describe the conditions or ways of thinking that influence how we consider policies and services: the *context* that frames them, the *systems* that embrace them, and the *outcomes* that drive them.

This volume, however, breaks new ground in that it suggests an entirely new narrative. Moving beyond explanatory narratives that describe changes in the contextual variables that characterize ECEC systems, this fourth narrative is *strategic*. It suggests that we actually do know what it takes to create and implement effective early childhood systems. We understand the composite elements—the pillars and the building blocks—that must be present. And what’s more, we have rich examples of how to implement them. The fourth narrative, then, is the “can-do, how-to, must-do” narrative. As such, and returning to the Richmond formula that opened this chapter, it is about social strategy, that heretofore missing link of the reform agenda tri-fecta. This new narrative boldly asserts that we do have the social strategy; this volume reveals and explicates it.

New Narrative I: Transcendent and Multiple Influences of Context

It has been long recognized that political and economic contexts shape the amount and nature of ECEC services, with profound difference among countries, and profound differences even within them during different epochs in their political history. Major events like World War II or America’s War on Poverty may occasion increased investment that may ebb once (and if) the crisis wanes. Similarly, cultural context weighs heavily both on commitments to ECEC service provision, and on the nature of pedagogy. Not a guaranteed right in all countries, ECEC is often the handmaiden to more transcendent social, cultural, political, and economic forces.

Although successful ECEC, both as a set of services and as a policy strategy, differs vastly within and across countries, common variables can be associated with different regions of the world and with different political regimes and values. As shown in Figure 1.2, the six study countries cluster roughly into three categories that we have elected to term the Nordic, Anglo, and Asian approaches. Although these labels do generalize the findings, and do not account for the significant within-category variation, commonalities are apparent. Of course, Finland does not fully represent the Nordic experience, just as England and Australia do not represent all Anglo countries, and Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore do not represent all Asian jurisdictions. Yet these categories represent important contextual considerations that help shape service delivery. For example, Finland offers far more services for young children and does so with far less required accountability than the Asian or Anglo countries. The Asian countries rely most heavily on markets and have found inventive ways to marshal contributions from the private sector. Anglo countries use mixed markets, but rely more heavily on data and accountability—variables that render their contexts considerably different from Nordic or Asian service delivery.

Though not offered as a perfect heuristic, Figure 1.2 does attest first to new thinking about the salience of context, challenging conventional

Figure 1.2. Suggested Typology of CED Operational Approaches

<p>NORDIC APPROACH Finland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy public funding for ECEC services • Heavy public provision of ECEC services • National framework; freedom of implementation; focus on children’s agency • Limited, if any, national formal child monitoring • Limited, if any, formal program monitoring • Heavy public funding for health care and child protection
<p>ASIAN APPROACH Hong Kong Singapore South Korea</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate to heavy public funding for ECEC services • Mixed public-private provision of ECEC services • National framework; structured pedagogy • Limited national formal child monitoring • Moderate to heavy formal program monitoring • Heavy public funding for health care and moderate to heavy funding for child protection
<p>ANGLO APPROACH Australia England</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to heavy public funding for ECEC services • Mixed public-private provision of ECEC services • National framework; moderately guided pedagogy • Moderate to heavy national formal child monitoring • Heavy formal program monitoring • Heavy public funding for health care and moderate to heavy funding for child protection

narratives that there is one right way to achieve effective CED and ECEC. Second, it offers a clear picture of how such contextual variation is manifested in policies and practices. In short, the new narrative affirms that context matters and that *many* contexts produce equally strong, but quite distinctive, ECEC systems.

New Narrative II: Essentiality of Systems Thinking

Unlike eras past, when policymakers regarded the provision of direct programs and services as the answer to addressing the needs of young children, today’s new narrative suggests that cross-program and systemic thinking and planning are necessary. Motivated by desire for transcendent quality across programs, equitable distribution of resources among services, efficient use of resources, and the need to sustain programs over time, systems thinking is taking hold in countries where ECEC advancements are being

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made. In some jurisdictions, such a transcendent purview is labeled specifically “systems thinking”; in others, it is not, but because elements of the system are deemed inherently important, they are being addressed. While no single country has the perfect system, the study jurisdictions are all making headway on diverse elements of the infrastructure. They recognize the potency of common structures and documents that transcend programs, and they (some more than others) are engaged in planning over time and across ministries and delivery systems. In short, this new narrative means that systems thinking, once mysterious, is becoming commonplace in ECEC parlance and policy.

