

Citation: Carney, M. M. (1982). Home, school, and community support systems for young children. In D. Streets (Ed.), *Administering day care and preschool programs* (163-205). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

# VII HOME, SCHOOL, AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

M. Magdalene Carney

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter has a twofold purpose. First, it presents a model for day care, pre-primary, and early elementary education as a model for developing coherent programs for young children. Second, it discusses the challenges of real life.

Why is there so much emphasis on child-oriented programs? What kind of help do families need? Whom? When? For how long? What are the most effective community services and ways to prevent child-oriented programs?

The issues and questions raised in this chapter tend to propose solutions to problems. It is interesting why one solution may be chosen over another. Why we do things this or that way. The author's problems has long-lasting benefits for us when he says, "The trouble with the current questions is that it is caught in the trap of being too much theory." In this chapter I share with you theory and its application consistent with Phillips' admonition in this volume.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

A support system refers in part to the whole out of multiple efforts to create a mutual concern of home, school, and community to learn how to coordinate our

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter has a twofold purpose. First, it offers to administrators of day care, pre-primary, and early elementary centers a rationale and a model for developing coherent home-school-community support systems for young children. Second, it suggests ways to make the model work in real life.

Why is there so much emphasis on support systems for child rearing? What kind of help do families require in their child-rearing efforts? From whom? When? For how long? Under what circumstances? Why are coordinated community services and supports so difficult to deliver? Are there ways to prevent child-oriented agencies from working at cross-purposes?

The issues and questions raised suggest that we ought to modify our tendency to propose solutions to complex social problems without analyzing why one solution may be better than another. We need to question why we do things this or that way and whether what we do to solve social problems has long-lasting beneficial effects. Phillips (1975) states the case for us when he says, "The trouble with most thinking about larger social questions is that it is caught in the pull between having no theory and having too much theory." In this chapter I shall try to strike a balance and share with you theory and its application in practice in a way that is consistent with Phillips' admonition and that is in keeping with the spirit of this volume.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

A support system refers in part to a commitment to create a coherent whole out of multiple efforts devoted to a mutual concern. Children are a mutual concern of home, school, and community, and our primary job is to learn how to coordinate our efforts effectively to assist in their develop-

ment. Let us look at the family, the school, and the community to identify some of the key factors that impinge on our attempts to create a coherent whole out of our multiple efforts.

### The Family as a Support System

Peter Farb (1978) describes four basic functions the family performs in modern society. First, the family provides a social structure whereby the society can be perpetuated. This involves the procreation of children and the provision for their care during the long period of childhood dependency. Much of this care is provided by members of the family network. After survival, the family makes efforts to ensure that the children learn how to live in the culture. At that time, other kinds of survival—economic, political, social, and technological—become important. Other institutions and agencies, such as schools, religious bodies, politics, and the media, assist in the socialization process.

A second function of the family centers on the means by which society recognizes offspring as legitimate and competent to carry on its traditions. Rules about legitimacy are really the licensing of parenthood by society. Both simple and complex societies are concerned about legitimacy because the infant is the focus of many important relationships involving the roles played by the biological parents and the networks of kin to which they belong. Many options are opened or closed to both the child and the child's parents, depending on the factor of legitimacy.

A third function of the family is the regulation of sexual behavior. Rules that define the boundaries of sexual behavior are undergoing redefinition. While the redefinition is going on, sexual freedom makes boundaries appear to be nonexistent.

A fourth function of the family is one of economics. Before the beginning of the industrial revolution, the family was the basic production unit. Marriage in former times meant a merging of economic goods. Today, the family is more a consumer unit than a production unit, and thus the emphasis is on making sure that each family member learns how to secure material things—the more the better.

There seems to be a wide variety of acceptable arrangements for achieving the family functions of perpetuating a society, legitimating offspring, regulating sexual behavior, and providing for economic well-being. How well do these particular functions support child rearing? Here again, there is no consensus on the matter. For example, not all children from so-called broken homes or disrupted families are delinquents. Not all children from unbroken, stable families are models to be emulated. In fact, some children from economically rich families suffer from problems related to psychological and spiritual neglect.

