What would you do?
Family Engagement Teaching Cases

Read the following teaching cases dealing with common issues when working with families and the community. After reading the stories, discuss the questions and analyze the possible scenarios with those individuals sitting closest to you.

1. Parent Conferences: Meet Holly (Parent Teacher Education Connection)

At our high school, conference time is in early November. We send out notices and invite parents to sign up for a conference. Not every parent wants to attend a parent/teacher meeting but most do. We have evening meetings, childcare, translation, even transportation available so more families can come.

My first conference was an eye-opener. Daniel's mother arrived right on time. She was dressed up and ready to go. Daniel's mother was very friendly. We talked briefly about his work. I showed her his grades. We got along famously. Perhaps that's why I got into trouble.

Daniel's mother asked me about homework. Specifically, she asked if she should check over his assignments. Now I have strong opinions about most things and very strong opinions about homework. I told her what parents should do. I told her what I do with my son. I told her stories of him fibbing about his homework, hiding his homework, and correcting his homework. Before I knew it, our time was up.

Daniel's mother left quickly. I felt a little like a preacher who doesn't get to finish a sermon. I just could not let it go, this feeling of incompletion.

You know what I did? I went to the expert, my colleague Ruth Dunning. She always knows what to say. Really, I expected her to tell me I did fine, not to worry about it. I was surprised when she didn't.

"Remember the workshop we attended before school started? We discussed parent/teacher conferences. Look over your in-service notebook to see if you met all of the requirements."

So I went home, read my notebook, and figured out my problem.

1. What was Holly's problem?

2. What would have done differently in this situation?

3. What can Holly do to make up for her mistake?

2. Communicating with Parents: Meet Matt (Parent Teacher Education Connection)

Maybe it's because I am the only male teacher in my Pod, but I really notice gender stereotypes. In my science class, several of the girls believe that they cannot be scientists because only boys are scientists. So, I turned the tables and had the entire class write about an accomplished female scientist. Apparently this assignment wasn't sufficient.

During our discussion on states of matter, the class experimented with cooking. I thought the kids would enjoy eating while they learned. The boys rebelled. At least one kid in every class said, "Cooking is for girls."

The next day in class I asked the kids about gender. We talked about stereotypes. When I asked the students where they learned that girls cannot be scientists and boys cannot cook, I was surprised by their answers. I guess I expected them to blame the media. The students said their parents believe these stereotypes.

"My mom said girls aren't good at math."

"Girls do the cooking and boys mow the lawn."

"Science is too hard for girls. Their brains don't understand analytic stuff."

After hearing these comments, I did what any first year teacher would do. I got angry with their parents. At home that night I wrote a letter telling the parents how to talk to their kids about science. I was very proud of the letter until I turned it in to the principal. Mrs. Barnes would not accept it.

"You have great intentions, Matt, but this letter is not parent friendly. You blame parents. Your assignment is to re-write the letter with more empathy and more helpful information. I need it by next Wednesday."

I now had homework. My mentor teacher Karen agreed to help. She suggested I make a list of 10 ways parents can encourage gender equity. She helped me think about this from the average parent's perspective. After doing some research on the Internet, I made another attempt.

1. What was Matt's first mistake?

2. How would you start Matt's letter to the parents?

3. What are some do's and don'ts to include in a letter to parents?

BONUS: Create a positive note of praise to send home with a student who has been struggling.