2 THEORIES AND MODELS FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

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Family engagement is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Family engagement means doing with—not doing to or for—families.

—*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start (2018)*

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVES (CLO 2)

1. Students will create their own definition of family.

2. Students will describe the Family Systems theory, in terms of its characteristics, relating it to their own family experiences.

3. Students will describe Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, defining each level of influence on children's learning and development.

4. Students will explain Moll's Funds of Knowledge concept, applying it to their family engagement philosophy.

5. Students will list the components of the Head Start Parent, Family, Community Engagement Framework, comparing to the other theories and models presented in this chapter.

6. Students will describe Epstein's National Network of Partnership Schools family engagement model, with examples of each type of involvement.

Teachers often begin the school year with a commitment to having a strong family engagement program, and they look for ideas, activities, or strategies to help them reach this goal. However, before beginning to collect a list of ideas, it is important to examine some of the foundational concepts underlying the idea of family engagement. Theories, along with models built on theory and research, can guide teachers in creating a cohesive family engagement approach. As you read this chapter, consider these questions:

- How is a family defined—beyond the legal definition?

- How does a family operate as a system? What are some implications of this family systems theory in my family engagement practices?

- How do the home, the community, the society, the culture, and the time in which children live influence their learning and development?

- What are different ways to recognize and incorporate in my teaching the strengths, knowledge, and skills that families offer children in their learning and development?

- What are some models for how I can organize my classroom and family–school engagement practices into a successful program?

DEFINING FAMILY

Before learning about different theories and models for family involvement, it is important to determine what is meant by the term *family*. What exactly is a family? Is there one definition of a family? As noted in Chapter 1, the U.S. Census Bureau (2020) has defined a family as "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together." Some communities have developed a legal definition of family for zoning ordinances, such as the broader definition used by East Hartford, Connecticut: "Individuals living together as a single, non-profit housekeeping unit occupying a dwelling unit that has complete housekeeping facilities" (Bansal, 2014). This definition implies that a "family" does not necessarily have to include individuals who are related by blood or a legal document.

CONNECTIONS 2.1

Think about how you would define *family*, and jot down your ideas. Pair up with a classmate and compare your ideas. How similar or different are they? Is your definition more inclusive in nature, or is it more specific to your particular family experience? With your partner, create a definition of family and share it with the class.

Defining family in legal terms narrows the possibilities of what a family may be. However, when broadening the definition of family, difficult questions arise: Can someone act as a family member in a child's life, yet not be related to the child? Can a family be a group of people who live together and are committed to one another but are not related? Are people who are legally related but have no bond or love for one another a family? Do people remain a family when legal ties are severed or members move out of the home? Must a family have two adults? Must a family include children? The Children's Museum of Indianapolis offers this definition of a family:

At The Children's Museum, a family is an on-going relationship between at least one adult and one child. Moms, dads, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, life-long friends of the family, mentors, godparents, and more all count as part of that unique pairing of adult and child. As far as the combinations of what that can look like, we'll leave that up to you.

(Wood, 2010)

This definition relates more to the function of a family than the structure of it. In reality, functional definitions are a better fit for what a family is in the wide variety of family types in the United States. For example, one survey of LGBTQ people in Minnesota found the majority preferred the term "chosen family," which did not require a blood relation or legal contract, but instead could include friends, roommates, co-workers, and children of friends (Bewkes, 2020). Perhaps the best answer is that you must determine your own definition of a family. That definition will reflect your experiences with a family because, ultimately, family is an intensely personal construct and will have different meanings for each person.

FAMILY SYSTEMS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the 1970s, a conceptual framework emerged in the field of family therapy to help explain how a family functioned. This framework has been called family process theory or family systems theory and grew out of von Bertalanffy's (1968) general systems theory and the structural functional theory developed by sociologists, which focused on the social functions of the members of a society. Bowen proposed the idea that a well-functioning family operates as a "social system," much like the other systems noted in nature, such as the solar system or biological ecological systems (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Bowen, 1978). Members of a family system are interconnected, and each member influences the others. For educators, applying family systems theory to their teaching means not just focusing on individual students but rather looking at children in the context of their families to understand why children act the way they do in the class setting (Christian, 2006). To better understand what a system is and how family systems influence children's classroom behavior, it is helpful to look at the general characteristics of a system and see how these relate to families and the classroom setting.

Characteristics of a System

As you read the descriptions of the characteristics of family systems that follow, think about how each family system characteristic functioned in your family of origin. Then complete the activity for that characteristic by filling in the appropriate box in the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1).

The Whole Is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

In a system, one part cannot be understood without looking at the whole (von Bertalanffy, 1968), and families operate on the "principle of wholeness" (Bigner, 2006, p. 41), or the family as a whole is greater than the sum of its individual family members (Day, 2010). This means that, as a teacher, you cannot fully understand how a child is functioning at school without considering the family. You must look at each student as a part of a family and not just at the student alone. Some examples that demonstrate this concept:

- A child's schoolwork may suffer when a parent develops a chronic illness, such as cancer. If you focused only on the child's poor school performance, you might make the mistake of thinking that the child has a learning problem or is not putting forth any effort.

- A child's parents are divorced and have remarried, meaning the child lives in a **binuclear family**, where two families share the same children. You will need to learn how both families operate to better understand the child because both families have an influence on the child's learning and development.

CONNECTIONS 2.2

Think about how your family of origin operated as a system. Then fill in the first line of the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1). Briefly sketch an example of how the whole is greater than the sum of its parts—how what occurred in your family influenced your learning and development at school.

A System Has Boundaries or Limits

A system is open enough to allow the members to get resources from the environment yet is closed enough for them to operate as a unit. A well-functioning system will have a balance between open and closed boundaries, with the family having open enough boundaries to allow outside information and people such as teachers, friends, or neighbors to enter but closed enough to maintain some privacy and functionality. Establishing boundaries helps define the family as a unit. Examples of this concept:

TABLE 2.1 ■ Your Family System	
Family Systems Characteristic	**Your Family Example**
"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts"	
Boundaries or limits	
Bonding or buffering	
Rituals or traditions	
Rules	
Hierarchical structure	
Dynamic change	
Goals	
Roles	
Self-regulation	

- Children may have outside interests and friends, but there may also be a family rule that they are not allowed to take any phone calls from friends during dinner or family time, thus creating a boundary around the family unit during that family activity.

- Family members may have guests at the house yet also have certain limits about when guests will be invited, such as not inviting anyone but family at holidays.

- Family boundaries may be actual limits, such as fences around a home or security systems that keep strangers out.

- A family with rigid boundaries may not want their child to be involved in a school-based after-school tutoring program but would prefer that their child receive extra help at home.

A family's sense of boundaries may influence how open they are to your suggestions about how best to help their child learn and develop (Christian, 2006).

