



A Path to Follow: Learning to Listen to Parents

Patricia A Edwards

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The diverse and difficult needs of today's children far outstrip the ability of any one institution to meet them. Yet one of the richest resources for understanding a child's early learning experiences-parents-is quite often the most frequently overlooked. *A Path to Follow* suggests that parent "stories" can be a highly effective, collaborative tool for accessing knowledge that may not be obvious, but would obviously be of benefit.

Pat Edwards and her coauthors have here defined "stories" as narratives gained from open-ended conversations and/or interviews, where parents respond to questions designed to shed light on traditional and nontraditional early literacy activities in the home. After all, as a child's first and most important teacher, a parent can offer memories of specific formative interactions, observations on early learning efforts, and thoughts on how their own backgrounds have impacted a child's attitude toward school. In sharing their anecdotes and observations, parents give us the keys to unlock a vault of social, emotional, and educational variables.

The secondary benefit to the story approach, of course, is the empowerment that parents feel when they are given the chance to participate in a personally meaningful way-one that respects their viewpoint. As parents and schools continue to wrestle with prodigious challenges-shifting family demographics, time constraints, cultural divides, privacy issues, and of course, economics-stories remain a nonthreatening and practical vehicle for collaboration.

With its step-by-step approach to creating parent story programs, sample questions, case studies, and useful guidelines on collecting and interpreting data, *A Path to Follow* will be hailed as a detailed and innovative roadmap to involving the whole community in a child's education.

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