Understanding Families

Applying Family Systems Theory to Early Childhood Practice

Linda Garris Christian

WORKING WITH FAMILIES is one of the most important aspects of being an early childhood professional, yet it is an area in which many educators have received little preparation (Nieto 2004). We spend hours learning about child development, developmentally appropriate practices, health and safety, playgrounds, and play. At times it seems that we focus on children as if they appear from nowhere, land in our classrooms, and merely disappear at the end of the day. We may ignore the settings in which they spend their time away from us, believing they are not very important. In fact, the home environment greatly influences what goes on in school. Much has been written on parent involvement (Ginott 1965; Henderson & Berla 1981; Epstein et al. 1997), and the literature includes a growing number of references to family involvement (Birckmayer et al. 2005; Crosser 2005; Diss & Buckley 2005). However, a limited amount of research (Bredekamp & Copple 1997; Couchenour & Chrisman 2004) directly addresses understanding of family systems as a key component of early childhood education.

To serve children well, we must work with their families. To be effective in this work, we must first understand families who are diverse in ways such as culture, sexual orientation, economic status, work, religious beliefs, and composition. Single-parent families, families of divorce, blended families, extended families, homeless families, migrant families, and gay and lesbian families represent some of the diversity in the families with whom we work as early childhood professionals. Yet no matter how different families appear to outside observers, all have certain characteristics in common; families just show them in different ways. Examining those characteristics helps educators engage families in ways that foster optimal child development.

Family systems theory can explain why members of a family behave the way they do in a given situation.

Family systems theory

Family systems theory comes from the work of individuals like Ackerman (1959), Jackson (1965), Minuchin (1974), and Bowen (1978). While this theory is typically used in family counseling and therapy, much can be learned from examining it in the context of early childhood settings. Family systems theory has been used in trying to understand problems of students in school settings (Sawatzky, Eckert, & Ryan 1993; Widerman & Widerman 1995; Kraus 1998; Van Velsor & Cox 2000). The need for understanding family systems

---

Linda Garris Christian, PhD, is a professor of education at Adams State College in Alamosa, Colorado, working primarily with preservice teachers. Linda is also involved in local Even Start, Head Start, and other nonprofit early childhood centers.

theory in early childhood settings has been underscored by professional organizations in their guidelines for preparing early childhood and elementary professionals (NAEYC, CEC/DEC, & NBPTS 1996; ACEI 1997a,b).

A primary concept in family systems theory is that the family includes interconnected members, and each member influences the others in predictable and recurring ways (Van Velsor & Cox 2000). From our families we learn skills that enable us to function in larger and more formal settings, such as school and the workplace. Family experiences also shape our expectations of how the larger world will interact with us (Kern & Peluso 1999; Nieto 2004).

Family systems theory focuses on family behavior rather than individual behavior. The theory considers communication and interaction patterns, separateness and connectedness, loyalty and independence, and adaptation to stress in the context of the whole as opposed to the individual in isolation. Family systems theory can explain why members of a family behave the way they do in a given situation (Fingerman & Bermann 2000). It is critical to use these explanations to better serve children and families rather than for the purpose of blaming or trying to "fix" families.

While there are many aspects of the theory that could be applied in early childhood settings, I will limit this discussion to a few basics that I have found useful in my work with families and children. There are six charac-

