Proceedings of

The Rural Early Childhood Forum On American Indian and Alaska Native Early Learning

July 28-29, 2005

William J. Clinton Presidential Center
Little Rock, Arkansas

The National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives
Mississippi State University Early Childhood Institute

The American Indian Leadership Program
The Center on Rural Education and Communities
Pennsylvania State University

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Introduction
Assessing the State of the Knowledge: American Indian and Alaska Native Rural Early Childhood Education

Kai A. Schafft, Susan C. Faircloth, and Nicole L. Thompson

Over the course of the history of the United States, American Indians and Alaska Natives have consistently remained among the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups along an array of indicators from income and employment, health care and life expectancy, to educational attainment (Gonzales, 2003). Despite these challenges, American Indians and Alaska Natives have demonstrated remarkable resiliency (see Endfield's contribution and Banks-Joseph & McCubbin's contribution, these proceedings). Despite the threats posed by disease, poverty and concerted efforts to eradicate native culture and language, Native communities, along with their languages and traditional cultures, continue to persist. According to census figures, at the beginning of the 20th century, American Indians numbered about 237,000. By the end of the 20th century, however, that figure had increased to just under 2.5 million (Gonzales, 2003). Native communities have been able to maintain traditional beliefs and cultural practices in the face of an often brutal history of European colonization and government assimilationist policies (Banks-Joseph & McCubbin, 2005; Gallegos, Villenas, & Brayboy, 2003; Johnson, 2003). Although social and economic conditions for American Indians and Alaska Natives have generally improved over the last 100 years, in comparison to other groups, Native people still lag behind on many social, economic and educational indicators (Snipp, 1995).

Arguably, improving educational opportunities must be a main thrust in the effort to improve the life chances of American Indian and Alaska Native children, increase community vitality, and preserve native languages and cultural traditions and practices. Early childhood education is a crucial first step in increasing the chances of educational success, both in the short-term and the long-run. Research

since the 1960s has documented short-term benefits including increased cognitive and social skills as well as increases in later academic achievement. Similarly, early childhood education has been tied to decreased referrals to special education, and decreased grade retention (Barnett, 1998; Bryant & Maxwell, 1997; Illinois State Board of Education, 1985; Nieman & Gastright, 1981; Yoshikawa, 1995).

These findings are important to consider in light of the relationship between educational attainment and economic security in later life. Census data show that the average annual earnings for college graduates is $45,400, as compared with $25,900 for high school graduates and only $18,900 for adults who never completed high school. Additionally, these earning inequalities have increased over the past 25 years, indicating the growing significance of education for socioeconomic well-being (Day & Newburger, 2002). The gap in academic achievement between Native and non-Native peoples thankfully has narrowed in the last 30 years. However, as Ward (2005) noted, as recently as 1980, over 8.4 % of Native children did not complete fifth grade as opposed to 2.6 % of Whites. American Indian and Alaska Native youth remain at the highest risk for high school dropout of any racial or ethnic group, and are much less likely to complete a four-year degree or higher than White or African American college students (Ward & Snipp, 1996).

The papers in this volume join other commentators in noting the marked gaps in research on Indian Education (see, for example, Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). Regardless of the logistic, cultural, and other challenges that may be to some degree responsible for this gap, the lack of research-based knowledge in this area is to the detriment of Indian educators and the Indian communities within which they work. The absence of research, however, is not due to a lack of important unanswered questions.

Research on American Indian Education: Addressing the Gaps

The National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initia-

tives, known as Rural Early Childhood; Penn State's American Indian Leadership Program (AILP); and Penn State's Center for Rural Education and Communities (CREC) in 2004 began discussing what might be done to address these research needs and gaps, particularly with regards to early childhood education and educational leadership. Our discussions resulted in the convening of an "experts" conference, the *Rural Early Childhood Forum on Native American and Alaska Native Early Learning,* of which this proceeding is one result. The forum was comprised of academic researchers and faculty, Native educators, Native early childhood education specialists, and community leaders with a strong interest in and concern for rural Indian early childhood education.

Participants in this forum were invited to revisit the American Indian and Alaska Native Education Research Agenda (Strang, Von Glatz, & Hammer, 2002; Strang & Von Glatz, 2001) that was prepared in response to President Clinton's 1998 White House Executive Order 13096 on Indian Education. Our aim was twofold: first, to assess the current state of rural Indian early childhood education, with an emphasis on the years prior to formal school entry, as well as educational leadership as it pertains to rural Indian early childhood education; and second, to discuss how research might be initiated that would help to fulfill the goals of the research agenda.

The forum took place July 28-29, 2005 at the William J. Clinton Center in Little Rock, Arkansas. This was the first academic meeting ever held at the Clinton Center. More than 30 people, recognized as experts in their research/issue areas, participated in the forum. Participants presented papers synthesizing research gaps in key areas of Indian Education, and participated in roundtable discussions to determine a best course of research, partnership and action, identifying the most needed areas of research as well as strategies for partnering with communities and leveraging resources to carry out this work.

Why Rural?

A strong focus of the forum was the discussion of how key

issues related to early childhood education might play out differently across rural and urban contexts, with a specific focus on rural settings. Although there are concentrations of Native populations in large urban areas such as New York City and Los Angeles (Ogunwole, 2002), almost one million American Indians or Alaska Natives reside in nonmetropolitan and/or reservation settings (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004), where much of Indian education occurs. However, research has also shown that the nonmetropolitan location is associated with decreased educational attainment. Snipp (1989), for example, has shown that the percentage of American Indian and Alaska Native students falling behind by grade level differs significantly by location. Evidence shows dropout rates are also increased in nonmetropolitan areas (Ward, 1995, 2005). Challenges in education include shortages of highly qualified teachers, higher costs for transporting students (as well as the time spent by students on school buses), and the challenges of meeting the requirements of the No Child Left Behind legislation in the face of often limited fiscal and human resources. There also is less access to programming and social services in rural areas, as well as decreased economic opportunities, increased concentrations of poverty and limited political power relative to urban areas.

On the other hand, rural and reservation settings and the tribal communities located there may represent valuable opportunities for preserving traditional cultures and knowledge that have been demonstrated as vital for increasing academic achievement among Native children and for decreasing dropout rates (Kushman & Barnhardt, 2001; Ward, 2005). Recognizing the strong interrelationships between school and community and building these interrelationships into educational practice can yield powerful results in educational improvement, community vitality, and preservation of traditional cultural beliefs and practices (Kushman & Barnhardt, 2001). Understanding the specific contexts in which Indian education takes place, including both the challenges and assets posed by the rural context, is a crucial part of developing a better understanding of promising models and practices to improve the life chances of Native children,

and of ensuring the continued social, cultural and economic vitality of the communities of which they are a part.

Assessing the State of the Knowledge: Rural Early Childhood Indian Education

The papers that follow in this volume represent an important summation of the state of the knowledge on rural early childhood education as it concerns American Indian and Alaska Native children.

Yazzie-Mintz addresses two central questions. First, to what extent do Native children and families in reservation, rural, urban and other settings have early childhood education opportunities available to them? Second, how might an appropriate and effective network of tribal early childhood programs be organized, especially in rural settings? To address the first question, Yazzie-Mintz uses census data, Head Start Statistics and Children's Defense Fund reports. In aggregate, Native children appear to have slightly decreased access to early childhood education opportunities in comparison to other children. However, she observes that too often aggregated data hide differences across tribal contexts. "Scientific" data collection procedures tend to obscure inter-tribal and community-level differences; while more targeted studies might have greater potential to yield meaningful data for American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

Endfield discusses the heightened risk of a variety of health problems for Native children, noting that these problems are embedded within a history of social, political and economic marginalization associated with western expansion and European conquest. Improved access to health care and government programs has helped American Indian populations to grow and enjoy improved health, yet serious problems still remain that affect Native children including diabetes and fetal alcohol syndrome, compounded by broader social inequalities. Effectively addressing these problems will remain a challenge in rural areas where access to health services remains limited.

Rinehart examines promising practices in early childhood educa-

tion programs, particularly with regard to both instruction in English (as a first or second language), and effective methods of preserving and/or revitalizing native language and culture. Her discussion results from both her review of research literature as well as her firsthand experience developing and implementing a language revitalization program for the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes' Head Start in Juneau, Alaska. Her paper emphasizes the importance of culturally appropriate early childhood education for American Indian and Alaska Native children for developing a strong sense of cultural identity as well as for providing the foundations for later academic achievement. At the same time she notes that little research exists as to the effectiveness of different approaches for Native children, and much of what does exist does not address inter-tribal differences that might affect the appropriateness and/or effectiveness of different programs.

Clay explores the cultural and language discontinuities associated with Native children entering into kindergarten. She discusses the programs preschools and elementary schools use to support Native families as their children transition between preschool and elementary school, emphasizing the parental role of "cultural mediator" and the importance of involving multiple stakeholders including educators, parents and community members in the transition process. Ultimately however, she concludes that there is a disconcerting lack of comprehensive research investigating transition models, particularly for Native children.

Thompson, Pope, and Holland investigate the issue of whether promoting school readiness among American Indian and Alaska Native children through current mainstream developmentally appropriate practices may conflict with Native traditions and culture. To this end they address two central questions. First, how must early childhood programs be structured so that they foster the fundamental skills that children are expected to have when they enter school, and second, how effective are these early childhood programs and activities for promoting school readiness for Native children? Compounding the debate over what exactly constitutes school readiness and how

this concept should be defined, Thompson et al., like Yazzie-Mintz, point to the problems of generalizing across groups, and argue that "programs and assessments which address the school readiness of Native children must also address the cultural differences of these children" [pp. 100-113, these proceedings].

Faircloth addresses two main questions. First, how is the incidence of disabilities among infant and pre-school aged American Indian and Alaska Native children related to differing residential contexts including rural (reservation and non-reservation), peri-urban and urban residence? Second, how can early childhood programs accommodate Native children with disabilities? While the disproportionate representation of Native students in special education programs within public and BIA-operated or funded schools is well-documented, little is known about the status of these children prior to their enrollment into the educational system.

Banks-Joseph and McCubbin discuss American Indian and Alaska Native community involvement in their children's schools and programs and the community and school-level factors that appear to be associated with involvement and best practices specific to Native children promoting family and community involvement in early childhood education programs. The authors find that the research literature in this area is extremely limited, especially when narrowed only to Native children. Following Johnson (2003), they argue that the lack of research on family involvement in American Indian and Alaska Native early childhood education may be due in part to research approaches that fail to take into account indigenous perspectives leading to an appropriate understanding of family involvement.

Finally, Bordeaux discusses appropriate educational leadership practices in rural and reservation-based schools and communities serving American Indian and Alaska Native children. He argues that effective leaders must have an intimate understanding of local community culture, including local politics, family structure and traditional practices of communication.

Conclusions: Summarizing the State of the Knowledge

The most overwhelming result of the forum was the consistent identification of the lack of research in all areas of American Indian and Alaska Native early care and education. All of the authors experienced difficulty when attempting to identify data-sets that contained information about Native children. Most quantitative data available related to early childhood education is not disaggregated to tribal and community levels. Although case studies and ethnographic research exits at more disaggregated levels, the generalizability of these findings remains limited as does the capacity for generating appropriate programmatic responses to American Indian and Alaska Native early childhood education needs. Quite simply, more research is needed—most of the questions were only partially answerable due to the lack of quantitative and qualitative data.

Further, the need for culturally sensitive research abounds. Current research practices must respect Native traditions and policies. Gone are the days when a lone researcher could enter an American Indian or Alaska Native community to document what the Native people do. Research today must actively involve the people being researched—American Indian and Alaska Native people must be involved in the research process—research can no longer be conducted *on* Native people, but must now be conducted *with* Native people. The extensive amount of research needed in Native communities is going to require cooperation and participation from a variety of entities. Multiethnic research teams, researcher-community collaboration, and community partners must actively engage in research processes to eliminate the existing gaps in knowledge about the early care, development, and education of American Indian and Alaska Native people. We hope that this forum, as well as these proceedings, helps to move these efforts forward.

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AGENDA

Thursday, July 28, 2005

9:00 A.M.	CONVENE
	Welcome Elizabeth F. Shores
	Greeting David Alsobrook Director William J. Clinton Presidential Library
	Prayer Winona Sample (Red Lake Chippewa)
	Opening Remarks Cathy Grace, Co-chair John Tippeconic, (Comanche), Co-chair
9:30-10:00 A.M.	*Opening Discussion* Julie Quaid, Pigeon Big Crow, Roger Bordeaux
10:00-10:20 A.M.	*Presentation: Resources* Tarajean Yazzie-Mintz
10:20-10:35 A.M.	*Response* Linda Kills Crow, Linda Smith
10:35-10:55 A.M.	*Presentation: Health* Laurel Endfield

10:55-11:10 A.M.	*Responses* Cheryl Wilson, Julie Quaid
11:10-11:30 A.M.	*Presentation: Language* Nila Rinehart
11:30-11:45 A.M.	*Responses* Gloria Sly, Tarajean Yazzie-Mintz
11:45 A.M. – 12:15 P.M.	BREAK
12:15 – 1:15 P.M.	LUNCHEON
	"No Child Left Behind" Nicole Bowman
	"The Indian Health Service" Cheryl Wilson
1:15-1:30 P.M.	BREAK
1:30-1:50 P.M.	*Presentation: Transitions* Cheryl Clay
1:50-2:10 P.M.	*Responses* Rick St. Germaine, Dwight Hare
2:10-2:30 P.M.	*Presentation: School Readiness* Nicole Thompson, Margaret Pope, and Jeanne Holland
2:30-2:50 P.M.	*Responses* Cheryl Clay, Pigeon Big Crow

2:50-3:10 P.M.	*Presentation: Special Education* Susan Faircloth
3:10-3:25 P.M.	*Response* Susan Banks
3:25-4:00 P.M.	Discussion
4:00 P.M.	RECESS

Friday, July 29, 2005

9:00 A.M.	RECONVENE
9:15-9:35 A.M.	*Presentation: Family and Community Involvement* Susan Banks
9:35-9:50 A.M.	*Responses* Debbie Lente-Jojola, Pigeon Big Crow
9:50-10:10 A.M.	*Presentation: School Leaders* Roger Bordeaux
10:10-10:25 A.M.	*Responses* Grayson Noley, David Beaulieu
10:25-10:45 A.M.	BREAK
10:45 A.M.-NOON	*Discussion*
NOON	ADJOURN

Early Childhood Educational Opportunities For American Indian and Alaska Native Children and Families

Tarajean Yazzie-Mintz
Indiana University

THERE EXIST economic, social, and cultural costs to acquiring access to *quality* early childhood education for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) families. Even if individual families have the financial background to "invest" in early education, the challenge remains for an increased portion of American Indian and Alaska Native families to acquire the benefits of an early childhood education. To help parents make informed choices among available program possibilities, research needs to be conducted to investigate whether children from different economic, language, and cultural backgrounds respond differently to early childhood education in general or to specific program models (Cotton & Conklin, 1998).

Access to early education is an issue that intimately involves both child *and* parent. Access to early education requires parents, educators, and researchers to carefully critique existing educational structures and philosophies in order to focus attention on accessing quality early education. Ultimately, economic, social, and cultural investments need to be made in order to bring forth new energy and possibilities for American Indian and Alaska Native families residing in diverse social and cultural contexts.

In this paper, I present and discuss issues of access to early childhood education and educational opportunities in terms of American Indian/Alaska Native economic, social, and cultural investments. I will examine research on access to early childhood education in general and discuss descriptive demographic data, extracted from the Decennial Census 2000 and other available sources that may include American Indian and Alaska Native early childhood education data. The following questions guide my inquiry:

1. To what extent do American Indian and Alaska Native children and their families in reservation, rural, urban, and other settings have early childhood education opportunities available to them?
2. How can a network of tribal early childhood programs be organized for action, particularly in rural settings?

Saluja, Early, and Clifford (2002) report that overall the number of children attending early childhood programs has been increasing. What the increase means in terms of AI/AN children and families can be explored by examining descriptive data and existing research literature focused on various tribal nations and early childhood education programs. Currently, there is little research that examines in-depth the current state of early childhood education for AI/AN children (Cahape & Demmert, 2003). Cahape and Demmert found, in their review of American Indian early childhood education, that research studies tend to focus generously on educational evaluations of programs for accountability purposes and on health domains , and very little on examining access to programs.

Moreover, the existing research lacks reliable statistics about how many AI/AN children and families are served by the different types of programs. The lack of information and studies may be due to the fact that until the 2000 Census, data specifically focused on AI/AN populations were not available, not collected, collected by some tribes and not others, or were not easily accessible for analysis. However, with increased technological advances, opportunities to access meaningful national data are improving. Moreover, early childhood programs and centers are able to communicate information in ways that are readily available in published reports (i.e., Head Start) on the Internet. On the other hand many of these published reports include only those groups with significant numbers or percentages of the U.S. population, such as White, African American, and, more recently, the drastically increasing, Hispanic/Latino population.

Access to Early Childhood Education: Review of Research

To understand access in terms of early childhood education, it is important to examine the general early education literature on access and benefits of early education, and from this work hone in on questions related to AI/AN populations. Researchers have reported that pre-kindergarten education and experiences are important for school readiness for both child and parent (Nissani, 1993). Specifically, a national research sample indicated that "attending Head Start, prekindergarten, or other center-based preschool programs was linked to higher emerging literacy scores in 4-year-olds. This correlation remained statistically significant when other child and family characteristics were taken into account. This benefit of preschool attendance accrued to children from both high-risk and low-risk family backgrounds" (Zill et al., 1995). In a review of research, Cotton and Conklin (1998) reported that parents whose children were preschool graduates were more likely to be involved in their child's education (Lazar & Darlington, 1982), had high expectations for their child (Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1983; Featherstone, 1986), and felt comfortable contacting teachers more often (Featherstone, 1986). Access to such early childhood educational programs has been linked to income level of parents (Svestka, 1995). Interestingly, Schumacher and Greenberg (1999) and the Children's Aid Society (1999) found that access to quality child care was very limited for families leaving welfare.