The **family worldview** is the lens through which the family sees the world. The family worldview causes the family to organize their lifestyle according to their attitudes about the place in which they live. The family worldview also influences the boundaries that are set by the family members. For example:

- The Salas family, as a whole, views the world as a good place and believes that people can be trusted, with relaxed boundaries and children having outside interests and activities.

- The Miller family has a distrustful view of the world, due to the racism or violence they have seen or experienced and has tighter boundaries for their children in terms of who they play with and the after-school activities in which they participate.

- Zahra, a young Muslim woman, faced discrimination in middle school when she began wearing her hijab. Due to taunts about being a "terrorist" or being shunned by the other students, she preferred to be homeschooled rather than attend school, creating a tight boundary around her educational experiences (Tribune News Services, 2016).

CONNECTIONS 2.3

What boundaries or limits did your family set? Can you determine what your family's world-view was as you were growing up? Add an example to the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1).

A System Has a Balance of Bonding and Buffering

Related to the boundaries set around a family unit is the concept of bonding. **Bonding** is the process of drawing close together and operating as a cohesive unit. Families who are strongly bonded have established family boundaries and emphasize togetherness, belonging, or being

emotionally connected (Christian, 2006). Bonding can be measured by the amount of focused time spent together, how family members get along with one another, and how families resolve conflicts or crises. Examples of family bonding activities:

- Reading bedtime stories together

- Listening to and singing along together with favorite soundtracks in the car on the way to school

- Working together to prepare dinner or clean up afterward

Bonding must also be balanced with **buffering**, or allowing for space, privacy, and a healthy distance between family members. Examples of healthy family bonding are:

- Children spend time alone in their bedrooms reading or playing video games

- Children spend time with friends, rather than doing all their social activities with family

- Children participate in extracurricular activities, such as a soccer team, Scout program, or music lessons

Buffering is necessary for healthy identity development and allows young adults to leave home and pursue their career interests, separate from the family identity. For a system to operate effectively, there must be a balance of both closeness and time apart, although the levels of bonding and buffering will change as the family goes through its life cycle; families tend to be more bonded when children are small, and buffering increases as children grow older and more independent.

System that don't function in a healthy manner will operate at the extremes of bonding and buffering. At these extremes, families are enmeshed or disengaged. A family that is too close or overconnected becomes **enmeshed**, while a family that has few or no bonds may become **disengaged**. Some of its members may stop interacting altogether or may have **cutoff relationships**. Although cultural differences influence the definition of healthy bonding, a family can be defined as enmeshed when the connections are too close to be healthy for individual family members. One woman described her experiences in an enmeshed family:

My family is very close-knit and puts great value on family togetherness. As young children, my brother and I went with Mom to our dad's softball and soccer games. We attended school picnics and events as a family and participated in church events as a family. We celebrated all the holidays with extended family gatherings. Every Friday night my mom, grandma, and I went shopping and out to eat. We enjoyed spending time together as a family, and then, I became a teenager. Everything was status quo until some of my friends and a couple of boyfriends did not make the grade. I cherished the closeness of my family, but realized that noncompliance came with a price. In fact, one year, I was 22 at the time, I was not allowed to bring my boyfriend to the family

Easter breakfast and egg hunt. So I didn't go.… Today my parents, my uncle, and my cousin all live next door, and my sister, her husband, and their three children live two houses down the street from us. And my mom sets the dinner table for 10 to 13 almost every night.

(R. Mayse, personal communication, June 24, 2010)

In enmeshed families, an individual's identity is strongly tied to the family's identity (Christian, 2006). Thus, it is especially important to understand the family unit when working with a child from an enmeshed family and to build strong relationships with the family members, who have such an important influence on the child.

CONNECTIONS 2.4

Think of examples of how your family bonded or buffered. Are there any examples of enmeshed, disengaged, or cutoff relationships in your family? Add your examples to the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1).

In many cultures, the family is the center of social, financial, and child-rearing support, and what is considered enmeshed in some cultures is considered to be healthy in others. For example, for many Hispanics/Latinx in the United States, family is crucial, more important than friends. Recreational or social activities are a natural extension of family functions, and independence from the family is discouraged (Taylor & O'Flynn, 2020; Welton, 2002). You might find when working with Hispanic/Latinx families that extended family members, such as a grandparent or aunt, would also attend parent–teacher conferences. The concept of family bonding is a personal and cultural construct, and your judgment about whether a family is bonded or enmeshed is probably based on your personal experiences with your family. It is important to avoid letting your personal biases about what is a good family influence your interactions with families (Christian, 2006).

At the other extreme from bonding is disengagement. In a disengaged family, members have withdrawn or become distant from one another. A disengaged family may value independence and autonomy over a sense of belonging (Christian, 2006). Examples of a disengaged family:

- Family members move long distances from one another and rarely have contact

- Parents work long hours and spend little quality time with each other or with their children

- Noncustodial parents who only see their children during holidays or in the summer

At the extreme of disengagement is the cutoff relationship where there is no physical or emotional contact with a family member. For example:

- A child who has no contact or doesn't know a parent because he or she left the home

- Family members who feuded over an inheritance and haven't spoken in years

You may find that you will have to work harder to establish relationships with all family members of a student when a family is disengaged, and it is also important to understand and be sensitive to any cutoff relationships that exist in a student's life.

Rituals and Traditions Affect the Bonding Process

One way that bonding occurs in family systems is through **family rituals or traditions**. Family rituals teach children what is important to the family and bring members together. Family rituals can be related to holidays, faith practices, or traditions. Examples of rituals and traditions are:

- Preparing a special recipe for a birthday or Thanksgiving meal

- Putting on a family fireworks display on the Fourth of July

- A quinceañera celebrating the 15th birthday of each girl in a family

- A Christian baptism, christening, or naming ceremony of a new baby

- A Jewish Passover seder led by the family patriarch

- An Eid Al-Fitr food celebration in a Muslim family

- Weekly dinners at a grandparent's house

- A family vacation in the same location each summer

- A family reunion with matching t-shirts each year.

To better understand your students' families, you can ask them to share their favorite family traditions or rituals, which can be compiled into a booklet that is sent home for families to learn about one another's traditions (Galinsky, 2001).

CONNECTIONS 2.5

Did your family have any rituals or traditions? Did these traditions help family members bond or have a sense of closeness? Add your examples to the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1).

Systems Are Rule Governed

Another characteristic of a system is that it operates according to rules. For families, rules may be explicit (communicated openly) or implicit (implied or understood). Examples of family rules are:

- Daily chores, with a chores schedule chart posted on the refrigerator

- Completing homework before watching television

- Not allowing name-calling or violence toward one another

- An established bedtime or curfew

- A limit on screen time

- Taking shoes off before coming into the house

- Making the bed before going to school

Sometimes there may be a clash between what children are allowed to do at home and what they are allowed to do at school. For example, it may be all right for children to challenge authority at home or use profanity, and they may not understand why such behavior is not appropriate at school. You may have to discuss the difference between "school rules" and "home rules" with them (Christian, 2006). There may also be times when students are conflicted about participating in a school activity that is not allowed in their family. For example, it would violate the rules of a family who practices the Jehovah's Witness faith to require their child to say the Pledge of Allegiance. It is important for you to understand the set of standards, laws, or traditions established in your students' families (Christian, 2006).

