

CHAPTER 3

Benefits of Family Involvement for Children

Why does family involvement matter? This question has taken on greater importance over the past few decades as more attention has been devoted to involving families in their children's education. In this chapter we review the benefits of family involvement for children.

As you read this chapter, take notes on the following items. Use your notes to address the Reflections, Discussion Questions, Field Assignment, and Capstone Activities that you find in the chapter.

- Explain why it is important for teachers to have an ecological perspective of their work with children and families.
- Explain how family involvement contributes to children's academic achievement.
- Explain the purpose of family backpacks, tip sheets, activity calendars, and activity cards. Summarize the guides for their development.

COMMUNITY LEARNING GUIDE

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory and Family Involvement

Appreciating the benefits associated with family involvement requires us to first take a broad perspective of children's development and education. Indeed, as reflected in Chapters 1 and 2, children's well-being is the responsibility of not just families or schools but also the entire community. Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) ecological model of human development provides us with a lens for appreciating these multiple sources of influence and their interconnections.

The information in this chapter supports the following family-school-community partnership standards. These standards are reviewed in Chapter 2.

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| NAEYC Standards and Associated Key Elements | 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3b, 3c, 5c, 6a, 6c, 6d, 6e |
| ACEI Standards | 1.0, 3.2, 4.0, 5.1, 5.2 |
| PTA Standards | 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 |

Let's begin with the term *ecology*. When we hear this term, most of us think about the interconnections between plant and animal life that form physical ecosystems such as rivers, mountains, and deserts. Bronfenbrenner (2005) built on this idea to describe a **human ecology** of interacting social systems:

Over the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. (p. 6)

Reflected in this quote is Bronfenbrenner's belief that children are active players in their development. In short, children both adapt to and influence the interactions that take place around them. For example, children learn to distinguish between the different expectations associated with their home and classroom environments. At the same time, teachers and parents learn how to interact with different children, based on their unique personalities and needs. An abbreviated summary of other ecological principles governing children's development include the following (Bronfenbrenner, 1990, pp. 27–38):

- **Mutual attachment.** In order to develop, a child requires progressive interactions on a regular basis over an extended period of time with one or more persons with whom the child develops a strong, mutual, and emotional attachment.
- **Responsiveness to the environment.** The establishment of progressive interpersonal interactions under conditions of strong mutual attachment promotes a child's responsiveness to other aspects of the physical and social environment. This in turn invites exploration, manipulation, and imagination, all of which accelerate the child's psychological growth.
- **Admiration from a third adult.** Progressively more complex interactions and emotional attachment between a caregiver and child depend on the involvement of another adult who assists, encourages, and gives status to the caregiver engaging in joint activities with the child.
- **Socially supportive exchanges.** Effective child rearing in the family and other settings requires an exchange of information, two-way communication, mutual accommodation, and mutual trust among the settings in which children and their parents participate (home, school, parent's place of work, etc.).
- **Supportive child rearing policies and practices.** Effective child rearing in the family and other settings requires public policies and practices that support child rearing activities not only on the part of parents but also on the part of relatives, neighbors, communities, and economic, social, and political institutions within society.

These principles are reflected in the structure of our human ecology, a summary of which follows.

The Structure of the Human Ecology

Bronfenbrenner (2005) described the structure of the human ecology as taking place within “a series of nested and interconnected structures” (p. 45). These structures include five social systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. In this section, we briefly review each of these systems and how they support children's development and education (see FYI 3.1). In some cases, educational influences are *proximal*, meaning

they have a direct impact on children. Other educational influences are *distal*, meaning their influence on children is more indirect. For example, a parent-teacher conference includes both proximal and distal influences. Proximal influences include the teacher's and parent's conversations with the child about the conference and their following up with assistance in the classroom and at home. Distal influences include the teacher and parent's adherence to a conference schedule set by the school principal and discussion of academic standards set by the state board of education.

FYI 3.1 Supports for Children's Development and Education in the Human Ecology

Microsystem Supports

- Children learn how expectations and rules of behavior change across different microsystems (e.g., home, classroom, youth group).
- Children learn the language and routines associated with different microsystems.
- Children learn new life skills by participating in different microsystems.
- Children observe how individuals interact and treat each other across different microsystems.
- Children learn to apply basic human values, such as honesty and respect, across different microsystems.
- Children learn how to get along with their peers by participating in group activities across different microsystems.

Mesosystem Supports

- Parents and teachers collaborate in sending children consistent messages about their behavior.
- Parents and teachers collaborate in reinforcing similar learning experiences in the classroom and at home.
- Parents, teachers, and other school personnel collaborate in assessing the physical, cognitive, and emotional needs of children.
- Schools collaborate with community agencies to provide children's physical, cognitive, and social-emotional needs.
- Teachers enrich children's education and provide cultural learning experiences by using interactive technologies to cooperate with other teachers within and outside the United States.

Exosystem Supports

- School administrators, as well as teacher and parent groups, work together to plan and implement policies that ensure all children receive a quality education.
- School boards develop educational budgets and policies that take into account the lives of diverse families.
- Communities support the well-being of children and families' through social, health, sanitation, recreational, and protective services. They also offer ongoing cultural and artistic events that enrich human lives and reinforce a sense of community identity.
- Local, state, and federal governments pass legislation that takes into account the diversity of community life.

Macrosystem Supports

- Children receive consistent and positive messages about "American values" and customs through the media, community events, and classroom lessons.
- Children learn to respect the values and customs of all cultures within and outside the classroom and home.
- Children are taught democratic principles through the social studies curriculum, use of respectful behavior management practices, and daily routines such as the morning pledge of allegiance.
- Children are taught about the value of healthy self-expression through literature, dance, art, and music.

