Preparing Early Childhood Preservice Teachers to Engage with Diverse Families

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Today’s Agenda

• Objectives
• Review of the literature
• University of Florida Case Study
• Data Collection & Analysis
• Discussion
• Further Research
Objectives

In this presentation, participants will:

- Gain an understanding of how to incorporate culturally responsive practices and partnerships into EPP field experiences and coursework (F1/L9)
- Learn how to utilize student beliefs and dispositions from self-reported data to facilitate growth throughout the program (F1/L12)
- Learn about course refinement, as well as the challenges and implications of implementing family-focused engagement experiences into coursework (F1)
University of Florida
Case Study
Benefits of Family Engagement

- When families, particularly families from diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, are engaged in their children’s education, it leads to positive outcomes.
- Benefits of meaningful family-school engagement for promoting optimal learning and development, parenting practices, and the prevention of behavior problems are well established.

(e.g. Henderson, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Anthony et al., 2014; Brotman et al., 2011; Conner & Fraser, 2011)
Research on Family Engagement

- Establishing partnerships remains challenging, and new in-service teachers report feelings of inadequacy engaging with families upon graduation.
- Incorporating service-learning opportunities and exposure to diverse families, and teaching specific strategies for family engagement are associated with EPPs whose graduates engage in effective practice.

(Hargreaves, 2000; Markow & Pieters, 2009; Able et al., 2014; Kidd, Sanchez, & Thorp, 2005).
Research on Family Engagement...

- Cultural competence and willingness to engage families is best developed using reflection, meaningful communication, and deepening understanding of one’s own background and beliefs.
- Educator preparation programs must systematically and intentionally incorporate experiences that encourage students to understand themselves and the families that they will serve.
Activity
Think, Pair, Share:

**Think** of practices you’ve seen that promote or inhibit positive family engagement

**Pair** up with someone around you

**Share** your experiences and brainstorm potential changes to facilitate positive family engagement
Theoretical Framework

- Grounded in Joyce Epstein’s framework for family engagement in education
  - These six types of family involvement include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2001).
Purpose of Study

- The purpose of our study is to better understand the impact of different pedagogical strategies embedded in coursework on families on our students’ knowledge and dispositions relative to engaging diverse families
  - Expanded clinical experiences
  - Implementing strategies for encouraging deeper reflection
  - Analysis of candidates’ reflections across the course of the semester and culminating case study assignment
Our Program

- This study collected data from an undergraduate Families course in an Early Childhood Education (ECE) program at a large, land-grant University.
- ECE program is a three-year program that continues on to the master’s level.
- The Families course is taught in the first year of the major, the junior year.
Course Objectives

1. Expressing understanding of the principles of family partnership;
2. Applying these principles to multiple case studies;
3. Identifying and describing family-centered practices and family capacity-building practices; and
4. Identifying and describing opportunities that engage and empower families.
Student Demographics

**Age of Participants**
- 22-24: 14.3%
- 18-19: 21.4%
- 20-21: 64.3%

**Race of Participants**
- Caucasian: 10
- Hispanic: 7
- African American: 2
- N/A: 0

**Gender of Participants**
- Female: 92.9%
- Male: 7.1%
Measurement
Research on Reflection

- Practices in reflection connect field experiences to the theory learned in the classroom, while promoting professional development.
- Reflective writing in educator preparation programs facilitate learning in the teacher candidate, as well as a self-analysis of personal growth.

(Burton, Quirke, Reichmann, & Peyne, 2009; Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012)
Research on Reflection…

- Reflective journal writing is a self-assessment tool that candidates can use to express and process thoughts, assert personal voice, and develop professional identity.
- Benefits of reflective journaling include: flexibility in formats and prompts, mediates between new and existing knowledge, encourages higher order thinking, facilitates opportunities for scaffolding deeper reflections.

