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Promoting Reciprocity: Transforming Family Contexts through Education while Bringing Family Contexts into Education

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ABSTRACT. For early education efforts to contribute to opportunities for the mobility and holistic development of all children, professionals need to foster reciprocity between educators and families. The focus on how education can transform family contexts should be grounded in an asset-based and inquiry approach to partnering with families. In addition, this approach should be coupled with a consideration of the ways we can bring family contexts in to transform educational practices, promote student engagement, and inform emergent curriculum. While service providers should work to identify and support the assets within and between families, they should also work to identify and address vulnerabilities. The manuscript concludes with applications and directions for future research and intervention.

Keywords: families, parent engagement, engaging caregivers, cultural funds of knowledge

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Promoting Reciprocity: Transforming Family Contexts through Education while Bringing Family Contexts into Education

For many, the abiding schism between home and school limits the potential of education. Education is generally viewed as a tool for seeking knowledge, self-improvement, and socioeconomic mobility. Paradoxically, many children and families,[1] particularly those with minoritized or marginalized backgrounds or experiences, may find schooling to be a source of psychological distress and social isolation, affording limited opportunities for mobility. In many cases, a caregiver who feels disenfranchised when engaging with their child's teachers or when visiting schools or child care centers may also feel catapulted back to their own experiences as a child who felt small and powerless in front of their teacher (Lightfoot, 2004). Starting in early childhood for students representing diverse racial and intersecting identities, similar behaviors are policed differently (e.g., exuberant and engaged v. disruptive and "loud") leading to a link between the punishment gap and the achievement gap when comparing outcomes between White students and students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) (Morris & Perry, 2016). Beyond race-based differences, disaggregating data for Asian-American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) shows evidence of a discipline gap between ethnic subgroups where PI subgroups were at equal or higher risk for discipline (Nguyen, Noguera, Adkins, & Teranishi, 2019).

Although the inequities in educational processes and outcomes are often examined throughout years of formal education, they take root in early education. From an opportunity-based lens, there are persistent gaps in access to and utilization of early education programs by minoritized and socioeconomically vulnerable families for their children (Buysse, Castro, West, & Skinner, 2005; García & Weiss, 2015). Further, there is mounting evidence that discipline gaps occur as early as preschool and kindergarten. Because BIPOC children are disproportionately suspended from preschool, experts are developing strategies to support teachers in reversing exclusionary disciplinary trends (Garro, Giordano, Gubi, & Shortway, 2019).

For all children, early childhood experts and families share concerns that overly structured formal early childhood schooling may be supplanting a play-focused exploratory experience (Barblett, Knaus, & Barratt-Pugh, 2016; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2008). Expectations in which children must be seated for long periods of time and in which paying attention is measured largely by keeping one's body still and eyes on the teacher or speaker, contribute to disciplinary infractions – even though such behavioral expectations are widely critiqued developmentally. Such disciplinary infractions mark a culturally mediated schism between expectations at home and in the community and those upheld in school contexts. For example, consider a White teacher from a middle-class background who announces to her students who are engrossed in an activity, "In a few minutes, we'll be cleaning up" and then follows up with, "Let's put our scissors away." When she notices a Black student continuing the

[1] We define family as being a constellation of caring members who function as a larger unit. Families may include biological, adopted, and legally associated individuals as well as fictive kin. Adult family members responsible for children may serve in roles of parent, grandparent, foster parent, guardian, aunt, uncle, or other designations. Although we may use different terms throughout the manuscript (e.g., caregivers, parents, families) we intend for the terms to be fully inclusive of all care providers and contexts for the relationship.

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activity by cutting, she may consider the student as non-compliant. In actuality, any student, particularly those from a different racial and socioeconomic background than the teacher, may have been socialized to different discourse patterns. Students may interpret open-ended statements as a suggestion instead of as the intended directive: "Put all your materials away," (Delpit, 1995/2006).

