CHAPTER 19

The Family-Center Partnership

OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe the family-teacher partnership that affects language arts programs.
- Compare strategies used to enhance family-school communication.
- Identify ways in which families can strengthen a child's language growth.

KEY TERMS

socioeconomic outreach

family literacy programs

The Power of Persistence

At pick-up time, when Martin's mother arrived, Mei Lin, Martin's teacher, observed a behavior she had not previously seen in Martin. Martin immediately started what Mei Lin would describe as vocal badgering. His verbal assault included a steady stream of, "But you promised . . . , I want one . . . , You said so . . . , I didn't have one yesterday . . . , I want it . . . , You told me I could . . . , I'm ready . . . , Let's go." His voice got louder and louder and didn't stop when his mother attempted to talk to Mei Lin. It continued as Martin and his mother exited to the porch. Mei Lin then heard Martin's mother say, "All right. We'll go to McDonalds!"

Questions to Ponder

1. What is happening here?
2. Should Mei Lin discuss the situation with Martin's mother? Why or why not?
3. Does this have anything to do with language development?
4. Is there anything positive about Martin's way with words?

FAMILIES AND CHILD LITERACY

Although families and teachers are partners in a child's education, a family is a child's foremost teacher and model, and the home is a child's first and most influential school (Figure 19–1). Many families are eager consumers of information about what is best for their offspring. Six in ten parents read books about parenting or early childhood development before their children were born and about 32 percent took classes for new parents.

Families are usually informed of the school's language and literacy curriculum during enrollment interviews. Most families want to find out how teachers interact with their children on a daily basis to realize their instructional goals. Educators find that some families will ask for advice concerning what to do in terms of their children's education and are vulnerable as a result. It is suggested that anxious families need reassurance and can be encouraged to trust their instincts.

FIGURE 19–1 The child's foremost teachers and educators are the child's parents and family.

Early childhood teachers can enhance their ability to work with the families of children in their classrooms. They should not make assumptions about a family's parenting practices. Within any cultural group—be it ethnic, racial, **socioeconomic**, or religious—individuals and families vary in their beliefs and adherence to the social conventions of their community.

Significant changes in family structure have occurred. More than 25 percent of all children and more than 55 percent of African-American children are living with an unmarried parent. Whatever family type exists, the family should be viewed by educators as having knowledge on a wide range of topics that might be accessed by schools and educators. Family members are experts concerning how the home supports their child's emerging literacy. Questions teachers ask during initial and later meetings and interviews can gather valuable information concerning family literacy goals and practices, home conversations with children, home literacy settings and materials including books and other publications, and their children's particular preferences and developing interests. Information gathered can influence the classroom library book selection as well as individual and group instructional planning.

Early childhood teachers and centers examine a wide range of strategies to enhance their relationships with families. Researchers urge educators to consider a family-by-family approach. When reaching out to families, teachers are likely to find that intra-group differences may be as great as inter-group differences. Efforts could include hiring bicultural and bilingual staff to increase a program's ability to communicate and create trust.

Child literacy at home and school is influenced by three important factors: (1) setting, (2) models, and (3) planned and unplanned events. The setting involves what the home or school provides or makes available, including furnishings, space, materials and supplies, toys, books, and so forth. Family "connectedness" is

socioeconomic — relating to or involving a combination of social and economic factors.

crucial. Interactions with parents, siblings, grandparents, and other relatives enrich children's lives. Sharing hobbies, trips, chores, mealtimes, community and neighborhood happenings, conversations, and stories are all language-development opportunities. Access to additional settings outside the home is also considered. Time allowed or spent in community settings can increase or decrease literacy.

Preschools planning to maintain the continued literacy development of attending children must face the fact that a home's low socioeconomic status often affects their children's literacy growth. Au (2006) notes that poverty appears to be the factor most highly associated with poor reading achievement in elementary school. Middle-class families usually offer their children the advantage of more home book reading, more library visits, and more print-related experiences. Families with low educational aspirations for their children and low motivation, which sometimes results from poverty, stress, fatigue, and other unfortunate living conditions, are the families who most need sensitive professional **outreach** from their children's teacher and school.

Family economics may determine the opportunities and materials that are available, but family ingenuity and know-how may overcome a lack of monetary resources. Most things that families can do to encourage reading and writing involve time, attention, and sensitivity rather than money. All families can be instrumental in fostering literacy if they spend time doing so. The usefulness of speaking, writing, and reading can be emphasized in any home. Children's literature may be borrowed from public libraries and other sources in almost all communities.

Although preschools are not as programmed as elementary schools and much of the learning in preschools goes hand-in-hand with firsthand exploration, families still have a big edge over group programs in offering intimate, individualized adult-child learning opportunities. Family interactions during activities involve both the quality and quantity of communication (Figure 19–2). The supportive assistance given at home, the atmosphere of the home, family-child conversations, and joint ventures can greatly affect the child's literacy development. Educators take every opportunity in everyday conversations and in planned meetings to help families know how to turn ordinary home occurrences into young children's learning experiences. Trish Megan (2009) has voiced what every teacher knows in her heart—"If we can't involve parents (families) in schools, then we do little to really impact the children we teach."

FIGURE 19–2 Some parents consult their child's teacher for language-developing ideas.

Successful families listen to what children say and respond to them. They interpret the child's language attempts and reply with related action accompanied by words and sentences. Learning is enhanced where children are supported by caring adults who share their world with them and enter into the children's worlds of play and talk, tuning in to their feelings and experiences. The essential element is the intimacy between child and the people in his life who share a common environment; this fosters the understanding of meanings and child curiosity.

Children who find their efforts and attempts at language received and valued develop the confidence to continue. Children's learning flourishes when they are allowed some degree of control over their own actions and when they interact with adults who are receptive, less concerned with the correctness of child speech, and more likely to respond in ways that stretch thinking.

outreach — an early childhood program's attempt to provide supportive assistance to attending children's families to promote their children's success in school and developmental growth.

Early childhood centers design their own unique family involvement programs. With increased federal and state emphasis on early childhood educators' working jointly with parents and families, educators working in publicly funded programs will need to clarify their goals and analyze their efforts. Most educators would agree any involvement must start with the development of a trusting relationship (Figure 19–3). NAEYC's Engaging Diverse Families (EDF) Project (2010) has researched and identified the family engagement practices of high-quality early childhood programs. They follow.

- Encourage family participation in decision making. (Programs have Boards of Directors with family representation, active committees, and regular parent-teacher conferences that encourage shared decision making concerning the program and individual children.)
- Facilitate consistent, two-way communication. (Programs communicate with families through the use of multiple formats and in the families' preferred language.)
- Seek out information about families' lifestyle and community and integrate this information into their curriculum. (Programs welcome family talents, interests, or family traditions into the classroom.)
- Support families' efforts to create home environments that value learning by connecting families with information and activities that enhance early learning. Announcements of community events, lending libraries, and newsletter tips about child development are examples of how programs can extend the learning beyond the classroom.
- Develop a program supporting staff leadership and support dedicated and trained teachers in their efforts to reach out to and include families. (p. 8)

