

Chapter 10:

Continuity and Partnerships

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Guiding Principle: Partnerships and Continuity

Kindergarten teachers honour children’s families and communities, recognizing that children interact with and learn in a variety of contexts and that family engagement in children’s learning is a critical support for their school success. The continuity of children’s past, present, and future learning is best supported through coordinated home, school, and community approaches.

Children’s learning is enhanced through strong family and community connections. As such, teachers honour and respect children’s families and commit to inclusive and collaborative partnerships with parents and guardians. Teachers take the time to learn about the dreams, values, expectations, and factors that shape each of their students’ lives at home and in their communities. Family involvement helps to create optimal learning experiences that are relevant for and respectful of each child and helps parents to engage fully in their child’s learning and development. Teachers invite families to participate in decision making and goal setting for their children wherever possible.

Manitoba’s Kindergarten teachers recognize that young children may have previously attended early learning and child care facilities, Aboriginal Head Start centres, nursery schools, or other early childhood development (ECD) programs. Many Kindergarten children attend another ECD facility during non-school hours. We can help children to successfully negotiate transitions between their various experiences when we scaffold on their prior knowledge. We actively communicate and partner with other early childhood professionals in our community, and with allied professionals in our school.

The Importance of Family and Community

From an early age, children are active participants in their families and communities. Families provide their children with their first and most important learning experiences. As such, families have a central role in promoting their children’s well-being, learning, and development in the context of supportive communities. How can we build effective partnerships that bring out the best in us as teachers and early childhood educators (ECEs), and in parents and community partners, for the benefit of our Kindergarten students?

The importance of the social environment to children’s learning is discussed throughout this document. Clearly, however, a culture of respect, inclusion, and mutual acceptance benefits parents and teachers as well.



Cultural Perspectives on School-Family Relationships

For some families, the roles promoted in Manitoba schools may be new and culturally unfamiliar:

Beliefs about how parents should support their children's education are grounded in cultural perspectives and influenced by the historical relationships of schooling with family, faith institutions, and the state. . . . People within a society tend to assume that the ideas they hold are conceptually universal, and schools and families may not be aware that they hold different expectations about the other's responsibility (Hiatt-Michael). Newcomer parents may have experienced school systems quite different from Manitoba's in organization and educational methods.

Source: Manitoba Education. *Manitoba Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum Framework for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Literacy, Academics, and Language (LAL) Programming, June 2011 Draft*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, 2011. Section 1, 1–28 to 1–29. Available online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/eal/framework/index.html> (7 July 2014).

Early Years educators recognize the unique strengths in every family and within each community. A family's values, beliefs, and composition often come from their own unique racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds and may differ from the values and beliefs expressed in schools or other ECD programs.

Developing and maintaining a strong relationship with each family is vital for understanding and meeting the needs of children. What is involved? You commit to collaboration with families and aspire to ensure continuity of experiences for young children. You actively involve all important adults in the children's lives in order to offer a truly family centred approach. You encourage capacity building through family-to-family connections. As far as possible, you commit to continuity between home and school for young children and their families.

Continuity and Discontinuity

Children and their families may encounter continuity or discontinuity during the children's transition to school:

- *Continuity* occurs when the new environment (your Kindergarten classroom) builds on the previous experiences of the child. For example, if the new environment maintains similar routines or activities (things that are familiar to the child), there is a sense of continuity. Similarly, when the new environment provides information and supports parent engagement, there is continuity of experience for families.
- *Discontinuity* occurs when changes are abrupt and children and their families experience little support or assistance in handling those changes. According to the Centre for Community Child Health, "the key discontinuities are those involving differences in curriculum and teaching strategies, difficulties in sharing information, and disruptions in the relationships children and families have developed with teaching staff" (4). If we are not purposeful in our support of children's transitions, and their move from one environment to another is abrupt, then children may experience discontinuity. Children who have difficulty adjusting to a new environment most often show this in their behaviours.

Clearly, “continuity and connectedness between children’s past, present and future are essential for smooth transitions and success in life and learning” (State of Queensland 6). Kindergarten teachers and ECEs can intentionally facilitate continuity of learning for young children in Manitoba. This chapter discusses some of these intentional strategies.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the role of community in supporting children’s security and belonging is integral to the Reggio Emilia philosophy and practices. Each child in your class is a member not only of the Kindergarten community, but of the larger community as well. In the early childhood development community, your partners may include public health personnel, ECEs, the children’s librarian at a local library, the coordinator of a family centre, and many others. Within your own school, partners will include your Grade 1 colleagues, educational assistants who work within your classroom, allied professionals such as speech-language pathologists, and others. You can work toward continuity with all these partners, including families.

Indigenous Families

According to census and Manitoba Health data, “Manitoba has a high percentage of Aboriginal families and children, and this diversity is growing. Aboriginal children under six (not including those who live in First Nations communities) represent 19% of all children under six in Manitoba, compared to 5% in Canada” (Healthy Child Manitoba, *Starting Early, Starting Strong: Manitoba’s Five-Year Plan* 4). We welcome many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children into our Kindergarten classrooms, and we

need to know about these young learners and their families.



An Indigenous family enjoys storytime together.

Relationships are of paramount importance in an Indigenous world view, beginning with people’s relationship to the land, which is honoured as Mother Earth. The significance of this terminology is underscored by the respect given to the natural world as the provider of the means by which people are able to live a good life (in Cree, *mino pimâtisiwin*). When First Nations say, “all my relations” in prayer, they refer to the elements of nature.

Indigenous family structures extend beyond the conventional Western nuclear family. This kinship model includes cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and others in the community who are considered family, although the blood ties may be distant or non-existent. Children are often raised by grandparents or aunts and uncles.

The Indigenous social organization revolves around community. Traditionally, the community is of prime importance, and, in this world view, rights and obligations are communal rather than individualistic. There is an overlap between family and community, and one’s relationship to community is of great importance. Teachers

in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities especially need to develop good relationships with all community members, but this a recommended practice for all teachers.

Elders are key members of Indigenous communities. They are the respected keepers of knowledge and traditions to whom the community looks for advice and wisdom. The title *Elder* is a recognition and respectful acknowledgement by the community of an individual's knowledge and wisdom. Elders can play an important role in the classroom; classroom visits and other interactions with Elders are integral to the education of children. Teachers should be aware of the protocols related to consulting Elders and respectful interaction with them. For suggested protocols to follow, please refer to Appendix S: Elders in the Classroom.

Factors That Influence Children within Their Families

Children entering school today come with experiences that may vary greatly from those their parents or grandparents had at a similar age. Many factors influence the development of each child. You should be aware of these changing social elements and be informed about each child's situation. This knowledge will foster acceptance of various experiences and lifestyles and will be reflected in the types of learning experiences you provide.

Definition of Family*

The Vanier Institute of the Family defines "family" as:

Any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following:

- Physical maintenance and care of group members
- Addition of new members through procreation or adoption
- Socialization of children
- Social control of members
- Production, consumption, distribution of goods and services
- Affective nurturance—love

* Source: The Vanier Institute of the Family. "Definition of Family." *Our Approach to Family*. <http://www.vanierinstitute.ca/definition_of_family>. The Vanier Institute of the Family's definition of family first appeared in "Family definitions: What's it to me? An interview with Robert Glossop," *Transition Magazine*, March 1992. Reproduced with permission.

The Changing Family

Our definition of *family* is much broader today than it was in past generations. We have experienced many changes in our ideas of marriage and families, gender relations and roles, division of labour, and typical life cycle patterns. Although today many family lifestyles may be non-traditional, all children—whether they live in a two-parent family, in an extended family unit, in a single-parent home, in a shared custody situation, in a foster home, or in another type of family unit—want and need to share their feelings and experiences and to feel unconditionally accepted. Likewise, all parents want to be "good parents." It is important for you to know the children in your classroom well and to be supportive and accepting of all types of families without bias.

Compared to previous generations, more children today are growing up in smaller

families without siblings; however, with increased rates of divorce and remarriage, many are part of blended families with assorted step-siblings and step-cousins. Statistics Canada estimates that “the national divorce rate is about 38%—meaning that, based on divorce trends today, about 380 out of every 1,000 marriages can be expected to end within 30 years” (Statistics Canada, 2004, as cited in Luxton 10). Children in your classroom may be part of diverse types of families, such as extended (multi-generational), multicultural, multi-religious, blended, sexually diverse, adoptive, foster, single-parent, sibling-led, grandparent-led, or common-law families, as well as traditional “nuclear” families. Children whose parents are divorced often experience a shared custody arrangement (Bohnert, Milan, and Lathe 11).

How do you sensitively support children from so many types of families? Begin with small steps. For example, replace a phrase such as “take this to Mommy and Daddy” with “take this home” to avoid having a child feel discomfort or confusion. Depending on the nature of a divorced family’s custody or access arrangements, you might need to be sensitive to the non-custodial parent’s feelings of being left out of the communication loop, or you may need to share information with two families. How can you keep parents who do not live in the same house as their child on a full-time basis “in the loop”? What about newcomer parents whose first language is neither English nor French?

Think about traditionally celebrated days such as Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, and be sensitive to the feelings of children who may have two mommies but no daddy, or the reverse. You might decide to celebrate National Family Week instead. Your genuine interest will foster caring and understanding between yourself and students, between you and parents, and among all students in the classroom.



A mother and her child with exceptional learning needs.

Manitoba’s Changing Tapestry

Our provincial history is an ever-changing and evolving tapestry of peoples, languages, cultures, religions, technologies, and ideas, which began with our Indigenous peoples. This original tapestry was further developed by immigrants who migrated to this land over the last several centuries from around the world, many of whom were seeking freedom from the ravages of natural disasters, oppression, and war.

Manitoba’s diversity has accelerated in the last several decades due to the growth of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and to our success in attracting newcomer Canadians from around the world.

