Curriculum as a Collaboration with Families and the Community

5

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Pretest

1. Collaboration with families and finding ways to involve them in the curriculum is an important goal in early childhood education today. T/F
2. Teachers don't need to learn about students' families in order to have an effective curriculum. T/F
3. Offering them information about learning standards helps families understand how the curriculum works. T/F
4. Documenting and displaying what children do conveys a message that their work is important. T/F
5. It is worth the effort to invite families and members of the business and neighborhood communities to serve as volunteers. T/F

Answers can be found at end of the chapter.

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Explain the importance of a collaborative approach to working with families.
2. Summarize accepted principles, effective strategies, and typical challenges for understanding and working with families.
3. Explain how teachers can help families understand the current standards-driven environment.
4. Describe ways in which teachers can help families understand the curriculum.
5. Describe how the community can be incorporated as a resource for your curriculum.

After completing your home visits, you realize that you now have a lot of additional information about the families of the children who will be in your class. You know which children have a single parent as the household head and have some information about family occupations and work schedules. You now know who lives with siblings and/or an extended family and which children have pets. You have also identified the parents and children with limited English proficiency, and you have some information about what steps have been taken to support the two children with special needs.

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There are many ways for early childhood educators to connect with families and the community, as we will discuss in this chapter.

But you also have many remaining questions about how the families will respond to you as the teacher and how to create and sustain productive and satisfying relationships. You want the families to feel like partners in the adventure of early childhood education, but you also realize that there may be many factors that could complicate your efforts.

What can you do to learn more about the values, traditions, hopes, and wishes of your families? What strategies to include them in their children's school lives will be most successful? How will you help them understand the curriculum as partners in their children's learning? How will you make connections between the school, your families, and the local community?

In this chapter, we will address the very important challenge of how to construct meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with families and the community, particularly with respect to curriculum. (Note: In this chapter, all references to interactions and communications with families are made on the assumption that they would be conducted in or translated to the home language as needed.)

5.1 What Is a Collaborative Approach and Why Is It Important?

An expanding number of households have both parents working outside the home. Between 1950 and 2000, the number of women in the workforce increased by an astounding 256 percent, from 18.3 to 65.6 million; it is projected to increase by another 39.5 percent by 2050 (Toosi, 2002, p. 16). Therefore it can be challenging to effect a significant representation of families in the affairs of programs and schools. In one survey for example, approximately 70 percent of families indicated that they never helped out at school, while only 4 percent described themselves as highly active (Epstein, 2001).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that there is no single formula for collaboration between programs and families. However, as part of their recent Engaging Diverse Families project, they have outlined six principles that focus on communication, engagement, and decision making. The principles suggest that:

1. Teachers and programs engage families in two-way communication
2. Programs implement a comprehensive program-level system of family engagement
3. Programs and teachers engage families in ways that are truly reciprocal
4. Programs provide learning activities for the home and in the community
5. Programs invite families to participate in program-level decisions and wider advocacy efforts
6. Programs invite families to participate in decision making and goal setting for their children (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012)

Many years of research and well over one hundred studies on initiatives connecting families, schools, and communities overwhelmingly attest to the value and benefits of strong, positive connections (Fiese, Eckert, & Spagnola, 2006), not just for the children but for the parents and teachers as well. When families are actively involved in the daily lives of their children in school or care and they know what their children are doing during the day, children feel more secure, have a higher sense of self-worth, and learn better. Parents can benefit from feelings of affirmation, increased knowledge about early education and child development, and higher self-esteem. Teachers feel supported and gain additional, relevant knowledge and resources from working closely with families (Gestwicki, 2004).

These kinds of positive correlations with student achievement are most closely associated with programs that feature:

- Support and respect for family values and expectations
- Attention to and observation of parent behaviors and interactions
- Promotion of parent and family participation in school activities and affairs
- Inclusion of parents in decision-making processes that affect their children (Weiss, Krieder, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005)

Early Collaboration: Parent-Teacher Associations

Like other aspects of early childhood education, the characteristics of parent/family involvement in schools have evolved over a long period of time (Olsen & Fuller, 2008). In the 1800s, when schools were primarily isolated and rural, the men in a community typically had control over all school matters. As more schools were built to accommodate the population growth that occurred with large-scale immigration, schools were located increasingly in urban areas.

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In the days of mostly rural schools, the community shared all responsibility for the education of its children. This photo documents the author's great grandfather using his tractor in 1918 to move the local one-room "Liberty" school across the prairie to its new location.

In response to growing concerns about social issues and the welfare of children, women—who did not yet have the right to vote—began to organize and advocate. Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst established the

National **Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)** in 1897. The goals established at that time (and subsequently achieved over the following century) were:

- The creation of kindergarten classes
- Child labor laws
- A public health service
- Hot-lunch programs
- A juvenile justice system
- Mandatory immunization

By the 1950s, parent involvement in elementary schools through PTA membership had swelled to more than 6 million members. As many women returned to homemaking after World War II, they became increasingly involved in their children's schools in both volunteer support and PTA leadership roles. Today, the PTA continues as a national organization, with the mission to "make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children."

In addition, local parent-teacher organizations, loosely referred to as PTOs, have established a parallel network of independent groups. Most recently, federal funding for Title 1 schools through the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act mandates that schools receiving funding should establish parental involvement policies that focus on:

- Assisting their child's learning
- Being actively involved in their child's education at school
- Serving as full partners in their child's education and being included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child (National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, 2012)

In child care centers, no such national grassroots effort took place. Public funding for child care began during the Great Depression through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and with the Lanham Act of 1940, which established child care for the many women working in factories to support the war effort (Cohen, 1996). These programs were temporary, ending with the crises that spurred their establishment. However, federal funding for early education, starting with Head Start, expanded the missions of programs to include a focus on families.

The Goals of a Collaborative Approach

According to the NAEYC, the goals of a collaborative approach to home/school/community involvement should be to increase learning and reduce the achievement gap that still persists in our society (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). One of the core considerations of DAP is the need to understand sociocultural family contexts as essential to developing curriculum and experiences that are meaningful and relevant. Curriculum should be "clearly defined for, communicated to, and understood by all stakeholders, including families" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 20).

Engaging the entire family, particularly fathers, is a very high priority today. As Glenn Olsen and Mary Lou Fuller (2008, p. 11) have stated, "Educators are experts in . . . the education of children, and parents are the experts on their children. However, because past experiences have given either parents or teachers disproportionate power in the relationship, both now have to learn to work as a team."

5.2 Understanding and Collaborating with Families

Many collaboration approaches have been devised, implemented, and studied over the past half-century. With shifts in priorities and technological advances, the details about how early care and education programs connect with families continue to change and evolve. But in general the emphasis and goals have been to promote mutually inclusive, collaborative, and productive relationships (Gestwicki, 2004). When teachers understand the cultural context and dynamics of families, they can use that knowledge to create opportunities and encourage family involvement in their children's learning.

Children with Special Needs

While all children, families, and teachers benefit from high-quality, ongoing interactions, this dynamic might be considered absolutely essential for children with special needs. In a recent study of nine child-care centers that serve children with disabilities (Bradley & Kibera, 2007), the researchers learned that understanding and attention to family culture was the key to successful inclusion. The provision of an individualized approach, ongoing communication, and the flexibility needed to adapt to different needs depended on understanding family values and beliefs, sociohistorical influences, and attitudes about seeking help. Therefore taking a collaborative approach to curriculum will naturally fit in with the needs of families with children who have special needs.

Understanding Families

Two theories in particular are helpful to teachers for understanding the families with which they work: Uri Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory (introduced in Chapter 1) and **family systems theory (FST)**, used widely in family therapy settings (Christian, 2007; Fiese, Eckert, & Spagnola, 2006; Grant & Ray, 2010; Hill, Stremmel, & Fu, 2007; Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005). Taking a family-centered approach departs from older, more traditional parent involvement models by shifting emphasis from the program to the families (Hill, Stremmel, & Fu, 2007). Further, a family-centered approach respects families as decision makers and culture bearers and assumes that all members of the family should benefit from home-school collaboration.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

Bronfenbrenner's theory makes particular sense as a foundation for thinking about home/school/community relationships because it represents the child's experience in the context of interrelated influences. When teachers understand and apply these influences to the particular community environments in which they teach, they can use this knowledge to customize their strategies for the development of relationships with families. Table 5.1 lists the priorities, suggested by ecological theory, for educators who want to develop family involvement in their programs (Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005).

Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory describes family dynamics and provides insights about family structures. Teachers and programs can apply their understanding of family systems to develop productive and collaborative relationships. From a family systems perspective, educators recognize that while the families they serve today are increasingly diverse, all have elements in common that may be represented and operate in different ways (Christian, 2007; Grant & Ray, 2010).

Table 5.1: How Ecological Theory Plays Out in Family Involvement Programs

Sphere of Influence	System Features	Family Involvement Program Features
Microsystem	Home and immediate surroundings	• Develop family-focused services • Tailor different kinds of support for moms vs. dads • Provide teacher professional development focusing on family systems
Mesosystem	Relationships among immediate contexts	• Reduce barriers to family participation • Cultivate welcoming settings • Communicate effectively • Promote decision-making skills • Help navigate program activities
Exosystem	Links between contexts that do and do not include the child	• Focus on family strengths • Identify the social supports families need • Promote civic engagement • Celebrate family cultures
Macrosystem	Links among other systems	• Ensure that classroom culture is informed by the community • Encourage familiarity with children's lives at home • Provide balance of individual/larger group interactions • Embed family values and culture in classroom activities, goals and expectations • Self-awareness of teacher values/biases

Source: Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005.

When teachers use strategies such as home visits, child interviews, or questionnaires, they can acquire information for six specific areas of focus within FST about how families establish and maintain:

1. Boundaries: Across families, the desired level of involvement with schools varies, as families have different ideas about the lines that should be drawn between home and school. Understanding why a family might or might not want to be involved in school activities can help teachers make decisions about how to encourage involvement.
2. Roles: Children's behavior and interactions at school reflect what they know about and how they experience roles they inhabit at home. Children may emulate these roles at school, as helpers, caretakers, peacemakers, problem solvers, or, conversely, victims or even bullies. Teachers who work to identify positive role models among their families can offer opportunities at school where family members can apply these skills in roles that are already familiar to them.
3. Rules: Both families and programs have explicit and unspoken rules that children have to integrate. This will be harder when a rule at school is very different from one at home—for example, a child who is allowed to fight with siblings at home but clearly not with other children in the care or educational setting. When these discrepancies are identified, communications can be focused on balancing what the child understands about expectations and interactions.

4. Hierarchies: The ways families make decisions, who makes them, and who holds and wields power is greatly influenced by diversity and circumstances. Teachers learn, for example, which family member assumes responsibility as primary contact.
5. Climate: Physical and emotional environments vary widely across families and can change with circumstances, as in the loss of a job or a significant illness in the family. Teachers can convey sensitivity and respect for a family's need for privacy or assistance when they identify and understand the stresses families experience.
6. Equilibrium: Rituals, customs, and traditions provide consistency, security, and balance. Gaining insights into the importance of these things can be helpful to a teacher for planning activities that represent the diversity among students' families.

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Understanding the rules that exist in a child's home, such as those about interacting with siblings, can help a care provider to teach the child the rules in the care setting.

Involving Families at School

Family involvement models and approaches today aim to achieve what the Reggio Emilia educators call an "amiable school," envisioning programs that welcome, incorporate, and reflect everyone's ideas—those of children, families, teachers, and community (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Hill, Stremmel, & Fu, 2007). Teachers and families might take a grassroots approach, constructing their own vision and strategies for how to promote collaboration and involvement. Or, planning for family involvement might be done within the framework of an established model if the teacher works in a program that uses one.

Grassroots Approach

Frameworks for collaboration with families typically include some or all of the six types of parent involvement proposed by Joyce Epstein (2001) for the National Network of Partnership Schools initiative:

1. Parent education: Providing information or training about topics important to parents in structured or informal ways.
2. Communication: Understanding the ways in which parents and teachers interact with one another and share information.
3. Volunteering: Inviting family participation at the educational setting including social events, classroom support, clerical work, and so on.
4. Learning at home: Finding ways to involve parents in activities that support their learning at school.
5. Decision making: Inviting parent participation in all levels of decisions, from those related to individual children to advisory councils or committees that participate in establishing and enacting policies and initiatives.

6. Collaborating with the community: Inviting families to help the program establish relationships with merchants, organizations, and public services such as libraries or health centers.

Teachers and programs seek input from families about what kinds of involvement would best serve their needs, recruit parents who might be interested in leadership roles, and work together to develop and implement plans.

Family Involvement Models

Some programs, especially those funded by the state or federal government, or grants, establish and operate comprehensive family involvement programs with different kinds of features. If you work in a Head Start program, for example, there are clearly defined policies about how teachers and the program will collaborate with families. In a pilot or experimental program such as Leaps and Bounds, the framework might be more open-ended as the program is developed.

Table 5.2 displays a range of examples of family involvement models with a short description of each (Gestwicki, 2004; Lim, 2008; Narvaez, Feldman, & Theriot, 2007; Rhodes, Enz, & LaCount, 2007).

Table 5.2: Examples of Family Involvement Models

Program	Description
Even Start	Federally funded Title I home-based program that promotes family literacy; GED programs, and workforce skills development (over 800 sites).
No Child Left Behind (NCLB)	Among mandated activities are annual informative meetings for parents; involvement in planning, review, and improvement of schools; opportunities for parent input/suggestions.
Head Start (3-to 5-year olds)	Includes parents directly in program decision making; provides opportunities to work with child as volunteer with career-ladder support; planned parent activities; ongoing communication; leadership via parent committees and policy council.
Early Head Start (infant/toddlers)	Similar to Head Start but with home-based services.
Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Program (ECFE)	Started in the Minneapolis Public Schools in 1974 with classes and activities for parents of children from birth to 5 years of age. Expanded statewide and used as a model for other states to establish parent education programs.
AVANCE	Private nonprofit organization started by Gloria Rodriguez and the Zale Foundation in 1973 to serve primarily Hispanic families in San Antonio; programs as of 2012 in Texas, New Mexico, and California with partnerships in several other states around the country; focuses on parent education.
Virtual Pre-K	Started in the Chicago public schools, now available nationwide with free online resources developed by master teachers in English and Spanish and modeling of high-quality activities parents can do with their children.
Leaps and Bounds	Developed by Arizona State University, provides support workshops for minority and underserved families in the Phoenix area, focusing on kindergarten readiness and accompanied by a research initiative.

Barriers and Challenges

There is widespread agreement that home/school/community programs succeed only when mutual trust is well established among those involved (Dombro & Lerner, 2005; Fiese, Eckert, & Spagnola, 2006; Sciarra & Dorsey, 2007). Other factors are important as well. Parent education efforts, especially literacy-focused programs, require that educators appreciate and respect many "ways of knowing" and the life experiences of parents—a sociocultural perspective that doesn't regard teachers as the only authentic source of knowledge or information (Grant & Ray, 2010; Ordonez-Jasis & Ortiz, 2007). Involvement programs that establish clear goals (Fiese, Eckert, & Spagnola, 2006; Ordonez-Jasis & Ortiz, 2007) and boundaries (Christian, 2007; Sciarra & Dorsey, 2007) help create a climate for partnership and define vision and purpose.

Educators have also learned many lessons over time about pitfalls—the factors that can challenge those working to establish relationships and create practical and meaningful family and community-friendly activities and processes. Memories of past experiences with school, particularly negative ones, are powerful disincentives, especially for those who might feel marginalized to begin with by limited education or language proficiency (Gestwicki, 2004; Grant & Ray, 2010).

Some parents who might otherwise be very interested in participating in their child's classroom might be limited by logistical considerations, such as access to transportation or work schedules (Gestwicki, 2004; Grant & Ray, 2010). Other factors, such as a lack of self-confidence, self-consciousness about family structures or alternative lifestyles, perceptions parents may have about teachers' "turf," or cultural norms and expectations may also be present but are even more difficult to acknowledge or recognize (Clay, 2007; Gestwicki, 2004; Grant & Ray, 2010).

