

SECTION I

Foundations of Family Involvement

Chapter 1: Contemporary Family Lives and Early Childhood Learning Environments

Chapter 2: Developing a Guiding Philosophy of Family Involvement

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CHAPTER 1

Contemporary Family Lives and Early Childhood Learning Environments

In this textbook, we focus on the families of children enrolled in prekindergarten through fifth-grade classrooms. Working with families may seem like a simple task, since we all grew up in some type of family arrangement. Yet, as noted by two family scholars, “a variety of family forms are accepted and practiced widely today” (Smock & Greenland, 2010, p. 588).

Indeed, contemporary families and the communities in which they live are more complex and diverse than those even a generation ago (Cherlin, 2010).

It is because of such family diversity that, as a teacher, you will want to assess how the family and community lives represented in your classroom are similar to but also different from your personal experiences. The insights that result from this assessment will guide you in creating a classroom where all families feel respected, welcomed, and have multiple opportunities for supporting their children’s education (Muscott et al., 2008).

In this chapter we explore basic concepts and dilemmas associated with contemporary family and community lives. We also examine concepts associated with childhood learning environments. We conclude with a review of how family systems theory can provide us with insight into the dynamics of family lives.

COMMUNITY LEARNING GUIDES

One of the most important challenges for any beginning teacher is to transition from the role of student to that of professional. While this transition does not happen overnight, it need not be a daunting task. You can begin the transitioning process now by participating in a “community of learners” where you share your concerns, questions, and ideas with your peers. As you read each chapter, write down your responses to the items that appear at the beginning of the chapter, such as those that follow. Then use your notes to address the Reflections, Discussion Questions, Field Assignments, and Capstone Activities found in each chapter.

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- Describe the various definitions of “family.”
- Describe the difference among traditional families, “normed” families, vulnerable families, and emerging families.
- Describe the difference between biological parents and sociological parents. Explain why this distinction is important.
- Describe the childhood outcomes associated with authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parenting styles.
- Describe how teachers can use family systems theory to better understand the families in their classrooms.

Family Concepts

The American Family Versus American Families

Many scholars in the family studies field have replaced the traditional phrase “the American family” with “American families” to signify the diversity of family life experiences found in contemporary society. This change in terminology is also reflected in debates over what is and is not a family. Consider, for example, Reflection 1.1.

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

NAEYC Standards and Associated Key Elements	1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3c, 4b, 6a, 6c, 6d, 6e
ACEI Standards	1.0, 3.2, 5.1, 5.
PTA Standards	1, 2, 3, 5, 6

REFLECTION 1.1 Defining Family

How do you define a family? Compare your definition with those of your peers.

Your **personal definition of family** is just that, your personal beliefs as to how families should be structured and how they should behave. Individuals who had positive family life experiences as children are likely to use those experiences when defining family. In contrast, individuals who had negative family life experiences while growing up are likely to avoid using those experiences when defining family. In addition, our personal definitions of family are influenced by social trends and events that shape our views of the world in general and interpersonal relationships in particular.

Our personal definitions of family stand in contrast to two other definitions. First, **professional definitions of family** are provided by organizations that set professional standards for their members. Two examples of professional definitions of family follow.

The family is a group of individuals with a continuing legal, genetic and/or emotional relationship. Society relies on the family group to provide for the economic and protective needs of individuals, especially children and the elderly. (American Academy of Family Physicians, 2009)¹

A family consists of two or more people who share resources, responsibilities for daily decisions, share values and goals, and show a commitment to one another over time. (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, 1997, p. 8)

Second, a **legal definition of family** is provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (2010): “A family is a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together.” Unfortunately, this legal definition can at times be too narrow to capture the diversity of family arrangements found in classrooms. Consider, for example, Case Study 1.1.

CASE STUDY 1.1 Kim

Kim, a nine-year-old, has lived with her grandmother since she was three years of age, at which time her father had abandoned the family and her mother had been sent to prison for drug trafficking. Kim and her grandmother are very close. The grandmother is a loving person and clearly wants the best for Kim. She attends every parent-teacher conference prepared to discuss Kim’s academic progress.

Kim’s mother, who is preparing for release from prison, has failed to maintain contact with Kim. Nevertheless, you have recently received a letter from the mother asking about Kim’s classroom work and requesting a parent-teacher conference. Kim’s grandmother asks that you deny these requests, noting, “My daughter is manipulative and a troublemaker. Mark my words. She’ll be back in prison within the year.”

How might this situation be handled, depending on the definition of family used by Kim’s teacher?

Kim’s situation reflects only one of the many challenges we face in defining family. In fact, throughout our lives, some if not most of us will live in multiple types of families. Think about the types of families in which you have lived or might live at some point in the future as you read about traditional, normed, vulnerable, and emerging families.

Traditional Families

Traditional families are considered the norm in society. In truth, the traditional family is a relative concept since what is considered traditional today is different from what was considered traditional as recently as a generation ago. Likewise, we can expect that families will continue to change as society itself changes. Nevertheless, traditional family concepts like those that follow are useful in describing many contemporary family arrangements.

