

Intro Teaching – Case 1

On the Frontlines: Connecting with Families

from Becoming a Teacher, Sixth Edition, by Forrest W. Parkay and Beverly Hardcastle Stanford

For a fieldwork project you observe Mr. Rocha, a well-regarded educator who has taught third grade for over thirty years. You are quickly impressed by the high respect he receives from and gives to his students and their parents. The children seem to try harder and behave better when they are in his presence. Parents seek him out, defer to him, ask his advice, and volunteer to help. He regularly includes parents in class activities, asks them to share favorite books with the class, and invites them and their preschool children to join him on class walks to the town library.

One day you ask if he would mind telling you how he establishes his special relationship with students and their families. He seems to welcome the request and speaks quickly, earnestly, and with some urgency:

Before school begins each year I go to the home of each child in my class. I greet the child and say that I'm going to be his or her teacher, and I tell the child's parents how honored I am to be their child's teacher. Next I sit down with them, usually at the kitchen table, all of us—child, parents, and teacher—and we discuss the goals we each have for the coming school year. I tell them that how well the child does in meeting all the goals is a three-way responsibility—the child's, the parents', and mine.

When the year starts, I already know the children. In the first few days, I talk to them about respect and what it means. I explain that teachers deserve respect, and that they should listen to me, as their teacher, with their ears, eyes, and heart. Then I tell them that they deserve respect, and I commit myself to listening to them with my ears, eyes, and heart. Finally, I explain that everyone in the room deserves respect, no matter who they are. So when any student talks to the class, everyone needs to listen to him or her with their ears, eyes, and heart.... That always seems to work well.

Driving home that evening you think about your conversation with Mr. Rocha and imagine yourself visiting your future students' homes before the school year begins. Where you hope to teach many of your students will be Latino. Will you be welcome in their homes? You don't speak very much Spanish. How can you have a good goal-setting talk with your limited Spanish? You will have just moved to the community. Will the parents accept a newcomer? How safe is it to go alone into some of the neighborhoods? The questions come faster than answers.

Exploratory Questions:

1. You have a very diverse classroom, with a number of foreign-born students from Mexico, China, England, and Pakistan. What challenges would you face in trying to connect with your students' parents? What challenges would you face in the classroom?
2. What do you see as the purpose or value in setting up interviews with families?
3. List five questions that you would include in your standard interview questionnaire.

4. Using the following websites, identify at least one strategy for connecting with parents and creating a healthy learning “community” in your classroom.

The Institute for Responsive Education: Connecting School, Family, and Community
(www.responsiveeducation.org)

National Network of School Partnerships located at Johns Hopkins University
(<http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/sixtypes.htm>)

Partnerships for Family Involvement in Education
(<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/whoweare/index.html>)