

AN EXERCISE IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Vignette: Tamika, a four-and-a-half year old girl, is enrolled in an Even Start pre-K program. Tamika's mother, Ms. J., is 22 years old and has almost completed high school; she has struggled to support herself and Tamika by working two jobs. She knows the value of education and wants to ensure that Tamika completes more schooling than she did.

Maria, the Even Start teacher, has worked with Ms. J. to support Tamika's literacy development. In November, the interactive literacy activity started off well. Ms. J. and Tamika were using an alphabet book, reading each page. Ms. J. emphasized the words that started with the letters that were highlighted. She involved Tamika in naming the pictures. On the "A" page, the pictures included an *apple*, *airplane*, *ant*, and *arch*. Tamika and her mother identified each picture. Tamika called the *arch* a *bridge* and her mother corrected her, but acknowledged that bridges often have arches like the bridge near their home. When they got to "H", Ms. J. asked Tamika to tell her the letter's name. Tamika didn't know, so her mother told her. On subsequent pages, Ms. J. continued to ask Tamika to tell her the letters' names and seemed increasingly annoyed when Tamika did not answer. By the time they got to "N", Ms. J. was very upset. She turned to Tamika and said, "Girl, what is wrong with you? Don't you listen? I have told you what these letters are more than once. You're going to be held back if you don't know your letters! If you don't remember them next time you're gonna get a good spanking". Tamika began to whimper. Maria observed the interaction from the other side of the room.

In your group:

1. Take turns practicing what Maria should say to Ms. J. in response to what Maria has observed. Consider what would be important for Maria to accomplish in her communication with Ms. J.
2. As a group discuss, how to balance empathy and respect for parental competencies with your own beliefs about how children should be nurtured and corrected.