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SMART FUTURES

(Volume 2)

Pedagogical recommendations to support learning continuity between early childhood care and education and home settings

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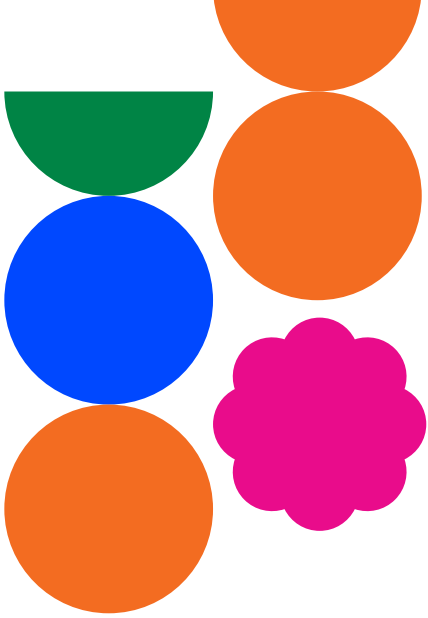
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Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

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In recent years, international organizations have extensively documented a concerning learning crisis within education systems worldwide. Shockingly, almost 70 per cent of children reaching the age of 10 in low- and middle-income countries struggle to read and comprehend a simple passage (World Bank et al., 2022). Even though the East Asia and Pacific region had once boasted the lowest percentage of low-performing students on international assessments (World Bank, 2018), a simulation has projected an increase in learning poverty within the region. It surged from 35 per cent in 2019 to nearly 45 per cent in 2022, incurring a staggering cost of approximately US$4.7 trillion (World Bank et al., 2022).

Extensive research in the field of early childhood education highlights the profound impact of high-quality early education on children's learning and educational trajectories. Studies have demonstrated that children in the region who engage in one year of pre-primary programmes exhibit, on average, a 0.10 standard deviation increase in mathematics test scores at age 15, with this effect growing to 0.22 standard deviations for those participating for two or more years (Richter et al., 2021).

In response to these challenges, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific (EAPRO) has developed the Smart Futures series, a comprehensive initiative aimed at bolstering the quality of early education services and addressing the learning poverty crisis from the very beginning of life. **The Smart Futures guidelines, which focus on quality pedagogy and interactions, provide a framework with primary elements to enhance early education learning and development experiences.** At the preschool/early childhood care and education (ECCE) centre level, the guidelines offer practical recommendations that teachers can seamlessly implement within the ECCE setting.

This second volume of Smart Futures provides pedagogical recommendations to build partnerships between teachers and families, facilitating learning continuity between ECCE and home settings. Acknowledging the pivotal role of parents during early childhood, these recommendations emphasize that parenting practices directly affect crucial learning skills, such as executive function, motivation and imagination, leaving a lasting effect on children's connection with educational services (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022; UNESCO, 2021).

Research has shown that teachers working in partnership with families have a profoundly positive effect on children's learning. Evaluated programmes have resulted in a positive impact of approximately four additional months' progress in a single year (Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.), offering an economical means to enhance children's learning (Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2022). Effective education programmes include approaches that encourage parents to engage in reading, talking and participating in activities with their children at home or within early years settings.

The recommendations presented in this volume are designed in alignment with the roles and competencies of the ECCE workforce. They aim to enhance, maintain and complement existing initiatives with targeted content and ideas. As such, this publication primarily targets UNICEF's country offices and policymakers responsible for programme design. They can employ and adapt the proposed content to integrate it into their respective country ECCE services and quality assurance initiatives.
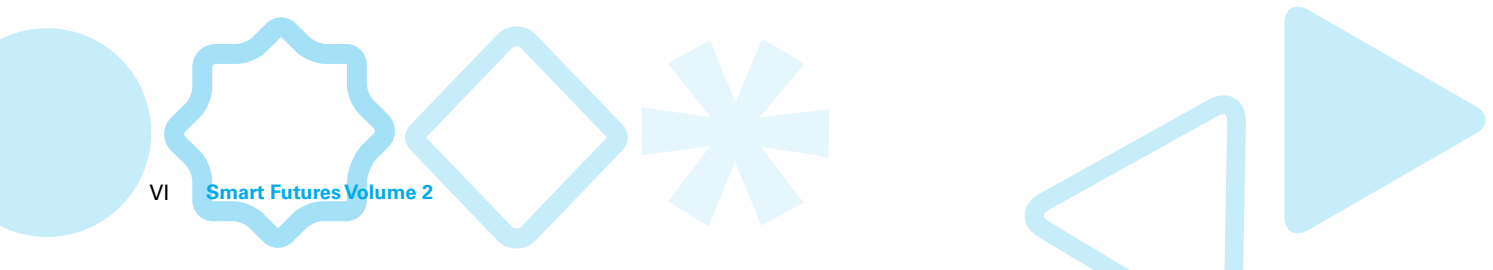
Recommendations

This volume supplements the four core recommendations proposed in the first volume with three further recommendations to guide quality-improvement efforts to enhance ECCE services. These recommendations aim to enrich the practices and strategies used in ECCE services by incorporating contextual elements, cultural practices, and families' parenting priorities alongside evidence-based pedagogical practices and guidance.

Figure 1. Pedagogical recommendations to support learning continuity between ECCE and home settings

Learning at ECCE setting

R5

Experiences at home

Support families to provide enjoyable and playful home learning experiences based on their daily routines and cultural strengths.

R6

Communication

Make communication with families simpler, more effective and diverse.

R7

Family–school exchanges

Actively involve families in school-led projects, such as volunteer programmes and literacy and numeracy initiatives.
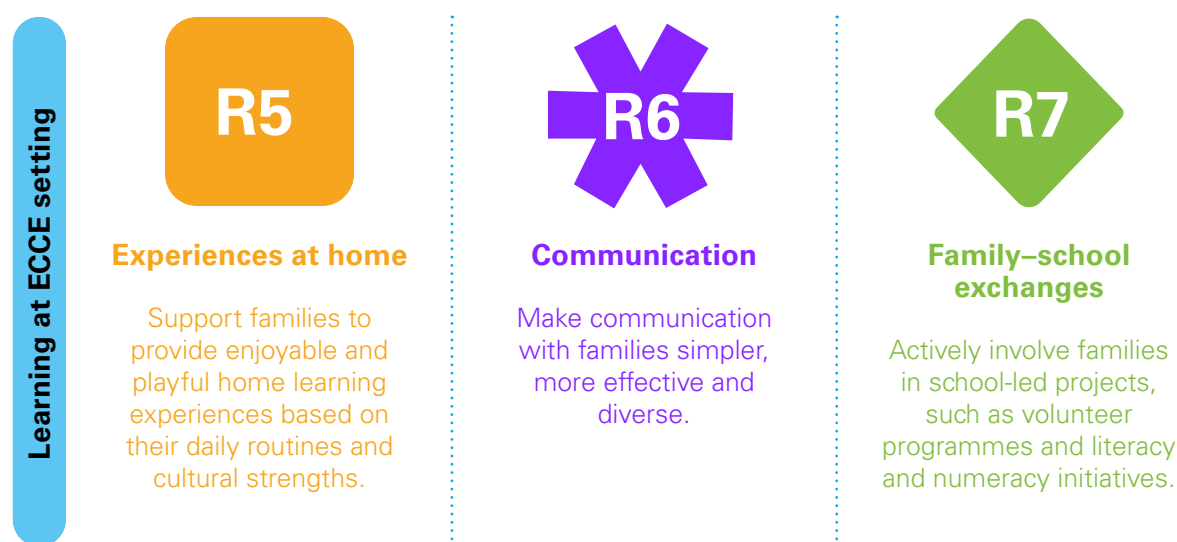
This volume aims to elevate the significance of education in the parenting agenda by harnessing the collective efforts of teachers and families to advance children's learning and development. Implementing these recommendations entails integrating delivery mechanisms, practices and approaches tailored to the context in which children grow and develop (McCoy et al., 2021). This approach fosters partnerships between teachers and families and, consequently, renders ECCE services more effective.

Each of these recommendations contains a conceptual orientation, two or three actions, a list of activities, and resources with ideas and inspiration to implement in the ECCE setting (see Figure 2). Table 1 shows suggested actions for each of the three recommendations.

Figure 2. Structure of the pedagogical recommendations

Pedagogical recommendation structure

Action | **Conceptual orientation** | **Activities** | **Resources**
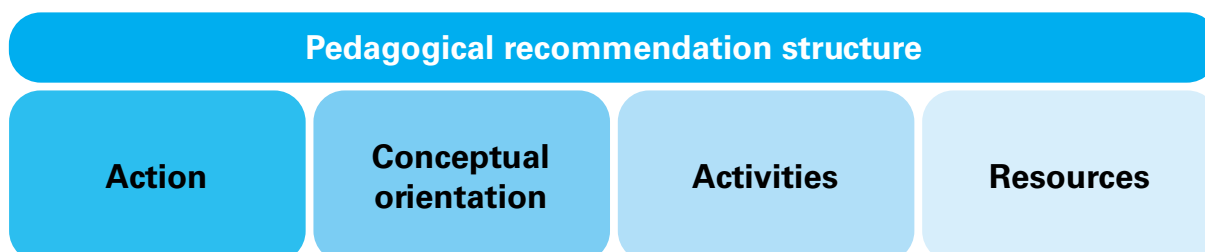
Table 1. Suggested actions for each recommendation

Recommendation	Actions
R5 **Experiences at home** Support families to provide enjoyable and playful home learning experiences based on their daily routines and cultural strengths.	5.1 Encourage learning experiences and environments that build on the cultural strengths of communities, including values, oral traditions and culturally valued activities. 5.2 Develop strategies to encourage the participation of fathers and other caregivers, apart from the mother, in early learning activities.
R6 **Communication** Make communication with families simpler, more effective and diverse.	6.1 Strengthen the quality of communication by using key insights to improve dialogues between teachers and parents. 6.2 Introduce various forms of media, such as phone calls, text messages and community-based communication, to propose simple behaviours and address cultural and contextual barriers that hinder family engagement. 6.3 Ensure that families are involved in assessing the interventions and activities they participate in.
R7 **Family–school exchanges** Actively involve families in school-led projects, such as volunteer programmes and literacy and numeracy initiatives.	7.1 Encourage families to engage in volunteering activities to support children's learning experiences. 7.2 Establish at-home reading and numeracy learning strategies and increase access to books and digital resources such as songs, videos and audiobooks.

Finally, there are two paths proposed to implement these recommendations.

1 **Path 1:** Use the Smart Futures content to inform countries' ongoing initiatives to improve the quality of education services. In this approach, the existing experiences in the countries are enriched with the content of Smart Futures. The idea is that the relevant content from Smart Futures migrates to countries' existing programmes or policy instruments. For example, a country developing a community-based curriculum integrates some of the Smart Futures categories or activities into the structure of this instrument.

2 **Path 2:** Plan a comprehensive implementation of the recommended content in the early education policy. This approach aims to infuse various policy strategies with the Smart Futures content. This process may involve actions such as designing capacity-building programmes for specific populations, or updating policy instruments like the national curriculum.

