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PARENT TEACHER CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATION IN SPECIAL
EDUCATION

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY

ELVERA AGBOKA

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FOR THE DEGREE OF
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PARENT TEACHER CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATION IN SPECIAL
EDUCATION

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May 2018

APPROVED

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Abstract

Classrooms today are so diverse that it cannot go unnoticed. Diversity ranging from academic levels, religion, culture, etc. The focus for this thesis is how to create a collaborative environment with parents of students from different cultures. Collaboration between parents and teachers has been proven to provide student success. This is the same for all students. Collaboration is especially important for parents of children with special needs. Schools are required to ensure equity and inclusion. Equity and inclusion means “every learner matters and matters equally”. Parent and teacher collaboration helps this agenda. However, in order for parents and teachers to work together to support school success, they need to be able to understand each other and to communicate well. For many teachers, this is a challenge. One of the challenges is that the United States has become more culturally diverse. There are immigrants from different cultural backgrounds and languages. In order to ensure equity and inclusion, teachers are encouraged to strengthen their cultural understanding so that they can work with different students and be able to collaborate with parents for their children’s education. Children with special needs benefit more with parents and teachers working more closely. In Minnesota, equity and inclusion are highly promoted and supported, and there is a new grant for school districts for this purpose. District 196 is one of the school districts that received such a grant. The district has been developing a work plan which includes how to work with student from families of different cultures especially now that there are many immigrants moving south of the river to cities like Eagan, Burnsville, and Apple Valley. District 196 has already engaged community cultural workers. Trainings are also being developed. As a teacher and a parent with children including a special needs student, this writer wants to contribute to the training of teachers in working specifically with Africans. This paper includes the importance of

teacher and parent collaboration, and the barriers to collaboration such as cultural differences. The writer has developed a half day curriculum. The curriculum includes creating a common vision for cross-cultural understanding by teachers, creating commitment, and developing strategies that would enable the teachers to collaborate more effectively with parents from other cultures. The focus is on working with African families. The curriculum will involve developing strategies and ways of making necessary changes.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Is it critical for special education teachers to have an extensive cultural understanding in order to effectively collaborate to meet the needs of students with special needs? This question is based on many assumptions. Among many other things, our schools and communities are becoming more culturally diverse. Students with special needs include new immigrants and many from different cultural backgrounds. Working with children with special needs involves a collaborative effort between the parents, the school system, and the students.

Culture plays a critical part in learning. Culture includes language and the way we look at things, do tasks, as well as our attitude towards education and life as a whole. Immigrant students may have many difficulties as they are caught between two cultures. For example, African students (born in the United States or migrated to the United States) would have to work within the culture of their African parents and the United States culture.

The special education teacher will have to provide the best education for the student with special needs. According to Pang (2011), this should be best done by a collaborative effort between the student, the school system, and the parents. These are very important relationships, but may be very difficult for the teachers, parents, and students especially as they work within many cultural barriers. Among the questions asked are the following: How can the lack of cultural understanding affect the teacher's ability to work collaboratively with parents of special needs students? What are some of the strategies or areas to consider in order to enable them to work more effectively with parents from different cultures?

This paper is a literature review. The purpose of this literature review is to explore the influence of culture in special education teaching. It is specifically focusing on teachers working collaboratively with parents to meet the needs of students. It seeks to understand why strong

cross-cultural understanding is necessary. The main question is whether there is a need for strong cross-cultural understanding among teachers in special education as they work collaboratively with parents for the success of their students. If there is, how can teachers attain a cultural understanding, what kind of cultural understanding, and in which specific areas? The paper will include an application section and a section where this writer presents her conclusions and personal reflections.

Although the issue of culture is related to all student populations, the focus of this thesis addresses students in special education with parents from Africa. The reason for this focus is the experience of this writer and the increase of diversity among our school systems and in special education classrooms. The literature review is based on the understanding that working with children with special needs is a collaborative effort between parents and teachers. Culture plays a critical role in collaboration. It can serve as a barrier or an asset.

Other areas of culture include the classroom environment, which may not be inclusive enough to provide diverse learning. When a teacher is well equipped, he or she will be able to develop a good relationship with parents. He or she will better understand the culture and how the social struggle of the student and family may affect the student and what kind of attention is needed. He or she will be able to manage the difficulties of working with families in the way they perceive things and the way they solve problems for their children. The teacher can then use this understanding to communicate better, modify his/her assessment, make proper class arrangement, and make use of targeted resources to effectively impact student learning and to be more sensitive. Cultural understanding provides an opportunity to bring ideas. Teachers can take many steps to build bridges with different cultures to help students.

This writer has tried to contribute to the need for effective collaboration between parents and teachers of students with special needs. Effective collaboration between parents and teachers will go a long way in meeting the national goal of equity and inclusion. The writer has identified cross-cultural challenges in having effective collaboration among teachers and parents with different cultural backgrounds and communication.

It is not enough to generalize the immigrant culture or the African culture. Although there are similarities, there are many differences. These differences are reflected by tradition, perceptions, decision making, and many others. Because culture is complex, understanding it and being able to work collaboratively will require teachers to look beyond what is general. Therefore, future studies should include an opportunity to understand the African culture in a more in-depth way. Any study should include how Africans perceive things and what the underlying reasons are. A deeper understanding of that culture will demonstrate an appreciation of their culture.

The example the writer has given is on collaboration with African immigrants. This is because she is an African and understands the culture more. She understands the difference between the American and the African culture. As an example of school districts that are becoming more diverse and in need of cross cultural training, the writer has used District 196, as she resides in the area and it is also the district where her children attend school. The writer has investigated what District 196 is doing with regards to inclusion and equity, its plan for more parent teacher collaboration, and the challenges they have. The plans may be different from other school districts. Other school districts may not have the resources that District 196 has. The school district has received a grant to promote inclusion and equity and for more collaboration

between parents and teachers. As District 196 tries to work with the immigrants more effectively, they will need to become familiar with their cultures.