Research focused on early education for language minority students suggests that education should be inclusive of family. For example, Nissani (1993) suggests that in order to "promote the healthy self-esteem of each and every young child, early childhood education programs must be thoughtfully designed to serve both parents and children – all the more so for those who speak a language other than English at home".

The 1990 decennial U.S. Census revealed, "participation rates in preschool, including both public and private programs, are 81% of

5-year-olds, 50% of 4-year-olds, and 30% of 3-year-olds" (Svestka, 1995). Interestingly, when Svestka examined available data on financing preschool for all children, she found that the U.S. provides free education targeted "exclusively for the poorest children and for disabled children, while in other countries all children are included in the regular preschool classes, and children with various special needs receive additional benefits." Moreover, the U.S. is believed to be far more financially capable of investing in the education of young children than other countries such as France and Italy. However, France and Italy reported 100% and 92% participation in preschool respectively. This information highlights our greatest challenge of persuading the general U.S. public and government to invest in high quality early education for young children residing in the U.S. If in the U.S. we are unable to create opportunities for the general U.S. population at large to achieve 100% participation in early childhood education, the question becomes: Which populations within the U.S. are not receiving quality early education?

Access to early childhood education can be defined in terms of ability or motivation to acquire programmatic and structured schooling opportunities or informal learning opportunities provided through socialization with family and interactions with a cultural or social community. The majority of the existing research discusses educational opportunities in terms of formal structured programs, such as early childhood learning centers, and programs offered by non-profit and for-profit organizations (independent for-profit, religious affiliate, Head Start, public school, independent non-profit or other public agency). In this paper I treat informal non-school learning and socialization provided by parents, family, and community as important considerations in examining the question of access to early learning opportunities. For example, a specific tribal nation may set priority on early Native language learning opportunities with village elders – and having access to this type of education may be just as important as having access to opportunities in structured school settings.

Descriptive Data

There are very limited sources of descriptive data specifically focused on AI/AN early childhood education. There are numerous reports in the form of program evaluations which may provide local and tribal specific information – certainly tribes and early childhood educational programs serving Native children would benefit from an in-depth examination of these reports or a quantitative study which provides an overview of tribal access to various types of early education opportunities. In an effort to provide an overview of the existing knowledge, I chose to focus on three main sources of data: Census 2000, Head Start Statistics, and reports generated by the Children's Defense Fund. These three sources are widely used in research and advocacy work related to early education and populations served by such programs. Finally, by examining reports and descriptive data provided by these three organizations, I could share the strengths and weaknesses of the existing knowledge in terms of generating researchable questions for future work.

Census 2000. The U.S. Census American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File (AIANSF) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) provides both an overview and tribally specific information about enrollment in school by age and by school type: nursery school and preschool. Using the AIANSF data tool, I extracted sample data focused on two particular populations: 1) American Indian and Alaska Native 3- and 4- year olds enrolled in school, and 2) children enrolled in public and private nursery/preschool. These two samples of data were treated as different inquiries because children enrolled in public and private nursery and preschool include children who may be older than 3- and 4- years old. The two sets of information were extracted to highlight different aspects of early education access; general enrollment by specific age grouping and nursery/preschool by public and private school status. Both sets of data are important to building a fuller understanding of access to early education program type.

The AIANSF data sample showed that of the total number of

AI/AN children who were 3 and 4 years old in 2000, there were approximately 37,492 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in school, compared to 44,675 3- and 4-year-olds *not* enrolled in school (see Figure 1). When this same population was compared with the total U.S. non-Native population of 3- and 4-year-olds (see Figure 2), 46% of AI/AN 3-and 4-year-olds were enrolled compared to 49% of the children in the total U.S. population. By contrast, 54% of the AI/AN 3-and 4-year-olds were *not* enrolled in preschool, compared to 51% of the 3-and 4-year-olds in the total U.S. population. In the U.S. population about half were enrolled and half were not enrolled. In the AI/AN

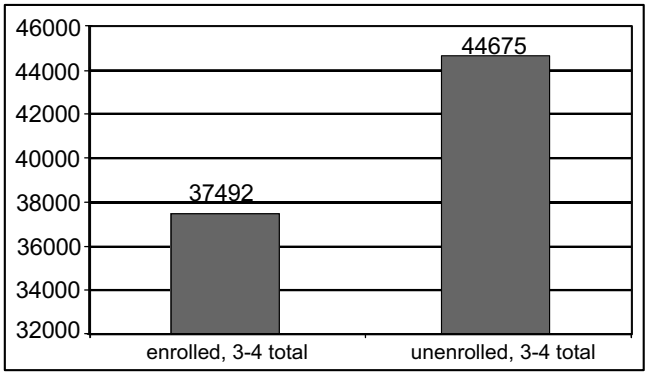

Figure 1. School enrollment status for all American Indians and Alaska Natives, 3-4 years yld. (Source: U.S. Census 2000 – American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File (AIANSF) – Sample Data.)

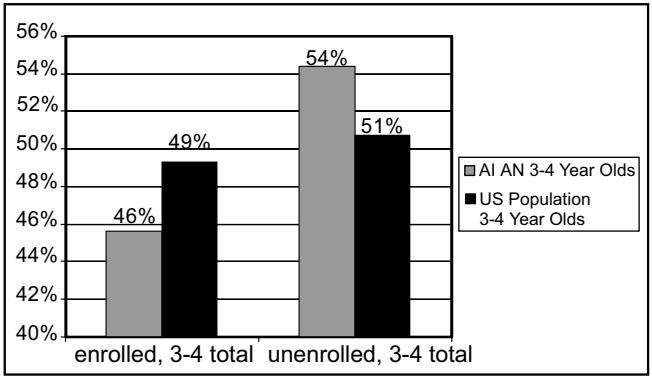

Figure 2. Enrollment in nursery school, preschool by race as a percent of total age group, 3- years old. (Source: U.S. Census 2000 – American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File (AIANSF) – Sample Data.)

the picture is much different; a greater percent were not enrolled than were enrolled.

I include Table 1 to show data broken down by selected tribes with populations greater than 10,000 members; data is available to do more careful analyses of enrollments in early childhood programs by tribe. Note that for some tribes, such as Pine Ridge, the enrollment picture differs from the overall picture of AI/AN children – more children are enrolled than are not enrolled. Other tribes more closely mirror the overall picture in which a greater number of children are not enrolled. This chart also provides a breakdown by gender allowing the possibility to analyze differences and trends between male and female 3- and 4- year olds. Additionally it is possible to look at breakdowns of programs by type of program: public and private.

Table 2 breaks down enrollments by both gender and public and private nursery/preschool (note that this table includes children

Tribe	Total Population	Population 3 years and over: Male; Enrolled in school; 3 and 4 years	Population 3 years and over: Male; Not enrolled in school; 3 and 4 years	Population 3 years and over: Female; Enrolled in school; 3 and 4 years	Population 3 years and over: Female; Not enrolled in school; 3 and 4 years
Gila River Reservation, AZ	10317	55	145	62	147
Fort Apache Reservation, AZ	11597	114	103	83	107
Pine Ridge Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, SD — NE	14255	186	143	141	147
Chickasaw OTSA, OK	22378	128	229	274	233
Choctaw OTSA, OK	29357	231	273	231	332
Creek OTSA, OK	49564	331	531	385	542
Cherokee OTSA, OK	74739	594	931	561	800
Navajo Nation Reservation and Off-Reservation Trust Land, AZ — NM — UT	174847	1468	1792	1656	1610
Total	387054	3107	4145	3393	3918

Table 1. Selected tribes (total population > 10,000) by 3- and 4- year olds enrolled and not enrolled in nursery school or preschool. (Source: U.S. Census 2000 – American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File (AIANSF) – Sample Data.)

older than 4 years old). It is clear that the great majority of AI/AN children enrolled in school are enrolled in public nursery/preschool programs. This points to a greater responsibility for tribal and U.S. governments to provide high quality programs, as most of the children are enrolled in public programs.

Head Start. A recent report released by the National Head Start Association in the form of a fact sheet brief indicates that of the 1,072,014 children and pregnant mothers reported as receiving services in 2003, 11% were AI/AN, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, Bi- or Multiracial, and other (see Table 3). Statistics provided in the brief did not disaggregate and distinguish data by

	Male	Female	Total
Enrolled in nursery school; preschool	25,610	23,672	49,282
Enrolled in nursery school; preschool; public	20,594	18,979	39,573
Enrolled in nursery school; preschool; private	5,016	4,693	9,709

Table 2. AI/AN enrollment status: Male and female by public and private nursery/preschool enrollment. (Source: U.S. Census 2000 – American Indian and Alaska Native Summary File (AIANSF) – Sample Data.)

Ethnicity	Children %	Staff %
White	35%	42%
Black	27%	27%
Latino	25%	21%
American Indian or Alaska Native	4%	3%
Biracial or Multiracial	4%	1%
Asian	1%	2%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1%	1%

Table 3. Early Head Start population, 2002, by ethnicity. (Source: Irish, K., Schumacher, R., & Lombardi, J. (2003). *Serving America's youngest: A snapshot of Early Head Start children, families, teachers, and programs in 2002.* (Head Start Series Brief No. 3). Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy.

AI/AN only (for more information see the National Head Start Association web site: http://www.nhsa.org.). The lack of disaggregated data for AI/AN children and families is overshadowed by attention paid to larger ethnic groups: White, Hispanic and African American, and by the need to generate "generalizable" research findings through national "scientific" studies. Targeted statistics revealing AI/AN access to early childhood programs and services provided by Head Start would be informative to a national research and program agenda focused on AI/AN early education.

The national study indicates that the findings of this "probability national sample" of Head Start programs are generalizable to "all newly entering 3- and 4-year-olds in all Head Start Centers operating in 2002-03, *except those serving only special populations (i.e., programs serving primarily only migrant, Native American, or Early Head Start children*)" (Westat & others, 2005, p. 50, italics added for emphasis). When national studies exclude AI/AN children and families, it is nearly impossible to examine national Head Start data in terms of AI/AN early education provided by Head Start Centers and programs. The access to data on AI/AN students may become much more cumbersome as educational researchers will be forced to extract data by tribe through other venues.

Children's Defense Fund, 2005. In 2002-2003, 44.4% of the children enrolled in Head Start in Alaska were identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (2005a). In general, early childhood education centers in Alaska do not require teachers to participate in ECE pre-service, nor does the state require family child care homes to have similar pre-service in caring for young children. The child care provided to AI/AN children and other children in Alaska are provided by programs with teachers who, for the most part, are not exposed to pre-service in early childhood care and education and by programs that have low salaries, which the Children's Defense Fund links to high teacher turnover. What this information signals is to carefully consider the quality of those programs to which AI/AN families have access, particularly if there exists high turnover in staff and little to no pre-service for

teachers providing care to young Native children.

An interesting comparison provided by the Children's Defense Fund: In the year 2000, the cost of child care was reportedly $6,019 per child per year as compared to the annual cost of public college tuition, which was $2,855. Early child care costs more than one year of a college education! In another report, the Children's Defense Fund (2005b) describes similar differences in annual costs for child care ($4,627) and college ($2,990) in North Dakota. This is relevant and important data because in the state of North Dakota, AI/AN as a group are reported as the second largest ethnic population, and comprised 11% of the total number of Head Start enrollees in North Dakota in 2003-2004. The reasons for the disparity in costs for early child care and college in Alaska and North Dakota were not discussed, only highlighted.

If family income is correlated with access to high quality child care, we have reason to be concerned about the ability of Native families to sustain access to costly early childhood education. Researchers and early childhood education advocates must consider the economic challenges of providing every AI/AN child with a continuous *and* quality early learning experience. The North Dakota and Alaska examples are only two of many states in which tribal nations reside. The information provided by the Children's Defense Fund provides evidence which motivates educational leaders and researchers to seek viable possibilities to create better educational investments in quality early education for AI/AN children.

Factors Affecting Access to Early Childhood Education

In this section, I attempt to speak about access in complex ways. Access is more than simply delivering a child to a physical location called preschool or day care. Access for parents and children must include knowing about the ways in which to interact, read (text and context), and critically engage in the structural and political aspects of the educational system. As I searched the Navajo Head Start Department's web site (see http://www.nnheadstart.org), I realized

that in order to benefit from the great amount of knowledge and information posted on this site, parents must first have a computer with access to the Internet. Second, parents must be both computer literate and be literate in the English language in order to access this knowledge. And third, both of these characteristics – having a computer with Internet access and literacy in English – are connected with having sufficient income to sustain Internet access and educational attainment or background.

I noticed that in order to enroll a child in the programs, parents must fill out what is called a "Head Start Recruitment Worksheet," two pages of questions with notations that inform parents that filling out the form is not a guarantee that their child will be enrolled. This process requires the parent to know the entire process for enrollment, including the qualifications needed to be considered a viable participant. And in order to fill out the worksheet, parents must be able to read and write.

I wondered about the effectiveness of the ways in which early education programs make themselves accessible to parents. This line of thought also led to questions about the current levels of literacy among American Indians and Alaska Natives, and whether or not there is a link to issues of access to quality early education. How many of the Native grandparents who care for grandchildren have sufficient opportunities to access early education institutions in meaningful ways? How does the fact that many grandparents do not speak English have an impact on access to early education? More than 75% of the total number of parents who benefit from Early Head Start programs have little or no schooling past high school (Irish, Schumacher, & Lombardi, 2003). While this data was not disaggregated by race, the percentage provides a snapshot of the overall challenges that may exist in terms of need for child care, and ability to access and interact with programs in effective ways. Early education centers and programs can be innovative in their approaches to outreach, considering creative approaches to reaching parents that they may not already be reaching with their current methods.

Access to Information about Quality Early Childhood Education Opportunities

The challenge of access to early education opportunities continues to point to the limited knowledge that parents and families have about early childhood programs and options. A study conducted by Schumacher and Greenberg (1999) suggests that families leaving welfare do not use subsidies because they do not know that they are available, or as Fuller and Kagan (2000) found, single mothers after leaving welfare did not have the time to investigate all their options for child care (Fuller, et al., 2002). Lack of information addressing the following questions may exist: Which education program is best for my child, a public or a private program? What are the benefits to enrolling my child in a racially integrated early childhood program versus a program that is racially and geographically isolated? How much time should young children spend in early education programs? What is the influence of speaking a language other than English in accessing quality child care programs? How do families choose an educational program that is responsive to learning and physical disabilities? Is educational research available to parents and families in a format that is both accessible and informative? To what extent do parents and families consider the importance of research in their decisions? To what extent do parents and families consider future educational outcomes linked to early educational opportunities in their decision to enroll a child in early education programs? Responses to these questions may prove significant in parental decisions about their child's early education. These are questions that can also inform a research agenda focused on early childhood education for AI/AN families. Lastly, parents who are knowledgeable about early education opportunities are in a better position to envision their child's early learning experiences as a social, cultural, and economic investment in their child's future.

In addition to parents, tribal communities and educational agencies can serve as valuable partners in gathering information and knowledge about early education. Community members may require knowledge

about the process for accessing appropriate and sufficient funding to create programs that meet the needs of local communities and families. Availability of programs is a massive challenge, particularly for rural communities which may not have the local resources to seek funding opportunities. Organizing rural communities in multiple ways is an action that can increase the local knowledge base and may spur local education projects. Rural Voices, a community capacity project in Manitoba, Canada, seeks to increase rural participant involvement in developing social programs, which include thinking about early childhood education opportunities. Questions about rural early education are apparent in the global context as well. Rural Voices has learned the following from their pilot and research projects with rural, northern child care in Canada during the past 15-20 years (2005):

- "Few provinces have not experimented with rural service delivery options and seasonal supports."
- "Lessons learned and progress made rarely receive necessary attention to move forward with responsive public policy changes."
- "Although the realities and subsequent changes in rural life continue to lessen the gap between urban and rural child care needs, the challenges of population base, geography, and irregular employment patterns mean rural input into public policy development is critical if future public policy development is to respond to rural families."
- "In Canada approximately 30% of the population lives in non-urban areas, 80% of the land mass is non-urban - the people who live in these areas are guaranteed access to social programs under Social Union Framework Agreement."
- "Provincial and territorial governments all acknowledge there are needs for child care in rural, remote and northern communities. The issue centers around the fact that the new service models need to be developed and put in place to meet the diverse needs of individual communities.

What can we learn from Rural Voices? We learn that our neighbor

country to the north guarantees access for rural population people – of which First Nations people make up a percentage – to social programs such as early childhood education. Rural Voices also acknowledges what we know, which is that "new service models need to be created to serve diverse populations." Work with rural AI/AN communities will benefit from examining other progress made in rural communities, such as work conducted by Rural Voices in Canada. There exist cautionary tales particularly focused on the way in which lessons learned and progress made "rarely receive necessary attention to move forward with responsive public policy changes." Without serious attention to creating both programs and responsive public policy, change in access to quality programs may be limited to parents and families with young children. It is clear that AI/AN parents, families and communities need to become active and knowledgeable in the educational and political agendas at the local, regional and national levels. Active educational and political participation can lead to increased opportunities for local communities to embark on developing quality early education programs close to home.

Access to Quality Programs and Facilities

Access to quality programs and facilities are dependent upon the type of program desired, costs, location, and flexibility in hours of business. There are many different types of early childhood learning programs and centers available from which families can choose. The question remains: Do the choices meet the expectations that AI/AN families have for those programs and centers? The mere existence of choice highlights both the need to consider issues of economic, physical, and political access, and the need to question whether the choices provide the kind of early education that may socialize values and beliefs in young Native children that are in connection with family expectations. Families in urban and suburban settings may have more choices in terms of number of programs and centers; do they also have the kind of education that incorporates tribal knowledge, values, language, and culture? Surely, family and parental expecta-

tions are important in deciding among available early child care and education options.