These two paths are complementary, and one does not replace the other. Implementing one path can lead to the other, and vice versa, depending on the country's interests and capacities.
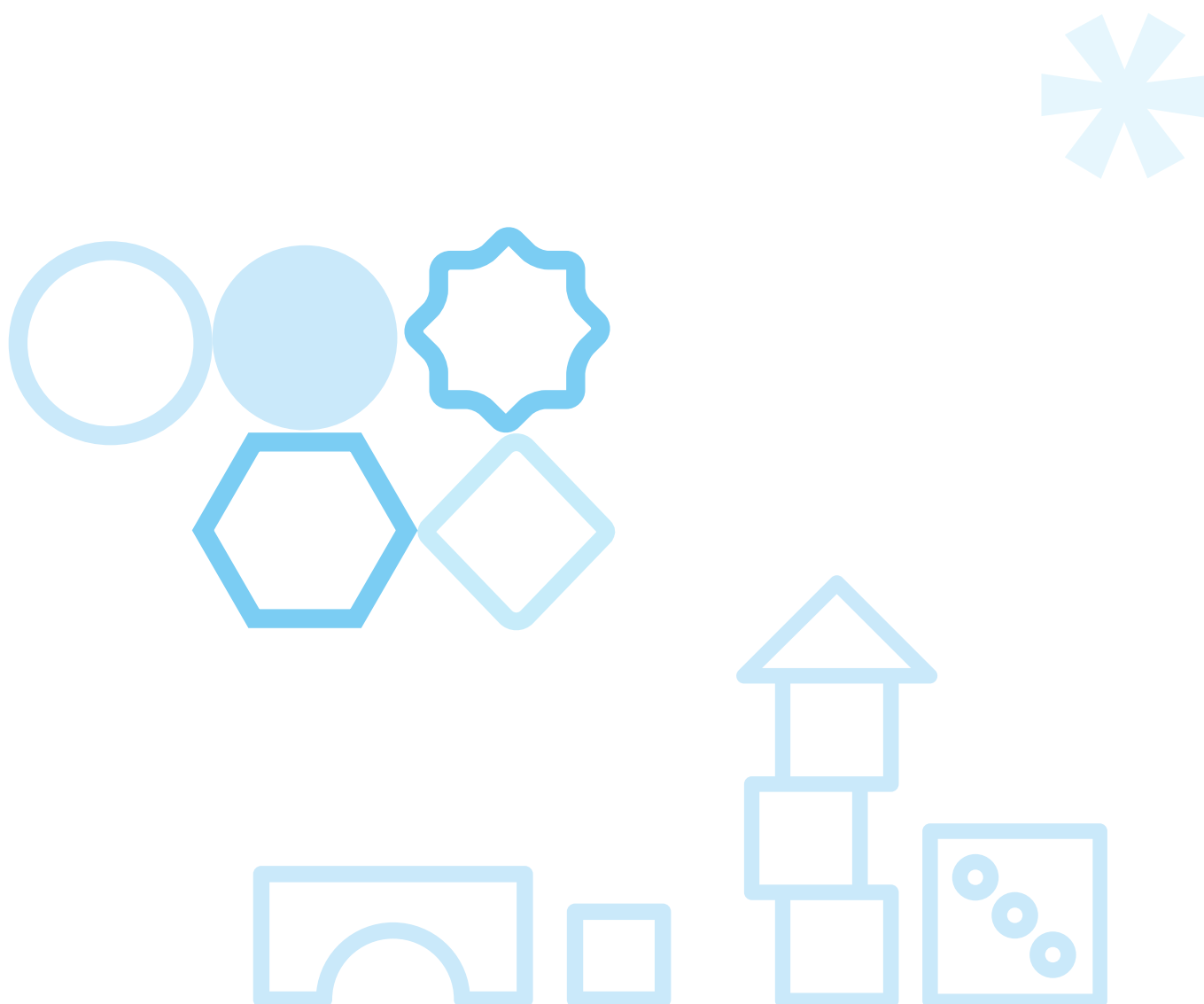
Introduction

There is robust evidence documenting the impacts of quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) on children's learning and educational trajectories (Cunha & Heckman, 2009; Richter et al., 2021; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Providing high-quality ECCE is crucial for establishing a strong foundation for children's future academic success amid the current learning crisis and the learning loss caused by the COVID pandemic. Research has shown that children in the East Asia and Pacific region who participated in one year of pre-primary programmes had, on average, mathematics test scores 0.10 standard deviations higher at age 15 than children who did not, increasing to 0.22 standard deviations when they participated for two or more years (Richter et al., 2021).

Although the East Asia and Pacific region has experienced an impressive increase in ECCE enrolment rates – from 13 per cent to 82 per cent in less than 30 years (UIS, 2019) – challenges remain. The region has been noted for having the lowest percentage of low-performing students on international assessments (World Bank, 2018), but a recent simulation estimated that owing to school closures, learning poverty in the region increased from 35 per cent in 2019 to approximately 45 per cent in 2022 at the cost of approximately US$4.7 trillion (World Bank et al., 2022).

In the context of addressing this issue, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO) prepared the Smart Futures series to strengthen the quality of early learning services and tackle learning poverty from the beginning of life. The Smart Futures series, which focuses on quality pedagogy and interactions, establishes a framework with recommendations to improve early learning and development experiences for young children and strengthen the impact of early learning investment.

This is the second volume of the Smart Futures series and provides pedagogical recommendations for developing and strengthening partnerships between teachers and families to facilitate learning continuity between ECCE and home settings. It seeks to raise awareness of the role of early learning in the parenting agenda, and vice versa, by maximizing the efforts that both teachers and families make to further children's learning and development.

Parents have an essential role to play during early childhood years in fostering children's critical learning skills and encouraging their engagement with educational services. Parenting practices have a direct impact on key skills for learning, such as executive function, imagination and motivation to learn, and can create long-lasting effects on children's connection with education services (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022; UNESCO, 2021).

In this context, teachers working in partnership with families have a powerful and positive impact on children's learning. Programmes evaluated to date have demonstrated a positive impact of about five additional months of progress for every year of intervention (Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.) and can increase children's learning at a low cost (Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2022).[1] These programmes include approaches and strategies that encourage parents to read and talk with their children at home and to participate in activities in the early years setting.

Any intervention working with families should recognize that families' cultural strengths are a potential resource for building partnerships and increasing parental self-efficacy. As most of the evidence comes from interventions implemented in developed contexts (McCoy et al., 2021; UNESCO, 2021), several researchers have called out the importance of strengthening the cultural relevance of

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1 Progress means the average difference in children's results, comparing those who received the intervention with similar children who did not.

education and family support services and including participatory methods to design, conduct and evaluate these services (McCoy et al., 2021; Scheidecker et al., 2022). Countries in the East Asia and Pacific region have been working extensively on this area. Some countries have developed policy guidelines, programmes and materials to support families and strengthen their role as the first and most enduring educators.

This volume puts forward a set of recommendations that align with the roles and competencies of the ECCE workforce and aim to supplement and reinforce existing initiatives by offering targeted content and ideas. Therefore, this publication is primarily intended for UNICEF's country offices to employ in supporting stakeholders responsible for programme design, who can use and adapt the proposed content to incorporate it into the ECCE services and quality assurance initiatives of their respective countries. These recommendations aim to enrich practices and strategies in ECCE services by combining families' contexts, cultural practices and parenting priorities with evidence-based pedagogical practices and guidance.

These guidelines are divided into three sections:

1 Pedagogical principles to support learning continuity between ECCE and home settings

2 Pedagogical recommendations to support learning continuity between ECCE and home settings

3 Actions, activities and resources to implement each recommendation

1
Let's tune in!
Pedagogical principles to support learning continuity between ECCE and home settings

The first volume of Smart Futures guidelines – Smart Futures: Pedagogical Recommendations to Support Early Learning and Development – defined a set of pedagogical principles that are critical to understanding how young children learn and how to inform teaching and learning practices for fostering learning.

Figure 3. Pedagogical principles for learning and development

Children learn by exploring the world and engaging with others.

The quality of the interactional environment defines learning.

Families are the best ally of the ECCE workforce.

Knowing the children's learning styles and needs is the best tool to guide teaching and enhance learning.

Children learn all the time, but if we enrich their time, they learn more.

Learning happens better with a holistic pedagogical portfolio.

This volume expands one of these principles: families are the best ally of the ECCE workforce. Parents aspire to raise children who are academically successful and possess social and emotional skills that are vital for participating in community life and in the job market. While parents tend to focus more on socio-emotional skills, they also engage with children in cognitive skills development and so influence crucial learning skills – such as self-directed learning, curiosity, and motivation to learn – that are essential for learning at school (Bornstein & Putnick, 2012).

By practising these forms of responsive caregiving, parents involve not only socio-emotional practices, such as listening, being emotionally close and singing, but also a variety of strategies that promote

children's understanding of their environment. These strategies encompass reading, storytelling, naming, counting, drawing, taking them to the park, and engaging in interpersonal interactions that make children feel valued, accepted and approved (Bornstein & Putnick, 2012; Britto et al., 2017).

To support these processes, ECCE services should consider two further principles when interacting with families.

Figure 4. Pedagogical principles for interacting with families

Consistent and reciprocal relationships between teachers and families promote parents' and children's confidence and well-being.

Culturally responsive interactions enhance family participation and actively include their expertise and priorities.

Consistent and reciprocal relationships between teachers and families promote parents' and children's confidence and well-being

Family members will learn best when they feel respected and psychologically safe (Ramachandran, 2023). Teachers must strive to enhance parents' confidence and self-efficacy. They should empathize with parents who are overburdened and frustrated, and encourage them to take pride in their abilities (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2022a). Responsive listening is crucial to driving effective communication with families.

Teachers and service providers should understand that there is "a gap between knowing and doing" for parents, which cannot be filled only by providing information and increasing knowledge. Rather, teachers can seek to understand what is creating this gap, and avoid blaming the parents (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2022a). Strategies should build on existing strengths, which will both foster an understanding of existing parental practices and identify positive culturally responsive practices, all in consultation with parents.

When teachers engage in reciprocal communication, it involves a two-way dialogue. They need to support families by providing them with the space to ask questions and to share their interests and fears. Teachers should also demonstrate respect for caregivers and avoid forcing them into actions that make them feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

When teachers are consistent, communication with families is timely and ongoing. Teachers should work on using time with parents effectively to communicate and come to agreements. Communication takes many forms and can focus on a variety of factors, such as how children learn, how to use everyday life to enhance their development, how to get to know them better, and how to nurture their interests.
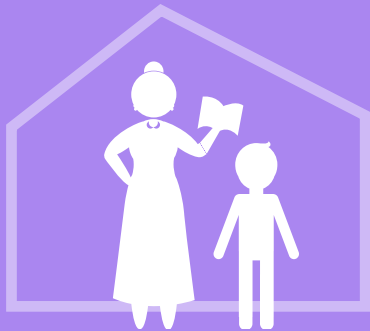
Teachers should support families by drawing on their everyday life, play, cultural traditions and sources of faith and hope. Teachers should engage in dialogue and co-construct culturally responsive, playful environments with parents. Combining physical, cognitive and socio-emotional support practices with cultural expertise facilitates positive relationships between families and their children. Teachers should work with families to identify their cultural strengths, parenting ethno-theories and socialization goals, and use these as a base for proposing pedagogical experiences that facilitate children's learning.

Teachers should explore and understand the social norms that guide parents' child-rearing practices, as they affect what is feasible and what is not. The local parenting system defines the intensity and presence of parenting practices, such as body contact, body stimulation, face-to-face interactions, exclusive attention, distress regulation, and object stimulation (Keller et al., 2005; Otto & Keller, 2015). Communities do not all share the same practices or priorities, and it is not desirable for them to do so. In some communities, face-to-face interactions are highly valued, while in others, distress regulation or object stimulation is prioritized, and this is acceptable. The focus should be not on identifying what is missing but on recognizing and reinforcing the distinctive forms of care and cultural norms that govern parenting.

Service providers and teachers should acknowledge that families have the right to participate and make decisions about how they are supported and to what extent. They should involve families in setting children's goals and activities, consider ideas and suggestions for improvement, and encourage families to actively evaluate the processes in which they participate.

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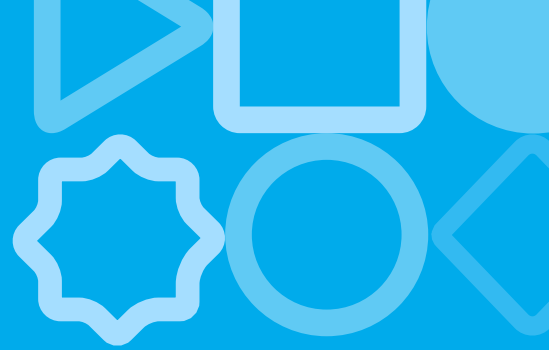
2
Let's do it together!

Pedagogical recommendations to support learning continuity between ECCE and home settings

The Smart Futures recommendations suggest how to implement the principles in ECCE services. The first Smart Futures guidelines – *Smart Futures: Pedagogical Recommendations to Support Early Learning and Development* – outlined the first four recommendations (R1–R4), and this volume follows up with three further recommendations (R5–R7) aimed specifically at supporting learning continuity between ECCE and home settings.

These recommendations are flexible and can be incorporated into any ECCE service or family support activity, regardless of its structure and methods.

Figure 5. Pedagogical recommendations to support learning continuity between ECCE and home settings

Learning at ECCE setting

R5

Experiences at home

Support families to provide enjoyable and playful home learning experiences based on their daily routines and cultural strengths.

R6

Communication

Make communication with families simpler, more effective and diverse.

R7

Family–school exchanges

Actively involve families in school-led projects, such as volunteer programmes and literacy and numeracy initiatives.
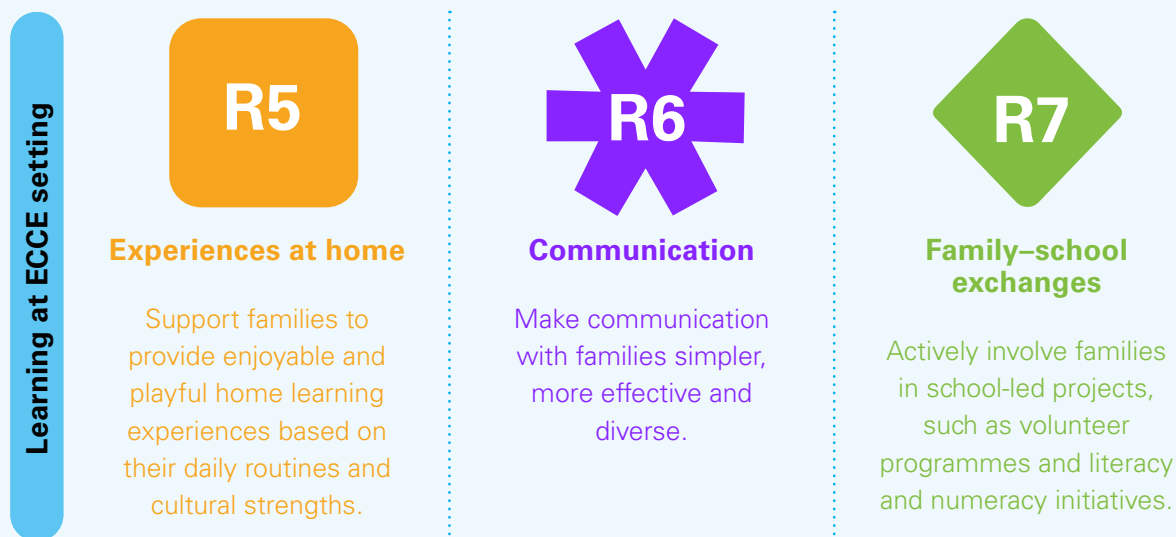
These recommendations seek to develop partnerships between teachers and families to ensure continuity of learning between ECCE and home settings. They aim to strengthen the quality of the pedagogical process and interactions as well as foster children's learning and the development of their potential.