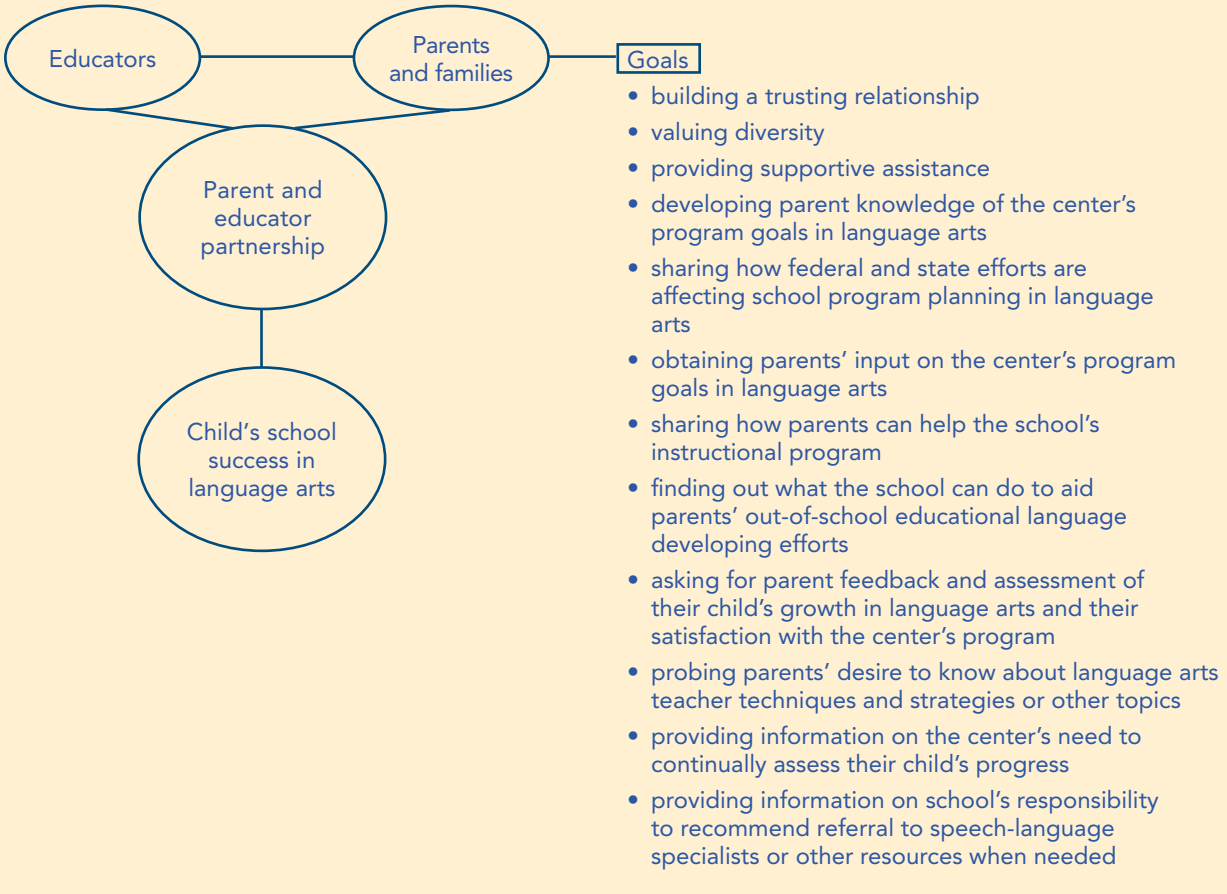


FIGURE 19–3 Parent involvement goals.

Developing Trust

Developing trust grows from family feelings of being respected, accepted, and valued for their individual and cultural diversity, and it also grows when staff members are sensitive to family economics. Educators need to be aware of what families' desire for their children. All of this starts the day family members walk through the school's door. What is on the walls and how they are welcomed and treated by staff are important. This calls for a consideration of comfort and requires staff preparation and planning. A clearly-labeled school entrance and an open classroom door should guide families on children's first day. Ideally, an adult who speaks their home language greets them or is immediately available. A welcoming letter should have reached homes beforehand that included a statement concerning whether a family member is welcome to stay if their child seems to need this, and also whether families are able to visit the classroom before opening session begin.

Truly thoughtful administrators/teachers know if printed signs directing families to the school's office or classroom are necessary in parking areas and whether signs should be printed in more than one language.

Identifying Supportive Assistance

Identifying exactly what a center can offer in supportive assistance is a necessary task.

VIDEO ACTIVITY

Go to the Education CourseMate website to watch the TeachSource Video Case, *Communicating with Families: Best Practices in an Early Childhood Setting.*

1. After watching Mona Sanon, the teacher greeting parents as they enter, what teacher techniques did you notice that were especially effective in building teacher-parent rapport?
2. Some good ideas were presented for building family participation and reinforcement of classroom learning and to increase the parents' role in their child's overall educational growth. Pick two suggestions and discuss their benefit to both the child and the parent.
3. "Make yourself available" was suggested to teachers. Does this in any way make you feel uneasy or it's opposite, comfortable? Discuss this by writing a short paragraph or two.

A school's list can be long or short depending on the financial and human resources available. Some schools have generous budgets; others do not. Some have committed and dedicated staff members who realize working with and through parents and families is a priority. Most educators are familiar with data and research showing that a family's socioeconomic status, cultural and linguistic group membership, parenting style, and home literacy experiences correlate with the knowledge and skills that children bring to school. They realize that excellent instructional help will be necessary to prepare some children for kindergarten. The State of Kentucky (2009) has developed a valuable guide to facilitate home/school connections when working with other than English speaking families. See Figure 19–4.

In a little-noticed section of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), expectations of schools include arranging remedial education for parents who need it, teaching parents to use the Internet to check on children's grades and homework, and holding workshops on how to talk to children about what they are learning in class (Foundation for Child Development, 2009).

Early Childhood Language Arts Program Planning

It is a staff's task to explain how a center's program addresses "the whole child" and, in this case, especially language arts instruction. In some states, early childhood programs will need to follow curricular standards and requirements specified in licensing and/or federal or state guidelines or standards. Individual states have established standards and practices to ensure program quality after their state legislators became aware of research concerning young children's brain capacity and growth. Other groups have developed or are currently developing guidelines and benchmarks, including the U.S. Department of Education, the International Reading Association, NAEYC, the National Reading Panel, the Administration for Children and Families, and the National Goals Panel. Every effort to develop research-based recommendations is

Since this may be the first opportunity that ELL families have with school contact, it's vital that they feel welcome. Below are some suggested activities that will assist in accomplishing this goal.

1. Host a back-to-school night with interpreters. Make accommodations for parent's schedules. offer transportation, food and childcare. Use this as an opportunity to find out how to establish and maintain regular contact with families. Also include information about adult education opportunities.
2. Find bilingual volunteers, parent liaisons, or staff assistants to translate or serve as interpreters.
3. Develop family learning activities (including multi-lingual activities.) Send home for the purpose of involving the family.
4. Consider sponsoring single parent and/or native language parent groups. Consider having meetings away from the school campus.
5. Involve language minority parents on advisory committees, councils and key communicator groups.
6. Hold family nights on parenting issues, including child development, early math, writing, science and literacy, setting up a work area at home and goals for their children and family; provide translators.
7. Find bilingual volunteers, parent liaisons or staff assistants to bridge the gap between families and the school.
8. Offer ongoing interactive training sessions for parents on topics such as homework, school attendance, standards, report cards and discipline.
9. Implement a bi-lingual hotline number where parents can get information on how to help their children at home.
10. Form a citizen advisory group that can advise the principal on how to improve services for students and families in poverty, singly parents, and those who do not speak English.

FIGURE 19–4 Home/school connection.

undertaken. Goldenberg (2002) lists what he terms the "emerging consensus" of current instructional practices (preschool through third grade) in beginning literacy:

1. Literate environments in which print is used for diverse and interesting purposes, including opportunities for student choice and ample time for looking at books and reading or "pretend reading."
2. Direct, explicit, systematic instruction in specific skills (e.g., phonological awareness, letter names/sounds, decoding, and comprehension strategies), with sufficient practice in successful use of skills in order to promote transfer and automaticity.
3. Discussions and conversations about materials children read or that are read to them.
4. Focus on word-recognition skills and strategies (direct instruction, but also use of techniques such as word walls and making words).
5. Strategically sequenced instruction and curriculum materials to maintain optimal challenge (instructional or independent, as appropriate).
6. Organizational and classroom management strategies to maximize academic engagement and appropriate use of materials.
7. An explicit focus on language (including vocabulary development).
8. Valid and frequent assessments, using multiple measures as needed and appropriate, to allow teachers to gauge developing skills and target instruction appropriately.
9. A home-school connection component that links the school's efforts with children's home experiences and enlists parents in supporting their children's academic development. (p. 282)

Some of this curriculum may be difficult to explain to families without using specific examples over an extended period. Schools and centers that are privately funded may not use the "consensus" goals listed and instead may use other goals as the basis for their language arts instruction.

Obtaining Family Input

Schools have developed vehicles to ensure that family input is part of a school's operational plan. These include classroom mailboxes, parent advisory committees, and parent councils. Family questionnaires, surveys, and checklists often probe family ideas. Other efforts to reach out and communicate include e-mail, reading groups, planning workshops, and on-the-fly daily contacts. An early childhood program that isn't aware of family member's special talents or their unique access to diverse resources that can in some way enhance a program's instruction or maintenance may be missing extraordinary opportunities. This might be a family member who can volunteer, or one who works at a print shop, or a computer expert who might provide consultation services. Families may contain an ethnic storyteller or a teenager who can demonstrate a particular hobby or sport skill. This can't be discovered until a program sensitively asks or provides a probing take-home form or individual interview. Wouldn't it be a plus if teachers knew a public safety officer or dog groomer was available to discuss loose or stray dogs, or animal care, if a theme on dogs were planned?

FAMILY GUIDELINES FOR LITERACY AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The techniques or actions recommended to help children's language and literacy development apply to both teachers and parents. A family may have different and more varied opportunities to use these techniques. The following guidelines have been gathered from various sources dealing primarily with family-child relations. Families can promote literacy when they spend time with their children every day. At school, the teacher has many children to attend to and may not be able to provide as much individual attention as a family can provide. Recommended family actions include:

- Create home activities in which a child matches buttons, beans, blocks, or toys by colors, shapes, sizes; this kind of categorizing is an important thinking skill.
- Sort groceries by categories (canned goods, vegetables, fruits, and so on) with children.
- Keep in mind that a child's early experiences with print, writing tools, alphabet letters, and books can be puzzling. When a child asks question answer while he is focused.
- Slip quickly in and out of children's play, encouraging child discovery. This type of on-the-move teaching is natural and different from sit-down structured teaching, to which a child may tune out as interest wanes.
- Offer what is just a little beyond what a child already knows using a supportive, enthusiastic, "let's-discover-together" attitude.
- Realize pressure and commands aimed at teaching language arts turn children off.
- Arrange things so that a child has opportunities to see operations from beginning to end. For example, make butter from whipping cream or applesauce from picked apples.
- Encourage accomplishment, success, or honest effort with approval or appreciation.
- Be available as a resource person. When a child asks questions that an adult cannot answer, do not hesitate to seek help from others or books.
- Help children feel secure and successful. Interactions can build feelings of self-worth—if children's ideas and opinions are valued.
- Realize that young children's self-control is developing. In preschool and kindergarten, behavioral expectations create the climate for learning. Families set home behavioral standards. Disciplined work habits promote school success.
- Believe that fantasy play (make-believe) is correlated with other positive attributes such being creative, understanding the perspective of others, and possessing greater social skills (Wang, 2009).