For education to contribute to mobility and holistic development, we need to focus on the reciprocity of relationships and influences in the educational process. While these concepts are relevant to education generally, we will focus on illustrations from early childhood contexts given the importance of early investments. After providing a theoretical framework and contextual grounding in early education, we will model this reciprocity by focusing on 1) transforming family contexts through education; 2) bringing family contexts into education; 3) applying principles of reciprocal relations; and 4) suggesting implications for policy and legal reforms, and future scholarship. To address these issues, we draw from existing scholarship and incorporate our experiences as teachers and teacher educators using the teacher-as-researcher methodological approach (Meier & Henderson, 2006). In addition, we integrate illustrative examples from our study of how professionals and caregivers holistically define access to early childhood education and care and identify barriers to it (Abo-Zena & Beatty, 2019). The study draws from mixed methods to consider perspectives in context with implications to promote quality engagement with and support of young children and their families. Field notes and survey data provide background about caregivers and care providers and describe aspects of the physical and social context of early care. Photo-elicitation is used to represent key study constructs within a semi-structured interview protocol (Cheyney-Collante & Cheyney, 2018; Latz, 2017).

Theoretical Grounding

Historically, developmental scholarship concerning both minoritized and privileged children (and their families) has been conceptually shortsighted (García Coll et al., 1996; Spencer, 2006), missing considerable variations in how culture and context affect development and learning (Rogoff, 2003). When "diverse" families were represented in scholarship, their varied beliefs and practices were often depicted from a deficit perspective (Spencer, 2006). A deficit lens coupled with a focus on vulnerabilities has contributed to overlooking the resilience and assets of minoritized children and families (García Coll et al., 1996). Increasingly, human developmental studies have expanded to include the range of bioecological factors that affect developmental processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In addition, they explicitly name how racism and stratification affect the development of diverse children (i.e., all children) in intersectional manners (Spencer, 2006; 2017).

Theoretical models have begun to reflect multiple and reciprocal influences. For example, in contrast to one-way depictions of ecological factors affecting individuals, relational developmental systems (RDS) theory highlights the transactional nature between the individual and contextual influences. In particular, RDS highlights the agency of the individual to act upon their context and derive meaning from the interactions over time in a holistic and integrated manner (Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhoff, 2015; Overton, 2015). From a sociocultural perspective, there is widespread understanding that children enter a social world of meaning that is created and recreated through cultural artifacts such as language (oral and written) and tools with which we engage in home, community, and other contexts (cf., Cole, 1996; Vygotsky,

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1978). As young learners, children are often guided to participate in particular communal practices and their socialization involves what they can and are asked to do, what is not allowed or is not taught, and what they observe without explicit teaching (cf., Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 2003). While culture and cultural situatedness exist at a macro-contextual level, it is also useful to explore the micro-level contextual ecology of a child's developmental niche (Super & Harkness, 1986), particularly since cultural artifacts are used at the individual level. This theoretical model weaves anthropology and psychology to highlight a child's immediate physical context, the psychology and values of caregivers, and the particular practices in which they engage. Theoretical lenses that explore everyday practices provide a glimpse into the rich traditions, heritage, and cultural funds of knowledge students bring to school (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), and that is often unknown, undervalued, and under-utilized in academic settings. Exploring cultural funds of knowledge includes noting how families and communities cultivate and pass them on generationally as part of their community wealth, even though these funds may be undervalued by others, particularly within institutional contexts like schools (Yosso, 2005). Given the evidence that brain development is inherently social and emotional, strengthening connections among young children's caregivers facilitates bridging experiences across home, community, and education or care contexts, which promotes young children's learning and development (Immordino-Yang, Darling-Hammond, & Krone, 2019).

Identifying Tensions within Early Childhood Educational Frameworks

Within education generally and early childhood education, in particular, we are at an important crossroads that requires reconciling two primary contradictions. First, despite the converging evidence from diverse disciplinary fields of economics, education, and human development on the benefits across the lifespan of early education and care for children, as well as for families and society, there is an underutilization of services. In particular, there are persistent gaps in access to and utilization of formal early education programs by minoritized and socioeconomically vulnerable children and communities (Buysse et al., 2005; García & Weiss, 2015). Scholarship and educational policy often analyze access from a resource-based perspective that includes financial components of access (Bainbridge, Meyers, Tanaka, & Waldfogel, 2005; Liang, Fuller, & Singer, 2000), but few studies have considered the family-based reasons for enrolling or not enrolling young children in formal early care and education (ECE).

The second tension relates to challenges within the field of early childhood education and care about defining the very notions of what constitutes development and how developmental timelines are determined. While the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has marked quality by defining developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), (NAEYC, 2009), researchers in early childhood education have critiqued the culturally loaded nature of the term 'appropriate' (Mallory & New, 1994). Demircan and Erden (2015) argue that while DAP is considered universal, the decision of what is considered appropriate or inappropriate should be based on the needs and characteristics of the specific population and culture. While there is an increasing awareness of the role of culture and context in contributing to diverse developmental and learning processes and outcomes, ironically this increased understanding is occurring alongside a push for standardizing curriculum and other assessments (McNeil, 2012). To optimize the intended positive effects of educational reforms, stakeholders

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should seek to reconcile contradictions, including ones that threaten the potential alliance between stakeholders, particularly families and professional caregivers.

