

1. Positive Perspectives on Parents and Families

"Whether it's an informal chat as the parent brings the child to school, or in phone conversation or home visits, or through newsletters sent home, teachers can begin a dialogue with family members that can result in learning about each of the families through genuine communication."

-- Sonia Nieto (*)

WHAT

Parents are the child's first teacher and are critically important partners to students and teachers. To help parents become aware of how they can be effective partners in the education process, teachers should engage in dialogue with parents as early as possible about parents' hopes and aspirations for their child, their sense of what the child needs, and suggestions about ways teachers can help. Teachers explain their own limitations and invite parents to participate in their child's education in specific ways.

Parent involvement need not be just how parents can participate in school functions. Oftentimes, religious and cultural differences preclude active participation in school activities. However, parental involvement also includes how parents communicate high expectations, pride, and interest in their child's academic life (Nieto, 1996).

WHY

Constant communication with parents is an important aspect of a child's educational progress. Involving parents and families in their child's educational process results in better scholastic achievement. When families share their "funds of knowledge" with the school community, teachers get a better idea of their students' background knowledge and abilities, and how they learn best (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

HOW

1. Seek to understand parents' hopes, concerns and suggestions
 - Conduct needs assessments and surveys (in the parents' first language) of what parents expect of the school community
 - Establish parent-teacher organizations or committees to work collaboratively for the benefit of the students
 - Conduct home visits in which parents are able to speak freely about their expectations and concerns for their children

2. Keep parents apprised of services offered by the school
 - Send weekly/monthly newsletters (in the home language) informing parents of school activities
 - Conduct monthly meeting at parents' homes or community centers to inform

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- parents of school activities
 - Host family nights at school to introduce parents to concepts and ideas children are learning in their classes and to share interactive journals
3. Gain cross-cultural skills necessary for successful exchange and collaboration
- Research the cultural background of students' families
 - Visit local community centers to find out about the cultural activities and beliefs of the students
 - Tour students' neighborhoods to identify local resources and "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) classes and to share interactive journals

2. Communication of High Expectations

"When a teacher expresses sympathy over failure, lavishes praise for completing a simple task, or offers unsolicited help, the teacher may send unintended messages of low expectations."

-- Kathleen Serverian-Wilmeth (*)

WHAT

All students should receive the consistent message that they are expected to attain high standards in their school work. This message must be delivered by all that are involved in students' academic lives, that is: teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, and other school personnel. Teachers should understand students' behavior in light of the norms of the communities in which they have grown. They should respect all students as learners with valuable knowledge and experience.

WHY

Effective and consistent communication of high expectation helps students develop a healthy self-concept (Rist, 1970). It also provides the structure for intrinsic motivation and fosters an environment in which the student can be successful.

HOW

1. Communicate clear expectations
 - Be specific in what you expect students to know and be able to do
2. Create an environment in which there is genuine respect for students and a belief in their capability
 - Encourage students to meet expectations for a particular task
 - Offer praise when standards are met

3. Learning Within the Context of Culture

"The increasing diversity in our schools, the ongoing demographic changes across the nation and the movement towards globalization dictate that we develop a more in-depth understanding of culture if we want to bring about true understanding among diverse populations."

-- Maria Wilson-Portuondo (*)

WHAT

Children from homes in which the language and culture do not closely correspond to that of the school may be at a disadvantage in the learning process. These children often become alienated and feel disengaged from learning. People from different cultures learn in different ways. Their expectations for learning may be different. For example, students from some cultural groups prefer to learn in cooperation with others, while the learning style of others is to work independently. To maximize learning opportunities, teachers should gain knowledge of the cultures represented in their classrooms and adapt lessons so that they reflect ways of communicating and learning that are familiar to the students.

WHY

Children learn about themselves and the world around them within the context of culture (Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University, 2002). Students from minority cultures may feel pressured to disavow themselves of their cultural beliefs and norms in order to assimilate into the majority culture. This, however, can interfere with their emotional and cognitive development and result in school failure (Sheets, 1999).

HOW

1. Vary teaching strategies
 - Use cooperative learning especially for material new to the students
 - Assign independent work after students are familiar with concept
 - Use role-playing strategies
 - Assign students research projects that focus on issues or concepts that apply to their own community or cultural group
 - Provide various options for completing an assignment

2. Bridge cultural differences through effective communication
 - Teach and talk to students about differences between individuals
 - Show how differences among the students make for better learning
 - Attend community events of the students and discuss the events with the students or cultural group

4. Student-Centered Instruction

"In our multicultural society, culturally responsive teaching reflects democracy at its highest level. [It] means doing whatever it takes to ensure that every child is achieving and ever moving toward realizing her or his potential."

--Joyce Taylor-Gibson (*)

WHAT

Student-centered instruction differs from the traditional teacher-centered instruction. Learning is cooperative, collaborative, and community-oriented. Students are encouraged to direct their own learning and to work with other students on research projects and assignments that are both culturally and socially relevant to them. Students become self-confident, self-directed, and proactive.