Many of the African parents in America will need to be invited to work together with the school. However, this is difficult for the teachers because of cultural and communication barriers. Many teachers may not have the skill to go the extra mile to reach out, understand, and work with African immigrant parents. They need to be encouraged and given cross-cultural training in order to collaborate with parents. Another problem is that, in some African cultures, there is a different perception about children with special needs. When parents have children with special needs, they often attribute it to some wrong the parents have done and are being punished.

This paper focuses on parent and teacher collaboration for the success of student. Collaboration is about parents and teachers working together for the success of the student. Parent and teacher collaboration is considered a mandate in United States schools. This is considered important as the United States education system promotes inclusion and equity. The focus of the paper is on teachers' collaboration with parents of African immigrants. It specifically focusses on special needs students.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Equity and Inclusive Environment

There are many strategies for schools to create an inclusive environment. However, it is difficult to create a perfect inclusive environment. According to Brighthouse (2000), creating an inclusive environment for students with disability and those with non-disability may be hard to attain. Therefore our goal should be the reduction of the level of inequality. The creation of inequality should also be seen as a process for short and long term success and not a one-time activity. An outline on strategies to attain equality include: recognizing and planning for diversity, using accountability and evaluation for improvement and professional staff development, external support services, education policies, parent and community involvement, curriculum development, and classroom organization.

There is extensive research on parent involvement in education that leads to student success. In some provinces in Canada, parents are involved in school governance and school policy. In Australia, the national strategy for educational equity include curriculum development and assessment for students with special needs. (Strategies for Effective Collaboration with Parents, Schools and Community Members, 2009).

The special education public law of 94-142 emphasizes the need for parent involvement in special education. It was signed into law on November 29, 1975. This includes the rights of parents. Among these are participation in the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and giving or refusing permission for evaluation and testing. This legislation increases the role of parent involvement (Education for All Handicapped Children's Act, 1975).

According to LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling (2011), it is very difficult to promote and maintain parent involvement although the success of the student depends on this. Generally, African Americans and Native Americans are less successful in terms of academic achievement when compared to whites. Many factors contribute to student success. Parent involvement is part of those factors. When working with parents, communication is key. The fact that families differ in culture also makes it difficult for them to have different expectations. Research shows there is a direct correlation between parent involvement and student success (LaRocque et al., 2011).

In the 2010 census of individuals living in the United States, there were 16% Hispanics, 13 % blacks, 5% Asians, and less than 1% American Indians. (Newsroom Archive). This shows a lot of diversity. In addition to the difference in learning style, students from cultural and linguistic minority groups pose other learning style differences. It is not easy to have an inclusive learning involvement as a way of accommodating cultural difference (Billings, 2015) Part I.

It is necessary to foster successful partnerships with families of students with disabilities. This can be done in many ways. Edwards & Da Forte (2012) outlined the following points: Teachers and parents need to look for solutions together and teachers need to respect the parents, even when they come from different cultural backgrounds. Teachers need to communicate regularly with parents and listen to parents as they work together. All these are necessary as parent involvement goes a long way in the education of children with disabilities. Students become more successful when there is parent involvement. It is therefore necessary to collaborate between parents and teachers (Edwards & Da Fonte, 2012).

Teachers need to recognize the growing diversity within our schools. The growing diversity results in linguistic and cultural barriers. Many teachers acknowledge the lack of preparation to deal with this trend. Teachers must be better prepared for diverse classrooms.

Such preparation includes adequate amount of course work to prepare teachers for a culturally diverse classroom (Daniel & Friedman, 2005). The following quotes focus on the importance of collaboration:

Nationwide, there has been progress in creating a collaborative environment between teachers and parents. For example, the Michigan Department of Education provides services that improve parent involvement. This push is based on several research studies conducted in the past. The research shows that students are more successful academically when parents are more involved. The desire to create effective collaboration among parents and teachers had The Michigan Department of Education, The State Board of Education, and the Office of Field Services (OFS) to design strategies to create a more collaborative environment between parents and teachers. The recommendations included the following: developing strategies and providing support that will help in overcoming barriers to parent/teacher collaboration, show the impact of parent teacher collaboration, and provide the necessary resources for parents to better understand the school systems so that they can be more involved (Diversity, Inclusion and Equity: Insights from Special Needs Provision, Education Policy Analysis OECD, 2003).

According to Mohandas Gandhi, in order for us to bring about change we want to see, we also need to be the tools for change. Teachers need to communicate diversity in classrooms as the demographics in our communities and across the United States have changed. Teachers fail students if they do not let them recognize that we are living in a changing world and the importance of that. (Grant, 2009).

According to the United Nations goals on Science, Education, and Cultural Scientific Organization, all students should be given the opportunity to have an individualized education so they can succeed. However, this has been a challenge, as not all countries have the resources to

do so. It is very difficult to have an inclusive environment. The United Nations has its goals for sustainable development for 2030 to have no person left behind. It has education as a priority. Its recommendations are improving school facilities for disability, gender, safety, and a nonviolent environment. (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Sustainable Develop Goals Education, 2030 [UNESCO201] 2017).

The goal of equity and inclusion is to meet the needs of the student. It is also about recognizing that we live in a diverse environment. America is becoming very diverse both in the community and the schools. Equity and inclusion is also a United Nations mandate on human rights for children. According to this mandate, all children should be given the opportunity of education. Therefore, our school systems need to provide the right environment. This includes considering the needs of children with a disability. There is however a challenge to this. There are many interpretations on what equity is. These include providing equity access to educational opportunity and providing a good environment (Diversity, Inclusion and Equity: Insights from Special Needs Provision; Education Policy Analysis OECD 2003).

Parent Involvement

The teacher builds positive relationships by showing interest and respect to the student and parent as well as their culture, making them feel self-worth and welcome in the environment. They Provide translators to families that need them. Families could be encouraged to attend school/community building programs such as Dairy Queen Night, Family Fun Night, and Spring Carnival where parents, teachers and students mingle. Providing volunteer opportunities for parents and also occasional home visits when necessary are all ways of creating a collaborative environment, which fosters student success. All special educators should be expected to communicate frequently with parents when the child is making progress, and when he is not. In

the case where the parent points out concerns about the student, the teacher must follow through to make it right. Collaboration and involvement in the IEP planning and other areas are very important. All parents must be encouraged to get strongly involved as this will benefit children to a great extent. Communication involving each of the stakeholders is key, and this should be the ultimate goal of every educator. Generally, people do not want to step out of their comfort zones. They want to get close to people that they know. They tend to stay away from people who look different. They miss out on the opportunities and excitement of knowing and working with others who are different (Edwards & Da Fonte, 2012).

