

Chapter 3

UNDERSTANDING THE ELEMENTS OF PARENTING AND CARING

Theories and Research

No society can long sustain itself unless its members have learned the sensitivities, motivations, and skills involved in assisting and caring for other human beings.

—Urie Bronfenbrenner, 2005b, p. 14

Every human being has the capacity of knowing, of analyzing and reflecting about reality so that she becomes a true agent of action in her own life.

—Ada and Beutel (1991, p. 8, as cited in McCaleb, 1994, p. 57)

Some of the questions this chapter addresses:

- How does life experience prepare a person for parenthood?
- How does a person's "way of knowing" and thinking affect the way that person might relate to children and professionals in schools and other institutions?
- What other factors are related to effective caregiving of children and youth?

AUTHOR'S NOTE: All names of children and parents in this chapter and throughout this book are fictitious.

DEFINING PARENTS

In the last chapter, we saw how theorists and researchers have progressed in their understanding of the parent role and development within that role. Often we can substitute the word *teacher* for *parent* as we think about adults caring for children, but in many instances we can't. The National Parenting Education Network defines *parents* this way:

Those who are so defined legally and those who have made a long term commitment to a child to assume responsibility for that child's well being and development. This responsibility includes providing for the child's physiological and emotional needs, forming a loving emotional relationship, guiding the child's understanding of the world and culture, and designing an appropriate environment. (National Parenting Education Network, www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/npen/)

Parents in many countries have at least an 18-year commitment to the child. Van der Pas (2003) defines a parent as an adult who has an awareness of being responsible for a child. "This awareness, and its all-or-nothing quality—being unconditional and without a limit in time—distinguish a 'parent' from those persons with children who are not parents" (p. 40). (This awareness might even involve turning over custody to someone else while the parents get the help they need.) A tremendous amount of research has been done to determine what children need but not very much research on who parents are and what parents do on a daily basis to care for children. This chapter provides a theoretical framework for looking at parents in more depth. It describes the process of parenting and the characteristics and resources that have been found to be associated with successful parenting. The following case study illustrates what parents do and demonstrates that success for parents often depends on the context in which they attempt to do their "parental work." Then we will turn to Heath's theoretical framework (2006) focusing on the parenting process and parental competence and related research that can prepare professionals to understand and support parents as well as collaborate with them as caregivers of children.

A CASE STUDY ILLUSTRATING WHAT PARENTS DO

Here is a description of two mothers in a children's hospital in late March, when asthma attacks are often frequent. Mateo, Miguel, and Carlos have had severe asthma attacks at the same time. Mateo's mother got her neighbor to agree to watch Mateo's siblings and bring them to school, rushed Mateo to the hospital in her car, and called her husband, who took a cab from his work. Because she could do this so quickly, Mateo's lungs were in better shape than the other boys'. She got a colleague to teach her class and provided the staff with details regarding her son's status, as

she had been taught by her doctor how to listen to his breath sounds with a stethoscope at home. The other mother, new to the neighborhood, had to wait until her husband returned from work to watch their four other children. She had to ride a total of three buses to bring Miguel and Carlos to the hospital. She was told there was room for only the toddler, so the infant had to go to another hospital. The staff did not talk to her much because she was not fluent in English. Mateo's mother heard a few people criticize Miguel and Carlos's mother for not being in the hospital all day. They must not have known she was going from one hospital to the other. Staff praised Mateo's father and parish priest for coming. They may not have known that before his shift, Miguel and Carlos's dad would come, bring Miguel homemade corn bread, change his sheets, and lovingly care for him. Mateo's mom was treated better and seen as a better parent by her hospital and church, and her son was in less medical stress because of her resources and financial situation and the support she got from various institutions, advantages the other loving family did not have.

Relationships between a parent and a child and then between them and societal systems are important in terms of understanding the parents with whom one works, because a parent can have good motivation and attitudes about parenting and even many skills but be seen by others (e.g., spouse, relatives, associates, teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers) as ineffective. Or one may be so preoccupied with basic needs that it is hard to do all that is needed for a child. In the situation described above, Miguel and Carlos's family lacked language, money, and community support. The two mothers were just as worried about their children's health and just as observant of their children's needs. They differed in the resources they could access at the time, the environments in which they lived, and the way others viewed them.

The model of describing parents presented in this chapter and used to frame and understand this case study is informed by the theories from the previous chapter and focuses on parents as persons in their own right. The model and the theory of the parenting process put forth by Heath (2006) are representative and integrative of the complexity of parenting suggested in the previous chapter and in this case study. There are many important questions to ask about parents. Here are some examples: Who are the people who walk into your classroom, office, or hospital? What are their thoughts and feelings? What is their cultural background? What body of information do they have about their child? What beliefs do they have about their role and about children? What resources do they have? What support from the community? What is it these parents do on a day-to-day basis? How can I support them? How can I learn from them? Heath uses Erikson's theory as the framework for analyzing the parenting process. She also draws on Bronfenbrenner's theory but adds more focus on the developing parent and child, something Bronfenbrenner (2005a) admitted got lost for a while in his important body of work on the environment. Heath and McDermott have been working collaboratively for two decades on using and refining this theory to inform theory building and practice.

THE PARENTING PROCESS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Zigler has noted, “I have long believed that the development of a child does not begin the day he is born—or at age three—but much earlier, during the formative years of his parents” (1976, Foreword). From the day a child is born, the environment in which the child grows sets the stage for that child’s own parenting potential, as Heath has demonstrated (see Figure 3.1).

■ How Does Life Experience Prepare a Person for Parenthood?

People will come to the threshold of parenting with different levels of energy and preparedness. They are influenced by those who care for them, usually parents, as demonstrated by the arrows on the figure. They may or may not be influenced by all the others shown in Figure 3.2, including extended family, friends, peers, school, church, medical institutions, work, the media, the community, or the socio-cultural context, in terms of whether they will possess the attitudes, information, and skills necessary to parent confidently and competently. Thus, arrows from these categories are not shown in Figure 3.2. This influence often depends on a person’s age, health, resources, culture, and so on. For example, if someone is ill as a child, that person may have more contact with medical personnel than is typical of the child’s peers. In many cultures, several people are very involved in rearing a child from the very beginning. In U.S. society, parents can often be quite isolated from others as they rear their children. The older a child gets, the more likely it is that media, schools, neighborhoods, and so forth will influence the child.

In some families, the church has a strong influence on children, while in others, it has little or no influence. Sikkink and Hernandez (2003) found that in many Latino families, church has provided an opportunity for parents who might feel alienated from schools to network with other parents of the same religion but higher socioeconomic status. This networking has often enhanced their social capital and their support for their children’s educational success. While some had hypothesized that certain more fundamentalist religious affiliations might tend to isolate parents and children, the authors reported that in general, even Latino parents of these affiliations had higher educational aspirations for their children than did nonreligious parents. The authors also reported that connection to the church often meant that children had another source of support with schoolwork and a connection to civic and community activities, which allowed them to feel connected and efficacious. The researchers found that religious affiliation and involvement had the greatest positive impact on Latino teens in impoverished, as opposed to middle-class, neighborhoods.

