

Booklet 2 :

Working with Families and Communities to Create an ILFE



TOOL GUIDE

Booklet 2 describes how you can help parents and other community members and organizations to participate in developing and maintaining an ILFE. It gives ideas about how to involve the community in the school and students in the community. It will help you identify in what ways this is already going on, and it will offer ideas for involving families and communities even more in promoting and developing an ILFE.

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Tool 2.1

Teacher-Parent-Community Relationships in an ILFE

WHO IS THE “COMMUNITY”?

The community includes parents and guardians of our students, other members of their families, as well as neighbours near the school. It also includes senior retired head teachers, grandparents, and everyone who lives in the school's administrative area. If the school is in an urban area, the community may be defined somewhat differently and include merchants, shopkeepers, government workers, and others. All of these persons can make significant contributions towards improving children's learning in an ILFE.

In an ILFE, we are responsible for creating a learning environment where ALL children—girls and boys—can learn and feel included in a “learning-friendly” environment. Parents and community members have important work to do to support the development of ILFE in our schools and classrooms as well. For instance, they need to work with us to ensure that all out-of-school children are found, enrolled in school, and continue to learn well.

Unfortunately, while involving the community is crucial for developing an ILFE, in reality there is often a distance between the school and the community. This distance may be due to many reasons. There may be conflicts between the school's schedule and parents' schedules, especially when parents (many times single parents) cannot attend school activities because they are busy working. Sometimes we, as teachers, are assigned to schools with which we are not familiar. We may not even live in the community in which we teach, or we may even live at the school and return on weekends to see our own families in distant communities. For these and other reasons, communication often becomes one-way, from school-to-parent or school-to-community, and very rarely from parents-to-schools or communities-to-schools. Yet these obstacles must be overcome when a school begins involving families and the community in creating an ILFE.

Local Communities Involved in the School?

Educators in Chennai, India were challenged by the statement, “All local communities are involved in the school.” Although they saw themselves as part of the larger community, they had very little contact with individuals or other organizations in the community. The only interactions they had were with other educational institutions. They felt on the margins of life in the neighbourhood. They did not know about others, and others did not know about them and what they did. In general, the educators wanted to work with more learners and parents to get their view of the school. Therefore, they started to work with parents in small groups to encourage more active discussion with teachers. They also invite local community members to the school to interact with the learners.

Booth T and Black-Hawkins K. (2001) Developing Learning and Participation in Countries of the South: The Role of an Index for Inclusion. UNESCO: Paris.

WHY SHOULD WE INVOLVE COMMUNITIES?

Communities are the overall context in which children live and learn, and in which they apply what we have taught them. The values and involvement of families, community leaders, and other community members are vitally important for getting all children in school and helping them to learn successfully. For instance, if families and communities value the education we give their children (and value us, as teachers, as well), then children will also value their opportunity to learn. It will encourage them to respect us and their classmates—especially those with various backgrounds and abilities—and encourage them to apply their learning in their daily lives.

Communities also offer a wealth of information and practical knowledge that we can use to improve our teaching and promote children’s learning. For instance, we can incorporate traditional stories or songs into our language lessons, or use different techniques for growing local plants or raising animals in our science lessons.

Moreover, if we want to mobilize the resources needed to improve learning for ALL children, to improve the quality of our schools, and to achieve sustained, lasting change, then **we must work together!** Philippine schools that participated in education reforms made this observation:

Stand-alone interventions and quick-fix solutions have never worked. It is the interaction among the different interventions and the ways in which the teachers, the school administrators and supervisors, the parents and community members, and the children themselves have participated in the change process [that makes the lasting difference].

Feny de los Angeles-Bautista with Marissa J. Pascual, Marjorie S. Javier, Lillian Mercado-Carreon and Cristina H. Abad. (2001). Reinventing Philippine Education: Building Schools Filipino Children Deserve. The Ford Foundation, Philippines.

Communities have been a valuable resource for schools that have begun to develop an ILFE. BRAC schools in Bangladesh are one example.

An Early Model of Community Support for ILFE

In 1979 the first BRAC school opened in Bangladesh in response to the requests of women in a functional literacy class who wanted basic education for their children. BRAC stands for the "Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee." BRAC, an NGO already involved in rural Bangladeshi communities, helped the mothers form a school committee, find a site for the school, identify a teacher, and manage the school.