© Ellen B. Senisi

teristics of the family as a system that are especially relevant for early childhood professionals: boundaries, roles, rules, hierarchy, climate, and equilibrium. Each of these characteristics lies on a continuum. For example, while all families have rules, some have many and others have few; some adhere strictly to rules and others are inconsistent. While few families fall on the extreme end of a continuum, they do tend to be more to one side.
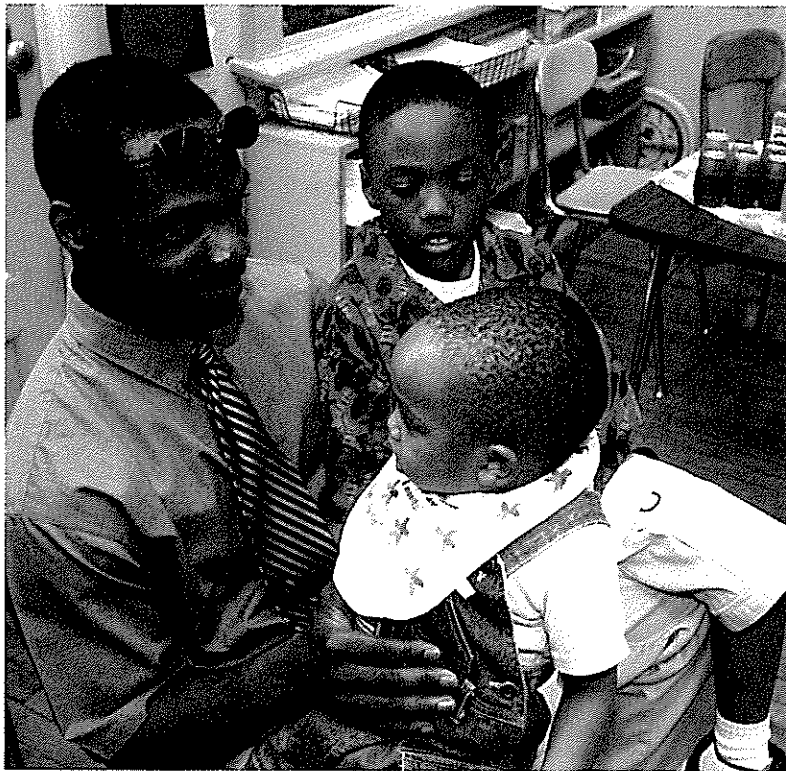
Boundaries

Eight-year-old Miguel knows about the call to his house today. His after-school program director, Mr. Chin, told him that unless his spelling improved, he would be ineligible to compete at the city spelling meet. When the flyer on after-school classes came out in August, Miguel said he wanted to try pottery or chess. His mother insisted on his participation in the spelling bee and the challenging preparation for it. As he studied, Miguel felt a sense of pride in carrying on a family tradition. His mother, uncle, and older cousin had all won competitions when they were his age. However, Miguel has been frustrated by the rigor of the activities and the lack of time for other interests. By the time he gets home, a family meeting has already been planned to determine how best to help him to prepare. Miguel is nervous but knows his family will have good suggestions.

When Miguel's best friend, Mark, asked his mom which after-school class to take, she responded, "Whatever you want." Last year he tried and enjoyed swimming but got discouraged when his parents did not attend his meets. He signed up for the spelling bee this year, but only so he could be with Miguel. He isn't doing much better than Miguel, but when Mr. Chin calls Mark's family, their response is quite different from that of Miguel's family. Mark's dad takes the call and mentions it at dinner: "Mr. Chin called. It seems you're not doing so well with the spelling thing. Is there anything we can do to help?" Mark says, "No, I'm just tired of school stuff by the end of the day. Next time I'm going to try a sport or maybe chess." Mark's mom replies, "Sounds like a good plan, but what about Miguel?" Mark shrugs, "I did the spelling with him to keep him company. Maybe next time he'll do something with me."

Boundaries relate to limits, togetherness, and separateness—what or who is "in" or "out of" the family (Walsh & Giblin 1988). Some families are open to new people, information, and ideas. Family members tend to be independent and able to make decisions on their own. They value separateness and autonomy over a sense of belonging. Each person's identity is encouraged and respected. These families are sometimes described as *disengaged*. In other families

boundaries tend to be more closed and restrictive; the families emphasize togetherness, belonging, emotional connectedness, and at times, conformity. They may control rather than monitor their children's friends and activities. Discipline is one way a family can enforce the boundaries within the family (Kern & Peluso 1999). Behaviors are seen as a reflection on the family, not just the individual. These families are sometimes referred to as *enmeshed.* An individual's identity is very much tied to the family when he or she is part of an enmeshed family.

Boundaries relate to limits, togetherness, and separateness— what or who is "in" or "out of" the family.