Snipp (1988), a prominent Native sociologist, conducts empirical demographic studies particularly focused on AI/AN peoples. Snipp and other sociologists have conducted relevant research about American Indian families in urban settings. Snipp reports that many of these Native individuals resist assimilation into the White culture and retain and maintain their own cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This phenomenon of social and cultural resistance is important, as it allows us to question whether the early education programs available to American Indian families actually reflect cultural and social values of their family and tribe. And in terms of cultural and relevant educational programming, are these programs based on authentic knowledge and practices? Are these considerations important to AI/AN parents?

I would venture to guess that in rural areas the number of programs and centers available to families are less in number, but the need for parents to make informed choices about their child's early education remains. The choices can range from placing their child in the care of their relatives or in daycare offered by the tribe (through Head Start) or religious organizations. Again, we know little about what motivates parents to choose one option over other options. The research literature, in general, speaks to parental choice having much to do with flexible schedules and hours of operation and availability.

Access to Tribal Knowledge and Processes of Learning

Soto and Swadener (2002) discuss the need for groups perceived as "the minority" to construct educational paradigms which reflect the cultures and values associated with unique linguistic and cultural groups and reflect the experiences and values of social classes other than the White, European middle-class. With this significant perspective in mind, the research discussed to this point becomes marginal and even questionable in our efforts to define and describe access

to quality early education programs that attempt to educate young children in terms of indigenous knowledge, language, and ways. Soto and Swadener call educators to action by asking educators "to examine and critique how issues of power are affecting our lives and children's lives..." and opening our eyes to "see the need to rethink our overreliance on a strictly scientific world-view" (2002, p. 52). Methodology used to create debate and consider theory, research, and praxis certainly should include generating questions about access to local tribal knowledge and history as early learning opportunities for young Native children. What opportunities are there for young children in programs to access tribal language and culture and interact with Native teachers and elders? Do Head Start programs serving reservation communities infuse local social and institutional culture-learning experiences, so that young children and families are exposed to both "mainstream" values and tribal values? What role does culture and language play in religious-based early childhood education? Is this aspect of early learning important to parents? These are questions which need further investigation.

Access to Culturally Responsive Teachers and Instruction

In a time of increased cultural and linguistic diversity in populations in both urban and rural settings, the teaching force providing education to these contexts needs to reflect preparation for teaching children representing diverse cultural backgrounds (Horm, 2003). Irish, Schumacher, and Lombardi (2003) reported the following breakdown of children and staff by race in Early Head Start programs (see Table 3). Irish, et al. (2003) suggest that what these statistics demonstrate is that, overall, the Early Head Start program staff tends to reflect the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the children they serve. While this may be true when we examine the aggregate data, the data does not necessarily indicate that students and staff of the same race are matched together at the same sites. It would be important to see what the data looks like for individual races, such as American Indian and Alaska Native. Overall, AI/AN parents may

have access to Head Start programs but we don't know if they have access to culturally responsive teachers.

Organizing Tribal Networks for Access in Rural Educational Contexts

American Indian and Alaska Native nations have available to them a variety of tribal and intertribal resources, research institutions, and universities interested in improving early educational access for young children. Below I share some initial ideas for the development of tribal networks, partnerships and nationally funded research-based projects that may contribute to rural tribal needs and contexts. In order to build inter-tribal capacity quickly, tribal nations can begin work by building upon existing educational agendas, and devise research questions targeted at local tribal issues. Some of the ideas shared here are meant to target what early childhood educators can do, and other ideas are intended for consideration by tribal organizations and educational networks at large.

Tribal Networks – Beyond Single Nationhood (Inter-tribal Consortium)

Tribal nations already demonstrate innovation in intertribal collaborations to meet their needs. In conceptualizing tribal networks among small rural tribes, we can learn from successful tribal consortia which currently exist — for example, the Northwest Intertribal Court System. The Northwest Intertribal Court System is an advancement of tribal sovereignty comprised of the following Northwest tribes: Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, Muckleshoot Tribe, Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, Sauk-Suiattle Tribe, Shoalwater Bay Tribe, Skokomish Tribe, Stillaguamish Tribe, and Tulalip Tribes. This intertribal system was created to respond to individual tribal needs and maintain legal autonomy from the state legal system (Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, 2003):

The reality was that many western Washington tribes simply

> did not have the resources to maintain their own court systems. Some of these tribes are extremely small, consisting of a couple hundred citizens. Many of them could not provide the necessary funding or professional staff to operate independent tribal courts. And, yet, because the tribes lacked robust dispute resolution mechanisms, tribal citizens were regularly forced into state courts for the resolution of critical tribal disputes.

Early childhood education for small, rural tribes share similar characteristics as the tribes of the Northwest Intertribal group; programs lack economic resources, have small populations within tribes, and have limited staff to support educational opportunities which must respond to both geographic distance and quality in terms of trained educators and opportunities for continued professional development.

Use of technology. Early childhood teachers serving AI/AN children in rural areas can use electronic networking to communicate with other teachers serving similar populations. Honey and Henriquez (1993) suggest that this type of professional interaction supports a sense of autonomy for teachers. In addition, access to email, Internet, and electronic discussion groups serve as other resources for teachers in their search for quality research and information on teacher practice (Rothenberg, 1995). Use of technology by early childhood teachers in conjunction with other modes of conferencing, pre-service, and in-service may provide continued networking with other early child educators. Access to technology may prove to be a problem for programs with little funding to support this type of interface.

Tribal research inquiry. Tribal research inquiry – research initiated and conducted by the tribes themselves – is imperative to the process of increasing access to early education, particularly for rural tribal nations. When research is conducted about programs serving AI/AN children by non-Native researchers or researchers from outside of the local community, findings may not bloom into implementation

of quality programs or policies which target improving educational opportunities for AI/AN children and families. It is important that tribal and intertribal initiatives be developed to carry out and document promising practices in terms of policy, program implementation, and funding at the local, regional, and national levels. There exist multiple venues for sharing research conducted by tribes, such as the National Indian Education Association annual meeting, and early childhood education conferences, such as the Head Start annual conference, or via a National AI/AN early childhood education research center.

Tribal, tribal college and university partnerships. Partnerships among these three political entities – tribes, tribal colleges, and universities – are crucial. Tribes, as sovereign nations, have much power to control the development of early childhood education initiatives. Tribal colleges and universities have the capacity to help guide tribes to fund and develop research projects which respond directly to tribal and inter-tribal early education needs. Strong partnerships create sustained opportunities to create longitudinal studies of early education and provide the means to include research-based recommendations in local, regional, and national policy. Endless possibilities exist both for individual tribes and inter-tribal networks.

Early Childhood Education As a Cultural, Social, and Economic Investment

AI/AN children and families need to be empowered to access quality early childhood education in ways that extend beyond physically entering centers or programs. Educators and researchers must be challenged to think about access in complex ways, including questioning current research informed mainly by "generalizable studies" with "representative samples," which ultimately do not include or apply to AI/AN populations. Alternative research methodologies may lead researchers to discover new and important findings.

The investment in early education makes sense when *all* Native

children – regardless of family income – are provided the opportunity to be exposed to quality learning opportunities – both in and out of formal programs. In turn, researchers and educators must remember that our low participation rates are low because there are minimum qualifications to participate in most government-funded or non-profit programs. Not all children and families qualify to enroll, and many of these families that never qualify may be on the cusp of economic need and at the same time fall just below the ability to afford to enroll in private or other early education programs – not funded by government subsidies. The reality is that we will not reach 100% participation until multiple organizations, tribes, and the U.S. government at large sees that early education is a social, cultural, and economic investment in every child's future.

Access is about both entrance/participation and quality. Entrance or participation in low quality programs is not really access at all. Critically examining access to early education is much like "looking a gift horse in the mouth." We are receiving "free" education, and yet I am asking that we look carefully at what it is that we are getting that is "free." What is the quality of this free education? Finally, we need to ask ourselves, "Do we want access to an educational system built on weighted political agendas and mediocrity?"

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The Health and Development of American Indian and Alaska Native Children In Relationship To Reservation and Rural/Urban Residence

Laurel S. Endfield (White Mountain Apache)

EUROPEANS MOVING into North America and then expanding ever westward was the cause of drastic declines in the American Indian population (Cooper, 1999). Cooper estimated that the American Indian population declined from more than one million people at the beginning of the nineteenth century to fewer than 300,000 in 1879. The causes of this decline were not solely from the battles between the newcomers and the American Indians but more so from the contagious diseases brought to their homelands. Improved health care, increased access to government programs and education, among other developments, have helped American Indian and Alaska Native populations to grow.

According to Snipp (2002), overall, 1.4 million children were identified as Native American or Alaskan Native. However, interpretation of data is difficult because of the census's self-identifying procedures. Respondents were asked to report all races that applied to their ancestry. Comparisons of the 2000 census material was made more difficult than previous censuses because there now requires comparison of two sets of numbers. Out of the 1.4 million reported America Indian/Alaska Native children only 840,000 reported only one racial group. Using the single race definition, American Indian/Alaska Native children (AI/AN) increased by 21%, or by the multiple race definition, by 99%. Approximately 29% of all AI/AN children lived on reservations or in Alaska Native villages. The majority of children living on reservations or villages, 87%, did not report more than one racial ancestry.

According to the U.S. Indian Health Service (2005), "the American Indian and Alaska Native population has grown more rapidly than the nation's population as a whole during the last decade, 17.9% versus 10.7%." However, there are serious threats to American Indian

and Alaska Native health and development that still exist. Diseases and conditions that have a high prevalence rate in AI/AN children include, but are not limited to: diabetes, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and fetal alcohol effects, nutritional inadequacies, inadequate education, high rates of unemployment, discrimination and cultural differences. Also important to note is that according to Indian Health Service statistics (2005), a safe and adequate water supply and waste disposal facilities are lacking in 12% of AI/AN homes compared to only 1% of homes for the general United States population. On some reservations, for instance the Navajo Nation, some children live in homes that completely lack electricity, water, and indoor plumbing due to the remoteness of their home's location.

Diabetes is a growing disease worldwide; however in AI/AN populations, the disease has reached epidemic proportions (Daychild, n.d.). According to Daychild, "minorities have higher rates than the general population. American Indians and Alaskan Natives (AI/AN) in particular experience type 2 diabetes and its complications 4-6 times more often than the general population." In fact, according to the Indian Health Service (2005), "American Indians and Alaska Natives have the highest prevalence of type 2 diabetes in the world. Diabetes is traditionally a disease of older people but, alarmingly, diabetes is being diagnosed at young ages in Indian communities. Prevention of diabetes has become an urgent priority." Childhood obesity is a leading factor to the development of diabetes and heart disease in children. Over the past 30 years the prevalence of overweight and obese children in American Indian and Alaska Native communities has increased dramatically. Rates of AI/AN children suffering from obesity are three times more likely than national patterns, and overweight children are two times more likely than national patterns (Hammer & Demmert, 2003).

Prenatal exposure to alcohol can result in Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or fetal alcohol effects. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2000):

> The term *fetal alcohol syndrome* (FAS) refers to a constellation of

> physical, behavioral, and cognitive abnormalities. In addition to the classic dysmorphic facial features, prenatal and postnatal growth abnormalities, and mental retardation that define the condition, approximately 80% of children with FAS have microcephaly and behavioral abnormalities. As many as 50% of affected children also exhibit poor coordination, hypotonia, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, decreased adipose tissue, and identifiable facial anomalies, such as maxillary hypoplasia, cleft palate, and micrognathia. Cardiac defects, hemagiomas, and eye to ear abnormalities are also common.
>
> The term *fetal alcohol effects* was developed originally to describe abnormalities observed in animal studies, but it was adopted quickly by clinicians to describe children with a variety of problems, including growth deficiency, behavioral mannerisms, and delays in motor and speech performance, who lacked the full complement of FAS diagnostic criteria.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome in AI/AN populations is much higher than the rest of the national population. According to the Centers for Disease Control (About, n.d.), "Incidence of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome per 10,000 total births for different ethnic groups were as follows: Asians 0.3, Hispanics 0.8, white 0.9, blacks 6.0, and Native Americans 29.9." Occurrences of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome among AI/AN tribes vary between tribes. Health facilities serving primarily Navajo and Pueblo tribes report prevalence similar to the national statistic, while Southwest Plains Indians reported a much higher prevalence, 1 in every 102 live births (About, n.d.).

In any community, and for any race, there is little that is more important than the health and welfare of its children. The health and development of American Indian and Alaska Native children, including schooling practices, has changed within the last century. Tactics of assimilation are still definitely present in different forms, but can be considered not as severe as in times past. Boarding school practices have made some positive changes that allow children more freedom of expression and reduced the abuse associated with previous board-

ing school practices. However, school programs that provide cultural awareness and language preservation are small in number, even within reservation boundaries. Strides are being made, but there is still a long way to go. Federal laws have been enacted that allow tribes some self-determination, including the right to protection of its children. However, true self-determination is yet to come.

Before 1978, responsibility for American Indian child welfare lay mainly with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) (Snipp, 2002). Young children were removed from their families and homes and moved to boarding schools where schooling attempts for American Indian children focused on assimilation. The end of the boarding school system began in the early 1930s and more children were allowed to stay at home with their families. The BIA established the Indian Adoption Project in 1958 to oversee the welfare of AI/AN children in possibly abusive homes. The numbers of America Indian children living in off reservation foster or adoptive homes increased swiftly. The majority of placements were in non-Indian households, far from reservations. In 1978 the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed. The law was intended to keep Indian children in environments similar to which they were born. However, time, economic development, acceptance, and technology have changed the parameters of AI/AN children's environments.

Many AI/AN children do not live on Indian reservations or in Alaska Native villages but rather off reservations in both rural and urban settings. The Indian Health Service population trends (2005) shows that in 1990, 56.2% of the Indian population resided in urban areas, with the remaining 43.8% residing in rural areas. Programs for American Indian and Alaska Native children, both on and off the reservation, in both rural and urban areas, are essential to improving their health and development. Accessibility to these programs is dependent upon many factors, including economic status, geographic locations, tribal membership, and transportation, among others.

The major contributor to the improvements in American Indian and Alaska Native health and development, and the primary provider of federal health care, is the Indian Health Service (IHS). IHS is an

agency within the Department of Health and Human Services, and is responsible for providing health services to American Indians and Alaska Natives. The Indian Health Service provides the following information: The provision of health services to federally recognized tribes is a direct result of a special government-to-government relationship between the federal government and Indian tribes. This relationship was established in 1787 and is based upon Article I, Section 8 of the United States Constitution. Numerous treaties, laws, Supreme Court decisions, and Executive orders give this relationship form and substance. Currently, IHS provides health services to approximately 1.5 million American Indians and Alaska Natives who belong to more than 557 federally recognized tribes in 35 states (Indian Health Service, n.d.). According to the Indian Health Service (2005), approximately 56% of American Indians and Alaska Natives living in the United States rely on the Indian Health Service to provide their primary access to health care services.

In 2003, the AI/AN user population in urban areas was approximately 605,000 (Indian Health Service, 2005). According to IHS (2005), American Indians and Alaska Natives in urban locations experience aggravated health problems because of the lack of family and traditional cultural environments. This same report also identifies American Indian and Alaska Native youth as being at greater risk for serious mental health and substance abuse problems, suicide, increased gang activity, teen pregnancy, abuse, and neglect.

According to IHS (1999) statistics, the service population is increasing at a rate of about "1.8% each year, excluding the impact of new tribes" (p. 35). This yearly increase continues to strain an "already challenged [system] to meet even 60% of the health needs of Indian country". The "user population in FY 1997 was considerably younger than the U.S. All Races population" (p. 28). The total IHS population under age 5 was 10.2%, compared to the U.S. All Races percentage of 7.7. The largest IHS area, Phoenix, which had the highest percentage of population under age 5, had a percentage that was nearly 4% higher than the U.S. All Races percentage. The smallest IHS area, Nashville, which had the lowest percentage of

population under age 5 still had a percentage that was more than 1.1 times the U.S. All Races percentage. The median age of the AI/AN population is 27.8 years, which is considerably younger than the U.S. All Races age of 36 years (Indian Health Service, 2005).

The mission of IHS is "to raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level" (Indian Health Service). They strive to reach their goal in assuring that "comprehensive, culturally acceptable personal and public health services are available and accessible". Reports show that solid gains have been made in IHS reaching their goal and improving American Indian and Alaska Native people's health. When IHS was transferred from the Department of the Interior to the Public Health Service in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, "the general health of Indian people substantially lagged behind the rest of the U.S. population" (IHS, 1987). This was reflected in the AI/AN mortality rates compared to those of the general population (Rhoades, D'Angelo, & Hurlburt, 1987).

Mortality rates were several times higher for American Indians and Alaska Natives than for other races. As a result of preventative healthcare programs, sanitation improvements, and medical advances, American Indian and Alaska Native health has substantially improved, however, the health of American Indians and Alaska Natives still lags behind the general U.S. population. Life expectancy has increased by 20 years from 1940 to 1980 (Rhoades, D'Angelo, & Hurlburt, 1987). This still leaves American Indian and Alaska Native populations lagging behind the U.S. All Races population by almost 4 years (Indian Health Service, 2005). Significant gains have also been made in reducing infant mortality rates as well as drastic improvements in neonatal mortality rates. Mortality rates in infants dropped from 62.7 deaths per 1,000 in 1955 (Hammer, & Demmert, 2003) to 8.8 in 2001 (Indian Health Service, 2005). The U.S. All Races population infant death rate is 6.9 per 1000 live births. Neonatal mortality rates have reduced by approximately two thirds between the early 1970s and the mid-1990s (Hammer, & Demmert, 2003). It is important to note that these rates are inclusive only for geographical areas serviced

by the Indian Health Service. According to Indian Health Service (2005b), "American Indians and Alaska Natives die at higher rates than other Americans from alcoholism (517%), tuberculosis (533%), motor vehicle crashes (203%), diabetes (210%), unintentional injuries (150%), homicide (87%) and suicide (60%)."