According to Manitoba Health and federal census data, “immigration continues to be a leading contributor to

population growth in Manitoba, having increased by more than 200% between 2000 and 2010. The majority of recent immigrants in Manitoba are from Southeast and Southern Asia, and Eastern Europe” (Healthy Child Manitoba, *Starting Early, Starting Strong: Manitoba’s Five-Year Plan* 4). The result is a more complex and rich human tapestry of spiritual beliefs, languages, experiences, and cultures.



Mothers carrying babies on their backs is a common cultural practice across Africa. In response to one girl's request, swaths of fabric were used to tie dolls to the children's backs.

The diversity that is present in our land today and that will evolve in the future is seen not as an obstacle or a problem, but as a strength and a source of hope for the future. Respect for, or appreciation of, diversity has become the keystone that unites Canada and its people, and is often upheld as an ideal for the world as a whole.

How do you respond to this cultural diversity in your own Kindergarten classroom? Since you know that cultural practices vary from family to family, you seek to support each child's development and learning in a culturally responsive way. Children's development is optimized when there is continuity between the school, the home, and the early education

and care environments in terms of experiences and expectations. Multilingual resources and communication tools, cultural/linguistic interpreters, and community outreach persons are common and often essential aspects of an effective community-involvement strategy.

Children in the Media Age

Most Kindergarten children have had experiences with television. In addition, they may have had some experience with various forms of digital media such as computers, tablets, smart phones, video games, and movies. They may have been exposed to inappropriate media content, heard profanity, seen explicit sexual acts, violence, gender stereotyping, drug and alcohol use, and so on. Some children may already be familiar with the use of social media, such as Facebook, to keep in touch with family, or may be video conferencing regularly with grandparents who live in another province or country.

Along the way, children will have picked up much incidental knowledge. They may have memorized many words, without necessarily understanding the concepts that match them. They sometimes appear ready for higher level thought processes than they actually are able to handle. Although children may appear more sophisticated or advanced today than children were in earlier generations, child development experts argue that this is not actually so. For these reasons, parents and teachers must remain observant, alert, and ready to provide the appropriate amount of guidance to young children throughout their development.

The Canadian Paediatric Society recommends that five- to nine-year-old children be limited to two hours or less per day of recreational screen time (TV, computer, video games, multimedia phones) (Lipnowski, LeBlanc, and Canadian Paediatric Society).

Stress and Mental Health

Family stress and trauma have developmental consequences and are real factors in the lives of many young children. Research has shown that prolonged “toxic stress” can have detrimental effects on the developing brain of a young child. Behaviour and development are affected when children experience stressful environmental situations such as parental depression and anxiety disorders, physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, addiction, domestic violence, and/or poverty. Newcomer children may exhibit temporary or long-term stress and mental health issues related to refugee, emigration, and settlement issues and experiences. In Manitoba, we have seen a substantial increase in the number of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and with mood and anxiety disorders (Brownell et al.). Supportive relationships play a crucial role in mediating the impact of stress on mental health as children learn coping strategies and develop resiliency. Ultimately, “creating the right conditions for early childhood development is likely to be more effective and less costly than addressing problems at a later age” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2).

Obesity and Physical Activity

According to the Canadian Paediatric Society, there is a global epidemic of childhood obesity, which continues to rise. The Canadian Paediatric Society reports that “up to 26% of young people (two to 17 years of age) . . . and 41% of their Aboriginal peers” are overweight or obese (Lipnowski, LeBlanc, and Canadian Paediatric Society). The risk factors for obesity are multi-faceted, but many are related to lifestyle and include sedentary time and non-exercise activity. Early childhood sedentary behaviour patterns worsen with age, but do respond to intervention. Children may be far more sedentary today than they were in previous generations. This may be due to a variety of reasons, such as the amount of time spent in front of various screens; overscheduling and a concurrent decrease in free play and outdoor play activities because of busy family lifestyles; and family perception about dangers inherent in allowing young children to play outside unsupervised.

Some school divisions and many teachers try to address these kinds of challenges directly by

- sharing information with parents about guidelines for physical activity and reducing screen time
- opening up schools in the evenings for parent-child drop-in physical movement activities
- dedicating time for recess or moving to the balanced school day schedule
- having children spend large chunks of time outdoors in natural environments
- ensuring that healthy food choices are available to children during school-sponsored meal or snack times

Preschool Experience

The internationally accepted definition of *early childhood* is the period of a child’s life from birth to age eight years (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development). In Manitoba, the term *early childhood* encompasses the period from birth to eight years of age, including both services and provision for children in the prior-to-school years and the early years of school, such as child care programs, Kindergartens, and nursery schools or junior Kindergartens.

A generation ago, Kindergarten may have been a child's first experience away from home; however, this is not the case for most children today. Many children have attended playgroups, nursery school, and/or some other type of early learning and child care program prior to Kindergarten. Some children who have had prior experiences in an early learning environment may be less intimidated or nervous about starting Kindergarten than those who did not have these experiences.

According to Statistics Canada, close to 78% of mothers with children from age three to five are in the paid workforce in Manitoba (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada), so most children in your Kindergarten class will have a mother working outside the home. As a result, many children in your Kindergarten class also attend an early learning and child care centre (or other caregiving experience) and may actually spend more hours of the day there than in your Kindergarten.

Early learning and child care (popularly referred to as *daycare*, although this term is no longer used by the government or in the field) is typically a full-day and often full-time experience for children whose parents are working or furthering their own education or who want socialization and early learning experiences for their children. About half of Manitoba's licensed early childhood education and care spaces are either co-located in schools or are on school property. The regulated child care system also includes licensed family child care providers who provide care in their own homes.

Part-day preschool services may be called preschools, nursery schools, parent-child or family centres, or children's centres. Some children attend Aboriginal Head Start centres, which are offered in some First Nations communities as well as in cities and towns in Manitoba. Some organizations offer part-day nursery school and full-time child care at the same location.

School-operated preschool options offered by some of Manitoba's school divisions may be called junior Kindergarten, *prématornelle*, child development centres, or nursery school. Many school divisions offer part-time or special learning experiences focused on early childhood development for children from birth to age five through the Early Childhood Development Initiative of Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning. Some school divisions host their own family centres, while others make space available to local parent-child centres, Aboriginal Head Start centres, and community-operated nursery school or early learning and child care facilities.

Whatever the location or sponsoring body, quality early learning experiences have been identified as a critical resource for young children and their families, benefiting all children, but particularly those from vulnerable groups. The evidence shows that they have both positive short-term and positive lasting effects on key developmental domains of language and thinking skills and social competence. Participation in high-quality child care does not threaten parent-child attachment or children's emotional development (Friendly and Prentice 107).

Access to licensed quality early childhood services in Manitoba, and indeed across Canada, is unequal, however: “In 2012, there were full- or part-time centre-based child care spaces for only 22.5% of Canadian children 0-5 years” (Ferns and Friendly 6–7), while 20.5% of children 0-5 years attend a licensed centre-based child care space in Manitoba

An ecological perspective on young children’s development must take into account their prior and ongoing early learning experiences, both at home and in a variety of possible ECD locations. Bronfenbrenner notes that “the developmental potential of settings in the mesosystem are enhanced if . . . the different settings . . . encourage the development of mutual trust, a positive orientation, goal consensus between settings, and an evolving balance of power in favor of the developing person” (212). When we bridge institutional boundaries or perceived systems barriers and engage with families, we increase the likelihood of continuous learning for our Kindergarten children.

Involvement and Engagement of Families

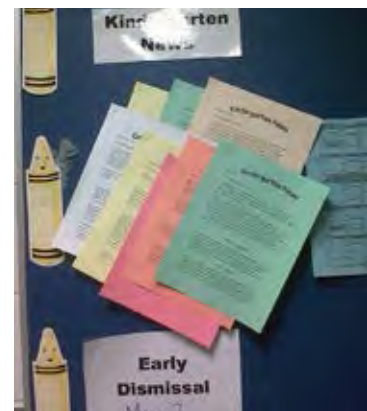
As a Kindergarten teacher, you recognize your integral role in facilitating optimal learning and development for children in a year that is either the beginning of their educational journey or the point of transition from child care, nursery school, or other settings to a school environment. You are also keenly aware that a collaborative partnership between teachers and parents and families throughout their children’s Kindergarten year is essential to children having the richest possible learning experiences at school and at home. The relationship established with families is particularly important in this time of rapid change to Manitoba’s social landscape due to the increasing diversity of families, with respect to culture, language, family composition, and so on. The new landscape presents opportunities and challenges for teachers, students, families, and communities, which are met most effectively through joint efforts focused on optimal outcomes for learners through strong home-school connections established in the first years of school.



Families see a welcome sign in their first languages as they drop off their children at Kindergarten.



Families are invited to spend time in a special family centre established in many schools.



A Kindergarten News bulletin board outside the Kindergarten classroom provides families with current information as they drop off and pick up their children.

Although family engagement is more than information sharing, keeping parents informed is one important part of helping families understand what their children are learning. In Manitoba, we have long recognized and supported the crucial role of parents and families working in partnership with schools for the educational success of students. Often, parent/family involvement is encouraged primarily through schools inviting parents to participate in school activities/events and parent groups or committees, including parent advisory councils. Parents are asked to help their children at home by reading with them, ensuring they complete their homework, and so on. Fortunately, parents are generally most actively involved in interacting with their child's school during the earliest years of the child's education, including Kindergarten. Many parents work during school hours, so the chance to be a regular volunteer in the class may not work for all families. You may need to think of other less traditional but equally meaningful ways of engaging families.

Parent/family engagement is increasingly acknowledged as an effective way to produce "much bigger gains for students, their parents, the school and the community" (Ferlazzo and Hammond 3). So, what is the difference between family involvement and family engagement?

