



Harvard Family
Research Project



FINE Forum

Teacher Preparation

Family Involvement Network of Educators
Harvard Family Research Project

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For questions or comments about this paper,
email hfrp_pubs@gse.harvard.edu

About the Family Involvement Network of Educators: Harvard Family Research Project's Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE) is a strategic effort to strengthen family and community engagement to support children's learning and development. FINE brings together thousands of educators, practitioners, policymakers, and researchers dedicated to strengthening family-school-community partnerships. Members get the latest information about family involvement research, as well as the opportunity to connect with others in the field.

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From the Directors

Welcome to the premier issue of *FINE Forum*, the e-newsletter of Harvard Family Research Project's newest initiative, the Family Involvement Network of Educators or FINE. The network represents a bold new initiative to strengthen teacher preparation in family and community engagement in education. For the first time, teacher educators will have a place to go to access the most up-to-date information and tools on pre-professional and professional development in family involvement practices.

Both FINE and the *FINE Forum* represent an outgrowth of the research and publication of *New Skills for New Schools*. We reported then that the teacher educators we surveyed throughout the country were planning to incorporate more training in family involvement. A number of the educators we interviewed in greater depth pointed to a lack of successful models and noted the absence of research on promising strategies to prepare teachers in this domain. Clearly, this signaled a need for a central bank of information and mechanisms for teacher educators to learn from one another.

The *FINE Forum* begins to address some of the interests you shared with us. Each edition will profile a teacher education program or course offering followed by a Question and Answer section from a faculty member or administrator. The *Forum* also features the insights offered by teachers, parents, and school administrators and presents selected research findings to inform your courses and programs.

In this first issue of the *Forum*, we profile the Family as Faculty program and interview its directors. We offer parent and teacher perspectives on teacher preparation in family involvement and point to recent research on the subject.

We welcome your suggestions for future issues of the *FINE Forum* and envision that this e-newsletter will be shaped by your contributions and inquiries. We are each personally excited about this new project given our strong interest in and history of research in the field and sincerely hope you find this newsletter meaningful and enjoyable.

Happy reading!

Heather B. Weiss, Ed.D.

Founder & Director

M. Elena Lopez

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Program Spotlight

Featured Program: Family as Faculty

Family as Faculty is a program at the University of South Florida, Tampa that addresses a new state competency on teachers' ability to develop collaborative relationships with families. The program recruits family members as guest lecturers to provide students in the College of Education opportunities to learn about the barriers and keys to effective involvement of families in their children's learning.

Program History

The Family as Faculty program began in late 1999 under the initial direction of Karen Childs at the Florida Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. The program The program patterned itself after a model at the University of Vermont College of Medicine, Parent to Parent of Vermont, and the Institute for Family-Centered Care, which featured families of students with disabilities in its courses. Florida statutes, with a recently added teacher competency on family involvement, provided some of the impetus for the program's inception. Recent research by the Harvard Family Research Project also informed the program, pointing to the need for family involvement in teacher preparation and the promise of guest lectures as a method for bringing parent voices into the curriculum (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider & Lopez, 1997).

Program Description

The goal of the Family as Faculty program is to "enhance home-school partnerships by providing future educators with opportunities to listen to the voices of families from a variety of walks of life."

The program recruits and trains a diverse group of parent presenters to deliver 20-30 minute lectures to teacher education classrooms at the University of South Florida, with additional time for questions and answers. In general, family presenters focus their lectures on involvement in their children's education and academic success, revealing barriers and keys to successful involvement, and telling personal stories. Sample themes of specific family presenters include issues of ADHD, language barriers, socioeconomic barriers, teacher conferences, and grandparent caregivers. For example, one parent with a learning disabled child shares her strategy of videotaping her interactions with her daughter and sharing these with the child's teacher to help the teacher relate to the child better.

A faculty guide describes the program and assists faculty members in scheduling and planning such family-centered activities. It also describes instructor responsibilities, such as introduction, presence throughout the family member's visit, discussion facilitation, student preparation, and faculty and student evaluation of the visit.

