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Creating Opportunities for Using Family Funds of Knowledge to Support Literacy Skills

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Question

The research question was “In what ways can purposeful engagement with families through community kitchens create opportunities to support early childhood literacy?” We wanted to explore ways to engage families in using and sharing their family funds of knowledge to increase literacy skills.

Background

In our community school we are working on improving oral language and literacy skills. We know the research says that parent engagement is a primary factor in student success; thus, we wanted to explore different ways to create authentic opportunities for caregivers. The research also points to higher parent engagement in literacy programs when parent knowledge is recognized. Typically, literacy programs for families are very teacher-directed; we tell them what we want them to do. We rarely ask families what they would like to do, what they do, and what knowledge they have to share.

We used a community kitchen to develop relationships with families and share knowledge. We worked alongside the families while preparing the meals. Initially, the cooking sessions were meant as a way to bring families in; however, as we were in the process we realized it was providing us with ways to directly help build on family literacy skills.

Findings and Conclusions

This experience challenged us to think differently about families and family engagement. Even when we thought we were creating opportunities that were based around families, we still had a tendency to make them teacher-directed and had to reflect on that a few times. We also realized we tend to make assumptions; when we were planning our initial cooking activities we didn't plan for families not being familiar with cooking, baking, or reading recipes. When we asked families about some of the things they wanted or didn't want to do in school, some of the answers surprised us.

What we learned from this experience was that we need to do a better job of asking families, in any school, what they would like to do and what works for them. As teachers and parents, we reflected on the times we've been asked to do something at home with our children that frustrated us and were told what, how, and when something had to be done. We also believe in creating opportunities for relationships outside of the classroom setting and really start to develop a genuine relationship that carries over to the classroom. We do believe that families want to be engaged with their children's learning; however, we may need to reflect about how we are trying to engage them. Does an activity have more open-ended ways to create authentic opportunities for sharing of family knowledge? Families and teachers have been conditioned to think about how they are involved in schools in certain ways; we are challenging those ideas and trying to create opportunities for purposeful engagement that is centred on the needs and knowledge of families.

To view the full video report visit http://youtu.be/TAq_kCyjhVM.

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