5.3 Helping Families Understand Curriculum, Goals, and Expectations

If we want families and the community to be more involved in our children's early education, we need to help them understand the nature and purpose of learning standards and how they affect the curriculum as well as the systems in place for achieving accountability to the standards. For instance, we need to explain that a curriculum standard is a statement that reflects society's current values about what children should know and be able to do. Families also need to know that standards do not dictate the specific curriculum a program or school uses but that school districts, child care, and preschool programs choose or design a curriculum that will address and meet learning standards. Finally, families deserve to know how their children's growth and progress are documented with respect to standards.

Aligning (Mapping) Curriculum with Standards

Standards are written to allow educators to make decisions on behalf of each individual child. At the local/site/classroom level, teachers should share the ways in which they interpret the standards. Sometimes teachers do this by identifying how the curriculum connects with specific standards or desired learning and development outcomes—a process called **alignment** or **mapping**. Commercially produced curricula for early childhood may include written documentation of this process. For example, the Creative Curriculum includes documents that connect the objectives, dimensions, and performance indicators of the program with the

specific domains and domain elements that Head Start programs are mandated to meet. Table 5.3 provides a selected example.

Table 5.3: Creative Curriculum Alignment (for 3-Year-Olds)

Head Start Domain Element	Examples of Objectives and Dimensions from the Creative Curriculum for Preschool	Examples from the Creative Curriculum for Preschool
Receptive language: the ability to comprehend or understand language	8. Listens to and understands increasingly complex language 8a. Comprehends language 8b. Follows directions	• Mighty minute 73 "Are You Ready?" • Intentional Teaching "My Turn at the Microphone" • Intentional Teaching "Introducing New Vocabulary"
Expressive language: the ability to use language	9. Uses language to express thoughts and needs 9a. Uses an expanding expressive vocabulary 9b. Speaks clearly 9c. Uses conventional grammar 9d. Tells about another time or place 10. Uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills 10a. Engages in conversations 10b. Uses social rules of language	• Trees Study: Day 4, Investigation 1 (Large-group discussion and Shared Writing, p. 34) • Buildings Study: Day 4, Investigation 3 (Large-group discussion and Shared Writing, p. 58) • Intentional Teaching "Introducing New Vocabulary"

Source: Teaching Strategies, 2012.

In classrooms that use curricula designed by individuals, parents should also have the opportunity to know whether the curriculum is consistent with the mission and goals of the program and the extent to which it aligns with or supports standards used in the state or local community. Regardless of the type of curriculum, this requires that the teachers and program administrators plan for and implement intentional communication about the curriculum. Information about the selected curriculum model or approach should be included in official program documents such as a family handbook, written curriculum guide or overview, or program websites. Teachers can provide parents with examples of standards that are being used in their classrooms and point out how they relate specifically to the activities that are planned for the children. Some teachers create classroom or hallway displays that indicate how an activity is related to a particular standard or group of standards.

See the annotated list of "Websites for Creating Classroom Blogs" at the end of this chapter for examples of the way in which programs describe or explain their approaches to curriculum.

Accountability: Testing and Assessment

Parents are entitled to accurate reporting designed to help them understand how the curriculum is working on behalf of their children. Teachers and programs need to provide information to families to help them understand the accountability measures in use and how that information is specifically relevant to the curriculum and its goals/objectives.

This responsibility is complicated by many factors. In the public schools, standardized tests are used that report results in terms of the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Report cards are issued for schools and states, beginning with third-grade data intended to provide information about which schools and districts are making **adequate yearly progress (AYP)**, with accompanying options for parents who wish to transfer their children from schools designated as low-performing to schools that report higher achievement.

Although test reporting in the public schools doesn't officially begin until third grade, many public and private schools feel pressure to use standardized tests with younger children for a variety of reasons that may or may not be related to determining progress, including:

- Determining entry-level readiness for a class of 4-year-olds, kindergarten, or first grade
- Screening children who must meet minimal score requirements for eligibility to charter, magnet, or private schools
- Identification of special needs, including giftedness
- "Coaching" to help children perform better on standardized tests to be administered later

These kinds of activities are described as **high-stakes testing**—when the outcome of an individual child's performance on a single measure can have significant effects on decisions that will affect the child's future access to educational opportunities. Often—especially in communities with high numbers of immigrant or low-socioeconomic, undereducated families and families navigating the elementary school choice system for the first time—parents aren't aware of the potential implications of high-stakes testing.

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Teachers, children, and families are increasingly affected by high-stakes testing. Educators and families can benefit from a shared understanding of how external pressures and mandates affect goals and curriculum.

The terminology of curriculum standards can also be confusing to parents and families. While educators use professional jargon and terms such as AYP, alignment, **benchmarks**, **differentiating instruction**, and high-stakes testing, it is best to communicate with families about standards-based curriculum in plain language; this helps to establish meaningful dialogue (Grant & Ray, 2010).

Developmentally Appropriate Accountability

Assessment and communicating information about assessments is a focus in Chapter 12, but here it is important to note that early childhood educators are mindful of the developmental issues associated with accountability and standards. The NAEYC position statements provide clearly articulated guidance about:

- The types of assessment that are appropriate for young children
- How programs can and should communicate, incorporate, and share assessment information with families

- How assessments should be linked to curriculum
- How early learning standards can be developed to maintain fidelity to developmentally sound principles about how young children learn (NAEYC/NAECS/SDE, 2002).

For early childhood programs seeking national accreditation through the NAEYC, standard 4 is devoted to the identification of criteria that programs must meet to document that they:

- Develop and use a written assessment system that describes the purposes, procedures, and uses of assessments and results
- Use developmentally appropriate methods aligned with curricular goals
- Are sensitive to and informed by family culture and home language
- Use the information gathered to plan and modify the curriculum
- Include information from families to inform the assessment process
- Provide regular opportunities for two-way communication with families about children's progress

5.4 Helping Families to Understand the Curriculum

As you begin to develop reciprocal relationships with families, you will want to share information about developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) with regard to curriculum; this will provide a foundation for further discussion (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Gestwicki, 2011).

For example, programs and teachers can:

- Include a statement in promotional or informational materials that curriculum for young children is based on research about child development and is designed to complement and support how they learn best.
- Invite parents to tour the classroom, emphasizing features that reflect DAP, such as displays at the child's eye level, carefully organized and labeled materials that promote independence, and a variety of materials that appeal to children in different ways.
- Provide resource information about DAP in a notebook or parent library.
- Post information in the classroom about developmental characteristics relevant to the age of the children in the group.
- Create and display printed labels for classroom centers that briefly describe how activities promote development in different ways.
- Include a statement on interest inventories or family questionnaires that information gathered is used to construct goals and make decisions about curricular activities.
- Establish a communications notebook or log that goes back and forth between home and school.
- In parent-teacher conferences, describe a specific example of a decision you made that was based on an observation about each child's development (Seplocha, 2007).
- Enlist parents' support and input to establish learning and social/emotional goals for individual children (Kaczmarek, 2007).

In short, building relationships with families should include the use of multiple strategies that clearly communicate the importance of knowledge about child development as the foundation

for learning. By sharing information about how children learn, one creates a logical context for providing visual documentation about what they are learning.

The Power of Documentation

Making the curriculum visible in the classroom and other appropriate areas of the school sends a powerful message to all—children, families, and community—that what young children learn and do is important. As mentioned in Chapter 2, visual documentation of learning is a concept associated with and highly developed in the Reggio Emilia programs (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Essentially, Reggio Emilia teachers construct displays that recount what and how children learn during long-term project work. The displays include images, scripts of children's words, teacher reflections, and examples of children's work. They focus on how a project was initiated and how the children think about what occurred over time. Judy Helm (2007) describes this process for American teachers as "windows on learning."

The use of visual documentation does not need to be restricted only to those programs that use an emergent curriculum or long-term project work. From a practical perspective, making curricular activities visible to others can be a powerful communications strategy in any early childhood setting. Visual documentation helps visitors understand the curriculum and inspires confidence that you are teaching from a developmental perspective, meeting children's individual needs, and meeting learning standards and/or program outcomes.

Reggio Emilia-style documentation was originally constructed on panels—display boards that included cut-and-pasted photographs and text accompanied by displays of two-dimensional work or pictures of three-dimensional work. More recently, selected projects have been published by Reggio Emilia in book form, including *The Theater Curtain* (2002); *Reggio Tutti: A Guide to the City by the Children* (2000); *Everything Has a Shadow Except Ants* (1999); *The Future Is a Lovely Day* (2001); and *Dialogues with Places* (2008).