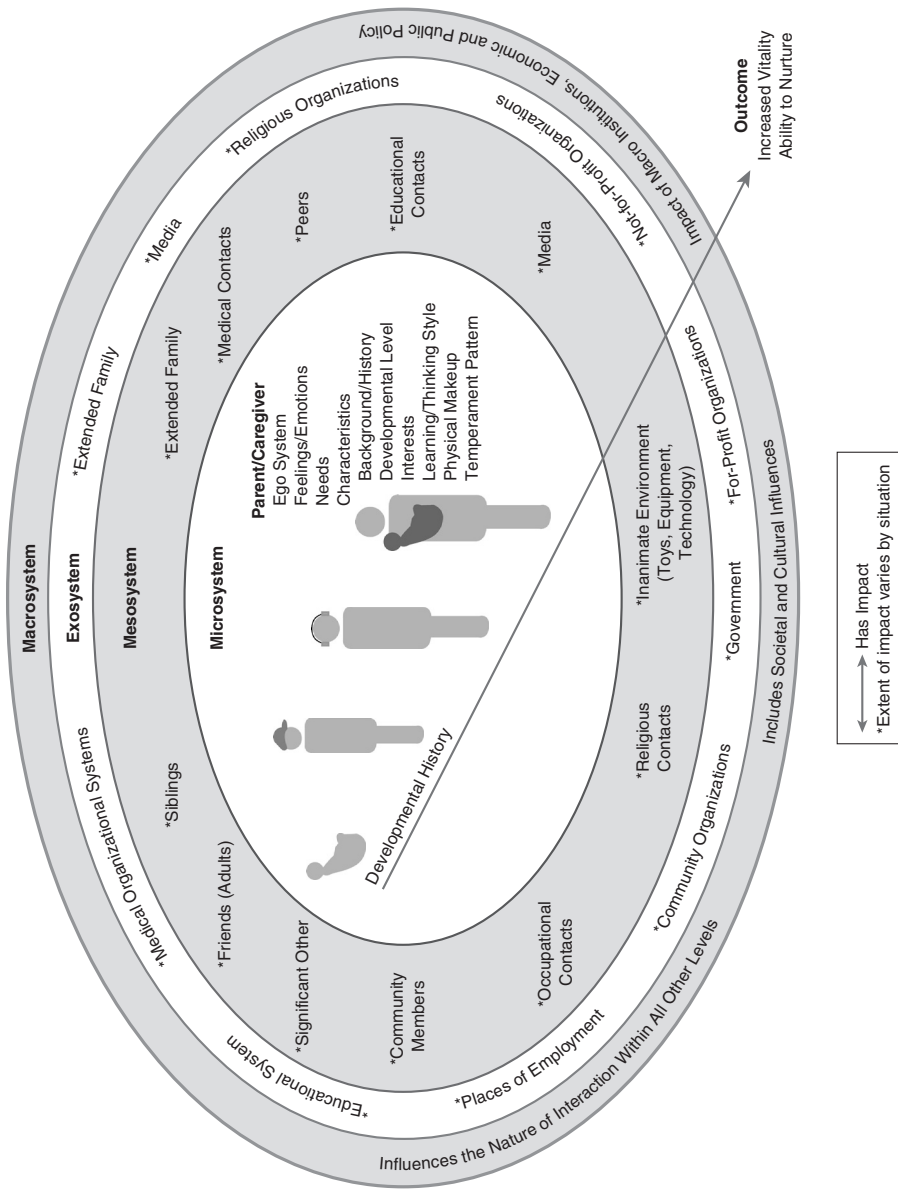


Figure 3.1 The Parenting Process: Developmental Determinants

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Figure 3.2 The Parenting Process: Ego Systems

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In addition to the impact of some of these other environmental factors, people each come to parenting with their own unique psychological resources, physical and mental health, thinking style, beliefs, and so forth, all of which must be considered as well. Figure 3.2 describes the personal ego processes involved in parenting after the birth of one's first child. First, one needs to be motivated to parent and have the right attitude. This means appreciating the importance of the role and of being involved and psychologically available to one's child (Belsky, 1984; Fogel & Melson, 1986; Palacios, Gonzalez, & Marino, 1992; Van der Pas, 2003).

The right attitude is not the only requirement, however. Parents also need observation skills and an ability to describe situations clearly and accurately (Greenspan & Greenspan, 1985; Heath, 2000, 2006). They may or may not have developed these skills before parenting. Some parents and teachers just automatically respond once they have observed a child, and they do either what they saw their own parents do or what they might have observed elsewhere. This could be a mindless approach. Others go through a mindful process of filtering the observation through their own general and individual knowledge base, beliefs, feelings, and thinking, and then they act. Their final actions are effective based on the information and knowledge they possess (Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Sigel & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2002), the thinking ability and skills they have developed along the way (Holden & Hawk, 2003), and their own personal resources and situations (Belsky, 1984; Demick, 2002).

Practitioners also understand children in terms of accessing the sources of information under "Knowledge, Beliefs, and Feelings" in Figure 3.2. They first need to understand themselves, including their own background, needs, and so forth (Graue & Brown, 2003; Siegel, 2005). They need to understand child development, individual children, and their needs (prenatal, early care, physical, safety, emotional, social, and intellectual) and capacities (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000). Simpson (2001) describes parents in the United States this way:

Each parent unconsciously or consciously shapes his or her strategies to fit factors that often include his or her physical health, such as the presence of disabilities or chronic illness; mental health, such as the presence of depression; gender; temperament, such as ease with transitions and new situations; developmental level, such as capacity for perspective-taking; early experience, such as history of trauma and abuse; knowledge such as fluency in the English language and an understanding of the American educational system; beliefs and attitudes, such as religious and cultural beliefs about gender roles of mothers and fathers, daughters and sons; and skills, such as problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills. (p. 42)

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Parenting educators, including many from the field of family and consumer sciences, have added to that list of needed skills *basic life skills* (e.g., planning, decision making, problem solving, time, household and financial management skills) and *relationship skills* (the ability to build and maintain positive and productive relationships as well as to communicate and resolve conflicts). So effective parenting is not based just on having the right attitude, although that is important. It is also about information, including knowledge about the self and others (Goodnow & Collins, 1990), beliefs (Sigel & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2002; Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992; Smetana, 1994), feelings (Belsky & Barends, 2002; Belsky, Crnic, & Woodworth, 1995), and thinking (Ehrensaft, 1987; Holden & Hawk, 2003; Kegan, 1994; Newberger, 1980), not to mention skills, but throughout it is also, as we saw in the previous chapter, about a dynamic and changing relationship that calls for mindfulness, or conscious attention to thoughts and feelings (Breslin, Zack, & McMain, 2002).

As Figures 3.3 and 3.4 illustrate, a parent and a child come to their relationship with their own developmental level, personality, learning style, needs, health, and other attributes. In addition to their interaction, other environmental factors may or may not affect the relationship. What actually affects the parent-child relationship often changes over the years between infancy and the teen years, with teenagers often being more influenced by factors outside the family, such as school and the media, than younger children are. Families with children of all ages, though, are influenced by their environment. Many educators strongly recommend that we should fix the environment in which families live, not just fix a child or a parent (Turnbull, Blue-Banning, Park, & Turbiville, 1999, p. 165). Doherty and Carlson (2002) have developed a model of citizenship or “community engaged” parenting education that empowers parents and professionals working with parents to focus on the larger environmental context (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4) and ways they together can improve their communities on behalf of children.

The Search Institute (www.search-institute.org/) also takes this systemic approach to supporting children. Project Cornerstone in California (www.projectcornerstone.org/html/about/index.htm), using the Search Institute’s developmental assets approach as a framework, has the goal of building a “web of support around every young person in our community.” Founded in 1998, it now has more than 200 members, including schools, school districts, city and county agencies, businesses, corporations, foundations, community groups, and other organizations serving youth and families.

Heath’s parental competence model encompasses both the differences in developmental level and the capacities or assets of each person involved, something not usually done in family systems theory. Her model of the parenting process is used as a reference, not only for understanding unique parents and children in social-cultural

