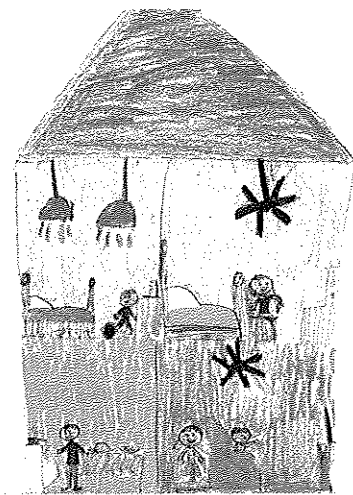


## CHAPTER 7

# Influences of the Home



### WHY THIS TOPIC MATTERS

In this chapter, we provide examples of the many experiences children have at home, the implications of these experiences, and the resulting potential for expanded learning. We know that communities are becoming more diverse; therefore, it is important to realize that the homes where children are spending their formative years nurture children in different ways. Because the field of early childhood education is committed to an integrated model of early education, understanding the powerful influences of the home will help you better serve young children.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- Clarify how families promote children's development at home.
- Describe the influence of the physical environment of the home.
- Identify the influence of family practices, home learning, and especially technology on child development.
- Explain ways in which extended family members—particularly grandparents—affect features of the home curriculum.
- Discuss the pros and cons of home schooling, and explain why some families embrace this trend.

It stands to reason that the diversity of US families produces a variety of home experiences for young children. Too often, professional educators underestimate the power of the home and dismiss the learning that children acquire outside of school. And when there is disparity between children's home learning and the expectations of the school curriculum, unfortunately, children can be judged to be deficient. Remember, a parent is a child's first teacher.

In his seminal research, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) indicates that regardless of the ethnic or socioeconomic makeup of the family, a warm and responsive parenting style, a structured environment, and stimulating activities that include a variety of materials—plus parents' involvement as children use these materials—support children's growth toward a productive lifestyle. Conversely, in some family

situations, parenting styles and habits can work against children's natural pursuit of knowledge and positive development.

All families have an organizational structure that defines family members and their roles. Children in any family household have at least one adult (referred to in this text as a *parent*) who is responsible for them. Siblings, who play an important role in any child's learning, also may be present. In addition, many households have kinship networks of extended family members who may or may not be living in the home but who give added support and nurturance. The social networks that parents develop in their neighborhoods also support kinship influences on the family organizational structure. This structure provides physical and emotional support as the child moves into the school and community.

Still, whatever their environment, children first learn valuable information and life skills from their families. They learn who they are, how to communicate with others, what their role is in society, how to function in their environment, and the kind of world in which we live. So, regardless of their family structure, this early learning is a consequence of family interactions and stimulation. And we find that the greater the variety of these influences, the richer the learning.

Early learning of appropriate (or inappropriate) communication behaviors, developing language, and acquiring literacy skills are the underpinnings of children's later cognitive development. Besides child-parent interactions, home learning is further supported by a family's use of the following:

- time and space
- the household routines
- the sharing of interests and skills
- the family's rituals and religious practices

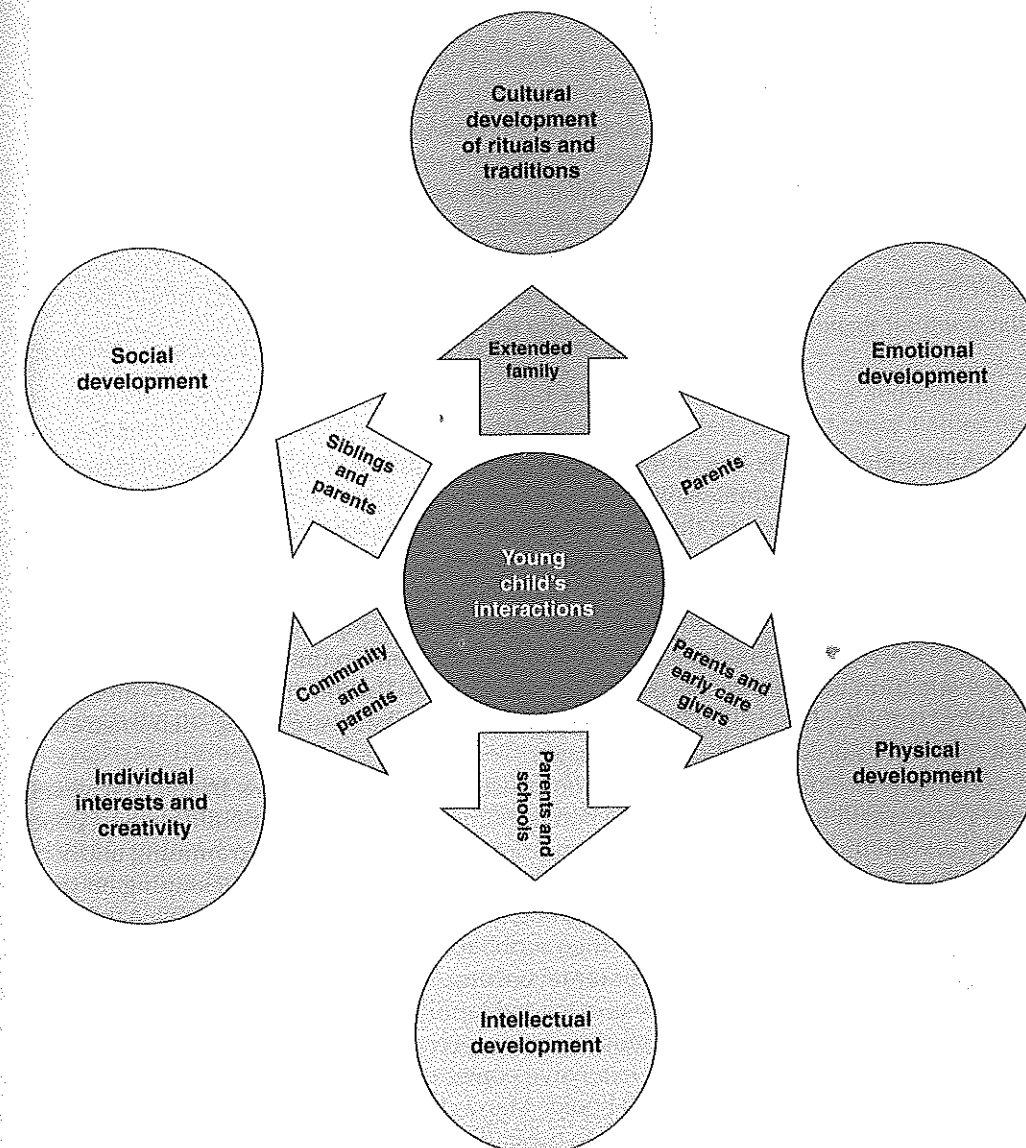
In all situations, children's learning depends on their readiness for the tasks and experiences they encounter. Figure 7-1 shows the range of children's learning at home and the involvement of particular family members.

### HOMES NURTURE CHILD DEVELOPMENT

In his often-cited research, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton (Brazelton & Sparrow, 2006) explains that cognitive development actually begins before birth. Since that time, other studies have looked specifically at prenatal language development and confirmed that children are learning in utero (Choi, Cutler, & Broesma, 2017; Partanen, Kujala, Naatanen, Liitola, & Sambeth, 2013). First experiences truly shape how a newborn will learn to think and interact with his or her primary environment. Developmental cognitive theorists from Piaget to Bronfenbrenner also discuss the importance of a child's environment as a factor that influences growth and development.

#### Knowledge of Child Development Influences Growth

Adults rely on different sources to obtain information about child growth and development. Although in the past parents had to rely on extended family members and close friends for child rearing advice, today's parents have more options available. They read parenting books and articles published by authorities such as Dr. Sears or T. Berry Brazelton. Many parents participate in online message boards especially for parents. Some read (and write!) parenting blogs or subscribe to child development newsletters via e-mail. Many connect with other parents using social media. Still more depend upon advice from neighbors and caregivers. Parent education programs developed by such organizations as La Leche League, **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**, well-baby clinics, Early Head Start, and other programs provide important support that comes from a specialized perspective. Some hospitals and high schools provide basic courses on child development to educate future parents.



**FIGURE 7-1** Different Family Members Nurture the Home Curriculum

*Note:* Foundational skills, concepts, attitudes, and experiences are developed in the child's home environment. Some areas are influenced more strongly by family members and the child's peers.

The advantages of such availability are a sense of unity with a larger group and a feeling of being in the mainstream. The disadvantages are that not all available information is based on sound practices or good research, and some information sources suffer from lack of the moderation sometimes provided by personal encounters. All linkage, of course, depends on a parent's interest and on having the time to access and evaluate sources of information.

#### Parents Nurture Communication and Cognition

Parents and significant others talk to the baby, interpret the baby's responses, and establish communication patterns. They assign meaning to the baby's movements, coos, laughs, cries, and other nonverbal behaviors, as illustrated in the following vignette.

During a family get-together, Tamaria is cuddling her 6-week-old niece, Lorelei, against her shoulder and neck. Murmurs and coos between the two seem to indicate contentment on both sides. Suddenly, Lorelei begins sucking on Tamaria's neck.

"Oops, honey," Tamaria exclaims, "I guess you need your mommy!" She calls across the room, "LaShon, you're needed. Lorelei is hungry, and I sure can't provide for her." She passes Lorelei and a nursing pillow to LaShon, who snuggles Lorelei as she offers her breast, saying, "There! You're happy now." Gentle approval sounds can be heard from other family members in the room as they acknowledge that the important role of feeding the youngest member of this extended family is nicely met.

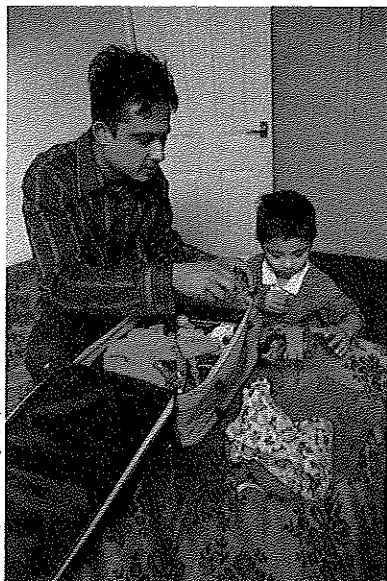
Although crying is one of the earliest forms of infant communication, other non-verbal behaviors also work, as we see in this vignette. Even though some of the interpretations may be incorrect, the fact that parents are responding provides the basis of child language development. Babies sense that their needs can be met if they somehow initiate the action. When certain actions get no response, they are likely to be stopped. The baby's skills expand rapidly because of planned and unplanned family interactions and experiences. Parents echo their infant's vocalizations, name things, and direct the baby's attention to nearby objects, people, and events. Parents, other family members, and caregivers explain to the baby what they and the baby are doing, demonstrating with real objects accompanied by language.

Families extend the communication process as children grow. In the first years, some parents will introduce babies to books. Some will sing to their children and point out the text on important signs in the community. Many choose programming and videos from trusted educational sources. Children also observe parents messaging on their phones, writing lists, and signing important papers. Parents give paper and crayons to children, who then scribble, draw, and write sounds for letters or words, imitating their parents' writing.

Literacy expands as extended family members, friends, and neighbors become part of the communication process by engaging children in more and more social play, extensive conversations, writing notes or letters, or providing materials and books. Many children get the message that reading and writing are important to the entire family, and communication patterns vary from one family member to another.

Children learn vocabulary and grammatical patterns as important adults model language in the course of family interactions. In other words, children learn language from hearing it spoken. As parents broaden children's social contacts to care settings, the extended family, the neighborhood, and the larger community, children observe more than one way of communicating. It is in these different settings that children develop and expand their **interactive skills**.

In homes where multiple languages or dialects are used, children learn **code switching** to deal with different social venues as they observe adults using different language codes. Language expands and develops for all children as they are exposed through connections with extended family, family friends, neighbors, and playmates to various dialects or culture patterns.



Lisa Payne Photography/Pearson Education Ltd

Families promote children's literacy by introducing books at an early age.

## PERSPECTIVES ON DIVERSITY

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) offers helpful information to guide teachers and schools as they consider if their practices meet the needs of individual families. Engaging diverse families is a key element to developing effective partnerships.

Search online for the "The National Association for the Education of Young Children," and from the website's home page, search for "Family Engagement: A Family Checklist." Visit this checklist for extensive information about enhancing family engagement.

### Families Support Social and Emotional Development

All families have commitments, values, and priorities. Some of these sentiments are explicit and well defined, but often, many are only implied. Some family values and goals are more immediate and often expressed as wishes or as "what we are trying to do." Some families have both long-range and short-range goals, whereas other families are able to plan only from one day to the next. Regardless of the method of accomplishment or the expression of these goals, all families develop practices, routines, and activities to support their wants and needs.

Children's attitudes, beliefs, and values resemble those of their parents, but all allow that siblings, schools, peers, and communities extend or modify these considerably. Educating children about stealing, lying, and disorderly conduct is normal for most families, although the instruction can take different forms. Some parents teach values and impose a moral code through intimidation and punishment. Others, however, approach the challenge by explaining children's problems and discussing the impact of one's actions on others. The latter approach results in stronger development of conscience and internal **locus of control**. Families who focus on values, morals, and attitudes by modeling behaviors, reasoning through solutions, and labeling the behavior when seen in public (see Figure 7-2) give children a much-needed sense of purpose and direction in their lives.

FIGURE 7-2 Helping Children Develop an Internal Locus of Control

1. Allow children to accept the consequences of their actions; for example, they can manage cleanup after some water play.
2. Avoid performing tasks that children can do for themselves. Caregivers should encourage effort and experiments so children learn to do these things.
3. Give children responsibilities that fit their age and skill levels.
4. Praise children when they perform well; be encouraging and supportive when they make mistakes or fall short of expectations.
5. Model behaviors and attitudes that show you are proactive; for example, communicate to children that people can make things happen.
6. Encourage and support children's interests, and show respect for their accomplishments.
7. Be consistent in expectations by establishing reasonable standards of behavior.
8. Explain the reasons for needed rules and limits, as well as any deviations from normal expectations.
9. Allow children to make age-appropriate decisions (including rules and guidelines) as often as possible. Start with minor choices and graduate to consequence-bearing actions.

Source: Based on information in <http://wilderdom.com/psychology/loc/LocusOfControlWhats.html>. Accessed Jan 05, 2018.

Whatever the organizational structure of the family, children absorb these values and goals, and their role in accomplishing them. As children grow older and other events happen to families, such as the birth of a child with disabilities, what children learn about themselves can be vastly different and quite contrary to school or societal expectations of families. The following vignette shows one family's approach—a strongly goal-oriented one defined by societal expectations. The second vignette demonstrates how this family modified its expectations after the birth of a child with Down syndrome.

*Every morning before her children left for school, Mrs. Martinez wished them a good day in Spanish and asked each to set a small goal for the day. Studying hard, practicing the piano, or improving at shooting baskets were all acceptable. At dinner one evening when the family shared accomplishments and worries, José told his family that he wasn't going to read with his classmate Louie anymore because Louie was "just too hard to deal with." The older brothers and sisters sympathized with José, but reminded him that they had read to him when he was little. Mrs. Martinez hugged José hard a few days later when he told her, "I'm going to read with Louie. I found out yesterday that he can read lots of words if you start them out and whisper the real hard ones."*

In the Martinez family, the mother was a strong and dominant influence. She believed in goal setting and certain family values, and made them clear and explicit for her children.

Whether values and goals are stated each day, written, or merely implied, notions of having purpose and direction in one's life are modeled and communicated to children. Such strong purposes can help a family adjust and adapt to an unexpected event, such as the one the Martinez family experienced.

At the end of José's third-grade year, Manuela, a child with Down syndrome, was born to the Martinez family. José was thankful for his earlier school experiences with Louie, for they helped him and his family as they weathered the many and dramatic effects of this event. The strong sense of unity in the family allowed them to adjust their lives so that they all shared the responsibilities of raising this child. José always came home on Tuesdays to help his mother. He helped care for Manuela by playing peek-a-boo and playing with her favorite toys while his mother worked remotely for a few hours from home. The following vignette demonstrates how this strong family helped the school change its policies and helped their child cope with conflicting expectations.

*One Tuesday, José's teacher informed the class that they would all have to stay after school because of their rowdiness with a substitute teacher. Knowing his agreement with his mother, José tried to explain to his teacher why he couldn't stay late, then walked out of school and went home. His mother was both pleased and dismayed, for she had received a phone call about the event. When José explained that he hadn't been rowdy and needed to meet his obligation to his mother and sister, he and his mother began to work out plans for communicating their needs to the school personnel. Mrs. Martinez then called the school to make an early-morning appointment with the teacher and principal. At this meeting, many important changes between the school and the Martinez family began to take shape. Besides enabling the teacher and principal to reevaluate how they worked with families to meet their changing needs, Mrs. Martinez showed José how, by being proactive, parents could make things happen.*

Most families expect their children to undertake responsibilities within the home. Some responsibilities may be explicit, others implicit. In some families, the responsibilities are fairly consistent, but in others, they may be haphazard and even confusing to children. They may be communicated in dictatorial fashion, explained reasonably, or learned through observing an older sibling. As with José in the vignettes just described, changing family circumstances and expectations can affect children's behavior in schools.

José's affection for and commitment to his sibling also are noteworthy. Siblings can be powerful shapers of social and emotional development. While we all know that children learn physical skills faster and at an earlier age by competing with a more skilled family member, children also learn strategies for convincing others of their point of view as siblings squabble and handle their differences within the family unit. Even learning how to unite in family loyalty against the outside world gives children important social skills—although not always desirable ones.

At times, home expectations can conflict with school expectations. Children can't always express or explain conflicting values. When conflict occurs, children become caught in the middle. In the preceding vignette, Mrs. Martinez was able to handle the situation and seek the school's support. In other families, negative attitudes can result in poor school-family relationships with which both parents and schools must struggle. If you are to support the growth of all children in your community center or classroom, you must recognize that children and their families come with different skills, values, and circumstances.



When parents reason through decisions, children get a sense of purpose and direction.

## IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

- Roles:** When interacting with young children, be mindful about cultural difference regarding family roles. As a strategy to increase your knowledge and sensitivity without prying, consider using journaling frequently in your classroom. Of course, you can have the children journal in class, but there are other options such as teacher/parent communication journals which are passed back and forth on a daily or weekly basis to build strong and meaningful connections to parents.
- Responsibilities:** Instead of purchasing or downloading a premade "job chart" for your classroom, listen to the ways the children want to participate in the classroom. Does having a line leader help the class operate effortlessly, or does it create more problems and arguments among the children? The children can brainstorm what the classroom needs to run smoothly. If ants appear on the rug in the spring, perhaps a student would volunteer to sweep up graham cracker crumbs after the daily snack. A few paper pockets can be labeled with the jobs that "make sense" for the group as a powerful way to teach the purpose of responsibility.
- Values:** There are many character education programs that are used with young children in a variety of settings. Whatever values you as a teacher, the school as a whole, or the

community you serve choose to reinforce, be certain to implement the core tenets with fidelity. Children can understand positive values that are constantly interwoven into the fabric of their school experience. Special days that draw attention to certain values (Earth Day, Martin Luther King's Birthday) are indeed teachable moments, but the values you communicate every day through your words, actions, and expectations are much more fertile ground for values education.