The microsystem. The microsystem refers to the social systems closest to children's daily lives. The classroom and home are the most common examples of childhood microsystems. Within these immediate social systems, children are socialized and educated as they interact with and learn from adults and peers. Other microsystems important to children include after-school programs, youth organizations, and religious institutions.

The mesosystem. The mesosystem refers to the number and quality of linkages between children's microsystems. Children's development and education are supported best when there are frequent and strong linkages among their microsystems. For example, our focus on family-school-community partnerships is, primarily, a mesosystem issue. Indeed, the upcoming chapters in this textbook deal with information and practical strategies you can use to strengthen the continuity among children's home, classroom, and community lives. In addition, many of the Community of Learners' Field Assignments and Capstone Activities at the end of each chapter are designed to strengthen various aspects of the family-school-community mesosystem.

The exosystem. So far, we have talked about ecological systems in which children directly participate. In contrast, the exosystem refers to social systems in which children do not participate but that nevertheless influence children's actions. For example, every school sets policies that guide children's daily behavior, schedule, and dress. Yet children themselves have little or no role in establishing these policies.

Other exosystems in which decisions and policies are set without input from children include community agencies, businesses, and the federal government. Community agencies decide what types of services children will receive, when they will be available, and how they will be accessed. The work schedule, pay, and benefits businesses set for parents impact children's quality of life. For example, some businesses are more flexible than others in allowing parents time off to attend parent-teacher conferences. Finally, the federal government establishes policies and programs that, depending on your particular view, benefit or harm children.

The macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner (2005) describes the macrosystem as a "societal blueprint for a particular culture or subculture" (p. 81). Put another way, each culture establishes values and beliefs that govern the priorities of all the previously noted ecological systems. In the United States, we have two predominant macrosystem blueprints. We live under a democratic style of government and we operate as a capitalist society. Thus, rather than being ruled by a monarch, we elect individuals to represent our views in Congress. Likewise, rather than allowing our government total control over our economy, we rely on businesses to produce goods and compete for customers in a free market.

Before leaving the macrosystem, it is important to touch on one additional issue. Although all Americans share the values of democracy and capitalism, we also come from different geographic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Subsequently, one can argue that nested within our American macrosystem are subculture macrosystems.

The chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner added this social system to his original model to acknowledge that, like physical ecologies, human ecologies change over time. More precisely, in every generation there are events and people that alter the course of history. Likewise, new

technology influences the way we behave and work, and new educational research reshapes the way children are taught in the classroom.

Try your hand at assessing our human ecology in relationship to educational issues you may face as a teacher. Complete Case Study 3.1.

CASE STUDY 3.1 Assessing the Human Ecology From a Teacher’s Perspective

- In response to the recent recession, some schools have cut art and music programs as a way to save money. What does this exosystem policy say about our American macrosystem?
 - As a teacher, how might you compensate for these cuts in the classroom microsystem?
 - As a teacher, how might you join with others in your community to create a school-community collaborative project (i.e., school-community mesosystem) to ensure all children have access to art and music during or after school hours?
 - How have chronosystem trends addressed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 altered the way families and teachers interact today?
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Teachers often find the ecological model helpful in thinking about how contemporary educational issues are influenced by school, family, and community links. For example, one group of researchers noted the limitations of current educational policies in relying too heavily on school professionals to ensure children’s educational achievement (Whipple, Evans, Barry, & Maxwell, 2010). Taking an ecological perspective, these researchers measured two different types of proximal risks that they believed were associated with student academic performance. The first measure involved elementary school risk factors such as student mobility, teachers’ years of experience, and school building conditions. The second measure involved neighborhood risk factors such as proportion of households living in poverty, proportion of single mothers as heads of households, proportion of crowded households, and proportion of vacant buildings. As the researchers predicted, the percentage of students meeting state English and math standards decreased significantly as the number of neighborhood and school risk factors increased. The researchers pointed to this finding as evidence of the range of proximal ecological factors, many outside the control of school professionals, that can impact students’ educational performance.

With this brief introduction to ecological theory, we next turn to a review of key research reviews and studies that confirm the power of the home–school mesosystem in promoting children’s learning skills and their motivation to do well in the classroom.

Research on the Benefits of Family Involvement

As you will discover in this section, there is ample evidence to reinforce the importance of teachers’ working collaboratively with parents on behalf of children’s development and education.

Longitudinal Studies: Answers to Four Common Questions

Researchers conducting **longitudinal studies** focus on changes in behavior over time. Findings from a number of longitudinal studies provide answers to the following frequently asked questions about the importance of family involvement.

Does family involvement have a lasting impact on children's academic achievement? A number of studies have explored this question. Perhaps the best known study, the Perry preschool project (PPP), provided preschool educational services to children as well as family support services to parents (Schweinhart, 2005; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993, 1997). Family services included group meetings and home visits to work with parents on supporting their children's learning skills.

Researchers using the PPP database found that teacher ratings of high maternal involvement during kindergarten were related to more academically motivated children who also displayed more socially appropriate behavior (Luster & McAdoo, 1996). Children's academic motivation in kindergarten was in turn positively related to high academic achievement in the eighth grade, which in turn was associated with higher educational attainment at age 27. Finally, higher educational attainment was associated with higher income at age 27.