How Parents Can Stimulate Speaking Abilities

- Talk to children naturally and clearly as you would a friend. Listen when children want to tell you something without overtly correcting speech errors.

- Read stories, poems, jingles, and riddles to children.
- Encourage play with puppets, bendable family dolls, dress-up clothes, play stores, doctor kits, and play telephones, letting the children act out various events.
- Encourage children to tell you stories.
- Increase your attempts to build vocabulary by including new and descriptive words.
- Give attention; listen for intent rather than correctness. Show children that what they say is important. Communicate with children at their eye level, when possible. Expand and tactfully extend children's comments; talk on the children's chosen subjects.
- Use your best speech model—Standard English, if it comes naturally. If you speak a language other than English, provide a good model of that language.
- If a member of a cultural or ethnic group, examine attitudes concerning adult-child verbal interactions being important.
- Become a skilled questioner by asking questions that promote thinking, predicting, and a number of possible correct answers based children's viewpoints.
- Encourage children to talk about whatever they are making, without asking," What is it?"
- Talk frequently, give objects names, and describe the things you do—be specific.
- Talk about what children are interested in.
- Do things together and talk about them: trips to stores, the zoo, museums, and so on.
- Take photographs and urge children to take their own. Jointly label photos. Create stories or picture books with them for the family library. Let children dictate the text.
- Listen to your children so that you learn about them and show that you are interested.
- Talk with children to describe objects they see in a picture. Then hide the picture and see how many objects they can recall.
- Sing songs with rhyming words.
- Make up chants to give life to boring housekeeping jobs.

How Parents Can Build Print Awareness and Skill

- Provide literature and a language-rich setting in the home.
- Write down the things children tell you about their pictures. Make books of each child's work and photographs, and talk about the books.
- Read family letters and mail to children, along with circulars, junk mail, restaurant menus, wrappers and packaging, signs, labels, building identifications, catalogs, brand names, and calendars.
- Provide scrap paper and writing tools, and reserve an area in the home as a writing center for children's use.
- Make or buy alphabet letter toys or word books.
- Ask teachers for copies of the alphabet your children will use in kindergarten.
- Encourage scribbling and doodling.
- Write messages to children or make signs for their play, such as "Mark's tower."
- Talk about what you are writing and its use to you.
- Start sharing books in infancy. Promote a child's personal book collection.
- Help your child learn the rules of print such as spaces separate words, reading left to right and punctuation marks.
- Be a co-explorer of books who promotes critical thinking, discusses unfamiliar words, ask questions, predict happenings, and discuss book characters and their actions.
- Encourage interest in paper-and-crayon activities by showing children their names in print. Give attention to their attempts to copy their names or write them from memory.
- For pretend play, provide bank forms, memo pads, school forms, store order pads, and ordering pads used in restaurants. This kind of play stretches children's imaginations and broadens their experiences.
- Help children in writing letters to grandparents, sick friends, book authors, or famous people.
- Put little notes in children's lunch boxes or backpacks. These can be picture notes or simple messages.

- Model writing for children; write private notes, grocery lists, and recipes with children.
- Praise preschool aged children's attempts to invent their own spelling when they are learning the relationship between print and speech. "Correct" spelling will follow later.
- Write down shared experiences or often-told family stories. Stories can help children anticipate a sequence of events or help children figure out words of personal importance.

Dokoupi (2009) points out families, especially those using government sponsored and funded preschool care, may unfortunately adopt parenting styles that over use verbal commands and directives. This practice offers less vocabulary and fewer language opportunities and can "short circuit" language growth. Dokoupil's recommendations are based upon a large research study of over 8,000 children with diverse Latino origins (Fuller, Bridges, Bein, Jang, Jung, Rabe-Hesketh, Halfon, & Kuo, 2009). Bardige (2009) suggests adult "business-like" talk about child behavior that directs, commands, and makes no-nonsense statements clarifying expected child actions and behaviors or states clear limits, isn't bad for young children. Business-like talk and adult-child play talk both have a place in young children's lives. Family talking, Bardige notes, adds an essential dimension for it affects many aspects of development including relationships, creativity, exploration self-concept, initiative, inquisitiveness, knowledge, grammar, vocabulary, expressive language, social skills, storytelling and literacy, imagination, thinking, and reasoning.

How Experiences Outside of the Home Can Promote Literacy

Taking trips to interesting places such as a bowling alley, shoe-repair shop, bakery, zoo, farm, airport, or to different kinds of stores or on a train or bus trip is recommended. When the family returns, making drawings related to a trip can be encouraged. Discussing and reliving experiences and adventures promote expression of children's ideas. Remembrances might also be recorded or recreated using creative dramatizing. Effective trips can be quite simple ones like visiting community events such as 4-H fairs, craft shows, antique-auto shows, etc. It is wise to find what learning destinations exist in a city. Accompanying family members on routine trips to the store, bank, post office, or park is also recommended. Families can plan many adventures that a school cannot duplicate.

Librarians and the Internet can become invaluable resources for information and books along a child's particular passion or interest—be that bugs, baseball, electricity, or airplanes, etc. Wise adults help children pursue and discover the answers to their many questions. Preschool children, on average, ask their parents about 100 questions a day according Bronson & Merryman (2010). By middle school, these authors believe children pretty much stopped asking. It's no coincidence that this is the same time when student motivation and engagement in school plummets (p. 47).

Subotnik (2010), a researcher who has studied children's transitions into successful creative careers as adults, suggests children do better when they are allowed to develop deep passions and pursue them wholeheartedly during childhood. In the process, children may research their chosen topic, focus deeply, think creatively, and communicate with others by various means explaining what they have learned and discovered.

The Association for Library Services to Children and the Public Library Association (2010) suggest families trying to choose worthwhile books for young children should consider a book's vocabulary; its narrative connections; its possible print awareness opportunities; its ability to enhance children's alphabet letter and sound recognition; and its ability to help children's ability to follow words on a page.

How Parents Can Promote Listening Skills

Trying to teach children to listen to and identify sounds, such as the whine of car tires, bird calls, insect noises, and sounds of different kinds of doors closing in the house is something families can to do to increase skill. Recordings, television, and storybooks can also stimulate interest in listening. Experts also suggest adults pause before answering a child's questions to consider briefly what the child is really probing, and wait patiently for children to formulate answers to the parent's questions.

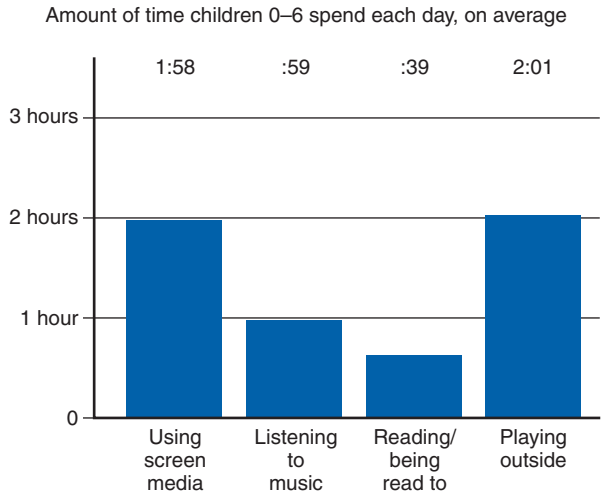
How Families Can Promote an Interest in Reading

Some families create an environment that supports reading by making sure it is impossible to avoid books. They always bring a backpack full of books along on car rides, and keep books in the pockets on the back of car seats. These families understand that young children can make tremendous progress as readers while "just pretending." This happens when a child pretends to read books, read illustrations, or flips pages as he tells his own story or imitates the actions or voices of those who have read to him.

Families with positive attitudes about reading will usually find that their children are motivated, spend more time at reading, and expend more effort in learning to read. Put simply, parents who value reading have children with a greater interest in reading skills.

Reading is dependent on facility with oral language. Children who talk easily, handle words skillfully, ask questions, and look for answers usually become good readers. Families have more opportunities for one-on-one time with children compared with teachers who have groups of children to help. Skilled adults reading picture books stop when a child has lost concentration. They try to obtain enthralling books. They restrain themselves and do not go overboard in their attempts to educate children. Instead they have fun, enjoy humor, and encourage questions. Literacy-promoting families read to children every day. A survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2003) showed the amount of time children were reading or being read to compared with the time children engaged in other activities (see Figure 19–5).

