

EDF4122

Teaching Partnerships: Working with
Families and Communities.

ASSESSMENT TASK 1

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Importance of a collaborative approach to teaching was introduced after noticing the effects of a teacher's self-actions in relation to children's parents on their learning (Amatea, 2013). In the triad of stakeholders involved in educational partnerships – as a teacher and the mediator, it is imperative to ensure every child is valued, while also making an effort to build constructive relationships with parents that are based on respect, trust, honesty, authenticity, patience in understanding cultural values or standpoints, in hand with maintaining the dignity of all children and their families for student success. Ineffective partnerships with children's parents or, lack thereof can directly affect the relationship between a teacher and student.

There is a high possibility of dissimilar values, cultures and personal ideologies influencing these clashes. Ethical issues surrounding the maintenance of these relationships can either lead to neglecting the child's inherent potential and its development and/ or negatively affect their identity creation process. Hence, a need to apply relevant strategies to diverse situational contexts, keeping the child's educational needs at the centre was recognised by educators and theorists.

According to the FDCQA (Family Day Care Quality Assurance) Quality Practices Guide, parent interactions that are founded upon respect, empathy, cooperation and professionalism ensure that all communications are successful and positive (2004, p.9). In addition, positive interactions between children, families, carers and coordination unit staff are integral to a successful program and should support the development of trusting relationships, partnerships and teamwork within the scheme and with the wider community (FDCQA, 2004, p.9). Keeping these statements at the base of discussion, views of Delpit (2006) and Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2004) in relation to these issues – 'How are partnerships with families responsive and supportive if educators' mentalities are based on a deficit view of their students' backgrounds? How can a teacher build trusting relationships grounded in empathy and understanding if egalitarian value systems are preferred? How can an educator practice culturally relevant pedagogy if he/she is convinced that their own ways are the best for everyone?' are argued.

Stereotyping based on social status, colour, race, gender, nationality, physical disability, etc. can hinder the partnership building process with students as well as

parents. In the 1950s, after recognition of the influence of family life on children's school success, educators started to blame parents for their lack of effort, compartmentalizing them into categories that later restricted growth (Amatea, 2013). Thus, deficit mentality complements the remediation paradigm. This is evident in today's classrooms as well. Here, parents are considered to be incapable of supporting their child's learning needs because of their immigrant, low-income or culturally diverse families, which is why teachers try to build their expertise according to the standards of the educational institution (Amatea, 2013), which may not always benefit or be relevant. Strategies built on this paradigm often reveal an inherent resistance to considering the parent on an unequal footing with educators (Amatea, 2013, p. 31), in contrast to collaborative partnerships that need to be built on equal trust among all the stakeholders.

Knowing children's individual backgrounds should encourage teachers to add more efforts into teaching them instead of teaching less (Delpit, 2006). Nevertheless, Carter and Goodwin (2004, cited in Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011, p.224) documented low expectations of many white teachers towards children of colour – framing them as biologically and culturally inferior. If and when genes are involved, low expectations seem to be a viable option, making it a situation wherein, nothing can be done because the fate is decided by the unknown. While well-meaning, such teachers still perceived cultural and linguistic diversities as deviant, as needing to be fixed, or alternatively they believed that certain students cannot be fixed and take a “helping the disadvantaged” teaching approach (Lawrence, 1997, cited in Price-Dennis & Souto-Manning, 2011, p.224). In this situation, by naming it ‘education for social-justice’, ‘White’ teachers actually used their racial heritage to satisfy their egos, or to achieve academic success, both not taking into consideration the individual backgrounds of children to support them.

Additionally, across time and space, studies (Galman et al., 2010; Sleeter, 2001; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005) have authored a meta-narrative of White teachers as unwilling or unknowledgeable in regard to educating children of colour and, Galman, Pica-Smith and Winters (2005) have suggested that White pre-service teachers often do not have the skills to negotiate daily interactions with students and families who do not share similar backgrounds (cited in Price-Dennis & Souto-

Manning, 2011, p.224). For instance, if children are culturally not accustomed to be looked in the eye during conversation, forcing them to do the same is not going to foster student-teacher relationship development in any way. Such cultural differences restrict educators' abilities to look past surface behaviours of parents as well from lower social classes or non-White communities in order to understand the origin of their actions that seem incorrect from a narrow-minded perspective at first (Delpit, 2006). Thus, it can be concluded that lack of knowledge leads to unethical partnerships built upon false assumptions.

