Director’s Corner: Relationships Matter

Several of NAEYC’s ten accreditation standards highlight the importance of **relationships as a foundation for quality early care and education.** Standard #1 is actually called “Relationships” and includes criteria regarding promoting positive relationships between educators and families, between educators and children, and between children and peers. Standard #7 is called “Families”, but the emphasis of all the related criteria is on establishing and maintaining collaborative relationships with the diverse families we serve so that together we can support each individual child’s development. Because our laboratory school is thoroughly integrated into the university community, we cultivate an even broader view of relationships that includes all of the learners involved in our educational system. As with Leadership and Management (see October 2012), our affiliation with Carnegie Mellon affords innovative approaches to building strong relationships as a foundation of excellence.

- We begin with the belief that all of our interactions and communication should focus on building a consistently warm, respectful, and positive emotional climate for our entire school community, so we aim to set that tone in all of our routines and conversations from greeting through dismissal, with children, families, undergraduates and facilities workers, within the school and elsewhere on campus.

- From our web site design and our initial application forms to our newsletters and emails with enrolled families, we attempt to communicate clearly a broad welcome to diverse families and children and a deep interest in getting to know and understand the family structure, cultural background, child-rearing practices, etc. so that we can foster strong reciprocal relationships.

- With families, we emphasize close home – school connections through a variety of communication mechanisms so that we can support each child’s growth in the self-regulation and social skills that will help with functioning comfortably and building friendships in a classroom community that feels secure and is responsive to everyone’s needs. CMU’s Message from Me project is helping involve our children in the communication directly, as well as sharing that technology with neighboring centers.

- Our “open door” policy invites families to connect in ways that fit their styles, interests, and schedules, whether that means simply attending the whole school events, or joining committees to help plan ways for families to connect with each other and enhance the school program. We also solicit input about our programs in multiple ways so that we can continually improve our work.

- For all families, we discuss their children’s development in detail and provide resources for community involvement and school transitions. When needed, we can arrange for language translation and help families connect with services to help with unique challenges regarding physical and mental health, individual learning support or counseling, etc.

- When conflicts arise, we seek to utilize direct, honest, and sensitive communication to help us develop an effective solution. We listen carefully and reflect frequently so that we can discern assumptions that may be biasing our perspectives and work toward solutions that counter discrimination and collaboratively address persistent challenges.

In all of these ways, we seek to develop close partnerships with children and families, as well as with the university and Pittsburgh communities to create the best learning opportunities for everyone in our busy laboratory school. We invite your input and involvement as together we strive for excellence.