Many families consult librarians for help. See Figure 19–6 for a list of books with an element of predictability. Finding predictable picture books that include repetitive features enhances the child's feelings of being part of the telling. Competency increases when the child knows what comes next after a few readings. An appealing book selected by a parent can be read with enthusiasm and animation. Children enjoy active participation when chanting lines, pointing to illustrations, and speaking in characters' voices. Families can give reading status and importance; they can read recipes and directions with their children to show print's purpose.



Note: Average is among all children, across all days of the week, including those who don't do certain activities yet at all.

FIGURE 19–5 *Zero to six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers*, (#3378), The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Fall 2003. Copyright © 2003. (This information was reprinted with permission of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. The Kaiser Family Foundation, based in Menlo Park, California, is a nonprofit, independent national health care philanthropy and is not associated with Kaiser Permanente or Kaiser Industries.)

Children will become readers when their emotions are engaged and their imaginations are stretched and stirred by what they find on the printed page. The truly literate are not those who know how to read, but those who read fluently, responsively, critically, and because they want to.

It is wise to select from among the best books for even the youngest children. The best books are well-designed with uncluttered pages, interesting text, and colorful pictures that stimulate young imaginations.

When reading aloud from books, authors and illustrations can be discussed. Adult enjoyment should be apparent, and book happenings can be related to children's past experiences. Additional tips follow.

- Ask warm-up questions to set the stage and help children anticipate what will happen.
- Point as you read. For very young children, point to things in pictures as you talk about them. Pointing helps focus attention, thus lengthening the time children will sit still for a story. It also develops visual literacy—the idea that pictures have meaning.

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER
Arno, E.	*The Gingerbread Man*	Crowell
Bang, M.	*Ten, Nine, Eight*	Greenwillow
Baum, A., & Baum, J.	*One Bright Monday Morning*	Random House
Berenstain, S., & Berenstain, J.	*Bears in the Night*	Random House
Bonne, R., & Mill, A.	*I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*	Holiday House
Brown, M. W.	*Goodnight Moon*	Harper Festival
Charlip, R.	*What Good Luck! What Bad Luck!*	Scholastic
Charlip, R., & Supree, B.	*Mother Mother I Feel Sick Send for the Doctor Quick Quick Quick*	Tricycle Press
Flack, M.	*Ask Mr. Bear*	Simon & Schuster
Galdone, P.	*The Three Billy Goats Gruff*	Seabury
Graham, J.	*I Love You, Mouse*	Harcourt Brace
Hoban, T.	*Just Look*	Greenwillow
Hogrogian, N.	*One Fine Day*	Macmillan
Hutchins, P.	*The Surprise Party* *Rosie's Walk*	Simon & Schuster Simon & Schuster
Isadora, R.	*Max*	Simon & Schuster
Langstaff, J.	*Oh, A-Hunting We Will Go*	Simon & Schuster
Martin, B., Jr.	*Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*	Holt
Mayer, M.	*What Do You Do with a Kangaroo?*	Macmillan
Sendak, M.	*Chicken Soup with Rice*	HarperCollins
Shaw, C. B.	*It Looked Like Spilt Milk*	HarperCollins
Slobodkina, E.	*Caps for Sale*	HarperCollins
Spier, P.	*The Fox Went out on a Chilly Night*	Doubleday
Stevenson, J.	*"Could Be Worse!"*	Morrow, William & Co.
Stover, J.	*If Everybody Did*	McKay
Thomas, P.	*"Stand Back," Said the Elephant, "I'm Going to Sneeze"*	HarperCollins
Viorst, J.	*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*	Simon & Schuster
Zolotow, C.	*If It Weren't for You*	HarperCollins

FIGURE 19–6 Predictable books.

- Try asking what the child expects the book to be about from looking at the cover.
- Look for ways to involve the child during readings.
- Stop and let the child supply words.
- Talk about words (unusual ones) the child may not understand.

Parents are able to connect book story features not only to past happenings experienced together but also to the unique characteristics of their child's personality, interests, desires, and abilities. They have an emotional bond that can connect book-reading times to "pleasantness." They can start book reading during infancy and make parent-child book time a special "together" time. Families can ask questions, point to objects in illustrations and hesitate to promote guessing, and prompt their child to see details and cause-and-effect relationships. All of these things will increase the child's literacy and vocabulary. Families can become active listeners who add information a little above what the child knows. When they accept their child's comments and ideas, parents reinforce the child's efforts and desire to share his ideas. Storybook illustrations can also be "read" and discussed in detail. Encouraging families to read in their native language is an

Use the following ratings: O = often, S = sometimes, I = infrequently, D = does not apply

Family attempts to:

_____ 1. initiate family discussions at mealtimes.
_____ 2. give full attention to child's comments.
_____ 3. add descriptive or new words in conversation.
_____ 4. take child to library.
_____ 5. take time at post office to discuss letters and postage.
_____ 6. discuss children's books.
_____ 7. read to child daily.
_____ 8. point out print around the house.
_____ 9. accept child's opinions.
_____ 10. use dictionary with child.
_____ 11. talk on the child's chosen subject.
_____ 12. ask questions that promote child's descriptions or predictions.
_____ 13. listen patiently.
_____ 14. discuss television programs.
_____ 15. plan community outings.
_____ 16. invite interesting people to home and promote interactions with child.
_____ 17. correct child's speech casually with little attention to errors.
_____ 18. encourage child hobbies.
_____ 19. answer questions readily.
_____ 20. discuss care and storage of books.
_____ 21. play word games or rhyme words playfully.
_____ 22. talk about how print is used in daily life.
_____ 23. find books on subjects of interest to child.
_____ 24. consult with child's teacher.
_____ 25. give attention and notice accomplishments.
_____ 26. take dictation from child.
_____ 27. try not to interrupt child's speech frequently.
_____ 28. initiate family reading times and family discussions of classics.
_____ 29. establish a book center in the home.
_____ 30. create child writing or art center in the home.
_____ 31. give books as gifts.
_____ 32. provide different writing tools and scrap paper.
_____ 33. provide alphabet toys in the home.

FIGURE 19–7 Family self-rating.

important consideration. Schools enrolling other-than-English-speaking children include foreign language picture books in their classroom collection and often stock additional copies that parents can borrow. Local library staffers may be able to provide others. Family members who wish to rate themselves can use Figure 19–7. They may discover that they are already promoting child language and literacy in a number of ways.

Family Storytelling

The magic of parental storytelling not only improves child listening but also broadens child interests and opens new worlds of discovery. Following are tips from professional storytellers.

1. Select a story that will interest both you and the children. Your enthusiasm for a story is important in helping the children enjoy the story too.
2. Practice the story several times before you share it with the children. Learn all you can about the characters, settings, and events within the story.
3. Decide how to animate the story. Practice some hand gestures, facial expressions, or body movements that will spice up the story for the children.
4. Practice different accents, voice inflections (angry, sad, joyous), and loud and soft speech patterns to help make characters come alive and to add drama to your presentation.
5. Create some simple puppets from common household objects such as wooden picnic spoons, paper plates, or lunch bags. Draw individual character features on each item and use them during your story.
6. Promote your storytelling time. Make an announcement about an upcoming story or design a simple "advertisement" for a story and post it in advance.

7. Design a simple prop for the children to use during the telling of a story: a paper boat for a sea story, a magnifying glass or camera for a mystery story, or a paper flower for a springtime story.
8. Have the children suggest new props, gestures, or voice qualities that would be appropriate for retelling of the story at a later date.
9. After telling a story, talk about it with the children. Ask them to tell you the most enjoyable or memorable parts.
10. Being a good storyteller takes a little practice, but the time invested can make a world of difference in helping children appreciate good literature.

Preschool educators are quick to inform the families of English language learners that they should continue to support the development of their child's home language. Research and educational experts confirm that the child's native language development aids the child's academic success in English. Leaving the child's home language behind is not the school's intent as some parents and families may believe (Nemeth, 2009). The advantage of learning two (or more) languages well is a desirable skill in any future career. Hearing stories in his home language is an experience no child should miss.

Families Can Build Children's Self-Regulation

Vanderkam (2009) defines self regulation as the ability to stop, think, make a plan, and control impulses. Many educators believe these are important skills children need to do well in school. Vanderkam suggests self-regulation can be taught. Vanderkam notes educators are examining older studies, one of which is important research conducted in the 1960s and 70s by psychologist Walter Mischel. A description of a section of Mischel's research done by Vanderkam follows.

