

Working with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families-- A Philosophy Statement

By Lisa Moore

The family is the most important entity in a child's life. A family is the basic structure on which the adult is built regardless of the structure, number of people it includes, or the languages it speaks. If this structure has vulnerabilities during childhood the child is at-risk for issues in throughout life. That is the reason why I have focused my own education on working specifically with vulnerable populations, specifically: (1) the homeless; (2) migrant farm workers; and (3) American Indians. As an educational leader, learning how to work with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families is imperative for success. As the United States itself becomes more diverse, we must learn these skills in order to lead our students into the 21st century that they will know as successful adults.

The US education system has long struggled to involve families in school buildings and in the education of their children. Almost 20 years ago I worked at a central Kentucky nonprofit which had a primary focus of parental involvement and community collaboration in school in Kentucky's fifth congressional district, which still ranks lowest in the US for well-being (e.g., education, health, life satisfaction, poverty). This, in part, is what formed the basis of my desire and focus that I have today.

At the most basic core working with CLD families is an understanding of the different cultures themselves. While we can never really know cultures other than our own, we can gain an understanding and appreciation of them through scholarship (e.g., funds of knowledge, linguistics, cultural anthropology) and reflections of our own stereotypes and prejudices that we possess. This understanding and knowledge are important to share with our fellow educators and community members in order to engage in effective dialogues in order to achieve important educational and societal outcomes to support our children.

One outcome that this understanding and knowledge of CLD families will be to help us to initiate a school, family, and community partnership to support the success of our children. By engaging these three entities we can help our most vulnerable populations become more successful in and out of school. By assisting parents and teachers alike, and getting them working in tandem so the child can do nothing but be more successful now and later in life. Further engaging the community just adds another stone to the structure that will only strengthen it.

As I work in education I will continue to connect and reflect through practice and continuing education.

"In every conceivable manner, the family is link to our past, bridge to our future."

-Alex Haley