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EHDI Annual Conference

Building Strengths Within Culturally Diverse Families

March 19, 2024

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>> Good morning, welcome. My name is Angela, I am the moderator for today. I would like to begin this session for building strengths within culturally diverse families.

>> MEGAN PERRIA: Hi everyone, welcome, glad you omitted before lunch. My name is Megan Perria and I'm listening and spoken language specialist working for St. Joseph visited for the Deaf in Indianapolis. I do home visits in the Indianapolis and surrounding area.

Since we are talking about cultures and diverse cultures we thought it would be interesting for us as presenters to share a little bit about our own personal culture. And for you to do some self-reflection during our session today to reflect on your own culture and think about how you might answer the questions that we are going to propose today within the context of your own families.

I spent most of my childhood in rural Northern Michigan. I was raised in a Christian reformed community that was settled mostly by Dutch immigrants. And my grandfather on my father's side came from the Netherlands to the US when he was a child. He actually earned his American citizenship by serving in the US Army in the Second World War.

>> MARIANA BARQUET: Hi everyone, my name is Mariana Barquet. I whole different hats in Indiana. I'm the program coordinator, the [can't understand] and Hispanic but for the presentation today I have been collaborating with St. Joseph visited for the Deaf as a Spanish interpreter mostly through their tell us ear program iHear.

Bob was my son's therapist when he was two and now he is 12 and so we have known each other for many years. I was born and raised in Mexico and I joke with people and I tell people if you know the Mexican, you know me. But funnily enough my father is half Lebanese and half Cuban and my mother is half Ontarian. They are survivors of concentration camps and have this pain from the northern side where the joints are made. My grandfather was six foot nine inches.

I was born and raised in Mexico and my culture, my own culture is such as Mexican even if I don't look very much like that, but I love celebrating everything that is Mexican related.

>> BARBARA MEYERS: I am Barbara Meyers, with the St. Joseph visited for the Deaf in St. Louis. I am a therapist working through the iHear tele-practice program and as Mariana said that is how I met are many, many years ago. I see children in all areas in the state of Missouri, Indiana, Kansas, Nebraska, and Florida. Okay, my background is I happened to be Jewish and I come from -- my grandparents came from hungry, pull it, and Russia and emigrated to the United States. They came to St. Louis. Why I don't know they can be St. Louis, and they opened up a bakery. I grew up in a Jewish bakery.

I went to college at Fontbonne University, a Catholic college. I taught preschool at St. Joseph visited for 28 years. So I can plan a mass with both hands tied behind my back. I think the cultures meld together very well.

>> MEGAN PERRIA: I'm going to look at our mission, we interface to the Deaf and we only have 25 minutes, but here are our services that we offer at two locations. And our objectives for today. I'm going to delve into them not too deep because we want to get through and we are really excited to share with you our toolbelt with you.

>> MARIANA BARQUET: Megan, Barbara, and myself have been talking about this because we were together for five years in the therapy world [can't understand] meeting the support person to serve Hispanic families and we always talk about the barriers and challenges and how do we find a way that these families can be successful. And I have been reading a lot about this cultural wealth model that was developed by [can't understand], mostly to be applied to university students and finding their strengths in that system.

Of course I am a Mexican and I am like how can we use these ideas to serve our youngest Deaf and hard of hearing students. And so it is all about finding the strengths that these families already bring to the table.

They know how to raise their kids, Mexican moms know how to raise their kids, everyone knows that, right? How to use those strengths that are organic to the family so interventions are not an imposition and are not a different way of raising our children. Any immigrant family, any minority community always comes to this country and you either assimilate or you pushback. The idea is we use what they bring so the interventions have adapted to a way that it feels to them part of their culture so they buy-in and they truly, truly integrate them into their daily routines. Not as a therapy model but as a daily routine way of doing things.

That is what this idea started. And then the cultural wealth idea, as I spoke a little bit about that, there are six domains or forms of cultural capital that were developed by Dr. [can't understand] and we will -- that is probably my mother calling me. To wish me good luck in my presentation today.