A second well-known longitudinal study, the Chicago Child-Parent Center program (CCPC), provided educational services to three- to nine-year-old children, as well as family involvement support to their parents. Children's social adjustment and academic achievement were measured through high school. Family involvement support again was significantly related to short- and long-term positive school achievement (Barnard, 2004; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2002), including lower school dropout rates and increased on-time high school completion (Barnard, 2004). In addition, both the frequency and number of CCPC family involvement activities used during preschool and kindergarten were significantly associated with higher reading achievement, lower rates of grade retention, and fewer years in special education up to age 14 (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

In another study that spanned kindergarten to fifth grade, children with less educated but highly involved mothers displayed more positive feelings about reading activities over time when compared to children with less involved mothers, regardless of their level of education (Dearing, McCartney, Weiss, Kreider, & Simpkins, 2004). In addition, while there was an achievement gap in the literacy performance of children of more and less educated mothers, in favor of children of mothers with higher levels of education, this gap disappeared between kindergarten and fifth grade if family involvement levels among mothers with lower levels of education were high (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006).

Taken together, the above longitudinal studies indicate that early family involvement has the potential to influence children's academic achievement across grades. This finding is important, since administrators are more likely to support family involvement activities if they are given evidence of their beneficial impact on children's academic achievement. With this in mind, the preceding results suggest three reasons why schools should support family involvement programming.

First, the results reinforce the need to support and proactively reach out to all families, regardless of their economic and educational backgrounds (Reality Check #1). Second, the results reflect how parents' commitment to education can be transmitted to their children, perhaps contributing to both their skill development and motivation to do well in the classroom (Reality Check #7). This is a topic we address in further detail in Chapter 4.

Finally, family involvement should be given greater recognition as a mediator in reducing the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income children (Dearing et al., 2006; Haskins & Rouse, 2005). Put another way, rather than viewing family involvement as an extra chore or secondary goal, we should view it as a primary protective factor in counteracting living conditions that have the potential to detract from classroom achievement (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

To be effective, must family involvement activities always occur in the classroom? In a study that began with first grade and ended when children reached age 16, family involvement in children's education during the first three years of school was associated with higher math achievement in the sixth grade (Jimerson, Egeland, & Teo, 1999). In addition, a positive association was found between families' creation of a supportive home learning environment and children's improved reading scores in the sixth grade and at age 16 (Jimerson et al., 1999).

Two other researchers looked at the association between home-based family involvement activities and the reading skills of children between kindergarten and third grade (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Results of this study showed that children's exposure to storybooks at home while in kindergarten was related to the development of language skills (vocabulary and listening comprehension) in the first grade, which in turn were associated with positive reading skills in the third grade. Likewise, parents' involvement in teaching children about reading and writing during kindergarten was associated with emergent literacy skills in the first grade (knowledge of alphabet, word reading), which in turn were associated with positive reading skills in the third grade.

These findings support the conclusion of other longitudinal studies that home-based educational materials and activities are associated with improvements in children's math scores (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005) and reading scores (Izzo et al., 1999). Considered collectively, all these studies support the importance of home-based family involvement activities in promoting children's emerging academic skills. Examples of three home-based family involvement strategies that you can use in your work with families are presented later in this chapter.

Can family involvement impact children's classroom behavior? Using survey data collected over the course of a school year, researchers found that schools that offered more opportunities for family involvement reported a lower incidence of student referrals to the principal's office for disciplinary problems, along with a lower incidence of in-school suspensions (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). The researchers used these findings to reinforce the importance of parent-teacher communication regarding school goals and student behavior.

Interestingly, another study found that indicators of parent involvement as reported by teachers (e.g., parents' attendance at back-to-school meetings or school events, parents' volunteering to help in the classroom, parents' initiation of contact with the teacher to discuss their child's progress) helped to reduce the negative influence of the arrest or incarceration of household members on children's aggressive, hyperactive, and withdrawn behaviors (Ziv, Alva, & Zill, 2010). Although the researchers called for more research on this topic, they nevertheless advocated parental involvement as a strategy for reducing negative socialization risks pertaining to children's home environments.

Can family involvement improve school attendance? Because academic achievement is associated with classroom attendance, a pair of researchers investigated how various school-home communication practices promoted attendance over the course of a school year (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). They found that communicating with families about school attendance policies and the importance of attendance in advancing a child's learning skills was associated with an improvement in student attendance. In addition, the use of a school contact person to discuss school attendance and to make home visits was linked to a reduction in chronic absenteeism. Indeed, some schools already employ family resource coordinators to facilitate parent-teacher communication, help parents support their children's education at home, and assist families in accessing community resources that address children's developmental and educational needs.

Reviews of Research: Answers to Six Common Questions

Researchers periodically undertake a review of studies to provide a summary of themes associated with a particular body of work. Recent reviews of family involvement research point to a number of positive themes for children, some of which complement those from the longitudinal studies summarized earlier.

A positive association between family involvement and academic achievement holds across race and gender (Jeynes, 2005.) Furthermore, this significant association holds when measured by grades, teacher ratings, and standardized tests (Jeynes, 2005). One conclusion reached by the scholar conducting this review is that family involvement represents an untapped resource for equalizing the academic achievement of children from all racial and ethnic groups.

Family involvement has a stronger association with classroom grades than standardized test scores (Desimone, 1999; Jeynes, 2005). This finding should not be too surprising, since families are more likely to focus their energy on helping children with class assignments and exams personally prepared and explained by teachers than on helping them with standardized tests designed by unknown specialists outside the classroom. In addition, because grades are more dependent on teachers' personal assessments than are standardized tests, greater family involvement is likely to give teachers a more complete picture of children's true skills (Desimone, 1999). This in turn is likely to influence the grades children receive. For example, teachers may add an extra point to a final grade based on a child's completion of homework assignments or other indicators of achievement. Such an extra point would not be possible on a standardized test.

