



Finding Time Together: Families, Schools, and Communities Supporting Anywhere, Anytime Learning

Christine Patton and Margaret Caspe
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Harvard Family
Research Project



PROLOGUE

Six months ago, I began working with HFRP on a concept that we're giving renewed attention to—anywhere, anytime learning (AAL). The concept is elegantly simple, and suggests that learners across all developmental periods, from infancy to adulthood, gain knowledge and skills in multiple places and across all hours of the day. The more that I read about this concept and the more interviews that I conducted with people in the field who are working to engage children and families across time and contexts, the more enthusiastic I became. It was an enthusiasm that arose from seeing theory being put into practice right in front of my eyes. I began to see children and families engaged in AAL experiences everywhere that I went.

Like an anthropologist in my own town, I began to take pictures of the AAL activities that were occurring around me. In June, I captured my 18-month-old daughter giving kisses to herself in a mirror that is built into the lower half of a checkout aisle at our supermarket. In the spirit of anywhere, anytime learning, I began to giggle with her and encourage her as she realized that she was actually the little girl staring back and receiving her kisses.



Margaret's daughter developing self-concept in the supermarket

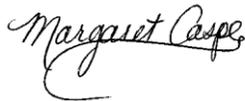


A mother talking about letters and shapes with her children in the park

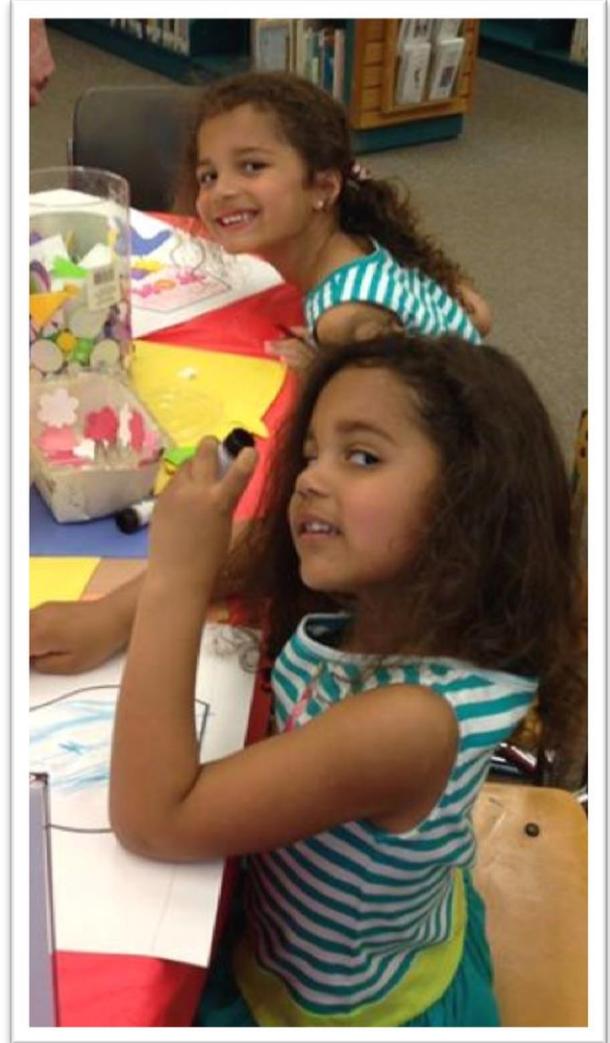
In the same month, I took pictures of my neighbor, who had taken a break from a busy day at work to create chalk drawings in the park with her 1- and 3-year-olds, and was showing them different shapes and letters as they played together.

In July, I took pictures of the droves of 4- to 10-year-olds who participated in my local elementary school's summer enrichment program, and then joined their families and friends afterward at the library for snacks, crafts, and stories at the free summer reading program.

These events all occurred outside of the academic day and prior to the start of the school year (which began in early September in my town). They happened at different times in the day—during the morning, afternoon, and evening. These activities showed me that learning can and does happen anytime.



Margaret Caspe
Senior Consultant
Harvard Family Research Project



Children enjoying arts and crafts at a library reading program

TIME

Discussions about time are ever-present in the media. Time is also a hot topic at many nonprofits, public policy institutes, and universities. ExpandedED Schools, by TASC, for example, released a short [video](#) and supplementary [infographic](#) on the “6,000 Hour Learning Gap” to emphasize the disparity between the number of hours that children from middle- and low-income households spend in learning. And the New America Foundation recently released a report, [Making the Hours Count: Exposing Disparities in Early Education by Retiring Half-Day vs. Full-Day Labels](#). These materials highlight the importance of children having sufficient opportunities *and* sufficient time for learning—with TASC’s materials indicating that learning time needs to be more equally distributed across children from different socioeconomic statuses, and New America Foundation’s report highlighting the importance of expanding access to “high-quantity” learning experiences for young learners.