The Need for Effective Parent/Teacher Collaboration

Parent involvement includes parents participating in their children's education, serving as committee volunteers, assisting with homework and school based decision-making, and liaisons between schools (Harry, 2008). Collaboration is part of the United States constitution but is difficult to implement due to cultural misunderstanding, mistrust, and different views of disabilities by families. There are also conflicting ideas on goals for students with disabilities as teachers work with students from different cultures. There is a need for more effectiveness to prepare teachers to deal with cultural diversity, which has increased in the United States. Part of those barriers include ethnicity and gender, life context of parents, parent beliefs about their involvement and their perception about collaboration (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

According to Mueller and Buckley (2014), there is a need for effective collaboration between parents and teachers. According to research, the IEP process especially requires effective collaboration. Effective collaboration includes and requires building strong relationships ensuring effective, open, honest, and frequent communication, and listening to parents' voice. It further includes the need to resolve conflict and a strong trustworthy

partnership. Fathers have a desire to be involved in their children's education and especially that of collaboration in the IEP process and conflict resolution. The special educational system is complex with lots of paper work. It could be hard to manage especially with documents relating to IEP (Mueller & Buckley, 2014). A key part of communication between schools and parents is working together in decision-making. This is meant to strengthen parent involvement which is a complicated issue (Cobb, 2014).

Importance of Collaboration

Pang (2011) highlights the importance of collaboration between families of diverse cultures and special education systems. There is a need for skills and effort to work with parents who's linguistic and culture is different and pose challenges. Pang emphasized the need for making it more convenient for parents to be involved, which provides an opportunity to resolve conflict between parents and teachers, as conflict may arise because of miscommunication or expectations. Parents need to be empowered to be more involved in their children's special education needs. Special attention should be given to the needs of parents from different cultural backgrounds due to the differences in values, perceptions, attitudes, and expectations. Effective collaboration with parents require more communication. Teachers should find ways to improve IEP meetings for parents to be able to plan better for their students. When students are more involved and they understand more, they can benefit a lot and be able to support their children more (Pang, 2011).

Parents generally understand the importance of reading at an early age. This becomes more effective when there is a collaborative effort between parents and teachers. Sukhram & Hsu (2012) emphasize the value of parent-teacher collaboration as established in the United States constitutions. Research shows that this collaboration has created significant improvement on

students. Parent-teacher collaboration follows a continuum of informing, involving, engaging, and leading. It is described as a process that is based on mutual goals, shared responsibility, accountability, and resources for those involved. It also involves trust and a sense of community that works together (Sukhram & Hsu, 2012).

Cross-Cultural Competency

There should be training for teachers on skills for effective collaboration. This should include communication. The school should also include policies and opportunities for effective collaboration in a unique way. Teachers should consider the use of technology to support collaboration. Parents try to be involved but face many barriers set by teachers. Often they would have to follow certain protocol. Parents found it difficult. Furthermore parents are considered the same despite their different cultural background. There is an understanding and agreement among many teachers that education of students is improved when parents and teachers work together (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). When teachers invest their time to research and understand the various cultures in their school community, they are enabled to serve and partnership opportunities enhanced (Graham-Clay, 2005).

When people do not know others, they do not have any desire to be close to them and so they tend to judge them. They stereotype and develop prejudice, and act negatively against them. They tend to focus on what they see as negative and do not see the good things in them. As teachers it is very possible to fall into that trap. With the increased diversity in the United States, and in our classrooms teachers have to deal with students and families from different cultures. In addition to the daily workload, they now have to work across cultures; something that requires a lot of effort. The requirement of equity, inclusion, and parent collaboration especially with special needs student makes it challenging. It requires an extra effort (Chamberlain, 2014).

Working across cultures involves knowing about other cultures. It also includes understanding how different one's culture is from other cultures. The following are some ways one can learn about other cultures: being conscious of self, culture, and possible biases against other cultures, researching about other cultures, talking to someone from a different cultural background, traveling to other countries in order to learn and appreciate other cultures, and having an open mind about other cultures. Having an open mind is one of the most important things in learning about other cultures. This is because even within the same culture, there are subcultures. For example, all Africans have a similar culture different from the United States. However, within Africa there are also sub cultures. People from West Africa might be different from those from East Africa. We need to understand that. When people do not have an open mind they tend to stereotype and forget that everyone is unique. Everyone has one opinion based on their cultural experiences. If someone has any negative experience with one African, he or she cannot say all Africans are the same. Also, some of the behaviors of people we meet may not be negative, but a lot may depend on our interpretation. Therefore we need to have an open mind. Teachers should have an open mind as they work with parents from other cultures. If they do not have an open mind, they cannot build strong relationships, and there would not be trust between the teachers and parents. Trust is necessary to be able to work together and support the success of the student (<https://au.reachout.com/articles/understanding-a-different-culture>).

What may be considered normal in one culture may be considered abnormal in another culture. In the African culture in general, two men or two women walking together and holding hands signifies a sign of trust or closeness in relationship. It is common for a young man and an uncle to hold hands. However, in the western world like the US, this shows a sign of courtship (<https://online.pointpark.edu/business/cultural-differences-in-nonverbal-communication/>).

Most of the information we communicate is nonverbal. Nonverbal communication varies from culture to culture. Nonverbal means the words are not stated verbally. The messages we seek to communicate are hidden. This is the kind of communication in a high context culture. Africans communicate in a high context manner. They communicate based on their unique cultural background and unless one has some level of cultural understanding, one would not be able to understand what another person may communicate in a nonverbal way. There are high context and low context cultures. The following are examples of nonverbal communication: eye contact, touch, gestures, physical space, facial expressions, and posture (The Provider's Guide to Quality & Culture, Culture Plus Consulting, 2008).