Nuclear families consist of a husband and wife and their children. In the United States today, approximately two thirds (67.3%) of children under age 18 live in nuclear families, a percentage that has steadily declined since 1970, when 85.2% of children lived in two-parent families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). **Extended families** consist of the nuclear family as well as immediate relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Finally, **fictive** or **affiliated kin** are individuals who have no biological or legal relationship to family members but are nevertheless viewed as part of the family and are given family responsibilities. Fictive kin have always existed, as evidenced during the period of slavery when African American

families were torn apart and the welfare of children depended on the care and support provided by multiple adults, not all of whom were biological family members.

Today, the concept of fictive kin has expanded. For example, neighbors who care for children after school while their parents are at work can be considered fictive kin, as can godparents and youth workers who help to socialize children and provide for their well-being (Crosbie-Burnett & Lewis, 1993). Even teachers can be considered fictive kin when they work closely with families to help children reach their full potential.

Normed Families

Normed families include those who a generation ago would have been considered atypical but are now increasingly considered part of “normal” life in American society. Single-parent families, stepfamilies, and grandparent caregivers are three examples of normed families that carry less negative stigma today when compared to the past. We examine these family structures in Chapter 5.

Vulnerable Families

Vulnerable families are families who, because of their life circumstances, experience financial, emotional, and physical stress that can impair their functioning and well-being. Two examples of vulnerable families include homeless families and working-poor families. **Homeless families** are those who lack permanent housing. **Working-poor families** are those who remain in poverty even though their family members work full time.

Working-poor families exist for a number of reasons. Family members who earn a minimum wage often have difficulty covering the cost of basic family needs like clothing, housing, and food. Medical expenses likewise can lead families into a financial crisis. Still other families lack access to the type of reliable and affordable transportation needed to reach better-paying jobs. We take a closer look at the potential challenges and strengths associated with families living in poverty or at the poverty threshold in Chapter 6.

Emerging Families

Emerging families include family arrangements that are becoming more visible and gaining greater recognition within American society. For example, **network** or **friendship families**, also referred to as **families of choice** (Bigner, 2006, p. 21; Tasker, 2005), are formed when individuals who are not related join together to support one another. For example, a group of single mothers may join together to provide one another with emotional and financial support. A network family may also be formed among newly arrived immigrant families. In fact, some



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colleges and universities today use the phrase “friendship families” to characterize campus programs that help foreign students build social support networks.

Gay and lesbian families also are emerging families. They consist of same-sex partners with or without children. Only a few states currently give some type of legal standing to gay and lesbian families (Davey & Robbins, 2009; Goodnough & O’Connor, 2009; Gramlich, 2011). In states that sanction **same-sex marriages**, gay and lesbian couples receive the same rights given to heterosexual couples. Other states grant **civil unions** to same-sex couples. Unlike same-sex marriages, civil unions provide gay and lesbian couples with many, but not necessarily all, of the rights given to heterosexual couples (Gramlich, 2011).

Based on the U.S. Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) of 1996, the federal government does not recognize same-sex marriages or civil unions. In addition, DOMA does not require same-sex marriages or civil unions to be recognized outside the states in which they take place. This is one of the forces behind current court challenges to DOMA, along with the fact that over 1,000 federal rights automatically granted to married heterosexual couples by the U.S. government are denied to married gay and lesbian couples (Human Rights Campaign, 2006). These rights include the right to social security payments upon the death or disability of a spouse, the right for the spouse of a deceased worker to receive survivor benefits, the right to inherit property from a spouse in the absence of a will, and the right to job protection while taking up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave from work to care for an ill spouse or a child (Human Rights Campaign, 2006). Perhaps in part because of these discrepancies, in 2011 President Barack Obama announced that the U.S. Justice Department would no longer defend DOMA (Gramlich, 2011). This ruling reflects the fluid nature of same-sex marriages and civil unions in the United States.

We take a closer look at the potential challenges and strengths associated with gay and lesbian families in Chapter 6. For now, we continue with another concept associated with emerging families that can be applied to heterosexual and same-sex marriages. That is the concept of serial monogamy.

The phrase **serial monogamy** describes the series of monogamous relationships many individuals go through during their lifetime. As one marriage, or some other type of union, ends, another one takes its place. Serial monogamy can in turn lead to **multiple partner fertility**, meaning that adults have children with more than one partner (Cherlin, 2010; Smock & Greenland, 2010). Both serial monogamy and multiple partner fertility reflect just how much family living arrangements can shift even within a few decades.

Standing in contrast to serial monogamy is the concept of **covenant marriage**. Covenant marriages are designed to reinforce marriage by making it more difficult for individuals to divorce. Currently, only a few states offer couples the voluntary option of signing an oath honoring their commitment vows. These couples also agree to premarriage counseling. In addition, the covenant marriage oath specifies a limited number of conditions under which the state will grant a divorce. These situations usually involve family abuse, adultery, and abandonment. Postdivorce counseling and a waiting period before a divorce is granted may also be required.

Households

A **household** includes everyone who occupies a housing unit (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In a **family household**, at least one individual is related to the householder by birth,

marriage, or adoption (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). A **nonfamily household** includes a householder living alone or with nonrelatives only, for example, boarders, roommates, or live-in girlfriends or boyfriends (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Like many other family arrangements, family and nonfamily households have the potential to create interesting situations for teachers. Consider, for example, Case Study 1.2. Then complete Reflection 1.2.