1 **The first recommendation emphasizes the value of using day-to-day activities as a means for teachers to collaborate with families and promote learning.** Routines offer an invaluable opportunity for contextualized learning experiences. By identifying and leveraging the cultural strengths of families and communities, teachers and families can enrich children's daily lives and enhance their learning experiences. In rural communities, for example, cultural strengths such as the ability to explore and discover the environment, oral traditions, and knowledge of making toys and tools from natural materials can be particularly valuable. Teachers can recommend learning activities for children and their families that build on these strengths.

This approach recognizes the diversity and potential of different family compositions. When relevant, teachers can promote activities beyond mother–child interaction, including fathers, siblings, cousins, grandparents and other relatives by recognizing the role of family and community contexts in nurturing children's development. For example, teachers can collaborate with families to promote children's participation in culturally valued events, such as celebrations, social gatherings and harvesting days. Such occasions provide children with the opportunity to actively engage and collaborate with other children and adults, which helps them become more familiar with their culture and enhances their development.

2 **The second recommendation suggests practices that encourage effective communication between teachers and caregivers through active listening.** Enriching families' daily lives to improve learning experiences requires strong dialogue between families' knowledge and interests and teachers' pedagogical knowledge. This type of dialogue enables families to feel valued and supported, rather than monitored or judged.

ECCE service providers and teachers should assess the quality of their communication with families and take steps to improve it. The nature of communication varies depending on the medium used, whether it be a home visit, phone call or text message. To enhance communication, teachers can use these different platforms, keeping in mind their context and needs, if they are not already in use. In addition, families should actively participate in the assessment of activities they take part in and provide feedback to aid in further improvements.

3 **The third recommendation emphasizes the importance of strengthening school-led projects with families' active participation.** For this purpose, volunteering by families to develop and implement different initiatives is highly valuable, as is the promotion of literacy and reading-at-home programmes. Volunteering involves teachers encouraging families, including grandparents, siblings, mothers, fathers and others, to participate in school-led projects. These projects can encompass community initiatives like cleaning up the park, painting, or developing a community farm, or learning recovery programmes such as literacy and numeracy tutoring. Families can also participate in school activities like Earth Day events, or be guest speakers for children. Participation in these strategies can be for a short time, such as an hour, or extend over several weeks.

Each of these recommendations contains a conceptual orientation, two or three actions, a list of activities, and resources with ideas and inspiration to implement in the ECCE setting (see Figure 6). Table 2 shows suggested actions for each of the three recommendations, listing practical interventions.

Figure 6. Structure of the pedagogical recommendations

Pedagogical recommendation structure			
Action	Conceptual orientation	Activities	Resources
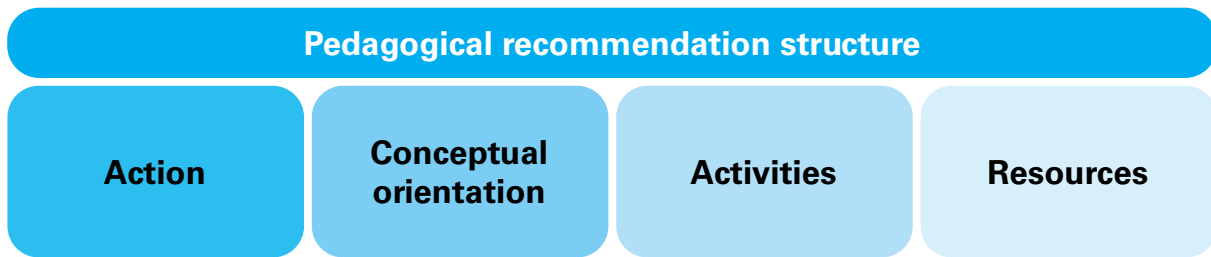
There are different ways of implementing a recommendation in an ECCE service; the actions frame those into specific practices and experiences.

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Table 2. Suggested actions for each recommendation

Recommendation	Actions
R5 **Experiences at home** Support families to provide enjoyable and playful home learning experiences based on their daily routines and cultural strengths.	5.1 Encourage learning experiences and environments that build on the cultural strengths of communities, including values, oral traditions and culturally valued activities. 5.2 Develop strategies to encourage the participation of fathers and other caregivers, apart from the mother, in early learning activities.
R6 **Communication** Make communication with families simpler, more effective and diverse.	6.1 Strengthen the quality of communication by using key insights to improve dialogues between teachers and parents. 6.2 Introduce various forms of media, such as phone calls, text messages and community-based communication, to propose simple behaviours and address cultural and contextual barriers that hinder family engagement. 6.3 Ensure that families are involved in assessing the interventions and activities they participate in.
R7 **Family–school exchanges** Actively involve families in school-led projects, such as volunteer programmes and literacy and numeracy initiatives.	7.1 Encourage families to engage in volunteering activities to support children's learning experiences. 7.2 Establish at-home reading and numeracy learning strategies and increase access to books and digital resources such as songs, videos and audiobooks.

Countries can adopt and implement these recommendations in different ways. They can incorporate them into their existing initiatives aimed at strengthening the quality of ECCE services – by embedding Smart Futures content, emphasis and methodologies – or they can use the proposed content for a specific duration for a rapid capacity-building process.

3
Let's get on board!

Actions, activities and resources to implement each recommendation

The content of each of the recommendations is developed in depth below, in three sections:

Why is the recommendation important?

Conceptual orientation: ideas to understand and approach the recommendation

Actions, activities and resources

Recommendation 5

R5

Experiences at home: Support families to provide enjoyable and playful home learning experiences based on their daily routines and cultural strengths

⚠ Why is the recommendation important?

Communication, analytical thinking and socio-emotional development are the key skills that can be significantly fostered using daily routine activities at home. Research has shown that using everyday moments with families can be a powerful approach for enhancing their engagement with children because it allows natural and authentic interactions that fit seamlessly into their daily lives (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). By incorporating learning opportunities into everyday moments at home – such as mealtime, bath-time, or even a simple walk to the park – families can create meaningful and enjoyable experiences that support their child's development. Thus, using daily routines or everyday moments with the insights of pedagogy can help families to see the value of early learning and create a strong foundation for their child's future success.

Families possess knowledge and expertise based on their work experiences, social history and cultural environment in various domains such as cooking, farming, medicine, religion, biology and mathematics. These valuable family practices – termed 'funds of knowledge' – play a vital role in enhancing children's learning and increasing family confidence and skills in participating in their child's education (González & Moll, 2002).

💡 Conceptual orientation

Teachers can draw on three key elements when suggesting or enhancing home-based learning experiences: **positive interactions**, which are beneficial and can be encouraged; **families' cultural strengths**, which support actions in which families excel and possess substantial knowledge; and **pedagogical intention**, which underscores the skills to be mobilized through pedagogical expertise. Each of these elements is detailed below.

Families' implementation of such experiences at home enhances parental self-efficacy, and consequently bolsters their capacity to foster children's learning and care.

Figure 7. Three key elements of home-based learning experiences
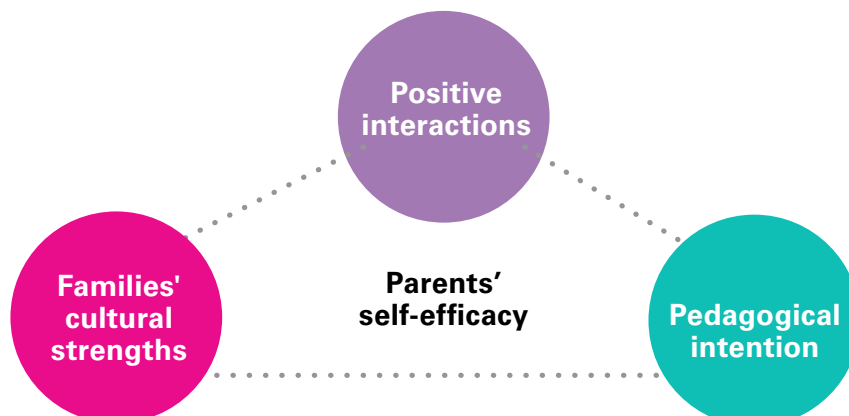
1 **Positive interactions.** The power of positive interactions between a family and their children is well documented, as these interactions can foster children's learning and development. When children engage in positive interactions, they feel loved and valued, which can help build their self-esteem. For instance, inputs in everyday life, such as playing with the child, reading to them, following their interests, asking questions, taking turns or simply spending quality time together, can create a positive environment that encourages learning and strengthens the bond between the family and the child (Center on the Developing Child, 2019). Positive interactions also include simple instructional practices such as language modelling, where families can encourage, respond to and extend children's language by demonstrating, supporting and helping them to find words and express themselves, and mathematical language in everyday communication, where families can introduce numbers, shapes, measurements and mathematical concepts to compare, explore spaces and find patterns in everyday life.

2 **Families' cultural strengths.** Families' cultural strengths can significantly contribute to improving children's learning by providing a unique and valuable perspective on the child's upbringing and learning experiences. Acknowledging families' cultural backgrounds, values and practices, and incorporating them into the learning process can provide a more comprehensive and enriching learning experience that is relevant and meaningful to the child's cultural identity. Cultural strengths include knowledge or practices encountered in everyday family life around nature, language, spirituality, celebrations, livelihoods, hobbies, talents and food. For example, if a family has a cultural tradition of storytelling, incorporating storytelling into the child's learning experience can promote language development and literacy skills while honouring the family's cultural practices.

3 **Pedagogical intention.** Pedagogical intention is the teacher's purpose or objective when fostering a child's development and learning. It emphasizes the set of skills the teacher seeks to mobilize when implementing specific learning activities. Teachers should suggest learning experiences that families can implement in their day-to-day lives, that will direct children's learning by developing a specific set of skills, and that facilitate interactions and draw on cultural strengths. For example, a teacher who wants to strengthen a child's analytical thinking could suggest an experience in which the father and older siblings will teach the young child how to build a trap to catch wild rodents in the forest. The family will agree to collect and prepare the material with the child, follow and communicate some steps, and demonstrate how the trap works using some mathematical concepts (movement, figures, cause and effect). Teachers should focus on three key types of experience to support their pedagogical intention when proposing activities to families: experiences to explore and experiment, experiences to create narratives, and experiences to get to know oneself and others. More information about this can be found in the first Smart Futures guidelines – Smart Futures: Pedagogical Recommendations to Support Early Learning and Development.

These three elements – positive interactions, families' cultural strengths, and pedagogical intention – can help teachers to propose a wide range of activities and experiences that are relevant to home contexts and easily implemented by families. In this process, parental self-efficacy is strengthened, with positive impacts on children's learning. ECCE services succeed in promoting **parents' self-efficacy** when the family:

- knows what they need to do to promote their children's learning at home

- have confidence in their abilities to promote learning – using their cultural strengths gives them the confidence to use their expertise as a learning tool

- knows that the child will respond appropriately when directed or guided in an activity or behaviour

- believes that other people, especially family and friends, can support their parenting efforts (Bandura, 1997).

▷ Actions, activities and resources

Action 5.1 **Encourage learning experiences and environments that build on the cultural strengths of communities, including values, oral traditions and culturally valued activities.**

Suggested activities	Resources	
• Identify and discuss the families' and communities' cultural strengths.	**Resource 1**	Ideas to identify families' cultural strengths
• Agree on activities and goals to develop learning experiences at home.	**Resource 2**	Ideas to define activities and strengthen positive interactions at home
• Provide suggestions for families to practise and strengthen family–child interactions. Agree on what to do to enhance everyday moments for creating learning environments at home by using readily available and low-cost materials.	**Resource 3**	Ideas to set goals with families
• Recap, strengthen and continue. Monitor learning.		

Action 5.2 **Develop strategies to encourage the participation of fathers and other caregivers, apart from the mother, in early learning activities.**

Suggested activities	Resources
• Identify what members of the family play an important role in children's education.	Not applicable
• Create specific strategies to encourage male participation based on their interests, roles and community life.	

Resource 1 describes the main domains where teachers can find families' expertise and cultural strengths.