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Bower (1971) posits a definition of a healthy, child-enhancing family.

A family or a reasonable facsimile, exists to provide children with the best chance of experiencing a mediating adult. Such an adult is able to lower and connect affective bridges with children over which all kinds of important cognitive-affective traffic can pass. . . . In the confusing kaleidoscope of objects, events, and feelings, the child is helped to see similarities in things that differ and differences in things that are alike.

A mediating adult, then, helps children to see how things are related to each other.

The mediating functions of the family often get lost by the press of economic, protective, health, political, and educational functions. The degree to which any of these functions is subsumed by other agencies and institutions, we have the appearance of breakdown, decline, or dissolution of the family. Many families can mediate only one function at a time. This is especially true when forces, conditions, and circumstances beyond families' control impinge on them. For example, inequities and injustices in the economic sphere alone probably mean that survival becomes *the* central family concern to be mediated. And certain families within our society experience a disproportionate share of inequities in trying to carry out family functions.

Families in their mediating function often need access to outside options for high-quality child care, such as substitute care, day care, home visiting services (all varieties), help in emergencies, agencies to act as mediators, and protective and guidance services. As parents turn more frequently to professionals for help, they find themselves unskilled in locating, much less coordinating, all the professional assistance they require. As modern family life reels under current economic, social, political, and technological pressures, other institutions are called on to take on added responsibilities in the caring for children.

If we believe what social scientists are saying these days, families also appear to need help in sorting out their values and priorities. Their findings may alarm some, disturb others. Many studies conclude that the family in the United States is on the skids, in trouble, falling apart, disorganized, besieged, and undergoing frightening, drastic changes.

Families appear to becoming more violent. Battered husbands and wives have become commonplace. Likewise, children come in for their share of brutality. One million cases of child abuse were reported in one year, and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect estimates that two million cases is a more accurate figure. Often children who survive repeat the process as they grow into adulthood, maiming their kin, friends, and strangers alike.

In addition to physical abuse and neglect we must include millions of children who are psychologically neglected, abandoned, and abused. We have yet to calculate the degree of damage that occurs when young-

sters conclude they are unloved and unwanted, because they are abused verbally by their parents or subjected to perpetual argument and squabbling.

Even before children are born, millions of them have their potential thwarted by malnutrition. If the requisite proteins are not provided during especially critical periods of development such as the second trimester of pregnancy or the first six months of infancy, as much as 30 percent of the brain's neurons may never be formed, which may mean a lifetime shortage of three billion brain cells!

Although all the evidence about the relationship between early chronic malnutrition and brain development has yet to be gathered, we do know that child victims of malnutrition are affected during those critical periods of their development that coincide with early formal learning. Even if the brain deficiencies can be remedied, it may be too late. "The child," Levitsky (1976) says, "may have been robbed of his most precious characteristic—the hunger to learn." What we have said here about the deleterious effects of malnutrition emphasizes the importance of the nutritional health of the couple prior to pregnancy, the health of the mother during pregnancy, and the health of both child and mother in the postnatal period. (For further discussion of this, see Chapter VI.)

As administrators, you can intervene in prenatal nutrition only to the extent that you advise prospective parents of services that can assist them. You can provide an environment for another important kind of nurturance to take place—feeding the mind. Others refer to this process as stimulation. I prefer to call it learning. Your effort to provide an optimum environment for learning to take place becomes more challenging as you consider the uniqueness of each child. From an administrative point of view, you may want to accept the fact that families may exhibit a variety of lifestyles; that families require more services from agencies outside itself; and that assistance to families is a shared responsibility, shared because it has been adequately demonstrated that parents, children, and families as a whole need support from all other systems. "What is needed," Hobbs (1975) affirms, "is a new partnership among public agencies, professional people, and parents to achieve an optimal balance of shared long-term responsibility...."

### The School as a Support System

When we refer to schools here, we are limiting ourselves to those institutions that participate in the care and development of young children. These institutions include all forms of day care, pre-primary centers, and early elementary schools.

