Family Engagement Game for Change

Background

There are a variety of approaches that organizations can use to **build capacity for meaningful**, **co-created family engagement**. In recent years, gaming has emerged as one interesting professional learning approach. Through games individuals are active participants in control of their own learning. They tackle complex problems, use strategic thinking, collaborate with others, modify their actions based on feedback, and learn from failure as well as success. Games make people think about the bigger picture and how different actions can be a made to fit together to achieve a goal.

Gamification involves bringing components traditionally associated with video games or board games into the learning environment. Often, this involves concepts like points accrual, competition, and rewards being integrated into activities in a safe space for failure.

The purpose of gamification is to increase engagement by making tasks both challenging and entertaining, but also giving participants a chance to try again if they don't immediately succeed.

The Family Engagement Game

The game is based on five family engagement processes that emerged from our research on public libraries. These processes have relevance for schools and community programs as well. Called the 5Rs, the processes are:

- **Reaching out** to families means promoting programs and services that are available, especially to those who are disproportionately underserved and under-represented.

- **Raising up** family voice means elevating family views to co-design programs and services together.

- **Reinforce** means reaffirming families important role in promoting children's learning and development at home, in schools, and in the community and integrating families' cultural values and routines into teaching and learning.

- **Relate** means offering opportunities for families to build peer-to-peer relationships, social networks and parent-child relationships.

- **Reimagine** means expanding community partnerships, combining resources and extending their range to improve child and family well-being and new connected learning opportunities.

Reminder: While the 5Rs serve as a helpful brainstorming framework, they are not meant to be a definitive prescription for family engagement. Many meaningful projects utilize multiple Rs in practice.

Uses of the Family Engagement Game

There are multiple ways you can use the game for amplifying family engagement approaches. You might use the game to:

- Talk with the people in your district and school community to discuss issues of importance in your local context;
- As a professional development tool for your organization, to help stretch their thinking around common family engagement dilemmas; or
- As a direct family engagement tool, involving families and other key stakeholders in the play of the game to co-create new solutions to dilemmas.

The current version of the Family Engagement Game has been updated updated through previous iterations of piloting with a variety of organizations.

How to Play the Game:

In the Family Engagement Game for Change, family engagement professionals—whether they are librarians, teachers, early childhood staff, or others—are split into teams and read short "dilemma" cards based on real-life family engagement problems of practice across a variety of organizations where family engagement happens. Players are challenged to bring expertise from their own areas of practice to manage and build solutions to the problems that emerge. Players gain points for creating the best proposed solutions.

In the materials below we lay out directions for playing the Family Engagement Game for Change. Please note that this game is only a draft.We hope that you will use it and share with us how it goes, what changes you suggest, what new dilemmas emerge, and the influence you see it having

Materials Needed:

The game is based on five family engagement processes that emerged from our research on public libraries. These processes have relevance for schools and community programs as well. Called the 5Rs, the processes are:

- **A group of 4-6 players** (that's you!)
- **5R cards, including Wild Card (**pg. 3) - You may make multiple copies of this page!
- **A set of GFRP coins** (pg. 3)
- **Dilemma cards, including "Create Your Own Dilemma" cards (**pg. 4 and 5)
- **The judging rubric** (see below)
- **Reflection Guide (**pg. 6)

Step 1: Assign a judge and deal cards

Assign one of the players in the group to serve as the "judge". The judge deals each of the players in the group one of the 5R cards. If you have less than 6 people in your group, be sure to mix up the "R" cards since each won't be used every time. If you have more than 6 people, you might buddy up!

Step 2: Read and manage dilemmas

The judge then reads the first family engagement dilemma to the group. One by one each player sets his or her 5R card down (e.g., player 1 might have reinforce, player 2 might have relate, etc) and explains how he or she might manage the dilemma presented using his or her "R" card as inspiration. Each player has around 30 seconds and must make the case for why they chose the solution they did. The whole table goes around and shares ideas.