BRAC identifies poor children, especially girls, through household surveys. The schools must enrol a majority of girls, have a focused curriculum, have child-centred teaching, and reject corporal punishment. When pupils finish BRAC's basic education curriculum, they can enter the government school. Many children have done so successfully.

School staff usually are residents of the community and maintain quite high levels of contact with parents. Parents decide the specific times for the school schedule, and they can change the hours during the year to conform with holiday and agricultural seasons. Parents informally monitor and follow up on teacher absences, which are very low. Each school has a School Management Committee made up of three parents, a community leader, and the teacher. Together they are responsible for managing the school.

BRAC staff members conduct monthly meetings for parents and teachers at a time that is convenient for the parents. Because it is held during the day, mostly women attend. One of BRAC's quality indicators is that parents of at least 70% of the children should attend the parents' meetings. On average about 80% of the children have a parent present. Parents can air their concerns about the school, but BRAC has addressed the main concerns of fees, other costs, distance, discipline, and scheduling, so there is little dissatisfaction.

Adapted from Rugh A and Bossert H. (1998) Involving Communities: Participation in the Delivery of Education Programs. Washington, DC: Creative Associates International, Inc.



Reflection Activity: How Communities Support ILFE

In what ways is the community involved in developing an ILFE in BRAC schools?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

In what ways does your community **already** help your school to maintain an ILFE?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

In what **other** ways could your community help your school to maintain an ILFE?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Who from the community can act as leaders to create and maintain an ILFE?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What can **you** do to encourage your community to help maintain an ILFE in your school?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

WHAT ARE OUR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES?

As teachers, what are our roles and responsibilities in working with parents and community members so that they can support an ILFE?

All teachers have the responsibility...

1. to communicate regularly with the home—that is, parents or guardians—about their children's progress in learning and achievement;
2. to work with community leaders to find out which children are not in school and why, and to devise ways to bring them into school;
3. to explain the value and purpose of an ILFE to parents of pupils in their classes;
4. to prepare their pupils to interact with the community as part of the curriculum, such as through field trips or special activities and events;
5. to invite parents and members of the community to be involved in the classroom.

Some teachers also will take on the responsibility...

6. to work with other teachers and the head teacher to communicate about ILFE to parent and community organizations (School Management Committees, Village Education Committees, Parent Teacher Associations); and
7. to encourage and work with parents to be advocates for ILFE with other parents and in the community.



Action Activity: How Can We Work With Our Communities

Begin by listing every school activity that you are aware of that involves families and communities—such as field visits, parent-teacher meetings, holiday parades—and that brings teachers, children, their families, and communities together.¹ Next to each activity, write down:

- ◆ whether you assisted in this activity or not; and if so, in what capacity (such as “organizer” or “greeter”),
- ◆ the positive happenings that resulted from the activity,
- ◆ the negative or unexpected occurrences that happened and how these could be avoided in the future (for instance, few parents attended, which could be overcome by several announcements of the event being made in advance, rather than only one).

Underline those activities that you think are the most important. Circle those that are related directly to your class or teaching practices. Which activities did you underline and circle? For those that are only underlined, think about how you can incorporate them into your activities.

Also ask yourself, which activities are the most important in making your school and classroom inclusive and learning-friendly? Which activities are good events for promoting a better understanding of ILFE among families and communities?

Briefly summarize the relationship that has developed between you, your school, and the community because of each activity. For instance, “By holding a parent-teacher meeting at the start of the school year, I developed a better understanding of my students’ families, and more parents are volunteering to help with classroom activities?”

¹ This activity was adapted from *The Multigrade Teacher's Handbook* (1994) Bureau of Elementary Education, Department of Education, Culture and Sports in cooperation with UNICEF Philippines, and UNICEF at <http://www.unicef.org/teachers/environment/families.htm>

Finally, look again at the positive activities and relationships between your school and community, and then identify ways in which they can be expanded; for example, holding an Open School Day at the beginning and end of each year, rather than only once a year. The Open School Day at the start of the year can focus on what the children will learn and how families can help, while the one at the end of the year can exhibit the children's work and celebrate everyone's achievements in working together and creating an ILFE.



