

Appendix B

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Child Development

Some Principles of the Ecology of Human Development

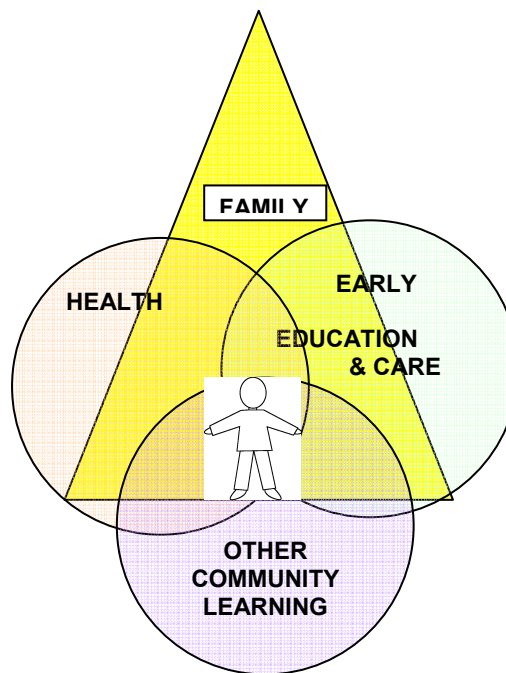
Urie Bronfenbrenner and the Ecology of Human Development

SOME PRINCIPLES OF THE ECOLOGY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

From the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, PhD

Child development takes place through processes of progressively more complex interaction between an active child and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time. (Adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1998, p. 996)

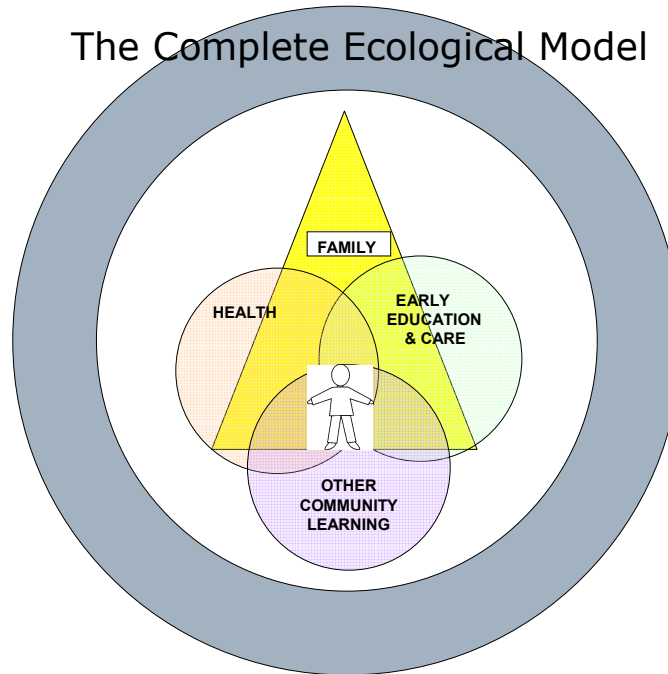
1. The child is at the center of this model.
2. The model acknowledges that a child affects as well as is affected by the settings in which she spends time.
3. The most important setting for a young child is his family, because that is where he spends the most time and because it has the most emotional influence on him. Other important settings may include his extended family, early care and education programs, health care settings and other community learning sites such as neighborhoods, libraries and playgrounds.



4. A child's development is determined by what she experiences in these settings she spends time in. Is someone showing the child appropriate ways to behave? Is someone talking and reading with her? Is someone providing materials for her to play with? These experiences, called *proximal* – or near – *processes*, that a child has with the people and objects in these settings are “the primary engines of human development.” (1998)

5. The number and quality of the connections between the settings in which a young child spends time (for example, his family and preschool) also have important implications for his development. For example, do his parents and teachers communicate with one another often? Do they have similar expectations of him?