Using Technologies for Documentation and Communication

With advances in user-friendly technologies, teachers now have at their disposal many options for creating documentation (Berson & Berson, 2010). Many tools are currently available that can serve to streamline the process and help families feel a part of the daily learning experiences of their children.

Certainly the digital camera has revolutionized the way in which teachers capture the essence of classroom activities. The ability to take, store, edit, print, and insert images in a variety of applications suggests many possibilities for sharing the curriculum with families. Teachers can also scan children's two-dimensional work.

But pictures alone don't tell the whole story. Consider Figure 5.1. The image depicts a block structure built by children. Without a description, it could be interpreted in any number of ways. When the teacher adds a simple printed description to the figure (label A), more information is conveyed. Further expanding the label to include a short reflective statement about what the image represents (label B) connects the activity with the curriculum in a way that is meaningful. Label C fully describes the learning represented in the photo as well as the skills and knowledge the children used.

By posting captioned photographs, teachers can give families a glimpse into the everyday lives of their young children at school or in child care. Extended documentation of children's work

Figure 5.1: Labeling

Labels A, B, and C represent three increasingly informative levels of description that complement the visual depiction of a classroom activity.

Label A
Children in the 4/5K class worked in the block center this morning.

Label B
This 4-story block tower represents a zoo. It was constructed during the work cycle period over two days by three kindergarten children.

Label C
Three kindergarteners who have been developing their skills in the block center all year demonstrate their knowledge of balance, symmetry and classification in this 4-story construction. These are major math concepts included in the kindergarten math standards. The children solved several structural problems as they worked over two days to complete the tower. The decision to add animals and people was made after the 4 levels were complete, but before the enclosing pieces were placed. At one point, they posted a sign that said, "wrk n prgrs." After they decided to add animals, the children carefully counted out pairs of identical animals, sorting them by size and type, putting animals from like habitats together.

and play over time goes even further, showing how the curriculum supports children's interests, development, and holistic learning. Feature Box 5.1 tells the story of how two teachers used a blog to document a curriculum study with a group of 5- and 6-year-olds.

Teachers can now use many forms of technology to connect families with the classroom and the curriculum (Grant & Ray, 2010). Ebooks, like the one you're reading now, show how technology is expanding our ability to provide remote access to learning materials. Of course teachers must follow school or program policies to protect privacy and restrict public access to online applications. Some programs are also creating policies regarding family and staff use of social networking sites (National Coalition of Campus Child Development Centers Listserve Communications, March, 2012).

The level of technological support will likely vary by setting. But to the extent that such applications are available, any or all of the following can be used to link home and school:

- Newsletters (see example in Figure 5.3) can include descriptions of activities; features on children, families, and teachers; favorite stories and songs; upcoming events; classroom recipes; and much more.
- Classroom or program websites can include both permanent and time-sensitive information (see annotated list of websites at the end of this chapter).
- Blogs (see list at end of chapter for free online blogging sites).

Blogging

Two teachers, Mary and Jane, embarked on a month-long field-based investigation of the city parks in their community. The parks were all within walking distance of the child development center and easily accessible via public transportation. Family members were invited to participate in the planned excursions, but the teachers realized that not everyone would be able to do so.

Jane and Mary wanted all parents to feel that they were involved with this project, so they used a free online service to set up a password-protected classroom blog. For parents without computer access, daily pages were printed and kept in a notebook at the classroom sign-in area. Parents could review them as desired at dropoff or pickup times. The teachers posted photographs and daily entries dictated by the children. They scanned and uploaded children's drawings and excerpts from their journals to the blog.

The blog also included teacher reflections, copies of articles they had read that informed their planning, and links to online resources they had used to develop and conduct the study. Other artifacts from their work, such as organizational charts and brainstorming lists that were too big to scan, were displayed in the classroom and photographed to upload to the blog. Figure 5.2 includes a sample entry from the blog.

▶ Stop and Reflect

1. Since a blog represents an online forum for sharing ideas or experiences with others and may be interactive, it has many potential applications. Can you think of a way you might use a blog in your classroom or care setting?
2. Do you think there might be potential privacy issues associated with blogging about the children in your care or classroom? How might such issues be addressed?

Figure 5.2: Blog Entry

In this blog entry from the first week of the study, a few of the children went with one of the teachers on a test run of the bus system to get maps from the City Visitor Center. Many of the subsequent posts were dictated by children to the teacher.

Serptember 21, 2012 4/5K class blog

The Park Project Blog

Main Parking & Visitor Center 1 MILE AHEAD

Search

About | Our Classroom | Meet the Teachers | Photo Gallery | Upcoming Events | Archives

Bird's Eye View
by The Butterfly Class

The first week of Summer we showed the children some maps and talked to them about "birds-eye-view." We looked at maps we had picked up on a field trip to the Visitor's Center and also at Google maps and Google earth. We asked the children to draw their own "birds-eye-view" maps. You will notice that the children generally combine birds-eye-view and side view. They draw their beds and other things they have seen from above as birds-eye-view and they draw everything else from a side view. We really enjoyed looking at these maps.

Cielings Light Shelf Ny bor My Bed Bear Jen's

Upcoming Events

September

					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Contact Us

Name

Email

Question/Comment

- Email distribution list to families in addition to individual communications.
- Text or instant-messaging for real-time announcements.
- Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, or other social networking applications to connect with families and connect them to one another.

Figure 5.3: Newsletter

Many teachers publish a newsletter—daily, weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly—with user-friendly software programs. This is a sample newsletter, the *Sunflower Gazette,* about a 3-year-old class.

Septermber 21, 2012 3-year-old class newsletter

Sunflower Gazette

In the classroom:

Mini Rockets: Each child created a miniature rocket out of a toilet paper tube and film canister. They decorated these, and will launch them for our grand finale of space after spring break!

Moon Cake: We enjoyed a delicious snack of "moon cake" on Thursday. It was mentioned in a book we read about a bear who woke up in hibernation surrounded by snow and thought he was on the moon! He ate "moon cake" there as well.

Moon Rocks and Astronauts

As you may have guessed, we are now studying outer space! After many weeks of the children pretending they were on a trip to the moon while pushing them on the tire swings, we realized the interest wasn't going away. A few of our students even knew the names of the planets; naturally, everyone started taking a great interest. We have been doing many fun space related activities.

The Sunflower astronauts helped us create their own class rocket ship for imaginary trips to the moon! The astronauts are learning to count down from 5, play a space board game to enhance 1:1 counting and numeral recognition, and have learned the four phases of the moon.

Why Does the Moon Change Shape?

See what we've been reading!

Student of the Week: David

What is your favorite food? "Pizza"
What is your favorite color? "Orange"
Who is in your family? "Mommy and Daddy and big sister and me"
What is your favorite book? "The Hungry Caterpillar"

1

Informational and Interactive Events and Programs

As described in Table 5.2, many well-known models for formal family involvement include components focused on parent education. These priorities may include such things as general education, improving literacy and/or facility with English, career-ladder opportunities, or parenting skills. The focus or intent of these kinds of programs is different from parent education about the child's curriculum.

In this section, we briefly consider programs and experiences intended to inform and engage parents/families in dialogue about the curriculum itself. These types of activities fall into three broad categories: (1) providing access to curriculum resources, (2) planned events that engage families in first-hand experiences with the curriculum, and (3) sending the curriculum home (Berger, 2008; Gestwicki, 2004; Sciarra & Dorsey, 2007; Wentworth, 2006).

Providing Access to Curriculum Resources

First, parents should be able to see printed information about the curriculum and relevant books, articles, or other references they can read or review at any time. If a purchased curriculum is being used, samples of teacher resource books, printed assessment materials, and examples of print materials that children use should be accessible at school for parents to view.

Teachers who develop their own curricula should make a description of the approach or model and assessment system available in writing. An organized notebook of print resources, such as articles that inform the curriculum and examples of children's activities, can help parents understand its goals. A specific location for resource information should be created that is clearly designated for parent/family/community use. If a separate room is not available, this space could be in the entry or reception area, a book rack in a hallway or office, or in classroom observation areas if the site is so equipped.

