

Responses to the Presentation by Representatives of the National Black Child Development Institute

Wanda Roundtree Henderson and Rozita La Gorcé Green represented NBCDI at the symposium because Evelyn Moore and Oscar Barbarin could not present. After their presentation, Wanda Roundtree Henderson and Rozita La Gorcé Green answered questions from symposium participants. A panel then convened to respond to their presentation.

Questions and comments after the presentation by NBCDI

Participant: Do parents view schools as not doing a good job?

NBCDI response: Parents view the teacher as the primary educator, and focus groups were concerned about safety because parents felt that schools were not the best place for their children to learn. On the one hand, parents viewed the teacher and school as problematic, but focus groups also felt that parents had the primary job to teach their children prior to school (during the preschool years) but not after school begins.

Participant: Regarding the focus group data—how did that inform the refining of the curriculum?

NBCDI response: We are still new with using the focus group process and realize that we need more “flags” that help the parents understand specific issues. The focus group pilot sites were selected to include rural and urban settings. NBCDI provides facilitators to train the focus group leaders and will also work with schools and organizations. Clearly, we need to develop ways to get parents more information about particular issues and topics that are of interest to them, such as the African American cultural unit. We also need to be more receptive to school readiness and loop it into parent training. Another area where we need more attention is on quantitative research to confirm success of the program, and then we need to interweave the cultural components.

Participant: With the second version of the model—how does it really clarify African American culture?

NBCDI response: Participants learned about African American history and culture, and this experience helped open discussion up a lot about how their culture is different or the same. It helped to open up discussion about culture and traditions, beliefs, and practices.

Participant: Do parents know what they need to do to become better parents?

NBCDI response: Parents may or may not know strategies, but they will often know that there is something that they might need, or they may have the idea that they can be doing something better—sort of an intuitive situation. Their issues might be about relationships and people. They may want some help about these or a different issue.

For example, if we looked more deeply into the socialization of children, parents often recognize that they have a responsibility to perpetuate their social world, understand children’s ways of knowing and doing. Lily Wong Fillmore found that children were not “ready for school” but that parents were doing a very good job of letting the children know what they needed to know for success in their community. Children knew all they needed to know to help them survive in their cultural world. Perhaps we need to focus more on schools being ready for children?

Participant: How do we research these parenting concepts with quantitative testing and NCLB?

NBCDI response: Not sure—but one way to think about it is to focus on “Funds of Knowledge” or knowledge about what parents need. We have found that parents do reveal what they are confident about and what they are not confident about once we have built a trusting relationship. Those trusting relationships overflow into the school environment, and often a parent’s view of the school is to identify with the teacher as opposed to identifying with the school. Also, parents related better to older teachers or guidance counselors; they related better to the older staff person rather than the younger teacher. Younger teachers seemed to have less respect for parents.

Panel Session: Responding to NBCDI’s presentation

Moderator: Professor Susan Matoba Adler, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Low audio quality prevented full transcription of the panel session. The themes that were addressed during the discussion are summarized below.

1. *The importance of duplicating programs that are successful in providing comprehensive support for parents.*

Every attempt should be made to identify successful programs and duplicate characteristics in other areas. Successful programs provide a model of

community-based interventions for young children. They also support parent leadership from the community by building a cadre of specially trained local people to work in the field and provide sustainable growth for the community.

2. The importance of building relationships of trust and respect.

Because we understand that culture plays such an important role in getting information to parents, we should make every effort to first build relationships of trust and respect. This process begins with the planning stages of the program and understanding the values of the parents in the community so that those values can be incorporated into the program. For example, if being multilingual is important, then the maternal language should be incorporated into the parenting and early childhood program. Key parenting and early childhood principles or concepts can be adapted to the cultural context so that it is more respectful of the way the community learns.

Working to build relationships may mean stepping outside of traditional divisions or roles between professionals and parents. For example, in AVANCE, staff members are often invited to parties or other events at a parent's home, and it is appropriate for staff to attend. Hiring people who are either from the community or who represent the community's culture is important and resolves many universal issues or concerns. Home visitors should be from the same cultural background or community. Programs need to be creative about reaching and building relationships with parents from the community who are most vulnerable.

3. The need for high-quality preservice training.

Once every effort has been made to provide high-quality preservice training, it is important to provide ongoing incentives to continue training and advancement. Cross-training, or integrating other systems with education such as social services, mental health, substance abuse, and health care, so that staff and parent leaders have diverse opportunities to learn more is important. Cross-training also helps to bring the right resources to the program or parent at the time it is really needed.

4. The importance of understanding economics in early child care settings and with parents.

Any program designed to reach vulnerable parents and families that does not recognize the importance of economics will fall short. Although raising the salaries of family care providers and family support professionals is important, the problems are deeper than an increase in wages. An integrated program will help provide opportunities for parents to learn, get jobs, get adequate housing, and advance their status. The program recognizes that for children to be secure and ready to learn, parents and families need to be stable and secure. Program policies will need to reflect the time that parents need to work, get further education, or search for jobs. The community services available, such as affordable health care that covers both basic needs and catastrophic issues, will be available so that families are not severely set back financially by a crisis.