Tool 2.2

Information and Advocacy for ILFE in Families and Communities

For educational interventions to have real impact, the community must fully support them and be actively involved in them. For the community to be actively involved, they need to be contacted, informed, and motivated.

CONTACTING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

One of our most important responsibilities as teachers is to open lines of communication to families and other members of the community. Children learn better when their parents and other family members are interested in, and involved with, the school and with education. When we involve families in learning, we increase the potential for learning in our classrooms, and we create support for our teaching in many ways. Consequently, making contact with our children's families and important community members is vitally important in creating inclusive, learning-friendly environments.²

There are many effective ways to begin communicating with families. Below is a list of some of them. Try a method that you like the best, and are most comfortable in doing, and then go on to try the others.

- ◆ Hold meetings with family and community groups where you introduce yourself, describe your goals for teaching and for children's learning, the value of diversity in an inclusive, learning-friendly classroom, and discuss the ways in which families and community members can participate in your classroom activities.
- ◆ Once or twice a year, schedule informal discussions with parents to assess their children's learning. Show them examples of their children's work. Stress each child's talents and positive

² This section and activity were adapted from *The Multigrade Teacher's Handbook* (1994) Bureau of Elementary Education, Department of Education, Culture and Sports in cooperation with UNICEF Philippines, and UNICEF at <http://www.unicef.org/teachers/environment/families.htm>

achievements, and talk about how each child can learn even better if she or he overcomes certain obstacles.

- ◆ Send your students' work home to show parents how well their children are doing. Ask them for their opinions about their children's work, and what do they think their children should learn next.
- ◆ Encourage children to talk about what they learn at home and use this information in your lessons. Also talk with the parents about how what their children are learning in class relates to their life at home. In other words, show how their classroom knowledge can be used, or is being used, at home.
- ◆ Conduct community field visits or ask children to interview parents or grandparents about their own childhood years in the community, and then have the children write stories or essays about "Community Life in the Past."
- ◆ Encourage family members to participate in classroom activities and invite community experts to share their knowledge with your class.



Action Activity: Contacting Families and Communities

Begin by summarizing the ways in which you are currently involved with children's families and communities. How did you first communicate with them, and to what extent were they involved in their children's learning?

Look again at the different ways mentioned above on making contact with families and communities. Select two or three (or more) of these different ways, write them down, and then under each note:

- ◆ what materials you should prepare (if any);
- ◆ the ways by which you will communicate with the family or community members; and

- ◆ the approximate date and time of the activity, and other relevant dates, such as special occasions.

Next, decide if these different ways can be linked. For instance, you might want to hold a group meeting at the beginning of the year or school term. At this meeting, you can encourage or recruit family members as classroom assistants, and ask for community volunteer experts to give special talks to the children.

Write down the starting dates and other relevant times and events on your calendar or your date book so you can create a simple "family and community involvement plan."

KEEPING REGULAR COMMUNICATION

Informing Parents about Their Children's Progress

As teachers in an ILFE, we need to communicate regularly with parents about their children. We may visit parents in their homes, send notes home with children about their progress, or invite parents to school to meet with us. Consequently, it is essential to create a welcoming atmosphere for all parents and community members at school.

Meeting with parents or guardians early in the year is important so that teachers and parents can develop a relationship and a partnership for children's learning. However, if parents have come to expect that our home visits or invitations to school only occur when a child is being punished, you will need to state clearly at the beginning of your visit or in your invitation to parents that this conversation will be different. Tell them that you want to learn about the child from them so that you can teach the child more effectively. Tell them also that you want to inform them about their child's skills, so that they can help the child at home and reinforce what the child is learning at school.

Teacher-Home Communication

In Thailand's Child-Friendly Schools, parents and community members answered this question on an assessment form, "What is most important for our school—and why?" One item that was mentioned as a high priority was teacher-home communication. They said, "Teachers and parents of all pupils make an appointment each term to consult about pupils' behaviour and learning. This is important because it can provide direction for solving problems among School Committee members, important members of the community, and the school; it increases sending news and communication from the school to the community; and it creates understanding between parents and teachers."

Hopkins J and Chaimuangdee K. (2000) School Self-Assessment: Participatory Learning and Action for Child-Friendly Schools. Chiang Mai, Thailand: The Life Skills Development Foundation, in collaboration with the UNICEF Office for Thailand, Bangkok.

