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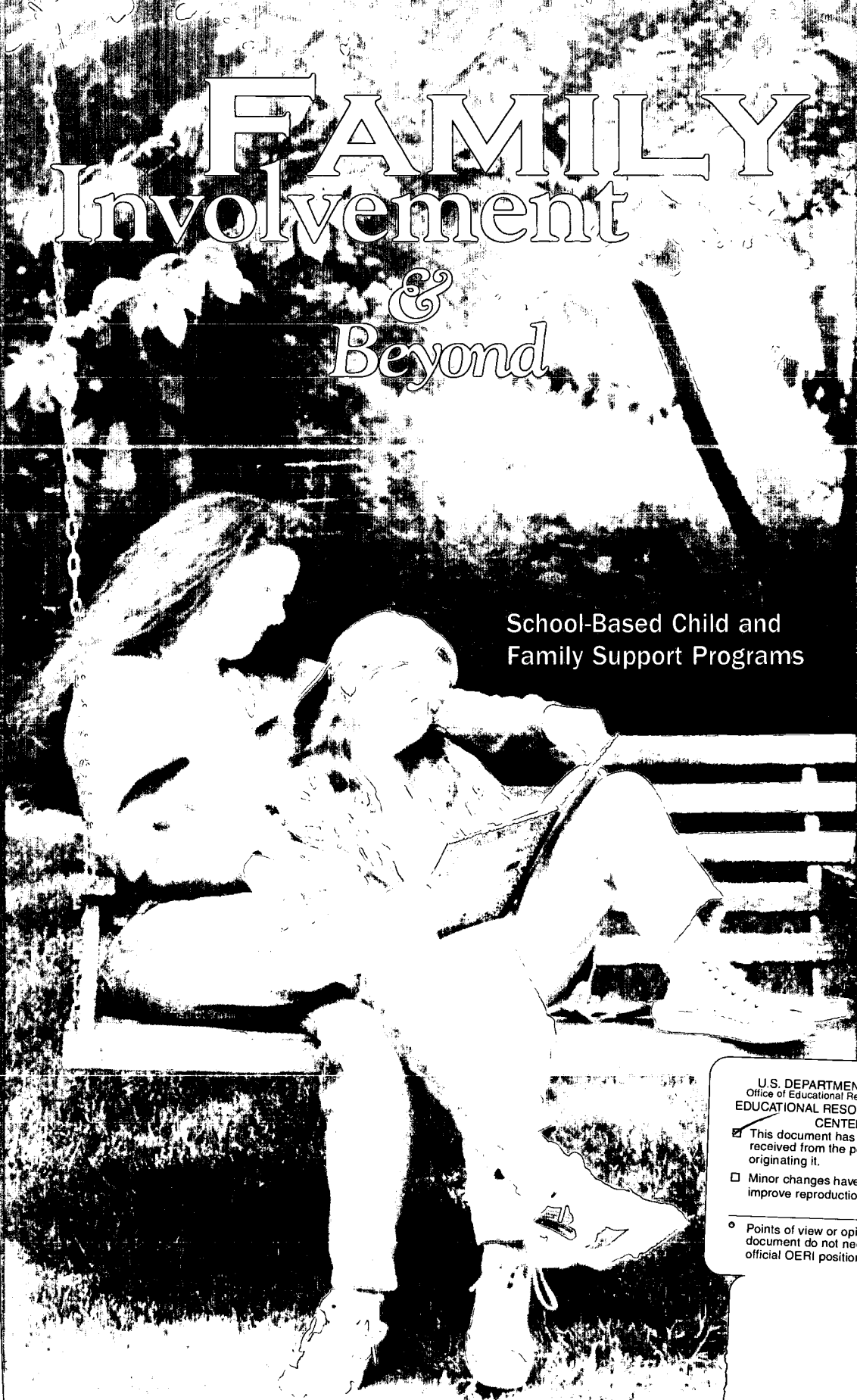
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## ABSTRACT

Teachers often spend much time attending to the needs of children who are unable to focus attention, get along with other children, control their emotions and behavior, and lack persistence and motivation. During the last few years, many schools and families have begun to move beyond the finger-pointing stage and are developing partnerships to promote the optimal development of all children, creating school communities that foster positive relationships among all members. In this report, research on resiliency, culturally responsive teaching, school reform, and characteristics of school-based child and family support programs in elementary schools are discussed, and promising practices based on research are highlighted. Following a literature review, the report describes four Northwest schools (Helen Baller Elementary School, Camas, Washington; Cherry Valley Elementary School, Polson, Montana; Mary Harrison Elementary School, Toledo, Oregon; and Richmond Elementary School, Salem, Oregon) that have integrated effective school-based child and family support into their school programs. In these schools, emotional development is enhanced through supportive relationships with teachers, child and family mentors, family advocates, and other staff members who provide opportunities for children to learn how: to recognize and manage emotions, to understand how others think and feel; and to learn collaborative approaches to resolving conflicts. The report finds that educational practices that create the conditions that foster resiliency for all include: culturally responsive teaching; a curriculum that enhances children's inherent curiosity and builds upon personal interests; staff development that emphasizes reflective study of teaching practices; and family involvement and support. Throughout the report are references to materials suitable for handouts in workshops. (Contains 123 references.) (BT)

# FAMILY Involvement & Beyond

School-Based Child and  
Family Support Programs



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# FAMILY Involvement & *Beyond*

School-Based Child and  
Family Support Programs

December 1999

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Child and Family Program



Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

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# INTRODUCTION

*For the last several years, Jake, according to his father, has been a difficult child—impulsive, quick to anger, and the word “active” does not begin to describe his behavior. When he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) at age five, it was almost a relief. But the medication hasn’t been the magic pill his parents had hoped, and they worry about side effects. Jake’s second-grade teacher is understanding, but even she is losing patience with his disruptive behavior.*

---

*Every morning it’s the same scene at the Farber house. “I don’t want to go to school,” wails Joey. “Don’t make me go.” And every morning Joey’s mother brings her always tearful, sometimes angry seven-year-old to his classroom and runs from the room, her own feelings of anger, sadness, and confusion mirroring those of her son.*

---

*Trudy’s kindergarten teacher is worried about her. Always a shy child, lately Trudy has been so withdrawn that she has hardly spoken. Increasingly, she spends her time curled up in the large stuffed chair in the reading center, sucking her thumb. Although school staff members haven’t seen any bruises, they are more and more convinced that Trudy is being abused.*

Every day, scenarios like those described above are being played out in families and classrooms across America. The way that teachers and school personnel deal with these issues will have a profound influence on children’s success in school and beyond. Although schools have traditionally separated children’s academic achievement from their social and emotional development, increasingly educators are coming to the conclusion that while educational achievement is the central purpose of schooling, a narrow focus on academics will not always bring results.

Due, in part, to a number of tragic, high-profile acts of school violence, there is growing recognition that disruptive and antisocial behaviors are best addressed in the early years, before patterns of behavior become established and resistant to change. In addition, there is increased awareness that when schools fail to deal effectively with teasing, bullying, and the division of students into winners and losers, feelings of isolation, alienation, anger, and despair may become all too common among students who feel left out. Yet, as Greenspan and Benderly (1997) point out, “Children who have become withdrawn, angry, suspicious, or humiliated—that is, those who most need emotional support—are least likely to get it” (p. 1).

School violence rarely escalates into the sensational events that have made headlines in the last few years. However, emotional and behavior problems can take a toll on the atmosphere of learning (Moore, 1999). According to polls of kindergarten teachers, growing numbers of families are unable to raise children who are ready for school, and schools are said to be unready for children. Teachers often spend a great deal of time attending to the needs of children who appear to lack persistence and

motivation, and who are unable to focus attention, to get along with other children, and to control their emotions and behavior.

During the last few years, many schools and families have begun to move beyond the finger-pointing stage and are developing partnerships to promote the optimal development of all children. Even before First Lady Hillary Clinton's "It takes a village" campaign, educators and human service workers had reached consensus on an important principle: Children do not exist in isolation; rather, they develop in the context of child/family/school/community relationships. Creating a school climate that fosters success for all children requires careful attention to the relationships between all of these contexts for development. Montana's Polson Partnership Project Coordinator Co Carew points out, "Creating school communities that foster positive relationships among all members is not in competition with math and other basic subjects; social and academic competence go together."

But how do already overburdened teachers find the time to create these ever-widening circles of inclusion? More and more schools are creating school-based child and family support programs to address the social and emotional needs of children, and to build strong linkages between the home, school, and community. It is these programs and the school communities into which they are integrated that are the focus of this paper.

Of course, school-linked comprehensive services are not new. As early as 1923, an urban superintendent asserted:

The school should serve as a clearinghouse for children's activities so that all child welfare agencies may be working simultaneously and efficiently, thus creating a child world within the city wherein all children may have a wholesome environment all of the day and every day (quoted in Tyack, 1992).

Since that time, numerous collaborations have been created to address the complicated problems faced by children and families in today's society. A number of publications have captured the experiences of collaborative endeavors across the country in guides for integrating education and human services (Melaville & Blank, 1993; Winer & Ray, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1996). The programs highlighted in this paper differ from many of the collaborative efforts discussed in these publications in one important respect: Rather than being one player in a collaborative partnership with numerous community agencies that create their own vision of a pro-family system, school-based child and family support programs keep children and their school success at the center.

While effective programs evolve to meet the unique needs of a particular school community, they share many commonalities. They are frequently directed by a working team that includes teachers, principals, school psychologists, social workers, and counselors. Partnerships with the juvenile justice system, Head Start programs and other preschool teachers, and medical and mental-health community members increase the support network for children and families. In addition, at the center of these partnerships is often a position that has a long history in Head Start programs, but is still relatively rare in schools. Variouslly described as a family advocate, child and family mentor, parent liaison, case manager, family service worker, and child-development specialist, this liaison between home and school plays an important role in breaking down barriers that inhibit home/school partnerships.

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Services are both child- and family-focused. In the context of a supportive relationship, children are given opportunities to learn conflict-resolution, anger management, communication, problem-solving, and friendship skills. Family advocates or mentors (often with guidance from licensed counselors or social workers) frequently work directly with children, as well as coach teachers and all staff members in the use of strategies to promote children's social skills and emotional development. When schools and families provide opportunities for children to systematically think through emotions, to reflect on their behavior, and to understand how others think and feel, bullying, teasing, and other hurtful behaviors are much less likely to become an accepted part of school culture (Egan, 1999; Kohn, 1996; Meier, 1995). "We can only secure peace by providing emotional security for all our children," writes Peter Gorski, a pediatrician and President of the Massachusetts Caring for Children Foundation (Web address: <http://www.naecyc.org/resources/eyly/1999/08.htm>).

Vivian Paley, an author and educator whose latest book, *The Kindness of Children* (1999), is an exploration of children's impulsive goodness, advises adults to begin having conversations with children about kindness, fairness, and justice well before kindergarten. Says Paley:

Listen closely to children's questions. Be alert to the fact that they are absorbing all of what is played out before them. And try not to miss any opportunity to sift through the rightness or wrongness of what unfolds, whether the child is actor or audience in the drama. Keep talking about it. Because that is the thing that is of the greatest interest to the child; what is fair, what is not fair, and why does so much of what goes on seem unfair (1999).

Families, of course, play a crucial role in providing emotional security for their children. Schools can provide opportunities for families to learn about children's development, assistance in developing positive behavior plans for their children, and help in accessing health, educational, and social services, as well as other resources. "A family might need shoes, food, housing, or clothing. Whatever it takes to make a child equal to other kids, that's what we help with," explains Zann Johnson, family advocate at Mary Harrison Primary School in Toledo, Oregon.

A strong philosophical base is critical to program success. In *High Risk Children in Schools*, researchers Pianta and Walsh observe:

Theory is what is missing in the contemporary discourse on risk. Good theory allows us to see contemporary reality through contemporary lenses rather than through the lenses used yesterday. Most important, for those of us working in applied fields, a good theory points us toward action (1996, p. 3).

Fortunately, a rich body of research from the fields of sociology, family systems theory, brain development, and developmental and cognitive psychology can guide the formation of school-based support programs and increase the likelihood that educational reform will lead to enhanced student learning. By understanding their role in fostering the development of young children, teachers and all school staff members can have a profound effect on children's success at school and beyond. Pianta and Walsh conclude, "Now that we have a far more accurate idea of how the human mind develops, we must base our educational methods not on tradition but on the best current insights into how children learn" (1996, p. 219).

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## About this Document

In this paper, research on resiliency, attachment theory, culturally responsive teaching, school reform, and characteristics of school-based child and family support programs in elementary schools are discussed. Promising practices based on the research are highlighted throughout this section.

Following the literature review are descriptions of four Northwest schools that have integrated effective school-based child and family support into their school program. A central goal of these schools is, as one Northwest principal puts it, “to create an atmosphere where children and their families feel a sense of trust, attachment, and a sense of belonging not only to the school, but to their community as well.” In these schools, emotional development is enhanced through supportive relationships with teachers, child and family mentors, family advocates, and other staff members who provide opportunities for children to learn how to recognize and manage emotions, to understand how others think and feel, and to learn collaborative approaches to resolving conflicts. In addition to careful attention to children’s emotional development, educational practices that create the conditions that foster resiliency for all include:

- Culturally responsive teaching
- A curriculum that enhances children’s inherent curiosity and builds upon present interests
- Staff development that emphasizes reflective study of teaching practices
- Family involvement and support

The profiles are the result of site visits that included classroom observations, document review, and interviews with teachers and principals. The schools featured are:

- Helen Baller Elementary School in Camas, Washington
- Cherry Valley Elementary School in Polson, Montana
- Mary Harrison Elementary School in Toledo, Oregon
- Richmond Elementary School in Salem, Oregon

The success of these school faculties in working with economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse children and families demonstrates that caring, strengths-based, inclusive approaches are not just an idea anymore; they can be a reality in our schools and communities. Because schools have often served to socialize students into the existing social, economic, and political ideologies, they have been seen as unfriendly and even oppressive institutions by some cultural groups. Yet, when schools honor the history of the community and include the voices of families and community members in planning and decisionmaking, they can help all children become active, critical, and responsible members of society. “Schools,” points out Carew, “can begin a healing process for an entire community.”

Throughout the document are references to materials suitable for handouts in workshops. These handouts, located in the final section, include synopses of a concept, summaries of research, and suggestions for designing learning experiences for young children and their families.

# USING RESEARCH TO INFORM PRACTICE

## Resilient Children: Understanding the “More”

*The real ABCs come down to attention, strong relationships, and communication, all of which children must learn through interaction with adults (Greenspan, 1997).*

In the 1970s, child development began to shift from the study of pathology to the study of self-righting tendencies in the human organism, which appear to move children toward normal development under all but the most adverse circumstances (Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). In *The Child in Our Times*, Dugan and Coles (1989) write of the first Black child to enter a segregated school in New Orleans. The little girl, who was six at the time, told the authors that she hoped that she would get through one day and then another. She also told them that if she did manage to do so, and to do so with success, she would have an explanation: “It will be because there is more to me than I ever realized” (p. 3). Studies of resilient children are an attempt to understand the “more.”

The concepts of resilience and protective factors are the positive counterparts to the constructs of vulnerability and risk factors (Werner & Smith, 1992). Resilient children, called “keepers of the dream” by Germezy, Masten, and Tellegan (1984), are children who remain competent despite exposure to misfortune or to stressful events (Rutter, 1985). One of the key elements identified in resiliency is a sense of self-efficacy, which allows the child to cope successfully with challenges. Rather than

behaving as though they are at the mercy of fate, resilient children take an active stance toward an obstacle or difficulty (Rutter, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1992).

The capacity to bounce back requires the ability to see the difficulty as a problem that can be worked on, overcome, changed, endured, or resolved in some way. In addition, resiliency requires reasonable persistence, with an ability to know when “enough is enough” and a capacity to develop a range of strategies and



skills to bring to deal with the problem, which can be used in flexible ways (Demos, 1989). Finally, in order for resiliency to flourish, one's efforts must be successful and gratifying in some way, at least some of the time (see Handout 1).

Researchers have identified a number of protective factors that foster resiliency: caring and support (particularly the opportunity to form a supportive relationship with at least one adult); consistently communicating clear, positive expectations to the child; and opportunities for meaningful participation in the social environment (Benard, 1993). Children are not either at risk or not at risk, points out child-development expert James Garbarino. "It's more than the absence of risk, it's the presence of opportunities," he explains. "Put simply, while some children score '-1' (risk factor) and others score '0' (absence of risk), a third group scores '+1' (an opportunity factor)" (1995, p. 153). The goal for educators and human service providers is not just to reduce risk, but to help all children to be in the "+1" group.

The concept of resiliency has contributed a great deal to our understanding of how to provide supportive environments for children, and it has provided a much-needed shift from children's supposed deficits to recognizing and building on strengths. However, a simplistic interpretation of the resiliency literature may lead to the belief that that all life hazards offer opportunities for growth, and that some children are invulnerable to stress.

During the 1970s, Anthony (1974) introduced the analogy of the three dolls—one made of glass, one made of plastic, and the third made of steel—to contrast children in their vulnerability to adversity. Under the blow of the hammer, the first doll shatters and the second is permanently scarred, but the third doll only emits a fine metallic sound—appearing to be invulnerable. While Anthony and other resiliency researchers did not intend for policymakers to base practices on the notion that children should be invulnerable to an onslaught of life-threatening hazards, the concept of resilience became widely popular—particularly the idea of invulnerable children. People came to consider that there were some children so constitutionally tough that they could not give way under the pressure and stress of adversity (Rutter, 1985). Rutter (1985) characterizes the notion as "wrongheaded" in at least three respects:

- The resistance to stress is relative, not absolute
- The basis of the resistance is both environmental and constitutional
- The degree of resistance is not a fixed quantity; rather it varies over time and according to circumstances

In addition, researchers agree that risk increases substantially when children experience two risk factors and risk is multiplied (rather than merely added) as the number of risk factors increases (Rutter, 1985; Schorr, 1989). Farber and Egeland (1989) caution that we should be responsible in discussing children's invulnerability lest policymakers come to harbor the belief that if children are strong enough, they can survive and overcome adversity of all kinds. Pianta and Walsh (1996) explain:

Young children are dependent on parents, family members, communities, and schools, that is, upon a system, for resources related to balancing the effects of life hazards. A comprehensive analysis suggests that viewing hazards as opportunities for growth and development is often a semantic twist to what is otherwise an experience that produces a negative trend in development that can be predicted with great regularity. No amount of semantic change or identification of individual success stories can mask the overwhelming evidence that

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for the population of children as a whole, life hazards are to be avoided, and it is the responsibility of the adult population to respond to this need (p. 121).

Life hazards are particularly likely to be encountered by children in poverty. Poverty has been called a constellation of risk factors because it increases the likelihood that numerous risk factors are present—in schools, families, and communities.

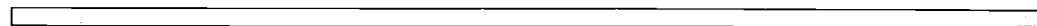
#### □ RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS □

- The concepts of resilience and protective factors are the positive counterparts to the constructs of vulnerability and risk factors. Resilient children are children who remain competent despite exposure to misfortune or to stressful events (Werner & Smith, 1992; Rutter, 1985).
- Dispositions that act as protective factors include an active, problem-solving approach and a sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Resilient children are characterized by a belief in their power to shape and have an impact on their experience.
- Caring and support, high expectations, and opportunities for meaningful participation are protective factors for children found in families, schools, and communities (Benard, 1991). One of the key protective factors for children is the availability of consistent adults who provide them with a secure base for the development of trust, autonomy, and initiative (Werner & Smith, 1992).



- The presence of a single risk factor typically does not threaten positive development. In situations where a child is vulnerable, the interaction of risk and protective factors determines the course of development. For example, growing up in a family that provides a sensitive, responsive home environment can offset the adverse effects of poverty.
- If multiple risk factors accumulate and are not offset by compensating protective factors, healthy development is compromised (Schorr, 1989; Werner & Smith 1992). A child who is exposed to drugs in utero, and who is raised by abusive and/or neglectful parents in a dangerous neighborhood is at high risk for impaired social and cognitive competence.
- Poverty increases the likelihood that risk factors in the environment will not be offset by protective factors. Poverty is often a constellation of risk factors that combine to produce “rotten outcomes” (Schorr, 1989). Garbarino (1990) describes high-risk neighborhoods as “an ecological conspiracy against children.”
- When a child faces negative factors at home, at school, and in the neighborhood, the negative effect of these factors is multiplied rather than simply added together, because these conditions interact with and reinforce each other (Werner & Smith, 1992; Schorr, 1989). For example, a child who experiences risk

factors such as maltreatment at home, who lives in a dangerous neighborhood, and who attends a poor-quality child-care setting and school is unlikely to develop in a healthy manner.



## Were You Poor or Regular?

*Hard times are about losing spirit,  
And hope,  
And what happens when dreams dry up (Hesse, 1997).*

Despite the global financial crisis, the U.S. economy grew at its fastest pace in nearly 15 years in the last quarter of 1998, closing out a year in which Americans enjoyed the best combination of rapid growth, low unemployment, and low inflation in at least three decades (*New York Times*, 1999). With the GNP growing at an annual rate of 6.1 percent, the United States continues to be “an oasis of prosperity,” according to David Wyss, chief financial economist at Standard & Poor’s DRI. By many measures of growth, unemployment, and low inflation, the country is already enjoying its best days since the 1960s, many analysts say.

Yet the prosperity enjoyed by many is not shared by all. “Across the United States, we are beginning to hear the rumblings of a quiet crisis. Our nation’s children under the age of three and their families are in trouble, and their plight worsens every day,” begins a 1994 report by the Carnegie Foundation. In 1996, 2.8 million children under age three and 5.5 million children under age six—23 percent, or nearly one in four—lived in poverty. The numbers of children in extreme poverty—living in families with a combined income below 50 percent of the federal poverty line (\$16,036 for a family of four) have dramatically increased over the last three decades. Of the 5.5 million poor young children, almost half (47 percent) live in extreme poverty (National Center for Children in Poverty, 1999).

While there are fewer children in poverty today than in 1993, the United States’ peak year, the country continues to have the highest rate of young children in poverty of any Western industrialized nation (National Center for Children in Poverty, 1998). In addition, the United States has the highest rate of income inequality of any industrial country. In 1998, 111,000 households—one-tenth of 1 percent of the 120 million income tax returns filed in 1996—received more income than 18.1 percent of households. In 1997, the highest-earning Americans’ share jumped again, to 19.9 percent (Uchitelle, 1999). When wealth is calculated, the gap is even more extreme; in 1996, the wealthiest 1 percent of U.S. citizens owned more wealth than the bottom 90 percent combined.

What does being poor mean for America’s children? In *Raising Children in a Socially Toxic Environment* (1995), author James Garbarino describes being poor as “being left out of what society tells people they could expect if they were included.” He writes:

Recently, a child asked me, “When you were growing up, were you poor or regular?” That’s it precisely, are you poor or regular? Being poor means being negatively different; it means not meeting the basic standards set by your society. It is not so much a matter of what you have but what you don’t (p. 137).

In addition to feelings of shame and inadequacy that may be part of the experience of being poor in a country that places a high value on material success, poverty frequently has severe and negative consequences for children’s health and well-being. Due largely to a growing shortage in affordable housing and a simultaneous increase in poverty, the number of homeless families with children has increased significantly over the past decade. Families with children are currently the fastest growing group of the homeless population, constituting approximately 40 percent of people who become homeless (see Handout 2). Although unemployment is a contributing factor in home-

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lessness, employment is not a guarantee of stable housing. Declining wages for unskilled workers have put housing out of reach for many; in every state, more than the minimum wage is required to afford a one- or-two bedroom apartment at fair market rent.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, poor health is closely associated with homelessness. For families already struggling to pay the rent, a serious illness or disability can start a downward spiral into homelessness, beginning with a lost job, depletion of savings to pay for care, and eventual eviction. Over the last decade, the number of people without health insurance has climbed from 31 million to 43 million; 10 million children lacked health insurance in 1998 (Kilborn, 1999).

Children in poverty are far more likely to suffer from ill health than their more advantaged peers. A study by government researchers examining poverty, race, and single parenthood found that "poverty had the strongest effect on children's health." According to the study, conducted by researchers at the National Center for Health Statistics, poor children were 3.6 times more likely than more affluent children to have only fair or poor health. Research indicates that life in near poverty is almost as detrimental to children's health and development as living just below the poverty line, and that extreme poverty early in life is especially deleterious to children's future life chances (National Center for Children in Poverty [NCCP], 1996).

While being poor does not inevitably lead to problems in school, poverty's adverse effects on children and families have been well documented. Poverty gives rise to many types of deprivation and increases the likelihood that numerous risk factors are present simultaneously: in parents, children, health care, housing, support systems, schools, child care, and neighborhoods. Due to the interaction of multiple risk factors, children from poor and minority families are disproportionately at risk for school

failure. Nationally, poor children are three times more likely to drop out of school, and poor teen girls are five and a half times more likely to become teen mothers (Children First for Oregon, 1994).

The recently concluded report from the Columbia University-based NCCP concluded that young children in poverty face a greater risk of impaired brain development due to their exposure to a number of risk factors associated with poverty (see Handout 3). Children living in poverty are more likely to:

- Be born at a low birth weight
- Be hospitalized during childhood
- Die in infancy or early childhood



- Receive lower-quality medical care
- Experience hunger and malnutrition
- Experience high levels of interpersonal conflict in their homes
- Be exposed to violence and environmental toxins in their neighborhoods
- Experience delays in their physical, cognitive, language, and emotional development, which in turn affect their readiness for school

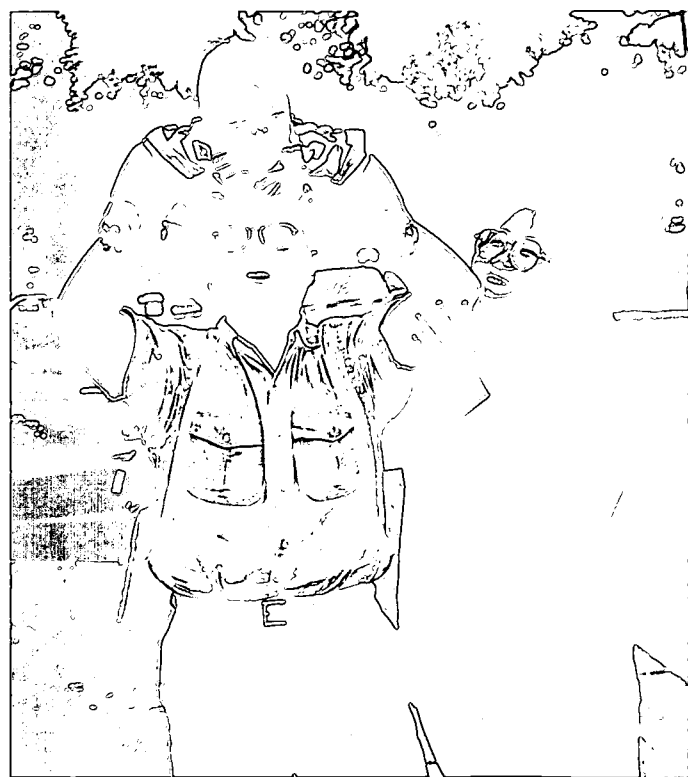
The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1996) reports that family income is related to child maltreatment rates in nearly every category of maltreatment. Children whose families earned below \$15,000 were:

- More than 22 times more likely to experience some form of maltreatment
- More than 44 times more likely to be neglected
- Sixty times more likely to die from maltreatment of some type under the Harm Standard,\* and over 22 times more likely to die from abuse or neglect using the Endangerment Standard\*\*
- Nearly 56 times more likely to be educationally neglected

According to J. Lawrence Aber, the director of the National Center for Children in Poverty, “The increasing number of poor young children reflects a 20-year trend that is having devastating consequences on children today whether they are toddlers or teenagers.” Now, as in the past, socioeconomic status remains the best predictor of a child’s future earning power.

**Avoiding victimization.** It is important to note that most low-income parents provide nurturing environments for their children’s development, despite the difficulties presented by living in poverty. Many children from diverse cultural backgrounds, who may also be poor, have a great deal of knowledge and language competence that goes unrecognized by teachers who are predominantly White and middle-class. Thus, differences in verbal interaction and narrative styles may be interpreted as deficits (Delpit, 1995). Delpit points out that teacher education usually focuses on research that links failure and socioeconomic status, failure and cultural difference, and failure and single-parent households. “It is hard to believe that these children can possibly be successful after teachers have been so thoroughly exposed to so much negative indoctrination,” says Delpit (p. 172).

Teachers, then, can do much to ameliorate the difficulties often experienced by children from low-income families by having positive expectations for all children and by examining their own biases and beliefs regarding children living in poverty. When teachers see themselves and the children in their classrooms as “victims” of demographics, low expectations can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. But Pianta and Walsh (1996) warn, “To dismiss the realities of poverty is to fall into a naïve romanticism under the guise of cultural sensitivity. Poverty is hard on people, and it is getting harder all the time” (p. 124).





Although schools alone cannot solve all social problems, by becoming informed advocates for children and by forming partnerships with families and community members, they can not only reduce risk and foster resiliency for all children, they can also play a key role in strengthening the entire community.

In addition, by understanding how children's developmental histories affect subsequent attitudes, behaviors, and adaptation to the school environment, they can more effectively address the needs of high-risk children. Developmental psychologists agree that many of the academic and behavioral problems young children have in the school setting stem from problems with the earliest relationships.

**WHEN TEACHERS  
SEE THEMSELVES AND  
THE CHILDREN IN  
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CAN BECOME A SELF-  
FULFILLING PROPHECY.**



\*The Harm Standard requires a child to have already suffered demonstrable harm as a result of maltreatment in order to be "countable" (i.e., in order to be included in the estimated totals).

\*\*In order to qualify as "endangered," the child's maltreatment has to have been substantiated or indicated by a child protective service agency or a participating sentinel in a non-CPS agency (such as a teacher in a school, a nurse or social worker in a hospital, etc.).

# The Importance of Attachment: The First Relationship

*A baby alone does not exist (Winnicott, 1965).*

Research over the past 30 years has demonstrated that the infant is born far more competent, more social, more responsive, more able to make sense of his or her environment than we ever imagined. The infant is no longer regarded as passive, responding only to stimuli; research is now verifying what mothers and fathers have always known: from birth, the infant is profoundly social. Research has shown preferences of the newborn infant for a human face-like gestalt, a feminine voice, and maternal odor (Fantz, 1963).

An infant can remember and respond differently to the smell, voice, and face of the mother as early as the first few days of life. At the 1998 White House Conference on Early Childhood and Learning, Dr. Donald Cohen, Director of the Yale Child Studies Center, commented:

Infants see and hear and taste, and they try actively to make sense of these impressions. They recognize patterns and are interested in shapes, and they remember what they have heard and what they have felt. Babies, in short, are smarter, more competent, more curious and eager than ever was suspected.

A study by DeCasper (cited in Associated Press, 1992) demonstrated that infants hear the mother's voice and are aware of varying intonations in speech before birth. In this study, several mothers read to their in-utero infants, each reciting a different Dr. Seuss story. At three days old, when they were read several stories, the infants preferred the story that had been read to them before birth. The infant, then, is born with an ear for the rhythms of language and an innate need for interpersonal relatedness (Emde, 1987).

But it is important to note that *the infant and young child can only be competent in the context of a relationship*. Infants are born expecting a competent caregiver to give them care and attention. D.W. Winnicott (1965) puts this dramatically: "A baby alone does not exist." So important is this first relationship that developmental psychologists regard the formation of a secure attachment with primary caregivers during the first year of infancy as perhaps the most important developmental task of infancy (Cicchetti, Toth, & Hennessey, 1989).