Transforming Family Contexts through Education

If educators and other providers seek to shape family contexts through education, we need to recognize that our transformative potential is not only defined by our professional knowledge, strategies, and skills; our impact also reflects our ability to build rapport with families. The reality is, though, that many teachers have not been supported within their teacher preparation programs or while being supervised as in-service teachers to develop alliances with caregivers, given the primary focus is largely on pedagogy and developing diverse strategies to deliver the curriculum. Therefore, when teachers meet with families, the tone of meetings and conferences is often coated with a ritualized politeness that masks the ascribed meta-messages the adults may have experienced themselves as children (Lightfoot, 2004). To support building rapport, we need to avoid judging families by our personal views, approach understanding their context from an inquiry stance, and work to engage with families in a reciprocal nature that meets families where they are.

To enact the transformative potential of our professional work, as educators we should engage with families in manners that productively build rapport. We cannot authentically partner with families if we are looking down on them. Caregivers are more engaged when they feel a sense of connectedness with their child's teachers, the staff, and other families in the program (Underwood & Killoran, 2012). While educators may consider their interactions with families as neutral, caregivers can pick up on judgments communicated subtly. For example, consider the study of accessing early childhood care and education described earlier (Abo-Zena & Beatty, 2019). When one caregiver was asked to reflect on her relationships with her child's teachers, she discussed her experience dropping her daughter off late to preschool, "Once you see the clock, they say that, 'Oh…' They look at you and they look at the clock. So that look is enough for you. You know what I mean?" Even if that teacher had insightful strategies to share with this caregiver about the child, the mother's feeling judged by the teacher may have created a defensive barrier that would limit how receptive the mother would be to the teacher's feedback. Educators need to have opportunities throughout their training to reflect on and potentially change the tone surrounding conversations with families (Lightfoot, 2004). Furthermore, teachers need opportunities to challenge prior assumptions about families by acquiring new knowledge about families through face-to-face interviews, observing at family events, directly engaging with diverse communities, listening to guest speakers, reading case studies about families, and reflecting on experiences with families with colleagues (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011; Whyte & Karabon, 2016).

One particularly robust strategy for developing conversations that can shift the tone from judging to disarming is the use of an inquiry-based approach. Teachers may observe scenarios that they feel impede the learning and development of young children, such as when children arrive late or not at all. Directly questioning the parent, "Why is your child late again today?" may be perceived as confrontational. Recurring tardiness could negatively affect the child's engagement in learning and development and may signal other challenges within the family. As demonstrated by the "look" described above, failure to address issues productively may lead to unhealthy communication dynamics between care providers. A teacher using an inquiry-based approach embedded in empathy would explore the overall context of a situation before

pinpointing problems and solutions. For example, educators learned that where caregivers worked non-standard hours, one parent intentionally took their young child to school late because the early morning was the only time throughout the week where that caregiver could interact with their child given their opposite schedules. Consider another mother who reflected on her children's absence from school and disclosed:

> [Sometimes] I feel like I don't have the energy to bring the kids to the school, although they are healthy enough. No fever. I called them and I let them know I myself is not good enough to bring them to the school. And I don't have any other resource to send them to school. And it is true. So I appreciate that they understand it because I don't want to give you a feel that I'm not coming to school because I don't want to (Abo-Zena & Beatty, 2019).

In this case, for a teacher to have a transformative effect on this family, they would need the family member to be comfortable enough to disclose such potentially vulnerable information. Ideally, the teacher would then be able to identify support for the family, particularly related to transporting the children to their early childhood or school settings.

