Strategies for Preparing Educators
To Enhance the Involvement
of Diverse Families in Their Children's Education

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Educators want and need specific preparation about the knowledge, attitudes, and skills it takes to enhance the involvement of diverse families in their children's education. The importance of preparing educators to work together with diverse families cannot be overstated; a parent is a child's first teacher and the only teacher who remains with a child throughout his or her education. The research is compelling about both the academic benefits (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) and the social emotional learning benefits (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004) of family involvement in education.

When families are involved in their children's learning, children do better in school and in life. In addition to the strong research and practice findings about family involvement in education, current policy initiatives also dictate a strong role for family involvement in education. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) has specific requirements for family involvement that require notification and participation of parents in their children's education.

Universities have a tremendous potential to improve the academic achievement and social emotional learning of all students by preparing future educators to work with diverse families; however, most universities are just beginning to prepare educators to work with diverse children and families (Goor & Porter, 1999). Diverse families include families with different social economic status, living arrangements, languages, histories, cultures, religions, sizes, etc. The list of differing characteristics is endless, and it is important for educators to be prepared for these differences.

Educators need to understand the many contexts in which families live, work, and play—these different contexts

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are important components of the way we can work together with families. Differences can be strengths, and it is with this strengths perspective that educators can help diverse families become actively involved with their children's schools.

There has been some earlier work at the university level on preparing educators to engage families in their children's education, but these earlier efforts did not focus on the diversity of today's families and the potential resources that these diverse families can bring to their children's education. This article will describe promising theoretical models, discuss successful approaches, consider key issues, and offer recommendations for preparing educators to work with diverse families.

Promising Theoretical Models

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in developing theoretical models of preparing educators to work effectively with diverse families. Some of the renewed work builds on a model originally developed in the mid-eighties by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), and thus it is important to examine the prototype plan originally developed by Chavkin and Williams (1988). It contains four essential components for a prototype parent involvement teacher preparation program: the personal framework, the practical framework, the conceptual framework, and the contextual framework. An overlapping of elements from the first three components is the ideal program (see Figure 1).

Even though this model is almost twenty years old, the knowledge, understanding, and skills areas that are contained within SEDL's personal framework are particularly relevant for preparing educators to work with today's diverse families and can be a building block for curriculum modules. The personal framework focuses on teachers' knowledge about their own beliefs and values, their understanding of the school, their comprehension of the diversity within the community, and the importance of individual differences among parents.

Another model was developed by Shartrand and her colleagues (1997) from the Harvard Family Research Project. They identify seven key knowledge areas about family involvement that teachers need to know and recommend that they be included in teacher training programs (see Figure 2). The group also presents four approaches that are especially helpful in teaching the attitudes, knowledge, and skills for working with diverse families. The approaches are: a functional approach that clearly describes the roles of schools and parents; a parent empowerment approach that is based on the strengths of disenfranchised families; a cultural competence approach that focuses on an inclusive, respectful school where diversity is valued; and a social capital approach that builds on community assets and parental investment in their children's education. Many educators prefer this model because of its emphasis on the strengths of families and communities and the clear acknowledgement of the roles that schools and parents both play in the family involvement in education process.

Others, such as Leuder (1998) and Kirschenbaum (2001), present additional models that emphasize the importance of preparing educators to work with diverse families. Kirschenbaum's model pays particular attention to educator knowledge, attitudes, and skills. He stresses that it is not enough for professionals to just *know* how to develop a family-school partnership. They must also *want* to do it and to *believe* that they can do it. He states that educator preparation must include cognitive, affective, and behavioral components.

Leuder's model emphasizes changing the traditional parent involvement approach from single-dimensional, with parent involvement coming into the school for the sole purpose of supporting the school, to a multi-dimensional model which focuses on

reaching and involving what Leuder calls "the missing families." The goal of Leuder's model is to create learning communities, and it requires a new outreach dimension. Instead of just the traditional "energy-in" components of family involvement (Leuder's term for when families are supporting the school by volunteering and giving their time), his model expands on traditional roles and also adds a new "energy-out" component.

Leuder's "energy-out" component is a series of strategies that the school uses to reach out to parents. In other words, the school uses its resources to create a collaborative relationship with families and communities. Teacher educators often report that they like both Kirschenbaum's and Leuder's models because they provide information about how to translate their models into practice.