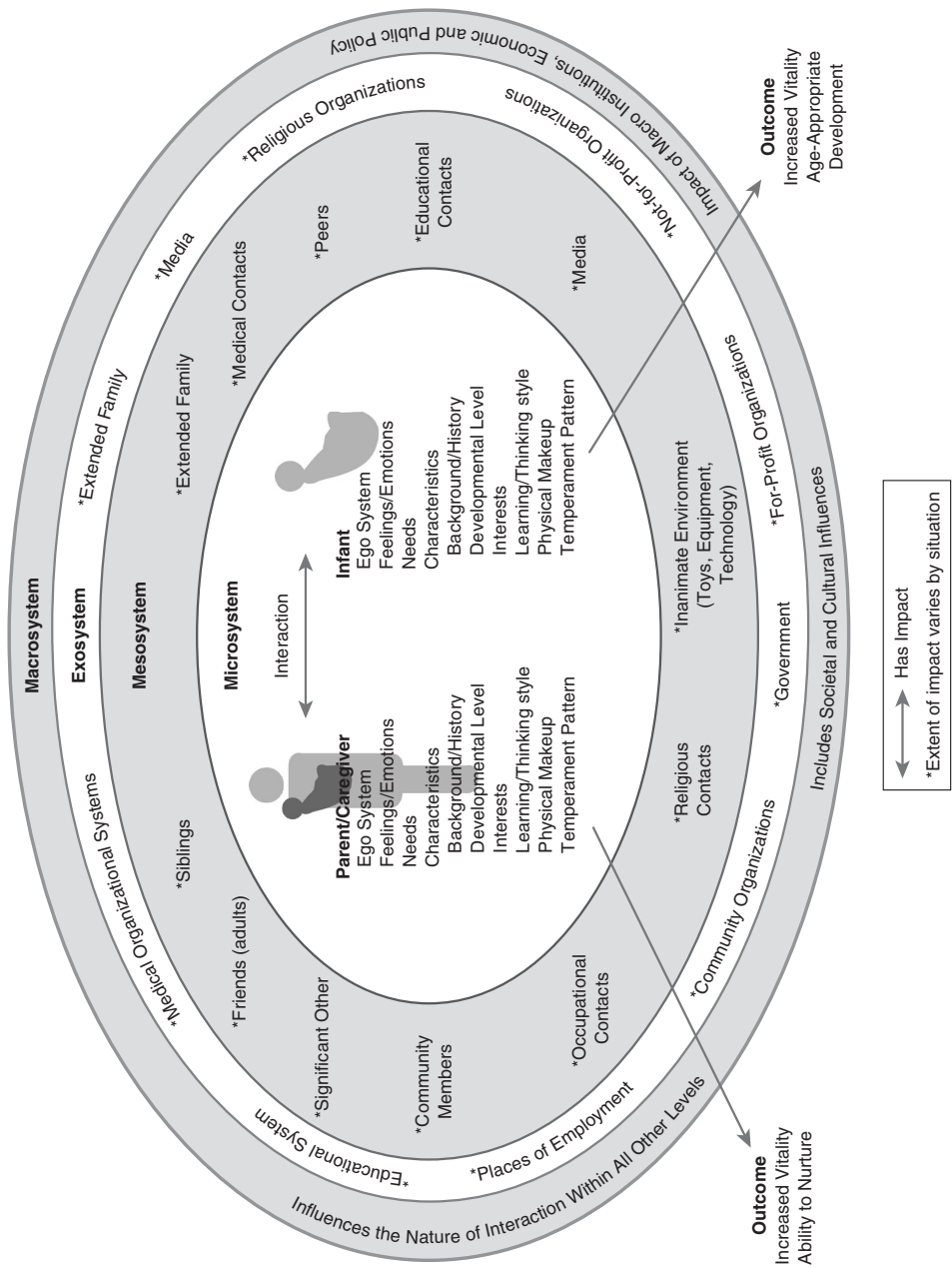


Figure 3.3 The Parenting Process: Context of Parent and Infant Interactions

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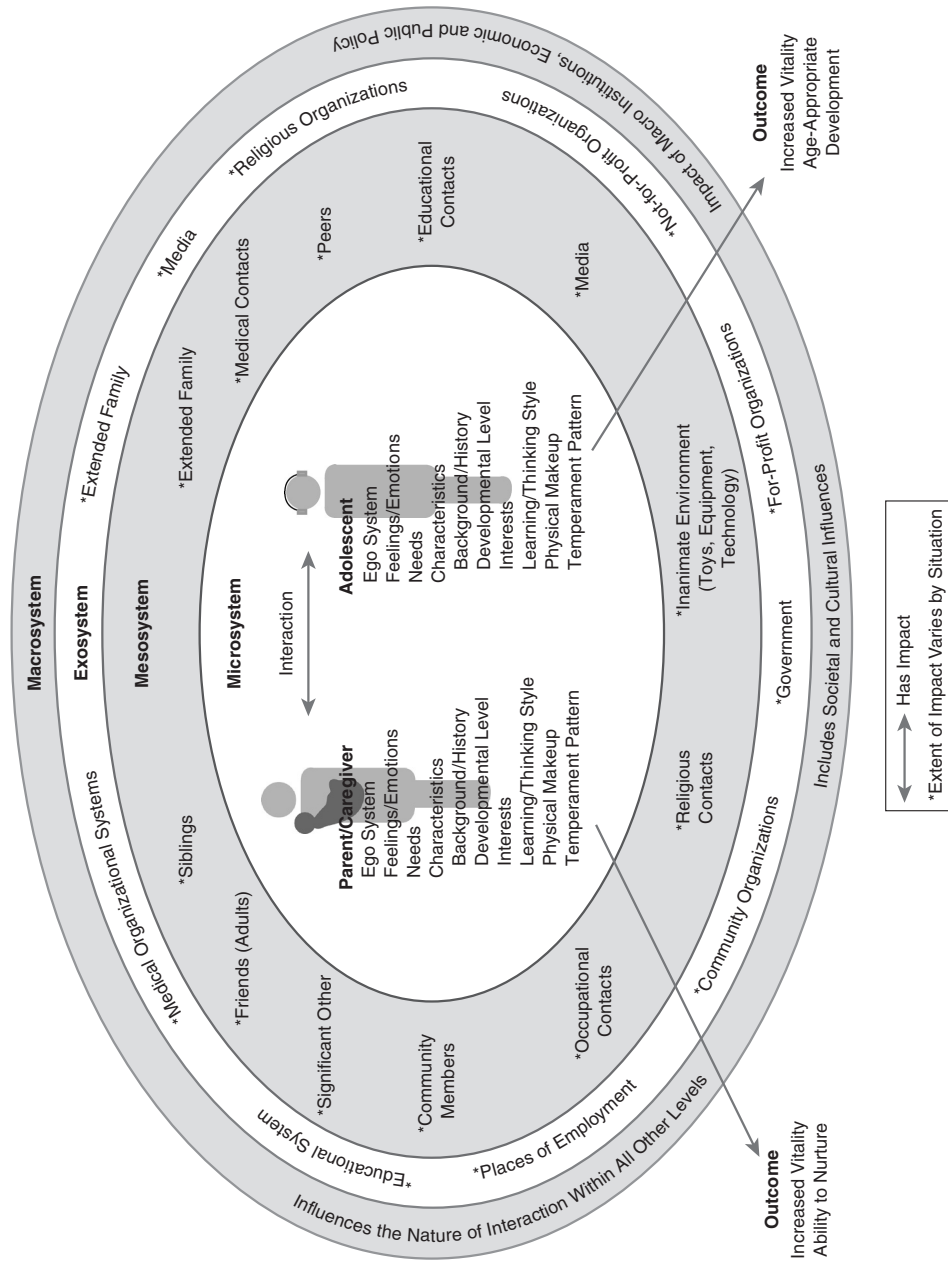


Figure 3.4 The Parenting Process: Context of Parent and Adolescent Interactions

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context but also for developing school and community parenting programs that take all this information into consideration. Turnbull et al. (1999) say the role of the professional is shifting from focusing on just the child to enhancing a parent's ability to develop a strong support system and changing the environment of families so that their quality of life is enhanced.

RESEARCH DEMONSTRATES THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PARENTING PROCESS

A very important body of research by Chess and Thomas (1999) on goodness of fit further supports the usefulness of Heath's framework for understanding parents and families. Their findings, especially about environmental impact on temperament, are informative for teachers. They were concerned with theories of parenting that attribute any bad outcome to the parent. They found in their own work that some well-functioning parents had disturbed children and some disturbed parents had healthy children. They embarked on longitudinal research to look at the goodness-of-fit model. They were interested in the individual behavioral differences and styles of children and the environments in which those children lived.

Their original longitudinal study began in 1956 and identified a group of 131 children of middle-class, native-born parents. Chess and Thomas assessed temperament and collected other data, including parent-child interactions, parents' child-rearing attitudes, events in the families' lives, illnesses, and numerous clinical assessments of the children's behavior, and then followed the families over the years to measure the children's adjustment and development. Then in 1961, they identified a sample of 95 children of semiskilled and unskilled working-class Puerto Rican parents who lived in two housing projects in Spanish Harlem, in New York. The vast majority of children in both samples were in stable, intact families, and their parents were very committed to caring for them. The children in the second sample were followed through adolescence.

Chess and Thomas's findings were dramatic. Almost all the middle-class children attended good private schools with all the resources the children needed. If these children needed extra testing or tutoring, their parents got it for them. Children in the Puerto Rican sample almost all went to public schools that lacked many resources the middle-class children enjoyed. Chess and Thomas (1999, p. 112) found that the parents of the children in the second sample, lacking the education of the other sample's parents, had some trouble helping with homework and were less likely to critique or challenge the education their children were receiving. When the researchers looked at the school adjustment and academic achievement of all the children in their studies at 9 years of age, they found that almost half the

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Puerto Rican children were assessed by teachers as excessive in motor activity and sometimes uncontrollable, whereas only one child in the other sample was assessed as uncontrollable. Chess and Thomas looked for the factors that explained this difference.

What they found was that many of the Puerto Rican children who might have started out with an activity level that was very active but within the normal range were often cooped up in small apartments and not able to play outside because of safety concerns. Their families often were large, so the home had little room for children, who furthermore did not have safe recreation areas, which the middle-class children did. Chess and Thomas (1984, p. 223, as reported in Chess & Thomas, 1999) found that one child assessed as uncontrollable was less so once the family moved to a home with a small yard in a safer neighborhood.

An even more disturbing finding was that by middle childhood, a large number of the Puerto Rican students had been placed in special education classes. This was surprising because when tested by Puerto Rican psychologists in good testing situations, the children had had normal IQs. As a result of this study, the children were tutored by the members of the project team, retested, found once again to score in “normal” categories, and mainstreamed into regular classrooms. Think about all the children who remained in special education classrooms because they did not have this help. Using a comprehensive theory to understand parenting is helpful in terms of deciphering the many sources of problems and the many parties who need to be involved in the solutions.

We can be more hopeful today because of the findings of Calabrese Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George (2004) concerning a high-poverty urban environment where some parents are taking a more active role than in the past. The first parent described in this study, Miranda, though she had had bad experiences herself while in school, began to be engaged when one teacher cared about her son’s well-being and saw him as having potential. Miranda was invited into the school, and the more she was in the school, the more she observed children and teachers. The more she was “present,” the more confidence she had in challenging the teacher respectfully about a math concern. She had the advantage of being able to mediate on the spot. She created a place for herself, and when she could not tutor her son herself (as many cannot, beyond fifth-grade math), she made sure he got the help he needed so that he would not fall behind. What about all the other parents who were not made to feel comfortable in the school or who did not believe the teacher saw potential in their children? Here, if completing the diagram, one could not draw a positive arrow from school to parent and child on Figure 3.4.

Another parent in the study whose story is powerful and enlightening is Celia. This mother attended presentations on school reform and in particular about a special science education project in her school, and with the help of organizers

who appreciated parents as adult learners, she became aware of how much she really “did science.” She was helped to appreciate her knowledge of family health, plants and animals, and what she learned growing up within a community of farmers and fishermen. As she learned about the science education project planned for her school, she said, “I have known these things all my life but I never knew that was science” (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004, p. 10). Thus, again, if one were to fill in the diagram for this parent, an arrow from school to parent was positive.