CASE STUDY 1.2 Nolan

Nolan lives with his parents in a family household. His parents rent out their basement apartment to a young woman, Maria, who recently immigrated to the United States with her young son. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), Maria and her son are defined as an *unrelated subfamily* living within Nolan and his parents' family household. Maria and Nolan's parents have an agreement that substantially reduces her monthly rent. Maria cares for Nolan and her son, who are the same age, in the afternoon and during the summer when school is not in session. Because both of Nolan's parents travel as part of their jobs, Maria also cares for Nolan when they are away.

Nolan's teacher has recently asked each student in her classroom to draw a picture of something they do at home with their parents. These are to be used to make a family mural. Nolan draws a picture of himself, Maria, and Maria's son baking cookies. The teacher's assistant asks Nolan to redraw his picture showing something that he does with his parents. Nolan's teacher takes the opposite view. She feels Nolan's drawing should be honored and that it should be included in the family mural. What would you do in this situation?

REFLECTION 1.2 Identifying Family Arrangements

Refer back to the family definitions presented in this section. Which definition or definitions apply to the following family arrangements?

- A husband and wife with an adopted child.
- Three female friends and their children, all of whom live in a house owned by one of the women. The women share living expenses.
- A man, his girlfriend, and her child, all of whom live in the man's house.
- Describe another family arrangement that you have encountered in your personal or professional life that reflects one or more of the above family definitions.

Parenting Concepts

Like the concept of family, our understanding of what it means to be a parent can be understood from different viewpoints. In this textbook, we will use the term **parent** as a generic term to refer to any family member or nonfamily member (e.g., legal guardian) who cares for a child. We can define at least three types of parents. **Biological parents** are genetically related to a child. The wishes of biological parents are usually given primary consideration in legal matters, unless they relinquish their parenting rights or are denied those rights by the state. **Extended parents** include the relatives of a nuclear family who, when required to do so, assume parenting responsibilities. For example, social workers often turn to grandparents, aunts and uncles, adult siblings, or cousins as caregivers when a child's biological parents are unable or unwilling to carry out their parenting responsibilities.

Finally, **sociological parents** assume the mother or father role even though they are not biologically related to a child. For example, *foster parents* are given temporary rights, and *adoptive parents* permanent rights, by the state to care for a child following the death of the biological parents or the child's removal from the biological parents' home. *Stepparents* also assume the parenting role when they marry a child's biological parent. However, they must adopt the child in order to make legal decisions about his or her welfare. Stepparents are a good example of how the rights of biological and sociological parents can conflict and create additional dilemmas for teachers. Consider, for example, Case Study 1.3.

CASE STUDY 1.3 Toni

Toni's father and mother, who divorced two years ago, hold joint custody rights. Toni's father recently married Melissa, who is now Toni's stepmother. While Toni's biological parents manage to get along for the sake of Toni's well-being, this is not true for Toni's biological mother and Melissa. In fact, they rarely speak to one another.

The negative relationship between Toni's mother and stepmother is now creating a dilemma for you, Toni's teacher. Toni's mother is insisting that Melissa be denied access to Toni's school records and that she not attend parent-teacher conferences.

As Toni's teacher, what is the first question you must answer to identify your legal responsibilities regarding the requests made by Toni's biological mother? How might you justify the importance of the involvement of both Toni's mother and stepmother in her education? What ideas might you present to achieve this compromise?

The above case study reflects the need for a **professional definition of parenthood** that acknowledges the parenting role played by any adult, regardless of his or her legal standing, who protects and provides for the needs of a child. While such a definition would no doubt prove difficult to defend from a legal perspective, it nevertheless reminds us that, as teachers, we have a professional obligation to at least consider the viewpoints of the various adults who support children's development and education.

Diane Baumrind's Model of Parenting Styles

The term **parenting** refers to the child guidance practices parents use to socialize their children. Most parenting practices fall under one of three styles that were first introduced by Diane Baumrind (1989, 1991a, 1991b) as she followed the development of children into adolescence: (a) authoritarian, (b) permissive, and (c) authoritative. Within this model, each parenting style is associated with two parenting dimensions: (a) parents' responsiveness to their children's need for attention and affection, and (b) parents' demands for children to follow adult-imposed rules of behavior. For example, **authoritarian parents** are autocrats in that they display a high level of demanding behavior but a low level of responsiveness to their children's ideas and expressions of independence. Put another way, these parents are obedience and status oriented, expecting their orders to be obeyed without explanation (Baumrind, 1991b, p. 750). This stern form of parenting may also be accompanied by few displays of affection and/or little encouragement.

Compared to other children, those with authoritarian parents are described as "discontented, withdrawn, and distrustful" (Baumrind, 1989, p. 351). In addition, girls are described as being overly dependent on their parents and submissive in interpersonal relationships (Baumrind,

1989, p. 352, Baumrind, 1991a, p. 127; Teti & Candelaria, 2002, p. 157), while boys are described as resistive and more hostile or shy with peers (Baumrind, 1989, p. 352; 1991a, p. 127; Teti & Candelaria, 2002, p. 157). As adolescents, children of authoritarian parents are obedient and conform to standards set by adults, do well in school, and are less likely than their peers to get into trouble (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991). However, such conformity comes at a price in that they also lack self-confidence. In short, these children appear to have been “overpowered into obedience” (Lamborn et al., 1991, p. 1062). Indeed, we can argue that the hostile and resistive behavior displayed by some boys of authoritarian parents may reflect their attempts at fighting back against their parents’ demands for conformity.

