

Family Engagement Storytelling Project Stands at the 'Intersection of Media and Educational Justice'

Cambridge Agenda for Children's Stories of Family Partnership offer a new approach to building capacity within the out-of-school-time community.

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When experienced storyteller Ekow Edzie was preparing to interview Joseph Corbie, director of the Fletcher Maynard Community School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he thought the interview would be about fathers' involvement in their children's afterschool programs.

But the conversation—filmed for one of eight videos about family engagement created by Cambridge Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time—took a different direction when Corbie talked about the empathy that he feels for the families involved in the program.

"When they're up, they're up. When they're down, they're down," Corbie says in the video. "And I just try to leave everything that I'm dealing with in my own family at the door, and then I go to work and I'm like, 'I have to worry about this family.'"

Corbie's heartfelt words, however, drive home the important role out-of-school time (OST) providers play in the lives of children and families, and serve as an example of how practitioners can build supportive relationships with parents.

[Stories of Family Partnership](#) is a powerful, unique, and valuable collection of eight videos, accompanied by guiding reflection questions and additional materials, that offer a new approach to building the skills of providers to connect with the families of the children they serve. While the videos tell stories of afterschool, they are also useful for others working with families.

"You could come up with a list of best practices in some kind of manual, but those already exist," Edzie says. "We were really committed to trying to maintain the integrity of the story form."

Adding 'energy to the community'

The videos serve multiple purposes. They are a window for busy parents into the learning experiences students have in afterschool and summer programs. The process of creating the videos and the resulting stories "invigorated" a group of practitioners who don't normally receive a lot of external recognition, says Edzie, now a senior associate with the nonprofit Consensus Building Institute in California.

"The opportunity to tell their own story added energy to the community at large," Edzie says. And for others working in programs, "seeing their colleagues share their story meant a lot to them."

The videos demonstrate the "more nuanced aspects" of family engagement practices, Edzie says. And they provide another way to measure the impact of OST programs beyond the typical metrics of how many students they serve or whether student reading performance improved. There is now strong [neuroscientific research](#) showing how stories and storytelling build empathy, enable people to see situations from different perspectives, and open up possibilities for problem solving and change.

Stories of Family Partnership

1. Finding Common Ground
2. Parent Voices on Family Partnership
3. Building Empathy
4. Showing Them They Matter
5. Showing Us What They Know
6. Building Dialogue
7. Creating Welcoming Culture
8. Celebrating Families

"The opportunity to tell their own story added energy to the community at large"

*- Ekow Edzie
Storyteller*



A scene from "Show Them That They Matter," featuring Ayesha Wilson, right, a teacher-counselor with the Work Force, a youth program of the Cambridge Housing Authority

The videos and the guiding questions also serve as a stimulating training tool and prompt providers to examine the quality of their own programs and whether family engagement is an area they are prioritizing. It's common in the OST community, Richards says, for programs to hold events where parents can see the work students have been doing.

"But parents were longing for a deeper connection," she says, adding that the videos exemplify and can help to build the types of relationships between parents and practitioners that support positive outcomes for students. "Hiring practices matter. This can be a guide for what kinds of skills you should be looking for in leadership and staff."

Richards and Edzie have presented the videos at PD sessions they co-facilitate about family engagement. "We get higher-quality usership when we use these videos as a starting point for a traditional workshop format," Edzie says. "We were asking people to really sit down and dig into the stories—and discuss."

Members of the OST community are also sharing the videos through their own social media channels and at staff meetings.

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*- Susan Richards
Co-director,
Cambridge Agenda for
Children Out-of-School Time*

The mission of [Cambridge Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time](#) is to convene, catalyze, and support the youth-serving community in Cambridge for the shared purpose of increasing equity, access, and innovation, and sustaining the highest-quality OST opportunities and experiences for all children, youth, and families.

A wider 'global application' for stories

Stories of Family Partnership can also inspire a broad range of OST providers and others to create something similar in their own communities. Like Edzie, they can ask questions, listen, empower, and share perspectives and information as part of the process of co-creating family and community engagement with families.

That potential for broader "global application" is one of the key lessons learned from this project, Edzie says, underscoring that a lack of access to high-end video equipment shouldn't keep practitioners and others from telling the stories of the staff members, teachers, and families in their community to build shared understanding and change.

"You can do this with all different types of tech," he says. "Don't let lack of access to high-quality technology limit you."

Letting students use their YouTube, TikTok, and other social media skills is also a way to showcase providers and families and to engage students in a project that benefits their community.



Joseph Corbie

Richards, in fact, notes that her organization has especially focused on networking programs that provide “skill-building opportunities” for middle-school students. “We’ve gotten very deep into the middle-school years because we know that quality engagement is particularly critical at this age,” she says.

Edzie’s approach to listening and letting the providers and parents tell their stories underscores how afterschool providers are co-creating [next-generation family engagement](#) with families. The video project also demonstrates a lesson explored in GFRP’s [recent article](#) on the design-thinking work of IDEO’s Teachers Guild—authentic communication and engagement with families can often lead practitioners to a different response than what they originally planned. And what they thought families “need” might turn out to be completely different.

The videos, Richards says, also represent the “intersection of family engagement equity, culture, and social justice” in an affluent community in which low-income families can struggle to find learning and enrichment opportunities for their children. “If the parent can’t fight, we’ve got to fight for and with them.”🌀



Fletcher Maynard Community School director Joseph Corbie, featured in a Stories of Family Partnership video, greets a parent at a school event.

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