Celia also became a “critical actor,” not a reactor, in her school. She was helped in this by her child’s teacher’s fluency in Spanish. Another thing that helped was her experience as a cleaning lady for wealthy families. She saw that their children were learning more: “At the schools in rich neighborhoods children have more opportunities. They are different in every way. Even teachers are different in the schools in rich neighborhoods and they do not teach the same. At the schools in poor neighborhoods, they teach less” (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004, p. 9). She began to carve a space for herself in the school. Whether she was in a classroom or in nonacademic school activities, she got to know teachers, and as she gained awareness and confidence, she found herself raising questions to the teacher on behalf of her children. She was employing many of the thinking skills in Figure 3.2.

A poignant example of an African American mother who thought mindfully about the differences between her children’s school experiences and those of white students in her neighborhood in the late 1930s was documented in *Maggie’s American Dream* (Comer, 1988). It is essential reading for educators in order to see how parents without the educational and economic resources of wealthier parents in their environment have found ways to be strong advocates for their children and have a voice in educational institutions. And this mother’s son, Dr. James Comer, honors his mother and families by designing schools that allow all children the opportunity to fulfill their potential in spite of environmental challenges.

Another wonderful example is Hurtig’s work (2005) with urban Mexican mothers. Not only are they welcomed in their small bilingual and biliterate school, they take the lead in community building around activity and space issues that place children at risk. If the typically confining school classrooms are in neighborhoods that are unsafe, children may not even have outdoor recess. Parents are pushing for safer neighborhoods and more recreational spaces for their children, which demonstrates that parent engagement in all the systemic influences on children is legitimate, important, and vital parent engagement. If teachers would look at parenting through these systemic and developmental lenses, they might see parent engagement in community as just as important as engagement in schoolwork because all are necessary for children to grow and develop.

This research also highlights the importance of looking at the fit between parent and child as well as between child, school, and community systems. To review the

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findings above, a parent can have skills but have a child who does not respond as expected and in a rewarding way, as is sometimes the case with an autistic child. This absence of positive response may have an impact on the parents' sense of competence and their actions. What about a parent's own personality traits and resources? How does a parent's own temperament match the child's? Are the parents very intense but have a child who is shy? Do the parents have the necessary self-knowledge and general knowledge of temperament (see the column under "Knowledge, Beliefs, Feelings" in Figure 3.2) to understand this situation? Do they have the basic life skills, such as problem solving, to create an environment that helps minimize problems between children and parents who might not be a perfect "fit" with one another? Next, are they capable of thinking the way we teach children to think in school (see the column under "Thinking" in Figure 3.2)? If not, how do support systems help them in this regard? Finally, do they have the necessary skills to integrate all this knowledge and thinking (see the column under "Skills" in Figure 3.2)? Chapter 9 will describe a program in which children and youth are taught these skills and have opportunities to discuss the complexity and importance of the parenting role before they become parents (McDermott, 2003–2004, 2006).

THE PARENTING PROCESS AND PARENTAL THINKING

■ How Does a Person's "Way of Knowing" and Thinking Affect the Way That Person Might Relate to Children and Professionals in Schools and Other Institutions?

How do school parents in your communities think about their role? Most of us can recall a time when we wished others understood what we were thinking, experiencing, or feeling. We were frustrated when our gender, nationality, or role (child, student, parent, teacher, counselor, principal) was in the foreground and who we really are was in the distant background. Another case study illustrates this point. Margaret was at the sidelines of her daughter Lauren's championship basketball game. She could hear Lauren explaining to the coach that the other team had figured out Lauren's team's offense and so Lauren's team needed to go to another plan. The coach said, "Lauren, I am the coach, you are the child." He benched her for part of the game, and her team lost. Margaret shared her disappointment with other parents in the stands. Some characterized her as an overprotective mother, and some felt that as a woman, she knew less about the game than the coach did. The opposing coach, however, who saw Lauren not in a static role but as a team member who could adapt when necessary, asked Lauren to be on the all-star team.

Many people, especially those in positions of power, are rarely trained or rewarded for trying to understand the perspective of others with less power or

status. Danielle had recently come to the United States from an eastern European country. Soon after her arrival, she learned her son had autism. Her husband could not handle this news, and Danielle suddenly found herself a single mother in a strange country. She was cooperative with teachers wanting the best for her son, but over time, she saw that the regular classroom situation was not well suited for her son's particular type of autism. He was regressing, and she tried to get the school to place him in a more appropriate setting, but the more she tried, the less she succeeded. Each meeting with school professionals felt to her as if the school decision makers were ganging up on her. She did not realize she could bring someone with her to these meetings about her son's education. She went through years of frustration and of feeling she was perceived as hysterical, until she met another autistic child's parent, who happened to be a lawyer. That mom helped Danielle get a proper placement for her son. Now Danielle is pursuing a master's degree so that she can help parents in similar situations.

Sometimes we form expectations of parents or teachers on the basis of a particular role. If practitioners do not have time to know each parent as an individual, they might base their expectations on limited sources of information: the "typical" parent, as portrayed in the media, in teacher training materials, or by veteran teachers; their own parents and developmental history; the parent's behavior; or a limited view of parents' role (feed and clothe your child and help with homework). If parents deviate at all from these expectations, practitioners often don't know what to do. If you have dealt with parents who always seemed silent, trusting, and cooperative but who suddenly began to question your judgment about their child, you may feel they have become negative or regressive. In fact, these parents could be embarking on a different way of thinking and knowing. If we look at theories and research on the way adults think, we can better understand their diverse perspectives and behaviors, and this understanding is, of course, at the core of mindful learning.

PARENTAL "WAYS OF KNOWING"

Educators who draw from the theories and research of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986/1997), Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997), and Belenky and Stanton (2000) can hypothesize that parents like those described in the preceding paragraph may have proceeded from a stage of *silenced knowing*, in which they did not see themselves as capable of learning from instruction or words, through a stage of *received knowing*, in which they accepted everything said by authority figures, including school personnel, to a stage of *subjective knowing*, in which they may think they can trust only themselves and their own subjective experience.

Think about parents you have known who appeared uninvolved and isolated from the school and community and then one day, when asked a simple question

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by a child or a teacher, lashed out in a manner that you thought inappropriate. According to Belenky and her colleagues, at the stage of thinking and knowing called silenced knowing, a parent sees herself (think of this example as she or he, but *she* will be used because the research was done with mothers) as mindless and voiceless, and sometimes, when asked to do something she may not be able to do, she may use “words as weapons.” She may have had parents or been in relationships with people who called her stupid and never really gave her credit for having good ideas. Recall from Chapter 2 that early theorists also did not care about or value parents’ ideas. In terms of others, this parent may be distant and guarded, believing she cannot really learn from dialogue of any kind. She may fear that any talking or sharing she does will lead only to more betrayal. She may see her child as a similar threat, and even if the child simply asks her a question she cannot answer, she may hit the child. She may tend to use raw power (just as she may have experienced) to influence her child and may see no point in listening or explaining. Belenky’s framework lets us see parents not in terms of deficits but simply in terms of where they are and where they may need to get eventually so as to be engaged with others in a mutually beneficial way.

Other parents may be described as received knowers (Belenky et al., 1986/1997; Belenky et al., 1997; Belenky & Stanton, 2000). They receive information from authorities and store it as is without adding their own thoughts or opinions. They tend to receive information from friends if it is similar to their own. They see their children as needing to listen to others and to take in information without questioning it. They expect their child to obey them and do what they do. They may also think the child will learn through rewards and punishments and by modeling adult behavior. These parents might be compared to Baumrind’s description (1989) of the authoritarian parent. They may be seen as cooperative by school staff.

Belenky and her colleagues (1986/1997; 1997; 2000) found that parents who were subjective knowers had discovered their inner voice and believed truth comes from within more than from outside authorities. The subjective knower would value individuality and be able to tolerate friends’ having beliefs different from hers. She can also see that her children have their own inner voice, and she is likely to let her children think for themselves. Even though this may be good for her children, it may cause trouble in the school, which may see this parent as non-cooperative or even hostile. Because these parents tend to trust their own concrete experience, instincts, feelings, and insights when it comes to rearing their children, they may not attend lectures. Sometimes these parents are seen as neglectful. While neither extreme—trusting all authority without question or trusting only the self—is ideal, for some parents, one or the other may be a step along the way to relating more effectively to self and to others.

Belenky et al. next describe parents who are *procedural knowers*. They are interested in examining thoughts and feelings of both the self and others and searching for systematic ways to do so. They do not mind being in a group in which others do the same. They will help their children use such procedures as gathering information and posing and evaluating alternatives to arrive at answers to their questions. In terms of child rearing, procedural knowing is more like Baumrind's authoritative parenting (1989), in which parents and children seek and provide reasons and background for their actions or decisions. Simply to gather information in an objective, logical way is called *separate knowing*. Others will seek understanding, not just proof. This is *connected knowing* and involves trying to understand the feelings, perspectives, and experiences of others, which requires drawing people out to better grasp their thoughts and beliefs and encouraging their confidence in their own abilities and strengths. This was the goal of Belenky and colleagues for the mothers in their studies and interventions and could clearly be a meaningful goal for teachers and parents as they relate to children, parents, and each other with openness to learning from everyone. This is the goal of the many new programs cited earlier in this chapter.