An inquiry-based approach can help educators look beyond deficits and also reframe behaviors and characteristics. For example, consider the predicament that occurred at dismissal time when a young child from a Somali family was picked up by "family" members who seemed familiar to the child but were not listed as caregivers to whom the child could be released (Abo-Zena, 2018). The teachers were concerned about seemingly unstable home life. In addition, they were worried about the child's safety and their own legal responsibility. They approached another Somali family to discuss the overall situation and learned that "family" for many Somali families includes a strong and wide network of caregivers that blends biological family and fictive kin resembling tribal connections. In addition to the emotional connections between its members, the network helped manage the pragmatic challenges of supporting large families while working non-traditional hours. After inquiring in an empathic manner that replaced initially negative judgment with open curiosity, the educators realized the multiple caregivers were assets in the life of the child and family. To manage dismissal more smoothly, they increased communication and adjusted school records to account for the wide social support network while ensuring the child's safety.

For educators to be able to build on a family's strengths, we have to recognize them as such (i.e., not confuse differences with deficits) as well as identify skills and assets that may serve the child's learning and development. Drawing from a cultural fund of knowledge approach to working with families involves teachers entering into the lives of their students' families to learn about their historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills that contribute to families' overall well-being and functioning (Moll et al., 1992). Transforming family contexts through education, then, begins with educators committing to a partnering approach with families that limits judgments about differences, includes self-reflection, and replaces an interrogational or authoritarian tone with an inquiry style rooted in empathy. Even when difficult issues arise, such as concern about discipline style, the history of positive rapport coupled with inquiring about the reason for and efficacy of caregiving practices provides a context for caregivers and educational professionals to discuss effective ways to support the child that reflect the family's culture (Abo-Zena & New, 2012). Ultimately, cultural funds of knowledge and familiarity with the family's everyday practices provide a

foundation whereby educators can scaffold learning and development by relating school-based learning and developmental goals to routines at home and in community contexts.

Bringing Family Contexts into Education

Bringing family contexts into education helps to reduce the distance between home and school, which may provide a sense of belonging and enhance the quality of engagement between children and their caregivers. Familiarity with family contexts helps educators build curriculum and classroom practices around the child's cultural funds of knowledge, providing a useful scaffold and connection for children's learning and belonging. Beyond cultural connections, this approach helps recognize and address reality-based barriers that families may face related to schooling. Finally, in seeking multiple levels of partnerships between families and schools, understanding and meeting the situation and needs of families helps reframe family engagement in a reciprocal and more mutually fulfilling manner.

Scholars and practitioners assert that tailoring educational programs to draw from and build on youth's experiences through culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies can enhance the effectiveness of programs designed to address existing disparities and promote students' academic success and thriving (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012). Through a fund of knowledge framework, teachers engaging in visits at home can begin to challenge their uninformed assumptions and the status quo of teacher-parent relationships that promotes a deficit view of students and families (Reyes, Da Silva Iddings, & Feller, 2016; Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Home visits can better accommodate caregivers' schedules and responsibilities and shift the context of the teacher-parent relationship to value the student's unique and complex experiences with their family and community (Reyes et al., 2016). While home visits build connections that draw from family's everyday experiences, listening conferences allow teachers to learn about the everyday routines of families. These conferences can be guided through photo-sharing. Photo-sharing creates a shared experience to ground conversations and reduces power dynamics (Cheyney-Collante & Cheyney, 2018; Latz, 2017). Educators can bring what they learn from the conversations to the classroom. Attentive listening during informal exchanges, such as at drop-off and pick-up times can also yield useful entry points into a child's learning that connects the home to school. For example, consider a young child who announced to her teacher at drop-off that peanut butter tastes good on French toast. The parent explained that their family often spread peanut butter over pancakes and French toast before drizzling it with syrup. The next day at drop-off, the teacher greeted the young child and invited her to a center where there was a grocery bag that she asked the child to empty. The parent watched the child take out toast, a carton of eggs, and peanut butter while the teacher questioned, "Do you know what those ingredients can make?" The parent watched her daughter's eyes expand with excitement, "French toast!" she burst. This relatively simple series of interactions by the teacher communicated invaluable messages to the caregiver about the teacher's willingness to listen to what mattered to her child and her motivation to incorporate these interests into hands-on learning where cooking and measuring activities engaged all the children in the class. Through similar activities with other students over the course of the year, all children will have opportunities for their interests and cultural experiences to be reflected in their learning community. Through the children's discussions with their families, classroom newsletters, and other photo communication, these connections between home and school can create a thick web of positive interactions.