Attachment appears to be essential to the development of trust and security, and later autonomy. According to attachment theory, children develop expectations of self and others based on their early experiences with primary caregivers. Children's self images are formed in large part according to how acceptable they feel in the eyes of their attachment figures. Children with sensitive, responsive caregivers come to perceive themselves as accepted and valued, whereas children with unresponsive caregivers come to perceive themselves as unacceptable and unworthy of attention (Cicchetti et al., 1989). Tom Salyers and Lynette Ciervo of the national nonprofit organization, ZERO TO THREE (<http://www.zerotothree.org>), explain:

Trust grows in infancy in the everyday, ordinary interactions between the child and the significant caregivers. A baby learns to trust through the routine experiences of being fed when she is hungry, and held when she is upset or frightened. The child learns that her needs will be met, that she matters, that someone will comfort her, feed her, and keep her warm and safe. She feels good about herself and about others.

Conversely, children with insecure attachments learn that their needs will not be met; the world is neither predictable nor supportive. Consequently, their trust in others and their confidence in themselves is undermined, often resulting in an impaired ability to explore the physical environment and form friendships with peers (Sroufe, 1989; Urban, Clalson, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1992). Because these are multiple pathways for personality development, there is no linear relationship between an insecure attachment to a primary caregiver and later social and behavior problems (Campbell, 1990). Mitigating factors include an improved relationship with the primary caregiver and a warm affectionate bond with other significant adults.

THE CAPACITY TO CARE

ABOUT ANOTHER

PERSON, TO IMAGINE

AND UNDERSTAND

HOW OTHERS THINK

AND FEEL, BEGINS

IN THESE FIRST

RELATIONSHIPS.

## THE ABCS OF ATTACHMENT

- Active and engaged care is essential for children's brain maturation and for social, emotional, and intellectual development.
- Emotional signals, such as crying and smiling, serve as the language of the baby. Babies whose mothers are responsive to crying during the early months tend to cry less in the last months of the first year. Instead, they rely more on facial expressions, gestures, and vocalization to communicate their intentions and wishes to mother (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972).
- For the infant and young child, the warm, responsive care—rocking, touching, holding, singing, talking, smiling, and playing—are essential for both cognitive and emotional development.
- For young children, the environment does not just provide the context for development; it directly affects the way the brain is wired. A supportive environment builds neural pathways that encourage emotional stability.
- It can't just be any adult who helps a child develop emotional competence. Children need consistent, nurturing relationships with the same caregivers. These are the people who are relied on as a secure haven in times of distress and as a secure base from which to explore.
- Both quality of care and security of attachment affect children's later capacity for empathy, emotional regulation, language and cognitive development, and behavior control. Pianta (1992) suggests that early relationship experiences around attachment issues lay the foundation for interaction with adults that influences subsequent adaptation in school contexts.
- Strong, secure attachment to a nurturing caregiver has a protective biological function against adverse effects of later stress and trauma.

The capacity to care about another person, to imagine and understand how others think and feel, begins in these first relationships. The experience of forming strong early connections with a caring adult lays the foundation for the capacity to form meaningful relationships with others, including peers and adult love relationships. Intrigued by the connection between a young child's love for its caregivers and later adult love relationships, Fraiberg (1977) writes in *Every Child's Birthright*:

During the first six months, the baby learns the essential vocabulary of love. There is the language of the embrace, the language of the eyes, the language of the smile. ... Eighteen years later, when this baby is fully grown and falls in love for the first time, he too will woo his partner through the language of the eyes, the language of the smile, and the joy of the embrace. And naturally, in his exalted state, he will believe that he invented this love song (p. 37).

It appears that a need for unique attachment is part of our biological makeup. Animals, from birds to primates, bond to specific caregivers, for whom substitutes are not readily accepted. The child, like the newborn kitten or chimpanzee, organizes his or her security regulating system around a limited number of caregivers. These are the people who are relied on as a secure haven in times of distress and as a secure base from which to explore (Bowlby, 1988). In addition, this early relationship likely lays the groundwork for the beginnings of moral judgment. The desire to please his or her parents provides a strong motivation for the child to control his or her impulses. Fraiberg (1959) writes:

Our personal identity—the very center of our humanness—is achieved through the early bonds of child and parent. Conscience itself, the most civilizing of all achievements in human evolution, is not part of constitutional endowment, but the endowment of parental love and education (p. 301).

### Research on Brain Development

Brain research has enhanced our understanding of emotional development and its critical role in cognitive development (see Handout 4). In *The Growth of the Mind and the Endangered Origins of Intelligence*, authors Stanley Greenspan and Beryl Benderly (1997) state, “Emotions, not cognitive stimulation, serve as the brain’s primary architect” (p. 1). We now know that the frontal cortex, the area of the brain that dominates emotions and complex thoughts, shows increased activity between the ages of six



months and two years. This time period is considered by many researchers to be critical for healthy emotional development.

A responsive, nurturing environment that allows the infant and young child to develop strong attachments to a limited number of caregivers enables the child to build neural pathways that encourage emotional stability. Sroufe and his colleagues

found that both the quality of care and security of attachment affect children’s later capacity for empathy, emotional regulation, cognitive development, and behavioral control (Kestenbaum, Farber, & Sroufe, 1989).

Gunner’s research (1996) on cortisol—a hormone that is easily measured because it is present in saliva—helps to explain how a secure attachment helps children withstand stress, even later in life. In stressful situations, children who have experienced a secure attachment to a caregiver are more adaptive and produce less cortisol. This research also shows that adverse or traumatic events elevate the level of cortisol in the brain. Excessively and chronically high levels of cortisol alter the brain by making it vulnerable to processes that destroy brain cells responsible for thought and memory.

**A RESPONSIVE,  
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THAT ENCOURAGE  
EMOTIONAL STABILITY.**

Just as importantly, cortisol reduces the number of connections in certain parts of the brain—causing memory lapses, anxiety, and an inability to control emotional outbursts.

Children who have chronically high levels of cortisol experience more delays in all areas of development. In addition, stress causes the child's brain to consume glucose—glucose that could be used for cognitive functions. Trauma and abuse, emotional neglect, and social deprivation all interfere with the development of the frontal cortex and limbic areas of the brain, areas that are involved with integrating emotions with cognitive processes. The result may be impaired emotional, cognitive, and social development; judgment, creativity, problem solving, and planning may be particularly affected (Jensen, 1998; Shore, 1997).

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL  
EFFECTS OF  
MALTREATMENT ARE  
SEEN AS SOME OF  
THE LEADING CAUSES  
OF LEARNING AND  
BEHAVIOR DISORDERS  
IN CHILDREN, AS WELL  
AS LONG-LASTING  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
DISTRESS IN ADULTS.**

### **Child Maltreatment**

*The legacy of maltreatment in its various forms is damage to the child's sense of self and the consequent impairment of social, emotional, and cognitive functioning (Erikson, Egeland, & Pianta, 1989, p. 648).*

Whereas news stories tend to focus on the more sensational cases of child abuse, such as severe physical or sexual maltreatment, less obvious but more chronic kinds of abuse are far more common. Psychological maltreatment is still the least likely to be identified and treated by our child welfare system. However, there is growing consensus that psychological maltreatment is at the heart of negative developmental outcomes. Garbarino and Vondra (1987) argue that “psychological maltreatment is the core issue in the broader picture of abuse and neglect, as it is in poverty and oppression of all kinds” (p. 28).

The psychological effects of maltreatment are seen as some of the leading causes of learning and behavior disorders in children, as well as long-lasting psychological distress in adults. Research indicates that maltreated and neglected children suffer psychological and behavior problems in virtually all areas of development. Effects include aggressiveness, withdrawal, depression, emotional maladjustment, antisocial behavior, difficulty with self-control, impaired cognitive and language skills, and decreased academic performance. In addition, maltreatment interacts with and exacerbates the effects of poverty, inadequate provision of medical care, and education. Thus, most abused children are at double jeopardy for cognitive delay, as they generally suffer the disadvantages associated with low income, as well as suffering the effects of abuse (Crittenden, 1989).

It is unlikely that single instances of psychological abuse or neglect are directly harmful in the same way that instances of physical abuse lead to injuries. On the contrary, it appears that the harm of psychological maltreatment, which frequently accompanies other types of maltreatment, results from the cumulative effects of repeated occurrences over time. Egeland and Erickson (1987) note that abusive families are often multiproblem families with homes and neighborhoods characterized by chaos, disruption, and deprivation. Abuse and neglect, then, should not be viewed as an isolated incident, but an environment. As Crittenden (1991) writes, “It is the simple, daily experiences that constitute the basis of a self that can hope, engage the cooperation of others, and find satisfaction in the process” (p. 13).

### **To Sum Up**

Research in child development leaves little doubt that a child's healthy development is based, in large part, on a secure relationship with psychological parents. In two longitudinal studies of high-risk children (Sroufe, 1992; Smith & Werner, 1992), a secure attachment with caregivers was the most important protective factor in their

ability to remain competent and confident, despite a number of risk factors. University of Minnesota researcher Sroufe (1989) and his colleagues found:

- The kinds of attachments children have formed with their primary caregivers at one year of age predict teacher ratings, behavior problems, and quality of relationships with peers in preschool. Early attachments also predict the social competency of 10- and 11-year-olds themselves in summer camp settings.
- Children gain a great deal from interactions with peers over the years. Infants who experience warm, responsive caregiving are, later in life, more empathetic with peers. When they are responded to early in life, they learn something basic about what it means to be connected with other people.
- Both the quality of care and security of attachment affect children's later capacity for empathy, emotional regulation, and behavioral control.
- Early caregiving that is sensitive and emotionally responsive can indeed buffer the effects of high-risk environments (including maternal stress). This is especially true for boys. It can promote positive change for children who have experienced poverty and abuse, and can interrupt the transmission of abusive patterns from one generation to the next.
- Children with insecure attachment histories explore more poorly, perform worse on tasks involving mastery and cognitive performance, and do more poorly on interactive tasks requiring the child to use an adult as a resource, than do children with secure attachment histories.

Other researchers have found strong links between a child's attachment history and competence in school:

- Van IJzendoorn and DeRuiter (1993) summarize research that demonstrates a clear link between attachment security and emergent literacy, peer relations, and problem solving in school situations.
- In a 1988 study by Bus and van IJzendoorn, children who were classified with avoidant attachments were far less competent in engaging in emergent literacy skills and activities than peers with secure attachments.

## SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

1. Every child needs a safe, secure environment that includes at least one stable, predictable, comforting, and protective relationship with an adult (not necessarily a biological parent), who has made a long-term, personal commitment to the child's daily welfare and who has the means, time, and personal qualities needed to carry it out.
2. Consistent, nurturing relationships with the same caregivers, including the primary one, early in life and throughout childhood, are the cornerstone of both emotional and intellectual competence, allowing a child to form the deep connectedness that grows into a sense of shared humanity and, ultimately, empathy and compassion.
3. Third is the need for rich, ongoing interaction. Love and nurture, though essential, don't suffice. During the first five years of life, children learn about the world through their own actions and their caregiver's reactions. They cannot develop a sense of their own intentionality or of the boundaries between their inner and outer worlds except through extended exchanges with people they know well and trust deeply. As their development advances, their interactions with others should also gain in complexity and in subtlety.

4. Each child and family needs an environment that allows them to progress through the developmental stages in their own style and their good time. Only in this way can children cultivate a sense of themselves both as distinct individuals and as members of particular groups.

5. Children must have opportunities to experiment, to find solutions, to take risks, and even to fail at attempted tasks. A child's self-worth and positive self-esteem are rooted in relationships that support her initiative and ability to solve problems.

6. Children need structure and clear boundaries. They derive security from knowing both what to expect and what others expect of them. They learn to build bridges among their thoughts and feelings when their world is predictable and responsive. Firm yet reasonable limits, set within an atmosphere of warmth and empathy, constitute a crucial element of any relationship that truly nurtures a youngster's growth and allows him to learn self-discipline and responsibility.

7. To achieve these goals, families need stable neighborhoods and communities. The appropriate, consistent, and deeply committed care that a child needs to master the developmental levels requires adults who are themselves mature, empathic, and emotionally accessible.

Source: Greenspan, S. & Benderly, B. (1997). *The growth of the mind and the endangered origins of intelligence*. Reading, MA: Perseus Books.

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## Implications for Elementary School Teachers

Teachers of young children can have a profound effect on their emotional development, fostering resilience and helping children overcome the adverse effects of high-risk environments. The relationships between children and teachers, while not parental, should reflect the same kind of sensitive, responsive interactions that are the hallmarks of a healthy attachment between parents and children, say researchers Pianta and Walsh (1996): "The combination of felt security in a relationship with an adult and freedom to explore the world in a competent manner is a hallmark of the parent-child relationship; it appears to also operate within the teacher-child relationship" (p.161).

In a longitudinal study of a multiracial cohort of 698 infants on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai, Werner and Smith (1992) identified children who, despite multiple risk factors, were able to lead productive lives, exhibiting competence, confidence, and caring. One of the key protective factors for these children was the availability of persons who provided them with a secure base for the development of trust, autonomy, and initiative. Among the most frequently encountered positive role models in the lives of the children of Kauai, outside of the family circle, was a favorite teacher. For the resilient youngsters, a special teacher was not just an instructor for academic skills, but also a confidant and positive model for personal identification. Highlights from other research include:

- In a recent study of more than 400 children, Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollins (1996) found that teacher-child relationships in kindergarten were predictive of children's competence and behavioral adjustment in the first three years of school.



- Dr. James Comer, Director of the Yale University Study Center School Development Program, reports that in their work with 650 schools, they found that traumatized children who formed a relationship with a caring, reliable, responsible teacher made strong academic gains (1997). “With continuity, trust, and bonding came a willingness to open up and take risks that academic learning requires,” he says (p. 54). He suggests that schools provide opportunities for teachers to keep students for two years.
- In a case study of a first-grade teacher, Pederson, Faucher, and Eaton (1978), show the impact of a teacher who formed relationships with students that supported independence, made them feel worthwhile, motivated them to achieve, and provided them with support to interpret and cope with environmental demands. This teacher’s students differed on dropout rates, academic achievement, behavioral competence, and adjustment in the adult world.
- Pianta and Steinberg (1992) found that children who were at risk for retention were less likely to be retained if they developed a positive relationship with their teacher during the year.
- The relationship between students and their teachers remains important for children throughout their school years. In a study of high school students living on American Indian reservations, over a third of the dropouts from Montana, and almost half of the Navajo and Ute dropouts, felt their teachers didn’t care about them (Dehyle, 1992). When asked about good teachers, students consistently explained that a good teacher was “one who cares.”

Pianta and Walsh (1996) conclude:

Social and affective interaction taking place in classrooms is of primary importance in determining who succeeds and who fails, especially for students whose background characteristics are indicative of lack of social and affective resources. ... These processes, not socioeconomic status, may be fundamental to understanding the school as a context for development (p. 161).

**Promoting healthy development.** While most children enter school expecting to succeed, research shows that some children’s attitudes towards school often decline steadily as they go through school, as does their academic self-image (Entwisle, 1995). Failure begins early, and by third grade educational trajectories are often fixed (Bowman, 1994). Slavin and his colleagues conclude that while success in the early years does not guarantee success throughout the school years and beyond, “failure in the early grades does virtually guarantee failure in later schooling” (1993, p. 11).

What are the conditions that promote healthy development of young children? Research on school restructuring has identified a number of commitments and competencies that lead to improved outcomes for children, including:

- High expectations for all children (Newmann, 1993; Benard, 1993; Nieto, 1994)
- A commitment to learn from and about children, building on the strengths and experiences that children bring to school (Bowman, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Meier, 1995)
- Working collaboratively with families and the community
- The development of schools as a caring community (Lewis, Schaps, & Watson, 1995, 1996; Meier, 1995; Newmann, 1993)



A

A CARING COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS:  
CREATING A PROTECTIVE SHIELD

*However else one defines schooling, especially in the very early years, it is mostly about face-to-face interaction between children and adults, and these interactions, these conversations, are the process of adjustment, or adaptation. Test scores and other common assessment measures are but blurry snapshots of this process (Pianta & Walsh, 1996, p. 156).*

Caring communities are defined by Lewis, Schaps, and Watson (1995) as “places where teachers and students care about and support each other, actively participate in and contribute to activities and decisions, feel a sense of belonging and identification, and have a shared sense of purpose and common values.” The factory-model school, with an emphasis on competition, hierarchical authority, and a view of teachers and principals as interchangeable parts, still exerts a strong influence on our educational system.

However, based on a synthesis of literature about human growth and development, Argyris (cited in Clark & Astuto, 1994) concluded that hierarchical, bureaucratic work environments are more likely to lead to immature behaviors, such as passivity, dependence, and lack of self-control and awareness. In contrast, schools organized as caring communities have been shown to foster a shared sense of responsibility, self-direction and a stronger motivation to learn, experimentation, less absenteeism, greater social competence, respect for individual differences, and higher educational expectations and academic performance (Clark & Astuto, 1994; Lewis, Schaps, & Watson, 1995; Newmann, 1993).

A central goal of such schools is, in a Northwest principal’s words, “to create a positive school climate as seen through the eyes of *each* child.” To do so requires not only careful attention to interactions and relationships between teachers and children and among children, but throughout the school and community as well. Teachers, families, secretaries, businesspeople, senior citizens, family advocates, teaching assistants, foster grandparents, reading visitors, custodians, child development assistants, librarians, police officers, beekeepers, and administrators all make important contributions to the care and education of young children.

Knowing that emotional competency is learned through interactions with peers and adults, school personnel emphasize the crucial role they play as models of attitudes and behaviors. A principal in a Northwest school notes, “There may be some place where the expression ‘do as I say—not as I do’ is effective advice, but school is not the place. We constantly ask, ‘How do we talk to kids? How do we interact with kids? What behaviors are we modeling?’” At the same time, children are helped to reflect on their own feelings, and to increase awareness of others’ feelings. “Look at her face,” a teacher might advise, “How do you think she feels?”

## Expressing Thoughts and Feelings in Appropriate Ways

Helping children express thoughts, feelings, and opinions verbally and in writing can begin in the early preschool years. At Helen Gordon Child Development Center in Portland, Oregon, children are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings—in letters to friends and parents, in poems, and in stories. Supported by teachers who write children's dictated words just as they are spoken, children write about rejection, fears of abandonment, and injustice. As Steve Franzel, a teacher of three-through six-year-olds, says, "Language becomes a way to support children's power—their ability to deal with a peer, with conflict, with sad or scary feelings. Words empower them to express themselves—to handle life." Franzel explains:

I usually use writing as a means to a goal, to validate children's feelings about separation, to help resolve conflict—as crisis prevention. I hear someone screaming and I go over to help them use their words to express their needs and feelings. Then I ask the child, 'Do you want to write it down, write a letter?'

The process is such an integral part of the day's activities, that the children explain it to new adults in the classroom and expect them to take dictation, just as they might expect their shoes to be tied. Frequently throughout the day, children use writing to sort out their feelings and, at times, to come to terms with their own behavior. For example, the following letter was written after four-year-old

LANGUAGE BECOMES  
A WAY TO SUPPORT  
CHILDREN'S POWER—  
THEIR ABILITY TO DEAL  
WITH A PEER, WITH  
CONFLICT, WITH SAD  
OR SCARY FEELINGS.  
WORDS EMPOWER  
THEM TO EXPRESS  
THEMSELVES—TO  
HANDLE LIFE.



Tony watched his classmate leave for the doctor to have stitches in his forehead, following an altercation involving a broom. As Tony thought about what to write to Mark, anger was replaced by a sense of responsibility:

I'm sorry Mark. I hit you with the broom. Why did you want to take my broom? I was just about to color with the chalk and you were trying to take my broom. I was coloring in five seconds. I wanted to give him a hug before he left.

Four-year-old Aaron expressed her complex thoughts on friendship and rejection in a prose poem written about and to her friend Olivia:

Olivia is a good friend.  
Sometimes she doesn't play with me.  
Today she said, "Don't follow me."  
I was upset.  
Then I was angry.  
Then I said, "Bad Olivia."  
Then I walked away.  
Just like Olivia.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Read this note and then you will  
Find out about me  
And your friend Aaron.  
Love, Aaron  
To Olivia

Using books and stories can also help children examine feelings. In a Northwest Head Start classroom, teachers read aloud Hans Christian Anderson's story *The Ugly Duckling* and the whole class talks about how the ugly duckling must have felt when everyone made fun of him. When a child uses a word that hurts another child's feelings, children are encouraged to call it "an ugly duckling word," and to make it clear that such words are not acceptable. "Ugly duckling words are those that hurt your heart. Ugly duckling actions are those that hurt your body," explains their teacher.

At four years of age, these children are learning important lessons in empathy and are learning to stand up for themselves and each other against teasing and bullying. Vivian Paley contends that although each child comes into the world with an instinct for kindness, it is a lesson that must be reinforced at every turn (Paley, 1999). "Caring and compassion," says author and educator Deborah Meier, "are not soft, mushy goals. They are part of the core of subjects we are responsible for teaching."



# Teaching for Understanding and Learning as Understanding

Authentic pedagogy is at the center of a caring community. According to Newmann and Wehlage (1995), a learning situation is authentic if students engage in higher-order thinking, develop a deep understanding of subject matter, participate in classroom discourse to build shared understanding, and can relate their knowledge to public issues or personal experience. They write:

Our standards emphasize teaching that requires students to think, to develop indepth understanding, and to apply academic learning to important, realistic problems. We call this “authentic pedagogy,” and we found that authentic pedagogy boosted student achievement equitably for students of all social backgrounds (p. 3).

Creating learning communities where everyone is engaged in challenging and meaningful activities requires changes in the “core of educational practice”—in the “fundamental relationships among student, teacher, and knowledge” (Elmore, 1996). Researchers in school reform have consistently found that in order for teachers to facilitate higher-order thinking and a love of learning in children, they must be viewed as intellectuals, capable of creating new knowledge to inform instructional practice and of designing (often in concert with parents and students) authentic learning situations (Carr & Braunger, 1997). Learning new ways of teaching requires time for observation, reading, reflection, dialogue with colleagues, action research, and ample opportunities to address questions and concerns regarding educational practices.

Teacher observation and research can be powerful tools for informing and improving teaching practices. Good teachers have always built on children’s understandings, seeking to understand learning from the child’s point of view. A teacher in a Northwest multiage classroom advises, “Listen to children’s thinking. Use their words and work as a window to see their processing and perspectives” (Novick, 1999).

UGLY DUCKLING WORDS  
ARE THOSE THAT HURT  
YOUR HEART. UGLY  
DUCKLING ACTIONS  
ARE THOSE THAT  
HURT YOUR BODY.

## THE CARING COMMUNITIES OF LEARNERS FIVE INTERDEPENDENT PRINCIPLES:

- 1. Warm, supportive, stable relationships.** Schools are set up so that all members of a school community—students, teachers, staff, parents—know one another as people and view each other as collaborators in learning. Teachers carefully examine their approaches, asking, “What kind of human relationships are we fostering?”
- 2. Constructive learning.** Good teaching fosters children’s natural desire to understand their world by providing experiences that help children become more skillful, reflective, and self-critical in their pursuit of knowledge. Rather than focusing on rote learning, teachers help children make discoveries, struggle to find explanations, and grapple with evidence and views different from their own.
- 3. An important, challenging curriculum.** Curriculum development should be driven by major long-term goals, not just short-term coverage concerns. These goals should be broadly conceived to include children’s development as principled, humane citizens.
- 4. Intrinsic motivation.** Educators need a curriculum that is worth learning and a pedagogy that helps students see why it is worth learning. Teachers introduce topics in a way that piques students’ curiosity and helps them make personal connections.
- 5. Attention to social and ethical dimensions of learning.** Everything about schooling—curriculum, teaching method, discipline, interpersonal relationships—teaches children about the human qualities we value. Teachers scrutinize disciplinary approaches to promote children’s responsible

behavior over the long run. Teachers engage children in shaping the norms of the class and school, so that they see that these norms are not arbitrary standards set by powerful adults, but necessary standards for the well-being of everyone. Teachers also help children develop collaborative approaches to resolving conflict, guiding them to think about the values needed for humane life in a group.

Source: Lewis, C., Schaps, E., & Watson, M. (1996, September). The caring classrooms' academic edge. *Educational Leadership*, pp. 16-21.

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In an educational approach based on authentic pedagogy, both adults and more competent peers play important roles in children's learning: an *active child* and an *active social environment* collaborate to produce developmental change (Vygotsky, 1978). Glennellen Pace (1993) describes the role of the teacher in a classroom based on social-authentic pedagogy:

This is not a *laissez-faire* approach. As the teacher, you are a central player, not someone who "sits-out," afraid of "getting in the way of" students' knowledge construction. But neither is this approach teacher centered, where your meanings are the meanings students must "get." Instead, you play multiple roles: demonstrator, mediator, keen observer, and listener (p. 4).

Creating a state of disequilibrium in a child's understanding through posing questions and problems, followed by discussion, is a strategy used frequently in classrooms where higher-order thinking is valued. Three Northwest teachers describe their approach to teaching math in their blended first- and second-grade classrooms:

As teachers, we look for challenging problems that will land our students on the edge of a cliff. We must help them find the motivation and courage to take the leap across the chasm. Not every learner needs the same distance to cross. If the gap is too wide, a child will falter and lose confidence. If too narrow, the child won't stretch, and instead just follow a prescribed course. Students must take this leap of understanding, over and over again. When the confusion is resolved, a bridge has been built across the chasm, bringing power and flexibility of thinking (Briggs, Folkers, & Johnson, 1996, p. 36).

Brain research has helped us to understand why frequent new learning experiences and challenges are critical to brain growth. The brain, we now know, is designed as a pattern detector—perceiving relationships and making connections are fundamental to the learning process (Caine & Caine, 1997). Early experiences and interactions do not just create a context for development and learning; they directly affect the way the brain is wired—the connections that are formed between neurons (Shore, 1997). Because the brain is predisposed to search for how things make sense, strong connections are formed when children make meaning from their experiences (Caine & Caine, 1990). "Challenging sensory stimulation has been rightfully compared to a brain nutrient," writes Jensen (1998, p. 31).

**Teacher expectations.** In the early school years, then, children develop patterns of learning and patterns of reliance on significant others to support learning that directly affect later attainment (Entwisle, 1995). Children's self-images, in large part, are based on their perceptions of how acceptable they are in the eyes of significant adults (Bow-

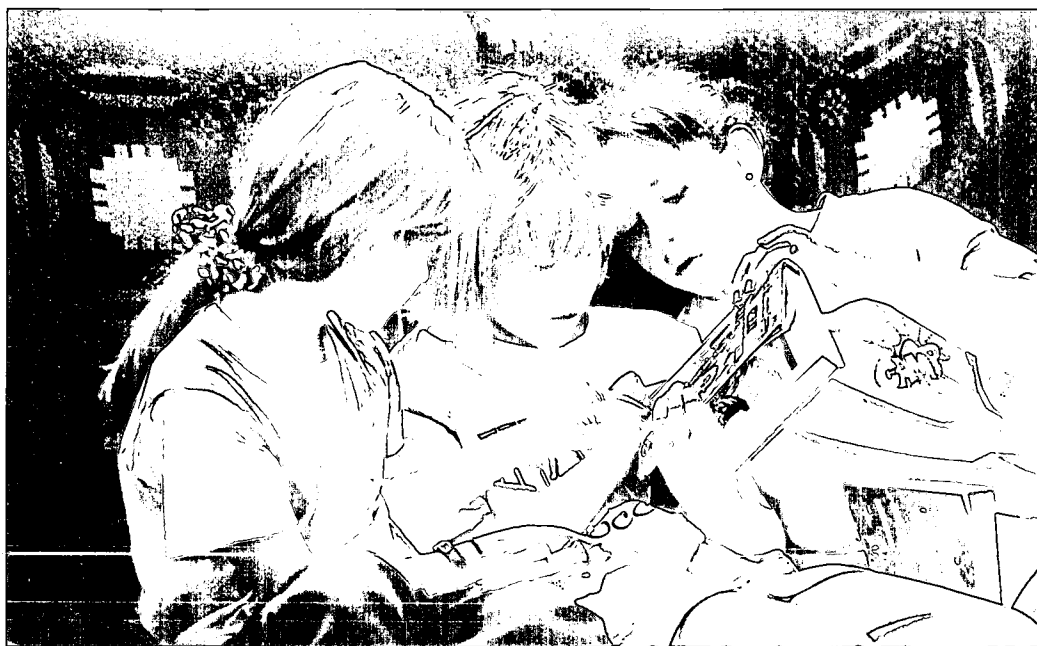
man & Stott, 1994; Sroufe, 1979). Because the disposition to learn, in large part, depends on a positive sense of self, teaching for understanding includes paying careful attention to children's interpretations of themselves as learners. Joanne Yatvin, superintendent of a rural district and principal of a small rural school in Oregon, writes:

In order to learn, a child must believe: "I am a learner; I can do this work; craftsmanship and effort will pay off for me; this is a community of friends and I belong to it." Because such beliefs often are not the inherent property of children who come from splintered families and dangerous neighborhoods, teachers today must work as hard on them as they have always worked on the intellectual side of learning (1992, p. 7).

Several studies have found long-term effects of first-, second-, and third-grade teachers' expectations on children's performance in high school and beyond (Entwisle, 1995). Teachers' expectations for children's success have been shown to have both direct and indirect influences on achievement. Directly, teacher perceptions can affect placement of children in ability groups. Once the child has been assigned to an ability group, Entwisle (1995) explains, "real consequences begin to follow":

Placement in reading groups effectively determines the amount and type of instruction children receive; it influences group process (interruptions and disruptions); and it affects how children are viewed by parents and teachers .... Indirect effects come about when the teacher influences the first grader's own attitudes toward achievement, which are then carried forward within the child" (pp. 238, 240).

In a study by Graue (1992), a six-year-old boy's words illustrate how teachers' judgments in the early school years may shape a child's self-image in a way that may seriously constrain his or her future ability to learn. When asked what skills are needed to succeed in first grade, the child replied, "Read and be good and sit down and be still .... If you don't know how to be good then you'll be a bad boy .... Then you'll have to wish that you were good .... Nobody will want you if you're a bad kid."



More than what districts mandate, more than what teachers teach, it is how children interpret their role as learners that determines what and how they learn. Creating a psychologically safe environment is not a frill to be addressed only after the basics are attended to; for young children, such an environment is essential for learning.

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ADULTS.**

## Culturally Responsive Teaching

*The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique, impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life (Octavio Paz, 1967).*

RESEARCHERS HAVE  
FOUND THAT BY  
THE AGE OF EIGHT,  
DISPARITIES BETWEEN  
THE HOME AND  
SCHOOL CULTURE MAY  
UNDERMINE CHILDREN'S  
ENTHUSIASM FOR  
LEARNING AND THEIR  
BELIEF IN THEIR  
CAPACITY TO LEARN.

A major goal of effective teaching is to make learning meaningful for individual children. In order to make sense of their experience, children must see the connections between what they already know and what they experience in school and other settings. For example, a child who has had little experience with storybooks but who loves to tell stories and engage in dramatic play can be encouraged to act out a story that is read aloud. Increasing the continuity and congruence between children's home experiences and the school environment is particularly critical to the success of children from diverse cultures and social classes.

From the early part of the 20th century, theories of cultural discontinuity have been proposed in an attempt to explain the difficulty encountered by students in adapting to a school environment foreign to the societal norms of their ethnic community. Proponents of the cultural difference approach, such as Cummins, argue that differences between Anglo and minority cultures in values and interaction, linguistic, and cognitive styles lead to cultural conflicts that in turn can lead to school failure (Cummins, 1986).

Sociostructural theorists, such as Ogbu, argue that social and economic stratification lead to rejection of schooling by some groups when they see that schooling does not necessarily translate into social and economic gains. Unlike many immigrant groups who come voluntarily to this country to "begin a new life," minority groups such as American Indians and African Americans were incorporated into U.S. society against their will. Their "caste-like" status may result in a rejection and distrust of schooling (Ogbu, 1982). Both of these theories provide a framework for understanding the school experiences of culturally diverse children.

Although schools are often designed to "use educational technology to 'stamp' a uniform education on all students" (Bowman, 1994), the absence of continuity and congruence between the child's home culture and the school, an absence of shared meaning, may interfere with children's competent functioning in the new setting. Researchers have found that by the age of eight, disparities between the home and school culture may undermine children's enthusiasm for learning and their belief in their capacity to learn (Entwisle, 1995).