Finally, as a *constructive knower*, the parent not only gathers information but synthesizes it. As a mother in one of my parent groups said, "I was talking to myself more and to others. It made it easier to do this then with my child." Parents at this level would not want to get information from just their own concrete experience, intuition, feelings, and insights or from just the school but to combine ideas from all perspectives, come up with a joint solution that could be better than individual ideas, and then share that solution with school staff and others. The parent would hope the children would also listen not just to their own voice but to others'. Parents also hope children will not listen just to tear down someone else's argument, as is often the case in competitive societies, but will listen to "see the whole picture, understand, and build others and the self up in a creative and integrative process" (Belenky & Stanton, 2000, pp. 90–91).

This is easier in those school contexts in which cooperative learning and collaboration are a key mode of learning. If teachers are using this method, "doing collaboration" with parents could be a great learning opportunity as well. Parents then would see the need to draw their children out, share views, and come up with an action that is informed by different people and perspectives and takes all of them into consideration. The parents might also gather information about how past and present personal and social-cultural contexts figure into the situation. The Parent Education Initiative, the model development school described in Part II, makes time to facilitate this kind of exploration.

This research with women in rural Vermont and the documentation of other women's community building are very exciting and promising in terms of school

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reform and the facilitation of adult learning (Belenky & Stanton, 2000). It took time and great care to empower these women to move from silenced to connected and constructive knowing. As Belenky and Stanton noted: "The Silenced do not have the tools they need for participating in the kind of discourse community Mezirow describes. . . . To bring them into an ongoing dialogue requires the creation of an extremely safe and caring community where people draw each other out and listen to one another with the greatest of care. That experience can be profoundly transformative (see Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997)" (p. 83). The creation of such communities is also described in Hurtig's work (2005).

If parents are asked to be involved at school while they are in an early stage or way of knowing, they may give the impression that they are noncooperative, dysfunctional, or even abusive. Many parents who have been recipients of abuse or whose past experience prevented them from discovering their own voice may not be good candidates for PTA president right now; nevertheless, with the right support, they have the potential to be good partners in their children's school. How they think about themselves, their children, and school is not fixed. It can evolve to the point, as Kegan (1994) has described, where these same parents cocreate a better world for all with their children, their children's teachers, and fellow parents.

Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock's powerful book (1997), *A Tradition That Has No Name*, is about hope and potential. Now, what do a teacher and administrator do with this insight into ways of knowing? Are teachers expected to be a child's parent's teacher and social worker? No. It is an insight that helps us know ourselves and others better and understand that one-size-fits-all programs for parents will not work. You may not know where your students' parents are in terms of how they think and go about knowing themselves and their world. Parents at some of the levels Belenky identified may simply not come to your programs. But if you or your school offers only lectures dispensing expert advice for parents to accept without question or comment, then perhaps low involvement means many parents are at the stage at which they see a need for dialogue and process. On the other hand, as has been learned in programs with middle- and upper-class parents, some parents are capable of dialogue but do not want to take the time or cannot do so. Others, in all cultures and social classes, see dialogue as scary or inappropriate. When I taught in graduate school, students new to this country told me that no one ever asked them what they thought before. Some newly arrived students may have perceived a professor who did so as incompetent. The same thing happened when I worked with teachers and school psychologists in Russia a decade ago. They asked for my patience in letting them unlearn the received knowing they had used in school and elsewhere.

If parents are at the stage of silenced knowing and all you see is their abusive language around their children, your goal is to find a way to engage these parents rather than reject them. Belenky and colleagues (1986/1997; 1997; 2000) do this;

Shure (1992) has a very successful program for children called *I Can Problem Solve* and adult materials for parents (1988, 2004). She found in working with inner-city parents of 4-year-olds that if she could acknowledge their adult learning needs and get them discussing adult problems, discussing consequences, and talking about each other's feelings, they were much more likely to use the same tools to solve problems with their children.

Programs to empower parents have been developing with the help of the family support movement in the United States (see Cochran, 1988; Cochran & Walker, 2005; Dunst & Trivette, 2006). The state of Minnesota has been in the forefront, having decades ago mandated that all parents of children from birth through age 5 have access to parenting education and support (Cooke, 2006). Supporting parents may mean home visits like those from the "parent mobile" of the Fresno, California, Parent Engagement Center, outreach to homeless and hard-to-reach parents, or meetings on a parent's turf, such as a church or community agency or at work. The common bond for starting such an effort is that most parents and teachers want children to succeed.

RESEARCH ON PARENTAL THINKING

Other pertinent research has focused on parents' thinking and helps us understand the range of thinking in parents. In building on Piaget's model of children's stages of intellectual development, Sameroff and Feil (1985) posited parallel ways that parents and caregivers think about children. The interpretation of a child's behavior depended on how complex the thinking of the parent was. At the *symbiotic level*, parents often would not differentiate between themselves and their child and would see what they do for the child as key. Thus, it would be hard for parents at this level to reflect on how the child is developing separate from what they do for the child. If the child has an easy disposition, the family may not experience a problem, but if not, the relationship could be stressful, with the parent possibly rejecting the child.

At the *categorical level*, the parent sees the child's behavior as intrinsic to the child and separate from the parent. Parents at this level tend to place children into categories such as good or bad, based on their behavior. This may work well if children are seen as good, but if they are seen as difficult early on, they may be characterized that way even if they change. Parents in this stage also are limited to thinking in terms of only one cause for behavior: either internal dispositions of the child or the environment, but not a combination. In the *compensating stage*, parents can see children as separate from categories or labels. They can make exceptions and see that some behavior might simply be related to a child's age. Also, certain attributes might compensate for others. For example, a child who is not considered smart may nevertheless be considered hardworking and respectful.

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Parents or teachers may not think in these either-or terms, but they may not be able to think through the relative contribution of a variety of factors, such as personality and living conditions, to a child's developmental outcome. Unfortunately, professionals sometimes assume that all teachers and parents can do this.

At the *perspectivistic level*, parents can think hypothetically and can see the child's behavior in context. So perhaps a child should be able to sit quietly in class, but because of the environment, the child does not. This is exemplified in Chess and Thomas's studies (1984) of children living in close quarters in dangerous neighborhoods. Some of the parents studied came to understand that if they had a larger house or safe places for children to play, the children might not be so "uncontrollable" in school. Of course, there are other issues at play. For example, many of the parents Chess and Thomas studied put a high value on obedience, which also might have colored their interpretation of rambunctiousness in their children.

What can we conclude from this research? As the authors wisely stated, one cannot look at parental thinking without looking at the characteristics of children and the environment and how all these factors interrelate. With an easy child, a parent's way of thinking may not be as significant as it may be with a more challenging child or in an environment that brings with it all kinds of additional problems. Furthermore, socioeconomic status and work role may relate to parental thinking. When we can benefit from a wealth of insight into the elements that affect parenting, it is remarkable that few studies of parents and children look at more than just two variables, such as parent style and child behavior, and how they might interact. It is helpful to think about parents' level of thinking as one of many factors involved in parent-child relationships. Parents and children have their own capacities and are embedded in other systems, including such things as school policies that limit physical exercise during the day, which might also affect outcomes.

Newberger (1980; Newberger & Cook, 1983) described the related construct of *parental awareness*. Newberger identified several levels of awareness based on parents' own experiences, needs, feelings, and cognitive abilities. For many, parental awareness is a growth process that progresses from self-centered, egoistic views, to conventionally oriented views reflecting cultural norms, to understanding that individuals are unique and different. The process culminates in an analytic, systems-oriented view of the parent and child in interdependent self-systems. Hence, it is similar in part to some of the other theories described in this chapter.

Newberger and Cook (1983) found that levels of awareness were significantly and positively related to age and experience as a parent but not to gender, race, or social class. Cook (1979) and Newberger (1980) found that abusive parents scored lower on parental awareness than nonabusive parents did. Sandy (1982) found significant increases in parental awareness in parents who received a parenting education intervention that included both child development information and time for discussion. This is an encouraging finding.

You may be dealing with parents at the *egoistic level of awareness*. They tend to see the child in terms of their own needs. An example is a parent who is tired and says the child is too tired to do homework or go out and play with peers even though the child is wide awake and wants to play or do homework. While it is important to acknowledge one's own needs and find ways to get them met, most parents know that children are very dependent on them, in the early years especially, and have needs that are very different from the parents' needs and that must be met by someone if the children are to survive.

At the second level of parental awareness, or *conventional thinking*, parents look to what is expected by society. They consult authorities and norms about child needs, including child-rearing books and other sources. A parent would not expect a child to be able to stay alone at age 6, but perhaps the child could do so by age 12, the age at which U.S. societal norms suggest children can baby-sit. In some societies, spanking is accepted, and in others, it is a crime. In many traditional schools, parents in the conventional stage are welcome. With so many families coming to the United States from other countries, it is very important for schools to understand the conventions of their students' country of origin. In some cultures, parents' never coming to school is the norm.

