


Involving American Indian Parents in Their Children's Education: Challenges and Opportunities

Dawn Mackety, Ph.D.
Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)
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McREL

Overview

- Why involve parents?
- What's...
 - a parent?
 - parent involvement?
- Study design & findings
 - Factors that discourage & encourage involvement
 - Cultural issues
- Your turn...discussion




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Why involve parents? ...we have to and we want to

- Support student academics & learning
- Parents are children's first teachers
- Pass on our culture
- Be advocates for children
- Children of involved parents become involved parents

...and tomorrow's leaders




"Whoever controls the education of our children controls our future."
Wilma Mankiller, former Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation

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What's a parent? ...involve the entire family


- "Adults in many students' homes may not be their parents but other adult members of their extended family"
(Ward, 2005, p. 125)
- "...include grandparents and uncles and aunts, the people who traditionally took responsibility for much of the children's education."
(Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 157)



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What's a parent? ...involve the entire family

- "I have a friend [who's] been pretty much like a third parent to me since I was 15. To my kids, she's Grandma...and she's just [as] involved...with my kids in school as I am. She wants to pick them up, talks to the teachers, goes to conferences with me."
- "...there's probably...38 other women besides us...a majority of them are involved...with my children...they're...like aunts."
- "When my grandkids had trouble at school, my parents came, plus their great-great-grandparents."



(Mackety & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008)

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What's parent involvement?

- "Parent Involvement means that families take an active role in their child's education and development, helping to make decisions...in partnership with other parents, staff and community members."
(Early Head Start Program, American Indian Institute, University of Oklahoma Outreach)
- "...allowing parents real decision making power about what and how their children learn."
(Reyhner, 1992)

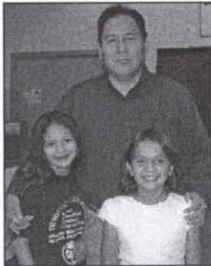


(Head Start website: www.aill Outreach.ou.edu/EHS/parent_involvement.htm)

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The Study

- Qualitative design
- 10 elem. schools in 2 districts targeted (5 schools/district)
- 47 self-selected American Indian "parents" from 9 reservations
- Five focus groups, 90 minutes each, audiotaped
- Questions asked parents' perceptions of involvement in their children's education and factors that encourage and discourage their involvement



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Like the general population

Parents get involved to:

- Help children succeed & build confidence
- Monitor children's progress
- Volunteer in their children's school
- Read to their children
- Attend school events

Involvement is influenced by

- Scheduling, childcare, family size
- Transportation, distance to school
- Financial issues
- Personal experience




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Unlike the general population

Issues unique to American Indian parents:

- History of federal education policies of coercive assimilation, boarding schools, alienation of parents education
- Need for culturally competent staff & school environment
- Need for objective & culturally relevant curriculum
- Need for genuine parent-staff relationships, trust, personal invitations
- Perceptions of racism & discrimination
- Different values & perspectives




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What discourages involvement?

Unwelcoming school environment:

- Difficulty breaking into established relationships & groups
- Uncomfortable with teacher, staff, other parents
- Lack of understanding of how to "negotiate the system"
- Feeling intimidated
- Fear of making a mistake
- Perceptions of racism & discrimination
- Lack of cultural sensitivity, American Indian staff
- Lack of others' effort to be cordial
- Being ignored




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What discourages involvement?

Previous negative experiences:

- Lack of exposure to good models of parent involvement
- Boarding schools, forced assimilation
- Children's negative experiences
- Prior involvement that had a negative outcome
- "Cultural memory"




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What discourages involvement?

School's lack of cultural sensitivity:

- Eurocentric curriculum, inaccurate portrayal of American Indian history
- Schools named after individuals who supported American Indian oppression & cultural genocide
- Overrepresentation of American Indian students in special education (misinterpretation of behaviors)
- Perception of favored treatment for non-American Indian students
- Lack of American Indian artwork, images, language, culture & staff




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What discourages involvement?

Different communication styles:

- Cultural tendency to withdraw to avoid conflict, disengage when uncomfortable, avoid eye contact
- Encourage children to "walk away" if there's a problem
- American Indian parents explain with stories rather than short answers
- Don't know how to act appropriately
- Being interrupted
- Lack of "proper" English (ESL, rez-talk)
- Extreme shyness
- Need for interpersonal relationship



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Low involvement... some parents choose noninterference

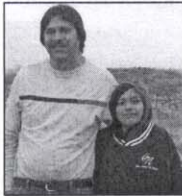
- Supervising or assisting with homework may not be typical behaviors for some traditional families
 - Some parents respect children's choices even when the choices contradict the preferences of their families and tribal elders
 - Independent decision making is encouraged
 - Good behavior is taught, encouraged, rewarded; bad behavior is not punished
- Some traditional families members support high school graduation but not academic achievement
 - Some parents don't get involved unless graduation is threatened
 - Most jobs on/off the reservation require a diploma or GED

(Ward, 2005, study among families on Cheyenne and Crow reservations)

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Low involvement... some parents can't get involved

- Competing personal problems and family needs
(Mackety & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008; Ward, 2005)
 - Scheduling, childcare, financial issues, time
 - Substance abuse, domestic issues, incarceration
 - Transportation (lack of vehicles)
 - Lack of access (lack phones or electricity)
- It's too far
(Mackety & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008; Reyhner, 1992; Ward, 2005)
 - Long distances between home and school discourage parents and students from participating in school activities



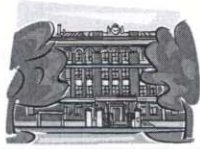
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Low involvement... some aren't comfortable being involved

- Schools are too big and intimidating
(Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Mackety & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008)
 - "The psychological burden of even attending a meeting in a big, formal, brick building is intimidating to many reservation parents.