The importance of these early child care development centers increases as we continue to compile evidence that the first five years of a child's life determine in a large measure how the child's later development

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will evolve. Given the critical significance of the early years, it becomes crucial for adults to learn and continue to learn all they can about human development, both biological and psychological.

Children in these early years are dependent entirely on competent, compassionate adults who arrange health-giving environments for them to develop in. This human being-environment relationship constitutes the basis on which a school can be structured and organized and on which character and personality can be developed.

There is no need any longer to argue the merits of whether or not early childhood centers are to be primarily custodial, academic, or social centers. All of these functions apply in degrees and according to the populations being served. The important fact to bear in mind is that *learning is taking place*, no matter what organizational or programmatic emphasis exists. We can decide to influence in positive ways the quality of that learning, since we know that a child's later development depends on it.

Requests come from a number of sources for schools to assist in getting parents re-involved with their children. This is a great burden to place on schools with underpaid, overworked, burned-out staff, even though most of them do a magnificent job with the resources available to them. More and more we are beginning to realize the importance of parents as teachers. They are, indeed, their child's first teachers. Most intervention programs have acknowledged the role of parents in producing long-lasting results in their child's intellectual and social development. Many parents want and seek to learn how to interact with their children in ways that facilitate their growth and development.

The school must operate within a context that encompasses the human organism as a whole—i.e., as a person endowed with infinite potential, with character and personality to be developed—and that recognizes the importance of the environment with its human and material dimensions.

We must continue to ask ourselves whether the school—the place where our society has institutionalized education—offers the kind of milieu that arouses enthusiasm for learning and becoming in children, staff, and all others who participate in that process.

### The Community as a Support System

In earlier times the community was considered an extension of the family, an enlarged kinship unit. Both family and community were relatively fixed in geographical and social space. For a time, both shared a loyalty to common values and standards of behavior. The community gave to the family physical protection in the form of laws and armies, group labor at harvest time, assistance during natural disasters, and even ritual condolences in grief. In return, the family nourished a child's development in ways that helped the child to accept those responsibilities imperative for



communal functioning. Gradually, communities became the social expression of common beliefs, values, and meanings, not only providing its members with the physical resources for survival, but also the intellectual, moral, and social values that gave purpose to that survival. To some extent communities continue to do this type of support. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult for people or parents to find the support they need among the many social units and systems.

Warren (1972) describes five basic functions that characterize communities today:

1. *production/distribution/consumption*, which concerns the availability of goods and services essential to daily living in the immediate locality (and includes all social institutions found in the community),
2. *socialization*, which refers to the transmission of basic values and behavior patterns to the individual members of the system;
3. *social control*, which is the structural arrangement that inclines community members toward behavioral conformity;
4. *social participation*, which refers to those social structures that facilitate one's incorporation into the community through opportunities for participation in community life;
5. *mutual support*, which describes the process of care and exchanges for help among the members of a group, especially in times of stress. Mutual support may be performed by socializing agents, family members, religious bodies, formal associates, friendship cliques, and so on.

Present-day communities exist within larger social systems made up of organizations, institutions, groups, and individuals. Many communities organized in this fashion, however, fail to serve their citizens equitably and adequately. The direction and control of the community may be left to those persons who specialize in particular arenas of life. While many benefits have derived from specialization, there have been serious shortcomings as well, the main one being fragmentation of effort. The complexity of this fragmentation, institutionalized in the form of huge bureaucracies, has created a vast distance (social and psychological) between those who attempt to deliver community services and those who need to receive those services. Incredible neglect and wastage have been the result. You can readily see, then, that coordination of services and energies becomes increasingly more difficult as a community becomes more complex. It is this complexity that you as administrators of early childhood centers face as you enlist community agencies for their services. Remember that people make up communities. If they want the community to serve their needs, they have to agree to unite their interests for the common good. It follows that policies and practices that aim to serve the citizens within a community must be integrated and not conflict with one another.