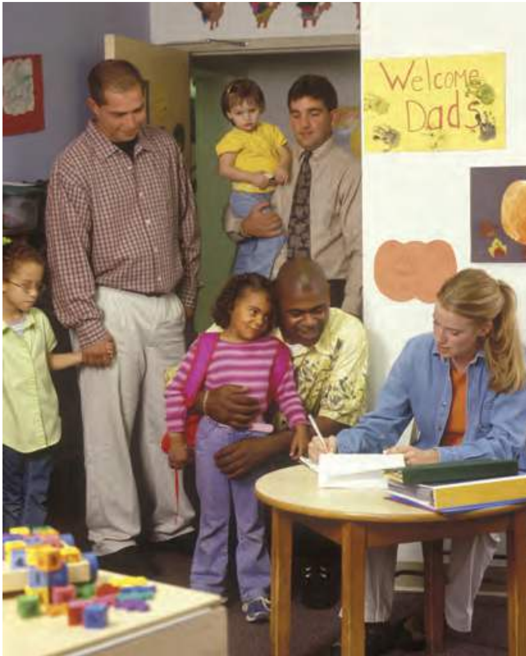
The point is that parents need to sense that you want to share information about curriculum with them, that you make an effort to do so, and that the information you provide is current and accurate. If at all manageable, a circulating or lending system can reach family members who can't get to the resource location.

Planned Events That Engage Families

Events provide information and/or hands-on activities that give parents the opportunity to learn about and interpret the curriculum first hand. Ideally, parents and teachers together should have input about topics.

Examples of this kind of activity can include:

- Social events—such as a picnic, pancake supper, or cookout—designed to develop a sense of community at school.
- An orientation meeting or information session to share general information about the curriculum and/or particular elements such as literacy, math, or art.
- Informal discussion groups focused on a specific topic (such as temper tantrums or toilet training) or sharing a film or reading an article of relevance or timeliness.
- A panel discussion with representatives from local schools focused on helping parents prepare for children's transitions to elementary school.
- A back-to-school night or open house intended to familiarize family members with classroom organization, materials, and activities that are part of the children's daily experience.



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Teachers can create many different kinds of informal occasions to give families the opportunity to become familiar with and participate in their children's activities.

- Hands-on workshops that engage parents in activities demonstrating how children learn, such as story reading, a math/science cooking night, or even finger painting.
- Special events that highlight children's work, such as an art exhibit, harvesting the classroom garden, or celebrating children's writing.

These events also provide for informal discussion and question-and-answer opportunities with the teacher. When teachers and families engage in ongoing dialogue about the curriculum, children benefit indirectly from insights they gain and a sense of shared purpose.

Sending the Curriculum Home

Inventive teachers also employ practical strategies to directly extend children's curriculum activities from school to home. Academic homework is inappropriate for young children. But you could, for example, create a "traveling suitcase" or book bag (Gestwicki, 2004) with items that a child might not have at home but that the family would enjoy using together, such as a favorite book and puppet or puzzle. You might also provide paper, markers, and envelopes for a drawing and note to put in the classroom mailbox for a friend. You can ask parents if it would be appropriate to make a special call to children at home as an incentive for learning their phone number, or send a postcard when they can tell you their address. You might send home a photograph of the child at school, with paper and a pen for the parents to record how the child describes what he or she was doing.

Families as Primary Curriculum Resources

If you reach out to the families in your classroom, you will find that they enrich your curriculum tremendously. Every group of children brings a host of familial language, cultural, occupational, and personal knowledge that, when combined, forms a unique community in ways both obvious and subtle. Luis Moll and colleagues described this perspective toward family involvement as a "funds of knowledge" approach (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Grant, Ray, 2010; Ordonez-Jasiz & Ortiz, 2007), cautioning that failure to recognize parents as a significant resource constitutes a deficit approach (pp. 4–5).

If you were writing a case study paper for a course assignment, you would certainly rely on **primary** or first-hand **sources** (e.g., observation, interviews, and so on) as the most reliable information for your description of the study subject(s). Similarly, you can consider your children's families as primary resources for the curriculum. The knowledge and insights you gain about them should serve as a major influence for the decisions you make to plan and adapt activities so that the curriculum is relevant, meaningful, and respectful.

Antibias Curriculum

Further support for these perspectives comes from the antibias curriculum guidelines developed by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards (2010). The premise of antibias curriculum is that a central focus of our work should be "to support children's full development

in our multiracial, multilingual, multicultural world and to give them the tools to stand up to prejudice, stereotyping, bias, and eventually to institutional 'isms'"(p. vii).

The four broad goals of antibias curriculum can inform our work with families as curriculum resources:

"Each child will:

1. Demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
2. Express comfort and joy with human diversity, accurate language for human differences, and deep, caring human connectedness.
3. Increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
4. Demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions." (pp. 4–5)

While there are many dimensions of the curriculum that can be enhanced with family support, learning about the families of the young children you teach is one effective way to individualize curriculum and promote the goals outlined above.

Learning About and Connecting with Families

There are several useful strategies you can use to gather information to help you connect your curriculum with the children and their families. In this section we will consider three: (1) questionnaires and interviews, (2) family mapping, and (3) storytelling.

Asking parents to complete an informational questionnaire or to participate in an interview, either at school or during a home visit, can be extremely useful. The purpose of these activities should be twofold: to gather information about the child and to learn about the family. Including a brief introductory statement that describes the purpose of the interview or questionnaire can answer questions parents might have about its intent.

Family survey questions should be framed in a manner that gives parents control over how they report information. For example, asking to list family members who live in the home and indicate their relationship to the child is preferable to listing family roles such as "mother," "father," "sisters," "brothers," with an adjacent fill-in blank.

Table 5.4 lists several examples of questions about children and families you might want to ask.

Table 5.4: Examples of Interview or Family Survey Questions

Questions about the Child	Questions about the Family
1. What are your child's favorite activities? 2. What are your child's least favorite activities? 3. Who does your child like to play with? 4. What are your child's food preferences? 5. Does your child have any particular fears? 6. Does your child enjoy being read to or telling stories? 7. Describe your child's personality. 8. What does your child seem to be most interested in learning about?	1. List the names of the family members who live in your home and their relationship to your child. 2. What is your family's country of origin? 3. What language(s) are spoken in your home? 4. Describe your family's favorite recreational activities or hobbies. 5. How does your family observe holidays? 6. How do the members of your family share family history? 7. What kind of work do members of your family do?

As you gather information, you can begin to represent it by using a **graphic organizer** or chart to create maps for individual families (Bennett, 2007) and/or your class as a whole. In this way, you can start to see patterns and opportunities for ways to connect your curriculum, children, and families. Figure 5.4 displays a map for an individual child/family in our imaginary class. Figure 5.5 provides an example of the kinds of things you might learn about the group of seventeen children in our opening vignette.

Figure 5.4: Family Map

From this family map you can see that Joseph lives with a bilingual extended family. They own a landscaping business. His mother is a nurse and she is expecting their third child. The family enjoys camping and fishing. The family reports that Joseph is generally happy but fights with his brother. He seems to have science-related interests.