It calls back memories of their childhood and the summons to come to the agency, which always meant problems.


Families are herded through large school plants every year at 'Welcome back to school' days, but the format used...makes it clear to parents that they are outsiders."
(Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 157)



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Low involvement... some aren't comfortable being involved


- Cultural discontinuity between home & school
(Mackety & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008; Reyhner, 1992; Ward, 2005)
 - Lack of culturally-relevant resources, curricula, programs, and activities in the school
 - Discontinuity in learning styles, values, and interpersonal interactions
 - Cultural discontinuity between what Indian children learn at home vs. at school alienates parents, confuses children, harms children's self-concept, and forces children to choose between their heritage and school success
(Reyhner, 1992)



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Low involvement... some have different values

- The goals of American education (e.g., graduation, occupational attainment, professional advancement, wealth, self-sufficiency) are not valued among many Indian families
(Ward, 2005)
 - Reservation employment depends more on relationships and loyalties than on academic achievement
 - Regardless of income level, many Indian families prefer not to exhibit superiority over other community members in their spending patterns, clothes, housing, vehicles, employment, activities, standard of living, or social status



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Low involvement... some have different values

Traditional Navajo values (McInerney, McInerney, Ardington, & De Rachewiltz, 1997)

- Some Navajo children feel a strong sense of community, close bonds to family, and an obligation to give back
- Individual achievement at the expense of the community is not desired
- When there are challenges in a family, some Navajo children will likely fulfill family duties before school work
- After having completed their education, some Navajo children will likely return to the reservation despite limited employment and resources



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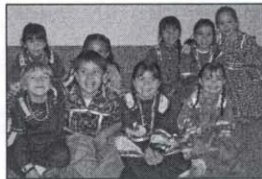
But wait! ...variations by school type

Factors Influencing High School Dropout		Tribal School (99% AI/AN)	Catholic School (99% AI/AN)	Public School (34% AI/AN)
School	Discrimination at the school	No effect	No effect	Increase
	Resources for "problem" students	Increase	Reduce	Reduce
	School has high academic expectations for students	Increase	Increase	Reduce
Parent/Adult	Parent involvement at the school	Reduce	Reduce	No effect
	Education (at least one adult in home has diploma/GED)	Reduce	Reduce	No effect
	Employment (at least one adult in home has full-time work)	No effect	Increase	No effect
Family/Comm.	Substance abuse	Increase	Increase	Increase
	Cultural resources (native language & culture in home)	Reduce	Reduce	No effect
	Nonintact family (only one adult in home)	Increase	No effect	No effect
Student	Family relations	Reduce	Reduce	No effect
	Norms (education)	Reduce	Increase	No effect
	Information (education)	Increase	Increase	Reduce
Student	Student's involvement in school activities	No effect	Reduce	Reduce
	Student's mean GPA	Reduce	Reduce	Reduce
	Student speaks a native language	Reduce	Reduce	No effect
Dropout Rate		54%	44%	42%

(Ward, 2005, study of 3 high schools serving the Northern Cheyenne in MT)

Improving parent involvement

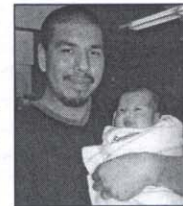
- Respect parents' educational & cultural values
- Friendly, collaborative, genuine parent-staff relationships
- Advocate/liaison at the school to welcome & assist parents, students
- Family-friendly & culturally-based programs, resource centers, afterschool activities, & clubs
- Personal encouragement
- Invite parents to present in classrooms
- Culturally-respectful environment
- Carpooling
- Listen



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Parent involvement depends on...

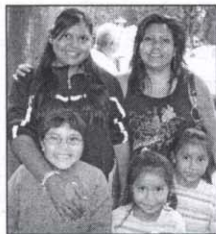
- ✓ Family residence (on/off-rez, mobility, homogeneity)
- ✓ Family support/networks, cultural groups, community groups
- ✓ Parents' experiences
- ✓ Acculturation (ESL, culture, assimilation)
- ✓ Parenting styles (skills, permissive, noninterference)
- ✓ Support for graduation vs. achievement
- ✓ School population (intertribal, interracial)
- ✓ School type (tribal, BIE, Catholic, public)



(Mackey & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008; Ward, 2005)

And, it depends on good research

- Consider the source
...primary vs. secondary data
- Context & cultural relevance
- Rigor of design, nature of evidence
- Don't generalize findings from the general population or from other ethnic groups
- Do your own research...ask



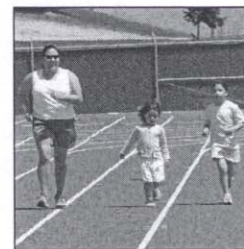
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Now what?

"Let us put our minds together and see what life we will make for our children."

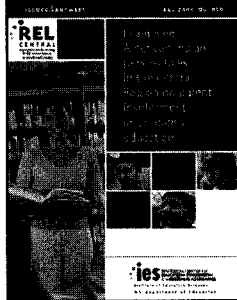
Sitting Bull

What challenges and successes have you had involving American Indian parents?



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Want to know more? ...get the whole story



Mackety, D. M., & Linder-VanBerschof, J. A. (2008). *Examining American Indian perspectives in the Central Region on parent involvement in children's education* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2008-No. 059). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Central.

Available online:
<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=159&productID=108>

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Chi megwetch (Thank you very much)

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Megwetch (Thank you)



Dr. Dawn M. Mackety, Ph.D.
Senior Researcher

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)
4601 DTC Blvd., Suite 500
Denver, CO 80237-2596
P: 303.632.5640
F: 303.337.3005
dmackety@mcrel.org
<http://www.mcrel.org>

McREL