"Why should being poor or a member of a particular social group have anything whatsoever to do with learning to read in school? Isn't the whole purpose of public schooling to create a level playing field for all children?" Gee (2004, p.7)

Lastly, inequality in education has preserved itself despite all the government efforts toward a more equitable schooling (Knight, 2010, p.85). Democratic education systems based on merit might aim to promote equality but are not necessarily promoting equity. In this [video](#) (Channel 4, 2017), Musharaf suffers from a form of speech impediment, wherein, he stammers and therefore, cannot read to pass his high school graduation speaking exam. Even though he possesses literal understanding (or else he would not have come this far), regulatory requirements created on the basis of equality but not equity could not have let him graduate if it was not for his teacher. Here, it was his ethical responsibility as an educator to ensure his student's capabilities were acknowledged and different means were used to assess the same ability. His idea of using music influenced by the movie 'King's Speech' enabled Musharaf to read and pass the speaking exam. This solution was presented as an alternative to deficit thinking and a necessary adjunct to equity in Knight's (2010) sense of understanding.

As mentioned earlier, teacher's lack of knowledge, specifically in relation to cultural differences often result in further exploitation of relationships. Similarly, Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2004) have argued that knowing certain values or religious beliefs of Indigenous communities will enable teachers to plan purposeful pedagogies instead of simply enforcing Western norms and practices that do not work in such

contexts as for indigenous communities, assimilation into the Australian education systems might not be perceived as necessary.

Achievements in formal education settings are promising but is that really what is perceived by these communities who have lived self-sufficiently on this land for centuries as growth? “I want to give them (the students) a purpose for reading and purpose for writing – the community isn’t very word-oriented. At this age, I want them to develop familiarity with books and their purpose.” – this is an extract from an interview with a teacher conducted by Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist in his study based research (2004, p.5). However, Indigenous knowledge systems and Western scientific ones are considered to be disparate as to be “incommensurable” (Verran, 2005, cited in Nakata, 2007, p.8) or “irreconcilable” (Russel, 2005, cited in Nakata, 2007, p.8) on cosmological, epistemological and ontological grounds. Such a massive difference in ideologies is bound to create friction between their connective application. Hence, in relation to the aforementioned excerpt, it could be concluded that Indigenous knowledge systems may not be heavily reliant on word systems but instead they could be making sense of their world in the form of symbols or other forms of communication.

Culturally inappropriate curriculum built upon Eurocentric discursive perspectives requires Indigenous Australians to conform to a set of pre-determined, measurable characteristics of the non-Indigenous ideal, which means that anything that may be uniquely positive about being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is of little relevance to the evidence base (Vass, 2012, p.90). According to Scheurich and Young (1997), current policies and practices in mainstream contexts are based upon and are created within a context of epistemological racism; that is, racism that is embedded in the fundamental principles of the dominant culture (cited in Bishop & Glynn, 1999). This statement is also relevant to current times in my opinion. Such inherent racist structures are still prevalent in contemporary classrooms marginalizing indigenous population and explain poor attendance and retention of Indigenous students in education (Vass, 2012).

Delpit’s (1998) research based study includes an excerpt from a conversation with a school principal of African- American origin – “It becomes futile because they (teachers) think they know everything about everybody. What you have to say about

your life, your children, doesn't mean anything. They don't really want to hear what you have to say. They wear blinders and earplugs. They only want to go on research they have read that other White people have written. It just doesn't make any sense to keep talking to them." The principal's learnings from personal experiences were considered unimportant due to her racial background, thereby ignoring valuable inputs. This person could have easily been a concerned parent of a child and if approached with the same mentality, will lead to building unethical partnerships because of disrespectful practices. Teachers' preference of 'Western' over 'rest of the world' academic literature illustrates adherence to power relations and foundation of unethical partnerships on racial biases which do not promote understanding. In the end, Delpit (2006) asserts that the person in power, for no logical reason, blames and criticizes the victims for being lazy, absentees, etc.

Being 'colour blind' or 'culture blind' might justify ignoring personal prejudices but it is actually a matter of serious concern for students who are targets of racism (Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist, 2004). They do need to be considered as the same but in this case, White teachers are then ignoring the evident consequences of racism that are faced by that child of colour on a daily basis, but does not affect the teacher in any way. External factors affecting student identity, including parent's influence at home should be part of the ethical process of relationship building.

In conclusion, ethical issues surrounding formation of teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships need to be considered while planning collaborative pedagogical practices. Deficit and assimilationist framing is directly associated with student outcome. Under the deficit mentality umbrella, stereotyping based on varied individual characteristics leads to unfair treatment.

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