(Lee, 2008; Cohen-Sayag, Fischl, 2012; Davis, 2006)
Data Sources

Field Experience Reflections

Family Partnership Project

Final Diversity Reflection
Field Experience Reflections

- Bi-weekly reflections on student experiences in Head Start and university affiliated child care center
- Guided questions
- Create connections from course content to practices observed
- Explicit relationship between theory and practice
Coding Process

- Researchers performed content analysis on all of the reflection journals, partnership projects, and final reflections.
- Triangulated findings to determine prominent themes across experiences and reflections.
- Facilitate vs. Impede Positive Family Engagement.
- Head Start vs University Childcare Center.
Family Partnership Project

- Partnership with local families with a child with a disability
- Students conducted three home visits
  - First: Build rapport & conduct needs assessment
  - Second: Give family intervention and resources
  - Third: Progress check and final wrap up
- Stresses the importance of viewing the families as the experts
- Evidence-based practices appropriate for the family’s needs and goals and an analysis of implementation of the practice
Final Diversity Reflection

- Culminating self-reflection comparing and contrasting experiences from both child care centers
  - Family Systems Theory
  - Various aspects of family engagement
- Further introspection in how to serve families with varying needs
- Students reflected on the multiple ways families can be engaged in their children’s education, both in and out of the classroom
# Findings

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| Structures      | Behaviors, practices, and objects that may facilitate or impede positive family engagement | **Preschool:** Open door policy, photos of families and pets around the classroom, take home folder  
**Head Start:** community resource bulletin board, classroom liaison, drop off behaviors, use of technology for instruction |
| Communication   | The frequency, quality, and methods of interaction between parents and teachers | **Preschool:** Frequent updates on digital applications & websites (diaper changes, feedings, naps, and behavior concerns); need for variable types of communication to reach diverse families, translation services  
**Head Start:** some teachers reported to have open lines of communication with parents, others were reported to communicate only regarding negative behavior concerns or unexplained absences |
## Findings

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| Relationships| The level of trust, comfort, and openness between teachers, families, and students | Preschool: Frequent check ins, respect for parents’ dietary concerns, parents often come in during the day to breastfeed or visit, could see more effort on both sides  
Head Start: teachers from the same neighborhoods as the students, familiarity with extended family, strained relationships between parents and teachers and teachers and administrators |
| Development  | Growth or changes in perspective seen in the preservice teachers throughout their field placements | Preschool: ideas to implement in future classrooms, including “restricting the amount of time each family can spend in the classroom” and asking parents to “respect educational time”.  
Head Start: severe lack of family engagement, “family engagement is more than what I have witnessed thus far” |
## Findings

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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<td>Attitudes and Dispositions</td>
<td>Prior and current beliefs about field placements and the teachers that work there, broken stereotypes</td>
<td><strong>Head Start:</strong> “taught me more than I ever thought,” another student “did not feel safe at her school,” understanding of teachers being advocates for children as well as partners with families</td>
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Activity

With those around you, **discuss:**

- Initial reactions to all student interviews
- How would you respond to concerns?
- Given what we found in our study - what are the next steps?
Implications for Implementation
Scholarly Significance

- Systematically incorporating collaboration and engagement experiences during the preparation of teacher candidates
- Clinical experiences that are aligned intentionally to coursework
- "Real world" experiences that engaged candidates with families from cultures other than their own appeared to have the biggest impact on candidates’ knowledge and skills.

(Smith et al., 2014; Vartuli et al, 2016)
Scholarly Significance

• Candidates own background seemed to influence the extent to which they were able to report meaningful family-centered activities with the families

• The sophistication of the candidates’ reflections increased throughout the semester, suggesting that intentional scaffolding and assignments that utilized reflection were important components of the pedagogical strategies in the course.

(Moore, 2003; Smith et al., 2014)
Program Revision

- Grounded in clinical practice and interwoven with academic content and professional courses
- Revamping curriculum and staffing
- Promote continuous improvement
- Supporting partnerships
  - Local and surrounding school district
  - Early Steps

(NCATE, 2010)
Program Revision

- Intentionally preparing future early childhood professionals to work with each child
- Diversity and inclusion incorporated across the full sequence of preparation, not just one class

(Catlett, Maude, Skinner, 2016)
Guiding Conceptual Model

Intro Course | Foundations | Human Development | Methods I & Methods II | Internship
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<th>Intro to Early Childhood Ed.</th>
<th>EC Curriculum, Teaching, &amp; Assessment</th>
<th>Family Involvement &amp; Multicultural Issues</th>
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Challenges

● Challenging to identify the correct prompts to encourage deeper reflection
● Understanding the most meaningful “aha” moments for our students
● Variability in quality of placements
Closing Discussion: 
How to Tailor to Your EPP

- What data sources may you incorporate to analyze student growth throughout the course/program?
- Can you identify a course or field experience you might want to revise a family component on?
References


References


Contact Information

University of Florida - College of Education
School of Special Education, School Psychology & Early Childhood Studies
https://education.ufl.edu/sespecs/

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