It is important to inform parents regularly about children's progress in learning. This means using assessment methods that help teachers, students, and parents know which skills a child has developed in literacy, numeracy, life skills, and other subjects. Parents need to know what their child has learned well and what the child still needs to learn. One of the ways to do this creatively is through colour-coded charts, which are particularly effective with parents who are not literate. For example, in Chart 1 below, a colour corresponds to the skills needed for Grade 3 mathematics.

Chart 1. Colour-Coded Chart of Content and Tasks for Third Grade Mathematics

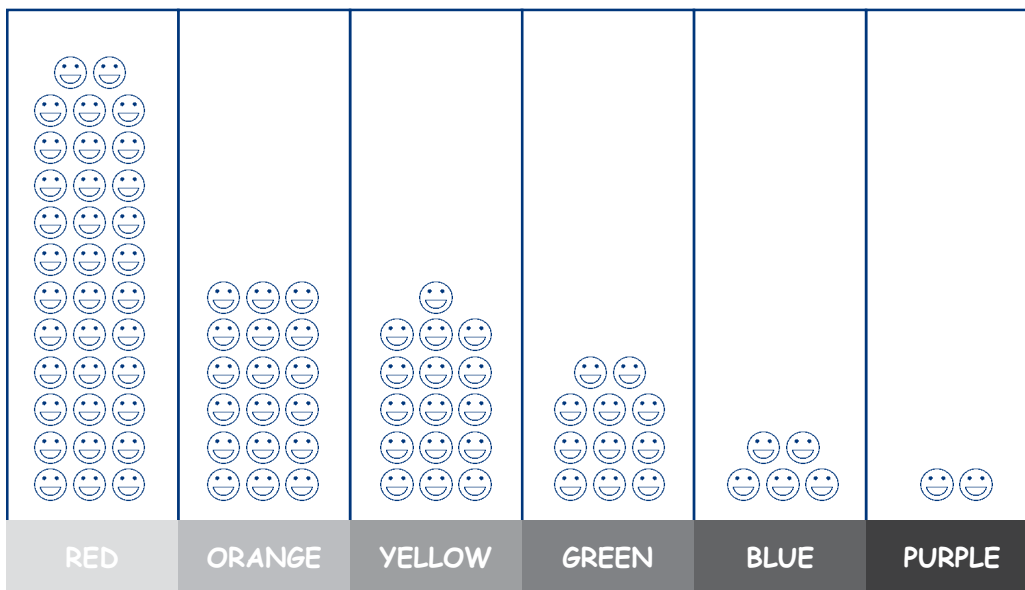
Level	(8 out of 10 correct to proceed to next level)
RED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values of currency (up to 1. 00) • Writing numbers • Subtraction - single digits; addition - single and double digit numbers
Orange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental arithmetic (addition, subtraction) • Division - single digit numbers • Reading math problems
Yellow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiplication • Subtraction and addition of double digit numbers • Measurement (distance, volume)
Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying numbers up to 700 • Subtraction and addition by regrouping • Subtracting a triple and a double digit number • Identifying triple digit numbers
Blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiplication - double and single digit numbers • Division - double and single digit numbers • Reading word problems
Purple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiplication - triple and single digit numbers • Measurement (distance, liquids) • Reading word problems

Adapted from duPlessis J. (2003) Rainbow Charts and C-O-C-O-N-U-T-S: Teacher Development for Continuous Assessment in Malawi Classrooms. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Using Chart 1, colour-coded "Rainbow Charts" are then made to show children's progress and ensure that teachers, students, and parents together monitor the children's learning. In the Rainbow Chart (chart 2), each child has a "happy face" marker with her or his name on it. As they progressively improve their mathematics skills as indicated in the

colour-coded chart, their marker is moved to the colour that matches her or his skill level. If a teacher observes that some children have stayed in a level too long, she can try to find ways to help the children learn what is required to move to the next level.

Chart 2. Rainbow Chart of Pupil Progress



Whether teachers use a Rainbow Chart, a skill list, or a progress report card to send home, informing parents about their children's progress is enormously important in creating and sustaining school-home communication.