In 1994, the United States Department of Health and Human Services outlined some basic assumptions about cultural competency that directly relate to the preparation of educators for working with families who come from a multitude of cultures. Although the original assumptions were directed toward professionals working with the homeless, their principles can be adapted for teachers who work with many kinds of diverse families.
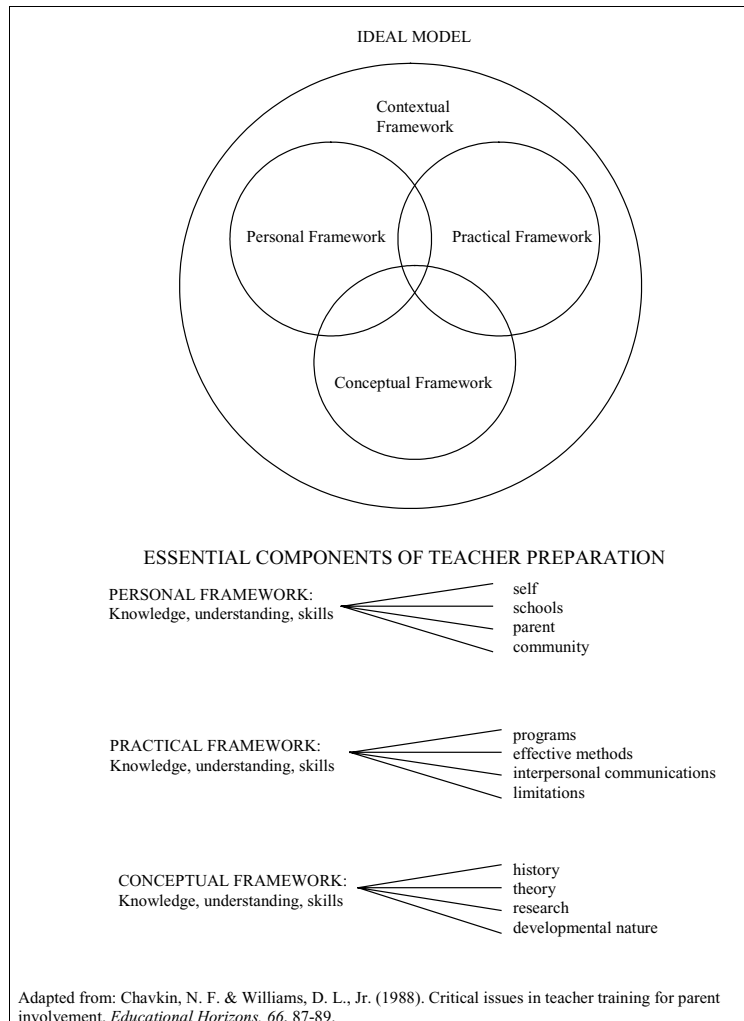
The authors believe that teachers can teach better if they enhance their own competence in group and intragroup differences. They emphasize that developing competence in diversity is a dynamic, ongoing process, but that although diversity training is important, it is not effective in isolation. They stress that ongoing training is an opportunity for both organizational and personal growth.

Building on these theoretical models, the successful practice approaches described in the next section provide a framework for developing new initiatives and enhancing efforts already in progress.

Successful Practice Approaches

Epstein and her colleagues (2001) have written a text for educators, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*, that offers many excellent ideas for working with families of all kinds. The centerpiece of the book is a practice model for developing school, family, and community partnerships. The six types of involvement are the core for helping to prepare educators for family involvement practice. Each of the six types (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the com-

Figure 1:
SEDL's Ideal Model
for Effective Preparation of Eductors

IDEAL MODEL

Contextual Framework

Personal Framework   Practical Framework

Conceptual Framework

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF TEACHER PREPARATION

PERSONAL FRAMEWORK:
Knowledge, understanding, skills
- self
- schools
- parent
- community

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK:
Knowledge, understanding, skills
- programs
- effective methods
- interpersonal communications
- limitations

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:
Knowledge, understanding, skills
- history
- theory
- research
- developmental nature

Adapted from: Chavkin, N. F. & Williams, D. L., Jr. (1988). Critical issues in teacher training for parent involvement. *Educational Horizons, 66*, 87-89.

munity) is followed by sample practices, challenges, redefinitions, and results for students, parents, and teachers. Each area includes major attention to how to work with diverse families in the schools.