Early childhood professionals should remain open when thinking about these two types of families. One is not positive and the other negative; the types are just different from each other. Families may show signs and degrees of each type; this may vary at any given point, depending on factors such as the age of the children, the family's economic circumstances, and the family's stage of development (for example, first-time parents versus a family with several children). Other factors, including the families in which the parents grew up, the social and political climate of the times, the culture and values of the family, and physical or mental health issues in the family, also influence the degree of enmeshment or disengagement. Over time families may change from one style to another. For example, during times of stress and crisis, a family that had operated in a disengaged manner may move toward a more closed system.

Miguel's family is closer to the enmeshed end of the continuum, while Mark's family tends to be more disengaged. Mark may sometimes wish his parents would become more involved with his activities, while Miguel may secretly wish his family would occasionally keep their opinions to themselves! The family's involvement in his preparation for the competition indicates their enmeshment.

In a conversation with Mark's parents about next term's activities, you may learn that while Mark's mother thinks sports would help his lagging physical development, his father fears self-esteem issues could arise if Mark struggles because of this lag. However, both feel that it is Mark's decision and they will support it. The family's disengagement works to foster Mark's independence and develop his identity, while Miguel's identity is closely related to that of his family.

As an educator, you would foster both Miguel's and Mark's sense of identity while respecting their families: share what you know about each boy's real strengths with the boys and their families. Help each child and his family to see the characteristics that make him unique and wonderful. Work with Miguel to identify family rituals, traditions, and values in which he believes. Help him find ways to appreciate and honor his family's support. As Mark's teacher you may plan activities that allow his family to see Mark's uniqueness or activities that lend themselves to family involvement. Help Mark to see the ways in which his family does support his development.

-

Ideas for working with families—Boundaries

1. Recognize different parenting styles and family boundaries. Educators often perceive the family who comes to meetings and responds with active and enthusiastic involvement and participation (helps with learning or discipline issues, provides materials for a special project, serves as a volunteer) as more caring and as a "good family." The family who responds politely to requests but leaves day-to-day decisions and work on school matters to the child and teacher (allows a child to experience the consequences due to her lack of preparation for a quiz or forgetting her share item for the day) is seen as less caring and uninvolved. Build on family strengths and avoid labeling and allowing personal bias to influence your interactions with families.

2. Avoid stereotypes. Just because a child is of a certain culture does not automatically mean that that child's family is of a given religion, does not have legal status, has a certain discipline style, or has a particular socioeconomic status (Kagan & Garcia 1991). It is critical for teachers to become familiar with the cultural background of individual children and families.

3. Recognize that for some families *everything* is a family affair. Be sure to have enough chairs, snacks, and materials to accommodate extended families at events and conferences. For some families, an invitation to family night includes aunts, uncles, cousins, friends who serve as family, and even neighbors (Trawick-Smith 2005).

4. Balance children's activities and curriculum to incorporate both individual and group identity. Whether their families are disengaged or enmeshed, children need opportunities to experience who they are individually and as a part of a group.

5. Respect families' need for control. When introducing new ideas, materials, or experiences to children, involve families as well. Also recognize that some family members did not have positive experiences with education as they were growing up. While they may display anger, hostility, or mistrust, and these may be directed at you, the source may be events from the past. It will take time and persistence to build a relationship with these families. Teachers need to demonstrate that families can depend on and trust them to help in the education of their children.

Roles

"Lela, go and join the others on the playground. I'll finish the rest of cleanup for you. You've been a big help today," says Kathy as she hugs the four-year-old. Lela hesitates at the door and asks, "Are you sure?" Kathy smiles reassuringly. "Yes, now go play!"

Once on the playground, Lela pushes Sadie, one of the younger children, on the swing. When Sadie tires of swinging and goes off to play in the sand, Lela helps the teacher carry toys from the storage shed to set up an activity. Later, Lela mediates a dispute between two classmates. A visiting teacher taking anecdotal notes that day writes, "Lela's play was limited to 'helping' for outdoor playtime and much of the rest of the day. How can we encourage her to expand her play activities to include other roles?"

In all families, individual members have roles (Walsh & Giblin 1988; Tarnowski-Goodell, Hanson, & May 1999; Fingerman & Bermann 2000). There is usually a peacemaker, a clown, a rescuer, and a victim, although there can be many other roles as well. Each role has certain behavioral expectations. For example, if someone is the responsible one within the family, this person has a tendency to fix problems and take care of others, and others depend on him. The victim in the family is the person who gets blamed for everything. This person often acts out in ways that are sure to bring responses of anger, threats, and punishment.