### Video Example 7.1

Watch this video to see how two teachers use communication journals. How does this technique build strong and meaningful connections with parents?



Social and emotional development is an important part of every child's growth and development. Developing awareness of one's own feelings and of others' feelings helps children develop positive relationships and healthy self-esteem.



#### Check Your Understanding 7.1

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

### LEARNING FROM THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE HOME

Children's learning is greatly influenced by environmental factors. The amount of space, the kinds of materials in that space, and the ways in which families allow children to use the space all affect what children learn in the home. Children living in crowded conditions can be successful when the family is nurturing and supportive; if children are restricted in movements or ignored in their environment, regardless of the amount of space, learning is lessened. In his classic study of high and low achievers from poor families, Clark (1983) found that, among other nurturing qualities, high achievers' parents skillfully supervised their children's use of time and space. Since this study, neuroscience has supported the idea that children cognitively benefit from uncluttered predictable spaces (McMains & Kastner, 2011).

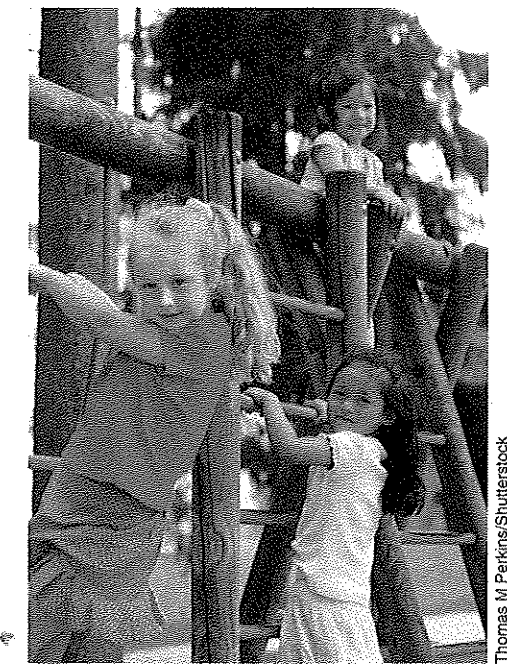
### Space Influences Emotional Growth

Great differences occur in the amount and kind of space that children have in their growing years, and space can be a factor in a family's ability to support children's physical and mental health. Of course, as family situations change, so can the amount of available space. Studies have shown that the greater the population density in a household, the more the family was subjected to stress and unhealthy conditions affecting children's development.

Children learn different things about themselves, depending on the amount and quality of space they have. And the way parents respond to the family's living conditions and their children's needs will guide the outcomes. Resilient families overcome great adversity when sharing, and mutual respect is evident in the family's use of available space.

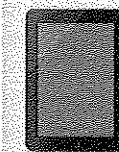
### Space Influences Intellectual Development

When rooms have different functions, children learn categorization skills in determining where household items belong and where people do different jobs. When families are crowded, rooms may have more than one function, and children learn that the same space is used differently. For example, in one crowded one-room apartment, a home visitor found two people sleeping, another cooking, and two children playing on the floor most of the day. There appeared to be limited adult-child interaction. Across the hall, the same limited space for another family had distinct functions at different times of the day; the room was a living room during the daytime hours, a kitchen and dining room during early morning and evening, and a bedroom at night. During each part of the day, the second family appeared to use the space cooperatively, helping to prepare meals, making beds, and watching TV together. With the support of the entire family, household furniture was rearranged to fit the family's needs, although a lot of discussion (even argument) ensued about what belonged where. The processing skills of children in these two families appeared to be affected by these situations.



Outdoor space and freedom to explore assist in physical skills and creative endeavors.

### MEDIA MATTERS



Recently, our nation has begun discussing the real problems of hoarding and the systemic effects on the family of the hoarder. There are blogs, memoirs, and popular press articles devoted to the phenomenon of being the child of a hoarder. Specifically, this media deals with how living in a chronically disorganized and potentially dangerous home environment is damaging to the emotional growth of children. Putting aside the sensationalized vignettes of reality television, the extreme behavior of hoarding helps us see how physical environment can contribute to stress. Furthermore, when families choose to compulsively collect things instead of attending to the health and safety needs of their children, they thwart healthy emotional development in their young children.

Children who are not food-secure may hoard the food offered at school. As a teacher, it is important to recognize that if a child is storing food in school spaces, it could be an indicator of chronic hunger.

In their preschool classroom, two children, one from each of the preceding homes, were asked to put household items into categories and place them in appropriate spaces. The child whose home space was haphazard did a random assignment of the items and

could not explain why he organized the items that way. In fact, when asked to explain his strategy, he began to rearrange the items. The other child had a definite pattern to his selection of items for each category and a clear reason for putting each item in its chosen space.

### Space Influences Problem-Solving Skills

Homes can foster problem-solving skills through encouraging observation, exploration, and experimentation. When parents, both wittingly and unwittingly, allow children to explore their indoor and outdoor environments, children's problem-solving skills expand. In the early years, the sandbox or the dirt in the backyard offer countless experiences for curious children. One preschooler spent almost an hour observing an ant carry a large crumb to its nest in the sidewalk and try to poke it between the cracks. The boy ran to his mother for help, but she encouraged her son to watch and see what the ant might do to solve his problem. Later, after the ant had broken the crumb into small bits, he excitedly explained the process to his mother.

*Three-year-old Shaoket discovered that the box of cookies could be reached by shoving a chair next to the cupboard and climbing up. When his mother put the box on top of the refrigerator, out of his reach, he had a new problem to solve. He began some experimentation, first with a chair and then with different-sized boxes. Finally, he discovered that if he piled the boxes on top of each other, he could reach the forbidden cookies.*

Such learning is usually not planned by parents. In the first instance, the mother was delighted with the child's interest and absorption. Shaoket's mother was none too pleased, however, with the child's cleverness at the moment she discovered him teetering on the piled-up boxes. Still, when homes are organized so that items for children's use are within easy grasp and other items are stored out of reach for various reasons, curious and determined children will try out their ideas if allowed enough freedom to explore safely. By modeling problem-solving skills and exploring problems and solutions with children, parents steer their children toward competence.

### Space Influences Physical and Creative Development

Family space isn't necessarily limited to indoor space. Outdoor space and the freedom to explore it safely will assist children in developing physical skills and creative endeavors.

*Kenisha shared a bedroom with her sisters wherever they lived, and as the family moved from farm to farm, they usually shared their meals in a crowded space. Kenisha's outdoor space, however, provided greater opportunities for physical and creative development. Many of the farms had large barns and fields where Kenisha and her siblings could play. There were trees nearby and beams in a barn where she and the others could climb when they were not expected in the fields. Cardboard boxes, old blankets, boards, nails, and hammers enabled them to create their own fantasy worlds. Kenisha and her siblings made creative use of the strong ropes that the family used to tie up their goods. They often tied the ropes to the barn beams or to strong tree limbs, then developed skill in climbing and swinging on the ropes.*

Research from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) supports the assumption that today's children, especially those growing up in poverty, have reduced opportunities to play outside (Milteer & Ginsburg, 2011). Joint initiatives such as the federal government's "Let's Move: America's Move to Raise a Healthier Generation of Kids" and private campaigns such as the NFL's "Play 60" are new resources that parents can use to reverse the trend of sedentary childhoods and obesity.

Many people assume that a clean home is a sign of good parenting. To be certain, it is important that homes have access to untainted water and sanitary food preparation areas, and are free from disease. However, there is a growing body of research that is exploring a modern phenomenon called *The Hygiene Hypothesis* (Klass, 2017). This idea is that our inclination to keep our children free from germs has resulted in some of our modern homes perhaps being "too clean" for healthy development. To support optimal development of healthy immune systems, new research is examining the necessary exposure to microbes and bacteria (Stein et al., 2016). Researchers are also looking at how germs and microorganisms can actually be protective against chronic illnesses (Bokulich et al., 2016).



### Check Your Understanding 7.2

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

## FAMILY PRACTICES AND HOME LEARNING

By this point, you should realize that families help children develop basic skills—many taught through daily routines—that prepare children to function successfully in society, and that parents fulfill these responsibilities to differing degrees. By considering each part of a family's day, we can see how these practices can contribute to healthy growth and development.

### Daily Routines

Although modern family lifestyles appear to be hurried because of job requirements, child care, children's sports, and other recreational activities, all families establish some sort of routine. It is because of these routine events that children are able to mentally organize their environments and therefore grow and develop.

When events happen in the home in a timed sequence, children develop a better sense of society's meaning of time. First is the process of getting up and getting ready for school or work. When mealtimes are regular, the second routine involves preparation and a specified mealtime. A further set of routines focuses on bathing and other toileting procedures. The family reuniting at the end of the day is often another routine event. Bedtime is the final routine as family members prepare for the night. During these daily events, parents support and encourage or negate and suppress children's physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development.

**PREPARING FOR THE DAY** Children who arise, dress, and then brush their teeth as routine morning activities establish a pattern whereby they learn through habit about a sequence of events. Parent-child discussion about these events reinforces parental values and attitudes toward the activities, assists in children's language development, helps children learn a sense of time, and supports children's memory and recall. When parents can give explanations or answer children's questions when varying routines, they often lessen the stress and help them learn to reason, question, and adapt to new situations.

Children develop a sense of well-being and security when limits are clear and deviations from routines are dealt with in a caring and supportive environment.

**Homeless families** who are able to maintain some daily routines and rituals are also able to strengthen their positive interaction patterns by regularly playing with their children and caring for their emotional needs (Howard, 2013). Families who are separated by circumstances can help provide stability by committing to certain routines (such as scheduled visits, phone calls, and Skype sessions) when other family variables may be in flux.

**MEALTIMES** Mealtime in families offers many educational opportunities. How events are handled determines the amount and types of learning that take place. Two examples will serve to support the idea and suggest the degree of variation in family habits.

*In Bonita's family, mealtimes had established routines and consistent hours. There were expectations for shared responsibilities and behaviors. One day, Bonita returned from her ballet lesson at 5:30 p.m. to find her father and brother starting dinner. They asked her to set the table and not watch TV, because Mom was late and Joe needed to leave for tae kwon do at 7 p.m. When Mom arrived at 6, the family sat down and, after a blessing, began to eat. When Bonita started to protest that she didn't like peas, her father quietly said, "Don't eat them, then, but don't fuss." Joe was going for his red belt that evening, so the family discussed how he was progressing. When her father said the dinner was scrumptious, Bonita wanted to use that word, but didn't know how to spell it. Her mother suggested that she look it up using the dictionary app on her phone and practice it on the way to Joe's red-belt test. The entire family cleared the table and put the dishes in the sink for later washing.*

Although Casey's family was equally supportive, their mealtimes reflected a different ambiance.

*Casey's father picked her up at the child-care center earlier than usual because his last meeting of the day was cancelled. He had picked up frozen pizzas. At home, he engaged Casey in getting plates, and helped her count the silverware for everyone. Casey pretended to read the instructions on the pizza package with her father as they warmed enough pizza for each of them. Casey and her father then settled onto the couch together. She played with her paper dolls while her dad responded to a few e-mails on his phone. When the pizza was ready, Casey's dad served her, then went back to his e-mails. Her two older brothers arrived home and greeted their father and Casey. They served themselves pizza, milk, and a handful of baby carrots, then sat at the kitchen bar, discussing their soccer practice. Ready to attend a neighborhood association meeting, the children's father indicated that their mother would be home soon. The boys were to help Casey if she needed something. When their mother arrived, she too had some pizza, watched a short video with Casey, and reminded the boys about homework.*

*When it was Casey's bedtime, the mother asked the boys to clean up the counter and put their sports uniforms in the washing machine. While her mother folded laundry, Casey followed her routine of getting undressed, brushing her teeth, and kissing her brothers good-night. Her mother read Casey a story and tucked her into bed. She then went downstairs and supervised her sons' homework while preparing materials for her own job.*

In both families, mealtime is an end-of-the-day event with all family members sharing a meal. However, the purpose of the meal is very different in each family. In Bonita's family, mealtime is not only a time for feeding the family, but also one of sharing responsibilities and learning about each person's day. A special effort is made to keep the family a single unit during that time. The entire family often shares evening events, but there is little freedom of choice, as adults make most of the decisions.

In Casey's home, mealtime is a more flexible and less significant moment. The members eat as they come in. All members are united in greeting each other and assuming responsibilities. Adults are definitely in charge; however, there are more choices, and more freedom is allowed.

Research supports that frequently sharing meals supports nutritional and emotional health of children (Harvard School of Education Project Zero, 2016). Regularly sharing meals can act as an anchor for a family. Children who share meals with their families reduce the risk of engaging in risky behaviors such as smoking, drinking, and experimenting with drugs. They are less likely to get depressed, develop eating disorders, and consider suicide. These same children are more likely to do well in school, have an increased vocabulary, and, unsurprisingly, have better table manners.

The process of preparing food provides children with many learning opportunities, regardless of the circumstances and regardless of when and how family members share in the process:

- Fine motor skills are developed as children help with food preparation such as cutting vegetables.
- Children are more likely to try a wider variety of healthful foods if they help with preparation.
- Concepts about quantity are learned as children help use measurement tools in the kitchen.
- Following along as the adult reads the recipe or the package directions develops sequencing skills and other prereading skills.
- Helping to make a grocery list supports writing and spelling skills and language development.
- Observing the change that takes place as liquid batter becomes a solid pancake provides basic scientific understanding of a change process.
- The kinds and varieties of food children eat during mealtime communicate the family's values regarding the environment, nutrition, or the family's concern with obesity.

The different kinds of parental or sibling involvement in preparation and cleanup after meals teach children the family's attitude toward gender-role responsibilities. In some families, the mother is expected to prepare meals and clean up afterward, especially if she stays at home to care for the children. In other families, there is a sense of shared responsibility, particularly when the mother works outside the home. In Elizabeth Kolbert's (2012) influential piece for *The New Yorker*, she claims that many American children are being indulged with material goods, but are often denied opportunities to develop responsibility within the family structure. We find that a sense of maturity and responsibility develops as children assume some of the tasks in the mealtime process.

**FAMILY REUNITING AT THE END OF THE DAY** When the family's routine is such that each member goes off to work or school, there is often a homecoming routine. The end of the day can be a stressful time, and both positive and negative lessons are learned.

Members of the family can be tired, hungry, and even anxious at day's end. Often, this is a time when children begin to learn how to cope in difficult situations. When parents or partners argue and disagree, children can be frightened of the anger, and

their sense of security is threatened. Nurturing parents and partners resolve their differences and provide models of negotiating behaviors. Those who lash out, demean each other, or even strike each other are modeling ways to diminish another person's self-concept. When parents or partners are able to resolve differences through discussion, apologizing, and coming to agreement, they provide lessons in how to negotiate a peaceful settlement.

Many end-of-the-day routines are pleasant experiences. In some families, children and adults at home share what happened to them during their absence from each other. Children learn important **socialization skills**, such as how to listen, how to take turns talking, and how to explain so that someone else can understand; in some instances, they learn the skills of sticking to the topic being discussed. How much understanding and skill children develop in the routine situations of the home depends on a combination of factors, such as the age and gender of the children, **socioeconomic factors**, the children's interest, the level of previous understanding, and adult-child interactions.

**BEDTIME** As children prepare for bed, there are many procedures that assist children's development. As in all routines, regularity and consistency help children develop a sense of time and order of events, and a sense of security.

*Four-year-old Connor's parents went out for the evening, and Connor had a new babysitter, whom he appeared to like very much. The sitter played games with him and read him his favorite stories. At his regular bedtime, she helped him get undressed and brush his teeth. After one last story, she tucked him in, turned out the light, and went downstairs. A little later, she heard Connor crying, and went up to see what was the matter. As she soothed him, she finally heard him whimper, "I want Mommy. She says my prayers, and you didn't."*

Connor derived a great deal of security from a series of routine bedtime activities. Although he apparently forgot part of the routine, he sensed that something was wrong, and when he remembered, he became upset. In addition to satisfying Connor's sense of security, the episode demonstrates activities whereby Connor's parents (or the babysitter in their absence) fulfill their educational responsibilities. As Connor washes and brushes his teeth before retiring, he is learning good health habits. Saying prayers at night or at mealtime can be the beginning of religious training.

### IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

*It is well known that tired children aren't as available for learning, and recent brain research confirms it. Teachers can support families by recommending that each child get a full night's rest prior to attending school. This may be a good time to consult the well-researched sleep information for children of all ages, which can be found at the CDC's website.*

### Cultural Heritage

Heritage can be seen as a personal history that is unique to each person. It is each child's inherited story. Heritage can include rituals, traditions, folklore, and **playlore**. It is an important part of what children learn in the home.

The established definition of *family ritual* is the formal procedure for defining routine patterns of behavior. These rituals and traditions are important to any society, for it is

by such behaviors that individuals show respect for the value system within a family or clan. In rituals and traditions, behavior patterns are neither questioned nor examined; the behavior is continued because it is important to the family. As children learn the expected behaviors of the rituals, they develop a sense of identity and a self-concept. In addition, religious ceremonies involve rituals whereby children extend their understanding about the world and their connection to their family.

Customs and folklore often are part of cultural heritage. Psychologists for years have stressed the importance of folklore to children's psychological and emotional development. Such stories serve as moral lessons as well.

In addition to providing emotional or moral support, rituals create an intellectual stimulus. Traditional rhymes, chants, and incantations have a language pattern and a story structure that support literacy development. In many families, adults chant or read the rhymes they learned as children, often in the course of playing with children. "This Is the Way the Lady Rides," "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe," or "Shoe the Old Horse" provide rhythms and language patterns that form the foundation of children's developing language (Dunst, Valentine, Raab, & Hamby, 2013).

You have likely seen older children teaching younger ones special games, rituals, and the chants of childhood that parents do not attend to. This is known as **playlore** (Davey, Darian-Smith, & Pascoe, 2013). Siblings are powerful communicators of playlore in the home. Whether singing traditional songs, writing a letter to Santa Claus, helping count candles on the cake, or learning to read their part for the seder, parents and older siblings are engaging children in cultural heritage.

### Sharing Interests and Skills

The amount of knowledge that parents transmit to their children varies widely from family to family. The greatest differences in children's special knowledge occur between families who explore their interests together and those who ignore each other. For example, when computer enthusiasts involve their young children in learning rudimentary computer skills, the children often enter kindergarten very adept at using computers. Children's curiosity leads them to ask many questions. Parents respond differently, of course, depending on their own interests, knowledge, and style of interaction. But children's learning and continued interest depend greatly on the response they elicit. Families may also share an interest in the arts, as the following vignette shows.

*When Mrs. Jacobs placed a Faith Ringgold print in her third-grade classroom, Roberto quickly volunteered to the class that Ringgold used painted quilts to tell stories. He and his artist father had experimented with the technique after reading "Tar Beach." Roberto had been fascinated with the illustrations, and his dad had extended that interest as the two explored the technique together in his father's studio.*



Family rituals can vary according to traditions and cultural influences.



