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Building a Culturally Sensitive Teen Parenting Program

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Building a Culturally Sensitive Teen Parenting Program

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Communication Studies 431: Intercultural Communication

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Abstract

In this article, I examine a teen parenting program and observe what needs and desires the students want the program to meet. Based on my experiences with pregnant and parenting students within the program, I created a communication-based work plan that, if employed, would further encourage that these students' needs be met. I also incorporate an in-depth training module for resolving conflicts within intercultural communities. With the help of this work plan, educators at the teen parenting program facility will learn more about ways to enhance their program and settling conflict occurrences in a respectful, competent manner that meet the needs of the students and recognize the educators themselves.

Building a Culturally Sensitive Teen Parenting Program

Introduction

Scholars across the country have conducted research to follow the trends of teenage pregnancy in the United States and its effects on the parenting teens and the children they birth (e.g. Cherlin, 2008; Schweinhart & Fulcher-Dawson, 2006). Although the rate of pregnancy for American teenagers has declined over the past three decades (Cherlin, 2008), DoSomething.org (n.d.) found that the United States still has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the industrialized world – twice as high as in England or Canada. According to Guttmacher Institute (2006) eleven percent of all births in the United States are to teens. Researchers have determined that pregnant and parenting teens are often ill-equipped and poorly prepared to maintain their parenting duties primarily because of their young age, lack of knowledge and other influential impacts on their life experiences (Roxas, 2008; Philliber, Brooks, Phillips Lehrer, Oakley & Waggoner, 2003).

Today's trends show that only one third of teenage mothers earn their high school diploma, and only 1.5 percent of teen mothers obtain a college degree by the time they reach the age of 30 (DoSomething.org, n.d.). The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) (1998) recognizes the importance of establishing a broad system of support and assistance for pregnant and parenting teens. Researchers have conducted a plethora of studies to evaluate the effectiveness of teen parenting programs to determine what makes the teens most likely to succeed as a supportive parent and what influences impact them the most to encourage them to stay in school (e.g. Clewell, Brooks-Gunn & Benasich, 1989; Fuscaldo, Kaye & Philliber, 1998; Philliber *et al.*, 2003; Schweinhart & Fulcher-Dawson, 2006; Zweig, 2003).

This proposal examines what scholarship has shown regarding the implementation of successful teen parenting programs and strategies, and considers how some approaches have helped and others

have hindered teens' receptiveness to completing the programs. The proposal aims to lead pregnant or parenting students to long-term success, described by the American Academy of Pediatrics (2001) as "high school completion and employment or support by a spouse" (430).   Additionally, it will explore new methods of determining how to structure a teen parenting program in an attempt to ensure the needs of the teens are being met. This was done by conducting a fantasy theme analysis to explore what values, motivations and emotions are present in teen parents' discourse. Such analysis helps tailor a culturally adept parenting program that can better ensure teen parents' continuing education and proper parenting training skills aquisition.

This proposal's design incorporates several facets of intercultural conflict training modules outlined by Ting-Toomey (2007) to enable people to responsibly deal with debilitating conflicts that may occur before, during and after teen parenting program enhancements are made.

Suggestions made here require enhanced communication efforts throughout the organization, including ways that internal, direct communications, as proposed by Pacanowsky (1988), can be tweaked to better enhance a culturally sensitive teen parenting program.

Collecting Data

For the purpose of this project, I decided to volunteer at Vanguard Academy in North Portland. Vanguard is an alternative education option for pregnant or parenting teens and young adults, ages 14 to 21, who are seeking to obtain their GED. The program creates individualized academic plans for each student, offers peer support groups, and provides transitional support for students planning to attend community colleges or receive professional training (personal communication, October 10, 2009). Many of the students take advantage of Vanguard's comprehensive English Language Learner program which includes complete ESL services. Aside from reading, writing and math courses, Vanguard Academy also hosts a teen parent support group each week, in which major topics of parenting, health and nutrition

are included. The majority of the students come from low-income backgrounds and many were born to teen parents themselves. I chose to volunteer during the parenting class hour and work with the students to help meet their needs to achieve academic success and enhance their parenting skills.

Fantasy Theme Analysis

Fantasy theme analysis is a term coined by Ernest Bormann (1972, 1982) who instigated the idea primarily because he maintained that one person could create a fantasy in which he or she communicates about a vision or a narrative of the past, present or future. Then, he or she shares their ideas with another person or with a group, and soon the fantasy is being spread and accepted by others – it is chaining out. Chaining out a fantasy can affect any interaction between two people, a group or an entire society. Bormann (1972) asserts that people's visions, values, motivations, emotions and characteristic styles can be determined by observing their conversations.