Families want schools to welcome their active involvement/participation, provide them with opportunities to help, listen and respond to their concerns, keep them informed, and consider them partners in children's educational success (Governor's Office, State of Washington 4).

Ways to ask for family engagement:

- Tell me about your own hopes and dreams for your child.
- What can you tell me about how your child learns best?
- What role would you like to play in your child's learning?



Engaging Newcomer Families

For more support in engaging newcomer families, please see Section 1 (pages 1–28 to 1–34) of the following resource:

Manitoba Education. *Manitoba Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum Framework for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Literacy, Academics, and Language (LAL) Programming, June 2011 Draft*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, 2011. Available online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/eal/framework/index.html> (7 July 2014).

Dictionary definitions of *involvement* and *engagement* demonstrate that the two terms are not synonymous. *Involvement* may be understood as something the school does to the parent, while *engagement* implies doing with. The most effective school-family connections are based on family engagement, which you can think of as a reciprocal commitment to one another for the benefit of the children. That means families and teachers co-create the agenda for their collaboration (rather than one party telling the other what to do); they make decisions together, and then take action in tandem. Everyone, especially children, benefit when engagement is authentic.

While recognizing that all practices used to involve families have value, the continuum presented in Figure 10.1 identifies family engagement practices proven to result in greater and lesser impact on student achievement. Where do you think your own practices fall on this continuum? What about your school as a whole?

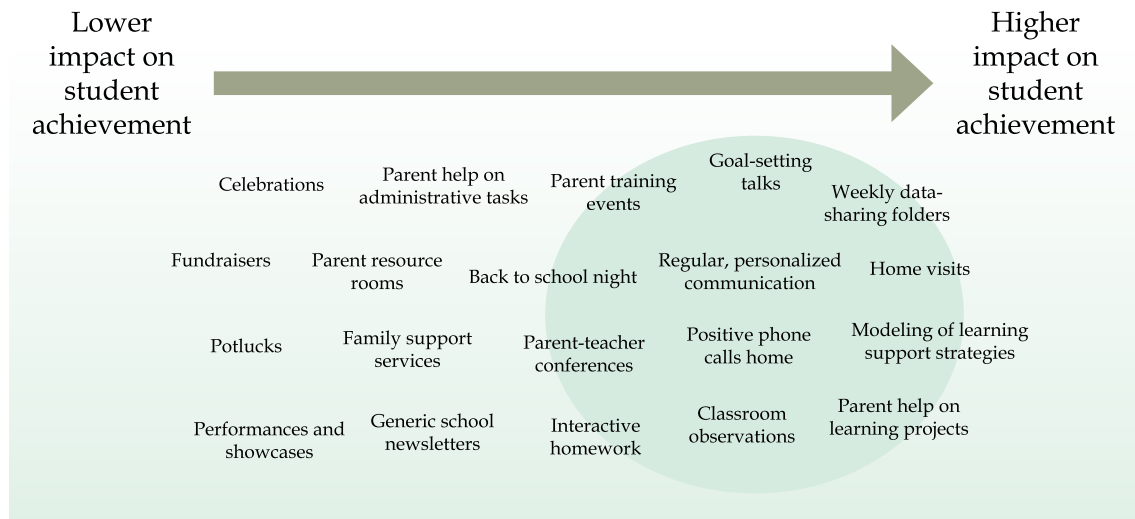


Figure 10.1: Relative Impact of Family Engagement Strategies on Student Learning*

* Source: The Flamboyan Foundation. Reproduced with permission.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Manitoba families are richly diverse, with an increasing number of newcomer Canadians choosing the province as home. These families may have had previous experiences with school systems that differ significantly from the Manitoba model with respect to organization and instructional methods. Indigenous caregivers may be reluctant to engage with school. Some of this reluctance may stem from the residential school era, which had an impact on generations of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families and communities. Thus, it is imperative that you, as the Kindergarten teacher with frequent opportunities to interact with families, actively “listen” to and collaborate with parents/families to ensure they feel welcomed and safe enough to become true partners in their children’s education.

Researchers note that it is not parental involvement per se that improves student achievement; rather, what contributes most is family engagement in learning within the home environment (Harris and Goodall 38). Parents “have a significant impact on their children’s education through the attitudes they help shape and the direct support they provide to their children” (Ontario Ministry of Education, *Parents in Partnership* 7). Helping families to understand what is happening in the classroom—*what* their children are learning and *why*, and *how* they are doing socially, emotionally, and academically—is essential, especially in a play-based classroom where learning can look quite different from what parents may expect. Intentionally working to develop two-way relationships between the school and parents that are based on mutual trust, respect, and a commitment to improving learning outcomes will help

to engage families. Parental engagement should be fully embedded and integrated in your teaching and learning plans to make a real difference.

Early Years educators respect family diversity by learning about cultures represented in the school or in the educational programming and by providing opportunities for learning about different cultural heritages in a respectful, positive way. Educators consider how to build regular and active parent participation into educational programming for young children. This gives parents relevant examples of the learning and development that take place for their children each day. It also helps parents understand why play is so important for young children.

Engaging Families in Play-Based Learning

Play-based learning is an ideal opportunity to invite family engagement and collaboration at the Kindergarten level. You can help ensure that families understand what their children are learning as they go about the important work of play. You may find that Sandra J. Stone's cartoon "A Play Creation" (see Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2) helps to clarify for families (in a humorous way) all the things their children learn about through play in Kindergarten. You may also find that the *CMEC Statement on Play-Based Learning* (see Chapter 2) helps to convey that play-based learning is recommended by education experts.

As discussed in Chapter 4, artifacts made by children and documentation such as Learning Stories help make play-based learning more transparent for families. Keep taking photos of children at play, and link the learning outcomes inherent in the Kindergarten curriculum to what children are doing in the photos to help families make connections. Inviting families to contribute to the learning in the classroom by contributing loose parts from home for Kindergarten collections is a fun way to build the home-school connection. Most families will have items such as buttons, pennies, old keys, and bread tags they can send to school, and they will be pleased to see how their child counts, sorts, and sequences these items in the photos you take.

Talk to parents about how they view the role of play in their child's learning at school and ask for their perspective on how they can enhance their child's learning through developmentally appropriate, play-based interactions at home. Parents may not be familiar with the effective play-based instructional approaches that shape their children's educational experiences, which makes your role even more vital in engaging them as active partners in providing children with appropriate play-based experiences.

Many schools hold a Kindergarten orientation evening in the spring of the year before children begin Kindergarten. In some schools, the principal and teacher use this occasion to speak to families. Other schools use an interactive child-centred approach. As parents and children rotate through a variety of hands-on learning experiences, educators informally talk to parents about what their children are learning through these types of play-based activities and encourage them to play and learn together. You can intentionally create play centres that have the kinds of items families would likely have at home, such as a table where children can sort and count buttons, coins, small pasta, cereal, and so on.



Kindergarten fairs often include play-based learning centres, such as this numeracy and literacy centre, which has magnetic letters and numbers and paperclips for children to count.

Framing Strength-Based Conversations with Parents

Frame your conversations with families by focusing first on children's strengths.

- Your child is so smart. Let me tell you what I saw him do today . . .
- Your child is so interested in learning. Today, she was trying to . . .
- Your child is a good friend to others. Today, I watched him . . .
- Your child said something clever today. She said . . .
- Your child asked such a great question today. He asked . . .
- Your child is so good at solving problems. Today, she . . .
- Your child will make you proud. Today, he . . .
- Your child loves you so much. Today, she told me . . .

Schools may provide parents with a Kindergarten bag filled with learning materials such as crayons, scissors, and books, which they can take home for their children. When a snack is served, parents have the opportunity to talk to one another and to the teachers, the principal, and others from the school, such as the music teacher, Reading Recovery teacher, or librarian.

Your role as a Kindergarten teacher is a highly demanding one, and requires family alliances to ensure optimal learning outcomes for students. The research is clear that “families have a major influence on their children’s achievement When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more” (Henderson and Mapp 7).

A combined junior/senior Kindergarten in an economically disadvantaged neighbourhood in Manitoba holds a Rhyme Time every Thursday. On that day, parents are encouraged to attend school with their children, and are also welcome to bring their babies and toddlers. A large circle experience with the Kindergarten children, their siblings, and their parents exposes children and families to literacy activities, including songs and fingerplays, which parents may try at home with all their children. Following the circle time, the group has a cooking time when children write out recipes, measure ingredients, and make a snack that is shared with parents and babies. Parents provide additional pairs of hands in the room during this busy learning experience.

Since you are probably the first teacher your students and their families encounter in the school, you have opportunities to engage families as allies in ways that result in the greatest benefits for all partners. The choices you make in seizing these opportunities can have a far-reaching positive impact on a child’s educational journey.

Kindergarten drop-off or pickup time may provide opportunities to engage in quick conversations with parents that inform them about their child’s transition progress, special events in the classroom or school, or the new learning their child has demonstrated. Remember to frame your conversations with families by focusing first on children’s strengths and the rich learning you see in their children as they play. These conversations give you a chance to answer any questions parents might have about their child or to check in on any concerns. Some teachers post their pedagogical documentation, class newsletters, and community notices on a bulletin board right outside the classroom where it is easy for parents to see while they are waiting.

In the following vignette, a Manitoba Kindergarten teacher shares an example of family engagement practices she is implementing successfully with the use of information technology tools.



Vignette: The New Face of Parent Engagement— The Impact of Social Media in Kindergarten

I teach in a small rural school, and each day more than half my students arrive and depart by bus. So, how do I maintain strong communication with parents when I rarely see them face to face? I send home a monthly calendar, I post blogs, and I tweet; but currently, my quickest and easiest tool for disseminating information is Facebook. After posting daily to my private classroom Facebook group for two years, I have found a number of ways to maximize the use of this popular social media site in Kindergarten, while protecting children’s privacy, as well as my own.