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Some aspects of a family's circumstances represent barriers to learning and engagement, that educators' interventions can either help navigate or may inadvertently further aggravate. Consider the interaction initiated by the teacher and relayed by this caregiver (who is also a teacher):

> …But his teachers aren't moms…She's like, "His boots are very cute and everything, but he's been falling in them a lot. Can you please not send him with those shoes?" I was like, "Sure," but I felt attacked because, first of all, I didn't get him dressed. It was his dad. I didn't know when I went to pick him up. I didn't know. And I know that my son, again, he's having a difficult time. My husband doesn't want to deal with what boots or what shoes he's wearing, so he just put the boots on, you know? And then you come to tell me, "Oh, they're so cute and everything, but …" Okay. I didn't know. You know? (Abo-Zena & Beatty, 2019).

In further reflecting on how, as a teacher, she tries to engage productively in conversations with caregivers, this caregiver/teacher advises:

> That's also why I always try to relate as a mom… I know they said that to me. I didn't like it, so I'm not going to speak to her in that way because I know she probably won't like it, just because I felt this way and because when we are teachers we also ... not me, but I've noticed that teachers who are not parents, they tend to criticize them a lot. They tend to criticize or just say things. As a mom, or just a teacher, I'm thinking you don't know. Why are you talking about it? You don't know all the things that parents go through to come here at 8:00 AM, you know? (Abo-Zena & Beatty, 2019).

While not every teacher needs to be a parent to be effective, the focus on approaching caregivers with empathy is important. In addition to the approach, educators can help address caregivers' reality-based needs. Because it is challenging to get children to school on time, early care centers and educators can share useful strategies with families in general about time-saving tips (e.g., laying out clothes and materials the night before, setting routines at home). Throughout the year, they can review these points and introduce new themes that arise in classroom culture, or become relevant seasonally (e.g., features of boots or articles of clothing that are adaptive to school contexts and why). In addition to sharing these perspectives, educators should consider ways to disseminate information to families given their diverse schedules and linguistic backgrounds, including involving caregiver representatives to share information (Hong, 2011).

The fund of knowledge approach challenges teachers and researchers to deconstruct narrow notions of family involvement or engagement and to make pivotal shifts to transform relationships with families by respecting home practices and disrupting deficit views of families (Moll et al., 1992; Whyte & Karabon, 2016). In particular, family engagement involves valuing and making space for various forms of cultural wealth held by families through aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). It is not enough to simply invite families to become participants in their child's education under the well-intentioned guise of a teacher-parent partnership. Research on parent involvement in early childhood education demonstrates that most parents would like to be involved in their children's education, but face barriers such as lack of available care for other children and demands from their employment (Demircan & Erden, 2015). Measuring parent involvement has multiple dimensions. Teachers reported low parent involvement measured as *attending* school programs or activities such as parent-teacher conferences, parent education programs, and assisting in the

classroom (Hilado, Kallemeyn, & Phillips, 2013). However, teachers reported high levels of parent involvement when their definition included the *efforts* parents expended to be involved and the *quality* of the time spent in the home and in the school to support the child (Hilado et al., 2013). The teachers who focused on the efforts and quality of parent involvement also had more positive views of families than the teachers who focused on the *attendance* aspect of parent involvement (Hilado et al., 2013).

The absence of clear family engagement expectations and structures can generate inequality in relationships between teachers and families. Teachers find themselves unable to make time to engage with all families, with "high-income" families who possess and apply power demanding teachers' limited time at the expense of efforts with "low-income" families (Gregg, Rugg, & Stoneham, 2012; Miller, 2018). Without accommodations for parent-educator cultural and linguistic differences, culturally and linguistically diverse families often feel disconnected from school, become less involved in making decisions about their children's learning, and are less able to support their children's learning at home (Douglass, 2011; Mahmood, 2013). A lack of clear expectations for family engagement practices also leads to miscommunication and misunderstanding: teachers feel uninformed regarding information about the child that the family could provide and families do not feel updated about school-related information about their child that the teacher could share (De Gioia, 2013).

In addition to the role of the teacher in facilitating family engagement through relationships with families, educators also have a role in facilitating relationships *between* families. Many families desire to build stronger relationships with other parents and families at school but struggle to build these connections at family events without school personnel taking an active role in fostering such relationships (West, Miller, & Moate, 2017). Practices to promote sharing information between families about caregiving practices and resources contribute to their collective efficacy, a type of social capital (Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999). In contrast, some families may be reluctant to engage with other families who are different from them and may not want to be identified with families who come from different cultural groups (Grace & Trudgett, 2012). In such cases, it is important to support affinity groups between families, while also promoting exchanges between children and between families about shared interests. In such events, families feel recognized and included, and also have an opportunity to learn from and become visible to other families who may share concerns beyond social group membership.