Resource 2 includes ideas on how to propose home-based activities for families using cultural strengths and positive interactions as key strategies.

Resource 3 contains ideas on how to set goals with families and implement the defined activities.

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R6 Recommendation 6

Communication: Make communication with families simpler, more effective and diverse

! Why is the recommendation important?

The quality of the relationship between the family and the teacher predicts caregiver engagement and children's outcomes (Guralnick, 2013; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Establishing a positive relationship between the caregiver and the teacher is fundamental in promoting learning in ECCE programmes. It can reinforce social cohesion with regards to child development and increase teachers' understanding of communities and their interests.

Being consistent and effective promotes quality communication, which should be two-way, personalized and positive (Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2022). Active listening, a positive relationship with the family, responsiveness to caregiver strengths, caregiver–child interactions, and caregiver engagement are some of the factors that contribute to the quality of communication (Ramachandran, 2023; Roggman et al., 2008).

Interventions that involve parents through phone calls and text messages have shown promising signs of success (Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2022). This approach increases information flow and confidence, and it is positively linked with improved family– child interactions and children's development. For families in isolated regions with limited access to mobile phones and the internet, community-based communication can be used to provide similar services, but more research is still needed to explore this approach further.

♀ Conceptual orientation

Three ways to make communication with families simpler, more effective and diverse are being suggested. Each of these will facilitate the exchange of information between families and teachers. The first involves using **behavioural insights** to identify why individuals may not implement some of the suggested experiences with children. The second focuses on **quality interactions between teachers and families**, to strengthen teachers' abilities to interact with families, and the third centres on the **strategic use of media** to enrich exchanges between teachers and families and communities.

More detailed descriptions of each of these strategies are provided below.

Figure 8. Ways to make communication with families simpler, more effective and diverse

1	**2**	**3**
Behavioural insights	**Quality interactions between teacher and families**	**Strategic use of media**
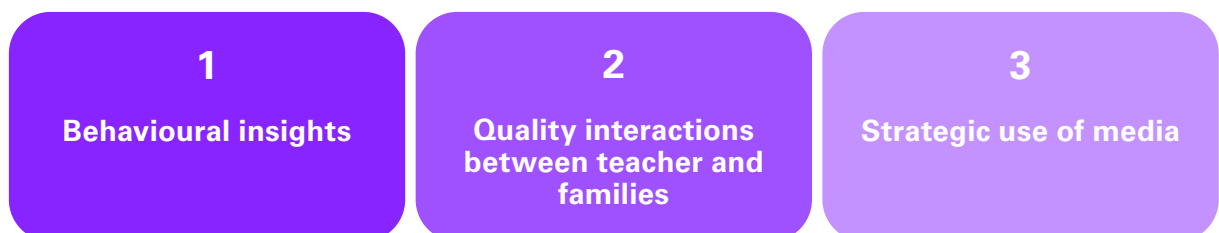
1 **Behavioural insights.** To support families effectively, knowledge alone is not sufficient. When programmes aim to promote changes in families and communities – such as increasing quality time between fathers and children, or providing more play-based learning opportunities – simply providing knowledge and suggestions may not be enough to bring about the desired change. Practitioners and teachers need to consider additional factors that can influence behaviour, such as cultural norms (e.g., fathers wanting to maintain authority), emotional states (e.g., stressed families may not be receptive to play), and the number of available options (e.g., families may feel overwhelmed by too many choices). Taking these factors into account is referred to as incorporating 'behavioural insights', which helps create conditions that enhance the likelihood of a desired practice (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2022a).

2 **Quality interactions between teacher and family.** The quality of interactions between teachers and caregivers is associated with children's learning (Mashburn et al., 2008). Researchers have developed evidence-based frameworks that include key components for effective and high-quality communication with families (Ramachandran, 2023; Roggman et al., 2008). To analyse the quality of interactions, these frameworks have been translated into instruments, which vary depending on the communication strategy used, such as home visits, group work, phone calls and text messages. Some key components of the frameworks can be used to enrich communication with families and strengthen teachers' interaction skills.

3 **Strategic use of media.** To support families effectively, it is crucial to use multiple communication strategies that leverage the existing resources (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2022a). Service providers and teachers need to make strategic use of media, such as phone calls, text messages and community-based communication, to enhance interventions. They can engage with local and participatory strategies, which value the practices and interests of communities, and use unconventional communication scenarios and mobilization strategies to increase learning opportunities.

Actions, activities and resources

Action 6.1 **Strengthen the quality of communication by using key insights to improve dialogues between teachers and parents.**

Suggested activities	Resources	
• Check the key insights to improve communication between teachers and parents and implement the required ones.	**Resource 4**	Key insights to improve communication
• Identify interests and questions from families and children regarding early learning.	**Resource 5**	Ideas to gather families' concerns and interests about children's learning
• Use interests and questions from families and children while communicating with them.		

Action 6.2   **Introduce various forms of media, such as phone calls, text messages and community-based communication, to propose simple behaviours and address cultural and contextual barriers that hinder family engagement.**

Suggested activities	Resources	
• Boost the intervention with social media, text messages or phone calls. • Boost the intervention with community-based communication practices.	**Resource 6**	Successful experiences using phone calls and text messages
	Resource 7	Community-based communication and examples to support children's learning

Action 6.3   **Ensure that families are involved in assessing the interventions and activities they participate in.**

Suggested activities	Resources
• Plan a feedback/follow-up strategy with families and children on the activities that were carried out. • Reach agreements with families and incorporate their suggestions on the content and strategies that teachers can use to support them.	Not applicable

Resources (click on each resource to go and explore its content)

Resource 4   includes key ideas from the behavioural sciences and the main components that define quality interaction between teachers and families.

Resource 5   presents some ideas on how to ascertain families' interests and concerns.

Resources 6 and 7 describe how different communication means can enhance an intervention.

R7

Family–school exchanges: Actively involve families in school-led projects, such as volunteer programmes and literacy and numeracy initiatives.

⊙ Why is the recommendation important?

The ECCE setting holds specific knowledge and expertise that add new value to families' and children's everyday life. This knowledge opens opportunities for families and children to understand and explore their world in different and new ways and to connect with others. When families and schools support each other, as well as the wider community, it creates multiple avenues to support children's learning.

When parents get involved in school-led projects, it boosts the accountability and quality of teachers' instruction for children. Teachers tend to perform better when they know that families are involved (OECD, 2012; UNESCO, 2021).

These interventions have a significant impact on children's skills and development. For example, reading comprehension improves with peer and family tutoring, and parents reading to children helps reduce learning losses that may arise during school closures, especially in kindergarten and primary levels. (Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.; Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2020).

💡 Conceptual orientation

Increasing exchanges between the ECCE and home settings strengthens the continuity of learning between the two. **Family volunteering programmes** and **literacy and numeracy initiatives** (including provision of materials) are examples of school-led projects that involve families in their children's learning (see *Figure 9*).

The main characteristics of each of these strategies are described below.

Figure 9. Two examples of strategies to foster family participation in school-led projects

Family participation in school-led projects

Family volunteering programmes	At-home reading and numeracy initiatives

1 **Family volunteering programmes.** Family volunteering strengthens a family-friendly school. These initiatives are special because they use the school's resources to support community development, while also using the families' and communities' resources to strengthen the school. Volunteering includes diverse activities of varying duration and intensity.

Table 3. Volunteer project examples

Volunteer project	Description and examples
Activities for community development or environmental protection	The school uses its capacities to foster community development while encouraging children's learning. • social mobilization for spatial recovery or improvement (e.g., parks, streets, corners and rivers) • collaboration in social projects, such as community canteens, animal shelters, and aged care residences • development of solidarity farms and gardens • collaboration with community groups organizing events and celebrations
Learning recovery initiatives that include family and community members	The school proposes tutoring programmes involving community members of different ages and profiles, such as young people, community leaders and grandparents.
Family participation in school management and school routines	The school involves families in school activities and routines. • families participating in schools' government bodies • families participating in school celebrations • families helping to manage meal programmes • families participating in classroom activities sharing experiences or leading field visits or picnics

2 **At-home reading and numeracy initiatives.** Strong evidence demonstrates the benefits of using at-home reading and numeracy strategies to support children's cognitive, social and emotional development, while preparing them for academic success (Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.). Some effective strategies include sending reading materials home, providing parents with guidance on how to support literacy and numeracy, promoting the use of low-cost materials available at home for learning, and providing access to digital learning resources to enrich the interaction with children. For example, a teacher may provide families with a list of reading activities to conduct at home. By working collaboratively with families, teachers can help to promote early reading and numeracy development and support children's academic success.

▶▶ Actions, activities and resources

Action 7.1　**Encourage families to engage in volunteering activities to support children's learning experiences.**

Suggested activities	Resources
• Gather ideas from families and children to support the school or community. • Design strategies and clearly define the family's role and participation modalities (when, where, how long, with what). • Implement initiatives and encourage families to get involved. • Monitor learning progress. **Note:** While proposing these activities, keep in mind parents' busy schedules, especially where both parents are working. These activities need to be flexible and easy to accommodate.	**Resource 8** Ideas to involve families in volunteer experiences

Action 7.2　**Establish at-home reading and numeracy learning strategies and increase access to books and digital resources such as songs, videos and audiobooks.**

Suggested activities	Resources
• Communicate with families about the importance of reading and numeracy during the early years. Take the opportunity to explore together some new ideas and suggestions for increasing children's reading and numeracy opportunities in family life. • Define strategies to promote reading and numeracy with families (e.g., reading challenges, 'the flying book', reading parks, counting, finger games). Include strategies to facilitate families' access to books and other reading materials. • Complement these strategies with social mobilization activities (e.g., events, publicity, interviews and incentives). • Discuss the experiences and preliminary learning results with families.	**Resource 9** Strategies to promote reading with families

👆 Resources (click on each resource to go and explore its content)

Resource 8　provides some ideas to use family volunteering for enhancing children's learning.

Resource 9　provides some strategies for promoting family reading, including links to access digital resources and audiobooks to encourage reading, writing and language in the early years.

4

THE RESOURCES
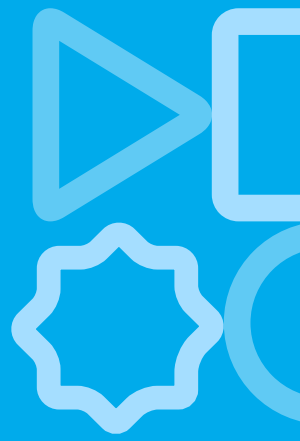
Ideas to identify families' cultural strengths

Teachers should remember that difference is not a deficiency. The initial step in enhancing children's learning and development in collaboration with families is to recognize that different parenting approaches and practices do not mean that these families' parenting is deficient. On the contrary, during centuries families have adopted parenting practices that vary from one community to another, and it is within these differences that opportunities for building family–school alliances should be seized.

In early childhood education, it is important for teachers to understand and use the unique strengths of families and communities. When teachers identify and highlight these strengths, and then use them in learning activities, it can boost children's learning and families' self-confidence. Especially when working with families who have young children, it is key to celebrate the good things about their culture and show parents how important these strengths are, rather than dwelling on what might be missing.

These unique strengths are known as 'funds of knowledge' (González & Moll, 2002) and can be identified and encouraged to promote children's learning and development. Four steps are suggested to help teachers identify these cultural strengths and use them to enhance young children's learning:

1. Identify where cultural strengths can be found.

2. Engage in conversations with families about their cultural strengths.

3. Build and set goals with families using the cultural strengths.

4. Keep an eye on stereotypes and biases.

1 Identify where cultural strengths can be found

Teachers should observe and identify sources of cultural strengths within families in order to actively engage them, enrich their cultural practices, and maximize the potential to foster children's learning

Sources of cultural strengths	Importance for children's development
Where can teachers find families' and communities' cultural strengths?	How can teachers use these cultural strengths?
In nature The natural environment creates opportunities to gain knowledge of plants, animals, celestial bodies, seasons, and families' rituals and uses for these elements in everyday life. These include families' and communities' modification and transformation of natural resources to create objects for use in the house, such as decorative objects, playthings and bedding, among others.	Nature is a fantastic setting for promoting children's learning. While promoting care and love for planet Earth, the cultural strengths linked to knowledge and manipulation of the environment foster essential skills such as social and spatial location, scientific and mathematical thinking, problem-solving, and a sense of belonging.
In language and oral tradition These cultural expressions encompass communities' own literature passed down from generation to generation. They include various spoken forms, such as proverbs, riddles, stories, nursery rhymes, legends, myths, epic songs and poems, prayers, psalmodies, songs, dramatic performances, tongue twisters and games.	Through oral traditions, communities recover and maintain memories of their heroes using voice, bodily expression, and memory. Oral traditions encourage communication and bonding between generations, associations between words and meaning, and phonological awareness.
In the ways families make a living, and their hobbies and talents These practices are bodies of knowledge that families have built up to use in daily life. They include what children's parents, families and family friends do and what their grandparents and great-grandparents did. This knowledge includes the use of objects and materials, along with understanding of how things work and the required procedures to achieve specific outputs. For example, families might include electricians, biologists, dressmakers, musicians, skateboarders, collectors, athletes, writers, recyclers or photographers.	Family history and knowledge is a strategic resource for building relationships between families and teachers, and strengthening children's respect and admiration for adults and their skills. This knowledge can help children to learn mathematics, everyday science, problem-solving, hypothesis-building, creativity, and socio-emotional skills such as cooperation.