The Complete Ecological Model



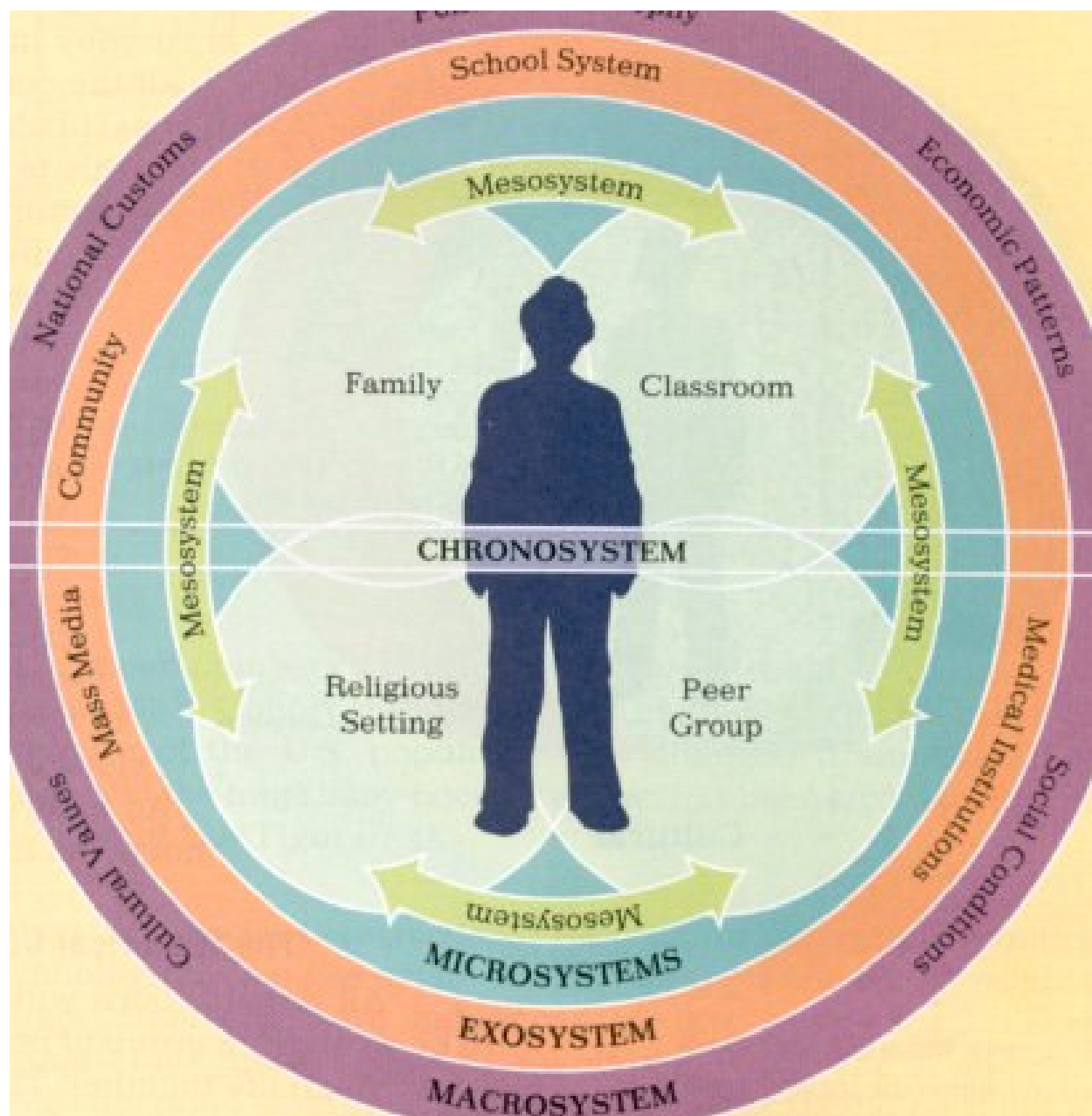
6. Other environments where the child doesn't spend time can also affect the power of proximal processes to influence development. These can include both more immediate factors (for example, the parent's workplace or community mandates) and more remote ones (for example, federal laws).

