Every Shut Eye Ain’t Sleep

Families as Equal Status Partners in the Educational Process

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Mary Bacon’s journey from the projects in the South and tenements in the Northeast to the role of consultant was a varied and exciting one that makes her uniquely prepared both personally and professionally to address issues related to the closing the achievement gap between those who are racially, ethnically and culturally different as well as those who come from the culture of poverty. Educated in elementary and secondary parochial schools in New Orleans and Harlem, she earned a BA in Secondary Education from Fordham University, majoring in Spanish and French, becoming the first one in her family to graduate from elementary school. Graduate education was at Stanford University where she earned an MA in Guidance and Counseling and a Ph.D. in Social Psychology. Postgraduate work at San Jose State University in Educational Administration and in Special Education Administration at San Francisco State University rounded out her educational preparation for the themes that would shape her life’s work.

An experienced teacher, university instructor, counselor, psychologist and school administrator in a variety of educational institutions, Dr. Bacon has also served as a Probation Officer in juvenile halls and community-based programs, ending her career in juvenile justice as a Field Deputy in the California State Attorney's office. For the past two decades, she has conducted keynote addresses and seminars for hundreds of thousands of educators throughout the country and internationally primarily related to serving the most challenged and challenging youth and families in our educational systems. Her firm, Images of a Culture, has served as a consultant to major school districts on the East and West Coasts in implementing multi-year contracts focused on deconstructing negative beliefs about, attitudes toward and expectations of those who are challenged in the educational system and providing strategies for fostering institutional change to ensure equity and equal access to educational opportunities for all.

Dr. Bacon’s wide range of personal and professional experiences provided a wealth of experiences that has contributed to her lifelong fascination with working with multicultural populations and experiencing the world from the perspectives of those who bring the rich cultural diversity that characterizes the American experience. She has worked with Puerto Rican and other Latino youth and families on the Lower East Side of New York, with the National Conference of Christians and Jews throughout New York City, with Mexican and other Hispanic youth in Southern California, and with African American children and families in urban and suburban communities throughout the country. In addition, Dr. Bacon has held leadership positions in one of the most advantaged communities in Northern California, lived with families in Spanish-speaking countries, traveled extensively throughout the world, variety of experiences that all have shaped her unique appreciation of difference that resonates with audiences to which she presents.

Just as important, Dr. Bacon is a parent who has managed to maintain a refreshing sense of humor while addressing the challenges of functioning in a culturally pluralistic society. In her personal and professional life, it is clear that each of the threads of her varied background has contributed to her message of strong advocacy for those whose perspectives and strengths often go unrecognized within the environments in which they must function.
Sample Presentation Abstracts

The presentation titles noted below are samples of topics routinely selected by various groups throughout the country. Content may be altered to fit the particular theme of the event and the nature of the audience to which the presentation will be provided. Topics may be combined and also adjusted for keynote address of 60-90 minutes in duration as well as interactive seminars of one hour to a full day.

Keynote Addresses

• Disproportionality:
  A Socio-Cultural Approach To Addressing Dysfunctional Behavioral Adjustment

• Trends, Like Horses are Easier to Ride in the Direction They Are Going:
  Educational Leadership for a Pluralistic Society

• Deconstructing Negative Beliefs, Attitudes and Expectations:
  Achieving Equity in the Context of Excellence for All

• Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things:
  Culturally Relevant and Responsive Educational Service Delivery

• Building Fences Around The Mountaintop Instead of Ambulances in the Valley:
  A Strength Model for Serving Those Who Come From the Culture of Poverty

• A Dream Deferred:
  The Promise of America…Greater Than Its Reality

• Caregivers Need Nurturance Too!
  Teambuilding as the Key to Success

• No Malice Required:
  Culturally Relevant and Responsive Strategies for Serving Challenged And Challenging Students

Seminar Sessions

• Disproportionality:
  Adopting A Socio-Cultural Lens For Addressing The Disproportionate Representation of The Culturally Different in the Disciplinary System and Identified as Emotionally Disturbed