How families use this knowledge to interact with an environment that is different from them, a different culture, a different set of social language, medical rules, educational rules. How do we use these so that these families can feel successful, file have the ability to parent their children the way they wish they would in their own countries.

>> BARBARA MEYERS: As Mariana said, there are six domains of cultural wealth. We are focusing on four for the tool we have created. And we chose these because we want to see how we can begin to ask questions of our families in order to get a good rapport with them.

We felt that these areas would have the most impact on our relationships and giving us valuable insights into their culture, and in turn would create good relationships and a bond between the therapist and the parents and the family, and any of the caregivers.

This is just a little snapshot of our cultural tool. As you can see we've got questions that we have come up with. And this is just the one from the language and literacy, but several interview stock questions is what we have chosen. And that is not the end all, there is lots of questions out there. And we are going to ask for your input at a later time.

Our first was language and literacy. We came up with -- we said -- why did we choose this? Because we really feel that parents of diverse cultures share stories in different ways. We want to use -- to get that information from them in a very natural setting, in a very natural way.

Instead of telling a family in America reading is extremely important, right, we want your child to read, we want you to read to them every day. Well, not all families read. We realize that. Since Mariana was telling me Barbara, not all Hispanic families have books at home. So what we decided to do was ask the question that is up there. How did your parents share stories with you when you were a child?

We got lots of different answers from parents. Some of them very similar, some of them not. One of the questions was this dad from Guatemala said oh, you know, my parents, I grew up with my grandmother. And we didn't have books, we really didn't even have toys much at home. But my grandmother told us stories every single night. We would go to bed and she would tell us stories. Sometimes they were about monsters, sometimes they were about supernatural creatures. And sometimes there were about her when she was going up. And he said I look forward to the stories every single day.

So the next question was do you find yourself doing the same thing with your child? And he said absolutely. Every night I cuddle up with my three kids in bed and I tell them stories. Some of them were from my Abuela and some were my stories from when I was a child. And he said they love it just as much as I did when I was growing up.

So what? Okay. I got that answer from them, right. So how am I going to adapt my practice now that I know that. They don't have books. In the past we would have said we will send you books. But that's not the family's strength. The family struck the storytelling. So I asked the dad do you have pictures on your camera, do you show Domingo your pictures. And he said yes, sometimes. And I said that is no different than looking at a book because you were looking at experiences that the child has had, and you are talking about it with him and talking about who is in the picture and where you went and what you did. And I said you think you could do that on a regular basis? How many times a week you think you could do that?

He said I could do that a few times a week. That's great. And then he shared that he was going to Guatemala over the summer to visit family. And I said maybe when you get your pictures back, we can print them out and make and experience book and give it language. And that way we can build that literacy piece into it and yet still sharing stories which is the family strength.

>> MEGAN PERRIA: All right, the next area that we focused on was family structures. We know that families from diverse cultures are often structured differently than a typical American family might be structured. And even among American families there is all sorts of different family structures. Different people raising children, different important people in children's lives. And so one of the families that I work with, it is a family originally from Mexico, and the mom is a stay-at-home mom, the dad works outside of the home. They have four boys. And I thought the mom was the main caretaker of this little baby who I just got hearing aids because she was a stay-at-home mom. That was my experience.

It wasn't until I started asking her some questions like who are the important people in your child's life, Mytilus people live, how often does your son see them, that I actually realize that grandma was a very important part of day-to-day life with his family. She only lived a couple of blocks away, and she actually did most of the main caretaking.

So what do I do with that information? Well, I include grandma in the sessions. She is just as important as this mom. And grandma did not know how to put on the hearing aids, she didn't even know if the child needed hearing aids. So the child was not wearing hearing aids even though the mom wanted him to.

So that was a very powerful situation. You know, to include these people that are important in a child's life that I would've never known because the grandma did not live in the house and I only ever saw the mom. That was eye-opening for me. All you need to do is ask a question, and then your therapy can be so much more effective.