Culture is comprised of several components: attitudes, beliefs, language, customs, rituals, behavior, faith and religion, food, art, drama, and music. The uniqueness of each of these traits in a specific ethnicity, race, or national origin brings about the term cultural differences. Some examples of cultural differences other than that of country of origin at the workplace would be employees who grew up in either the city or the country-side, those who are different in age, and those who hold higher educational degrees than others. Although these differences can sometimes generate a lively workplace, they can also lead to several cultural disputes. Barriers in culture make it difficult to collaborate effectively in conformity with state mandate. Students with special needs are the ones that are mostly affected (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Although there is currently no clear path for effective collaboration, district 196 is taking measures towards it. Due to the increase in diversity in this district as a result of many Africans migrating from other parts of the Twin Cities, an action plan is being developed for effective parent teacher collaboration. This collaboration involves building strong and trustworthy relationships to ensure frequent and honest communication with parents as well as conflict

resolution. Current research findings indicate that people tend to feel their culture is more superior to others, and also stereotype people from different cultures. People could be biased without being aware, hence they need to understand their biases in order to know how to deal with cultural issues in a better way. To be able to collaborate effectively, people must resolve their cultural differences (Strategies for Effective Collaboration with Parents, Schools, and Community Members, 2009).

It is important that mainstream teachers are trained properly with the concepts of inclusion, displaying great values and attitudes in order for them to gain adequate confidence to teach children with diverse needs (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Inclusive education in Scotland involves creating a spirit of achievement for all pupils promoting high self-esteem and talent in an environment of high educational standards. Efforts are made to eradicate barriers to learning as well as any form of discrimination in order to promote diversity in the society (Count Us In HMIE, 2002).

Many times parents are excluded due to cultural barriers. They are lumped in one area as if one size fits all. Research shows that schools have had a good record on parent involvement. Culture poses another problem. Parents from different cultures often do not trust the school system. Teachers tend to work better when working with parents from similar backgrounds. Approaches to help develop a better collaboration between teacher and parent include respectful communications, avoiding the tendency of “one size fits all,” and being sensitive to cultural differences. Families of all cultures tend to be interested in their children’s education and need to be involved (Pang, 2011).

It is very difficult for teachers to work with parents from different cultures. This is because culture is very complex. The layers of an onion represent how complex culture is. It has

different layers. There are the observable artifacts, the values and the basics, or underlying assumptions of culture. When one looks at cultures, for example the Somali culture, the first thing one notices is the observable area of culture such as dress code, communication style, emotions, and how they relate to one another. Beyond the observable indicator are the values. The values are what a culture presents in an observable way. For example the Somali women generally cover most parts of their heads with the hijab. This is a symbol of modesty and privacy, protecting women from being attracted by men whom they are not married to. When we try to judge peoples behaviors, we should understand why they behave the way they do (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

According to Chamberlain (2005), the difference in culture between students and teachers has an impact on students. Cultural misunderstanding is often seen to lead to wrong assessment. That is part of the reason why there is an over-representation of certain cultural groups. Teachers often misunderstand the reason for student behavior. They attribute misbehavior to disabilities when in fact, it might have been due to cultural issues. Cultural misunderstanding between teachers and parents has a negative impact on student success. Values, norms, and traditions affect the way we think and see things. For parents, understanding is critical. Teachers need to understand the culture so that they do not make hasty judgements. The differences between linguistics, culture, and issues of disabilities need to be considered. Teachers would need to understand these differences. This may require teachers to develop a cultural consciousness mindset and stop blaming parents or others about problems of working with other cultures. They should also be aware of the law to be inclusive. That includes knowing about other cultures and recognizing and responding to cultural differences in the education of culturally and

linguistically diverse learners (Diversity, Inclusion and Equity: Insights from Special Needs Provision; Education Policy Analysis OECD, 2003).

Teachers should be willing to learn how to work with parents and be sensitive to cultural differences. This is important as schools are now more diverse than before. Parents go through a lot of stress, and teachers must try to understand them, empathize with them, recognize their struggles, and exercise patience. There is a high percentage of biased diagnosis of minority students from different cultures labeled as having an educational handicap. Sometimes when immigrants are struggling with English as a second language and may have problems integrating, they are automatically determined to have a need for special education. This may not always be in favor of the student's progress. Such an issue could be avoided with proper collaboration among parent, teacher, and student. Working with parents of different cultural backgrounds requires effective cross-cultural communication. A special education teacher requires collaboration with paraprofessionals, general education teachers, parent, and student, making use of different communication tools (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Cross-Cultural Communication

Communication and collaboration between the special educator and the parent is very important to ensure that the student attains his/her utmost potential. Nothing should be taken for granted when it comes to communicating with parents about their child. Parents need every detail of their child's progress, and they like to give input towards the progress of their child.

Student needs are better met when there is an effective collaboration. The school system and the community should be supportive to the teachers, the students, and the parents, as they work collaboratively to provide valuable information that can be used to better support the student (Harry, 2008).

Teachers may not also always be able to understand and work well with students from difference cultural background. Teacher communication with parent is very critical. The role of a parent in their child's education can be effective if there is clear communication with the teacher, and there is parental involvement in each step of the child's progress. Parents are welcome to give suggestions and voice out their expectations since it is about their child and they (as well as the teacher) want the best for him/her. Tools for communication with parents will depend on their level of education, communication skills, and cultural background. Among the tools are email, news-letters, take-home memos, skype, notes, or whichever channel the parent feels comfortable to use. The frequency of communication for all these depend on what is at hand. For the most part, it is recommended to communicate with parents on a daily or weekly basis (Chamberlain, 2005).

Communication, which is a two-way process is very crucial in collaboration. To ensure effective communication, the other party needs to respond to be sure that recipients of the message (parents, students, or teacher) acknowledge and understand the message.

Teachers must seek the best in the students, assuring them that they believe in them (Spencer-Oatey, 2008)

CHAPTER III: APPLICATION

There is a need for strong cross-cultural understanding among teachers in special education as they work collaboratively with parents for the success of their students. The following is a curriculum that will help support the efforts of cross-cultural understanding while making a big difference. This curriculum covers three objectives: helping teachers have a common vision in creating an environment of equity and inclusion through effective collaboration with parents from diverse cultures, especially those from Africa; creating commitment among teachers on the issue of equity and inclusion by effectively working collaboratively with parents from diverse cultures, especially those from Africa; developing strategies that will bring about changes that will help effective parent-teacher collaboration and in dealing with cross-cultural barriers.