Permissive parents are the opposite of authoritarian parents in that they make few demands of their children and instead allow them to make their own choices and to assert their independence (Baumrind, 1991b, p. 750). In short, permissive parents take a hands-off approach to parenting, setting few rules of behavior. When rules are set, they may not be consistently enforced.

Children of permissive parents are described as “the least self-reliant, explorative, and self-controlled” (Baumrind, 1989, p. 352). Girls in particular are less socially assertive, but both sexes are less achievement oriented (Baumrind, 1989, p. 355). By adolescence, these children score high on measures of social competence and self-confidence (Lamborn et al., 1991). On the other hand, they are more disengaged from school and show a higher frequency of school misconduct and drug and alcohol abuse (Lamborn et al., 1991).

Authoritative parents are responsive to their children’s wishes but also demand that they follow clear standards of behavior (Baumrind, 1991a, p. 750). Likewise, these parents involve their children in setting rules, but also apply consequences when those rules are broken. One key objective behind authoritative parenting is to help children become assertive and independent but also socially responsible (Baumrind, 1991b, p. 750).

This combination of support and control seems to fall within a “Goldilocks zone” in that the children of authoritative parents exhibit the best adaptive behavior. Compared to other children, they are “the most self-reliant, self-controlled, explorative, and content” (Baumrind, 1989, p. 351). Based on multiple measures, children of authoritative parents are friendly with peers, independent and assertive, cooperative with their parents, and achievement oriented (Teti & Candelaria, 2002, p. 157). Girls of authoritative parents exhibit greater achievement-oriented behavior while boys exhibit friendly and cooperative behavior (Baumrind, 1991a, p. 128). Similarly, as adolescents these children are well adjusted, competent, confident about their abilities, and less likely than their peers to get into trouble (Lamborn et al., 1991).

A number of programs are available to help parents develop skills that promote these types of positive child outcomes. We review some of the programs in Chapter 4. In addition, we revisit Baumrind’s parenting styles as they apply to race in Chapter 8. For now, however, we briefly examine the implications of parenting styles for teachers.

Implications of Parenting Styles for Teachers

One of the more difficult challenges teachers face is reconciling the child guidance practices carried out in the classroom and the parenting styles of parents. For example, teachers today are taught to follow an authoritative guidance approach in which children are provided with a nurturing environment that also involves rules of behavior. Children help to set classroom rules and are taught that consequences follow broken rules. Further, teachers are taught to actively involve children in discussions about their behavior as a way of teaching self-reflection, impulse control, and problem solving skills.

Some permissive and authoritarian parents may question these authoritative approaches to classroom behavior management. For example, permissive parents may feel the teacher is being “overly strict” in setting rules and delivering consequences for misbehavior. In contrast, authoritarian parents may feel the teacher is being “soft” and abdicating his or her disciplinary responsibility by inviting children to help set rules and engaging them in discussions about their behavior. Because of these types of concerns, teachers often take great care to explain their classroom behavior management practices. This may be done in multiple ways: (a) during registration, (b) in the family handbook (see Chapter 12), and (c) on a classroom website. You will find one example of a teacher’s behavior management philosophy on the Family Involvement Portfolio section of the student study site. Before continuing to the next section, complete Reflection 1.3.

REFLECTION 1.3 Assessing Parenting Styles

Think about the parents you have observed in your family, in your neighborhood, or while traveling. Identify a situation where a parent demonstrated an authoritarian or permissive style of parenting. Describe this situation and the parent’s child guidance practices. How might an authoritative parent have handled this situation?

Learning Environment Concepts

The **learning environment** encompasses a number of concepts related to the classroom and community at large. You will be introduced to key concepts in this section.

Classrooms and Other Learning Environments

In this textbook, the terms *classroom* and *learning environment* are used synonymously to describe any location in which children receive instruction and care. Most often, these locations include public and private elementary schools, nonprofit and private early learning centers, and Head Start programs. In addition, some libraries, gardens, museums, hospitals, and community centers set aside educational space for children, as do some homeless shelters for abused women. Likewise, there are numerous youth organizations that sponsor after-school, summer, and holiday learning environments (e.g., recreation centers, boys and girls clubs). Think about the role teachers can play in these different locations as you complete Reflection 1.4.

REFLECTION 1.4 Learning Environments Beyond the Classroom

Identify a learning environment in which you might like to work other than a school. As a teacher, how might your daily work in this alternative setting be similar to and different from a classroom setting? What might be the advantages and disadvantages of working in this setting?

Teachers, Educators, and Caregivers

For the purposes of this textbook, a **teacher** is anyone who receives a professional license from his or her state to teach and care for children. The phrase “teach and care for” is used to emphasize that one cannot be an effective teacher without also being a good caregiver, and vice versa. Put another way, teachers not only have instructional responsibilities, but they also have responsibilities for attending to children’s emotions, health, and safety.