Applications

An asset-based model for considering family-school relationships helps inform applications at the personal, interpersonal, and structural levels (McWayne, 2015). From an applied level and reflecting reciprocal relations between family and school that affect curriculum and instruction, a collective of professionals outlined what operationalizing key principles "looks like" and "doesn't look like" (Workgroup on Principles and Practices in Natural Environments, 2007). While these principles were primarily designed for early interventionists working with children with or at risk of having disabilities or developmental delays, they may be adapted to developing strategies to work with children and their families across contexts. Based on these principles, familiar experiences, toys, and materials (i.e., not those brought in by visitors that seem to operate in some "magic" manner) should be centered in developing the curriculum. Educators should work to outline how families identify their resources and needs (i.e., not assuming the same care strategies and priorities based on social position or disability status).

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Care professionals should seek to partner with families in providing care and establishing priorities (i.e., not taking over, or "nicely" imposing standards). In working with families, educators should ask about and point out a child's interests and tendencies to help families facilitate "incidental teaching opportunities" (i.e., not providing didactic instructions or worksheets). Early childhood professionals should collaboratively partner with families in a manner that reflects fluid and diverse expectations (i.e., recognizing that "one size fits all" approaches do not acknowledge diverse approaches of caregivers within one family, as well as cultural and situational variations within and between families). Service providers should work collaboratively to set goals that reflect the goals and priorities of families (i.e., not being primarily driven by tests and standards that may inadequately reflect cultural variations and strengths). All service professionals should strive to refine practices based on professional and personal introspection (i.e., engaging in self-work and not using popularized practices without considering the values they reflect). Ultimately, reciprocal approaches to engaging with families should affect all aspects of professional work (e.g., matriculation, conferences, daily interactions).

Implications for Policy and Future Applied Scholarship

While family-based strengths are important to identify and build on, it is also important to identify challenges that exist within families, which reflect asymmetric relations to systemic issues (Spencer, 2017). Children and families may be navigating a range of poverty-related stressors, including experiencing food scarcity, homelessness, or housing instability, and care providers need to be able to address the trauma associated with these circumstances (Trella, 2020). Young children may come to school having experienced these and other types of trauma that teachers may be unaware of, such as a child placed in a foster care setting who appears "normal" and whose guardians may have limited information about the child's experiences before entering into their care. To illustrate, in a population-based study, adverse childhood experiences (e.g., survivor/victim of violence, living with mental illness, divorce, poverty, parent incarceration, adult substance abuse) have been found to contribute to the likelihood a preschool-aged child is suspended or expelled (Zeng, Corr, O'Grady, & Guan, 2019). To help address these inequities and racial disproportionality in special education, transdisciplinary teams need to translate findings and provide ongoing training to direct service providers who can help support families (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010; Bal, Sullivan, & Harper, 2014).

In addition to being able to develop a basic rapport with families, educators need to be able to help families and their children navigate adverse circumstances and contribute to efforts that alleviate challenging circumstances. Unfortunately, many teacher preparation programs do not provide explicit theoretical or practical training about how teachers may develop strong collaborative relationships with families about the ways families and schools may perceive situations differently, including ones involving religion and values (Lightfoot, 2004; Pedro, Miller, & Bray, 2012). From a systemic level, ongoing attention to cultural diversity needs to become central to performance standards for individual teacher candidates, faculty, and departments, and not considered achieved "competence.". Just as teacher candidates need to demonstrate content proficiency on licensure tests, there should be evidence of teacher candidates' sustained engagement with addressing issues of dispositions and working with diverse (i.e., all) families reflected in all aspects of the teacher preparation program, in ongoing professional development, and in licensure related requirements.

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Conclusion

Like in any relationship, the connection between all engaged parties can lead to life-altering changes for all stakeholders; this requires a collaborative, bidirectional relationship where educators work with (not for or on) caregivers (Freire, 1994/1970). To contribute to intentional and desirable changes, we need to regularly (re)examine the assumptions that guide our practice so that we can build on the wealth that families bring and incorporate this wealth into educational practices across contexts. In partnering with families, we can identify barriers that may be addressed within the relationship. Alternatively, broader or systemic challenges may require a range of stakeholders to come together to address. For relationships to be transformative, we (and our practices) need to be as willing to be transformed by the interactions as we hope to transform others.

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