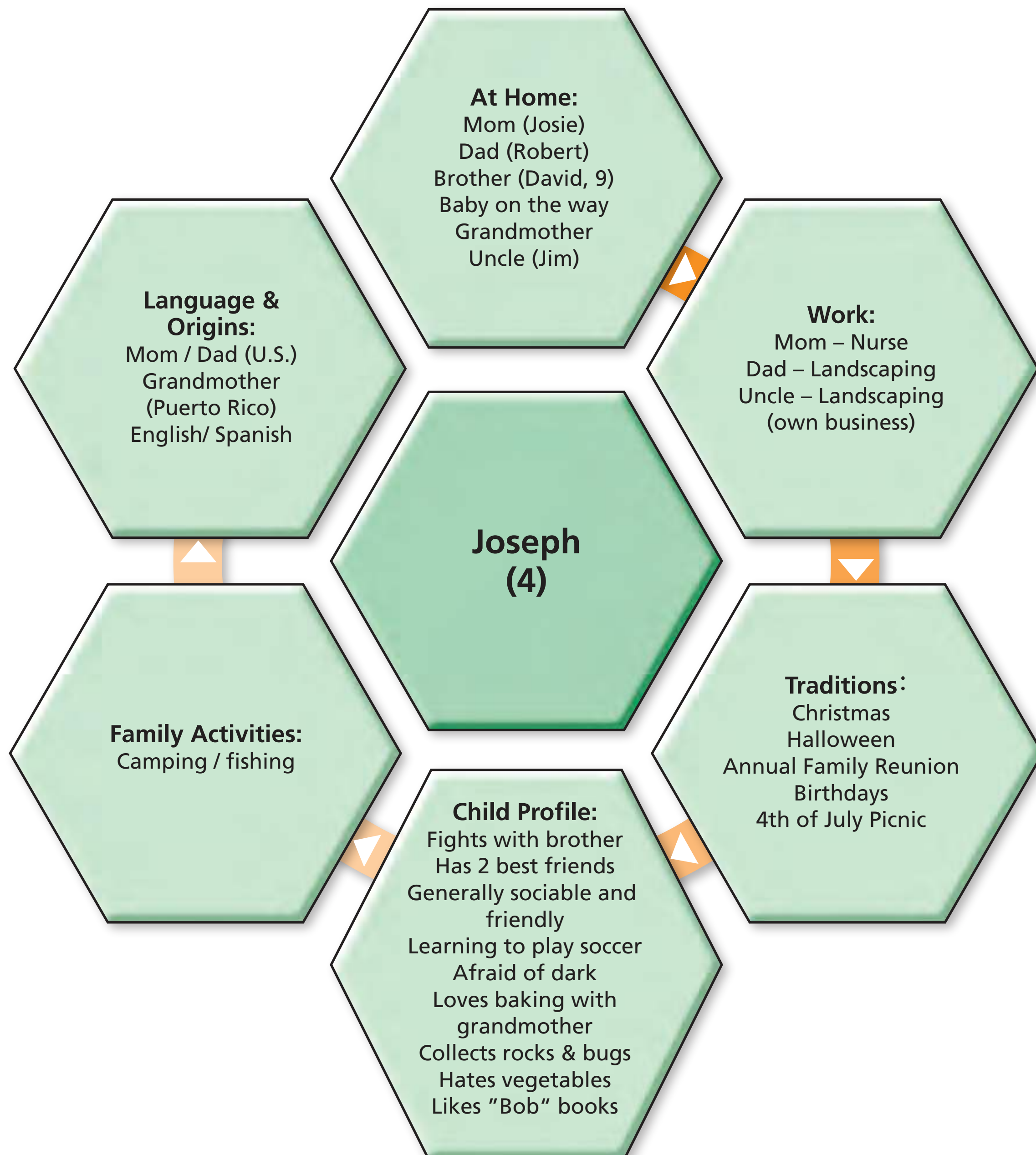
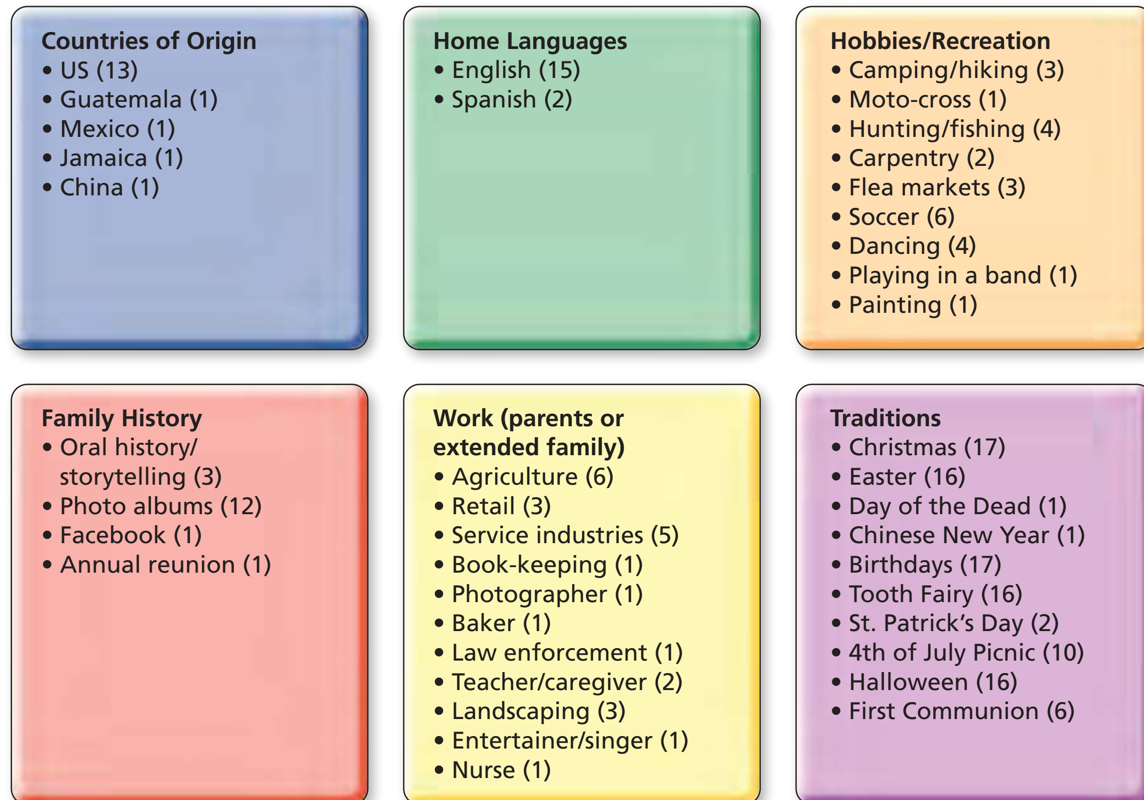


Figure 5.5: Classroom Map

From charting family survey data, you learn that you have family members who might be able to support a study of community helpers (nurse, law enforcement); there is expertise related to growing, producing, distributing, and preparing foods and learning about stores and services; there also might be interesting possibilities for photography and music.



A third option for developing insights about families is storytelling. Stories can serve as powerful tools for learning, both as modeling an important component of literacy, and a means to identify strengths and values within family groups (Fiese, Eckert, & Spagnola, 2006; Overton, 2005). Typically, the focus of family stories and legends varies by culture and reflects the family's worldview.

In Western cultures influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition, stories often feature main characters that exemplify strength and a focus on individualism, qualities highly valued in the American mythology and folklore. In non-Western traditions, a collectivist orientation influences narrative themes that frequently revolve around family responsibilities and a group orientation (Fiese, Eckert, & Spagnola, 2006). Asking families to share a favorite story about their child, history, or interesting characters can be done in numerous ways, including:

- Sending home a tape or digital audio recorder and asking a parent to read or tell the story for use in the classroom listening center.
- Transcribing the story during a face-to-face meeting or visit to the classroom or care setting.
- Giving each family a large index card to summarize a story and keeping the cards in a file box.

- Providing each family with a piece of "language experience paper" that has lines for writing on the bottom and space for an illustration at the top. Short narratives can then be assembled into a book for the classroom library or book center.

Family stories can reveal patterns of strengths not perhaps observable in other ways, such as perseverance, resourcefulness, spirit, humor, or diplomacy (Overton, 2005). When used in the classroom, they offer children a concrete connection to home and opportunities to learn about their friends.

Strategies for Involving Families in Your Curriculum

If you have engaged in the kinds of activities described above, you most likely will have already formed initial relationships with the families of your students. Armed with information and motivated by a desire to include them in the curriculum and classroom culture, what can you do to encourage them to actively participate? Providing a range of options is critical, as at any given time family members' ability and motivation to participate can vary (Hallacka-Ball, 2007). As a general rule, planning ahead and providing clear guidance, and a formal orientation about your expectations if necessary, is also good practice.

