The art of collaboration: lessons from families of children with disabilities

Katharine G. Shepherd, Colby T. Kervick and Djenne-amal N. Morris. *The Art of Collaboration: Lessons from Families of Children with Disabilities* | Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers., 194 pages | ISBN 9789463008242

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In The Art of Collaboration: Lessons from Families of Children with Disabilities, as one work of "Studies In Inclusive Education", Katharine G. Shepherd, Colby T. Kervick and Djenne-amal N. Morris purpose some new directions for collaboration between families and school professionals. Disability is one of the most reliable predictors of educational failure. "Studies In Inclusive Education" expands the focus from special educational needs to understand school failure and exclusion in all its forms across all sectors of education. This shifts the focus of research from a need that is necessary but may not be realized to the problem of the real situation, so as to solve the problem and achieve the goal of satisfying the needs.

The work consists of a collaboration by two university professors who are former special educator and a mother of a special child. Katharine G. Shepherd and Colby T. Kervick are specialists in the College of Education and Social Services at the University of Vermont. Djenne-amal N. Morris, B.A. is a mother of a child with disability whose profession it is to support other parents in developing their skills in leadership, advocacy and parenting a child with a disability.

As one work of the series, the book draws on the literature as well as original research to explore the meaning of collaboration and the benefits and barriers to developing positive school and family partnerships. The voices and stories of families of children with a variety of disabilities and experiences are at the heart of the book, providing insights into how we might re-conceptualize collaboration as an ongoing process and an "art" built on a shared commitment to improving the lives of children and families. There are nine chapters of the book. It begins with an overview of the research on collaboration and explores key themes, including the process of identifying a disability, the meaning of parent knowledge and expertise in the digital age, the potential to join parent and professional knowledge for the benefit of the child and family, and approaches leading to meaningful collaboration and communication. These include a variety of family-centered tools and practices, strategies for promoting parent advocacy and leadership, and a focus on hope and resiliency. Each chapter concludes with questions for reflection and suggested activities, making it an ideal resource for both parents and professionals.

As described in the book, parents of children with disabilities assume different roles: actors and experts (case managers, interventionists, as champions and advocates for their children), leadership, parents, and coordinator. These roles are undertaken to make them feel that their ideas and expertise are valued that is often a critical step in partnership building. Without the appropriate expertise, parents will be frustrated during meetings to designate educational plans for their children because they often feel excluded. They cannot understand what the professionals do and why, so they cannot be integrated. This kind of bad experience will affect the emotional and healthy atmosphere of parents and even the whole family, and invisibly affect the relevant rights that children should enjoy in the future. Therefore, in order to make parents more actively participate in the formulation of IEP, and parents' ideas about their children are valued, so as to formulate more applicable teaching plans and achieve better intervention effects, effective and in-depth cooperation between families and professionals is crucial. Addressing the question of how families and professionals can build meaningful partnerships, this book offers advice based on successful experiences: expressing openness and gratitude for the family and professional relationship, creating time and space for communication, talking across professions.

A big difference of this book is that it is from the perspective of parents, through the description of parents' relevant experiences (this will make the parents who are reading generate deep empathy and make it easier for them to accept the future before they succeed. It also makes the professionals who have read this book better understand the difficulties faced by parents, which makes it easier to open up and establish good cooperation), which depicts the parents' efforts for the growth of children. The breakthrough, which not only pointed out the problems that the vast majority of parents may encounter, but also gave a successful experience, gave hope to other parents, and showed a path in which they may all be successful. Many times people are more inclined to appeal to others about their misfortunes and rarely see what they have. They think about their future more often, but it is precisely the road under their feet that needs to be taken step by step. Therefore, this book focuses research on the description of the current problem and the provision of possible specific solutions, rather than just describing what parents with disabilities need. This shifts from the requirements of the external environment to the improvement of the ability of disabled parents. This seems more pragmatic. Because of appealing to the suffering of others, more people will choose to laugh it off, and only a few or stakeholders will solve the problem. Greater mobility still belongs to the sufferer himself. This book shows the world that parents of disabled people never give up growing up because of their children's disabilities. While they show that they want to get help from others, they are more about their own successful transformation.

This is a very successful book.

However, there are still some gaps in this book when it describes the way to obtain ability improvement. For example, the book describes the improvement of parents' own corresponding abilities, such as special education knowledge, parenting knowledge, communication skills, leadership skills, etc. can be obtained through corresponding channels, such as local federally funded parent center, Parent Training and Information Center in every state, online information (Center for parent Information and Resources (www.parentcenterhub.org), research project of "parent to parent support"(Santelli, Betsy 2002). Among the suggestions on improving the ability, the book gives some specific names and URLs, but not specific and systematic. If parents need to spend a lot of time reading ineffectively in seeking information, this may be another blow to families who are already short on time. It is recommended that researchers collect relevant information according to regional classification and make a booklet. In this way, parents can quickly find the corresponding information according to the region and the type of children, so as to obtain timely help.

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