The National Network of Partnership Schools uses this strength-based model and works with school-family-community teams to plan, coordinate, and implement partnership activities in diverse communi-

Figure 2:
Harvard Family Research Project's Seven Key Knowledge Areas for Preparation of Educators about Family Involvement

1. **General Family Involvement:** knowledge of the goals of, benefits, and barriers to parent involvement
2. **General Family Knowledge:** knowledge of different families' cultures, childrearing, lifestyles, etc.
3. **Home-School Communication**: provision of techniques and strategies for two-way communication between school and home
4. **Family Involvement in Learning Activities:** information about how to involve parents in their children's learning at home or in the community
5. **Families Supporting Schools:** information on ways that families can help the school, both inside and outside of the classroom
6. **Schools Supporting Families:** information on possible ways that schools can help support the social, educational, and social services needs of families
7. **Families as Change Agents:** information of possible roles that families can play as decision makers, researchers, and advocates in the improvement of policies, programs, and curriculum.

Adapted from the work of the Harvard Family Research Project. Shartrand, A. M., Weiss, H. B., Kreider, H. M. & Lopez, M. E. (1997). *New skills for new schools: Preparing teachers in family involvement.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research.

ties across the nation. This program provides in-service education in conjunction with a school's ongoing reform effort. One of the reasons that the National Network is so successful is that educators learn about family involvement as they are actively developing partnerships in their own schools (Epstein et al., 1997).

The California Board of Psychology in conjunction with the University of California, Los Angeles Center for Mental Health in the Schools (2004) has developed an outline of content for a module on human diversity that could guide continuing education courses for teachers and other professionals in the schools. The intent was that this module would provide the foundation, and in-depth learning would occur in future continuing education modules. The six major units are: (1) Toward an Informed, Functional Understanding of the Impact of Diversity on Human Behavior and a Respect for Differences—in the Context of Professional Practice; (2) Ethical and Legal Considerations; (3) Enhancing General Competence Related to Diversity Considerations: (4) Implications of Diversity for Assessing and Diagnosing Psychosocial Problems and Psychopathology: (5) Implications of Diversity for Intervention; and (6) Implications for Supervision/Mentoring. This highly acclaimed module has been used effectively in programs across the nation.

Service learning for preservice education students is another successful approach. Of particular note are service-learning opportunities where pre-service students are actively engaged with local family involvement programs in multicultural communities. Students are learning through "hands-on" experience with families, and family-school partnerships are benefiting from the students' volunteer hours. Katz and Bauch (2001) report that students who have had pre-service preparation are more comfortable with family involvement activities and actually reach out to more families in their classes than teachers who do not take a course or unit on family involvement.

At the preservice level, there is a strong need for activities that help beginning teachers understand their own social and emotional learning first through the development of self-awareness and interpersonal skills. Service learning is one useful way to help accomplish growth in both self-awareness and interpersonal skills. These experiential activities can also increase the linkage between pre-service and in-service educators and encourage collaboration across disciplines.

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and the Metropolitan Life Foundation have recently developed a new initiative on infusing parental engagement education in teacher education programs. They selected five national sites through a competitive grant process to become partners. The five partners are each developing and evaluating new approaches to preparing teachers to engage families in diverse communities.

The projects include activities such as: using students as community researchers; developing on-line training; conducting parental engagement conferences; infusing parental involvement activities into curriculum; and using families as faculty. The families as faculty initiative has produced some excellent results with both pre-service students and the Family Faculty gaining new understanding of how diverse families and schools can work together.

An increasing number of professional organizations have also developed both guidelines for their membership and online resources related to the topic of diversity. Figure 3 provides some examples of websites that may be helpful to universities as they work to prepare teachers to be culturally competent. Figure 4 contains the addresses and websites of many centers and organizations devoted to increasing family involvement in education, and most of these websites contain specific practice examples and resources for working with diverse families. Of particular note is a publication from the National Center for Family & Community Connections (Boethel, 2003) that uses research-based information to make recommendations to strengthen local diversity programs and practices.

Key Questions Remain

There are a variety of ways to offer preparation for working with diverse families, but key questions remain about which are the best ways to prepare educators. Should the curriculum be offered in separate courses or infused? Should the focus be on pre-service or in-service education? What should the content include? How should the content be sequenced? Should we involve families in the learning process? How much content can be taught from texts and theoretical frameworks? What is the right mix of "hands-on" learning and review of evidence-based practices?

Some universities feel strongly that content on family involvement should be infused into many courses while others believe it is best to have a separate course or a sequence of courses. Either way can work, and it seems more likely to occur faster if content can be infused. Mandating an entire course takes time and sometimes tends to isolate the content instead of integrating it into the curriculum. The reality is that in many schools there are many competing courses for time slots and there is only so much room in the degree plan.

Martha de Acosta (1996) suggests that family involvement content should be infused throughout foundation courses, but she also advocates for community-based learning to help teachers develop reflective family involvement practices. She proposes three themes for foundation courses: families and schools; communities and schools; and the social context of teaching.