Informing Parents About ILFE

In talking with parents or guardians about their child's learning, it is important to explain how your classroom and school are becoming inclusive and learning-friendly. You may want to have a brochure from the school or a paper signed by the head teacher to help explain what you are trying to do. Also explain that by "learning-friendly" we mean that everyone—teachers, parents, and community members—will be helping the children to learn, and they will be learning along with the children as well. You can show them some of their children's work and describe what children do in a child-centred, active learning environment that differs from the school

they or their siblings or even their older children attended. You will need to explain carefully what you mean by “inclusive,” as we learned about in the first Booklet in this Toolkit, and use some of the case studies as examples of how inclusive learning can benefit **ALL** children.



Action Activity: Playing Favourites

When meeting with parents, you may need to help them understand what it means to “include the excluded.” One valuable activity for doing this is “playing favourites”.

In this activity, prepare badges of two different colours—such as red and blue—for people to attach to their clothes using tape or a pin. Each person should have one badge, giving some reds to women and some to men. Explain that in this activity some of them will be made to feel privileged while others will feel excluded.

Tell the people with red badges to sit at the back of the room or all on one side of the room. Then carry on a pleasant conversation with the people with blue badges. Ignore the red badge group; occasionally look sternly at them and tell them to sit quietly or to stop fidgeting or smiling. Continue to talk to the blue badge group. Continue this for five to ten minutes. You may even want to ask a blue badge person to tell the red badge group to be quiet. At the end of the ten minutes, tell everyone to take off their badges and sit together again. Ask these questions:

- ◆ How did it feel to have a blue badge? How did it feel to have a red badge? If you were wearing a red badge, did you want to have a blue badge? Could you do anything to get a blue badge? What did it mean to be excluded? Who did the excluding? Who were (or could be) the most vulnerable?

Remember that those individuals who are often excluded (such as children with disabilities) may feel even more ashamed, embarrassed, or punished by having a child with a disability; they are being doubly excluded. Moreover, those who are most vulnerable are poor children with disabilities who are of a minority ethnic group and do not speak the dominant language

and, in particular, girls. These children may be excluded for many reasons at the same time (for instance, being a poor, minority girl with a disability who cannot understand what is being said in class). Yet these are the very children we seek to include in our ILFE.

Now apply the lessons above to explain better what we mean by "inclusive" and "learning-friendly." Discuss the benefits of "inclusive learning" and how an "inclusive, learning-friendly environment" can be created through partnerships between teachers and parents.

IDEA: This activity also can be used to help children understand what it means to be "excluded" and why it is important to value diverse backgrounds and abilities.

Informing the Community About ILFE

In addition to talking with parents, some teachers can work with the head teacher and the schools' ILFE team or coordinating committee to explain the development of an ILFE to larger groups including community members. If you are one of these persons, some of the ways you can explain ILFE include the following.

1. **Printed Information.** Prepare school brochures or newsletters to give out. Invite journalists from the local newspaper to visit the school and encourage the local press to write about ILFE. Show the journalists the benefits of an ILFE school, and explain the school's plan to provide a quality education for all children.
2. **Radio and TV Public Service Announcements** where schools use radio and television to show and tell parents about the need for schooling their children.
3. **Community or Group Meetings.** Plan to hold one- to three-day workshops or training sessions. These sessions are helpful in introducing the school to people who are new, especially for families whose children are not attending school. The sessions can explain the school's mission to educate all children and can explain the participatory, active learning environment of the school. Also

important is listening to and answering parents' concerns and questions during this first meeting and later meetings, as well as getting their ideas about how the quality of education at your school can be improved even more.

4. **Involve Social Services.** Since social services may well be involved in your school as it becomes more inclusive, stay in touch with them as one of your important strategies. They can provide important resources and help to protect the rights of your children.
5. **Link (network) with Other Schools.** In some countries, a minimum of three schools work together to support each other in becoming more inclusive. Teachers share ideas about new teaching methods they are using or ways they are involving community members in their classrooms. They host school workshops to update teachers' knowledge. They jointly organize community events to get all children in school, or jointly conduct field trips so that children can learn from communities other than their own.

MOTIVATING SUPPORT FOR AN ILFE

Parents as Advocates

Parents as Advocates for Change. In some communities, parents themselves will be the advocates for an ILFE at the school level, even before teachers and head teachers. In a northern province of Papua New Guinea, for example, parents demanded schooling for their children in their native language. The provincial government worked with the university and a non-governmental organization to provide low-cost education in the children's native language. In the BRAC schools of Bangladesh, mothers requested basic education for their daughters and sons who had been excluded from school due to the high cost and long distance.