Our next area is social communication and pragmatics. We know that often times the American way of communicating is not the way that the rest of the world communicates. And I had a family from Africa. And this child had just gotten bilateral cochlear implants and we were working on sound detection. And I noticed he never glanced up, he never looked up at me when he heard a sound and he did not look up at mom. And I could not figure it out. I know these cochlear implants are working, should have detection, you should look up at me when he hears a sound.

So I started asking some questions. And I found out that the way this family communicates was that they show respect to people in positions of authority over them by not making eye contact. If you make eye contact with someone that is above you, it is considered disrespectful.

So how did I adapt my therapy, what did I change? We looked for other ways that this child was showing us that he did indeed detect sounds. And I could then say the reason this child is not making eye contact has nothing to do with his social communication skills, is pragmatics. It's actually a cultural way of showing the respect.

>> MARIANA BARQUET: Of course I'm going to talk about ceremonial rituals and customs because that is part of my culture. You have the questions we ask but I will tell you about my favorite. Barbara sometimes gasps a little bit at that. What is your favorite tradition from your culture. My father died when I was seven, and my mom took us to the cemetery every year, the day of the dead, to spend the night with him. We had a party and the mariachis come around and you celebrate and we cooked the food he loved and we leave it outside all night. You do not touch the food, you do not eat the food of the dead. That is taboo. But this is my culture. And other people gasped when I say that, but it is one of my happiest memories. It was the night I could see my father can one night. Life allows you to do that, right.

I can see your face going a little pale very subtly.

We have a family we have been working with for a couple of years, and I have these little squishy balls that are skulls, face painted skills. You know what I mean. And Barbara always gasps when I pull them out. And this little boy is like [Spanish phrase] and there is a song that goes at 12 o'clock the skull sings where my going to drive home today. 1 o'clock the skull sings the books are home to read. He loves it and every session is like skull, skull? And I pull out my squishy stress release skulls, and I have two and he likes to see both of them.

That is to say that motivates this child to speak. And we have so much success and he can sing the whole song and dance and use hand motions and everything. It is something we have incorporated. And I'm not a therapist, I'm just an interpreter and I have this lived experience of growing up in my culture and understanding that the nursery rhymes always end up with the monster will eat you.

Go to my baby, go to sleep right now. If you don't sleep, baby, the monster will eat you alive.

It is perfectly normal, that is how I grew up and no one thinks anything is wrong with it. And I am like Barbara, it's fine, this is not child abuse, this is culture. And so that is my story about how to incorporate ceremonial rituals and customs.

And then I'm going to talk a little bit about how to build trust with these families. Culturally speaking these families coming to therapy with a little bit of a disadvantage. Not only because of the language but because of the culture of how we are towards a family that is in immigrant family. The therapist know so much more and I'm just a mom who does not speak English and has a Deaf/Hard of Hearing child needs to learn so much from her because what I know is not beneficial to my child.

So in order to equalize the balance of power, it is so important to build trust between both parties. If there is trust, I always say if the Hispanic family trusts you, they will make tamales on your deathbed. Believe me, they will bring you food when you are in the hospital 25 years later because you were there neighbor back in the day three states ago. And so trust is so important to develop these relationships.

So these families can feel comfortable with your interventions, understand where you are coming from and that it is a good place in trust what you are telling them. Even if I don't exactly what's going on, I trust you. So it is really, really crucial.

And I always say all of this can be put together when you show up. You are honest with the family. You put yourself at the same level. You find commonalities as human beings, as mothers, as people that live in rural areas or big cities, as experiences you had as a child. They are not that different. I have always said we are so much more alike than different as we are mothers trying to care the best we know for our children.