New Narrative III: Desired Outcomes from Contextually Driven Systems

Changing Ideas About Quality. The third new narrative represents a reconsideration of the nature of “quality” as a desired outcome of ECEC efforts. Conventionally, desired outcomes have taken two forms: those that evince positive changes in children’s behavior and learning, and those that represent improvements in the pedagogy and programmatic quality of the formal settings that evoke child outcomes. Measures of quality, therefore, include measures of improvements in children’s physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language development. They also include measures of conditions that help evoke effective pedagogy, including interactions between children and adults (pedagogical quality) and physical conditions of the environment, ratios of staff to children, and array of services provided (programmatic quality). Yet, increasingly, these ideas of quality have been expanded to include the quality of the *system*, which encompasses, but is not limited to, pedagogical and programmatic quality. In fact, the new quality narrative suggests that it is difficult—if not impossible—to achieve large-scale pedagogical and programmatic quality unless systemic quality is considered. More specifically, systemic quality includes the infrastructure elements that are proffered in Box B of Figure 1.1: governance, finance, pedagogical quality, transitions, workforce development, data-driven improvement, and engagement and support strategies.

Changing Ideas About Equity. Historically and even today, ECEC has not been universally available to all children in all countries. Globally, wealthy parents often purchase ECEC services for their children, while some poor children have no access to services or are enrolled in government-supported services, which may be of lower quality. This bifurcated approach means that the nature and quality of the services differ for children, often contingent on family income.

The new equity narrative suggests that all children are entitled to ECEC services, regardless of their country of origin, family income, home language, or ability. And, for youngsters who may need more than basic

services, enrichment supports should be provided. In other words, on top of equal access for all, there is recognition that equality is not equity. The new equity narrative suggests that not simply services, but services designed to meet children's diverse needs, should be a universal right.

Changing Ideas About Efficiency. Conventionally, ECEC predicated its efficacy and efficiency on the “inputs”—the services experienced by children and families. Quality services sufficed to meet the efficiency criteria. Today, the new efficiency narrative expands the idea of an input focus to include systemic efficiencies. Transcending the individual program, systemic efficiencies consider the degree to which ECEC services are available but not redundant, the ways in which they are coordinated and cohesive, and the ways in which resources are used effectively (e.g., value returned on expenditures invested). Far more complex than simply envisioning efficiency as measured by the effectiveness of a single program (for which metrics now exist), the new narrative beckons fresh approaches to assessing systemic outputs.

Changing Ideas About Sustainability. In the past, ECEC was satisfied with short wins, particularly the passage of a policy that affected some of the population for some of the time. With no guaranteed funding base and no durable policy assurances, the sustainability of ECEC programs, particularly in the United States, was questionable. The new sustainability narrative, however, acknowledges that the mere funding of an ECEC effort with no plans for its longevity is counterproductive. Here-today-gone-tomorrow programs wreak havoc on children, their families, and the workforce that builds and staffs services for them. Today's narrative stresses that sustainability of services over time is a clear output that must be considered as policy is developed.

New Narrative IV: Acknowledging and Popularizing Strategies That Work

Considering the three narratives noted in the previous subsections, alongside the diversity of contexts embraced in this book, one might expect that there would be little hope of discerning a common—and by implication single—strategy for advancing ECEC systems. In essence, that is correct. The countries studied employ very different approaches to designing, funding, monitoring, and sustaining their services to young children and their families. They approach the ECEC sector with different goals, commitments, and timelines. Yet all have achieved notable success. The implication, then, is that there is no one right or correct way to design and implement an early childhood system, as successful systems are inevitably heavily contoured by economic-political and sociocultural factors, as indeed was suggested in frames G and H of the posited Theory of Change (Figure 1.1).

Having noted these variations, the overarching lesson from the study is that there are critical elements that do need to be in place in order for an ECEC system to function: the pillars and building blocks, as we have termed them. These elements, however differently contoured by contextual factors, are present in all study jurisdictions and provide the bedrock on which ECEC systems are built.

THE OVERARCHING LEGACY: COMMON PILLARS AND BUILDING BLOCKS

In its quest to unpack the strategies that yield effective ECEC systems, this analysis found that there are important elements (i.e., building blocks) present, albeit to different degrees, in all study jurisdictions. Building on the systems framework that undergirds this analysis, these elements emerged as analytic comparisons of the study countries were undertaken. The process began with each co-principal investigator writing a narrative of her individual jurisdiction, as presented in *The Early Advantage I: Early Childhood Systems That Lead by Example* and in the corresponding elaborated case studies available at ncee.org/earlyadvantage.