> . . . a researcher would place a marshmallow in front of a hungry four year old and tell the child that she could eat the marshmallow right then, or have two if she waited until the researcher returned. About a third of the children could distract themselves and wait. Followed for years, these highly disciplined kids had better school outcomes, and scored more than 200 points higher on the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) when older. (p. 9A)

See en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WALTER_MISCHEL for further information. A number of educational experts believe today's children are growing up with less practice in self-regulation. A good number have not demonstrated the ability to turn off TV and other media to start homework, nor can they plan how to solve important daily problems or hurdle road blocks. Brown (2009) cites the conclusions of recent research that suggests certain kinds of fantasy (dramatic) play in which children plan the fantasy roles they are going to enact, can have a measurable effect on children's ability to control their impulses. Some preschools are experimenting with planned activities and games that involve children's planning a course of action and then following through. Teacher's promotion of children's follow through plans is believed crucial. Games can be designed by teachers to promote (a) child's thinking first, and acting second, or (b) one where the child must control his/her impulses to be successful or complete the game.

Family advice to aid the development of children's self-control (regulation) development includes:

- playing games with rules which are enforced.
- promoting child help in household tasks that lead to successful task completion.
- setting time limits on TV or other electronic media especially during toddlerhood or preschool ages.
- limiting entertainment media viewing.
- letting a frustrated child think and plan his/her way out of a problem before jumping in with a solution or suggestion.
- coaching children to analyze and solve their own difficulties.
- promoting a child's work on a project and then expecting the child to complete to it.

VIDEO ACTIVITY

Go to the Education CourseMate website to watch the TeachSource Video Case entitled, *Parent Involvement in School Culture: A Literacy Project*. More than one parent in the video provided reasons for parents to be involved in their children's schooling.

1. Describe parent reasons and their suggestions for what a school or teacher should do to promote family involvement and school participation.
2. Linda Schwerty, the literacy specialist in the video, mentioned a number of ways she had tried to accommodate families so they could attend school meetings. Name a few.

- expecting a child to complete what activity he has chosen to start.
- increasing children's knowledge of process such as understanding there is a beginning, middle, and a finishing end of a task.

Home Reading and Writing Centers

Home reading centers are a lot like school reading areas. A comfortable, warm, private, well-lighted place free of distraction works best. Adjacent shelving and a chair for comfort is important to book-sharing times. Window seats and room dividers make cozy corners. Parents can get creative in selecting and furnishing reading centers.

Family book collections encourage children's positive attitudes concerning books as personal possessions and give books status. Home-made books often become children's favorite volumes. Families model appropriate storage and care in home reading centers. A special area with writing supplies, an alphabet chart, table, and chair should be suggested to parents.

Families interested in purchasing books can be alerted to the opportunity to buy books through school-sponsored book clubs, local library book sales, used-book stores, thrift shops, and yard sales. Pointers should be shared concerning selecting quality books.

Home Visits

In trying to understand attending children, especially "silent ones" or culturally diverse ones, a home visit may help to plan for children's individual needs. Most early childhood centers with strong home-school partnerships schedule yearly visits to each family.

Families Who Speak Languages Other Than English

Early childhood centers have become increasingly sensitive to other-than-English-speaking families who are often eager to promote their child's literacy. Many children with limited English proficiency also have in common that their parents are poorly educated, that their family income is low, that they reside in communities in which many families are similarly struggling, and that they attend schools with student bodies that are predominantly minority and low achieving.

Family literacy programs attempt to break the cycle of intergenerational illiteracy by providing services to both family and child. Programs vary from community to community as each program tries to meet the needs of participants. Participants are often parents who lack basic literacy skills and may need to acquire positive self-concepts to encourage their children's school success. Family literacy programs and adult literacy programs can be located through county Offices of Education or state agencies.

Family literacy programs have a greater chance of success and longevity when they attempt to tap into the wealth of background knowledge and experiences of the family (parent) participants (Ortiz & Ordonez-Jasis, 2010). Relevant themes in books by Latino authors urge families to preserve traditions, celebrate cultural richness and personal stories, value family heritage, and share family social issues and concerns (Ada, 2003).

Directors and administrators can receive information and a multitude of resources

family literacy programs — community programs attempting to provide literacy-building opportunities and experiences for families. Services are available for both adults and children.

concerning exemplary family literacy programs from the following two agencies:

National Center for Family Literacy
325 W. Main St., Suite 300
Louisville, KY 40202-4237

Division of Adult Education and Literacy Clearinghouse
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. S.W.
Washington, DC 20202-7240

Early childhood centers can often locate family literacy programs and identify resources by contacting the Director of Adult Education in their state. A growing number of communities are instituting publicly funded family literacy programs. Many of these programs are designed to provide child care, transportation, introduction to literacy-building home activities, access to community services, involvement in children's school activities, bilingual support, and the promotion of pride in language and culture.

Many education projects working with immigrant parents reject the idea that the best way to help families is to hold group parenting classes. They instead attempt to increase families' confidence in their teaching abilities by other means. They encourage family picture-book readings and after-book discussions in the child's native language. They provide books, book bags with suggested activities, or recorded books or may use other strategies.

African-American School Success

Murphy (2003) conducted case studies on four high-achieving elementary school children of African-American heritage. She points out the children's academic success was no accident because all four benefited from the continuous, active involvement of their parents in guiding and influencing their school success (p. 17).

Murphy describes five factors that "maintained and sustained" these African-American families. They had a high-achievement orientation, strong kinship bonds, strong work orientation, and displayed an adaptability of family roles, and a religious orientation, Murphy also cites additional contributing family characteristics. These include individual family beliefs and values, the quality of the interactive behavior of parents, parent's placing an extraordinarily high value on education, and family maintenance of a social environment in which learning flourished.

Early childhood educators working with diverse groups of children will find this study interesting, for it alerts teachers to the strength, resolve, and commitment to education that exists in many American families. One of the four children that Murphy studied, a 10-year-old, was asked why he has done so well in school. He cited

> "great teachers, parents who cared about my school work, friends who helped me with my school work, and a great staff"; and about his parents, he said, "They helped me learn about the world and my environment"; and he added, "I'm special because God made me special. He sent me to this earth to have fun, get an education, and go to college." (p. 21)*

What child wouldn't do well with a similar attitude toward school, teachers, parents, and himself as a "learner"?

Family Education Projects—Working Together

The fact that many young families today may be less prepared to care for children than were their predecessors has not escaped educators. Nor has it escaped our national government. A government program called "Good Start, Grow Smart," is an early child hood initiative that helps state and local governments strengthen early learning for young children. The initiative focuses on young children's literacy and cognitive, social, and emotional development. In an effort to reduce the stark contrast some young children and their family members experience between home and school, family literacy programs and early childhood programs currently are attempting to become aware of each enrolled child's family literacy proficiency, their culture-specific literacy practices, and family literacy knowledge. This type of collaboration and connection between home and school, it is felt, will promote better planning for school instruction and increase the school's ability to relate school activities to children's daily lives. Promoting home literacy events and activities,

*From Murphy, J. C. (2003, Nov.). Case studies in African-American school success and parenting behaviors. *Young Children, 58*(6):85, 89. Copyright © 2003 NAEYC. Used with permission.

particularly storybook reading, is still an important goal, but collaborating and understanding what families know, what they do, and how they do it, has been given increased emphasis and attention.

Paratore (2007) describes Project Flame (Family Literacy Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educcando) as follows:

> Although Project Flame is clearly based on teaching parents how to support their children in the acquisition of school-based literacy behaviors (including sessions on creating home library centers, book sharing, library visits, teaching the ABC's, and helping with homework), parents' personal perspectives and cultural knowledge provide an essential foundation for literacy conversation. This collaborative learning provides opportunities for participants to share the "multiple literacies"' of their home lives. (p. 59)

Current studies of Latino family's literacy practices confirm that there is considerable parent guidance, participation, assistance, and concern for their children's reading and writing development (Ortez & Ordonez-Jasis, 2010). These practices also result in children's higher scores, better attendance, and children's stronger cognitive skills (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik, 1994). Numerous studies suggest that when children brought-home school work, this often initiated family literacy interaction. Children sometimes served as teachers of other family members.

TELEVISION VIEWING AND YOUNG CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Parents often ask teachers about the value of television and videos and about their child's viewing habits. A national survey of more than 1,000 parents conducted by the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation (Antonucci, 2003) suggests that parents have divided opinions concerning whether television viewing "mostly helps" (43 percent) or "mostly hurts" (27 percent) children's learning. The foundation's survey also notes that in homes where television is on for the longest periods, children were less likely to be able to read. A review of research generally supports the idea that children's television viewing casts children as "watchers" rather than active participants in language exchanges with others. The effect of viewing on particular children differs. After children become readers, studies show that reading development is adversely affected when viewing is excessive. A report by the Kaiser Health Foundation found that 8 in 10 of the nation's 1- to 6-year-olds watched TV and/or played video games about 2 hours on a typical day (Neergaard, 2006). This estimated figure had not changed significantly since the Kaiser foundation's first report in 2003. Approximately 19 percent of children under age 2 have TVs in their bedroom even though the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that *no* TV or other multimedia use should happen for children younger than the age of 2—a time of the brain's most rapid development (Broughton, 2006).