Baldwin et al. (2002) provided more information specific to this study. According to their research, both rural and urban AI/AN mothers were 2 to 3 times more likely than white mothers to receive inadequate prenatal care. Urban AI/AN mothers and infants would more often receive better care than rural AI/AN mothers and infants. Low birth weight rates for AI/AN infants were higher than for Whites, with urban AI/AN rates worse than rural American Indian and Alaska Native rates. Rates for postnatal deaths were very high for both rural and urban AI/AN infants, with rates more than twice the rate for white infants.

Another program that has been successful in improving the overall health and development of AI/AN women, infant and children is WIC, the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, a federal program operated through state and local agencies. The 33 tribal WIC programs currently on American Indian reservations are administered by Native American organizations and represent nearly 100 of the 557 federally recognized tribes (Cole, 2002). WIC has helped to improve the health and nutrition of AI/AN women, infants, and children by providing nutritious supplemental foods and nutrition education, while also working together with other organizations to improve access to health care (Henchy, Cheung, & Weill, 2000). AI/AN participants make up about 1.7% of the national WIC caseload and have grown from an average of 2,433 clients each month in 1976 (Henchy, Cheung, & Weill, 2000) to serving an average of 121,140 clients each month in 1998 (Cole, 2002). Tribal WIC programs offer culturally appropriate services specific to AI/AN health and nutrition concerns and help to provide continuity of care in geographically isolated tribal lands (Henchy, Cheung, & Weill, 2000). According to Henchy, Cheung, and Weill (pg. 7-8), documented benefits of the WIC program include:

- WIC is successful in improving participants' health and nutritional status, bringing them into the health care setting, and preventing health problems.
- WIC improves the dietary intake of pregnant and postpartum women and improves weight gain in pregnant women.
- Pregnant women participating in WIC receive prenatal care earlier.
- WIC increases the duration of pregnancy and reduces low birth weight rates.
- WIC reduces fetal deaths and infant mortality.
- WIC decreases the incidence of iron deficiency anemia in children.
- WIC significantly improves children's diets.
- WIC improves the growth of at-risk infants and children.
- Children enrolled in WIC are more likely to have a regular source of medical care and are more likely to be immunized.
- WIC helps prepare children for school; children who receive WIC benefits demonstrate superior cognitive development.
- WIC saves money by preventing costly health problems.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture: Food and Nutrition Service (as cited in Cole, 2002), the 63% of AI/AN WIC enrollees located on or near reservations differ considerably from WIC enrollees living off reservations:

WIC enrollees located on or near reservations are concentrated in the West (61%) and Mountain Plains (20%), while those off the reservation are most concentrated in the Southwest (44%). Those located off the reservation are more likely to reside in metropolitan areas (45.7% versus 33.4%). Compared to Native American WIC enrollees off reservations, those on or near reservations have larger average family size (4.4 versus 4.0) and are more likely to be in families of six or more persons (23.8% versus 14.0%). Those on or near reservations also have greater participation in public assistance programs (24.6% versus 15.2% receive TANF; 39.4% versus 29.5%

receive food assistance) and more severe poverty (41.4% versus 34.9% are below 50% of the federal poverty level) (Cole, N. 2002).

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (1997) reported that 30% of the employed American Indians in Indian country still live below the poverty line. The United States unemployment rate is approximately 4%, while many American Indian tribes suffer unemployment rates of 50%, with some even higher (Fryer, 1999). The consequence of such poor economic circumstances is that 43.1% of AI/AN children under the age of 5 are living in poverty compared to 20.1% of the U.S. All Races (Indian Health Service, 1998).

According to Cole (2002), AI/AN infants have greater recorded prevalence, compared with all WIC infants, in the major risk categories. Infants living on reservations or in Alaska Native villages, compared to those off reservations, have higher clinical risks (22.2% versus 12.5%) and dietary risks (19.2% versus 12.3%), while infants off reservations are slightly higher in anthropometric rates of risk (28.9% versus 27.5%). AI/AN children also show greater prevalence to risk categories except in biological risks. Their patterns of risk replicate those of infants on and off reservations. Additionally, AI/AN children have higher rates of obesity as compared to all WIC children: prevalence is 20% for children on or near reservations, 16% for children off reservations, and 13% for all WIC children.

Traditional AI/AN education was conducted at home amongst the people within family units and villages. Children were educated for tribal life by their elders, family members, and peers. Storytelling, working with adults, participation in ceremonies and puberty rites were essential to cultural education. Education also came from the customs of the different clans (Spring, 2001). With the introduction of European cultures into North America, AI/AN children were introduced to cultures very different from their own. Fortunately, AI/AN cultures and languages have experienced some revitalization, as well as renewed acceptance and respect so that children are receiving some culturally and developmentally appropriate educational services from different federally, grant, and tribally supported programs.

Although there has been a revitalization of Native languages, indigenous languages continue to be lost at an alarming rate. There is an ongoing struggle to promote language and preserve it in written form. Many linguists predict that half of the world's 6000 languages will be dead or dying by the year 2050. Languages are becoming extinct at twice the rate of endangered mammals and four times the rate of endangered birds. Linguists predict that if this trend continues, a dozen or fewer languages could dominate the world (Ostler, 2000).

The leading federal program that provides AI/AN children with developmental and educational services is Head Start. Head Start programs, including Early Head Start, are comprehensive child development programs, which serve pregnant women, children from birth to age 5, and their families. These child-focused programs strive to reach an overall goal of increasing school readiness of young children from low-income families (U.S. Administration for Children & Families, 2003).

Head Start began in 1965 as an 8-week summer program by the Office of Economic Opportunity, and was designed to help break the cycle of poverty (Administration for Children & Families, 2003). The preschool program, serving children from ages 3 to 5, was a comprehensive program designed to meet the emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs of the low-income children served. Head Start provides a range of individualized services in the areas of education and early development including: medical, dental, and mental health services; nutrition; and parent involvement. Head Start also ensures that all services provided are responsive and appropriate to individual child and family development, ethnicity, culture, and linguistic heritage and experiences (Administration for Children & Families, 2002). Head Start has had a strong impact on children, families, communities, and early childhood programs across the country. Head Start serves both rural and urban children and their families in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. territories, including many American Indian and Alaska Native children (U.S. Administration for Children & Families, 2002).

According to the Head Start Bureau's fiscal year 2004 Head Start

program fact sheet, the actual 2004 fiscal year budget for Native American and migrant programs was $451,325,000.00 (U.S. Administration for Children & Families, 2005). The fiscal year 2005 appropriation is $456,003,000.00. There are 2,729 Head Start grantees and delegate agencies. Excluding family childcare homes, there are 20,049 Head Start and Early Head Start centers. Of these grantees and delegate agencies, 6% are through tribal governments or consortium agreements. The Head Start enrollment for 2004 was 905,851. Of these children, 3.1% were AI/AN (U.S. Administration for Children & Families, 2005). These numbers represent about 50% of the pregnant women, infants, and preschool-age children eligible to receive Head Start services (National Head Start Association, n. d.).

The National Head Start Association (n. d.) provides that:

- Substantial research finds that Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide positive educational benefits.
- Head Start children performed better on cognitive, language, and health measures than their comparison group counterparts did.
- Head Start programs improve the well-being of the children and families they serve, providing health and dental services to children and families who might otherwise not have them.
- Parents who participate in Head Start are found to have greater quality of life satisfaction; increased confidence in coping skills; and decreased feelings of anxiety, depression, and sickness.
- Head Start children are at least eight percentage points more likely to have had their immunizations than those children who did not attend preschool.

According to Taylor (1996), during the 1994 Reauthorization of Head Start, Early Head Start was established as an outreaching arm of the Head Start program. Early Head Start is a federally funded, comprehensive early childhood program serving low-income prenatal to age three children, pregnant women, and their families. Research has shown that the years from conception to age 3 are critical in human development. This called for the Head Start program to embark

on an extensive planning process that would ensure that children and families would receive high quality services that would enhance growth and development, making a difference in outcomes for young children (Taylor, 1996). The National Head Start Association (2005) provides documentation of the following benefits of the Early Head Start program:

- Early Head Start children on average had a higher cognitive development score than their control group had.
- Early Head Start children demonstrated a higher level of social-emotional development than their control group in a number of areas. Compared with their control group, they showed less aggressive behavior and were more attuned as they played.
- When their children were 3 years old, Early Head Start parents reported significantly less depression than parents in the control group did.
- Early Head Start children had a higher immunization rate than children in a control group.
- Early Head Start children at age 3 had larger vocabularies than the control children had.

Head Start has made huge impacts in the health and development of AI/AN children. Children are receiving services both on and off American Indian reservations. As a parent who has had children in both settings, I recognized that a major benefit of reservation, or tribal programs, is the promotion of culture in the classroom. American Indian programs are respectful, knowledgeable, and appreciative of the culture of the children they serve. According to Strand and Peacock (2002), feeling good about one's tribal culture; participation in tribal and cultural activities; positive feelings of belonging within a community and a family; appreciation of the influences of elders, parents, and grandparents; and participation in a school setting where the curriculum included culture provided for three positive characteristics in AI/AN children: good self-concept, a strong sense of direction, and tenacity. All three of these are very important attributes

for children to have to succeed in the world.

Head Start is only one of the early childhood programs available for American Indian and Alaska Native children both on and off the reservation and in both rural and urban settings. Many individual tribes provide grant-funded childcare, such as those funded by the Child Care and Development Fund, for parents of young children that ensure that the children are receiving care that is monitored by the tribe. Children off the reservation, in both rural and urban settings, may qualify for state and/or grant-funded programs that monitor childcare to ensure the health and safety of the children.

Although programs are offered both on and off the reservation and in both rural and urban settings, a disparity that exists between rural and urban settings, as well as on or off the reservation, is the availability of programs. Children in urban areas are going to have greater access to programs that will contribute to their health and development than those living in rural areas. Similarly, children living off the reservation are going to have access to more and different programs, including state-funded programs. It is important to note that continuing budget cuts in not only Head Start, but also in child care and educational programs in general, are making it more difficult for AI/AN children and families to receive quality child care. Unless education and childcare become a priority to the government, cutbacks and decreases will continue to have negative impacts on AI/AN children nationwide.

Historically, AI/AN populations represent the most economically disadvantaged and underserved groups in America. They have the lowest income and educational levels as well as the lowest standard of living (O'Connell, 1985). Fortunately, for American Indians and Alaska Natives, the best of both worlds have combined after centuries of frustration, confusion, misunderstanding, repression, and perseverance. American Indians and Alaskan Natives have remained determined throughout years of attempted assimilation to keep their native traditions and tongues alive. Formal Native American education spans from reservation preschools to universities far from the reservation lands of the native peoples. It can and should encompass

tribal traditions, cultural beliefs, academics, and technology in a middle ground between two distinct cultures with each providing the other with the opportunities to teach, learn, and grow. However, too often educational endeavors remain unable to break completely away from assimilation tactics and embrace cultural values. Regardless, Native American and Alaska Native populations have emerged victorious as students, educators, and leaders determined to leave their mark on American history and to carve their place in the future.

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Effective Early Education Programs that Promote Learning the English Language and Tribal Languages and Cultures

Nila M. Rinehart

THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY, Head Start has been the nation's cornerstone of services for low-income young children and their families. With the addition of the Child Care Bureau, created in 1995, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services provides much of the funding and concentrated support for American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children in early care and education programs. Approximately 28,000 AI/AN children were served in Head Start in 2004 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2005). Approximately 35,000 children were served by the Child Care and Development Fund of the U.S. Child Care Bureau in 2003 (Rinehart, 2005). An additional unknown number of AI/AN children receive care from family members and friends, non-tribal child care, public and tribal schools, and other state, local and private funded early care and education providers. The Kids Count data on AI/AN children measures of child well being from the 2000 census reports that there are 432,994 American Indian children under the age of 6 in the United States (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). One has to wonder where the estimated 85.5% of the AI/AN children are, what is the level of care they are experiencing, what developmental opportunities are they being provided, what is the level of family and community support, and is the tribal culture and language accessible and supported?

Throughout the late 1990s, funding for early care and education programs grew with opportunities for enhancing services. Some of these projects included Early Learning Opportunities Grants, Even Start, and Early Head Start. Although tribal communities were recipients of these funds, along with Head Start and Child Care and Development Funds, the largest service providers for young AI/AN children in tribal communities, little is known about child outcomes and best practices relative to this special population. There is not a central clearinghouse or place for AI/AN early care and education

providers to learn about and share ideas, promising practices, and current research in order to improve services and child outcomes. Lastly, there have been few studies with a focus on young AI/AN children. In summary, there is little known about the status of early care and education for AI/AN children.

This paper examines promising practices in early childhood education programs and activities that promote effective use of English as a primary and/or second language and the programs and activities that are effective in developing, preserving, and/or revitalizing AI/AN language and culture. Additionally, innovative systems, public policy, and unmet research needs are identified.

Promising Practices in English Language Learning And Retaining Tribal Languages

To grow to their fullest potential, AI/AN children need strong and loving families and communities that care for their needs. Equally important, tribal children need an understanding of teachings about community traditions, tribal values, and language. The center of strength and identity for tribal children comes from belonging to an extended tribal community-family, their participation in cultural activities and in understanding the sacred meanings behind their tribal practices (Strand, 2003). While learning to understand their tribal heritage, AI/AN children are also gifted learners of other skills. Tribal children need a learning environment that nurtures their natural curiosity and their path to knowing. This balanced preparation of tribal children fully enables them to participate in their place in tribal communities as well as in the larger world community. Practice and preparation in their cultural traditions interwoven with math, science and the full range of experiences reflecting all early education learning domains helps them to understand and participate in their rightful place in our universe.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) position statement, "Responding to Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: Recommendations for Effective Early Childhood Educa-

tion," emphasizes that children learn and grow to their fullest potential when the home language and culture is valued and integrated within the curriculum and learning environment (NAEYC, 1995). The position statement recognizes that the language and culture of the home is what children know and it is the basis for their unique perspective on life and on learning. This important foundation and framework supports children as they begin to make sense of experiences and construct knowledge. From a very early age, and some would say before birth, many tribal children are taught about their connection to the world. They are taught to honor the reverence of tribal practices and they are taught to think of themselves as connected to one another and to the greater universe. This interconnectedness is essential for tribal children's development of the self. Language, culture, and the home environment allow children to know who they are and from this, children form the basis for constructing knowledge. It is from these incredible eyes that tribal children see and interpret their world.

The following practices and reflections come from an examination of early care and education and AI/AN education literature, and from my experience in implementing a language revitalization program in the Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA) – Head Start program, in Juneau, Alaska.

Addressing Language in Program Design

Given what we know about AI/AN children and the values placed on culture and language, how do educators build learning environments to help children use these strengths to succeed? Tabors (2000) provided a definition that is important to AI/AN children, "A bilingual child is a child who is exposed to two languages, no matter what her level of proficiency is in the two languages." Given this premise, AI/AN children are bilingual if they have any contact with family members, caregivers, or a community that is rooted in a tribal language or culture. With this understanding, the approach to answering the question of what programs and activities appear to promote effective use of English as a primary and/or second language

and/or are effective in developing, preserving, and/or revitalizing the tribal language and culture must be set in research on best practices for children learning a second language (whether that language is English or a tribal language).

Tabors (2000) provides an overview of bilingualism relative to how much English and the home language is spoken in the home and in the community. These distinctions are necessary to consider when planning for curriculum design and developing effective early care and education programs for second-language learning. Based on a home and community language inventory, professionals can make program design decisions to implement a variety of options:

- AI/AN language immersion classrooms
- Bilingual classrooms in the AI/AN language and English
- English-only classrooms
- Cultural and language enrichment programs for children and their families

Tabors (1997) suggests that children learn language in two ways: simultaneously and sequentially. Simultaneous learning happens when children are learning more than one language at once. In her review of the literature and research on this subject, Tabors reports that teachers and parents often express concern that children will mix up the two languages, or that second language learning might hold children back. However, second language learning yields cognitive benefits. Tabors also contends that children learn languages in relationship to their experiences with them, and they are able to hold each language separate from the other, determining when to use which language.

Sequential acquisition occurs when children begin learning their first language and then begin learning another. Tabors (1997) states that there are benefits associated with this language learning: "second-language learners, even very young ones, already have prior knowledge about language and its uses. In the process of learning a first language, they have determined what communication is all about, and, furthermore. . . [how communication works]. For these children,

then, second-language acquisition is not a process of discovering what language *is*, but rather discovering what *this* language is." Learning a second language can occur at any age, however, young children are better positioned to take on this task, more so than an adult or teenager who is faced with many more cognitive demands and tasks (Tabors, 1997, p.12). This outlook is supported by Peacock (1999), reflecting on work by Greymorning (1997; 1999), who maintained that "tribal groups that begin AI/AN language instruction at an early age will be more successful than tribes that concentrate on teaching older students."

Tabors (1997, p. 39) describes that researchers have observed a definite developmental sequence for young children learning a second language:

1. There may be a period of time when children continue to use their home languages in second-language situations.
2. When they discover that their home language does not work in this situation, children enter a nonverbal period as they collect information about the new language and perhaps spend some time in sound experimentation (and children use nonverbal communication).
3. Children begin to go public, using individual words and phrases in the new language.
4. Children begin to develop productive use of the second language.

In making choices about program planning, AI/AN educators are wise in knowing about how children learn a second language (whether the objective is for children to learn the English or the tribal language). It is through understanding what has been learned about language acquisition that appropriate choices can be made for effective planning.

Curriculum Planning and Development

In addition to selection of the appropriate language-learning environment, choices must be made about curriculum planning and development. The curriculum in early childhood classrooms serving AI/AN children must be grounded in community values, set in the societal context, rooted in the ebb and flow of community life, and is an emergent and reflective process. This curriculum belongs to the community and comes from the inside out (Rinehart, Tagaban, Focht, & Squibb, 2000). The outcomes are clear and include science, math, language, literacy, creative, physical, social and emotional outcomes. The process for developing these outcomes is inclusive of the children's family and community.

The Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska Head Start program developed a curriculum framework that is imbedded in tribal values and learning outcomes. It is a collection of what we know as the best in relationship to tribal culture, community practices, subsistence life practices, and sciences that relate to our area of the world. The framework responds to the entire realm of child learning domains and outcomes as required by the Head Start Bureau, Alaska State School Standards, and state learning outcomes for young children.

The At Yatx'I Satu Kei Nas.a'x Curriculum is rooted in the ebb and flow of the seasons and is relevant to the events happening in the communities and in the subsistence life style. The Tlingit economic year of hunting, salmon fishing, seaweed gathering and berry picking are central elements. The curriculum mirrors the values and beliefs of the community and of the families, and it also recognizes contemporary practices and knowledge. The learning domains include natural sciences, language and literacy, physical/motor, problem solving, and creative arts. Because the curriculum is centered on the seasons, there are "Gathering Places" for the fall, winter, spring, and summer. Within each Gathering Place, there are thematic units. For example, a Gathering Place for fall is Salmon Ecology. Within the unit on Salmon Ecology, there are several choices for lessons and activity plans asso-

ciated with each of the relevant learning domains. All of the lessons reinforce important community values of taking care of our natural resources because nature provides our food and subsistence. The lessons also include Tlingit language words and phrases for teachers to highlight with the children. The activities promote learning about the natural sciences and the ecological life of a salmon. There is a family-based curriculum tied to what the children are learning in the classroom "Family Feathers," so that parents and grandparents can further the children's learning. The family curriculum includes video tapes designed to help parents learn about child development and it is tied to a "Family Time Workbook" (CCTHITA Head Start 2002). Furthermore, the lessons have as an outcome the ability for children to meet state early education learning standards. Curricula building on community strengths, values and practices enhance the lives and learning of young children by telling them a rich story about who they are and this story strengthens the children's success in school.

The need for AI/AN children to understand their own culture, language, and connection to the tribal community is no different than the need all children have to acquire a sense of belonging. For AI/AN children this means that it is important that they have opportunities to learn about their culture, language, and history. This process must be in the earliest years, beginning first with the family and community. Continuity is established when this learning is reinforced and continued through early education programs and later in elementary and secondary schools.

Strategies identified by the English Language Learners Focus Group (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002) and strategies that were identified and implemented in the CCTHITA language program include:

- Learning environments are enhanced with the spoken and, when possible, the written language of the children. There is a conscious effort to extend and add to the children's language.
- Community elders and language masters are included among the staff either through paid or volunteer positions. They are trained

in language acquisition skills and have a defined role in language teaching.

- Family and community stories are documented and shared and appropriately used as learning tools in the classroom.
- Staff members establish meaningful relationships with the community and thereby have firsthand experience in the lives of the people they serve.
- Resources are provided to provide a rich learning environment that has culturally relevant and authentic literature, art, music, and studies that are congruent with the community activities and embedded in community values.
- Early literacy skills, alphabet knowledge, and phonemic awareness are a focus in classroom activities and are provided using developmentally and culturally appropriate methods.
- Since many tribal languages may not be written, opportunities are created for community dialog to occur to work out agreements on appropriate spellings and language usage to begin documenting the language.
- Publish curriculum frameworks, lesson plans, books, and materials in order to promote sharing. Distribute the resources widely to promote community progress.
- Investigate and learn about language-teaching methods (i.e., immersion classrooms, total physical response methods); use simple language for new language learners, use facial gestures and point to objects to help children in understanding; repeat words and phrases; when children speak in the target language repeat and extend their language, always adding.
- Help children link what they are learning to real life experiences and concrete objects.
- Plan predictable routines so new language learners can anticipate and learn to expect what is coming.
- Write books; develop picture dictionaries in both the home and target language. Distribute these resources widely.
- Involve parents by inviting them to the classroom and special sessions so that they know what is occurring and help them to

extend the learning in the home by providing resources.

- Make available on loan early literacy and family literacy kits/bags. Include writing materials, books, tapes, master cards and readers, and other audiotapes of the target language. Encourage adults to read aloud to children and to tell stories.
- Complete language inventories (surveys, not assessments) of parents and family members in order to inform planning and encourage their involvement in program activities.
- Identify family, program and community resources to help with oral and written translations and new word translations. Also identify resources to assist in developing materials (artists and crafts people).
- Provide summer curriculum development institutes, a place where teachers and community members (including parents) can develop curriculum materials (i.e., books, audiotapes, games, lesson plans, felt board stories, computer program software, family take-home kits). Reproduce these kits so that the resources reach beyond one classroom.
- Use commercial materials to support lesson plans (such as plastic whale and sea mammal figurines for the water table to extend Tlingit stories and songs). (Commercial "Native American" curricula and materials must be carefully reviewed for stereotypical or inauthentic presentation of culture.)

Politics of Language and Culture

Teaching or integrating AI/AN culture and languages in schools is a politically and emotionally sensitive issue in most AI/AN communities. There is loss and trauma associated with this issue and many are skeptical and cautious about new initiatives. Many AI/AN communities may resist letting the schools become a place where language and culture are taught because culture and language are the responsibility of the family and community (Batchelder, 2000). These attitudes especially exist toward schools because schools often are controlled by outsiders.

AI/AN parents and families care about their children's success and work at providing the best for them. Because of this inherent need to protect and to ensure their children can fully participate in the outside world, some parents may want English language learning first as the best goal for their children, even when it risks the loss of home language. Overt and covert discrimination is very real and very much alive. When an Indian child learns to be grounded in tribal traditions and languages, their speech patterns are different and they think, interact and perceive their experiences in different ways. "Cultural differences can lead teachers to misunderstand children, to mis-assess their developmental competence, and to plan incorrectly for their educational achievement" (Bowman, 1994).

Also, because of past efforts to assimilate AI/AN people, many parents in the parenting generation have lost proficiency in the tribal language and this will create challenges in revitalizing languages that are risk. With many demands on family life, second language learning may not be a priority.

Lastly, there are many dialects, alphabet systems, proper spelling, and language usage to consider. There may be disagreement among key members of the community in the "right way." Sometimes these disagreements can cause great divisions in the community.

There are many solid reasons why educators should not integrate the language and culture of AI/AN children into the school setting. However, there are many more reasons why responsible educators should. Strategies include:

- Create community conversations about how best to support AI/AN children to succeed and to learn about how best to integrate their language and culture in the schools.
- Create a language consortium, with broad representation and support. The consortium can assist in making critical decisions about language usage.
- Expect there will be those who disagree and professionals will need to find people who can support and encourage them to keep moving forward.

How AI/AN Children Learn

There have been some debates over how AI/AN children learn. Some assert that AI/AN children have particular learning styles. Learning styles often reported in AI/AN children include a greater capacity for artistic expression and symbolism, visual cognitive learning, and conceptualizing from a holistic framework. As with any theory, we should be cautioned that by concentrating on these learning styles we must not stereotype children and diminish the individuality of AI/AN children because they are all very unique. Research has found learning style differences between cultural groups and within groups, and learning style studies are often contradictory. There is a need for more research in this area, as well as an identification of effective interventions for differences in learning styles (Soleste, 2002). This information is another piece among many to consider when planning an appropriate learning environment for AI/AN children. Planning deliberate classroom environments that are developmentally appropriate, individualized, and rich with a carefully planned curriculum combined with effective teaching methodology is essential for young AI/AN children.

Staff Development

Teachers and administrators must possess a level of cultural understanding, be reflective in their practice, and create an environment respectful of diversity (Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003). It is important for children to experience schools that employ caring adults who can relate in a culturally competent manner to the children's culture and traditions. These attributes are important whether or not teachers are representative of the child's community. Just because staff may be from the community does not mean they are able to create a caring environment for children to experiment and grow. In order to teach children, especially children from different and linguistic backgrounds, teachers must know themselves. We all come from different places in life. Our experiences are different, and these experiences have an

enormous impact on our belief systems and in the way we process information. According to U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2002), Strategies for staff development include:

- Provide staff with ongoing training and development on issues related to culture including learning about the historical context of the people.
- Provide staff with training on first and second language acquisition and learning.
- Create opportunities for staff to be involved with the community.
- Provide opportunities for staff to examine their own beliefs and attitudes toward second language learning and cultural issues. Create provocative conversations to allow staff to wrestle with their ideas, biases, truths, and allow for rediscovery.
- Use the help of early childhood experts, theorists, researchers and scholars to share knowledge and skills with practitioners.
- Establish partnerships with colleges and universities to obtain college credit for professional training in these areas; also request the creation of classes to assist in the community's efforts.
- Establish partnerships with other language-learning communities, consortiums, and institutes to share knowledge and adopt models; join and/or establish language consortiums to work in support of one another to further language goals.
- For language revitalization communities, provide opportunities for teachers to learn the target second language (i.e., summer institutes, language coach/mentors, immersion programs for teachers).

Family and Community Partnerships

AI/AN parents and community leaders must be involved in decision making in early education programs, especially in decisions concerning second language learning and curriculum. Empowering families means working in partnership with them to jointly make

the best and most informed decisions possible for the well-being of AI/AN children. According to U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (2002), strategies include:

- Identify family and community interests, dreams for the future, strengths and needs. Use this as a basis for planning.
- Share information with parents and the community about the developmental process of learning a second language; investigate with parents the political and social-emotional side of language.
- Provide opportunities for parents to learn about early childhood development, and culturally related child rearing practices.
- Provide opportunities to involve parents in their own second language development by providing classes and by providing at-home projects focused on language and literacy.
- Encourage parents and the community to talk, sing, tell stories, hold conversations with children that extend and enrich their vocabulary in their home language and in English.
- Use the family's home language in verbal and written communication as much as possible.
- Invite elders, extended family, and community members to be involved in the program either as paid staff or as volunteers.

Outcomes for AI/AN Children

Before a teacher can facilitate learning, the teacher must know what learning objectives and outcomes are expected. For many years schools and teachers developed their own outcomes. These outcomes were based on the teacher and school's culture and values. In order to facilitate learning for AI/AN children, teachers and schools need to know what a successful AI/AN child will be like once that child has gone through the educational system. What skills will he or she possess, what things will he or she be able to do in life, what things will he or she have experienced? Only the parents, extended family, communities, and nations into which AI/AN children are born can answer these questions. In early education programs, Head Start has

taken the lead in determining educational outcomes by instituting locally developed plans and outcomes that also respond to national outcomes. These plans are used as a tool to document, for the community and program, the kinds of skills, abilities, hopes, and dreams parents and families have for their children, and what kind of commitment the Head Start program will have to fulfill the need. Teachers and schools can only expect participation and support from families and communities if the family and community's priorities become the teacher and school's priorities.

Many AI/AN communities are documenting their tribal values so that families, schools, and communities can facilitate learning in a way that respects and activates important practices that help children succeed. In this way, the community begins to voice the things that make AI/AN children unique. When these outcomes are further focused by integrating other local, state and national learning outcomes, the combination offers children possibilities to excel in all developmental domains. Strategies include:

- Invite parents and the community to identify what they want their children to be like in the future, what they want them to know, and what they want their children to be. Ask parents to envision their children in the future and build outcomes on these visions.
- Use child outcomes, the culture, natural environment, community happenings, and values as the framework to build a curriculum.
- Integrate local, state, and national child outcomes with locally developed child outcomes.
- Partner with colleges, universities, language institutes, and other professionals to assist.
- Learn from other communities, adopting methods and processes.

Assessment

Now more than ever, early childhood education programs and educational systems must prove their effectiveness. Accountability

is often measured by standardized achievement tests that are not designed to measure true child outcomes. These tests can be harmful to children if they are interpreted and used in the wrong way. Poor test scores among AI/AN children seriously undermine the dignity of AI/AN children, their families, communities, and nations. Educators must be careful about how standardized tests and assessments are delivered and used. Strategies for assessment include:

- "Identify measures and processes that assess first and second language levels of proficiency; use observation, recording strategies, and documentation procedures that are aligned with child outcomes and are meaningful for parents to interpret and understand" (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002).
- Consider the use of observational, narrative-rich descriptions of children during a regular classroom day, or when children are in their home environment during a family visit (Tabors, 2000).
- Use principles and guidelines to inform practice, including position statements such as the joint position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, "Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and program Evaluation" (NAEYC, 2003).

In summary, young AI/AN children can attend well-provisioned and safe, aesthetically beautiful early care and education programs that are specifically designed for their tribal community. The curriculum incorporates everyday life in a way young children understand. The curriculum is individualized for the community and child, it is experiential, and it develops children's physical, cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, and creative skills. The learning environment and significant adults nourish the child's individual and communal spirit. The children speak and are read to in their tribal language as well as in English. The community is supportive and contributes to their learning. Innovative practices, including research, are shared with practitioners to continually renew and improve outcomes.

Innovations in Early Care and Education Systems And Public Policy

Several research projects have been undertaken to provide information to guide public policy, enhance services, and practice in early care and education. The following are a few representative examples:

- The Family and Child Experiences Study (FACES) is a national longitudinal study that describes the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes for children and families in Head Start. The study is providing information about quality and outcomes for young children. The study was initiated in 1997 and continues to provide valuable data (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, August 2003).
- The Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project measured outcomes and collected information about programs and family experiences within Head Start programs. The analysis will link program interventions with child and family outcomes (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, retrieved July 2005).
- Head Start Impact Study was launched in 1998 as a congressional mandate as a part of Head Start's authorization. The purpose of the study is to determine the impact of Head Start on the children it serves (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, retrieved July 20, 2005).

Although these studies and many others contribute to the early care and education knowledge base, AI/AN children have not directly benefited from these projects. The body of knowledge that has been gained through these large-scale efforts has not included this special population and there is strong consensus that the unique characteristics of tribal children require specialized approaches to research design and approaches. Additionally, legislative mandates have excluded tribal programs from certain national Head Start research and evaluation activities (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2004).

In 2001, the Head Start bureau initiated a 2-year AI/AN Head Start Research and Outcomes Assessment (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2004). The project was launched to address the following questions:

- What are the research priorities and needs of AI/AN programs?
- What issues should be considered in conducting research in American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start programs?
- How can ACF support partnerships between researchers and American Indian-Alaska Native Head Start programs?
- To what extent are culturally appropriate instruments, measures, and procedures available to assess outcomes?
- What technical assistance would be helpful for program staff in terms of conducting developmental screenings and assessing child outcomes?

A synthesis of relevant studies, articles, reports, theses and dissertations, unpublished documents, and other materials was gathered and the following references are gathered from this synthesis (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2003). It should be noted that relatively few recent studies or resources were found that further contribute to early care and education English or tribal language learning. However, the studies, articles, and other documents found in the synthesis continue to support the use of culturally appropriate practices to help provide contextual links for children's learning.

In 2004 the Head Start Bureau launched an Innovation and Improvement Grant program with one of the priorities being English Language Learners. Several projects were awarded in the planning phase of the project in 2004. In 2005, projects will be selected for a full 3-year implementation phase. Because AI/AN children are considered a special population, they have not been included in this initiative. The rationale for not including AI/AN children is because they are thought to be trying to retain and revitalize their AI/AN language and not necessarily learn the English language. However, if

Tabors' definition of a bilingual child is accepted, then many AI/AN children are indeed bilingual and in need of this kind of support.

In 2002, the Head Start Bureau sponsored an English Language Learners Focus Group and issued a report on findings. The purpose of the session was to solicit specific recommendations regarding effective approaches for addressing the opportunities and challenges presented by working with young children who are English language learners (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2002).

In 2005, the Head Start bureau initiated a bulletin on English Language Learners that highlights promising practices and resources for programs to use in serving English Language Learners. Among the many articles in this bulletin is an article entitled "Head Start: An Avenue to Revitalize a Language." This article provides insight into the efforts of the Cherokee Nation Head Start program in continuing the tribal culture and language (Drew, 2005).

The Administration for Native Americans (ANA) funded 23 (116 received) applications from tribal entities in 2003 and 33 (117 received) in 2004 in the area of Language Preservation. ANA grants are awarded from one competitive area at any time. Therefore, while eligible applicants may compete for a grant in each of the three competitive areas (Social and Economic Development Strategies, Environmental Regulatory Enhancement and American Indian and Alaska Native Language Preservation), an applicant may only submit one application per competitive area and no applicant may receive more than one grant in each competitive area, including any existing ANA grants (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, retrieved July 15, 2005). Tribes must choose their priorities between critical areas.

Released in 2000, the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework is intended to guide HS programs in their curriculum planning and ongoing assessment of the progress and accomplishments of children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2003). Relative to this initiative is the Head Start Bureau's National Reporting System (NRS), which AI/AN programs completed nearly 16,000 NRS assessments in 2003-2004. Although the bureau cautions reading too much into

the data, the following findings are relative to AI/AN Children in Head Start. American Indian children in Head Start show growth in understanding spoken English, vocabulary, in letter recognition, in early math skills. The greatest gains were made in letter recognition and early math skills (Shultz, 2004).

Unmet Research Needs and Recommendations For Additional Research

Many studies have contributed to the early care and education and family development knowledge base (i.e., studies in brain development, the effects of poverty on the educational outcomes of children, the effects of domestic violence and child maltreatment on young children) (Hixon, S., personal communication of the National Indian Head Start Directors Association, 2004). These studies have been used to guide practice and program development and are valuable resources to the early care and education profession. However, research specific to the AI/AN population needed and highlighted by many of the authors cited in this paper.

When working with AI/AN children and families, it is critically important to use research as a tool to help better practice. However, there have been few studies that focus specifically on AI/AN children. Being such a small percentage of the overall population, the AI/AN population is often left out. When studies are brought about, AI/AN communities are forced to make comparisons across tribal groups, which can be very problematic. Although there are many similarities among AI/AN tribal groups, we are also very different. AI/AN people speak different languages, some of them are written, but most are not. Our tribal histories are different. We live in small rural communities and large urban ones. Some live in close-knit tribal communities, and many do not. Our social systems are structured differently as are our governments. Lastly, there are always differences, even among families that are affected by demographics, socioeconomic status, and many other variables. All of these issues make research and the interpretation of research challenging.