Once completed, common operational strategies that characterize the jurisdictions' work in the realm of ECEC were discerned and subjected to intensive review and discussion among the full study team. Once agreed upon, these strategies were codified into "building blocks" and organized into five pillars. To assess their veracity, the building blocks then underwent an informal analysis, wherein the presence and intensity of each was ranked for each jurisdiction by its representative co-principal investigator. Far more important than the actual numerical rankings (1–5) that were ascribed, discussion ensued in which each co-principal investigator shared and justified her rankings to the others. This oral discourse was characterized by intense probing, thoughtful questioning, and validation of the building blocks that comprise effective ECEC systems. Through this process, the actual wording and organization of the building blocks and pillars was finalized.

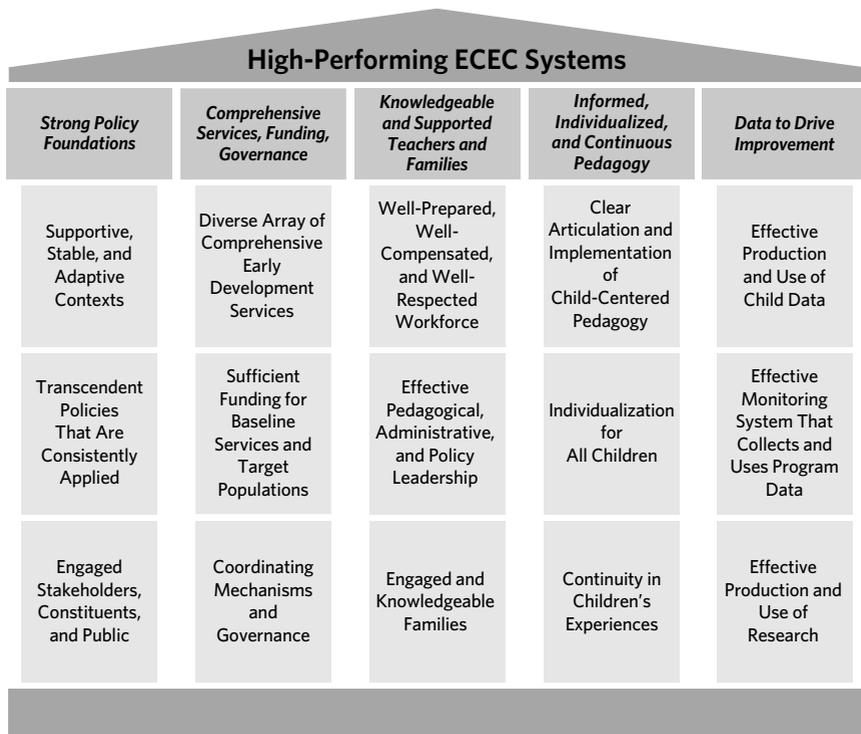
The 15 building blocks, organized into five pillars, now stand as the overarching legacy from this study. As such, they reflect the past in that they incorporate many of the elements posited in the Theory of Change infrastructure (see Figure 1.1). Not contradictory or redundant, however, they elaborate and build on the original infrastructure elements, adding important new dimensions to systems thinking. They also anticipate the future as they incorporate the new narratives, and speak to the importance of strong policy foundations, durable policy structures, and diverse policy strategies. As transcendent elements of the six study jurisdictions, we share them in detail in this volume in hopes that they will be helpful to those seeking to create or reform ECEC systems.

The chapters that follow elaborate on and analyze each of the five pillars and 15 building blocks. With a focus on content and strategy, each chapter details the unique structures and approaches used by the jurisdictions to operationalize their ECEC systems.

The building blocks and pillars are displayed in Figure 1.3, which is followed by brief summaries of the chapters that comprise this volume.

The first pillar, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, proposes that supportive policy foundations are manifest in the study jurisdictions and represent the bedrock for their early childhood work. Included in a strong policy foundation are the general economic and political stability of the country and the durability of its commitments to families and children. Thus, high-performing ECEC systems emerge in largely stable political and economic environments, and are shaped by their countries' social values. A supportive, stable, and adaptive context provides fertile soil for transcendent policies that guide ECEC programs. Such policies can include laws, guidelines, regulations, and pedagogical or policy frameworks. Moreover, a strong policy foundation incorporates input from diverse stakeholders, multiple and organized constituencies and communities, and the public at large.