She suggests that the use of themes in foundational courses will help students think critically about family involvement, particularly in diverse communities. Students will not just be memorizing strategies but will, instead, be examining the pros and cons of alternative courses of action. The community-based learning component gives students "hands-on" experiences in applying what they have learned.

The Peabody Family Involvement Initiative (PFII), described by Katz and

Figure 3:
Resources on Preparing Professionals to be Culturally Competent

American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education
http://www.aacte.org/Multicultural/multicultural_edu_resources.htm

American Psychological Association, Expanding the Psychology Curriculum: An Annotated Bibliography on Diversity in Psychology
http://www.apa.org/ed/biblio.html

American Medical Student Association, Promoting, Reinforcing and Improving Medical Education Culture and Diversity Curriculum
http://www.amsa.org/programs/diversitycurriculum.cfm

Center for Mental Health in Schools, Cultural Concerns in Addressing Barriers to Learning.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/cultural/culture.pdf

Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence
http://www.cal.org/crede/

Council on Social Work Education—Diversity Content
http://www.cswe.org

Cultural Competence Standards in Managed Care Mental Health Services
http://mentalhealth.org/publications/allpubs/SMA00-3457/

National Association for School Psychologists
http://nasponline.org/culturalcompetence/index.html

National Association for Social Workers
http://www.socialworkers.org/sections/credentials/cultural_comp.asp

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
http://www.ncate.org/

National Center for Cultural Competence
http://www.georgetown.edu/research/gucdc/nccc/

National Multicultural Institute
http://nmci.org

Resources in Cultural Competence for Healthcare Professionals
http://www.calendow.org/reference/publications/pdf/cultural/resources_book.pdf

Bauch (2001), has developed a sequence of family-involvement courses that focus on three major areas: (1) general knowledge, (2) skills, and (3) authentic "real life." The PFII emphasizes six key themes about the importance of respecting and building upon the strengths of all types of families.

The program presents a clear message that because the family is the child's first and most important teacher, it is essential that schools work in collaboration with families. Family involvement includes activities at both home and school and is most effective when it not only strengthens the relationship between the child and the family but also addresses the teacher's needs.

The PFII program begins with a required one-semester course called "Parents and their Developing Children." Students are taught both the traditional typologies (e.g., Epstein's six family involvement categories) and innovative strategies such as electronic voice mail and interviewing parents in their homes. The practice component of the initiative allows students through course assignments and student teaching placements to implement some of the strate-

Figure 4:
Resources about Family Involvement
in Education

ASPIRA Association, Inc.
1444 I Street NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
http://www.aspira.org

**Center on School, Family,
and Community Partnerships**
Johns Hopkins University
3503 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218
http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm

Harvard Family Research Project
Longfellow Hall, Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138
http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/

Institute for Responsive Education
21 Lake Hall
Northeastern University
Boston, MA 02115
http://www.responsiveeducation.org

**National Center for Family
& Community Connections with Schools**
Southwest Educational Development
Laboratory (SEDL)
211 East Seventh Street
Austin, TX 78701
http://www.sedl.org/connections

National Coalition of Title 1/Chapter 1 Parents
National Parent Center
3609 Georgia Avenue, NW, 1st Floor
Washington, DC 20036
http://www.nctic1p.org

National Community Education Association
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91-A
Fairfax, VA 22030
http://www.ncea.com

National Parent Teacher Association
330 North Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611
http://www.pta.org

gies they have been discussing in class with diverse families. The third course involving authentic "real life" is the course that has strong implications for helping prepare educators to work with diverse families.

The University of Houston-Clear Lake developed an educator preparation course specifically designed in collaboration with a school district's in-service education and offered as a graduate course. Andrea Bermúdez (1993) describes a university-school district collaborative education program that was developed to integrate knowledge about multicultural systems and family involvement in education in the in-service teacher-training curriculum. The program developed a curriculum guide for helping teachers work with non-English speaking parents. The research on this in-service education program showed gains for parents, teachers, and students.

In-service education is definitely a way to help the large cadre of current educators who have not had the opportunity to take a course or developing school-family partnerships. Evans-Schilling (1996) developed a proposal for a Continuum of Family Involvement Training, and this proposal is one way to address the ongoing needs of teachers, the dynamics of the field, and the personal growth process of educators.

The Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) is a national network of over 2,000 people who are interested in promoting strong partnerships between children's educators, their families, and their communities. FINE's membership is composed of faculty in higher education, school professionals, directors and trainers of community-based and national organizations, parent leaders, and graduate students. The FINE network does not take a position about whether the curriculum should be infused or separate courses, but instead, offers examples of cases for teaching about family involvement in course modules and complete syllabi for both pre-service and in-service education.

