



Phone Link Ups

Working with Families to Enhance Diversity and Difference

Discussion Paper

Critical Questions

1. What does true collaboration with families look and feel like?
2. What is the aim of developing a collaborative relationship with families?
3. What knowledge and approaches are more valued? The professional's knowledge or the parent's knowledge?
4. What happens when our approaches don't fit comfortably with approaches taken by families?
5. What is the implication of calling ones self an 'expert'?

It is inevitable that our work with families will see us encounter a range of parenting styles and child rearing practices. As such we must pause and consider ways to enhance and work with this diversity in order to deliver positive outcomes for children and families.

What is Collaboration?

Collaboration means many things to many people. Reflect on the following statements and the assumptions these may have on differing notions of what collaboration may mean:

'it's really difficult working with that family, they seem to be resisting all the advise we provide them'

'Our role is to educate parents on the best way to raise their children'

'It would be so much easier if that family understood the most appropriate ways to raise their child. Its really obvious this is the way we do it here in Australia'

Alternatively here are other ways of understanding collaboration:

'It's interesting understanding the different ways child rearing is understood across the world. I wonder why I believe in what I do'

'it's really important that I don't judge families about their child rearing practices. My way of understanding 'good parenting' is so specific to my cultural context and is only one way of understanding parenting'

Values

Our approaches to working with diversity and difference are very much influenced by our values. Values can be defined as principle, standard, or quality considered worthwhile or desired. A clash of values can create some 'creative tension' in our practices. The effectiveness of dealing with a clash in values is impingent on the strategies we adopt.

Organic Intellectuals

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was a leading Italian Marxist. He coined the term organic intellectuals. Organic intellectuals are those who recognise that their knowledge is produced through educational systems and the other forces around them. Organic intellectuals reject the idea that their expertise is neutral or independent. They also reject their status as 'the experts' in a particular field. Instead they use their knowledge and expertise to improve democratic relationships by introducing new ways of thinking and raising new questions that challenge 'accepted wisdom'.

Rethinking Our Approaches to Working with Difference

Can staff and parents really collaborate when their expertise is so different?

Can parents' 'anecdotal' knowledge of young children really combine with the 'systematic' knowledge of staff who work with families and children?

"Must genuine collaboration with parents and democratic decision-making with them require staff to somehow deny or blank-out their specialist knowledge?" (Hughes & MacNaughton 1999)

When Values Clash

When values clash consider the following:

- 🌈 What is negotiable?
- 🌈 How can we genuinely discuss differences without alienating families.
- 🌈 What language portrays a genuine interest in seeking a win-win solution.

"Staff wishing to reconceptualising themselves as organic intellectuals need to actively collaborate with parents to deconstruct their hierarchical relationships between them and reconstruct it as a democratic relationship in and through which to increase their understandings of children, teaching and learning".

Hughes & MacNaughton (1999)

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