

## **Gestwicki's Approach to Building Home, School, and Community Partnerships**

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Teacher preparation programs across the nation have been entrusted with the responsibility of training teachers who represent the school to work in partnership with families and community. The various degree and certification options for prospective teachers also require an understanding of the unique avenues for building a three-way partnership or relationship for the family, school, and community. Thus, Carol Gestwicki's *Home, School, and Community Relations: A Guide to Working with Families* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) seeks to provide higher education classrooms, experienced teachers, or professionals working with families of children in schools, centers, homes, or other types of settings with a usable text which addresses the uniqueness of early childhood education.

This text is built on the need to address issues of the current era, which are much different than the early rural culture of the United States. Considering the changed culture and thus the new dynamics and roles of the family, school, and community, there is an overwhelming number of effective arguments supporting "the value and necessity of partnerships between parents and teachers" (Spayth Riley, 2004, as cited in the foreword, p. x). The text is built around usable guides to professional attitudes, philosophies, and practical techniques that teachers can use to build relationships and strong partnerships. Because Gestwicki uses several vignettes as examples, the material is relevant and easy for the reader to apply to their setting and also to similar situations within early childhood education.

There are four sections to the text. The first section focuses on parenting for today's families. There is a clear definition of how that looks with current demographics and a discussion on the need for understanding sociological trends. Diversity and family are newly defined, as is the specific role of the teacher. The second section talks about teacher-family partnerships and gives attention to community interest and involvement. The author does a good job of briefly outlining types of family involvement, benefits, and possible barriers to partnerships for children, parents, and teachers alike. She is very practical in giving much advice and perspective to various educators; professors in higher education will find her book a useful textbook for training teachers, but the book can also be used as a resource or reference for veteran teachers and other professionals in the field. There is a lot of emphasis on the larger role and responsibility of the professional teacher in the success of family partnerships. The third section focuses on the methods for developing partnerships. This section starts with a rationale and proceeds to outline in the following five chapters five avenues for developing partnerships: informal communication, parent-teacher conferences, home visits, family involvement in the classroom, and parent education. The section ends with a discussion on the community's role as an educational resource. Emphasis is placed on the need for both educators and families to influence the community, raising its interest and involvement in early childhood education. Attention is given to understanding corporate involvement, legislative initiatives, and community links for partnership. The final section of the book focuses on the diverse needs that often cause concern for teachers in developing a partnership with families. The author gives a rationale for teacher involvement and establishing an understanding of the strategies, conflicts, and issues within the classroom. The chapters that follow focus on the particular circumstances/context from which parents and children come, giving advice concerning the resolution of troublesome attitudes and behaviors that get in the way of working in a partnership. In the conclusion, the author gives an overview of four effective parent involvement programs.

Beyond the text, Gestwicki has added several new features to this edition which make it both a valuable resource and reference tool. The author encourages ongoing professional development for both new and veteran educators with suggested reflections for journaling, several case studies for each of the chapters, and a list of helpful web sites including a connection to Online Resources™. The text itself is formatted in such a way that it is a great textbook, resource, and reference: noting key words and terminology, listing chapter objectives, bulleting examples, providing real-life photographed illustrations of partnerships, organizing important concepts, providing chapter summaries

with a suggestion of activities for the higher education classroom setting, a listing of professional organizations and agencies for the professional in the field, and a comprehensive glossary and index for easy cross-referencing. In addition to this there is a separate instructor's manual, computerized test bank covering each chapter, and a web tutor which is available in either the WebCT or Blackboard platform, all of which make it a valuable resource for instruction.

The text gives a thorough overview of information needed for developing partnerships that is current in its information and examples, giving the reader a valuable resource for understanding and making application through case study and reflections. In addition to this, the text is very up-to-date in its use of technology and educational value in presenting the material and offering additional support, resources, and references, making it a very valuable textbook for higher education. Gestwicki does a fine job updating the book in this Fifth Edition to make it cutting edge.

However, a suggestion for further editions and refinements would focus on the community aspect of relationship development. While Gestwicki gives a general overview of community concerns and how important it is for teachers and families to become advocates in the community, a fifth section could easily be added to this volume which would cover the development of community partnerships in more depth. Possibly this section could do this by developing or expanding on the information concisely presented within chapter 14 of the book. There seems to be more emphasis given throughout the text to the teacher and parent roles than the community's, though the title would suggest otherwise.

The author's long-time experience working in the early childhood education field is evident in the practical advice and development of resources, activities, and comprehensive listing of resources for use by the reader. Those interested in the development of a partnership between the family, school, and community will benefit from reading this text and using it as a resource. *Home, School, and Community Relations: A Guide to Working with Families* offers a thorough and technological-based text with resources for professional development at the undergraduate and higher levels. This most recent edition continues to provide a contemporary approach to early education, making it is an excellent choice for both candidate and veteran early childhood professionals alike to acquire and use as part of their growing knowledge base and/or professional development and practice.

## Reference

Gestwicki, C. (2004). *Home, school, and community relations: A guide to working with families* (5th ed.). Clifton Park, NY: Thomson Learning.

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