Parents as Resisters of Change. In other communities, parents may resist change. Some parents, mirroring the values of society, may not want children who are different from their own to be in school with their children. These persons, should be the targets for the advocacy activities discussed below.

Parents as Willing Participants in Change. In other communities, parents may be very willing to get involved with the school—if you ask them, and if you explain to them what an ILFE is all about. If parents traditionally have not participated in their children's education, they will need to be invited in, welcomed, and invited to return again.

Advocacy Strategies

Advocacy involves education, publicity, gaining support, and getting others to tell your message. How can parents and community members become advocates for an ILFE?

- 1. Encourage Parents to Tell Others about Your ILFE School.** Parent advocates may want to use some of the same information you used to tell them about ILFE, such as brochures, newsletters, or children's work. They can be especially effective in talking with parents who resist change, in explaining the value of diversity in the school and classroom through their own experiences or those of others, and in convincing them that quality education comes first in an ILFE school.
- 2. Involve Parents in the Classroom to Help Traditionally Excluded Children.** As parents come to see that they are welcome in school and in your classroom, they may volunteer to come more often and assist you. If they do not, plan tasks for parents or community members and invite them to help you. For example, parents or community members can serve as volunteers in language instruction or for assisting children with disabilities. They can read to children and listen to children read. They also can supervise group activities and free the teacher to work with individual children or small groups who may need more attention. We'll explore other ways to involve parents and community members in the next Tool.
- 3. Involve Parents in Child-seeking Activities for Traditionally Excluded Out-of-School Children.** For instance, hold a school enrolment fair at the school before the beginning of the school year to attract all families from the community to attend—and then enrol all children in school. Local merchants and businesses may want to contribute small gifts to be given away in a lottery, and parents and

teachers can donate special food and organize games. Singing and dancing may even be included. All activities focus on the importance of a quality education and the ways in which the school and community can work together to educate all children. One school enrolment fair in Guatemala that had clowns, special food, games, and door prizes, enrolled so many children that the school could not hold all the new children and had to begin making plans to build a new school building! Many other ideas for involving parents and communities in child-seeking activities can be found in this Toolkit's Booklet on getting all children in school and learning!

4. **Link School Management Communities with ILFEs.** Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) or School Management Committees (SMCs) are ways of involving parents in a long-term relationship with schools. They help to provide on-site supervision, as well as improved quality and accountability.

Village Education Committees

The Community Support Program in the Pakistani state of Balochistan supported the establishment of women's village education committees. There are now over 1,000 of these groups, each with five members, modeled after the men's education committees. It has been difficult to integrate the sexes into a single committee in the conservative areas; however, the women have proven to be better at sustaining attendance and other daily activities in the all-girl schools.

For more information on this programme, see <http://www.worldbank.org> and search for "Balochistan."

5. **Outreach through Home Visits.** Connecting with families whose children have been traditionally excluded is not easy. One way to provide information about ILFE is for the school to ask someone from a traditionally excluded group, such as a disabled person or a person from an ethnic minority, to be an outreach person for the school. A group meeting with that person or individual home visits can be effective in explaining the school's approach to ILFE.



Tool 2.3

The Community and the Curriculum

THE COMMUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Practical contributions by parents and communities are important for ILFE development. Financial and in-kind contributions are concrete ways that parents can support children's learning. For example, community organizations, parent-teacher associations, and school management committees often get involved in helping to improve school facilities. This is important, especially for schools that may have physical barriers that prevent children with physical disabilities from entering buildings. If there are steps, community members can help to put in ramps in place of steps. In many countries, community organizations are also active in improving school water supplies and sanitation. If there are no separate latrines for girls, they build them.

Parents in a community in Malawi learned that teachers had no safe place to keep the learning materials they had developed to encourage pupils' participation in learning, so the community bought doors for the school classrooms and the head teacher's office. Parents from that community and 20 other communities in the same district began to provide old boxes, rubber shoes, and other materials for teachers to make learning materials to use with pupils in literacy and mathematics classes. One teacher noted that this experience of parents' involvement with schools at the curriculum level was contributing to the increased learning achievement and success of children at school.

