Chapter 6

Reimagining Family Engagement:
Building Equitable Relationships With Multilingual Families Under Faculty Mentorship

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ABSTRACT

Employing a qualitative case study approach, the researchers examined three preservice teachers' (PSTs) perceptions of building relationships with diverse families while tutoring their children in their homes in a semester-long after-school program that is designed to support migrant education students academically, socially, and linguistically. Multiple data sources, such as PSTs' weekly journals, action research projects, philosophy of diversity papers, and individual semi-structured interviews were collected. The findings revealed that as PSTs had more interactions with families, they viewed them as co-partners in students' learning processes, planned lessons with family background in mind, utilized the home language, and valued home visits. These in-home experiences coupled with critical self-reflection, encouraged PSTs to critique their practices, enabling them to enact more equitable approaches for interacting with families. These intentional processes helped PSTs envision family engagement as a two-way partnership, a benefit for both parties.

INTRODUCTION

Family engagement has a significant impact on student academic achievement and is essential for children's learning, development, and social growth (Mapp et al., 2017; Zeichner et al., 2016). Family engagement has traditionally been viewed as family involvement in school-based activities. Yet multilingual families are often seen by schools as less engaged in supporting their multilingual learners (MLs) in academics (Herrera et al., 2020).

This deficit mindset is typically due to different ways multilingual families engage with schools and their children's education that do not conform with traditional methods (i.e., volunteering, attending school events, requesting conferences, etc.). Because their linguistic and cultural capitals are not viewed as assets, multilingual families are often overlooked or viewed with a "pobrecito" attitude of not knowing certain norms due to their background (Herrera et al., 2020). In order to be more welcoming of parents' different forms of involvement in their children's education, schools need to stop "perceiving parents through a social and cultural deficit lens" (Herrera et al., 2020, p. 5). Recognizing multilingual families' funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) and capitalizing on their cultural and linguistic assets may cultivate more equitable educational practices, which in turn may promote more community and family trust.

The traditional definition of family engagement rooted in systemic inequities calls for a reconceptualization of what family engagement is and how it is viewed. Moving away from this traditional ideology to a more holistic and meaningful two-way relationship may have positive outcomes not only for student learning but also for families and teachers. Therefore, this study highlights how one teacher preparation program mentored their preservice teachers (PSTs) in tutoring MLs while striving to honor their families' funds of knowledge and in turn aimed to provide PSTs with opportunities to practice culturally relevant approaches for family engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To situate this study, recent research on family engagement and the role of mentoring in teacher preparation will be discussed.

Family Engagement

Research on teacher preparation suggests that their programs have been trying to set goals to help PSTs understand how to work with families and communities for over 50 years (Zeichner et al., 2016). Yet, minimal attention has been devoted in

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