**PS340: Exceptional Needs Children**

**Unit 2 Discussion Board Lecture**

Welcome students! In Unit 2, you will examine the family and how family relationships, systems, and functions impact student success. You will discover strategies that can be used to increase family engagement in the school life of students, and how family engagement contributes to academic progress. You will also begin to explore standards of professional conduct that must be adhered to when working with students’ families.

Your reading assignment for this unit outlines the importance of family engagement to student success. However, the challenge for teachers is developing collaborative relationships with culturally diverse families. The interrelated elements of the Family Systems Model will be examined in terms of how such a model can inform teacher strategies for establishing collaborative relationships with parents and families. The differing effects of family involvement versus family engagement will also be explored.

By 2035, children of non–European American heritage will make up the majority of students in United States’ (U.S.’s) schools. The proportion of children living in poverty in the U.S. has increased, and teachers must understand how poverty can affect academic performance and student behavior. Teachers need to realize that many of their diverse students’ parents are dealing with a number of difficult conditions. These factors cannot be taken in isolation and teachers need to understand the conditions with which their students are struggling in order to meet their needs in the classroom.

Understanding the cultural expectations of students’ families, and how to respond to the families in a culturally sensitive manner, is of utmost importance to building collaborative relationships. In the family systems model, the family is seen as an interrelated and interactive social system in which the events and experiences of each member of the family unit affect other members of the family. Understanding family systems can help teachers better understand the interactions between students and their families and thereby meet the academic and behavior needs of their students and work collaboratively with families.

Children acquire the values, beliefs, traditions, and languages of their cultures through interactions with their environments. Both Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems model and Bandura’s social cognitive theory stress that a child’s family and environment influence the child’s behavior. Currently, many of the teachers in the U. S. are European American females who may have little understanding of the lives of families that are culturally and linguistically different from themselves, or of the lives of families living in poverty.

Cultural self-awareness, as we learned in Unit 1, is a key element in a person’s consideration of the cultures of other groups. Once teachers have explored their own culture and how their beliefs affect their interactions with the families of diverse students, they can use several strategies to help engage parents of diverse students.

The best strategy for teachers to use to begin building collaborative relationships with parents is to reach out to the families before there is a need to contact them. Teachers should establish relationships with their students’ parents from the beginning of the school year so that when they need to contact the parents about academic or behavior concerns later in the school year, the parents are more likely to be receptive to the communication.

Family involvement and family engagement are two different approaches that teachers can take in working with students’ families. A family involvement approach often entails teachers informing parents about how they can contribute to fulfilling their children’s academic and behavior needs and parental response or feedback is seldom necessary. Family involvement is often not conducive to reciprocal communication between teachers and families. Family engagement, however, encourages reciprocal communication between teachers and families. Teachers actively seek input from families regarding the children’s academic and behavior needs.

Any efforts teachers make to address the academic and behavior concerns of diverse students are likely to be ineffective unless teachers understand the lives of families that are culturally and linguistically different from themselves, or of the lives of families living in poverty. Teachers must always demonstrate to both students and their parents that they have high expectations of *all* students. If parents perceive that teachers do not think their children are capable of success in school, a barrier is set up that makes it very difficult for teachers to establish collaborative relationships with the parents.

Thank you for viewing your Unit 2 lecture!