I collected pertinent data through six weekly visits to Vanguard. To learn more about the center and its tactics for helping teen parents I conducted an informational interview with the director of the program. Additionally, I talked with many of the students in the program to better understand their emotions and to get a feel for what needs they wanted to be met. I also kept an on-going log of entries for each visit and consistently marked any observations, noted specific conversations and gathered paperwork that Vanguard educators used as teaching material for the students. Because of the sensitivity of some of the topics expressed, and to protect the privacy and location of the community members of Vanguard, all names have been changed.

Examining Fantasies

My field notes demonstrate that the students spent the majority of their day in one classroom filled with three long tables in a U-shape, four computers with Internet access, a teacher's desk, personal calendars complete with stickers to mark each student's attendance record, and miniature

murals painted on the walls that past and current students have painted representing their dreams for their future.

The Vanguard Lifestyle

I took a close look at the murals the students had painted; one included a road map with pit stops like a school, a bank, a hospital and an amusement park. The road was filled with inspirational words like "success," "investing in the future," "savings account 4 my kids," "monny," "ambitin," "health," "education," "motivation," "graduate," "family fun," and "Disney Land." Another painting included a picture of a red car with musings like "get GED," "graduate," "get a safe home for my son," "successful job," "get married," and "live a long healthy life." Although I did not observe these goals being communicated verbally, Bormann (1972) asserts that the recurring themes that the students paint about are proof that their visions are chaining out to one another. These primary themes of education, graduation, success, and family can be taken as hints as to what the students value most, and by implementing the steps that will be proposed in the work plan, the program can be tailored to more specifically meet the students' needs and desires.

Classroom Exercises

During the majority of my visits to Vanguard, the primary topic of parenting class was about communication. One day, the parenting teacher, Katy, a 30-something single mother, began teaching about Marshall Rosenberg's *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (2003), describing basic needs all humans – young and old – have, and the emotions we feel when the needs are or are not being met. The activity involved role-play for the students, where one acted as the child who was cranky, irritable, over-stimulated, sick, etc., and the other acted as the parent, acknowledging the child's behavior, determining why the child is behaving in a certain way and coming up with a solution to meet the child's needs.

Example
Situation: Parent dropping a verbal child off at daycare

Child: Crying, complaining, not being obedient

Parent: "When you see me *leave from your daycare* do you feel *sad, lonely and uncomfortable* because you *need to feel safe*? Would you like *me to give you a hug*?

Everything in the underlined italics are the blanks the students had to fill in to describe situations they experience on a daily basis. This activity proved to be quite challenging for the students, with many saying "pass" instead of sharing their example with the class. Some of the students described their ways of coping with their children's sometimes obnoxious and repetitive behavior. Izzie, a 20-year old married mother with an 8-month old son, explained that she likes to turn it into a game whenever her son will continuously throw his bottle from his highchair. "I just keep picking it up for him and after a while I start to laugh and then he starts to laugh. It makes me less irritated when we both laugh about it," Izzie explained.

Another day, the primary activity again was a communication-building exercise. Students were split into groups of three. We created obstacle courses around the auditorium and a blindfolded student had to complete the course with directions from a group of students verbally telling them where to go. The verbal students, however, were not able to watch the blindfolded person; rather they were taking directions from a group of silent students acting out the actions the blindfolded person should have done. After this activity, several parents stressed their anger and frustration with not being able to convey or understand the messages being sent. Many related it to their experiences with their children who are too young to speak and how it is difficult to accurately interpret messages. The activity was also used to re-establish the importance of remaining patient, ultimately to emphasize how

negative and detrimental violent communication can be, and to prove there are other ways to solve an issue without violence.

When Mary, the instructor for this lesson, mentioned that patience is an alternative to violent communication, Monique, a student, said that she thinks it is not as bad if a girl is beating up a guy. "My boyfriend was pissing me off last night when I was putting away the dishes so I started slapping him with a wooden spatula," she explained. Mary asked her if hitting him with the spatula resolved the problem and Monique responded, "No, he just kept buggin' me and he was doin' it again this morning." She then revealed to Mary and me that her mom went to jail for two months because she beat up Monique's stepfather. "He was always pretty bad to her and one day she just didn't like it no more and she beat him up. He never touched her or hurt her like that, but she just wanted to beat him up." Monique then let out a little giggle. Zweig (2003) would suggest that Monique's candidness and honesty of the violent situation calls for some type of action to reassess the meaning of violence as a solution to conflicts.

A Lattice Organization

Vanguard Academy is structured in such a way that Pacanowsky (1988) would call a lattice organization. Pacanowsky (1988) describes a lattice organization as one that

> *looks like* a lattice, a regular crosshatching of lines, representing an unrestricted flow of communication with no overlap of lines of authority… it means "one-on-one communication" with whomever you need to talk to in order to get a job done, no fixed or assigned authority but leadership that evolves over time and that fluctuates with the specific problem at hand that most need attention, and tasks and functions that are organized through personally made commitments… (357).

A lattice organization values opportunities available to everyone involved, no matter what position they hold. This system of communication is very prevalent within Vanguard, and is a very important system, because students can go straight to the source (Eric, the director of the program) during any conflict situation or to request that certain needs be met. On the other hand, lattice organizations are also

based on the notion that people have more freedom to carry out certain actions without having to consult anyone.

Vanguard students rely heavily on their ability to freely make their decisions, which usually come without direct consequences. For example, students' attendance is monitored, but barely enforced. During my first day at Vanguard, I arrived before lunch time so I could get a chance to sit down and meet the students. While the students normally eat in the classroom, I stood in the kitchen eating lunch while talking to the cook because of the 21 students enrolled in the program, only seven came to class that day. During the 20-minute lunch period, however, three mothers had to run an errand to the relief nursery for their children, one went on a walk, and the other three were completing their homework assignments that were due in the next 20 minutes. For most of the students at Vanguard, lunch is the only complete meal they eat every day, and of those at school that day, half of them did not eat either because they left to tend to their children, or they had to finish assignments because they were too busy parenting to complete them earlier.

Later on, I took a glance at the attendance calendars and was shocked to see the lack of stickers the majority of the students had. One can earn a sticker if they get to class on time, by 9:45 in the morning. This is a struggle for most because they have to drop their children off at daycare and use the public transportation system to make the trek to North Portland. They have a good incentive, however, to make it to school on time every day. Once a student has 15 consecutive stickers, they receive a $25 gift card to Fred Meyer. As students Johanna and Violet explained to me, however, it takes a long time to get their gift card because it is not easy for them to make it on time 15 days in a row, let alone make it to class 15 days in a row because their parenting duties come first.

Appendix B includes how to fine-tune the lattice organization so that the effectiveness of communication might be more beneficial to the students and the director and teachers while

maintaining enforcement applications for the students. It is important that the students have the ability to freely exercise their right to make their own decisions, as demonstrated in the lattice organization (Pacanowsky, 1988), but it is also imperative to enforce a set of standards in which to adhere so the students can make improvements to their lifestyles.

Introducing an Intercultural Conflict Training Module

The Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory

This theory is comprised of seven assumptions that aim toward facilitating conflict situations between different intercultural groups (Ting-Toomey, 2007). It is incorporated into the proposal with the intention that if it used, the members of the Vanguard community can alter their ways of dealing with conflict to meet each other's needs and show a higher level of respect to one another. See Appendix A for more details and to understand how it justifies the proposed plan.

Proposal Approach and Work Plan

The proposed plan addresses the needs of pregnant and parenting teens involved in a school-based teen parenting program. The proposal aims to encourage parenting programs to incorporate certain practices to better lead their students toward long-term success. The plan maintains a major focus on cross-cultural strategies parenting programs should incorporate and what the educators should consider implementing to create better outcomes for their students. The plan also incorporates ideas suggested by Pacanowsky (1988) to maintain and improve effective communication in an empowering lattice organization. Lastly, the plan outlines key strategies to use as examined by Ting-Toomey (2007) that focus on intercultural conflict-management techniques.

Addressing Needs and Desires of Students

A comprehensive list is provided to outline common themes and the chained-out fantasy themes I observed in students' communication at Vanguard Academy. I created the list based on

observations I gathered through means of conversation, examining the interactions students had with

others, paying attention to body language, monitoring attitudes students expressed toward varying class

activities, noting projects or artwork the students made, and talking with the teachers at Vanguard to

better understand the students.

The following is a list of common themes I observed at Vanguard (see Appendix C for

descriptions of the chained-out fantasies and other common themes):

1. Talk of violence

2. Unwillingness or lack of desire to want to participate in class or complete assignments

3. Narratives of life with children (including the advantages and disadvantages

The proposal will examine each category from both lists in order to provide suggestions as to

how to incorporate elements of each topic into the curriculum to meet the students' needs.

Talk of Violence

According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (n.d.), many

forms of violence are associated with teen pregnancy. Many young teen girls experience intimate

partner violence, domestic abuse and sexual abuse; almost 60 percent of teens who become pregnant

reported they had a history of sexual or physical abuse during their childhood (thenationalcampaign.org,

n.d.). Researchers note that it is difficult to get people to talk about their previous abusive histories

(thenationalcampaigh.org, n.d.; Cherlin, 2008), but by looking at today's statistics, many things can be

done to help keep violence rates at a minimum.

- **<u>Encourage positive dialogue.</u>** Currently, Vanguard has used several communication techniques

     to emphasize the importance of communicating verbally, but many of these exercises have

     failed to relate directly to dealing with the students' children or suggest dialogue that is not

easily understood by the students. I propose that Vanguard incorporate more activities to show *how* positive, patient and understanding communication can benefit the child, the parent and their relationship. Many times students do not make the connection between class activities and how it pertains to them, but finding exercises to support positive dialogue and explaining the correlation between its use and positive effects would be beneficial to the students and their perception of violence.