Looking at pictures together. I cannot tell you the stories you hear when you look at pictures together other countries, of the families, of their food. Involving the whole family, asking about their interests. Be curious and ask questions and to find common ground, something that I love is when there is a family that finds it difficult to do therapy or to put the hearing aids on or to learn sign language, when I work with different families, ask them what can we do together to make it easier on you? What can we find out, and intervention, a tool so that this is easier for you coming from your cultural perspective. Not me telling you what to do. You tell me what is hard and what you think would help you to get to the goal that you need.

Food. We love our food, people. If you want to do icebreakers just ask what is for dinner tonight and who taught them how to cook that dish. There is wonderful stories behind that.

With extended families, homes have grandparents, box, cousins, five families together. That is the norm and there is nothing wrong, invite everyone, we are very inclusive. And we use the cultural wealth family tool that they will present as the therapist that they are.

>> BARBARA MEYERS: So we got the cultural family tool. So now what? Do we adjust our therapy? Absolutely we need to adjust our therapy. We have this tool and we have some hardcopies, you can find it actually on the EHDI website, you can download it. We have a few hardcopies here.

They are not expected to be -- you don't walk in and say I will ask all of these questions to you, or I'm going to take the language and literacy section and asked -- that is not how it goes. It needs to be in a natural way where it just happens to come in. You find a way to segue it into the conversation. And that is what we do.

We are listing questions that we came up with. These obviously -- there are more questions than what we've got here, this is just a working document, you all, and we would really like feedback on it. If you find there are some questions that you have tried and that work with families, please -- this is our email address, feel free to reach out to us and let us know if you have tried some of these questions.

The goal is to build trust with the family, and I can't tell you in the short amount of time, I don't how long we have been doing this, but the questions, probably six months we have been doing this, asking questions and it's incredible that you can see a change and you can see the family, their faces light up. You can see them all of the sudden drop their guard down. The dad that was telling me about telling his stories in bed with his child, he said oh yeah, and sometimes I sing to them.

I am all about singing and Mariana will tell you I sing constantly in our sessions. I can sing a lot of things in Spanish, but I will start a line and then I go -- and she is across the world and she is singing in Spanish.

It's amazing, and this dad, I have always asked do you saying? He goes not really, and I don't push it. So when he told me he sings to his kids at night, I was like would you may be think about singing some time? And ego some time, Barbara. But it was so cute because that meant he would think about that, and I will take that to the bank.

So we thank you. We hope if you use this you will have some success and it helps you with your relationships with your families. Because I know that we found that it did. So thank you all for being here.

>> I think we have time for a couple of questions if anybody has any questions. We will bring you a microphone.

>> Hi, I am [can't understand] with the Virginia EHDI. First of all ages wanted to say that was a really wonderful breakdown of the way you approach all of these things. And I like how it is also a little bit generalizable to other public health problems. I think that's a really good framework that you guys came up with.

My question is as a part of the EHDI program, we are not directly involved with early intervention and being able to apply these frameworks. But I am wondering from a programmatic side how can we encourage this kind of thinking with all of our EI providers that we are connected with.

>> MEGAN PERRIA: That's a great question. I think it starts with whoever it is, with you have direct contact in the home with families, or you are doing follow-up phone calls after they get a referral on newborn hearing screening. I think it starts with curiosity and asking families questions.

Also I think as an EI provider, is a new provider, working with culturally diverse families was something that was very scary to me. You know, I am going into this family's home that I think I have nothing in common with. And I find out I have lots in common with them. And once you are curious with people, I think people open up and they are willing to share.

So if there is any way you can encourage the value of curiosity in your team, I think that is where it starts.

>> MARIANA BARQUET: Sorry, this is Mariana and I will add something really quickly. The power of asking is really important. Sometimes we think oh my God I don't feel comfortable asking mom, what is the barrier for you to get to the appointment, is it transportation, time, childcare, because you don't know if you can bring seven other kids and the aunt and the grandma, how can we make this work for you. Please share with me what would work for you. I always say the first answer is yes, the second question is how, how do we make it happen that works for you.

Thank you so much everyone.

>> MEGAN PERRIA: We have copies of the tool here if you want a hard copy to take with you.