## Contents

### Foreword
Dr. Joyce L. Epstein  

### Acknowledgments

1. The Importance of Family–School Partnerships  
2. Tools to Deepen Understanding and Develop Solutions: Exploring the Module Format  
3. Preparing Teachers for Interactions with Parents: Some Thoughts on Using Case Modules from the Perspective of Cognitive Flexibility Theory  

### Modules—Part I: Reaching Out to Caregivers

1. Module 1: Caregivers Who Do Not Respond  
2. Module 2: Caregivers with Low Print-Literacy Levels  
3. Module 3: Caregivers Experiencing Homelessness  
4. Module 4: Caregivers with Complex Job Situations  
5. Module 5: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Caregivers  
6. Module 6: Caregivers Who Speak Limited or No English  
7. Module 7: Caregivers Who Are Immigrants or Refugees  
8. Module 8: Extended, Reconstituted, or Blended Families  
9. Module 9: Families with Incarcerated Caregivers  
10. Module 10: When School/Neighborhood Demographics Change  
11. Module 11: What to Do When You Have Tried It All

### Modules—Part II: Handling Difficult Conversations

12. Module 12: Honest Caregiver–Teacher Conferences  
13. Module 13: Discussing Academic Concerns  
14. Module 14: Discussing Discipline Issues (Positive Discipline)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module 15: Advocating for a Neurodiversity Paradigm</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 16: Families with Students Experiencing Life-Altering Developmental Disabilities</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 17: Caregivers Who Challenge Teaching</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 18: Caregivers with Frequent Concerns</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 19: Adversarial/Confrontational Caregivers</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 20: Caregivers of Students Who Have Suffered Trauma</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Modules—Part III: Involving and Empowering Caretakers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Module 21: Curriculum-Based Versus Event-Based Caretaker Involvement</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 22: Connecting Caregivers with Community Resources</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 23: Caregiver Empowerment: Making Caregivers Feel Comfortable at School</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Module 24: Technology and Literacy</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix A. Tasks for Section 2: Exploring Current Perspectives**

| Appendix A. Tasks for Section 2: Exploring Current Perspectives        | 187  |

**Appendix B. Tasks for Section 4: Listening to Expand Perspectives**

| Appendix B. Tasks for Section 4: Listening to Expand Perspectives        | 191  |

**Appendix C. Tasks for Section 5: Fixing It**

| Appendix C. Tasks for Section 5: Fixing It                              | 193  |

**Index**

| Index                                                                  | 197  |

**About the Authors**

| About the Authors                                                      | 210  |
CHAPTER 1

The Importance of Family–School Partnerships

“When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.” That’s the conclusion of *A New Wave of Evidence*, a report by Henderson and Mapp (2002, p. 7) from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. The report, a synthesis of research on parent involvement over the past decade, also found that regardless of family income or background, students with involved parents are more likely to

- earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs;
- be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits;
- attend school regularly;
- have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and
- graduate and go on to postsecondary education (see Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Therefore, involving parents and families in their children’s education is important, and the concept of family–school partnerships seems relatively simple. It is about a seemingly plausible idea: that teachers should encourage all families to become involved in their children’s education and that teachers should reach out to families in new and different ways.

This idea has heavily influenced educational reform over the past decade, and it lies at the center of most school-restructuring initiatives (Edwards, 2004, 2016; Epstein, 2011). As with most complex reforms, though, it is difficult to decipher exactly what advocates of school restructuring want by way of family involvement. Unfortunately, many advocates of restructuring seem to believe that by acknowledging they want families involved in the business of the schools, teachers and administrators will restructure how they think about family involvement, which will in turn increase the overall participation of families and subsequently lead to
improved performance of students. Unfortunately, this is not a reality in most schools.

We believe, like Epstein (1987), that while “parent involvement is on everyone’s list of practices to make schools more effective, to help families create more positive learning environments, to reduce the risk of student failure, and to increase student success” (p. 4), that involvement does not automatically occur. Epstein correctly notes that “parent involvement is everybody’s job but nobody’s job until a structure is put in place to support it” (p. 10). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that there is little real parent involvement in schools given the lack of infrastructure to foster and support it. Merely stating a desire for family involvement is not enough; the extent of the responsibility has to be accepted by parents, teachers, the school, and the community. Epstein emphasizes that:

Parent involvement is not the parents’ responsibility alone. Nor is it the school’s or teachers’ or community educators’ responsibility alone. All groups need to work together for a sustained period of time to develop programs that will increase parents’ understanding of the schools and their ability to assist their children, and that will promote student success and reduce failure at every grade level (p. 10).

As we explain below, one of our goals in developing our parent involvement modules is to seriously address the notion of parents and teachers working together and create a structure for family involvement in grades kindergarten through 8. Given the importance of family involvement and the time it takes to develop family–school partnerships, we advocate for helping teachers develop knowledge, competencies, and confidence in this area during their teacher preparation programs.