- **Give the students someone to talk to.** Currently, a representative from Oregon's Department of Human Services comes to Vanguard every other month or so in case students want to talk about any issues going on at home or school or to receive more support. I was told by Vanguard student Violet that she sometimes does not like talking to the DHS representative because that person does not know her situation very well and is not present on a day-to-day basis. Violet also told me sometimes she thinks her teachers will "think bad" of her if she tells them some personal details about her personal life. The teachers are such an integral part of the students' lives and often times not only serve as educators but also act like friends, so the students do not want to disappoint the teachers. If the students had a third party whom they viewed as neutral, they may be more open about their personal lives (Pillsbury & Mayer, 2005) and feel more comfortable in talking about violence, if it occurs in their household and ways to control and prevent it.

Unwillingness or lack of desire to want to participate in class or complete assignments

It is not uncommon for the average teenage student to be uninterested in the material they are learning; Vanguard students often verbally say they think a certain activity is "stupid," decide to pass on their turn to share something, let out an audible "hmmph" if they are bored and carry body language like rolling their eyes or crossing their arms that says they do not find the material important. Here are

some suggestions for the teachers at Vanguard to try to engage their students in varying activities that keep them alert, aware and interested:

- **Tailor teaching styles to suit the students' learning styles.** The students at Vanguard are a culturally diverse group. Many are Hispanic, some are African American and others are Caucasian. All the staff members at Vanguard are Caucasian, though. Cultures can be a great influence on students' differing learning styles (Tong, Huang & McIntyre, 2006). Students' behavior and willingness to learn may be negatively affected if their learning styles clash with the teacher's teaching style. If the Vanguard teachers understand the differences between the students and adjust their personal teaching styles, they may be more effective in conveying the material and keeping the students interested. Giles and Noels (2002) note that when members from different cultures interact, they need to determine whose communication system to employ. Vanguard educators may be better able to accommodate students' learning styles if they adapt to the students' communication styles in the classroom setting. This is very important and would be beneficial because it will help the students maintain their identity and cultural background (Giles & Noels, 2002). Educators who converge their communication styles to reflect those of the students' can improve the overall effectiveness of their communication and improve the cohesiveness between the different cultural groups (Giles & Noels, 2002).

- **Vary activities and maintain high expectations.** Tong *et al.* (2006) assert that when teachers bring a creative, accepting and warm environment into the classroom students put out a greater effort. If Vanguard teachers instill that feeling into the classroom and make known their expectations, students will be more likely to participate. It is also important to mix up the activities and take new approaches to addressing similar topics to prevent a mundane atmosphere. Perhaps the teachers should look for alternative ways to teach learning material aside from class discussion; then the students may feel more engaged in the activity.

Narratives of life with children (including the advantages and disadvantages)

I discovered that the students at Vanguard love talking about their children. My first day there I sat down next to Izzie and Violet and after introducing ourselves, we immediately started talking about kids. Both girls pulled pictures out of their wallets; Izzie showed me a picture of her infant son and Violet showed me pictures of her two daughters. They then asked me if I had any kids, waiting for me to pull pictures out of my wallet and brag a little about my son or daughter. I told them I did not have any kids. They laughed and Izzie told me I must have decided to be smart instead. She then immediately started talking about her son and some funny thing he was doing the night before. Violet chimed in with a story about her youngest daughter and told Izzie and me that she often gets stressed out and frustrated with her daughter. Class started and our conversation was over. Another day, Monique started a discussion during lunch by asking every student if they wanted a boy or a girl before their child was born. Some said boys, some said girls, and others had no preference. Monique said she wanted twins. I find that most of the conversations the parents have take place in between classes or at lunch; they do not have any other time set aside throughout the day to talk about life at home. So I propose a couple ideas to Vanguard:

- **<u>Set aside time each week for students to talk about their life with children.</u>** This process should be facilitated by a staff member to encourage students to carry a discussion. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2001) suggests that incorporating multidisciplinary programs into the curriculum including support from peers and teachers provides an outlet for the students. Not only can the students vent to their social support group, but they can receive advice from other students and perhaps gain new perspectives about how to deal with difficult situations.

- **<u>Redefine the structure of the current parenting classes.</u>** In my time attending the parenting classes at Vanguard, the class has focused on communicating with children in order to meet their needs and understanding nonverbal cues of nonverbal children. Fuscaldo, *et al.* (1998) provide a comprehensive curriculum that has proven to be effective in other parenting programs. They suggest using a combination of parenting education and group counseling. The researchers recommend teaching students about child development and guidance, parenting skills, child and maternal health, and family planning strategies (Fuscaldo, *et al*., 1998). If these tenets of the class are incorporated to the current parenting classes, students can not only learn new tips and information but they can also share their advice about what works or does not work for them.