Families and educators, along with staff from schools and community organizations, play important roles in determining how to use existing time as well as how to find free time to support children’s interests and create pathways for learning across the day and throughout the year. In this commentary, we highlight what we know about what these groups are doing and *can do* to connect children to learning opportunities. We explore the time that children and families spend together in learning pursuits, the constraints on families’ time, and ways that institutions are supporting families’ time use.

A CLOSER LOOK AT TIME IN ANYWHERE, ANYTIME LEARNING

We know that the ways that families and other institutions support, connect, and build learning pathways for children’s formal and informal learning time, at home and in community settings, matter for children’s social-emotional and cognitive success.^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Our [June 2014 issue](#) of the *FINE Newsletter* began to explore these processes and marked a yearlong focus on family engagement in anywhere, anytime learning (AAL).

Central to AAL is the question of how children and families actually spend their time. Elementary- and high school-aged children spend approximately 20 percent of their waking hours each year in school. The remaining 80 percent represents hours of opportunities for families and communities to engage children in AAL activities in nonschool settings.^{7,8}

Focusing first on the time that children and families spend together engaging in AAL experiences, we can group these activities into the following categories:^{9,10,11}

- **Routine family activities**, including household work, folding laundry, grocery shopping, general household conversations, and shared meals. These activities might also include the time that parents spend managing their children’s schedules and taking care of children’s physical and medical needs.
- **School-related activities**, including shared reading (although this might also be done for leisure), working on school projects, and completing homework.
- **Digital media activities**, including using computers, playing video games, and watching television.

- **Unstructured activities at home or in the community**, including children and families engaging in unstructured play, such as jumping rope, pretend play, playdates, board games and cards, and playing in the park. These activities also include children and families learning from one another's special skills, such as cooking, carpentry, and the use of digital media.
- **Organized out-of-school activities in the community**, including families' time spent enrolling children in and transporting them to regularly scheduled activities, such as music classes, sports programs, afterschool programs, and scouting. This category also includes families' time encouraging children to attend activities and participating with them in these experiences.
- **Informal learning and recreational activities and those within religious settings**, including visits to the library, museum, or zoo, and participation in ethnic or cultural events and faith-based services.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT FAMILIES' USE OF TIME

We can say a few things about the above activities and families' use of time, in general. In 2013, adults living in households with children 6 years old and younger spent an average of two hours per day reading to, talking with, or providing physical care for children in their house. Regarding media use, parents and children spent, on average, about an hour each day in *joint* media engagement.¹² In terms of overall time spent together, 68 percent of mothers said that they spent the right amount of time with their children; 50 percent of fathers said the same.¹³ And, families rated their time spent with their children to be their most meaningful use of time.¹⁴

VARIATIONS IN FAMILIES' USE OF TIME

The ways that families structure their routines and engage in activities together varies widely, based on different factors. For example, most parents want their child to spend more time in organized activities.¹⁵ However, families' desires about how time is spent in these activities are often complicated by their economic situation and the affordability of programs of interest; the amount of free time that they have to research programs, fill out applications, and transport children to and from programs; and their access to and the availability of social networks, community resources, and offered activities.^{16,17} Also, families organize their time around their beliefs about child development. For instance, some parents approach parenting by making concerted efforts to cultivate their child's growth and talents, whereas other parents view their responsibility as one to actively provide for children but allow them to grow naturally.¹⁸ A child's age also influences how his or her time is spent. As children get older, they sleep less, become more independent, and spend more time with nonfamilial adults and peers in settings other than the home.¹⁹ Other factors, including family size, the number of adults in the home, family work schedules, and parents' age and education, also influence family rhythms.

Despite time constraints, families are adaptable and resilient and often find ways to adjust time so that they can engage meaningfully with their children. A study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics²⁰ found that full-time employed mothers of children aged 0 to 4 set aside time for enriching activities (e.g., reading to and playing with children) during nonworkdays and on

workday evenings. Part-time employed mothers’ work schedules vary according to their child’s student status: part-time employed mothers of children ages 5 and older worked most of their work hours (60 percent) during school hours, suggesting that they choose to work while their children are in school.

