[Goal Seven Reflective Essay: Working with Parents, Families and the Community](https://blackboard.uas.alaska.edu/webapps/assignment/uploadAssignment?content_id=_253668_1&course_id=_9226_1&assign_group_id=&mode=view)

Stephen C. Fink

University of Alaska Southeast

Working with Parents, Families and the Community

One of the more challenging and overlooked aspects in teaching is dealing with parental and community involvement. However, it is very important. If I look back on my life, and ask myself who are the people that influenced me the most, the answer would undoubtedly be my parents. As teachers, we strive to teach and to influence. But in the grand scheme of things, we don’t hold a candle to our students’ parents when it comes to influence. So what if the people that influence our students the most were heavily involved in their children’s education? Most parents want very much for their students to succeed, and this warrants an attempt to establish healthy teacher/parent relationships.  While this has many challenges and factors, I believe that teachers should communicate praise to parents, be open and approachable, and include collaborative projects that could involve parents or community members in their instruction. With these characteristics in place, I believe that communication with parents can positively influence the support they give to their children’s academic success and their support for teachers.

First of all, communication with parents of students should include the positives. Of course, if a student has a disruptive outburst or gets into a fight or something, parents need to be notified immediately. Those are the sorts of things that we think about the most when we think about contacting parents. Unfortunately, the majority of times a parent is contacted is because of a bad thing their kid does. But I believe that parents should be contacted just as much for positive things their kids do. What if a teacher spent about 10 minutes at the end of each day sending out an email, or making a quick phone call to tell one parent something that their kid did well that day? Parents would take a greater interest in who their kid is away from home. And I believe that those parents would have a more positive view of their children’s education. This is a very ambitious goal, but it is worth it. According to Chris Robbins and Linda Searby, (2013) “when a parent experiences perceived increases in invitations for involvement from the school, teachers, and students, their involvement is very likely to increase” (p. 115). Calling parents to tell them something positive about their student is, in a way, an invitation for involvement. I believe this practice could make a big difference.

Secondly, I believe that teacher should be open and approachable with parents. We have to remember that every one of our students are somebody else’s kid, and they want their kid to succeed. We have to be open and approachable, and listen well to parents. A study was conducted on three schools to ascertain the most beneficial parental involvement strategies. The researchers Chris Robbins and Linda Searby (2013) write:

The teams establish and advertise very clear open door policies to parents, inviting them regularly and through many different methods to contact them with questions, concerns, and issues relating to their child. The teams are also intentionally friendly and welcoming in their interactions with parents. During parent nights, throughout conferences, while writing emails, or when talking over the phone, the teams are keenly aware of the verbal and nonverbal necessities that help make themselves and their team seem open and approachable…Parents perceive that their child is in a welcoming and student-centered environment when the team provides students with a guiding theme for the year (p. 124)

If parents feel welcome to approach their children’s teachers, they will do it more often. Advertising these open door policies is a great way to extend those welcomes, as is communicating positive things about their kids.

A third opportunity and important reason for communication with parents is for collaborative projects. A middle school in Nikiski, Alaska conducted a school-wide project in 2002 that combined all the disciplines (math, English, etc.) to create a book about the town of Nikiski. Language Arts teacher Scott Christian (2002) said this about the project in regards to the parents of the students:

It provides a tangible product through which they can discuss learning with their children and become involved in the learning process by chaperoning field trips, participating in interviews and questionnaires, responding to student writing, and celebrating the final product at the Author’s Tea (p. 77).

What a great way to get parents more involved with the education of their children. Some other collaborative projects include students conducting interviews with their parents, having their parents sign a written goal that the students commit to, or invite parents in as guest speakers. These types of projects can serve as a gateway for connection and communication.

When parents are supported and included, I believe they will extend support and participation. Timely communication that includes praise, being open and approachable, and assigning collaborative projects are all ways to offer this support and inclusion to parents, and I believe it will not only mean worlds to them, but to the students as well.

References

Christian S., Bensen C., (Eds.) Inquiry-based Learning: A Collaborative Model, Writing to Make a Difference: Classroom Projects for Community Change, New York: Teacher's College Press, 2002, 59-80.

Robbins, Searby, Exploring Parental Involvement Strategies Utilized by Middle School Interdisciplinary Teams, School Community Journal, 2013, 23(2), 113-136.