CONNECTIONS 2.6

What were the spoken and unspoken rules in your family when you were a child? Did you feel a sense of consistency between the rules at home and the rules at school? Add your examples to the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1).

A System Is Hierarchically Organized

A system has a **hierarchical structure**, or a well-defined structure of power. In a family, the adults make the major decisions for the family and have more of the power. In a poorly functioning family system, the adults in a family may not assume a position of power, which forces children to make adult decisions, as when a child has to take care of an alcoholic mother and younger siblings. This is an example of a **parentified child**: a child who becomes like a parent and takes on adult responsibilities, such as grocery shopping or counseling a parent about personal problems. Parentification can be instrumental, such as when a parent gives their child tasks that aren't age appropriate, i.e., paying bills or taking care of a sick sibling. Parentification may also be emotional, as when a child has to meet the emotional needs of and provide emotional support for their parent. Emotional parentification tends to be more harmful for children than instrumental, and parent-focused parentification is more stressful for children than sibling-focused parentification (Healthline, 2021). Well-functioning families may share power with children, depending on their age and maturity, but ultimately, the adults must be the head of the hierarchical structure.

In addition to the parentified child, another unhealthy structure of power is the **perverse triangle**, which occurs when two members of a family system form a coalition and gang up against another family member. For example, if one parent sides with the children against the other parent, the power shifts away from the parents as a team to the parent–child coalition. Another unhealthy structure of power is the **detouring coalition**, which occurs when one family member becomes the scapegoat for the family's problems, and the family stress is detoured from the real cause. This may occur in a family with a child who has special needs in which the child is blamed for all the family's problems (Carlson & Dermer, 2017). As a teacher, you can determine the hierarchical structure of a family by looking for clues, such as who signs permission forms and returns phone calls or how the student responds to male or female teachers' and administrators' authority. Understanding a family's hierarchical structure and knowing "who's the boss" can help you deal more effectively with your students' families (Christian, 2006).

CONNECTIONS 2.7

Who had the power in your family or made the decisions when you were a child? Can you identify the power structure among the adults and children in your family? Describe your family's hierarchical structure in the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1).

A System Is Dynamically Changing

A system is continually changing over time, losing and gaining parts in the system and new patterns of interaction that call for adaptation by the parts of the system. Families change over time with normal family circumstances such as the birth of a baby or the death of a family member as well as children growing up and leaving home. Families also change because of unexpected events, such as a parent developing a terminal illness or a spouse leaving a marriage. The family life cycle stages force family systems to go through **morphogenesis**—that is, to change and adapt—but because families cannot function well or maintain any order if they are in a constant state of morphogenesis, family systems constantly return to a state of stability or **morphostasis** (Maruyama, 1963). When families can find a balance between change (morphogenesis) and stability (morphostasis), they are in a state of **homeostasis**, or equilibrium. Healthy families are able to balance rapid changes and stagnation and achieve homeostasis (Jensen & Shafer, 2013).

CONNECTIONS 2.8

What changes or transitions did your family experience when you were growing up? How easily did your family adjust to the changes? Give some examples of how your family changed over time in the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1).

Families have problems when they resist morphogenesis; for example, keeping the same rules for older children that they had when they were younger may lead to teenage rebellion. However, families also have difficulties when there is too much change at once, and they are unable to maintain any morphostasis. A family divorce may require the children and one of their parents to move to a smaller home and send that parent into the workforce. Well-functioning families adjust to the changes that life brings, although the adaptation to a new family structure may take some time, depending on the nature of the change or transition. Some common family transitions and their impact on student learning will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

A System Has Goals

The members of a system will set goals for the system. For example, families may set the goal that all their children will receive a college education. They may choose to sacrifice some of their material goods to help provide their children with a good education. You may find that not all families have the same educational goals for their children as you do. If family closeness is the most important goal for a family, and they may not encourage their children to participate in extracurricular activities or leave home for college; instead, they may expect children to grow up and participate in a family-owned business. They may not be responsive to your suggestions about different career opportunities for their child that would take their child away from their hometown. Although you may not agree with a family's goals for their child, it is important that you respect the beliefs and values that have led to those goals.

Families have a variety of goals for their children, such as a college education.

iStock.com/monkeybusinessimages

CONNECTIONS 2.9

What goals did your family have for you? How were those goals communicated to you? Describe your family's goals in the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1).

Members of a System Have Roles

In a system, different parts play different roles. For the family, this means that mothers and fathers may have certain roles, and children may also assume certain roles. Examples of family roles are:

- Caregiver
- Breadwinner
- Peacemaker
- Family clown
- Decision maker
- Troublemaker
- High achiever
- Rule maker
- Free spirit
- Competitor

Family roles often carry over to the classroom, and you can better understand why a child behaves in the classroom by learning the role that the child plays in the family (Christian, 2006). For example, a student who is the family peacemaker may be especially good at resolving conflicts among his or her classmates, or the student who constantly disrupts class with joking behaviors may just be continuing in the "clown" role established at home. By learning more about the different roles in a student's family, you can work more effectively to nurture the student's strengths and deal with any negative behaviors.

CONNECTIONS 2.10

Can you identify the roles in your family? What was your role? Did it carry over into the classroom? Give examples of family roles in the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1).

A SYSTEM IS SELF-REGULATING

A system that is always dynamically changing will regulate its conflicts and work toward homeostasis or equilibrium. For example, a well-functioning family does not require visits by local police officers to settle their conflicts and will work to reach a state of peace in the home, whereas a couple going through a divorce may be unable to self-regulate when determining a custody agreement without the help of a court ruling. Although it would be abnormal for a family not to have conflicts, the key to a well-functioning family is that family members are able to resolve conflicts in a mutually supportive way. It is crucial for children to have an overall sense of security and trust in the home, which may be difficult to maintain when a family goes through times of change and stress. As a teacher, it is important for you to be aware of changes and unresolved conflicts in a student's family. Although it is not your job to be a family therapist, you can provide consistency and security in your classroom routine and create a nurturing environment for a child who is experiencing an unstable home life. You can also encourage families to create or maintain stability through family rituals, such as regular bedtime stories, during times of conflict.

CONNECTIONS 2.11

How were conflicts resolved in your family? Did your family work to have a sense of equilibrium, or were there many ongoing conflicts that were not settled? Give an example of how your family regulated itself in the Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1).