To overcome time barriers, families also utilize the resources that their places of employment provide. For example, working mothers from low-income homes take advantage of the structural features that an office space might provide (e.g., quiet settings where children can complete homework, and the use of computers) as well as the insights, advice, and knowledge that colleagues might recommend (e.g., advice on choosing teachers and on good child care or afterschool program options).²¹

HOW EDUCATORS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS ARE SUPPORTING FAMILIES’ TIME USE

According to a survey conducted by the National Center for Families Learning, 53 percent of parents wish that they knew how to make better use of their time with their children.²² Librarians, pediatricians, school counselors, mentors, and others are being called on to assist families in this effort and are taking steps to offer them ways to address concerns related to time spent with their children. They are also helping families find ways to use their free time to participate in both unstructured and organized activities with their children.

<p style="text-align: center;">Revisiting Program Entry Requirements: Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory</p>	
<p>Several years ago, the Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF) had a strict program entry requirement for new students (preteens and teenagers from Philadelphia): To be accepted into the program, all new students had to attend an initial in-person meeting accompanied by a caregiver. Staff members had based this requirement on initial data suggesting that, when families were engaged from the beginning, students demonstrated a stronger commitment to the program. However, several families of interested students could not attend the caregiver interview, leaving these students ineligible to apply. Fearing that they were excluding students who were most in need of the program support and adult mentorship, PWBF leadership reassessed this requirement. As a result, the program no longer requires a caregiver interview, but instead engages families in different ways. For example, PWBF recently hired a student advocate, a social worker who considers the ecology of students’ lives and provides guidance and support that link the “anywhere, anytime learning” experiences of school, afterschool, community, and home.</p>	

To help families overcome or work around their time constraints and to facilitate families’ time use in informal and formal settings, institutions are offering: (1) flexible sign-up requirements and programming, (2) on-demand resources, (3) coordinated and aligned services from strategic partnerships, and (4) information about and support for learning opportunities during different developmental milestones. These approaches help make learning experiences more streamlined, meaningful, and enjoyable.

Flexible sign-up requirements and programming: An organization’s business processes and activities can be adjusted to suit families’ scheduling and other needs. Programs can extend their hours, alter their enrollment requirements (e.g., see the text box “Revisiting Program Entry Requirements: Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory”), and offer more and varied activities. To show greater respect for the decision-making power of families, organizations that offer families and children multiple program options can also adjust their procedures (e.g., matching procedures for mentoring programs)²³ to give families more time to “shop” for programs and visit with staff in order to determine the best fit.

- On-demand resources:** In addition to being flexible with their enrollment requirements and programming, programs can also make changes in how they offer their resources. Programs can provide these resources on an on-demand basis, which allows busy families access to them when they are needed. Programs, for example, can turn print-based resources into e-resources (see the text box “Philadelphia’s Directory of Enrichment Programs”). Programs can also put their resources on wheels, literally. Staff members from the [ReCharge! Energizing After-School](#) program in Tennessee, for example, give families access to the Nutrition Cart, a rolling reference library that contains an assortment of books, including cookbooks, and games about good nutrition. The cart can be moved around the school and placed within high-traffic areas where families drop off, pick up, and visit with their children.

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Philadelphia’s Directory of Enrichment Programs</h2>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #0070C0; color: white; margin: 0;">DIRECTORY</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;"> of After School Programs in Philadelphia</p> <p style="text-align: center; background-color: #A52A2A; color: white; margin: 0;">Refine Your Search</p> <p>GRADES SERVED</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Pre-K</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> K-5</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 6-8</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 9-12</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other</p> <hr/> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transportation Provided</p> <hr/> <p>PROGRAM HOURS</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Before School</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Evening School</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Weekend</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Overnight</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Summer Programs</p> </div>
<p>Each September in Philadelphia, After School Activities Partnerships (ASAP) collaborates with the <i>Philadelphia Daily News</i> to distribute a directory listing enrichment programs offered in the city. The directory, featuring more than 950 programs, was designed to increase families’ awareness of the variety of afterschool programs available to children of all ages. In order to increase the timeliness and searchability of program information, the organization has developed an online version, in which users can search for programs by categories such as zip code, grades served, program hours, and activity type. The online database was developed after a series of interviews with parents, youth, and out-of-school time providers. This past summer, ASAP partnered with Philadelphia 3-1-1 and Code for Philly to develop a widget so that people can search the program database on their mobile phones.</p>	

As digital media tools, including smartphones, become more widespread, learning resources become more accessible to families. Videos, apps, downloadable resources, and other Web-based offerings all give families access to learning tools when they want them. For example, Cool Culture, a nonprofit organization that we featured in our [June 2014 issue](#) of the *FINE Newsletter*, offers families access to 12 “hunt cards” that are available for free download on their website. Cards such as [this one](#) for the *Pendant Mask* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art help guide families through an institution and help them discover cultural objects along the way. And [Comienza en Casa \(It Starts at Home\)](#), a program that is sponsored by a nonprofit organization that serves Mexican farmworkers in Maine, integrates iPads into a curriculum that provides families with research-based information and early learning activities to promote their preschoolers’ school readiness.