Family roles can be carried over to work, school, and social settings. A child who has spent four years practicing every day to be the peacemaker will bring those skills to the classroom. While each role can have positive behavior, there can also be negative consequences. For example, if the responsible person in the family always solves the problems, others do not have opportunities to develop problem-solving skills.

© Ellen B. Senisi

Lela has a clear idea of her role in her family: she is a helper. Helping is a wonderful attribute and not one that teachers want to disappear. Having Lela teach others how to help is a way to build on her strength. To facilitate her whole-child development, teachers could set up a situation that does not lend itself to her helping anyone and encourage her play in that area. They could also refuse some of her offers to help, but with careful wording. For example, "You were such a great help yesterday, you deserve a day off today! But you can choose someone to do this job today."

Lela's teachers will need patience, consistency, and creative ideas to help her learn new roles. They can look for her other strengths and channel her energies in that direction. For example, Lela has strong fine motor skills; she could be paired with a child who is creative to design and construct new signs for the play areas. It is also important to find ways to share positive information with Lela's family that allow them to foster opportunities for new roles at home.

Ideas for working with families—Roles

1. **Give children ample opportunity for role play, in both structured and unstructured situations.** Children need to experience new roles as well as work through their current roles. Recognize the importance of children's cultural backgrounds in the roles they adopt (Noel 2000; Garcia 2002).

2. **Observe children carefully.** Many "problems" that educators identify are very role bound. A child who seems to be a magnet for disruptive events may be the child who gets

Family roles can be carried over to work, school, and social settings.

blamed for everything at home. Set up situations for that child to see herself in different roles. For example, engage the child in working with you to negotiate a dispute between two other children or allow the child to lead an activity.

3. Help families recognize their children's many and varied strengths. A note home might read, "Sally taught Ki how to put on his shoes today! She was a very good teacher" or "I appreciate Ricky's sense of humor. He always makes us smile!"

Rules

Jason teaches a toddlers' class. Soon after single parents Sam and Imelda met at a party, they began sharing rides and helping each other out on weekends. The relationship blossomed into something more than two single parents sharing the trials and tribulations of their two-year-olds. The two families have recently joined together as one.

As the assistant director, Jason needs to find out which families need child care over an upcoming holiday. When he broaches the subject with Sam and Imelda, he detects a stony silence. Finally Sam says, "I thought it would be nice for our first holiday to go away together with the children. My uncle has offered the use of his house in the mountains." Imelda chimes in quickly, "But I've always spent the holidays with my family here in town. It's just expected that everybody will be there. If someone isn't there, they hear about it for years."

Jason remembers a huge fight with his own wife the first year they became parents. It was about when to open Christmas presents. He understands Sam and Imelda's dilemma, but he isn't sure how to support them as a new family.

Rules are sets of standards, laws, or traditions that tell us how to live in relation to each other. Our patterns and rules for interaction have long-term and far-reaching effects. For example, if we believe in the predictability of life, we tend to plan ahead. If we believe what happens is out of our control, we may deal with circumstances as they arise rather than trying to prevent or avoid problems (Fingerman & Bermann 2000).

Rules may be spoken or unspoken. If we have been informed about a rule, we can discuss, problem solve, and make choices. If we are unaware of a rule, we may behave in ways that are not consistent with that rule. We usually find out about an unspoken rule by breaking it and then experiencing the consequences. Rules are often embedded in a cultural context; therefore, they can contribute to the feeling of cultural discontinuity that some children experience at school. When home and school cultures conflict, misunderstandings and even hostility can occur for children, families, and teachers (Delpit 1995; Noel 2000). Sam and Imelda are experiencing problems with procedural kinds of rules. Jason needs to support this family in a positive way without crossing professional and personal boundaries. There may be resources to which he can direct them.

Jason must be very careful in how he responds; he is not a counselor. Is this a simple issue, or is it one in which the family may need outside help? Jason can share his experience—that he and his wife found it helpful to talk to their priest, and that the center resource director has a list of local counselors that other families have used in the past. On a practical level he can acknowledge the importance of bringing both familiar rituals to the new family as well as new experiences that will bond the members together. He can encourage Sam and Imelda to keep talking and listening to each other so that they can determine what is important to each of them.