All the characteristics of family systems exist along a continuum, and when the system is working smoothly, a family is well functioning. However, when parts of the system break down, the family may not function well, which will have an impact on the student's ability to learn and achieve. Although the term **dysfunctional family** is often used to describe family systems that have broken down, this term is judgmental and stigmatizing. A better way to describe families is to focus on how they are functioning as a family at the present time. "Dysfunctional" tends to imply that a family system is in a permanently unhealthy state. In reality, families move on a continuum from poorly functioning to well functioning because of life's circumstances. A well-functioning family may go through a period of being poorly functional when an unexpected change occurs, such as the death of a family member or the loss of a job. Well-functioning families tend to recover from these circumstances and move back into a state of homeostasis, but the nature of the transition can affect how quickly this occurs. As a teacher, it is important that you not label families in your mind as dysfunctional but, instead, seek to understand how families are operating as a system and how you can support them.

CONNECTIONS 2.12

Now, share the completed Your Family System chart (see Table 2.1) with your classmates, noting the diversity among families. How did the different cultures or ethnicities represented in your class impact these differences? Discuss how understanding the different characteristics of family systems may help teachers work with students and their families more effectively. Also discuss why it is important to avoid the judgmental label of "dysfunctional" when working with families.

In addition to family systems theory, different theories and models for effective family engagement have been proposed by researchers. Following are descriptions of theoretical models that have had an impact on successful family engagement practices.

ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY: URIE BRONFENBRENNER

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1986, 1993) proposed the ecological theory to explain how children develop and function in a family system and in the broader context of the world. Bronfenbrenner developed a model of "contexts" that children are influenced by; the child is in the center of the different settings (see Figure 2.1). In the family systems theory, an individual part of a system cannot be isolated but must be studied in the system's wholeness. In Bronfenbrenner's theory, all the levels of influence are reciprocal and not unidirectional; the different contexts influence one another (Weiss et al., 2005). Bronfenbrenner identified these five levels of influence:

● Microsystem

● Mesosystem

● Exosystem

● Macrosystem

● Chronosystem

The first level of influence is known as the **microsystem**, which contains the direct contacts in a child's world, such as family members, friends, neighbors, and teachers. The face-to-face interactions that the child has with the people in his or her home, school, and community will have a strong influence on the child's growth and development, but these immediate contacts are not the only influences on a child's development.

The next level, the **mesosystem**, is the quality of the connections or influences that exist among the direct contacts in the microsystem. For example, if a grandparent serves as a caregiver for a child, the relationship may be bonded and the influence of the grandparent may be strong in the child's life. If a parent has a substance abuse problem, the relationship with the parent may be strained and that relationship may affect how a child behaves at school both

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model
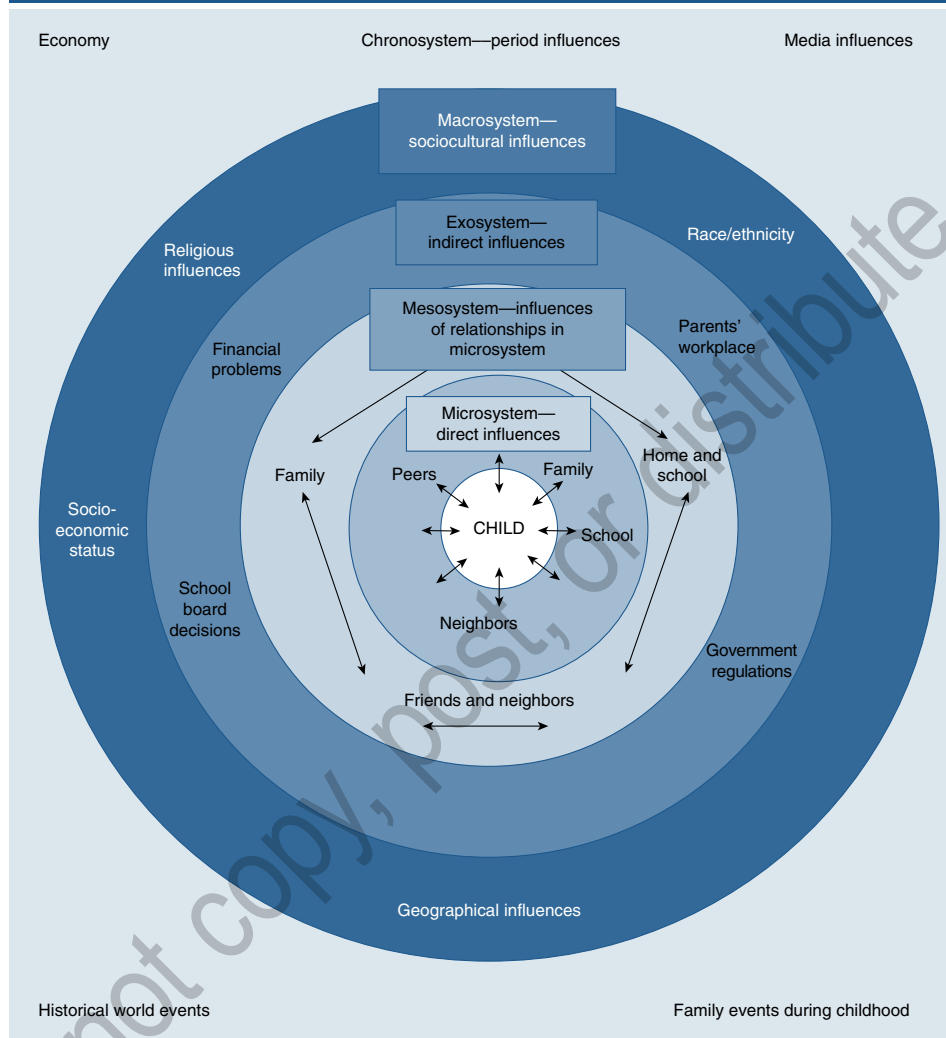
academically and socially. The child's peer relationships or lack of friendships may affect home and school life. Thus, the quality of the different relationships or the degree of connectedness that the child has with individuals in the microsystem form the mesosystem level. A child who has a thin mesosystem with few positive relationships will have little support for learning and development, while a child who has a rich mesosystem with strong, nurturing relationships will have many resources for school achievement. This may explain why research has shown that elementary-age children with families who have high levels of communication with teachers (strong positive relationship in the mesosystem) receive higher grades and show greater initiative and independence as they get older (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

CONNECTIONS 2.13

As with the family systems theory, it is helpful to understand Bronfenbrenner's theory by applying it to your life. Using the blank diagram of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model in Figure 2.2, identify the different influences in each of the levels in your life as a child. Discuss these with a partner. What differences and similarities do you note in the influences of family, community, culture, and time? Why is it important for teachers to understand the multiple influences and relationships in students' lives to work more effectively with them and their families?