Program Implementation

The program recruited parent presenters through flyers, meetings, district parent liaisons, and presentations to community-based organizations. Candidates, who were primarily mothers, completed a three-day orientation and training session in which they reflected on their experiences, identified specific issues and personal stories, and considered what makes a good presentation. This was followed by practice presentations, group feedback, and a campus tour. Beyond the initial training period, parents have built their own informal network with one another. Parents received a \$150 training stipend and \$30/hour for each presentation, including transportation time. Recently the program has changed to a flat fee of \$40 for each visit to a classroom.

Outreach to faculty involved more effort. Program staff circulated a brochure to faculty and doctoral students, and met with program administrators and key professors. Faculty in special education and counselor education have been the most responsive. The program has adjusted its typical guest lecture format to accommodate faculty needs. Parents have agreed to role play counseling interviews with students in counseling education courses and reflect on the students' performance, and on occasion, parents have even brought their children to participate with them on a panel.

Program Costs

The program costs approximately \$20,000 to operate, per year. The costs are broken down as follows:

- Training/Orientation of Families (\$150 for 20) = \$3,000.00
- Development/Printing of Brochure = \$1,000.00
- Lecture Stipends (\$30/hour @ 50 lectures*) = \$1,500.00
- Project Coordinator (.50 FTE 12 months) = \$15,000.00

*reaching an estimated 2,500 students

Program Evaluation

The program is being evaluated by a third party evaluator, the At-Risk Institute for Children and Families, at the University. During the first year, the program staff and evaluator worked together to fine-tune program goals and how to establish outcomes. As part of the ongoing evaluation, the program conducts a pre- and post-test of the parents' orientation and collects written feedback from faculty, students, and family speakers, after each visit. So far, feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, and in Fall 2000, requests from faculty have increased.

Update: Added June 2002

Family as Faculty continues to thrive in Florida. The program receives an increasing number of requests from faculty at the University of South Florida to invite parents as

guest lecturers for various courses taught at the School of Education. Part of the success of Family as Faculty can be attributed to its careful matching of faculty needs for their courses and the parent speakers. Parents deliver key messages to students and use their powerful stories to stimulate student awareness and inquiry.

Other state universities are beginning to replicate Family as Faculty. Through Curriculum Infusion Institutes, Sally Wade, director of the Partnership, and her staff bring together faculty from Florida's public and private universities and colleges to learn about ways to integrate family involvement in their education courses. The Family as Faculty program is a centerpiece of these institutes. The University of North Florida and the University of Central Florida are replicating Family as Faculty. Additionally, with the Partnership as co-sponsor, a consortium of higher education institutions in the Miami-Dade and Fort Lauderdale area organized their own curriculum infusion institute.

As an outgrowth of Family as Faculty, a Teacher as Faculty program evolved. Teachers that are NBTPS board-certified act as guest lecturers, talking to students about their family involvement practices. Plans are underway to develop a panel with both parents and teachers sharing their messages with pre-service teachers.

Contact Family as Faculty:

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Questions & Answers

Karen Childs and Jane Sergay Family as Faculty Program

Family as Faculty is a program at the University of South Florida, Tampa that addresses a new state competency on teachers' ability to develop collaborative relationships with families. The program recruits family members as guest lecturers to provide students in the College of Education opportunities to learn about the barriers and keys to effective involvement of families in their children's learning.

Karen Childs is Assistant Director of the Florida Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. Jane Sergay is Project Coordinator for the Family as Faculty Program and an alumna of the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Q: Can you offer some lessons or pointers for other community-based organizations hoping to collaborate with universities for teacher preparation in family involvement?

Karen: We started out with two approaches but learned that we needed to modify them in order to get the program moving. First, we developed a brochure and put it in faculty and doctoral student boxes, but found that that didn't generate very much interest. The best thing we did was meet with the dean of the college whose buy-in helped to legitimize our program. Our Parent Information Resource Center is a unit of the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System (FDLRS), and our department head speaks regularly with the dean.

Meeting the assistant dean was very useful because she was able to look at the programs strategically, and identify key people in various departments. She knew how we could reach the most students through courses that all students have to take, like methods courses. Then we met with the key individuals, and that really did lead to generating the requests for our family members. And being able to say "the assistant dean suggested I contact you," helped from my perspective because it gave me the confidence to contact them, and perhaps led them to return phone calls.