Acknowledging and nurturing the cultural knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse children can help bridge the gap between home and school. Based on a number of studies (Campos & Keatinge, 1984; Cummins, 1983; Rosier & Holm, 1980), Cummins maintains that "widespread school failure does not occur in minority groups that are positively oriented towards both their own and the dominant culture, that do not perceive themselves as inferior to the dominant group, and that are not alienated from their own cultural values" (p. 22).

But creating a culturally responsive and relevant learning environment can only be achieved through in-depth work. Bowman (1994) suggests that in order for schools to release the educational potential of poor and minority students, they must first understand how these children have learned to think, behave, and feel.

## Reflective Self-Analysis

One of the first steps teachers can take is to engage in reflective self-analysis to examine their own attitudes toward different ethnic, racial, gender, and social class groups (Banks & Banks, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Phillips, 1988). Because our own cultural patterns and language are seldom part of our conscious awareness and seem quite natural, "just the way things are," we often forget that our taken-for-granted beliefs and values are interpretations that are culturally and historically specific. As Native American author Jameke Highwater says, "We do not all see the same things" (1981, p. 59) (see Handout 5).

As our schools are becoming increasingly culturally diverse, our teachers are becoming increasingly White and middle class (Delpit, 1995). When members of the dominant culture have little opportunity to experience other ways of seeing and knowing, other world views are dismissed as illusions or as deficient, in need of remediation (Highwater, 1981). We all bring our own "private collection of biases and limitations to the classroom," reminds Vivian Paley. In *To Become a Teacher*, Nancy Balaban (1995) writes:

Critical to truly seeing and understanding the children we teach is the courage to reflect about ourselves. Facing our biases openly, recognizing the limits imposed by our embeddedness in our own culture and experience, acknowledging the values and beliefs we cherish, and accepting the influence of emotions on our actions are extraordinary challenges (p. 49).

A number of strategies (e.g., reflecting on one's own life story or videotaping classroom interactions and examining them for bias) can help all concerned gain the self-awareness needed to begin a classroom conversation on the deeply-held, often taken-for-granted beliefs and biases that make up the ecology of the classroom and society. Using multicultural literature dealing with issues pertaining to race, class, gender, or disability can teach children to think critically and, at the same time, build a democratic classroom and school (Braxton, 1999).

In Beverly Braxton's third- and fourth-grade classroom, the children read *Crow Boy* by Yaro Yashima, a story about Chibi, a boy who for five years is made to feel alienated and isolated at school. Children respond to questions that identify different ways

that people reinforce discrimination, consider the power of nonverbal messages, and encourage understanding of what it feels like to be excluded based on differences. To help her students empathize with Chibi, Braxton asks them how they might feel if they were him. She asks: "How was Chibi made to feel? How might you feel if you were Chibi? Why might you feel that way?" (Braxton, 1999, p. 25).



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CLASSROOM AND SCHOOL  
(BRAXTON, 1999).**



CHILDREN NEED  
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A BOOK AND FIND  
THEMSELVES IN IT.

The multicultural curriculum advocated by many early childhood educators, then, is not merely a “tacos on Tuesday” or “tourist” approach to diversity, one that emphasizes the “exotic” differences between cultures by focusing on holidays, foods, and customs. Derman-Sparks (1992) points out that such an approach tends to ignore the real-life, everyday experiences and problems of other cultures and can lead to stereotyping. Instead, the suggested approach is to view multicultural education as a perspective that is integrated into the daily activities of the classroom. If it begins with teachers’ self-reflection, it also includes an examination of the racism and biased attitudes and behaviors that are structured into our society and our schools, and an exploration and validation of the many cultures that make up the classroom, our nation, and our world.

### Creating a Culturally Safe Environment

Key to this approach is the assumption that diverse languages and ways of understanding and interpreting the world are an asset and a resource, not a liability. In order for children to construct a “knowledgeable, confident self-identity” (Derman-Sparks, 1989), schools must stop requiring children to “subtract” their language and cultural identity and replace it with the language and culture of the dominant group, a process known as assimilation. Rather, they must acknowledge and build on cultural differences, while at the same time preparing children to live successfully in both worlds—their home culture and the larger society.

According to Rosegrant (1992), a teacher in a multilingual kindergarten, the first place to start is with the child’s family. In order to create a “culturally safe” classroom, she finds out as much as possible about the family backgrounds and experiences of all the children by surveying parents, by reading multiple books on the represented cultures, and by careful observation of children to “see what experiences seem to connect with them.” She describes a little girl from Africa who had listened to many African stories before one in particular connected to her experience:

The story was *Bringing in the Rain to Kapiti Plain*, and in it a shepherd is depicted standing on one leg—“like a stork.” The child brightened immediately and yelled out, “That’s how people stand in my country!” Her enthusiasm communicated to me that she feels culturally safe in our classroom (p. 146).

In order to legitimize the contributions of all people, early childhood classrooms should include pictures, puppets, dolls, foods, and other objects for dramatic play that represent diverse cultures and people with disabilities. A wide variety of multicultural learning activities and materials ensures that all children see themselves and their families reflected in the classroom environment. “Children need to know that they can choose a book and find themselves in it,” notes a teacher at a Northwest child development center.

### USING LITERATURE

Literature is one of the best ways to learn about diverse cultures and ethnic groups:

- Songs and literature from a variety of cultures, lifestyles, and income groups—especially those represented in the classroom—should be an integral part of the classroom environment. Children need to see “people like themselves” in the stories they read.
- Creating a take-home library of children’s books in diverse languages encourages parents to reinforce the heritage language as well as to read to their children.

- Books and tapes in diverse languages and from diverse cultural perspectives—rather than mere translations of English stories—are particularly salient for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

**The importance of language.** For many years, educators have viewed children who speak languages other than English as deficient. Lack of English has been seen as the problem, and speaking other languages has been thought to interfere with the acquisition of English—the solution to the problem. As a 1918 superintendent noted, the objective for all immigrant children was “absolute forgetfulness of all obligations, or connections with other countries because of descent of birth” (Yzaguirre, 1999). This sentiment is illustrated by the following story: According to legend, Henry Ford periodically staged a ceremony to celebrate “the great American melting pot.” In the ceremony, newly arrived immigrant employees, dressed in their ethnic attire, walked behind a large caldron. When they emerged on the other side, dressed in their new company-provided overalls, they symbolically disposed of their ethnic clothing in the caldron.

Schools have reflected this melting pot concept of America. The role of public education has been not only to produce future workers but to socialize students into the existing social, economic, and political ideologies by transmitting knowledge, skills, and social and moral rules of the culture (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). However, a number of studies have found that when children’s language and culture are incorporated into a challenging and responsive curriculum, widespread school failure does not occur.

The most successful bilingual programs appear to be those that emphasize and use children’s primary (home) language; the proportion of English instruction increases gradually, from approximately 10 percent in kindergarten to 90 percent in fifth grade (Miner, 1999). Cummins (1986) suggests that “students’ school success appears to reflect both the more solid cognitive/academic foundation developed through intensive primary language instruction and the reinforcement (rather than devaluation) of their cultural identity” (p. 25). There is substantial agreement among researchers on second-language learners that it is critically important that young children maintain and continue to develop their home language while they are gaining proficiency in English (Tabors, 1998). Researcher have found:

- Young children who are forced to give up their primary language and adjust to an English-only environment may not only lose their first language, but may not learn the second language well (Wong-Fillmore, 1991).
- When children have only a partial command of two languages, they may mix both languages in what Selenker (1972) calls “fossilized versions of inter-languages,” rather than using fully formed versions of the target languages (Wong-Fillmore, 1991). While mixing languages may be only a temporary stage before full mastery of two languages, children in environments that do not support language development may not fully master either language. This inability to speak any language with proficiency puts children at high risk for school failure.
- The loss of the heritage language can seriously jeopardize children’s relationships with their families, who may not be fluent in English. The inability to communicate with family members has serious consequences for the emotional, social, and cognitive development of linguistically diverse children (Cummins, 1989; Wolfe, 1992; Wong-Fillmore, 1991).

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Research on bilingual education shows that most children can pick up conversational or “playground” English in a year or two, but may need more time to master academic English, regardless of whether they take part in bilingual education programs or learn in English-only classrooms. Researchers have found that literacy developed in the primary language transfers to the second language. “The reason is simple,” says Krashen (1997). “Because we learn to read by reading, that is by making sense of what is on the page, it is easier to learn to read in a language we understand” (p. 1). The National Research Council (1998), suggests:

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WE UNDERSTAND.**

- Whenever the resources are available, children should be taught to read in their first language while they are mastering oral English
- When that is not possible, substantial levels of oral English competence should be in place before attempting to read in English

Even when teachers cannot speak the language of all children in the classroom, they can communicate to children and parents that their language and culture are valued within the context of the school (Cummins, 1986)(see Handout 6). For example, learning as many words as possible in a linguistically diverse child’s language, encouraging children to teach the class a few words in their language, and providing bilingual signs around the classroom convey to children and their families that diverse languages are valued. Color-coding the signs with a different color for each language draws children’s attention to the different languages used in labeling.

**Stages of second-language learning.** Learning a new language is a huge task, for both children and adults. While many educators believe that young children learn a new language with little effort, studies of the process reveal that mastering a new language takes time, perseverance, and support from adults and peers. Patton Tabors, professor and researcher from Harvard University, points out that children are building the language system from scratch, and, in a busy classroom, they are primarily doing it themselves, without the one-on-one attention they enjoyed as infants.

Tabors and Snow (1994) argue that when children are learning a new language (after the first language is established), they go through four distinct stages. First, children use the home language. When it becomes clear that others do not understand him or her, the child may enter a nonverbal period, a period in which they do not talk at all. While this can be frustrating for teachers, who may refer children for special educational services or mistakenly interpret the silence as stubbornness or noncompliance, Tabors (1999) advises teachers to try to understand the child’s point of view. She offers this analogy to help adults understand why a child might choose this option. “You have just won an all-expense paid trip to Tibet. You get off the plane and enter a crowded airport. You are surrounded by unfamiliar people, sights, and sounds. Congratulations, you have just entered the nonverbal phase!”

After considerable practice, data gathering, and sound experimentation (a period that may last as long as a year), children may be ready to go public with a few individual words and memorized common phrases, such as “my turn,” and “give it to me.” Finally, children reach the stage of productive language use. In this stage children move from using a few formulaic patterns, such as “I wanna” coupled with names of objects (e.g., I wanna paper), to an understanding of the syntactic system of the language. At any stage, a child may use the strategies of an earlier stage. “Learning a second language is a cumulative process,” explains Tabors (1999). “It’s highly volatile; at any point, a child might have it one minute and lose it the next. It’s important for teachers to be aware of how a child feels, and provide lots of nonthreatening opportunities for the child to talk with adults and peers.

**Including families.** Developing strong family/school partnerships is essential to providing cultural continuity for children (Wolfe, 1992). Creating and sustaining partnerships requires open, two-way communication in the family's first language. Classroom study teams, school advisory groups, and multicultural planning sessions can be effective strategies for including parents' voices in decisions about curriculum and school policies. Encouraging children to bring pictures of their families and share favorite stories or songs from home, and asking family members to share aspects of their culture, can help children feel secure and valued for who they are (Boutte & McCormick, 1992). Parents and other family and community members may be encouraged to visit the school to read, tell stories, and share oral traditions, beliefs and values, and knowledge of traditional celebrations, art, music, poetry, and dance (Wolfe, 1992).

It is important to respect a family's beliefs about sharing their culture and language; some families may feel that this practice is intrusive. It is also important to help children be comfortable with their parents' visits. Because English is a high-status language, children may learn early that other languages are less valued, and feel ashamed of their home language and culture. A teacher in a Northwest Head Start classroom tells how she dealt with a tense situation in her diverse classroom:



Our children are used to diversity and tend to take most things in stride. But when Ruby, whose mother is deaf, entered our program, we noticed that she would ignore her mother, often going to the far end of the room to avoid her. We soon realized that Ruby was embarrassed by her mother's use of sign language in the classroom. So we began teaching sign in circle and using it throughout the day. We brought in books in sign language, and the children loved to study them. Over the next few weeks, we watched Ruby change from being ashamed of her mother to being proud of her and of her own ability to use sign language. They became the experts.

**Structuring the language-learning environment.** By understanding the way children learn a first language, teachers can apply these principles to help children learn English. While until recently English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) methods of teaching had a strong behavioristic skills orientation, current practices emphasize a whole language approach. ESL literature identifies attainment of communicative competence as the goal of instruction (Abramson, Seda, & Johnson, 1990). With the recognition that language is best learned through actual use in a nonthreatening social context, language use is encouraged by focusing on meaning rather than correctness of form, regarding errors as part of the learning process (Abramson et al., 1990). Like young children learning a first language, when children's communicative attempts are directly corrected, they may learn that it is better not to speak at all. Modeling the correct form and encouraging further communication help children gain proficiency without damaging their self-esteem.

Teachers can help children connect new words with meaning by using contextual cues, such as gestures, actions, pictures, and real objects. As Okagaki and Sternberg (1994) point out, for children with limited English skills, following teachers' directions and even "figuring out what to do to stay minimally out of trouble is an enormous task" (p. 18). While Anglo teachers typically value the decontextualized "text" over the context, Delpit (1995) observes that other groups, such as Alaska Natives, Native Americans, and African Americans, place a far greater value on context. In a classroom setting, while an Anglo teacher frequently directs children to do something while he or she is engaged in a different task, other cultural groups typically match words with actions.

For example, if a Native American teacher says, "Copy the words," she is at the blackboard pointing. Delpit (1995) points out, "The Anglo teacher asks the children to attend to what he says, not what he does; the Native American teacher, on the other hand, supports her words in a related physical context. What gets *done* is at least as important as what gets said" (p. 98). To help linguistically diverse children feel secure and competent in the classroom setting, as well as to promote English proficiency, teachers should learn to provide as many cues as possible to aid understanding.

Rowe (1986) found that providing ample time for children to answer questions increased the number and quality of responses for all children. Increasing the "wait time" from the usual one second or less to three or more seconds can provide needed time for children not only to reflect on their answers but also to form their words in a second language. Children may need to rehearse their response by first saying the words to themselves or in a low voice, before saying them out loud.

Using lots of predictable books, poems, chants, and songs that include repetition of phrases helps children learn vocabulary and knowledge of story structure within enjoyable activities. Poetry and songs are fun to memorize and can last a lifetime.



Unusual vocabulary and complex word structures are often taken in stride when they appear in songs and poetry. In *Wally's Stories* (1981), Paley describes a five-year-old Japanese girl who was not comfortable with the other children in her classroom and was afraid to speak English. But through memorizing lines from fairy tales, which she “carried around like gifts, bestowing them on children in generous doses,” Akemi began to conquer English:

“I am the wishing bird,” she said, flying gracefully into the doll corner.  
“I wish for a golden crown,” Jill responded, whereupon Akemi delicately touched her head with an invisible wand.

Adults who go about quoting poetry seldom receive encouragement, but the children rewarded Akemi by repeating her phrases and motions. She correctly interpreted this as friendship. Whenever a child copied her, Akemi would say, “Okay. You friend of me” (p. 124).

Through the magic of fairy tales, Paley reports that Akemi progressed from memorizing phrases, to telling imaginative and complex stories, to acting out stories, in a remarkably short time. But it is not only learning new words that may be difficult. Cultural incongruities between the patterns of communication experienced by children in the home and at school can undermine successful learning. For example, many classrooms emphasize individual responsibility and achievement, competition, and teacher-controlled learning. Other cultural groups—such as Native Americans and Alaska Natives—may be unaccustomed to this style of learning, and instead place a higher value on group work that fosters shared responsibility. In addition, Tabors (1998) points out that “high-pressure situations—such as being called on in front of a group—can make even the most confident second-language learners unable to communicate effectively” (p. 23).

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AND POETRY.**

## LANGUAGE TECHNIQUES

When teachers interact with young second-language learners, they automatically use a variety of techniques to help get their message across. These include:

- Using lots of nonverbal communication
- Keeping the message simple
- Talking about the here and now
- Emphasizing the important words in a sentence
- Combining gestures with talk
- Repeating certain key words in a sentence

Source: Tabors, P.O. (1998.) What early childhood educators need to know: Programs for linguistically and culturally diverse children and families. *Young children*, 53(6). p. 24.

In the preschool and early elementary years, learning centers—art, blocks, manipulatives, sand and water play, housekeeping—provide a place where children can use and develop competencies other than language. These centers serve as “safe havens” where second-language learners can watch and listen until they are ready to join in (Tabors, 1998).

Slavin (1995) demonstrated that when teachers support cooperative learning methods, children's interactions become less competitive and more thoughtful and equitable. When children of different backgrounds have opportunities to work together on a project, each child has an opportunity to contribute. Projects that involve exploring the local community can help children understand the region they live in and can serve as the basis for integrating skills in math, science, art, history, and language arts (Rowe & Probst, 1995).



These researchers describe an adventure in learning that began when a third-grade class in Alaska abandoned its traditional science text and participated in weekly projects and field trips to study their community in the Pribilof Islands. The authors report that the project gave the students opportunities to apply prior knowledge in ways that validated their thinking, to learn what it means to be an Aleut, and to value their heritage.

### Summary

Research on resiliency has shown that schools that establish high expectations for all kids—and give them the support necessary to live up to the expectations—have high rates of academic success (Benard, 1993). In order for schools to build on the potential of all children, school staff must create a culturally sensitive environment that is both responsive *and* demanding, an environment where children's multiple intelligences are recognized and nourished. Narrow, culturally biased definitions of "readiness," "giftedness," and "school success" track and label children; low expectations restrict their opportunities and ability to learn. Schools, informed by families and the community, can broaden their definitions of learning and expectations for school success, enhancing the quality of life for all concerned.

## Partnerships with Families

*The presence of parents can transform the culture of a school (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978).*

Three decades of research have demonstrated strong linkages between family involvement in education and school achievement (Riley, 1994) (see Handout 7). Researchers have found that the earlier in a child's educational process family involvement begins, the more robust the benefits will be (Epstein, 1992). The value of family participation in their young children's education is particularly well documented for low-income families and those who are ethnically diverse.

By encouraging and providing opportunities for meaningful family involvement, schools play a critical role in bridging the gulf between home and school. "Just as with kids, it all goes back to the relationship," explains Debbie Fagnant, a teacher in a Northwest school. "It's the same with parents. Parents will be connected to school if they feel comfortable with us, their children's teacher. Establishing that relationship is a big part of our job" (Novick, 1998).

While traditional forms of family involvement focused on the supposed deficits of low-income and minority families, new models that reflect a family-support philosophy emphasize building on family strengths and developing partnerships with families based on mutual respect and responsibility (see Handout 8). In these family-centered approaches, parents are involved as peers, collaborators, and the first teachers of their children, resulting in benefits for children, families, schools, and communities.

Fruchter et. al. (1992) have identified four tenets of programs that have been shown to improve the educational outcomes for all children, particularly low-income and minority children:

- Parents are children's first teachers and have a lifelong influence on their children's values, attitudes, and aspirations
- Children's educational success requires congruence between what is taught at school and the values expressed in the home
- Most parents, regardless of economic status, educational level, and cultural background, care deeply about their children's education and can provide substantial support if given specific opportunities and knowledge
- Schools must take the lead in eliminating, or at least reducing, traditional barriers to parent involvement

Perhaps the most powerful form of parental involvement occurs when parents are actively engaged with their children at home in ways that enhance learning (see Handout 9 for ways that schools can involve families in literacy activities). In a review of the literature on parent involvement in education, Thorkildsen and Stein (1998) reported that a number of activities—such as parents encouraging reading and homework, caring about what happens in class, keeping track of school progress, and finding children a place to study—were correlated with children's school performance. Three main themes emerged from the studies they reviewed:

- A supportive home environment provided by parents with high expectations for their child's success in school consistently has the strongest relationship with achievement
- Parent communication with the school is important, as is communication between the parent and child about school

**PARENTS WILL  
BE CONNECTED TO  
SCHOOL IF THEY FEEL  
COMFORTABLE WITH  
US, THEIR CHILDREN'S  
TEACHER. ESTABLISHING  
THAT RELATIONSHIP IS  
A BIG PART OF OUR JOB.**



- Parents need strong, ongoing support from schools to provide effective parent involvement

## Effective Strategies

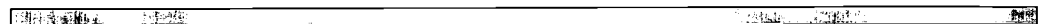
A number of strategies, both formal and informal, have been identified by practitioners and researchers to enhance family/school communication, without putting additional demands on already overburdened families (see Handout 10). Frequent newsletters and positive phone calls, surveys, interactive journals, parenting education classes, home visits, family resource centers, opportunities to serve on site councils and advisory groups, and referrals to community resources help parents feel supported, informed, and included. Nonthreatening and enjoyable activities—picnics, potlucks, work parties, multicultural celebrations, authors' parties, field days, family fun nights, literacy fairs—can lure even the most reluctant parents to school.

### NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters can help families feel informed and included by describing class activities, providing the words to recently learned songs, sharing recipes, and offering examples of children's work and suggestions for learning activities in the home. The Washington Central Kitsap School District offers these suggestions for reading aloud with children:

Reading aloud to children helps them to increase their vocabularies, improve their comprehension, and develop their written and spoken language skills:

- Be consistent with a time and place to read daily. Bedtime is often a favorite time.
- Choose a book appropriate to your child's intellectual, emotional, and social level.
- Stop and discuss what your own thoughts are as you read, and encourage your child to share opinions about characters and events.
- Maintain your enthusiasm and that of your child by selecting books you both find interesting. If neither of you is enjoying the book, discuss why, and choose a more appropriate book.
- Ask your child to make predictions about what will happen next. Read further and, through discussion, compare predictions with what really happened.
- Discuss events that really could happen and those that are pure fantasy, as found in animals talking and science fiction adventures.
- Take turns with your child. Take the part of listener while your child reads. The art of listening is an acquired one. It must be modeled, taught, and cultivated.
- Model your own reading habits. Let your child see you reading books, magazines, and newspapers. Talk about something you've read that you found interesting.



Cummins (1986) cites an example of a successful project in Britain involving children from multiethnic communities, many of whose parents did not read English or use it at home. Yet the researchers found that simply having children read to their parents on a regular basis resulted in dramatic changes in children's progress in reading, surpassing children who received extra instruction from an experienced, qualified reading specialist.

The researchers also found that, almost without exception, parents welcomed the project, agreed to hear their children read, and completed a record card showing what had been read. The teachers involved with the home collaboration found the work with parents worthwhile, and they continued to involve parents with subsequent classes after the experiment was concluded. Teachers reported that children showed an increased interest in school learning and were better behaved.

At Cherry Valley Elementary School in Polson, Montana, staff has found that one of the most successful strategies for building trust and including parents in the school community is “family fun nights.” Like most schools, Cherry Valley teachers found that while there is no trick to attracting White middle-class parents to school events, other families may be disinclined to come to school for a variety of reasons, including lack of time, their own negative experiences in school, and cultural incongruity. Understanding these barriers, Joyce Crosby, Cherry Valley’s Family Enrichment Coordinator, has organized nonthreatening and enjoyable activities that provide opportunities for the whole family to participate.

While some activities target one or two classes, others are schoolwide; all are averaging a 70 percent turnout. During one week, over three nights, a total of 276 parents and grandparents of kindergarten children made play dough together with their children. These informal evenings are not only a perfect setting for parents to get to know each other and school staff but offer opportunities for teachers to talk about how family members can participate in their children’s education. First-grade teacher Doug Crosby explains:

In this country, we often read for extrinsic rewards, like pizza. It’s the American way. What we need is intrinsic motivation, meaning sharing. We work very hard to get families involved in literacy activities with their children—not focusing on a particular set of words but establishing a habit that keeps going. Younger siblings see their older brothers and sisters reading with their parents. They see the enjoyment and they want to read too. Often younger siblings of children in Reading Recovery don’t qualify for this program because of this early involvement with reading.

Creating “traveling books” is another effective strategy used in this small Montana school. Written as a group, with each child contributing a page on a shared topic, these books offer opportunities for families to see the progress of all the children in the class, as well as of their own child. Crosby comments:



Think about a worksheet—it might take 10 or 15 minutes to fill out a worksheet, and it will be thrown away or hung on the fridge. Take a traveling book. It might take an hour to make it. Each child might read it with their mom and dad for 10 minutes. It comes back to the classroom, becomes part of the classroom library, and is read during the day. At the end of the year, it becomes part of the school library. How many hours of reading and enjoyment is that book giving to kids?

These activities go beyond traditional family-involvement strategies, reflecting a philosophy of creating inclusive, supportive family/school partnerships. They are not merely added on to the school day; rather, they are integrated into the school community—a community that includes culturally responsive teaching, authentic pedagogy, and ongoing staff development that encourages and supports learning by all.



## ORGANIZING A SUCCESSFUL FAMILY CENTER IN YOUR SCHOOL

### What Is a Family Center?

#### A family center:

- Provides parents with a room or space for their own use at the school (or district) and facilitates communication between families and the school
- Provides opportunities for parents to get to know each other and network
- Offers educational and socializing opportunities
- Serves various needs of families so that parents and other adults can turn their attention to helping and supporting children

## What are the Advantages of a Family Center?

### A well-designed center will:

- Make the school an accessible, safe, and friendly place for parents to gather
- Improve communication among families and between home and school
- Promote greater multicultural understanding among the school's families
- Demonstrate tangibly that parents are welcome at the school
- Serve as a hub for promoting parent education by linking with community resources and carrying out a wide range of home/school partnership activities that enhance students' learning
- Serve as the center for partnerships
- Help develop leadership and advocacy skills and opportunities for parents to participate in the school community
- Coordinate parent and community volunteer services that are available to teachers and the school

### Key Points for a Successful Family Center:

- Everyone, including families, school staff members, and the community, should experience the benefits offered by the family center.
- As many different parent, school, and community perspectives as possible should be involved from the start to engender a sense of common ownership.
- A time line should be set, tasks and responsibilities should be assigned, and momentum should be maintained.
- Wherever the family center is located, it must be perceived as an accessible and safe place to go. The center should offer a welcoming and friendly atmosphere where parents can relax, visit with one another and with staff members, and obtain help and services that will meet their families' needs.
- A family center does not need a large budget to get started. What is more important is a firm commitment to the idea and a willingness to explore all possible sources of support.
- Participants can share in the responsibility of decorating, furnishing, and supplying the family center. Involvement in those aspects will lead participants to take pride in the center and feel at home there.
- The successful functioning of a family center depends on the selection and training of effective staff and the support and encouragement of the administration.
- Families and school staff members will support the center if the activities meet parents' needs and if teachers perceive that the center is enhancing children's learning.
- Success in reaching out and involving all families requires the center to be a caring and inviting place that meets families' needs.
- From the beginning, clear objectives should be set and evaluation should be planned.

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. (1996). *Organizing a successful family center in your school: A resource guide*. Madison, WI: Author.

**PERHAPS THE MOST  
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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT  
OCCURS WHEN PARENTS  
ARE ACTIVELY ENGAGED  
WITH THEIR CHILDREN  
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ENHANCE LEARNING.**

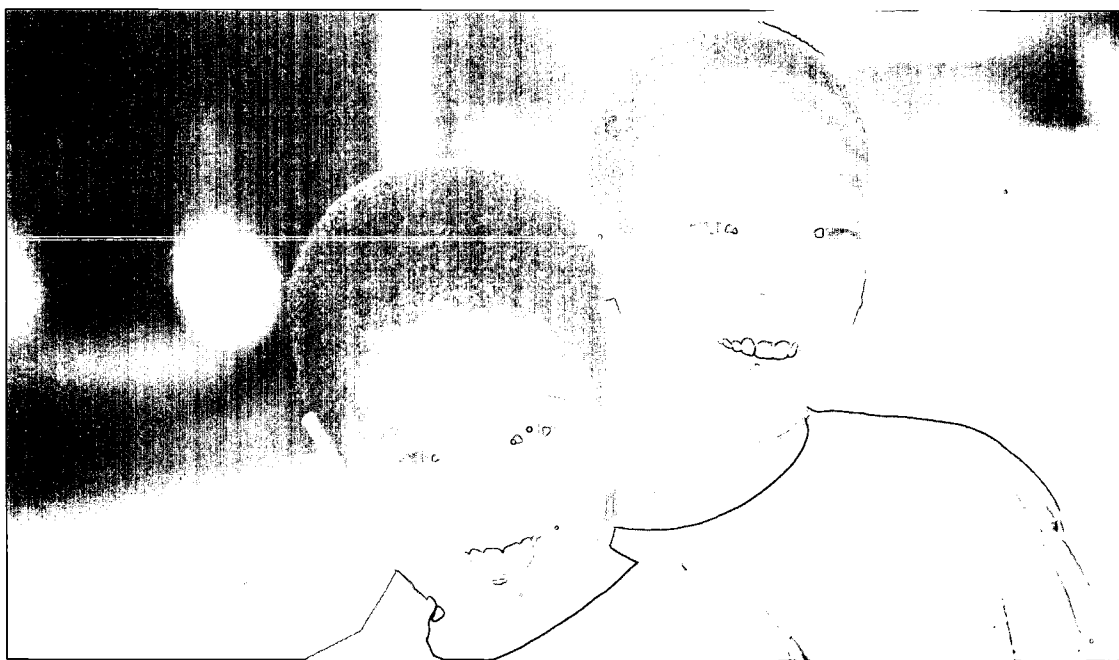
## Child and Family Support Programs: Fostering Resiliency and Emotional Intelligence

*The need to know how someone else feels is the rock upon which the moral universe depends (Paley, 1999).*

Creating supportive partnerships with families and understanding school as a context for children's development reflect a number of tenets (see Handout 11), including:

- The child must be viewed from an ecological perspective—that is, in the context of the family, community, and larger society
- Rather than diagnosing and remediating “the problem,” professionals form partnerships with families—sharing knowledge, building trust, and developing goals and action plans based on family strengths, perspectives, and values
- Both families and children need supportive environments for healthy development. Effective programs help families build informal support networks, as well as link families with health and social service agencies.

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LIFELONG SUCCESS  
THAN IS IQ.



While support programs serve all children and their families, their efforts often concentrate on children who may be experiencing difficulty in the school or home setting. They focus on social and emotional development—helping children to develop a positive sense of self, and to recognize and appropriately express emotions. But rather than encouraging an inward focus—an “I am special because ...” approach, characterized by early childhood educator Lillian Katz as fostering a “collection of self-absorbed individuals”—the goal is to help all children become competent, responsible members of the learning community.

Is the emphasis on nurturing and caring merely a warm, fuzzy approach to education that conflicts with or replaces a more rigorous curriculum? In *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why America's Children Feel Good About Themselves but Can't Read, Write, or Add*, Charles J. Sykes (1995) argues that schools are enhancing children's self-esteem but ignoring the basics. However, many researchers have concluded that emotional intelligence is the bedrock upon which to build other intelligences, and that it is more closely linked to lifelong success than is IQ (Goleman, cited in O'Neil, 1996).

Emotions are not usually something that gets in the way of thinking; they are a crucial source of information for learning—they drive attention, create meaning, and have their own memory pathways (Jensen, 1998; Greenspan, 1997). In *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*, author Eric Jensen explains why engaging children’s emotional response is important for robust learning:

Emotions engage meaning and predict future learning because they involve our goals, beliefs, biases, and expectancies ... the systems [for thinking and feeling] are so interconnected that chemicals of emotion are released virtually simultaneously with cognition (p. 93).

The stronger the emotion connected with an experience, the stronger the memory of the experience. Intense emotions trigger the release of the chemicals adrenaline, norepinephrine, and vasopressin. They signal the brain, “This is important—keep this” (Jensen, 1998). But emotions can also inhibit the thinking process. Under conditions of high stress, the brain goes into “survival mode”; higher-order thinking is impeded. Although in many schools, there are few opportunities to talk about feelings and concerns, children’s ability to learn is often jeopardized by the neglect of their emotional well-being.