One final point is in order regarding the preceding research findings. In short, avoid making general statements that suggest all indicators of student achievement benefit equally from family involvement. Instead, focus on the positive link between family involvement and classroom grades (versus standardized tests).

Family involvement matters, regardless of family income. Two researchers reviewed a number of studies in which families were trained to work at home with their children on academic skills. Results indicated that these programs had a positive effect on children's grades and teacher ratings, regardless of family income (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Furthermore, the more families were involved in the home training programs, the greater

their children's achievement scores. In some cases, children showing the greatest gains were those having the most difficulty in school. These findings support Reality Check #7: All families, regardless of their educational or economic background, want to be involved in their children's education. Indeed, most families recognize that it is through education that we achieve healthy and happy lives.

Family involvement promotes children's interest in and responsibility for learning. A group of researchers who reviewed studies related to the motivational aspects of family involvement found that children reported more effort and greater personal responsibility for learning when their families were active participants in their education (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005). One explanation given for this finding is that families who are actively involved in their children's education model effective strategies for dealing with the classroom environment. For example, an involved parent might model how to handle a disagreement with a teacher or how to check a class assignment before turning it in.

Children benefit academically when their parents are actively engaged in their homework. A group of researchers found a positive association between parental assistance with homework and children's academic achievement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). The researchers concluded that this association was mediated by several factors, including families' modeling of appropriate study behavior, reinforcement of children's study habits, and provision of in-home instruction. Another group of researchers found that setting rules as to when and where homework was to be conducted had a strong and positive relationship with academic achievement (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008).

In-home family involvement activities can be as effective as those based in the classroom. A review of studies related to children's reading scores found pronounced gains when families received training on exercises designed to support in-home reading activities (Darling & Westberg, 2004). In another publication, a group of researchers reviewed 19 studies to determine if parents' support of their children's schoolwork outside of school (e.g., reading activities or completing supplemental math problems with their child) would impact their children's academic performance. The researchers found that parental support had a positive and significant effect on children's overall academic performance and an especially strong effect on children's reading performance (Nye, Turner, & Schwartz, 2006a). Indeed, a summary of the researchers' review by the Harvard Family Research Project revealed that parents' engagement in academic enrichment activities with their children for an average of less than 12 weeks resulted in children's demonstrating an equivalent of four to five months' improvement in their reading or math performance (Nye, Turner, & Schwartz, 2006b).

These findings reinforce our earlier review of longitudinal studies (Izzo et al., 1999; Jimerson et al., 1999; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005), as well as other research reviews (see Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001), indicating that in-home family involvement activities can be as effective in promoting children's academic success as those conducted in the classroom. Nevertheless, supporting families in their implementation of in-home family involvement activities is essential in yielding the most positive outcomes (see Patall et al., 2008; Senechal & Young, 2008). Thus, four strategies to assist you in this endeavor are presented in the following section. Before continuing, however, put the information presented in this section to practical use by completing Reflection 3.1.

REFLECTION 3.1 Justifying Your Commitment to Family Involvement

Pretend you are interviewing for a teaching position. At one point in the interview, the administrator asks, "Why is family involvement important?" Use the research presented in this section to give a succinct response to this question.

Home-Based Family Involvement Strategies

Given the support for in-home family involvement found in the professional literature, it is important that we next examine a few practical strategies for linking children's classroom and home learning experiences. Descriptions of four popular in-home family involvement strategies follow: (a) family backpacks, (b) tip sheets, (c) activity calendars, and (d) activity cards.

Family Backpacks

Family backpacks contain all the materials and directions parents need to complete an educational activity at home with their children. As such, they represent a popular strategy for helping parents reinforce their children's mastery of new concepts and skills. Likewise, family backpacks facilitate children's ability to transfer new knowledge and skills learned in one environment (the classroom) to another environment (the home). One example of a family backpack is presented in FYI 3.2. (The backpack was developed by Meredith Galligan, a graduate student in the Department of Child and Family Development, University of Georgia, Athens, under the direction of the author and Dr. Charlotte Wallinga.) You will have an opportunity to develop your own backpack at the end of this chapter (see Capstone Activity 2).

Family backpacks can be used in a number of ways. Most often they are sent home during the week to reinforce classroom learning objectives. However, they also can be used during school holidays and summer breaks to help children review and practice skills that will be incorporated into lessons when classes resume.

FYI 3.2 Family Backpack: Imogene's Antlers—Directions for Families

Imogene's Antlers

Dear Families,

This week we have been practicing our sorting and counting skills. In this backpack you will find a storybook called *Imogene's Antlers* by David Small (1985). In the storybook, Imogene wakes up with antlers on her head.