© Skjold Photography

> **Ideas for working with families—Rules**

1. Distinguish between home rules and school rules. When children challenge you on a specific school rule, it may be because it differs from home rules. Proceed carefully; it is critical to respect the home environment. For example, you may allow children to serve themselves at mealtimes, although at home their plates are prepared by adults.

2. Watch for unspoken rules, especially those related to gender, power, and how we treat each other; discuss them

Rules are often embedded in a cultural context; therefore, they can contribute to the feeling of cultural discontinuity that some children experience at school.

with care. While you may want girls and boys to enjoy cooking experiences, recognize that in some traditional families this may create a conflict. Discuss the skills, rationale, and benefits for children and families. You may uncover alternate activities that meet the goals of all.

3. Ask for families' input and assistance when conflict arises over rules. Explain the reasons behind school rules and, equally important, listen to the family. They can share information that may help resolve a problem or address changes that may need to be made in school rules. They may also be willing to modify home rules or talk with their child about the differences between home and school.

Hierarchy

Nancy, a preschool teacher, notices that the Hudson family has been rather short with her and almost cold since the last family meeting. Up until now they had been supportive and friendly. Puzzled, she schedules an appointment with Kate, the center director. Kate thoughtfully listens to Nancy's dilemma, and together they re-create the events of the last meeting with families.

After much thought, they focus on one activity. Several teachers had presented three curriculum designs on which they wanted family input. A couple of parents had given ideas, but then the communication stopped. In an effort to get things going again, Nancy had said, "Mrs. Hudson, you and Mr. Hudson have been active volunteers and observers of our curriculum for several months now. What do you think?" While Mr. Hudson offered several ideas, Mrs. Hudson averted her eyes and did not respond. Thinking back, Kate and Nancy remember Mr. Hudson looked rather startled and almost angry. But what was the source of this animosity?

Hierarchy helps answer the question "Who's the boss?" This characteristic is related to decision making, control, and power in the family. In some families, the hierarchy is a parental one. The parents share family responsibilities. One may defer to the other based on a specific situation or individual strength, but there is a definite balance and trading back and forth of power and control. Early childhood professionals may also observe family hierarchies based on gender and age and influenced by culture, religion, or economic status. At times there may be a clear and strong message but other times it may be difficult to discern. You may observe at the center's family picnic that the males are seated, served, and encouraged to eat first. In other families, the elder grandmother may be the deci-

sion maker, and everyone may look to her for leadership and guidance. The role of extended family in understanding hierarchy may be very important in some families (Morton 2000).

Early childhood professionals need to understand hierarchy because of the diversity of families with whom we work. Each time the family composition changes, there is a shift in family members' positions in the hierarchy. For example, one family consists of a child, a younger sibling, a mother, and a grandmother at the beginning of the year. After a mid-year marriage, the family home has the child, the sibling, the mother, the grandmother, the new father figure, and two new older stepsiblings. The hierarchy has changed. In families with large extended kin networks, hierarchy can be confusing to outsiders.

The Hudson family may feel that Nancy and her colleagues did not respect the hierarchy in their family. There are two issues for Nancy and her colleagues: prevention and repair. In terms of prevention, they could add some items to the information sheets distributed at the beginning of the year and returned by each family that respectfully ask about how the family would like to be approached in certain situations. Sample items might read:

Decisions about children in our family are usually made by _____.

How and with whom would you like information about your child shared?

We want to respect your family in our work with you and your child at this center. Please share any information that you feel will help us in these efforts.

Most important, Nancy and her colleagues should make conscious efforts to observe families and their children in center activities and social gatherings and in home visits to notice cues the family gives as to the hierarchy. They can become "family watchers" in addition to being "child watchers." For example, does a mother always defer to the grandmother on questions that the teacher asks?

To repair the relationship with the Hudsons, Nancy and her colleagues will need to be sincere, diligent, and focused on respect and what is best for the child and family.