Figure 1.3. Building Blocks of High-Performing ECEC Systems



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Presented in Chapter 3, the second pillar suggests that comprehensive and coordinated services are essential to the existence and success of an ECEC system. These CED services strive to meet young children's health, education, and developmental needs from birth through the early years of primary school, as well as their family's needs. Governments provide funding for these services, to varying degrees and in varying ways. In some jurisdictions, proportionate universalism is employed to ensure that children with more acute needs have them addressed. Although not ubiquitously present, sufficient and stable funding is essential, with the episodic financing that is characteristic of many democracies inhibiting provision of durable, high-quality services. Moreover, while necessary, the mere provision of funded services is not sufficient; such services must be coordinated so that their delivery is not haphazard, duplicative, or redundant. Thus the presence of aligned governance or coordinating entities and mechanisms that foster such alignment is also critical.

The third pillar, discussed in Chapter 4, acknowledges that people really matter, and that without a commitment to the development and maintenance of a well-trained, well-compensated, and well-respected workforce, early childhood services are compromised. The development of standards-based, actionable, and well-implemented plans for increasing the quality, skills, and compensation of the workforce is a common goal among the study jurisdictions. This commitment to individuals is also manifest in a dedication to fostering pedagogical and policy leadership, so that there are also actionable and implemented plans to support the advancement of leaders. Study jurisdictions also work to honor the diversity of families of all children, provisioning for family engagement in multiple ways (e.g., involvement in program activities, collaborative decisionmaking, and parental education and support).

The fourth pillar, discussed in Chapter 5, underscores the importance of informed, individualized, and continuous pedagogy. The study jurisdictions each have a delineated, child-centered pedagogical framework that specifies philosophy, learning and social goals, and accepted strategies. Moreover, they have an articulated and implemented commitment to meeting the individual needs and enabling the full participation of children of all abilities, circumstances, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

While the implementation of quality pedagogy is often at the behest of individuals who work directly with children, there are important institutional and policy elements associated with quality pedagogy. These include the existence of clear expectations and supportive strategies that foster the implementation of curricula. Further, institutional supports include mechanisms that enable teachers to better individualize their pedagogy (e.g., required individual education plans, individualized screening). A focus on developing strategies that address children's transitions from home to care settings and from ECEC to primary settings is also fostered in quality

settings. Such transition efforts may include linking activities and services, creating structural alignments (e.g., continuous standards/curriculum/assessments), and honoring the diversity of the home.

The final pillar, discussed in Chapter 6, is the production and use of data to support quality improvement. Data, whether on children, programs, or staff, are routinely collected and used to improve practice. Though less routinely collected at the national level, data from and about young children collected at the program level are routinely used to improve pedagogy, and in some cases aggregated child data are used to target services more effectively. Used more frequently at the national level, program and monitoring data are routinely collected by trained personnel, with the results used for program improvement. Indeed, study countries embrace and advance data collection as a means of systemic improvement, so its collection and application is normative. Further, study jurisdictions value and support the production of academic research to guide policy and practice.

Based on this analysis, the five pillars and the associated 15 building blocks appear to be fundamental to the design and development of successful ECEC systems. Together, they hold the key to significant, strategic social change on behalf of children and families. Importantly, they do not represent ephemeral ideas; the pillars and their associated building blocks are concrete and sturdy, alive and well. They are actionable elements of the diverse social strategies that are being fashioned in inventive, contextually responsive ways throughout the globe.

As such, they provide a monumental leap forward in fulfilling the quest for the social strategy needed to create solid, durable early childhood reform. Augmenting the rich scientific base and the strong public will components of the Richmond trilogy that already exist, plentiful strategies have emerged, are being refined, and give hope for the kinds of reform that leaders want and children deserve. Dedicated to children, our own and others', this book is abundantly promising in its content. We hope it will be a guiding contribution to those who wish to create early childhood systems for their nation's children and families.

NOTES

1. The six jurisdictions highlighted in this study have a combined population of approximately 149.8 million, accounting for 1.99% of the world's total population. World Bank. (2017). *Population, total data*. Retrieved from data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL; Office for National Statistics. (2017). *Estimates of the population for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland*. Retrieved from ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland