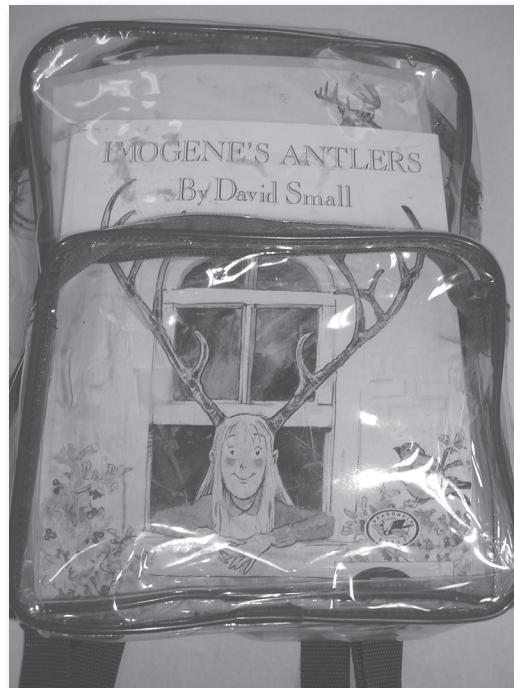
You will find a set of your very own antlers in the backpack. Just like Imogene's antlers, these antlers are useful for holding (and counting) different things.

- The antlers can hold **DOUGHNUTS**.
- The antlers can hold **CANDLES**.
- The antlers can hold **RED, YELLOW, AND BLUE BIRDS**.

Use the cards in the backpack to determine how many of each object the antlers can hold at one time.

Directions

1. After reading *Imogene's Antlers* with your child, invite him or her to select a card.
2. Ask your child to read the *type* and *number* of objects on the card.
3. Take those objects out of the bag.
4. Invite your child to count each object as she or he places them on the antlers. Your child may place the objects on the antlers while they are lying on a table or while wearing them (or while you wear them). Choose whichever is more fun.
5. When you are done, ask your child to take the objects off the antlers one by one. After each object is removed, ask your child to count the number of objects that remain.
6. Repeat the above steps until you have gone through at least two sets of cards.
7. Give your child the sheet of paper and crayons found in the backpack. Ask him or her to draw a picture of himself or herself wearing antlers. Encourage your child to decorate his or her antlers.
8. Ask your child to write a short sentence about her or his antlers at the bottom of the paper. Then, ask your child to sign her or his name.
9. Return your child's drawing with the backpack. We will share everyone's drawings in class.



Family Backpack:
Imogene's Antlers.

Contents of Family Backpack: Imogene's Antlers.



Developing a Family Backpack

Tie the backpack to a classroom learning objective. This will ensure that the backpack activity reinforces key concepts and skills taught in the classroom. Remember to be selective in choosing which classroom lessons to use as a foundation for developing family backpacks. Choose only lessons that lend themselves to an affordable and age-appropriate backpack that will also be fun for families and children to work on at home.

Tell families about the learning skills on which the backpack is based. Families who understand the skills associated with a backpack are more likely to reinforce and talk with their children about those skills while carrying out the activity.

Keep the activity focused. Include no more than one or two activities in a backpack so families will take time to complete it. Including a number of activities can be overwhelming and lead some families to ignore the backpack altogether.

Keep backpacks safe. Make sure the materials you include in a backpack are safe. Also, if needed, provide instructions regarding adult supervision. This tip is especially important if the children in your classroom have younger siblings at home whom parents may include in the backpack activity.

Review new backpacks in the classroom before sending them home. This will help ensure that children understand the activity and its relationship to their classroom work (Kokoski & Patton, 1997). It will also allow them to work cooperatively with their parents in completing the backpack activity.

Use an integrated approach when designing a family backpack. This means you will want to address two or more curriculum areas (e.g., math, science, reading, art, social studies) in each backpack (Kokoski & Patton, 1997). One approach for achieving an integrated backpack is to use a children’s book to introduce the activity. Consider, for example, the backpack activity in FYI 3.2. Parents and children begin their exploration of this backpack by reading the book *Imogene’s Antlers*. They then count different objects that are placed on and removed from their own antlers. The backpack activity ends as the children draw themselves wearing antlers and write about their drawings. Upon completing this backpack activity, parents will have involved their children in exercising reading, math, art, and writing skills.

Ask for feedback. Ask families to evaluate each backpack activity and to provide suggestions for improvement. Possible questions to ask include the following:

- Were the directions easy to understand?
- Was the activity easy to complete?
- Did your child demonstrate mastery of new skills or knowledge while carrying out the backpack activity?

Try your hand at introducing a family backpack by completing Reflection 3.2.

REFLECTION 3.2 Introducing a Family Backpack

While books represent one way to introduce a backpack, other strategies also can be used. What materials other than *Imogene’s Antlers* might you use to introduce the family backpack in FYI 3.2?

Managing Family Backpacks

Consider material costs. The cost of developing a family backpack includes not only the materials needed for initial development but also the cost of replacing torn and lost materials. Likewise, it is important to consider the cost of replacing consumable materials such as art and craft supplies, glue, and crayons. Other issues to consider when estimating the cost of creating a backpack include the following:

- Are the backpack materials durable enough to be transported to and from children’s homes without being damaged?
- Will you make a backpack for each child to take home or rotate a few copies of a backpack among children?
- Are costly and specialized materials required, or can alternative and less expensive materials be used?
- What is the cost of the backpack itself?

Consider the time needed to develop and distribute backpacks. It is not uncommon for teachers to have creative backpack ideas that, unfortunately, are never properly executed

because of time constraints. Think carefully about how long it will take to put together a backpack. In some cases, you may need to revise or scale back your idea to save time. Time becomes even more important if you decide to make multiple copies of a backpack. One way to address this concern is to use parent or community volunteers to help make multiple backpacks.

Consider packaging. Child-sized backpacks can be purchased from early-childhood supply catalogs. In some cases these backpacks are made of clear plastic, which makes it easier to see their contents. However, it is important to compare the durability of plastic backpacks to canvas backpacks. In particular, canvas backpacks may be easier to clean and prove more durable over the long term. Of course, other types of packaging are also possible. For example, you may choose to use large storage bags, cloth bags, pizza boxes, shoeboxes, and so on. You may even choose to use different types of packaging for different types of backpacks. Think through the types of backpack packaging that might work for you by completing Reflection 3.3.