Initiating Facebook Communication with Parents

I was the first teacher in my school division to use Facebook with parents, so there were some growing pains in getting started. I would recommend getting permission from your school principal, information and communication technology (ICT) consultant, and superintendent, and written consent from parents. I introduced the idea of a classroom Facebook group at my pre-Kindergarten conferences in September, and I explained it in person to each parent/caregiver. I stressed that it would be set up to share information and resources with parents. If anyone had a major concern, Facebook was not the forum for airing it (a phone call, meeting, or private message would be more appropriate). After nearly two years, this approach has worked wonderfully well, and I follow the same procedure at the beginning of each school year.

Using Lists to Avoid Getting Too Personal

Setting up a classroom Facebook group does require me to be Facebook friends with all my Kindergarten parents. This has not posed a problem (I have a fantastic group of parents), as I have simply created a “Kindergarten parents” list or group in Facebook. This allows me to control my privacy settings and make sure parents have access only to the content I want them to see. With each status update and uploaded photograph, I can easily decide whether my Kindergarten parents will see it.

Establishing the Group

The only members of our Kindergarten group are my current parents/caregivers, any student teachers I have in a given year, and my principal. Every September, I remove the previous year’s parents from the group, and add the new parents after my pre-Kindergarten conferences.

Deciding What to Post

I use Facebook to post

- daily updates and reminders (e.g., return your library books and/or home reading books, remember we have music today, send back permission forms)
- information regarding what we are learning about (details about lessons and important skills we are practising)
- links to online resources and games that might be of interest to parents
- links to applications we are using on the classroom tablets if parents would like to download them at home

- photos of bulletin-board displays, art projects, work samples, and other documentation
- presentations from parent nights, literacy events, and so on
- our Kindergarten handbook with important information for families, supply lists, and so on
- videos or social stories that the children or I have created for easy home viewing

Occasionally, parents post information about sports teams or children's events in the community.

Creating Facebook Events and Asking Questions

I often use the Events tool to invite parents to conferences, concerts, and Kindergarten graduation. This information gives me an idea of how many guests to expect, and it is right there for parents in their Facebook accounts.

Occasionally, I poll parents on new ideas, such as how they felt about having me purchase all the school supplies and charging them a flat fee in the fall. The feedback was excellent and helped me to decide how to approach obtaining school supplies for the following school year.

Engaging Parents

Updating our Facebook page in real time throughout the day is so quick and easy with my smart phone and tablet, and parents love knowing what is happening in the classroom by checking their Facebook account throughout the day. I also believe that it improves parent-child communication. When parents are picking up their children or visiting with them after school, they are able to ask about specific events from the day. For example, questions such as "What do you think of those new riding cars in your classroom?" or "I hear that you learned how to print teen numbers today. Why don't you show me how to do it?" are going to lead to a much richer discussion and sharing than the age-old question, "How was school today?"

I would highly recommend this form of communication to any classroom teacher. Family engagement is extremely high in my classroom because parents all feel so involved. Parents rarely tell me they didn't know about something. When plans change, last-minute messages are easy to share with parents—and the counter attached to each post lets me know who has seen it and how many have seen it.

Using My Smart Phone in Kindergarten

I make use of my smart phone a great deal in the classroom to enhance parent communication. All my parent contact information is saved in my phone, so it is a snap to text, call, and have video conferences with parents when the occasion calls for it, such as for a child's separation anxiety and illness (e.g., "How sick are you really? If Mom sees you, she can decide.").

At pre-Kindergarten meetings with families and their children, I take the opportunity to enter all their contact information and sync it with my tablet and smart phone. Regardless of the situation, I always have one of my devices with me and can contact parents easily.

I regularly photograph children engaged in learning, and text the pictures to parents. Parents are always thrilled to see what their children have been doing at school, and it can be really motivating for children to know that when they

have completed a task, a record of it can be sent to their mom or dad. Once I have taken a picture on my phone or tablet, I can easily upload it to the student's online portfolio.

All parents have my cell phone number and know they can text me at any time, and I will respond. (Some of my colleagues don't agree with this, but I have had no problems. I have found that by responding immediately to parents' questions, small concerns don't have the chance to turn into huge problems.)

So, why not consider getting face-to-face with the most important people in your students' lives? As long as you operate within the parameters of your school division's policy, obtain informed consent from parents, and exercise good judgment when using social media, you have nothing ahead of you except more involved, engaged parents!



Reflection: Your Engagement Journey with Families

When you use your understanding of child development, developmentally appropriate play-based instructional strategies, and the integral role of families as equal partners in education, you are well-placed as a champion for family engagement. The following are some questions to reflect on as you continue your engagement journey with families:

- What am I currently doing effectively to interact and co-learn with families based on truly hearing what their hopes and dreams are for their child's learning success?
- Am I aware of my own potential biases, stereotypes, and assumptions that need to be addressed if I am to be effective in my collaborative relationship with families?
- Am I reaching out to parents even before their child enters Kindergarten in ways they view as welcoming and respectful and with a focus on collaboratively ensuring their child's successful transition into school?
- Do I collaborate with families in planning educational goals and enlist them in taking actions that result in optimal learning outcomes for their child?
- Have I shared with families the "big ideas" their child will learn in Kindergarten, the importance of their role regarding their child's regular school attendance, ways to engage their child in playful learning, effective strategies for reading with the child, and so on?
- When communicating with families about their child's academic or other needs/challenges, do I frame the conversation around strengths before addressing concerns?
- Am I seeking ways to connect with families who need interactions that more effectively engage them in their child's education?
- Am I seeking ways to communicate and involve parents who do not speak English or who are unfamiliar with our education system?
- Does the classroom environment appropriately reflect the culture and home lives of my students, and do my practices value differing parenting styles and family circumstances?
- Whose needs are met through my interactions with families (i.e., Do the interactions tend toward "doing to" [involvement] or "doing with" [engagement])?

Alignment Eases Transitions

Research shows that “a high-quality, well-aligned educational system for young children that bridges the divide between early childhood programs and K–12 schools can improve outcomes for children, engage and support families, strengthen the local workforce and economy and enhance their cities’ quality of life” (National League of Cities 1). Alignment of standards, curricula, teaching practices, and assessments are key parts of systems that value children’s social competence as well as academic progress, scaffold on children’s prior experiences, coordinate parental engagement efforts, strengthen community connections, and link families to the supports and opportunities that help them and their children to thrive.

Partnerships help develop a healthy school environment and a stronger community. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (discussed in Chapter 3) reminds us to consider children’s societal context, focusing on the interrelationship of family, school, and community (refer to Figure 10.2). We understand that young children who live in strong families and strong communities are more likely to have healthy development and to be successful at school.

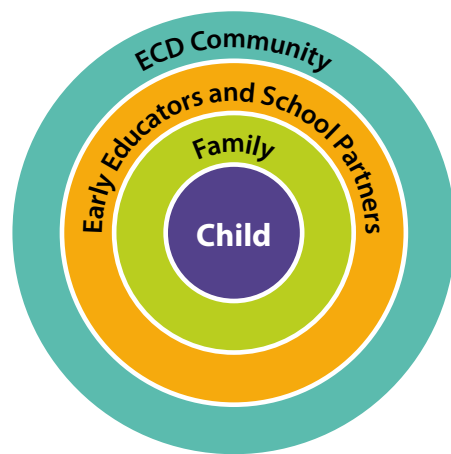


Figure 10.2: Layers of the Environment in Which Young Children Develop and Learn

Communities can provide support to parents in strengthening home-related elements of their children’s development. Parents may appreciate obtaining factual information about their children’s development in the areas of nutrition, prenatal and postnatal care, oral language, literacy at home, and other topics; however, check with parents to see what they themselves want to know more about. Remember, parents are the experts about their own children, and have much to share with you, too.

Think about the strengths, needs, and unique characteristics of your community and your school’s fit within it. Collaborate with other significant

partners in the early childhood development (ECD) community to help achieve the smoothest of transitions to school for each child. Welcome and include families and community partners into your classroom and into the school. See yourself as an active partner in each child’s education. Act as a champion for children within your larger community. Reach out to new partners, purposefully seek to engage children’s families, actively collaborate, and build strong relationships. Seek to smooth transitions for children and families and create continuity between environments and people. These actions will help foster optimal learning conditions for children, not only in Kindergarten, but also as they transition into Grade 1.

When early learning programs are intentionally coordinated, young children experience consistency in education. Clear partnership processes to align experiences

for young children and their families create stronger relationships between ECEs across different settings, and a sense of community and greater success for all. Helping children and their families prepare to transition between early learning and child care and the formal school system requires coordination and, ideally, an alignment between what children are doing before they enter school with what is expected of them once they are in school. It is important that you get to know ECEs in centres close to your school and become aware of the curriculum they provide.

Licensed Early Learning and Child Care

In licensed early learning and child care (ELCC) centres, the approach to curriculum refers to how learning opportunities are organized for children. The ELCC curriculum is based on goals for children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, while understanding and responding to the unique abilities, interests, and needs of each child. Diversity and inclusion are incorporated to reflect each child, family, and community.

Components of the Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care curriculum are based on the age and developmental level of the children:

- *Early Returns: Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Infant Programs* describes appropriate curriculum for children from three months to two years of age. The infant curriculum is based on positive, responsive interactions and relationships. ECEs use opportunities that arise during caregiving routines and in exploration and play to meet children's individual needs and promote learning and development.
- *Early Returns: Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Preschool Centres and Nursery Schools* describes curriculum for children from two to six years of age. The preschool curriculum is based on play, and components include interactions and relationships, environments, and experiences. Children are encouraged to extend their learning by communicating with adults and peers, exploring open-ended materials, and participating in hands-on experiences to promote learning and development.

ECEs have a unique set of skills, qualifications, and experiences. These include a strong foundation in child development, observation, and play-based learning. ECEs understand the importance of developmentally appropriate holistic planning that promotes children's development across all the developmental domains. The licensed ELCC system employs ECEs in full-time centres, nursery schools, and family child care homes, as well as in centres for older children (six to 12 years of age) that operate during out-of-school hours.

Licensed ELCC facilities in Manitoba are required to develop a curriculum statement to describe their infant, preschool, and nursery school programs to parents and community members. A clear curriculum statement helps ELCC staff provide intentional and purposeful curriculum to create meaningful and relevant learning opportunities for children. It also strengthens accountability to children, parents, management, and the public to provide play-based and developmentally appropriate curriculum.

The curriculum implementation practices are based on knowledge and beliefs about how children learn and develop. For example, children’s ability to write begins in infancy, when they are encouraged to explore art materials and practise “writing.” With more experience, growth, and development into preschoolers, children are better able to understand symbols and purposefully create lines, patterns, shapes, and pictures. Once children reach Kindergarten, they can use their prior knowledge and experience with print to begin to express themselves using the written word.

Wherever possible, alignment between Manitoba’s ELCC curriculum and Kindergarten curriculum should encourage continuity of vision, beliefs, values, and principles related to early learning and pedagogy from preschool to Kindergarten. Pedagogical alignment means that early learning standards, curricula, and assessments must be aligned as children transition into school. Moreover, pedagogical alignment refers to educators’ views of the nature of childhood and the importance of play to children’s learning, their approach to teaching (structured and didactic or emergent and responsive) and what they teach (focusing on subjects or developmental domains), and the values they hold about parents, community, partnerships, and more (Kagan et al. 10–11).

Developmentally appropriate early learning is child-centred, reflects family and community contexts, and encourages meaningful partnerships that include each child, the child’s family, and your early childhood allies. When children’s experiences in ELCC and school are intentionally coordinated, young children experience consistency in education. You intentionally create opportunities to scaffold on learning based on children’s prior knowledge and experiences to build a sense of continuity from preschool to Kindergarten and beyond.

Community-Based Parent-Child Programs

Within Manitoba, 26 parent-child coalitions support grassroots, community-driven programs for early childhood development. These community-based parent-child coalitions bring together parents, ECEs, teachers, health care professionals, and other community service providers to plan and work collaboratively in supporting the healthy development of children from birth to six years of age. Parent-child coalitions support existing community programs for families with young children and develop new initiatives that reflect each community’s diversity and strengths. Coalition partners encourage a broad range of services and learning experiences for children from birth to six years of age and their families, based on the priorities of positive parenting, nutrition and physical health, literacy and learning, and community capacity-building. Participation at a leadership level by community educators is critical for the success of community-based family support initiatives.

Many communities offer family resource programs, often located in schools, with supports and opportunities for parents and children to participate in early learning experiences together. These types of play-based early learning programs help to foster social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of children. Trusting, respectful relationships are developed when professionals spend time interacting with young children and their families and learning more about their strengths and

challenges. Children learn respect, empathy, and self-regulation when they relate to other children, families, and other adults. These interactions also help family members to deepen their own understanding of their children's development and to value learning through play. Relationships that support children, families, and educators from various systems are built with frequent, positive interactions based on trust and open communication.

Parent-child coalitions provide an opportunity to work with the community to promote the importance of the early years and to share Early Development Instrument (EDI) results, based on the work you do to assess children's development during the Kindergarten year. Children's strengths and vulnerabilities when they begin school are influenced by what has happened prior to school entry, and the family and community factors that shape children's early childhood development. As discussed in Chapter 2, EDI results are a reflection of the strengths and needs of children's communities. Community-level EDI reports are developed for the parent-child coalitions in Manitoba. For these community reports, the EDI results are grouped by where children live—by rural municipality or Winnipeg neighbourhood. Through their efforts to link with the broader community and to engage community partners in working for enhanced family support programs, parent-child coalitions use the EDI reports to address the strengths and needs of individual communities. Ready parents and families, ready communities and schools, and ready governments and leaders, working together, promote the best possible outcomes for Manitoba's children.

Collaboration between home, Kindergarten, child care, and other early learning services in a supportive community is essential for all children to experience success. Continuity occurs when the new environment builds on the children's previous experiences. For example, when your Kindergarten classroom environment provides familiar play materials, the children develop feelings of security, consistency, and continuity of experience. Similarly, when your Kindergarten offers information to families and encourages parent engagement, there is continuity of experience for parents. Self-esteem, confidence, and emotional development are strengthened when children and families feel accepted and supported.



Vignette: Pedagogical Partners

ABC School is a Kindergarten to Grade 5 school located in a culturally diverse neighbourhood of Winnipeg. The building also houses the **ABC Family Centre**, which offers programs such as Preschool Storytime and Drop-in Play and Learn for families and their young children. The centre is jointly funded by the school division and Healthy Child Manitoba and is staffed by an ECE and coordinated by a divisional teacher team leader.

Co-located in the school are two licensed early learning and child care programs. One is the **123 Daycare**, a full-time child care facility, licensed for 40 preschoolers and infants, with a long history of serving the community. The **Before-and-After School Child Care Centres, Inc.** is a larger multi-site child care agency that provides quality care and education for children between the ages of 5 and 12 years throughout the school division. Their **ABC location** is licensed for 45 children during the school year and 55 children throughout the summer program.

At the beginning of a project to form a pedagogical partnership, the four partners (the school, the family centre, and the two child care centres) recognized that although they often served the same families and children, they really knew very little about one another. Staff did not spend much time in direct interaction with one another. Their conversations were typically brief but polite, and they rarely crossed into each other's spaces even though they were all under the same roof.

Nine meetings were held over 18 months as project participants dug deeply into personal and organizational values and beliefs. The goal that emerged was to develop an overarching pedagogical statement that reflected their shared values and common approaches to working with young children and families across their separate programs, all located under the roof of the **ABC School**. While relationships had always been cordial, the chance to reflect and really explore those values and beliefs and how they played out in their respective classrooms was exciting and deeply meaningful for the participants. Partners articulated the desire that children and their families would experience continuity rather than feeling disconnected as they moved from one program to another, and that all would benefit from the common approach to teaching and learning in the building despite their separate governance and funding structures.

Educators used a series of questions to guide their many conversations. They asked whether they had a common, shared set of agreed-upon core values and beliefs about

- Kindergarten
- the way young children learn
- their role as teachers
- their role as early educators
- the nature of learning and teaching
- their view of the child
- the type of children's program they offer
- their work with families
- their relationships with each other
- their roles in the community

Shared Vision Statement*

We believe that children, being rich in potential, are capable, competent, unique people with their own feelings, opinions, and experiences. Children are at the centre of all teaching and meaningful learning opportunities, which grow out of responsive, purposeful engagement of educators, children, and families. Families provide their children with their first and most important learning experiences and are an integral part of their children's successes at home and in the programs in our school. On behalf of children and families, we want to create environments that support connectedness, empowerment, and the honouring of diversity. As early childhood educators, we respect individuality in children, provide rich learning environments, promote development through play, and build healthy relationships. Our role in the community is to support and advocate for the growth of children and families in partnership with other community members. We commit to mutually respectful and collaborative relationships with each other, families, and community partners.

* Used with permission of the project partners.

By the end of the journey, in addition to learning more about all they had in common, the partners had crafted a shared pedagogical vision statement, which was presented to families at board meetings, at parent council meetings, and in one-to-one conversations. The statement now appears in each partner's informational materials and websites and is meant to guide smooth transitions from one program to the next. Children and their families experience continuity, rather than feeling disconnected, and all benefit from the common approach to teaching and learning in this building.

The pedagogical partnership described here is unique in that it includes four separate partners: the school, particularly its Kindergarten; the family centre, serving young families who usually have a parent at home; and both a licensed preschool centre and a licensed school-age centre. It really reflects the continuum of services required by today's families. A key goal of the partnership is to provide and maintain consistency in the program delivery serving young children through pedagogical alignment, which takes the ideals of partnership beyond simple co-location and sharing of physical space to the sharing of the minds and passions of the people who work in the building. The chance to meet regularly away from the demands of work, "break bread" together, visit one another's spaces, and talk and talk and talk meant that many misperceptions were corrected, resources shared, commonalities identified, commitments deepened, stories exchanged, plans generated, and professionalism stretched and supported. As a result, a pedagogical community of practice is now operating in the school building.

Partnerships with School and Divisional Staff

As discussed in Chapter 2, when Kindergarten teachers actively engage with allied professionals, children are the beneficiaries and their development is better supported. Collaborative partnerships—with your school librarian, the Grade 1 teacher, educational assistants, your school division's psychologist or speech-language pathologist, or other external clinicians and service providers—will enrich your teaching and deepen the supports available to you and the children you teach. These partnerships require your active promotion of collaborative goal setting among parents, clinicians, and teachers. A collaborative-consultative model is workable only when there is a true sharing of information between the various professionals and you. As noted in Chapter 4, the framework on which the collaboration rests may be defined within a specific child's individual education plan (IEP). In some cases, however, your collaborative work supports many students simultaneously.

In one Kindergarten classroom, the teacher wondered how to increase children's use of positional words, such as *over, under, beside, right, left, inside, outside*, and so on. Students' use of language should be growing quickly during their Kindergarten year, and knowledge of positional words such as these increases their ability both to follow and give directions and to use language precisely. The Kindergarten teacher shared this learning goal with the music and physical education/health education teachers, who intentionally inserted this kind of language into their own work with the Kindergarten students. Practice with these words across different settings seemed to be the right approach for this group of children, who began to apply their new understanding of "position" no matter which setting they were in.

The Transdisciplinary Approach

Effective teams require interpersonal communication and collaboration skills. In a transdisciplinary approach, the decision of who does what is not based on the particular credential one has achieved. Instead, various professionals rely on each other to build on the range of strengths found in each child and family (Howard et al. 34–35).

The *transdisciplinary* approach or model is founded on shared meaning, fosters a coherent and holistic plan for children, and is especially supportive of early intervention efforts. It involves "the sharing of roles across disciplinary boundaries so that communication, interaction, and cooperation are maximized among team members . . . , with the family considered to be a key member of the team" (King et al. 211–212). Team members teach each other through continuous staff development, joint team functioning, and role release and role substitution.

The transdisciplinary approach works well when team members clarify respective expectations and explain discipline-specific concepts other team members may not be familiar with, such as the importance of play to children's learning. With this approach, various professionals interact, learn from each other, and value collaboration and shared experience. There may be a sharing of specific techniques and strategies unique to one discipline or another, a sharing of terminologies and best practices, conversations about observations, theories, and interpretations, and a focus on how best to meet child and family needs through a holistic approach and shared vision. However, some components of teaching and intervention should not be released to another team member. For example, as the Kindergarten teacher, you will retain responsibility for implementation of the Kindergarten curriculum. Some assessment tools may be administered only by professionals trained in their use. Some interventions may be beyond the skills of most team members or may require the involvement of a medical professional. In all cases, team members treat each other with respect.

If you have an educational assistant in your classroom, this assistant may be assigned to support a particular child's inclusion, or to lower child-to-adult ratios overall. Part of your work with your educational assistant will be to share some of your own knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices and play-based learning.

Other clinicians may help you and your educational assistant to develop any student-specific competencies that are required, such as how to expand and model language structures, facilitate a child's use of specific technology or equipment (e.g., a Braille), and so on. A clinician can be invited to conduct child-specific therapy within a small peer group in the classroom rather than pulling out the child to the resource room, thereby becoming a co-teacher and co-player in the room.

Figure 10.3 conceptualizes how collaboration between a speech-language pathologist and a Kindergarten teacher can help promote children's oral language development through a cycle of observation, reflection, differentiation, and assessment. The listening and speaking competency areas include conversation, grammar, oral stories, phonology, and vocabulary. For more information about listening and speaking competency areas, please see *Listening and Speaking: First Steps into Literacy* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth). Because the Manitoba English language arts (ELA) curriculum is currently being renewed, this Kindergarten support document makes connections to the practices identified in the new curriculum, as well as to the general learning outcomes (GLOs) and specific learning outcomes (SLOs) identified in *Kindergarten to Grade 4 English Language Arts: Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes and Grade 3 Standards* (Manitoba Education and Training, 1996). You can access information and processes for reflecting on the new curriculum in the group *Reflecting on and Moving Forward with a New English Language Arts Curriculum* on the *Manitoba Professional Learning Environment (Maple)* website at www.mapleforem.ca/.

The vignette that follows Figure 10.3 tells a story of how transdisciplinary collaboration between a teacher and a clinician was formed to address low language competencies within one Kindergarten classroom.

Based on their seminal 1995 study of vocabulary and language development in very young children, Hart and Risley emphasize the importance of a language-rich environment early in children's lives. They report that by the age of three, children born into low-income families have heard roughly 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers whose parents were college educated and employed as professionals. These disparities continue to grow over time, and by the time low-income children enter Kindergarten, they may be significantly behind their peers in language development unless they have had a language-rich experience early in life.

	Phase					
	Starting Out	Getting Acquainted	Planning for a Variety of Learners	Learning about Particular Learners	Monitoring Particular Learners	Reflecting on a Classroom of Learners/ Planning for a Variety of Learners
Purpose	Prior to fall term Gather formative information to plan/design the Kindergarten learning environment.	First days/weeks of school Gather formative information to plan/design learning and teaching contexts.	Gather formative information to differentiate instruction.	Work with particular learners to seek a deeper understanding of them to gather more formative information in different contexts at different times.	Clarify earlier observations by augmenting formative information about particular learners.	Begin/revise a class profile (see Appendix I). Plan/design learning and teaching contexts to differentiate learning. Develop/revise specific action plans for particular learners based on observation and formative assessment.
Grouping	Whole class	Whole class	Interest groupings or cooperative groupings	Flexible groupings	Interest groupings or cooperative groupings	Whole class
Focus for Observation	Overview of listening and speaking competency areas	One or two general listening and speaking competency areas and/or ELA GLOs	One or two general listening and speaking competency areas/ELA GLOs or descriptors/ELA SLOs (targets)	One to three specific descriptors/ELA SLOs (targets)	One to three specific descriptors/ELA SLOs (same as previous targets or new, depending on areas of strengths and challenges)	One or two general listening and speaking competency areas and/or ELA GLOs
Sources of Information Contexts for Learning/Observing	wellness fairs classroom visits parent interviews and/or surveys school/divisional orientations open house staggered entry	parent drop-off/pick-up classroom routines groups to introduce play centres information sharing with early childhood educators, if applicable	Routines and play centres	Extended or adjusted versions of previous play centres	Return to the contexts in the Planning for a Variety of Learners phase	Opportunities for exploration and play with sound and language in many rich contexts
Collaboration and Planning	Begin to develop or extend a common understanding of listening and speaking competency areas and ELA learning outcomes.	Make or revisit a plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grow as a team through team planning and reflections. Collaborate and share in planning, instructing, and observing the classroom groupings. Continue to meet to plan and reflect. Collaborative structures depend on divisional, school, classroom, and student needs.			
Team Reflections	Administrative support					
	What have we already learned that can help us plan a literacy-rich learning environment/context for this class? What do we see and hear in our class in terms of listening and speaking?	How do we meet the needs of a variety of emergent/beginning literacy learners?	What are particular learners' strengths, and what learning gaps are emerging?	How will we plan next steps to maximize listening and speaking skills and strategies for particular learners?	How will we plan and tailor the learning environment to differentiate learning opportunities and ensure the success of all learners?	

Figure 10.3: A Model for Maximizing Listening and Speaking through Collaboration in the Kindergarten Classroom

* Source: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. *Listening and Speaking: First Steps into Literacy: A Support Document for Kindergarten Teachers and Speech-Language Pathologists*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2008. 29. Available online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/ela/list_speak/> (1 Dec. 2014).



Vignette: Maximizing Listening and Speaking through Collaboration in Kindergarten

Staff in a school in northern Manitoba set a goal to be more strategic and intentional in supporting oral language development in the Kindergarten class. As a result, a partnership between the speech-language pathologist and the classroom teacher began with a reflection on important questions sparked by the Manitoba resource *Listening and Speaking: First Steps into Literacy* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth). Figure 10.3 can be used to support this kind of deep reflection and intentional planning.

Questions for reflective collaboration included the following (as suggested in *Listening and Speaking*, pages 27–28):

- What have we already learned that can help us plan a literacy-rich learning environment/context for this class?
- What do we see and hear in our class in terms of listening and speaking?
- How do we meet the needs of a variety of emergent/beginning literacy learners?
- What are particular learners' strengths, and what learning gaps are emerging?
- How will we plan next steps to maximize listening and speaking skills and strategies for particular learners?
- How will we plan and tailor the learning environment to differentiate learning opportunities and ensure the success of all learners?

The teacher and clinician team chose to focus on the question *How will we plan to maximize listening and speaking skills and strategies for particular learners?* They considered the classroom's learning environment and made purposeful changes to support language development within a play-based approach.

The collaborative partners established a focus by reflecting on observations, classroom-based assessments, and a formal screening. Basic concepts and their related vocabularies became a targeted area. The speech-language pathologist was scheduled into the class for large blocks of time every day in a “push-in” rather than a “pull-out” approach. (In this Kindergarten class, which operates at 0.6 time, the children come to school every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.) Language development became an integral part of the class schedule, beginning each day with a welcoming “meet and greet” circle time. Children were grouped into flexible small groups, and play centres were redeveloped to address the language needs of the students.

Scheduling accommodations were made to ensure the availability of more adult play partners in the class during this time. This allowed for the creation of small flexible groups of children, with many opportunities to hear language modelled by adults and to participate in many conversations. Displays on the classroom walls supported the basic concepts being targeted, and were helpful reminders for the children and the adults.

The speech-language pathologist and the classroom teacher used every opportunity to talk to the children and to encourage listening and speaking. Children began to use new vocabulary and expanded sentence structures at the dramatic play centre, when using classroom tools, and when having a conversation with the class pet.



The class schedule includes lots of time to talk.

(Top L) A chart of recess rules about "Where to Play."

(R) A display of "How to Get Ready to Go Outside."

(Bottom L) Children's dramatic play centre.
(R) The class pet.



Both partners reflected on the process of supporting oral language development:

- **Teacher reflections:** "I do lots of daily quick reviews. I find ways to work familiar topics into new conversations. I do lots of modelling. I introduce a topic in the morning and come back to it two or three times a day."
- **Speech-language pathologist reflections:** "Play time became a time for great language expansion, with all the adults in the room participating in the play and offering constant language enrichment to the children."

Together, the teacher and clinician developed a better sense of how to collaborate on early intervention strategies to develop oral language in the classroom, and to provide parents with support to foster oral language development at home.

Collaboration between Teachers and Early Childhood Educators

Collaboration between teachers and ECEs occurs in various ways within school divisions:

- Kindergarten teachers collaborate with ECEs as partners within the Kindergarten classroom.
- ECEs may work with four-year-old children in division-sponsored junior Kindergarten.
- Five-year-olds may spend half the day with their Kindergarten teacher and half the day with an ECE employed by the school division.
- Kindergarten and early learning programs remain under separate administrative structures, but teachers and ECEs make time to share and cooperate.

One teacher shared her experience in the following vignette.



Vignette: Working with an Early Childhood Educator*

My school division has full-day Kindergarten every day in six schools. Along with being given the gift of time with our Kindergarten students, we are also fortunate to have a full-time qualified ECE in each classroom. As a seasoned teacher, I feel privileged to work not only full days with these children, but also alongside an early childhood professional. We work as a team in the classroom.

As a team, we are able to create play spaces that encourage the growth of social and academic skills. With two adults in the room, we are more readily available to model appropriate play, language, and turn taking. We discuss what centres will look like and whether they will have a structured or unstructured set-up. Having two trained adults in the room allows direct instruction to take place, both through unstructured and structured play centres. In my classroom, there are times when both adults work together with the whole class, and other times when we each work with a small group of students. In this scenario, differentiation is not only attainable, but also successful.

The ECE understands the importance of reading to the children and knows there is more to reading than just picking up a book. She is able to have the children make predictions and make connections to the story, and she reads in a way that engages the children in the book.

The gift of having a longer day with these children and the benefit of having two trained professionals in the room enable the children to grow at their own pace and in their time. The curriculum remains as it was, but the children have the time and support they need to internalize what we want them to learn. As we know, children learn best through play, and having experts in the room who understand child development and the importance of play in learning makes this a win-win situation for the children.

* Used with permission of a Kindergarten teacher.

Collaboration with Adults in the Classroom

Whether you have an ECE, an educational assistant, a teacher candidate, a related professional, or a volunteer who spends time in your Kindergarten classroom, communication about your Kindergarten culture (the way things are done in your classroom) is very important for maximizing the benefits of having a second adult in your room. In one Kindergarten classroom, the teacher provides the following tips to other adults who spend time in her classroom.

Tips for Supporting Play*

(for Educational Assistants, Teacher Candidates, and Volunteers)

In this classroom, there are no “number of children” rules in any area or learning centre, but you can help children negotiate space when things get crowded or really loud, or when there is an increase in conflict. Here are some tips for supporting play:

- Engage in play rather than “supervise.”
- Help children focus on their plan for play with a question (e.g., “What are you playing?”).
- When children enter the space where other children are already at play, assist them in the following ways:
 - Help them join in if they need it (e.g., “They are playing ____ . Who will you be?” or “How can you help?”).
 - Help negotiate if the newcomer is not being sensitive to the play that is already in progress. (A newcomer can’t just come in and crash through play or begin playing in a way that interferes with the ongoing play.)
 - Help children negotiate materials. Simply saying “share” is not very helpful, as children may not be ready to give up something.
 - Encourage negotiating talk (e.g., “Can I have that when you are finished?” and “I am still using this. I will give it to you when I am done.”).
 - If it is really crowded, suggest an alternative (e.g., “There is just not enough room here right now. You may want to come back when there is more space. Where else would you like to play while you wait?”).
- Respect children who are engaged in play. Please don’t have them stop playing or go play somewhere else unless there is an important reason (e.g., they are playing inappropriately, being very loud even when asked to use a quieter voice). If you have asked them to go somewhere else, help them choose a new place to play and make sure they follow through. Redirect them respectfully (e.g., “You keep on taking Samara’s blocks even when she said she still needs them, so you will need to play somewhere else now. Where would you like to go play?”).
- Always try to avoid negative messages of what the children can’t do (e.g., “Stop . . .,” “Don’t . . .”). Instead, help children with what they *can* do (e.g., “Can you think of a way to build that wall so that it doesn’t fall down?” “Please play with the doll in this area rather than at the snack table.” “That wall is getting really high. If the top blocks fall, they may hit you on the head. Please build carefully so that you do not get hurt.”).
- Model the volume and tone of voice you would like the children to use. If we want children to use a quiet and kind voice, we must use a quiet, kind voice.

* Used with permission of a Kindergarten teacher.

Transition Planning

Throughout our lives, each of us will go through many transitions, which may include beginning a new job, marriage, the death of a loved one, or becoming a new parent. All these transitions, even the good ones, can be difficult as we adjust to the new experiences. If you were to reflect on your own significant life transitions, you might think back to your own first days of school. You might recall the first day of school as exciting or pleasant, or you might shiver and shake your head at the unpleasant memory. If you could fast-forward 20 or 30 years from now to ask the children starting Kindergarten with you this year to reflect on their first day(s) of school, what do you think they would say? Clearly, what we as educators of young children do today can make a huge difference in how these future grownups will respond to that question.

Transitions can be thought of as processes. As children grow and develop, they move or transition from one learning environment to another. Often, these transitions involve a process of change that requires learners to adapt and prepare for new experiences.

Transitions refer to changes between different types of activities. In education, we may talk about vertical and horizontal transitions:

- *Vertical transitions* are changes that occur over time (e.g., moving from early learning and child care to Kindergarten).
- *Horizontal transitions* are changes that occur during the same day (e.g., moving from home to Kindergarten to child care to home, and then perhaps out again for swimming lessons or soccer).

Starting Kindergarten is one of the most important moves a child will make. While it is an occasion for new opportunities and challenges, it is often a time of stress when the child and family are encountering new people and unfamiliar places. How you and your community partners handle the transition process lays the foundation and sets the tone for future expectations and experiences.

One of the important recommendations in the early childhood literature is to try to foster continuity between home and school, and between the preschool and school environments. The goal of continuity is to make transitions appropriately challenging and smooth, so children experience change less abruptly and can easily see and understand links between one setting and another.

Moving from Preschool to Kindergarten

Researchers have identified various elements and strategies that can facilitate continuity between preschool settings and Kindergarten. The following five strategies for promoting successful continuity, identified by Kagan (as cited in Hale, Brown, and Amwake 6), all require informed parental consent:

- written transition agreements between early childhood programs and schools, clearly outlining roles and responsibilities

- attention to children’s needs, including the transfer of names and records
- planned transition efforts that function year-round
- outreach to parents and training that informs them about early learning and child care options, the importance of play, the expectations of the school system, and available services
(For example, many schools hold a Kindergarten open house, often in February or March of the year before the child will start Kindergarten, where they share information with parents and encourage registrations. Some schools hold a Kindergarten orientation evening attended by parents and children, with learning stations for children and families and a chance to spend time in the Kindergarten classroom. Child care facilities located in the school or neighbourhood may also set up information booths that evening to ease registration for families who will require out-of-school care.)
- visits by Kindergarten teachers to local early childhood centres, and vice versa, throughout the transition from preschool to Kindergarten

Ideas for facilitating communication between ELCC centres and your Kindergarten include the following:

- Plan joint in-service training and workshops on topics applicable to both settings. If there is a speaker coming to your school for an in-service, consider inviting your colleagues from the other systems to join in.
- Plan cross-program visits and observations to learn more about what the children have been doing this year and how their ELCC centres have structured their days, environments, and learning experiences. Aim toward continuity and try to scaffold on prior successes. Continue to include the child-directed investigations and documentation processes children have experienced in their preschools. (For example, four-year-olds attending a child care centre located in a school were ecstatic when their soon-to-be Kindergarten teacher joined them for snack one day in June, and loved the chance to show her around and explain all their favourite things to do.)
- Schedule regular meetings and sharing sessions, as appropriate.
- Encourage communication via telephone, email, or conferences to discuss a particular child (with informed consent of parents).
- Celebrate successes together.
- Organize social situations where staff from both systems can meet.
- Develop written policies and procedures regarding transitions.
- Exchange newsletters, add each other to your email trees, and invite children’s ECEs and parents to class parties or open houses. When you are invited to attend these kinds of events hosted by your ECD partners, make the time to attend.

A carefully planned transition provides parents and educators with opportunities to participate as equal partners in the transition process. Cooperation among all the adults involved in the lives of young children and consideration of their needs during transitions helps provide the children and families with positive experiences.

Visiting Next Year's School and Classroom

To avoid discontinuity, confusion, and fear in children, you may already have developed specific activities that facilitate their adjustment. In some Hutterian colony schools with multi-age classrooms, four-year-olds may begin attending Kindergarten class during May and June to become used to attending class each day before they officially begin Kindergarten in September. Elsewhere, teachers may invite small groups of four or five children on successive days in June to the next year's classroom. This process is particularly important for the soon-to-be Kindergarten children, because it may be their first contact with the school environment. The teacher can then speak to the children individually and take them on a tour around the classroom. This is not a time to give any screening tests to the children, as these might only frighten and confuse them.

If the school provides a booklet for Kindergarten children to take home, the visiting children could receive it at this time. While the children are visiting their future Kindergarten classroom, and if they are willing to remain in the classroom on their own, their parents might meet with the principal and the resource teachers. Parents should be encouraged to ask questions and to share information; after all, their children are about to embark on an experience that is of vital concern to them, and everyone wants the year to be happy and fulfilling.

One Kindergarten teacher shared that during the June visits of new Kindergarten children, she takes a digital photo of herself with each child. During the summer, she writes a letter to each incoming child and includes the photo to help the child remember what she looks like. Children are thrilled to receive their own personalized mail from their new teacher, and this simple act helps reinforce what the children learned during their visit and builds their comfort level about school starting at the end of the summer.



Children receive a letter from their teacher during the summer before Kindergarten begins. Used with permission of a Kindergarten teacher.

Another Kindergarten teacher shared a variation of that welcome strategy. At the beginning of August, she mails a welcome letter to each incoming child, accompanied by a Kindergarten handbook for the family and a school supply list. One year, the welcome letter was printed on pink paper and included pink feathers. Parents reported that it was a big hit with their children!

When children visit your classroom, what things are most important to them? Children need to know what is expected of them in the new school and what they can expect in turn. They like to know pragmatic details about what to expect (e.g., Where will I put my jacket? Where is the bathroom? Where do I line up for the bus? Whom will I play with?). Of course, we want children to look forward to the experience with a sense of excitement and anticipation rather than a feeling of fear or anxiety. Some children, especially those with exceptional learning needs, may benefit from the

creation of a customized social story about their new Kindergarten, with photos of key experiences and people at their new school.

Gradual Entrance

“No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship” (Comer, cited in Payne).