Sources of cultural strengths	Importance for children's development
Where can teachers find families' and communities' cultural strengths?	How can teachers use these cultural strengths?
In family and community spirituality and celebrations These encompass practices connecting families and communities beyond the material world. This includes spiritual sources of the communities and some of the most important family and community celebrations. Spirituality goes hand in hand with celebrations, and celebrations reflect what human beings are and what is important to them. Here it includes the knowledge and practices displayed in places where significant events – traditional, religious, ceremonial or social activities – occur or once occurred.	Spirituality and celebrations foster children's values of love, compassion, altruism and wisdom, enabling the cultivation of tranquillity and the importance of contemplation. Celebrations promote joy and relief and build community, solidarity and teamwork.
In food and nutrition practices Practices and traditions connected with food include knowledge about plants, nutrition, harvesting, storage and preparation. They also encompass knowledge of farming, agro-ecological calendars, food as medicine, healthy food preparation, traditional medicine, and recycling.	Food brings people together. Important values such as solidarity and empathy are formed around food. Working with these strengths allows children to recognize food's value and the importance of health and nutrition. Food is also great for working on numeracy, literacy, scientific thinking, problem-solving and hypothesis-building.

2 Engage in conversations with families about their cultural strengths

Teachers can work with families to recognize the importance of cultural knowledge and its relationship with children's learning.

One example for teachers is to create a **family treasures box** as a way to discuss cultural strengths with children and their families. Teachers can work together with families to design this special box, which could be a cardboard box, a bottle or a chest. In this box they can collect knowledge and experiences that are important to them. Each experience or piece of knowledge can be represented by a drawing, some writing or an object.

These cultural strengths are like treasures because culture offers invaluable resources that strengthen the relationship between nature and communities, as well as between families and children's learning.

During these discussions around sources of cultural strengths, teachers can ask questions about both children's and adults' experiences and childhood memories. Examples of specific questions teachers might ask are:

- "How did you learn to count?"
- "What was your approach to harvesting?"

Broader questions could be:

- "What would you like to pass on to children based on what you've learned?"
- "What concepts or values do you believe are crucial for children to remember?"

Families can also explore what aspects of their community make them proud.

By fostering such conversations, teachers can deepen understanding of diverse cultural perspectives and tap into the collective wisdom of families, enriching the learning experience for children and forging stronger connections between families and their children's learning.

3 Build and set goals with families using the cultural strengths

Find inspiration in the content in Resource 2, which focuses on how to enrich practices with positive interactions, and in Resource 3, which discusses how to build agreements and set goals with families.

4 Keep an eye on stereotypes and biases

Developing an understanding of others' perspectives requires an awareness of one's own. Therefore, teachers must continuously reflect on how their personal identities and beliefs about childhood and parenting influence their biases and assumptions about families' practices. These can negatively affect respectful and equitable interactions. By acknowledging and challenging their own biases, teachers can become more attuned to the diverse needs and strengths of each family, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for all. Ultimately, by recognizing and addressing personal biases, teachers can build stronger partnerships with families, promoting mutual respect, trust and understanding, and ultimately improving outcomes for children.

Ideas to define activities and strengthen positive interactions at home

Positive interactions during early childhood are fundamental for promoting children's learning. This resource offers ideas on:

1. How to plan activities with families that are developmentally and age-appropriate

2. How to engage families with children using the types of interactions that are crucial for enhancing learning – for instance, how to pose questions to children or how to expand children's vocabulary during the proposed activities and in their everyday lives.

1 Define activities that are developmentally and age-appropriate

Teachers can propose activities that promote the development of specific skills in children, based on families' cultural strengths (such as those identified in Resource 1) and developmental emphasis drawing from key pedagogical experiences.

Teachers can use the following ideas for inspiration to suggest activities that families can undertake based on their cultural strengths.

Activities to propose to families, based on their cultural strengths and interests			
Key pedagogical experience			
Area of cultural strength	**Explore and experiment**	**Create and share narratives**	**Know oneself and others**
Nature	Take children on nature walks in the mountains, beaches, rivers, parks, gardens, or nearby green spaces. Encourage them to observe and discuss the plants, trees, insects, birds and other natural elements they encounter. Encourage children to observe, collect, and discuss what they find, such as such as leaves, rocks, flowers and animal tracks. Conduct a project or build together with children. For example, involve children in planting seeds, caring for a small garden or potted plants, or building objects such as shelters, insect hotels, bird and other animal houses, or drinking troughs.	Join children in creating artwork using natural materials like leaves, flowers and twigs. They can make leaf rubbings, flower pressings, or nature-inspired collages. Spend quiet and relaxing time with children observing the sky and the clouds, looking for planets, stars and constellations. Encourage them to observe, breath, count, imagine and tell stories. Tell children stories about the wonders of nature and the environment. Create imaginative tales about animals, plants and natural phenomena (e.g., seasons and weather), or share personal experiences related to nature.	Encourage children to breathe, contemplate, and recognize the body and its parts and functions. Take children to a nature reserve where they can observe animals in their natural habitat. Talk about the importance of animals. Engage in role-playing, where children can act out the behaviours and characteristics of different animals, fostering empathy and understanding of others.
Language and oral tradition	Tell stories and tales about places and their importance. Teach children traditional songs that teach numbers, letters and words, or play clapping and finger games.	Teach children to learn and memorise tongue twisters, rhymes, verses, riddles, jokes and traditional games. Imagine and create new tongue twisters, jokes and riddles.	Engage children in drawing, visiting or interviewing important community members. Plan a tour with children around community landmarks.

Activities to propose to families, based on their cultural strengths and interests			
Key pedagogical experience			
Area of cultural strength	Explore and experiment	Create and share narratives	Know oneself and others
The ways families make a living, and their hobbies and talents	Plan a tour through family members' workplaces (ensuring safety first). Encourage children to explore objects and processes. During the tour children can imagine the different uses of objects and envision new uses. When possible, let children observe how materials and objects are being transformed. Encourage different family members to share their talents with children.	Teach children songs about professions, along with specialized vocabulary and funny words. Children and families can use these words outside the workplace and during dinner or other moments of their daily lives. Explore objects with children. For example, explore objects from the past and present, showing how they have changed (e.g. telephones, camaras, boxes and shoes). Join children in exploring family photos, comparing places and objects, and sharing stories.	Encourage children to compliment and praise others, for example about behaviour, emotions, values, or sense of style.
Family and community spirituality and celebrations	Participate in community events and celebrations with children.	Help children learn songs and dances, and make performances.	Support children to help animals, adopt trees or feed homeless animals.

Activities to propose to families, based on their cultural strengths and interests			
Key pedagogical experience			
Area of cultural strength	**Explore and experiment**	**Create and share narratives**	**Know oneself and others**
Food and nutrition practices	Include children in every process related to food. For example, include children in growing and collecting food, selecting and shopping at the supermarket, and planning a visit to a grocery store. In any of these processes encourage children to count, sort, organize, prepare, eat, and explore flavours and new preparations. Plan a scavenger hunt with children around their neighbourhood or in their local grocery store. Prepare a list of common food items and ask children to find and identify them. Help children to learn the source of each item, such as fruits, vegetables, grains or dairy products. This activity helps children understand where their food comes from and promotes awareness of different food sources.	Encourage children to write and draw recipes, food lists, and food. Play games like imagining new vegetables and fruits. Tell stories, such as about what and how grandparents ate, and what has changed. Explore the concept of food security while preparing meals or snacks. Tell stories about the ingredients used, their origins and the nutritional benefits they offer. This activity not only enhances children's language and storytelling skills but also fosters an understanding of the connections between food, health and well-being.	Recognize children's food preferences and favourite preparations. Join children in collecting and donating food to animal shelters.

There is no limit to the activities that families can engage in, and they can draw inspiration from the cultural strengths present in their own family and community.

- Teachers can find further suggestions for activities in the first volume of Smart Futures guidelines – *Smart Futures: Pedagogical Recommendations to Support Early Learning and Development* – where activities are defined according to age and developmental process.

The activities proposed above are for inspiration. Some of these ideas can be adapted and adjusted according to the children's age and developmental processes. As they are based on family strengths, it is important to encourage activities in which families feel they have expertise. The main aim is to strengthen both children's participation and engagement in social and cultural situations, and their opportunities to explore and experiment with their environment.

2 Encourage families to use positive interactions when implementing the proposed activities

Regardless of the activity that families implement, it is crucial to ensure a positive interaction that fosters children's learning and skill-building. Teachers can encourage parents to use eight key techniques when interacting with their children.

Follow children's interests

Demonstrate and explain

Ask open-ended questions

Always be ready to:
Model language
Expand vocabulary
Use numbers and mathematical language

Support and encourage

Take turns
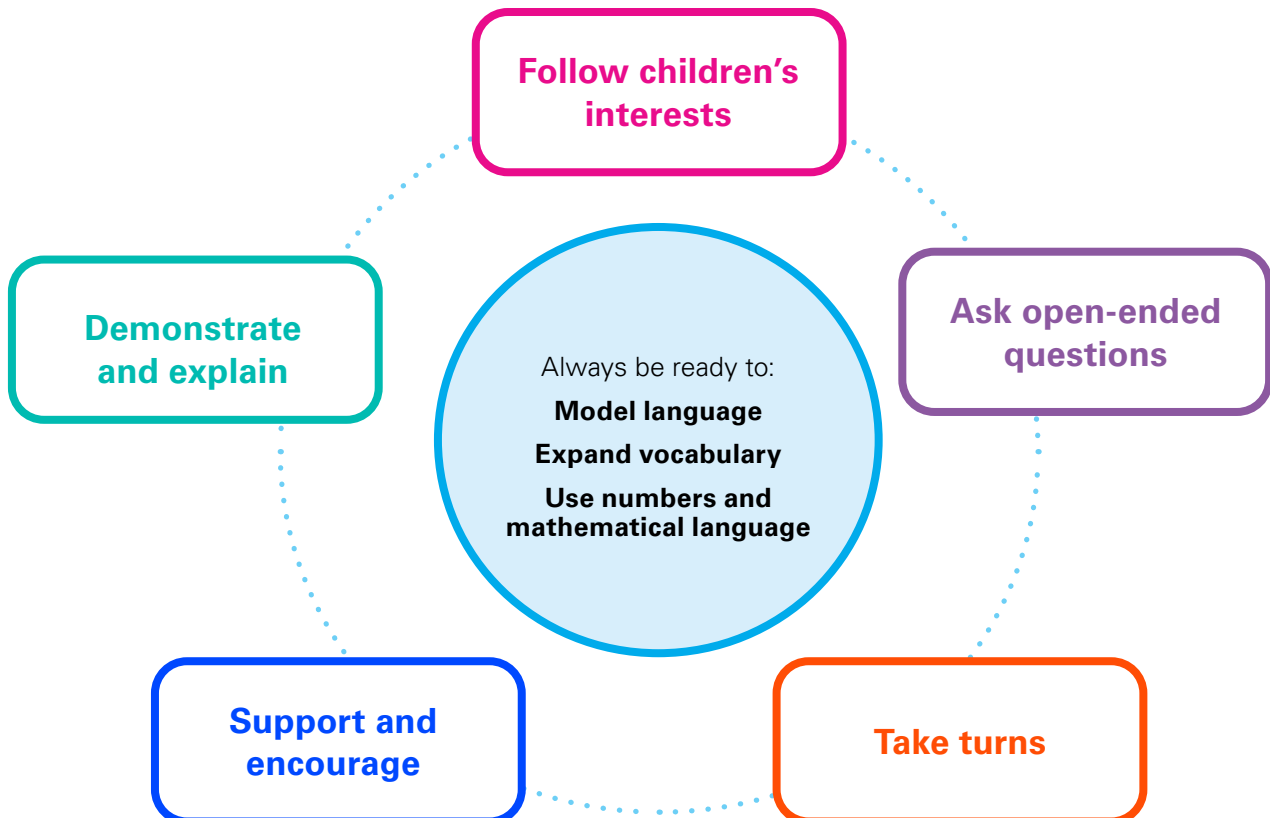
Families can choose any one or a combination of these techniques for interactions, based on their unique situation, the activity they are engaging in, and the specific skills they wish to emphasize. Teachers can use the following information when guiding parents in these interactions.

- **Follow children's interests.** It is important to follow children's interests and passions. By doing so, families can create a more engaging and enjoyable learning experience. Pay attention to what excites and captivates them, and tailor activities accordingly. For example, if children show interest in their environment or in animals, explore nature together, visit a farm, or read books about different species. If children are fascinated by art, encourage them to express their creativity through drawing, painting or crafting. This will not only foster their curiosity and motivation, but also create opportunities for them to develop their skills and knowledge in areas that truly engage them.