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT ANDTEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS: WHY HAVE TEACHER EDUCATORS BEEN SLOW TO RESPOND?**

There is broad consensus on the importance of the family’s role in education (e.g., Edwards, 2004, 2016; Epstein, 1987, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), and there are several documented examples of teacher educators preparing teachers to work with parents (e.g., D’Haem & Griswold, 2017; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Garibaldi, 1992; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Levine, 2006; Patte, 2011; Safran, 1974; Williams, 1992). While teacher educators may agree that parents are important participants in the educational process, teacher educators too often “believe that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for working with parents flow naturally from the teaching experience. Yet, teachers in classrooms
are frequently just as uncomfortable dealing with families as are the teacher educators who trained them” (Kochan & Mullins, 1992, p. 272). Not only are many teachers uncomfortable dealing with families, but teacher educators have similarly voiced their discomfort with preparing prospective teachers to work with families. Epstein and Sanders (2006) surveyed administrators in 161 teacher preparation programs and reported that although respondents agreed that involving families was important, few believed that graduating teacher candidates were fully prepared to do so. The lack of documented examples of teacher educators preparing teachers to work with parents is particularly alarming when the research literature has repeatedly highlighted the fact that parents are their child’s first teacher, and teachers are children’s second teacher (Edwards, 2016; Epstein, 2011).

As we describe in more detail below in our discussion of our goals for this book, the modules we have developed are an attempt to remedy this disparity and to provide prospective as well as practicing teachers with recommendations for dealing with the many diverse situations they may encounter regarding relations with parents, families, and other caregivers.

Receiving instruction, support, and guidance related to working with families and other caregivers is especially important when students and their caregivers come from different cultural, economic, and/or linguistic backgrounds from their teachers. Researchers have noted concerns about prospective teachers’ lack of preparation to teach diverse learners and appreciate the impact of the relationships between these caregivers and schools (e.g., Cazden & Mehan, 1989; D’Haem & Griswold, 2017; Delpit, 2006; Florio-Ruane, 1994; McDiarmid & Price, 1993; Paine, 1988; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Sharrtrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). For example, Epstein and Sanders (2006) suggested that many educators have inadequate understanding to effectively create partnerships in inner cities that differ from the communities in which they live. While prospective teachers may feel that issues of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or language would not affect their relationships with families/caregivers (e.g., Foster & Loven, 1992), Lareau (1989) has noted that inequalities in caregivers’ resources and dispositions—for example, education, occupational status, or income—critically affected levels of parent/caregiver involvement, regardless of caregivers’ aspirations for their children.

Therefore, not only must teachers develop skills in working with families in general, but findings from Foster and Loven (1992) and Lareau (1989) also point to the need for all teachers, prospective and practicing, to learn how to work with culturally different students and families. One reason such training is needed is that the culture of poor, minority, and immigrant students might conflict with the middle-class educational vision that a primarily White, middle-class, K–12 teaching staff brings to the classroom and school environment (McDiarmid & Price, 1993; Paine, 1988). A lack of shared background frequently makes it difficult for instructors
to connect subject matter to the lives of their students, which may pre-
vent these students’ parents/caregivers from becoming involved in school
affairs. They might become discouraged and dissatisfied with teachers’ in-
ability to successfully teach their children. Unfortunately, this often leads
to an unraveling of the relationship between home and school. Because of
this miscommunication, children are caught in the crossfire and ultimately
suffer academically.

OUR GOALS FOR THIS BOOK

Given the need to prepare teachers to work with families and learn to build
bridges across socioeconomic, ethnic, linguistic, and other divides, we have
written this book to support prospective teachers, practicing teachers, and
teacher educators. We have developed a series of caregiver-involvement
modules to provide teachers with strategies to use when confronting chal-
lenging situations and, more importantly, to broaden teachers’ perspectives
on caregivers so that teachers can identify and attempt to address the un-
derlying needs and situational factors affecting caregivers’ actions instead
of finding deficits in the caregivers (and students) themselves.

Dealing with difference is never easy, whether it involves differences
in race, class, ethnicity, language, worldviews, or roles (e.g., parents and
teachers). With these modules, we wanted to explore many ways in which
teachers might encounter differences or difficulties with caregivers so that
teachers can explore the implications of the situations in safe spaces and re-
fect on possible solutions before they must make in-the-moment decisions.
Because each situation is different, we use Cognitive Flexibility Theory as
the underlying theory of these modules. Cognitive Flexibility Theory is nec-
essary when each individual case differs from every other case and we can-
not rely on a set of prescriptive behaviors that will work in every situation.
Instead of relying on a “template,” teachers employ cognitive flexibility by
using their prior knowledge and experiences acquired over different times
and integrating those with information from the specific case (Spiro, 2015).
See Chapter 3 for further information on Cognitive Flexibility Theory.

We realize that teacher preparation programs cannot prepare teachers
for every situation, so our goal is to help teachers critically evaluate situ-
ations and develop reflective habits because those skills transcend specific
situations. In Chapter 2, we introduce the format of the modules. We have
also created a table in which we present an overview of the module top-
ics and how they connect to the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and

*In the modules, we generally use “caregiver” instead of “parent” or “family” because
“caregiver” can refer to anyone actively involved in raising and educating a child and is
thus more inclusive and reflective of the diversity of students’ home situations.
Support Consortium (InTASC) standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). This table can be found online at www.tcpress.com.

REFERENCES