The following is a summary of research needs as identified by my own practice, by many of the authors cited in this paper, the AI/AN research agenda for Head Start programs, the National Indian Head Start Director's Association, and the English Language Learners Focus Group.

Tribal Identity and Culture

Differences in educational outcomes for AI/AN bilingual children and English-only children; effective ways to promote AI/AN language instruction in a multi-language environment; developmentally appropriate teaching practices that support second language learning (English or tribal language); effective practices in teaching/revitalizing the AI/AN language; case studies of community tribal language revitalization projects; links of culturally relevant/tribal language enhanced programs to academic child learning outcomes.

Early childhood education. Data on long-term educational outcomes for AI/AN children who attend Head Start as compared to AI/AN children who do not; more information about learning styles in AI/AN children; the content and structure of Head Start instruction (effectiveness of mixed age groups, benefits or drawbacks of full day versus part day); classroom strategies and interventions that accommodate differences in learning styles; how and if learning strategies (styles) change over time; socialization of learning styles; appropriate screening, assessment and outcomes measurement (birth to 5).

Health and development. Ties of tribal identity, language and culture to social and emotional well-being and links to educational outcomes.

Staff and staff development. Effects of teachers' attitudes and methods of interacting with children and links to educational outcomes; strategies and best practices in teaching methods for teaching second languages.

Family and community involvement. Parents' disciplinary practices and their effects on children's mental health and educational outcomes; family involvement in programs that are embedded in the family's culture and language; family participation in tribal language revitalization programs; effects of family involvement on student achievement.

Accessibility of research findings. In the review of literature concerning the topic of this paper, there are many important research projects, papers, and information that can contribute to daily practice in teaching young children. The problem that exists is making the outcomes of research projects and recommendations accessible to teachers and administrators who are in the process of working with and designing programs for young AI/AN children. There is not a clearinghouse of materials, resources, and research available to the AI/AN early care and education community in the topic areas addressed by this paper.

Summary

The strategies addressed in this paper are possible goals. Our nations must realize the essential gift that children bring to our futures. We must learn to nourish every child by providing every essential that children need to grow and thrive in our world. The broader community must understand that there is not one right and true way and that many perspectives are desirable and are necessary for survival and growth. We must all recognize that the only thing stopping us from providing young AI/AN children with the essential things they need to grow and learn so they can assume their rightful place in our world is us.

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Transitions of American Indian and Alaskan Native Children From Pre-school to Kindergarten

Cheryl D. Clay

WHEN YOUNG children anticipate entering kindergarten, they may have feelings of excitement, uncertainty, or even fear of the unknown. Likewise, families, including American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) families may look forward to their children entering kindergarten with both anticipation and apprehension. Will their children find success in school? Some families of AI/AN children, due to their own challenges with schooling, may be apprehensive about how their children will cope with the new teacher and his/her academic and behavioral expectations. Is my child prepared to succeed with the academic goals of kindergarten? Will my child behave and learn what this kindergarten teacher expects? Will my child be accepted by other youngsters and find friends in school? What can I do to help my son or daughter succeed in kindergarten? Although AI/AN families may experience similar hopes and fears as other families, their children may also face challenges of coping with curriculum, language and cultural discontinuities between the educational contexts of preschool and kindergarten. AI/AN parents and preschool and kindergarten personnel seek transition strategies, programs, and models to facilitate AI/AN children in learning academic skills and social competencies needed for school success while maintaining language and cultural participation with their families and tribal communities.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the transition of AI/AN children as part of the change process of entering kindergarten along with maintaining connections with their unique home languages and cultures. First, a brief history of transition programs is reviewed including definitions of transition and continuity. Second, attention is given to how preschools and elementary schools support the involvement of AI/AN families as they and their children transition between preschool and kindergarten. Third, promising transition strategies for AI/AN children from the literature are reviewed. Fourth, pro-

gram models in the literature are described including features that address ways to build successful relationships among families and school personnel from diverse language and cultural backgrounds. Fifth, research needs and recommendations are discussed. Finally, policy recommendations for improving the transition of AI/AN to kindergarten are proposed.

History of Transition

For the past 20 years positive adjustment during transition to kindergarten has been broadly recognized as the first step to school success. In 1992 transition was defined in the U.S. Department of Education's National Transition Study as "those activities initiated by schools or preschools to bridge the gap between the preschool and kindergarten experiences" (RMS Research Corporation, 1992). The transition of AI/AN children from preschool to kindergarten encompasses the changes that occur as AI/AN children complete the last few months in their preschool, often reservation-based Head Start, classrooms and their first few months in kindergarten classrooms. Within an ecological view of transition to kindergarten (Pianta & Cox, 1999), children and family members experience letting go of relationships with the familiar people and setting of preschool and forming new relationships with unfamiliar kindergarten personnel and procedures. They also encounter different curricula in preschool and kindergarten. Preschools, including Head Start, have been designed as developmentally appropriate while kindergartens were academically oriented. Developmentally appropriate meant that the curriculum and methods were designed to match the cognitive/language, social/ emotional, and physical/motor developmental levels of the children in the class. In contrast, kindergarten curricula focused on the academic goals of the school district curriculum for all children regardless of individual developmental levels.

Not all children adjust to the academic and behavioral expectations of kindergarten programs in ways that are both effective and appropriate (socially competent). According to Lombardi (1992),

"many children have problems adjusting to elementary school programs that have a different philosophy, teaching style, and structure than those programs in which they participated during their earlier years." As many as half of entering kindergarten students experienced adjustment difficulties that interfered with their learning progress according to kindergarten teachers (Pianta & Cox, 1999). Children who experience greater discontinuities, such as language, culture, and socioeconomic background, between preschool and kindergarten programs may need more supports in order to adapt to the new schooling and benefit from learning activities.

In the 1980s and 1990s, preschool teachers and parents endeavored to "prepare" children for kindergarten with school and home "readiness" activities. These efforts were intended to bridge the gap between developmentally appropriate preschool curricula and academic kindergarten curricula (Lombardi, 1992) by preparing children to perform specific academic skills and to behave in ways effective and appropriate to kindergarten. For children deemed "not ready" according to readiness screening procedures of academic and behavioral skills, parents were often advised to provide the "gift of time" through academic red shirting (extra year of preschool), transition kindergarten classes, transition first grade classes and kindergarten retention. There is some evidence that Native American children were referred to these extra year programs at a disproportionately higher rate compared with non-Native American children (Clay, 1998).

The popularity of "extra year" programs diminished after the National Association for the Education of Young Children ([NAEYC], 1995a) issued a position statement on school readiness. This document reviewed longitudinal research that showed short-term academic benefits of an extra year washed out by second or third grade and the risk of damage to self-esteem was more likely to negatively affect academic performance in the long term. Many policy makers and practitioners shifted their concern from preparing "ready" children to changing schools to be ready for all students. According to NAEYC, schools were called upon to promote universal school readiness through *schools* that are ready for all age-eligible students, by:

- Addressing the inequities in early life experiences so that all children have access to the opportunities that promote school success;
- Recognizing and supporting individual differences among children including linguistic and cultural differences; and
- Establishing reasonable and appropriate expectations of children's capabilities upon school entry.

The burden of "readiness" shifted from "ready" children to "ready" schools. According to Shore (1998) the responsibility for a successful transition was a specific responsibility of elementary schools:

- Ready schools strive for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools.
- Ready schools smooth the transition from home to school.

Continuity is the concept of similarities or differences between preschool and kindergarten. Continuity is the degree to which behaviors learned in the first environment are seen as appropriate in the next. Will adults in kindergarten respond to children in ways that are consistent with expectations established in preschool? If children suddenly find that their usual ways of responding are no longer effective and appropriate, they will experience discontinuity. American Indian children experience cultural discontinuity through disrupted reciprocal use of oral language in kindergarten consistent with academic disorientation, lower oral language skills and slower development of literacy skills (Clay, 1998). It is possible to reduce academic, language, and cultural discontinuities through family involvement and building relationships that sustain communication and coordination among stakeholders (Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens, & Sims, 2001).

Preschool and Kindergarten Transition Efforts

Preschools and schools may address the need for greater continu-

ity during transitions of AI/AN children to kindergarten with three changes: 1) coordination of the curricula of preschools and kindergartens; 2) school procedures to build relationships and maintain communication and coordination of stakeholders; and, 3) specific strategies to address the languages and cultures of AI/AN families. The following discussion reviews research related to each of these ways to change preschools and schools, increase continuity across settings, and improve adjustments and school success of AI/AN children.

Early childhood care and education programs must be high quality in order to effectively prepare young children for school success (Helburn et al., 1995). In this study, children from low-income, single-parent families who attended low-quality early childhood education programs were most vulnerable to lower academic skills in kindergarten, first and second grades. On a wider scale, in 2003 federal legislation required Head Start grantees to assess and plan curriculum around more academic content focused on specific child outcomes in literacy:

- Understands an increasingly complex and varied vocabulary.
- For non-English-speaking children, progresses in listening to and understanding English.
- Develops increasing abilities to understand and use language to communicate information, experiences, ideas, feelings, opinions, needs, questions; and for other varied purposes.
- Uses an increasingly complex and varied spoken vocabulary.
- For non-English-speaking children, progresses in speaking English.
- Associates sounds with written words, such as awareness that different words begin with the same sound.
- Recognizes a word as a unit of print, or awareness that letters are grouped to form words, and that words are separated by spaces.
- Identifies at least 10 letters of the alphabet, especially those in their own name.

- Knows that letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named.

In this way Head Start Program curricula became a closer match to the more expectations for academic skills of entering kindergarteners. More recently, some elementary schools have reached out to coordinate curricula further by housing Head Start or preschools on site. This facilitated adopting preschool and kindergarten literacy and mathematics curricula from the same company.

On the kindergarten side of transition efforts, the National Association of Elementary School Principals urged elementary principals to lead initiatives among stakeholders that advocate for quality early childhood programs associated with their schools (2005). This report specifically recommended that principals "create transition programs that ensure close contact among Head Start programs, preschool programs and public schools" (p. 9). In contrast to common assumptions, families from all cultural backgrounds, education, and income levels are known to have a positive influence on their children's school success (Ho Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Shaver & Walls, 1998). In research synthesized by Henderson and Mapp and published by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (2003), programs that strengthened connections among school, family and community had a positive impact on school achievement. When schools welcomed parents to be involved and addressed specific needs of families and the community, their transition programs were more successful in generating engagement and supporting the positive adjustment of children (Peña, 2000; Sanders & Harvey, 2000).

As AI/AN children enter kindergarten they encounter cultural discontinuities related to differences between home languages and cultures and mainstream schools. It may be the first time they are in a position to relate to non-Native American authority figures and peers without older AI/AN family or community members to mediate the experience (Vygotsky, 1978). Children who attend reservation-based Head Start classrooms often have AI/AN teachers, aids, or support staff who act as their language and cultural mediators (Moore, Beatty,

& Pérez-Méndez, 1995). For example, the events of daily life such as birth, tragedies, stresses, job changes or accomplishments of a family are more readily known, understood and accommodated in a relatively small, homogeneous AI/AN community. The language and way language is used are more readily understood by an AI/AN child in their reservation (Clay, 1998) or village classroom. When children enter kindergarten, it may be their first experience interpreting and responding to languages of non-American Indians or Alaskan Natives on their own. To the extent that families are involved in the transition of their children to kindergarten, they serve as mediators to interpret and support the daily learning activities.

Although much was known about the value of a positive adjustment to kindergarten in the 1990s, the National Education Goals Panel declared that "transition activities . . . are the exception rather than the rule in our public schools" (as cited in Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). The most common way kindergarten teachers (95%) helped children make the transition to kindergarten was to talk with the child's parent after school started. What, specifically, is known about how schools may support families as they transition to kindergarten? How do school personnel facilitate stakeholders to form positive relationships during transition? Currently, many schools have transition programs designed to ameliorate apprehensions of all families; promising features of these transition programs are now considered for AI/AN children and families.

A review of current transition practices shows many ways stakeholders seek to communicate, coordinate, and increase the quality and quantity of family involvement. They share information about school, early education, individual children, and ways to respect language and culture along with other promising transition practices.

Sharing Information about School

- Principal, teacher, teacher assistant and other support staff who warmly welcome families, but do not intimidate
- Clear, jargon-free description of the kindergarten program

- Tour of the classrooms to see teachers and children "in action"
- Tour of the school including gym, cafeteria, playground, nurse's station
- Clear answers to questions in their native language
- Expectations of the school of entering kindergarteners and their families
- Opportunity to meet and interact with other parents
- User-friendly printed information and a phone number for future questions
- Parents may help children become familiar with kindergarten teachers by reviewing their names, showing their pictures and talking about the kindergarten classroom (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 1999).

Sharing Information about Preschool Children

- Preschool curriculum and methods
- Preschool personnel prepare information about individual children: health, special needs, test results and progress reports
- Kindergarten teachers adapt curriculum with above information
- Transition staffing for children with identified disabilities in preschool
- Invite parents of preschoolers to PTO/PTA meetings
- Joint inservice professional training with preschool and kindergarten teachers
- Resource/parent center and libraries in preschools and elementary schools open to all staff and parents
- Aggregate data on assessments of individual children, classrooms and programs shared with preschool and kindergarten personnel
- Respect for the language and culture of each family
- Classroom environment shows AI/AN culture with pictures, children's literature, cultural displays
- Curriculum materials (counting objects, stories, vocabulary of

common concepts in native language—colors, numbers, animals, direction words, family relationships)
- Classroom procedures reflect AI/AN cultural values (daily greetings, display of knowledge, individual vs. group work, use of time and space)
- Classroom presenters from AI/AN communities such as dancers, musicians, cultural events, storytellers, pottery makers, weavers, tribal leaders
- ECE and kindergarten staffed with bilingual teacher aides, as needed, to serve as cultural mediators
- Preschool and kindergarten personnel trained in cross-cultural competence (Moore, Beatty & Pérez-Méndez, 1995).

Other promising practices to involve families in transition to kindergarten include:

- Spring kindergarten visits by preschool children and parents
- Home learning activities such as reading to children and discussions
- Elementary school informational meetings about kindergarten in the spring
- Preschools partner with local PTAs
- Home visits by preschool and kindergarten teachers
- Family support groups during transition to kindergarten
- Preschool teachers maintain informal contact with preschool "graduates"
- Early registration and assignment of children to kindergarten classes
- Class assignments with kindergarten teachers who taught older siblings to facilitate relationships between the teacher and family members (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 1999).

While these features of transition programs offer promise for communication and coordination among stakeholders, specific barriers have also been identified; class lists generated too late to make

contacts with children and families before school starts, summer work by kindergarten teachers is not supported, and a plan for transition to kindergarten is not available in the school district. Furthermore, a national survey by the National Center for Early Development and Learning showed that kindergarten teachers perceived that family characteristics are greater barriers to family involvement in schools that are urban, have a higher minority population, or are located in higher concentrations of poverty. The following models are included as examples of promising features likely to overcome these barriers.

Models for Transition Programs

Although preschools, Head Start programs, and elementary schools have adopted practices believed to improve the adjustments and school performance of children during their transition to kindergarten, few research-based models of transition programs are currently in use. This section describes Head Start transition requirements and the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition.

The reauthorized Head Start Act (2003) provides guidelines for local programs to implement transition practices. "Each Head Start agency shall take steps to coordinate with the local educational agency serving the community involved and with schools in which children participating in a Head Start program operated by such agency will enroll following such program, including:

1. Developing and implementing a systematic procedure for transferring, with parental consent, Head Start program records for each participating child to the school in which such child will enroll.
2. Establishing channels of communication between Head Start staff and their counterparts in the schools (including teachers, social workers, and health staff) to facilitate coordination of programs.
3. Conducting meetings involving parents, kindergarten or el-

ementary school teachers, and Head Start program teachers to discuss the educational, developmental and other needs of individual children.
4. Organizing and participating in joint transition-related training of school staff and Head Start staff.
5. Developing and implementing a family outreach and support program in cooperation with entities carrying out parental involvement efforts under title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6301 et seq.).
6. Assisting families, administrators, and teachers in enhancing educational and developmental continuity between Head Start services and elementary school classes.
7. Linking the services provided in such Head Start program with the education services provided by such local educational agency.

Each local Head Start grantee uses the above guidelines to design a specific transition plan that fits their local community. Local plans and transition efforts vary widely across Head Start programs. A key factor in the effectiveness of transition interventions is the extent to which transition plans are actually implemented (Boethel, 2004).

The most promising comprehensive theoretical model for the transition of AI/AN children from preschool to kindergarten is the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000) (see Fig. 1), which is included in Bohan-Baker's and Little's (2002) review of family involvement literature. This model shows how relationships change over time for transition stakeholders of preschool and kindergarten. As children move from preschool to kindergarten, their continuing relationships are with parents and peers if they are assigned to the same kindergarten classroom. The move to kindergarten necessitates that both children and their families disengage from the familiar relationships of preschool and establish new relationships with the teacher, peers and community members in kindergarten. If families are actively involved, they more actively support their children to form new relationships during their transi-

tion to kindergarten.

Through active involvement, family members are also in a position to mediate the adjustment of their children as they are forming new relationships in kindergarten. They may assist their children to cope with discontinuities specifically associated with language and culture. For example, mainstream kindergarten teachers use space, time and their voices in culturally determined ways that are different from practices in AI/AN families. Space and time are more flexible in AI/AN communities, responsive to the needs of children and teachers at the moment. AI/AN family members and teachers communicate with children using low voices and culturally specific gestures; mainstream teachers more typically use high pitched, louder voices to communicate and control behaviors of students (Clay, 1998). Families may be able to help their children interpret behavioral expectations at school and ways to meet their teacher's academic expectations.