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Asking children questions is a powerful way to engage their thinking and promote deeper understanding. Encourage them to think critically and express their thoughts by posing open-ended questions. For example, when reading a story together, ask them about their favourite part or what they think might happen next. When doing a science experiment, ask them to predict the outcome or explain why certain results occurred. During a nature walk, ask them to describe what they observe or why they think certain plants or animals behave in a certain way. Asking such questions can help stimulate children's curiosity, encourage active participation, and promote higher-order thinking.

- **Take turns.** Taking turns is essential for promoting cooperation and mutual respect. Encourage children to share their thoughts, ideas and perspectives, and model taking turns by actively listening to their contributions. For example, while solving a puzzle together, take turns in placing pieces and discussing strategies. When engaging in imaginative play, allow each person to contribute to the storyline. During artwork, take turns in sharing and discussing each other's creations. Taking turns means giving space to the child's response and reaction, and acting accordingly. It can help to create a collaborative atmosphere where everyone's input is valued, and it teaches children important social skills such as patience, empathy and compromise.

- **Support and encourage.** Adults should accompany and support children's discoveries and achievements. Motivate children to pursue their goals or to accomplish what they want to achieve. For example, if a baby wants to reach an object, encourage them to try to reach it, but if the baby is definitely not yet able to do it by themselves, give them a little help so objects are closer to them, until they can achieve their goal. Support children to do new things like jumping, learning to swim, or overcoming an obstacle on the road. Supporting and encouraging are also about challenging their knowledge and stimulating their curiosity. During play or in regular conversation, use information about how things and the world work – for example, where the sun goes during the night or where the rain comes from. Cultivate their interests. For example, if children are fascinated by Bengal tigers, try to find material on the subject, such as photos, videos and books. Allow yourself to learn about what children discover.

- **Demonstrate and explain.** It is fundamentally important to show children during a directed activity what to do, how to do it and, most importantly, why. When doing a joint activity that follows a step-by-step process, explain this process to children using different strategies and giving the reasons for each step. Allow time for sharing and questioning, and be flexible enough to change the process. For example, if the idea is to make a tower of sticks, demonstrate how it is done, or if the idea is to separate the green apples from the ripe ones, show them what this means and how to do it.

Finally, teachers can encourage families, in any interaction with children at any time, to:

- **Model language.** Demonstrate to children how to use language to express themselves. Help them find words, complete their sentences, and find appropriate language for the situation. Two simple actions to suggest: self-talk, telling the children what is happening and describing activities, and parallel talk, describing to the children what they are doing and helping them to find the words they need.

- **Expand vocabulary.** Enrich children's language repertoire. Expand vocabulary by teaching new words, strange words, odd words, funny words and synonyms, and give examples during interactions.

- **Use numbers and mathematical language.** Use numbers and mathematical language in everyday situations to help children develop key foundational skills, like the sense of quantity. Use words such as up, down, side, front, more, less, big, small and equivalent in everyday situations. Encourage children to count actions, things and stairs, play easy subtractions and sums, and make sets and patterns.

These practices are easy for parents to implement in everyday situations when interacting with children. Teachers can practise them with families during activities with children to develop caregivers' interaction skills. While it is not necessary, all these practices can be used all at once in one meaningful interaction, for example when starting the day and getting ready to go to school, when going to the park, or when helping to do the groceries. Parents will need some time to get used to and develop the habit, but once they start to see children's responses the process will run smoothly.

When working with families, setting goals is key to increasing children's learning opportunities using families' and communities' cultural strengths. Here are some ideas on how to set goals with families.

In these links, from The Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University, find more information on positive interactions to promote learning

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/5-steps-for-brain-building-serve-and-return/

Ideas to set goals with families

- **Establish regular communication.** Schedule meetings or regular check-ins with families to discuss their aspirations for their children's learning and development. Collaboratively identify areas of focus and set specific goals that align with their aspirations.

- **Agree with families on common goals.** Work together to prioritize which areas to focus on first. Consider the child's interests, needs and age, as well as any upcoming milestones or challenges.

- **Identify families' cultural strengths.** Connect these strengths with children's learning skills and opportunities.

- **Examine family traits that might be obstacles to developing activities with children.** For example, adults prefer to avoid playing with children because it disrupts key hierarchical parenting structures, families are very busy and stressed in the morning, or activities need to include older children.

- **Propose activities using family strengths and reducing obstacles.** Consider activities that can be done regularly – for example, 'chants, tongue twisters and riddles afternoons' or 'a treasure hunt across the landscape'. Include several family members when possible and avoid stressors – for example, if adults do not want to play, suggest that older siblings lead the activity in the presence of adults, or if mornings are busy, propose activities for the afternoon or evening, or short activities during the week and longer ones on weekends (see Resource 2 for inspiration).

- **Define an implementation strategy with the family:**

  o A daily challenge. For example, the family will recite three riddles and tongue twisters daily or play some games during bath-time.

  o A weekly goal. For example, during the week the family will go four times to the mountain to collect some special stones and count them.

  o A competition. For example, the family will form teams and play at who can discover new jokes or objects with unique characteristics.

  o Missions. For example, families will have one mission per week, such as discovering 15 words in the house with the letters A and P, or finding a group of treasures in their territory.

  o Mysteries. For example, families will solve mysteries using exciting questions based on their cultural strengths: What time do birds start singing, and when do they go to sleep? What kind of fruits does the family grow? How is cheese produced?

- **Suggest families dedicate a place in the house to display the actions they will carry out during the week.** Families can also use this space to reflect on their progress. One possibility is to design a calendar that they can mark every time an action is performed. This reminder will motivate children and adults to carry out the activities.

- **Practise positive (serve and return) interactions.** Share tips and practise improvised interactions, such as asking open-ended questions, taking turns or using mathematical language. To practise these with families:

  1. Present the practice and illustrate to the family how each interaction can be performed.

  2. Engage families in practising the interaction with children or in hypothetical situations, and encourage them to ask questions.

  3. Provide support, feedback and guidance to families on how to use the practice.

- **Regularly check progress.** Conduct a follow-up to discuss how the activity went. For example, ask what parts of the activity engaged the child and how the family felt using new interactions. Did they notice anything different in the children (did they do or say anything different)? Identify different ways to continue these activities at home, whether the same activity or a new one.

- **Celebrate milestones.** Encourage families to celebrate milestones and achievements along the way. This boosts motivation and reinforces the importance of setting and working towards goals.

This resource presents some practical ideas for simplifying, improving and diversifying communication with families. These ideas are drawn from the behavioural sciences and the principles that define high-quality interactions between teachers and families during home visits, phone calls and text messages.

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Key insights to improve communication

Consider these recommendations to improve your communication with families.

- **Establish a welcoming environment.** Create a warm and inviting atmosphere where families feel comfortable approaching the teacher. Display a family-friendly bulletin board, share photos of classroom activities, and provide a designated space for family communication.

- **Use a behaviour-change approach to improve communication with families.** According to these approaches, programmes should take into account some of the following core ideas to improve results.

  o Providing knowledge alone is not sufficient to prompt change or build desired practices. Families could know about the practice and the benefits of the desired change, but other factors such as cultural and contextual practices must also be considered. For example, implementing text message interventions may differ depending on the country and locality. It is necessary to consider access to phones, usage patterns, and appropriate timing for introducing such interventions. In some contexts women do not have access to social networks (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2022a).

  o Decisions made by families are often influenced by cognitive biases. These mental shortcuts guide people's actions, especially when they have to make quick or difficult decisions (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2022a). For example, it is very common for families' parenting decisions to be influenced by 'present bias', which leads people to give more weight to decisions with immediate rewards or outcomes rather than those that are far-off and uncertain. Parents are also often influenced by a 'no-time action', or 'urgency', bias, where people make quick, on-the-spot decisions without having enough time to reflect on what to do – for instance, when a child throws a tantrum or runs down a busy street. Interventions should be designed to prevent parents from relying on these biases as primary sources of decision-making. This can be achieved by recognizing local practices and providing accurate and feasible options according to the context and the challenges presented in situations where these cognitive biases are most evident.

- **Use standardized measurement tools for assessing the quality of work with families and children.** These measurements can be taken during home visits, in early childhood development centres, and in phone calls or text messages. Measurements can serve as a reference for designing and evaluating programmes and for training.

In these links, you can access different experiences based on behavioural sciences, and interventions to make communication more straightforward and more diverse.

https://earlychildhoodmatters.online/issues/early-childhood-matters-2022/

Ideas to gather families' concerns and interests about children's learning

Taking into account families' ideas about their children's interests and parenting challenges, and incorporating them into instruction and curriculum design is a proven strategy that enhances learning outcomes (Henderson & Geller, 2020). It is crucial to understand the primary interests and concerns families have regarding their children's learning. Are these interests and concerns effectively communicated to the early childhood care and education (ECCE) workforce? And are they being integrated into the proposed activities and support?

Below are some ideas for acknowledging families' interests and concerns by collecting their questions about children's learning and development. By using these questions to inform initiatives and communication with families, teachers can enhance their understanding of communities and their interests. This approach will increase effective collaboration between teachers and families, fostering a stronger partnership in supporting children's educational journeys.

These ideas are for inspiration and should be further developed and adapted according to the specific context in which they are being implemented. It is essential to consider the unique characteristics of the setting and the needs of the families involved. This systematic exercise can be conducted at specific times throughout the year, such as at the beginning or middle of the year, or when defining objectives in collaboration with families. This process would take approximately three weeks, allowing for comprehensive exploration and meaningful engagement with families.

- **Talk to families to gather their questions about their children's learning.** Collect and recognize families' concerns, interests, preferences and questions about their children's learning. Ask open-ended questions such as "What are your goals for your child's education?" and "What specific areas of learning would you like us to focus on?" Encourage the expression of questions and recognize that all questions are legitimate. This practice provides valuable insights into the families' priorities and helps tailor the learning approach accordingly.

- **Establish different strategies to collect families' questions.** These can be personalized but also anonymous. For example, you can collect questions using:

  - a letterbox in a community setting (e.g., a shop or a school bus stop)

  - a focal point or leader in the neighbourhood or village

  - a WhatsApp message

  - a home visit.

- **Inform families about these strategies to collect and generate expectations.** For example, send messages to families, put up bulletin posters, and remind families during conversations. Give families a week or two to submit their questions.

- **Collect the questions and organize them by topic.** Categorize all collected questions into thematic packets based on common themes – for example, home habits, screen usage, learning characteristics, and parenting. After organizing the questions, examine if there are any variations

based on age groups. This process allows for a structured analysis and enables a deeper understanding of the specific concerns and interests that may vary across different age ranges.

- **Define two to three response options for each thematic packet of questions.** When addressing the questions, it is essential to emphasize the importance of play and interaction in learning, aligning with the community's socialization goals. Offer two or three options for discussion with families, recognizing that each family is unique and may have different experiences. What works effectively for one family may not be as impactful for another.

- Consider using existing resources on the subject to elaborate on the answers (e.g., from country governments or UNICEF). Another option is to conduct a couple of workshops with selected families. By leveraging the expertise of the early education team and actively involving families, meaningful answers to these questions can be constructed, ensuring a collaborative and informed approach.

> **Remember:**
>
> All questions are valuable, and it is important to acknowledge that one question may have multiple answers depending on different perspectives and contexts.
>
> The intention is not to provide direct teaching but rather to offer recommendations for families to explore new approaches or ideas.
>
> It is important to understand that while some recommendations may work effectively, others may not yield the desired results. Therefore, families should remain open to trying different strategies and approaches until they find what works best for them.

The journey of finding effective solutions is a continuous process.

- **Build strategies to use questions to communicate with families.** One way to use the collected questions is to discuss the response options during a work session. Alternatively, teachers can consider recording a podcast or including the questions in text messaging strategies to connect with families and share the answers. Another option is to present the questions and answers at a community event. By using real questions from families, teachers can establish a connection with the families and better address their concerns.

- **Gather feedback from families on the questions and answers, to assess effectiveness.** Determine whether families found the questions and provided answers sufficient and if they comprehended the recommendations. Evaluate the relevance of the information to the specific context. Additionally, invite families to share any new questions or concerns they may have. By actively seeking feedback, teachers can continuously improve and tailor the communication process to better meet the needs and expectations of families.

- **These ideas are designed to increase families' participation in early education services and ensure that the support provided is relevant to their needs.** It is one initiative among many that teachers can swiftly and affordably implement to amplify the voices of families and communities. By prioritizing and valuing families' input, teachers can create a more inclusive and impactful learning environment for children and their families.

Successful experiences using phone calls and text messages

In recent years, there has been growing emphasis on using various communication channels to support families and promote early learning. Innovative approaches have emerged, revolutionizing the way we engage with parents. The Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel has acknowledged the effectiveness of interventions that involve parents via phone calls, text messages and emails. These interventions have shown promising results, particularly in contexts where communication is interactive, personalized and imbued with positivity. The integration of such two-way communication channels has proven to be a valuable tool in strengthening parent–child relationships and enhancing early learning (Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2022).