> **Each time the family composition changes, there is a shift in where family members are in the hierarchy.**

If conferences with the family don't elicit a response that allows Nancy to address the change in their behavior, she may choose to directly state her concern that she has offended them in some way. She may ask for their help in understanding so that she will not repeat her mistake and stress how much she values and respects the family as part of her classroom. She may communicate to them how vital they are to the success of the program and especially to their children. She may also ask if they have a need that she has failed to address.

Ideas for working with families—Hierarchy

1. Engage in careful and keen observation. Family watching is essential. Who signs the permission forms? Who returns a phone call? What family role does the child assume in dramatic play? Does a youngster assume that a male teacher is the boss of the female teachers? While answers to these questions are not always indicative of hierarchy, they may offer clues.

2. Note the signs that a family's hierarchy is in the process of changing. Be aware that children can respond by testing hierarchy in the classroom. A child who often leads at school may appear lost or unsure of herself as a new stepbrother takes her place "in charge" of younger siblings. Help her to reclaim her confidence through activities that allow her to experience success.

3. Watch out for hierarchies emerging in the classroom and on the playground. While hierarchy can lead to a sense of order and security, it can also lead to a pecking order and in the worst cases, bullying. Avoid activities that reinforce the same hierarchy over time. Vary activities so that different children's strengths are showcased.

Climate

Climate is about the emotional and physical environments a child grows up in. Some families compensate for hurtful or inadequate parts of the environment, such as living in a dangerous neighborhood, as best as they can (Nieto 2004). Other families have the best that money can buy, but the emotional quality of the home environment is not optimal for the children. The culture, economic status, or educational level of the family does not cause the emotional quality of the environment to be positive or negative. Emotional quality is related to beliefs about children and families. To determine the climate of a family system, consider the answers to the following questions: What would it feel like to be a child in this family? Would I feel safe, secure, loved, encouraged, and supported? Or would I feel scared, fearful, angry, hated, and unhappy?

Ideas for working with families—Climate

1. Provide opportunities for families to discuss their beliefs about children, what they want for their children, and how they support their children's development. Staff can facilitate at the events. These discussions help teachers learn how they can best support families as the families support their children (Delpit 1995; Garcia 2001). An additional benefit is that families often value information and advice from their peers more than through a lecture on good parenting.

2. Create a classroom climate of safety, positive feedback and guidelines, and healthy sensory experiences. Even (or especially!) if home environments do not offer these, children need to feel school is a wonderful place to be.

Equilibrium

It is critical for early childhood professionals to understand the balance or sense of equilibrium within a family. Changes or inconsistency in a family can create confusion or resentment in its members, including children (Kern & Peluso 1999). Consistency in families can be difficult to maintain, but it is essential to children's development of a sense of security and trust. Rituals and customs often keep a family together during times of change and stress (Fingerman & Bermann 2000). All families, even ones with ongoing difficulties, have a sort of balance that tells members what to expect. When there is change, positive or negative, it impacts the balance of the family. That is one reason change is so difficult to maintain.

For example, in a family where sweets, fried foods, and white bread are meal staples, a family member with a heart condition is told to change to a healthier diet. While other family members may wish to be supportive, it can be difficult. They may resent that their eating habits must change too, because preparing two meals is usually not feasible.

Ideas for working with families—Equilibrium

1. Consider inviting a trained family professional to facilitate a discussion when a big change or issue impacts a number of families (for example, a bond issue will impact the public schools the children attend). Families need to have safe places to vent, discuss, and talk about their changing worlds.

2. Provide as much consistency as possible when you are aware of changes within a family (a new baby or sick grandparent). This is usually not a good time

Climate is about the emotional and physical environments a child grows up in.

to change the routine, rearrange the classroom, or introduce new staff. Recognize that in some cases, the teacher, the environment, and the school routine are the most stable forces in the child's life.

3. Encourage families to plan ways to increase stability and security. For example, parents may have to meet the needs of their young children while also caring for an older relative in failing health. Nevertheless, they can set aside time for a bedtime routine that involves reading a story and talking about the day's events.

Conclusion

The suggestions in this article are not absolutes nor meant to be perfect. Each family is unique, as is each teacher. Some educators are comfortable with direct interactions. Others of us need to begin discussions with an activity that demonstrates our connections to and caring for families before tackling these kinds of conversations. While establishing relationships with families before problems arise is essential, it doesn't always happen. We need nonconfrontational ways to broach sensitive topics.