For research purposes, this ecological model of transition provides a promising framework for evaluating which transition strategies most effectively impact the adjustment and school success of AI/AN children during their transition to kindergarten. For example, what intervention strategies are associated with increased family in-

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition

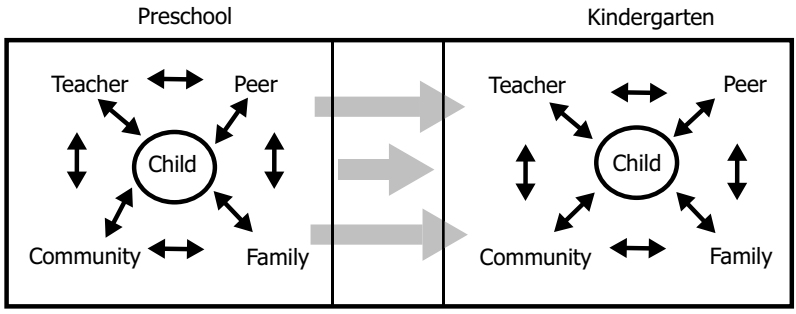

Figure 1. From Kraft-Sayre, M.E., & Pianta, R.C. (2000). *Enhancing the transition to kindergarten: Linking children, families and school.* Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, National Center for Early Development and Learning.

Diagram from Bohan-Baker, M., & Little, P.M.D. (2000). *The transition to kindergaten: A review of current research and promising practices to involve families.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. Retrieved March 19, 2006, from www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/research/bohan.html.

volvement and school success for AI/AN children? What strategies increase the involvement of tribal officials and other tribal leaders in the transition of young AI/AN children to kindergarten?

Although much has been written about the process of transition from preschool to kindergarten and promising strategies for effective transition programs, little is known about the relative effectiveness of specific strategies and no evaluations have been conducted of comprehensive models of transition. Even less is known about how the languages and cultures of AI/AN children may be associated with involvement of family members, new relationships in kindergarten, adjustments to kindergarten, and subsequent school success. For example, the Family and Child Education Program sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Schultz, Lopez, & Hochberg, 1995) could be studied using the ecological model discussed above. What specific family involvement strategies of the reservation-based Parents as Teachers program and center-based Even Start Family Literacy Program were associated with positive adjustment to kindergarten?

In light of the dearth of comprehensive research addressing research-based theoretical models of transition of children, particularly AI/AN children, to kindergarten, more research is needed to better understand effective transition practices.

Research Needs and Recommendations

According to McWayne (2004), transition research projects should be planned and implemented using these recommendations:

- Multidimensional measures
- Culturally relevant constructs and operationalizations
- Family involvement across different developmental periods
- Longitudinal designs
- Regression models that incorporate other known correlates of child outcomes
- School variables and effects on family involvement
- Empirical investigations of programs that work

The following research topics drawn from multiple sources are timely and critical to improving the transition of AI/AN children to kindergarten.

Parent Involvement

- Factors motivating parents' decisions to become involved in their children's education, how involvement influences outcomes, and how to help teachers and schools encourage involvement
- How to build relationships between home and school before concerns and tensions lead to mistrust between home and school (Pianta & Cox, 1998)
- Community organizing as a means of involving low-income and ethnically diverse parents and community members to improve low-performing schools and children's learning and development (Weiss, Henderson, Epstein, Hoover-Dempsey, & Jeynes, 2005)
- Workable alternatives for involving working parents, parents of infants, or parents experiencing high stress
- Home-based family involvement interventions
- Male involvement/outreach

Communication/coordination among stakeholders

- Home-school reciprocal dialog, parental expectations for children's academic success, notions of parents' and schools' responsibilities
- School-based programs of school, family, and community (tribal) partnership and the roles of districts and states in guiding these programs
- Cultural discontinuities in current classroom practice
- Professional development to increase cultural awareness and sensitivity
- Exchange of quality information on children's development in home and school contexts
- Expert/unilateral dictations versus reciprocal dialogue and col-

laborative action
- Bilingual staff and community paraprofessionals
- Efficacy of "culture-language mediators" to increase the quantity and quality of family involvement during transition (Barrera, 1996)
- Indirect (brochures, packets, media messages) vs. direct contact (phone calls, home visits, conversations at school) in generating family involvement

Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations are based upon the transition practices likely to facilitate a more positive transition of AI/AN children to kindergarten. They are divided into policies to improve the quality of preschools and elementary schools, structure of transition programs and professional development.

Preschools

1. Tribal Head Start Program personnel encouraged to participate in language preservation and cultural activities in preschool classrooms and to communicate these practices to stakeholders during the transition process (Drew & Glass, 2005).
2. Universal enrollment of all 3- and 4-year-old children in poverty in high quality early childhood care and education programs (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005).

Elementary Schools

1. Family Involvement programs employ paraprofessionals within the AI/AN community as language/cultural mediators (O'Connell, 1998).
2. School Principals provide leadership to establish transition teams made up of stakeholders (parents, preschool and kindergarten personnel, and tribal community members) to plan,

implement, and evaluate transition programs (Ferrandino, 2005).

Structure of Transition Programs

1. Frequent direct stakeholder contact, especially children, family members and kindergarten teachers
2. Alignment of curriculum and program features of preschool and kindergarten
3. Timely communication/coordination between preschool and kindergarten programs; provide families with kindergarten information in the spring in order to better prepare their child to participate in kindergarten (Pacheco, Tullis, Everest, Baker, & Sutherland, 2004).
4. Recruit and support educators in preschool and kindergarten who are trained in languages other than English—multilingual and multicultural backgrounds (NAEYC, 1995b).

Professional Development

Elementary principals and preschool administrators should require joint professional development training for kindergarten and preschool classroom personnel (NAEYC, 1995b; Pacheco, Tullis, Baker, & Sutherland, 2004) that includes the following topics:

- Cultural awareness and sensitivity in areas of culture, language, and diversity to achieve cross-cultural communication and competence, including how to use self-reflection tools to assess cultural competence (Moore, Beatty, & Pérez-Méndez, 1995).
- Communication patterns differ among families and teachers from different language and cultural backgrounds (Phillips, 1992).
- Communication patterns of American Indian kindergarteners are disrupted in kindergarten compared with preschool with peers and adults, evidence of cultural discontinuity (Clay, 1998).

- Inherent cultural conflicts between AI/AN tribal communities and mainstream schooling (Peshkin, 1997).

Summary

AI/AN children experience cultural and language discontinuities as they transition from preschool to kindergarten. Family members who are involved in the transition process may serve as cultural mediators as their children move from preschool to kindergarten. Using the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, the promising transition strategies may be the subject of research to better understand and improve the transition of AI/AN, the beginning of a positive adjustment to kindergarten and school success.

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American Indian and Alaska Native School Readiness

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THE DEBATE OVER the concept of school readiness has been ongoing for over a century (Kagan, 1990). However, in the past decade, the debate has become even more intense due to the passage of Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994. The National Education Goals panel identified a framework to improve American education and better support students' learning. The first goal focused on school readiness: "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (Section 102). By including school readiness as a part of Goals 2000, lawmakers acknowledged that many American children did not enter school ready and that educators needed to do something to rectify this situation. But, what to do and how to do it are questions still begging to be answered. Other questions arise as well. Does the child have to come to school ready to learn? Should the school be ready for the child? Is there a difference in being ready to learn and being ready for school? What role should the family and community play? Whose responsibility is it to make a child ready for school?

In American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities, the situation becomes even more complicated—should families and communities work together to promote school readiness? In this case, it will be important to remember the history of AI/AN educational experiences with mainstream (i.e., White European) education, where the goal was to *civilize* and *Christianize* the Indian, and to remove young Native children from their communities in order to *educate* them (Adams, 1995). Does promoting school readiness then mean moving away from traditional tribal child rearing practices? What happens when current mainstream developmentally appropriate practices conflict with AI/AN traditions and culture?

Unfortunately, the majority of the aforementioned questions do not have an answer. They simply have yet to be explored. President

Clinton signed Executive Order 13096 on AI/AN education in 1998. This action placed greater emphasis on the need for research about AI/AN education as a whole, but specifically identified AI/AN early childhood education as an area needing further exploration. The purpose of the research agenda resulting from Executive Order 13096, completed in 2001, was to "summarize the current state of research and describe the research topics that should be given the highest priority" (Strang & von Glatz, 2001, p. 1). The purpose of this paper then, is to attempt to answer the following questions in the AI/AN Education Research Agenda:

1. How must early childhood programs be structured so that they foster the fundamental skills that children are expected to have when they enter school?
2. How effective are early childhood programs and activities for AI/AN children in promoting readiness for school?

First, a brief overview of school readiness will be presented. Included in this section will be a general discussion of the effectiveness of early childhood programs in preparing young children for school. Second, a possible way to structure early childhood programs so that they foster skill development in young AI/AN children is presented. Third, the effectiveness of early childhood programs in promoting school readiness among AI/AN young children is examined. Finally, the paper ends with implications for future research and suggestions for investigation.

School Readiness

Researchers, educators, and policymakers continually attempt to define school readiness (see, for example: Bruner & Copeman, 2003; Crnic & Lamberty, 1994; Gredler, 1992; Kagan, 1990, 1994; Katz, 1991; Lewit & Baker, 1995; Maeroff, 2003; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995; National Association of State Boards of Education, 1991; Pianta & LaParo, 2003; Shore, 1998).

However, the search for one universally accepted definition continues because an acceptable definition in one community does not work in another. In the first 5 years of the new century, early childhood educators focused on incorporating language, literacy, and numeracy skills into their instructional practices so that children will be academically ready to enter school. Early childhood programs are to teach children the foundational skills that would promote success in school and prepare children to enter kindergarten. However, preparing children for school is not a sole responsibility of early childhood educators or programs (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1991). Teachers in elementary schools, families, and communities also play an important role in preparing children for school.

The concept of school readiness is difficult to define within the current educational context; nationally recognized standards explicitly stating the concepts and skills that young children must acquire within their first 4 years to prepare for school do not exist. Additionally, there is not a nationally recognized assessment to determine whether children are ready for school. Being ready for school in one school district, state, or tribe may be extremely different from another school district, state, or tribe. Simply stated, expectations differ across the nation.

Although a universal definition for school readiness has not been established, several entities have used specific guidelines to assess the school readiness of the students in their programs. Ten years ago, the National Association for the Education of Young Children ([NAEYC], 1995) released a position statement regarding school readiness. NAEYC recognized children's developmental differences; specifically social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development as important indicators of school readiness. Therefore, school readiness is a compilation of all of the areas in which educators and parents feel are necessary to promote positive learning experiences that translate to successful academic achievement within the school context. School readiness consists of multiple components that are affected by numerous factors: age, health and maturity of the child, family involvement, and social competence, just to name a few. Children who

are involved in stimulating learning experiences related to language, literacy, and numeracy prior to entering kindergarten ought to have a knowledge base on which to build.

NAEYC (1995) posited that several factors influence the child and family's readiness for school: life experiences or limited life experience, variations in children's developmental processes, and the level of school expectations for children as they enter school. The variability of children's learning experiences as well as cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development all play a role in children's success in school. Parents and early childhood educators therefore, are to provide children with experiences that will help them succeed within their own learning capacity.

In addition, NAEYC (1995) contended that excuses related to the lack of school readiness (single parent families, lack of materials in the home, minimal health care, education levels of parents, etc.) are no longer acceptable. If the child is not ready for school, then it is the school's responsibility to ready the child. Therefore, early childhood education programs do have a strong role to play in the preparation of young children for school, but family and community members have an equally important role to play as well.

Pianta and LaParo (2003) described the relationships and interactions that a child engages in as significant to their academic achievement. For example, children should be cared for by devoted adults as well as live in a safe environment that follows routines and contains a vast array of stimulating materials. Maeroff (2003) provided examples of how parents or caregivers can offer experiences that encourage learning. For example, literacy materials, such as books, should be displayed conveniently for children's use and read frequently. Computers and field trips, which include trips to the library or museum, can provide children with experiences that promote academic success and broaden their life experiences.

Currently, reform efforts exist to provide young children with the experiences necessary to increase academic achievement and prevent learning difficulties. One of these efforts is the federal Good Start, Grow Smart Initiative (GSGS), begun in 2002. The GSGS Initiative

is to ensure that young children possess the skills needed to be successful when they enter school. GSGS asked states to create content standards related to school readiness that align with state kindergarten through 12th grade standards. These content standards, known as Early Learning Guidelines (ELGs), in development at this time writing, will provide concrete, measurable support for early childhood programs to teach children what they need to know in an effort to foster a seamless transition to kindergarten. ELGs will address early literacy, language, prereading, and mathematics.

More recently, the Department of Health and Human Services (2004) published a booklet, The Tribal Guide to the Good Start, Grow Smart Early Learning Initiative. This booklet provided an explanation of GSGS and described the implications of GSGS for AI/AN communities. Due to sovereignty, AI/AN communities are encouraged to follow their state ELGs but are not required to do so. AI/AN communities are also encouraged to design high-quality learning experiences for their young children so that they are better prepared for school. One important factor to consider in the development of ELGs is that only three states have tribal representation on the committees that draft the ELGs.

Many states are attempting to create consistency within early childhood programs as well as between these programs and kindergarten. Maeroff (2003) described a study in which data were collected in the state of Maryland that used an assessment tool to evaluate children's readiness to enter kindergarten. In 2002, just over half of all children were "ready for what awaited them" (p. 3). Most children who were not prepared to learn the concepts and skills required in kindergarten were from low socioeconomic homes in which few books or learning experiences were available. In fact, the children who entered kindergarten lacking the skills and experiences needed to succeed academically were found to have reading scores that were 60% lower than children from higher socioeconomic status.

Additional problems have been identified in early childhood settings, such as the quality of the learning experiences and instruction that children receive. According to Maeroff (2003), the Committee

for Economic Development criticized early childhood programs' lack of appropriate learning experiences provided to children. Pianta (as cited in Maeroff, 2003) believed that early childhood teachers do not build academic relationships with young children through discussions and inquiry-based activities. Instead, children learn basic skills in isolation within a passive learning context.

Young children entering early childhood programs are greatly affected by the type of learning experiences, family support, and teacher they encounter. Additionally, children's home environments tend to be predictive of their performance in school. The implications surrounding young children and school readiness are clear. The question now becomes, can young children be expected to perform successfully upon entering school when standards are continuously becoming more rigorous; when instruction is inconsistent; and when their learning experiences, developmental levels, cultures, and home environments differs greatly.

Early Childhood Programs' Structure To Foster Skill Development

The State Early Childhood Policy Technical Assistance Network (SECPTAN), developed to assist policy makers in 17 states access information about effective policies and practices in the area of early childhood education, identified 6 domains of school readiness. These six domains correlate to the NAEYC standards and to the categories associated with the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B) and Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) baseline data sets. The identified 6 domains include health and physical development; emotional well-being and social competence; approaches to learning, language development/communication skills, cognition and general knowledge; and other miscellaneous mathematics and scientific thinking (Bruner & Copeman, 2003).

These domains can be used to examine the parameters for the development of early childhood education programs that will foster

the fundamental skills AI/AN children are expected to have when they enter school. Regardless of the populations being served, the 5 general domains for school readiness and the following indicators can be used to effectively structure early childhood programs that will ensure that children are ready to learn when they begin school.

Although these indicators offer a strong foundation for developing an effective early childhood program and are intended to cultivate school readiness, the position statement of the NAEYC (1995) regarding the critical factors associated with establishing a universal design for school readiness must be acknowledged. NAEYC posited that universal school readiness programs recognize and support children as individuals who have various linguistic and cultural differences and needs. The U.S. Administration for Children & Families (n. d.) reported that much of the research that has been associated with the AI/AN children has not always provided benefits for them. The report indicates that AI/AN children have unique learning styles, develop language skills, and are affected by health matters that are different from other races or ethnicities. AI/AN children not only differ from other races or ethnicities, but they also differ from other tribes across the United States. Therefore, as with the NAEYC (1995) position statement, programs and assessments which address the school readiness of AI/AN children must also address the cultural differences of these children. Children who are English language learners, minorities, or come from low-income families, tend to have a culture gap to bridge when entering school (Shore, 1998). When a difference exists between the culture of the school—regardless of grade level—and the culture of the home, teachers need to be cautious so that they do not misinterpret children's abilities or actions (Delpit, 1995).

Early Childhood Programs' Effectiveness In Promoting School Readiness

Knowing what research has shown about the many ways that school readiness can be defined and the lack of national standards

to assess the readiness of all prekindergarten children, regardless of race or ethnicity, the question then becomes how can the effectiveness of early childhood education programs and activities for AI/AN children be measured in order to promote school readiness, especially in the rural context. Assessment of program effectiveness is even more difficult in rural communities, because early childhood practitioners in rural America tend to have less opportunity for continuing professional development and children are more likely to be in informal care arrangements that are not licensed or regulated. Currently, there is no published research to answer the question of how to measure the effectiveness of early childhood programs in the rural setting. However, in an attempt to begin to answer this question, an examination of ECLS-K and ECLS-B baseline data by the National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives ([Rural Early Childhood], 2005) can be used to look for variations in the selected indicators related to child and family health, socioeconomic status of children, and children's readiness for school across all ethnic groups in the cohorts. This data can then be used to understand the specific needs of AI/AN children in relation to their school readiness.

According to the National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives (2005) analysis of the ECLS-B and ECLS-K regarding previously identified indicators of health, socioeconomic status, and school readiness, AI/AN children tend to be significantly different from their Caucasian, African American, and Hispanic counterparts. This analysis does not differentiate between rurality, family poverty, or parental education as key factors in the disparities between ethnic groups.

Upon examination of this data, it is evident that extreme variations exist among people of all ethnicities. Nonetheless, rural AI/AN indicators are significantly different. For example, most indicators are almost double or less than half of the level of non-rural AI/AN children. Strang, von Glatz, and Hammer (2002) reported that AI/AN children do not seem to be as prepared to begin school as compared to children of other racial or ethnic groups. The ECLS-B and ECLS-K data sets provide further evidence to support their conclusion. Based

on this data, it would seem that early childhood education programs and activities are not that effective in preparing rural AI/AN young children for school. At this point, it will be important to remember the difference between being ready for school and ready to learn. AI/AN children may engage in learning activities that are not measurable or valued in a mainstream educational setting.