Armstrong (1987) points out that while feelings can get in the way of learning, at the same time they hold the key to academic success. “Ignored or hidden from sight, they can sabotage youngsters’ efforts to succeed. Acknowledged as real and given the opportunity for appropriate expression, they can pave the way for effective learning to occur” (p. 97). School-based child and family support programs provide opportunities for children and families to discuss feelings and concerns in a supportive environment, an environment that focuses on problem solving, rather than assigning guilt or deciding who is wrong (see Handout 12).

Because the goal is for children to learn to think for themselves and to care about others, behavior is not seen as something to be “managed.” Instead, children are helped to think through their emotions, to reflect on their actions, and to imagine how others think and feel. Author and educator Alphonse Kohn points out: “To help students become ethical people, as opposed to people who merely do what they are told, we cannot merely tell them what to do. We have to help them figure out—for themselves and with each other—how one ought to act” (1996, p. 4).

Effective programs are an integral part of the school program that supports resiliency for all, and are informed by a strong philosophical and research base. In identifying characteristics of the highly effective Polson Partnership Project in Polson, Montana, (see p. 53 in this document), Cherry Valley Principal Elaine Meeks observes:

We are seeing that commitment to the project and eventual success for students is dependent on strong support from the school personnel. It is critical that the program be fully integrated as part of the school program with the understanding that to provide for human service needs is an important part in ensuring equity in education for all students.

Programs may include a number of components and characteristics:

- *Family advocates, child and family mentors, and child development assistants* (who may be funded with Title I monies) can play an important role in bridging home and school and in breaking down barriers that inhibit home/school partnerships. They often design inclusive family involvement and parenting education activities, and help families access needed health and social services. Though typically not certified counselors, advocates work closely with counselors and social workers, serving

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**ACADEMIC SUCCESS.**

as a special friend and mentor to children identified as needing extra support. They also provide individual consultation and assistance to teachers regarding the students and families they work with, as well as coach teachers in the use of strategies to promote children's social and academic skills.

Both training and ongoing support are crucial. When there are a number of family advocates in a district, it is helpful to form a support network that meets on a regular basis. The effectiveness of family advocates is greatly enhanced when they are fully integrated into their school communities.

**PARENTS ARE  
ENCOURAGED TO  
SEE THEMSELVES AS  
IMPORTANT TEACHERS,  
EVEN IF THEY HAVE  
LIMITED READING  
SKILLS.**

- *Home visiting programs*—sometimes with parents visiting other parents who become links between parents and schools—have been effective in including families in the school community. Careful attention to cultural issues and the comfort level of families is crucial to their success. Major elements include (Heleen, 1992):
  - Paid parent support workers, selected on the basis of previous experience in counseling or training in community settings
  - Systematic training, supervision, and support
  - Services that provide information about school programs
  - Services demonstrating positive ways to work with children
  - Services that offer referrals to health and social service agencies
  - Meetings between teachers and home visitors to exchange information and ideas
- *Family resource centers* (see sidebar on pp. 38-39) provide an inviting place where parents can chat with other parents and teachers, watch informational videos, and learn about school activities. In addition, they often provide resources and information about health and social service agencies, adult educational opportunities, child development, school policies and procedures, and how to support their child's education. Most important, family resource centers are a highly effective way to communicate to parents that they are welcome at school.
- *Family literacy programs* have been successful in creating home/school partnerships and in providing enjoyable intergenerational educational experiences. Based on the premise that the family literacy environment is the best predictor of a child's academic success, the goal of family literacy programs is to provide opportunities for children and parents to learn together.

Programs may include book giveaways, lending libraries for parents, workshops on storybook reading, early childhood programs, adult basic and parenting education, and coordination with other service providers. Parents are encouraged to see themselves as important teachers, even if they have limited reading skills. For example, parents are encouraged to engage in a variety of enjoyable activities with their children, providing questions and comments that promote language development, and to view storytelling as an important literacy activity that lays the foundation for learning to read. Linguistically diverse parents are encouraged to tell stories, to read to children in their primary language, and to share knowledge of their culture, helping the child to connect their life outside the school with literacy activities.

- *Effective transition practices* between the home and school settings and between school settings help teachers build on children's strengths and experiences. *Transitions to School* (1995), a publication focusing on recommended practices designed to facilitate a child's movement into kindergarten and the primary grades, summarizes what is known about successful early childhood transition services and highlights existing policies and approaches. Effective practices include:

- Parent involvement
- Preparation of children for the transition
- Clear goals and objectives agreed upon by all parties involved
- A shared commitment to the successful transitions of young children
- Shared decisionmaking among home, preschool, school, and community representatives
- Cultural sensitivity
- Specific assignments of roles and responsibilities among all parties, including interagency agreements
- Specific timelines for transition activities



Attention to the transition from elementary school to middle school can play an important role in helping children adapt to a new and often very different school setting. In Polson, Montana, school guidance counselors from both elementary schools and the director of the Polson Partnership Project (a school-based child and family support program) take all fourth-grade students on an all-day field trip where

**STUDENTS IN SMALL SCHOOLS HAVE MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL, HIGHER LEVELS OF EXTRACURRICULAR PARTICIPATION, BETTER ATTENDANCE, MORE POSITIVE SOCIAL RELATIONS, LOWER DROPOUT RATES, AND A GREATER SENSE OF BELONGING.**

they enjoy team-building activities and make new friends. It is a day, in Principal Elaine Meeks' words, "when they celebrate the unity and beauty of where we all live."

- *After-school programs* can provide an inviting, safe environment for children to engage in academic, cultural, artistic, and recreational activities. Although over 28 million children have parents who work outside the home, many of these children do not have access to affordable, quality care during the hours before and after school. There are an estimated five to seven million "latchkey children" who go home alone after school (Source: <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/SafeandSmart>).

Quality after-school programs can provide much-needed supervision of children during out-of-school hours, and can positively impact social interactions and academic achievement, particularly when there are links between school-day teachers and after-school personnel. Wellesley College's National Institute of Out-of-School Time has identified four desired outcomes for after-school programs and the children who participate in them:

- Relationships with caring, competent, and consistent adults
- Access to enriching learning activities
- Access to safe and healthy environments
- Partnerships with families, schools, and communities





◦ Researchers have consistently found that *small schools*—a maximum of 800 students in high schools, 400 in elementary schools—are superior to large schools on most measures of effectiveness. Students in small schools have more positive attitudes toward school, higher levels of extracurricular participation, better attendance, more positive social relations, lower dropout rates, and a greater sense of belonging. Student social behavior—as measured by truancy, discipline problems, theft, substance abuse, and gang participation—is more positive in small schools. Academic achievement is at least equal—and often superior—to that of large schools (Cotton, 1998).

◦ Just as assessment results are used to guide instruction, *program evaluation* guides planning and implementation. Although evaluation is often not the top priority for busy practitioners, evaluation can be a powerful tool for clarifying expectations, for improving services, and for procuring funding. According to Elaine Meeks, Principal at Cherry Valley Elementary School in Polson, Montana, the key to the school's continued success in obtaining grant monies is thorough and ongoing evaluation. She reports that they “evaluate everything. Teachers, parents, and children are included in the evaluation process of determining what works, why it works, what doesn't, and how to improve it.”

Effective programs base their interventions, desired outcomes, and program evaluation on a strong theoretical and conceptual base. Careful attention to the process that produced the outcomes can shed light on the extent of impact and how the change occurred (Schorr, 1997). While increasing educational achievement is a primary goal of schools and the child and family support programs within them, educators know that many factors affect student achievement. Because these factors interact with each other, it is not always possible, nor even desirable, to determine if one particular element or event *caused* a particular result. For example, we know that meaningful family involvement, culturally responsive teaching, authentic pedagogy, and positive discipline that focuses on problem solving and communication skills are positively correlated with student achievement. They interact with and reinforce each other, creating a caring environment that supports healthy development.

Each element of a program can and should be evaluated, however. Information can be collected on family involvement, parent, student, and staff satisfaction with school climate and activities; student attendance; children's social and emotional development and behavior (see Handouts 13 and 14), teachers' and students' attitudes toward school, and, of course, student academic achievement. Methods of collection may include quantitative measures, such as numbers of parents at school events, student attendance, structured interviews, and surveys with rating scales.

Qualitative measures—which are designed to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms—can include open-ended interviews and focus groups with children, school staff, and families.

Of course, questionnaires can include closed-ended questions (which can be answered with a yes or no) and also provide space for comments, such as the survey used at Mary Harrison Elementary School in Toledo, Oregon (see sidebar). Collecting stories from all participants can provide powerful illustrations of a program's work.

A number of resources are available to help programs assess their effectiveness. A program self-assessment toolkit from the Family Resource Coalition of America provides specific benchmarks to help family support programs assess all aspects of their day-to-day operations, identify program strengths, clarify areas for improvement, and develop a plan for improvement (Family Resource Coalition of America, 1999). The *Inno Net Toolbox Web site* (<http://www.inetwork.org>), offers tools and instruction for creating detailed evaluation plans, as well as program and fundraising plans. Also available is a database that provides downloadable generic surveys, interview guidelines, and tips for collecting data. The United Way Internet site (<http://www.unitedway.org/outcomes>) is a guide to resources available for measuring program outcomes for health, human services, and youth and family service agencies.

**PARENT SURVEY**  
**AT MARY HARRISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
**(TOLEDO, OREGON)**

This is a survey we are asking you to fill out for us. It is about your child's start at school. These results will help us make an even better start next year.

Did you know what room or teacher your child had before the first day?  Yes  No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Did your child feel welcome at school?  Yes  No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Did you feel welcome at school?  Yes  No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

When you left your child at school, did you feel they were in a safe, caring place?  Yes  No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Did you have specific concerns or questions that did not get answered?  Yes  No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Was there something special about your child's first day?  Yes  No

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

- Obtaining ongoing *funding* for support programs can be a daunting task, even for seasoned grant-proposal writers. In a recent regional needs-assessment undertaken by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, stable funding for such programs was identified as a need by a number of educators. While Federal Title XI and Title I monies may be used to fund some portions of support programs, including a family advocate position, not all schools qualify for these funds. In addition, other programs that compete for these funds may take precedence.



With increased recognition that schools are responsible for creating and maintaining a “warm school climate where children can learn in peace” (Sherman, 1999), more monies are becoming available for schools to create learning communities where all children feel valued and cared for. Successful programs typically utilize a variety of funding sources, including state, federal, and private foundations (see Handout 15). The Internet provides easy access to a wide variety of funding sources. The Northwest Regional Educational Lab-

oratory’s Child and Family Program has compiled an extensive list of resources that may be reached through their Northwest Education Collaboration Web site at <http://www.nwrel.org/cfc/frc/funding.html>. The site also offers tips on funding, including:

- Look for both public and private funding sources.
- Study funding sources to learn their priorities and funding process.
- Customize your appeal to their priorities and your needs.
- In your written application, follow the format provided by the grantee. Be concise, use headings.
- Utilize personal contacts and follow-up letters.
- Collaborative appeals strengthen your requests.

## Conclusion

Research on resiliency has shown that schools that establish high expectations for all kids—and give them the support necessary to live up to the expectations—have high rates of academic success (Benard, 1993). In psychologically safe environments that offer stimulating activities and opportunities to form relationships that are personally meaningful, children form a positive self-image as learners, problem solvers, friends, and family members. Schools, Garnezy (1991) points out, have become a vital refuge for a growing number of children, often “serving as a protective shield to help children withstand the multiple vicissitudes that they can expect from a stressful world.”



Learning how to recognize and manage emotions, understanding how others think and feel, and developing the ability to form caring relationships are essential competencies for children to grow into adults who are able to “live well, love well, and expect well” (Werner & Smith, 1992). School-based child and family support programs provide a safe, supportive environment to learn and practice these competencies. By including families in a caring community of learners, such programs foster resiliency for all: children, families, school faculties, and the communities in which they live.

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HAVE HIGH RATES  
OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS.**

# PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

*Being able to think imaginatively, resolve conflicts with grace, trade ideas with others and feel compassion are the building blocks of human relationships .... How different some adults' lives would be if they had learned these skills as children (Heidemann & Hewitt, 1992).*

## **The Comfort Corner: Helen Baller Elementary School (Camas, Washington)**

### *Highlight My Strengths*

At Helen Baller Elementary School in Camas, Washington, staff members have defined education broadly, to include emotional as well as academic competence. They feel that establishing caring relationships, building on strengths, offering choices, and encouraging responsibility, problem solving, and communication skills are key to establishing a community where all children can learn. One of the key resources for their literacy curriculum, *Highlight My Strengths* by Leanna Traill, quotes a Maori saying: "Highlight my strengths, and my weaknesses will disappear." To convey that message, the entire staff works together to support children and their families. "Education," as a poster in the school announces, "takes everyone."

The Comfort Corner plays an integral role in the school community. Part of the Primary Intervention Program (PIP), it provides a safe, supportive place for all children to "get a healthy start in school by helping to build friendship skills, communication skills, and self-esteem." Funded by a state grant, the PIP has been in operation since 1990 and serves children who may be experiencing difficulty in classroom, playground, or home situations. Children are selected on the recommendation of parents, teachers, and other staff members.

Parents, in particular, are an important part of the program, sharing their views about their children and helping to set goals for their children's growth, as well as benefiting from both formal and informal parenting education. "We try hard to honor all parent requests. No one knows the kids like parents do," explains child development assistant (CDA) Kathy Duley. Based on research on resiliency, which found that one of the key protective factors for resilient children is a relationship with a caring adult (Werner & Smith, 1992), Duley has served as "a special friend and supportive listener" to approximately 300 children since the program began. She provides the one-on-one attention and support that many children need in order to grow into competent and caring adults.

### **The Role of the Child Development Assistant**

According to Helen Baller's parent handbook, the CDA offers children assistance in a variety of ways, including: "providing a committed, accepting human relationship, encouragement of appropriate expression of feelings, assistance in developing coping behaviors, providing structure/limits within a caring relationship, providing an escape

from stress of school and peer worries, and advocacy for the child (helps others to see him/her as a lovable child).”

How does Duley, whose excitement about her job is contagious, accomplish all this? “They think they just come in and play,” she says of the kids in her charge. Which isn’t surprising—in the Comfort Corner, for about 40 minutes every week, children sing, dance, read stories, draw and paint pictures, watch videos, make snacks for guests, play with puppets, write letters, play games, and talk. No wonder children frequently ask her, “What do I have to do to get in your room?”

Although the Comfort Corner is a tiny office space adjacent to the music room, it is filled with children’s art and equipped with bright blue child-size sofas and chairs, stuffed animals, puppets, overflowing book shelves, a tape player, and a small space for dancing—all the things a child might need to feel at home. During the first weeks of school, activities center on building trust and self-esteem. “Kids won’t open up if they’re not confident,” says Duley. “I let them know from the get-go that, with the exception of abuse, what they say is between them and me.” Duley uses a variety of tools to open up conversation. “Initially, I introduce the speaking ball that we use when it’s our turn to share, and I tell them a little about myself and my family—my husband, our cat, my three children and my seven grandchildren.”

While part of the time is spent working on social skills and basic life skills, such as what to wear in the snow or how to make and serve a snack to a friend, it is feelings that have center stage in the Comfort Corner. A feelings chart helps children recognize and talk about their feelings, but of course children don’t just talk—they also sing,

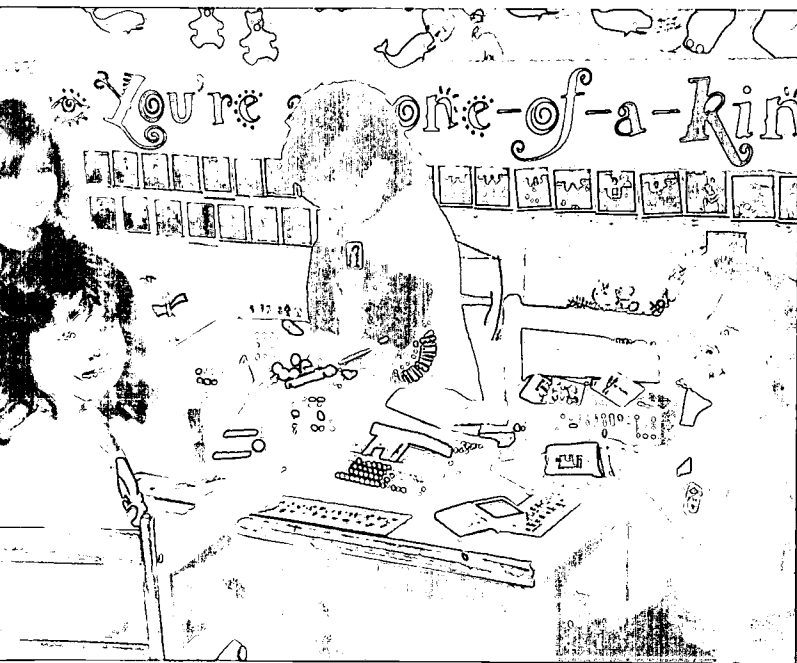
read aloud, act out, and paint their feelings. Duley might ask them to draw a picture of how they feel today or a time when they felt sad, angry, or happy. Or after watching a video of *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, Duley asks, “What was the worst day you ever had?” Then they talk about and illustrate it.

Music helps lighten the tone, and circle time is used for singing, dancing, and affection. Even for children who

are not comfortable with hugging, “circle hugs”—a hand squeeze acknowledged with an “I got it,” and “sent” to the next the circle partner—helps everyone feel included and valued. In follow-the-leader, everyone in the circle matches the leader’s expression. “A lot of children think it’s not OK to be angry,” explains Duley, “so I tell them, ‘Show me how to look angry. Let it shine!’”

Book shelves spill over with stories about bad dreams, bad days, divorce, and every imaginable kind of feeling. *On the Day You Were Born* and *I’ll Love You Forever* are

**NO WONDER  
CHILDREN FREQUENTLY  
ASK HER, “WHAT DO  
I HAVE TO DO TO GET  
IN YOUR ROOM?”**



favorites. “Many children hear, ‘If it weren’t for you things would be better, I wouldn’t have to work so hard, we’d have more money,’ notes Duley.” These stories help them imagine a happier family.”

Imagining is something the children do a lot. Duley invites them to imagine a perfect day or asks, “What would you do if you were president?” And many of the answers belie the playful nature of the activities and the idea of carefree childhood: “On my perfect day, I would go out and work and surprise my mom with a whole bunch of groceries.” “If I were president, I would give everyone a dollar and then they would have money.” “I would make abuse against the law and then my dad wouldn’t hit my mom.” “I’d bring back to life the person my father murdered so then my dad wouldn’t be in jail anymore.”

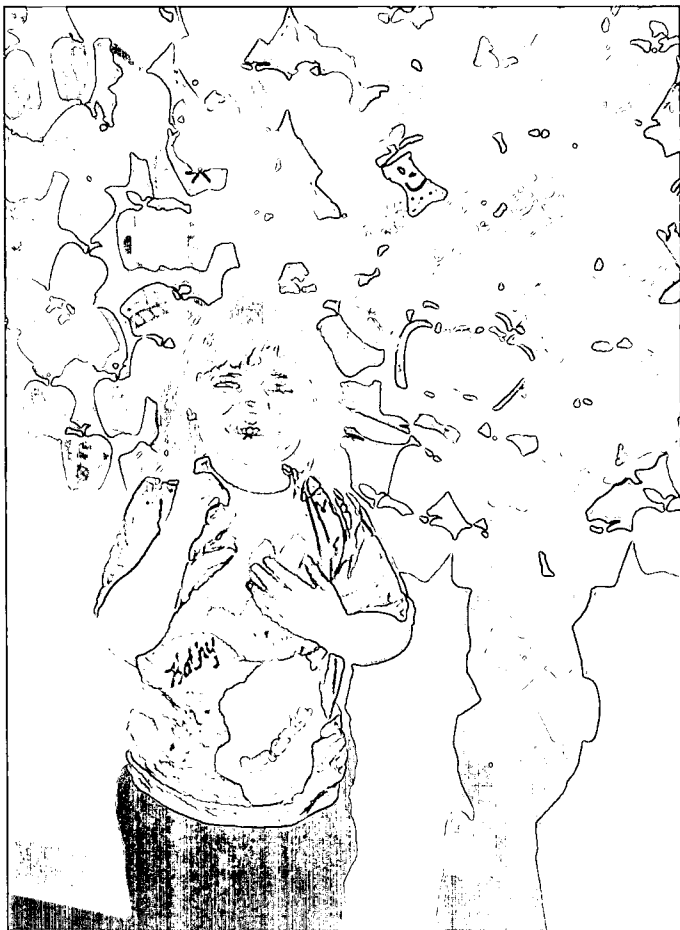
A worry box provides a tangible way to relieve anxiety. Children write down their most pressing worry and talk about it with the group—what they can do about it, how they feel about it. Then when they are ready to get rid of it, they put it in the box. But they know it’s OK to say on another day, “I have that worry again,” and they can start the process all over again. “The worry box gives children permission not to worry,” Duley says. “I always have a plan for the day, but the kids set the mood. If they have something pressing to discuss, we always work on that first.”

Brain research has demonstrated that emotions can speed up or inhibit the thinking process. Under conditions of high stress, the brain goes into “survival mode,” and higher-order thinking is impeded. Creating a psychologically safe environment that fosters emotional intelligence, then, is not a frill to be addressed only after the basics are attended to; for young children, such an environment is essential for learning. And

although in many schools there are few opportunities to talk about feelings and concerns, children’s ability to learn is often jeopardized by the neglect of their emotional well-being. “When children are worried about Dad going to jail, not enough money to pay the rent, or parents fighting, learning is the last thing on their mind,” notes Duley.

Every year, between one and three children in Duley’s class are “school phobic”—children who are extremely anxious and even physically sick at the thought of school. Depending on the severity of the problem, Duley might ride the bus with them, meet them at the door, let them spend the first few minutes of the day in the Comfort Corner, and let them use as many as three tickets a day for time in the Comfort Corner during the school day. By the end of the year, these children need less time with Duley, and when they are in the Comfort Corner, they are usually helping her. Duley believes the first step in helping children overcome fear is helping them understand that “everyone has fears about something, and it’s OK to feel afraid.” In fact, feeling OK about feelings is a central message at the Comfort Corner.

**A LOT OF CHILDREN  
THINK IT’S NOT OK TO  
BE ANGRY, SO I TELL  
THEM, “SHOW ME  
HOW TO LOOK ANGRY.  
LET IT SHINE!”**



## It's OK To Be Mad but it's Not OK To Be Mean

"It has basically been a lifesaver for us. I wish all kids could have this program," explains Jenny Sorenson, mother of Max, a successful graduate of the PIP Program:

Although our son was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) before kindergarten, we wanted to work on our parenting skills, rather than using medication. But when Max entered school, I visualized a free parking place right in front of the principal's office—I knew I would wear a path between home and school because of his behavior and quick temper.

But in the Comfort Corner with Kathy, he has learned to talk about and express his feelings in an acceptable way. Now he tells me, "Mom you really made me angry when you wouldn't let me wear my red shirt with my blue pants." Or he tells his dad, "Dad, you can take me to the park at 8:30; that's what they have street lights for." Then we can talk about it and work out a solution. Before he would just blow up.

His communication skills have really improved. He doesn't need to be reminded to use them. When a Portland Trail Blazer player punched a fan, he told us, "I should send him my sign that says, 'It's OK to be mad but it's not OK to be mean.' He could put it in his living room like I do. Then he wouldn't have to punch people."

Max agrees with his mother's assessment. An unusually mature, articulate child of seven, Max appears at ease as he recounts his first experiences in the Comfort Corner:

At first, I was kind of shy. But then I got to know Kathy and felt comfortable. We talked a lot about feelings, so I didn't feel sad and mad all the time. If I have a problem, I don't say, 'I don't want to talk about it' like I used to. I can talk about how I feel—angry, sad, down, left out.

And sometimes I don't feel like talking. Sometimes I just handle it myself. I go in my room and put up a sign that says, 'Don't come in.' Then I climb up on my bunk bed and hang on the bars and think of something to do. I know that it's OK to feel mad and sad. Some people laugh when people cry, but you don't have to be shy about crying. It's OK to cry; some kids don't know that. And that's OK too.

After participating in the program for two years, Max and his parents are confident that he can be successful in any of Helen Baller's classrooms. The friendship skills, communication skills, refusal skills, and conflict-resolution skills learned and practiced in the Comfort Corner have transferred to his home, the playground, and the classroom. While in the past he might have been tempted to use force to resolve a conflict, he is now able to reflect on a situation and evaluate his own responsibility in creating and solving it:

Sometimes kids on the playground like to start a fight. I try to handle it myself by telling them no; but if they punch me, I tell a teacher. I think it started when I brought my karate trophies to sharing time in the first grade. I got a reputation as a tough guy. Some kids don't know how to stand up for themselves, and they keep asking me to beat up other kids for them. Boy, do I wish I had never brought those karate trophies to school!

**WHEN CHILDREN  
ARE WORRIED ABOUT  
DAD GOING TO JAIL,  
NOT ENOUGH MONEY  
TO PAY THE RENT, OR  
PARENTS FIGHTING,  
LEARNING IS THE  
LAST THING ON  
THEIR MIND.**



Despite ongoing challenges, Max is enthusiastic about the program and explains that he learned a lot and enjoyed himself too. “My favorite part was making pictures and when we wrote the president. We got to write about what we would do if we were president. I said I would stop nuclear wars—I mean nuclear activities. I’m not so worried about wars any more, but there are way too many wars going on—it’s really starting to get stupid.” Max also loved the many stories they read and discussed. His favorite story, *The Great Blueness*, is “about a kid who was feeling left out and wouldn’t talk to anyone. I learned a lot from that book. I try to learn everything I can about what I see, do, and hear. I may be a scientist when I grow up.”

At the age of 7, despite a diagnosis of ADHD, behavior problems, and a “quick temper,” Max has formed a positive self-image as a learner. Because the attitudes and patterns of learning established in the early years tend to persist, fostering a positive self-image is crucial for future success in school and beyond (Entwisle, 1995).

### Effectiveness of the PIP\*

The response to the PIP—from parents, children, and staff—has been overwhelmingly positive. The program plays a pivotal role in helping children like Max—whose parents have the skills, resources, and motivation to provide needed support—to meet all the goals of the program: developing communication skills, problem-solving skills and coping skills; learning to play cooperatively; improving self-esteem; building an interest in making new friends; and bringing out individual strengths. But despite the additional services of a half-time counselor for children with serious difficulties, not all children fare so well. Notes Duley:

We work with kids who probably aren’t going to make it; they will drop out, end up in trouble—become abusers or abused. You just hope you can give them enough tools so they can beat the odds, something that connects that will help them have the determination to change things. But some will never change because they live it all day every day. All schools can do is give them a safe place to come for six hours a day.

However, combined with a supportive school climate, the PIP is able to bring about, in the words of Superintendent Milt Dennison, “a positive turnaround in the lives” of many students and their families. Although most children spend only one or two years in the program, the relationships formed there are enduring. “All my kids are special,” says Duley. “They can come see me any time. Our relationship doesn’t end when they leave.”

Nor are benefits of the Primary Intervention Program confined to the children and families who directly receive services. The philosophy of the PIP and Duley’s Comfort Corner—establishing caring relationships, building on strengths, offering choices, and encouraging responsibility, problem solving, and communication skills—is integrated into the school community. “A primary goal of education at Helen Baller,” explains principal Pat Edwards, “is to allow children to explore and problem solve; we want to make children aware that they have something to say about what happens, that they can make a choice and that their choices *do* matter.”

\*In 1997, the Primary Intervention Program lost its funding and is no longer in operation.

## Polson Partnership Project: Cherry Valley Elementary School (Polson, Montana)

### *Reducing Relationship Gaps*

Located on the outskirts of the Flathead Indian Reservation—1.2 million acres of lakes, mountains, and wilderness—Cherry Valley Elementary School serves an economically and culturally diverse student body. Ten years ago, with the leadership of Principal Elaine Meeks, Cherry Valley began the process of creating a school culture that supports all children's learning. Over the next four years, utilizing a team process for decisionmaking, teachers began an intensive study of learning and teaching. Based on research into their own teaching practices, as well as educational research, they implemented a child-centered, developmentally appropriate curriculum that focused on literacy as the primary and most essential goal for all students.

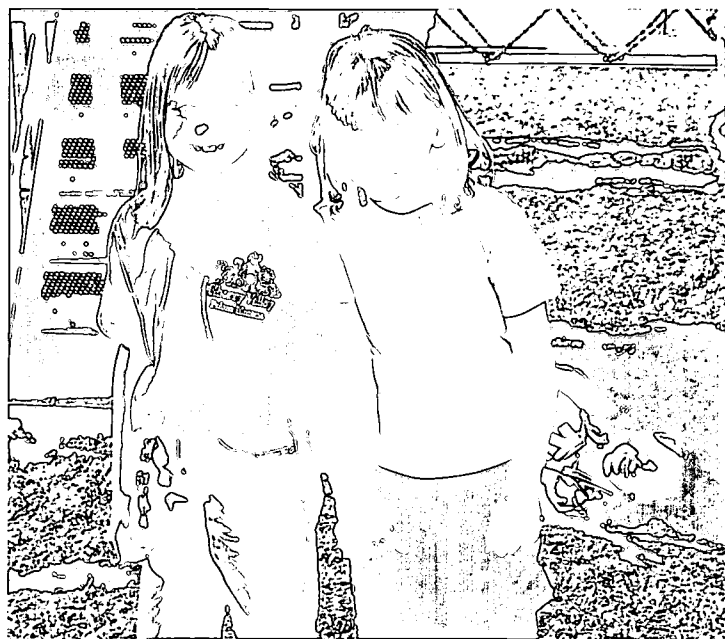
But even with the addition of Reading Recovery, a New Zealand intervention program designed to accelerate the reading progress of struggling first-grade children, not all children were successful. Poor attendance, behavior problems, and personal hygiene issues often got in the way of learning. Some teachers were frustrated with what they perceived as a general lack of family involvement. "If only the parents would ..." was often heard in the teachers' lounge.

"It became clear," says Meeks, "that until needy families can have their human service needs met in a comprehensive, coordinated, and personalized manner, it is unlikely that children from these families will demonstrate improved outcomes." Teachers were particularly concerned that many of the Native American children, who make up approximately 28 percent of Cherry Valley's first- through fourth-graders were "falling through the cracks" of the dual service-delivery system provided by tribal and nontribal agencies. Instead of combining resources to better serve Native American children and their families, poor coordination and jurisdictional battles between the two governments often led to lapses in case management and a general fragmentation of service.

In 1993, a broad base of school personnel and key stakeholders from the community came together to study best practices and conceived the Polson Partnership Project as a means to respond to the needs of the children and families of the school community. Designed to "ensure that all children have a positive, successful school experience and to link families with needed services," the program is directed by a working team that includes: Principal Meeks, Project Director Co Carew, the classroom teachers, the school counselor, a family enrichment coordinator, child and family mentors, representatives of the Native American parent committee and the PTA, and the district superintendent.

During the project's six years of operation, Cherry Valley's teachers and all school personnel have deepened their understanding of how children learn and develop, improved student outcomes, and created an inclusive learning community both inside and outside the school. In addition, as Paul Coats of the Tribal Health and Human Services Community Health Division observes, the project partnership serves as an

EVERY CHILD AND  
FAMILY BENEFITS  
FROM THE ACTIVITIES  
OF THE PROJECT.



important liaison between Native and non-Native people within the schools and in the larger community.

“A big agenda is to increase tolerance in the community,” notes Project Director Carew. “The project has been a catalyst for dialogue about learning practices for all of our children and families. Now children, teachers, families, and community members are offered learning opportunities that are active, hands-on, and specific to our culturally diverse community. Getting people together to work for kids is key.”