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larger social systems made up of individuals. Many communities serve their citizens equitably. Some of the community may be left out of the arenas of life. While many there have been serious short-allocations of effort. The centralized in the form of huge bureaucratic and psychological) between services and those who need to avoid wastage have been the result. Allocation of services and energies between community becomes more complicated for administrators of early childhood services for their services. Remember that we want the community to serve their interests for the common good that aim to serve the citizens and not conflict with one another.

There is yet another way to recognize community. Blackwell (1975) says that

people are brought together in community because they share common interests and values. They have accepted sets of definitions of situations, life experiences, or other conditions that give them a uniqueness apart from others whose views, values, and experiences are dissimilar.

As such, shared values, in the formation of a community, supersede geographic boundaries; they may also cross over social class and color lines. This special sense of community is worth keeping in mind as you work with diverse populations within your community. The critical issue here is to meet needs that are different without being unjust in doing so. We have yet to regard the diversity of humanity with appreciation and without prejudice. That challenge is ever before us and calls itself to our attention most forcefully as we strive to deliver human services.

Where are your children in the large, complex community? What responsibility does the community assume for their well-being? No blanket answer suffices. Communities vary in the way they regard and respond to the needs of their children. You will have to find out what kinds of services are available and whether they are actually used. You might look for family services, child guidance clinics, protective services, and day care and health care services as a beginning.

Beyond locating the kinds of resources mentioned above, you will need to find out about the quality of services these agencies give to people and which ones you can draw on for your purposes.

While it is impossible to take on the task of bringing coherence into an entire community, you can make an attempt to coordinate effectively those services that will help you to achieve the goals of your program. To the extent that you are effective in bringing coherence to what ought to be a collaborative effort, a significant contribution will have been made to bring about the kind of system integration that makes for greater efficiency.

Let us conclude this section on context and background by answering briefly the questions we raised earlier. There is more emphasis on building, creating, and developing support systems because society in general has grown very complex. We have a plethora of organizations, agencies, societies, and institutions with overlapping functions, responsibilities, and services. Some means must be devised to help people make sense of it all and to give clear-cut structures or channels for them to get what they need without so much bureaucratic hassle.

Many but not all families want and need supporting services of all kinds because they face the same kinds of turmoils and transitions the larger society around them faces. To compound matters, we have not placed parent education where it belongs—in early childhood training as well as in junior high and high schools. In other words, parent education begins in the family and becomes a continuing, lifelong process.

We can stop working at cross-purposes in devising support systems when we reach a level of moral commitment that nurtures and sustains cooperative rather than competitive behavior. There is no reason why strong support systems cannot be organized at the grassroots level in our communities. If we wait for institutions outside our domain to do it for us, we may wait a very long while.

### RATIONALE FOR A SUPPORT SYSTEM MODEL

Why do we need a model for developing and organizing support systems for young children? A model is needed to help us get all the mileage we can out of every resource, human and material, to serve the best interests of children.

Nicholas Hobbs (1975) makes a case for having a model to help us "create a coherent whole out of our multiple efforts." He says:

Services for all kinds of children remain a tangled thicket of conceptual confusions, competing authorities, contrary purposes, and professional rivalries leading to the fragmentation of services and the lack of sustained attention to the needs of individual children and their families. Federal and state bureaus, categorically organized, vie for jurisdiction. Community agencies compete for limited resources. Even voluntary organizations are often reluctant to cooperate to achieve common purposes. The challenge is to develop a coherent national policy to generate and use wisely resources for family life and child development.

Hobbs cites a number of reasons why we need to find a way to get our support system working effectively. In such a system all of the subsystems ought to be logically connected to each other around common purposes. To be of maximum service, support systems must be coordinated and integrated, accessible and comprehensive, effective and efficient. If these are the characteristics we want in our ideal support system, then a model is required to achieve them. The rest of this chapter is devoted to specifying the framework of a model and its application.

### Definition and Function of a Model

"What makes our practical life really human," Northrup Frye (1964) explains, "is a level of the mind where consciousness and practical skills come together. This level is a vision or model in your mind of what you want to construct." For instance, as humans we desire to bring into existence cities, towns, technology, and all that we call civilization. We know what we have done, and we can compare what we are doing with what we can imagine being done. Our imagination, then, gives us the power to construct possible models of human experiences.

