Chapter 8
Families and Teachers: Partners in Education
Working with Parents

• Can either be really satisfying or frustrating
• There is a lot of potential for a great partnership between parents and teachers
• Both parents and teachers have the same goal of nurturing the child.
Historical Overview

• Pestalozzi and Froebel, 18th century educators, detailed many procedures for home involvement
• Involvement of the mother in the child's education was important then
• National Parents and Teachers Association continues to promote partnerships
• Parent involvement was basically ignored in the 1990s, except for Head Start
• Family-centered approach is mandated by many states as part of the learning outcomes
• NAEYC's code of ethical conduct includes families as well.
Strengthening the Partnership

Five attitudes a teacher must have to form successful partnerships with families:
• A concept of professionalism that believes in sharing responsibility and power with parents;
• A strong sense of self based on clarifying one’s own values;
• A sense of humility that allows teachers to be approachable and have an open mind;
• A sense of compassion that recognizes the feelings families may have and the ability to be empathetic with them;
• A genuine respect for others so that they treat each family with dignity as they acknowledge the family’s experience and knowledge.

Home, School, Community Relationships
By Carol Gestwicki, 2007
Strengthening the Partnership (cont.)

• What families contribute to the partnership?
  – Knowledge about their children’s history and development (physical, medical, social and intellectual)
  – Provide a context from which the teacher can view the whole child
  – They know what makes the child feel happy, sad, how they react to changes in routine.
How Families Benefit

• Observe modeling techniques that teachers find successful
• Learn what behaviors are appropriate at certain ages (word pictures)
• Resources that are available to them in the school and community
• Teachable moments and opportunities for sharing learning. Family members teach children by all they do and say.
• A sense of importance and confidence as parents
Family Cultural Influences

- One of the most important issues in teaching today is to seek contributions from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.
- Families and teachers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds must share expectations and routines for benefit of their children.
- See figure 8-2 page 237.
What Teachers Contribute to the Partnership

• Child in relation to others based on knowledge of child development
• Resources and connections with other families (psychologists, behavior specialists, hearing and speech specialists...)
• Numerous opportunities to work with families
• See checklist from Figure 8-3
What Children Gain

• Children gain
  – Research shows positive effects on achievement when parents are involved
  – Families can reinforce learning and experiences
  – A family’s presence can heighten a sense of belonging
Becoming Full and Equal Partners

• Family-centered support
  – Strengthen families to become involved parents
  – Family education and participation are only a part
  – Create family centers for different family types
    • Single-parent families, divorced families, working parents, and immigrant families
Public Recognition

• Government’s recognition of the need for a family-centered approach
  – 1965 Head Start parent center
  – Education for the Handicapped acts and subsequent amendments mandate involvement and services for the family not just the child.
Reggio Emilia: An Exemplary Partnership

- Strong and active partnership at every level of school functioning as a parent cooperative would
- School-based management with families and teachers making decisions equally
- Frequent family meetings managed by families to inform each other about changes or new information
- Families learn educational techniques through consultation with experts in the field.
- Items are brought from home to dress and adorn the center as well as provide educational experiences
The Complexity of Today’s Families

• Little preparation for becoming a parent
  Is there a handbook for parents?
• Men are taking a more active role in child rearing
• Fathers more aware of their critical role
• We have blended, mixed, and extended families
• Parents are growing and changing with their children
Patterns of Child Rearing

• Authoritative parents
  – Highest level of self-esteem
  – Warm, nurturing, clear limits, high expectations

• Authoritarian parents
  – Rarely listen to their child’s point of view
  – Strict
  – Lack of warmth

• Permissive parents
  – High level of warmth, but little control or limits set
Families with Diverse Needs

- Families of children with developmental delays and disabilities
- Single parents
- Adoptive and foster families
- Parents who both work outside home
- Divorced families
- Families who do not speak English

- Gay/lesbian families
- Homeless families
- Teenage parent families
- Grandparents raising grandchildren
- Families who are raising children in a culture not their own
- Multiracial families
- First-time older parents
Supporting Single-Parent Families

- Economic necessity to work
- Usually women living at poverty level
- School policies are often hostile and insensitive to single parents, need to furnish a support system instead
- A teacher should evaluate his or her own bias and find ways to support their needs rather than making excessive demands
Valuing Family Culture

• Recognize them as a family
• Focus on communication
• Create a supportive environment
• Put yourself in their shoes
Challenges of Immigrant Families

• 50 percent of recent immigrants are Hispanic
• Miscommunications due to language and cultural barriers
• Teacher’s role: accept families for who they are
• Avoid stereotypes, examine own biases
Education and Involvement

- Almost any contact between teacher and parent can be parent/family education
- Teachers interpret children’s behavior to their family
- Parent/family education can be both formal and informal
Strategies for Keeping in Touch

• Classroom newsletters
• Bulletin boards
• A parent/family place
• Informal contacts
• Home visits
The Separation Process: Learning to Trust One Another

• The separation process may be stressful
  – For the child, change can be overwhelming, and he or she may exhibit a wide range of anxious behavior
  – The teacher is to help the parents as much as the children; have a written school process for entry, and become acquainted with both family and child
  – Most families want their children to make a smooth transition; families need to be reassured and reduce their anxiety as well
  – The partnership is the teacher giving support to both the family and the child and helping them achieve a sense of independence; there is a need for careful and thoughtful planning with open communication
Parent/Family-Teacher Conferences

- Focus on the needs of the child
- Use a written outline and encourage families to bring information to share as well
- Listen and ask, don’t tell

- Maintaining privacy and confidentiality
  - Establish guidelines for all families working in the school or in their supportive role
  - Every family and child has a right to privacy