The keys to win-win resolutions are awareness, willingness, sincerity, and respect. Making an effort to understand families will open up opportunities for you to better serve children and their families.

© Skjold Photography

Consistency in families can be difficult to maintain, but it is critical to children's development of a sense of security and trust.

References

ACEI (Association for Childhood Education International). 1997a. Preparation of early childhood teachers. *Childhood Education* 73 (3): 164–65.
ACEI (Association for Childhood Education International). 1997b. Preparation of elementary teachers. *Childhood Education* 73 (3): 166–67.
Ackerman, N. 1959. Theory of family dynamics. *Psychoanalysis and the Psychoanalytic Review* 46 (4): 33–50.
Birckmayer, J., J. Cohen, I. Jensen, & D. Variano. 2005. Supporting grandparents who raise grandchildren. *Young Children* 60 (3): 100–04.
Bowen, M. 1978. *Family therapy in clinical practice.* New York: Jason Aronson.
Bredekamp, S., & C. Copple, eds. 1997. *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs.* Rev. ed. Washington, DC: NAEYC.
Couchenour, D., & K. Chrisman. 2004. *Families, schools, and communities: Together for young children.* Canada: Delmar Learning.
Crosser, S. 2005. *What do we know about early childhood education? Research-based practice.* Clifton Park, NY: Thomson Delmar Learning.
Delpit, L. 1995. *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* New York: The New Press.

Diss, R., & P. Buckley. 2005. *Developing family and community involvement skills through case studies and field experiences.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
Epstein, J., L. Coates, K.C. Salinas, M.G. Saunders, & B.S. Simon. 1997. *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
Fingerman, K., & E. Bermann. 2000. Applications of family systems theory to the study of adulthood. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 51 (1): 5–29.
Garcia, E. 2001. *Hispanic education in the United States: Raices y alas.* Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
Garcia, E. 2002. *Student cultural diversity: Understanding and meeting the challenge.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
Ginott, H. 1965. *Between parent and child: New solutions to old problems.* New York: Macmillian.
Henderson, A.T., & N. Berla. 1981. *The evidence grows: Parent involvement improves student achievement.* Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education.
Jackson, D.D. 1965. Family rules: Marital quid pro quo. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 12: 589–94.
Kagan, S., & E. Garcia. 1991. Educating culturally and linguistically diverse preschoolers: Moving the agenda. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, University of Illinois.
Kern, R., & P. Peluso. 1999. Using individual psychology concepts to compare family systems processes and organizational behavior. *Family Journal* 7 (3): 236–45.
Kraus, I. 1998. A fresh look at school counseling: A family systems approach. *Professional School Counseling* 1 (4): 12–17.
Minuchin, S. 1974. *Families and family therapy.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Morton, D. 2000. Beyond parent education: The impact of extended family dynamics in deaf education. *American Annals of the Deaf* 145 (4): 359–66.
NAEYC, CEC/DEC (Council for Exceptional Children, Division of Early Childhood), & NBPTS (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards). 1996. *Guidelines for preparation of early childhood professionals.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.
Nieto, S. 2004. *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education.* Boston: Pearson.
Noel, J. 2000. *Developing multicultural educators.* New York: Longman.
Sawatzky, D.D., C. Eckert, & B.R. Ryan. 1993. The use of family systems approach by school counselors. *Canadian Journal of Counseling* 27: 113–12.
Tarnowski-Goodell, T., H. Hanson, & S. May. 1999. Nurse-family interactions in adult critical care: A Bowen family systems perspective. *Journal of Family Nursing* 5 (1): 72–92.
Trawick-Smith, J. 2005. *Early childhood development: A multicultural perspective.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
Van Velsor, P., & D. Cox. 2000. Use of the collaborative drawing technique in school counseling practicum: An illustration of family systems. *Counselor Education and Supervision* 40 (2): 141–53.
Walsh, W., & N. Giblin. 1988. *Family counseling in school settings.* Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
Widerman, J.L., & E. Widerman. 1995. Family systems-oriented school counseling. *The School Counselor* 43: 66–73.