Informal visits can help you welcome families and make them feel comfortable in the classroom or care setting. Such visits do not require a tremendous amount of preplanning, but you should think about an overall approach, according to what the visit or occasion requires. For example:

- Informal visits or observations—advance notice is helpful, but an open-door policy makes families feel welcome and lets them see curriculum in action.
- Birthdays or other special occasions—these require advance notice and time limits; advise families of any policies relative to allergies or food restrictions.
- A visit from the family of the week or month —schedule the visit and let the family know ahead of time what the routine is and what you would like them to share about their family.
- Invitations to siblings or grandparents to school—schedule in advance and set aside time for introductions and interactions.
- Lunch visits—letting the child know ahead of time is important, as separating from the parent a second time, after lunch, can be difficult.
- Assisted/chaperoned field trips—field trips often require additional adults. Parents need to know that sometimes children's normal classroom behavior changes when parents are present. But parents can be very helpful with the logistics of transporting lunches, rain gear, a first aid kit, supplies, and so on, and they can provide the closer supervision that is usually needed when children leave the school or center.
- Guest reader or storyteller—advise the family member on how the choice of a book or story will be made; consider audio- or videotaping such a presentation for later use (with permission).

Another range of options centers on more intentional, volunteer-type involvement that is directly related to curriculum activities. These kinds of activities may require active recruiting, some orientation, or directions regarding the specific nature of expectations or procedures and the need for confidentiality and limits of authority. Volunteering in the classroom can provide family members with a high level of satisfaction and self-esteem (Sciarra & Dorsey, 2007).

Note: Long-term volunteers in a child-care setting, licensed preschool, or elementary school classroom who will interact with children may have to secure health and security clearances according to your state's licensing regulations.

Volunteer opportunities are limited only by your imagination, but some of the more common examples include:

- Reading to children—Reading on a regular basis rather than the one-time visit described above. You may need to provide a reading list and some introduction to effective strategies for introducing and reading a book, such as previewing the cover, naming the author/illustrator, helping children predict what might happen, and moderating expression while reading. But family members who might want to do this are likely enthusiastic readers already. Reading to a group of children can be very different from the one-on-one reading they do at home, so establishing a comfort level with the number of children a volunteer reads to can also be wise.
- Clerical support—Some volunteers prefer to work "behind the scenes," but they can still learn a lot about and support your curriculum by working with materials: fixing toys or mending books, cutting paper, laminating, printing announcements, assembling classroom books, making labels. Task cards that provide simple directions are helpful, especially if the helper is working when you are busy doing other things.
- Work/play facilitators—If a family member wants to volunteer as an "extra hand" in the classroom for instructional support, the educator must provide him or her with the same kind of orientation given to a paid assistant. Observing the classroom beforehand will help the volunteer adapt to standard procedures and routines as well as the teacher's approach to classroom management. In the elementary school, volunteers may be asked to help with homework or even assist at the computer station. Areas of the preschool/kindergarten classroom particularly adaptable to this kind of help are dramatic play, art, cooking, and the block area. With babies and toddlers, an extra "rocker" is usually welcome, and volunteers willing to get down on the floor and play can be priceless!
- "Experts"—Enlisting the help of parents or other family members with particular areas of experience, expertise, or interest that relate directly to curriculum topics. Once you know what kind of informational resources your parents can provide (via your surveys and conversations) you can intentionally include topical studies or enrichment experiences in the curriculum that relate to skills and knowledge present among your family population. Family members are an excellent resource for sharing multicultural activities, including the stories, but also for the music, food, song and dance of native cultures.

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Members of a child's extended family—such as grandparents, aunts, or uncles—are often ready, willing, and able to attend both formal and informal school functions. Their involvement can extend the security of family relationships to the education setting.

5.5 Collaborating with the Community

A developmentally appropriate approach to the curriculum assumes that teachers consider communities an important source of information for planning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Gestwicki, 2011). This requires that teachers and administrators figure out how to gather and share information and successfully integrate the community into the lives of their children in school or care settings. This part of the chapter focuses on practical ways to do so.

Communities as Primary Curriculum Resources

Every content area of a curriculum is represented in the real world by individuals, organizations, businesses, and the natural/physical environment. Teachers and schools that attempt to integrate children's experiences with the community provide them with a meaningful context for what they are learning, and there are many practical ways to do so.

© Bridgepoint Education

In this image, volunteers, with the support of corporate sponsors, are painting a school. This is an example of how community partnerships can be mutually beneficial.

Knowing and Connecting with the Community

If you have lived in the community where you work, you will already have some familiarity with the stores, neighborhoods, businesses, schools, and hospitals that make up the community. If you are not familiar with the area, you can make an effort to get to know these features over time. Once again, creating a file or notebook with information about community resources can be very helpful. You can also add suggestions for how each resource can support your curriculum. Figure 5.6 displays a template for recording information in a resource file.

Other ways in which you can gather information about your community include the following:

- Take walks in the immediate neighborhood.
- Obtain a calendar of community festivals and cultural events.
- Locate the nearest university extension service.
- Find out what child-friendly programs are available through local museums, parks, media outlets, and tourist destinations such as zoos or historical sites.
- Identify closest access to public transportation, routes, and fare information.
- Gather menus from local restaurants.
- Make use of city/community websites and retail listings or Yellow Pages directories.

Strategies for Involving the Community in the Curriculum

Experienced teachers know that once you have established relationships with individual families and community partners, those networks don't disappear at the end of each school year

Figure 5.6: Template for a Resource File Card

On the sample card, information is recorded for a nearby retail store, including the name of an individual who would be willing to come to the classroom.

Date of Entry: 10/10/2012

Resource: Pottery Place

Address: 123 Any Road

Phone: 111-222-3333

Email: Potteryplace@mail.com

Website: www.localpotteryplace.com

Contact Individual: Susie Potter

Potential Connections: Owner is professional potter with 20+ years of experience. Also certified teacher. Can schedule visit any Monday or Friday, preferred hours 9–11am. For $3.00 per child she will do a mini-workshop and we can pick up finished pieces the next day.

or when your students move on to other schools or programs. The connections you make over time constitute a store of personal resources that enhance any curriculum you use and also serve to inform the community about how they can become involved with and invested in early childhood education.

Opportunities for involving community in the curriculum are limited only by your imagination and ability to make creative use of resources. The following list provides brief narrative examples from the author's recent experiences:

- A toddler teacher notices that her 2-year-old children seem very interested in animals but easily confuse larger farm animals, such as cows, horses, and goats. In her community, horse-drawn carriage tours are a major tourist attraction. She arranges with a local tour company for a short carriage ride around the neighborhood and a visit to the company's barn, which has a small petting area with baby farm animals.
- Kindergarten children observe a nest being built by a bird on the playground and begin to request information about how eggs hatch. The teacher contacts the state university extension service. They have a program that offers to send a field agent who will bring an incubator and eggs to the classroom, teach the children how to monitor and turn the eggs daily until they hatch, and then reclaim the chicks.
- In a class of 3-year-olds, the teacher notices a high level of interest in rocks. She provides many activities and books about rocks and arranges a walking trip to a nearby store that specializes in minerals, stones, and rocks. The store owners answer children's questions and allow each child to choose a small rock to bring back to the classroom.

- Children in a class of 4-year-olds who are studying different kinds of bread plant a small patch of wheat in their class garden. One of the parents from the class works as a cashier for a local grocery store. The parent approaches the operations manager of the store, who agrees to send the head baker to the classroom to demonstrate bread making.
- The director of a child care program contacts a local lumber yard that agrees to save and donate trimmings from their custom woodworking shop to the center. The teachers then have a ready supply of interesting wood shapes for construction and three-dimensional art projects.

In some instances, more formal, long-term collaborations that enhance curriculum are established between schools, programs, and communities. There are many examples across America of "public-private" partnerships that represent significant investments of personnel, money, services, or equipment in early education and child-care programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). A local business may "adopt" a school to provide it with computers and technology support. A benefactor might donate or bequeath gifts for a variety of purposes, or a local charitable group may actively pursue a mission to support young children and their families. The *United Way* is a good example of a community organization that funds and organizes activities to "help children and youth achieve their potential."