At the *individualistic level*, parents see their children as individuals. So while a very quiet and cooperative first child makes it easy for a parent to feel competent, the parent at this level would view a second, more outgoing, verbal child not as bad but as different and calling for a different kind of interaction. Finally, at the *analytic level*, parents see that they and their children are growing and changing within various systems within society and that, therefore, the way they relate can also change. These parents are able to reflect on ways systems impact each other, such as the ways government cutbacks or war or mandates like No Child Left Behind affect family and school life.

While research (Newberger, 1980; Newberger & Cook, 1983) has shown that parents move up the levels somewhat as their age and experience increase, one needs to consider that sometimes parents have the potential to act in a certain way but do not do so. So parents who know their child is unique and curious but want that child to succeed in a school that is authoritarian or traditional may encourage more-conventional behavior in their child at certain points. Other parents may decide to encourage their child to continue to question things even if the child is in an authoritarian school. These parents may assess how well their approach is working and help their child cope successfully with their choice.

Kegan (1994) is another educator who described parental cognition as thinking that is inseparable from feeling or social relations. He describes the "mental demands of modern life" as we organize how we think, feel, and relate to others. According to Kegan, we construct our sense of self in the relationship between our own point of view and others'. His *first order of consciousness* is childhood.

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In Kegan's *second order of consciousness*, people focus their knowing or thinking on their own needs, and in the *third order of consciousness*, we focus on a moral-ethical code that comes from our group, family, culture, race, religion, or society. In the *fourth order of consciousness*, we respect differences in people's thinking and realize values are based more on situations and the way each person construes or views situations. At this level, one realizes one's view is just that, one view, which may differ from others' views, and so one can look objectively at how one sees the world. Kegan feels that in these times, parents cannot stay on the third level but need to move to the fourth level and understand how their thinking is viewed by their children and by others. Furthermore, parents need to be clear with children and others about where they stand.

There are some obvious similarities among these levels of thinking and awareness, Belenky and colleagues' ways of knowing, and Sameroff and Feil's parental concepts of development. For each, the thinking is more complex and deep at higher levels. It is important to be able to understand these constructs to better understand the parents with whom we work. While principles of adult learning need to be considered in work with parents, some parents may be better able to learn than others are. Dialogue, for example, is not always a choice even though it has been found helpful in adult learning. First, we would have to understand what dialogue means to the parents with whom we work. Some parents would need to reach several intervening levels before they are ready to dialogue. Talking to their children about their own lives or about migrant worker issues, for example, as a homework assignment would be much less threatening and more meaningful than talking to teachers about why they are not helping with homework they cannot understand or do not feel is relevant.

EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS SUPPORT PARENTS AS LIFELONG LEARNERS

McCaleb's unique project (1994), involving students' drawing out their parents' voices, is an example of how this can be done. This technique was also used in the Belenky research, with women telling their stories and having them written down. McCaleb was herself inspired by Ada and Beutel (1991), who stated that "every human being has the capacity of knowing, of analyzing and reflecting about reality so that she becomes a true agent of action in her own life (p. 8)" (as cited in McCaleb, 1994, p. 57). McCaleb goes on to describe the benefits of such a project:

When family words and experiences are turned into the printed word the thoughts of the participants are validated. The new knowledge that emerges can subsequently or simultaneously be transformed into action. As families begin to

participate in this manner, their feelings of self-esteem increase. Parents begin to realize that their words and experiences merit a valuable place in the education of their children. (p. 58)

She delineates the benefits to parents and children of coauthorship of a book as a school project. Some parents might not even be ready for this without some preliminary work or support, as was the case with the silenced knowers encountered by Belenky and colleagues. In researching a family topic, students are involved with their parents in communication, dialogue, and sharing. McCaleb (1994) described her rationale and the benefits of this program in this way:

1. A child has a chance to ask their parents their opinions about things. Often a student interview of parents is a great process for inquiry.
2. Students and families can discover their voices are heard as opposed to reading some traditional text.
3. Everyone's history gets to emerge as worthy of study. Each person's experience is essential to complete the story.
4. Self-identity and self-esteem are strengthened. Students are positively affected when they see their parents have knowledge and are teachers in their own way.
5. As parents are asked to recall their childhood they often identify better with their children. Parents share joys, struggles and reveal successes and vulnerabilities.
6. When students write and talk important life themes emerge. The more we talk the more we identify what we value and we gain knowledge and understanding of self and others.
7. Students recognize all the knowledge in families and communities and hopefully have the schools validating this. Respect for family can translate to self-respect. When children show an interest in elders a new bonding and hope emerges.
8. By exploring what they know and do not know students become researchers and take family and community along with them.
9. Info from home and community helps teachers understand students better. Their lives come into the curriculum more and the teacher can be more effective.
10. This can lead to a culturally and linguistically relevant curriculum.

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11. Studying their own lives can help students feel good about themselves and thus make them more motivated to learn. This helps students believe their home and school are not worlds apart. (p. 51)

Today this project of creating a book of students' families' lives is being done in many school and community settings, as are a variety of similar initiatives. The Caring School Community Program of the Developmental Studies Center (www.devstu.org) uses "homeside activities" to involve parents in their children's learning. Questions have to do with family beliefs, history, and values. The Tellin' Stories project (teachingforchange.org) involves parent-teacher workshops in which parents write and share their stories with their children and other parents. The program involves parents of various cultures and creates a place in the school where culture and traditions are highly valued. Parents in these schools feel they are playing a more meaningful role in their children's schools than they were before these kinds of interventions. Teachers get a much better view of their school families' realities. Teachers and parents also come together for workshops on topics of mutual interest, such as discipline.

Libros y familias is also an exciting family literacy and parent involvement project (www.ncpie.org/best_practices/LibrosyFamilias.doc). Parent-teacher-student book groups have been developed to further mutual understanding and to facilitate the school as a learning community model. Excellent Spanish literature (by such celebrated authors as Alma Flor Ada and F. Isabel Campoy) is used. Parents read books their children are reading. Bilingual and bicultural teachers facilitate the group discussions. The books are chosen so that when parents come to school once a month, they can discuss the materials in terms of their own experience. They then join together to enter their thoughts about the topic on a computer so that students can read their parents' writing in class. Parents are thus seen as having important experiences and wisdom to share with the school.

In California, another Project Cornerstone success story is the mothers of the "los dichos de la casa" program who come to school once a month to share cultural activities and read literature in Spanish to children. They share the proverbs and wisdom of their homes and culture. Teachers read the same book in English to the students. Thus, in addition to building dual language skills for themselves and the students, these parents who thought they would not be able to contribute at school are involved in a very important way, and in doing so, they build their child's "assets" (mentioned earlier; see search-institute.org/), such as "asset 6," involving parents in authentic and meaningful ways, and "asset 41," valuing the language, traditions, and culture of families. Schools were also shown how this activity aligned with standards in language arts, writing, listening, speaking, and visual arts.



Photo by Gerardo Santana.

A mother of the “los dichos de la casa” project in Santa Clara County reads students a book titled *The Woman Who Outshone the Sun*, by Rosalma Zubizarreta (original poem by Alejandro Cruz Martinez), and answers their questions.

In Chicago, Hurtig’s Parents Write Their Worlds Project (2005) brings parents together to write their own stories, recording their rich life experiences, insights, and hopes for the future. This successful project produces excellent and professional literary magazines through the joint efforts of these women and their collaborations with Hurtig and the project team, who recognizes and nurtures their talent and who collaborate with a supportive principal to incorporate the stories into school curricula. This project allows children to learn about their culture not in a generic way but by reading their own parents’ powerful stories about their traditions, knowledge, and experiences. Over time, the parents in this project see themselves not in the static, conventional roles that others often see but as school and community leaders.

The Study Circles project (studycircles.org) moves people beyond one school. People involved tell stories in groups to educate each other about issues of concern to all. The focus is on relationship building, networking, and action. Between 8 and 12 participants from a large geographical area meet in many diverse study circles and try to solve a problem shared by all. The key principle underlying these models is collaboration. They also respect adult learners who know there are many solutions to a problem. The assumptions are that everyone has something to contribute and that when people are inclusive, everyone benefits. When people

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Photo by Janise Hurrig.

Parents in the Parents Write Their Worlds Project at Telpochcalli School.

collaborate in a face-to-face meeting, the result is often the kind of dialogue that leads to new and unexpected solutions. People try to find some areas of agreement (e.g., we all want this city to be less violent), and they try to find solutions together. If many people are part of the discussion, many more people will take ownership of the actual action plan.

These examples are just a few of the projects around the country that engage parents in a respectful and productive way. They may not be of interest to all parents, but they are an option for those who feel that school is safe and who are made to feel welcome. Some silent knowers may not think right away that they can profit from dialogue, especially about personal issues or parenting, but being part of a story or reacting to a story may feel safer and may pave the way for other discussions.