**THE RESULT IS A  
PROTECTIVE SHIELD  
THAT HELPS ENSURE  
SCHOOL SUCCESS  
FOR ALL STUDENTS.**

**CHERRY VALLEY ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY**

We believe learning is a process that begins at birth and is lifelong. Consideration of equity and diversity are a basis for ensuring success for all students. Varying social contexts allow children to purposefully select, interpret, and integrate information about their world. All students are expected to become confident, resourceful, disciplined, and self-motivated learners. Responsibility to self and community are emphasized.

Meaningful acquisition and application of content knowledge and process skills is achieved through problem solving, critical thinking, decisionmaking and creativity. There are opportunities for student choice and time for discovery learning with student experience being central to instruction.

Literacy is the primary and most essential goal for all students. Literacy is defined as proficiency in not only the written and spoken word, but also includes numeracy, the arts, and emotions. The curriculum is presented in an integrated format respectful of individual learning styles and abilities. Flexible groupings are based on the nature of the activity and varying rates of growth and development of individual children.

Learning occurs most effectively in a culture that is safe and nurturing. School personnel, parents, and the community share the responsibility to work together to provide a positive school environment.



### **Expanding Services**

In the fall of 1997, the project expanded from its base at Cherry Valley to include Linderman Elementary and Polson Middle School. Responding to an overwhelming need for after-hours care, a pilot after-school program has served over 200 children in the district for each of the last two years. At all schools, the project's implementation has resulted in increased family involvement from families considered at risk, and children are showing better attendance, behavior, and academic performance.

While the project offers intensive and personalized services to the neediest children and families, most activities include the entire school community. Each year, Meeks reports, the project directly affects approximately 3,500 children and families through the mentor program, family fun nights, counseling, and after-school pilot program. “A major strength,” Carew says, “is the inclusive nature of our activities.”

We intentionally avoid creating a separate group of high-risk children. Every child and family benefits from the activities of the project. We reduce relationship gaps—between teachers and families, between classrooms, between the generations, and between the school and the community. And the mutual support means that ideas feed off each other.

## Creating a Successful and Sustainable Partnership

A number of factors have contributed to the project's success. Careful attention to the project-development process and ongoing evaluation have played key roles in the staff's ability to respond to the needs of children and families and in continued success in procuring grant monies. In addition to careful monitoring of student behavior, attendance records, and achievement, the partnership staff uses a variety of evaluation tools, including interest surveys, parent/child feedback, case notes, and teacher/child observations in order to determine achievement of goals and objectives.

Although Carew has found that funding is “the hardest part,” over the years, due in part to thorough and ongoing evaluation, the project has obtained funds from the Meyer Memorial Trust, the West Foundation, the Montana Board of Crime Control, the Office of Public Instruction (Drug-Free Schools Grant), and the Polson School District. Local contributors include St. Joseph's Hospital, the Ecumenical Women's Association, and food banks.

A strong philosophical base that informs practice is essential to program success, notes Carew, a licensed clinical social worker with a strong background in attachment and resiliency theory. By understanding the family, the school, and the community as systems that directly influence children's development, teachers and all project staff are better able to work together to build bridges between these environments and to foster protective factors—thus resiliency—for all children and their families.

The mission of the project is to “define and create resiliency-based collaborations that build on family strengths, cultivate healthy attributes, and create a care-giving environment in the school.” The result, Meeks says, “is a protective shield that helps ensure school success for all students.” The original objectives include:

- Providing teacher education, consultation, and support
- Reducing cultural discontinuity for minority students
- Incorporating cultural enrichment activities into the regular classroom and curriculum
- Early intervention for at-risk children and their families, including case management, referral and collaboration with community resources, individual and family counseling, and a child and family mentor program
- Involving parents in their children's education and development

Each of these objectives is explored in the following section.

## Providing Teacher Education, Consultation, and Support

Ten years ago, when teachers at Cherry Valley began the process of creating a school culture that supports children's learning, it was clear to Meeks that two areas needed to be addressed simultaneously: beliefs and structure. It would not be enough to come to consensus on beliefs about teaching and learning; the school would have to develop the structures to enable teachers and all staff to bring about congruence between their beliefs and teaching practices. Meeks explains:

Sustaining an environment that supports learning for all requires constant monitoring of the match between what we believe and what we actually do. If we really believe it is the children's schools, then we must keep their needs at the center. We can say we believe anything but what we do had better illuminate what we believe. We have to keep taking it back to our philosophy—keep that out in front of us. This is key.

Over the years, professional development activities at Cherry Valley have evolved to focus on four major goals:

- A consistent and unified theory of learning
- Continuity of educational practice with this theory
- Data- or results-driven evaluation (student performance, family involvement)
- An expanded concept of a learning community to include families, community members, and all staff

**WE DO A LOT OF  
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SAY AND CREATING  
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CHILDREN LEARN  
EMPATHY, PROBLEM  
SOLVING, AND ANGER  
MANAGEMENT.**

These goals have become a driving force behind the Polson Partnership Project. From the beginning, teachers have played an integral role in the project, and receive support through individual consultation and assistance to address issues of concern. At Cherry Valley, professional development based primarily on individual and collective inquiry into teaching practices has helped to create, in Meeks's words, "a culture of inquiry and reflectivity focused on teaching, learning, and success for all." This culture has extended to the Polson Partnership Project. Teachers, child and family mentors, counselors, and all staff are asked to think about what they are doing and why, what's working, and what isn't. In a report to the school board, Meeks concluded:

We are seeing that commitment to the project and eventual success for students is dependent on strong support from the school personnel. It is critical that the program be fully integrated as part of the school program with the understanding that to provide for human service needs is an important part in ensuring equity in education for all students.

The project offers training and support to all of Polson's elementary and middle school teachers through individual consultation and assistance regarding specific students and families, classroom presentations to address concerns such as impulse control or anger management, and professional development courses. Course topics have included resiliency, team building and group dynamics, critical feedback and communication skills, community collaboration, and cultural diversity.

In a course on the history of Native American schooling, an historical approach is utilized. Carew, who draws upon her own Native American heritage in her work with children, families, and teachers, adds:

We talk about the boarding schools that were established to remove children from the cultural influences of community and family—where children were forbidden to speak their own languages. In order for non-Indian teachers to support Native children and their families, it is important for them to understand the very real historical baggage that many Native American parents bring to their interactions with schools.

Supporting and appreciating teachers is a critical component of the project. "We empathize with teachers," says Carew. "Teachers are exhausted. In some classes, it is no exaggeration to say that there are three kids on medication for Attention Deficit Disorder and three that probably should be. When there is a high proportion of high-needs kids, they feed off each other." In such cases, Carew may intervene directly in the classroom. Viewing the classroom as a family, she observes and validates the teacher's concerns before intervening directly.

In one classroom, she reports, "the whole group was in trouble—telling on each other, saying hurtful things. Children needed skills to better support themselves and each other." Carew explains:

As a classroom, we problem-solve—we don't allow putdowns; we don't allow anyone to take all the power. We ask the kids, "How do you support yourself—emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually?" We might say, "Do you see how what you said affects her—how do you think it feels? How does this support him emotionally? What did you notice that happened differently?" They know and they are empowered by getting to figure it out.'

Carew often incorporates traditions from her Native American culture in her work. In some classrooms, each child makes an identity shield. Each piece of the shield represents an aspect of the children's lives—their interests, their friends and family. When a child says a kind thing, they attach it to feathers on the shield. "Children learn to recognize their own and their classmates' uniqueness and strengths, and they become more aware of each others' feelings," notes Meeks. "We do a lot of looking at what kids say and creating activities to help children learn empathy, problem solving, and anger management," agrees Carew. "At the same time, we recognize and support teachers' skills in order to foster their self-efficacy and power."

**WE HAVE TO MOVE  
GENTLY WITH KIDS.  
IT OFTEN TAKES  
YEARS TO BUILD  
RELATIONSHIPS.**



## Reducing Cultural Discontinuity for Minority Students

*There is often a chasm between the child's home life and life at school that is not bridged by the conventional elementary school. Sadly, many Native American children drop into this chasm and eventually drop out (Little Soldier, 1992, p. 16).*

Although the Polson Partnership Project serves all children and their families in a variety of ways, approximately 50 percent of children who benefit from the highly specific, individualized, and intensive components are from Native American families. Alaska Native and American Indian children begin dropping out of school much earlier than other groups, often in the middle school years, and research has shown that school failure often begins early, even in kindergarten (Entwisle, 1995; Slavin, Karweit, & Wasik, 1993). Native American children stand a greater likelihood than any other group of being labeled handicapped or learning disabled. They are also more likely to be held back in first grade (where retention rates are highest for all children) and placed in special education by second grade (Paul, 1991).



Theories of cultural discontinuity help to explain the difficulty encountered by some students in adapting to a school environment foreign to the societal norms of their ethnic community. Because schools typically reflect the values and norms of middle-class European Americans, children from other cultural groups may have difficulty adapting. Researchers have found that by the age of eight, disparities between the home and school culture may undermine children's enthusiasm for learning and their belief in their capacity to learn (Entwisle, 1995).

In recent years, after many Native cultures and languages were lost due to a long history of colonization, armed struggle, and forced assimilation, many Native peoples have been actively seeking ways to preserve and revitalize their cultural heritage (Van Hamme, 1996). The Polson Partnership Project works with the Kootenai Cultural Committee, as well as the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, to promote cultural continuity for its Native children. According to Paul Coats, family nurse practitioner at the Tribal Health and Social Services:

The project serves as a key force to assist Native American children in coping and thriving within a predominantly non-Native school environment. This is accomplished via direct support given to Native students. The partnership staff provides tutoring, compassionate problem solving, and a safe, familiar environment for students to retreat into when problems arise. Beyond that, the partnership reaches out to student's family and home community to give support and services wherever needed. Support also comes in the form of advocacy, as the project partnership serves as an important liaison between Native and non-Native people within the schools and in the larger community.

For five years, fluent language speakers from the Kootenai community have taught Kootenai language in the two Polson elementary schools, as well as in the Head Start Program, the reservation school, and at the Salish and Kootenai College. Kootenai language teacher Wayne McCoy explains the goal of the popular language program:

Our Kootenai language is on the brink of being lost to our future generations. Our traditions and heritage are something that the Kootenais cherish and would like to keep for our future generations, so that even the younger generation will teach their children and grandchildren in future years.

Through legends and storytelling, children learn the words that reflect the actual geography and history of the region. "They aren't learning Kootenai words to represent English words like calculator," Meeks says. "For example, McCoy often uses a watershed kit that includes maps of our lakes and rivers and puppets of our local animals made from beautiful materials. This makes it authentic to where we live and relevant to young children. We are building activities to enhance children's understanding through experiential learning."

TWELVE STANDARDS  
FOR AN INDIAN THEORY OF EDUCATION

1. **Spirituality**—an appreciation for spiritual relationships
2. **Service**—the purpose of education is to contribute to the people
3. **Diversity**—meeting the standards of diverse tribes and communities
4. **Culture**—a people's ways of thinking, communicating, and living
5. **Tradition**—continuity with tradition
6. **Respect**—the relationship between the individual and the group recognized as mutually empowering
7. **History**—appreciation of the facts of Native American history, including the loss of the continent and continuing racial and political oppression
8. **Relentlessness**—commitment to the struggle for good schools for Indian children
9. **Vitality**—recognition of the strength of Indian people and culture
10. **Conflict**—understanding of the dynamics and consequences of oppression
11. **Place**—the sense of place, land, and territory
12. **Transformation**—commitment to personal and societal change

I FEEL LIKE I'M IN  
THE PEACE CORPS;  
WE ARE FREE TO  
FEEL OUR WAY.

Source: Grant, A., & Gillespe, L.V. (1993). *Joining the circle: A practitioners' guide to responsive education for Native students*. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. Charleston, WV: Appalachia Educational Laboratory.

In middle school, children have opportunities to learn quilting and beading, drumming, and hoop dancing. Each year, at young persons' Pow Wows children have opportunities to participate in their traditions and dance traditional dances. The middle school drum group has offered a particularly powerful opportunity for children to experience camaraderie, gain a sense of connection to their culture and history, and contribute to their community. "Children are both anxious and excited to present to their classmates, teachers, and families cultural dances so well known to them," Carew says.

For many people in Indian culture, the drum represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth. "These events have a strong spiritual component," explains Carew. "People have little understanding of the duration of violence that Native peoples have suffered. But when you get behind the drum you don't drink or do drugs. You make a commitment to the drum group and to the creator to drum and sing in a good way for the community."

### **Intensive and Individualized Intervention for At-Risk Children and Their Families**

**The role of the child and family mentor.** At the heart of the Polson Partnership Project is the opportunity for children to form a positive relationship with a caring, responsive adult. Based on resiliency research that has identified caring and support as a key protective factor for at-risk youngsters, child and family mentors at each of the district's elementary schools and at the middle school provide support and encouragement for children who are identified as needing individualized services.



COMING UP WITH  
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At the beginning of the year, teachers and project staff assess strengths and risk factors of all children and families as part of a Child Find process. After referral, mentors visit children's homes to assess goals and objectives, identify needs, and begin referral services to community agencies if needed. Becoming a "resource guru" is an important part of the job," notes Lori Johnson, who has been a mentor at Cherry Valley for five years. Parents play an active role in their child's goals and are encouraged to spend time in the classroom, on the playground, and in the after-school program.

Working individually or in small groups, mentors work with children who are experiencing difficulty in one or more areas—self-esteem, impulse control, anger management, peer relations, academic performance, attendance, or personal hygiene. While not trained as counselors or social workers, all of the project's mentors have bachelor's degrees in social work, human services, or education, and they all participate in a number of staff development activities, including workshops on art therapy, resiliency, team building and group dynamics, critical feedback and communication, cognitive coaching, and parenting education. Working closely with Carew and with school counselors, mentors serve as "guides or pals to children." "Unconditional, nonjudgmental interactions and respect are essential in our relationships with children and families," Johnson says.

In the elementary schools, mentors often spend time with children in the classroom, but they don't always interact with children. Johnson explains:

Just having someone pay attention—to know that someone is clearly out for them is enough for some kids. Other kids don't feel comfortable with us in the classroom, so they visit us in the Family Resource Center. Girls love to come during recess. We play cards, visit, and talk. For some of our kids, especially our Native kids, the invitation to "Come and talk to me—the door's always open," isn't enough. There are still barriers. We have to move gently with kids. It often takes years to build relationships. Kids just sit outside the door—they don't knock. They wait—so you open the door slowly—and ask, "What's going on?" "I was just wondering if I could sit with you," they will answer. It has been an awesome growth experience.

While the project looks different at each school, the goals of "ensuring that all children have a positive, successful school experience and to link families with needed services" remains the same. At Linderman Elementary, Principal Gail Becker observes that the project has helped the faculty to create a supportive climate for everyone. "When I first arrived, staff morale was low. There are many talented and committed teachers here, but there was little teamwork," she says. "When the project expanded, it became a visible part of what we were trying to do—a wonderful example of what we were moving toward."

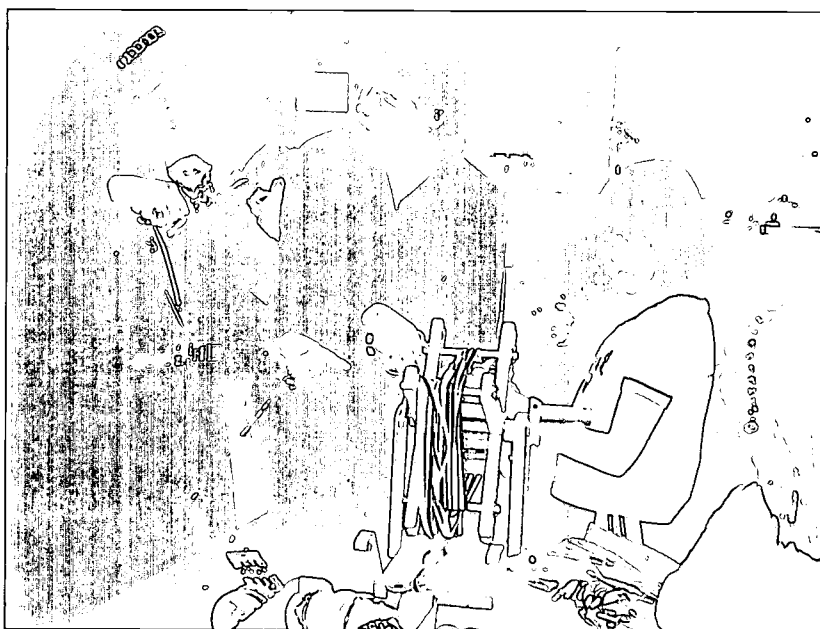
At the middle school level, the project has provided crucial support for students, teachers, and families at a time when students begin dropping out of school. A Big Brother and a big Sister Program, in which high school students serve as Big Brothers and Big Sisters to middle-schoolers, provides peer support. Partnerships with local businesses have enabled students to get job experience and to see the connections between school and work. When placed at a machinery repair shop, a student who had little interest in reading was motivated to read manuals on fixing small machinery.

Working in a pet store has allowed a seventh-grader a chance to get in touch with his nurturing side. One teenager—an indifferent student but gifted artist—has been placed with a local artist and is making signs. For this student, notes Bill Starkey, a district counselor, "having his artwork acknowledged, coupled with the

opportunity to be paid for his artwork (he is paid by the piece) and supervision from an attentive adult, has empowered him about who he is. Recently, his mother picked him up from his job for the first time.”

Working with Carew and the school staffs, mentors organize activities that include all students—horseback riding, lunches, field trips, and skits. Mentors also staff the pilot after-school programs, where children participate in community-service projects, go on field trips, engage in art projects and educational games, enjoy a healthy snack, and engage in cultural enrichment activities. “I feel like I’m in the Peace Corps; we are free to feel our way,” says middle school mentor Linda Greenwood. “No one comes in and says, ‘This is what you need to do.’ In a way, we are creating something out of nothing.”

**Case management.** The project plays a key role in linking children and families with health and social services, and in increasing collaboration between the tribal and non-tribal service agencies. Simply referring families to services is often not enough; families may need help with transportation and other ongoing support. Meeks explains, “Case management used to fall on the school guidance counselor and the principal. In many cases, there simply wasn’t time. Breakdowns happen without ongoing communication between families, social services, and the school.”



Facilitating collaboration between the tribal and nontribal agencies has resulted in increased dialogue between Native and non-Native peoples and in more effective service delivery for children and families. A series of staff development workshops planned by Carew and open to the community was well received by staff from a number of community agencies—the Tribal Social Service, Tribal Head Start, Adult and Family Services, the local hospital, Child Protection, and foster parents. Topics included effective parenting, children and divorce, “understanding your teen’s roller coaster of emotions,” Attention Deficit Disorder, self-esteem and attachment disorder, and social issues impacting the elementary and middle school child.

Over the years, the project has supported families in a variety of ways. Home visits by Carew and child and family mentors provide education and assistance in home living skills, hygiene, behavior management, and health care. Carew provides short-term family counseling as needed and referrals to community agencies for more long-term needs are also made. Through an ongoing relationship with project staff and referrals to counseling services, a chronically depressed parent was helped to overcome depression and obtain a GED. Others have been helped to find housing, to participate in substance abuse and domestic violence counseling, and to transport their children to the dentist or doctor.

One of the triumphs of the 1998-99 school year was a successful campaign against head lice, which for years had caused chronic attendance problems for a number of children throughout the district. Project staff worked closely with school nurses and with families; in some cases, project staff went into the home and provided cleaning services for the families. “For the first time in 10 years, we have been head lice-free for six weeks at a time,” says Linderman Principal Becker. “Some children have gone

from 30 to 90 percent attendance. Now they have a sense of belonging. They love school and they're experiencing academic success—they're not playing catch-up anymore. They're reading and writing."

Forming respectful relationships with families is as essential to the project's success as community collaboration and networking. Working with Native families, in particular, requires time for building trust and rapport. Former Cherry Valley mentor Maggie Ryan explains:

Respect is a major part of Indian culture. White culture has not respected Native families and their strengths. There is an expectation that the dominant culture won't err on the side of caution, and because we do see strengths, trust begins to develop. We provide support, not judgment. There is a need to move in a gentle way. Many Native families have legitimate concerns for expression.

"Coming up with solutions in a way that is not disrespectful is a big part of what we do," Carew agrees. Practical issues, such as transportation, create attendance issues for some children. Many families live miles away—up to 70 miles round trip. Twenty percent have no phones. Almost a third have no reliable household transportation. "Some families weave in and out of life here, and we need to support families to fill those gaps," notes Carew.

For example, half-day kindergarten can pose problems for working parents. Arranging for child care so that a kindergarten child can take the school bus at 3:30 with her siblings was a solution that allowed one five-year-old to be the first in her family to attend kindergarten. "Now she is successful and teachers are happy—she can go into first grade with a foundation," Carew says. "This was not a case of neglect—it was a very practical issue. We have to figure out where gaps are and find respectful solutions."

### **Involving Parents in Their Children's Education and Development**

From the beginning, a primary goal of the project has been to help parents feel a sense of belonging to the school and to the larger community. In an annual report, Carew writes:

A team process has been developed at Cherry Valley whereby responsibility is shared for all aspects of the school community. This creates an atmosphere where children and their families feel a sense of trust, attachment, and a sense of belonging to the school, but to their community as well. When families feel support and encouragement from the school community, they will most likely feel attached to that community, practice the values it promotes, and their children will succeed academically and socially.

Yet Carew notes that there is often a gap between the classroom teacher and parents, and between classmates and other parents. To reduce the relationship gaps and to help parents see the many ways that they can help their children learn, the project sponsors 10 innovative evening programs—family fun nights—each year, which often include children from two or three classrooms and their families. These popular events are averaging 40 to 70 percent turn-out, with more than 100 people—from grandparents to toddlers—enjoying art, math, and literacy activities. During one week, over three evenings, a total of 276 parents and grandparents and their kindergarten-age children made play dough together.

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While these informal activities began at Cherry Valley, all participating schools have experienced success. “At first we were totally astonished when parents flocked here with their children and told us how fun it was,” says Becker. Parents report that getting to know children in a number of classrooms relieves their concerns about their children’s peers. “I enjoyed meeting the ‘bad’ kid in the classroom,” said one parent after a night of making scarecrows. “I liked him and his parents. I talked to my child about behaviors that bugged him and wondered if the ‘bad’ kid needed a friend.”

At Cherry Valley, educating parents and the community about curriculum and assessment approaches has gone hand in hand with changing practices. Including, rather than marginalizing, parents who have concerns helps solve inevitable conflicts in positive ways. Meeks notes, “We have to communicate with parents. Our approach is not a rejection of the basics. We take current knowledge of learning theory and find better ways to teach and learn. We need to have the ability to articulate what we’re doing.”



At literacy fairs and family fun nights, in newsletters, and during parent-teacher conferences, families have opportunities to learn ways to participate in their children’s lives in positive ways. Parenting classes are offered through the Family Resource Center—a large, inviting room adjacent to Cherry Valley, filled with comfortable furniture, a coffee pot, and resources for parents to check out and take home. In classes and informal conversations with Carew, with teachers, and with child and family mentors, parents learn positive techniques for encouragement, praise, and discipline, as well as conflict-resolution and problem-solving strategies.

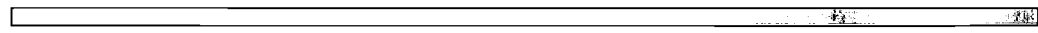
**An array of literacy activities.** Because literacy “is the primary and essential goal for all students,” families are encouraged to participate in a colorful array of literacy activities both at home and at school—literacy fairs, authors’ parties, traveling books, and interactive journals (see Handout 9). In the *Cherry Valley Literacy News*, teachers discuss a number of topics, including Big Books, literacy in the preschool setting, process writing, and the role of phonics in the Cherry Valley literacy curriculum.

FROM THE CHERRY VALLEY LITERACY NEWS

The contribution of art to literacy is multilayered. Since most young children are wildly creative, experiences in various artistic mediums allow for expression of this creativity.

The opportunity to discuss a piece of art with a sensitive adult not only helps a child clarify his thoughts and feelings about his piece, but also validates his perceptions. Discussion of a child's art work enables the teacher to gain insight into the child's interests, hopes, and dreams in an unobtrusive way, thereby increasing her understanding of the child.

Art projects provide a natural springboard for oral and written language activities, which are an integral part of literacy. What better way to encourage speaking and writing skills than to speak or write that which you have created yourself and know best?



For years, children at Cherry Valley have been publishing their own books, which are displayed in classrooms and the library, as well as travel home with children to be enjoyed by the whole family. It soon became clear that teachers could not keep up with the volume of books that were ready for publishing. This year an open, multipurpose room serves as a publishing center, complete with several older computers and a couch and rug. Staffed by numerous parent and community volunteers (including many parents from the onsite Even Start Program), who do some of the typing and all of the binding and laminating, the room is always full of groups of children anxious to see their book become part of the school community.

Recently, their work has found a larger audience, due to a number of parents who regularly bring children's published books to Polson's doctors' and dentists' offices. Now, along with copies of *Field and Stream* and parenting magazines, local residents can not only read the latest student works, but they can also sign their name and write responses to the books on the comment page.

**Celebrating families.** Celebrating the lives of family and community members takes many forms, and often integrates many aspects of literacy—oral, written, and the visual arts. Each year, at a Family Heritage Museum in the school cafeteria, children display the results of their research on their own family tree. Interviews with parents and grandparents yield rich stories, which the children write and accompany with photographs and illustrations.

For several years, both in multiage groups and with their classrooms, children have been visiting a local nursing home and establishing relationships with one or more residents. Children then interview the residents, who frequently tell stories about their lives. Young children may simply remember as much as they can of these stories, while older children take notes. They then write the stories, share them with the residents, make suggested changes and edits, publish the stories, and take them back to the nursing home, where they read to the elderly residents. The project has been met with enthusiasm from the staff at the nursing facility and the residents themselves. A social worker at the facility writes:

I have witnessed contacts between young and old, which can only be described as "touching." Residents are able to hold a child's hand or see a bright young smile. They look forward to these visits and are delighted by the children's eagerness to please and entertain. These

intergenerational exchanges are a benefit for both age groups. They nurture an understanding and acceptance of age difference.

This year, a number of celebrations marked the end of the school year. To ease the transition to middle school, Carew, along with the guidance counselors from both elementary schools, took all fourth-grade students on an all-day field trip where they enjoyed team-building activities and made new friends. "It is a day," notes Meeks, "when they celebrate the unity and beauty of where we all live." A celebration of Kootenai language learning by the kindergarten and first-grade children was held at Elmo, located on the Salish/Kootenai Reservation, and included the whole community.



In a Celebration of Families Pow Wow that included all members of the reservation, Native and non-Native families were honored at Polson High School. Everyone—from toddlers to grandparents—enjoyed chili and fry bread, as well as a wide variety of Native traditions—storytelling, drumming, medicine shield making, bead work and shawl making, and a stick game. At the gathering, all graduating Native American seniors were honored in a ceremony that both affirmed their cultural heritage and demonstrated to younger children the importance of education.

"The project emerged and continues to change," Meeks says. "It's multilayered; you can't contain it. As a director, you decide whom to bring in, but once you bring them in, you don't dictate what happens. Everyone needs flexibility and autonomy to do what needs to be done." Being flexible means that the project often takes unexpected turns—like the creation of T-ball teams. "It's a balance between measurable goals with well-thought-out evaluation and spontaneity," explains mentor Johnson. When a number of children were unable to participate in the summer T-ball league, Johnson's idea of organizing teams was met with enthusiasm from parents and fellow mentors who supplied hats, T-shirts, and coaches.

Unexpectedly, says former Cherry Valley mentor Ryan, the games have become a way for families to become actively involved in the community. Now families who seldom found time to participate in school-based activities are attending every game. "They're sitting in the bleachers with other parents; they're helping coach and cheering all the kids," she notes. "It has become a big cultural event, a place where parents can meet each other, see other parenting models. It includes the whole family."

**CELEBRATING THE  
LIVES OF FAMILY  
AND COMMUNITY  
MEMBERS TAKES  
MANY FORMS.**

## Conclusion

During its six years of operation, the Polson Partnership Project has evolved into a highly effective child and family support program that has been successfully expanded to include both of the district's elementary schools and the middle school. "More and more," notes Polson Middle School Assistant Principal Stephen York, "we are tying the social fabric together. Whether or not schools were designed for it, it's a very real role." The project provides the support that schools need to weave a stronger family support net and to "form a protective shield" that helps ensure school success for all students.

To create and maintain these conditions requires ongoing discussion about how best to meet the needs of children and families. The following principles, first articulated and implemented at Cherry Valley, continue to structure the discussion and to guide the project's expanded role:

- A consistent and unified theory of learning
- Continuity of educational practice with this theory
- Data- or results-driven evaluation (student performance, family involvement)
- An expanded concept of a learning community to include families, community members, and all staff

According to Meeks, a recent recipient of the National Milken Education Award, creating a positive school environment, as seen through the eyes of each child, is essential to convey the school's overriding belief: "Every child counts." Says Meeks:

I've worked for the last 10 years to support the creation of a school where students and teachers joyfully engage in learning, parents and community members are authentic and valued members of the school community, and there is an abundance of caring, compassion, and celebration.



The Polson Partnership Project has played a key role in realizing this vision. Careful attention to the development process and ongoing monitoring of the project's effectiveness are crucial to linking theory and practice, as well as for procuring funding. Meeks reports that they evaluate everything. "Teachers, parents, and children are included in the evaluation process of determining what works, why it works, what doesn't, and how to improve it," she stresses. This year, in order to share the responsibility of writing grant proposals—a time-consuming process that previously fell primarily to Carew and Meeks—all of the project staff will take courses in grant writing.

While the project's flexibility encourages creativity and innovation and allows it to evolve to meet the needs of each school, there are a number of critical components that have contributed to the goal of an expanded concept of a learning community:

- By understanding the family, school, and community as systems that directly influence children's development, all faculty are better able to work together to build bridges between these environments. Collaboration with tribal health, educational, and social services has not only enhanced cultural continuity and service delivery for Native children, but has also led to the increasing role of the project as a liaison between the Native and non-Native people within the community. "The increased dialogue has led to a healing in the community," Carew says.
- While the project offers intensive and personalized services to the neediest children and families, most activities include the entire school community, and many include the larger community.
- Utilizing a team approach to decisionmaking and project implementation has encouraged shared leadership and responsibility.
- A focus on everyone's strengths has helped to change the culture of the participating schools from finger pointing to one of mutual support, respect, and appreciation among children, teachers, families, and the community.

"Unconsciously," Meeks says, "we have been creating the conditions identified by Bonnie Benard (1993) that foster resiliency in children, and we have extended these conditions to staff and families: caring and support, positive expectations, and ongoing opportunities for meaningful participation."

**CREATING A POSITIVE  
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EVERY CHILD COUNTS.**



# Mary Harrison Primary School (Toledo, Oregon)

## *Bringing Back the Focus on the Child*

It's Red Ribbon Week at Mary Harrison Primary School. Since the beginning of school, children have learned about friendship, communication, and conflict resolution. At class circle and early morning assemblies, children have observed skits and sung songs about these important competencies. School rules—play safely, solve problems, include everyone, respect each other, fun for everyone—have been discussed, sung, and illustrated. Teachers and children have held classroom discussions about how friends can support us in making good choices for our lives and about the importance of compliments and respecting each other's feelings. Children have helped develop classroom rules, practiced "I" statements, and used a conflict-resolution wheel (see sidebar) in practice situations and to solve real problems on the playground and in the classroom.

THERE MAY BE SOME  
PLACE WHERE THE  
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IS EFFECTIVE ADVICE,  
BUT SCHOOL IS NOT  
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In the library, in buddy reading, and at independent reading time, children in all 10 of Mary Harrison's classrooms have read John Losne's story about a red ribbon and how it pulled a community together. And all this week excitement has built as staff and children have prepared for the march around the school wearing their multicolored, beaded friendship necklaces, with a huge red ribbon pulling them together.