Miske SJ. (2003) Proud Pioneers: Improving Teaching and Learning in Malawi through Continuous Assessment. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

In the Philippines, one educator reported that they place a lot of effort on making parents feel that they are part of the school, and students are made to feel part of the community. Parents helped build the resource center which houses the 100-book library donated by UNICEF, while learning materials were made by the teachers and students or donated by NGOs. The students also helped make additional furniture and furnishings, such as the shelves for the resource center.

Feny de los Angeles-Bautista with Marissa J. Pascual, Marjorie S. Javier, Lillian Mercado-Carreon and Cristina H. Abad. (2001). Reinventing Philippine Education: Building Schools Filipino Children Deserve. The Ford Foundation, Manila.

We noted in the last Tool that one way to involve parents directly (mothers and fathers) is to invite them to visit the classroom. There are many ways in which parents, grandparents, and guardians can be involved in a pupil's education that will contribute to the ILFE nature of the classroom. Here are some ideas.

- ◆ Parents or other family members can volunteer to assist teachers with classroom activities, such as reading or preparing learning materials, helping with extra-curricular activities like sports or field trips, or organizing special activities like festivals.
- ◆ Parents can be classroom guest speakers who share information about their work and the world of work. They can talk about how education contributed to their expertise on the job. Parents who are not literate can talk about the history of the community, share folk stories, or demonstrate how to make traditional crafts.
- ◆ They can become involved in and attend PTA meetings and other school meetings to become informed, as well as attending special classroom events. At such events, they can meet their child's teachers, learn about the school's curriculum, and how to become involved in activities.
- ◆ They can donate needed materials to the school or help to find financial contributions to meet school and classroom needs.

- ◆ They can reach out to other parents whose children are not in school, or are thinking of dropping out, to encourage them to complete their education.
- ◆ They can participate in efforts to keep their children's schools or childcare centers safe and clean.
- ◆ They can help the school to hold an Open School Day. On that day, parents, community members, and officials are invited to the school. Representative work from ALL children is displayed along with new teaching materials; teachers demonstrate their new skills of assessment and teaching; and children of all abilities and backgrounds demonstrate what they have learned.
- ◆ Parents and members of the community can help to assess children's learning achievements. They can assign marks to the pupils' homework, and thus give their input into their children's learning.
- ◆ Successful graduates and dedicated parents can serve as role models, especially those with diverse backgrounds and abilities. Hold a career day every year. Invite these men and women to discuss their careers and how girls and boys can prepare for those careers.

Female Role Models

In schools where there are no female teachers, women from the community can be involved in role model programmes. Parents or other relatives of the students, as well as religious, artistic, athletic, or political figures from the community are usually willing to become involved with a school or classroom that tries to give girls positive role models.

If local women are available to do this, have them come in several times during the academic year. Ask them to address how they have worked with and for men and women, and how gender roles have affected their choices, successes, and failures. In addition to speeches, demonstrations of their work and consultations with individual students, they can help direct and comment on role-plays with students.

Have a female teacher and a group of girl students who have made it successfully to Grade 6 or Grade 11 visit rural schools where girls usually drop out at Grade 5 or earlier. All the girls should meet together to talk about what girls need to do to stay and do well in school. Have the visiting female teacher and older girls meet together with the girls and their parents to discuss specific ways to help girls stay in school and complete their education.

The Gender-Fair Teacher (2003) UNICEF/Eritrea

THE CLASSROOM AND THE COMMUNITY

Besides inviting parents and community members to the ILFE school, a relevant curriculum requires that children are in the community, learning as much as they can about various topics. For instance:

- ◆ Children can find articles or get information from their home or community that relate to a lesson at school.
- ◆ Children can interview parents or grandparents about their childhood.
- ◆ They can find plants or other materials that relate to a lesson.
- ◆ They can bring materials (such as used cardboard) that teachers can use to make teaching and learning materials.
- ◆ Children can participate in redesigning the classroom or in assessing and improving upon the school grounds so they are more "child-friendly" (especially for children with disabilities), safe (reduce conflict), and gender sensitive. Improving upon the school grounds can also lead to more outdoor classroom spaces.³
- ◆ Children can map their communities and assist in finding children who are not in school, but should be.