Television programs for children older than age 2 that stress educational or informative material do not seem to have harmful potential. Again, the amount of viewing time is critical. Because research offers so many conflicting views, teachers cannot give definitive answers to families. Educators can express their concern that heavy television and video viewing rob a child of a literacy-rich home environment, one that is necessary for the child's optimal growth. Real firsthand experiences, exposure to books, and conversations with interested and responsive family members stack the odds in the favor of early literacy and cannot be replaced by television or videos.

What is excessive viewing? Research suggests that more than 10 hours of viewing weekly is excessive. An increasing number of alarmed educators and researchers warn that excessive, unsupervised television and video viewing by young children promotes negative effects, including

- aggressive and violent behavior.
- decreased imagination, cooperation, and success in relationships.
- vulnerability to stimulus addiction, resulting in the child needing overstimulation to feel satisfied.

- immunity to vicarious emotional stresses, resulting in the inability to produce socially acceptable emotional responses.
- poor reading comprehension and inability to persevere to an outcome.
- listening problems.
- pronunciation difficulty.
- inability to make mental pictures (visual imagery).
- inability to remember or decipher meaning from what is viewed or heard because of the passive aspect of television viewing.
- hindered development of metalinguistic awareness (e.g., understanding that letters make up words, written words are linked together into meaningful sentences, a word is made from printed marks, one reads from left to right in English, and the meaning of terms such as *author*, *title*, *illustration*, etc.).*
- decreased verbal interactions with family.
- decreased opportunities to experience life and exercise verbal problem solving.

Very few research studies have attempted to reduce preschoolers' television watching. Dennison, Russo, Burdick, and Jenkins (2004) were successful in doing so. Their 2-year study with 16 early childhood centers was funded in part by the National Institutes of Health. Intervention sessions emphasized reading and alternatives to television viewing. They also stressed the importance of families eating meals together. Children in the study group were rewarded with stickers for choosing television alternatives. A children's book, *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much TV*, featuring an anti-television theme, was introduced to children in the study. Results indicated that children in the study session reduced television watching time by 3.1 hours per week. For a full description of the intervention program, consult the February 2004 issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

Some studies suggest that children, even those who have been taught critical analysis skills, do not generate critical thinking during television commercials. Children and adults think differently, using different parts of their brain. In other words, they tend to believe the images they see!

*From Jane M. Healy, Ph.D., *Endangered Minds*.

Educators are beginning to understand that children's excessive television viewing, electronic gaming, and other media use, combined with societal attitudes concerning reading and intellectual pursuits, are our nation's greatest threat to literacy and the development of our children's thinking abilities.

What can parents do? They can place firm limits, participate in children's television viewing, discuss program content, turn off the set, and give substitute care providers clear instructions concerning screen time. Arden's family had another solution.

> Arden's father explained to his child's teacher "I don't want the television or the computer to become the central focus of my home." His solution was to have each of his children select those television programs they wanted to watch during the next week on Sunday. Each program was to be one hour in length. Then designated viewing days and times were decided. Homework assignments had to be completed beforehand. Certain TV programs were off limits. Child-selected programs were recorded or taped in advance if necessary and a schedule was posted. Computer time was also strictly regulated and varied with a child's age. The father also planned weekly family times. These included joint projects, discussions, field trips; library visits, social, cultural, and sports events, and other local education destinations. The time spent selecting and recording child programs was well worth the effort Arden's parents believed. (Machado, 2011)

HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Schools differ widely in both the amount of written home-school communication and the amount of time spent talking or meeting with parents. Teachers are struggling, particularly in urban, coastal, and border states, to learn about family practices, beliefs, and educational needs and desires. They wish to find common ground and acknowledge parents' cultural values while

also sharing their programs' philosophies and teaching techniques. That can be a challenging goal to achieve, particularly in areas with a diverse population. In places such as California's Silicon Valley, it is common to find children from as many as 10 to 29 different ethnic or culturally diverse groups in one elementary classroom.

Most preschool teachers desire more time and more conversations and additional written communication with families. This suits some families who seem to be seeking supportive assistance in child-rearing. Each parent group and center is unique, and consequently, tremendous differences exist in the degree to which preschool centers and families work together. Most centers try to provide some type of family assistance. Families who receive help and support feel more open to contribute to the school's activities.

Family-school contacts usually take place in at least five ways—daily conversations, e-mail, written communications, family meetings, workshops, social events, and individual conferences. At the beginning of the child's school year, a telephone call welcoming the family establishes communication. Weekly newsletters and personal notes from teachers maintain links thereafter.

Communication on the Fly

Teachers have a good chance (time and duties permitting) to share children's interests and favorite school activities when families arrive to take their children home from the center; teachers can discuss with family such things as new interests, accomplishments, books, play objects, and child-created or constructed work. Children spend time with and talk about what excites them; the observant teacher can be aware of developing interests. Families are usually curious about what their children have shared about their home life and out-of-school activities.

Bulletin Boards

Many schools use "family" bulletin boards as a communicative device. Schools may receive more announcements of literary happenings in their communities than do families. Language-developing local events and activities can be advertised so families can become aware of them when picking up or dropping off children. Short magazine and newspaper articles of interest can be posted at eye-catching levels.

The Culturally Sensitive Educator's Awareness of Family Language Practices

The family language practices of English language learners can vary, yet similarities may exist. When teachers understand cultural differences in attending children's language use, it benefits their ability to plan instructional activities, converse, and respond. After a welcoming classroom environment is created for their English learning children, teachers monitor whether teacher language, gestures, or actions might convey meanings the educator had not intended.

Most experts suggest educators visit children's homes and observe family language interactions and also attend community functions in children's neighborhoods. Studying a family's culturally influenced communication style using a variety of methods and resources is also recommended. Family language practice may include (but is not limited to the following):

- storytelling frequently in family conversations.
- using particular hand gestures (both positive and objectionable) with specific implied meanings.
- using pantomime, role-playing, drama, or dance to express ideas.
- asking for child silence or listening during conversations.
- communicating fear and other emotions in uniquely different ways.
- using speech at a slower or fast pace than is customary in English.
- trying to avoid looking into a speaker's eyes during verbal exchanges.
- using direct instruction to teach children appropriate words to say in specific circumstances and situations.
- participating in many cooperative learning activities rather than independent learning ones.
- valuing artistic gestures as a means of expression.

Planned Meetings and Conferences

Planned meetings include individual and group gatherings (Figure 19–8). Conferences let families know what plans the school has in place to address their children's individual interests and growth, and whether their plans are working. When children have interests in alphabet letters, dramatizing, special-topic books, or other pursuits, families and teachers can discuss related school and home activities.

Preschool staff members prepare for home-based conferences with individual families by collecting child work samples, observation records, and assessments of social and academic progress. Discussions focus on child growth areas and then possible school and home planning to further growth. A portfolio, if developed, is shared and discussed. Families and teachers exchange perceptions of the child's unique needs and strengths while working together to plan and promote the child's full potential.

Teachers often gain insight into family goals, concerns, resources, and home environments during these conferences while families gain a deeper understanding of their children's progress and the families' role in being the child's first and ongoing teacher of language and literacy.

Method and Material Review Meetings

A meeting can be planned to take a closer look at the early childhood center's planned language program, materials, and language arts center. Families then get a firsthand look and an opportunity to explore what is at hand. Teachers often conduct sample activities and demonstrate material and equipment use. Families are able to ask questions about their children's use of or interest in a center's planned opportunities.

FIGURE 19–8 Parents' wishes and concerns are often aired in parent-staff meetings.

Family and Teacher Study Meetings

A family and parenting training effort developed by The National Latino Children's Institute (2008) blends child development research with traditional and community-based wisdom. Lessons highlight family relationships and child-adult interactions during the early years, especially language growth and development.

Other possible themes of study meetings might include (1) the effects of television viewing on children's language development, (2) bilingualism, or (3) free and inexpensive toys that promote language or any other subjects selected by families. Outside experts and speakers or films and other commercial media can present additional topics to be studied and discussed. Knowing what community and neighborhood issues exist that affect young children is important. This type of meeting helps inform all present. Differing views clarify everyone's thinking.

The following items are the author's high-priority topics. Many families show concern over their children's articulation and vocabulary, particularly children's pronunciation and speech errors. They may be worried when they notice that a child's language, which at 3 was apparently error-free and highly grammatical, becomes full of errors a year later. They need to know that this indicates progress. At each successive stage a child masters a limited range of simple speech structures. When more complicated structures are attempted due to his more complicated thinking, his hypotheses are tested by whether he is understood or not. It is helpful to assure families that the school's staff monitors fluency and to share typical child speech characteristics. Such discussions often relax parents and dispel their fears. Hints concerning simple modeling of correct forms are well received by most families.

Sharing information on school interaction techniques used to increase children's speech by listening, following children's leads, and expanding interest in daily conversation is also

very important. Families need to realize how influential they are in modeling an interest in and positive attitudes toward reading, writing, and speaking. Families profit when teachers share their goals and model their techniques and strategies for storybook read-alouds or other types of learning activities.