First, both parents and children sorted thousands of colored beads into bags of single-colored beads. At assembly, the idea of compliment necklaces was introduced. An orca puppet (Mary Harrison is located on the Pacific Coast) visited each classroom with the single-colored beads, presenting this gift to each child. Then, each time children exchanged a compliment, they also exchanged a bead. Now the multicolored necklaces reflect the many compliments exchanged, and the children are ready for the march and the book picnic that will follow.

### The March

Giggling quietly and holding their red ribbon, the children march slowly out of Sue McVeigh's classroom. As they wind down the hall, picking up one classroom after another, their voices grow louder. Just past the office, teacher Karen Johnson begins the school chant and 250 "inside voices" become a deafening roar:

*We are the orcas, the mighty, mighty orcas,  
Everywhere we go, people want to know  
Who we are  
So we tell them  
We ARE the Mary Harrison ORCAS!*

Around the track the chanting continues, the crescendo gradually subsiding as the children re-enter the school and head for the gym for a brief friendship assembly of stories and songs with lyrics about friendship: "We are a circle like the earth, like the sun and the moon above, a circle of friends and family, a wide, warm circle of love." "A friend is someone who likes you, a friend is someone who cares, a friend is someone who listens, a friend is someone who shares." Visibly calmer now, the children turn their attention to their classmate Tai Lai, who reads from her journal accompanied by two friends:

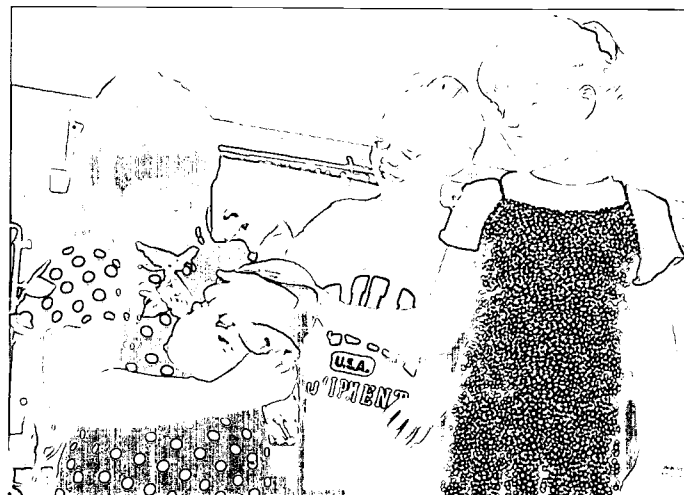
*Dear Journal,*

*This is Red Ribbon Week. I'm going to make a necklace with beads. I get a color of beads and my friend has a color. And then I give a compliment to her. When I give her a compliment I'll give her a bead. And she'll give me a compliment and we'll trade beads. But it doesn't matter about the beads, it matters about the friendship.*

## Creating a Caring Community of Learners

According to Mike Miller, a Camas, Washington, counselor, lecturer, and developer of the *Dare to Live* Program, creating a school where compliments, rather than cuts, rule the day goes hand in hand with successful student outcomes. At an assembly at Alki Middle School in Vancouver, Washington, he tells the students: “You young people possess a great power. If you want a friend, be a friend. If you want a compliment, give a compliment. If you need a hug, give a hug. And you will change your world!” (Meehan, 1999).

Such lessons—effective in middle school—are even more powerful in the elementary years. Working with children and families to create a nurturing school climate is top priority at Mary Harrison, a small primary school nestled into a hillside in the rural town of Toledo, Oregon. Although schools have traditionally separated children’s academic achievement from social and emotional development, staff at Mary Harrison long ago concluded that educational achievement and emotional competency go hand in hand.



Located seven miles inland from the Pacific Ocean, Toledo is an area of great natural beauty and rich natural resources. But the dwindling fishing and logging industries have left over 50 percent of the children’s families with incomes below the poverty line. Increasing numbers of families are struggling to earn a living from the burgeoning but seasonal tourist industry. And Lincoln County, in which the town of Toledo is located, ranks high on many indicators of risk to children and families, including incidence of child abuse, serious crimes, child death rates, and domestic violence.

While, as Em Perry, a teaching assistant for the last 27 years, notes, “Mary Harrison has always been a caring school,” creating a supportive school community is even more critical for children and families dealing with poverty and other hardships. Researchers Pianta and Walsh concluded that “social and affective interaction taking place in classrooms is of primary importance in determining who succeeds and who fails, especially for students whose background characteristics are indicative of lack of social and affective resources” (1996, p. 161).

Principal Jeanne St. John believes strongly in maintaining a psychologically safe environment for all children. Says St. John:

In the early years, children are learning habits of speaking and feeling that will be with them all their lives. We have to create a nonviolent school climate where hurtful words are not tolerated. So much of school is frightening to children. When kids are scared, their brains don’t work well. They literally can’t think when they are experiencing fear. We explain to children that one of the reasons for not saying scary things is that it makes it hard to learn.

Recently, when two second-graders were overheard talking about blowing up the school, we took them very seriously. We called a meeting with their parents, who were very supportive, and we talked with the children about how important it is for school to be a safe place. We emphasized that words really matter, and we told them that we take what they say very seriously. We made it clear that we don’t want anyone feeling scared at school.

## Maintaining Positive Interactions

St. John's remarks are well grounded in brain research, which shows that under conditions of high stress, the brain goes into "survival mode"; higher-order thinking is impeded (Jensen, 1998). Creating a psychologically safe environment is not a frill to be addressed only after the basics are attended to; for young children, such an environment is essential for learning. And, importantly, when schools and families provide opportunities for children to systematically think through emotions, to reflect on their behavior, and to understand how others think and feel, bullying, teasing, and other hurtful behaviors are much less likely to become an accepted part of school culture (Kohn, 1996; Meier, 1995). Author and educator Alphonse Kohn points out: "To help students become ethical people, as opposed to people who merely do what they are told, we cannot merely tell them what to do. We have to help them figure out—for themselves and with each other—how one ought to act" (1996, p. 4).

At Mary Harrison, a major goal is for children to learn to think for themselves and to care about others. Throughout the school day, children are introduced to an array of strategies and techniques for establishing and maintaining positive interactions with adults and each other, such as those described in the previous vignette. At the same time, all staff members are encouraged to focus on building a positive school climate by actively examining day-to-day interactions with children. A teacher in a first- and second-grade blended classroom explains, "There may be some place where the expression 'Do as I say—not as I do' is effective advice, but school is not the place. We constantly ask, 'How do we talk to kids?' 'How do we interact with kids?' 'What behaviors are we modeling?'"

## Family Advocacy

Family advocate Zann Johnson plays an integral role in this close-knit community, serving as a special friend and mentor to many of Mary Harrison's children, and helping families gain access to needed parenting, education, health, and social services. Originally begun as a pilot program seven years ago, and funded through federal Title I monies, the family advocate program has proven so successful that there are now family advocates in all elementary schools in the district. According to a recent Title I survey, parents consider the program the most valuable service that Title I provides.

Although not trained as a counselor, Johnson is one of a growing number of school-based family advocates who works directly with children, as well as coaches all staff members in the use of strategies to promote children's social skills and emotional development. Teachers refer children to Johnson when they feel that additional assistance with anger management, conflict resolution, and friendship skills is needed. By helping children see a particular situation as a problem they can solve, rather than assigning guilt or deciding who is wrong, Johnson helps children relax and focus on a mutually satisfying solution. "The first time they come in they're worried that they will be punished," Johnson explains. "'Am I in trouble?' is the typical question they ask. And I tell them, 'No, this is where you come to solve your problem.' After that, children often bring themselves in, just to come in and talk."

## Solving Problems

Working with children, individually and in groups, Johnson uses a variety of activities to further problem solving—many of which are suggested in the numerous books that line her shelves, including *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk* and those by the Assist Program, *Helping Kids Handle Anger* and *Teaching Friendship Skills*. Johnson and the children hold discussions, role play a conflict and its reso-

lution, work on individual behavior plans, and make puppets to act out their new skills at school and at home with parents. A turtle, made by the children, offers a four-step program on anger management: *Go in your shell. Think about the problem. Come up with a solution. Come out of your shell and talk about it.*

For students who are experiencing chronic academic or behavior problems, a Student Study Team, consisting of representatives from community agencies, school staff, and parents, meets to problem-solve how they can, as a team, work together to support the child. When children's behavior is the issue, parents and school staff work together to develop positive behavior plans. "Parents are included from the beginning," says Kathleen Davis, one of the district's child development specialists who works closely with family advocates. She continues:

Parents are always part of the solution—we focus on everyone's strengths. In the early years, problems aren't as huge yet, not as life-threatening as they might be later on. Parents are less defensive; they're more open to learning. After the first meetings, families often check with Zann when they have concerns. "Do you think it's a problem?" is a typical question.

By sharing ideas that work at home and at school, and by closely monitoring the recommendations and decisions made at these meetings, the behavior plans generated at these meetings are averaging a 90 percent success rate. Margo Speth, mother of eight-year-old Michael, says:

At Mary Harrison, we never get a note that says "Your child was in trouble." Instead we get a problem-solving form that helps us discuss the situation with our children and come up with solutions. Or we get a phone call from Zann or the teacher, and we get to discuss it. It really takes the pressure off kids—takes the weight off. They don't have to worry all day about being wrong, worry that they're in trouble. Children shouldn't have to pack so much on their shoulders. And the problem-solving sheet is there for the family to use with all their children. It's a big help to parents. Our youngest son already knows how to use it.



Many of the communication-building skills that Johnson teaches are integrated into the classroom and on the playground, including the use of a conflict-resolution wheel. "The staff here is compassionate," notes Johnson. "I use recess time to model conflict-resolution strategies. Teachers watch what I do, and new teachers learn from all of us." All day, teachers help children to reflect on their own feelings and behavior and increase awareness of others' feelings.

## RESOLVING CONFLICT CREATIVELY PROGRAM

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One of the first of Lincoln County schools to receive an Edward Byrne Memorial Grant, Mary Harrison has received extensive training in the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) for the last three years. Begun in 1985 as a collaboration between Educators for Social Responsibility in the Metropolitan (NY) Area and the New York City Board of Education, the curriculum stresses the modeling of nonviolent alternatives for dealing with conflict, teaching negotiation skills, and demonstrating to children that they can "play a powerful role in creating a more peaceful world."

Aimed at all the adults in children's lives—principals, teachers, support staff, volunteers, and parents—the program provides in-depth training, curricula, and staff development supports, establishes a student peer mediation program, offers parent workshops, and conducts leadership training for school administration. Key to its success is the emphasis on creating a schoolwide culture of nonviolence and the follow-up support that teachers receive. Each new teacher is assigned to an RCCP staff developer who visits from six to 10 times a year, giving demonstration lessons, helping the teacher prepare, observing classes, giving feedback, and sustaining the teacher's motivation.

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### Helping Children Feel Safe

"Maybe when kids are older, their problems can wait, but when kids are five, six, and seven, we have to deal with their social/emotional needs first. It takes a long time to help kids feel safe, like a family," explains first- and second-grade teacher Karin Dunaway. Knowing that first impressions are important and that the first day of school can be intimidating for the bravest kindergartner or transferring student, the faculty works together to create a welcoming atmosphere. A survey soliciting parents' perceptions about the first day of school asks, "Did you feel welcome at school? When you left your child at school, did you feel they were in a safe, caring place?"

Johnson plays a key role in welcoming new children and their families. "No family can go without contact with Zann," says Davis. "She greets everyone, introduces children and families to staff, helps them with the new student survey, and tours the school with them." A mother of a graduating Head Start student agrees:

The people here are open and incredibly friendly. When I got to the office, the secretary told us, "Oh, you're going to love it here." This eased my daughter's shyness. Then Zann came to the office and we went on a tour of the school. We walked into classes and watched how the children interacted with each other.

Do you remember schools where everyone was quiet and sat at their desks—where everything was regimented? That wasn't happening here. What we saw was affirmation, caring, in all the classrooms—everyone

was involved. And it is wonderful to have Zann to talk to. She knows everyone's name, and has a friendly word for everyone. Walking down the halls with Zann, we felt safe.

## Active and Collaborative Learning

This mother's remarks reflect the respect for children's thinking and feeling that is an integral part of the developmentally appropriate curriculum. "Listen to children's thinking. Use their words and work as a window to see their processing and perspectives," says teacher Karen Johnson. Teachers have worked for years to provide an integrated approach to curriculum that emphasizes projects and themes that help



children see the connections across disciplines. Each autumn the whole school focuses on relationships, exploring how people relate to each other in communities as friends and family members.

Creating group poems is one of the many ways that teachers encourage collaborative learning. To help children become comfortable with writing their own poems, music and poetry are interwoven into classroom activities. Classes read

poetry individually and in groups, and singing together is a frequent activity that eases transitions between activities, provides nonthreatening opportunities for rhyming, rhythm, and learning new vocabulary, and enhances group solidarity.

An "earth rap" (see sidebar), written and illustrated collaboratively by a first- and second-grade blended classroom, provided an introduction to rhyming and shows Mary Harrison's strong emphasis on conservation and respect for the earth. Teacher Janay Kneeland notes that respect for the earth and an understanding of the interdependence of all living things is a natural outgrowth of respect for each other and for all people.

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Earth is earth. Oh earth is earth.  
She is the one who gives us birth.

Earth is our home. It's the only one we got.  
It's getting real trashed up, and don't say it's not.

We can help the earth. We can start a new day.  
So let's get together and have it this way.

Trees and forests disappear into sand.  
And if we don't do something, it will ruin all the land.

Animals grow. Animals die.  
If we work together, we can clear the sky.

So stop your littering. Reduce your trash.  
Or our beautiful planet will start to crash.  
If you help today, and you help tomorrow.  
Then we'll clear the trash that made this sorrow.  
Recycle, reduce, reuse, and close the lid  
Because all this trash is stuff we did!  
Earth is earth. Oh earth is earth.  
She is the one who gives us birth.

*Creating group poems is one of the many ways that teachers encourage collaborative learning.*

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## Supporting Relationships

Research on resiliency has shown that one of the key protective factors for children is the opportunity to form a supportive relationship with at least one significant adult (Benard, 1995; Werner & Smith, 1992). Multiage classrooms, where children spend two years with the same children and teacher provide opportunities for children to develop relationships with each other, as well as with their teachers.

In her role as mentor, Johnson develops a relationship with all of Mary Harrison's children in a variety of ways. At the beginning of the year, she sends written invitations to each child to have lunch with her and a small group of children. Most mornings, she observes and talks to children at breakfast and talks to teachers and parents. If children are having a particularly hard time, they have the choice of spending part or all of the day with her. They can talk about why they feel angry and sad, and what they can do to move to more positive feelings. Johnson describes a withdrawn second-grader who spent several hours a week with her over the school year.

When I first started working with her, she was so sad. She thought no one liked her. She had nothing nice to say about herself or anyone else. She never smiled. What we came up with was a chart. I asked her to write something nice she did for someone else, and something nice they did for her, every school day. She had to reach out to others—to look for the good in others.

The chart reveals a steady progress of positive interactions: picking up a child's pencil, exchanging pictures, jumping rope with a group of girls, getting help with spelling, and exchanging dinner invitations. "She plays with me and hugs me" is the most recent entry.

## Supporting Families

In a review of the literature on parent involvement in education, Thorkildsen and Stein (1998) reported that a number of activities—such as parents encouraging reading and homework, caring about what happens in class, keeping track of school progress, and finding children a place to study—were highly correlated with children's school performance. All of Mary Harrison's teachers work closely with families, keeping them informed and included in their children's education. While all parents are also encouraged to volunteer in the classroom and participate on the school's Site Council (a decisionmaking body), more informal activities reach a wider audience.

Weekly classroom newsletters describe class activities, provide the words to recently learned songs, share recipes, and offer examples of children's work and suggestions for learning activities in the home. Potlucks, picnics, and fairs bring whole families to school for social activities. Monthly informational coffees are held for parents—both in the morning and in the evening—to accommodate differing schedules.

Several times a year, parents are invited to attend family nights, where they enjoy collaborative art and reading activities, and learn about their children's curriculum. During one family night, families used different textures and shades of colors to create a community mosaic—a huge orca whale—which was then hung in the hall.

In her role as advocate, Johnson also helps families support their children's learning, but her role often extends beyond the school. Through individual consultation and parenting classes open to the whole community, parents learn about their children's development, improve their parenting skills, and develop positive behavior plans for their children. A family resource center, located in a former classroom and funded through Families First, a districtwide Title I program, offers a warm, inviting place for parents to meet other parents and to become involved in their children's education. At the center, parents can check out books and tapes that offer tips on a wide variety of parenting topics, and they can also check out and "make and take" enjoyable educational materials—books, toys, games, and puzzles.

The center also acts as a clearinghouse for information to assist families in need of shelter, food, health care, and physical or sexual abuse programs. One of Johnson's key roles is supporting families in their efforts to access needed services. Child development specialist Davis explains:

There are some families with really difficult problems—unemployment, poverty, mental illness, child abuse, and domestic violence. Our country's foundation is the family, yet no one is mandated to help them. Zann takes care of the world outside the school. She supports parents in getting their concerns across—with psychologists, child protection workers, and other agencies. She helps parents who may be intimidated by the system to have a voice—to access Social Security, doctors' appointments, health insurance, GED information; she provides transportation to needed services and helps them find jobs.

"Just as it is with children, the goal is always to help parents see that they are capable and competent," says Johnson. "We can't fix it for them, but we can help them access resources. A family might need shoes, food, clothing, or housing. Whatever it takes to make a child equal to other kids, that's what we help with."

**WHATEVER IT TAKES  
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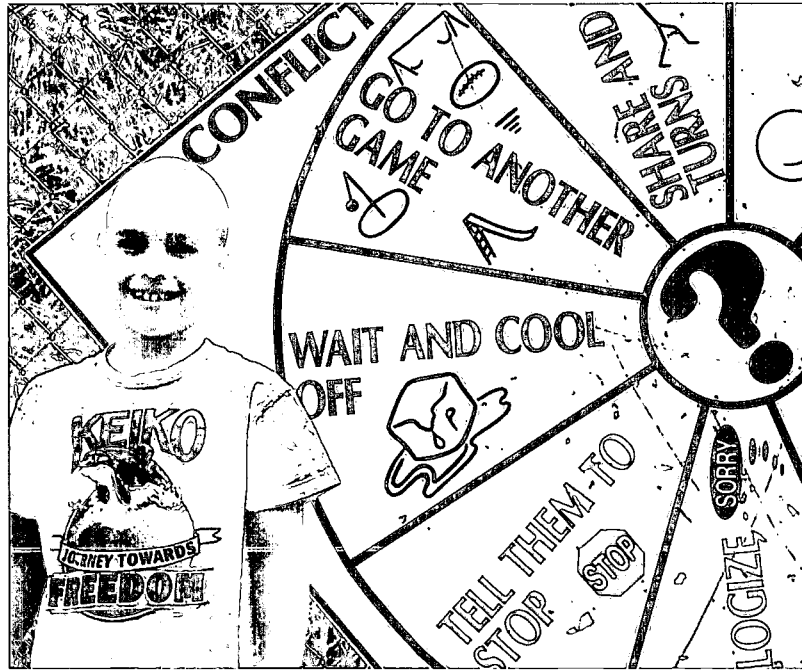




## Conclusion

In *Growth of the Mind and the Endangered Origins of Intelligence*, authors Greenspan and Benderly observe, “The real ABCs come down to attention, strong relationships, and communication, all of which children must learn through interaction with adults” (1997, p. 220). At Mary Harrison Primary School, careful attention to interactions and relationships among all members of the school community is considered essential to create a positive school climate where all children can learn.

In her role as family advocate, Johnson helps to extend the supportive environment to include families and the community. By providing opportunities for children and families to discuss feelings and concerns within the context of a supportive relationship, by emphasizing collaborative approaches to resolving conflict, and by helping families access parenting classes, health care, and social services, the healthy development of all children is enhanced.



Davis believes that every school should have a similar position: “In elementary school, we see kids through the whole day—not just for an hour—so there is an opportunity to see the strengths. The family advocate helps parents, administrators, and teachers bring back the focus on the child.”

## Richmond Elementary School (Salem, Oregon)

### *Nurturing Emotional Literacy*

Teacher Ardine Kapteyn sits with a group of third-graders on the well-worn circle rug, reading a story. Despite the hour—lunchtime is fast approaching—Kapteyn has no difficulty keeping the attention of the 24 nine-year-olds, who are anxious to find out if the hero of *The Small Person Who Had Feelings* will be able to cover up the feelings that he wears on his sleeve.

*“I wonder why a person would want to cover his lonely feelings with anger?” asks Kapteyn.*

*“Maybe he was afraid,” offers Ruby.*

*“Yes, isn’t that interesting, inside he was lonely and afraid, and outside he was ... what?”*

*“Angry,” a chorus of voices answers.*

*“Yet even with all the angry patches he put on his sleeve, loneliness and fear were sticking out among the patches. So what do you suppose he did? From his father, who believed it was important for boys never to show fear, he borrowed “tough.” Now he couldn’t find room for any other feelings. There was only room for tough and angry.”*

But the story has a happy ending and a new “feeling” word to add to the children’s vocabulary—acceptance. When the small person finds a friend and feels acceptance, all of his real feelings are able to come out—proud, sad, happy, scared, lonely—“all of the feelings we have talked about,” reminds Kapteyn.

### Linking Literacy with Emotional Development

Tying literacy to emotional development is at the core of the curriculum at Richmond Elementary School, which ranks eighth of 754 Oregon schools in serving the highest number of children in poverty. Many of Richmond’s 580 kindergarteners through fifth-graders suffer from the effects of poverty and its correlates: low literacy in the home, child abuse and neglect, parental drug and alcohol dependency, and homelessness. Approximately three-fourths of the children in this Spanish bilingual school are learning English as a second language (ESL). Since the arrival of Principal Kathy Bebe 11 years ago, creating a common vocabulary and language for helping children deal with their emotions and behavior has been a primary goal.

Research has shown that many children, particularly boys, go into the adolescent years with a restricted language for expressing emotions, which psychologist James Garbarino describes as “emotional illiteracy.” “This keeps the boy locked up because he may not be able to articulate his experience and he may be ashamed that he can’t,” explains Garbarino. But the beginnings of emotional illiteracy start much earlier, Garbarino points out. By kindergarten a girl is six times more likely to use the word love than is a boy, and by the age of eight or nine, many boys are beginning to lose facial expression. Garbarino notes, “You can watch the loss of facial expression in boys as they turn into men. By the age of eight or nine, a boy is measuring everything he does on one dimension—from strong to weak. Many boys feel required to express only a narrow band of what they truly feel” (1999).

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At Richmond, children begin in kindergarten to learn how to identify emotions, to recognize triggers for anger and strategies for managing it, and to imagine how others think and feel. The Second Step program, developed by the nonprofit group Committee for Children, has played a central role in this effort. Based on research that shows that people prone to violent and aggressive behavior typically lack empathy, impulse control, and anger management, the program provides opportunities for modeling, practice, and reinforcement of these prosocial behaviors.

During the weekly Second Step lessons, role-plays enable children practice new strategies, learn to recognize the outward signs of emotions, and understand that there is more than one way to solve a problem. School counselor Pam Rawlins points out an additional benefit to the role-plays: "Many of our children are reluctant to get up in front of their peers. But by the end of the year, all the kids are participating. When they get to role-play, this prepares them for presentations in the upper grades and in high school. They see it as a game at this point, but it helps to transfer learning."

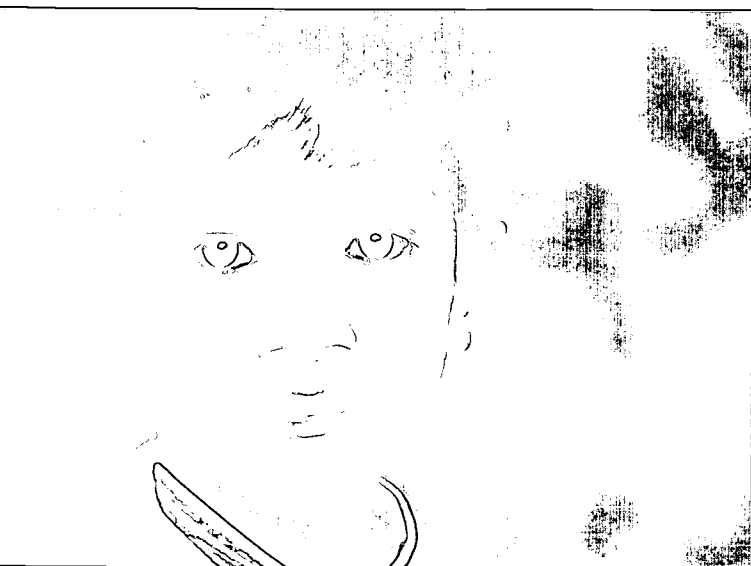
According to Inge Balleby, a counselor's assistant, "A big part of the program's success at Richmond is that the whole school is involved. It's not a choice, so it doesn't go by the wayside because of testing and other pressures; it's as important as any curricular topic." The carefully planned introduction and implementation of the program ensured that all teachers were supported and included. During the initial year, counselors and Title I staff taught all the lessons, with teachers observing. Over the next three years, counselors gradually decreased their role in teaching. Now all teachers are comfortable with teaching the lessons on their own, with the ongoing support of the Healthy Living Team, made up of the principal, the community outreach coordinator, all Title I teachers and assistants, the physical education teacher, and two full-time counselors.

And at Richmond, the lessons do not stop with the role-plays and class discussions that take place in every classroom, every week, on Healthy Living Day. "We have integrated the strategies and vocabulary provided by the Second Step program into our thought and language to use throughout the day—on the playground, in the halls, at breakfast and lunch," Principal Bebe says. "If we ask a child who is having difficulty controlling his or her behavior or who is in a conflict with another child, 'What do you need to do?' every child can tell you all the problem-solving skills they have learned. All day they get to use these skills, and we reinforce them at every turn."

Playing games during physical education classes and in the classroom helps children practice the problem-solving and cooperative skills they have been learning in a structured setting. To introduce the games, teachers go over the rules carefully, and children role-play how they will react to winning and losing. "Games like Trouble and SORRY are particularly challenging for young children," says Mary Harris, a teacher in a bilingual second-grade classroom. They have to learn rules and keep their tempers; they have to put into actions what we have been talking about: fairness, taking turns, respecting others' feelings, being good winners and good losers."

### Sharing Good Literature

Reading stories aloud, particularly stories that offer rich opportunities to discuss emotions, is a frequent activity. Teachers use reading aloud as a springboard for discussing times when children felt frightened and lonely, proud and happy. Without interrupting the story's narrative thread, teachers help children to relate stories to their lives and to other stories they have read, and to build vocabulary and concept knowledge. Open-ended questions during and after reading keep children involved and encourage reflection: "How do you think Pisca felt when her Dad said he was proud of her?" "When you have courage, does it mean you are not afraid?" "Can you remember a time when you felt like the Ugly Duckling?" "What does it mean to feel accepted?"



“Tying emotional development to literacy is hard to do in the electronic age of TVs and computers,” Kapteyn says. “Kids are used to a sitcom where everything is resolved in half an hour. It is critical to share good literature with kids, and while we read, we share lessons along the way.” These lessons not only help children develop an understanding of their own and others’ feelings; they play an important role in meet-

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DIRECTION, THEN THAT.  
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ing state assessment standards. “The goal is to raise the thinking level of the class,” explains Kapteyn. “Our job is to help them learn high-level comprehension and interpretive skills, not just literal comprehension.”

Through guided discussions of literature, children learn to make predictions, to imagine a setting, to identify with characters, to use the context to understand new words, and to become aware of the skills they are using to make sense of the text—all the earmarks of active engagement in the reading process. “Oral language is the key component,” Kapteyn says. “Many of our children enter kindergarten with language delays of two or three years, due to lack of experience. It’s up to us to provide the experiences they need to develop strong language skills.” Kapteyn explains:

I try to figure out how children are learning language. Not just many of our ESL kids, but also many of our Anglo kids, come from backgrounds with low literacy. And in second or third grade, most children—even middle-class children—can’t articulate their feelings very well yet. If you ask them how they are, they usually say happy or sad. But if I ask “What else?” they can come up with other words—disappointed, angry, proud, glad, curious. It’s amazing, really, how their vocabulary and concept knowledge is growing and how much they do internalize of what we teach. Second Step has been valuable for teaching the language connected with emotion. Parents tell us that their children go home and talk about the role-plays and use the strategies we practice at school.

## Creating an Equitable School Culture

The implementation of the Second Step curriculum is one of the many changes that has helped faculty at Richmond improve teaching and learning at their school. Eleven years ago, when Bebe arrived at Richmond, she found a divided school. Title I funding streams had separated children who qualified for services from those who did not, and in addition had also effectively separated bilingual and migrant children from Anglo children. “Everything was separate,” Bebe says. “If our family involvement activities were funded with Title I monies, we could only invite Title I families. If a child asked to talk to one of our counselors about something important—a dog that died, a divorce, rejection from a friend—we would have to say no. We wanted to change all this. It was unethical and stigmatizing.”

Developing a comprehensive plan to become a schoolwide Title I program in school year 1989-90 provided an opportunity for teachers, administrators, and the entire staff to work together to create an equitable school culture that supports all children's learning. Because the focus was on improving instruction in every aspect of each student's school experience (rather than a narrow focus on improving the Title I program), the plan formed a comprehensive structure to guide a collective vision of school reform.

With input from all staff through surveys, discussions, brainstorming, and meetings, the Title I staff decided to focus their efforts on three broad categories:

**OVER THE YEARS,  
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COMFORTABLE COMING  
INTO THE SCHOOL  
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BROADENED TO  
HELPING FAMILIES  
SUPPORT THEIR  
CHILDREN'S  
EDUCATION.**

- Family involvement
- Staff development
- Children's academic and emotional development

Over the years, the particular academic focus may change, but the overall goals have remained constant. "We can't waver in what we believe is important," says Title I teacher and Program Coordinator Nancy Redding. "We can't go this direction, then that. If you do, you never get to where you want to go." Adds Bebe, "We wanted a community where everyone belonged. We truly wanted—needed—parents as partners. Now we're all one Richmond family; we're no longer separate.

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### **PROMISING PRACTICES CREATING SCHOOLWIDE PROGRAMS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

- Schoolwide programs are most likely to make a difference when educators engage in planning with a strong expectation of substantially improving teaching and learning in their school. The focus is not limited to improving the Title I program. Instead, the focus is on improving instruction in every aspect of each student's school experience.

- In successful schools, the comprehensive plan will become an exciting blueprint for meaningful change. The plan will articulate a powerful vision of improved student performance that inspires the entire school community. Successful schools recognize that the greatest opportunity for reaching challenging student performance goals comes through the improvement of teaching and learning in regular classrooms.

- The school must engage in an in-depth assessment of strengths and needs. Needs are the focus of attention in the planning process; however, of equal importance, are areas of strength, so that the school might plan in ways that build upon those strengths to bring greater levels of academic success to more students.

- Educators should use the planning process to establish challenging goals for student performance.

- Successful schools engage in intensive searches for practices, programs, and policies that will make a difference.

- Schoolwide programs maintain a high level of commitment to continuous improvement.

- Every teacher, every school administrator, and every support staff knows and understands the school's goals for academic improvement. Furthermore, they know and understand their role in contributing to the attainment of the goals.

- Successful schools develop and implement systems for regularly gauging progress.

- Successful schools develop systems for celebrating progress. It is important to celebrate the hard work of students, parents, and teachers.

Source: Johnson, J. Support for Texas Academic Renewal (STAR). [Online.]. Available: <http://www.starcenter.org>.

## Family Involvement and Support

Over the years, Richmond has been recognized locally and by the Oregon Department of Education for program excellence in meeting the needs of their high-poverty population. In 1994, Richmond was one of two Oregon schools to receive an “A+ for Breaking the Mold” award from former President Bush’s “1,000 Points of Light” project. The faculty credits the school’s effective family involvement and support program with playing a crucial role in their success. Over the years, the original goal of families being comfortable coming into the school building has broadened to helping families support their children’s education.

