



# Shaping the Future



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## Parents as Partners in Education

by Tracie Douglas

**W**e all know that parental involvement in education leads to student success. If our goal is for our students to succeed, then we need to partner with parents to accomplish success.

Furthermore, parents are children's first and most important teachers. (KAGEN, 10) They are experts about their own children. As teachers, we are a step in the child's walk of life. Think about it- teachers change every year, but the students' parents stay the same. If we partner with parents in our class, we can have the biggest impact on the child.

Ministry does not end with the students in our classroom! Parents have the largest influence on the faith development of their child. (SCHWARTZ, 321-322) Since our goal is to spread the Gospel, and because parents have the greatest impact on a child's faith development, it just makes sense to partner with parents. Furthermore, we have a unique gift in early childhood and elementary education — we see the most parental involvement. Because of this, we have the greatest opportunity and responsibility to share the Gospel with the parents!



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### Review, Reflect, Resolve

Why is partnering with parents an essential component of Christian education? With which parent(s) do you have the most difficulty? How can you remember to try the suggestion made by the author? Which of the methods of educating parents will you try? What have you placed on your action plan?

### Think of relationships with the partners in your class like this:



*Envision the child in the middle, the parents on one side, and the teacher on the other; all walking together with the Lord as our guide.*

## The ABC's of Not Parents but Partners

- Attitude
- Be an Educator to Your Partners
- Communication

### Attitude

*"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

ROMANS 15:5-6

**How do you approach parent relations?** When I began teaching I was asked many times, "Are you excited to start teaching?" My response always was, "I am so **Just as your attitude affects the climate of**

### Links & Resources

**Works Cited:**

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Hoerber, Robert G. *Concordia Self-study Bible*. St. Louis: CPH, 1984. N. pag. Print.

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excited to work with the children, but I don't want to have to **deal** with the parents." However, as I developed relationships with the parents of my students, I realized that parents weren't so bad. I even started to like them! The notion that parents are just another thing for teachers to deal with is one way that Satan tears down the ministry. As my attitude changed, so did the climate of the relationship with the parents in my class. It is my belief that just as your attitude affects the climate of your classroom, your attitude also affects the relationship with the partners in your class!



ROMANS 12:3

In order to create a partnership with parents, we need a humble attitude. Yes, you are an amazing teacher, but the ministry can, and will, continue without you. God could equip anyone just as he is equipping you. However, he has graciously chosen you to serve! Someone once told me, "You are not God's gift to the ministry. God's gift to you is the ministry." When we embody a positive, humble attitude toward the partners in our class, we embody the attitude of Jesus.

*"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."* MATTHEW 23:12

## Be an educator to your partners

Although parents are experts about their individual children, they are not necessarily experts about children in general. As educators, we can provide specific knowledge concerning child development to assist parents as they help their children develop to their full potential. I don't know about you, but I don't have the partners in my class banging on my door begging me to teach them. We have to be a little creative, OK maybe sneaky, in the way we educate the partners in our class.

### How do we educate partners?

**Student work displays** When you display student work, type a little paragraph of what you did and why you did it.

Example: "Through this activity children are learning \_\_\_\_\_ which is important in this developmental stage because \_\_\_\_\_."

Hang the paragraph next to the students' work. Don't miss this valuable opportunity to educate your partners!

**Parent-teacher conferences** As you share information during parent-teacher conferences, look for opportunities to include information regarding child development. For example: when you share writing samples, share the developmental stages of writing.

**Weekly newsletter/blog site** At Zion Lutheran School in St. Charles, Missouri, all preschool teachers update a blog site daily with pictures of what the children do each day and why. We cannot ignore the "why" of education! This is especially important in early childhood education when the "why" is not always clear. In your weekly newsletter/blog site add facts to educate partners about the "why." Insert information concerning child development or even topics of study: "It is developmental for children at this age to..." "Sorting is a foundational math skill." "If you want to learn more about \_\_\_\_\_ click this link."

**Support your partners** When partners come to you with a problem, provide a variety of resources: articles, books, websites, etc. Support partners at home just as you expect them to support you at school. If it's appropriate for you to address an issue from home in the classroom, do it. (Ensure not to embarrass the child of course!) If there is a hitting problem at home, role-play about hitting at school. We educate partners as we provide support and resources.

**Jesus** The most important thing to educate parents about is Jesus! Again in early childhood and elementary education, we see the largest parental involvement therefore we have the biggest opportunity and responsibility to get the Gospel to the parents! Add the Gospel whenever possible! When informing partners what you are learning in Jesus time, add the Gospel application. Include the Gospel in your weekly newsletter/blog, emails, whenever possible!

## Communication

There are two things to always keep in mind when communicating with partners — these should filter through all of your communication with partners.