Second, we had figured out what we could offer, but that wasn't the best approach. Finding out what the faculty wanted and then providing it, worked better, but of course also within the purpose of Family as Faculty. So when faculty wanted their students to role play counseling situations with our family members, we asked that the family member fill out a feedback form for the professor afterwards, so that they weren't just guinea pigs, but had a real voice in the process. What happens most often is we ask the professor to develop a form that we then review. And we also ask the families if they feel comfortable with the process, especially if it involves cultural diversity issues.

Q: How has the program changed since it first started?

Jane: This semester, requests have become even more varied in format and specific toward a particular class. For example, last Saturday we had four Family as Faculty members present to a class of 30 teachers pursuing their Masters. Students prepared questions ahead of time, then we divided them into small groups by topics of interest. One parent was matched with each group, according to the topic area, and acted as a consultant and resource to that group, so it got very personal. It was wonderful, the issues that were addressed, and the enriched understanding of parent-teacher partnerships that students came away with.

Faculty are also asking for a particular type of parent to discuss a specific topic, such as second-language issues and cultural diversity. They want parents to speak to the challenges and to what they feel would make that more successful. We plan to broaden our parent base beyond the current 18 members, so we have parents on hand to respond to these requests. I have also asked parents to give me a list of topics they feel comfortable speaking about, in addition to the one or two specific stories they have developed, which expands the repertoire of what we can offer. And we have parents who may encompass four or five areas of life in one parent - for example, a parent may be Hispanic and low-income with an at-risk child with disabilities.

Q: How will you sustain the program over time?

Jane: We've had six requests per month since the semester started in September, simply by word of mouth. And I'm sure it's going to be in an even grander stage after holding an open house next month. It's a brown bag luncheon to get together with some of the faculty, to bring some of our parents to do their presentations, and I'll describe the program. And they've invited all faculty from the Education and Special Education departments. I think we'll get a lot more response.

Karen: Students are also invited, so it's a way of generating interest among students. If students see something they like--if we can get student buy-in--then they can talk to their professors. Because when the faculty do invite our families, the students really like it. The students are hungry for interactions with families.

Q: Has the program been expanded or replicated in other settings?

Karen: The Florida State Department of Education elected to present us with a small contract to expand Family as Faculty to special needs families and issues. The grant proposal targets families of children at risk for educational failure, such as low income, minority, and low education families.

Jane: We are moving into the medical school here at the university as well. Second and fourth year medical students can learn about how parents of chronically and acutely ill

children view and relate to the medical community. We are also trying to take it into the schools of social work and nursing.

Karen: Also, the University of North Florida is going to replicate Family as Faculty in its special education department.

Jane: They are coming next week to actually watch us train parents and see how we help parents develop their ideas into a story format that conveys a personal message. We want parents to tell their own story--that's the gift that they can give that no one else can teach. And to share not only the challenges but also the solutions and positive experiences that they have had with teachers and schools.

Please email any questions about the Family as Faculty program to Jane Sergay at jsergay@tempest.coedu.usf.edu.

Parent Perspective

Featured Program: Family as Faculty

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One mother in the Family as Faculty program poses this critical question to future teachers: "Do you know how what happens at home affects students in the classroom?"

An excerpt from her prepared comments follows:

"I am the mother of two children, Kristen, age 8, who is in the academically gifted program and in the third grade, and Ryan, age 6, who has a speech disorder called Dyspraxia. Ryan is mainstreamed into a regular first grade class. They both attend public school... My husband, Tim, is on disability...