• We Need To Be The Change We Want:
  A Conversation with the Presenter

• Them That Gots the Gold, Makes the Rules:
  Building Fences Around The Mountaintop Instead of Ambulances in the Valley

• You Don't Tame The Angry Lion and Leave the Jungle Unchanged:
  Culturally Relevant Behavior Management Strategies

• Every Shut-eye Ain't Sleep:
  Families as Equal Status Partners in the Educational process

• ¡Sí Se Puede!:
  Bilingual-Bicultural Approaches to Achieving Educational Equity

• Opportunities Denied: Promises Not Kept:
  Reclaiming African American Youth

For further information or to inquire about booking Dr. Bacon for an engagement, please contact her at one of the numbers that follow:
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Focus on Them…

“Parents in our community don’t support the school.”
“Parents in our schools are not involved!”
“They don’t care about education!”
“Student poor behavior is a result of poor parenting!”

The importance of a family support system in the education of our youth can never be underestimated. All too often however, as families struggle to handle the complexity of their own lives, it is easy for them to forget that the education of their children goes far beyond the responsibility for merely sending them to school and child care facilities if they are to be successful academically and socially in school and in life in general. Sometimes families face personal challenges that prevent them from doing the things that educators desire; sometimes their priorities and/or worldviews are different from those of educators.

Families can no longer expect that if they place them in the right program, the right school, the right classroom that they will achieve at the level that they would like without their continuing vigilance. Because of the cultural mismatch between what many of our children and families bring and what educators expect, children may experience numerous assaults to their self-esteem as they interact with societal institutions, often as a result of the efforts of well-meaning and caring individuals who are merely willing participants in a flawed system. It is important for the school and home to have shared goals and for families to provide support for their children in a manner that can maximize their success.

The portion of the presentation related to families will explore strategies for helping families to better understand their roles in young peoples’ schooling and how to develop effective relationships with their children, with educators and with other families. The presenter will share creative and culturally relevant approaches to family engagement that highlight the skills that a diverse constellation of challenged and challenging families and communities bring to the educational process and the characteristics that school staff bring that may enhance or impede their authentic engagement. With a particular emphasis on serving those who generally have not been actively involved in their child’s schooling, participants will explore a strength model for empowering culturally diverse families to negotiate the system more effectively.

If they knew better, they would do better…
Focus on Us…

The inability or unwillingness of educators to properly address the needs of those who have had different journeys than theirs is often not the result of an unwillingness to ensure excellence for all but precisely because of the differences in the experiences and expectations they bring to the teaching/learning process. All too often we naturally have a tendency to evaluate the behaviors of others from the perspective of our own experiences and upbringing and have expectations for them that come from our worldviews. Successful culturally responsive educational interventions are those that take into consideration the socio-cultural backgrounds, prior experiences, worldviews, as well as the learning, behavioral and communication styles of the clients served. Creative and culturally relevant approaches to family engagement seek to utilize the skills that a diverse constellation of challenged families bring to the educational process.

The portion of this presentation related to educators will examine the impediments to fostering truly authentic and culturally responsive family engagement that can prepare staff to serve more effectively in working with all types of families but particularly with those who have not traditionally been involved with educators in partnership roles. Building confidence and securing commitment to the shared goals of the school and home, particularly for those who are non-traditional in their approaches to schooling requires individuals who themselves are culturally competent and willing to cultivate equal status partnerships with families who may be different from them.

There is no malice required for destroying those who are different from us...
No fault...No blame...No guilt...
Beyond willing participants in a flawed system...

Impediments to Effective Family Engagement

- Lack of training for staff in family engagement practices in general and culturally responsive approaches in particular
- Competing priorities connected to their perceived primary roles
- Lack of fundamental beliefs in equal status relationships with families
- Lack of modeling of creative approaches to family engagement by the “experts”
- Lack of understanding and/or value the cultural realities that culturally different families bring
- Absence of an integrated collaborative systems approach to providing services
My Vision/My Perspective

- Race/Ethnicity
- Culture of Oppression
- Culture of Poverty
- Advocate for the Underserved
- Parent of Adolescents
- Child of an Empowered Parent

What shapes your vision/perspective?