The information above is drawn from:

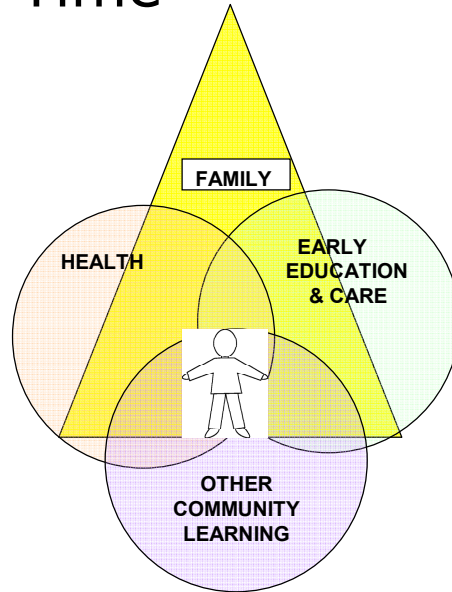
Bronfenbrenner, U. (2004). *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development*.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (1998). The ecology of developmental processes. In W. Damon (Series Ed.) & R. M. Lerner (Vol. Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1: Theoretical models of human development* (pp. 993-1028). New York: Wiley.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.



Important Settings Where a Child Spends Time



First - **It's what actually happens within settings like the family and the child care center where a child is that influence his or her development.** What is the child actually doing and with whom? In much program and policy planning we get lost or are ineffective because we begin with “risk factors” of children or the “social addresses” of their families – for example, children who live with single parents or in poor families. These risk and social address factors alone don't determine whether or not a child develops his potential – they **can** make it more difficult or less likely for a child to get the experiences he needs. But it's the actual experiences that count: For example: Is someone showing the child appropriate ways to behave? Does she have opportunities to draw and to climb? Does someone read with him regularly and interactively?

Although most of the emphasis in an ecological model is on these kinds of positive experiences – called proximal - or near – processes – it also acknowledges the importance of protective and preventive processes – things that keep a child from physical and psychological harm. For example: Is the child protected from environmental toxins like lead and smoke? Within the child's home and child care settings, is the child hearing encouragement or disparagement?

The second important thing to know about this model is that it acknowledges that **the number and quality of the connections between these settings also have important influences on a**

child's development. This includes relationships between the important adults in a child's life. For example, how often do the parents and the child's child care provider talk?

And it also includes transitions the child makes between settings. For example, are the expectations similar in preschool and kindergarten, or are some children faced with entirely new ways of doing things when they reach elementary school?

The three important points about an ecological model are that it is child-centered; it begins with a focus on the child's experiences because these are the "engines of development" and the nature of the relationships between different settings are also included because they influence what the young children's experiences.

Where does the community fit into this model?

In the ABC Project, a community is the **entire group of people and organizations** (in the geographical area of a school district) that has an interest in the well-being of the young children who reside there. This would most likely include families, formal community agencies and organizations, other citizens, and informal groups. (We're not just talking about government agencies or schools or any other single group.)

Beyond the microsystem settings and the mesosystem linkages that directly affect children's development lies the exosystem. These are settings where the child does not spend time, but which influence the child's primary settings – and thus his experiences. It is at this level that the community lies.

In the planning an ABC system consider what the community does to ensure that all children have all of the experiences they need in the microsystem settings – like families and child care centers - where they DO spend time? And, how can we help strengthen the linkages between settings?

A system is about relationships as much as about discrete programs and factors. So an important task of the ABC Project is developing the connections between these kinds of influences – to create a true system. A very important piece is the **child-centeredness**. The ABC Project takes a child-centered approach because it's the one needed to meet the purpose of ensuring that **all** children have **all** that they need (other approaches work fine for other purposes).

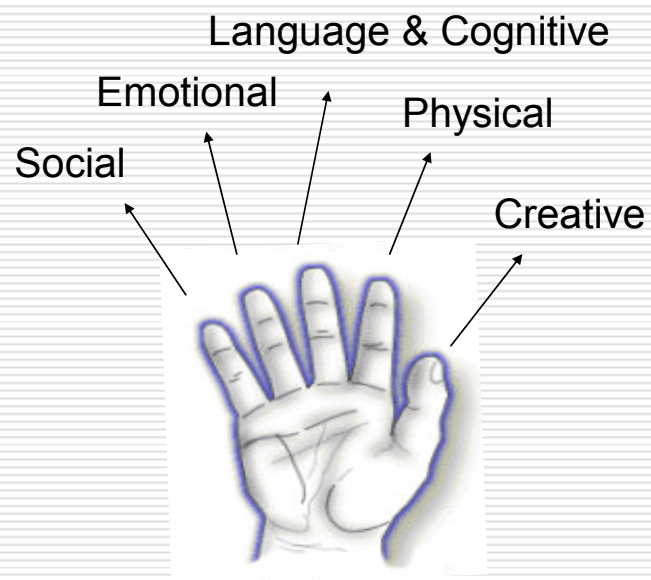
We often begin by noticing a problem. For example, we point out that too many children are victims of child abuse. Or those children from low income families don't have enough to eat. In this case we may think we're starting with children, but typically we focus on **WHO** seems to have this problem rather than on **what children need**. What happens next is that we tend to provide services and programs are targeted only at particular groups of children or families.