Family ability to listen closely to child ideas rather than judging correctness of grammar should be discussed. Alexander (2004) notes that research has found that before a child reaches age 14, parents are roughly twice as important as school is for a child's learning. Educators urge adults to engage in intellectually challenging conversations, offer new and increasingly descriptive words, and extend conversations with unpressured questioning. Another topic to discuss with families is the warm, unpressured social environments that promote family conversations. Discussing quality books and "advertising" books to children can perhaps combat electronic media dominance in the home. Analyzing books, pictures, text, and their messages is another great idea. The child's home access to creative materials, such as drawing and marking tools, is also important.

Families have many questions about early reading and writing of alphabet letters. Both reading and writing acquisition is aided by a widely enriching home and preschool curriculum that preserves children's feelings of competence by offering that which is slightly above their level and related closely to their present interests.

Last on this list may be the most important topic teachers can discuss with families. A lot of language development is possible when family and other adults share activities they love—the ones they can speak about enthusiastically in detailed specific terms; the ones that are vital to them and for which they have a passionate interest. Examples are easy to find and role-play for a parent and family groups: the dad who does carpentry, the grandma who grows garden vegetables, the aunt who dances the flamenco, the mom who makes noodles from scratch, the brother who plays the flute, the sister who collects butterflies, and the uncle who restores motorcycles. So many times families do not see themselves as language and information resources and do not understand the power of shared experiences and conversations with their young child. Family members supply the daily experiences that give words meaning and depth, as do teachers, but they are more instrumental because of the amount of time spent with the child and their access to the world of children's lives out of school.

Fathers and Language Development

An increasing percentage of children do not live with their fathers (Child Care Bureau, 2004). The number of children in single parent homes has nearly tripled since 1960, and the percentage of men who call themselves stay-at-home dads has stalled below 3 percent (Romano & Dokoupil, 2010). For some young children, good fathering contributes to the development of emotional security, curiosity, and math and verbal skills, a national study concludes. Many preschools are rethinking their family involvement and planning ways to include children's male relatives to a greater degree. Some schools require "father classroom time," and family meetings are designed to cleverly interest and increase male attendance.

Fathers can play an important role in their children's school achievement, and the earlier they become involved with their children's learning and socialization, the better. Educational research suggests that a father's ability to support his child's learning can affect the child's engagement with books.

Could it be that a sizeable group of American men have been raised to feel incompetent at child rearing? Many people might say so. In Sweden in 1995, a simple but revolutionary law took effect, which helped Swedish fathers redefine their role in parenting. Romano and Dokoupil (2010) explain the law's effect in 2010.

> . . . now more than 80 percent of Swedish fathers take four months off for the birth of a new child, up from 4 percent a decade ago. And a full 41 percent of companies now formally encourage fathers to go on parental leave, up from only 2 percent in 1993. Simply put men are expected to work less and father more. (p. 45)
>
> If a man refuses time at home with kids, he faces questions from friends, family, and, yes, other guys. Policy changes

> produce personal changes—and then, slowly but surely, society changes as well (Hegedus, 2010, p. 46)

Explaining Phonemic Awareness to Families

Many familiess are well read, but a definition of phonetic awareness and why it has become important is a good idea. Main points to transmit to families include (1) Phonemic awareness is an essential skill in learning to read; (2) Preschoolers can become aware and play with sounds, rhymes, and silly words; (3) Speech is composed of small units called phonemes (sounds); and (4) Lots of family word play with letter sounds can increase child skill.

School Lending Libraries. Increasingly, early childhood centers are aware of the benefits of maintaining a school lending library. Although extra time and effort are involved in this provision to families, centers are sensitive to the plight of families who are economically distressed and pressed for time. Lending libraries can also provide families with book-reading tips. Books in the first language of enrolled children are included in a center's book collection.

Rules and procedures for checkout and return are prepared in print for families. Staff time, center budget, and staff availability are key factors in deciding whether a family lending library is a viable activity.

Working with Hard-to-Reach Families

Centers incorporate family dinners and provide child care to increase family attendance at home-school meetings. Every effort is made to make the center staff and facility as nonintimidating as possible and to convince every family that they can contribute to child literacy.

DAILY CONTACTS

Greeting both families and children as they arrive starts a warm, comfortable atmosphere; encourages talking; and sets the tone for conversation. Should a family member entering the classroom be ignored in the doorway or left to search for a staff person? Not in a school sensitive to the power of a personal greeting. Teachers should exchange comments, build family-school partnerships, and help children enter by offering choices of possible activities through statements such as, "We've put red play dough on the table by the door for you." Or "The matching game you told me you liked yesterday is waiting for you on the shelf near the bird cage."

Family mailboxes can hold daily teacher messages. Important milestones, such as the child's first interest in or attempt at printing alphabet letters or his name or his first created stories, should be shared. A short note from the teacher about a child's special events is appreciated by most families. A note about special daily happenings such as, "I think Toni would like to tell you about the worm she found in the garden" or "Saul has been asking many questions about airplanes," keeps families aware of their children's expanding interests.

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Often, centers prepare informal letters, e-mails, or newsletters that describe school happenings or daily themes. Figures 19–9 and 19–10 are two examples of this type of teacher-family communication. A written communication may contain any information concerning child literacy and local services or events.

Monthly Newsletters

If a school is trying to help families expand their children's experiences, newsletters can suggest family outings and excursions to local community events and low-cost and free entertainment. Dates, times, costs, telephone numbers, and simple maps can be included. It is suggested that newsletters be upbeat, with humor, quotes, and anecdotes scattered throughout the pages.

FAMILY RESOURCES

Centers sometimes provide informational articles, magazines, and books that may be borrowed for short periods or available at the school's classroom parent library or office. Photocopied magazine articles in manila folders that have been advertised on the school's family bulletin board are a good resource for busy families.

A free public library card can be the smartest card in a family's wallet because the more children read the better they do in school. Libraries offer a wide variety of services that

SMALL, SMALLER, SMALLEST

Dear Parents,

We are studying the size of things and will have many discussions this week comparing two or more objects or people. In similar discussions at home, emphasize the endings of size words (*-er*, *-est*).

Following are some activities you may wish to try in which size can be discussed. Note the words *big*, *bigger*, and *biggest* or *tall*, *taller*, *tallest*, or others could also be appropriately used.

1. Sort bottle caps, canned food cans, spoons, or crackers.
2. Discuss your pet's size in relation to a neighbor's pet.
3. Take a large piece of paper and cut into square pieces. Discuss small, smaller, smallest.
4. Look for round rocks or pebbles and compare sizes. Ask the child to line them up from small to smallest.
5. Play games involving finding objects smaller than your shoe, finger, a coin, and so on, or smaller than a ball but larger than a marble.

You will find many opportunities to compare size in your neighborhood or on walks, or in the course of daily living.

Sincerely,

Your partner in your child's education

Your child's preschool teacher

FIGURE 19–9 Sample of informal letter to parents to strengthen school learning. Note: Adding child drawings might create additional interest.

Dear Family,

This week we have talked about many means of transportation—of how we use animals and machines to take us from one place to another.

We built things, painted things, and learned songs and heard stories about different vehicles such as bikes, cars, trucks, buses, boats, trains, airplanes, horses and wagons, etc., and we even took a bus ride.

Here are some suggested home activities to reinforce school learning.

- Talk about places you go together in your car.
- Save large cardboard boxes—line them up, and pretend they are railroad cars.
- Save old magazines. Let your child find "vehicles that move things from place to place." The child may want to find, cut, and paste pictures.
- Take a walk, and find all the moving vehicles you can.
- Sing a train song, "I've Been Working on the Railroad," or any other.
- Plan a ride on or in a vehicle that is new to the child.

As you enjoy life together, you may want to point out and talk about transportation.

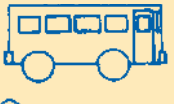
Sincerely,

P.S. Here's a rebus poem to share.

Sam wanted to go to the zoo.

The family wanted to go there too.

The was out of gas.

And the  didn't go past

their , so what could they do?

How could they get to the zoo?

FIGURE 19–10 A partnership letter.

promote child (and adult) literacy. Many public libraries offer the following: help locating material for children's homework assignments and/or research, books, magazines, periodicals, microfiche, newspapers, videos, movie rentals, CDs, DVDs, CD-ROMs, Internet access, laser printers, copy machines, photographs, audio books, and entertainment media. Libraries frequently sponsor and create children's programs and cultural events, bulletin boards posting local happenings that promote learning opportunities, and they hold periodic used-book sales where inexpensive books and other literacy-promoting items can be obtained.

FAMILY MEMBERS AS PROGRAM VOLUNTEERS

The role of families, relatives, neighbors, and community volunteers has changed. Family and community volunteers and resources are seen as vital parts of language arts instruction (Figure 19–11 and Figure 19–12). The teacher's goal is to involve and invite resource people to participate in a relationship that urges them to become active participants in children's language learning and literacy. Some of the ways families can help and contribute include joining school efforts, being guest speakers, providing classroom demonstrations, joining class field trips, performing maintenance tasks, and spending time fund raising or other types of assistance.