The prominence of these approaches has significantly increased in the wake of school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have played a vital role in mitigating the impact of these closures on children's learning. These innovative approaches serve as a crucial mechanism to support families and foster strong partnerships with schools. Leveraging various forms of media can further enhance the effectiveness of these approaches, providing an additional component to the services offered. By incorporating media, teachers and families can access a wider range of resources and opportunities to facilitate continuous learning and engagement, even in challenging circumstances.

Outlined below are three inspiring experiences that can serve as a great example to boost the quality of communication in ECCE services. While the evidence on this subject is still limited, these case studies offer robust information and valuable insights (Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2022).
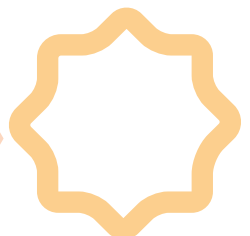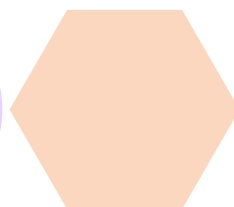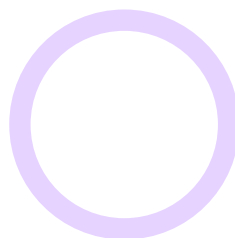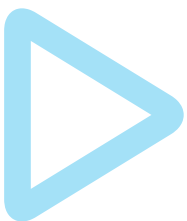
Text messages in Costa Rica

Content and structure. In Costa Rica, text messages were sent to parents of preschool children to support children's learning at home. The initiative was developed to keep children connected to education during COVID-19 school closures and was led by the ministry of education in alliance with the Inter-American Development Bank.

The text messages provided simple activities and encouraged families to use the national distance education programme via radio and television. They also included tips to strengthen parenting (e.g., parenting style, time management and healthy habits).

Parents received messages over three to four weeks (68 in total) on specific days of the week between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. via a bulk-messaging platform.

> *"Let's do addition! Ask your child: If you have four bananas and I give you two more, how many bananas will you have? Practise every day with different quantities."*

The messages included arithmetic, spatial reasoning, oral counting, sequencing and comparison, and aimed to teach early literacy skills, including expressive vocabulary, syllabification and oral comprehension.

Impact. The cognitive skills of children whose parents received the text messages increased by 0.11 to 0.12 standard deviations after 15 weeks of intervention. The improvements were mostly in numeracy skills such as counting, addition and subtraction. There was no evidence of parents increasing their self-efficacy or perceived ability to guide children's learning. The research reported that the main effect was driven by an increase in parental engagement using the proposed activities. Parents who received the messages had 0.24 standard deviations more involvement and increased their belief in their children's abilities.

Parents tended not to share the messages with teachers or other families, but 94 per cent of parents who received the messages said they were interested in continuing to receive text messages.

Cost. The programme produced, on average, a 0.01 standard deviation increase in learning per child for every US$0.08 spent.

Link to access to the publication:

https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Improving-Early-Childhood-Development-Outcomes-in-Times-of-COVID-19-Experimental-Evidence-on-Parental-Networks-and-SMS-Messages.pdf

(Hernández Agramonte et al., 2022)

Ahlan Simsim. Early learning programme in Lebanon

Content and structure. This programme focused on Syrian refugee children affected by the war. This was the largest humanitarian intervention for early childhood in history. Owing to COVID-19, the programme was implemented remotely through calls and access to culturally relevant multimedia educational content.

The programme targeted hard-to-reach families with nearly school-age children, and ran for 11 weeks, with a curriculum that was adapted for use through calls and a television programme called Ahlan Simsim.

Impact. The programme has produced statistically and developmentally significant impacts on children, particularly in literacy, numeracy and socio-emotional skills. These impacts are comparable to a year of in-person preschool programmes.

There is evidence of the relationship between educational mass media and improved foundational socio-emotional skills that are critical for children's long-term success. Children who watched the Ahlan Simsim television show increased their ability to identify and regulate emotions and apply coping strategies.

Link to access the different evaluations conducted in the frame of the project:

https://globaltiesforchildren.nyu.edu/as-findings

READY4K! and Tips by Text

Content and structure. READY4K!, now known as Tips by Text, is an eight-month text messaging programme supporting four-year-olds' academic development. In the programme, every week parents receive three messages emphasizing a skill.

- On Mondays, parents receive a 'Fact' text informing and motivating them by highlighting the importance of the week's skill.
  "Bath-time is great for teaching your child important skills for K. Start by asking: What are the things we need for bath-time? Why?"

- On Wednesdays, parents receive a 'Tip' text describing concrete activities they can do with their children.
  "When you are bathing your child, point out the letters on shampoo bottles. Ask your child to name them & the sounds they make."

- On Fridays, parents receive a 'Growth' text providing them with encouragement and a follow-up tip.
  "Keep using bath-time to prepare your child 4K! Ask: What rhymes with tub (cub, rub), soap (rope, hope), & bubble (double, trouble)?"

During the first year of the study, parents received only messages about literacy and family involvement at school. During the second year, messages on mathematics and socio-emotional development were also included.

Impact. A two-year study found that the programme increased parental involvement at home and school by 0.15 to 0.29 standard deviations. The results for children's skills in the first year were not significant, but in the second year the results showed a 0.11 standard deviation increase in literacy. The authors considered that this might happen for two reasons:

- In the first year, the programme was still developing some key elements.

- In the second year, the programme varied the content to include both mathematics and socio-emotional development material.

After the programme shifted to Tips by Text, a new evaluation was planned for 2019, sending three texts per week for nine months to improve the literacy, language, numeracy and socio-emotional skills of children aged 4–5 years.

The 2020 and 2021 partial school closures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic affected this project and its evaluation. As a result, the delivery was extended, as was the outcome data collection (and some outcome data collection was not possible). The trial experienced attrition of approximately 70 per cent, fewer evaluation tests could be completed, and children experienced disruption to their education and lives during this time. The evaluation team is planning the next steps, since in this context children whose parents received the Tips by Text programme did not show any further progress in literacy skills compared with children whose parents did not receive the programme (Education Endowment Foundation, 2020).

Link to access to the publication:
http://jhr.uwpress.org/content/54/3/537
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/tipsbytext
(York et al., 2018)

Text messages and phone calls in Botswana

Content and structure. Botswana tested two low-technology interventions using text messages and phone calls to support parents in fostering the learning of children aged 6–8 years. One group tested text messages that provided numeracy 'problems of the week'. In a second treatment group, these weekly text messages were supplemented with a 15–20 minute phone call, amounting to three hours of direct instruction spread over eight weeks.

Impact. The combined phone and text intervention increased learning by 0.12 standard deviations, but the text message intervention alone had no statistically significant effect on learning. The phone plus text intervention also affected other foundational skills, such as problem-solving, and reduced absolute innumeracy (students who cannot do any numerical operations) by 31 per cent.

The programme found that the strategy proved effective when phone calls were combined with text messages, whereas the use of text messages alone was not effective.

Cost. The intervention is highly cost-effective, with 0.63 to 0.89 standard deviation learning gains per US$100.

Link to access to the publication:

https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-022-01381-z

(Angrist et al., 2022)

The evidence in this area is still sparse but is promising. Bright by Three, a non-profit organization, found that in text messaging projects, caregivers with lower incomes and education, minorities and non-English speakers were less likely to enrol (Cunningham et al., 2018). Future research and programme design could identify ways to increase participation among these populations and determine the effectiveness of these programmes in improving the development of the most vulnerable children.

Community-based communication and examples to support children's learning

Community-based communication is a process that goes beyond involving communities in programme design and content development. It focuses on actively engaging and mobilizing communities in support of children's learning and development. By fostering inclusive participation, this approach empowers community members to contribute to the planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes. It recognizes the invaluable role that communities play in shaping the learning experiences of children. This holistic approach strengthens the connection between families, teachers and community members, fostering a supportive environment that nurtures the optimal growth and learning of young children.

Community-based communication can be used for different purposes. For example:

- It can be used to develop communication or advocacy campaigns for promoting key messages or tips that promote children's learning. By sharing success stories and community voices, programmes can raise awareness of the importance of ECCE and advocate for increased investment, improved policies and better support for families.

- It can be used to inform and strengthen children's development initiatives. By using the settings in which families and children live, such as squares, bus stops and shops, communication can be effectively disseminated to promote children's learning.

    o For instance, community-based communication may involve the distribution of educational materials in areas that families and children frequent. Flyers with information on local educational programmes, such as after-school tutoring and summer camps, can be posted in shops and bus stops. Similarly, community bulletin boards can be used to display information on educational events happening in the area. When information on educational opportunities is easily accessible, families are informed and encouraged to participate in programmes that will benefit their children's development.

- In addition to providing information, community-based communication can also involve active engagement with families. Community members, such as teachers and volunteers, can use public spaces like community squares and parks to facilitate educational activities with children, such as reading and playing educational games. Creating opportunities for children to learn outside of the classroom enriches their learning experiences and strengthens their overall development.

- It can be used to produce pedagogical material such as children's books, posters and flyers based on local language and aesthetics. By involving community members, programmes can incorporate culturally relevant content, teaching practices and learning materials that reflect the unique backgrounds and identities of the children and families they serve.

Community-based communication can happen through various platforms and methods, allowing preschool teachers to effectively engage with families and community members.

The following are some common platforms that can be used for community-based communication.

Unconventional scenarios such as community kiosks, bus stops, bus stations, shops, churches, parks and squares.	These spaces serve as strategic locations for preschool teachers to interact with families and community members. For instance, teachers can post information on community kiosks about upcoming events, resources and services that support early development. They can also engage with local shop owners to promote their programmes and services to parents.
Commonly used routes or paths that families and children take when navigating through different spaces.	Community sound systems, such as public radio or street music, can be used to share relevant information and updates about preschool programmes and activities. This platform can be particularly helpful for reaching out to families who may not have access to the internet or other forms of traditional communication.
Printed media such as flyers, posters and newsletters can be distributed throughout the community to provide information on preschool programmes, services and important updates.	This allows for a wider dissemination of crucial information to families who may not have access to digital platforms.

Community-based communication seeks to transform a typically top-down approach into a more participatory process. The most common method is through the implementation of participatory action research, where families and children actively engage as researchers to improve their lives and community settings. By actively involving families and children in the research process, they become empowered agents in shaping their own learning experiences and community development. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility, ensuring that communication and decision-making are inclusive, collaborative and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the community.

Urban 95

The Urban 95 initiative uses several ideas of community communication and, through the place-making concept, develops actions to provide children with learning opportunities throughout the surrounding environment.

"Urban95 gives children a 'voice' that can help to accelerate change in long-standing urban challenges, from air quality to the provision of public space … their goal is to encourage cities to create spaces where children can grow, learn, create, imagine and play across all neighbourhoods, reaching as many families as possible."
(Bernard van Leer Foundation, n.d.)

In some of their projects, they have employed unconventional communication scenarios to deliver information to caregivers and promote learning opportunities for children – for example, using the most common and safest routes from home to school. They have used bus stops and parks to provide learning opportunities and facilitate the continuity between schools and home.

Link to more information:

Here is information about how they work, the practices they promote and current initiatives.

https://brainbuilding.org/programme-areas/urban95/

Ideas to involve families in volunteer experiences

As mentioned earlier, engaging volunteer families in various capacities and time frames can have a significant impact on children's outcomes. Designing strategic interventions that involve families in school projects can yield positive results (Henderson & Geller, 2020; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Promoting family participation through volunteering means that teachers and school leaders actively encourage the involvement of various family members, including grandparents, siblings, mothers, fathers and others, in school-led initiatives. These projects can include activities such as assisting in the preparation of meals for food programmes, or participating in learning recovery efforts such as literacy and numeracy tutoring. By integrating families into these projects, schools can foster stronger collaboration and create an enriched learning environment that benefits both children and their families.

When seeking volunteer participation from families, several crucial factors should be considered to ensure a successful and meaningful experience:

1 **Role construction and clear communication.** Provide clear and transparent information about volunteer opportunities, including the role, purpose, expectations and specific tasks involved. Clearly communicate the benefits and impact of their involvement on children's learning and development.

2 **Flexibility and accessibility.** Offer a range of volunteer opportunities with varying time commitments and tasks, allowing families to choose options that fit their schedules and abilities. Ensure accessibility for diverse family backgrounds, languages and abilities.

3 **Welcoming environment.** Create a welcoming and inclusive environment that fosters trust and mutual respect. Make families feel valued and appreciated for their contributions and ensure that their perspectives and experiences are respected.

4 **Recognition and appreciation.** Regularly acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of volunteer families. Recognize their contributions publicly, express gratitude, and celebrate their impact on children's learning and the overall ECCE programme.

5 **Feedback and reflection.** Seek feedback from volunteer families to continuously improve their volunteer experience and address any challenges. Regularly reflect on the effectiveness of volunteer initiatives and make necessary adjustments to ensure volunteers' meaningful engagement in the activities.

Outlined below are descriptions of school-led projects that have successfully promoted family participation and made a positive impact. These examples can serve as inspiration for developing new strategies for involving families as volunteers.