A review of the literature shows the need for strong cultural understanding. Effective parent-teacher collaboration is necessary for student success, equity, and inclusion. Cultural differences among parents and teachers is a challenge. Parents and teachers need to be able to work together for student success. There is an increase in cultural diversity in district 196. For example, many Africans are migrating from other parts of the twin cities to district 196. Currently, district 196 is developing an action plan for effective parent teacher collaboration for its efforts on equity and inclusion. This includes parents of children with special needs. It is necessary to provide a strong cultural understanding to teachers especially those working with Africans. Strategies for the cross-cultural understanding include cross-cultural training, community engagement forums, teacher reward system, and innovative activities that would create cultural integration. See appendix for half-day training materials.

SECTION 3 - APPLICATION

PARENT TEACHER CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

HALF DAY TRAINING

CURRICULUM

DISTRICT 196 TEACHERS

MINNESOTA

8:30 AM TO NOON


BY

ELVERA O,AGBOKA

Purpose of The Training

- To help teachers have a common vision in creating an environment of equity and inclusion through effective collaboration with parents from diverse cultures, especially those from Africa
- To create a sense of commitment among teachers on the issue of equity and inclusion by effectively working collaboratively with parents from diverse cultures, especially those from Africa.
- To develop strategies that will bring about changes for effective parent-teacher collaboration and in dealing with cross-cultural barriers.

Problem statement



1. Collaboration is a mandate and necessary

2. Currently, there are difficulties in effective collaboration

3. Problem includes cultural barriers

- No clear path for effective collaboration
- District 196 is struggling to address the challenge
- Not knowing how to deal with cultural barriers
- Special needs students have more challenges

Figure 1

Our mandate for parent involvement

- The special education public law of 94-142 emphasizes the need for parent involvement in special education. It was signed into law on November 29, 1975. This includes the rights of parents. Among these are participation in the IEP (Individualized Education Plan), giving permission or refusing permission for evaluation and testing (page 10). The legislation increases the role of parent involvement.

Trend in cultural diversity

- There is an increase in cultural diversity in district 196. For example, many Africans are migrating from other parts of the twin cities to district 196. Currently, district 196 is developing an action plan for effective parent teacher collaboration for its efforts on equity and inclusion.



What is effective parents-teacher collaboration?

- Effective collaboration includes and requires building strong relationships ensuring effective, open, honest, and frequent communication, and listening to parents' voice. It further includes the need to resolve conflict. It also includes strong trustworthy partnership



Key points for effective parents-teacher collaboration

1. It is difficult to work within different cultures
2. What are some of the difficulties
3. It is possible to work across difficult cultures
4. As teacher, we need to develop skills to work across cultures
5. These skills include being culturally sensitive and learn more about other cultures
6. Recognize our biases
7. Recognize the importance of collaboration and working across cultures

Why is there growing interest in Cultural Diversity in Special Ed?

- 1. Migration
- 2. Diverse classrooms
- 3. A move towards quality education for all

What is culture?

- Cultural assumptions are an important aspect of understanding context. Culture is a system of beliefs, customs (usual habits and practices), values, attitudes and lifestyles of a particular people. Culture can refer to groups of people such as nations or more specific groups such as sporting teams.

The need for cross-cultural training for teachers especially in special education

1. Our schools are becoming culturally diverse
2. More and more students are diagnosed with special needs
3. There is now a greater emphasis in providing an environment that fully supports students with special needs

Culture is like an Onion

Visual Cultural Differences



Language
Housing
Food
Clothes

Key Beliefs

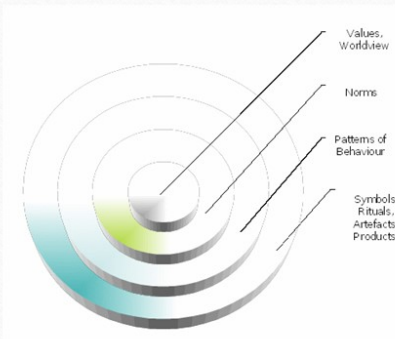
Not so visible but has an effect on determining behaviour at a more superficial level

Norms and Values

greetings
bow, shake hands



Cultural layers



Culture is like an Onion

- [Geert Hofstede](#), a social psychologist / behavioral scientist in 1991 came up with this explanation of culture. In his view, '[culture is like an onion](#): a system that can be peeled, layer by layer, in order to reveal the content. Imagine the whole onion as 'culture' and as you peel on, you see different levels which work on and influence culture (in any particular society).

Is it critical for special education teachers to have an extensive cultural understanding in order to effectively collaborate to meet the needs of students with special needs?

- Culture includes language and the way we look at things, do tasks, as well as our attitude towards education and life as a whole.



How to learn about other cultures



- The following are some ways we can learn about other cultures: being conscious of yourself, your culture and possible biases against other cultures, researching about other cultures on your own, talking to someone from a different cultural background, traveling to other countries in order to learn and appreciate other cultures, and having an open mind about other cultures

Examples of Nonverbal Communication

- The following are nonverbal communication: Eye contact, touch, gestures, physical space, facial expressions, and posture.



“

The challenge of parent teacher collaboration

”

Collaboration is difficult with immigrant families who many come from cultures that are very different from the American culture. This is very true of African immigrants. The beliefs, perceptions, norms, and traditions of Africans are very different from those of Americans.