REFLECTION 3.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Different Packaging

Sketch out a backpack activity idea. Then identify the advantages and disadvantages of using the following options for packaging that backpack activity: (a) a shoebox, (b) a pizza box, (c) a plastic storage bag, and (d) a large paper envelope.

Consider storage. Storing backpacks is yet another practical consideration. Is there sufficient space in your classroom to store backpacks, or will they need to be stored elsewhere?

Develop a tracking plan. As noted earlier, backpacks are sent home for varying amounts of time. Regardless of how you choose to distribute backpacks, you will want to keep track of when they are sent home and when they are returned. For example, you may choose to develop a master calendar so each family knows when they will receive a backpack and when it should be returned (Kokoski & Patton, 1997). On the other hand, you may prefer establishing a checkout system to track when and by whom a backpack is taken home and the date the backpack is returned.

Because the tracking of backpacks takes time, consider assigning this task to a parent or community volunteer. For quality control purposes, the parent or volunteer who tracks backpacks should also check them upon their return to make sure all materials are present and in good condition. Developing a checklist of materials found in each backpack can facilitate this process.

Tip Sheets

Tip sheets provide families with practical information about children's education and general well-being. One example of a tip sheet is presented in the photo on page 61.

Developing Tip Sheets

Identify topics that interest families. Tip sheet ideas can be identified using a number of strategies. Talk informally with families about topics that interest them. Take note of the

topics families ask you about during the year. Review the family surveys completed at the beginning of the year (see Chapter 10). Pay attention to childhood topics covered in the media and posted on the Internet.

Keep tip sheets simple. Provide families with basic information that can be read quickly. Use simple language. Also use bullets to highlight key points as in the photo. The tip sheet in the photo was developed by the author. Ideas for the tip sheet were adapted from the American Red Cross website (www.redcross.org/). Additional information can be found by typing “Halloween safety tips” into the search box on this website.

Make tip sheets visually interesting. Place a logo at the top of each tip sheet. Use clip art, photographs, drawings, and/or colored print to provide additional visual appeal.

Include a resource list. If appropriate and space permits, list a few Internet sites, articles, or book references at the end of the tip sheet for families who would like more information.

Revise annually. Once you have developed a tip sheet, file it away for future use. Remember to review each tip sheet on an annual basis to determine if revisions are needed.

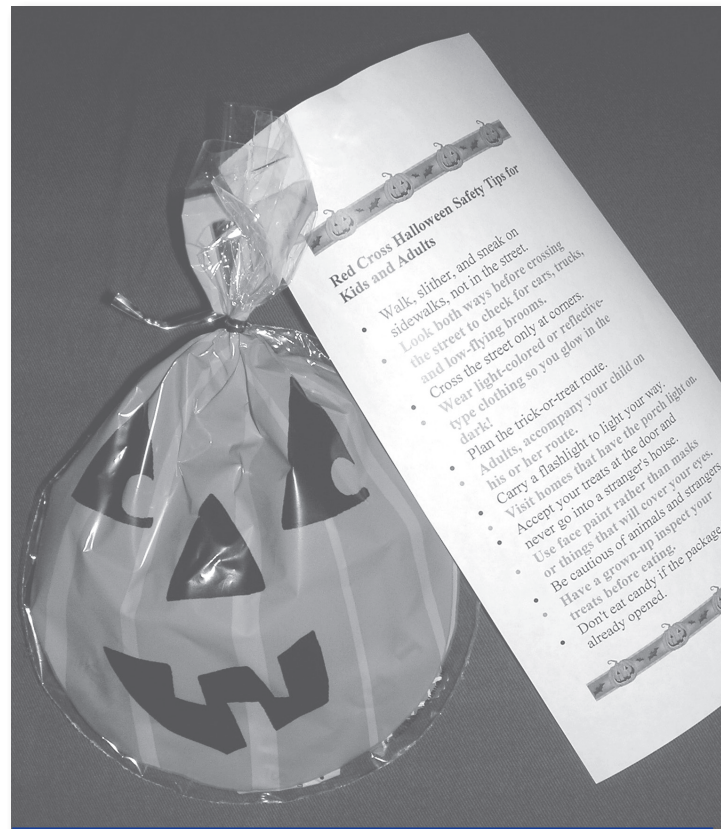
Managing Tip Sheets

Begin each year with a transition tip sheet. Parents always appreciate receiving tips on helping children make a smooth transition into the classroom at the beginning of the school year. Potential topics for transition tip sheets include helping children get up in the morning, making healthy classroom snacks, classroom supplies the children need, strategies for encouraging children’s interest in learning, and where parents can find coupons for or discounts on clothes and classroom supplies.

Identify a storage space. Place your tip sheets in clearly labeled folders for easy access.

Decide on a distribution schedule. Will you develop a monthly or a quarterly tip sheet? Will you use tip sheets selectively—for example, to address childhood health and safety issues that arise during the year? Alternatively, will you use tip sheets to reinforce classroom events, holiday themes (see the photo on this page), or selected classroom lessons?

Decide on a distribution plan. There are multiple ways for getting tip sheets to families. You might place them in daily folders (see Chapter 13), mail them, or incorporate them into family workshops (see Chapter 11) or parent-teacher conferences (see Chapter 13). You might also upload them onto your classroom or school Internet site (see Chapter 13).