Primary Agents of Socialization

Families

Educators

Community

Peers

Educational Partnerships

Critical Elements
- Same clients/customers
- All have similar goals/expected outcomes
- Each has roles essential to achieving desired outcomes
- Acceptance of equal status relationships essential to success
- Goal: Creating an institutional culture that devalues all roles
Some Definitions: Defining a Common Ground for Your Work

- **Culture**: The collective customs, arts, social institutions and achievements of a particular nation, people or other social group as well as the attitudes, behaviors, world views that may be characteristic of a significant number of the members of a particular group as a result of the commonalities of experiences that have shaped their responses to the world.

- **The Culturally Different**: Those individuals whose ways of being are different from that which the environments in which they must function rewards. Cultural differences may include but are not limited to race and ethnicity but may encompass any socio-cultural group that exhibits characteristics that are different from the expected norms valued by those in charge.

- **Equity**: Ensuring equal access to high quality educational opportunities for all students in a manner that is consistent with their world views, learning, behavioral and communication styles and any other characteristics that impact their ability to profit from available offerings.

- **Culturally relevant and responsive service delivery**: A framework that recognizes and celebrates the varied cultural wealth, knowledge and skills that diverse groups bring and seeks to develop relevant practices, family engagement strategies and accept multiple means of demonstrating competence that are consistent with the characteristics of clients served.

- **Culturally Competence**: A philosophy and set of behaviors that embodies a professional, political, cultural and ethical disposition that goes beyond superficial teaching acts but is grounded in fundamental beliefs that respects the unique strengths that diverse populations of students and families bring. Operationally defined, cultural competence involves the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, attitudes and behaviors that are effective with diverse populations in cross-cultural settings. Culturally competent educators accept that students have the right to maintain bicultural identities and should be able to be educated in their own cultural context, in ways that are tied to their lived experiences and personal backgrounds.

**Cultural Capital**: The behavior patterns, values, linguistic patterns and skill sets expected in the cultures of specific socio-economic or ethnic groups that allow them to effectively negotiate the rules, patterns of interaction and demands of the environments and the familial and social groups in which they must function. What counts as cultural capital may vary in different contexts but also may even be counterproductive in situations where those same skills are not valued.

**Cultural Mismatch**: The mismatch between aspects of individuals’ home, family, community cultures and those required within the school culture or other environments in which they must function. There may be a need to both modify some aspects of the school culture to accommodate the differences that students bring as well as to teach students appropriate code-switching survival skills that do not denigrate the skills developed to negotiate their worlds.

**Family Involvement**: The observable actions taken by parents and family members to support their child’s education at home and at school that are valued by educators.

**Family Engagement**: The series of targeted actions taken by schools to facilitate families’ increased understanding of the ways in which they can support their child’s education by proactively developing powerful ongoing partnerships between families and educators.
Impediments to Family Engagement

- Differences in belief systems/world views
- Reliance on school authorities to make decisions
- Challenges of addressing personal priorities/survival needs
- Historical distrust of the educational system
- Lack of responsiveness to written communications
- Feelings of inadequacy in relation to educators
- Inability to understand information presented/their importance in the process
- Passive role encouraged by schools

Viewing the World From the Lens of Culture

Bicultural Socialization
Factors Affecting Success

- Dissimilarity in appearance
- Bilingualism
- Overlap/commonality between cultures
- Match in conceptual style/problem-solving approaches
- Corrective feedback provided by both cultures
- Availability of cultural translators, mediators, models

Diversity And Multiculturalism:

What It Is Not? What It Is…

What it is Not

- Ignoring cultural differences
- Desegregation
- Providing isolated information about cultures
- Celebrating culturally relevant holidays

What it Is…

- Celebration of difference
- Vision of the world through the lens of culture
- Empowerment of cultural strengths as a vehicle for service delivery
- Affirmation of strengths that the culturally different bring
- Valuing survival skills socialization

If we knew better… we would do better…
Improving our Approaches: What Can We Do?

