

# Preface

**T**he Early Literacy Materials Selector presented in this book as Resource A is the result of numerous prototype drafts and revisions over five years of development. Its origins are in the sea change surrounding early literacy thought and policy at the start of the 21st century. A trilogy of research syntheses—*Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, editors), and *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschooler* (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001)—shed new light on the significance of early literacy for school readiness and future reading achievement and sounded a clarion call for earlier, stronger, better literacy instruction. New preschool literacy programs and materials flowed into the school marketplace in response to the demand for more high-powered early literacy education. But few measuring sticks were available to gauge the quality of early literacy instructional materials for young children.

Early versions of the Early Literacy Materials Selector included criteria for reviewing curriculum elements (goals, objectives, learning activities, assessment) and guidance for instruction in essential early skills as defined by research. Referred to as the Early Literacy Program Review Tool (ELPRT), this prototype underwent several iterations over a three-year period based on desk and field studies, including testing of a CD-ROM version of this prototype (Roskos & Vukelich, 2007). Commentary from professional colleagues and feedback from helpful, thoughtful, patient educators led to the final ELMS prototype, which provides a good start for reviewing the range of early literacy instructional products and materials in early childhood classrooms. It is designed to offer a fairly short and efficient means of reviewing the quality features of instructional materials and making practical decisions about how to thoughtfully use them for purposes of preschool/early primary literacy instruction—a highly sensitive area of early childhood education given its foundational role in school literacy.

## x • Early Literacy Materials Selector (ELMS)

The *ELMS Early Literacy Program Materials Review Tool*—ELMS for short—has evolved over time thanks to the generosity of colleagues, educators, and teacher *friends* who have contributed their expertise, excellent thinking, and energy to its design. Their thoughtful observations have led to substantial revisions and improvements that make ELMS a viable tool. We look forward to new ideas, comments, and feedback from future colleagues who use ELMS in their professional work.

Several faithful professional friends have been involved from the start, and we extend a special thanks to them. Susan B. Neuman and Carol Vukelich contributed to the *idea* of a materials review tool and offered many insights on content and structure. Erin Wilson, a graduate student at the University of Delaware, spent nearly two years helping to transform the idea into *reality*: examining early literacy instructional materials, conducting literature reviews, helping to generate and categorize quality features, and applying features to numerous sample lessons. Mary Park, an instructional technologist in Edinburgh, Scotland, transformed the prototype from a paper-pencil version to a computerized version that made coding, tallying, and calculating more efficient and visually clear. Her work also illuminated the potentials and pitfalls of the ELPRT prototype.

While these professionals helped behind the scenes, others did so in the field—and we are grateful to them for their input. In particular, Christine Boivert, a preschool consultant for the early childhood team at the Oakland Schools in Waterford, Michigan, effectively tested the ELPRT prototype with teacher teams. Her efforts yielded a wealth of information about the technicalities of materials review, as well as possibilities for professional development in the systematic review of instructional materials. We wish to thank, as well, the preschool educators—Shelly Smith, Andi DeLap, and Erica Laughman—who applied ELMS to their early literacy instructional materials and reported their observations, concerns, insights, and “Aha!” moments in considerable detail. And our gratitude to our ever-patient literacy colleagues in the Akron Ready Steps program—Pat Bing, Shelley Houser, Pam Oviatt, Yu-Ling Yeh, Rozlyn Grant, and Linda Reesman—who tested various iterations of the tool time and again, and provided us with invaluable feedback every time.

There is the quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson: *Build a better mousetrap, and the world will beat a path to your door.* So it is . . . and after several years of trial and error, we have a much deeper appreciation of the *build* part in our attempt to design and develop a practical, usable product review tool for early educators who must make the best choices in early literacy instructional materials for young children.