Education

The education of children can be divided into formal and informal categories. **Formal education** involves designing a learning environment to help children master state educational standards. **Informal education** involves families supporting their children’s learning experiences in the classroom, at home, and in the community. One goal of this textbook is to help you link children’s formal and informal education by using various family involvement activities. You will learn more about these activities in upcoming chapters. For now, continue to the next section to read more about how education extends beyond the classroom and into the community.

Bowen’s Model of Community Social Capacity

A **community** is defined not only by its geographic location but also the quality of life it provides through its institutions (e.g., schools, libraries, museums, and religious institutions), services (e.g., police protection, sanitation, recreation, medical care, and transportation), cultural events (e.g., fairs and festivals), and cohesion of its neighborhoods. All of these characteristics help to highlight why the social capacity of communities is an important component of the learning environment.

The concept of **social capacity** refers to the efficiency of formal and informal community systems in providing for the physical, psychological, social, and material care of its members (Bowen, Richman, & Bowen, 2000). Put another way, a community’s social capacity reflects how well individuals and families are able to manage their daily lives, life transitions, and responses to emergencies. We will use Bowen and his colleagues’ model of social capacity to better understand this idea (Bowen et al., 2000). This model makes use of three concepts: (a) social capital, (b) collective efficacy, and (c) human capital. We end this section by considering the use of community scans as a strategy for assessing social capacity.

Social Capital

Social capital refers to the time and energy families and communities devote to supporting the development of children and youth (Coleman, 1994). When assessing the social capital of communities, it is helpful to ask three questions (Bowen et al., 2000; Coleman, 1988). First, what types of *informal obligations* are shared among families that reflect their willingness to help one another with daily tasks such as child care and house repairs? Second, are the *information channels* in a community sufficient to assist families in identifying the services and resources needed to meet their daily needs and accomplish their life goals? Good information flow is supported through community centers, public libraries, safe neighborhoods that encourage social exchanges, Web-based community bulletin boards, and school meetings where parents are invited to share their views and ask questions. Finally, what are the *social norms* of a community? Ideally, social norms discourage disruptive behavior and encourage behaviors that

support families as well as community pride, safety, and development. Examples of programs that reflect these social norms include neighborhood watch programs, enforcement of traffic and noise ordinances, and mentoring programs for youth whose objectives include building self-pride, respect for others, and community citizenship.

Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy is defined not only by the level of social capital in a community but also by the ability of its members to use that capital to improve the lives of others (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). To assess a community's collective efficacy, ask the following question: Is the community able to mobilize its social capital to successfully address an identified challenge? An affirmative response to this question means that the community not only possesses a core set of social norms (Vega, Ang, Rodriguez, & Finch, 2011) but a willingness to act upon those norms (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002).

While the concept of collective efficacy has proved useful in explaining how communities with high collective efficacy are able to help children from dysfunctional homes make adaptive adjustments (see Yonas et al., 2010), of greater interest to teachers is its application to the classroom. One such application can be found in a study of primary and secondary students where collective efficacy was defined by class cohesion and trust among class members. Such collective efficacy was associated with less frequent bullying victimization, most likely because students and teachers took action when they witnessed bullying (Sapouna, 2010).

Human Capital

While collective efficacy is concerned with group well-being, **human capital** is concerned with individual well-being. One way to appreciate the importance of human capital is to compare it to business capital. In short, while businesses raise economic capital in the form of money, families, schools, and communities raise human capital in the form of knowledge and skills (Scanzoni, 2000, p. 149), which ensure children will lead healthy and productive lives (Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010). Human capital is “cashed in” when children reach adulthood and use their knowledge and skills to become productive workers and community citizens. In a sense, the social capital of a community can be used to support human capital.

It is important to note that societies have needed different types of human capital at different points in time. For example, knowledge and skills related to farming were needed during the *agricultural era* while engineering skills and knowledge of machinery were needed during the *industrial era* (Scanzoni, 2000). Today we live in an *information era* where technological, interpersonal, and problem solving skills are of prime importance. What role might you play as a teacher in raising human capital in contemporary society?

REFLECTION 1.5 Human Capital in the Information Era

List some examples of teaching strategies or classroom lessons you will pursue to prepare children for productive lives in the information era.

Think about this question as you complete Reflection 1.5. Then proceed to the next section, where you will learn how to use a community scan to assess the social capacity of your community.

The Community Scan

As a teacher, you may live and teach in different communities (Schutz, 2006). If so, your understanding of social capacity must involve not only your home community but also the community in which you teach. Conducting a community scan can help you achieve both objectives.

A **community scan** is an informal strategy for assessing a community's social capacity. Tips for conducting a community scan are presented in Tip Box 1.1. When conducting your own community scans, consider the agencies presented in FYI 1.1. They reflect some of the most common resources communities rely on to build and maintain their social capacities. You may also find FYI 1.1 helpful when completing assignments in upcoming chapters.



Teachers can use a community scan to assess a community's social capacity.

TIP BOX 1.1

Conducting a Community Scan

A number of strategies can be used to carry out a community scan. The larger the community, the more strategies you may need to use to gain a complete understanding of its resources and values.

