Megan Gregory
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SPED 854
Family Interview

This summer, I had the privilege of learning about the plethora of students who have a broad spectrum of disabilities and abilities. I have been able to dive into the diverse population of para educators, co-teachers, staff, students, and family members who have taught me a great deal about disabilities, collaboration, and communication. I have learned that each child is a unique case, and I should always enter situations with empathy and awareness. For this particular assignment, I was able to interview a mother with a son who has autism. For privacy, we will refer to the mother as Mrs. Casey and to the son as Ryan. As I reflect on this interview, I would like to say how I learned that each student requires a team of collaborative individuals to successfully support a child on the autism spectrum.

Mrs. Casey is a kind-hearted and positive advocate who has a vibrant attitude towards people, especially her son, on the spectrum. It was a warm surprise when she volunteered to let me interview her about her experiences. When meeting with Mrs. Casey at a local coffee shop, I included five questions in our interview. The first question was to describe Ryan so that I could gain a better understanding of him as a child and student. Mrs. Casey described Ryan as a shy, quiet, and intelligent ten year old. She expressed all of his loving and admirable qualities and made sure to let me know how she appreciated me wanting to obtain information about him as a person, not just what he is like with a disability. It was after discussing this question I truly realized how parents’ descriptions of their children are just as powerful as the performance they show at school.

The second question revolved around how Ryan’s disability on the spectrum impacted her role as a parent. After a few moments, Mrs. Casey responded with how it provided her and pushed her into an opportunity to proactive for Ryan. If not that, then what should her role be? Mrs. Casey went on to express Ryan’s specific needs and how it has allowed her to be extremely involved as a parent and advocate. She also added how though she loves working with the school system, she is brokenhearted at the families who do not. With her stating this heartfelt experience, I could see how her role (and the roles of all parents) in the educational process is crucial to Ryan’s success. She even brought up how it’s their right as parents to be advocates as much as it is their right to collaborate and be involved.

 Third, I asked Mrs. Casey about her experiences with the school and how they have impacted her. She said that a normal school year for her and Ryan involves several phone calls and meetings, but that she feels the faculty (teacher and principal, especially) truly hear her when they communicate. This question let me see through the lens of a parent who enjoys collaborating and who has had wonderful experiences with teachers who view her (the parent) not only has a part of Ryan’s life but what that entire journey encompasses. I learned here that the bridge of empathy and understanding is important to build when collaborating with family members.

 Mrs. Casey’s most difficult experience thus far has been with a couple of staff members she encountered early on in Ryan’s schooling. In her answer to this question, Mrs. Casey described these individuals as being unprofessional as they did not care to listen to the value she brought to the table. Though a rough decision, Mrs. Casey requested a different set of teachers for Ryan and has since made sure that her role is valued when the staff meets to collaborate. She said she has been guarded and makes sure to look out for Ryan’s best interests by being confident in her role as the parent. After hearing this, I reflected and learned that it is vital to the success of collaboration for us to be considerate of what parents have experienced thus far when working with the educational system.

 To end our interview, Mrs. Casey offered me a piece of advice specific for my future in communication with parents and family members. I view this as the greatest piece of advice I have received thus far in my years as a student and educator. Her advice is to, above all else, listen. Listen to the students, listen to my instincts, and listen to the parents because they (more than anyone else) know their children best. I enjoyed this interview and reflection, as I now have a deeper understanding of the importance of collaboration between special educators and family members.

Questions:

1. Can you describe your child, Ryan?
2. How has Ryan’s disability impacted your role as a parent? Challenges and successes?
3. What have your experiences with educational personnel been like, and how has that communication affected you?
4. Of all your encounters, what has been your most difficult situation? How has this changed your view towards collaborating?
5. Do you have advice for me as an educator when collaborating with parents?