Working with Communities and Systems: Early Childhood Partnerships

Dr. Stephen Bagnato led the class discussion on early childhood partnerships. Dr. Bagnato is currently a developmental school psychologist and professor at the University of Pittsburgh. He specializes in assessment and research of best practice strategies in early childhood education.

Dr. Bagnato’s presentation aligned with MCHB leadership competency #11: Working with Communities and Systems. This competency includes strong collaboration with different community facets, including families, providers, initiative programs, and government agencies. Dr. Bagnato demonstrated competency working with communities and systems during his presentation by outlining his long standing, multi-tiered involvement in early childhood research and program development.

Dr. Bagnato discussed the importance of being connected to the community when developing these types of programs, and “seeing things through” to help ensure that these services are both beneficial and sustainable over time. He also acknowledged the need to strive for “best practices” in assessments as well as in treatment, which is more often obtained through the use of practice-based research, rather than research-based practice.

We also discussed a variety of ways that research is conducted in early childhood education. Dr. Bagnato mentioned some, including single subject research, participatory action research, and applied research. Much of Dr. Bagnato’s success in developing meaningful initiatives for developmentally at-risk children has been driven by his strong research skills, as well as his ability to convey his findings in a practical, relatable manner to heads of agencies. He stressed the importance of developing our own public speaking and persuasion skills so that we can be more effective in bringing about positive change.

Throughout the presentation, Dr. Bagnato also emphasized how supporting parents and professionals involved in early childhood education is paramount to a child’s success. It makes sense that well-trained and well-informed providers would greatly improve the quality of any educational program for children. One program we discussed was COMET, a teacher mentoring initiative for Head Start teachers. COMET focuses on encouraging a collaborative mentoring model between teacher and administrators, as opposed to observation-based scoring of teacher effectiveness.

Finally, Dr. Bagnato encouraged us to learn how different agencies, initiatives, and policies operate and how they all work together. Doing so assists in identifying areas in need with respect to policy change and advocacy. Without this knowledge, it is much more difficult to effect positive changes.

Dr. Bagnato’s class presentation informed us on a wide variety of leadership elements, including the importance of authentic assessment, practical research, ongoing community collaboration, and strong knowledge of agency and policy dynamics that relate to early childhood partnerships. It is apparent from our class discussion that Dr. Bagnato is whole-heartedly invested in improving outcomes for developmentally at-risk children in Pennsylvania. His tremendous contributions to early childhood education research and implementation make Dr. Bagnato an excellent example of all of the MCHB competencies.