A Title I-funded Community School Outreach coordinator coordinates the community outreach and parent involvement programs by assessing school, parent, and community needs. A variety of activities—back to school night, kindergarten packet meetings; Love, Lunch, and Learn; volunteer work parties; a parent lending library; popover breakfasts; math and literacy nights—provide opportunities for parents to learn parenting skills and to explore the many ways they can help their children learn.

Recently, the school procured grant monies to purchase computers and digital cameras to offer night classes to all families. The goal of the project was for families to increase computer literacy while engaging in enjoyable family literacy activities. During structured classes open to four families over a six-week period, parents and children together learn to use the Internet and the digital cameras, including editing their photographs on the computer. After discussing their family background with extended family members and researching their family history on the Internet, children and parents together decide what pictures and stories to include in their jointly created memory books. Recently, their stories and pictures were displayed at an open house at school and at the Marion County Fair.

Bilingual assistant Irene Valdivia says, “This is hands-on learning and they pick it up quickly. And the money that comes into the school goes out into the community. Families take their new skills and help other families. It’s their way of giving back.” Continued access to the computers and cameras after school enables families to continue the project after the classes end. One family comes in almost daily to do homework together. “It’s impressive,” counselor Rawlins says, “to see the entire family—Mom, Dad, and all their children—making homework a family activity.”

At monthly kindergarten packet meetings, parents learn how to help their children get off to a good start by supporting language and literacy through cooking, reading, making play dough, painting, blowing bubbles, singing, and other enjoyable and inexpensive activities—all in one convenient packet. “Years ago we had these meetings and no one came, despite door prizes and pizza,” Bebe says. “Because of funding, the meetings were separate for Anglo and Latino parents.” Now that all parents can learn together, the meetings are well attended, and the popular packets offer all the activities in both English and Spanish.

Two full-time counselors—one district-funded and one funded through Title I—work with individuals and small groups of children, and serve as liaisons with the Salem social service agencies. Although, as in many schools, counselors spend a lot of their time providing parenting education and supporting family literacy, at Richmond more pressing needs often take precedence. “Ideally, we would concentrate on prevention approaches and referral to community services,” Rawlins explains. “But many of our kids don’t qualify for services of any kind—medical, mental health, or food stamps—because they were not born in this country. So we do a lot of crisis intervention and counseling.”

**KIDS NEED TO  
HAVE A PLACE  
TO PUT THEIR  
YUKS ASIDE.**

Richmond's children are part of a growing number of children nationally who lack health insurance. Hispanic people disproportionately lack insurance coverage and ready access to professional care, and that is particularly true for those children who are from Mexico and Central America. Over a third of the nation's 31 million Hispanic people have no health insurance. "I worry about kids who could get very ill. I don't know how they would receive medical attention," Rawlins says. "And an older sibling of one of our kids is exhibiting violent behavior. His parents are worried and asking for help. It's tough when parents feel like they have nowhere to turn. We do our best to help them get their needs met."



In addition to counseling, Richmond offers a number of services to children and families. A breakfast program helps all children start the day with a nutritious meal. Partnerships with community businesses and organizations have provided volunteers, field trips, picnics, and food drives. Dental vans sponsored by the Northwest Medical Teams International visit the school at frequent intervals to ensure that all children receive dental care. An after-school program sponsored by the YMCA offers structured activities that reinforce the school curriculum—arts and crafts, support with homework, field trips, and cooperative games.

### **A Calm, Unhurried Atmosphere**

Richmond's size (approximately 580 children) and large class sizes (up to 32 students per class) could easily result in an impersonal or chaotic atmosphere. Despite these numbers, Richmond is a close-knit school community that presents a calm, friendly face to children, families, staff, and visitors. Every morning all support staff are at the front door, in the halls, and at breakfast greeting entering children and their families, setting a positive tone for the day. Bebe explains the importance of modeling the positive behavior they expect from children:

It's how we speak to kids in a quiet voice; there's no yelling here. I was in a school last week where I overheard a teacher yell, "Don't you ever go by my desk again!" You forget that there are environments like that. If that happened here, it would be shocking—not ordinary. Kids who are at risk need more calmness, more structure, more predictability; they need to have adults they can trust.

In addition to the Second Step curriculum, all staff have been trained in Love and Logic, a program developed by Jim Fay and Foster Cline of the Cline Fay Institute, and teachers report that it "has changed the whole way we thought about discipline." "Love and Logic becomes a part of you," Rawlins observes. "You learn to talk to kids so they don't feel put down. So you don't get into power struggles, and if you do, you quickly figure out how to get out of them."

Each year a refresher course includes everyone, including classified staff. "The place to start is with yourself," Bebe says. "Before you can be successful with interpersonal relationships, you have to know yourself. All of our teachers are used to reflecting on their teaching practices and their interactions with children. But when teachers first come here they ask, "What is different here?"

Rawlins, who is in her third year as a Richmond counselor, agrees. “From the beginning I could tell that this is a peaceful place,” she notes. “It’s very well run, organized, and predictable—all the things kids need to feel secure. You can just feel the calmness. Mornings can be wild, but the hysterics come from outside, not once they’re here. Kids need to have a place to put their yuks aside.”

## A Challenging and Responsive Curriculum

For three years, First Steps, a program from the Education Department of Western Australia, has helped teachers achieve the goal of increasing literacy for all students. The detailed developmental continua give teachers an explicit way of mapping children’s literacy progress in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and linking the assessment of students’ literacy to developmentally appropriate learning activities and teaching practices.

But even in activities designed to be engaging, teachers have found that some children have a hard time settling down. To help children be successful, teachers move among the tables where groups of children are working, offering encouragement and choices: “If this is not the best place to do your thinking, you can work on the rug, or at another table.” “You can make a list of your ideas, or you can do it like Carlos and write in story form.” “If it helps, draw a picture—that would make the poster especially pretty too. It will look great on your refrigerator.” “How do you want to do it?”

These strategies, effective with young children, are also designed to help children make good choices later in life. Kapteyn explains: “We know that many teenagers have never learned to make choices, so when they do have the opportunity, they often make bad ones. We provide a wide range of choices, and encourage kids to make good decisions. We want to help them see things as problems that can be solved.”

## Richmond’s Bilingual Program: “A Give and Take of Language”

Teachers at Richmond have found that a strong bilingual program helps children gain the language skills they need to become strong readers and writers in middle and secondary school. By this age, children who have had the early support of their home language and a gradual transition to English usually are able to be successful in all-English classrooms. According to Kapteyn:

Children who are able to begin reading in Spanish at grade level tend to transfer their skills to English well. If they are not literate in their home language, they tend to struggle with English. So the idea is for children to work on their own language first. This is particularly important for our kids who come from families with low literacy in the home. They don’t catch up easily, especially with second language issues, and if they have low vocabulary and concept development, even in their native language. But over the years, that percent of children has been getting lower. As a staff we are more aware of the importance of oral language, and some families have been here longer and are better able to support their children’s language and literacy.

To ensure that children get the help they need, each student has a Home Language Survey on file. In addition, each student is assessed for language proficiency in both Spanish and English. Children in kindergarten through grade two are assessed on oral language only. The stronger of the two languages is used for instruction. Children in grades three through five must score at or above the district-established standards in both reading and writing to be classified as fluent English proficient (FEP) and to receive all instruction in English.

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For all students, the amount of English instruction increases as the student's English skills increase. By third grade, most children are receiving much of their instruction in English, although bilingual classroom assistants help translate stories and clarify instruction. Books are still available in Spanish, and even when children are reading in English, they often take home books in Spanish to read with parents. "It's a mixture of languages and sharing," says Mary Harris, a teacher in a bilingual second-grade classroom. "The English-speaking kids learn Spanish, while the Hispanic kids learn English in a give and take of language. If I am struggling with giving directions or explaining a concept, kids help me and help each other. We have to help each other so that everyone can learn."

## Meeting the Needs of All Children

Richmond's student population is highly mobile, with many children leaving and entering school during the year. In April, 68 new students enrolled; 16 came directly from Mexico. A large number of Richmond's children are from migrant farm families. Because these families consistently leave the area for extended periods of time and return at various times during the year, children often need extra academic support.

A district-sponsored migrant program provides two bilingual teachers who offer individual tutoring and serve as liaisons with families. In the classrooms, they teach reading groups, provide translation, and collaborate with teachers to assist students with academic needs. On home visits, they work with parents on supporting their children's literacy and assess other needs for referrals to community services. "They make a great contribution to our school because they are so in tune with kids and know so much about families," Rawlins notes.

Based on research that shows that achievement test scores decline over summer vacation, Richmond has implemented a modified calendar, with a shorter summer vacation and longer winter and spring breaks. During these breaks, or intersessions, extended school year programs are offered to all Richmond students. Children engage in book making, arts and crafts, and board games; dance to traditional Latin music; and write poetry.

## Conclusion

Although schools with high concentrations of poverty often present daunting challenges to educators, a well-planned school-reform process that focuses on everyone's strengths can help all children be successful. Joseph Johnson of the Support for Texas Academic Renewal (STAR) Center writes, "Title I school-wide programs give us a tremendous opportunity to focus all of a school's resources on actualizing the potential, realizing the dreams, and unleashing the giftedness that is within the community" (1999). With the leadership of Principal Bebe, the faculty at Richmond continues to use the structure provided by their schoolwide plan to guide a collective vision of school reform based on family involvement, staff development, and children's academic and emotional development.

According to Robin Karr-Morse, author of *Ghosts from the Nursery: Tracing the Roots of Violence* (1997), characteristics of resilient adults include the capacity for empathy, self-control, and problem solving. Aided by training in Love and Logic and Second Step, Richmond faculty help children—from kindergarten through fifth grade—to learn how to identify emotions, to recognize triggers for anger and strategies for managing it, and to imagine how others think and feel. By modeling, as well as teaching, the positive, respectful interactions and behavior expected from children, the faculty at Richmond has created an atmosphere that supports positive attitudes, behavior, and learning.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF RESEARCH ON RESILIENCY

The concepts of resilience and protective factors are the positive counterparts to the constructs of vulnerability and risk factors (Werner & Smith, 1992). Resilient children, called “keepers of the dream” by Germezy, Masten, and Tellegsan (1984), are children who remain competent despite exposure to misfortune or to stressful events (Rutter, 1985). Characteristics of resilient children include (Demos, 1989):

- A sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy, which allows the child to cope successfully with challenges
- An active stance toward an obstacle or difficulty
- The ability to see a difficulty as a problem that can be worked on, overcome, changed, endured, or resolved in some way
- Reasonable persistence, with an ability to know when “enough is enough”
- A capacity to develop a range of strategies and skills to bear on the problem, which can be used in a flexible way

No children, however, are invulnerable to the stress of adversity (Rutter, 1985). Researchers agree that:

- The resistance to stress is relative.
- The basis of the resistance is both environmental and constitutional.
- The degree of resistance is not a fixed quantity; it varies over time and according to circumstances.
- Risk increases substantially when children experience two risk factors and continues to increase as the number of risk factors increases. The more risk factors are present, the greater the damaging impact of each (Rutter, 1985).
- Poverty is usually not one risk factor; rather, it is a constellation of interacting risk factors (Schorr, 1987).

In a longitudinal study of a multiracial cohort of 698 infants on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, Werner and Smith (1992) identified children who, despite multiple risk factors, were able to lead productive lives, exhibiting competence, confidence, and caring. One of the key protective factors for these children was the availability of persons who provided them with a secure base for the development of trust, autonomy, and initiative. Among the most frequently encountered positive role models in the lives of the children of Kauai, outside of the family circle, was a favorite teacher. For the resilient youngsters, a special teacher was not just an instructor for academic skills, but also a confidant and positive model for personal identification.

## FACTS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS FROM THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

### National Estimates of Homelessness

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty estimates that approximately 760,000 people were homeless on any given night in 1996, and 1.2 to 2 million people experience homelessness during one year.

### Dimensions

- The fastest growing segment of the homeless population is families with children.
- Families with children constitute approximately 40 percent of people who become homeless. In a 1998 survey of 30 American cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that families comprised 38 percent of the homeless population. These proportions are likely to be higher in rural areas; research indicates that families, single mothers, and children make up the largest group of people who are homeless in rural areas.
- A review of homelessness in 50 cities found that in virtually every city, the city's official estimated number of homeless people greatly exceeded the number of emergency shelter and transitional housing spaces.

### Causes

Poverty and the lack of affordable housing are the principal causes of family homelessness.

- The gap between the number of affordable housing units and the number of people needing them is currently the largest on record, estimated at 4.7 million units. Only 26 percent of those households eligible for housing assistance receive it.
- While the number of poor people has not changed much in recent years, the number of Americans living in extreme poverty has increased. In 1997, 14.6 million people—41 percent of all poor persons—had incomes of less than half the poverty level.
- Forty percent of persons living in poverty are children; in fact, the 1997 poverty rate for children is almost twice as high as the poverty rate for any other age group.
- Stagnating wages and changes in welfare programs (principally restrictive eligibility requirements and erosion of benefits) account for increasing poverty among families. Between 1973 and 1993, the percentage of workers earning wages below the poverty line increased from 23.9 percent to 26.9 percent, while the percentage of workers earning less than 75 percent of the poverty line doubled.
- More than a third of poor children in America live in families where at least one parent works year-round.
- Nearly half of minimum-wage earners are over 25. Thirty-nine percent are the sole breadwinner in their family. Three out of five minimum-wage workers are women.
- Despite recent increases in the minimum wage, the real value of the minimum wage in 1997 was 18.1 percent less than in 1979.
- In the median state, a minimum-wage worker would have to work 87 hours each week to afford a two-bedroom apartment at 30 percent of his or her income, which is the federal definition of affordable housing.
- Between 1970 and 1994, the typical state's Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) benefits for a family of three fell 47 percent, after adjusting for inflation. In every state except Alaska, a family of three would have to spend more than their total monthly AFDC grant to pay the fair market rent.

### Lack of Affordable Health Care

- In 1997, approximately 43.4 million Americans had no health care insurance, including 10 million children. More than a third of persons living in poverty had no health insurance of any kind. Poor health is closely associated with homelessness. For families already struggling to pay the rent, a serious illness or disability can start a downward spiral into homelessness, beginning with a lost job, depletion of savings to pay for care, and eventual eviction.

### Domestic Violence

- Domestic violence also contributes to homelessness among families. The single largest cause of injury to women in the U.S. is domestic violence. Women are more often victims of domestic violence than of burglary, muggings, or other physical crimes combined.
- Lack of affordable housing and long waiting lists for assisted housing mean that many women are forced to choose between abuse and the streets. Forty-six percent of cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 1998 identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness.

### Mental Illness

- Approximately 20 to 25 percent of the single adult homeless population suffers from some form of severe and persistent mental illness. While only 5 to 7 percent of homeless persons with mental illness need to be institutionalized, they do need access to supportive housing and/or other treatment services. However, many mentally ill homeless people are unable to obtain access to supportive housing and/or other treatment services. The mental health support services most needed include case management, housing, and treatment.
- Substance abuse does increase the risk of displacement for the precariously housed, although most people addicted to drugs or alcohol never become homeless. In 1995, about 22 percent of Homeless clients were diagnosed as suffering from substance-abuse disorders. A 1992 national study of service providers found that 80 percent of the local treatment programs surveyed could not meet demand and were forced to turn homeless clients away.

### Consequences

- Homelessness severely impacts the health and well-being of all family members. Compared with housed poor children, homeless children experience worse health; more developmental delays; more anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems; and lower educational achievement.
- Homeless children face barriers to enrolling and attending school, including transportation problems, residency requirements, inability to obtain previous school records and immunization records, and lack of clothing and school supplies. According to a 1995 survey of 116 shelters by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 40 percent of shelter providers cited transportation as the biggest barrier to education for homeless children.
- Homeless children's access to education has significantly improved as a result of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. However, only 3 percent of all local education agencies receive McKinney funds.
- Homelessness frequently breaks up families. Families may be separated as a result of shelter policies that deny access to older boys or fathers, placement of children in foster care when families become homeless, and the necessity of leaving children with relatives and friends in order to save them from the ordeal of homelessness or to permit them to continue attending their regular school.

## Conclusion

It is clear that homelessness is often the result of a complex set of circumstances that push people into poverty and force impossible choices between food, shelter, and other basic needs. Only a concerted effort to ensure jobs that pay a living wage, adequate benefits for those who cannot work, affordable housing, and access to health care will bring an end to homelessness.

The National Coalition for the Homeless is a national advocacy network of homeless persons, activists, service providers, and others committed to ending homelessness through public education, policy advocacy, grassroots organizing, and technical assistance. Their online library provides a searchable bibliographic database with references to research on homelessness, housing, and poverty. Five directories list contact people, e-mail addresses, and Web pages for more than 100 local, statewide, and national organizations.

Address: National Coalition for the Homeless  
1612 K Street, NW, #1004, Washington, DC 20006  
Phone: (202) 775-1322 / Fax: (202) 775-1316  
E-mail: [nch@ari.net](mailto:nch@ari.net)  
Web site: <http://nch.ari.net>

## Books for Children About Homelessness:

Please review these first to make sure they're appropriate for your child or children.

*Cave Under the City*, Harry Mazer, 1986, Harper Collins.

*Changing Places: A Kid's View of Shelter Living*, Margie Chalofsky et al., 1992, Gryphon House.

*December Stillness*, Mary Downing Hahn, 1988, Avon Books.

*Fly Away Home*, Eve Bunting, 1991, Houghton Mifflin.

*The Homeless Hibernating Bear*, by Kids Livin' Life, 1993, Gold Leaf Press.

*Mandy's House: The Story of a Homeless Family Who Finds a New Place to Live*, Ruth Spanger, 1990, Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

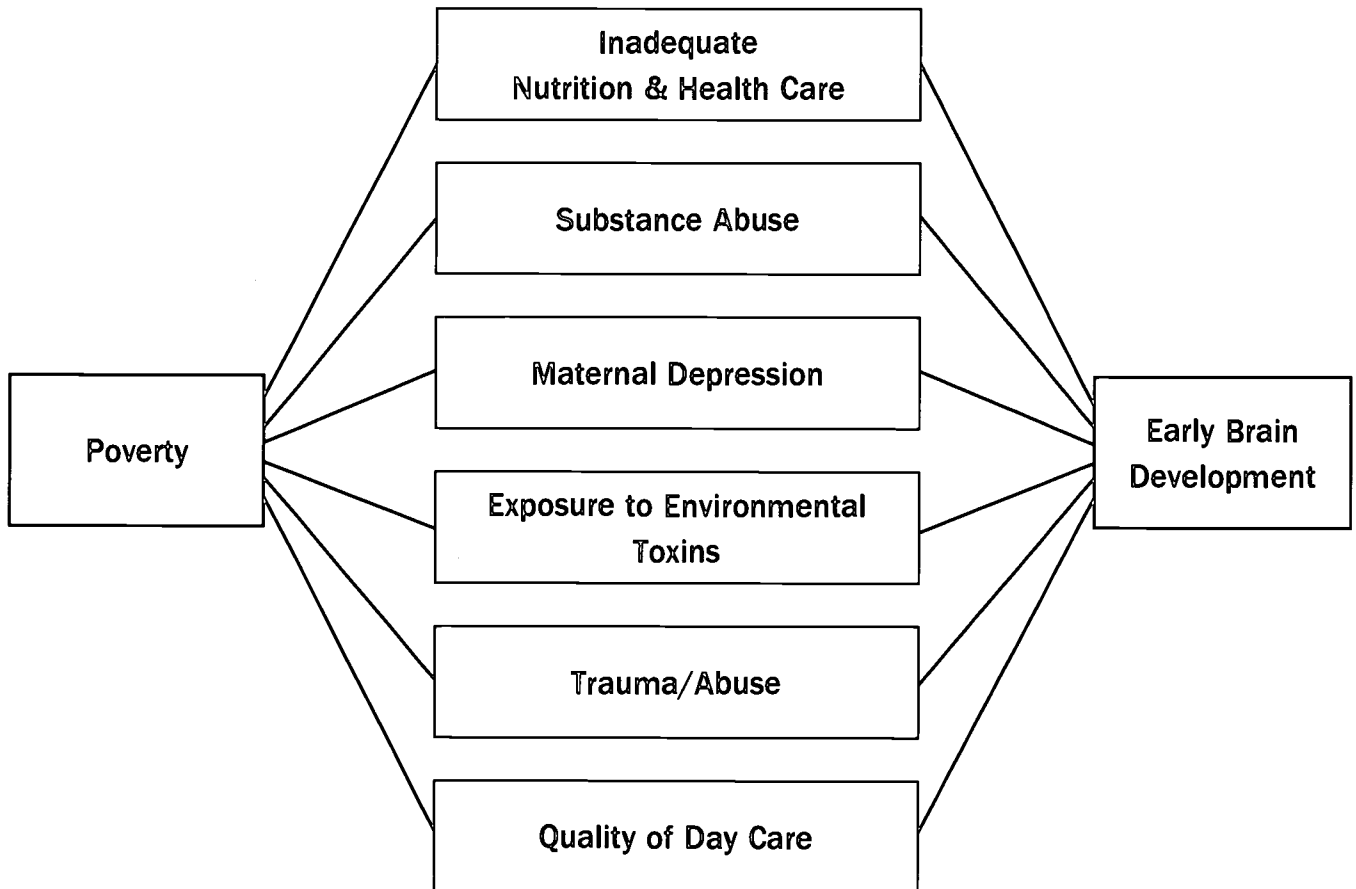
*Mr. Bow Tie*, Karen Barbour, 1991, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

*Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen*, Dyanne Disalvo-Ryan, 1990, Morrow.

*We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy*, Maurice Sendak, 1993, Harper Collins.

## HANDOUT 3

### THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON BRAIN DEVELOPMENT: MULTIPLE PATHWAYS



Recent advances in the study of brain development show a sensitive period when the brain is most able to respond to and grow from exposure to environmental stimulation. This window of optimal brain development is from the prenatal period through the first years of a child's life. While all children are potentially vulnerable to a number of risk factors which can impede brain development during this sensitive period, a disproportionate number of children in poverty are actually exposed to such risk factors. These risk factors can influence the brain through multiple pathways.

Source: National Center for Children in Poverty. (1998). *Poverty and brain development in early childhood*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia School of Public Health.

## NEW THINKING ABOUT EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

- Babies are born with 100 billion brain cells; however, only a relatively small number of neurons are connected. In the first decade of life, a child's brain forms trillions of connections.
- How a brain develops hinges on a complex interplay between the genes you're born with and the experiences you have. "It's not a competition; it's a dance," says psychiatrist Stanley Greenspan.
- Research on brain development has provided physiological evidence that early experiences and interactions do not just create a context for early development and learning, they directly affect the way the brain is wired. In turn, this wiring profoundly affects emotional, language, and cognitive development.
- Brain development is especially rapid during the first year. Brain scans show that by the age of one, a baby's brain qualitatively resembles that of a normal young adult. By age three, a baby's brain has formed about 1,000 trillion connections—about twice as many as adults have.
- The years between three and 10, described as "years of promise" by the 1996 Carnegie Task Force, are a time of rapid development of social, linguistic, cognitive, and physical competencies, corresponding with dramatic neurological changes (Carnegie Task Force, 1996).
- At age 11, the brain begins to prune extra connections at a rapid rate. The circuitry, or "wiring," that remains is more specific and efficient (Shore, 1997). The brain has been called the ultimate example of the saying "use it or lose it." Connections that are used repeatedly in the early years become permanent; those that are not are eliminated. While the brain continues to form new connections throughout the life cycle, there are periods during which the brain is particularly efficient at specific types of learning.
- Brain research helps us understand not only how and when the brain *develops*, but what kinds of experiences and environments *support* development:
  - *Social relations are central to every aspect of a child's development.* Active and engaged care is essential for children's brain maturation and for social, emotional, and intellectual development. For older children, caring adults are still vitally important. In addition, sharing ideas, experiences, and opinions with peers both challenges and expands children's thinking and builds social competence.
  - *Children learn best in a psychologically safe environment.* Brain research indicates that emotional intelligence is the bedrock upon which to build other intelligences, and that it is more closely linked to lifelong success than is IQ (Goleman, cited in O'Neil, 1996). Research has demonstrated that emotions can speed up or inhibit the thinking process. Under conditions of high stress, the brain goes into "survival mode," and higher-order thinking is impeded.

Gunnar's (1996) research on cortisol, a hormone that is easily measured because it is present in saliva, helps to explain why stressful and abusive environments have an adverse effect on brain development. Adverse or traumatic events elevate the level of cortisol in the brain. Excessively and chronically high levels of cortisol alter the brain by making it vulnerable to processes that destroy brain cells responsible for thought and memory. Just as important, cortisol reduces the number of connections in certain parts of the brain.

- *The brain is designed as a pattern detector; perceiving relationships and making connections are fundamental to the learning process* (Caine & Caine, 1990). The brain resists learning isolated pieces of information, such as unconnected facts and words that don't make sense. Children (and adults) learn best when they can actively make sense of their experience.
- *Effective teaching builds on the experience and knowledge that children bring to school.* In order to make sense of their experiences, children need help to make connections between the known and unknown. For example, a child who has had little experience with storybooks, but who loves to tell stories and engage in dramatic play, can be encouraged to act out a story that is read aloud.
- *Effective teaching enables children to use all their senses and intelligences.* Music, drama, and arts instruction have been linked to higher achievement-test scores and higher scores on tests of creative thinking, art appreciation, reading, vocabulary, and math. It is important for children to be physically active in the classroom. Physical movement juices up the brain, feeding it nutrients in the form of glucose and increasing nerve connections—all of which make it easier for kids of all ages to learn (Hancock, 1996). Generally speaking, the younger the child, the more important active engagement with materials, peers, and teachers are in order for learning to take place.



## CULTURAL INFLUENCES



1. What do you see?
2. If there are others with you, what do they see?
3. Do you and the others see something different?

You probably saw a woman. If you were a young man about town would you be interested in getting a date with her? Did you by any chance see more than one woman? If not, go back and look again. Study the picture carefully. Talk about it with someone else if possible.

Shown in the picture are the heads and shoulders of both an old woman *and* a young woman. But normally you can only see one at a time.

For some people, seeing both women is very difficult.

Which brings us to:

**Point Number 1:** Our perceptions play tricks on us. Even though we know intellectually that this is true, in our everyday lives we assume an objectivity and a reliability that is not born out by events. Things are not always as they seem.

Research on responses to this picture reveals that young people usually see the young woman and older people see the old woman.

Which brings us to:

**Point Number 2:** We are selective in what we perceive (psychologists call it “selective perception”). In fact, most of what we are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting or feeling at any moment is screened out by our conscious minds.

We tend to perceive consciously only that which is important to us. But what, for the most part, determines what it is that we consider important? It is enculturation, our cultural training.

## CREATING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CLASSROOM

### What Is Multicultural Education?

- Multicultural education is not an add-on to the regular curriculum. It is a perspective that is integrated into the daily activities of the classroom.
- The environment is both responsive *and* demanding, an environment in which children's multiple intelligences are recognized and nourished.
- Effective teachers acknowledge and build on cultural differences, while at the same time preparing children to live successfully in both worlds—their home culture and the larger society.

### A Place to Start

- Teachers engage in reflective self-analysis to examine their own attitudes toward different ethnic, racial, gender, and social class groups.
- Teachers strive to understand how children have learned to think, behave, and feel. Schools can start with finding out as much as possible about the family backgrounds and experiences of all children in the classroom by:
  - Surveying parents
  - Reading multiple books (including novels and poetry) about the represented cultures
  - Careful observation of children to see what experiences seem to connect with them

### What Does the Classroom Look Like?

A wide variety of multicultural learning activities ensures that all children see themselves and their families reflected in the classroom environment. Classrooms should include:

- Pictures, puppets, dolls, foods, and other objects for dramatic play that represent diverse cultures and people with disabilities
- Learning centers—art, blocks, music, manipulatives, games, sand and water play, dramatic play—provide a place where children can use and develop competencies other than language. These centers serve as “safe havens” where second-language learners can watch and listen until they are ready to join in
- Songs and literature (on tape, in books, on chart pack) in diverse languages and from a variety of cultures, lifestyles, and income groups—especially those represented in the classroom
- A take-home library of children's books and tapes in the languages represented in the classroom, to encourage parents to reinforce the home language, as well as to read to their children
- Using multicultural literature dealing with issues pertaining to race, class, gender, or disability can teach children to think critically and, at the same time, build a democratic classroom and school

## Family/School/Community Relationships

Developing strong family/school/community relationships is essential to providing cultural continuity for children. A number of strategies can be used to enhance continuity and help children feel valued and secure. It is important to respect a family's beliefs about sharing their culture and language—some families may feel that this practice is intrusive. If families are comfortable with these activities:

- Children can bring pictures of their families and share favorite stories or songs from home
- Parents and other family and community members may be encouraged to visit the school to share aspects of their culture—reading, telling stories, sharing oral traditions, beliefs, values, and knowledge of traditional celebrations, art, music, poetry, and dance
- Families are encouraged to use their home language in the home—talking, reading, telling stories, and singing with children

## Second Language Acquisition

The most successful bilingual programs appear to be those that emphasize and use children's primary (home) language, while at the same time helping children to learn English. Research on both first- and second-language acquisition shows that language is best learned through actual use in a nonthreatening social context. Learning a new language is encouraged by:

- Focusing on meaning rather than correctness of form, regarding errors as part of the learning process
- Learning as many words as possible in a linguistically diverse child's language
- Providing bilingual signs around the classroom
- Encouraging children to teach the class a few words in their language
- Helping children connect new words with meaning by using contextual cues, such as gestures, actions, pictures, and real objects
- When posing a question, increasing the "wait time" from the usual one second or less to three or more seconds
- Using lots of predictable books, songs, chants, and poetry with rhyme and repetition

Tabors (1998) suggests these language techniques to help young second-language learners begin to understand what is being said in the new language:

- Using lots of nonverbal communication
- Keeping the message simple
- Talking about the here and now
- Emphasizing the important words in a sentence
- Combining gestures with talk
- Repeating certain key words in a sentence

## RESEARCH ON FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

- The most effective forms of family involvement are those that engage parents in working directly with children on learning activities in the home. Programs that involve parents in reading with their children, supporting their work on homework assignments, or tutoring them using materials and instructions provided by teachers show particularly impressive results.
- Family involvement is most effective when it is comprehensive, long-lasting, and well-planned.
- Family involvement should be developmental and preventive, promoting strengths rather than remedial intervention.
- School practices to encourage parents to participate in their children's education are more important than family characteristics, such as the level of a parent's education or their socioeconomic or marital status.
- Children from low-income and minority families benefit most when parents are involved in schools.
- Parents do not have to be well-educated to make a difference.
- When parents help their children with schoolwork, the effects of poverty and the parents' lack of a formal education are reduced.
- The earlier family involvement begins in a child's educational process, the more powerful the effects will be. Involving parents when children are young has beneficial effects that persist throughout the child's academic career.
- Family involvement works for older children too, even if they have not been involved previously.
- Most parents prefer informal, personal attention in parent/teacher relationships.
- Parents want and need direction to participate with maximum effectiveness.

DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP MODEL

**Self-Assessment**

The **Partnership Model** is a model for developing parent/professional partnerships. It uses a strength-based approach to building relationships with families and assumes that:

- Programs are designed with a prevention/promotion approach
- Parents want what is best for their children; therefore, families, educators, and social service workers share their expertise with each other
- Knowledge is shared and building trust is the foundation of successful planning
- The family is a system whose concerns must be addressed through a comprehensive approach
- The environment around the family must be supportive and empowering
- Family members participate in developing goals and action plans

*Partnership groups, including representatives from education, human services, families, and community members, should use this self-assessment form as a springboard for discussion, not as an evaluation of programs. When each question is discussed, partner members can talk about what this would look like in their school or agency. Members should use their own expertise and experience to inform their rating and feel free to add guidelines as they arise.*

**Directions:** Think about the family activities, interactions, and physical attributes of your school or agency. Rate your school or agency by writing the number in the rating box next to each statement.