71884/Shutterstock

Children's learning and interest depend greatly on the response they get from their parents.

Eager adults can destroy children's interest as well as expand it. For example, children may learn different things from the simple question "Where does the wind come from?" One parent may reply, "Gee, I don't know!" Given that answer too many times, children learn that their questions are not important or that they shouldn't bother trying to find answers. Another parent may respond, "From the east," and point in the direction from which the wind is now blowing. If that is the end of the conversation, children may learn where east is, that the wind's origin is east, and that adults know things and children can get information from them. Another parent may expand on this answer by pointing and then adding, "See, you can tell by how the trees are swaying." Children's knowledge is expanded to finding out something about how one determines the direction of the wind. Another parent, whose own knowledge about wind and directionality is limited, may answer, "I'm not sure exactly. Let's see if we can find out." When parents and children pursue an answer together, children learn about the importance of questioning and new ways of knowing.

Howard Gardner (1993, 2011) has discussed various intelligences that result from different learning styles. These styles may be innate, but parents also support, reinforce, or even squelch their children's natural learning style by the way they respond. Linguistically oriented parents tend to teach their children through explanations and expressive use of language. Parents with strong logical-mathematical orientations enjoy math and strategy games, and encourage orderly and logical thinking in arriving at solutions. Spatially and kinesthetically oriented parents help their children move through space, and use their bodies as they figure out how the world functions. Artistic parents expand their children's knowledge through imagining and creating. Naturalist-oriented parents discriminate among living things and are very sensitive to features of the natural world, such as clouds, rocks, and land formations and configurations. These responses not only reflect the parents' orientations, they also communicate different ways of knowing.

Children whose parents reinforce their ways of knowing have greater success in school, but when the learning styles of the home and school are too disparate, children are at a disadvantage. Teachers who try to understand what and how children have learned at home, however, can create classroom opportunities for supporting and expanding children's skills and knowledge. Parents can help teachers understand how their children learn by discussing the methods used at home.

### Recreational Pursuits

Recreation, games, and play with family members have great emotional, physical, social, and intellectual value for children, and few activities bond families better than recreational pursuits. Children normally select their own levels of participation in play, sports, and creative work, but parents and other family members can always encourage and support their interest. Children require time, space, and equipment to pursue

recreation, and effective parents will plan for this, support it, and even participate. Children derive the following benefits from recreation and play:

- Working with others
- Gaining small and large muscle exercise
- Establishing an interest in fitness
- Developing a lifelong interest in and a positive attitude toward recreation
- Pursuing guided exploration of challenges and new ventures
- Making sensible and accurate use of equipment
- Achieving release from tension
- Experiencing pleasure, gratification, and satisfaction

### Toys and Games

Affluent parents have the means to provide an array of toys in the home, and their children often have their own tablet computers for games and activities. These parents arrange trips for their children as well as a variety of entertainment events, cultural activities, and recreational opportunities. On the other hand, affluent parents can also be consumed by the details and responsibilities related to their careers and therefore be less available to spend time with their children.

Other families can't afford as many diversions, but the children learn important coping skills as their parents try to overcome economic deprivation. They learn to develop kinship relations with family members and neighbors as they share material goods and responsibility for children's safety, and help each other cope in a sometimes hostile environment. Although poverty is limiting, it does not mean that poor families are not committed to their children's education. Many of them make wise choices, such as enriching their children's experiences with appropriate toys, books, and family outings, and arranging for enrichment activities.

The types of toys parents provide reflect their value structure and extend children's development in different ways.

— On the birth of her daughter Delaney, Bonita bought a set of wooden blocks. When Delaney was old enough to sit and stack things, Bonita took out a few blocks for the child to play with. The blocks were always stored according to their size, and gradually Delaney became involved in returning them to the shelf as she expanded her use of the blocks. Over time, other materials were added, such as play animals, toy trucks and cars, pieces of cloth, and paper and crayons for signs. At times, Delaney's father would join her in playing with the blocks by building towers and complicated structures.

Delighting in their new son, Christopher's fathers bought him a huge plush panda. Both would sit on the floor beside the panda holding his infant as he fed him or played with him. Panda was also an important character in Christopher's bedtime routine. As Christopher grew older, the panda became an important source of comfort and a wonderful companion to sit with while hearing a story or to chat with while strapped into his car seat for long rides.

Zena, a staff member at the community child-care center, often took home toys discarded by the center. One day, she brought several discarded sets of playing cards that were missing cards. At home, using the numbers and pictures, she and her children made up several games of naming, sorting, matching, and trading, and these were shared by children in the apartment complex. —

All children experience learning aided by the toys they receive, and all three sets of parents described in the vignettes played with their children as they used various types of materials. By selecting blocks as the most important toy for her daughter, Bonita established a cognitive curriculum, whereas Christopher's fathers' first gift reflected their wish to provide a warm, cozy support system to nurture emotional development. Zena's creative approach to sourcing toys set an example for sustainable living, and offered academic support to her children. All the children were prized and cherished, and their parents were teaching important self-concept and academic skills that would help them as they entered school.

### Economics and Money Issues for Children

Economists state that economic behavior begins at an early age, and that much of a child's early learning about financial matters persists into adulthood (Danes, 2014). This suggests that parents and early childhood teachers should be aware of how children interact with the realities of money.

The Sesame Workshop podcast *Elmo's Adventures in Spending, Saving and Sharing* (2011) and the extensive resources related to the PBS TV program *Biz Kid\$* (2017) can help parents teach financial literacy. Both programs are free, and include English and Spanish resources. Most importantly, they are especially geared to children and their parents. They include developmentally appropriate tools to help families reinforce positive values and a sense of responsibility when it comes to financial decisions.

### IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Many supermarkets are open to cooperating with local schools to provide a "Family Math Night." Students, their families, and their teachers arrive at the supermarket after school to see how math is involved in food shopping. Many math topics, such as concepts about money, can be reinforced in a meaningful and relevant way that all families can refer to later in subsequent trips.

### Sustainable Living

Closely allied to budgeting and using good economic sense is a sense of ecological responsibility. Although recessions and hard times prod some families to consider reusing or trading, thereby saving money, energy, or time, the labels "green" and "sustainable" have become prominent in recent years among many Americans who wish to make better use of natural resources and to create a cleaner planet.

Recycling, buying produce from local farms, using reusable products (such as cloth diapers and water bottles), and conserving natural resources are tangible ways to communicate values to children. Young children often become excited about the ideas of helping with conservation efforts that they can understand. In the following vignette, a family decides to begin a new conservation effort.

Destiny's dad came home on Saturday afternoon with a big barrel in the back of his truck.

"What's that?" little Destiny asked.

"It's a rain barrel! I made it at the neighborhood workshop down at the park. Come see what it does," replied her dad.

Destiny and her father rolled the lightweight plastic barrel to the backyard. "It smells sweet!" exclaimed Destiny.

"It used to have soda-pop syrup in it," explained her father as he set the barrel upright next to the rainspout. "But now we are recycling it, and it is going to help us water our new trees."

Destiny remembered that her dad had received some free tree saplings at the city's fair. They had planted the three saplings in their small city backyard.

"There! It's all ready now," proclaimed her father. "When it rains, the water that runs down the spout will collect in here. We can recycle that water. See, turn this spigot; you can fill up your watering can. Our new trees will have plenty to drink this summer!"

Destiny ran off to get her watering can with the ladybugs on it. She could hardly wait for it to rain.

If you are interested in learning more about how families are taking ecological decisions seriously, you might consider searching for "green mom" blogs or "eco-parenting" on the internet.

### Travel Experiences

Most families take trips together, some to the grocery store or to visit local relatives, others on lengthy vacations throughout the United States or abroad. Local trips provide rich learning experiences when parents extend the experience with observations about the scenery and what has changed in the familiar environment or with discussions about what is to be bought, why, and where to find it. Such involvement helps children learn about their natural environment and become keen observers of change. Among other things, they learn the give-and-take of discussion, reasons for doing things, and classification skills. Parents provide valuable emotional support and express values as they demonstrate pleasure in sharing these times with their children.

Ricardo, whose family lived in a subsidized housing unit in a small community, was a town rubbish collector with responsibility for retrieving bottles and cans for deposit reimbursement. He often took his two children on his rounds. The children counted the collectibles and sorted materials according to the size of the refund they would produce. A self-taught naturalist, Ricardo also enjoyed pointing out to his children features along the route, such as birds, new flowers in bloom, and interesting rock formations.

All families educate their children to achieve some level of functioning in society. Although there are dysfunctional families in which children's learning is hampered or even distorted, most families provide varied educational opportunities for their children through daily routines and ongoing family activities. The best outcomes occur when families assume their share of responsibility for the education of their children and work with schools and communities to assist in the process.

### IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Buy or draw a large map of your town or city, and post it in your classroom. If you have a smart-board, consider using a mapping program such as Google Earth. Then have the children identify the different places they visited last week. You will need to start them off with accounts of a few of your own trips (to the market, hardware store, etc.).

*With prompts (e.g., "Did anyone go to the movie last weekend?"), you will find that children recall much of the local traveling they undertook during the week. Mark the spaces on the map. You then can discuss with your group the value of the destinations for the families and the reasons for traveling. You may want to identify places in town that no one visited.*

*This project will heighten children's interest in the community and reveal the interconnectedness of our communities and neighborhoods. It will also provide a beginning study of the local geography and ecology.*

### Technology

As technology has become more prevalent in our culture, our reaction to its influence has changed as well. Turkle (2011, 2015) argues that the pervasive nature of technology affects our ability to build intimate relationships with family and friends. Many of us have seen families in public spaces who are sitting next to each other, and one or more in the group are engaged with electronic devices instead of speaking with each other. And we wonder if that is good for the family's relationships.

Social media in particular has been found to have both benefits and risks for families (Okeefe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Bullying, sexting, depression, and harassment are significant threats to younger users. Interactive media usage can also increase a person's abilities to discuss important issues, such as parenting, and to be involved in local community groups such as churches and neighborhood associations.

Many families use technology to increase communication during times when the family is separated geographically. Military deployment, incarceration, and remote employment are times that families can use technology to encourage children and adults to send written messages, artwork, music, photos, and voice recordings to maintain family relationships. So, there can be positive as well as negative dimensions to expanded technology.

**VIDEO PROGRAMMING** Although not the case with published materials, almost every home in the United States has access to video programming such as television. Children watch on average three hours of video programming every day (US National Library of Medicine, 2014). How each family uses "screen time" is, of course, the salient factor. The American Academy of Pediatrics released new recommendations for young children in 2016. You will find some guidelines for management of family screen time listed in Figure 7-3.

### Video Example 7.2

Watch this video and reflect upon how the growing numbers of military families can use routines to support their families during deployment. How can teachers be sensitive and supportive when dealing with children who have diverse home situations?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6bK2ayZIBo>

**FIGURE 7-3** Sensible Limits for Screen Time at Home

Pediatricians, media specialists, and teachers advocate TV controls as well as "media literacy" for children. Parents, however, are in the best position to shape any media effects into positive influences for their children.

1. Keep children under 18 months old away from video programming, except video-chatting that reinforces strong relationships.
2. Although there is a lot of programming aimed at children, be choosy. Select high-quality, age-appropriate shows.
3. Monitor what children watch, and view the programs with them.
4. Begin setting limits early. Prioritize sleep, physical exercise, play, and other healthy behaviors.
5. Encourage children's interaction with beneficial programming, then talk about the program.
6. Designate media-free times such as mealtimes.
7. Parents must watch their own TV behavior. Predetermine programs for everyone to watch and watch them, then turn the television off. Surfing through programs encourages children to do the same.

Source: Based on information from the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016).

Television shows' association with aggression and violence has been a concern for decades. In response to Congress passing the Child Safe Viewing Act, the Federal Communications Commission reported that while there are many tools and ratings available to parents, education was needed to help families effectively use the variety of tools available. In the following vignette, a teacher helps a family make educated choices when it comes to children's viewing habits.

*By the time Ms. Greene had finished her third parent-teacher conference with a Spanish-speaking family, she and the translator had noticed a similar theme. Mrs. Chavarin, the translator, spoke first.*

*"Do you notice that when we ask about what the children do at home, the parents all mention cartoons? I wonder if the parents know how to find educational programming?"*

*Ms. Greene sent an e-mail to the family liaison worker for the school. She in turn called the neighborhood apartment complexes to find out which television services were most used. Then she searched their listings for educational programs on the Spanish-language channels. She gave the information to Mrs. Chavarin, who typed up a quick notice in Spanish. Ms. Greene passed out the fliers at dismissal.*

*Two weeks later, Ms. Greene was thrilled to hear her student Yazmin exclaim, "Guess what I saw on Plaza Sésamo!"*



Tyler Olson/Shutterstock

Smartphones and tablet computers fascinate young children. Caution and supervision are warranted as children experiment.

**INTERNET** Like TV, internet access is available in virtually all schools and most homes in America. It is now a prominent part of some young children's lives. In 2013, 57% of children ages 3 to 17 used the internet at home, and 79% had a computer at home (Child Trends Data Bank, 2015). New research shows that many low-income families often only have access on mobile devices due to affordability issues (Rideout & Katz, 2016).

Recommendations similar to those concerning TV apply to children's use and parents' supervision of the internet. Some federal and international guidelines help codify the expectations of what is available in schools and libraries. Parents can control children's access to websites through internet filters; however, family agreements and sharing about positive websites is a far better method of

control. Nationally, more concern about distasteful online material has appeared, and media manufacturers now distribute software to control children's online experiments. Many parents are able to control internet content by limiting their children to using certain web-based apps that limit content by their design and by using trusted indexes of links provided by schools and libraries (see Figure 7-4).

More research is needed to examine this complex new phenomenon and how it is changing family relationships, especially as it relates to young children. The jury is still out on how technology affects our ability to develop meaningful relationships within families.

**FIGURE 7-4** Internet Privacy for Young Children

1. Never share identifying information.
2. Avoid strangers. Never open e-mail from or send pictures to people you don't know.
3. Usernames and passwords are private. Ask an adult before you create one, and change the password every six months.
4. If you see something happening that makes you feel uncomfortable, tell a trusted adult immediately.
5. Only go to sites and use search engines that your family and school have agreed are good for kids. Use bookmarks to help.
6. Use your manners online. Know how to report mean and unkind behavior.

Source: Based on information from Common Sense Education (2016).

### IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

1. Watch children carefully while they are using technology. What skills do they have? What skills would help them use the technology more effectively?
2. Teach online safety to older children. Websites offer age-specific indexes of resources to help teachers, children, and families make informed choices. For one such website, search online for "Education USAGov."
3. Talk to parents about research on children and media.
4. Recommend high-quality media to parents. Fred Rogers (*Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*) was a pioneer when it came to recognizing the potential of technology in the lives of young children. Visit the website of his foundation, *The Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media*, to see how professionals are working to advance the work of technology that can help young people and their educators communicate, collaborate, and create change.



### Check Your Understanding 7.3

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

### EXTENDED FAMILIES INFLUENCE LEARNING

In this section, we present some features of grandparents' and extended family members' influence on young children. In 2014, 17% of households in the United States consisted of extended and multigenerational families living together (Zonta, 2016). Extended family members may live close by, or they may live at some distance but still have strong ties. In addition to teaching about role expectations and hierarchical structures, the extended family helps children absorb the traditions and rituals of the larger group.

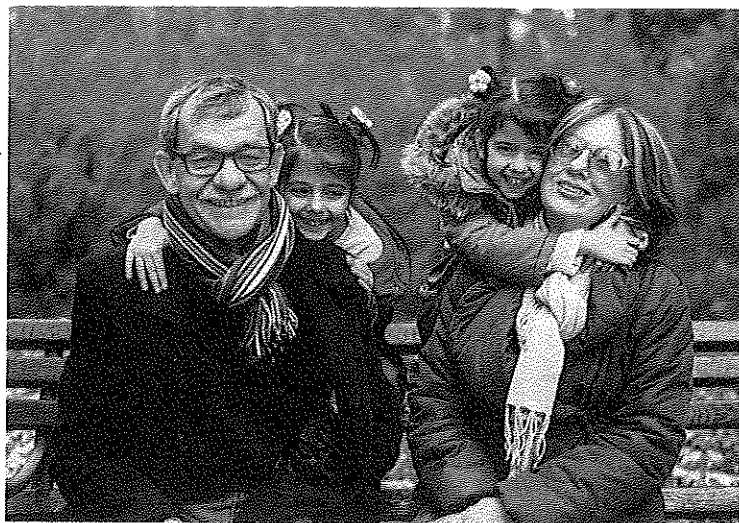
#### Extended Families Foster Rituals and Traditions

Celebrations often are a time when children learn about who they are, as extended family members share the rituals and customs of their particular culture. Children in bicultural homes often have very different experiences, especially when both sets of the extended family share holidays with the nuclear family. In the vignette that follows, Sila is the child of a European American father, Dan, and a Turkish mother, Nara, whose own family members are practicing Muslims. Nara no longer observes religious practice, but Sila is introduced to the Muslim faith through visits from extended family members.

*Seven-year-old Sila is excited about the upcoming holidays, because both Easter and Kurban Bayram are being celebrated close together. Greg, her father's brother, will be joining them for Easter week, and as he does every year, he will help her dye eggs, take her shopping, and help her hunt for Easter eggs on the church lawn. Sila is only beginning to understand that Easter week is about Christ's crucifixion, and has begun to ask questions such as "Why was Jesus killed? Did bad people kill him?" Although her father tries to explain, Sila is anxious for Uncle Greg's answer.*

*At the end of the month, her mother's sister, Bilge, will join them to celebrate Kurban Bayram. Sila will not wear her new Easter hat or dress during this time, but instead will wear a special head scarf. The family will go to the Muslim market to buy a lamb and have it killed in a special way, Sila believes, although she isn't quite sure how. Last year, her aunt explained that they kept only a small part of the lamb for cooking. She will need to ask about the lamb again this year. Although they have no relatives in the Muslim community in the city, Aunt Bilge and her mother will take her to visit the mosque. She does remember Aunt Bilge telling her that Mohammed was the great prophet in the Muslim faith, as Jesus was in the Christian faith. She wondered if they were friends. She will certainly ask her Aunt Bilge this time.*

In some families, both sets of extended family members have equal access to the nuclear family. When this happens, the customs and habits children learn from these members are of equal importance. Because family structures differ, however, what children learn from the extended family depends on the influence these relatives have on the nuclear family. The extended family expands the **home curriculum** by sharing its own values and interaction patterns. When extended family members work out the cultural differences and values of the others, children like Sila will learn how to solve the problems or deal with confusions that arise because of these differences.



Goran Bogicevic/Shutterstock

Nearby grandparents have shorter but more frequent contact with their grandchildren.