Reggio Emilia pedagogy

Five main features characterize Reggio Emilia's approach to early education:

- Teachers are researchers.
- Learning happens through projects using children's interest.
- Schools rely on children's symbolic languages, such as art and play, to promote learning.
- The learning environment is one main source of learning.
- Parents are key partners in running education services (New, 2007).

Using the term 'a school run by parents', Reggio Emilia's philosophy gives a central role to families and community participation. The development of strong links between the home and school is assured by:

- continuity of education in children's lives
- reciprocal communication networks
- participation strategies involving all children, teachers, parents and community in school life
- feelings of 'ownership and belonging' among parents and schools (Valentine, 2006).

Family and community participation can occur at different levels:

- Participation begins before school starts through the integration programme. This programme includes meetings between children, parents and teachers to get to know the child, and includes the development of pedagogical activities, such as learning about the child's favourite songs, that will then be used to enrich teacher–child interactions. The integration can last for a week.
- The family can actively participate by observing and documenting their children's development and learning process. Knowing how the children act at home allows the teachers to get a holistic image of the children.
- The family communicates daily with teachers, discussing key elements of the children's day and processes.
- Parents and grandparents are encouraged to maintain the centre's facilities and participate in its construction and development. For example, they can participate in growing and harvesting food, in the upkeep of playgrounds, play areas and furniture, or in developing tools required to carry out learning projects.
- Parents get involved in school management by electing members of school councils known as 'Consiglio Infanzia Città' (city childhood councils). These members discuss interventions and adjustments to education policy (Valentine, 2006).

Links to more information:

https://education.gov.scot/nih/Documents/ELC/ELC35_ReggioEmilia/ELC35_ReggioAug06.pdf
https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ756000

Urban 95

Urban 95 is an initiative to improve a neighbourhood, city or region, using the concept of place-making, in which communities are invited to reimagine and reinvent public spaces. It involves families and communities – including schools – working together and creating learning spaces.

Their key ideas and interventions include:

- family-friendly design for streets, sidewalks, parks and playgrounds
- safe, playful walking routes for caregivers and young children
- events and programmes for families and children in public spaces
- alignment of routes and fare structures to caregiver mobility patterns.

For example, in São Paulo, Brazil, the Elos Institute involved the community in thinking about how public space could be family-friendly. They worked hand in hand with around 350 residents to implement some of these ideas, clearing litter, painting murals, creating a space for play, planting a vegetable garden, and turning an abandoned shipping container into a toy library (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2022b).

The 'City at Eye Level for Kids' (Danenberg, 2018) is a fantastic source of inspiration containing more than 100 ideas worldwide for improving cities and the spaces where children live. The following graphic shows an example of what is included in the publication. It also encompasses ideas that involve communities working together to improve their environment and increase learning opportunities for children, with the participation and leadership of the educational setting.

Link to more information:

https://bernardvanleer.org/publications-reports/the-city-at-eye-level-for-kids/
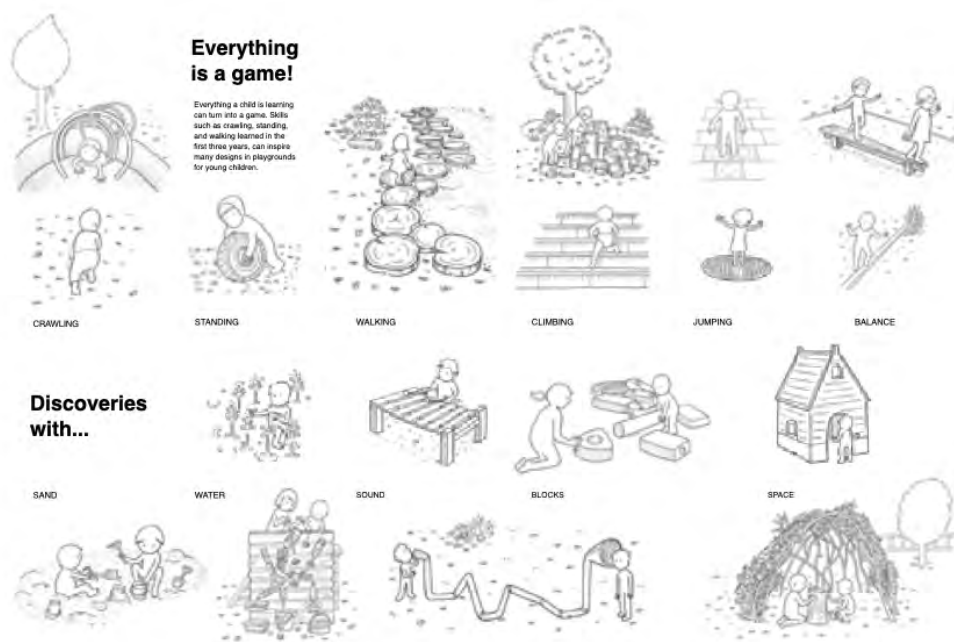
Learning recovery projects

In India, the REAL Centre at the University of Cambridge and the ASER Centre, in collaboration with the Pratham Education Foundation, studied how school and community-based interventions can improve the foundational learning of disadvantaged primary school children (Bhattacharjea et al., 2022).

They evaluated two interventions. The first, 'Awareness LA', involved activities to raise awareness and engage communities in children's foundational learning in Grades 2 to 4. They supported volunteers to organize events celebrating learning and promoting key learning messages.
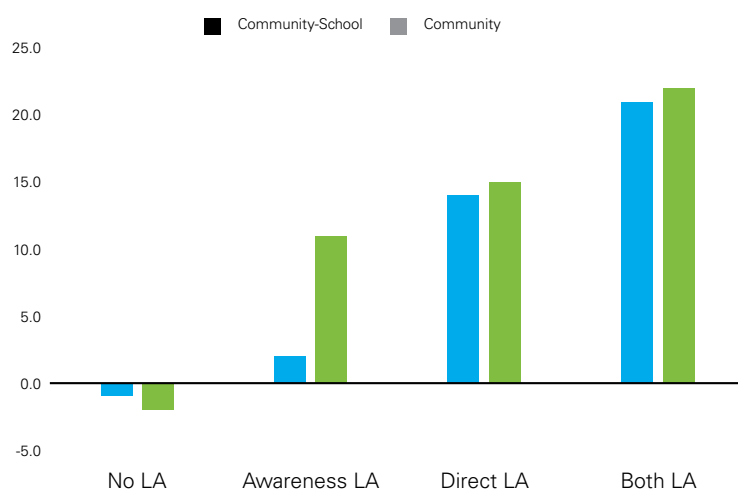
The second, 'Direct LA', included awareness activities and specific community support to develop learning activities with the children. They gave community volunteers training and materials (e.g. storybooks and charts) to support and enhance children's foundational learning. They organized after-school reading clubs that brought together children from the village.

Gains in foundational learning were significantly higher for the intervention groups than for children from similar villages who were not part of the programme, as the following graphic shows.

Gains in foundational learning were higher for children who participated in both direct learning activities and awareness activities. This result suggests that awareness activities complement direct learning activities to enhance children's foundational learning.

These awareness activities were associated with significant gains in children's literacy levels. This result suggests that community–school partnerships and school participation in community celebrations and actions positively affect children's learning.

Gains in foundational literacy levels

■ Community-School   ■ Community

Link to more information:

https://www.ukfiet.org/2022/involving-the-community-in-raising-childrens-foundational-learning-outcomes-evidence-from-india/

Other projects that used the power of family volunteering with good results:

- Blanch et al. (2012) researched the impact of peer tutoring and family counselling to improve reading comprehension in some schools in Catalonia, Spain. The main results of the evaluation showed positive effects for all students, but especially for the 223 students who received family support.

- Yousafzai et al. (2018) studied the impact of the Young Leaders for Early Childhood programme in Pakistan, linking the engagement of young community leaders with early childhood service provision.

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Strategies to promote reading with families

Learning to read is a wonderful process that introduces children to the world and broadens their understanding of others. This transformative process starts at an early age, intertwining with language development.

Engaging in shared reading experiences, where parents read to their children, has proven to be instrumental in mitigating learning setbacks resulting from school closures, particularly in kindergarten and primary levels (Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, 2022). However, further research is required to explore the effectiveness of this approach in regions with significant adult illiteracy, possibly by involving older siblings as reading partners.

> **The Early Grade Reading Rainbow**
>
> The World Bank produced a publication called the Early Grade Reading Rainbow: *A Quick Guide to Ending Learning Poverty.* This publication provides detailed information on how this process unfolds and several resources to strengthen it, including working materials and guidance for teacher training.
>
> *Link to more information:*
>
> https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/37993/P17425207894e40fe0b6e901ebe150bd216.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Family-directed interventions that prioritize reading at home and oral language development have been found to be highly effective in enhancing children's learning. Research indicates that children who have been read to by their parents during their early years exhibit stronger reading skills by the age of 15 (Richter et al., 2021).

Some easy ideas that can be shared with families for building a literacy-rich environment at home:

- **Share a list of age-appropriate books and reading materials with families.** Offer suggestions for different genres, topics and authors that align with children's interests and developmental levels.

- **Set up a borrowing system where families can borrow books from the preschool's library to read at home.** Encourage families to exchange books regularly to keep the reading material fresh and exciting.

- **Promote systematic efforts to create a reading routine – 10 minutes counts.** These activities can be done by creating family challenges to read daily (remember that not only stories can be read, everything can be read). Reading can be done independently or together at appropriate times. Parents can read food packages, magazines, stories and posters.

- **Create reading kits that include a variety of books, along with activity ideas related to the books.** Encourage families to read together and engage in discussions or activities based on the stories.

- **Provide families with simple reading tips and strategies to make reading enjoyable and interactive.** Offer guidance on how to ask open-ended questions, make connections to the story, and encourage active participation. Refer to the ideas in the first volume of Smart Futures guidelines – Smart Futures: Pedagogical Recommendations to Support Early Learning and Development. Establish alliances with local television and radio stations to publish tips, encourage reading or reproduce digital material.

- **Organize family reading events where parents and children come together to read and explore books.** Offer storytelling sessions or interactive reading activities to engage families in the joy of reading. Promote children's book-making or story-making with families. Hold story contests to encourage reading among children and their families.

- **Organize workshops specifically for parents to share strategies for building literacy skills at home.** Offer tips on creating a literacy-rich environment, fostering a love for reading and integrating literacy into daily routines.

- **Encourage families to share their own stories, traditions and experiences with others.** Create opportunities for families to share their cultural heritage through storytelling. Create a community project to collect local stories and narratives involving community leaders, and hold events to share these stories with the children.

- **Transform local spaces into 'non-library libraries'.** For example, a community centre could set up a reading corner with activities such as book clubs and storytelling sessions. A park could be transformed into a 'reading park' and could also offer outdoor activities such as book walks and storybook trails, where children can follow a path and read a story displayed on signs. Another idea could be to transform local businesses into mini 'non-library libraries'. For instance, a coffee shop could offer a book exchange programme.

By implementing these ideas, teachers can actively involve families in fostering a literacy-rich environment at home. Building strong partnerships with families and providing them with resources and support will contribute to children's language and literacy development and create a lifelong love for reading.

Below are some interventions that can serve as inspiration to include reading motivation in the ECCE environment.

Expanding access to Sesame Street in the Americas

Sesame Street is an educational children's television series produced by Sesame Workshop.

A meta-analysis of 24 studies in 15 countries found that exposure to *Sesame Street* was linked to positive cognitive outcomes, including literacy and numeracy (Mares & Pan, 2013).

In partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank and with the support of turn.io (a platform for using WhatsApp to develop social projects), the Sesame Workshop designed a chatbot to deliver quality digital material to thousands of families through WhatsApp, including activities, audio clips, e-books and other forms of content.

Link to more information:

Here are details on how this initiative works – download it and try.

https://www.turn.io/community/conversations/sesame-workshop

Early Reading Together in New Zealand

This programme brings together key actors to support families in developing language and literacy skills. It involves families participating in three workshops of one hour over three weeks, covering essential tips for language development and reading, and enjoying literature with children and at home.

It is designed to be culturally relevant and to address different types of families with different backgrounds. It involves using stories and rhymes, and singing songs, and access to books and printed material.

Link to more information:

https://www.readingtogether.net.nz/early-reading-together.html

Reading Partner

This programme is implemented in public schools in the United States and supported by the Social Innovation Fund. It uses community volunteers to tutor struggling readers in elementary schools one-on-one.

It operates both during the school day and after school in designated spaces called 'reading centres' at each of the partner schools.

The Reading Partners programme consists of twice-weekly, one-on-one tutoring sessions that last 45 minutes each. Children are tutored by community volunteers who do not need experience working in education or with children.

Tutors come from varied backgrounds, are not required to have experience working with children or teaching reading, and receive only limited training before beginning tutoring.

Tutors use specific materials and resources such as family texting, student learning packets, family literacy resources, family engagement workshops, and family advisory groups.

Link to more information:

https://readingpartners.org/our-impact/program-impact/

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