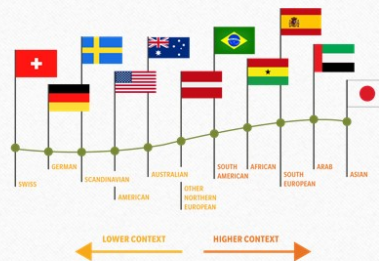


Basic assumptions are the reason why we act the way we do

- **BASIC ASSUMPTION.** Wilfred R. Bion (1961) uses the term **basic assumption** to designate that which, fundamentally, the individual must assume in order to be part of a group. Basic assumptions come into play at the unconscious, pathic, and affective levels.
- <https://www.google.com/search?q=basic+assumptions+of+culture+&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-1>

High and low context cultures

HIGH CONTEXT VS. LOW CONTEXT CONTINUUM



What is cultural differences



- **Cultural differences**
- Cultural differences are the various beliefs, behaviors, languages, practices and expressions considered unique to members of a specific ethnicity, race or national origin. Some examples of cultural differences as they pertain to the workplace include employees who are younger or older than their co-workers, employees who hold higher degrees than others in the workplace and individuals who grew up in either metropolitan areas or small towns. It is said that employees often have more similarities than they do differences, but those differences can sometimes outweigh the similarities. While these various differences can create a more vibrant office, they can also lead to more than a few problems resulting from culture clash.
- <https://www.mightyrecruiter.com/recruiter-guide/hiring-glossary/cultural-differences/>

African cultural norms

Show Respect to Elders



Africa has sub-cultures



Food and eating habit in Africa



Strategies for cross-cultural competency

- We need to appreciate the types of difficulties we encounter in cultures
- We need to understand that the difficulties go both to the parents and the teachers
- We should take responsibly on understanding cultures
- We should recognize how important it is to understanding cultures
- We should learn more about other cultures
- We should learn about our culture
- We should recognize our biases
- We should recognize the importance of collaboration and reconciling cultures
- We should follow expert advice and build on our own experiences

Strategies for teachers' cross-cultural competency

- Community engagement
- Training
- Make adjustment on the school system to support effective cross-cultural collaboration
- Include innovative ideas
- Introduce a reward system
- Implication

International Highlights on Parent Involvement and Parent/Teacher collaboration

- Scotland and other areas around the world



Cultural Diversity in Australia



- **Different experiences**
- Australia is becoming more multicultural, which means that people and traditions from other countries and cultures are becoming more noticeable and celebrated. Unless you live under a rock (okay, some narrow-minded people do), you're going to meet people and experience situations that are unfamiliar to you.
- <https://au.reachout.com/articles/understanding-a-different-culture>



Inclusion 2015

Catherine Lawson

Education Officer - Inclusion



Transforming lives through learning

An initial thought...

- *“The question is not whether inclusive education is effective, but rather why it is not done well everywhere. I believe that it begins with making the moral decision to do the right thing – to ensure that all members of your community feel welcomed and included – and you go from there.”*
- (Dr. J Specht, CEA, 2015)

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Question.....

- **Is inclusion a moral decision?**



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Inclusion: the wider perspective

- *“Inclusive education is central to the achievement of high-quality education for all learners and the development of more inclusive societies. Inclusion is still thought of in some countries as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general educational settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners.”*
- (UNESCO, 2008, p. 5)

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**Equity, Excellence
and Inclusiveness in Education**
POLICY LESSONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD
By Andreas Schleicher



 OECD

Charting a way towards Equity and Excellence

Building an equitable, excellent and inclusive system

Creating learning environments that address the needs of all children

Achieving equity in increasingly devolved education systems

Developing high-quality teachers for the schools with the greatest needs

European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

'The appropriate **training of mainstream teachers** is crucial if they are to be confident and competent in teaching children with diverse needs. The principles of inclusion should be built into teacher training programs, which should be about attitudes and values, not just knowledge and skills'. (World Health Organisation/World Bank, 2011)

But it is not just about individual capability, but the **whole system's capability**

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System Priorities

- -focus on developing the **'inclusive capability'** of the education
- system as a whole and encourage strong links, collaboration and
- support between and amongst all stakeholders and to recognize that:
inclusion is about continuous work to increase professionals' (teachers, support staff, and leaders) **capability to see, understand, and adapt** school and teaching to the needs of all pupils.

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Scotland's Definition of Inclusive Education

- In Scotland inclusive learning takes place when local schools and communities create a learning environment designed to meet the needs of all learners.
- In inclusive environments the needs of diverse learners are provided through personalized learning and support that takes account of individual needs, choices and circumstances while relentlessly reinforcing high expectations. Effective individualized support is provided in environments that ensure all our children and young people become successful learners, responsible citizens, effective contributors and confident individuals.



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Question

- What are the key drivers shaping inclusive education in Scotland?



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Scotland's Story

- *“We must ensure that everyone – regardless of gender, race or background – has the opportunity to flourish; the opportunity to fulfil their potential.”*

• Nicola Sturgeon

• Programme for Government, 2014

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Scotland's Story continued

- **Scotland's National Performance Framework**
- Our commitment to inclusion both in education and in society has been built into **Scotland's National Performance Framework**. It is one of many national policies and frameworks which lead our vision for inclusion and support us as we move from 'moral decision' to implementation. Some of the key outcomes include:
 - Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens
 - We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity
 - We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society.

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Scotland's Story contd

- Key system drivers include:
 - UN Convention on the Rights of the Child *and* UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
 - Equality Act 2010
 - Additional Support for Learning Act 2004
 - GIRFEC
 - Curriculum for Excellence
 - Developing Scotland's Young Workforce
 - GTCS: Professional Standards for Registration

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Equalities

- “Equal opportunities can be seen in terms of legislative duties, but legislation has come about because in effect a support need has been identified. It has been acknowledged that a person’s race, national or ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, religion or disability has the potential to put them at a disadvantage. All of these need to be given consideration from a support perspective, to ensure that there is a level playing field when accessing the curriculum.” BTC 3

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What does inclusive education look like in Scotland?

- *Within our education system, inclusive approaches to education can be seen as those which involve:*
- _____
- *creating an ethos of achievement for all pupils within a climate of high expectation;*
- *valuing a broad range of talents, abilities and achievements;*
- *promoting success and self-esteem by taking action to remove barriers to learning;*
- *countering conscious and unconscious discrimination that may prevent individuals, or pupils from any particular groups, from thriving in the school; and*
- *actively promoting understanding and a positive appreciation of the diversity of individuals and groups within society.*
- _____
- *Count Us In, HMIE (2002)*
- _____

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**CLEARING A PATH
FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
CLEARS THE PATH FOR EVERYONE!**

Clearing a path?