- **Drive or walk around the community.** Take note of activities on the street and the number and types of businesses that surround your school. Also note the presence of public parks, libraries, religious institutions, and social service agencies.
- **Listen to local radio and television programs.** What types of programs are broadcast? Are different views expressed about controversial issues?
- **Read the local newspaper.** What topics are addressed on the editorial page? Are different values reflected in letters to the editor?
- **Take note of the informal conversations that take place between parents who visit the classroom.** These too can help you better appreciate community values.
- **Attend local civic and government meetings.** Pay attention to discussion topics that reflect the community's strengths and challenges.
- **Visit the local chamber or commerce.** Learn about the businesses and industries that form the economic base of the community.
- **Use United Way 2-1-1.** Admittedly, conducting a community scan within a metropolitan area can be challenging. In these cases, use United Way 2-1-1, an Internet-based social service registry, to carry out an electronic community scan. To find a United Way 2-1-1 registry for your metropolitan area, visit the following website: www.211us.org/status.htm

FYI 1.1 Community Agencies That Support Social Capacity

Agency*	Examples of Services*
Health Department	Health information, screenings, and immunizations; nutritional programs; food safety inspections; pest control; air quality inspections
Family and Children Services	Child and elder abuse prevention; adoption and foster care; food assistance; refugee support; employment assistance; financial assistance with medical care
Fire and Rescue Department	Fire response and other emergency services; containment of hazardous material; canine search and rescue; emergency medical assistance
Police Department	Community protection; criminal background checks; volunteer programs to assist with crime prevention; neighborhood watch programs; 911 emergency dispatch centers; animal control services
Public Works Department	Coordination of the construction, installation, and maintenance of roads and drains, street lights, and traffic signs; garbage pickup and recycling services
Workforce Centers	Job training and search services; educational programs for youth and adults; youth summer employment programs
Parks and Recreation Departments	Child, adult, and family recreational activities; gardening programs; social clubs; movies and concerts
City and County Libraries	Reading and audiovisual materials; meeting rooms; reading and study areas; computers and Internet services; literacy and musical performances; children's programs; adult education and English as Second Language classes; literacy outreach programs at homeless shelters, health centers, and other community sites
Food Banks	Distribution of food and groceries to people in need through pantries, community kitchens, shelters, and senior centers
Youth Centers: Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA, YWCA	After-school programs, enrichment activities, and clubs; leadership activities, life skills education, and gang prevention; games and sports activities (some centers may also provide programs on building family strengths or addressing family stress)
Thrift Stores	Inexpensive clothing, furniture, household items, toys, books, and magazines
Arts and Culture Centers	Community educational programs and cultural events
Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) or Local Child Advocate Center	Trained volunteers represent the interests of abused and neglected children who are being served by social services agencies and the courts

*Agency names and services will vary among states and locales

Family Systems Theory: Understanding Family Life Dynamics

The **family systems theory** helps us move beyond definitions to an understanding of the dynamics of family lives. This theory begins with the principle that families interact with but

are separate from other social systems such as schools, religious institutions, and youth groups. As children move among these social systems they are exposed to different experiences and points of view that contribute to their development and education.

Within the family system are individuals who belong to subsystems such as mother-child, father-child, mother-father, and siblings (Parke, 2004). These subsystems, as well as individual family members, are *interdependent*, meaning that the behavior associated with one subsystem or family member has the potential to impact the entire family. For example, all family members experience stress when a child is diagnosed with a serious illness. Such stress can in turn upset the **family equilibrium**, broadly defined as a state of normalcy where all know what is expected of them. Practice applying the interdependent principle by completing Reflection 1.6.

REFLECTION 1.6 The Interdependent Principle

Think back to your childhood. Describe how a medical condition, achievement, or another life experience of a family member led to a temporary or permanent change in your family system. How did your family regain its equilibrium?

Family Rules

Family rules are the standards of behavior that govern life within a family system. Rules are found not only in families but also within other social systems, such as schools. This means that family rules can at times conflict with classroom rules (Christian, 2006). Assume the role of teacher and reconcile the rules of behavior listed in Reflection 1.7.

REFLECTION 1.7 Family Rules

Describe the rules you would set in your classroom regarding the following behaviors. How might your classroom rules conflict with family rules? How would you handle these conflicts?

- When or how a child should interact with adults
- When or how a child should express anger
- When or how children should put away materials

Family Boundaries

Family boundaries function like gates in regulating the flow of information and social interactions between the family system and the outside world. There are three types of family boundaries: (a) open boundaries, (b) closed boundaries, and (c) permeable boundaries.

Some families have *open boundaries* in which there are few if any rules governing the flow of information or social interactions. For example, parents may fail to monitor their

children's social friendships. Likewise, children may be allowed to come and go as they please or to bring home friends without first checking with their parents.

Other families have *closed boundaries* in which information and social interactions are tightly controlled. For example, parents may set rules that severely limit children's after-school activities. Such rules can prevent children from forming friendships, developing a sense of independence, and taking part in extracurricular activities that advance their social development.

Fortunately, most families achieve a healthy balance between extreme open and closed boundaries by establishing *permeable boundaries*. In these families, rules are used to maintain family equilibrium while individuals are also encouraged to pursue age-appropriate experiences and social interactions outside the family that allow them to develop their own interests and identities. See if you can distinguish among permeable, closed, and open family boundaries by completing Reflection 1.8.