Incorporating an Intercultural Conflict Training Module

The Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory

Ting-Toomey (2007) explains that face-negotiation models were created to frame various approaches toward intercultural conflict because people from different cultures deal with conflict situations in varying manners. Incorporating the conflict face-negotiation theory into conflict situations that occur at Vanguard will provide a set of conceptual standards that will allow the community to effectively deal with conflict. The teen parent-students are part of one culture and Vanguard educators and volunteers are part of another. While all of the members may share similarities and be part of co-cultures (i.e. being American), they are also constantly working together cross-culturally because of their present and immediate experiences and situations in life. The following pieces of advice stem from Ting-Toomey's (2007) seventh assumption of the conflict face-negotiation theory and will help manage conflict within these intercultural boundaries:

1. Encourage facework competence. As noted earlier, knowledge of varying conflict styles is the key component to being competent in dealing with facework (Ting-Toomey, 2007). Without knowledge of the differences, negotiators will not have a precise perception or reconstruct their interpretation of a conflict circumstance from the other's cultural standpoint. Vanguard can incorporate this by teaching about empathic and dialogic listening skills and encouraging students to use them in appropriate conflict situations. Promote empathic listening skills by telling the students that within interpersonal encounters, the focus moves from self-centered to an other-centered. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) encourage dialogic listening skills by explaining that within interpersonal communications it focuses on what is "ours" rather than "mine" or "the other's." The following is an example chart to provide to students describing empathic and dialogic listening skills (personal communication, February 19, 2009):

	Empathic Listening Skills and Uses	Dialogic Listening Skills and Uses
Advantages	Builds trust between speaker and listener Shifts the emphasis in the encounter from listener to speaker Strengthens the relationship Clarifies the listener's understanding of the speaker	Will help sculpt mutual messages between you and the other The other will respond less defensively if you refer to what you hear rather than assuming you know what the other must be feeling Can be open-ended, playful and trusting
Listening Practices	Think of it as investing time rather than spending time • Aiming posture toward the other, maintaining natural and responsive eyes, sounds and movements tells the other you are postponing your own agenda and focusing on the current interaction "Pull" more talk from the other person • Using attentive silence, asking open-ended and clarifying questions, mirroring key words, perception checking and asking the other to say more or keep talking means there will be more between you two to talk about	Think of it as investing time rather than spending time • Aiming posture toward the other, maintaining natural and responsive eyes, sounds and movements tells the other you are postponing your own agenda and focusing on the current interaction "Pull" more talk from the other person • Using attentive silence, asking open-ended and clarifying questions, mirroring key words, perception checking and asking the other to say more or keep talking means there will be more between you two to talk about

	Communicate that you're aware of the person's perspective • Paraphrase what the other says, add examples, and gently pursue verbal and nonverbal inconsistencies to achieve and show an understanding of the other's view	Communicate that you're aware of the person's perspective and they should be aware of your perspective as well • Ask for a paraphrase from the other person, paraphrase what the other says and include your own response to it, add examples and run with metaphors
Results	These listening attempts try to facilitate being sensitive to the other person's needs and sets aside the listener's own view and values to enter the other's world.	These listening attempts try to focus on verbal and nonverbal cues to focus on sculpting mutual meanings and understandings of symbols or conflicts.

Using reflective and analytic listening skills will show students how to focus their perceptual processes of selecting, organizing, inferring and interpreting information and will help them respond to problems of overload, stereotyping and attribution errors (personal communication, February 19, 2009).

2. Encourage mindful reflections. Ting-Toomey (2007) notes that being mindful will help people form practical conflict skills and develop knowledgeable interaction abilities. Mindfulness requires one to recognize their internal assumptions, cognitions and emotions all while being assertive of the other party's conflicting assumptions, cognitions and emotions. The following characteristics from Ting-Toomey (2007) can be emphasized in order for people to start developing mindful attributes:

- View the behavior or information offered in a conflict circumstance as original.
- Learn to see the conflict circumstance from many different standpoints and recognize the positive aspects from opposing viewpoints than one's own.
- Be assertive to the opposite party's perceptions and behavior and attend to their notion of the conflict.
- Develop new groups through which the unfamiliar conflict behavior may be comprehended.