Step 3: Select the best solution(s)

The judge then selects the idea he or she likes best based on the following criteria:

- **Feasible:** Is this something that would work in your community?
- **Desirable:** Is it something your community would want?
- **Viable:** And is it something that could work successfully?
- **Equitable:** Does the solution critically reflect the values of families in your community, via a system of tailored supports, flexible engagement options, and coordination between families and schools?

The player who "wins" the round gets a GFRP coin.

Step 4: Assign a new judge and repeat

Players hand in their card, and the game continues with a new judge who shuffles and deals the 5R cards again, and reads a new dilemma. Dilemma cards with a "?" require that the judge (or others in the group) present a dilemma they have faced with the group. The game ends when all of the dilemma cards are used, and the player with the most chips wins.

Step 5: Reflect as a group

Giving everyone an opportunity to reflect, think about what they've learned, and share plans for implementing new skills is essential for any capacity building experience. Use the Reflection Guide (at the end of this document) to lead a conversation about how to implement learnings from the game in your context. After everyone has played, we ask that anyone who plays the game take 2-3 minutes to provide us with some feedback via this form: bit.ly/GFRPGame.

We plan to use your reflections and perspectives to improve the next iteration of this game.

Variations:

Although it's fun to give points and coins to players with the "best" solution, it's also possible to play the game more collaboratively. In this version, the whole group works together on managing each dilemma card based on the R card they receive and work towards the collective goal of building off one another's ideas.

If you have ideas on how to improve the game, or variations that you think are fun or meaningful, please feel free to share them with us via info@globalfrp.org.

REACH OUT

Reaching out to families means promoting programs and services that are available, especially to those who are disproportionately underserved and under-represented.

RAISE UP

Raising up family voice means elevating family views to co-design programs and services together.

REINFORCE

Reinforce means reaffirming the important role families have in promoting children's learning and development at home, in schools, and in the community and integrating families' cultural values and routines into teaching and learning

RELATE

Relate means offering opportunities for families to build peer-to-peer relationships, social networks and parent-child relationships

REIMAGINE

Reimagine means expanding community partnerships, combining resources and extending their range to improve child and family well-being and new connected learning opportunities

WILD CARD

Choose any of the 5 Rs --Reach Out, Raise Up, Reinforce, Relate or Reimagine--to inspire your solution to the dilemma.

GF RP

Is My Child Doing Okay?

Despite increased interaction with parents during the pandemic, parents are worried about their students' academic progress. Test scores and grades are one indicator, but many parents are not always sure what to make of these metrics. What does a certain score mean? How has the pandemic and virtual learning influenced their child's progress? Should they be worried? What approaches can help educate parents and keep them informed about their child's progress?

Updated for COVID-19

Preventing Learning Loss

Alison, a single mother of a 4-year-old, has been working toward her GED at your school's adult education course, which moved online due to the pandemic. She informs you in the middle of the semester that she will not be returning because her daughter's school has shifted online again and she has no one to watch her daughter. You are concerned that she will lose ground on progress she has made over the year. What might the school do to support Alison and her daughter?

Updated for COVID-19

What is a Password?

The majority of families in your school community speak Spanish at home. Usually, your school translates important resources and sends copies home with students so that caregivers who cannot speak or read English can stay informed and engaged. During the pandemic, however, resources for families are updated daily via the school's online portal, which requires an individual password for each family's account. You notice that some parents, especially non-English speakers, have not been logging on to the portal. One parent calls to ask if you can give her the password for the portal and it is clear that she is unsure of how to use the password or log on to the portal. What strategies might you use to help this parent and others like her?

Updated for COVID-19

Parking Lot

The parking lot at the library has always been a busy place. With the increase of curbside pickup of books and other materials and increased demand for free public WIFI, the parking lot is being used more than the library itself!

How might you engage families who find themselves flocking to the library parking lot for WI-FI? What processes would you use to go about deciding programming and approach?

Updated for COVID-19

Mental Health and Family Needs

You have noticed increased mental health-related issues within your school community for the past few years, however, many of these issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, families are in need of social and emotional support and resources and are looking to teachers and counselors for support. This is leading to practitioner burnout and families are not as supported.

