

Chapter 8

Promoting Family Involvement through Using Technology

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter the authors have provided an overview of some of the ideas about families and technology use in early childhood programs. The four authors are university faculty and provide their thinking and some experiences with family involvement and teacher training. The chapter is framed with the idea that families are the first teachers of children and play a major role in learning. There is a special introductory section written by Denise Winsor, who piloted the Family Builders and Family Preservation grants in the 1980's. Winsor provides insight into the role of family in early childhood education. The next section explores technology that is used to facilitate family involvement and building family involvement through technology. The authors briefly discuss some of the issues, problems and solutions to technology within family relationships and the role you might play as a professional. They try to address the advantages and disadvantages of family/school communication approaches to developing technology relationships with caregivers. They have included some real world examples from practitioners and how they help our students conceptualize technology use with families. The last section includes helpful advice for families concerning appropriate use of technology with their child. The authors hope this chapter helps you think about the role of families in your classroom and how technology can work for the development of stronger relationships as well as academic support.

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INTRODUCTION

Discussions about early childhood education and development cannot be justified without the inclusion of parental and family involvement (Winsor & Blake, 2008). In ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1978) and according to Vygotsky, humans develop externally as a result of interactions with others, and we are products of the cultures in which we are reared (1978). Likewise, Bronfenbrenner, who was a co-founder of Head Start Programs in the United States believed that the immediate classroom environment is a *microsystem* (i.e., family, peers, teachers); a *mesosystem* is that which directly links to the immediate classroom environment (i.e., a child's home environment); an *exosystem* is that which indirectly links but may affect the immediate classroom environment (i.e., a parent's work, relationship, financial situation); and a *macrosystem* is the much larger cultural context that can impact the classroom environment. Given that preschool education is often times the gate keeper between a child's first formal educational experience and perhaps the end of nurturing pedagogy as they exit the tender care of their parents, it is essential that in early childhood models of education the parent(s) is an essential and vital component. In order for a teacher to have a successful relationship with a child there needs to be a relationship between the parent and the teacher. Similar to running a relay race, the runners who exchange the baton must have a strong connection between them; much time, energy, and practice goes into executing the exchange to be flawless. Preschool teachers get the first opportunity to prepare young children to be lifelong learners, but this includes educating parents, too.

John Dewey believed that parents are the central component of a child's growth and development. For decades there has been an ongoing controversy between the influences of nature versus nurture, this research is grounded using multiple theoretical approaches that heavily supports the

nurture theory, which is strongly supported by most developmental researchers, particularly in areas that are concerned with the influences of parents. There are difficulties involved in researching parents and very young children (i.e., parent accessibility, children's language development, valid measures to reliably evaluate); therefore, most of the parent-child research in education usually involves social and emotional factors or play. There are several studies that have found that, parent's beliefs influence child rearing (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Segal, 1985; Stevenson et al., 1990) but limited research exists on how parents' beliefs influence academic performance in early childhood education. Just as education has changed in the past half-a-century, so has parenting and the role of parents. Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinard (1998) studied parents' emotional expressiveness and found that children tend to express their emotions more freely when parents expose their children to emotional vulnerability. The important idea here is that children learn first from their family, and this knowledge and understanding get carried over into the classroom. Senge (2000) found that parents can often be the most resistive towards adjusting to their child entering school because they lose control of what their child's learning. In this study, parents had strong beliefs about what and how their children should be taught and justified this belief based on: (a) an association with their own positive or negative experiences and (b) how it connected to their belief within a large family and social dynamic (e.g., how their child compares to the neighbors child, what to tell the grandparents, and will their child be able to get into a competitive college).

It should be clarified that the relationship between the parent and child is reciprocal in nature, that is, the impact is not solely from the parent to the child in a linear course of action. As children begin to develop the cognitive, social, and emotional changes, in turn, influence the parental interactions with them; depending on the parent's beliefs and experiences this shift can be positive

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