3. Encourage the use of communication skills.   Bochner and Kelly (1974) provide three criteria

to judge communication competence and describe different approaches to achieve it. The three

criteria are the ability of the communicator to formulate and achieve objectives, the ability of

the communicator to collaborate with others, and the ability of the communicator to adapt

appropriately to changes in the situation or environment (personal communication, February

19, 2009). The following is a chart explicating pragmatic and humanistic approaches to

communicate competently and effectively in interpersonal interactions (personal

communication, February 19, 2009):

Pragmatic Approach	Humanistic Approach
Be confident and control anxiety so it is not perceived by others	Be open, honest, spontaneous and personal in information exchange
Use immediate verbal and nonverbal behaviors to create a sense of closeness with the other person • Use the other's name • Use inclusive pronouns (we, us, you and I) • Focus on the other's remarks • Reinforce the other person • Provide relevant feedback and disclosure	Employ empathic skills to feel what the other is feeling
Use interaction management skills to help control the interaction to the satisfaction of both parties • Self-monitor and adjust your actions based on the feedback from the other • Be expressive and communicate genuine involvement in the interaction • Focus on "other orientation" and communicate with the person who is actually there	Be supportive, descriptive, non-judgmental, provisional, positive and responsive

By incorporating the three pieces of advice from Ting-Toomey (2007) along with the

interpersonal communication competence skill sets displayed in the charts, Vanguard Academy

educators, students and volunteers can appropriately deal with intercultural conflict situations that arise within the organization.

Closing

As the teen pregnancy trend continues, it is of utmost importance that teen parent program educators encourage students of many cultures to reach their full potential. The current system instilled by some programs sometimes struggle to meet students' diverse needs. My research noted common themes in the chained-out fantasies portrayed by pregnant and parenting teens at Vanguard Academy, and proposed several potential program tweaks supported by numerous studies concerned with the wellbeing of teen parents and their education options.

This proposal aims to offer strategies to augment the effectiveness of teen parenting programs. Currently, many teen parenting programs lack certain practices that could improve the overall result of their students. I found that many of the suggestions offered by researchers are not currently being implemented at Vanguard; if the strategies are incorporated into the curriculum and services provided by Vanguard, the students may experience a higher level of satisfaction if their fantasies are being better met.

Vanguard may find these proposals will yield additional positive results in that their students may be more likely to continue their education or establish a strong career; they will be ensured that they are living in a healthy, safe environment and are providing that for their children as well and the students' likeliness of a repeat pregnancy during their teen years is decreased. Incorporating the above suggestions could enhance how Vanguard instills in students sufficient knowledge about how to live and succeed in today's society.

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Appendix A

The Conflict Face-Negotiation Theory

This module manifests itself in the conflict face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2007). Ting-Toomey (2007) asserts that intercultural conflict incorporates various face-saving and face-losing behaviors by all parties involved. In this instance, face refers to one's desired self-image and how they wish to be perceived in a relational or international setting (Ting-Toomey, 2007). When one's sense of desired identity is challenged or ignored, face loss is often experienced; it can occur on an individual level and/or an identity group level (Ting-Toomey, 2007). Face gain is experienced when one's identity and self-image is being accepted and respected, even if the other party holds an opposite self-image; the perceptiveness and mindfulness each party displays to one another saves face (Ting-Toomey, 2007). If continual face loss behaviors are being experienced however, it may be the cause for escalated intercultural conflict (Ting-Toomey, 2007).

Ting-Toomey (2007) states that the conflict face-negotiation theory is comprised of seven assumptions:

1. People from different cultures try to respect and negotiate face in all types of communication settings,

2. the idea of face can cause problems during "emotionally-threatening or identity vulnerable situations" when communicators' identities are being questioned (p. 257),

3. the cultural value scales of individualism-collectivism and small/large power distance determine facework concerns and techniques,

4. individualism and collectivism value styles form negotiators' preferences for self-oriented facework opposed to other-oriented facework,

5. small and large power distance value styles s form negotiators' preferences for horizontal-based facework opposed to vertical-based facework,

6. the value facets, along with individual, relational and situational aspects "influence the use of particular facework behaviors in particular cultural scenes" (p. 257), and

7. "intercultural facework competence refers to the optimal integration of knowledge, mindfulness, and communication skills in managing vulnerability identity-based conflict situations appropriately, effectively and adaptively" (p. 257).

Ting-Toomey (2007) found that these seven assumptions can serve as an instructive method for cultural relationship's impact on conflict behavior. For example, major findings included that cultural individualism-collectivism had direct results on conflict style patterns, and results through self-construal and face concerns (Ting-Toomey, 2007). Additionally, *self-face concern* was linked positively with dominating style of conflict management and *other-face concern* was related positively with avoiding and integrating styles of conflict management (Ting-Toomey, 2007). In determining the most influential aspect of facework competence, Ting-Toomey (2007) asserts that culture-sensitive knowledge of varying conflict management styles is the most important so that the different conflict parties can understand the embedded "ethnocentric lenses" people employ to assess various behaviors in an intercultural conflict situation (p. 259).

As I spent more time at Vanguard I picked up on many recurring themes. I was surprised, however, at how many of them were nonverbal cues that indicate how a student was feeling or what they were thinking. If more attention is paid to the specific needs the students require, perhaps Vanguard can become a more well-rounded program serving the pregnant and parenting teen population and witness a higher success rate for their students.