- Coordinated and aligned services from strategic partnerships:** Partnerships that are goal-oriented, intentional, and well executed by institutions can encourage innovation, increase resources, and coordinate and align services. Coordinating services in this way permits families to use their time more efficiently by reducing the number of people they need to see and places they have to go.²⁴ In the last decade, for example, school counselors have been called on more and more to serve as family-school-community liaisons, connecting students to in-school and afterschool activities and encouraging families to involve their children in these pursuits in order to raise children’s achievement.²⁵ Institutional alignment is also forming on statewide levels, with libraries, museums, schools, and even public transportation systems all working together to create formal and informal learning systems. These partnerships are found on [playgrounds that celebrate science and storytelling](#), in [libraries that highlight new digital technology](#) for patrons and schoolteachers, and in ads in [train cars](#) that encourage families to “build your child’s brain on the train.”

<h3>Stretch to Kindergarten</h3>	
<p>Stretch to Kindergarten is a tuition-free, six-week summer kindergarten readiness program in Northern California for children and families from low-income households who have limited prior preschool exposure. Serving primarily Latino families, the program cultivates strong, enduring partnerships among families, schools, and communities to support a successful transition to kindergarten. For children, the program offers high-quality, short-term spring and summer educational experiences. During this period of time and beyond, the program creates shared opportunities for families to strengthen their capacity to support children’s learning through workshops and parenting groups and to continue their own education as noncredit students at Foothill College.</p>	

- Information across developmental milestones:** Institutions can also focus on particular developmental time points to support families during growth periods in their children’s lives. For example, during the transition to kindergarten (see the text box “Stretch to

Kindergarten”), families, schools, and communities can come together to align and share goals for children’s learning. In another example, during well-child checkups at the doctor’s office, pediatricians can be encouraged to talk to families about the importance of early literacy activities.²⁶ As families, schools, and communities establish learning pathways early on and continue to do so as children grow, families save time by having messages reinforced by providers whom they trust and have established relationships with.

CONCLUSION

Families are working to adapt their schedules, and are relying on a variety of strategies to promote their children’s learning and build learning pathways that extend across the day and the year. In order to engage families, institutions are doing the same.

In this issue, we profile [local](#) and [state government](#) agencies, an [early childhood program](#), and a [national nonprofit organization](#) to highlight the many ways that schools, early childhood programs, families, and community organizations utilize strategies to reduce time constraints and create increased opportunities for families and children to learn together. The examples that we offer represent a small sample of the innovative approaches that institutions are using to engage in learning anytime that children and families want it to happen. We look forward to hearing about more strategies and seeing how digital media and institutional support continue to influence and support families’ time use.



ABOUT HFRP

Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) is a leading national organization whose purpose is to shape 21st-century education by connecting the critical areas of student learning. Our focus is on anywhere, anytime learning approaches that extend from early childhood through college and connect families, schools, out- of-school time programs, and digital media. We build strategic partnerships with policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders to generate new thinking, stimulate innovation, and promote continuous improvement in education policy, practice, and evaluation. Our research and tools provide timely, relevant, and practical information for decision making. Addressing issues of access and equity in children’s learning and identifying meaningful, effective family engagement practices that reinforce success for all children are central to our work.

¹ Chin, M. M., & Newman, K. S. (2002). *High stakes: Time, poverty, testing, and the children of the working poor*. New York, NY: Foundation for Child Development.

² Harvard Family Research Project (2006, 2007). *Family involvement makes a difference*. Retrieved from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/family-involvement-makes-a-difference>

³ Lam, C. B., McHale, S. M., & Crouter, A. C. (2012). Parent-child shared time from middle childhood to late adolescence: Developmental course and adjustment correlates. *Child Development, 83*(6), 2089–2103.

