

Relationship Building

Background

In an article noting the significance of the parent-teacher relationship, Keyes (2002) draws two contrasting images of “good” parent-teacher relationships.

Image 1

- Home and school are viewed as separate and unrelated
- Teachers and parents keep their distance and show mutual respect for one another
- The family meets the school’s expectations
- The school educates the child
- The school does not place any unfair expectations on the home

Image 2

- The school is viewed as an extension of the home, like an extended family
- The school has a more open system allowing the family and the school to interact.

As Keyes suggests, images of “good” parent-teacher relationships vary. Moreover, these images can vary within the same school community. Miretsky found that “[i]nvestment in the school community, open and direct communication, trust, mutual respect, and mutual goals” are among the “communication requirements” cited by parents and educators for building and maintaining effective parent-teacher relationships within a school community (Miretsky, 2004, p. 815).

An effective parent-teacher relationship can have a positive influence and impact on students’ social and academic success. However, students, parents, *and* educators can benefit from effective parent-teacher relationships. In a study of parent and educator attitudes and practices regarding the importance of parent-teacher relationships for all stakeholders, Miretsky (2004) reports that parents and educators tend to define themselves in relation to the student. One educator stated, “It makes it better in terms of the [child] knowing that these are two people who care about me, and care about what I’m doing” (p. 830). Another parent stated, “The teacher will understand what is going on with my [child] better” (p. 830). Both educators and parents identified the child’s social and academic success as the main outcome of an effective parent-teacher relationship.

How parents and educators define their roles in relation to each other can influence and impact their learning outcomes from their working relationship (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). When teachers assume the role of professionals and parents assume the role of clients their opportunities for learning from each other are minimized (Goodman and Hickman, 1991). However, when teachers

and parents assume the roles of equals and supportive colleagues, their opportunities for learning from each other are optimized. “Independent of students’ academic needs, parent-teacher relationships can foster individual growth, opportunities for mutual learning, support and respect for adult efforts, and renewed appreciation and participation in the community of the school” (Miretsky, 2004, p. 820).

Factors that affect parent-teacher relationships

Keyes (2002) identifies three broad categories that affect an educator’s ability to create and maintain effective relationships with parents: 1) the degree of match between teachers’ and parents’ cultures and values, 2) societal factors at work on families and school, and 3) how parents and teachers view their roles. Some of the key factors are listed below:

The degree of match between teachers’ and parents’ cultures and values

Culture and value-based factors that might affect parent-teacher relationships include:

- educators’ own background
- conflicting beliefs about parent and educator roles and responsibilities
- differences in education level and/or knowledge base
- language differences
- class differences

Parents from low-voice communities often come from a different social background than do the educators of their children (Coelho, 1998).

Societal forces at work on family and school

Societal factors that might affect parent-teacher relationships include:

- increased flexibility and fluidity of family structures and roles
- job stress for both educators and parents

These societal factors also affect families from low-voice communities (Coelho, 1998). Families from low-voice communities do not necessarily fit into the mould of the traditional two-parent family. Furthermore, families from low-voice communities tend to experience high job stress. Finding, obtaining, and maintaining a job is especially difficult for these parents.

How teachers and parents view these roles

How educators and parents view their roles in relation to one another and the student also affects the parent-teacher relationship (Keyes, 2002). According to Keyes (2002), these views may be influenced by:

- parents’ and educators’ expectations
- parents’ and educators’ personal attributes
- parent-teacher communication

In a school culture of collaboration, educators and parents are encouraged to define mutual goals for learning, teaching, *and* parenting (Giba, 1999; Miretzky, 2004; Rosenthal & Sawyers, 1996). In such a non-threatening environment, educators and parents tend to regard each other as supportive colleagues, teachers are more likely to try out new ideas in the classroom, and parents are more likely to get involved (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Lindle, 1989; Miretzky, 2004; Rosenthal & Sawyers, 1996).

Strategies for Establishing and Building Effective Parent-Teacher Relationships

- Articulate a vision for parent-teacher relationships and find ways to support this vision
- Be familiar with theory, policy, and research concerning parent-teacher relationships to challenge resistance from parents and educators
- Provide regular opportunities for parents and educators to collaborate
- Create meaningful opportunities for parent involvement
- Build networks for parents and educators
- Build better relationships with students
- Express appreciation for efforts made by parents and educators
- Understand and practice conflict resolution strategies
 - Know the school policy for addressing parent-teacher disagreements
 - Use discretion about when and where children and their families are discussed
 - Choose an appropriate time and place to discuss disagreements

Annotated Bibliography

Brewster, C., & Railsback, J. (2003). *Building trust with schools and diverse families: A*

foundation for lasting partnerships. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved March 1, 2007 from <http://www.nwrel.org/request/2003dec/trust.pdf>

This book explains obstacles to strong family-school relationships: how to build trust between families and schools, and strategies for engaging all families. Also included are numerous examples and contact information for schools, districts, and parent groups throughout the Northwestern USA who have built trusting school-family relationships.

Coelho, E. (1998). *Teaching and learning in multicultural schools: An integrated approach. Bilingual education and bilingualism 13*. Toronto: Multilingual Matters.

The book outlines approaches and strategies that schools and teachers can adopt to provide educational experiences meeting the needs of all learners in culturally diverse schools and classrooms, especially those in areas in which new immigrants settle.