Halloween Tip Sheet.

Activity Calendars

Activity calendars serve two objectives. First, they include reminders about upcoming family involvement activities, workshops, events, and parent-teacher conferences. Second, they contain simple and brief educational activities for the home that are linked to lessons carried out in the classroom. One example of an activity calendar is presented in FYI 3.3.

FYI 3.3 November Activity Calendar

Dear Families:

This month we will be reading Dr. Seuss books. These will serve as the basis for some of our math, science, and writing activities. We also will look at harvesting fall foods. Finally, we will study American symbols and their importance to our country. Don't forget about the [ANNUAL SCHOOL HARVEST](#). We are planning a number of fun activities. Have fun with the calendar activities!

Ms. Adams

| November 2008 | | | | | |
|------------------------|--|---|--|---|--|
| Theme | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri |
| Dr. Seuss | Read The Foot Book with your child. Then work with your child to make your own foot books by using your feet to paint with washable colors. | Read Green Eggs and Ham with your child. Make green eggs and ham with your child by adding a small amount of green vegetable food color to eggs. | Read If I Ran the Zoo with your child. Work with your child to design a new animal for a zoo. How does the new animal move? What does it eat? What sounds does it make? | Read Hop on Pop with your child and then practice rhyming together. Give your child a word and ask him or her to identify another word that rhymes with it. Provide help, as needed. | Your Turn! Work with your child to write a rhyming sentence (for example, "The cat played with the mat"). What other sentences can you and your child write using words that rhyme? |
| Harvesting Food | Visit a pumpkin patch or a grocery store. Talk with your child about the different shapes and colors of pumpkins you see. | Help your child string peppers and hang them in your window to dry. Discuss how early settlers preserved food using this drying process. | Work with your child to design a jack-o'-lantern on a piece of paper. Bring your design to the School Harvest Festival where you can participate in a pumpkin carving. | Your Turn! Talk with your child about any topic related to fall or fall foods. | SCHOOL HARVEST FESTIVAL! 5 to 8 P.M. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games • Snacks • Pumpkin carvings • Meet with your child's teacher |
| Fall Break | Have a | Great | Fall | Break! |  |

| November 2008 | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|
| Theme | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri |
| American Symbols | Use crayons, strips of paper, glue, and glitter to make an American flag. Or, use other items. | Bake cookies with your child in the shape of the Liberty Bell. Have fun! The shapes do not have to be perfect. Closely supervise your child while baking. | Show your child pictures of eagles. Then, invite him or her to make an American eagle out of modeling clay. Talk with your child about the importance of this American symbol. | Your Turn! Work with your child to draw pictures of your favorite American symbols. | Look at pictures of the Statue of Liberty with your child. Take turns posing like the statue. |

SOURCE: The calendar was developed by Lauren Shinn, a graduate student in the Department of Child and Family Development, University of Georgia, Athens, under the direction of the author.

Developing Activity Calendars

Decide on the scope of activity calendars. Like backpacks, not all classroom lessons lend themselves equally well to an activity calendar. Be selective. For example, during any given month you may have from one to four weeks of calendar activities, depending on the nature of the classroom lessons you will be covering.

Keep the activities simple. Activity calendars, like backpacks and tip sheets, should be simple. As shown in FYI 3.3, make sure your descriptions fit into small calendar boxes. This will help ensure families take the time to carry out the activities.

Encourage creativity. Encourage families to be creative by letting them decide how they will carry out at least one idea each week (see FYI 3.3 for examples).

Incorporate community outings into the calendar. Use your community scan to suggest a few family outings. This will help expand families' understanding of how they can contribute to their children's early learning experiences by taking advantage of community resources.

Highlight special dates and announcements. As noted in FYI 3.3, use activity calendars to remind families of special dates and events. Make the dates and events stand out by typing them in a different font or color.

Seek feedback. Ask families about the clarity and usefulness of your activity calendars.

Managing Activity Calendars

Suggest a placement location for the home. Suggest that families post their activity calendars where they can be easily seen. One popular location is the refrigerator door. What other locations might you suggest?

Decide on a distribution plan. The distribution options listed for tip sheets also are applicable for activity calendars.

Try your hand at developing an activity calendar by completing Reflection 3.4.

REFLECTION 3.4 Your Turn! Developing an Activity Calendar

Work alone or in pairs to develop an activity calendar. Similar to FYI 3.3, begin by identifying a weeklong theme on which to base your activities. Then develop five activities in support of that theme. Share your results with your peers.

FYI 3.4 Activity Card

Getting the Scoop: Researching and Writing an Informational Article

Grade: 3

State Learning Standard: ELA3W2 – The student produces informational writing.

By completing this activity, your child will gain practice in writing a brief informational article using multiple sources of printed information. We have been practicing this skill in class.

What You Need:

1. Internet*
2. Encyclopedia*
3. Magazines*
4. Books*
5. Paper, notepad, or index cards
6. Pencil or pen

*These can be found at home, in the family resource center at school, and at the public library.



What To Do:

1. Ask your child to use three of the above sources to gather information on any topic.
Give your child paper, a notepad, or index cards for taking notes.
2. Your child is now ready to write a short informational article about a topic of interest.
3. Invite your child to read her or his article to you.
4. Verbally reinforce your child's skills in researching and writing the article.

Follow-Up: Ask your child to bring her or his article to class to share with others.

Extension: Place a copy of your child's article in a notebook. Allow your child to decorate the cover. Invite your child to place other writing projects in the notebook. You and your child will enjoy reviewing these projects in the years to come.

