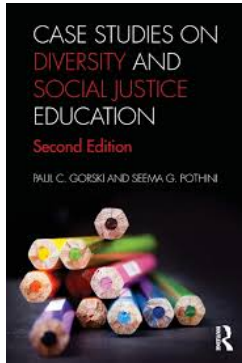


Case Study 10.3:

Family Night



Written by Paul C. Gorski (gorski@edchange.org) and Seema Pothini (sg1515@hotmail.com) for their book, *Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education, 2nd edition* (Routledge, 2017). Check out the book for this and more than 30 additional school- and classroom-based case studies on issues like race, class, (dis)ability, gender, sexual orientation, and religion.

In order to bolster family engagement and strengthen math outcomes among families who were masters of languages other than English—families of students in their English Language Learner (ELL) programs—Crestview School decided to host a Family Night. Teachers discussed ways to entice as many people as possible to attend.

A light dinner and student performances would draw a crowd, they hoped. They sent home fliers translated into the languages spoken in the homes of each student. They arranged for students to perform songs they learned in music classes. Teachers planned a presentation to follow student performances about how to reinforce math concepts by utilizing online resources.

The entire event would last only one hour, they decided, sensitive to the fact that many of their students' parents worked evening shifts or had other responsibilities that made long school events difficult to attend. Mr. Nelson, a veteran teacher, took it upon himself to create a handout about how to access online math tools.

The evening of Family Night, several families began arriving shortly before the published start time. The teachers noticed, however, that most early arrivers were families that attended every event. Five minutes after the scheduled start time, with several people seated and awaiting the performance but several other families not yet in attendance, the teachers decided to change the order of the program, moving their discussion of home support for math learning to the beginning of the evening, worried that families would be upset if they missed their children's performances.

The teachers were relieved to see more families filing into the event as they were speaking. *This is a great turnout*, thought Mr. Nelson. He and several other teachers noticed that several parents and caretakers of ELL students stood in the back of the cafeteria rather than joining other families in the provided seats. Many were chatting. Several parents who arrived early and were sitting in those seats seemed visibly annoyed with the background noise.

Ten minutes after the event ended, many of the ELL families continued chatting. Ms. Stowe, a newer teacher, noticed several copies of the handout Mr. Nelson created left on the table so she handed one to each adult who did not have one. She felt disappointed that so few of the parents took time to ask questions when she handed it to them.

Once everybody left, several teachers met briefly to discuss the evening. Ms. Stowe expressed discontent over what she interpreted as disinterest on the parts of many ELL families. Other teachers complained that the evening was not a success because many of the ELL families arrived late and seemed more interested in side conversations than the presentation.

Mr. Nelson could tell his coworkers were discouraged. He knew it would reinforce stereotypes they had about certain families. He also knew the evening held an important lesson for the school, but he was not sure what that lesson was.