Broadly conceived, a model may serve as a guide to personal experience; it may be reached easily or directly, or it may be a complex system of relationships. For educational programs and support systems to attain certain attributes. These attributes are a measure of adequacy.

*Coherence* refers to the conceptual unity that comes when coherence is achieved in a logical and consistent with scope, generality, and ability to address diverse domains. *Adequacy* is a model applicable to all kinds of situations.

In addition to the attributes mentioned above, a model must continue to be a source of refinement. Burhoe (1971) says of any conceptual system, "it serves the living system to other words, 'the real world of people, social groups and individuals' reality to accept a model of changes in the world" (Friedman, 1971).

You will be the ultimate one who meets the requirements of the model for yourself. At least you will have to deal with diversity, and you will have to deal with diversity.

You will notice that the model has a purpose and philosophy. This purpose and philosophy are both personal and institutional. The primary purpose is to make crystal clear to everyone involved in the educational program are all a part of the philosophy (personally and institutionally) thoughts, and actions. Most of the time, we tend to act without realizing it.

The very nature of the model is that your philosophical beliefs are a part of the nature of humanity. This does not mean the choices you make about the model are for the children's and the adults' benefit.

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Broadly conceived, a model is a symbolic representation of reality. As such, a model may serve as a substitute for a reality that is inaccessible to personal experience; it may describe things that cannot be observed easily or directly, or it may replicate on a small scale a very large, complex system of relationships. For a model to be useful in the design of educational programs and support system in particular, it has to embody certain attributes. These attributes are coherence, comprehensiveness, and adequacy.

*Coherence* refers to the interconnectedness, consistency, and conceptual unity that comes when we reduce arbitrariness and fragmentation. Coherence is achieved in a model when the fundamental propositions are logical and consistent with each other. *Comprehensiveness* refers to the scope, generality, and ability of the model to integrate disparate elements and diverse domains. *Adequacy* refers to whether the model is relevant and applicable to all kinds of phenomena and experience.

In addition to the attributes described here, an educational model must continue to be a source of insight and thus lend itself to revision and refinement. Burhoe (1971) says that "the supreme criterion for the value of any conceptual system, any model of the world, is how adequately it serves the living system to adapt to the requirements of its world." In other words, "the real world is somewhere down in the relationships among people, social groups and institutions and it would be a gross distortion of reality to accept a model as a thing in itself, static and unyielding to changes in the world" (Friedman, 1973).

You will be the ultimate judge of whether the model we propose meets the requirements of the administrative world in which you may find yourself. At least you will have a set of ordering schemes that will help you to deal with diversity, fragmentation, and incoherence.

You will notice that the model calls for explicit statements of purpose and philosophy. This explicitness operates on two levels: personal and institutional. The primary reason for being explicit is to force you to make crystal clear to everybody who you are and what you and your institutional program are all about. Being explicit about your purpose and philosophy (personally and institutionally) helps you to clarify your views, thoughts, and actions. Moreover, being explicit helps you to operate openly, aboveboard, and without hidden agendas and to overcome those tendencies to act without reference to clearly articulated principles.

The very nature of your work with other human beings demands that your philosophical base declare unequivocally your views about the nature of humanity. This declaration is important because it will influence the choices you make about the kind and quality of program you will provide for the children's and staff's development.

