

Foreword

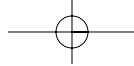
Connect school to students' homes? Teachers make a real connection with their students' families? There are so many reasons to do it—and so many reasons not to. Why should we? Because making the abstractions of mathematics and science and history meaningful requires us to embed that teaching in the prior knowledge and concerns and interests of students. Contextualizing instruction—connecting teaching to who students really are—can transform the bored student into an eager one, transform resentment into relationship, transform passivity into problem solving. But how can teachers know who their students are? Certainly by listening to them. And by listening to their parents.

A teacher these days is likely to see a classroom of faces unlike her own, often speaking languages not her own, living lives that are unknown to her. The children who most need the school-home connection are likely to be those whose parents are the most shy about making approaches to school, the least understanding about what teachers do and why, the most puzzled about how they could help in the education of their children. And the hardest for the teacher to approach.

The research evidence is clear—family involvement is a crucial element for effective schools. Teacher and parent working together provide a continuity of concerns and activities that envelop the student in clear goals and rich assistance. Knowing the family means knowing the child in so many more dimensions and allows a teacher to individualize the activities and assistance and challenges that will foster intellectual and social development.

But there are so many reasons not to. Everyone has too much to do. The days are too long already. We don't know how to connect. We don't know how or when or what to begin with. And it's probably not worth the effort anyway.

All of those concerns will vaporize by the time you turn this book's last page. The authors, Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, and Moore, conducted an invaluable research program of five years for the Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence (CREDE), exploring procedures and effects of a rich program of school-family connections. Their work provides a national model for improving education in diverse communities. These authors—teachers and researchers, using liberal quotations from families and students—teach us the joys—yes, the joys—that connecting with families can bring to the teacher and the students. And the pleasures of more authentic relationships with students that we wanted when we chose teaching as a life. But more than that, the authors tell us how to do



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it, drawn from their own rich experiences in school-family connecting. It turns out that there are many ways of beginning to connect; and many ways to continue it—enough to spark the reader's own creativity and to inspire us all.

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