Appendix B

Six Operating Rules to Improve Communication Effectiveness in an Empowering Lattice Organization

Pacanowsky's (1988) research on communication effectiveness in an empowering organization relies heavily on the fact that the organization is made up of a lattice-like structure. This design not only allows everyone involved to communicate with the appropriate person about any inquiry, but it also instills a high morale, high initiative and an increased risk taking coupled with the ability to enjoy in completing tasks (Pacanowsky, 1988). Pacanowsky (1988) outlines six principles which will help an empowering culture be sustained and enabled:

1. Distribute power and opportunity widely. Vanguard Academy should attempt to recognize and supportively encourage the power of the students' ability to accomplish. The students will be more apt to take the necessary measures to complete their tasks and honor their commitments. This can be applied through positive reinforcement and demonstrating to the students they have the tools they need to succeed.

2. Maintain a full, open and decentralized communication system. This will allow students to be informed about problems, opportunities, and resources so they are enabled make mature decisions about how to handle certain situations. This can be implemented at Vanguard by communicating to the students they should be actively involved in the goings-on of their educational community so they understand they have the ability to make informed decisions based on cultural experiences within Vanguard.

3. Use integrative problem solving. When any sort of problem arises, people at Vanguard should refrain from asking, "What did we do last time to solve this problem?" By incorporating a new means to solve the problem, people's opportunities, responsibilities and abilities will be expanded. This can be applied in various instances at Vanguard – anywhere from the classroom

setting while creating examples and activities, or by incorporating it into the every-day workings of the organization.

4. Practice challenge in an environment of trust. The type of challenge presented must come as a form of expanded support. For example, rather than always submitting to the students' responses, Vanguard educators should guide the students to a deeper understanding of their experiences by questioning what the students say to lead them to a more thorough comprehension. Often times students will either "pass" on their turn to share in class, or offer a similar example of others' inputs. According to Pacanowsky (1988) if the educators pushed the students to think more openly and perceptively of their experiences, the students will be more inclined to expose the true strengths and weaknesses they experience.

5. Reward and recognize people so as to encourage high-performance ethic and self-responsibility. Rather than encourage the students with incentives or compensation, Vanguard should put a twist on the way they reward the successes of the students to further support the notion of a strong work ethic and self responsibility. Vanguard can do this by creating projects – either in school, at home, or through community involvement – where students are expected to complete tasks and are held accountable by their peers. Pacanowsky (1988) notes that this will help people realize what ability they have to realistically contribute, what power they can enforce to accomplish, and can be proud of their true efforts. A sense of accomplishment will serve as a reward in itself.

6. Become wise by living through, and learning from, organizational ambiguity, inconsistency, contradiction, and paradox. By adhering to this notion, the members of the Vanguard community will realize that varying creative techniques will need to constantly be employed.

Everyone will learn that they will not be able to always fully resolve all ambiguities and inconsistencies, but they will be able to learn from their actions.

By sticking with these primary properties, Vanguard may find that not only are they employing a highly-effective communication system, they are also creating intellectuals among their students. By following these principles, students will learn to be better communicators and be a strong structural support for their empowering organizational culture.

Appendix C

My proposal focuses on communication-based strategies Vanguard Academy can implement to better meet the needs of their students. However, my extensive research led me to other tactics that would help satisfy students' other chained-out fantasies. The following is a list of more common themes and the fantasies that are described and possible solutions to enhancing the students' wishes:

1. Tardiness or absence from class

2. Students' desire to get their GED

3. Students' desire to have a good career

4. Students' aspiration for providing a safe environment for their children

Tardiness or absence from class

Eric, the director of Vanguard Academy, told me the school requires the students maintain an attendance rate of at least 80 percent. Many students do not adhere to that policy, however, and do not receive any reprimand for their lack of attendance. As noted earlier, students earn gift cards to Fred Meyer for $25 every time they come to class on time for 15 consecutive days. Surprisingly, this is not incentive enough for the students, and certain measures need to be taken to increase a stable rate of attendance. I propose several suggestions to Vanguard to facilitate this process:

- **Incorporate a child-care program within the school.** Many students do not make it to school because of issues with their children and getting them to or leaving them at daycare. Vanguard has the space and some tools necessary for incorporating a daycare within the school building. Fuscaldo *et al.* (1998) conducted a study to evaluate the effectiveness of a teen parenting program in Plainfield, New Jersey and found that the attendance rate of students there was

higher than those of students from the comparison group because the Plainfield parents could easily tend to their children if need be. Eric said Vanguard has thought about including a child-care program within the facility, but they have yet to do so. This could greatly improve attendance rates.