REFLECTION 1.8 Family Boundaries

Do the following situations represent open, closed, or permeable family boundaries?

- Mr. Beach's son is allowed to sign Mr. Beach's name to permission forms that are sent home.
- You send a note home asking parents to share their child's favorite bedtime story with you. Ms. Lexington returns your note with the following written message: "This is none of your business."
- Ms. Benton explains to her daughter the purpose behind a 9 P.M. bedtime rule.

Family Climates

A **family climate** describes the emotional environment in which family members live. Family rituals, stories, and myths are three factors that contribute to a family climate (Parke, 2004).

Family rituals are patterns of behavior or daily routines that give meaning to family life and interactions (Parke, 2004). Examples of family rituals include bedtime and dinner routines, holiday events, and recreational activities. **Family stories** are used to transmit core family values and rules between generations (Parke, 2004). Examples of family stories include explanations as to why a family follows a particular ritual, why they enforce certain rules of behavior, and why they do or do not participate in classroom activities.

Family myths include beliefs about family life that typically are not open for debate (Parke, 2004). Examples of family myths include beliefs about what makes a good husband or wife, how children should behave, and the respective responsibilities of teachers and parents in educating and socializing children.

With a little practice, teachers usually find that the family systems theory helps them to better understand and work with families. Tips for how you can use this theory are presented in Tip Box 1.2.

While family systems theory is one of the most popular theories for understanding the dynamics of family lives, it is not the only theory. Other theories and models are introduced in upcoming chapters, a summary of which can be found in the following section.

TIP BOX 1.2**Tips for Using the Family Systems Theory****Family Rules**

- Encourage children to talk about classroom rules and how they differ from those they follow at home. Help them understand why different rules are needed in different settings.

Family Equilibrium

- If a child's behavior shows a sudden change, consult with the family regarding anything unusual that might be taking place at home.
- Avoid making dramatic changes in your classroom environment if you know that a child's family life has been disrupted (Christian, 2006).

Family Boundaries

- Families with more open boundaries may take a relaxed approach to making decisions or responding to notes that are sent home. In some cases, they may ask aunts, grandparents, or even siblings to sign school forms. Be persistent but patient and diplomatic in explaining that it is important for parents to assume responsibility for reading and signing classroom forms.
- Avoid becoming defensive if a family rejects your attempts to get to know them on a personal level. Families with more closed boundaries may prefer a formal family-teacher relationship that protects their privacy. Likewise, these families may feel more comfortable engaging in a one-on-one exchange than participating in group events.

Family Climates

- Even though you may disagree, be respectful of statements such as "Spare the rod and spoil the child." Such statements often reflect family beliefs that are shared across generations. Challenging such beliefs can have negative consequences for the family-teacher partnership. Instead, be diplomatic by providing alternative child guidance information in your classroom newsletter. Write articles on topics such as "Tips for Communicating With Children" and "Setting and Enforcing Age-Appropriate Limits."

A Brief Overview of Theories and Models Used in This Textbook

We broadly define theories and models as frameworks for understanding and describing our world (Smith, Hamon, Ingoldsby, & Miller, 2009). In this chapter, you were introduced to family systems theory, Baumrind's model of parenting styles, and Bowen and his colleagues' model of social capacity. A summary of other theories and models presented in upcoming chapters are summarized in FYI 1.2.

As you review the theoretical concepts in FYI 1.2, keep in mind the important function theories and models play in our professional lives. This function is best summarized by a quote from a famous social psychologist: "There is nothing so practical as a good theory" (Lewin, 1951, p. 169). Indeed, theories and models function as practical professional guides (Thomas, 1996, pp. 3–4; White & Klein, 2002, pp. 16–18) in a number of ways. They allow us to communicate efficiently with others by using concepts we all understand. They help us to explain or predict the behavior of the children and families with whom we work. Finally, they help us to organize our thoughts about how best to plan activities that meet the interests and needs of children and families.

FYI 1.2 Theories and Models Used in This Textbook

Theory/Model—Chapter	Key Concepts/Principles	Relevance to Family-Teacher Partnerships
Baumrind's model of parenting styles – Chapter 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Authoritarian parenting – Permissive parenting – Authoritative parenting 	It is important that teachers explain the reasoning behind their classroom behavior management practices, since they may at times conflict with one or more parenting styles.
Bowen's model of community social capacity – Chapter 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Social capital – Collective efficacy – Human capital – Community scan 	This model is useful in assessing a community's level of functioning.
Family systems theory – Chapter 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Interdependent principle – Family equilibrium – Family rules – Family boundaries – Family climate 	Teachers can use this theory to understand the dynamics of family life.
Epstein's family–school–community partnership model – Chapter 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Overlapping spheres of influence – Parenting – Communicating – Volunteering – Learning at home – Decision making – Collaborating with the community 	This model represents a popular framework for planning a comprehensive family involvement program.
Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory – Chapter 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Human ecology – Microsystem – Mesosystem – Exosystem – Macrosystem – Chronosystem 	This model provides teachers with a lens for understanding how children's development and education can be supported at all levels of society.
Bandura's theory of self-efficacy – Chapter 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Self-efficacy – Mastery experiences – Vicarious experiences – Social persuasion 	This theory provides a basis for replacing teachers' self-doubts about working with families with a "can do" mind-set.
Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development – Chapter 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Scaffolding – Zone of proximal distance 	Teachers can use the concepts associated with this theory to guide parents as they help their children acquire new skills.
Symbolic interactionism – Chapter 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Role overload – Role strain – Role ambiguity – Role conflict 	This theory is helpful in understanding the role taking challenges faced by single parents, stepparents, and grandparent caregivers when interacting with teachers and schools.
Social exchange theory – Chapter 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Rewards – Costs 	Teachers can support family involvement among gay and lesbian families, as well as families living in poverty, by maximizing the rewards and minimizing the costs of their participation.