The third level of influence, or context, is the **exosystem**, which contains the influences on a child's life of people or institutions that do not have a direct contact with the child but,

FIGURE 2.2 ■ A Personal Application of the Ecological Model.
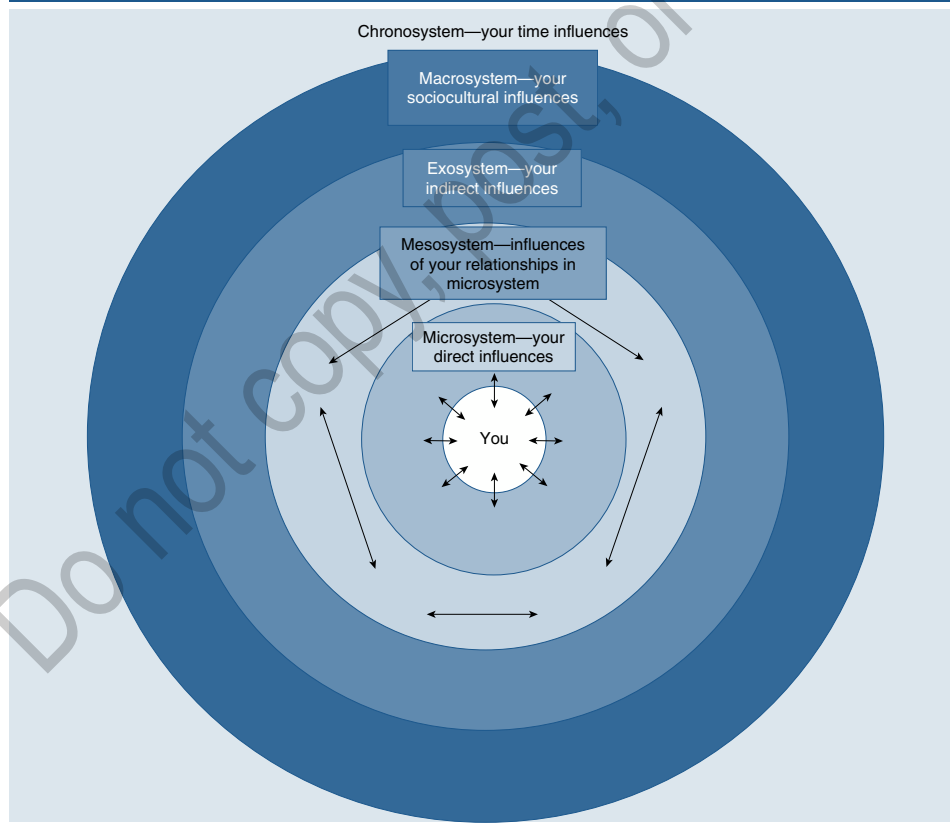
Note: Using the blank diagram of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, identify the different influences in each of the levels in your life as a child

nonetheless, influence the child. For example, a parent's workplace may require the parent to work more hours, giving less time for the child to spend with the parent and negatively affecting the child's life. Other exosystem influences might be government regulations, such as the **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** work requirements or poverty-level restrictions for child care funding, which may force a family to choose a poorer-quality child care program, negatively impacting a child's development (TANF is a federal program that designed to help families in poverty become self-sufficient; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], 2021b). A school district's decision to change the bus routes or district boundary lines may cause a child to spend more hours on a school bus, change schools, or leave friends and familiar teachers. Exosystem influences may also be positive, though, such as a parent's workplace that offers good health care benefits which allows a child to receive adequate medical and dental care.

The fourth level of influence is the **macrosystem**, which is the larger societal influence of cultural beliefs and values. The macrosystem can include the influences of race, ethnicity, language, religion, politics, socioeconomic status (SES), and geographical locations. For example, a child who lives in a homogeneous white, politically conservative, Christian, middle-class community and attends a parochial school will likely develop the attitudes and dominant beliefs of that community and religion because of the combination of the home, community, and school influences.

The fifth level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is the **chronosystem**, which is the time in which the child lives. Each historic time influences the generation growing up in that time. For example, a child growing up in the Great Depression of the 1930s will have had a different outlook on life than a child growing up in the affluence of later decades. Technological advances in contemporary life in computers, tablets, cell phones, video games, and robotics, have a major impact on today's children. The chronosystem also includes the age at which a child experiences significant life events. For example, the siblings in a family where the parents separate and divorce will likely be impacted differently, depending upon whether they are a toddler, elementary aged or a teenager.

Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a valuable resource for teachers to better understand how children operate within a system as well as the influences on both children and their families.

THE FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE: LUIS MOLL

Luis Moll proposed the idea that all families possess "**funds of knowledge**," based upon nearly 20 years of research (González et al., 2005). Funds of knowledge are the knowledge and skills that exist in the homes of students—or, as Moll et al. (1992) described it, the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning" (p. 133). Educators often miss the abundant cultural and cognitive resources that exist in households that can be used in family engagement practices, particularly in low-income, minority families. For example, migrant farm families have much knowledge about soil and irrigation systems and crop planting, and low-income families may have learned about repairing automobiles from having to drive unreliable, older vehicles. Rich funds

of knowledge may also exist relating to child care, cooking, and moral and ethical values passed down through generations by way of stories told in the family (Moll et al., 1992). Funds of knowledge can also explain the development of social skills in young children, as found in a study by Riojas-Cortez and Flores (2009), which demonstrated that Mexican immigrant and Mexican American families were teaching the children in their home the social skills found in the Texas prekindergarten standards, such as friendship, sharing, respect, and listening to others. The funds-of-knowledge approach allows educators to view families with a positive, strengths-based perspective that respects cultural values and practices and affirms that teachers can learn as much from families as children can learn from their schools (Mapp & Bergman, 2021). Rather than viewing low-income families with a deficit model or seeing them as socially and intellectually inferior, a funds-of-knowledge approach can encourage teachers to make more resources available to students in need. The approach also "reframes the family–school relationship to make communication, interactions, and curriculum development a two-way process" (Weiss et al., 2005, p. xxii). When teachers better understand the occupations and daily routines of students' homes, they can develop class activities or projects that are connected to the children's lives and then ask family members to volunteer in the classroom as experts on the topics (Weiss et al., 2005). Moll et al. (1992) suggested that educators research their community as a sociopolitical, historic, and economic context where the children's households reside. Learning about the history of a given community can in itself lead to immense gains in knowledge and can help transform the perspective of the educators in that community. In addition to the historic background, the community members may offer knowledge about ranching, farming, animal husbandry, construction, occupations, trade, business, and finance. It is also important to note the social networks that develop in these communities. Table 2.2 has examples of activities you can do to learn about the strengths your students and families possess.

HEAD START PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (PFCE) FRAMEWORK

With the national momentum for Universal Preschool, where public funds are used to ensure young children have a quality preschool experience, it is helpful to look at a framework designed specifically for the birth to age five range. The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework is a research-based organizational guide for implementing family engagement programs from birth to age five and is based upon a strengths-based approach that is mutually respectful. Children are at the heart of this approach (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2021a). While the framework is a guide for Head Start programs, the principles can be applied to any setting.