How might you create a culture of care within your school community that acknowledges and supports mental health concerns?

Updated for COVID-19

Create Your Own Dilemma

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Create Your Own Dilemma

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Create Your Own Dilemma

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*Thank you to Christopher Hope for contributing to this dilemma. Reference: http://bit.ly/2WK4T6u

Where Have All the Tweens Gone?

You used to have a core group of parents and children that were regulars at your library for storytimes, art workshops and other events. Now that the children are in upper elementary and middle school, you rarely see them, or the children might come in with friends. When you see the moms, they mention that teachers talk a lot about STEM, but they aren't sure what their children are actually doing in the classroom. How might the library help families grasp new ways of teaching science, math, and other subjects and help girls use skills they didn't know they had?

Ten Minutes Until Close

It's 10 minutes until the afterschool program closes, and you announce that all computers need to be turned off. A mother and son come rushing in. When you tell them the afterschool program is about to close the mother begins to become very upset. What might you do or say next?

Family and Community Dialogues

As part of a family and community planning process to improve your early childhood services and resources, you decide to hold a series of family dialogues. You send emails and post flyers about the event, but only 7 people show up. What can the library do?

Meeting John

John is an African American male in his 40s. He has 2 adult children and 3 grandchildren, who range in age from 1–6 years old. He was invited by me, a parenting specialist, to multiple literacy workshops about reading to children. Although John always said he would attend, at the last minute, he would cancel or simply not show up. His reasons for cancelling were very vague. Why might John agree to participate and then cancel? What strategies could the family literacy program use to build a relationship with John?*

Spanish-Language Storytime

You see an increase in more Spanish-speaking families with young children at your library. Their children look at the books and some of them speak English. But they and their parents don't participate in the weekly storytimes offered at the library. You don't have any librarians who are fluent enough in Spanish to offer a separate storytime. Where might the library turn to create such a program?

Create Your Own Dilemma

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Create Your Own Dilemma

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Create Your Own Dilemma

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*Thank you to Christopher Hope for contributing to this dilemma. Reference: http://bit.ly/2WK4T6u

Reflection Guide

Giving everyone an opportunity to reflect, think about what they've learned, and share plans for implementing new skills is essential for any capacity building experience. Use this Reflection Guide to lead a conversation about how to implement learnings from the game in your context.

Suggested Reflection Questions

- What is a new strategy that you learned during the game?
- Which dilemma did you find most challenging to respond to? Why?
- Did your perspective about family engagement change during the process of the game? If so, how?
- What ways do you think your organization or community could improve based on the ideas presented during the game?
- What capacities do you still need in order to put some of your family engagement strategies into place?
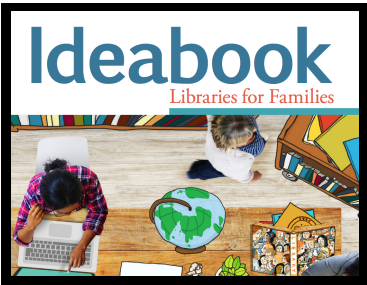- How do you plan to use what you learned during the game in your own work with families?

Feedback Form

Please send or direct all of those who play the game to complete a 2-3 minute reflection form:

bit.ly/GFRPGame

We plan to use your reflections and perspectives to improve the next iteration of this game.
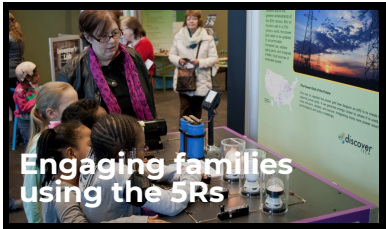
Additional Resources

bit.ly/GFRPIDEABOOK

bit.ly/GFRPSTEMBrief

bit.ly/Using5Rs

Reference: Weiss, H.B., Caspe, M., Lopez, M. E., & McWilliams, L. (2016). Ideabook: Libraries for families. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.