⁴ McWayne, C., Owsianik, M., Green, L., & Fantuzzo, J. (2008). Parenting behaviors and preschool children's social and emotional skills: A question of the consequential validity of traditional parenting constructs for low-income African Americans. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*(2), 173–192.

⁵ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2004). *Young children develop in an environment of relationships: Working paper No. 1*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu

⁶ Peterson, T. K. (Ed.). (2013). *Expanding minds and opportunities: Leveraging the power of afterschool and summer learning for student success*. Retrieved from <http://expandinglearning.org/expandingminds>

⁷ Davis, J., & Farbman, D. A. (2002). Schools alone are not enough: After-school programs and education reform in Boston. *New Directions for Youth Development, 94*, 65–87. Retrieved from <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/SUSE/projects/ireport/articles/afterschool/schools%20are%20not%20enough.pdf>

⁸ There have also been movements to expand the learning day and the learning year to account for this time. For further discussion, see Redd, Z., Boccanfuso, C., Walker, K., Princiotta, D., Knewstubb, D., & Moore, K. (2012). *Expanding time for learning both inside and outside the classroom: A review of the evidence base*. Retrieved from http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Child_Trends-2012_08_16_RB_TimeForLearning.pdf

⁹ These categories are adapted from the typology of time developed by Hofferth & Sandberg (2001) and the time use activity classifications from the American Time Use Survey Activity Lexicon (see Wang, 2013).

¹⁰ Hofferth, S. L., & Sandberg, J. F. (2001). How American children spend their time. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 63*(2), 295–308.

¹¹ Wang, W. (2013). *Parents' time with kids more rewarding than paid work—and more exhausting*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/10/08/parents-time-with-kids-more-rewarding-than-paid-work-and-more-exhausting/#fn-17805-2>

¹² The Joan Ganz Cooney Center. (2014). *Learning at home: Families' educational media use in America*. Retrieved from http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/jgcc_learningathome.pdf

¹³ Parker, K., & Wang, W. (2013). *Modern parenthood: Roles of moms and dads converge as they balance work and family*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/03/14/modern-parenthood-roles-of-moms-and-dads-converge-as-they-balance-work-and-family/>

¹⁴ Wang, *Parents' time with kids more rewarding than paid work—and more exhausting*, 2013.

¹⁵ Mahoney, J., & Eccles, J. (2008). Organized activity participation for children from low- and middle-income families. In A. Booth & A. C. Crouter (Eds.). *Disparities in school readiness: How families contribute to transitions in school* (pp. 207–222). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group/Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

¹⁶ Duncan, G. J., & Murnane, R. J. (Eds.). (2011). *Whither opportunity? Rising inequality, schools, and children's life chances*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.

¹⁷ Konnikova, M. (2014). *No money, no time*. Retrieved from http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/13/no-clocking-out/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0

¹⁸ Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race and family life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

¹⁹ Hofferth, S. L., & Sandberg, J. F. (2001). How American children spend their time. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(2), 295–308.

²⁰ Stewart, J. (2009). The timing of maternal work and time with children. *BLS Working Paper 425*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics.

²¹ Weiss, H. B., Mayer, E., Kreider, H., Vaughan, M., Dearing, E., Hencke, R., & Pinto, K. (2007). Making it work: Low-income working mother's involvement in their children's education. *Family Involvement Research Digests*. Retrieved from <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/making-it-work-low-income-working-mothers-involvement-in-their-children-s-education-digest-version>

²² National Center for Families Learning. (2014). *National family learning report*. Retrieved from http://www.familieslearning.org/pdf/NCFL_Family%20Time%20Report_Feb%202014.pdf

²³ Spencer, R., & Basualdo-Delmonico, A. (2014). Family involvement in the youth mentoring process: A focus group study with program staff. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 41, 75–82.

²⁴ Elliott-Johns, S. E., Wideman, R., Black, G. L., Cantalini-Williams, M., & Guibert, J. (2013). Developing multi-agency partnerships for early learning: Seven keys to success. *LEARNING Landscapes*, 7(1), 149–169.

²⁵ Bryan, J. (2005). Fostering educational resilience and achievement in urban schools through school-family-community partnerships. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(3), 219–227.

²⁶ O'Keefe, L. (2014). Parents who read to their children nurture more than literary skills. *AAP News*. Retrieved from <http://aapnews.aappublications.org/content/early/2014/06/24/aapnews.20140624-2>



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hfrp_pubs@gse.harvard.edu

Harvard Family Research Project
50 Church Street, 4th Floor
Cambridge, MA 02138

www.hfrp.org
(617) 495-9108

