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Synthesis 3.5: Single Parents and the Schools: Effects of Marital Status on Parent and Teacher Interactions'

School, Family, Community Partnerships - *J.L. Epstein*

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In each of my courses, I consider the *random* assignment of a chapter or article hardly random at all. I expect a lesson to my soul, and that is what I have gotten thus far. Great expectations yield great returns, less in the temporal and more in the unseen. My reading assignment for Epstein's book, School, Family, Community Partnerships certainly delivered as expected in that my soul needed an extra moment of repose on a present reality that I must deal with every single day: the home in which a child (student) lives that is not "traditional".

One important understanding that I gleaned was that of removing qualifiers from my line of reasoning when considering children from families that are *different*. One young man, in the two years I have known him has cried in my office several times about having a father who does not want to know him, though his mother is twice the parent individually that many are in pairs. Another child, when in first grade fulfilled the writing assignment, "My Family" referred to his father as "only a sperm donor". True, this child is quite precocious however now in fifth grade, his view of life has descriptors all his own and it is only as accurate as his self-identification. I cannot say it is a "different world" than my childhood, because my parents had an open marriage that allowed a significant other for each of them as an alternative to divorce (not in the home but in the *life*.) In the 60's and 70's this was rather racy, but again who is judge and jury except who one allows?

Epstein outlined a clear and relevant presentation of research to support the book's overriding theme that the school, family and community spheres of influence are over-lapping. I can

see the necessity for each to exist in resonance; however I am tentative about the extent to which any “village” must rear other people’s children. I suppose, should one reach out for this assistance then let the village respond, but for those [of us] who need it not, *hands off please*.

I am faced every day with 650 little faces, with developing minds, characters, spirits who come from a wide-range of homes. It did not take this reading to recognize that each and every one of those homes is expressly unique, in all its gloom or glory and each of those little ones are also expressly unique. At this point, I have learned not to make assumptions or to judge based on a check off of acceptable home descriptors. Epstein’s outline of parental involvement indicators was right on point in describing *what* is done rather than *who* is doing it, as important.

Once again, as has been my experience throughout the courses completed to date, this reading was perfect: focusing my lens just that much more to see that the school and community is performing a greater role than ever in the lives of children and we must prepare ourselves not to hold predisposed constructs of judgment but open minds of support.

I live a life juxtaposed. I appreciate and value the impact that school and community have on my children. I also must work twice as hard to *unlearn* them of the growing sentiment that if what is valued in your own home is dissonant from what is perpetuated outside, it is not necessarily wrong. I fully expect that my children will choose *the better way* however the only chance they will have to choose anything, is if it is presented as a viable option. That we know will never happen in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School or community, since there must be separation of such beliefs. I look often into the eyes of many sad, frightened, disillusioned little faces and wish I could just pray with them simply: for peace, for comfort, for reassurance- for hope. I guess I am the one who is *wrong* and what we are currently charged to do is working so *right*.