

Relationships and Leadership

Over the last few years, as an educator and a graduate student at Ohio University, I have learned the importance of building relationships with colleagues, students, and their families, and relationships between students. When you build relationships with others, you can collaborate with them, which can lead to greater learning for everyone involved. It is important to build relationships with students so that they feel connected and trusting. I have become a leader throughout my program by increasing my professional responsibilities, advocating for my students, and mentoring a new preschool teacher at my school.

The first artifact is a Collaboration Circle that I did for EDSP 5730: Diagnostic Assessment. In this class, we participated in many collaboration circles with other graduate students. We were given an assignment, and then met over Zoom to work together virtually. We collaborated by brainstorming ideas and working together. It was a great experience to practice collaborating with colleagues, maintaining clear communication with each other, and building relationships. These skills can translate to a school setting where I can collaborate with my paraprofessional, the other preschool teachers in my district, and other teachers at my school. I learned how to divide tasks, problem-solve, and understand different communication styles.

This experience also helped me collaborate and mentor a new preschool teacher in my classroom. Friend (2022) explains that “Interpersonal collaboration is a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal” (p. 8). I have helped mentor the new preschool teacher by helping her problem-solve student behaviors, collaborating with her about lesson planning, and giving support and suggestions for different teaching strategies. In addition, I have experienced working with educators who have been teaching longer than I have. Some of those experiences made me feel like I wasn’t valued as an equal. It’s important to me to make sure that the new preschool teacher feels valued and respected. I always make sure we are collaborating, rather than me telling her what to do or exactly how to do things.

The second artifact is a Goal Setting sheet and an All About Me sheet I use with families at the beginning of each school year. My school hosts an open house and a one-on-one orientation for preschool. During the orientations, we review paperwork with families, I perform a screener to assess the child, and we complete a goal-setting sheet. The goal-setting sheet I use has an area for the families to tell me about their child, including their interests and what they like to do together as a family. I take notes for my own recall, but the most important thing that comes from it is the conversations. It's become a great way to get to know students and their families better. We then work together to create goals for their child.

Before providing any input, I ask families what they want their child to accomplish during their year of preschool. If families are unsure, I share observations from the screener and suggest possible areas for growth. We review this information later in the year, during fall and spring parent-teacher conferences. According to Dunst et al. (2007), early education programs that adopt a partnership approach have benefits. The benefits include being more family-centered, greater family satisfaction with programs, families developing stronger beliefs about their parenting self-efficacy, and satisfaction with program outcomes and services. At this orientation, I also give families an All About Me sheet to complete at home with their child. The families send the paper back with photographs or drawings the child has made of their families. The form also asks the child's favorite color, favorite food, and favorite game. These sheets are then reviewed during circle time once school starts so that children can learn about each other, make connections about similarities, and start to form relationships with each other.

The third artifact is a daily overview and a weekly newsletter I send to my students' families to help build relationships with families and allow them to be more involved with their child's learning. I send daily Remind messages with an update of what we did for the day. For some families, I send individual Remind messages about children's behaviors, both positive and things to work on. I also send weekly newsletters that summarize what we've been working on and what we are going to learn about next. The newsletters have pictures of the children from the week to make it more personalized for families. The daily Remind messages and weekly newsletters help families stay in the loop of what's going on, continue conversations and

learning at home with their child, and help them feel more connected to the school. Friend (2022) explains that “One-way information sharing is often useful to keep the school and home aware of the child’s experiences and performance in both settings” (p. 298). On the Remind app, families are able to message me, which is a very convenient way to communicate with families without having to try to reach someone by phone. Families are busy, and in my experience, it seems like more and more families tell me that texting is their preferred method of communication. According to Friend (2022), one-way communication is often necessary for efficient information sharing, but two-way structures are essential for effective communication and productive relationships with families (p. 298). I have received feedback from families that they really appreciate and enjoy the daily messages and weekly newsletters.

The fourth artifact is the implementation of Conscious Discipline (Bailey, 2021) in my classroom. Conscious Discipline is integrated into the curriculum that we began using in the middle of the last school year, called Frogstreet (Schiller & Mowry, 2025). Conscious Discipline is a social-emotional learning program that helps teachers implement classroom activities and routines to teach children problem-solving skills and foster a sense of safety in the classroom (Anderson et al., 2020). Anderson et al. (2020) found that higher fidelity to the Conscious Discipline program was positively associated with preschool students’ social skills development.

I use the Brain Smart Start, the attendance/Wish You Well song, a calm-down area, and many other strategies/practices from Conscious Discipline. These help students feel more connected with each other and with me, which in turn helps build relationships in the classroom. During the Brain Smart Start routine, there are four sections: unite, calm, connect, and commit (Bailey, 2021). We unite by singing a theme-related song together, practicing a calm breathing strategy, connecting with a partner with a short activity, and committing to keeping our classroom safe. Previously, I skipped some of the steps of the Brain Smart Start, but after researching the benefits of the program during EDTE 6670 Teacher as an Action Researcher, I have approached the program with more fidelity. Since then, I have noticed that my students have better self-regulation skills, play with a greater variety of students, and enjoy circle time more.

These artifacts show that the activities from my master's program, both at Ohio University and in my classroom, have contributed to my development as a professional and a leader. I have learned how to communicate and collaborate more effectively with colleagues, build relationships with my students and their families, and support my students in building relationships with each other. Few social agents in children's lives have as much influence on learning and development as do their peers (Hanish et al., 2021). When children have relationships with an array of peers, it can help children interact with peers in ways that contribute to the development of relationships and relational skills (Coplan & Arbeau, 2009). Not only am I building relationships, but I am also teaching my students how to build relationships, which is a skill that will benefit them for the rest of their lives. This program has strengthened both my relationship and leadership skills, and I can use them to benefit myself, my students, their families, and my colleagues.

References

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