As Figure 2.3 shows, family engagement must be based upon relationships between home and school that are positive and focused on mutual goals for supporting children's learning and development, as well as goals for program improvement. A family engagement program must be equitable, recognizing and respecting cultural and linguistic differences. When a program has strong leaders who model effective family engagement practices, with all staff receiving training, coaching and support in culturally respectful

TABLE 2.2 ■ Funds of Knowledge Activity		
Connecting With Families	**Goals**	**Activities**
Teachers establish rapport with students and families in field-based placement	To establish a trusting relationship with students and their families	Teachers spend several weeks building a rapport with students, making home visits to families, and participating in parent–teacher conferences.
Teachers create classroom–family survey or interviews	To develop a comprehensive overview of the expertise and skills held by family members and students	Teachers prepare and disseminate a survey about the jobs, hobbies, family caregiving practices, values, beliefs, and/or specific expertise held by classroom families (a family interview may be used in place of a written survey, with an interpreter or translator if needed).
Teachers create presentations on their funds of knowledge	To showcase the expertise held by family members	After watching videotaped presentations, teachers write reflective essays.

Source: González et al. (1993).

family engagement strategies, a positive impact is seen in the program's environment, teaching and learning practices, and in the partnerships that are developed with families and the community. This impact is seen in both benefits for the family and children. It is important to note that in this model, families have leadership roles, participate in making decisions, developing policies and helping organize activities that will improve their children's health, safety, development and learning (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, 2018).
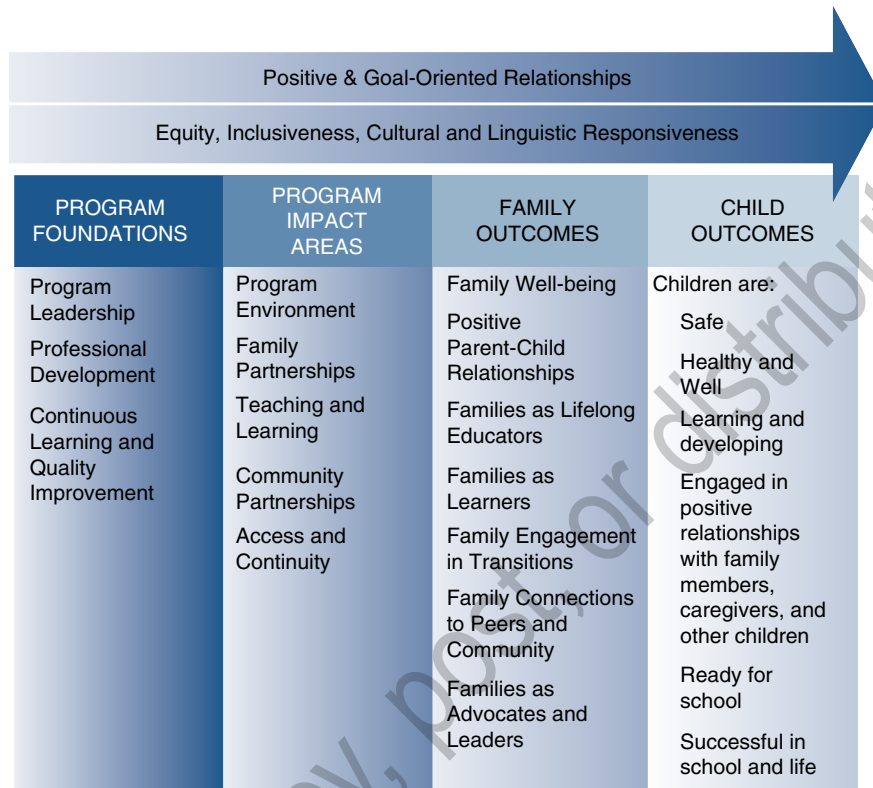
FAMILY–SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS FRAMEWORK: JOYCE EPSTEIN

One leader in the field of family engagement practices who has attempted to answer the question of how to form partnerships with families is Dr. Joyce L. Epstein, director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships (Johns Hopkins University). Epstein has been a seminal researcher in the field of school, family, and community partnerships and has written over 150 publications on the topic. She established the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) in 1995 to provide professional development to support schools in implementing research-based family engagement practices. Like Bronfenbrenner, she cited overlapping spheres of influence affecting students and acknowledges the need for parents, educators, and community members to share responsibility for students' academic and social growth (Epstein, 2001).

FIGURE 2.3 ■ Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework

Positive & Goal-Oriented Relationships

Equity, Inclusiveness, Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

PROGRAM FOUNDATIONS	PROGRAM IMPACT AREAS	FAMILY OUTCOMES	CHILD OUTCOMES
Program Leadership	Program Environment	Family Well-being	Children are:
Professional Development	Family Partnerships	Positive Parent-Child Relationships	Safe
Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement	Teaching and Learning	Families as Lifelong Educators	Healthy and Well
	Community Partnerships	Families as Learners	Learning and developing
	Access and Continuity	Family Engagement in Transitions	Engaged in positive relationships with family members, caregivers, and other children
		Family Connections to Peers and Community	Ready for school
		Families as Advocates and Leaders	Successful in school and life

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2021a).

Epstein et al. (2009) developed a framework of six types of family involvement necessary for successful family–school partnership programs. Figure 2.4 shows Epstein's keys to successful partnerships.
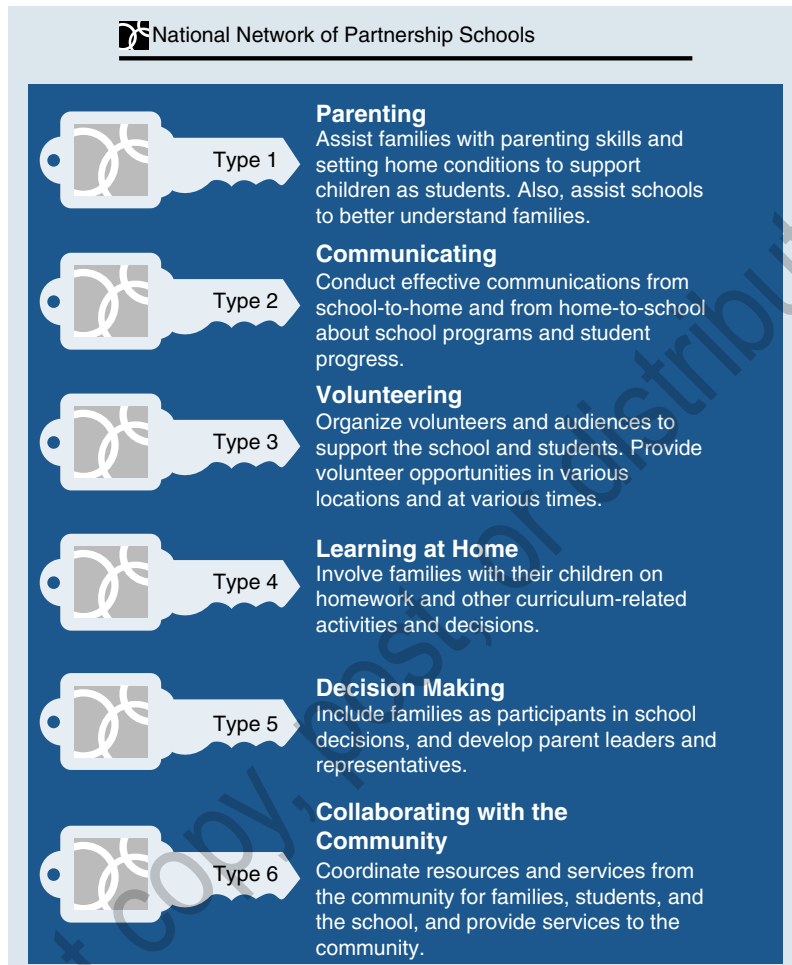
Six Types of Involvement

Ideas for each type of family involvement and the challenges that are involved include the following:

Type 1: Parenting. Help families with parenting skills as well as their understanding of child and adolescent growth, and foster family support. Collaborate with families to make sure you understand families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for their children.