In reviewing ways of knowing, one might hypothesize that teachers are all at the highest level of thinking. Many are, but they may be working in conventional settings or school systems where there is little time, training, or reward for connected or constructive knowing with parents. Others may have been reared in a very conventional manner and may have foreclosed on that style. For them, the parent who wants to explore options might be seen as frustrating or difficult. So parents and teachers, in spite of their capacity for thinking, may for various historical, political, and personal reasons be at odds. It is important for future and current teachers and other family-serving practitioners to engage in anticipatory

socialization to explore this area before and during their work with parents. Thus, they could avoid the hostility and defensiveness that may arise from making a judgment based on roles and stereotypes rather than on individuals.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPETENT AND CONFIDENT PARENTING AND CARING

Without knowing who parents are and what they bring to the process, we can't expect them to respond in a homogeneous manner to requests. But where do we begin? We need to consider much more than the environment and how parents think, though both are very important.

■ What Other Factors Are Related to Effective Caregiving of Children and Youth?

Table 3.1 is a chart designed to highlight research on some of the characteristics of effective and competent parenting and caring related either to parents' thinking or to other personal resources or situations in their lives. Much of the research cited in the table provides empirical evidence for the theories of parental competence described earlier. The job of the teacher is to understand that the role of parent, like that of teacher, is complex and that parents come with different resources. They are growing as they adapt to their children and work on their relationships. Their thinking skills vary. They were not all taught the attitudes, information, and skills of competent parenting before they had children.

Currently, a movement is under way to teach parenting to students so that when they become parents, they will be prepared to nurture children as children deserve to be nurtured. Most of the skills listed in Table 3.1 are taught in these programs. In the meantime, it is important for professionals to, first, assume parents want to support their children and, second, do what they can to help parents do so.

Many school reform programs, such as School of the 21st Century (Finn-Stevenson & Zigler, 1999), see the school's role as helping parents succeed in their role and helping them address the multitude of family needs they face today. Family life educators, parenting educators, and family support professionals are integrated into the school system. They provide the support necessary for parents to have some energy to spare to work on that important parent-child relationship. This is a family strengths model. In almost all cultures, communities rear children together. Today, families are often small, and they often move around the country and the world, so they often do not have the support they need to rear children

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Table 3.1 Some Characteristics of Competent Parenting and Caregiving

Resources Needed for Effective Parenting	Supporting Research
<i>Care for Self</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to care for self (physical, psychological, etc.) 	Kohut, 1977; Florin & Docecki, 1983; Smith et al., 1994; First & Way, 1995; Carlson, Healy, & Wellman, 1998
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An active coping style and sense of mastery 	Crockenberg, 1988; Eisenberg & Valiente, 2004; Christophersen & Mortweet, 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-efficacy—belief one can have influence and impact 	Teti & Gelfand, 1991; Okagaki & Divecha, 1993; Coleman & Karraker, 1998; Shumow & Lomax, 2002; Sanders & Wooley, 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychological integration, maturity, and ego strength 	Brunnquell, Crichton, & Egeland, 1981; Hauser et al., 1991; Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Gerris et al., 1997; D. Heath, 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low anxiety and absence of depression or low depression levels 	Cox, Owen, Lewis, & Henderson, 1989; Field, 1995; Heinicke, 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to function autonomously and have a capacity for mutuality as well 	Heinicke, 2002; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005, chap. 9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to manage stress and tolerate daily frustrations 	Belsky & Vondra, 1985; Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, & Myers-Wall, 1994; Brown, 2001; Crnic & Law, 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to make decisions alone or jointly 	Clabby & Elias, 1987; Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993; Holden, 1983; Holden & Hawk, 2003
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to make sense of parental experiences 	Newberger, 1980; Vondra & Belsky, 1993; First & Way, 1995; Thomas, 1996
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipatory socialization, ability to plan for parent role 	Steffensmeier, 1982; Jaffe, Sudermann, Reitzel, & Killip, 1992; Heath, 2000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical health, well-being, lack of fatigue 	Tinsley, Markey, Ericksen, Kwasman, & Ortiz, 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of substance abuse 	Mayes & Truman, 2002; Connors et al., 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment—if desired and if child-care needs are met 	Crouter & McHale, 2005; Fuller et al., 2002

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<i>Understand</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to read and understand children's physical, psychological, social, intellectual, and spiritual needs 	Lamb & Easterbrooks, 1981; Martin, 1989; Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000; DeBecker, 1999; Dunlap, 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of own child and child development 	Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to understand how experiences, social relations, and culture shape one's beliefs and feelings 	O'Connor, 1990; Robertson, 1996; Thomas, 1996; Harkness & Super, 1996, 2002
<i>Nurture</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to mirror child's emotions back to child and be empathic 	Baker & Baker, 1987; Feshbach, 1987; Cicchetti, Toth, & Bush, 1988; Izard, 1991
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to communicate openly and effectively 	Black & Teti, 1997; Vangelisti, 2004; Galvin, Bylund, & Brommel, 2003
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to be patient and tolerant 	Belsky, 1984; Belsky & Vondra, 1985
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willingness to be involved, commitment to role 	Greenberger, Goldberg, Hamill, O'Neil, & Payne, 1989; Holden, 1997; Palsey, Futris, & Skinner, 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to display warmth, acceptance, appreciation 	Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1979; Russell & Russell, 1989
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to establish a trusting relationship, to bond 	Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Cummings & Cummings, 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to maintain routines, high morale, traditions 	Doherty, 1997; Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999
<i>Motivate</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to "scaffold" to facilitate learning in others 	Kearn, 2000; Vandell & Wilson, 1987; Berkowitz & Grych, 1998; Abbeduto, Weissman, & Short-Myerson, 1999
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to remember past events in order to better anticipate future actions (distancing) 	Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992; Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2005
<i>Guide</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to plan, supervise, and monitor children 	Ladd, Profilet, & Hart, 1992; Brown et al., 1993; White & Koffman, 1997; Crouter & Head, 2002; Capaldi, 2003; Brody, 2003

(Continued)

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Table 3.1 (Continued)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to provide structure, guidance, and warmth 	Baumrind, 1989; Steinberg & Levine, 1997; Pomerantz & Ruble, 1998; Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Pitzer, 2000; Chao, 1994; Chao & Tseng, 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to appraise situations or problems and resolve them; ability to address competing needs 	Holden & Ritchie, 1988; Dix, 1992; Luster & Okagaki, 1993; Holden, 1997
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to solve problems and brainstorm options 	Spivack & Shure, 1974; Heath, 2000; Heinicke, 2002; Shure, 1988, 1992, 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to balance competing concerns and make behavioral adjustments in ongoing interactions 	Dix, 1992; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Holden, 1997; Holden & Miller, 1999
<i>Advocate</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to be a buffer and mediator for the child 	Luster & Okagaki, 1993; Siddiqui & Ross, 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to talk about one's own experience 	Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986/1997; Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997; Taylor, 1997
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to advocate for self and others in one's care and to locate resources and seek assistance 	Smith et al., 1994; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1998; Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988; Dunst & Trivette, 2006; Flaherty, 1999; Simpson, 2001
<i>Factors Related to Competent Parenting</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marital satisfaction 	Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1985; Grych, 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of violence in home or neighborhood 	Osofsky & Jackson, 1994; Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2004; Garbarino, Bradshaw, & Kostelny, 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social support from family, significant other, friends, community, and society 	Cutrona, 1984; Cochran, 1993; Smith et al., 1994; Heath, 2004; Cochran & Walker, 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact with others, absence of isolation 	Tolan & McKay, 1996; Cochran & Walker, 2005; Sheldon, 2002
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive work environment 	Greenberger et al., 1989; Crouter & McHale, 2005
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low income but has social support 	Burchinal, Follmer, & Bryant, 1996; Webster-Stratton, 1997; Jack, 2000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional, instrumental, and informational support 	Cutrona, 1984; Heath, 2004; Cochran & Walker, 2005

well. It is the job of the entire community to support parents and teachers in growing and learning along with the children in their care.

Many teachers could be more effective caregivers of children if they too possessed the attributes in Table 3.1, which go above and beyond knowledge of a school subject like math or one's college training. These characteristics and competencies echo the call for human development literacy by Brazelton and Greenspan (2000) and Comer (2001). How do people become more skilled in relating to other human beings? Surely professionals should be working on these attitudes and skills throughout their careers. Obviously, some of these attributes are more important in the very early years than others. Heath (1998) designed a tool to identify the skills and resources parents already possess, those they most need to develop, and the parenting programs they might choose to address their needs. DeBord, Heath, McDermott, and Wolfe (2000) did a similar project for the family support movement. This analytic approach makes more sense than thinking the parenting program du jour will serve all parents' needs. Unfortunately, the typical school program for parents tends to focus on just one variable, such as authoritative style, or just one topic, such as bullies.