How good are we at identifying inclusive approaches which meet the needs of all learners?

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Are we clearing a path?

- In 2009, HM Inspectorate of Education reported the key priorities as being:
 - identifying and tackling barriers to learning before they become entrenched
 - finding new ways to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse population of learners and
 - personalizing learning and support to take account of individual needs, choices and circumstances while relentlessly reinforcing high expectations.
- In 2012, while reporting on progress in many areas Education Scotland noted that much work still needs to be done to close the gap of inequalities in opportunities and achievement for children and young people across Scotland.

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In Scotland most children and young people in schools perform well, BUT

- we are below average in reducing social inequalities in achievement;
- inequality begins early in children's lives;
- comparatively high proportions of children and young people do not have positive post-school destinations;
- most inequalities are within schools; and
- insufficient match between curriculum, learning approaches and children's and young people's needs.

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However...

- **What else does inspection tell us about inclusion across Scotland?**
- Where approaches are effective:

 - The school has excellent systems for identifying children's and young people's strengths and the difficulties they face. Teaching staff work very effectively with care staff and the allied health team to plan how best to support children and their families
 - Staff have excellent relationships with children and young people. They use nurturing approaches skillfully to help children and young people feel secure, cared for, and to enable them to maximise their potential

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Good news continued

- Children and young people benefit from very good learning experiences that are linked to their individual interests and needs. Resources are well matched to learners' needs
- Home visits to each family allow key workers to gather information on children's individual needs. Staff continue to build on this information once children have settled into the center
- Strong partnerships with other educational establishments and community organizations are helping to improve and increase appropriate choices and challenges for children and young people

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Education Scotland Inclusion Team



- Young Ambassadors for Inclusion – Luxembourg
- Program of training, events and conversation days between now and December accessed through the Education Scotland learning blog:
- <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/eslb/2015/09/03/inclusion-team-professional-learning-and-engagement-calendar/>
- National and local training in relation to rights, support and wellbeing for all children and young people
- Downloadable resources and emerging guidance to support inclusive education
- <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inclusionandequalities/> and through GLOW
- Online professional learning community – GLOW
- Twitter @ESInclusionTeam

Transforming lives through learning

A final thought...



- *“The question is not whether inclusive education is effective, but rather why it is not done well everywhere....”*
- Does the answer lie in our culture, in our systems, or in our practices?



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CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The writer concludes that it is very important for parents and teachers to collaborate for the success of the student. Collaboration would include building strong relationships between teachers and parents. It also includes good communication. However, collaboration is difficult with immigrant families who many come from cultures that are very different from the American culture. This is also very true of African immigrants. The beliefs, perceptions, norms, and traditions of Africans are very different from those of Americans. For example, in Africa, the teacher is expected to do more for the student. He or she is expected to discipline the student. There is a belief that the student will listen more to the teacher. Since many parents never went to school, they may not be fully involved in the academic success of their children. Their focus is mainly on taking care of tuition, uniforms, and food. Not many parents attend PTA meetings.

Areas for Further Research

The paper does not address all areas of diversity such as religion, race, gender, etc. It is focused on cultural differences including communication barriers. The writer does not deal in-depth with the issues related to autism. She focuses on the idea that there is a need for greater collaboration between teachers and parents of special needs children than students who do not have special needs. The writer cites autism, since she is a parent of a child with autism and can relate more to that.

Personal Opinion

In my opinion, parent teacher collaboration is the primary solution to the problem of diversity faced in schools. Although we as teachers are professionals, we should not take it for granted that parents know their children better than we do. I worked with a high school student with special needs at his home. Although I was the professional, I needed the parental input and

collaboration in order to bring out the best in the student. During my student teaching, I noticed that some parents (especially the Hispanic population) shied away from teachers due to language barrier. Fortunately, District 196 has translators for such situations. Though the problem has not been totally resolved, we anticipate that as time goes on, parents will collaborate with teachers in order to help the students.

As a parent and an African immigrant, I see the value of collaboration with teachers. Coming from a different culture with different understanding, there is the need for me to see how things are done in order to help my son. I will also expect teachers to reach out to me so we can work together. Since I have a teaching background and I am familiar with some of the cultural issues of the school system, I feel less intimidated to ask for help when I need it. Unfortunately, there are many African immigrants who do not have that opportunity mostly because many of them may not be educated, and for some, language becomes a barrier. Leaving the burden on them to reach out and collaborate to help their children may be a challenge. Their culture and ways of communication become a barrier. They are not able to build strong relationships with teachers. It will be advantageous for parent and teacher to communicate frequently in order to understand the needs of the students, and work together to support them. I believe there should be more effort on the side of the teacher to understand how to appreciate other cultures and to learn general skills to deal with diverse cultures. I think it is also important to develop keen interest in getting the skills and to commit themselves to working with parents in a culturally effective way, dealing with their individual biases, stereotypes, and making the necessary changes to collaborate with parents.

Although there is a growing understanding regarding the subject of special needs among Africans and the disability is not due to what parents have done, that stigma is still there, and

parents of children with special needs tend to be shy about their situation. This was the case with my husband and me. Our son was born in the United States and was diagnosed with autism at the age of three. The news was delivered without any cultural sensitivity. My husband and I became very devastated. It took over a year for us to start sharing the “bad” news. Although people around us, especially at church, had already observed that something was going on, no one said anything.

I have since then seen the difficulties of collaborating with teachers. Many times the parents may not know what opportunities there are for their child. Sometimes the teachers may not go the extra mile to provide resources. They may be overwhelmed. Building strong relationships between parents and teachers will be helpful, but this could be difficult as teachers may have too much workload and also have cultural barriers.

Personal Experience

I have worked as a volunteer in District 196 and also did my student teaching there. What I noticed was that although teachers in special education generally want to work with parents, it becomes challenging for them. There is high work load and it is difficult for them to reach out to parents individually. I observed that a one hour IEP meeting alone is not enough for parent teacher collaboration and learning more about the diverse culture of the student. Parents may not fully understand what is going on at the school and how they can be of help to the students. They would have to trust the teachers for most things.