Once your philosophical stance is taken, you need to generate a body of theory that spells out how to make your philosophy work. The theory will consist of brief accounts of what is known about development, curric-

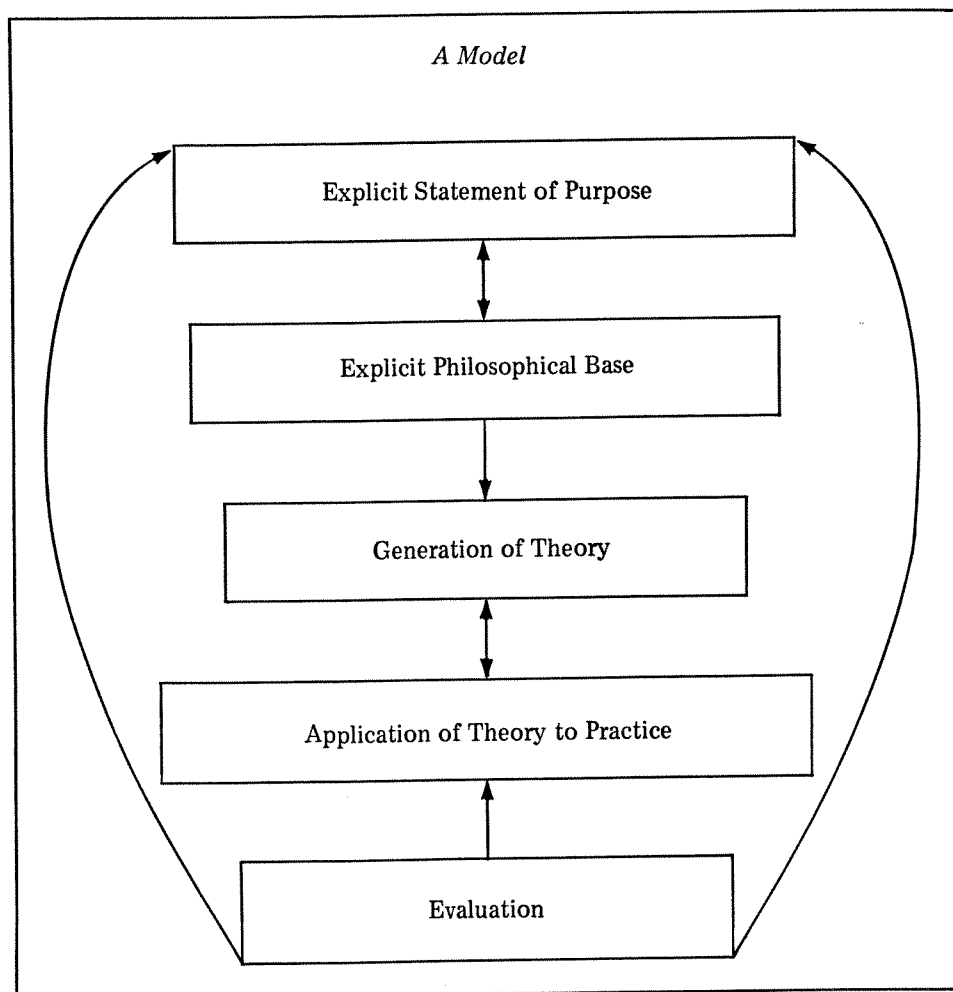


FIGURE VII-1. A framework for developing a support system

culum, teaching, administration, and evaluation, without the burden of details.

As this body of theory is applied to practice, the details will become more explicit. We all do things (practice) without always making explicit the reasons that support our particular actions. In other words, we have our body of implicit theory at work all of the time. Our efforts to be honest about why we do things this or that way will aid us when we evaluate the efficacy of each component of the model as well as the model in general.

### Explicit Statement of Purpose

Since purpose dictates functions purpose of something is directs goals. Whenever we find integrity exist:

1. The purpose is clear.
2. The purpose is considered astically by the participants.
3. The means for achieving th forth clearly.

The purpose of the education indicate the kind of support syst itself to the extent that it facili goals of the center.

Now what is the most fund institutions? A review of resear human institutions is to facilita means that each human being h in all its forms is one of the m children to actualize their pot acquire new powers. Every acc incentive to carry the process actualize their potential, they growth and development to be

As we refer to developme quantitative terms. Qualitative whereas quantitative measures something. For example, man finger painting. With few exce most the same at the end of th the children will have painted a of those paintings improve alpect the quality of children's knowns to improve over time? tative development, then you diagnose and assess a child's pr

When you concern yours you zero in on the *process* must strive to relate to. Let u of process as it relates to your

First, no child can be ac scription must be given in d