WHY

Learning is a socially mediated process (Goldstein, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). Children develop cognitively by interacting with both adults and more knowledgeable peers. These interactions allow students to hypothesize, experiment with new ideas, and receive feedback (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

HOW

1. Promote student engagement
 - Have students generate lists of topics they wish to study and/or research
 - Allow students to select their own reading material
2. Share responsibility of instruction
 - Initiate cooperative learning groups (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002)
 - Have students lead discussion groups or reteach concepts
3. Create inquiry based/discovery oriented curriculum
 - Create classroom projects that involve the community
4. Encourage a community of learners
 - Form book clubs or literature circles (Daniels, 2002) for reading discussions
 - Conduct Student-Directed Sharing Time (Brisk & Harrington, 2000)
 - Use cooperative learning strategies such as Jigsaw (Brisk & Harrington, 2000)

5. Culturally Mediated Instruction

"Ongoing multicultural activities within the classroom setting engender a natural awareness of cultural history, values and contributions."

-- Kathleen Serverian-Wilmeth (*)

WHAT

Instruction is culturally mediated when it incorporates and integrates diverse ways of knowing, understanding, and representing information. Instruction and learning take place in an environment that encourages multicultural viewpoints and allows for inclusion of knowledge that is relevant to the students. Learning happens in culturally appropriate social situations; that is, relationships among students and those between teachers and students are congruent with students' cultures.

WHY

Students need to understand that there is more than one way to interpret a statement, event, or action. By being allowed to learn in different ways or to share viewpoints and perspectives in a given situation based on their own cultural and social experiences, students become active participants in their learning (Nieto, 1996). Hollins (1996) believes that culturally mediated instruction provides the best learning conditions for all students. It may help decrease the number of incidences of unacceptable behavior from students who are frustrated with instruction not meeting their needs. Also, students from cultural groups who are experiencing academic success will be less inclined to form stereotypes about students from other cultures. Students from cultural groups who are experiencing academic success will be less inclined to form stereotypes about students from other cultures.

HOW

1. Research students' experiences with learning and teaching styles
 - Read the work of scholars who study students/communities from the same cultural background as the students about effective ways to teach them
 - Visit the communities of the students to find out how they interact and learn in that environment
 - Interview parents about how and what students learn from them

2. Devise and implement different ways for students to be successful in achieving developmental milestones
 - Ensure success by setting realistic, yet rigorous, goals for individual students
 - Allow students to set their own goals for a project
 - Allow the use of the student's first language to enhance learning

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3. Create an environment that encourages and embraces culture
 - Employ patterns of management familiar to students
 - Allow students ample opportunities to share their cultural knowledge
 - Question and challenge students on their beliefs and actions
 - Teach students to question and challenge their own beliefs and actions

6. Reshaping the Curriculum

"[Schools must] take a serious look at their curriculum, pedagogy, retention and tracking policies, testing, hiring practices, and all the other policies and practices that create a school climate that is either empowering or disempowering for those who work and learn there."

-- Sonia Nieto (*)

WHAT

The curriculum should be integrated, interdisciplinary, meaningful, and student-centered. It should include issues and topics related to the students' background and culture. It should challenge the students to develop higher-order knowledge and skills (Villegas, 1991).

WHY

Integrating the various disciplines of a curriculum facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge (Hollins, 1996). Students' strengths in one subject area will support new learning in another. Likewise, by using the students' personal experiences to develop new skills and knowledge, teachers make meaningful connections between school and real-life situations (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).

HOW

1. Use resources other than textbooks for study
 - Have students research aspects of a topic within their community
 - Encourage students to interview members of their community who have knowledge of the topic they are studying
 - Provide information to the students on alternative viewpoints or beliefs of a topic
2. Develop learning activities that are more reflective of students' backgrounds
 - Include cooperative learning strategies
 - Allow students the choice of working alone or in groups on certain projects
3. Develop integrated units around universal themes

7. Teacher as Facilitator

"A caring adult can make a big difference in the educational outcome of any child that is at risk of experiencing educational failure."

-- Maria Wilson-Portuondo (*)

WHAT

Teachers should develop a learning environment that is relevant to and reflective of their students' social, cultural, and linguistic experiences. They act as guides, mediators, consultants, instructors, and advocates for the students, helping to effectively connect their culturally- and community-based knowledge to the classroom learning experiences.

WHY

Ladson-Billings (1995) notes that a key criterion for culturally relevant teaching is nurturing and supporting competence in both home and school cultures. Teachers should use the students' home cultural experiences as a foundation upon which to develop knowledge and skills. Content learned in this way is more significant to the students and facilitates the transfer of what is learned in school to real-life situations (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).

HOW

1. Learn about students' cultures

- Have students share artifacts from home that reflect their culture
- Have students write about traditions shared by their families
- Have students research different aspects of their culture

2. Vary teaching approaches to accommodate diverse learning styles and language proficiency

- Initiate cooperative learning groups (Padron, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002)
- Have students participate in book clubs or literature circles (Daniels, 2002)
- Use student-directed discussion groups (Brisk & Harrington, 2000)
- Speak in ways that meet the comprehension and language development needs of ELLs (Yedlin, 2004)

3. Utilize various resources in the students' communities

- Have members of the community speak to students on various subjects
- Ask members of the community to teach a lesson or give
- Invite parents to the classroom to show students alternative ways of approaching a problem (e.g., in math: various ways of dividing numbers, naming decimals, etc.)