- **<u>Provide transportation to and from school.</u>** In the Fuscaldo *et al.* (1998) study, the teen parents and children of the Plainfield, New Jersey program received transportation to and from school. This, they said, ensures a higher rate of attendance because students no longer need to worry about getting rides to school (as most of them do not own vehicles), or finding money to catch the bus every day. TriMet (2008), the public transportation system in Portland, charges $946 for a year-long pass to ride the bus, light rail, commuter rail and street cars. With transportation provided by Vanguard, students are assured a ride to and from school and will feel more of a direct pressure to attend class.

Students' desire to get their GED

The primary reason many students are at Vanguard Academy is to prepare for their GED tests. Several students have told me they have taken parts of the test numerous times and some subjects like math and writing are very difficult to pass. To accommodate this chained-out fantasy, I provide the following suggestions to the Vanguard staff:

- **<u>Conduct placement testing when new students enter the program.</u>** Eric told me that some students – who are all at least 14 years of age – are at fifth grade reading levels. Yet they still receive the same material as students who are at higher reading levels. If incoming students received placement testing and are at a below-average reading level for their age, then Vanguard's volunteers could serve as tutors to help improve reading levels with the students

independently. This way, the class as a whole can be at a similar reading level and students will not have to read above or below their comprehendible levels.

- **Bring in Vanguard graduates who have earned their GEDs.** If students at Vanguard are exposed to someone who was once in their situation as a teen parent but managed to graduate and pass tests to earn their GED, they will have a sort of assurance that they, too, can succeed in that program. Students will have opportunities to solicit advice from the Vanguard graduates about their time at Vanguard, getting their GED and getting a job, among other things.

- **Establish a minimum time length requirement that students have to stay at Vanguard.** Right now, students enter Vanguard and typically remain in the program until they earn their GED. Seitz, Apfel, and Rosenbaum (1991) found that students with lower academic levels became indistinguishable from students with high academic level if they stayed in the program for the duration of the program and ultimately achieved academic success. Furthermore, many students have passed two or three of the five required tests (in the subjects of social studies, science, reading, writing and math). Izzie told me that she has taken the writing math portions twice and is hoping that "the third time's a charm." She explained that the costs of these tests in Oregon are expensive and just to complete the application process costs anywhere between $75 and $100. If Vanguard mandates that each student stay in the program for a certain time period the students may reach a higher level of academic achievement and perhaps will pass their tests the first time they take them.

Students' desire to have a good career

Two nursing students from Linfield College are also working with Vanguard students to complete a semester project of their own. They conducted a survey out among students inquiring about what topics interested them the most. Multiple students indicated they were interested in careers in the

health field. Hannah, who was sitting next to me, said she wanted to be a nurse some day. In order to better serve their students and prepare them for what type of career they wish to enter, I have some suggestions for Vanguard:

- **Hold a "career fair" for students.** This would entail Vanguard inviting in people from all different types of work backgrounds, whether it be doctors, nurses, electricians, teachers, businesspeople, etc. Students can get a feel for what might interest them and can talk to professionals in their respective areas about what they needed to do to get to where they are.

- **Help students find a job or the right program to continue higher education.** After students earn their GED, Vanguard should help them build and write their résumés, aid in constructing cover letters, or help them with application processes for higher education. By providing these services, Vanguard can be assured their hard work has paid off and that their program is successful in helping the pregnant or parenting teens succeed.

Students' aspiration for providing a safe environment for their children

I have witnessed time and again that Vanguard students are concerned for the wellbeing of their children and want to ensure they are healthy and are part of a safe environment. These chained-out fantasies have been portrayed in the murals painted on the walls of the classroom, explained in students' reflection projects and talked about in passing conversations. I have one primary suggestion:

- **Have a nurse make monthly home visits to the students' places of residence.** With frequent home visits, nurses can ensure the environment in which children live are safe and stable and can show teen parents other measures to take. Implementing this one strategy can be so much more beneficial than just ensuring there is a safe environment for the children of parenting teens. Clewell *et al.* (1989), Fuscaldo *et al.* (1998) Olds, Eckenrode, Henderson, Kitzman, Powers, Cole, Sidora, Morris, Pettitt, & Luckey (1997) and Philliber *et al.* (2003) all discovered

that parenting programs that incorporated home visits yielded many beneficial outcomes

among the students. These outcomes included factors such as higher levels of health in the

students and their children, stronger efforts put forth by students to complete their schoolwork,

reduced number of subsequent teenage pregnancies, teen parents' dependency on welfare and

child abuse or neglect (Clewell *et al.*, 1989; Fuscaldo *et al.*, 1998; Philliber *et al.*, 2003, Olds *et

al.,* 1997). This can be very advantageous for the student-parents because they would be

associating with members from different cultures through cultural contracts (Jackson, 2002). As

Jackson (2002) notes, the cultural contracts are imperative in helping protect, maintain and

define the self and provide a sense of reinforcement in the teens' lives.