FIGURE 19–11 This parent volunteer adds cultural songs with vigorous movements.

FIGURE 19–12 Blake and Ethan's dad volunteers as a computer consultant so he comes to the center with his sons one morning a week.

Some family members work in businesses where useful language arts materials are discarded, such as scrap paper, cardboard, and so forth. The family is usually more than willing to obtain these previously discarded materials, especially if they are unable to volunteer.

Some family volunteers enjoy making language games or keeping the school message board current (Figure 19–13). Art, photography, sewing, and carpentry talents lend themselves to creating and constructing many classroom materials. Repairing a school's books, flannel board sets, and puppet collections can

FIGURE 19–13 Some parent volunteers prefer to help indirectly with room maintenance rather than directly assisting children.

be an ongoing task. Through the joint efforts of home and school, centers are able to cut costs and provide a wider range of language-developing experiences for attending children.

SUMMARY

Schools differ in both the amount and types of interactions between families and the center. School personnel need to clarify priorities that they wish to communicate to families concerning children's language development. By teachers and families working together, children's learning experiences can be reinforced and expanded. A first step involves gaining family's trust.

Contact with families takes place in a variety of ways, both planned and unplanned, including daily conversations, written communications, meetings, and scheduled conferences. Centers are interested in promoting the reading of quality books in the home and alerting families to community opportunities. Volunteers can aid goal realization in the language arts by sharing their talents, hobbies, labor, time, and energy. Together, home and school work toward children's language growth and competence.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Readings

Berenstain, S., & Berenstain, J. (1984). *The Berenstain bears and too much TV.* New York: Random House. (A child's book that deals with television issues).

Falk, B. (2009). *Teaching the way children learn.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Fox, M. (2008). *Why reading aloud to our children can change their lives*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt.

Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships.* New York: The New Press.

Jones, E., & Cooper, R. M. (2006). *Playing to get smart.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Neuman, S. B. (Ed.) (2009). *Educating the other America: Top experts tackle poverty, literacy, and achievement in our schools*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co.

Schon, I. (2002, July). Pars los ninos . . . Picture books in Spanish for young children. *Young Children*, *57*(4), 92–85.

Sprung, B., & Froschi, M. (2010). *Supporting boy's learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Thernstrom, A., & Thernstrom, S. (2003). *No excuses: Closing the racial gap in learning*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Wells, R. (2005). *My shining star: Raising a child who's ready to learn*. New York: Scholastic Press.

International Reading Association Brochures

One copy of the following brochures and booklets can be downloaded from the International Reading Association's website, www.reading.org, or can be ordered for a small fee.

Brochures

Explore the Playground of Books: Tips for Parents of Beginning Readers, 1019-852/Spanish: 1019S-852

Family Literacy and the School Community: A Partnership for Lifelong Learning, 1045–852

Get Ready to Read! Tips for Parents of Young Children, 1017-852/Spanish: 1017S-852

Good Nutrition Leads to Better Learning, 1054-852 / Spanish: 1054S-852

Library Safari: Tips for Parents of Young Readers and Explorers, 1032-852/Spanish: 1032S-852

Connection: Make the Reading-Writing Connection Tips for Parents of Young Learners, 1038-852/ Spanish: 1038S-852

Making the Most of Television: Tips for Parents of Young Viewers, 1024-852/Spanish: 1024S-852

Summer Reading Adventure! Tips for Parents of Young Readers, 1023-852/Spanish: 1023S-852

Understanding Your Child's Learning Differences, 1037-852/Spanish: 1037S-852

What is Family Literacy? Getting Involved in Your Child's Literacy Learning, 1044-852

Booklets available for a minimum fee can also be ordered.

Booklets

Beginning Literacy and Your Child: A Guide to Helping Your Baby or *Preschooler Become a Reader*, 1028-852

Help Your Child Learn English as a Second Language, 1056-852/ Spanish: 1056S-852

Your Child's Vision Is Important, 1049-852

Your Gifted Child and Reading: How to identify and Support Advanced Literacy Development, 1057-852

Helpful Websites

American Academy of Pediatrics
http://www.aap.org
Position statements and phamplets on media issues and age level recommendations.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
http://www.cdc.gov
Search for "act early." The website offers descriptions of young children's developmental milestones and early warning signs of developmental problems.

HIPPY USA (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters)
http://www.hippyusa.org
Provides information about this parent involvement program that promotes 3- to 5-year-old's school success.

National Child Care Information Center
http://nccic.org
A clearinghouse for information of interest to families and educators. Spanish-language resources are available.

The National Institute for Literacy
http://www.nifl.gov
Provides information about this federal organization that supports state, regional, and national literacy services.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Communications and Outreach
http://www.nochildleftbehind.gov
Select Publications link and request booklets.

Go to www.cengagebrain.com to access this text's Education CourseMate website where you'll find helpful resource such as video activities, glossary flashcards, interactive exercises, quiz questions, and more!

Review It and Use It

CHAPTER REVIEW

A. In a paragraph or two, describe an ideal family involvement program that would promote an early childhood center's language arts program.

B. List the teacher's duties and responsibilities in school-home communications.

C. What is the meaning of the following statement? "Early childhood centers reinforce home literacy just as homes can reinforce the center's literacy activities." Be specific.

D. Describe the kinds of problems schools may face when they plan family-teacher study meetings concerned with enhancing young children's ease in learning to read.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. Photocopy the following list of scenarios, and cut the sections into cards. Rate each card before joining a group of classmates to discuss ratings.

Rating Scale:

1	2	3
teacher used good judgment	uncertain about teacher's behavior	teacher used poor judgment

A field trip is in progress. Mrs. Winkler, a parent, is acting as a volunteer supervisor. A teacher overhears Mrs. Winkler tell her group to be quiet and listen to her explanation of what is happening at the shoe factory. The teacher tactfully suggests to Mrs. Winkler that the children may wish to ask questions.	During a study meeting, two parents are having a heated discussion concerning television's value. A teacher offers her views. Her views happen to support one side of the argument.
Mr. Sousa is a violinist. He is also Tami's father. Tami's teacher sends a special note to Mr. Sousa, inviting him to share his talents with the class. The note mentions that he will be allowed to play the violin for a 5-minute period.	Mr. Thomas, a teacher, knows about a book sale at a local children's book store. He includes the item in the school's newsletter. He also announces a male only school meeting.
Sending written messages to parents is not personal, Ms. Garcia (a teacher) feels. She telephones parents in the evening with news of milestones their children have accomplished in the school's language arts program.	Family bulletin board posting is part of Miss Alexian's duties. She feels that families rarely read posted materials. At a staff meeting, she asks others for helpful ideas for displays that would grab attention.
Mr. Washington, a teacher, greets the children by waving from across the room or saying, "Hi, Mark. I'm glad you're here."	"Oh, that's not the right way to ask a child about his artwork," Mrs. Yesmin, a teacher, says to Patsy's father.

"You're her teacher. Why ask me what she does at home? It's what goes on at school I'm interested in!" says Mrs. McVey, Pam's mother. "Knowing how Pam spends her time at home helps me plan school activities," explains Mrs. Lerner, Pam's teacher.	"Do you read to your child?" Miss Hernandez asks Mike's mother. "Of course, didn't you think I did?" the child's mother answers.
"There's an article on the parent bulletin board about children's use of slang words that you might want to look over, Mrs. Chung," says Mr. Benjamin (a teacher) to one of the parents.	During a parent-teacher meeting, Mrs. Texciera says, "Jill's work is always so messy." Miss Flint, the teacher, answers, "With time, it will improve. She's working with small puzzles and painting. This will give her more practice and control."
"Oh, don't worry about Jon watching television, Mr. Dunne," says Jon's teacher.	"There isn't one good video for preschoolers, Mr. Perez!"

2. With a group of classmates, list ideas for families to obtain inexpensive quality books for home libraries.

3. Plan a newsletter for a local preschool center with helpful information concerning children's language development.

4. Invite a school's director to discuss family involvement in a school's language arts goals.

5. If you were to design a literacy packet for families whose children don't attend preschool to use over the summer before their child starts kindergarten, what would it include and why?

6. Interview a few families of preschoolers. Ask, "What three communication skills do you believe are important for your child's success in elementary school?"

7. Visit a public library in a multilingual, culturally and racially diverse community to search for other-than-English picture books. Were other literacy-promoting resources available to families that do not read English? Report back to your training group.

8. Discuss the things you observe concerning the lives of single parents you know that you think might have escaped the notice of their child's teachers. Especially mention factors that may affect young children's language arts development.

9. Arreola (2003) believes that many Latino parents are intimidated and are reluctant to visit their child's school:

   > Our culture believes that it is their territory, you don't get in their territory—if you do, you're not respecting them. (p. 4a)

   How could you encourage uncertain families to attend school functions?

Appendix

EDUCATION STANDARDS

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Assessment Tools (Chapter 6) • 572

Additional Story (Chapter 10) • 573

The Crooked-Mouth Family • 573

Flannel Board Activity Sets (Chapter 12) • 574

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