Advocacy as a Community Effort

When communities work together with programs, early educators, schools, and families, advocacy for young children becomes a shared, personalized endeavor. Through formal and informal interactions, particular areas of strength and need become apparent that provide communities with the information they need to set priorities and distribute resources. Teachers and caregivers are in a unique position to facilitate this process; besides membership in national professional organizations (see Chapter 1), at a local level, they can:

- Participate in local or regional professional association activities, such as the NAEYC's *Week of the Young Child*
- Serve on site-based school improvement councils
- Volunteer for community improvement projects and initiatives
- Write letters to local government or private-sector representatives to identify areas of need or opportunity
- Collaborate and network with educators in other programs

As you gain experience and knowledge about families and the community, your understanding of how to connect these resources with your curriculum will grow. You will see that the curriculum can respond to, include, and reflect unique perspectives that reinforce John Dewey's observation that "the school must represent present life—life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the play-ground" (1897, p. 78).

Chapter Summary

- Collaborating with families and communities involves communication, engagement, and shared decision making between teachers, programs, and families. Research documents the many ways in which collaboration among teachers, families, and communities benefit all involved.
- Ecological and family systems theories provide a basis for understanding how productive relationships can be established and maintained.
- Despite challenges such as building trust and logistics, family involvement at school or the child-care program can be effectively accomplished through formally established programs or grassroots efforts.
- Helping parents understand learning standards includes providing information about standards, accountability systems, and developmentally appropriate assessment.
- Teachers use many different strategies—including curriculum documentation, technologies, and interactive events—to help families understand and connect with the curriculum.
- Teachers gather information about children and their families to gain insights about the kinds of ways in which they can be considered primary resources for the curriculum and to help them identify and respond to interests and needs.
- Teachers also gather information about the community in order to uncover opportunities for enhancing the curriculum with real-world, meaningful experiences.

Posttest

1. Student achievement is positively correlated with programs that:
   a. Establish and maintain strict policies for keeping visitors out of classrooms so that the teachers can concentrate on their work.
   b. Find ways to promote parent and family participation in school activities and affairs.
   c. Make all important decisions thoughtfully and then inform parents about how they will affect their children.
   d. Implement standardized testing of children as early as possible.
2. Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst were instrumental in establishing:
   a. The PTO network of independent parent-teacher organizations.
   b. The National Association for the Education of Young Children.
   c. The Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).
   d. A coalition of social workers to lobby Congress for passage of the Lanham Act.
3. Bronfenbrenner's theory makes particular sense as a foundation for thinking about home/school/community relationships because:
   a. It represents the child's experience in the context of interrelated influences.
   b. Uri Bronfenbrenner was particularly well known and effective as a community organizer.
   c. Only theories from respected sources should be used to develop policies and procedures.
   d. It shows that culture has little impact on children's development.

4. Family systems theory maintains that while families are increasingly diverse,
   a. Physical and emotional home environments are remarkably similar.
   b. All families are highly motivated to be involved in school or child care center activities.
   c. Children learn to adopt characteristics of mainstream culture at school independently of the roles they exhibit at home.
   d. Incorporating rituals, customs, and home traditions can provide consistency, security, and balance for children at school or in care.
5. Alignment or mapping of standards and curriculum is a process that:
   a. Matches NAEYC developmentally appropriate practice with the National Core Standards
   b. Matches a particular set of learning standards with curriculum objectives, outcomes, or activities.
   c. Shows the relationship between state tests and state standards.
   d. Is developmentally inappropriate, so it is not recommended for preschool teachers.
6. Providing information to families about developmentally appropriate practice and the curriculum:
   a. Is not necessary, as only the teachers have the training and experience to understand what a DAP curriculum represents and includes.
   b. Helps them understand that standards do not dictate the specific curriculum a program or school uses.
   c. Provides an opportunity to address and meet early learning standards.
   d. Ensures that they will subsequently want to be more involved in school activities.
7. Visual documentation of student learning is a process that:
   a. Preschool and infant/toddler teachers don't typically use as it takes too much time.
   b. Teachers use to adapt curriculum for children with visual impairments.
   c. Aligns curriculum and standards using technology, so that it will be easy for parents to understand.
   d. Teachers use to represent children's work with images, narratives, reflections, and artifacts.
8. Teachers use many strategies to help families of preschoolers learn about their child's curriculum, including:
   a. Providing and discussing printed or online information about the curriculum.
   b. Sending home report cards four times a year.
   c. Setting up an email distribution list to communicate with families.
   d. Sending home worksheets for homework, so parents can see what the children do every day.

9. Regarding families and communities as primary curriculum resources:
   a. Isn't relevant, because the primary grades are not really part of early childhood education.
   b. Isn't needed because typically the curriculum provides all necessary resources.
   c. Includes gathering information in respectful ways that can be subsequently analyzed and organized for opportunities.
   d. Is the only way to effectively address the learning needs of the children in your care.
10. Teachers and families engage in child advocacy when they:
    a. Join together to celebrate children in events such as the NAEYC's Week of the Young Child.
    b. Share responsibilities for chaperoning field trips.
    c. Repair and recycle books for the public library.
    d. Collect and redeem grocery store box tops to raise money for the program.

Answers: 1 (b); 2 (c); 3 (a); 4 (d); 5 (b); 6 (b); 7 (d); 8 (a); 9 (c); 10 (a)

Discussion Questions

1. Identify aspects of working with families that you feel most and least confident about and what you might do to either strengthen or enhance those capabilities.
2. From what you already know about the community in which you live or work, brainstorm an initial list of possible curriculum resources; use the card format from Figure 5.6 to record information about them.
3. From the information you have so far from the opening vignettes about your imaginary class, what kinds of opportunities and challenges for successful family involvement might you anticipate?

Answers and Rejoinders to Chapter Pretest

1. **True.** Early childhood organizations, researchers, and public funding sources believe that collaboration improves learning outcomes for children.
2. **False.** Understanding the ways families work helps teachers understand and respond to the children they teach or care for.
3. **True.** Helping families understand goals and desired outcomes also aids their understanding about how the curriculum addresses curriculum standards.
4. **True.** Making the curriculum visible in the classroom and other appropriate areas of the school sends a powerful message to all—children, families, and community—that what young children learn and do is important.
5. **True.** Connecting children with the community makes the curriculum more real and meaningful and establishes partnerships within the community.

Key Terms

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) Refers to the expected average gain in achievement test scores of a school's population from one year to the next

Alignment (mapping) Documentation in writing of how curriculum goals and components connect specifically with elements of learning standards

Benchmark Description of a desired goal that represents a gain of knowledge or skills by a particular time

Differentiating instruction Adapting the environment, materials, and planning to meet the needs and interests of individual children

Family systems theory (FST) Looking at and studying children in the context of family

Graphic organizer Charts or other templates used to organize ideas, information, or procedures

High-stakes testing When the outcome of an individual child's performance on a single test is tied to decisions that will impact access to educational opportunities

Parent-Teacher Association An organization of parents, teachers and staff, all of whom work together to encourage parent participation in the school or classroom

Examples of Programs Offering Website Curriculum Information

Clicking on the links below will take you to the home page for each school, which provides examples of the curriculum in use at each.

N. E. Miles Early Childhood Development Center, Charleston, SC. The N. E. Miles ECDC is a university-based preschool and kindergarten demonstration program.

Nautilus Montessori School, Roseville, CA. A private preschool and kindergarten using an academic Montessori program with additional curricular elements specific to the school.

Emerson Waldorf School, Chapel Hill, NC. A school spanning pre-K through grade 12 using the Waldorf approach inspired by Rudolf Steiner.

Mini University, Miami, OH. Four NAEYC-accredited centers in southern Ohio using the Creative Curriculum. Clicking on "age groups" provides access to information about curriculum and standards used with children of different ages.

SETA Head Start, Sacramento, CA. Clicking on "in the classroom" provides access to information about the curricula used with children of different ages.

Rosalie Cooperative School of Young Children, Albuquerque, NM. This is a home-based cooperative of families inspired by Reggio-Emilia.

Pine Village Spanish Immersion Preschools, Boston. An early childhood program for toddlers and preschoolers with a curriculum focused on global citizenship and bilingual education.

Websites for Creating Classroom Blogs

Blogger (for teachers) Google site with version designed for teachers.

EduBlogs Designed for teachers to easily create and manage their own blogs, with features for customizing designs, privacy, and uploading videos, photos, and podcasts.

Kidblog Set up so that teachers can easily create blogs for kids to use. The teacher functions as the blog administrator to manage children's accounts.

SchoolRack Award-winning site for creating classroom websites and blogs with features for communication and collaboration.

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