Epstein, J. L. (2006). *Epstein's framework of six types of involvement*. Baltimore:

Partnership Center for the Social Organization of Schools.

The document offers an updated version of Epstein's framework of six types of parental involvement, highlighting new definitions of key concepts. It also outlines sample practices, challenges, and expected outcomes for students, parents, and teachers.

Epstein, J. L., & Dauber, S. L. (1991). School programs and teacher practices of parent

involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. *The Elementary School Journal*. 91(3), 289-305.

The authors studies connections between parent involvement programs, teachers' attitudes, and teachers' practices in inner-city elementary and middle schools. They examined patterns according to academic subject, classroom organization, and level of support for parent involvement and found that each variable has implications for the strengths of school programs and teachers' practices.

Giba, M. A. (1999). Forging partnerships between parents and teachers. *Principal*.

78(3), 33-35.

A former principal of Cielo Vista Elementary School in El Paso, Texas, Mary Anna Giba offers a short narrative account of her efforts to promote parent involvement at her school. This document includes strategies for building effective parent-teacher relationships.

Greenwood, G. E., & Hickman, C. W. (1991). Research and practice in parent involvement: Implications for teacher education. *The Elementary School Journal*, 91(3), 279-288.

The authors discuss the nature of parent involvement, barriers to parent involvement, and ways to overcome these barriers. Teachers interact with the parent as audience, volunteer, paraprofessional, teacher of his/her own child, learner, and decision maker. Ten recommendations for teacher education are offered.

Hamayan, E., & Freeman, R. (Eds.). (2006). *English language learners at school: A guide for administrators*. Philadelphia, PA: Caslon Publishing.

This book is a practical guide that administrators and educators can use to evaluate their school's program for ELLs, identify strengths and needs of their program and practices, and develop strategies for action. Chapter 2 focuses on strategies for building relationships between the school and community as well as how to communicate with parents in ways that they can understand.

Keyes, C. R. (2002). Parent-teacher partnerships: A theoretical approach for teachers.

In D. Rothenberg (Ed.), *Issues in early childhood education: Curriculum, teacher education, and dissemination of information* (pp. 107-118). Early Childhood and Parenting (ECAP) Collaborative: University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. Retrieved January 14, 2007, from <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/pubs/katzsym/keyes.html>

This paper discusses the research on parent-teacher partnerships, including factors that affect the development of effective parent-teacher partnerships. The paper also presents a theoretical framework that teachers can use to enhance parent-teacher partnerships.

Lindle, J. C. (1989). What do parents want from principals and teachers? *Educational Leadership*, 47(2), 12-14.

According to a Pittsburgh study, all families, regardless of socioeconomic status, have similar preferences concerning the nature and conduct of school communications. Parents view a "professional," businesslike manner as undesirable, whereas a personal touch (or timely information presented informally) is most likely to win their esteem.

Miretzky, D. (2004). The communication requirements of democratic schools: Parent-teacher perspectives on their relationships. *Teachers College Record*. 106(4), 814-851.

The study found that parents and teachers may routinely frame the meanings of their encounters in terms of the children they have in common. However, it appears that what they look for from each other is clearly connected to what they need for themselves as people who share in a community that reflects democratic values.

Public Broadcasting System. (2006). *PBS Parents*. Retrieved January 15, 2007, from <http://www.pbs.org/parents/>

This website offers a variety of resources for parents, including resources on parent-teacher relationships.

Rosenthal, D. M., & Sawyers, J. Y. (1996). Building successful home/school partnerships: Strategies for parent support and involvement. *Childhood Education*. 72, 194-200.

Written for teachers and administrators, this article provides several strategies for promoting collaboration with parents. The authors suggest a number of questions educators can ask themselves to get a sense of how “family-friendly” they are.

The Oregon Parent Training and Information Center. (1997). *How can parent-teacher differences be prevented or resolved?* Retrieved January 5, 2007, from <http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/conferencematerials/sped/2005/howcanparent.doc>

Parents and teachers share responsibility for creating a working relationship that fosters children's learning. This brochure examines the cultural context for parent-teacher relationships and suggests some general strategies for creating a climate in which misunderstandings and disagreements between parents and teachers can be minimized through communication. It also discusses some general principles for parents and teachers in dealing with misunderstandings or disagreements as they arise.

Witmer, M. M. (2005). The fourth R in education: Relationships. *The Clearing House*. 78(5), 224-228.

This article proposes concrete strategies stakeholders (teacher educators, teacher candidates, teachers, and administrators) can implement to ensure effective parent-teacher relationships.

Summary of the DVD Chapter

The DVD chapter on relationship-building addresses the following topics:

- The significance of effective parent-teacher relationships for students, parents, educators, and the community
- The requirements for effective parent-teacher relationships
- Parent and educator experiences of parent-teacher relationships
- Barriers to and strategies for building effective parent-teacher relationships

Questions to consider before viewing:

- How do you view your role as an educator?
- What are educators' roles and responsibilities in building effective parent-teacher relationships?
- What are parents' roles and responsibilities in building effective parent-teacher relationships?

Questions to consider after viewing:

- What were the factors affecting the relationships highlighted in this segment?
- What were the strategies implemented to improve parent-teacher relationships?
- Were these strategies effective?