Many teachers find they can establish a better relationship with each child if they plan for children’s staggered entrance into Kindergarten. Most children feel more comfortable if they can begin their new Kindergarten experience in small groups. If staggered entrance is to take place, children and parents should know well in advance so that the children are not disappointed to find they have to stay home on some days of the first week. Parents may need to arrange for child care on the days that their child will not be attending school.

Helping children and their families prepare for the big move to Kindergarten involves a great deal of planning, as well as careful consideration of the specific needs of children and families within the neighbourhood or community. In addition to the normal changes and adjustments that occur when children begin at a new school, many children and their families have specific needs to be met in transition.

Some school divisions offer a special day to ride the school bus for their junior Kindergarten children who will ride the bus to Kindergarten, so that they become familiar with the bus safety routines and guidelines. Other divisions organize an orientation day during which students who ride the bus will be picked up with their parents at their assigned bus stops.

Planning ahead can help reduce the anxiety and apprehension many children and their families experience during transitions.

Partnerships with the Grade 1 Teacher

Children will undoubtedly face many transitions throughout their school careers, and each transition will have its own associated challenges and excitements. Each new grade has distinct characteristics and unique demands for children and their families, including learning to trust a new teacher. As part of the move to Grade 1, children will likely meet new friends who may have attended other Kindergartens, or they may lose some favourite playmates who register for other schools. You can plan for a seamless transition from Kindergarten into Grade 1 in a deliberate way, understanding that the move from Kindergarten to Grade 1 has the potential to be a very stressful experience for young learners.

The concepts of continuity and alignment (as discussed earlier in this chapter) are important to how smoothly children make the transition to Grade 1 even when the move is only to another classroom down the hall in the same school. What is your own vision for alignment? How close is it to the following one?

The vision of pre-kindergarten through grade three alignment must begin with the recognition that early learning does not stop at the kindergarten school door—and play is the perfect example of how we must bring back developmentally-appropriate learning

experiences and carry them well into the third grade—or provide a seamless continuum of learning as children build upon the skills that they learn at an early age. (Connelly 4)

There is still an important place for play in the lives of first graders, and Grade 1 still offers young learners many opportunities for inquiry. Some Grade 1 classrooms may be more traditional and structured than your Kindergarten approach, both in the physical environment and in the types of learning strategies used. But many Grade 1 teachers share your image of the child and use child-centred approaches. Some children will struggle with the expectations to sit at desks rather than moving around the room, or they may find the full day of school tiring, especially during the first few months of the year. Sharing all you know about play-based learning, including this resource document, with Grade 1 allies is an important way to champion the unique learning styles of young students. Regular meetings between teachers to look at ways to align curriculum across the Kindergarten and Grade 1 experience are recommended. Sharing pertinent information about children (with informed parental consent) is a good strategy for supporting individual children.

Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers can intentionally plan for smooth transitions by organizing visits to the Grade 1 classroom, helping children to develop friendships during the year through a Kindergarten–Grade 1 buddy system, and offering family support that helps to allay parents' own concerns about the move. You can invite Grade 1 teachers to join the Kindergarten children for snack several times during the year, to see a play the children are showcasing, or to view their display of books they have written that year or their portfolios of all they have learned. Visits to the Grade 1 classroom before the end of Kindergarten will help children to keep a concrete picture in mind during the summer break of what comes next.

Even if you have not been going outdoors for recess throughout the year, begin heading outside in the spring so that the Kindergarten children become used to the bells, and the activity on the playground with children from all grades.

One rural school holds a yearly Kindergarten–Grade 1 switch day in the spring. Kindergarten students attend Grade 1 to experience their new environment firsthand for one day. In return, the Grade 1 students go back to Kindergarten where they reflect on and celebrate how much they have learned since they left Kindergarten one year ago. What a powerful experience for both sets of young learners!

As children gain familiarity with the Grade 1 teacher(s) in your school and with the physical space of the Grade 1 classroom, their anxiety should lessen and their comfort and excitement will grow. All they have learned during their time with you in Kindergarten, and the work you have done to help engage families in their children's learning, will help support smooth transitions for your Kindergarten children as they move into Grade 1.

A Letter from a Reading Recovery Colleague

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is a short-term intervention for Grade 1 students who have difficulty with early reading and writing. Specially trained teachers work individually with students in daily 30-minute lessons lasting 12 to 20 weeks. After a full series of lessons, about 75% of these students reach grade-level standard. Many Manitoba school divisions use Reading Recovery as an early literacy intervention.

Dear Colleague,

As a new school year approaches, please allow me to share some of the lessons I've learned from my experiences in Reading Recovery.

Believe all children can learn. Realize that they just learn at different paces. With this belief comes the understanding that we must pay particular attention to the different paths children follow to common outcomes.

*Hone your powers of observation. Know your children well. Teach purposefully to build upon what they already know. Think about the power implicit in the use of a child's own name as a springboard for instruction. Marie Clay's book *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* is a tool you may find beneficial in this pursuit.*

Understand the role oral language plays in the development of reading and writing. Invest time in conversations with English as an additional language learners, as well as reticent and reluctant speakers. Provide daily opportunities for all children to enhance and extend their oral language through talking, reading, and writing in both structured and unstructured settings. Think about how oral language development both benefits from and supports literacy instruction.

*Read to and with all children every day. Understand the role that shared and repeated readings of stories, poems, and chants should play in the development of oral language, concepts about print, and phonemic awareness. Provide daily opportunities for children to share and retell familiar stories through purposeful play. Be strong-minded in your belief that children don't need to know all letters and their sounds before they begin to read and write. See Marie Clay's book *The Puzzling Code*.*

*Understand the powerful connections to be made between reading and writing. Provide daily opportunities for children to write in both guided and unstructured settings. Think about the power of embedding letter and word study within the meaningful context of a writers' workshop. What children learn in writing, they can apply in reading and vice versa! See Marie Clay's books *How Very Young Children Explore Writing* and *What Changes in Writing Can I See?**

Endeavour always to balance your approach to literacy instruction: demonstrate clearly and provide opportunities for guided practice before encouraging children to "give it a go" in less structured settings.

Think about how much more likely our children are to succeed when we, as teachers, provide meaningful contexts through which to arrange for and celebrate success! Let's talk.

A Reading Recovery Teacher



Reflection: Continuity for Children

Reflect on questions such as the following:

- How do you think children feel when they move from their early childhood education program into Kindergarten or from home into Kindergarten?
- What kinds of stressors do you observe among children as they enter school? What do you think creates that stress?
- What do you think would help create a smoother transition for children? What types of activities/strategies would be most helpful?
- How can you intentionally work toward continuity of experiences for children in your Kindergarten class?

Summary

This final chapter of *A Time for Learning, A Time for Joy* provided an ecological perspective of the young learners in your class and of your important relationships with their families, communities, and partners, both within and external to your school. Your role as a champion for young children puts you in the forefront of community building, a vitally important outcome for the Kindergarten year.

“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It’s easy to say ‘It’s not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem.’ Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes” (Fred Rogers).



Continue Your Learning

For National Family Week resources and ideas, see:

Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada). Home Page. <www.frp.ca/> (25 Nov. 2014).

For more information about parent-child coalitions, and to find out how to become involved, see:

Healthy Child Manitoba. *Parent Child Coalitions*. <www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/parentchild/index.html> (28 Nov. 2014).

For more information about family engagement, see:

Ferlazzo, Larry, and Lorie Hammond. *Building Parent Engagement in Schools*. Santa Barbara, CA: Linworth Publishing, 2009.

Henderson, Anne T., Karen L. Mapp, Vivian R. Johnson, and Don Davies. *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. New York, NY: The New York Press, 2007.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). *About the Engaging Diverse Families Project*. <www.naeyc.org/familyengagement/about> (1 Dec. 2014).

NAEYC's Engaging Diverse Families (EDF) Project addressed the question "How do early childhood education programs meet the challenge of engaging families in the child's early learning and development?" Visit the NAEYC website for information and resources that resulted from the research project.

For Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care curriculum, see:

Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care. *Early Returns: Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Infant Programs*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care, June 2011. Available online at <www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/pubs/early_returns_infant_curriculum.pdf> (19 Sept. 2014).

———. *Early Returns: Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Preschool Centres and Nursery Schools*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care, June 2011. Available online at <www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/early_returns.html> (19 Sept. 2014).

For more information about the development of children's language, see:

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. *Listening and Speaking: First Steps into Literacy: A Support Document for Kindergarten Teachers and Speech-Language Pathologists*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2008. Available online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/ela/list_speak/> (1 Dec. 2014).

For more information about your work with educational assistants, see:

Manitoba Education. *Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, 2009. Available online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/ed_assistants/> (3 Dec. 2013).

To read more about parental involvement with EAL families, see:

Manitoba Education. *Manitoba Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curriculum Framework for English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Literacy, Academics, and Language (LAL) Programming, June 2011 Draft*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, 2011. Available online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/eal/framework/index.html> (7 July 2014).

For more information about educating children from refugee backgrounds, see:

Manitoba Education. *Life After War: Education as a Healing Process for Refugee and War-Affected Children*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, 2012. Available online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/law/> (1 Dec. 2014).

For more information about children's reading and writing, see:

Clay, Marie, M. *How Very Young Children Explore Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Publishing, 2010.

———. *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*. 3rd ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2013.

———. *The Puzzling Code*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2010.

———. *What Changes in Writing Can I See?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2010.

To read about the early childhood transition protocol, see:

Healthy Child Manitoba. *Protocol for Early Childhood Transition to School for Children with Additional Support Needs*. Winnipeg, MB: Healthy Child Manitoba, in press. Will be available online at <www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild/publications/protocol_cwsn.pdf>.

For more information about play-based learning, see:

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. *CMEC Statement on Play-Based Learning*. 19 July 2012. <www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/282/play-based-learning_statement_EN.pdf> (26 Sept. 2012).