## your classroom, your attitude also affects the relationship with the partners in your class!

Approach parent relationships with a positive attitude. It can be very difficult to maintain a positive attitude toward the partners in your class. Here's a secret: There is no way you can have a positive attitude without the help from our Savior. When you begin to feel yourself falling into a negative attitude, pray "Change my heart O God!" Think of a difficult or high maintenance partner in your class. Pray now for a positive attitude toward that partner!

*"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned."*

Adolescents' Religious Faith." *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (2006): n. pag. Web.



Other articles you might be interested in in this issue of **Shaping the Future:**

**[Celebrating God's Gift of Aging](#)**  
by [Sharolyn Sander](#) ([EncourAGEnet](#))

**[An Intentional Technology Plan](#)**  
by [David Black](#) ([SECnet](#))



**Smile!** Nehemiah 8:10b says, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.” Use that joy in your communication with partners.

**The Big But** My dad has been in the ministry over 30 years, and he gave me this advice when I started teaching. When you begin a sentence and add the conjunction BUT, the words following the BUT have more impact. Use the BIG BUT to your advantage! End on the positive note! Instead of saying: “He did a great job at lunch, BUT he had a rough time at rest.” Try: “He had a rough time at rest, BUT he did a great job at lunch.” You convey the same message, however you are using the BIG BUT to your advantage to keep the conversation positive while still communicating negative information.

### Communicating with partners

**Communication begins before school starts** Provide a clear picture of the school year to address any anxiety partners might have. At parent orientation/open house inform your partners of:

- School procedures
- Classroom Policies and Procedures
- Classroom Expectations
- Classroom Management Plan
- Classroom Schedule

Provide both a hard copy and email the information to your partners. Have partners sign and return classroom policies and procedures. If there is an issue, refer back to the signed policies. “As stated in the classroom management plan signed in the beginning of the year...”

**Get to know your partners: You will be working with them all year!** At the beginning of the year collect information from your partners. Send home a Family Interest Inventory, All About the Parents of \_\_\_\_\_ form, etc. The information on these forms will help you connect with the partners in your class.

**Positivity bank** I am borrowing the Love and Logic Choice Bank idea. Picture the partners in your class with a piggy bank above their heads. Any time you say something positive about their child, think of it as a “deposit” into the positivity bank. Every interaction with partners is an opportunity to ‘make a deposit’ into the positivity bank. When you have to say something negative (make a withdrawal), and you will, it won’t hurt as much because the “bank” is already full of positive comments. Email pictures, funny stories, videos, etc., to fill up the positivity bank too!

**Communicate in different ways** When communicating with parents, share information in a variety of ways. Use a parent information board, make phone calls, connect face-to-face, send emails, and utilize a blog site/weekly newsletter. The more avenues we use for communication, the more likely we will reach all of the partners in our class.

**Parent-teacher conferences** Before conferences send home a questionnaire. In this questionnaire provide an opportunity for partners to write down questions concerning their child’s development, classroom curriculum, classroom routines, and classroom management. As you share information, pause and ask for questions and comments. Be sure to address the concerns/questions the parents listed on the pre-conference questionnaire.



### When there is a concern or problem

When a partner approaches you with a concern or problem, it is difficult to not become angry or defensive.

Listen.

Show concern.

Take a second to calm down if you need to. Tell the partner, “Let’s set up a time to meet to address this issue.” This gives you time to pray, calm down, and gather your thoughts.

When you meet, problem solve as partners to help the child. Use phrases such as, “I notice \_\_\_\_\_ at school. Do you notice



this at home? If so, how do you handle it at home?" Write an action plan together and commit to it.

**Documentation** When there is an issue, documentation will be your best friend. Begin documenting when you notice a pattern developing. The rule of thumb I learned from Karl at Kidology: one time is an accident, two times is a coincidence, and the third time is a pattern. After the third time, begin documenting.

Document meetings with your partners as well. After the meeting, send a confirmation email to your partners including a summary of the notes from the meeting. Ask the partners, "Would you agree this is what we discussed at our meeting today?"

## Your action plan

Now that you have some tools to help develop a partnership with the parents in your class, what are you going to do? Take out a 3x5 note card and write an action plan. Post this action plan in your classroom to serve as a visual reminder. Write three goals on your action plan. On your action plan answer the following questions:

**Goal One Attitude:** How are you going to change your attitude towards partners? If you already have a great attitude, how are you going to maintain that throughout the year?

**Goal Two Be an Educator to Your Partners:** What are you going to do to educate the partners in your class? If you already are educating the partners in your class, what else could you do to further educate them?

**Goal Three Communication:** What is one way you are going to improve the communication with your partners?

May God grant you peace as you work to develop a partnership with the parents in your class!

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."* JOHN 14:27

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*Tracie Douglas is preschool teacher at Zion Lutheran School in St. Charles, Missouri. This article is based on a sectional she presented at the LEA Convocation in October, 2013.*

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