### Grandparents Influence Children's Development

As with other providers of the home curriculum, grandparents' influence on children is diverse. Age of grandparents, age of grandchildren, geographical differences, and relationships of grandparents with the nuclear family, plus family structure and processes, have an impact that ranges from minimal to substantial (Berns, 2012). Studies indicate four different categories of grandparents: the custodial grandparent, the nearby grandparent, the distant grandparent, and the emotionally remote grandparent.

The custodial grandparent influences the child's development in a manner very similar to that of a parent, so there is a significant influence. The emotionally remote grandparent has little contact with the child, so there is probably little influence. Caring

and supporting grandparents who keep in close contact with their families have considerable influence on the home curriculum, whether they live nearby or in a distant area.

Directly or indirectly, grandparents give their grandchildren a value system and a philosophy of how children are to be instructed, whether morally, religiously, culturally, or intellectually. In the following vignette, Elizabeth is learning two ways of writing and expressing herself because of her grandmothers. Because both grandparents live at some distance, they keep in contact with her through letters, e-mail, and telephone calls.

Elizabeth was an active 6-year-old who had discovered the rhythms of language early. Her Grandmother Dailey, a former English teacher, firmly believed that children should learn to speak correctly and not use "silly phrases" or "special invented terms." Her Grandmother Denato, however, delighted in the "discovered" terms Elizabeth used and would often repeat them, thus reinforcing the idea that language can be created. At Christmas, Elizabeth received a collection of rocks from Grandmother Denato and books from Grandmother Dailey. Her thank-you letters to both grandmothers consisted of a drawing of the gift plus a statement. Before sending the letter to Grandmother Dailey, Elizabeth asked her mother about Babar, one of the book's characters, and, with her mother's help, carefully copied on her drawing the words "I liked the elephant book best." On the picture she sent to Grandmother Denato, she wrote by herself, "Rnd redrks spkls lgbk rks wjshin ilou Dne" ("Round red rocks with sparkles long black rocks which shine. I love you, Donny"—her pet name for this grandmother).

At age 6, Elizabeth has already learned what each grandmother values. In wanting to please each, she is learning valuable things. For the grandmother who is precise, she learns about story characters, and has learned to copy a few short words with her mother's help. With her other grandmother, she has learned the fun of playing with words and sounds, and is willing to experiment and try out her knowledge of letters and sounds. Elizabeth's mother supports the values of both grandparents by supporting Elizabeth's efforts without passing judgment.

In some situations, children receive mixed messages concerning their competence, their sense of safety, or the importance of taking risks. In the following vignette, David receives two different messages about the same situation from his grandparents. Of course, other cultural and sociological factors will determine how he interprets these messages, especially because he sees his Grandmother Hu, who lives nearby, more often. Visits to Grandmother Williams take place each summer for three or four weeks, plus other holidays.

David Hu, now 4 years old, was born with a partly developed left hand. He has only stubs for fingers, though his thumb appears to be well developed. His father is Chinese, and his mother is European American. David, his mother, father, and Grandmother Hu are visiting at the summer home of his maternal grandmother in a small seashore community. The grandmothers are supervising David at a summer playgroup program, and he has gone outside to play on the slide. Grandmother Hu immediately goes with him. Grandmother Williams finishes her reading with a group of 4-year-olds and follows later. When she arrives, David has begun climbing up the front of the slide, with his thumb firmly grasping the side of the slide. Occasionally, he slips but catches himself. Grandmother Hu is trying to stop him from climbing, but David ignores her. Grandmother Williams speaks to Mrs. Hu rather sharply, "Oh, leave him alone, he's doing a great job."

Mrs. Hu says in a worried voice, "But he might get hurt," and points to his left hand. Mrs. Williams replies, "We don't know that. Let's just watch and see how he handles it."

David continues to climb two or three times, sliding gleefully down the slide. On his last slide, he jerks back, loses his grip, hits his head on the slide, and begins to howl. Both grandmothers rush to him and try to comfort him. Suddenly, he breaks away from them both and begins climbing and sliding again. While the two grandmothers argue over his safety, he happily continues his activity until one of the helpers calls to tell him that the rest of the class is doing an art project. David rushes inside with the other children.

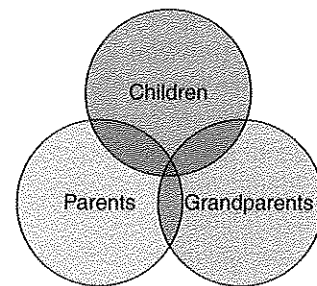
The two grandmothers have different views of how David should be treated. Mrs. Hu feels great responsibility and anxiety about his safety, but according to Mrs. Williams, she is overprotective. Mrs. Hu even hovers over him while he is doing his artwork. She is always ready to help him do the project "correctly." Mrs. Williams is satisfied with a cavalier approach, feeling that the art project is uniquely his.

David is developing his physical skills in a mixed-message environment. He already knows that he can do more around Mrs. Williams and less around Mrs. Hu. He knows Mrs. Hu will protect him more and make sure he doesn't overextend himself. Mrs. Williams will allow him to experiment more, but he is likely to hurt himself more.

Perhaps David will learn a middle course whereby he is willing to take risks but experiment more to test his skill level before plunging in.

Both nearby and distant grandparents can have a great influence on children. In general, the nearby grandparent has shorter but more frequent contacts, whereas the distant grandparent's contacts are longer but fewer in number. Grandparents tend to have more fun with their grandchildren than they had time for with their own children, and they tend to feel less responsible for the well-being of their grandchildren. Research has shown that in today's busy, stressed families, grandparents can provide valuable services for children (Buchman & Griggs, 2009; Griggs, Tan, Buchanan,

Attar-Schwartz, & Flouri, 2010; 2009). More recent research also shows that some involvement with grandchildren may be correlated with decreased depressive symptoms (Mooreman & Stokes, 2016) and possibly even enhanced cognitive health (Burn, Henderson, Ames, Dennerstein, & Szoeker, 2014). In the families shown in this chapter's vignettes, the children experienced connections to their grandparents through the rituals of their heritage—Christmas gift-giving and other holiday observations. Figure 7-5 gives cues to the different influence patterns found in extended families.



**FIGURE 7-5** Grandparent Connection to Nuclear Family Members

*Note:* For most families, there is substantial engagement between child and parents, between parents and grandparents, and between child and grandparents. The extent of engagement is related to living arrangements, marital situation and condition, and family history. The diagram assumes a typical nuclear family with grandparents living nearby and no estrangement. Note the lessened influence of grandparents on the parent-child connection and the similarly lessened influence of parents on the grandparent-child interaction. Children's influence on parent-grandparent interaction is different still.

### EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

*An epidemic of opioid addiction in the United States (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2017) has led to many grandparents becoming primary caregivers for their grandchildren. Think carefully about the special challenges grandparents can face as they take primary responsibility for parenting their grandchildren. How will you modify your interactions to acknowledge and support this alternative family structure?*

### Advantages of Grandparent Involvement

Grandparents often realize that to establish a relationship with a grandchild, they need to make an effort to know them as they mature and change. An important aspect of grandparenthood is "having fun with them" or finding satisfaction in their encounters, whether one visits a zoo, reads a story, plays games, listens to them, or attends their activities. Some advantages of grandparent influence are shown in Table 7-1.

#### ✓ Check Your Understanding 7.4

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

**TABLE 7-1** Advantages of Grandparent Involvement

Goals	Activities
Sharing values and adapting to different value systems	Elizabeth's adaptation to cultural influences focused on her developing literacy skills, whereas David's focus was on developing physical skills.
Child gaining knowledge from grandparents	The Williamses are sailors, and at age 4, David was allowed to help steer the boat. Later, he learned to sail by himself.
Grandparents learning from grandchildren	Elizabeth's Grandmother Denato learned many computer skills from 6-year-old Elizabeth, including how to use e-mail. David's Grandmother Hu was timid when climbing, and 4-year-old David showed her where to put her feet and where to hold on as they climbed ledges together.
Learning the skills of interaction with older people and grandparents of different cultures	David learned to speak directly to his Grandfather Williams (who was a bit deaf) by looking him in the eye and "speaking up." With Grandpa Hu, he spoke softly and was deferent. As he learned expressions of greeting, politeness, and questioning in both languages, he learned different inflections and body language for each grandparent.
Understanding the geography and history of family members	Elizabeth's Grandmother Denato frequently traveled and sent postcards to Elizabeth. Later, Elizabeth and her grandmother played games; they found these places on maps and recalled who lived there.
Understanding the different household tasks and responsibilities	At one grandmother's house, Elizabeth learned that she was to make her bed, take her dishes off the table, and help with the sweeping before playing or watching TV. At Grandmother Denato's house, her responsibility was to get her grandmother up, then the two of them would make plans for the day.
Building healthy self-esteem	Elizabeth and David's grandparents both helped build self-esteem because they praised them, attended the grandchildren's sporting events, and expressed pride in their art, music, and school papers. These grandparents attended to their grandchildren's successes and empathized with their struggles. Self-confidence was supported, as the grandparents accepted help from the grandchildren, respected their opinions, and reinforced the parents' child-rearing practices.

### HOMESCHOOLING

Families that assume total responsibility for their children's education often opt to educate their children at home, at least for part of their schooling years. The term **homeschooling** is used to define **academic learning** that occurs as a result of activities provided in the home (or extensions of the home), with the parents acting as teacher-facilitators.

Homeschooled is not a new concept, but it has gained popularity in recent years. It is difficult to estimate the number of home-schooled students due to inconsistencies of accounting from state to state; however, most sources cite that approximately 1 million to 2 million students in the United States are homeschooled. Homeschooling is a flexible and diverse system of teaching and learning with a variety of practices. Just as various philosophies guide curriculum in schools, parents also consider teaching and learning using a traditional approach as well as constructive methods. Because of their tutorlike environment, homeschool curriculum activities are more likely to be geared to children's interests.

#### History of Homeschooling

Homeschooling was the norm for most families in the past. However, with the advent of compulsory education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the practice of homeschooling diminished. In the late 1970s, many parents—for example, John Holt (1982)—were disenchanted with their local schools, and found support for their efforts in different

writings. Since the 1980s, interest in homeschooling, driven by differing motivations, has increased dramatically. We now find specialized publishing houses, advocacy groups with legal departments, and national conferences supporting homeschooling programs.

The demand for information about homeschooling has become a sizable industry, and estimates show that Americans who choose homeschooling spend on average \$500 per student per year for materials. Consolidation of support systems, plus easy access to a variety of resources, is now accompanied by greater public acceptance of homeschooling as a viable alternative to public education.

In some school districts, educators encourage homeschooling parents to use school services, attend some classes, and participate in extracurricular activities. Some school systems have organized education centers, and other districts share their resources and allow older homeschooled students to take special classes online.

### Motives for Homeschooling

Parents homeschool their children for a variety of reasons, but most parents fall into two distinct groups—the **ideologues** and the **pedagogues**. Both groups disagree with educators about what is happening in schools today. Ideologues disagree with the values presented by teachers or their children's peers; therefore, these parents choose to homeschool so that the family's religious and social values are the ones their children internalize.

The growing group of pedagogues feel that their children can receive a more personalized and better education if they are taught at home. Some parents choose to homeschool because they fear their children will be exposed to problems such as violence, drugs, and disruptive behavior in the public school system. Others disagree with the instructional and managerial styles of teachers and school administrators. Some are concerned with the inability of teachers to handle all the individual needs, interests, and learning styles of their children, and they fear that school will discourage their children from learning. Still other parents decide to homeschool because their children experience difficulty in school, and they feel that school personnel are inadequate or punitive when addressing problems.

At the beginning of the 21st century, 77% of homeschooled children were White. More recent research points to growing numbers of African American families choosing to homeschool (Huseman, 2015; Mazama & MUSUNUMU, G, Mazama & Musunumu, 2014). Parents of these children tend to have some college education and earn above the median income in the United States.

### Teaching Methods in Homeschooling

The curriculum and methods for homeschooling depend on the home, but most methods fall into three categories: **fixed curriculum**, **units of study**, and **unstructured learning events**. The fixed curriculum consists of published guides with specific lessons, suggestions on how to teach, and evaluation techniques. This curriculum satisfies parents who are unsure of what to teach and who find comfort in a fixed schedule and a prescribed curriculum. Some parents, especially those who view homeschooling as a temporary solution to their children's educational needs, use the same textbooks used in the local schools. Increasing numbers of homeschooling parents are using internet resources to provide online learning opportunities for their children.

The unstructured learning method, sometimes called **unschooling**, deals with subjects in which the children are interested, and development of skills takes place as children experience various events in their family life. Each child's curriculum will be quite different when parents follow this method. Parents using this method often write about the many ways they enable their children to be successfully educated without relying on school or curriculum. Some read to their children a great deal and provide a range of quality materials. For these families, books of all sorts, including reference materials, are always available. In addition, digital resources provide these knowledgeable homeschooling families

with many more learning opportunities: access to the internet for searches on current events or other topics; use of e-mail, video-chat, and message boards for communicating with friends or relatives in distant places; and a multitude of computer games.

### EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

*Dr. Peter Gray conducted surveys of families who participate in unschooling. Search online for "Psychology Today," and from the website's home page, search for his series of reports. The reports include extensive anecdotal records, which provide a unique view of the beliefs of more than 200 unschooling families. After you read the excerpts from their interviews, reflect on the following questions:*

*What is unschooling?*

*What is your opinion of unschooling?*

Children schooled at home normally are included in all family work activities, such as cooking, doing laundry, or construction projects. Family recreational and educational activities, such as visiting libraries and museums, also are done together. Math skills are developed as parents involve children in building, using money, and calculating family finances. Many children and parents explore their environment together, learning science concepts as they follow their interests.

Even within a single family, the routine and methods followed by homeschoolers vary from year to year as children develop skills, new interests, and the ability to pursue their own learning. The common element is that children's interests are always paramount, and drill or practice is done at the pace the children set.

### Legal Aspects of Homeschooling

Laws concerning homeschooling vary, and as homeschooling has gained momentum, many states are changing their statutes. All 50 states have compulsory attendance laws, and homeschoolers can encounter legal problems, depending on how state offices interpret these laws. Court and state offices use the following issues in deciding the legality of homeschooling:

1. Parents' right of choice regarding their children's welfare
2. Equivalency of education
3. Homeschools considered as private, religious, or charter schools
4. Issues of the qualifications of teachers

Specific state laws range from a most rigorous approach to parent-friendly support for homeschooling. The National Home Education Research Institute and the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) are sources of information on laws and regulations regarding homeschooling and special needs.

### Criticisms and Successes of Homeschools

As the homeschooling movement has grown, some states and school districts have registered concerns about truancy issues, appropriate curriculum, student achievement, and loss of matching funds.



The popularity of homeschooling has increased in recent decades.

Comprehensive data from independent sources regarding the achievement of home-schooled students is scarce. Examining the individual success stories of homeschooled children, there is evidence that many homeschoolers do well academically and socially when they return to public school, find jobs in the community, or gain acceptance to college. Communities and authorities have an obligation to all children under their jurisdiction, however, and educators recognize that homeschooling is not for all parents or for all children. The reported successes are probably attributable to parents who wish to be an integral part of their children's learning and are willing to do the hard work and make the commitment it requires. Certainly, not all parents have the time, inclination, patience, or ability to sustain such nourishment on a long-term basis. Teachers are key personnel in many phases of children's education, including those children being homeschooled. Therefore, communication with homes where children are homeschooled is vital. As a teacher, you need to give support and keep communication lines open. The situation must be analogous to the home-school-community partnership.



### Check Your Understanding 7.5

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

## Summary and Review

Parents begin the process of educating their young as they respond to the infant's vocalizations. These interactions nurture preliteracy and communication skills. Children learn role expectations and responsibilities as the family carries out routines and rituals. Parental interaction styles, the type of environment, and the space in which children are raised also affect children's learning.

Children's home curricula are accumulations of all the experiences they have in their homes. Thus, each child's curriculum is different, but similarities occur as a result of daily routines that exist for most families. Both skills and knowledge about the world are acquired as children participate in preparing for the day, meal preparation, and bedtime rituals. From family traditions and rituals, children gain an understanding of their ethnic and cultural identity and of their place in the world. As parents share their own special interests and talents, children expand their concepts of the world around them. The expanding world of technology provides an extended curriculum, and the way parents

monitor and interact with their children regarding new media determines the benefits or pitfalls of their use. The beginning steps of handling money also are necessary objectives in children's homes.

Extended family members also provide stimulus for children's development. There is a "grandparent curriculum" that reinforces and supplements—or differs from—the nuclear family's practices. The amount of influence depends a great deal on the relationships between the nuclear and extended families, and on the caring and involvement of grandparents.

Although a small group has always believed in education at home, the homeschooling movement has grown rapidly since the 1960s. Numerous reasons are given for this increase, but most parents choose this route for religious and social reasons or because of philosophical differences with schools regarding education. Homeschooling is not for everybody, and all agree that this process requires a lot of hard work and a strong commitment to sustain positive outcomes.

## How Does Learning About this Topic Help You Become a Better Teacher?

Children receive a great deal of education outside the classroom walls, and whether intentionally or accidentally, parents provide a rich and varied curriculum in the home. Although great differences appear in the quantity

and quality of home curricula, all parents, as well as other family members, provide emotional, social, physical, and intellectual stimuli for children's development.

## Suggested Activities and Questions

1. Download the booklet "Helping Your Preschool Child" from the US Department of Education. Discuss in a group whether this publication would be helpful for communicating with parents about their role in cognitive development. Why or why not?
2. Whether you distribute "Mr. Yuk" stickers to your class or arrange a book swap before summer break, there are ways that you can positively influence the physical environment of a child's home. Make a list of ways in which teachers can reasonably increase the safety and livability of home environments.
3. Which family routines do you think are the most valuable for young children? How can teachers encourage positive family practices?
4. Make a list of some childhood activities you did with your grandparents, then share with classmates some valued learning that came from those interactions.
5. Check with your state's department of education to find out the regulations for homeschooling in your state. What is your reaction to and/or experiences with homeschooling?

## Resources and Websites

Family Service Association of America  
Children, Youth and Family Consortium  
National Homeschool Organization  
Urban Institute

The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation sponsors the Education Excellence Network site to promote voucher programs, charter schools, and privatization.

The FBI has a free and extensive parent guide to internet safety. From the FBI website's home page, click on the "Resources" tab, and then on the "Parents" tab.

Home School Reviews contains curricula materials related to different philosophical views of curricula, such as

a Waldorf approach, an eclectic approach, a classical approach, and unit studies.

Zero to Three is an excellent resource for parents and professionals working with infants and toddlers.

Common Sense Media provides app and product recommendations specifically for children with special needs and learning disabilities. From the home page of the website, search for "Learning Differences & Special Needs."

Sponsored by the Nemours Foundation, the Kids Health website provides timely information on topics from general health to school and family social life.



## CHAPTER 8

# Community Influences on Children's Development

### WHY THIS TOPIC MATTERS

Understanding the rich, but often overlooked, features of the community for supporting children's learning will serve you well as a teacher. Every community has unique physical characteristics and services as well as interconnected social systems. And the way the people in these systems relate to one another and utilize community resources greatly affects children's learning and development. You must also consider the increasing influence of media, as learning opportunities and online communities have become vital in the lives of children and families.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- Discuss how the physical attributes of a community support and extend or hinder children's education.
- Explain how the social and emotional environments in a community affect the amount and quality of learning that children derive from the community.
- Describe how organizations and agencies within a community provide many and varied learning experiences for children.
- Delineate media and technology influences on children's learning and development.

The ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) illustrates how relationships affect children's growth and learning. This model, as you will recall from earlier chapters, can be visualized as nested structures, each larger and encompassing the one before it (see Figure 1-1 in Chapter 1). A central theme of this text is that families are strengthened and children's development is enhanced through partnership relationships that include connection to the community. Like the family influences examined in Chapter 7, the influence of community will vary depending on the location, cultural aspects, and physical makeup of the region, the social networks established by its inhabitants, and the ways media and technology are integrated into children's lives. Although there are great differences

among communities, there are also many commonalities that suggest similar educational experiences and opportunities.

The gap between the rich and poor continues to widen in the United States. Consequently, new strategies are needed to overcome the social, economic, and environmental barriers that hinder some children's learning. Most investigators agree that children growing up in affluent communities or with strong parental support have a greater chance of school success than those in poor communities with high crime rates, transient family life, and poverty, where parents have trouble just providing shelter and food (Coley, 2013). Under poor and depressed conditions, the school is the social setting typically stretched to ensure that all students succeed.

Whereas some communities deliberately plan additional opportunities for children's growth, others seem oblivious to the ways their organizational structure affects children's learning and, unfortunately, make no attempt to remove barriers. Community social agencies, entertainment outlets, and business organizations have an obligation to work with schools to find new solutions. The supportive interaction of community agencies with families and schools is crucial, and there is evidence that this effort works.

The terms *neighborhood* and *community* have many meanings and uses. In this text, we will use *neighborhood* to refer to the immediate vicinity around a child's home and *community* to refer to the larger entities to which the family and neighborhood belongs. The writers call your attention again to the Bronfenbrenner model shown in Chapter 1. If you look at that diagram, you will find that the outer circles focus on the world outside the child's home. This chapter shows connections can make a helpful difference in each child's learning.

Our concept of community includes **service agencies**, government institutions, **social agencies**, and business enterprises, as well as the kinship community of extended family and close friends. Then there are the communities of the mind, such as religious organizations and interest groups, and the digital world. See Figure 8-1 for the broad aspects of potential community influences.

A child's neighborhood may be in a city, suburb, or rural area, and each of these communities will vary in structure and the kinds of services available to its citizens. While we find similar human, natural, and material resources, their availability in each of these settings will differ. For example, whether in a rural area or in a city, children will observe the physical attributes of their communities, both natural and man-made. Trees, birds, animals, and stars at night are accessible to rural children, but city children also witness the warmth of the sun, wetness of rain, small plants pushing up between concrete slabs, and ants carrying away crumbs. Southern children know palm trees; northern children, fir trees; and southwestern children, juniper and cacti. Weather provides learning experiences as well. Some children experience tornado conditions and the haphazardness of destruction. Others may enjoy long spells of soothing hot weather but then learn the distress of drought.

Children acquire knowledge, values, and social skills (positive as well as



Children learn facts and acquire skills as they experience their physical surroundings.

FIGURE 8-1 Community Resources That Educate Children

**NATURAL RESOURCES****Living Organisms:** Plants, mammals, birds, insects, reptiles, fish**Geographic:** Minerals, bodies of water, beaches, parks, farmland, wetlands, wooded areas, fields**SERVICES****Educational:** Zoos, museums, libraries, schools, parks**Communication:** Telephone, radio and TV stations, post offices, newspaper offices, computer networks**Entertainment:** Theaters, movies, festivals, circuses, restaurants, TV and radio stations**Recreation:** Playgrounds, church or community clubs, athletic facilities, tennis courts, parks, sports arenas**Transportation:** Airports, train and bus stations, taxis, gas stations, car rental agencies**Commercial:** Department stores, grocery stores, pharmacies, different types of farms, farmers markets, specialty shops (toy stores, ice cream shops, salons, pet stores, craft shops), factories, malls, shopping plazas, other business enterprises**Professional:** Offices of physicians, dentists, lawyers, and other professionals, fire and police departments, courts, clinics and hospitals, political offices, university campuses, school department headquarters**Service agencies:** Employment offices, social services and public assistance offices, counseling centers, food pantries, offices of elected officials**Living quarters:** Children's and teachers' homes, apartment complexes, mobile homes, new home sites, real estate offices, retirement communities, nursing homes**MATERIALS AND MEDIA****Print:** Books, pamphlets, brochures, magazines and newspapers, advertisements**Audiovisual:** Films, TV, radio, smartphones, CDs, DVDs, computer programs and games, internet sites, social networking, exhibits**Recyclables:** Fabric, wood samples, buttons, ribbon, wallpaper samples, bottles, cans, boxes, wire, spools, cartons, used paper**SOCIAL NETWORKS****Adult:** Friends, neighbors, colleagues, social clubs, religious groups, sports groups, family members**Peer:** Young relatives, school and neighborhood friends, club and team partners**Digital Contacts:** Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, phone contacts**ETHNIC ASSOCIATIONS****Contacts:** Various languages, cultural festivals, religious activities, artistic expressions

negative) from their experiences within their communities and interactions with community workers as well as the larger digital community. Resources vary, and how these resources are made available, plus the family's and school's ability to make use of them, determine their learning potential.

**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS IN A COMMUNITY**

Children's neighborhoods and the atmosphere around them, including physical structures, provide the learning potential of the physical aspect of the community. This, of course, varies tremendously from one location to another. However, all natural and physical structures can provide learning opportunities, and skilled parents and teachers find ways to maximize children's learning in their local area.

Children also learn from the materials present in their area, including those that adults consider junk. From observing, touching, smelling, and manipulating wood scraps, earth and sand, Styrofoam, bottles, shells, cans, and the like, children learn variations in texture, size, shape, and smell. Without adult support, the learning may be minimal or the result could put children in harm's way. Even so, children left on their own gain considerable knowledge about the materials around them.

**Natural Environments**

As children move about their neighborhood, their natural surroundings offer rich learning opportunities for them to gain understanding about their world. Learning differs depending on the combination of social interactions regarding the environment and children's abilities and freedom of movement to explore. Through his research, Louv (2016) discovered that American children spend increasingly less time outdoors than they did in past decades. He coined the term Nature-Deficit Disorder to describe the wide range of behavioral problems that result when human beings, especially children, spend less time outdoors. While not a medical diagnosis, the term is meant as a description of the human costs of separation from the outdoors. Although children may learn about the natural world in minimal ways, their understanding and appreciation of nature will be enhanced when teachers and parents pursue increased opportunities for learning in the outdoors.

**CHILDREN'S PLAY** Studies on children's play activity indicate that the quality of children's outdoor and indoor play differs, and thus different learning opportunities emerge. Children engage in more dramatic and **constructive play** outdoors and in more **exploratory play** (Almon, 2013) when they feel, examine, crunch, and test materials, such as learning the sounds different rocks make when dropped into the water. Balancing while walking on uneven rocks in a dry riverbed develops different skills than balancing on the surface of a gymnasium balance beam. Children may climb indoors, but viewing the world from a tree branch gives them broader perspectives. With increasing concerns about childhood obesity, the need for active play environments both indoors and outdoors can hardly be overstated (Durr, 2012).

Adventure playgrounds and play pods (Almon, 2017) provide children with opportunities to explore and create in outdoor environments that give children freedom to create and take risks. An important feature of these play areas are loose parts consisting of natural materials as well as scrap collected from area businesses, stores, or homes. The scrap is clean and safe, and often comes predominantly from the waste from commercial operations. With no specific set of directions, children can move, carry, combine and take apart such materials in multiple ways, offering endless possibilities for creative play.

Forest kindergartens are a type of preschool education that is held almost exclusively outdoors. Children are encouraged to play, explore and learn in a wooded or other natural environment. Also known as outdoor nurseries, nature kindergartens, or nature preschools, these schools represent a small but growing movement of educators and parents who want to help children connect with nature and the outdoor environment. Outdoor classrooms (Nelson, 2013) have also been established in an increasing number of early care and education programs to transform outdoor spaces into complete

classrooms that different groups might use during the course of the day. Outdoor classrooms and forest kindergartens include logs for sitting, dirt for digging, stones for paths, native plants for gardening, and much more. Young children spend substantial time outdoors participating in a wide range of physically active and less active play. They are able to initiate activities with the support of teachers and experience nature in all kinds of weather throughout the year. Natural Start, a project of the North American Association for Environmental Education, is a coalition of educators, parents, organizations, and others who want to foster the growth of outdoor education for young children.

Outdoor classrooms have also been established at elementary schools, community parks, children's museums, and nature centers to provide hands-on learning experiences about nature for families and groups of students. Other initiatives such as the Schoolyard Habitats Project and Green Schoolyards also focus on the outdoors and the potential benefits of creating rich environments for learning. One of the hallmarks of these programs is the partnerships between community groups, businesses, and schools that are necessary for successful programs. See Figure 8-2 later in this chapter for more information on these initiatives.

Good children's books capture the many wonders of nature and can extend children's appreciation of what they experience, but reading books about farm animals and the harvest is not a replacement for a visit to a farm, pumpkin patch, or apple orchard. Without coming into contact with the reality of the world, a child's knowledge is limited. In the following vignette, Davon has book knowledge about snow, but it is the real experience that enriches his understanding.

*Davon, 5, had lived in Florida his entire life. He had heard a lot about snow, and was especially fond of Ezra Jack Keats's The Snowy Day, but he had never seen real snow. While visiting his cousin in Boston that winter, he awoke to white flakes floating down from the sky outside his window. He had never imagined that snow looked like that. As the week wore on and more snow fell, Davon learned much more about the feel of snow on his face and the taste of snow as he and his cousin held out their tongues to catch it. He learned how snow could limit and enhance activity, and how it felt to walk through drifts.*

**OBSERVING NATURE** Of course, not all of nature's lessons are pleasant. The first snow can be an exciting and beautiful event, but a blizzard followed by power outages and snarled traffic teaches a different lesson. Learning to observe the outdoor environment enhances children's cognitive learning as well as their social and emotional understanding. Joshua learned many things about his surroundings one late-winter day while watching the waterfront.

*Joshua lived near the St. Lawrence River, and with his mother loved to watch the seals bob up and down in the harbor. One winter day, a small, sick seal crawled onto an ice floe and collapsed. While watching and wondering about the seal, Joshua saw two eagles swoop down on the seal and begin to tear at the carcass. Alarmed, Joshua ran to get his mother, who tried to explain about the natural behavior of creatures in the wild. Then she remembered Cherie Mason's book Everybody's Somebody's Lunch. Together, they read how a young girl whose cat was devoured by a fox discovers that there are predators and*

*prey in our world, and that all are part of nature's food chain. Joshua then became quite fascinated with the eagles and their three-day work of cleaning up the dead seal. He watched as several crows tried to claim their share but were chased away. A neighbor farther along the shore telephoned and asked Joshua's mother whether she knew what was agitating the crows. An excited Joshua took the phone to explain to the neighbor about the eagles.*

Joshua's nature lessons didn't all take place in one day, but he gradually became a more interested and astute student of the world around him. Nature centers; local, state, and national parks; and activities such as geocaching and letterboxing (outdoor treasure hunts) bring children into the natural world and sharpen their navigation and observation skills.

The typography, geography, and geology of our communities present other areas for children's study. Although not a living part of nature, the formations and terrain surrounding us have an effect on our lives. The outdoors provides children with a wonderful area for investigation, observation, and experimentation to see how our environment impacts our lives.

### IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Taking field trips into the natural areas in your community provides an excellent opportunity to consolidate the science and social studies concepts and skills developed in the classroom. Learning opportunities abound when children observe the landforms in their area. When you are outdoors with children, consider having them do some of the following:

- Find as many land and water features as possible, and label them on a map or sketch.
- Determine uses of landscape formations. Do they provide a place for other forms of life? Do we use any of their features in our daily living?
- Speculate on land surfaces that make our lives easier, harder, or more interesting.

As a follow-up exercise, secure maps of your area and have the class study how the formations and the terrain are represented on the maps.

### Human Creations and Structures

Young children are getting to know their immediate surroundings when they come to school. This includes their neighborhood and the places in the larger community that they visit often—the supermarket, the mall, their school, their house of worship, and recreational facilities. All of this is basically a built environment, and though it overlaps with the natural one, it has a separate function that children will come to realize.

Human creations show what our society is capable of doing and completing. In the complex society where we live, children readily accept the towering buildings, roadways, and utilities as facts of life. No questions are raised about how these came to be, whereas in simpler societies, the assembling of homes and roads is often observed directly by the growing child. The comparison of structures is a key feature in any child's education.

All this means that young children need to start looking at the built community in which they live with respect and with the idea of examining it. In looking seriously at this part of our community curriculum, teachers will lead children to compare buildings in terms of function, type of construction, age, and design.

**Video Example 8.1**

Watch this video, which shows how a teacher took her class on a field trip to the Loop in Chicago. How did the teacher use this experience to stimulate children's thinking about their physical surroundings?



As the teacher in the video models, we should help children look at the function of a structure and consider how it differs from others. We also need to help them question why it came to be or why it was built, what type of material was used to build it, and if the design works well. If it is a historical building, we need ask them why it still exists if it is no longer used. With roadways, bridges, piers, and utilities (to a lesser extent), we can apply the same evaluation. This leads us to develop respect for all the labor required to erect this part of our community.

One interesting project for primary-school children is to examine the building of homes in different parts of the world. This activity focuses on a familiar feature of the community that everyone knows about. Then, with some good photos, children can ascertain the functions and materials used to construct homes they have never seen. They will be drawn to a new appreciation for how the natural land features often determine and affect the types of homes people have. For other ideas about how to use the built environment for learning, contact the Architecture + Design Network. This collaborative group develops educational programs that introduce teachers and their students to the built environment, and provides sample lesson plans on its webpage.

**IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM****Capitalize on Your Neighborhood**

Take a walk or ride through the neighborhood surrounding your school to find what might be valuable for learning projects. What places in this area would create rich opportunities for children learning about a given topic or subject? What new possibilities for teaching and learning emerge if we consider the entire community to be our physical classroom? Make a list of 10 things or places that could connect with your program; for example, there may be a new branch library, a recently built supermarket, or a renovated fishing pier.

Now, how do you approach these places? Will you visit the establishments and interview managers? Will you write to the directors? Perhaps you will get a few parents to go with you to analyze what will be useful in the community to enhance your school program. All this scouting will require planning on your part, but start a list before you move on to the specifics described in this chapter.

**Place-Based Education**

Place-based education formalizes the learning possibilities of a local community through hands-on, real world learning experiences (Sobel, 2004). The philosophy behind this approach is the belief that the places where people live can be sources of education. Students learn about local heritage, cultures, natural areas, and other aspects of the community as the foundation for the study of more traditional subjects. Teachers who use place-based education with their students create ties between various social and environmental organizations and schools and communities.

Evaluation data from six place-based education programs representing more than 100 schools (rural, suburban, and urban) covering twelve states indicate that place-based education fosters students' connection to place and creates vibrant partnerships between schools and communities (Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative, 2010). It also boosts student achievement and improves environmental, social, and economic vitality. Since place-based education involves a component of service learning, it also helps students learn to take care of the world by understanding where they live and taking action in their own neighborhoods and communities.

While there are schools that have made place-based learning a significant part of the curriculum, even as a single teacher in a traditional school, you can incorporate some of the principles of this approach. Something as simple as studying a tree in the schoolyard can be a catalyst for using the natural environment and other places around your school for exciting learning opportunities that foster relationships with members of the community as well (Bull, 2016).



Place-based learning encourages the study of local places as an essential aspect of the curriculum.

**EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

Consider the neighborhood and community where you were raised. Think about what you learned from interacting with the people and places you knew there. If you were developing a place-based project based on those memories, what might it include? Share with classmates any dramatic memories of your own experiences and how you would develop an interesting project based on these memories.

**✓ Check Your Understanding 8.1**

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.



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As children learn who they are and how to behave in society, their peers become important socializing agents.

### SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENTS IN A COMMUNITY

Children constantly learn from people in their neighborhoods. How much learning children gain from others besides family in the home depends on how much association they have, how safe their neighborhood is, and how many community services and agencies their parents use. In safe neighborhoods, children have more freedom to move beyond their homes and observe and interact with people involved in various activities and occupations. How people dress, what distinguishes young people from old, how adults treat each other and children in passing, and many other qualities and interactions teach children about life. In violent neighborhoods, children also learn important lessons from observation

of community activities, but too often out of fear, parents must confine their children or closely supervise them. Even in more affluent areas, children are often confined to their homes and yards due to parental concerns of possible dangers. This limits children's opportunities for physical exploration and thus limits their intellectual and social experimentation.

Children observe adults in their neighborhoods and often model their behavior on that of these adults. Usually, children look to parents as role models and identify with their positive qualities, such as caring, loving, and protecting. Depending on their age, children often find attractive models in their peer group, among young adults they know, and among media personalities. All of this interaction provides features of the community curriculum that impact much of children's development.

Children's chances of becoming healthy, confident, and competent adults are greater when they have both a safe home environment and a safe neighborhood in which they are able to play, explore, and form relationships. Regrettably, today many children are exposed to dangers within their family situations, in their communities, and from unhealthy media programs. When too many risk factors exist, children's total development is affected. Emergent intellectual capacity, motor development, coping strategies, social-emotional development of trust, autonomy, and a sense of self-worth all can be hampered (Shinn & Yoshikawa, 2010) when risk is high. All professionals must be aware of these situations and work to achieve the best solutions.

#### Social Networks

Children's ability to benefit from their neighborhoods is influenced greatly by the social networks their parents have established. As children mature, they develop additional social networks within their peer groups. In earlier generations, family structures tended to be stable, and community members formed bonds that enabled them to look after each other's children and to some degree control children's peer groups. Nowadays, however, children and their families need community support more than ever, because parental supervision is far less constant in dual-income and single-parent homes (Voydanoff, 2014).

**ADULT CONNECTIONS AND SUPPORT** The ambiance of a particular neighborhood may be welcoming or threatening, making it easier or riskier to initiate social contact. For example, in an affluent part of Eastern City, homes, streets, and sidewalks are well maintained. One residential street is a dead-end street with little traffic, so residents sit outside on doorsteps and watch their children play close to the street. Families moving into this community feel secure in reaching out to others. Children come to know the adults in the neighborhood easily, and are able to interact with them.

In another part of Eastern City, broken bottles litter sidewalks, poorly maintained buildings and grounds discourage families from venturing out, and illicit activities are common. Adults and neighborhood gangs are in such conflict with each other that children feel unsafe, even in their own homes. The street violence causes such trauma for families that children have difficulty learning anything positive from any community source. This area of the city is also poor in resources such as good schools, quality child care, and safe recreation. In poor neighborhoods, parents are less likely to have the social support of a network of friends and family (The Urban Child Institute, 2010). Low levels of social support increase parents' stress and make it more difficult for them to be effective. In neighborhoods that are unsafe, children watch more television and take part in fewer after-school activities, limiting their connections to adults outside the family for support.

