

Ways to Develop Teachers' Relationships with Caregivers

To rethink and redefine relationships with caregivers, a mindset change needs to happen. A teacher-parent relationship is not limited to only reaching families when there is concern regarding their children or seeking assistance from caregivers. Instead, teachers need to proactively engage with their multilingual families and students. Prior to devising strategies to build relationships with these families, teachers should first consider and address the following essential questions:

- What information would I like to learn about my multilingual students' families?
- How can I effectively engage with them and get to know them?
- How can I use my collected information to enhance their child's learning experience?
- Whom do I share this information with and how should I do it?

In redefining their relationship with caregivers, teachers need to bear in mind that:

1. It is important to recognize that the current school communication systems are tailored towards families proficient in English, possess an email address, and have computer skills. Consequently, teachers need to employ creative strategies to reach families, particularly when conventional methods such as phone calls or emails in English prove ineffective.

Evidence-based practices:

- Invite caregivers to have lunch with their children at school. The teacher can join them during the visit to gain valuable insights into the students' lives outside the classroom, such as the languages spoken at home or students' home responsibilities and develop a deeper understanding of their unique experiences (Colombo, 2012).
 - Invite caregivers to visit classrooms and attend school functions. To ensure a positive experience for all, informing caregivers about the expectations and appropriate dress code for school events is essential. It is worth noting that individuals raised and educated outside of the US may not be familiar with the US dress code and standards, and teachers should provide guidance on this matter (Ariza, 2010). By proactively addressing cultural differences and providing clear expectations, teachers can create a welcoming and inclusive environment that supports family engagement and promotes student success.
 - Set up a Facebook class or Twitter page. By doing so, teachers can encourage the sharing of events and foster a community of mutual support and learning.
2. Recognizing and valuing each individual and family's diverse linguistic and cultural characteristics is crucial. Caregivers of multilingual students are a valuable resource for understanding and addressing their children's language development needs. By consulting with the caregivers, educators can gain valuable insights into the student's language abilities, preferences, and challenges, as well as their cultural background and identity. These insights can inform the development of effective strategies to support the child's language development and success.

Evidence-based practices:

- The teacher can design a thematic unit centered around countries and ethnic backgrounds for the entire class. Teachers can encourage caregivers to participate by sharing their unique backgrounds and cultural experiences in class (Ariza, 2010). Involving caregivers in the learning process creates a sense of community and shared responsibility for students' academic and social-emotional growth.
 - Organize a multicultural event where caregivers are invited to participate. They can bring artifacts or food from their cultural backgrounds and share their personal experiences and traditions with the class (Hellman, 2016). It is important to note that scheduling the event outside of traditional holiday periods is advisable since the calendar is based on Christian Eurocentric holidays that may not adequately reflect the diversity of cultures and communities. By organizing such events and encouraging caregivers to participate, teachers can foster community and respect for diversity.
 - Have children and their caregivers deliver a brief lesson on a topic related to their country or background. This approach allows students to learn from each other, develop cultural competence, and gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for diverse perspectives while creating a community of mutual respect and learning (Moll et al., 1992)
 - Collaborate with caregivers to develop a multilingual home language plan. This plan can include strategies for using and developing the home language, such as reading books, having writing sessions, watching TV shows, and playing games in the home language (Breiseth et al., 2011).
3. There is a learning curve for newcomer families regarding what is involved in processing documentation and how the new education system works. By acknowledging the challenges that newcomer families may face, teachers can foster a more inclusive and supportive learning environment and help to ensure that all students receive the support they need to succeed.

Evidence-based practices:

- Organize a curriculum night where the teacher explains to caregivers what a day at school looks like for their child and asks caregivers to reflect on unique ways their child learns (Gonzalez & Frumkin, 2014).
 - Use district translators or websites to design bilingual fliers explaining the required documentation when a child is first enrolled in school (Ariza, 2010).
 - Teachers can enable translation on their classroom website, providing families with ongoing access to important information related to their child's education.
4. Negative attitudes and biases can lead to the assumption that some caregivers may not want to or are not able to support their children's education. Instead, an asset-based approach that focuses on the strengths of students and their families can help create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Teachers can work with administration, peers, and the wider community to promote a positive and proactive approach to caregivers' involvement.

Evidence-based practices:

- Utilize the school library or media center for bilingual story time by inviting caregivers to enjoy story time with their children or ask them to read the stories

in their home language. If caregivers work during the day, ask caregivers to record their storytelling or storybook reading. Send a camera to record if they do not have the means (Hall & Axelrod, 2014).

- Talk about Hispanic Heritage Month or other nations' celebrations and provide caregivers with information on events in your area (conferences, socializing events, restaurant organizing special events, etc.) (Hall & Axelrod, 2014).
- Communicate to caregivers that even students with limited or interrupted education may have other essential life skills such as resiliency, flexibility, and responsibility (Ariza, 2010).

5. Teachers become a community resource.

Evidence-based practices:

- Connect and engage caregivers with healthcare providers, resources, and organizations in the community by sending a weekly communication/link with ONE agency/organization and a short description of what the organization does or can help with (Sharkey et al., 2016).
- Share resources geared toward the needs and backgrounds of the families you have in your classroom (Ariza, 2010).
- Ask for replies to messages, emails, writing activities at school, or documents sent home that require a more reciprocal relationship than simply sending information (Hall & Axelrod, 2014).

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