Creating Welcoming Environments for Diverse Families

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Building trusting relationships with diverse families and leveraging their strengths and assets includes not only understanding the challenges and life circumstances associated with race/ethnicity, educational and socio-economic status but developing a safe, accessible, comfortable, inviting environments in schools. A place that sends the message that the school cares about families and they belong in that building.

Environments encompass not just a physical space but the cultures, beliefs and behaviors of all who fill that space and the energy that we bring into spaces determines how others feel and act.

School Environment Matters

Researchers Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard Sandler have consistently found that there are three variables that influence parents' decision not to become engaged with their school and in the education of their children.

1. **School environment** – They do not feel invited and comfortable at the school. They perceive it as a cold, hierarchical institution where they don't belong.

2. **Sense of efficacy** - How confident they feel about their ability to help their children. They do not believe they can make a difference in the education of their children.

3. **Role Definition** - Families' perception of their role and responsibility in the education of their children varies due to cultural and/or socio-economic factors.

Hoover-Dempsey, K.Sandler,H. (1997. 2001, 2007). *Review of Educational Research*

What Facilitates Involvement for ELL Families?

ELL parents are more likely to become engaged when:

1. A relationship with at least one person at the school has been established. They need to <u>know and be known</u> by at least one person at the school in order to <u>feel safe</u>.

2. The school has clear involvement expectations and guidelines and these have been explained (translated). They need to know what their children and they should and should not do.

3. The school (or the PTA) ask for <u>their help</u> (as opposed to asking for volunteer time or money).

What ELL Families Told Us

The majority of limited English speaking families we surveyed expressed a high level of concern about the quality of their children's education. They wanted to learn ways to support education at home.

"Please help us learn and let us know how we can contribute to our children's progress."

They need most from the school:

- Collaboration and communication from the school about their children's academic progress and behavior.

    "The schools should listen to the problems and concerns of my children and

    call me to solve them in common agreement."

- Provide before and after-school care and homework assistance for their children.

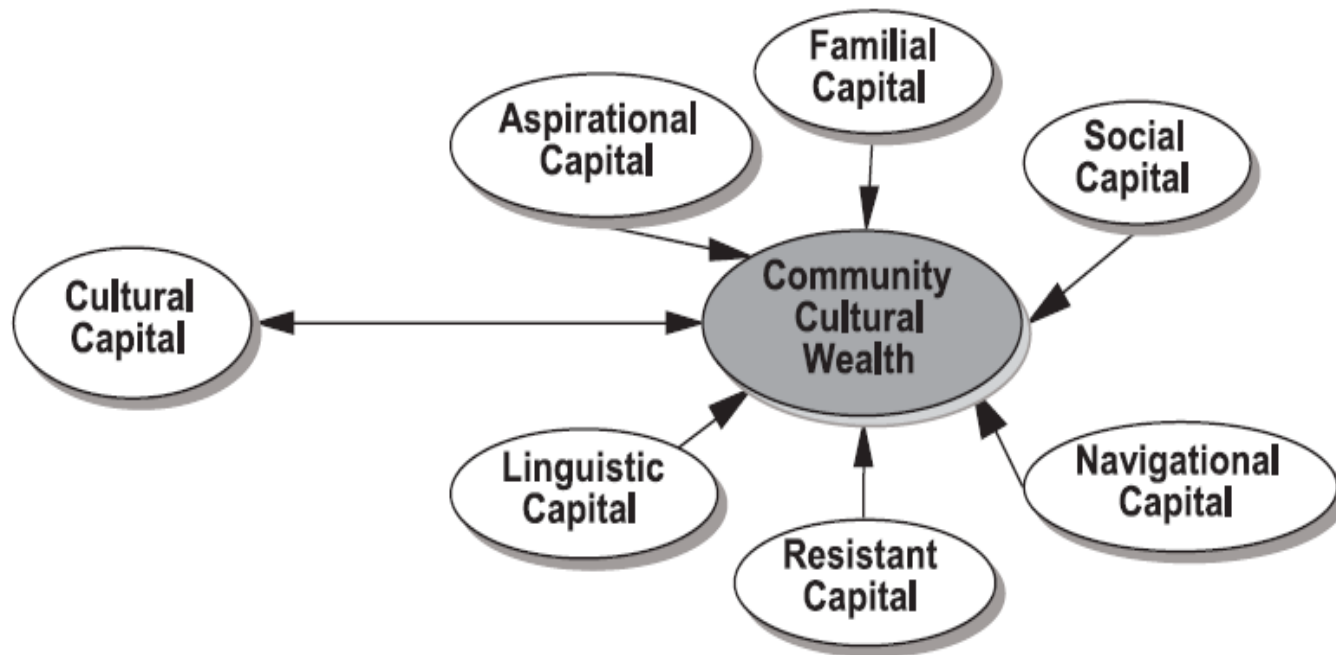   *"I can't answer my child's questions about homework. I need help from the school."*

- Help to understand the American school system.

    "Who can explain American schools to me?"

- Help to be connected with community services.

    "The first place I think about going for help is the school."

REVIEWING FAMILIES' CULTURAL WEALTH

Welcoming Environments

INVITING OTHERS PROFESSIONALLY

POLICIES – Supportive, equitable, sensitive, respectful, flexible, encouraging, culturally competent.

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PROCESSES – Respectful, ethical, equitable, democratic, cooperative, collaborative, culturally competent, visionary, innovative.

⬇

PROGRAMS – Family-community centered, staff time sensitive, customer service oriented, culturally relevant, equitable and competent.

Welcoming Environments

INVITING OTHERS PROFESSIONALLY

STAFF – Trusting, optimistic, intentional, professionally competent, culturally competent, caring, embracing common vision and goals.

BUILDING – Clean, aesthetic, well-laid out, user-friendly, efficient, warm, well-lit, signs and directions in multiple languages as needed.

Partnership schools

SHARED VISION - Schools, families and the community understand, support and contribute to student's hopes and dreams.

SHARED GOALS - Schools, families and the community assist each other to reach student-related goals.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY-Schools, families, and the community work within the framework of a respectful partnership and they are accountable to each other for the success of children.

Dr. Joyce Epstein, Researcher, social scientist
Johns Hopkins University

Partnership-based program planning

Five basic principles

1. Involve parents in program planning. Ask for and value the opinion of parents.
2. Tap into the interests of parents.
3. Be an agent of parental self-growth.
4. Develop programs that build parent-teacher relationships and focus on children's success.
5. Don't be afraid to ask parents to help tackle big problems or barriers --that's what partnerships are all about.

Strategies that work

- **Home visits**
- **Parent Action Teams – project based**
- **Parent leadership building**
- **Parent mentorship – parent-to-parent**
- **Cut and Chat groups**

Recommended readings

- **African Americans in urban schools: Critical issues and solutions for Achievement** by James Moore III and Chance W. Lewis
- **American cultural patterns: A cross-cultural perspective** by Edward Stewart and Milton Bennett
- **Non-western educational traditions** by Timothy Reagan
- **Kiss, bow or shake Hands** by Terri Morrison
- **The dream-keepers: successful teachers of African American children** by Gloria Ladson-Billings
- **Multicultural manners** by Noreen Dresser
- **Understanding and working with parents and children from rural Mexico** by B. Annye Rothenberg
- **A hope in the unseen** by Ron Suskind
- **Uncomfortable neighbors: Cultural Collisions between Mexicans and Americans** by James V. Tiffany
- **A framework for understanding poverty** by Ruby Payne
- **Culture and Power in the Classroom** by Antonia Darder