Poverty and its consequences are not limited to urban areas. Rural and suburban neighborhoods also vary in providing physical and mental safety for inhabitants, and this influences children's learning. Poverty is perhaps the greatest deficit, as it limits families in making the diverse social ties that enable children to participate in a neighborhood's growth opportunities. When children are able to move comfortably throughout their neighborhoods, healthy socialization becomes the norm and children benefit.

*Janice and Peter lived on the same street in look-alike houses in a large suburban neighborhood. Although all the yards were fenced, children felt free to visit from one house to the other, stopping to watch and ask endless questions of kindly neighbors. One day, Janice and Peter roamed and stopped to watch while one neighbor trimmed roses in her front yard and another washed his car. They even got to spray some water on the soapy car, getting a bit wet themselves. After a while, they wandered to a muddy area in another neighbor's backyard. Making a few mud balls, they proceeded to toss the balls at the neighbor's garage. When Janice's mother caught up with them, she obtained buckets and water from the neighbors and insisted that the children clean up the mess they had made. With help from some of the older neighborhood children, Janice and Peter managed to get the garage quite clean.*

That day, among other lessons, Janice and Peter learned a bit about the why and how of gardening, how cars are cleaned, and what makes water spray. They also discovered that they would be held accountable for any mess they created. They learned about helping others when they received help from the older children. Of course, children's everyday lessons from the neighborhood are not always the ones adults might wish. Still, children who have caring adults beyond family members to assist them in mastering skills and attitudes in a gradual way have greater **metacognitive** and problem-solving strategies.

Not all children have extended support, and many can have regrettable experiences that create serious barriers to their cognitive accomplishments. For example, Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert (2011) found that being raised in disadvantaged neighborhoods has a severe impact on high school graduation rates. Children unable to move about in their

neighborhoods because of pervasive community violence need safe places in the communities to gather and connect with others (Child Trends Data Bank, 2013). If reforms are to take place in neighborhoods that are unsafe, these require help and support from schools. Some authorities contend that community-type schools are needed in this case (Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). A neighborhood school would be a center of the community that is open to everyone during the day as well as on evenings and weekends.

**MENTORING** Many schools now contain significant numbers of children from one-parent families, migrant and high-mobility families, and immigrant populations. As we noted previously, children from these population subgroups are at higher risk for academic difficulty and social problems. Mentoring programs that use community adults have become increasingly popular to help address the problems that arise from frayed social networks in many communities. And studies show that mentoring programs enhance positive development in youth (DuBois & Karcher, 2013; Herrera, 2012).

Mentoring programs have a significant history; the largest and best-known of these is Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, which was established in 1904. This organization has established programs in all 50 states, and provides curricula and training procedures for volunteers to follow. However, any school and its community interested in helping youth grow in healthy ways can establish informal and helpful mentoring practices for children.

Basically, youth mentoring exists to provide positive role models and to help children develop socially and emotionally. Although academic support and tutoring often are features of a mentor plan, they have less importance, and research suggests that they are not very helpful (Herrera, 2012). The best mentoring results come when the focus is on developing trusting relationships between a child and peers, and between the child and the community's adults. Many teachers are mentors for their students, and although this is not a defined assignment, teachers are in a position to recognize the need for mentoring and refer children accordingly. If community agencies have established a Big Brother Big Sister program—or any mentoring project—in your district, this aspect of the community curriculum can support your partnering with others.

Strategies for mentoring programs vary from place to place, but the following are basic guidelines:

- Volunteers for mentoring plans need to be screened for appropriateness of background and to determine their interests and work styles.
- Volunteers need training and supervision by a community or school office with expertise in mentoring programs.
- The main focus of a mentoring program should be on social skills, because this is the area that will benefit the child in other areas of school and community life.
- Mentors should be matched with youth on the basis of shared interests.
- Successful mentor relationships last at least a year. Short-term connections can be more harmful than helpful.
- Successful mentors see their role as that of trusted friend rather than instructor.
- Mentoring programs need structure and a weekly schedule.
- In healthy mentoring, the needs of the child take precedence over the expectations of the volunteer.
- Although far less common than one-on-one mentoring, group mentoring can be successful with skilled leadership.

**PEER GROUP SETTINGS** Peers become increasingly strong socializing agents as children gradually move from family relationships to those with their peers. Both in school and in the community, children learn more about who they are and how to behave in

society from their peers. And when the cultural setting is diverse and inclusive, children can learn different interactions and expand their range of social and language skills. Parents teach children moral and ethical values, but the peer group is powerful in setting the social tone and imposing behavioral patterns.

Even as early as 18 months of age, children learn how their actions affect others and thus begin the process of learning behavioral codes. A toddler who tries to take a desired toy away from another child soon learns the consequences of the behavior. It may be an indignant yell, it may be a slap, or it may be compliance but the subsequent loss of a playmate. As children begin to form peer groups and play with one another, they begin to form rules of conduct so that they can continue to operate as a group. It is in peer groups that children learn to negotiate, solve problems, and compromise to continue to play and work together. Some children will be more dominant than others and will learn the rules for domination and acquiescence. Children are often rewarded by **significant others** in the group for conforming.

For example, children experiment with various roles (leader, compromiser, follower, negotiator, etc.) and discover from their peers how to act to fulfill those roles. They also see how their peers respond to them. Children learn about their own abilities from their peers, e.g., they find out that they can run faster, jump higher, or read better at times as they compare their skills with those of others. However, the group dictates what skills are prized.

Although parents teach children about gender roles, by preschool, peers begin to segregate into boy and girl groups that dictate what roles each group is permitted to play. After beginning preschool, a physician's daughter insisted that her doctor mother was really a nurse. At school, she had learned in her play group that doctors are boys and nurses are girls, even though her teacher and parents insisted differently. In addition, children learn cultural and social differences as they interact with their peers, comparing notes about their own family's customs and ways of doing things. So, peer group acceptance or rejection can influence how individual children change their own behaviors (Bigner & Gerhardt, 2014).

Sexual understandings and misunderstandings are learned from family members, extensive media exposure, and peers. Many young children learn the physical difference between boys and girls by examining each other, and they often learn about birth when some "wiser" child informs or misinforms them. It is through such discussions, along with other teachings, that children figure out for themselves the meaning of the confusing information they receive.

Cognitive information and development of numerous skills come from children's interactions with peers. Children have rituals and routines, just as adults do. Older peers teach younger ones the chants and rhymes of childhood. Memory skills and counting, as well as physical endurance, are enhanced as children jump rope to such rhymes as "One Potato, Two Potato" or "First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage." As they play together, children learn from more skilled peers how to climb higher, catch a ball, read a story, or add up their money for ice cream. Learning may result from a desire to compete with a peer or because the peer has more information and passes it on. Learning may also come because a new idea has been introduced and children need to test out the new concept.



Children learn about their abilities when they work with each other.

**EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

*What games did you play in your neighborhood when you were growing up? Think about positive things you learned as a result of these interactions. Were there some aspects of these games that may not have been healthy?*

*Billy was watching his friend Ahmed copy words from a book he was reading. "Whatcha doing?" asked Billy. "I'm making an 'r' for red," replied Ahmed.*

*"Nunh, nunh, that's not an 'R.' I'll show you how to make an 'R,'" said Billy, who then wrote a capital "R."*

*Ahmed retorted, "Oh! That's a big 'R', and I'm making a little 'r!'" After much discussion, Ahmed, in disgust, turned to his book. "Look," he pointed, "that says 'Red,' and that says 'red.' See, that's a big 'R,' and that's a little 'r.'" —*

Ahmed has challenged Billy's thinking, so now Billy will examine writing in a new way. New learning has been opened up to him by a friend. Ahmed's scorn for his not knowing seemed to spur Billy on, for later he got a book and paper, came to sit beside Ahmed, and tried to make the little *r*, asking his friend for help.

Not all learning from peer groups is positive. Bullying, as discussed in Chapter 6, is a widespread problem in schools and communities that has serious implications for both victims and bullies. However, positive peer influences and a positive school climate can deter bully perpetration and buffer against such attacks (Swearer, Espelage, Vaillancourt, & Hymel, 2010). Gangs can be another destructive force as children seek approval and find that they must develop antisocial codes of behavior to be accepted. When a community provides opportunities for children to develop social networks among different adult and peer groups, children have more options. When this happens, the lure of destructive peer groups is lessened, and children are helped to find positive peer associations.

**IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM****Seniors as Correspondents**

*One very valuable resource within the community is the life and experience of the older adults and retirees in your area. Grandparents and other community elders are a gold mine for connecting schools with their communities. Children of all ages can bond with seniors for help with particular projects and even with regular classroom assignments.*

*Perhaps the best-known elder/student program is the Foxfire program developed in the 1970s by Eliot Wigginton in southern Appalachia. In this program, the entire school curriculum revolved around interviews that students conducted with community elders and the publication of the fascinating oral history captured by the area youth. Less ambitious projects can still be very useful for your classroom as you help children discover the rich talent and stimulating stories stored in the minds of seniors.*

*Interviews and recordings can be conducted at the residence of the senior correspondent who has expressed interest. Panel presentations by elders and exhibits of their collections can be set up for your classroom to stimulate questions and open up discussions.*

*One way to start is to contact the administrator of a local retirement center or the senior circle of a local religious congregation about interviewing interested residents. Most will be agreeable and excited about the connection of their facility with a school. You should set up careful guidelines for any child-senior conversations and begin with a brief first encounter that can be used to refine later visits.*

**Ethnic Community Contributions**

Most American communities are becoming ethnically diverse. In recent decades, immigration to the United States (both sanctioned and undocumented) has intensified to such a degree that immigrant population growth alone has accounted for 29% of US population growth since 2000 (Pew Research Center, 2015). In addition, ethnic minority groups are dispersing throughout the United States. If you check the *American Demographics* minority population maps, you'll find only a handful of areas showing no increases in integration during the past decade.

All this means that our country is rapidly becoming a highly multiethnic nation, and schools need to take advantage of the dynamic aspects linked to ethnic differences in their communities. In almost all communities today, there is a rich mixture of culture and races from which children learn about differences and how to accept and learn about each other. Often, however, children do not understand their own culture. In order to be enriched by another culture, children must first understand their own culture and its variations. This understanding should be the start of multicultural education.

Schools can profit from the various ethnic cultures in learning about the richness of community life, and students learn to be analytical thinkers as they discover the cultural orientations of other persons in their schools and communities. In the past, schools focused more on the outward manifestations of culture—clothing and celebrations—and did not recognize variations of behavior. It is important to get beyond the stereotypic images that schools often used in the past to present different cultures, such as a Japanese woman appearing with kimono, obi, and parasol, or a Hawaiian appearing barefoot with a grass skirt and leis.

Attainment in the arts, special festivals and entertainment performances, and the business and commercial successes in a community of individuals from various ethnic groups are highly visible areas for enhancing a multicultural curriculum. Comparing similarities and differences in the daily events of children in one community offers insights into another culture as well as into variations within a culture. Becoming knowledgeable about the history of a group of people is another way of learning about them, and civil rights organizations such as the Urban League, the Anti-Defamation League, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) can provide some of this information. Individual ethnic groups also may have organizations and societies that can be useful in obtaining information about their culture.

We have to remember that the unique behaviors, language, learning patterns, and values of different ethnic groups are acquired for a reason. The fact that they differ from those of mainstream society means they have a particular purpose in another cultural milieu, and when we seek to learn about the differences, we come closer to an appreciation of the rich cultural history we all have around us. If there are different cultures in our community, we should want to understand and appreciate their talents and traditions. Everyone is proud of his or her culture and background, and if given a chance to share it, will do something that enriches our knowledge.



Different cultures in our country add a unique quality to children's education.

### IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

Acknowledge your community's various cultural groups by doing the following:

1. Research the stories behind the food choices that different ethnic groups make.
2. Uncover the history of the dances and music of each ethnic group.
3. Compare different family schedules, approaches to rearing children, and ways different families praise the successes of individual members.
4. Find out and record the stories behind the immigration journeys that individuals in the community undertook to reach the place where they now live.

In an ethnically diverse classroom, a teacher extended the homework project designed for parent-child reading to promote different viewpoints. While reading *Linnea in Monet's Garden* to her class, Mrs. McCloud introduced a doll of Linnea, the story's main character, and talked about Linnea's interest in Monet's house and garden. From there, the children became intrigued with taking the Linnea doll home and introducing her to their families. With their parents' help, the children pretended to be Linnea, and recorded in their journals the food they were eating that day, the games they played, the TV programs they watched, and the stories they read. At school, they developed charts to list the experiences the doll had in each child's home. The journal always went with the Linnea doll, so the parents could read about the different adventures in other homes. Parents and children started to see commonalities they all shared, and they noted differences too. This led to curiosity about the different ethnicities represented in their community, and opened up an appreciation of the differences and the challenges of others' lives.

In extending the project, the teacher introduced stories with different ethnic protagonists, and the children took these books home to share with their parents. The librarian noticed that the children were starting to select more books on different cultures, so she began displaying books describing different aspects of life in a single culture. Children's artwork and projects brought out diverse cultural elements. PTA meetings became quite lively, and Mrs. McCloud even introduced to parents Mary Pipher's *The Middle of Everywhere: The World's Refugees Come to Our Town* (2002). Parents discussed the book and began to share stories of their own family's arrival in the United States and how they adapted. Mrs. McCloud had each child develop a personal book titled, *Who Am I and Where Did I Come From?* This meant that all children began to research their own family's history and arrival in this country, and witnessed the many cultural variations represented in the classroom.

The changing demographics in our society mean that our children must learn about and accept differences. No longer are schools a "melting pot" for immigrants in this country; rather, they are places where a mosaic of cultures exists and where we learn from each other's experiences. Many now refer to this cultural pluralism as a *tapestry* by which individual cultures add their uniqueness to the continually expanding American fabric. Others prefer the garden salad metaphor in which an array of distinct cultures is blended into a unique and changing mixture.

Multicultural education emerged in response to the concerns about educational equity in the United States. The term *multicultural education* is used in various ways to describe programs and practices that schools have developed to ensure that all

students—regardless of gender, social class, abilities, or ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics—have an equal opportunity to learn in school. Because schools are social systems with many interrelated parts and variables, multicultural education aims to help change the culture of the school. This may take the form of integrating content in the formal curriculum from a variety of cultures and groups to illustrate key concepts. It may also include seeking the participation of community members who represent the various cultural groups of the school neighborhood to improve school diversity initiatives. Through prejudice reduction activities, students are guided in developing positive attitudes toward various racial, ethnic, ability, and cultural groups that make up the school community and the larger community of the United States.



### Check Your Understanding 8.2

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

### COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES

Community organizations and agencies provide families with health, education, transportation, protection, communication, and numerous other services. Some of these organizations are businesses offering their services for a fee, others are public services available to all, and still others are social services for those in need who qualify. These agencies provide experiences from which children gain knowledge through exhibits, demonstrations, and actual participation as well as in informal ways. Formal educational presentations from most agencies have been carefully thought through, and prepared materials are directed to parents or teachers to assist in instruction. Other materials or experiences are directed to children.

#### Businesses, Commercial Enterprises, and Professional Services

All communities have business and commercial enterprises, and most families use them at some time, although many are increasingly using online resources to shop, pay bills, and obtain information. In today's society, many families patronize large, impersonal organizations for purchasing, banking, and communicating, although in some communities, neighborhood shops still exist along a main street. Wherever they are, these establishments have identifying marks to advertise what they sell or what services they perform. Intentionally and unintentionally, adults and older children help younger ones sort out information regarding such businesses. Drive or walk through any of these commercial areas and observe carefully what the buildings or shops look like. The signs advertising them, the types of vehicles in the parking areas, and the displays in the windows help children learn about their world. Like their parents, you, as a teacher, can help children sort through this stimulating community curriculum.

Children hear comments from adults, note certain identifying characteristics of buildings, and learn without



Access to medical facilities is a vital feature for community health and education.

specific instruction where to buy ice cream, get stamps, find interesting books, or buy a desired toy. Children begin to recognize similar and different shapes. The stop sign is always red and octagonal. Children may question why their parents are stopping or may even figure out from adult conversations what *stop* means. They learn to recognize their own car, and eventually are able to find it in a large parking area.

Business enterprises distribute advertising circulars and put signs in shop windows. Such materials provide information about prices and the kinds of items a store sells. Window signs, especially in smaller communities, may also present information about events in the community. Children who become adept at using such resources acquire many skills about how to get information. They may also become skilled in using adults as resources for achieving certain ends. As with other curricula, how and what children learn depend on many factors, including the kind of community in which they live, their developmental stage, and how significant adults share such information with them.

Parents, of course, are major influences, and how much parents talk and interact with their children as they become involved in the community also influences children's learning. Sometimes, an important community person compensates for parental neglect or disinterest. In his classic work on family, school, and community connections, Comer (1988) described a shopkeeper in his community who taught a child, whom everyone believed to be mute, to talk. The shop was a candy store, and the child would only point to candy when he entered the shop. By refusing to acknowledge the child's pointing, the owner gradually got the child to tell her what he wanted and then eventually to talk to her. In large, impersonal malls, the lessons learned may not always be so positive, but many clerks will take the time to answer children's questions and assist parents as they support children's learning. Many business enterprises have special programs or relationships that support children's learning.

As you can see, the local stores, businesses, and professional services in a community can be a rich source of new experiences and learning for children. A family trip to the local grocery store, a preschool field trip to the neighborhood branch of a pizza chain, or a dentist appointment all can provide new insights for children. A child's first experience with the family dentist is one example of a community professional "educating" a young client.

Since Rodrigo was 2 years old, he had accompanied his mother to the dentist for her semiannual check-up. While his mother was in the chair, he would sit nearby with a few toys. One day, Dr. Garcelon asked him if he would like to sit in the big chair where his mother had sat. As Rodrigo climbed up, the dentist allowed him to touch the instruments, and told him what they were for. He encouraged him to press the water tap and rinse his mouth from the paper cup nearby. Gradually, over two or three visits, he introduced all the cleaning instruments and even turned on the polishing brush so that Rodrigo could see how it vibrated. At first, Rodrigo refused to have the brush placed in his mouth, but gradually, he became so intrigued with the instruments that he wanted to see what would happen. One day, a small squirrel came to the dentist's window and chattered away. Dr. Garcelon and the young child took a moment to feed the squirrel before the dentist gave Rodrigo a toothbrush and toothpaste with verbal and written pictorial instructions on how to use the brush at home.

This dentist had a planned program for introducing dental hygiene to young patients. At first, children observed parents' check-ups—a rather informal learning experience. Parental comfort and the dentist's reassuring ways provided a safe and secure

environment for the next phase. The formal instruction on what happens in a dentist's chair was designed to build children's trust as well as to start them on the road to good dental hygiene. The pamphlet Rodrigo received had simple instructions with pictures so that even at age 3, he could see how to brush his teeth. The squirrel's appearance was an accidental event during which Rodrigo observed an animal close up, discovered something about feeding animals, and experienced an adult's gentle treatment.

### EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The next time you go shopping, observe children in the store to see what is happening to them, their parents, and store personnel. Then speculate about what the children might be learning—emotionally, physically, and cognitively—on their shopping trip.

Just as teachers and homes vary in how they instruct children, so do people in various agencies and professions. Some dentists are not as thorough as Dr. Garcelon in giving information to parents, whom they expect to instruct children. But many medical professionals work with schools, child-care centers, and Head Start programs, and at health fairs to provide free initial health check-ups. In some communities, free health clinics (many as mobile units) are regularly available for needy families. It is through these avenues that materials and facts on health care are provided by medical professionals.

### Video Example 8.2

Watch this video, which shows Head Start children receiving hearing and vision screenings through a community program. What kind of learning occurs during the process?



### Transportation Services

In a mobile society, transportation is often necessary for children to participate in community events. Children who live in cities will experience various forms of public transportation, whereas those in suburbs may travel primarily in cars. Transportation in rural areas can be a limiting factor, as large distances may exist between homes and other facilities. Travel can also provide children with many enriching as well as hostile experiences, depending on the political, societal, or physical environment. A terminal in a

small airport can be explored freely, but at large terminals, children must be under close supervision.

In times of tight national security, young children's needs often are disregarded because of the nervousness of officials. A small child may be briefly separated from a parent's protective arms and made to walk through the metal detector while in hysterics. Yet, at a less tense time, an official may invite a child to watch what others do, then politely ask her to remove her shoes and allow her to watch them go through the scanner.

Transportation agencies provide many formal learning experiences for children as they collaborate with schools in planning trips to airports, train stations, or bus depots. Much of the learning about modes of travel comes from classes studying such a unit, from parents accompanying children, or from materials (maps, brochures, schedules) that adults collect. Informal learning as children use different modes of travel is enormous. One 6-year-old's explanation of how she traveled from her home in Minnesota to visit her grandmother in Russia is a small example of the range of learning.

*In answer to her grandmother's question about her trip, an eager Galina replied in one breath. "It took a l-o-o-ng time, Grandma, and I slept on the plane and I watched a movie. It was dark when Daddy put our luggage in the car and we drove to the airport. Daddy had to park our car—right, Daddy?—and Mommy and I took our luggage inside the terminal. I remember going through this machine, and the man asked me to take off my shoes. We were in lots of lines and there were s-o-o-o many people. There was a man with a gun, and I sat close to Mommy until he went, but Mommy said he was just making sure we were safe. On the plane, I fell asleep after we got some food on a little tray. Here in Moscow, we took a long escalator, and then I think some kind of train. Anyway, after we got our luggage, we had to wait in a long line until someone looked at the little book with our pictures in it. I think it's a passport. Right, Mommy? I am so glad to see you, Grandma! Just look at my red suitcase!! Uncle Vanya sent it to me—see, it has wheels, and it sure helped, 'cause Mommy said I had to carry my own luggage."*

Galina's parents capitalized on her experiences and discovered that she was aware of many other aspects of transportation. Her cards to her friends, her journal writing, her drawings, and her conversations with her relatives not only revealed what she had assimilated, but also reinforced her understanding of new environments.

### Government Agencies

All communities have government agencies that provide different types of community services. Many of these agencies provide materials that schools and parents can use to help children understand their functions. Police and fire departments, for example, provide speakers for schools and encourage field trips to their stations. Many schedule regular open houses on the weekends so families can visit the station. Some police officers and firefighters get special training in how to work with young children, and children who visit are allowed to climb under supervision onto fire trucks or into police cars. Department representatives wear their uniforms and explain the equipment they carry and use. They also explain what children are to do when a police officer or firefighter is trying to assist them.

The management decisions that government agencies such as school boards and task forces make will affect—directly and indirectly—the social, intellectual, and physical

development of children in that community. Like businesses and professional services, government agencies often provide written materials, websites, or social media postings designed to educate the public about their functions. Such agencies make use of newspapers, magazines, billboards, radio, television, and the internet to carry their messages to the public, and the assumption is that families and schools will then educate children.

In the United States, national policies for children and their families began to be formulated only in the past 30 years (Bogensneider & Corbett, 2010). Unlike other wealthy nations, the United States lacks federally mandated supports for family life in areas such as adequate parental leave and child sick leave, universal health care coverage for children, a living minimum wage, and affordable, quality child care (Cruse, Hegewisch, & Gault, 2016). Consequently, available resources vary significantly from state to state and from community to community.

Social policies established by community leaders affect the options and determine the resources of any family to establish networks and make use of available resources. For instance, people living in wealthy communities often are able to negotiate with political figures for funding of well-equipped and well-maintained parks or recreational areas. They also make sure that libraries and museums have appropriate materials and outreach programs. Citizens in affluent areas have better access to child-care support services, community-based activities, and protective and health services. They tend to be better educated, so they have developed better **networking** skills, which enable them to access these services. Children reared in poor communities, on the other hand, often are discriminated against and have fewer opportunities for learning. Parents in these neighborhoods appear to have less clout with governmental and management agencies. They also have less education; thus, they have fewer skills that enable them to **fully** access the benefits of community learning. The following vignette illustrates different potentials for social, intellectual, and physical learning as a result of two different policies for park maintenance.

*In Wexton, the recreation department provided a park with grassy areas and paths. There are two swings, one piece of climbing equipment, and a basketball court. Maintenance of the park is poor. Swings are always in disrepair; garbage and debris litter the ground. Parents who bring children to the area will briefly exchange a smile or a word with the homeless man who frequents the park, and occasionally with adults rushing through it on their way to work or with those bringing dogs for an outing. Parents appear to allow their children to use the park for play, but they display little sense of coming here to meet other people, and are likely to discourage their children from interacting with others in the park.*

*In Overton, the community provided a small park situated near a small shopping area with lots of climbing equipment, paths for tricycles, a basketball court, bicycle paths*



Social service agency policies can facilitate or hinder requests for needed services.

leading off into an open grove area, and benches where parents sit and supervise their children's play. The park is well maintained, with little debris. Paths are well cared for, as is all equipment. Park maintenance workers are seen frequently cleaning up the area, and have been known to remind the older, unsupervised children to watch out for others as they play. In this park, parents chat with each other, watch their children interact with one another, and often begin to develop friendships. There is a sense that children are brought for outings, but also that parental contacts with others in the neighborhood are expanded.

Children in these situations will learn many things in both parks, but the park in Overton, where more people, materials, and natural resources exist, has greater potential for positive learning opportunities. In both parks, one observes children gaining physical skills as they climb on equipment or play ball. Children use various strategies to engage other children in their play, and some appear to be skilled in interacting with other adults, such as when they crouch to pet a visitor's dog. There are differences, however.

In Wexton, there are fewer chances for personal interaction, because many parents discourage such interchanges. Park maintenance is poor, so children receive different messages about the value of a clean environment. Some adults passing through the park are seen picking up trash and throwing it into available receptacles, but children witness others carelessly dropping litter. More potentially dangerous spots exist in Wexton, and children learn to be wary of their environment and aware of the danger signals.

In Overton, a different learning potential exists. Safe paths for children riding bicycles and tricycles from their homes to the park provide more opportunities for expanded physical development. Adults feel more comfortable with each other. The ambiance is welcoming, and the sense of trust among adults creates a stronger sense of trust in children. The park is kept free of debris, and maintenance personnel do not hesitate to remind children about respect for their environment. On the other hand, opportunities for learning danger signals may be more limited.

The community policy of providing and maintaining a park varies in these two communities. These policies are management choices, which in turn are influenced by the residents' pressure (or lack of pressure) to maintain a safe environment. Adults' ability to use the resources available in the parks either enhances or limits what is learned in both situations.

### Social Service Agencies

It is not just with parks that communities provide options for adults to develop the social networks that enable them to use their communities more advantageously. Social service agencies, which can be governmental, private, or non-profit organizations, provide a range of public services for families and communities. Benefits and facilities such as education, food subsidies, health care, and subsidized housing and child care are provided by government social service agencies to improve the life and living conditions of children and families. Non-profit groups such as the YMCA, Catholic Charities, or other more local agencies may provide child care, emergency housing, meals and other services to families. While the aim of these services is to support families and build stronger communities, policies can vary and make it much more challenging or easier for adults to get the services they need for themselves and their children.

Darlene, a shy mother, moved to a new community with her new baby and 4-year-old son. She needed help, but dreaded applying for food stamps at the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program because of unpleasant previous experiences. When in desperation she finally went, however, she was pleasantly surprised at the quality of support. A community health organization had convinced the mayor's office to allow food stamp distribution at their well-baby clinic. Also, a group of volunteers had begun a program of reading with the babies and preschoolers at the clinic while their parents waited for appointments or discussed their children's health and nutritional needs. Darlene and the nurse discussed ways to entice children to develop good eating habits, and during her first visit, one of the volunteers invited Darlene to attend a parent support group for mothers with new babies. At these meetings, Darlene gained new confidence in herself, new skills in raising her children, and new friends.

Political decisions can affect the way the community impacts children. Not only is Darlene gaining help in feeding her children, she is learning how to educate them about good eating habits. She is also learning how to make social contacts with others, and has joined a group of mothers in which children play together while the adults visit and exchange ideas on child rearing. In a more subtle way, parents at the WIC office and in the parent support group are exposed to models of adults reading to and interacting with children. Thus, the parents in turn may provide expanded language experiences and positive social interactions for their own offspring.

## IDEAS FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

### Using the System

Most know that the political offices (mayor, county executive, commissioners, school board and the like) in a community are power centers. You must know how to use these to your advantage in creating successful school support. Teachers, child-care professionals, and specialists must be lobbyists as well as educators at times.

When you have an assignment or a project to launch, determine how you can use city hall, your area representative to the legislature, candidates for political office, and so forth. No political figure will reject overtures from schools or teachers for help and support, because all of them are interested in educating the young. Use this base to enhance your work with children.

Start early and begin to provide information to political units and municipal officials before you make requests. All offices want up-to-date information on school practices, school programs, and particularly school success stories. You can start with the last item by mailing or calling the office with a success story about your class at school. For example:

I am a second-grade teacher at Bannock Elementary School, and I want to inform you that we will be performing our original opera on May 23 and the public is invited.

or

I work with the primary team at Charleston Elementary School, and we are thrilled to inform you that five of our young students are featured in the Colorado Student Art Exhibit in Telluride.

These positive notices can start a healthy communication line between you and your community power brokers. Follow your positive news with a brief message explaining the goals that you or your team has for your school. Invite representatives from their offices to visit your program, and ask for suggestions or reactions to the things they see. When you feel secure, ask the officials how they see their offices aiding your school programs.

### Social and Cultural Organizations

The more skilled parents become at securing community services, the more opportunities they have to use other community resources, as illustrated in the following vignette.

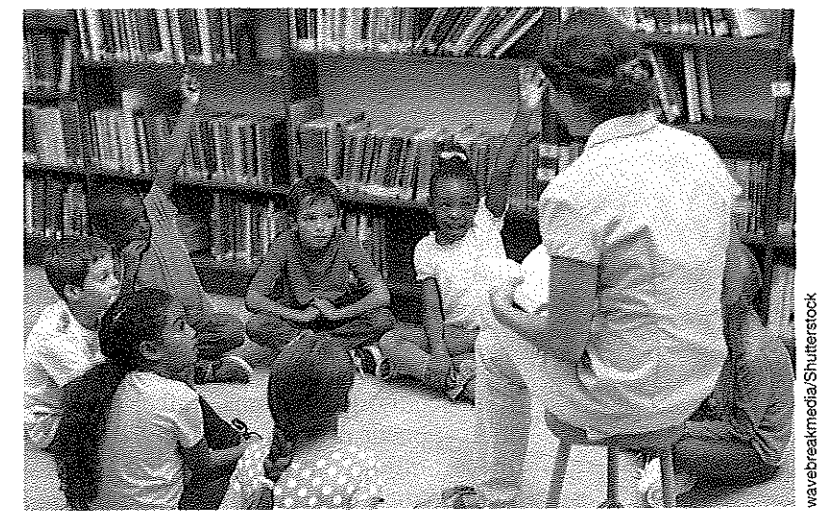
*Ginger's husband was a disabled veteran, and had been moved twice for rehabilitation. Ginger and their two preschoolers moved to new states with him, but after the second move, she was left with few funds and no family support. After a few weeks, she swallowed her pride and went to a church soup kitchen so her children could have one nutritious meal a day. A series of contacts with people at the center led her to the social agencies in her new community, where she learned how to tap resources for herself and her children. It wasn't always easy, for some of the policies seemed to hinder Ginger's progress. But the support systems she began to establish for herself enabled her to continue and adjust to her husband's long-term therapy. Ginger was able to finish her GED and find a part-time job. In the process, she expanded her network of friends in the service areas so that she could use community programs to enrich her children's experiences, of which museum programs and a two-week summer recreational program were recent highlights.*

Religious groups, theaters, and recreational facilities as well as municipal human services departments are community agencies that supplement children's education. How well families are able to use available resources and how well agencies are able to reach all families in the community account for some of the disparity. These social and cultural agencies do not exist apart from one another, as the vignette illustrates. A church agency providing physical and social nurturance helped Ginger access governmental policies, which in turn helped her find other community resources for her children.

Governmental policies concerned with separation of church and state limit the resources that a religious organization can receive to support outreach programs for a community. Concerned with expanding membership, religious leaders often want to provide religious activities for young people within schools, but community policies normally exclude such events. Under No Child Left Behind legislation, however, such restrictions changed. Currently, faith-based organizations as well as nonprofit organizations, can receive funding to provide supplemental educational services, such as after-school programs and summer programs for economically deprived children, fatherhood initiatives, and wellness programs to combat childhood obesity (Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, 2013).

Theater personnel and museum directors often try to develop programs with schools whereby children are invited to cultural offerings at their centers. Too often, though, communities will not support such programs financially, or they believe children will miss schoolwork and therefore must not be permitted to go. Children whose parents have financial and social capital are able to profit from such community offerings, whereas other children are left out. Some cultural agencies locate financial sources other than political agencies to help community programs expand their curriculum to include more children and families. When schools in a New Hampshire community eliminated art programs because of cutbacks in funding, the local artists' association provided art lessons to all children in the community with help from a local community foundation.

**CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS** Many social and cultural organizations provide a rich formal curriculum to children. Such settings have a strong impact on children's information-processing skills, as well as on their physical, emotional, and moral development. Unless all families have equal access to these opportunities, a gap will remain between those who can afford to participate and those who cannot. Some museums have specified days and hours when admission is free or reduced. Many also participate in Museum Day, a September Saturday when admission is free to many sites that usually charge an admission. Still others, such as the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, have obtained grant funding to rescind their entry fees so that everyone in the community can visit the museum, regardless of ability to pay.



Libraries enhance children's appreciation of literature and learning.

Art museums such as the Walters offer both art instruction and art appreciation, as do opera companies, orchestras, and theaters. Often, theaters provide acting lessons, summer camp experiences, children's performances, and lectures about plays and playwrights. Not only do these arts organizations want to enhance children's learning about the arts, they want to develop future audiences. Science museums, zoos, and children's museums offer hands-on experiences and formal presentations for young children. National and state parks provide various educational programs that emphasize education relating both to the park theme and to conservation and environmental protection.

One of the most accessible cultural agencies in most communities is the public library. Most libraries seek to enhance children's appreciation of literature and learning through educational lectures, storytelling events, and book talks. Children who participate in these **literacy events** expand their language, reading, writing, and computer skills, as well as their personal interaction skills and knowledge about where to find information.

Religious organizations offer summer day camp and religious education classes, and many integrate art, drama, and music in the instruction. Recreational facilities offer a wide array of courses in sports, such as gymnastics, basketball, or golf, as well as health-related classes in nutrition and physical fitness.

Children acquire a great deal of knowledge through informal interactions with these social and cultural agencies. For example, posters announcing coming events and programs inform adults, but in indirect ways, they inform children as well.

*In a local theater while awaiting a performance, a 5-year-old observed an adult pointing to an announcement of the next production and commenting, "Oh, look, Bill Braunschweig is appearing in Cats! I wonder what the dates are?" Running her finger under the date, she exclaimed, "Oh, too bad. It's Wednesday the 22nd, and we won't be here."*

With no intention of teaching young children, theater personnel provided materials that could and did instruct. In seeking information for herself, the adult unwittingly demonstrated to the child that such a poster offers information, and that pieces of that

information are found in different places on the poster. The child may even have discovered that "C-a-t-s" spells *cats* and recognized it when seeing it again, or that "22" can mean 22nd.

Sometimes, such informal teaching is intentional. In Overton, the community librarian discovered that children would look at and often take home books that were displayed attractively. He began to select more carefully for display outstanding books that had sat unused on the shelves. The quality of the books selected by young readers took a quantum leap. The librarian then began to coordinate his efforts with units of study done by local teachers. The teachers were pleased to find children bringing into class these extra resources from the local library for current topics.

**SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS** Community clubs are another means of educating children. Scout organizations, trail clubs, outing clubs, ski and skimobile clubs, and others often sponsor projects in which students participate with adults. Some take trips into the community and surrounding areas, where children cook outdoors, practice trail maintenance, clean up litter on roadsides, observe different natural phenomena, and learn lessons in getting along with others. Some lessons are intentional, and some are unexpected. On one such trip, three 8-year-old boys came upon a family of skunks in a meadow. Wondering what the skunks would do if startled, the children tossed some pebbles toward the nest. To their and the other campers' dismay, the boys learned how startled skunks respond.

### EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

*Speculate about what children may be learning when they visit a museum, aquarium, or historic site. In addition to the intentional information developed by the staff, what kinds of accidental and informal learning might occur? Consider one museum experience that was meaningful in your life. Do you recall how the connection came about?*

Some community agencies that offer programs to children depend on family or Big Brothers Big Sisters types of support. A scout-sponsored camping trip, for example, may include one or both parents or another adult accompanying the children. Trailblazing and fire-building lessons may be a planned part of the trip, but how the learning is extended depends on parental involvement with the organization. Some religious organizations sponsor family nights when leaders invite entire families to be involved in extended learning situations.

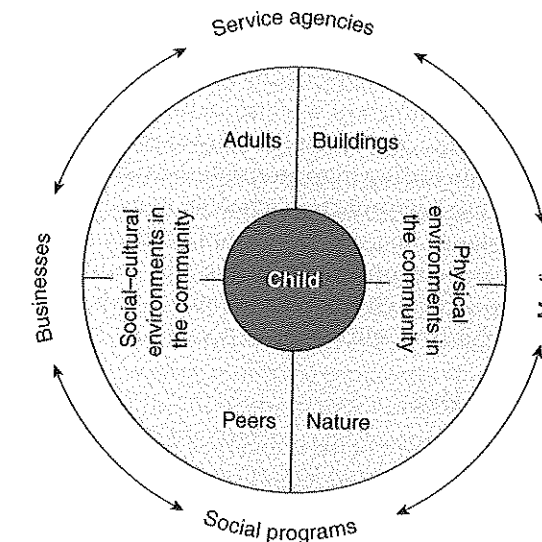
As Lareau (2011) pointed out in her book *Unequal Childhoods*, a family's social class determines how much children will participate in community opportunities, some of which are fee-based. Low-income and working-class families may not have the money, transportation, or time to avail themselves of these extras, or may not be aware of the many free programs presented by the local library. Schools that reach out to this underserved group will help all children benefit from these experiences.