Facilitated IEP meeting model – Chapter 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Neutral facilitator – The agenda – IEP goals – Ground rules – Fostering collaboration – Eliminating power imbalances – The parking lot 	The components of this model are designed to create a respectful environment when working with families with children who have disabilities.
Model of cultural adaption – Chapter 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Assimilation – Acculturation – Enculturation 	Teachers can work more effectively with immigrant families by understanding the processes involved in adapting to a new culture.
Poston's model of biracial identity – Chapter 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Personal identity – Choice of group categorization – Enmeshment/denial – Appreciation – Integration 	This theory assists teachers in working with biracial children as they establish a healthy racial identity.
The anti-bias education model – Chapter 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Goal 1: To nurture children's multiple identities – Goal 2: To encourage children's expression of and joy regarding human diversity – Goal 3: To recognize and understand the impact of unfair and discriminatory acts – Goal 4: To take action to address acts of unfairness and discrimination 	This model provides teachers with guidance in helping children acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed for a diverse social world
Three approaches for addressing multicultural education – Chapter 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Intervention – Tour and detour – Transformative 	This model provides teachers with guidance in becoming culturally responsive teachers.
Model 1: Webbing family involvement – Chapter 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Structure – Construction – Benefits 	Webs provide a visual picture of how teachers plan to link classroom lessons to family involvement activities, all of which support a central learning theme.
Model 2: Family involvement roles – Chapter 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support – Teacher – Student – Advocate – Protector – Ambassador 	This model allows teachers to match the interests of individual parents to different family involvement roles that can be played out in the classroom, at home, and in the community.
James Comer's school development program (SDP) model – Chapter 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The whole child – The SDP structure – SDP processes – SDP operations 	The SDP is a comprehensive school reform model. It provides both the structure and operational procedures needed for school administrators, families, teachers, school staff, and community professionals to optimize children's development and education.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The concepts of “family” and “parenting” are complex. Fortunately, we can use family systems theory to move us beyond definitions to a consideration of family dynamics.

- Today, learning environments extend beyond the traditional classroom and include such locations as libraries, gardens, museums, hospitals, and other community sites.
- The quality of life for individuals and families is in part influenced by the social capacity of their communities. Teachers can conduct an informal assessment of a community’s social capacity by using community scans.

NOTE

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss whether the difficulty we face in defining family is a positive or negative reflection of family life in contemporary American society.
2. Discuss the practical implications of the following distinctions for teachers: (a) biological versus sociological parents and (b) authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative parenting styles.
3. Like teachers, parents teach children life skills and attend to their health and safety. Given these similarities, discuss whether parents should be required to hold a state “parenting license,” just as teachers must hold a state “teaching license.” If so, what might be the criteria for holding such a license?

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS’ FIELD ASSIGNMENT

Conduct a Community Scan

Working in small groups, use the guides presented in Tip Box 1.1 to conduct a community scan. Use a picture collage, slide (e.g., PowerPoint) presentation, or videotape to present your findings.

How would you summarize the social capacity of this community? How can the community improve its social capacity?

CAPSTONE ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: Document Contemporary Family Images

Look through magazines for images of different family arrangements. Cut these out and bring them to class. How many different family images did you find? How do the images portray similar and unique aspects of family life in contemporary American society? How might teachers accommodate the different aspects of family life represented in the family images?

Activity 2: Apply the Family Systems Theory

Identify a family that appears on a television program or in a movie. Analyze this family's dynamics using the family systems theory. What types of subsystems are represented? How well are family rules defined? Does the family display more open, closed, or permeable boundaries? Is the climate of the family healthy or unhealthy?

Activity 3: Identify a Children's Book on Community Life for Your Teacher Resource File

Visit your local library to select a book that you can use to introduce a lesson on some aspect of community life. Share your book with your peers. As a class, develop a bibliography of all the books that are presented. Make copies for everyone in your class. Make a teacher resource file in which to place your bibliography. You will want to keep your resource file for future reference.

INTERNET RESOURCES

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

American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS)

<http://www.aafcs.org/>

AAFCS provides support for professionals who are concerned with families' relationships, nutritional well-being, housing, and economic resources. As with most other professional organizations, AAFC publishes journals and sponsors annual conferences to share information about the programs and research being carried out by its members.

American Educational Research Association (AERA)

<http://www.aera.net/>

AERA is a national research society that advances our knowledge about education. AERA sponsors an annual conference and publishes journals and books. AERA also sponsors a number of professional divisions and special