Challenge: Make sure all information presented to parents is culturally relevant, respectful, understandable, and useable to them to support their child's learning and development.

FIGURE 2.4   ■   Keys to Successful Partnerships: Six Types of Involvement

National Network of Partnership Schools

Parenting
Type 1
Assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students. Also, assist schools to better understand families.

Communicating
Type 2
Conduct effective communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school about school programs and student progress.

Volunteering
Type 3
Organize volunteers and audiences to support the school and students. Provide volunteer opportunities in various locations and at various times.

Learning at Home
Type 4
Involve families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

Decision Making
Type 5
Include families as participants in school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives.

Collaborating with the Community
Type 6
Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and provide services to the community.

Source: Epstein et al. (2009). Used with permission from Corwin.

Type 2: Communicating*. Provide information about school programs and student academic progress. Ensure that two-way communication exists between home and school.

Challenge: Consider family members who do not read English well, struggle with understanding text, as well as the variety of communication methods needed for today's busy and diverse families.

Type 3: Volunteering. Recruit, train, and schedule family volunteers. Make sure that you have time to work with volunteers and provide proper support for their work with students and the school.

Challenge: Orchestrate flexible scheduling and tasks for volunteers to match volunteer talents and their time availability to students' needs as well as offer volunteer opportunities during after-school hours.

Type 4: Learning at home. Promote family engagement with their children in academics at home, such as doing homework, discussing the school day, or setting goals. Develop authentic home extension activities that are interactive for both families and students.

Challenge: Keep families aware of the content of classroom instruction and ways to help their child and provide engaging home-learning activities for unmotivated families and students.

Type 5: Decision-making. Offer opportunities for families to participate in decision-making about their child's education, school curriculum, governance, and advocacy through various collaborative organizational teams.

Challenge: Provide meaningful and respectful opportunities for family input on their child's education. Train and delegate qualified parent leaders to serve as representatives for other families, which includes gathering their recommendations, voicing concerns, and relaying information back to families.
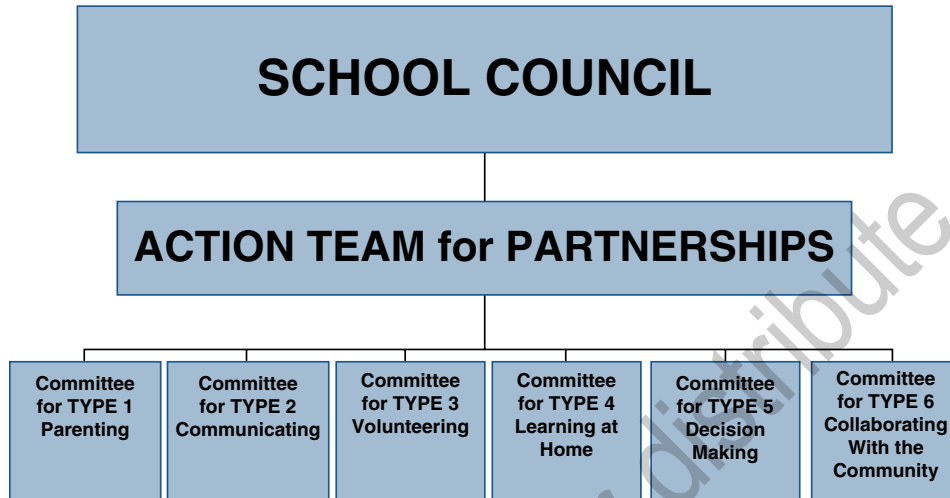
Type 6: Collaborating with the community. Coordinate community resources and services for families, students, and the school through all types of groups: businesses, cultural and civic organizations, and higher education.

Challenge: Connect with a wide variety of community resources with a full-service school approach in differing rural, suburban, and urban communities.

An important component of the NNPS model is an Action Team for Partnership (ATP). The ATP is a committee, composed of six to twelve members who oversee the school's family engagement program. Members include the school's administrator, teachers and parents from different grade levels, a parent liaison, parent organization representative, and community members. The ATP meets once a month and may have subcommittees for each type of family engagement, as noted in Figure 2.5 (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2021a).

The NNPS provides guidance to school districts on how this framework for family engagement can be put into practice. Research in elementary, middle, and high schools implementing the NNPS model found positive effects on student achievement in math, reading, and science; NNPS schools had higher attendance rates, fewer discipline problems, and higher homework completion, especially when homework was given that required parent–child interactions to complete (Epstein, 2005; National Network of Partnership Schools, 2021b).

FIGURE 2.5 ■ NNPS Action Team for Partnership

SCHOOL COUNCIL

ACTION TEAM for PARTNERSHIPS

Committee for TYPE 1 Parenting	Committee for TYPE 2 Communicating	Committee for TYPE 3 Volunteering	Committee for TYPE 4 Learning at Home	Committee for TYPE 5 Decision Making	Committee for TYPE 6 Collaborating With the Community

Two-way communication is crucial in forming strong relationships with children's families.

istockphoto.com/Jovanmandic

CONNECTIONS 2.14

As a class, divide into six groups, and choose one of the keys to successful family–school partnerships to discuss. In your small group, answer two questions:

● What are ways I could implement this type of family engagement in my classroom?

● What are ways that my school district could implement this key?

Then, come back together as a class, and compile the ideas into a master list, creating a class family engagement plan that addresses all six areas of family engagement.