**Rating Scale:** 1 = No ◦ 2 = Developing ◦ 3 = Yes

**1. Steps in active partnership development.**

Our organization creates a climate through policy and support that:	Rating
a. Is positive and proactive in communicating with families and demonstrates acceptance, support, and cooperative intentions	
b. Provides staff time to develop rapport with families	
c. Encourages two-way information exchanges between families and staff; is open to sharing of information and ideas	
d. Acknowledges and values the expertise and knowledge of parents	
e. Encourages teachers, service providers and families to support each other in respective roles	

<b>2. Building on family strengths and capacities.</b> <b>Teachers and service providers:</b>	<b>Rating</b>
a. Recognize and emphasize the positive aspects of the families we work with	
b. Reframe problems as goals to be addressed with families	
c. Offer information, resources, and support rather than solutions, causes, or blame	
d. Model the attitude that “everyone knows something and no one knows everything”	
e. Are respectful of and knowledgeable about the family’s perspective, including the family’s culture, values, and structure	
f. Help families to see themselves as competent, and promote strengths	
<b>3. Collaborative activities and atmosphere.</b> <b>Our organization creates an environment and climate in which teachers and service providers:</b>	<b>Rating</b>
a. Collaborate using the parent’s and professional’s information, and engage in joint information-sharing activities with families—each learning from the other	
b. Carry out activities and projects together with families	
c. Support families in identifying their goals, needs, and priorities; trust parents to decide what is best for their family	
d. Empower families to make informed decisions by providing necessary information and guidance	
e. Work on families’ agendas first, prior to professional concerns	
f. Engage families in identifying and utilizing community resources and their informal support network (e.g., family, friends, neighbors, church groups, etc.)	
g. Participate in joint decisionmaking with family members	
h. Advocate for/with families	

Source: Adapted from Dunst, C., Trivette, C., & Deal, A. (1988). *Enabling & empowering families: Principles & guidelines for practice*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR INCLUDING FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY IN LITERACY ACTIVITIES

**The Writer's Briefcase.** Filled with paper, blank books, stapler and staples, crayons, markers, pens, pencils, stencils, envelopes, clipboard, scissors, pencil sharpener, paper clips, paper fasteners, a variety of stickers and gummed labels, and an article for parents explaining the reading/writing process you use in your classroom, this briefcase can be taken home by a different child every night.

**Student-made school or class newsletters.** These help keep parents informed and included by describing class activities, providing the words recently learned songs, sharing recipes, and offering examples of children's work and suggestions for learning activities in the home.

**Book in a bag.** Children take home a book in a bag for home reading with family members. Adding both a comment section and a "tips for parents and caregivers" section encourages active family involvement.

**Literacy fairs.** Literacy fairs are a great way to celebrate literacy accomplishments and educate the community about your approach to literacy instruction.

**Family stories.** Family stories are narratives in which the youngster or other relatives are the featured characters in simple home adventures of days gone by (Buchoff, 1995). Buchoff writes, "Every family has its own unique body of stories that can be transmitted to the children of the family through the pleasure of story telling. Since it is often difficult for adults to recollect a special memory or specific anecdote on the spur of the moment, it can be quite helpful when children are provided with a list of 'Tell me about' prompts. Examples of such prompts might include: 'Tell me about something I did when I was little' or 'Tell me about when you got lost on the mountain.'" Young children can record their stories on audiotape or videotape and the teacher can transcribe them, or children can dictate the stories to an adult or older child. Children can also illustrate their stories and act them out.

**The Mom and Dad Book.** Jennifer deGroot-Knegt, child-care director at Kente Kinder Centre in Ontario, Canada, offers this suggestion: "We ask children to bring pictures of parents, grandparents, or other caregivers to make a cooperative class book. One page is allotted for each child. We ask children to dictate stories about what their parents do and what they like them to do with them. Children also illustrate their stories. It is wonderful to read through when they are missing their parents throughout the day. These books can also be checked out and taken home by children."

**Bulletin board.** Sydney Gewurtz-Clemens, author and teacher, suggests that classrooms make a special bulletin board for displaying drawings and writing by children about their families and *invite* children to contribute. So that children aren't pressured to participate, this activity should not be required.

**Meet the teacher day.** On an early childhood listserv, a child-care director suggested: "To help get to know each other, we send a bag home with families who attend 'Meet the Teacher Day.' We ask the students to put five things they like in the bag or five things about themselves or their families. Attach a note to each bag to welcome the student and explain the purpose of the bag. Put together a bag for yourself that goes home with the children's bags. If a child misses the meeting, we send the bag in the mail. Each child then brings the bag to the first day of school."

**Family banner.** At a child-care center, teachers supply a kit for each child to take home to make a family banner. The kits contain fabric, glue, scissors, markers, and other materials, at a cost of about \$1. Each family designs their own banner, which is displayed throughout the year, hanging from the ceiling. They then display the banners at a family picnic in a nearby park.

**Supporting multicultural awareness.** In a recent workshop, teachers in a migrant-education program were discussing how difficult it was when Mexican families often planned a return to Mexico to visit relatives during the middle of the school year, just when the students were finally learning to read. Because when the children return

they frequently have not maintained their literacy skills and have to “start all over again,” some teachers had been trying unsuccessfully to persuade families to postpone their trips home until summer (at the height of the harvest season) or even not to go at all.

One teacher, however, reported that her school staff had struggled with this issue, but “since visiting family was a vital part of the Latino culture that was unlikely to change,” they had come up with a plan that benefited all concerned. An investment in inexpensive instant cameras for the children to take to Mexico, with instructions to “take pictures of all your relatives and write a story about each one to share with the class,” enabled the children to use their literacy skills in a way that connected their families and culture to a meaningful learning experience that enriched the entire class. Some mothers also organized a workshop where they hand-stitched covers for the cameras and taught their skill to other parents.

### **From Cherry Valley Elementary School (Polson, Montana):**

**Children’s own published books.** These can include an “about the author” section and a comment page for parents and visitors to use in responding to the book. Children who have difficulty coming up with their own story can be encouraged to retell a traditional story, such as *Thumbelina*, or to create an innovation of a familiar story, such as *Red Deer, Red Deer*. These books can then go home with children and be shared with family members.

**Traveling books.** Written as a group, with each child contributing a page on a shared topic, these books offer opportunities for families to see the progress of all the children in the class, as well as their own child. Teacher Doug Crosby comments:

Think about a worksheet—it might take 10 or 15 minutes to fill out a worksheet and it will be thrown away or hung on the fridge. Take a traveling book. It might take an hour to make it. Each child might read it with their mom and dad for 10 minutes. It comes back to the classroom, becomes part of the classroom library and is read during the day. At the end of the year, it becomes part of the school library. How many hours of reading and enjoyment is that book giving to kids?

**Including the larger community.** At Cherry Valley Elementary School, parents regularly bring children’s published books to Polson’s doctors’ and dentists’ offices. Now, along with copies of *Field and Stream* and parenting magazines, local residents can not only read the latest student works, but they can also sign their name and write responses to the book on the comment page.

**Authors’ parties.** Families and friends are invited to listen to their child read his or her own individually written and illustrated books, make comments in the comment section, and then move on to another child.

**Floppy Rabbit’s Journal.** Each night, a stuffed rabbit named Floppy goes home with a different child, armed with a reading bag that contains a draft writing book, a journal, and colored pencils. On the first page, “Welcome to Floppy Rabbit’s Journal,” it is explained to parents that because “Floppy is not too good at writing yet,” it is up to the person who takes Floppy home to confer with parents to correct spelling and punctuation, and to “help it make sense.” Then the adventure is written into Floppy’s journal, accompanied by a colored picture. In addition, parents are encouraged to write their own version of Floppy’s stay, so children can see that their parents also like to write.

**Intergenerational relationships.** Establishing a relationship with residents at a local nursing home can benefit all concerned. At Cherry Valley Elementary School, children, both in multiage groups and with their classrooms, have been visiting a local nursing home and establishing a relationship with one or more residents. Children then interview the residents, who frequently tell stories about their lives. Young children may simply remember as much as they can, while older children take notes. They then write the stories, share them with the residents, make suggested changes and edits, publish the stories, and take them back to the nursing home, where they read to the elderly residents. Parents staff the busy publishing center, making possible a high volume of published books to meet the increasing demands of the community.



## GUIDELINES FOR FAMILY-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS

### Self-Assessment

This is a self-assessment tool based on a family-centered approach and discussed in the training series *Working Respectfully with Families: A Practical Guide for Education and Human Service Workers* (Connard, Novick, & Nissani, 1996). Family-friendly schools create a supportive climate for children and families based on the following assumptions:

- The parent is the child's first teacher
- Congruence between values taught at home and school is necessary to promote educational success
- Parents' support of education and learning is essential regardless of their level of education, economic status, or cultural background
- The school must take the lead role in eliminating traditional barriers to parent involvement (Fruchter, Galetta, & White, 1992)

School members should use this as a self-assessment tool and as a springboard for discussion, not as an evaluation of programs. When each question is discussed, members can talk about what this would look like in their school community.

**Directions:** Rate your school or agency on a scale of 1 to 5:

1 = not at all ◦ 2 = beginning ◦ 3 = some of the time ◦ 4 = most of the time ◦ 5 = all of the time

#### 1. Outreach to Families. In our school, we:

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| a. | 1 2 3 4 5<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Use a personal, face-to-face approach to recruit and invite families  |
| b. | 1 2 3 4 5<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Help parents get involved by providing transportation or assist in finding transportation when needed   |
| c. | 1 2 3 4 5<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Utilize parent liaisons, family advocates, and other members of the community who may be part of a family's informal support network to help make connections with families   |
| d. | 1 2 3 4 5<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Have staff available to greet children and parents as they drop off and pick-up their children, especially in the first week  |
| e. | 1 2 3 4 5<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Design activities to be nonstigmatizing, nonthreatening, and nonevaluative  |
| f. | 1 2 3 4 5<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Use fun activities as early ice-breaking events   |
| g. | 1 2 3 4 5<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Schedule activities and events to fit the availability and work hours of parents; encourage active staff participation in these events  |
| h. | 1 2 3 4 5<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Tailor events to specific, parent-identified needs or interests   |
| i. | 1 2 3 4 5<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | Provide many different ways for parents to participate in the school, (e.g., advocacy, parent and community networking, cultural exchange, as mentors, adult learners, classroom volunteers, and participants on site councils and curriculum-planning teams) |

## 2. Supporting Children's Learning. In our school we:

- a. 1 2 3 4 5      Convey the message that parents are experts concerning their own children
- b. 1 2 3 4 5      Provide information, resources, and support for families as they develop learning opportunities in the home
- c. 1 2 3 4 5      Break barriers to participation by providing child care, language translation, written information in each family's home language, home visiting, etc.
- d. 1 2 3 4 5      Suggest books and other learning resources to parents
- e. 1 2 3 4 5      Provide homework assignments for children that are "family-friendly," and include information and instructions that help families expand on the school curriculum
- f. 1 2 3 4 5      Provide parents avenues to explore learning with their children in the school environment

## 3. A Welcoming Climate. In our school, we:

- a. 1 2 3 4 5      Create a welcoming, accepting climate, reflecting the cultures and languages of the families and community where the school is located
- b. 1 2 3 4 5      Create a welcoming reception area that contains information about the school and directions so family members can find their way around
- c. 1 2 3 4 5      Provide a variety of opportunities for parents and children to become acquainted with the school environment and staff
- d. 1 2 3 4 5      Provide meaningful ways for non-English-speaking parents to participate; make accommodations to allow these parents to participate in the same ways other parents can
- e. 1 2 3 4 5      Initiate frequent, informal, and positive contacts between staff and parents
- f. 1 2 3 4 5      Provide opportunities for informal socializing among parents and between parents and staff, including office and administration staff
- g. 1 2 3 4 5      Provide a space for parents at the school that is safe, accessible, and comfortable
- h. 1 2 3 4 5      Explore and establish ways to create a trusting climate where parents feel comfortable bringing concerns to the school
- i. 1 2 3 4 5      Treat all parents with respect
- j. 1 2 3 4 5      Give positive feedback and appreciation
- k. 1 2 3 4 5      Provide training for all staff in working respectfully with families
- l. 1 2 3 4 5      Give parent volunteers and leaders support, training, and recognition

**4. Opportunities to Get Acquainted. In our school, we:**

- a. 1 2 3 4 5    Take time and provide structure for parents to get acquainted with each other within the school environment
- b. 1 2 3 4 5    Help families build their informal supports by encouraging parents getting together outside the school
- c. 1 2 3 4 5    Build on the life experiences, strengths, and capabilities of parents by inviting them to share in the classroom program or school
- d. 1 2 3 4 5    Include small group activities during formal large group meetings and functions to encourage networking

**5. Meaningful Adult Learning Opportunities. In our school, we:**

- a. 1 2 3 4 5    Include the interests and concerns of parents when planning learning activities
- b. 1 2 3 4 5    Provide a variety of informational materials and technology for parent use—audio, video, computer, and other resources—and offer appropriate training to use these resources
- c. 1 2 3 4 5    Ask parents to share their expertise, encouraging parent-to-parent information exchanges, as well as parent/professional exchanges
- d. 1 2 3 4 5    Offer parents connections to classes for adult education (e.g., link families to alternate sources of transportation and funding sources, hold classes at the school, offer educational advising)
- e. 1 2 3 4 5    Use interactive activities and parent-oriented discussions rather than primarily lectures during learning activities

**6. Collaborative Group Processes. In our school, we:**

- a. 1 2 3 4 5    Encourage parent ownership of the group through joint responsibility and decision-making
- b. 1 2 3 4 5    Use group processes that help parents and staff to work together
- c. 1 2 3 4 5    Offer parents opportunities to problem-solve with professionals and other parents and make decisions both staff and parents are comfortable with
- d. 1 2 3 4 5    Share leadership roles with parents
- e. 1 2 3 4 5    Have group-centered (rather than leader-centered) discussions
- f. 1 2 3 4 5    Work with conflict openly and respectfully
- g. 1 2 3 4 5    Provide opportunities for families to give feedback regarding school curriculum and activities

Source: Connard, C., Novick, R., & Nissani, H. (1996). *Working respectfully with families: A practical guide for education and human service workers*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

# HANDOUT 11

## ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT

Traditional Approach	Family-Centered Approach
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Focuses on child in isolation from family, and the family in isolation from community</li><li>2. Focuses on deficits</li><li>3. Views the professional as an expert and decisionmaker</li><li>4. Categorizes problems, fragments services</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Links families to community support; builds the community environment</li><li>2. Focuses on child and family strengths</li><li>3. Creates family/professional partnerships, encourages joint decisionmaking</li><li>4. Provides flexible, respectful, and comprehensive support</li></ol>

Source: Connard, C., Novick, R., & Nissani, H. (1996). *Working respectfully with families: A practical guide for education and human service workers*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

## FAMILY STORY

This family story can be used in workshops and meetings, as a way to begin a discussion on implementing a family-centered approach.

**Mrs. Hamachek, Gabe's Mother**

It all began with a broken fuel pump. Well, to be truthful, it started way before that. We were doing okay—Ernie (that's my husband), Gabe (he's six), Maggie (she's three), and me. True, we still lived in Felony Flats (also known as Mt. David Housing Project), but we were putting money aside every month to get us a place where we could get away from the drug deals and the fights and the paper-thin walls; where we could have a vegetable garden for Ernie, and a flower garden for me, and a cat for Gabe and Maggie; and rooms bigger than closets; and a place for the kids to play.

Ernie was working for the McKinley Farm Machinery Company. He'd been there for only six months, but was getting tons of overtime; enough so that I dropped down from full-time to half-time at Kinder Care. It was hard on Maggie to share me with 25 other kids, and Gabe wanted me to be there when he came home from school. The pay wasn't great, but I love the kids and it beats Taco Bell. Ernie would tease me, "Why did the day-care worker cross the road? To get to her other job," he'd laugh. "Very funny," I'd say, "but I don't need another job with you around to bring home the paycheck."

Ernie and all the folks at McKinley were working so hard for so many hours, they were breaking all kinds of records and the company was making record profits. So, when the boss called them all in for a big meeting, everyone was sure it was to get a raise and a bonus just to say thanks. When the boss told them they were closing the plant to move to West Virginia, everyone walked away numb. They just couldn't believe it, you know.

When Ernie came home that day, he was different. He didn't say much, just kept staring out the window. He could have worked another week, but he didn't. He just stared. And now he's gone. And it looks like we're never gonna get out of here. I guess I should be grateful, though, cause at least we have cheap rent, and if we'd moved out, the waiting list for the projects is 8 years long.

I went on ADC for a couple months, just to get on my feet. All because of a company that was so greedy, they sold out their people just to get a tax break. Talk about people like me being on ADC—what 'bout Aid to Dependent Corporations! But my hours at Kinder Care went up to almost full time, and we're squeaking by.

Then, Maggie got sick and Gabe started making trouble at school and the fuel pump went out. And how am I supposed to ride the bus to get us all where we have to go by 8:00 in the morning? This isn't New York—the busses run every 45 minutes. So, there we are, standing in the rain, waiting for the bus, with no car and no husband, and no way to pay for health care, and heat, and car payments, and food on \$750 a month.

So, when my caseworker calls me and wants to know why I've been late to work so many times, and tells me he can't help me pay my babysitter because she isn't old enough; and Gabe's teacher keeps writing notes home saying Gabe doesn't sit still and do his work, and my mother—well, that's a different story. Anyway, what am I supposed to do?

Sure, the babysitter's only 14—but she's got a lot more sense than my caseworker. Besides, who else is going to come to my house and feed Gabe when he comes home from school for \$1 an hour?

But all the caseworker talks about is self-sufficiency and job attachment. Well, I'm attached, but how can anyone be self-sufficient on my wages. I'd like to see some of those politicians supporting their families on \$750 a month. It won't be my fault if I lose my job.

And Gabe—he misses the only dad he's ever known. And yeah, he hates to sit still and he's so nervous about holding a pencil, he holds them so tight he breaks them. I always said, if Gabe couldn't ride it, or throw it, or climb it, he wasn't interested. But watch him ride his bike or play ball!

So, what are schools for? Like my neighbor says, “When the corn don’t grow, you don’t blame the corn. You say, ‘Am I watering it enough; am I feeding it enough?’” So why blame me and Gabe? Why doesn’t she figure out what to do so he can learn? I’m doing my job, and then some. Why can’t the school do theirs?

### **Mrs. Lady, Gabe’s teacher**

I’m worried about Gabe. He’s such a bright kid. But he just won’t do his work. And his mother doesn’t answer my notes. I’m worried that he doesn’t get much support at home. His mom—she can’t be more than 21. She’s never even been to a parent/teacher conference. If she would at least read to him every night.

Jane, the kindergarten teacher, says he did fine in her class. But in first grade, we have to concentrate on academics. Gabe can’t even hold a pencil. And hyperactive! You should see him. I’m beginning to wonder if he might be drug affected.

Every year, we spend more time working on behavior problems and less on teaching. And we’re supposed to bring all the test scores up to above average! How can we do our jobs when parents aren’t doing theirs?

### **Mr. Able, the Caseworker**

It’s not that Cindi is a bad parent, or even that she doesn’t try. But, she makes all the wrong decisions—like hiring a babysitter who’s not even 15 and expecting us to pay for it. Sometimes, I think I should turn her over to Child Protection; but I suppose she thinks 14 is old enough—she was already a mother at 16. It’s probably good practice for the babysitter—she’ll be a mother soon enough.

And the fuel pump—if she hadn’t spent the money on Christmas presents for her kids, she’d have had enough to fix it. And now, she might lose her job because she can’t get to work on time. But there it is—babies having babies. And wanting the taxpayer to pay for it. I’ve got 160 families on my caseload—it’s enough to discourage anyone. But someone has to help those kids. They don’t pick their parents.

## **Possible Questions To Explore**

What structures in the school need to be in place in order for teachers and family advocates to be aware of family situations that may affect a child’s learning?

How can we ensure that schools and human service agencies provide respectful, nonstigmatizing and nonintrusive support?

What are some of the strengths of this family? risk factors?

How does each person see the situation differently?

What is Mrs. Hamachek’s perception of the role of educators? How does this affect the support that she and Gabe receive from the school?

What are some ways that Gabe’s teacher and his mother can work together to help Gabe succeed?

How can Mrs. Hamachek be helped to become an effective advocate for her family?

What are some ways that Gabe’s mother and teacher can help him to become more engaged in reading and other literacy activities?

How can teachers/family advocates/service providers link the family to needed help?

What are some of the limitations of your ability to help this family stay afloat?

Source: Connard, C., Novick, R., & Nissani, H. (1996). *Working respectfully with families: A practical guide for education and human service workers*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

# HANDOUT 13

## WIDELY-HELD EXPECTATIONS IN EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

5-7 years	7-9 years	9-11 years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ May continue to show intense emotions (One moment will say, "I Love you" and the next "You are mean.")</li> <li>◦ May appear anxious once again when separated from familiar people and places (beginning school, sleepovers)</li> <li>◦ Are learning to cooperate with others for longer periods of time; friendships may change frequently</li> <li>◦ Continue to develop feelings of independence by becoming able to do certain things (making a simple breakfast or riding a bicycle)</li> <li>◦ May begin to talk about self and to define self in terms of what they have or own</li> <li>◦ May feel they are being treated unfairly if other children get something they do not</li> <li>◦ Begin to see themselves as bad, good, clever, and may seem very hard on themselves</li> <li>◦ Begin to develop the ability to share possessions and take turns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ May continue to show bursts of emotion and impatience less frequently</li> <li>◦ May show emotions that are both judgmental and critical of themselves and others</li> <li>◦ Continue to feel some anxiety within the larger community when separated from familiar people, places, things (going to camp, sleepovers, shopping malls)</li> <li>◦ Are becoming more outgoing</li> <li>◦ Are developing closer friendships with others; may begin to play mainly with children of the same sex</li> <li>◦ Show a generally increased sense of self-confidence</li> <li>◦ Will eagerly take on tasks and activities likely to be successful but usually will not take risks</li> <li>◦ May define self as a particular name, age, size, hair color, or other characteristics ("I'm Elizabeth Ann, and I'm seven years old!")</li> <li>◦ Are sensitive to criticism and display feelings of success or failure depending on how adults respond to them</li> <li>◦ Continue to develop the ability to share possessions and to take turns if they understand something is not always "lost" by doing so</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ May appear relatively calm and at peace with themselves and occasionally become angry, sad or depressed, but these moments are usually short-lived</li> <li>◦ Often hide feelings of anxiety when introduced to new experiences by appearing overconfident</li> <li>◦ Continue to be very sociable and spend time with parents and friends of the same sex, and often have a "special" friend</li> <li>◦ Are generally positive about themselves and beginning to understand what they are good at doing; may comment easily, "I can do that" or "I can't do that."</li> <li>◦ Often define self by physical characteristics and possessions as well as likes and dislikes</li> <li>◦ Often vary between the sexes in their view of what is important in dress and physical appearance</li> <li>◦ Are sensitive to criticism and display feelings of success or failure, depending on how adults and peers respond to them</li> <li>◦ Continue to develop the ability to work and play with others</li> <li>◦ May not want to be disturbed when involved in an activity or game</li> </ul>

Source: The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland (1993). Nebraska Department of Education, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Area Education Agencies, Head Start—State Collaboration Project.

DESCRIPTORS OF LEARNING  
IN RESPONSIBLE LIVING

Individual Awareness and Responsibility

Early Primary	Later Primary
<p><b>Attitudes ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates self-awareness:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Represents self (e.g., drawings, journals, orally)</li> </ul> </li> <li>◦ The child demonstrates personal growth in self-confidence and motivation:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Applies previous knowledge to new situations</li> <li>– Expresses own point of view</li> <li>– Responds positively</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Skills ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates the ability to persevere and solve problems:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Recognizes when a problem exists</li> <li>– Asks for help when necessary</li> <li>– Identifies alternate solutions</li> <li>– Recognizes the consequences of actions</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates an understanding that everyone needs to give and receive love:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Demonstrates an awareness of situations in which individuals show caring or loving behavior</li> </ul> </li> <li>◦ The child shows responsibility for his own behavior and decisions:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Accepts responsibility for own behavior</li> <li>– Acts responsibly in a variety of situations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Attitudes ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates self awareness:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Describes self in a positive, realistic manner</li> <li>– Accepts and plays a variety of roles</li> </ul> </li> <li>◦ The child demonstrates personal growth in self-confidence and motivation:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Adapts to new situations with confidence</li> <li>– Expresses and defends own personal view</li> <li>– Responds positively to encouragement and considers input from others</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Skills ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates the ability to persevere and solve problems:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Recognizes when a problem arises</li> <li>– Seeks appropriate resources for help</li> <li>– Solves problems using a variety of strategies</li> <li>– Recognizes the consequences of decisions</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates an understanding that everyone needs to give and receive love:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Demonstrates respect and consideration for self and others</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Source: The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland (1993). Nebraska Department of Education, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Area Education Agencies, Head Start—State Collaboration Project.



# DESCRIPTORS OF LEARNING IN RESPONSIBLE LIVING

## Relationships

Early Primary	Later Primary
<p><b>Attitudes ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates compassion, empathy, honesty, and respect in dealing with others;               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Shows awareness of need for compassion, empathy, honesty, and respect in dealing with others</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Skills ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child practices effective communication skills:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Expresses thoughts, feelings, and opinions in appropriate ways</li> <li>– Listens attentively to others' points of view</li> <li>– Responds appropriately in a variety of social situations</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates an understanding of the nature of human relationships and how they develop and change:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identifies different types of relationships (e.g., peer, family, other)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Attitudes ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates compassion, empathy, honesty, and respect in dealing with others:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Behaves in a compassionate, empathetic, honest, and respectful manner in dealing with others</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Skills ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child practices effective communication skills:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Expresses thoughts, feelings, and opinions in appropriate ways</li> <li>– Understands the role and impact of nonverbal communication</li> <li>– Listens attentively and considers others' points of view</li> <li>– Responds appropriately in a variety of social situations.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates an understanding of the nature of human relationships and how they develop and change:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Initiates new relationships and maintains positive, existing relationships</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Source: The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland (1993). Nebraska Department of Education, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Area Education Agencies, Head Start—State Collaboration Project.

# DESCRIPTORS OF LEARNING IN RESPONSIBLE LIVING

## Social Awareness and Responsibility

Early Primary	Later Primary
<p><b>Attitudes and Skills ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates a respect for personal and societal rights and responsibilities:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Demonstrates an understanding of the purpose of rules</li> <li>– Identifies and applies safety rules in a variety of everyday situations</li> <li>– Participates cooperatively in social groups</li> <li>– Recognizes own uniqueness</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates an awareness that irresponsible, abusive, and exploitative behaviors are intolerable:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identifies and reports irresponsible, abusive, and exploitative behaviors</li> </ul> </li> <li>◦ The child understands how family roles and societal expectations influence behaviors:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Is becoming aware of social rules</li> <li>– Demonstrates awareness of how peers and family affect interests and choices</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Attitudes and Skills ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates a respect for personal and societal rights and responsibilities:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Demonstrates social responsibility in caring for personal and public property and the environment</li> <li>– Identifies and applies safety rules in a variety of everyday situations</li> <li>– Accepts and assumes a variety of roles within social settings</li> <li>– Demonstrates an awareness of and respect for the similarities and differences among individuals and among groups</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child demonstrates an awareness that irresponsible, abusive, and exploitative behaviors are intolerable:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identifies options for dealing with a problematic, dangerous, or unsafe situation (e.g., refusing, reporting, and leaving situation)</li> </ul> </li> <li>◦ The child understands how family roles and societal expectations influence behaviors:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identifies and applies social rules in a variety of situations</li> <li>– Demonstrates awareness of how the community and the media affect interests and choices</li> <li>– Explores how significant social figures influence personal goals and choices (e.g., historical figures, role models, fictional characters)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Source: The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland (1993). Nebraska Department of Education, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Area Education Agencies, Head Start—State Collaboration Project.

# DESCRIPTORS OF LEARNING IN RESPONSIBLE LIVING

## Lifelong Development

Early Primary	Later Primary
<p><b>Attitudes and Skills ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child shows care and concern for others in need or crisis</li> <li>◦ The child demonstrates respect for the health of self, the health of others, and the environment</li> <li>◦ The child appreciates personal goal attainment:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Sets attainable personal short-term goals</li> <li>– Experiences satisfaction in attaining goals</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Skills ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child practices good health and safety habits (e.g., nutrition, fitness, hygiene, recreational activities)</li> <li>◦ The child understands and adjusts to change:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Demonstrates an awareness of changes within themselves and in their environment</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child identifies a variety of information sources</li> </ul>	<p><b>Attitudes and Skills ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child shows care and concern for others in need or crisis</li> <li>◦ The child recognizes the connection between a healthy environment and human health</li> <li>◦ The child appreciates personal goals attainment:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identifies and follows specific steps to achieve short-term goals</li> <li>– Experiences satisfaction in attaining goals</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Skills ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child practices good health and safety habits (e.g., nutrition, fitness, hygiene, recreational activities)</li> <li>◦ The child understands and adjusts to change:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identifies opportunities for personal growth with relation to change (e.g., moving provides opportunities for new experiences and friendships)</li> <li>– Adjusts to new situations and experiences and applies problem-solving strategies</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Knowledge ...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ The child evaluates a variety of information sources</li> <li>◦ The child develops strategies for accessing reliable information and support systems</li> </ul>

Source: The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland (1993). Nebraska Department of Education, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Area Education Agencies, Head Start—State Collaboration Project.

## FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR LINKS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIES:

**Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1994** provides children in targeted assistance schools a portion of Title I funds if other public and private sources do not meet a variety of needs, including basic medical equipment; eyeglasses and hearing aids; compensation for a school-linked services coordinator; development and training for parents in identifying and meeting the comprehensive needs of their children; and professional development for teachers, pupil services personnel, and other staff.

**Title XI of ESEA** allows local school districts the flexibility to reallocate up to 5 percent of the funds they receive under ESEA to programs of school-linked comprehensive services. Districts must submit a separate application to use ESEA funds in this way.

**The Goals 2000: Educate America Act** recognizes and supports the need for a more comprehensive approach by providing resources to states and communities to develop and implement comprehensive education reforms aimed at helping all students reach challenging standards for academic achievement and occupational skills. The law addresses school readiness; school completion; competency in challenging subject matter; science and mathematics achievement; literacy; safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools; and parental participation. Goals 2000 asks states and local education agencies to create broad-based planning groups that include educators; parents; business leaders; and representatives of health, community, and human service agencies.

**The Family Preservation and Support Program** provides funding for states to improve the well-being of vulnerable children and their families, particularly those experiencing or at risk of abuse and neglect. States are encouraged to use the program as a catalyst for establishing a continuum of coordinated, integrated, culturally relevant, and family-focused services. Activities range from preventive efforts that develop strong families to intervention services for families in crisis.

**The Head Start Program**, as reauthorized in 1994, funds state collaboration project grants that help build early childhood systems and access to comprehensive services as well as supports for low-income children in every state.

**Even Start**, administered by the U.S. Department of Education, provides federal "glue money" for local collaborative efforts to improve family literacy through early childhood education, parenting education, adult basic education, and parent-child interactions. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1994 contains provisions that suggest collaboration between Even Start, Head Start, and Title I efforts.

**Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities**, administered by the Department of Education, supports comprehensive strategies that include drug-prevention curricula and programs linking schools and communities.

**The 21st Century Learning Centers Program** (authorized under Title X, part I, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) provides funding for after-school programs. The focus of the program is to provide expanded learning opportunities for participating children in a safe, drug-free and supervised environment.

Source: Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, & the Regional Educational Laboratory Network. 1996. *Putting the pieces together: Comprehensive school-linked strategies for children and families.*

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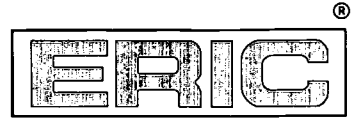
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