### Interactions among Community Organizations, Schools, and Families

Many community agencies welcome children's visits, either with their families or with schoolteachers. Some agencies actively attempt to reach families with differing cultural and economic backgrounds. Other agencies limit their support to families who can afford their services or to families who reach out. Teachers and other community-service personnel can help families become aware of community organizations, events, and

experiences that will enrich their children's lives. In an earlier vignette, Ginger was able to use more community resources because church members described programs that could assist her. As she became more confident of her ability to help her children, she more actively sought recreational programs that provided richer learning experiences.

The learning that took place in the vignettes presented in this chapter did not happen in isolation within these communities, but was affected by how the families and schools linked children to community resources and agencies (see Figure 8-2). Stronger links heighten the potential for children's learning.



**FIGURE 8-2** Community Impact on Children Through the Environment, Social Networks, and Cultural Events and from Interactions Among Agencies

### Collaboration Needs to Grow

Communities and schools can collaborate to provide concrete experiences to extend children's learning, but this is not done as much as possible. Trips into the community are enriched when the agencies have materials, people, and specific events appropriate for the learning level of the children who visit. When teachers make visits and discuss the trip with community organizations beforehand, learning is more likely to be enhanced. Many restaurants welcome children's visits, and provide opportunities for children to visit the kitchen and experience ordering and eating food in a relaxed manner. Some school trips within a community are not done collaboratively, however, and children's learning thus is limited and may even be negative.

In community programs in which children interact with materials, observe events, or see animals acting in a natural environment, youngsters usually learn more than they do in programs where adults demonstrate and lecture, expecting children to be enraptured with what they say and do. Through natural phenomena and by the nature of its organization, the community offers a stimulating alternative for teachers who see the benefits for the children with whom they work.

### ✓ Check Your Understanding 8.3

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

### MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY CREATE ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Educational and commercial television, mobile media, online media, and print material expose children to a world beyond their immediate neighborhoods, and can contribute to their learning. Some of this learning takes place serendipitously, but adults who extend and enhance children's media experiences through activities, conversation, and reflection help maximize their learning potential.

Media and technology provide education for children, and can connect them to others in positive ways. As identified in Chapter 6, there are also dangers associated with media use. Among the concerns are the amount of time children spend immersed in media (Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood, 2013), which has led to a decline in playing creatively, engaging with others, exploring the outdoors, exercising, and reading (Carlsson-Paige, 2012). Since much of television, music programming, and internet sources are for adult consumption, many children are exposed to materials that confuse, frighten, or misinform them, including inappropriate sexual content, violence, and marketing. Studies indicate that negative effects, such as an increase in aggressive and sexual behavior, obesity, and substance use, are associated with excessive television viewing of shows with violent and sexual content. With the vast number of programs and the quantities of information to which children can connect, it is difficult even with adult supervision to ensure that children will not be exposed to inappropriate materials.

#### Positive Aspects of Media Use

While it is important not to make light of the dangers of media use, the reality is that media and technology have become an accepted aspect of children's lives. Carefully chosen TV programs, movies, apps, and computer games can offer developmental and social benefits. For example, young children can start learning letters of the alphabet and how to count and identify shapes through TV programs such as *Play School* and *Sesame Street*. They can learn to read through educational computer games and apps such as *Teach Your Monster to Read*. And they can develop social skills through using computer games and apps such as *Toca Tea Party* and TV shows that show helping behavior such as *ABC Kids* ([abc.net.au/abckids](http://abc.net.au/abckids)).

Besides consuming media, children are increasingly creating media by communicating with words and photographic images through Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and other sites. They can develop skills in imagination, art, video-modeling, music, and media by using software and apps such as *My Story* or *Bubl Draw*, or they might be inspired to make something by a TV show. While children may have the technical savvy to create media, they do need adult guidance to learn what is appropriate to post and access as they navigate the fast-paced and ever-changing landscape of media and technology (O'Keeffe, 2011).

For children under age 2, however, it is hard to make the case for independent media use. Using media with an adult can help young children stay connected with people they love through video chatting with grandparents or a parent who is away. Children ages 18 months to 2 years should use media only with an adult actively engaged. The following vignette illustrates how ever-present media has become in even the youngest children's lives.

*Standing in line at the local motor vehicle office, a young mother holds her cell phone inches from her squirming infant's face. The screen is displaying a cartoon show developed for children years older. Recognizing a tired and inexperienced parent, the older woman in line behind the two offers to hold the baby, and begins crooning a lullaby. Soon, the baby has drifted off to sleep.*

**TELEVISION** As you will undoubtedly recall from your own childhood, the Public Broadcasting System has long provided appropriate and enjoyable educational programs for young children. These include *Sesame Street*, *Arthur*, *The Electric Company*, and *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot about That!*, which in spirited ways introduce children to the alphabet, new words and concepts, and interesting stories and facts about everyday events. Extensive research on *Sesame Street* over the past 30 years (Fisch, Truglio, & Cole, 2009) indicates that children who watched the program learned the alphabet, numbers, and vocabulary faster than those who did not. Further analysis found, however, that rather than being a boon to disadvantaged children, the show was more likely to be watched by middle-class children, and the gains children maintained were dependent on adult reinforcement of concepts. This research confirmed the importance of parents viewing shows with their children and using the content of the programs for further learning and enriched experiences.

On both educational and commercial television stations, science and social studies programs, story reading, and reenactments of children's literature offer rich educational opportunities. In addition, network educational offices often provide teacher or parent guides for assisting children in gaining more from these programs. Some learning from these programs may have an unintentional and perhaps undesirable effect, however. Children become accustomed to fast-paced materials, and may not develop longer attention spans or the ability to sustain interest in events that don't move rapidly. Television news programs can upset or worry children, especially those focused on a crisis or violent event. Some parents choose not to share news programs with children under age 8, or choose to watch news with their children so that disturbing news can be discussed.

Although parents ultimately are responsible for monitoring and limiting their children's television time, they can also use the television rating system and the V-chip to block inappropriate shows. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that televisions be removed from children's bedrooms, and that viewing be limited to one to two hours a day. Unfortunately, statistics show that children spend vastly more time than that watching TV, especially because TV programs now can be accessed on computers, tablets, and smartphones.

**ONLINE MEDIA** The internet is a consistent part of young children's learning environments. With access to the internet through computers, tablets, and phones, a child's world expands tremendously. Children have access to television programs, social networking sites, YouTube, and other websites. Chat groups, bulletin boards, and connections to individuals through e-mail, instant messaging, and blogs are readily available. In some ways, this larger networking is very positive, but the openness of the web and its lack of regulation can present dangers to children. Adult-oriented material that many parents would find too sexual, violent, racist, or offensive is easily accessed and downloaded by young children (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2009). In addition, children can become the target of unwanted attention from adults, other children, or advertisers. Some children become so involved with their cyber journeys that they become addicted and have difficulty reconnecting to their offline peers.

Even if children do not become addicted to social media, many enjoy it as the main way of socializing with their peers. Through sharing and commenting on photos and videos, children are connecting with others in mixed-media conversations that include links to other sites. In compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, the minimum age to open an account on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr, Kik, and Snapchat is 13. For Tinder, it's 17. YouTube requires account holders to be 18, but a 13-year-old can sign up with a parent's permission. While these guidelines are appropriate, there are many younger children who use these services, with or without their parents' permission. Helping keep children safe on social media can be a challenge

for parents and teachers. It is essential, however, that children learn that their photos, posts and comments reflect on them and others. Whether serious or silly, they become part of their public image. Teaching children that respecting others in how media is shared, tagged, and commented on reduces risk.

While parents can take steps to protect their children from dangers posed by the internet by using filtering software and establishing rules about the kinds of family information the child can divulge, the larger community has also gotten involved in educating parents and children about internet safety. The Consortium for School Networking Initiative is an organization of educators, technology leaders, policy makers, and others from the public and private sectors that provides leadership in all areas of technology use, including cyber safety. Increasingly, schools and community groups such as scouts and churches are developing online safety education programs as a service to families. With safeguards in place, the internet can support children's schoolwork and enhance their interests, hobbies, friendships, and play.

### Video Example 8.3

As you watch this video on cyberbullying, think about how this school helped families develop online safety in their homes and community.



**VIDEO GAMES** The US video game market gained nearly \$10.5 billion in sales in 2009 (Entertainment Software Rating Board, 2012), which indicates the popularity and pervasiveness of this form of entertainment in American homes. It is estimated that about 90% of youths play video games, and children are being introduced to these games at younger and younger ages. We find that children are spending increasing amounts of time playing them on handheld devices as well as on gaming systems. These games appeal to some children because they are perceived as enjoyable ways to feel in control. They also give children opportunities to follow directions, learn computer technology, and achieve a sense of mastery as they move through the various levels of the game. Computer games that give young children simple choices such as choosing a character or finding a background for a picture can also help foster creative decisions. The more interactive computer games and websites are, the better they'll be at helping children learn more effectively. Unlike television and the internet, however, these games have not been viewed as particularly educational. Their purpose has been seen as largely entertainment, and many children and adults use gaming for relaxation and enjoyment.

Recent research, however, has been making a case for the educational benefits of playing video games (Granic, Lobel, & Engles, 2014). While cautioning that studies on the negative effects of gaming, including addiction, depression, and aggression, should not be ignored, video game play actually may strengthen a range of cognitive skills such as spatial navigation, reasoning, memory, and perception. Playing certain video games improved a player's capacity to think about objects in three dimensions, spatial skills needed for achievement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Role-playing video games seem to help children develop problem-solving, and simple games that are easy to access and can be played quickly such as Candy Crush can improve players' moods, promote relaxation, and reduce anxiety.

Reviews of research on video gaming (Granic, Lobel, & Engles, 2014) also challenges the stereotype of the socially isolated gamer. The majority of gamers play with friends, and many participate in massive virtual worlds through video games such as Farmville. Multiplayer games have become virtual social communities, and games that encourage cooperation are more likely to be helpful to others while gaming than those who play the same games competitively. While game play clearly limits time outdoors, games that involve a physical aspect such as Just Dance, Wii Fit, and Guitar Hero promote activity. Children who play video sports games are more likely to become interested in those sports outside of the home, joining teams and practicing the skills they see in the game in real life.

Because video games intrigue and engage children, some educators are trying to redesign classroom experiences to integrate video games that will support curricular objectives. You will want to become familiar with the Common Sense Media website, which promotes sensible use of media; it has a section for educators to help them determine appropriate games for various purposes. The same site has recommendations for parents as well, and encourages parents to get involved in gaming with their young children. Fortunately, video games are rated with a logo showing age recommendations. Games are marketed to children as young as 3 years of age with an "EC" rating for early childhood, an "E" for children over age 6, and an "E10+" for children ages 10 and over. Although these guidelines are helpful for parents and teachers, monitoring the content, explaining why the content is objectionable, and limiting the time spent playing games will further protect children from the ill effects of excessive game playing.

### EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

*Consider your experiences with media as you were growing up, and compare those to the media experiences available to children now. What do you recollect about the way your media use was monitored by adults in your family? How have the issues changed since you were a child? Are there positive and negative implications for the current situation?*

**PRINT MEDIA** In the past, nearly all families would have printed materials in the form of books, magazines, and newspapers in the home. Increasingly, however, these materials are being replaced by digital formats. Children still observe parents and older children reading, but this is often done on e-readers, tablets, and computers. One exception to this trend is in the area of picture books. Parents continue to read "real" books to their children at a young age, and these children learn to associate reading with pleasure and warm interactions with others.

**CHILDREN'S BOOKS** Printed materials educate children through pictures and printed words. Children learn early that pictures relate to real objects and have names. As stories are shared, children learn more about their world. For example, when children read DePalma's *A Grand Old Tree* (2005), their knowledge and concepts expand as they view the artist's interpretation and hear language describing the seasonal changes as a cherry tree

comes into flower, bears fruit, and eventually scatters seed. Children have experienced cherries, if not cherry trees, but may never have realized that squirrels and birds eat the cherries and make their homes in the leafy branches.

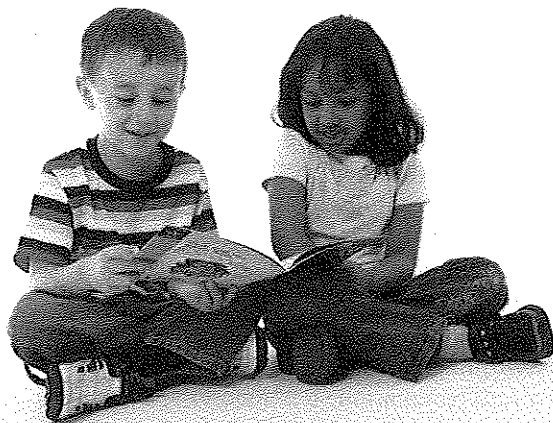
Children grow emotionally and intellectually when they can find security in loving and being loved through books, even while learning academic content. In Bang's *Ten, Nine, Eight* (1983), a loving father hugs and tucks in his child as the two count the objects in the room. Such a book conveys, besides the knowledge of rational counting, many different messages to children. One child may have his understanding of a caring parent reaffirmed, whereas another may realize that men as well as women can be nurturing. An Anglo child sees that African American children do things the same way she does.

Children feel secure when they see that book characters like themselves can be angry, frightened, frustrated, hateful, sad, or lonely. They see models for resolving conflict and learn valuable lessons from the book characters. In another one of Bang's books, *When Sophie Gets Angry, Really, Really Angry* (1999), children learn that everybody gets angry sometimes and do different things when they do.

Children's books appear regularly in all three of the social settings that we focus on in this text. Of course, their impact affects all parts of a child's life. These books can be used to support large parts of any school curriculum, so we urge readers to become acquainted with the extensive bibliography of children's books in the Appendix.

**NEWSPAPERS FOR EDUCATION.** With the rapid decline of newspapers in their paper format, online versions of the daily paper have become available. These editions feature the traditional children's section, comics, and the weekly Mini Page for children. The page contains puzzles, art activities, and frequently short essays on notable persons. Science topics and current news features usually are included as well. The newspaper, whether in paper or digital form, continues to be an important community resource for local news, sports, and special stories about each locality. This aids children in understanding their own part of the world. Newspaper publishers continue to offer guidance to teachers on how to use newspapers in classrooms.

**CAUTIONS ON USING PRINT MEDIA.** We must remember that the influence printed materials have on children is not necessarily positive. Stories and other printed materials, as well as television programs, video games, and online content, also can reinforce prejudice when characters of a different ethnic origin are interpreted as having the stereotypical characteristics of a certain cultural group. Fairy tales have been cited as reinforcing stereotypes of men and women. It is possible to interpret such female characters as Snow White and Rapunzel as passive women in need of rescue by an active and handsome Prince Charming. Many classic European tales present witches as old, ugly, mean, and to be feared, but in Asian cultures, the old are wise, kind, and to be revered. The clash of cultures may be confusing, especially for new immigrants to the United States. In the 21st century, the globalization of technology is subsuming cultural and ethnic interests, priorities, and expectations across the planet in a way that earlier media did not. This calls for increased understanding and more multicultural education.

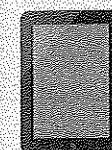


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Children who read grow emotionally, as books present stories about love and security.

**MEDIA VIGILANCE** Some printed materials, television content, computer programs, and internet information will not be comprehensible to or appropriate for children. Without support from an adult, that information could be harmful to a child's self-concept or to the child's emotional, social, or intellectual development. For children, and thus society, to benefit from media, parents, schools, and community members must work together to help children make wise choices as they use media tools and access the internet appropriately. Community members have a responsibility to engage schools and parents in forming healthy policies regarding the media available to children.

### MEDIA MATTERS



*In the past few decades, media resources have exploded in scope, and have changed the culture of life in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, there is a digital divide in the United States between the upper and lower socioeconomic groups. Almost half of the poorest households do not own a computer, and minority families have significantly lower rates of internet access than do Whites. One of your tasks in connecting families to community resources may be to help such families learn where computers with internet access are available for free. Public libraries, community centers, and community schools often have computers and training available. You must also determine the best ways to communicate with families without computers. Smartphones have become a more versatile and economical way for poor families to communicate with others and connect with the internet.*



#### Check Your Understanding 8.4

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

### Summary and Review

Community influences on children can be made rich and varied, depending on how adults promote the use of the natural and physical environment as spaces for children's learning. Governmental, social, cultural, and business agencies offer, both intentionally and unintentionally, learning opportunities and materials aimed at educating the public about their services. Increasingly, children also interact with the larger world through their experiences with media. Print materials, television, video games, and the internet expose children to ideas, concepts, and images in ways both positive and negative.

The natural and manufactured resources found within communities provide learning experiences even when there is little adult intervention. Children see signs, notice buildings, observe nature, note adult actions, and learn something from all their encounters. Children who live in communities providing safe physical and emotional environments have more educational opportunities, because in these areas, families are better able to establish social networks that allow them to tap community resources. For children outside such safe environments, parents, schools, and other agencies must work especially hard to compensate so that these children will thrive in tomorrow's world.

### How Does Learning About this Topic Help You Become a Better Teacher?

What children learn from their community resources depends largely on the use that parents and teachers make of them. As a professional, you will be in a position to build family awareness of the learning possibilities in the community, and to introduce children to the world outside the

school and home. And remember that you will be called upon to help guide children's media encounters. This means that your knowledge and skillful use of community resources will provide a large support for your classroom actions.

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### Suggested Activities and Questions

1. Conduct an internet search to see sites and curricula used in various outdoor nursery schools and forest kindergarten classes. Discuss with your fellow students how you might incorporate some of this information into your future teaching.
2. With a small group of other students, brainstorm a list of all the business, commercial enterprises, professional services, and agencies that exist in the neighborhood around your college, university, or nearby elementary school. Rate the learning potential of these places for children living in this area, and start a **resource file** from the information gathered.
3. Interview at least two community volunteers who have worked as mentors for elementary school children. Ask them to identify their successes in improving the lives of the children and to point out the challenges of the mentoring role.
4. Explore the internet to locate five or more websites you would recommend for children under age 6. Visit the Common Sense Media website to determine some of the best video games for this age group.

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### Resources and Websites

Green Schoolyard Network

International Bullying Prevention Association

The Outdoor Classroom Project

North American Association for Environmental Education

Natural Start Alliance

Consortium for School Networking

Geocaching

Letterboxing North America

The Common Sense Media website on selecting and using media with children.

The ConnectSafely website is dedicated to educating about research-based safety tips, parents' guidebooks, advice, news, and commentary on all aspects of technology use and policy

Children's Technology Review, a searchable online database that helps teachers and parents select appropriate interactive media for children

Field Trip Factory is a website that links teachers and community members with free (actual and virtual) field trips in their communities