As one can see from the discussion on cognitive style and the list of personal and contextual variables in Table 3.1, parenting is much more complex than the typical parenting programs would lead one to believe. Wadlington (1995) incorporated competency self-assessment as a tool for preschool teachers as adult learners working with children. In one scenario, teachers and parents could review the list of important parenting and caregiving competencies in the table, select those they can do well, and choose one or two they wish to work on during a school year or have the school's parent education and support program address. If, for example, a teacher and parent wanted to look at temperament and goodness of fit to better understand challenges with certain students, teachers, and parents, they could read something on the subject (e.g., Carey, 1997; Chess & Thomas, 1999; Shick, 1998) and do some exercises together (Wadlington, 1995). They could then document what they learned through the experience. If they chose empathy, for example, parents and teachers could assess themselves on empathy and then have a better understanding of how they understand and identify with what children are feeling and how feelings affect child behavior.

Of course, the list in Table 3.1 is not complete because the study of parenting is evolving rapidly. The supportive references are just a few of many examples to support each characteristic. The characteristics and very important early studies have stood the test of time, and it is hard to imagine that the attributes they have identified will not remain important over time. This is the work parents and adults

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who care for children need to be focusing on. In addition, contexts need to be supportive of this work. Thus, issues like work environments and opportunities, poverty, isolation, fatigue, and depression must be addressed by family support services, which can range from extended families and friends to schools and community or social service agencies.

A framework of critical parenting competencies and practices put forth by Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, and Myers-Wall (1994) has been used to structure the table. Smith and colleagues described the need for parents to care for themselves and work on their own competencies and confidence in their challenging role. They also described the additional parent tasks of understanding, nurturing, motivating, guiding, and advocating for their children. Simpson (2001) outlined a similar list of roles for parents of adolescents and provided a scholarly synthesis of research as a foundation for concrete parent actions. Many parent-teacher workshops and meetings sponsored at the Parent Education Initiative described in Part II addressed these tasks as a learning community.

The first critical parenting practice focuses on strengthening a parent's personal resources and caring for self in order to care for children. The tasks include managing resources, managing stress, and asking for help when needed. Asking for help is seen as a strength. Many of the abilities that Smith et al. (1994) include under caring for self were described in Chapter 2, in the section on personality and trait theories.

Understanding is the next category in Smith et al.'s list (1994) of resources for parents. Brown (2001) believes that "a parent needs the psychological resources to understand and consequently tolerate the daily demands and frustrations of an infant or young child. Needed are patience, sensitivity and responsiveness" (p. 5). Martin (1989) found effective parents are those who can read children's needs. The quality of *sensitivity* has been defined as "contingent, appropriate, and consistent responses to an infant's signals or needs" (Lamb & Easterbrooks, 1981, p. 127). We can help children develop these skills in the parenting classes mentioned earlier.

Some family centers serving school districts (such as the Clayton Family Center discussed in Chapter 8) provide places for new parents to come to sharpen these skills in a supportive environment. The Parents as Teachers program, now active in several states, provides this service through home visits. Some states, such as Minnesota, have funded mandates for decades so that all parents have access to quality education and support in the early years of parenting. Head Start and Early Head Start programs also fill this need. (Although some theorists see understanding as a skill needed to fulfill the more basic roles, such as nurturing and guiding, rather than as a role in itself, its importance is unquestioned.)

Nurturing is a very central focus in the kinds of programs just mentioned. Feshbach (1987) defined *empathic awareness*, a component of nurturing, as an

ability to recognize the emotions experienced by a child and respond appropriately to these emotions. Baker and Baker (1987) defined *mirroring* as reflecting back to a child what the child is feeling. Russell and Russell (1989) defined *warmth* broadly as acceptance, appreciation, physical affection, approval for good behavior, joking, and sharing mutually rewarding activities.

Often a willingness to be involved with children affects one's nurturing. Holden (1997) defines *parental involvement* as a "commitment to a child's welfare and therefore motivation to meet the child's needs. At the most basic level, this involvement means providing for the physical needs of the child (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, and protection)" (p. 120). Understanding a child's needs is addressed in the parenting programs described later. As the child grows, affirming and maintaining family activities, rituals, and traditions (Doherty, 1997; Furstenberg, Cook, Eccles, Elder, & Sameroff, 1999) are also important ways of nurturing the child's sense of connection.

Empathy and affect awareness are skills even very young children learn in relationships at home and school. Learning to be empathic and to care is central to some new programs and caring school models, which are shared in Part II of this book. Often in the United States, the focus is on competition more than care; therefore, parents and teachers need to be deliberate about emphasizing the importance of caring in all they say and do with children.

Motivating is described by Smith et al. (1994) as teaching children about themselves, encouraging their natural curiosity and love of learning, and providing good conditions for learning. Many feel creating caring classroom environments facilitates this process. Educators (e.g. Kohn, 1999) contend that many schools focus more on extrinsic motivators such as rewards and praise, which often impede children's intrinsic motivation to learn. Many feel *motivate* may not be the correct term here, because one learns from observing infants that they are born intrinsically motivated to learn about the world.

Cognitive distancing is a skill described by Sigel et al. (1992) as asking children to remember past events and use their imaginations to anticipate future actions. It is a way to help children learn about themselves and the world and grow in self-confidence. It is not about giving them answers but about asking them questions that will allow them to find answers themselves. Scaffolding is also a parenting and teaching practice that motivates children to learn new things by challenging them but providing support for them to move forward in their development.

Guiding is a huge umbrella concept for much of the "work" parents and teachers do. Holden (1997) found that the core of effective parenting is in how the parent appraises the child and the situation and then helps resolve competing needs. Gray and Steinberg (1999) found that modeling (e.g., good life-style habits, choices, and behaviors) is linked to better skills in and child attitudes toward academic

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achievement, work, health habits, relationships, communication, coping, and conflict resolution. Parents' monitoring and supervising of peer interactions, as well as thinking through the steps of decision making with children, have been related to the quality of peer relations and to a child's ability to master the challenges of childhood and adolescence (Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, & Steinberg, 1993; Crouter & Head, 2002; Ladd, Profilet, & Hart, 1992). As one might guess, guiding is a key topic of parenting meetings at school and elsewhere. Many believe that it must begin much earlier than adolescence and that teaching a caring process of decision making to preschoolers builds a foundation for children to make good decisions in their teen years, when parents are not always with them.

Advocacy is a crucial topic for parents. Obviously, parents need to have a sense of self-awareness and understanding to advocate for themselves, and this helps them advocate for their children (Belenky et al., 1986/1997, 1997). Katz, Aidman, Reese, and Clark (1996) have discussed the advocacy role for parents of young children. Simpson (2001) and Steinberg and Levine (1997) detail what this means for parents of adolescents. The term *advocate* has been thought of as anyone acting on behalf of another person. The goal is the best interests of the child or person for whom one advocates. Often people have the idea that when one advocates for someone, it becomes a win-lose situation. This does not have to be the case. Adults frequently need the help of an advocate when they do not have the expertise, means, or energy to represent their perspective effectively to others.

Advocacy is important for parents and teachers to discuss even if the word makes people uncomfortable. It is more about seeking information, understanding and articulating multiple viewpoints and perspectives, understanding everyone's long-term goals and needs, and then doing what is in the best interest of the child. In some cultures, the concept is truly foreign to the usual way of doing things. People from these cultures deserve to know how advocacy works and whether they can engage someone to help them decide how to deal with this phenomenon from their cultural perspective. Involving the child in this process in an age-appropriate manner is also important and will be addressed in Part II.

Finally, the last section of Table 3.1 lists some of the contextual factors that also affect a parent's sense of competence and confidence at all levels, as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005a) and Heath (2006). These factors are considered in detail in the discussion of culture in Chapter 5 in order to provide a full view of the interactions of context and culture in parents' lives.

SUMMARY

The goal in this chapter was for the reader to understand the elements of the parent and adult caregiver role. This was demonstrated through learning about a theory

of parental competence and supportive research and learning more about parents' thinking capacity and about what is needed for effectively fulfilling the caregiver role. Knowing all this no doubt informed Elias and Schwab's suggestion (2004) that schools allow parents to do their important work rather than pressure them to be teachers' assistants on homework.

Some Activities and Questions for Investigation, Reflection, and Action

Think

1. Think about the parents in all the case studies and stories described in this chapter (the parents of Mateo, Miguel and Carlos, Lauren, etc.). Make copies of Figure 3.3 and chart the kind of support these parents received by drawing lines connecting the parent to the source of support (schools, medical institutions, church, neighborhood, and so on). Place a plus or a minus sign on the lines to indicate whether the impact was positive or negative. Could you envision using this chart to think about the families with whom you work?
2. Go to the Web and read about these parental roles in more detail in either Simpson (2001), <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/chc/parenting/raising.html>, or Smith et al. (1994), http://www.cyfernet.org/parenting_practices/preface.html. What did you learn about parents and children that will help you better understand their needs and responsibilities?

Reflect

3. Add this activity to your journaling: Examine Table 3.1 and identify 10 characteristics that will make you a good teacher or caregiver of children. Where and when did you or will you learn all these skills?

Plan

4. Show the chart to parents you know. Ask them which characteristics are or were most important in their parenting. For which would they have liked more information or skills?
5. Think about role-playing a discussion with a teacher who is criticizing parents who did not attend a meeting about how to help their children with math homework. What kind of "mindful" questions would help the teacher see the event in a new way?