Activity Cards

Activity cards represent yet another strategy for delivering brief home-based educational activities that support classroom learning objectives. One advantage of activity cards is that families do not need to return them to the classroom. Thus, while activity cards fulfill many of the same objectives as family backpacks, they are often simpler to construct and implement. One example of an activity card is presented in FYI 3.4. You will have an opportunity to develop your own activity card at the end of this chapter (see Capstone Activity 3).

Developing Activity Cards

Decide how to access activity cards. Activity cards can be purchased through commercial companies. In addition, some can be downloaded for free from the Internet by typing the phrase *activity cards* into a search engine of your choice. Finally, you can develop your own activity cards following the directions given below. The last approach is encouraged, since it allows you to more closely match home activities with classroom learning objectives. In addition, while making activity cards takes time, purchasing them can be cost prohibitive.

Decide on the content. The content of activity cards can be tied to almost any classroom learning theme, or it can be tied to an educational skill such as reading or math. For example, you may choose to follow the example shown in FYI 3.4 by developing activity cards that are coded according to state learning standards.

Use sturdy and attractive cards. Use large index cards or sturdy cardstock to print the activities. Don't forget to add visual appeal by using graphics. Also, you may choose to use colored cards instead of white cards.

Keep it brief and simple. Because you are using a card, it is important that the activity be brief and simple. In contrast to family backpacks, activity cards do not include materials. Thus, they can be sent home in children's daily folders (see Chapter 13).

Managing Activity Cards

Share the work. Team up with other teachers to develop activity cards. Decide who will be responsible for developing activity cards for different educational themes or learning standards. After all the cards are developed, swap and review them. Make suggestions for revisions.

Explain their purpose. Just as you would introduce other educational materials, explain the purpose of activity cards to families. Since the activities will be easy to implement, you do not necessarily need to include an introductory letter. Instead, provide an explanation of their purpose during registration, family workshops, or in your classroom newsletter.

Filing the cards. As noted above, you can tie activity cards to classroom learning themes of your choosing or code them according to state learning standards. Whichever approach you choose to follow, set up an Internet filing system to keep the cards organized. Alternatively, you may choose to use filing boxes or folders.

Encourage families to keep their cards. Encourage families to file away the activity cards they receive for future reference or for use with siblings, nieces, nephews, or grandchildren.

Review and update. Remember to review each card on an annual basis to determine if it needs to be updated based on changes in classroom activities or revisions in state learning standards.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- The ecological model is useful for understanding how different levels of society influence children's development and education.
- Research findings provide evidence of the many positive influences of family involvement on children's development and education.
- Family backpacks, activity calendars, and activity cards can be used to link children's classroom and home learning experiences.
- Tip sheets can be used to provide families with practical information about various aspects of children's development and education.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important that we take an ecological perspective of teaching?
2. Discuss the relative advantages and disadvantages of backpacks, tip sheets, activity calendars, and activity cards.
3. **Your family involvement philosophy.** Return to the draft of your family involvement philosophy. Based on your reading of this chapter, what if any changes will you make to your philosophy statement? Discuss your answer to this question with your peers.

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS' FIELD ASSIGNMENT

In this chapter, you learned about using tip sheets to provide families with a range of information. The purpose of this assignment is to give you practice in developing a tip sheet.

Your task. It is not unusual for parents to ask teachers, "How can I help my child with math [or writing, reading, science, etc.]." Use your knowledge of child development, teaching strategies, and information found in this chapter as well as from other sources to develop a tip sheet that addresses this question for a particular age group (choose from prekindergarten through fifth grade) and a particular subject area. Don't forget to add visual appeal to your tip sheet. Share your tip sheet with your peers.

CAPSTONE ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Interview a Parent About the Benefits of Family Involvement

Do the benefits shared by the parent reflect the research findings reviewed in this chapter? Does the parent mention benefits not addressed in this chapter? Share the results of your interview with your peers.

Activity 2: Your Turn! Develop a Family Backpack

Identify an age group (choose from prekindergarten through fifth grade). Check out a children's book from your local library that is appropriate for this age group. Use the book as the foundation for developing a family backpack. Remember to include all the directions and materials needed to carry out the activity. Also remember to explain the educational objective(s) of the backpack. Share your backpack with your peers.

Activity 3: Your Turn! Develop an Activity Card

Identify an age group (choose from prekindergarten through fifth grade). Develop an activity card that reinforces a lesson on math, science, reading, art, physical education, music, writing, or social science. Share the resulting activity cards in class. Then make copies of all the cards. Place your copies in your teacher resource file for future reference.

INTERNET RESOURCES

You may find that some URLs have been altered by the webmaster. In these situations, try entering the name of the document or agency in a search engine. Alternatively, enter the domain name (e.g., <http://www.xxxx.org>). This should take you to the revised home page and associated links.

Family Backpacks

Teacher's Net: #489. Take Home Backpack Ideas—from chatboard and mailing

<http://teachers.net/lessons/posts/489.html>

Visit this website to read about the personal experiences and recommendations of teachers who have used backpacks.

Rocburn's Math Backpack Program

<http://res.hcpss.org>

Visit this Maryland elementary school's webpage to learn about its kindergarten through Grade 5 math backpacks. Backpack descriptions are given in English and Spanish.

Activity Calendars

Reading Is Fundamental: Activity Calendars

<http://www.rif.org/us/literacy-resources/activities/monthly-activity-calendars.htm>

Visit this website to view activity calendars devoted to reading for age groups birth through 5 years and 6 through 15 years. Calendars are printed in English and Spanish.