

Topic: **Build child, family, and community relationships that promote child development and learning.**

Cheatham, G. A., & Jimenez-Silva, M. (2012). Partnering with Latino families during kindergarten transition: Lessons learned from a parent-teacher conference. *Childhood Education, 88*, 177-184.

Context

The transition from preschool to kindergarten can be challenging and stressful for families and young children. Early childhood (EC) teachers must help families plan for the transition, providing them with information on what to expect in the process. When families come from diverse linguistic or cultural backgrounds, teachers need to be sensitive to the impact that culture, language, and power differences have on the relationships with families.

Purpose of the Article

The article presents a case study of an interview with an early childhood teacher, a teacher assistant, and an immigrant Mexican mother discussing the educational placement decision of her daughter. The case provides examples of how cultural differences, language use, and parent-teacher power differences challenged the parent-teacher partnership.

Understanding Cultural, Language, and Power Differences

EC teachers need to understand that culture, language use, and power differences can influence the ways that families communicate with professionals about issues related to transition. For the mother in this case study, the Latino value of respect for teachers' authority and expertise was important to understand. Yet, the parent advocated for her child's transition to kindergarten. The parent challenged the teacher's recommendation that her child remain in the current preschool placement.

The language barrier between the teachers and the parent also created a challenge. The teachers used terms and phrases that were not clear to the mother (e.g., social emotional skills). The teachers explained that the child was intelligent

and had mastered the academic skills necessary to enter kindergarten. They argued, however, that her daughter was not ready socially or emotionally to be successful in kindergarten due to her immature social behavior (e.g., pouting, crying). It was difficult for the mother to understand the role her daughter's behavior played in kindergarten.

Lastly, the teachers in this case study used their level of power to influence the final decision *not* to recommend the child be transitioned to kindergarten. They showed little respect for the mother's perspectives on her daughter's readiness for kindergarten as reported by her older son's classroom teacher. Their role as the experts signaled to the parent that the partnership was not equal and that the parent's perspective was not valued in the decision-making process.

How to Use this Article

The authors provide sections of the transcripts from the interview and explanations of the perspectives taken by the teacher, teacher assistant, and parent. Each section ends with suggestions for how the EC teachers could have handled the conflicts and challenges presented in the interactions. The suggestions provide the reader with culturally responsive strategies for communicating with parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The article could be used in an inservice workshop or preservice course on family and community collaboration. Sections of the transcripts could be disseminated with questions about what transpired and what the teachers might have done differently to resolve the challenges. Trainers or faculty could then provide the participants with the suggestions offered by the author.

Example of a Section of the Interview on the Challenges of Language Use (p. 181)

Luisa: She went with me to the Lincoln School for a parent-teachers conference too. And, uh, teacher for Diego and Gonzalo, they say Teresa is *ready* for kindergarten.

Jean: Yeah. She is.

TA: Uh huh, she is.

Jean: She really is. If there was . . . I would check if you could get her to see if she . . . social emotional might be the area where she, they might say, “Okay, let’s still hold her off ’till she turns five.”

Luisa: Uh-hm.

Jean: She still likes to, if something doesn’t go her way, she will cry or she will pout.

Luisa: Yeah.

Jean: You know. Maybe give her another way. Let her . . . but as far as cutting, writing, academic wise.

Luisa: Uh-huh.

Jean: She’s ready. She’s ready.

Luisa: Yeah.

Jean: It’s that social emotional area right there that they may say, let’s hold off.

Conclusion

The article provides an example of a parent-teacher conference on transition planning and decision-making between European American teachers and an immigrant Mexican parent. The authors divide the interview into three aspects of the interaction between the teacher and the parent: culture, language, and power. The article outlines essential skills that EC teachers need to consider when working with culturally and linguistically diverse parents.

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