IMPACT OF A PANDEMIC: "SOLVING FOR X: UNKNOWNS AND POSSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS DURING COVID-19"

Each year, members of the National Network of Partnership School complete an evaluation of their family engagement activities, which is compiled into an annual NNPS report. The 2019–2020 report, "Solving for X: Unknowns and Possibilities of School, Family, and Community Partnerships during COVID-19," yields insights into how the pandemic impacted over 300 schools that already had in place a commitment to family engagement (Epstein, Sheldon, & Chappell, 2021). The report listed these "Best Practices for Partnership" examples for how schools continued family engagement activities when schools closed in spring 2020:

● Created a phone line for families with live technical support

● Continued to have Action Team for Partnership monthly meetings via Zoom

● Used pre-established and new platforms to connect families, with strong family response, including Class Dojo, Facebook, Skype, Instagram, Parent Portal, Google Voice, Google Hangout, Microsoft Teams, Remind, Zoom, and others

● Distributed laptop computers to families in need immediately after schools closed and helped them obtain internet access and assistance with distance learning

● Conducted regularly scheduled virtual home visits

● Set up a food pantry for families in need and provided school supplies to all families

● School personnel rode the "lunch bus" every week to check in with families and students

The report listed these challenges that schools experienced in spring 2020 with virtual family engagement:

● Making sure families had the technology and internet resources for online learning, as well as knowledge on how to use the different technology platforms to be able to help their children

● Ensuring ongoing two-way communication with ELL families

● Overwhelmed families unable to help with remote learning, especially if they had more than one child and not enough devices

● Difficulty in providing special education services in a virtual format

● Difficulties in communicating with families who did not provide email addresses or not knowing when families had left the area

- Families who were essential workers and unable to help with remote instruction or insure their children were accessing daily online lessons

While the challenges for schools and families were many, there were "silver linings" from the pandemic schools' shutdown:

- Families', students', and teachers' appreciation for each other grew, with school personnel reporting they gained new insights into their students' lives and family situations they had not known before.
- Teachers learned new technology skills and innovative ways to communicate with families that continued even when schools opened again.
- With creative family events held virtually, in parking lots, driveways, drive-in movie theaters, and other non-school locations, some families who had never participated in a family event were able to attend. Teachers learned that family events do not have to be held at school.
- Critical inequalities for student learning were identified, and effective family/school partnerships were determined to be a top priority for the future, even when virtual instruction was not needed for all students.

SUMMARY

With the myriad of theories and models presented, is there one approach to family engagement that is better than others? What defines a public school as an exemplary family engagement site? To answer this, it will be important for you, as a teacher, to look at the community and population that your school serves to determine the most effective strategies. There is no one best approach, but you and your school colleagues should be familiar with different theories and models of family engagement while also acknowledging the needs and strengths of the families of your students.

Clearly, teachers who desire to collaborate successfully with families must do more than send an occasional newsletter or hold annual parent–teacher conferences. One of the first steps to beginning a family engagement program is to understand the complexities of families and their influence on children's learning and development. Theories and models such as those described in this chapter can provide teachers with an understanding of how to do this.

IN THE CLASSROOM: A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Driving home from her job as an ER admissions clerk at the local hospital, Christina Williams mentally checked off the tasks that needed to be done when she got home: dinner, laundry, dishes, and—now that school had started—homework. She was still struggling to fit in all of these demands since she and her husband had divorced the previous year and he had moved away for a new job. Her mother had been a resource to help with child care and home-work, but she had passed away from COVID-19 complications six months ago, and the fam-ily was still reeling from her loss. Christina felt guilty about all the changes that her three

children had experienced in the last few years. In addition to the divorce and death of their grandmother, Kennedy Elementary was a new school for them, moving near it last summer because the housing was more affordable. As an essential worker at the hospital, Christina had worked long hours throughout the pandemic, and she was not able to help her children with remote learning as much as she would've liked. She was worried they were behind their classmates, and she often felt like the "bad guy" when she had to enforce the rules for homework and chores. The kids frequently complained about the "no TV until homework is done" rule, and there were times when she wondered if she should just let them play their video games all night.

As she pulled into parking lot for the after-school child care, she saw guiltily that she was the last parent to pick up her children. The noise and competition for her time and energy began immediately and continued until the children were asleep. As she turned off the lights, she noticed the backpacks thrown by the back door and realized that she had not looked in them for several days. She pulled out the wadded-up stories, drawings, worksheets, tests, and book orders and came across several notes from teachers and the school. Five-year-old Gabriela's teacher, Ms. Grey, requested that all children bring in $5 for their field trip to the pumpkin patch and asked for parent volunteers to accompany them. There were unfinished worksheets in 8-year-old Nicolas's backpack and a note from his teacher, Ms. Harrison, asking to meet with his "parents" next week to discuss her "concerns" about his math grades and behavior in class. Ten-year-old Sofia's backpack had a letter about the careers unit that they were doing, with a schedule for parents to come in and talk about their jobs. There was also a scribbled note with the words, "I am NOT your friend anymore!!!!!" All three backpacks had information about the new school fund-raiser selling pizzas and a flyer about the school's upcoming PTO Fall Festival with a request for donations and volunteers to work the different booths. For a moment, Christina wished that she had never looked inside the backpacks. She felt overwhelmed and pulled in every direction. She knew she would not be able to miss work to volunteer at school. She also knew that she would have to limit the children's book order requests—there just wasn't enough money in the account to cover many extras—especially if she was going to have to pay for a field trip and order pizzas. Worst of all was the gnawing worry she now felt about Nicolas's unfinished schoolwork, behavior at school, and a fear that Sofia was having problems with friends. She knew that she probably had another sleepless night ahead of her.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How is the Williams family operating as a system? What family system characteristics do you see in their situation? Why is it important for the children's teachers to understand these characteristics in their family engagement practices with the children's family?

2. Apply Bronfenbrenner's Ecological theory to the children in the Williams family. What are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem influences for each child? What influences may be supporting or impacting the children's abilities to be successful in their school work?

3. Note the family engagement strategies that the children's teachers and Kennedy Elementary School are implementing. According to Epstein's model, what types of family engagement are present or absent? What strengths do you note about the teachers' and school's family engagement efforts? How could they be improved?

4. How could the children's teachers learn about the funds of knowledge present in this family? Why is it important to view this single parent family from a strengths perspective when building a relationship with Mrs. Williams?

CHAPTER LEARNING OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENTS

CLO 1.   Create a "Wordle" (word art) with all the words from your definition of a family.

CLO 2.   Choose your favorite family from a book, TV show, or movie and analyze it according to the characteristics of the family systems theory. Provide specific examples from the book, TV show, or movie of these family systems characteristics.

CLO 3.   Using the same family from CLO2, analyze the influences upon the children in the family, using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory. Create a visual graphic depicting the influences (Choose one child in the family to be in the center.)

CLO 4.   To further understand the concept of families' funds of knowledge, complete the class activity described in Table 2.2. Conduct surveys or interviews with families of students in a field placement and create a presentation on their funds of knowledge.

CLO 5.   Visit a Head Start program and interview the program director or a teacher about how they are implementing the Parent, Family, Community Engagement Framework. What are the challenges to a successful implementation of the PFCE Framework? What have been the benefits of engaging families of young children in their early childhood program?

CLO 6.   Browse the "Promising Partnership Practices" on the National Network of Partnership Schools website (http://nnps.jhucsos.com/success-stories/promising-partnership-practices/). Choose one example and present it to your class, noting which type of involvement(s) it is an example.