Whether the content is in a required class, an elective class, a sequence of courses, or infused throughout several classes, there are a wide variety of methods that have been very successful in helping to prepare educators for working with diverse families. The important point is that we need to pay closer attention to teacher's knowledge, beliefs, emotions, and attitudes about working with parents.

Research by Graue and Brown (2003) clearly supports the notion that we must provide more opportunities for teacher education students to expand their theo-

retical background and experiences with families in a variety of settings during pre-service education or else prospective teachers develop strategies for working with families based solely on their own middle-class experience rather than the reality of today's diverse schools.

Research by Toni Griego Jones (2003) with Hispanic parents offers a different kind of opportunity for pre-service education. She found that consulting Hispanic parents and bringing them into the teacher education classroom had a significant impact on the beliefs and attitudes of teacher candidates. Her research makes it clear that teacher education programs must do more than just add multicultural content and field experiences to the curriculum. Griego Jones suggests that although influencing beliefs and attitudes may be the most difficult part of preparing teachers, it should be the focus of teacher preparation because teacher beliefs help determine the expectations that teachers have for children.

On a similar note, Morris and Morris (2002) suggest that the missing ingredient in most teacher education programs is "Caring." Their work with successful African American communities makes it clear that it is possible to create a caring and nurturing educational environment for African American students if the school has exemplary teachers, strong curriculum and extracurricular activities and parental support.

The conundrum is how to do you find or create "caring" teachers, and the authors ask some important questions. Should there be specific selection criteria for teacher education programs? Should there be cultural immersion programs for student teachers? Should field-based education in multicultural communities be a requirement for graduation?

In her review of three decades of research on home-school partnerships, Broussard (2003) emphasizes that school professionals have an ethical obligation to collaborate to establish not only the importance of working with diverse families but the value of working with families as partners in the educational process. She believes teachers and school mental health professionals already have some of the requisite skills, but they need the will to make it work. Her recommendations focus on more self-awareness and a change in professional behaviors to reflect a true partnership with families of all kinds, whether they be single parent families, families with special needs children, homeless families, or families of different cultural backgrounds.

Recommendations

Preparing current educators to work with diverse families to engage them in their children's education is a daunting task. We know that parents support it, teachers desire it, and principals expect it, but it is still not happening on a large-scale basis. Educators have not been adequately prepared to enhance the involvement of diverse families in their children's education; few universities offer courses, and state certification policies are not strong in this area. Even when universities offer courses or modules on family involvement in education, they often do not emphasize the diversity of today's families and how to build on the strengths of these differences.

It is not likely that teachers on their own will become knowledgeable about working with diverse families, and certainly it is unfair to place the responsibility for family involvement on teachers without giving them some assistance. It is understandable that many teachers are feeling short-of-time and overburdened with responsibilities.

There are no easy answers. The complexity of the issue demands use of multiple approaches at more than one level to prepare both pre-service and in-service educators to work with diverse families. As Chavkin and Williams (1993) suggest, efforts at both the pre-service and in-service level also require support from state and national associations and policymakers.

It is essential that competency in working with diverse families is a credentialing requirement and that schools support continuing education about family involvement in education for all faculty on an ongoing basis. Recommendations for improving the preparation of educators to involve diverse families in their children's education must embrace change in three areas: pre-service education, in-service education, and policy.

Recommendations for the preservice level include: adding more content on family involvement with diverse families across subject areas (horizontal integration); developing a curriculum that builds upon learning from introductory classes to advanced classes (vertical integration); increasing the opportunities for "hands-on" learning and/or service learning; bringing diverse families into the classroom to talk about their experiences with schools; and building more linkages between pre-service and in-service educators.

Recommendations at the inservice level include increasing the time that teachers have to work on family involvement activities; providing easy access to tools and resources for working with many kinds of diverse families; collaborating with families and community members to develop family involvement plans; providing opportunities for continuing education; and giving teachers time to share best practices with other teachers.

Recommendations at the policy level include: adding competency in family involvement in education with diverse families as a credentialing requirement; developing networks to support educator preparation for working with families; and encouraging ongoing continuing education about family involvement.

The evidence for why we need to increase educator preparation for working with diverse families is clear, and the case for approaching the task by using a multi-level approach is promising. Preparing teachers to work with diverse families will have strong benefits for children. We have the requisite resources; the question remains about when we will have the resolve to make these changes in teacher preparation programs.

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