Meghan Whelan

Lesson 1.1F

“What is Family?”

As a parent, I believe family and the role we take in our child’s education is crucial. Working in the education system now, I can see from a different perspective how important it is to communicate with caring adults to ensure the child is getting the best support throughout their time in school.

I was always the parent to be present at the PTA meetings, pay my dues and ensure I would send in whatever they needed, whether it be items for a fundraiser/bake sale, school supplies, or a donation. I would volunteer at back-to-school events and sports events, mainly the sports my children were involved in. However, I understand that it is not always the same case for every family to be able to provide monetary donations or even attend and volunteer at events. Every family’s home life looks different and as a teacher, I have seen this more and more and developed a deeper understanding of it. I was blessed to be able to be a stay-at-home parent, but that is not always the case for most parents. Careers, money and even the lack of transportation are just three constraints that cause caring adults to be able to participate in school functions. At the end of the day, we still want to include and encourage all caring adults to have the opportunity to participate and be active in their student’s education. Zoom calls, power point presentations, and even meetings during planning periods may offer more flexibility for caring adults to be involved. Culture differences can also be a constraint causing caring adults to feel that are not able to participate effectively. I would offer translated material in this situation so they can understand exactly what their student is learning in the classroom, as well as offer insight to me as their teacher to help engage with the student better if a unique teaching style is needed.

The roles that parents, or caring adults, play through volunteering can look different for every family. Also, I am in a middle school setting where we do not have as many opportunities for parents to come into the school building as were offered in elementary school. I remember volunteering to be the “room mom”, going to read books to my kids’ class, as well as helping clean up during and after lunch. These are not opportunities we see in middle school. The opportunities for volunteering I see the most often is through the PTA, as well as sending in school supply items that are beneficial in the classroom (expo markers, pencils, Kleenex and hand sanitizers).

Caring adults’ voice play a major role in the decisions about instruction, extracurricular activities, and support services. Fun fact, my bachelor’s degree has a focus on Nutrition and Food Science. When I was writing my exit paper, I interviewed the school nutritional director at our local elementary school. She stressed the importance of feedback from parents to help guide nutrition policies when compiling the menu’s each month. Also, when parents are active in communicating with teachers about instruction, it offers the best possible way to ensure a student who may have a unique way of learning gets the best possible educational experience.

When communicating with parents/caring adults, it is extremely important that they feel their input is crucial in decision making. It can be very frustrating in any situation to feel that you have no say or control over what the outcome will be. Fostering a relationship where parents/caring adults can understand what you are trying to communicate clearly will send a positive message that their input is welcome. I went through a similar experience recently with my son when he was injured in a football game. He landed on his hand, and it immediately started turning purple and swelling. We went straight to the ER, only for them to give him ibuprofen and send him home, saying his wrist was not broken. I called his pediatrician the next day and explained it was not getting any better and I was wanting another Xray. After several hours, the doctor was able to get his Xray from the hospital, continued to explain in medical terms that I could not understand that certain bones looked fine, and said he did not need another Xray. Fast forward a week later, I finally got him in with an orthopedic doctor. They took him back for an Xray, only to come back and tell me more medical jargon and his wrist was not broken. I was extremely frustrated at this point and lost my temper, telling the doctor I need someone who will listen to me; that my son’s wrist was not hurt, but rather it was his hand and no one had x-rayed his fingers. They agreed to do one more Xray and found two broken spots in his hand and fingers. As a parent I know how important it is to advocate for your children. As a teacher, I would always want my students’ parents/caring adults to know how much I respect their role in their child’s education and how important it is to collaborate to make sure we are on the same page with every need for the student. Currently, I do not have any communication with my students’ parents/caring adults, so this is all simply my intentions going forward and how I plan to communicate with parents.

In conclusion, the overall goal is to develop a balanced partnership between myself and my student’s parents/caring adults to ensure we are offering the best support for our students. Being able to communicate effectively will not only ensure the student is getting the best possible educational instruction, but also give them a sense that they have support both in school and at home.