∞ A Systems Approach to Family Engagement
- Strengthen integrated, coordinated service delivery with all stakeholders
- Encourage visual representation of the value of family constellations
- Inculcate the importance of extended family support systems
- Identify the significant others within the family and community constellation who may have influence on the lives of the students we serve and use their influence when needed
- Identify alternative ways for families to demonstrate involvement that also meet the requirements that the school regards as important
- Encourage curriculum development that ensures multicultural content and images; choose activities that validate the various cultures and lifestyles represented by your client population and the values that they hold

• Facilitating Home to School Connections
- Ensure that the initial contact with families is a positive one that gives them confidence and lays the groundwork for future involvement in culturally relevant school activities
- Provide systematic opportunities for outreach to the home and community that promotes meaningful participation even without their physical presence
- Provide information that more advantaged families already use to promote success
- Decrease reliance on lengthy impersonal written communications
- Increase the use of systematic written communications that are brief, creative and consistent designed to maintain positive connections between home and school
- Use students in the communication process where possible
- Develop site based plans to increase family engagement activities at the school
- Promote creative methods of communication with families
- Assist families with issues that relate to their needs, not just yours
- Share easy-to-implement successful practices for replication
- Use technology to communicate more effectively with families through multimedia

• Supporting Family Voice as it relates to their child's education
- Creative ways to bring the voices of families to the school (surveys, interviews, etc.)
- Creating materials that prepare families to participate more effectively as advocates for their children
- Provide opportunities for families to focus on their strong suits rather than their weak ones by encouraging practices and activities that they can do rather than those that come from our value systems that make them feel inadequate
- Invite families to participate in uplifting activities where students are demonstrating competency and where families may make meaningful connections with others families who have similar aspirations for their children

Children…25% of the population of America
100% of our future…
Families as Partners with Educators

The Family: First and Forever

Primary Sources of Character Education
• Increase staff’s understanding of the youth and family’s culture
• Promoting the role of parent as equals to educators
• Helping families to define/communicate their family’s standards/expectations
• Assist families in reinforcing parallel skills at home that will be expected in school
  • Identify creative ways to establish a family presence in school
• Use selective praise to encourage family engagement: emphasizing the positives

Approaches to Culturally Relevant Family Involvement
• Establish early connections about positive aspects of the teaching/learning process
• Set up a format for regular and ongoing communication
• Observe what the family/community values
• Solicit their information/expertise
• Identify opportunities to create meaningful partnerships with other families
• Demonstrate interest in and empathy for the entire family system
• Understand “dysfunctional families” from their perspectives rather than yours
• Focus on the strengths that families and communities have to offer
• Provide opportunities for students to model/empower family values
• Teach young people to cope with difficult family situations
• Use technology to communicate more effectively with families of the 21st century
• Incorporating approaches that foster mutual support/liaisons between

Family: A Circle of People Who Care
It Takes a Village…
Partnerships with Other Parents

Caregivers need nurturance too!

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My Personal Action Plan

As you reflect upon our discussion today and your beliefs, attitudes and behaviors about the issues we have discussed, what do you need to:

**Start? What do I/we need to do differently?**

Focus on ME ___________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Focus on US ___________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

**Stop? What do I need to stop doing?**

Focus on ME ___________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Focus on US ___________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

**Continue? What am I doing right?**

Focus on ME ___________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

Focus on US ___________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

**Priority Areas to Address:**

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

**Barriers that exist:**

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

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UNITY

I dreamed I stood in a studio
And watched two sculptors there
The clay they used was a young child’s mind
And they fashioned it with care

One was a teacher—the tools he used
Were books, music and art.
The other, a parent, worked with a guiding hand,
And a gentle, loving heart.

Day after day, the teacher toiled with touch
That was careful, deft and sure.
While the parent labored by his side
And polished and smoothed it o’er.

And when at last, their task was done
They were proud of what they had wrought.
For the things they had molded into the child
Could neither be sold nor bought.

And each agreed they would have failed
If each had worked alone.
For behind the parent stood the school
And behind the teacher, the home.

Anonymous