"Because of my son's special needs, we go through periods of time when it seems as though we are always on the run. Therapists, doctor appointments, specialists and meetings. We will pick up the kids from the bus stop or from school, grab a quick snack and head off to an appointment. Often we don't realize until it is too late that the kids don't have the appropriate writing utensils, paper, or research materials to complete their homework properly. Their homework may not be as neat as we would like it to be. We had a teacher write a note on Kristen's paper because she did her homework in pen. This is after we wrote a note explaining that this was the only writing utensil she had at the time. We understand the importance of being organized, but if there is a situation beyond my child's control, it only adds to their frustration if they are criticized for being disorganized or unprepared for class. If a child is typically prepared for class, if their work is normally neat and organized, it would be beneficial to that child if the teacher were to take the time to question if there is a reason behind their disorganization, rather than making an assumption that the child simply does not care."

Contact Family as Faculty:

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Teacher Talk

Sharon Nelson is the Teacher in Residence at the US Department of Education where she enhances the communication between the nation's practicing teachers and the Department's top policy-makers. She directs the National Teacher Forum which brings together 120 of the nation's top teachers every year to discuss teacher leadership.

At the Curriculum Infusion Institute on Family Involvement held in Florida in September, 2000, Nelson shared her top ten list of knowledge, attitudes and skills that teacher educators should cultivate among the nation's aspiring teachers.

10. Role-play scenarios with future teachers. Examples might be parent/teacher conferences, and various positive as well as negative interactions.
9. Teach future teachers to LISTEN. Frequently, we see a need to express our viewpoint, forgetting that there are others. I always start my parent/teacher conferences with these questions: What do you hear about this class from your son or daughter? And what can we do as a team to improve your child's learning and experience in my classroom?
8. Teach future teachers the importance of communicating with parents positively and early. Establish open lines of communication before the school year starts. Return phone calls to parents promptly!
7. Emphasize the importance of a team approach to learning: parent, teacher, and student. This approach gives everyone ownership.
6. Let teachers know that it is okay to tell parents how much you enjoy their children as students. Such an appreciation for the uniqueness of that child allows a parent to understand that you care about the child, not just the course content.
5. Teachers need to learn to see past their own biases. Some parents have tolerances and rules of which you may or may not approve. Since the job of the teacher is to teach, it is important not to spend time being concerned about issues over which you have no control. Teach and care for the kids, and don't judge their parents because you disagree with their rules.
4. Involve student teachers more directly in dealing with parents. Give them the full experience, so they are prepared for any scenario. Many staff development courses and inservices are about dealing with and involving parents. Starting this training during preservice would be invaluable to all involved.
3. Teach future teachers how to involve parents positively and appropriately given the age of the child. Whether it be phone calls, emails, help in the classroom, a guest presentation

by a parent because of their training...all of these help to solidify that team approach to learning.

2. The focus of any discussion about teaching and learning should be on the CHILD. Not on what the parent thinks is best, not what the teacher thinks is best, and not what is dictated by the curriculum....Focus on the child and how he/she learns.

1. Teachers work with parents best by putting themselves in a parent's shoes. The best way to learn how to involve and deal with parents is to be one. I know I am a better teacher because I am also a parent, and I know how defensive and protective I can be of my own children, no matter what their ages. Please do NOT misunderstand my message here! I do not mean to diminish the understanding of those wonderful teachers who are NOT parents, and I know of many. However, I also know firsthand the value of being both teacher and parent. Short of being a parent, put yourself in their shoes. How would you react if what you were told about your child was in total conflict with what you knew and loved in your child? Such role reversals give us pause for thought, and often a different perspective.

New & Noteworthy

Making families matter at two-year colleges: Training the early childhood workforce to support families

by Julia Coffman, Harvard Family Research Project, Cambridge, MA 1999.

This report examines the extent to which two-year colleges offer family-centered training for early childhood professionals. Findings are based on research conducted with more than 350 two-year colleges across the nation. Written primarily for faculty and administrators, it offers tools for assessing and practical strategies for strengthening family-centered training.

School-community collaboration for learning and teaching: Findings from research and practice

by Meredith I. Honig, Joseph Kahne, & Milbrey W. McLaughlin.

In *New Designs for Youth Development*, Fall 1999.

This review of research addresses why and how school-community collaborations influence youths' opportunities to learn and teachers' opportunities to teach. The review examines various kinds of collaborations, expands the definition of teachers to all adults and young people influencing youths' learning, and focuses on learning outcomes and the day-to-day interactions that influence them.