³ UNICEF. Children as Community Researchers. <http://www.unicef.org/teachers>

- ◆ Children can participate in community service activities. In Thailand's CHILD project, children regularly volunteered to clean the houses of elderly persons who were living alone. At the end of the day, they shared a meal and the elderly talked about the community's history and culture. Despite their differences in age, everyone developed closer relationships and better caregiving practices. In addition, the children also worked to keep roadways and paths in the community clean in order to avoid accidents.⁴

Class Activities that Focus on the Community. There are other ways that students can learn from their community and share in their community's activities. For instance, in northern Thailand a group of fifth grade students studied the environment of their community for science class during the year. They documented signs of deforestation and interviewed community members about the history of the forest in the community. They also discussed ways of planting trees in their community. At the end of the year, the students presented their study to all of their parents. These parents actually learned about the community from the students! They were impressed with what the students had learned, and the ways in which students presented the information. Parents and students together joined together to find solutions to the environmental problems in their community.

Student Participation in Meetings. Students can also extend their real-world experience by attending and participating in school-parent meetings, community meetings, or other civic events. You can role play the meeting in advance with pupils in the classroom and practice when they will participate and how. Students can organize activities and projects from their classroom lessons and show them in a student fair, or a small group of students can present a dramatic play, song, or poem. In this kind of activity, students get to explain to their parents or guardians what they are learning. This improves communication between the school and parents, and it reinforces for the child what he or she has learned.

In preparing a school-parent meeting on student learning, you need to pay special attention to which language or languages people will use in the meeting. Students and teachers need to decide how they will communicate with parents who do not speak a common language or who are hearing impaired.

⁴ For more ideas on children's participation, see <http://www.inmu.mahidol.ac.th/CHILD>



Tool 2.4

What Have We Learned?

This Booklet has given you several tools that you can use to involve families and communities in ILFE. Can you complete the following activities?

1. List the responsibilities of ILFE teachers in relating to the community.
2. In what ways do you tell parents about their child's learning skills?
3. List two ways in which mothers and fathers can help to include traditionally excluded children (a) in school and (b) out of school.
4. Name several ways in which the community can come into the classroom.
5. List several ways in which pupils can get more involved in their community or in using materials from home or community.

Involving the community is critical for the success of an ILFE. There are many ways in which you can prepare pupils to engage in learning in the community, and with their local environment. There are also many ways in which teachers can work with the parents or guardians of students to inform them about ILFE and encourage them to become advocates for the school in the community. This Booklet has listed many ideas for this. **Now ask yourself, "What can I do to start working more closely with my children's families and communities?" Come up with three personal targets and compare and discuss them with your colleagues, your students, and their families. After one to two weeks, compare how you are progressing and what further actions you can take.**

WHERE CAN YOU LEARN MORE?

The following publications and Web sites are also very valuable resources

for encouraging closer school-family-community relationships.

Publications

Bureau of Elementary Education, Department of Education, Culture and Sports in cooperation with UNICEF Philippines (1994) *The Multigrade Teacher's Handbook*, Manila.

duPlessis J. (2003) *Rainbow Charts and C-O-C-O-N-U-T-S: Teacher Development for Continuous Assessment in Malawi Classrooms*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Miske S.J. (2003) *Proud Pioneers: Improving Teaching and Learning in Malawi through Continuous Assessment*. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Rugh A and Bossert H. (1998) *Involving communities: Participation in the delivery of education programs*. Washington, DC: Creative Associates International, Inc.

The Gender-Fair Teacher (2003) UNICEF/Eritrea.

Web Sites

Children as Community Researchers. This is an excellent publication for promoting children's learning through the community. It can be downloaded at:

<http://www.unicef.org/teachers/researchers/index.html> or

<http://www.unicef.org/teachers/researchers/childresearch.pdf>

Children's Integrated Learning and Development Project.

<http://www.inmu.mahidol.ac.th/CHILD>

Community School Alliances.

<http://www.edc.org/CSA>

Supporting Home-School Collaboration by Sandra L. Christenson.

<http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/schoolage/resources/supporting.html>

UNICEF Teachers Talking about Learning.

<http://www.unicef.org/teachers/environment/commun.htm>.

This excellent Web site offers information on: learning and the community; teachers and communities; involving families in learning; communities helping schools; community life; and tips for improving schools.