My faith serves as a strong foundation for my desire to be a special educator, as well as my views about special education. My faith informs me that we are all God’s children, and that we are all equal, made in His own image. Christ himself had compassion over people with disabilities. It is our responsibility to support the needy among us. My views are related to

Christ's admonition based on being Christ-like. My views are also reflective of my son who also has special needs.

I need God's guidance to increase my capacity. When I go on my knees, I ask God to give me wisdom - (Ask and it shall be given unto you... Mathew 7:7). I believe that in the fullness of time, He will grant it to His glory and honor. My prayer has always been for God to "use me mightily". It has always been my genuine desire to be a positive agent in the lives of the precious children He entrusts in my care – at home, at school, and wherever I come across children. I believe there will be times when I might feel discouraged and frustrated. I pray that God will cover me with His grace and give me the strength to remain steadfast and committed towards my goal of making a difference in the lives of young people with special needs.

As a special education teacher in preparation, I know it will be a challenge. However, by the grace of God, I am prepared for the challenge. My mission has always been about making a difference and I believe this is an opportunity. The biblical passages that have spoken to me the most are those related to the call for making a difference in the lives of the vulnerable among us, treating everyone equally as God's children, and doing our best in what we have chosen to do. The biblical text related to this is found in Eph. 4:1-4 : "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,..."

Biblical passages and other helpful insights that I believe will gain the most strength in difficult days in my teaching career are those related to dependence on God: all things work together for good to them that love God, and God will renew our strength, rewarding our faithfulness. I will also gather strength through prayer, continued support from my husband, children, and support from my church family. I am fulfilled by the assurance that I am doing this

because of the experience I have with my son who has autism. It has been a blessing to be able to support him and others. I believe the Lord will help me build the “house” as the Bible notes: “Unless the Lord builds the house, all that labor will labor in vain.” I am thankful that Bethel has included faith-based reflection in all its courses. I am graduating not only with the educational benefit but also good values that I need to be aware of at all times throughout my career. I believe this will enable me to succeed even when I teach at schools that may not include biblical principles in their curriculum.

Appendix

SECTION 3 – APPLICATION

PARENT TEACHER CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATION IN SPECIAL
EDUCATION

HALF DAY TRAINING

CURRICULUM

DISSTRIC 196 TEACHERS

MINNESOTA

8:30 AM TO NOON

Section One Theme: Creating a shared vision among teachers

8:30am to 9:30am

Purpose: To help teachers have a common vision in creating an environment of equity and inclusion through effective collaboration with parents from diverse cultures especially those from Africa

In this section, this facilitator (Elvera Agboka) will engage the participants (teachers of District 196) into a dialogue. This dialogue is to bring about a reflection and an awareness on the necessity to work collaboratively with parents especially those with special needs children. At the end of this section of the presentation, the participants will come up with a shared vision (short statements) on collaboration with parents.

Their vision may include a spirit of inclusion, equity and integration. It would especially include the establishment of a good working relationship with parents. They would also reflect on Minnesota state (and District 196) mandates of inclusion and collaboration. The teachers will further reflect strongly that effort on trying to collaborate with parents, especially those of African descent requires cross-cultural competency. This focus will be on African immigrant families as a case in point.

The facilitator will give a broad presentation on the following topics:

- National mandate of inclusion, equity, integration and goals in District 196
- The importance of parent teacher collaboration
- Culture and impact of culture in collaboration
- Effective collaboration

Key questions:

- What is the national mandate on equity and inclusion?
- What is the role of parent/teacher collaboration in student success?
- What is the effect of culture in collaboration?
- What is our vision for parent teacher collaboration in District 196?

Tools/Hand outs and activities:**Activities**

- Ice breaker – Card game “More Than One Story”
- Slides (Power Point Presentation)

Section Two Theme: Creating Commitment

9:30am to 10:30am

To create a sense of commitment among teachers on the issue of equity and inclusion by effectively working collaboratively with parents from diverse cultures especially those from Africa.

The second section of the workshop is a step forward from the first section. Having agreed on a vision to work collaboratively with the parents, the teachers would now have to create that commitment and willingness to follow through. It includes efforts in dealing with the issues that make it difficult or impossible for them to work collaboratively with parents.

The main challenge in working with Africans and other cultures is that of cultural differences. Due to these cultural barriers, teachers would have to take stock of themselves. They would have to think closely about issues that will make it difficult to realize the vision of working collaboratively with parents. What they need to think about is understanding their own biases.

This may include their limitations, as well as prejudices, and things they tend to stereotype about. Furthermore, the reflection would also include their communication habits, the differences in communication style and their responsibilities as teachers to work inclusively and equally with all students and their parents, and not just those that look and speak like them.

The facilitator will give a broad presentation on the following topics. This will lead to a short

dialogue with the participants

- Cultures and cultural difference and challenges
- Cross-cultural communication
- African cultural perspectives

Tools/Hand outs and activities:

- Slides (Power Point Presentation)
- Dialogue

10:30 to 10:45am - Break

10:45am to 12:30pm

To develop strategies that will bring about changes for effective parent teacher collaboration and in dealing with cross-cultural barriers.

Once the teachers have a shared vision for parent teacher collaboration as well as a commitment to deal with the cultural barriers, they would now have to establish strategies to make the necessary shifts and to adapt new ways of doing things.

This section would be very interactive and would include group activities in order for teachers to come up with strategies.

Presentation Topics

- Strategies for effective collaboration
 - Strategies for working across cultures
 - Strategies to support cross cultural competencies among District 196 teachers
 - Some international strategies – Scotland as an example
- What are the strategies for effective collaboration?
 - What are the strategies for working across cultures especially with African

parents?

- What are strategies to ensure cross culture competencies in District 196?
- Is there anything we can learn from other countries?

Tools/Hand Outs and activities

- Power Point Presentation Handouts
- 30 minutes group activities and reporting.

Question for group activities:

What activities would you recommend for creating awareness and commitment to ensure that teachers of District 196 increase their cross cultural competencies and be able to collaborate effectively with parents from Africa? Consider specific suggestions for parents of students with special needs.

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