Is licensed child care of high enough quality to meet the needs of children? Is money well spent on universal programs – when some families have neither the need nor the desire for such a program? But the child-centered ecological model invites us to look more broadly in initial planning – especially if we want to ensure that ALL children have ALL needed experiences.

To begin with children, think about each child's experience throughout each day. For example, does each child spend the time he is awake and aware doing interesting things with people who care about him? Or does he spend a lot of time being "warehoused" in poor quality child care or in front of a TV? Does he transition between a reasonable number of caregivers for his age? This is beginning with the CHILD'S experience – that is, being child centered – ACROSS settings, rather than looking only within individual settings.

*For a full copy of the power point **"How Can We Best Leave No Child BehindAnd Prepare Every Child to Succeed in the 21st Century"** contact Donna Doll-Yogerst, UW-Extension Family Living Agent, Oconto County UW-Extension.*

The Whole Child



Urie Bronfenbrenner and the Ecology of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner has been the foremost theoretician of human development over the past half-century. [He] stands as first among his peers. His ideas have been the ones that have stood the test of time to represent the fundamental concepts used in all of the developmental systems theories that constitute the cutting-edge models of human development.

Richard Lerner, the Director of the Institute for Applied
Research in Youth Development at Tufts University

Cornell University Professor Urie Bronfenbrenner, among the world's best-known psychologists, has been publishing articles and books for 60 years on what really matters in the development of human beings. Bronfenbrenner, the Jacob Gould Schurman Professor Emeritus of Human Development and of Psychology at Cornell, is a co-founder of the federal Head Start program and is widely regarded as one of the world's leading scholars in developmental psychology, child-rearing and human ecology -- the interdisciplinary domain he created.

His model of the ecology of human development acknowledges that humans don't develop in isolation, but in relation to their family and home, school, community and society. Each of these ever-changing and multilevel environments, as well as interactions among these environments, are key to development, he says.

Before Bronfenbrenner, child psychologists studied children, sociologists focused on families, anthropologists considered culture, economists the economic framework of the times and so on. Bronfenbrenner's groundbreaking concept of the ecology of human development, however, viewed these environments -- from the family to current society and the times -- as nested settings in which a person develops over time throughout the life course. Since 1979, when Bronfenbrenner published his ecological theory, he has transformed how many social and behavioral scientists approach the study of human beings and their environments.

The theory led to new directions in basic research and to applications in the design of programs and policies affecting the well-being of children and families both in the United States and abroad.
(Information from Cornell University)

For more information on Urie Bronfenbrenner and the Bioecological Model of Human Development:

Urie Bronfenbrenner – Biography
<http://people.cornell.edu/pages/ub11/>

WebQuest Project Theory Fact Sheet of Urie Bronfenbrenner by
(The beginning of this paper provides a good review of the levels of the ecological system. The specific implications appear to be those of the author of this paper and not of Bronfenbrenner)
<http://pt3.nl.edu/boemmelbriscoewebquest.pdf>

Outline and map of ecological model of Urie Bronfenbrenner:
<http://www.emory.edu/EDUCATION/mfp/302/302bron.PDF>

Selected works of Urie Bronfenbrenner:

The Ecology of Human Development. (1979). Harvard University Press.

The ecology of developmental processes. (With P.A. Morris). (1998). In W. Damon & R.M. Lerner (Eds), *Handbook of Child Psychology: Vol 1: Theoretical Models of Human Development* (pp. 993-1028). New York: Wiley.

Five critical processes for positive development. From “Discovering what families do” in *Rebuilding the Nest: A New Commitment to the American Family*, published by Family Service America, 1990.
<http://www.montana.edu/www4h/process.html>

Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development. (2004). Sage Publications.

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