The ECLS-B and ECLS-K baseline data also highlight an interesting child care phenomena in AI/AN settings, which is the percentage of rural AI/AN children not participating in a center-based child care program. Almost half of rural AI/AN babies were in no care outside the home (44.2%). A higher percentage of rural AI/AN babies (42.5%) received care by a relative (not a parent) than did rural White babies (26.9%) or rural Hispanic babies (13.9%). Additionally, only 5.1% of rural AI/AN babies were cared for by a non-relative. Further, rural AI/AN children (10.6%) in the ECLS-K were far less likely than rural White children (35.3%) to have attended a center-based prekindergarten program.

Approximately 560 federally recognized Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages exist in the United States today. Of these, approximately 500 receive Child Care Development Funds (CCDF) directly or through a consortium to support their early childhood education endeavors (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2004). As of December 2001, the AI/AN Program Branch of Head Start reported funding 145 Head Start and 40 Early Head Start programs and serving over 23,000 AI/AN children. Of these children, 3,400 speak an AI language or language other than English or Spanish in their homes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 2003). Both CCDF and Head Start funds can be used to provide child care through centers or homes. In the reports that tribes and villages must submit to CCDF and Head Start for funding, they must identify how the monies are being spent, both in centers or homes and on the activities being provided. The reports are approved, the funds are distributed to tribes and villages, and then the services are provided. However, plans can change, reports

can change, and services can change, thus, providing a very limited understanding of what actually happens in tribal child care settings (L. Kills Crow, personal communication, Jan. 12, 2005). The early child care practices used by the tribes who do not access federal funds have not been publicly identified.

Given the three factors of (a) the inexistence of a universal definition of school readiness, (b) a limited reporting system on information related to early child care practices from tribes receiving federal funding, and (c) the lack of information on early child care practices by other tribes, it is not possible to present an accurate assessment on the state of school readiness or the effectiveness of early childhood education programs for AI/AN children at this time. Research in these areas is needed to provide the data needed for effective decisions to be made.

Implications for Future Research

After attempting to answer questions regarding how early childhood programs are to be structured so that they foster the fundamental skills that children are expected to have when they enter school and how effective are early childhood programs and activities for AI/AN children in promoting readiness for school, it would seem that there is more unknown about the structure and effectiveness of early childhood programs regarding school readiness for AI/AN young children than is known. This dearth of accurate data presents a variety of options for future research. Possible topics for investigation are presented below.

1. How is school readiness defined within AI/AN communities? Does school readiness mean the same thing for all tribes and villages? How can that definition be incorporated into mainstream educational settings to show that AI/AN children enter school ready to learn?
2. Longitudinal data focusing on all AI/AN children (not just on the 10-12% in Bureau of Indian Affairs contract and/or

grant schools or Tribally-controlled schools) needs to be collected to determine the type and effectiveness of their early care experience and subsequent success in school.

3. Surveys of AI/AN early childhood programs and providers could be administered to determine what educational activities are being undertaken to prepare young AI/AN children for school. In addition, information regarding teacher attrition, teacher education levels, family involvement, health care and other services available to AI/AN children could be included to help policy-makers, educators, and researchers understand what happens in tribal child care settings.
4. In what ways do mainstream developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and traditional child rearing practices conflict? Is it possible to bridge these two concepts so that AI/AN children benefit from DAP and traditional child rearing practices? How?
5. Are the early childhood education services available to AI//AN children different depending on where they live (i.e., on or off a reservation)? What services are available to AI/AN children who live on a reservation? What services are available to AI/AN children who live off of a reservation in a town or city? Are the unique characteristics of AI/AN children considered when services are provided to them?
6. In what ways are AI/AN families involved in the early education of their young children? In what ways can AI/AN families be supported so that they play an active role in the education of their children?

This list of possible research topics is only a beginning; there are many topics in need of exploration in regard to AI/AN early education, care, and development. The scarcity of research surrounding AI/AN early childhood education has been already been well-documented. Regardless of the research project undertaken, the research must be conducted with tribes and villages, not on them. Additionally, the research must focus on success and respect tribal practices and

culture (Marks, Moyer, Roche, & Graham, 2003; Strang & von Glatz, 2001; Strang, von Glatz, & Hammer, 2002).

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Young American Indian/Alaskan Native Children with Disabilities: Implications for Policy, Research, and Practice

Susan C. Faircloth, Ph.D.

Introduction

After much dialogue and debate regarding early childhood education among American Indians and Alaskan Natives, I was charged by the National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives and the Pennsylvania State University's Center for Rural Education and Communities and the American Indian Leadership Program to answer two questions:

1. How is the incidence of disabilities among infant and preschool-age American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children related to rural (reservation and non-reservation), suburban, small town, large city, etc. residence?
2. How can early childhood programs accommodate AI/AN children with disabilities?

Given my own research and interests in the education of AI/AN children with or at-risk of developing a disability, I was eager to undertake this charge. However, after many hours of research and reading, I find myself facing a lack of published data to allow me to effectively answer these questions.

Although AI/AN students are disproportionately represented in special education programs in public and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) funded or operated schools (see e.g., Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2000), little is known about the status of these children prior to their entry into the educational system as well as their early years within this system. Given this lack of published data, I will use this venue as an opportunity to review what we do know about the status of AI/AN children with disabilities and to facilitate a dialogue around what we need to know about these children, particularly those from

birth to age 5. In doing so, I will provide a demographic profile of young American Indians and Alaskan Natives with disabilities, define Early Intervention services, identify and explore factors that place American Indian/Alaskan Native children at risk for developing or acquiring disabling conditions, explore ways in which early childhood programs may accommodate AI/AN children with disabilities, and briefly address the impact of disability across the lifespan. I will end with implications for policy, research, and practice and suggestions for next steps to address the issues and concerns identified, not only in this paper, but also as a result of the collective body of papers and discussion presented at this forum.

Demographic Profile of Americans/Alaskan Natives with Disabilities

Two thousand six hundred and thirty four AI/AN children ages birth to 2 were served under Part C of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) during the 2003-2004 school year. In total, 2.46% of AI/AN children ages birth to 2 received early intervention services, compared to 2.26% of Asian/Pacific Islanders, 2.16% of Blacks, 1.99% of Hispanics, and 2.34% of Whites. In addition, 9 states or territories, including California, Hawaii, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, West Virginia, and Guam, reported the number of AI/AN infants and toddlers, ages birth to 2, identified as at risk of developing a disability. This number totaled 176. Examples of early intervention services provided include: assistive technology; audiology; family training; health, medical, nursing, and nutrition services; occupational and physical therapy; psychological services; respite care; social work services; special instruction; speech and language; transportation; vision services; and other services not specified. During the 2002-2003 school year, AI/AN infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families were served in the following settings: developmental delay programs, typically developing programs, home, hospitals (inpatient services), residential facilities, service provider locations, and other settings (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, n.d.).

Eight thousand eight hundred and forty eight AI/AN children ages 3-5 were served under Part B of IDEA during the 2003-2004 school year (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, n.d.). In total, 8% of AI/AN children ages 3-5 received early intervention services, compared with 3.6% of Asian/Pacific Islanders, 5.94% of Blacks, 4.26% of Hispanics, and 6.37% of Whites. Of these, the largest number were served under the category of developmental delay (4,113) followed by speech or language impairments (3,897), mental retardation (123), autism (122), other health impairments (114), specific learning disabilities (113), multiple disabilities (93), hearing impairments (84), orthopedic impairments (84), visual impairments (45), emotional disturbance (44), traumatic brain injury (12), and deaf-blindness (4).

In both cases described above, ages birth to 2 and ages 3 to 5, a higher percentage of AI/AN children received early intervention services compared to Asian/Pacific Islanders, Blacks, and Hispanics.

Early Intervention Services Defined

Early intervention is defined in IDEA (20 USC§632) as developmental services that are:

- provided under public supervision
- provided at no cost except where federal or state law provides for a system of payments by families
- designed to meet the developmental needs of an infant or toddler with a disability in any one or more of the following areas:
    - physical development
    - cognitive development
    - communication development
    - social or emotional development
    - adaptive development
- to the maximum extent appropriate, [early intervention services]

are provided in natural environments, including the home, and community settings in which children without disabilities participate
- are provided in conformity with an individualized family service plan

Early intervention services include (20USC§631(4)(E)(i-xiv):

- Family training, counseling, and home visits
- Special instruction
- Speech-language pathology and audiology services
- Occupational therapy
- Physical therapy
- Psychological services
- Service coordination services
- Medical services (diagnostic/evaluation purposes)
- Early identification, screening, and assessment services
- Health services necessary to enable the infant or toddler to benefit from the other early intervention services
- Social work services
- Vision services
- Assistive technology devices/services
- Necessary transportation and related costs

In legislating early intervention services, Congress identified the following needs (20 USC§ 631):

- To enhance the development of infants and toddlers with disabilities and to minimize the risk of developmental delay
- To reduce educational costs by reducing need for special education and related services
- To minimize the likelihood of institutionalization and to maximize potential for independent living
- To enhance the capacity of families to meet the special education needs of their infants and toddlers

- To enhance the capacity of state and local agencies and service providers to meet the needs of historically underserved populations

Children with disabilities who qualify for special education programs and services transition from early intervention to school age services at age 3 and are eligible for such services, unless deemed otherwise, until the age of 21. During the 2000-2001 school year, approximately 47.2 million students were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Of these, approximately 5.8 million students, ages 6-21, were served by special education programs and services. Although American Indians and Alaskan Natives accounted for slightly more than 1% of the total school age population, they accounted for nearly 1.5% of all students in special education. Nearly 15% of the approximately 600,000 AI/AN students attending U.S. public schools were served by special education programs and services (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). They were more likely to be placed in special education than students from all other racial or ethnic minority groups except African Americans. In comparison, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and tribal schools served approximately 48,000 AI/AN students during the 2000-2001 school year. Of these, approximately 17% or slightly more than 8,000 AI/AN students were in special education programs (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2002).

Identifying Factors that Place American Indian/Alaskan Native Students at Risk for Developing or Acquiring Disabling Conditions

Regardless of the location (e.g., rural, urban, suburban, etc.) in which American Indian and Alaskan Native children live, they tend to be disproportionately affected by health problems including speech and language impairments, respiratory tract infections, fetal alcohol syndrome due to maternal use/abuse of alcohol, diabetes, and obesity (Marks, Moyer, Roche, & Graham, 2003). Each of these factors may increase children's risk of developing or acquiring a disability which

may result in eligibility for special education programs and services. These conditions may be related to socioeconomic and environmental factors such as poverty, smoking, poor nutrition, lack of adequate healthcare, stress, drug and alcohol use and abuse, recurrent otitis media[1] or middle ear infection, poor diet and nutrition, etc.

In addition to physical health, mental health has been cited as "… the largest unmet health need for Indian people today" (Neligh, 1990, as cited in Marks et al., 2003). Although there is conflicting data regarding the incidence of mental illnesses and other related disorders among American Indian/Alaskan Native children, there is some evidence to suggest that these children are more susceptible, than their peers, to depression, abuse, and neglect, factors that are thought to be correlated to behavioral problems, psychiatric symptoms, and risk-taking behavior (Marks et al.).

Although no studies were identified that specifically addressed similarities or differences in the incidence of disability among American Indian/Alaskan Native young children based on location of residence, one study did examine differences in perinatal and infant health among rural and urban American Indians and Alaskan Natives (Baldwin et al., 2002). The authors found that rural mothers received less adequate prenatal healthcare than did those in urban areas. They suggest that this may be related to factors such as distance to and from health services, limited transportation, and greater distances from health services than those located in or near urban areas, etc. that interfere with women's receipt of prenatal care. The authors also found that "…urban mothers were more likely to be unmarried, to be having their first child, and to be smokers…[while] rural mothers were more likely to have preexisting medical conditions, complications of pregnancy, and a prior preterm or small-for gestational-age infant" (Baldwin et al., 2002) and that the incidence of low-birth weight was approximately 10% higher among urban AI/AN mothers than those in rural areas.

[1] Shriberg, Flipsen, Thielke, Kwiatkowski, Kertoy, Katcher, et al. (2000) (cited in Hammer & Demmert, 2003) found a connection between recurrent bouts of otitis media and increased risk for speech disorders among American Indian children.

Other factors that contribute to poor health care and outcomes among American Indians and Alaskan Natives include: lack of financial resources, cultural barriers, suspicion of health care providers, and poor sanitary conditions (The Health Care Challenge, 1999, as cited in Office of Minority Health, n.d.). These findings are important given that health-related factors may place children at risk of developing or acquiring disabilities or other impairments later in life.

How Can Early Childhood Programs Accommodate AI/AN Children with Disabilities?

A synthesis of research (Marks et al, 2003) in the area of early childhood education and American Indians/Alaskan Natives identified the following issues or concerns:

1. Lack of culturally appropriate curricula and practices
2. The need to emphasize the development and use of language and literacy
3. The need for improved teacher training and professional development
4. The need for increased parent involvement
5. Improvement of assessment tools and practices
6. The need to address the physical health and well being, as well as the mental health, of young AI/AN children

Although this is not an exhaustive list, it underscores the need to develop and implement a comprehensive set of services for young AI/AN children regardless of their disability status that is cognizant, foremost, of the linguistic and cultural diversity of these children and the communities in which they live. According to Paul (1992), "As society moves forward in its efforts to improve conditions for early childhood care and education, deeper issues must be considered by Native Americans. Programs for young Native children need to be designed within the context of each child's culture, home language, and family. This cannot be done without community input and support"

(p. 39). Further, Paul (pp. 40-41) suggests the following strategies for the provision of successful early childhood care and education:

- Train more Native teachers and administrators through incentives to enter the field of education and to use alternative certification procedures.
- Include cultural awareness courses in teacher training.
- Hire Native aides trained in child development principles a language and culture models.
- Increase Head Start availability for all who wish to participate.
- Establish a culturally based curriculum relevant to the local community.
- Promote, maintain, and encourage Native language use.

As illustrated, effective early childhood programs are essential, not only for AI/AN children with or at risk of disabilities, but for all AI/AN children. This is underscored by findings (e.g. Beiser & Attneave, 1982, as cited in Fisher, Bacon, & Storck, 1998) that suggest that AI/AN children tend to do well in school during their early childhood years. However, marked differences become evident during the adolescent years. The question, then, is what happens to the child and/or the educational system during the adolescent years and how can we use this knowledge to retool educational programs so that AI/AN continue to fare well in the educational system?

Impact of Disability Across the Lifespan

Although the focus of this paper is on early childhood education for AI/AN children with disabilities, it is important to acknowledge that the existence of a disability has implications throughout one's entire life span. Current reports indicate that 22%, or 550,000, American Indians and Alaskan Natives report having one or more disabilities, compared with 20% of all racial groups, 20% of Whites, 20% of Blacks, 15% of Hispanics, and 10% of Asians (National Council on Disability, 2003). The most frequently occurring disabilities among

AI/ANs include (National Council on Disability, 2003):

- Spinal cord injuries
- Complications of diabetes
- Blindness
- Mobility impairments
- Traumatic brain injuries
- Deafness or hardness of hearing
- Orthopedic impairments
- Anthralgia (joint pain)
- Emotional or mental heath conditions
- Learning disabilities
- Alcoholism or drug related dependencies

Some of the barriers and challenges faced by AI/ANs with disabilities include (National Council on Disability, 2003):

- Attitudes and perceptions
- Lack of awareness
- Lack of uniformity/coordination of services among federal, state, and tribal governments and other service providers
- Lack of public transportation in rural and remote areas which also has implications for independent living and mobility
- Limited infrastructure among rural communities (e.g. lack of wheelchair accessible buildings, sidewalks, ramps, etc.)
- Limited access to tribal and federal offices, as well as housing and other physical structures
- Difficulty navigating the educational system
- Need for personal care assistance

Implications for Policy, Research, and Practice

As illustrated, the education of AI/AN children with disabilities impacts and is impacted by policy, research, and practice at the tribal/local, state, and federal levels. To effectively serve this population, we

must examine what the current landscape looks like in terms of the incidence and prevalence of disability among American Indian and Alaskan Native communities. This will provide data that will allow us to better understand which categories of disability are most prevalent and then to create, or in some cases, finetune existing services that target these particular disabilities. For example, we know that nationally, a problem exists with the high incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome that is related to maternal use and abuse of alcohol during pregnancy. However, we do not know the extent to which this condition is found among all AI/AN communities, or if the incidence rate is higher among certain tribes, and/or those tribal people residing in rural versus urban areas.

Nationally, we must advocate for the inclusion of American Indians and Alaskan Natives in sufficient numbers in large-scale research studies to enable valid and reliable analysis of data. It is also recommended that the Indian Health Service (IHS) collect and analyze national data comparing maternal and infant health status among all Native groups served by IHS facilities as well as tribal health care providers (Baldwin et al, 2002). At present, no such data were available.

As demonstrated by the lack of a comprehensive body of research and publications regarding the education of young American Indian and Alaskan Native children with disabilities, it is no longer acceptable to argue that American Indians and Alaskan Natives are an insufficient percentage of the overall population, who do not warrant statistical analysis. As we know, the current administration, and in large part the education community, heralds the use of evidence-based, empirical research. Without such research, we can not adequately argue for the development and implementation of appropriate services, nor can we accurately portray the current status of this population. This argument is bolstered by the Administration for Children and Families (Marks et al, 2003):

AI/AN children have not always been the direct beneficiaries of knowledge that has been gained through research. Very little evidence has been systematically gathered from Head Start programs that serve

these children. To date, understanding the differences across and within AI-AN populations has remained largely outside the body of knowledge derived from systematic, large-scale research on early childhood development. To the extent that studies have been conducted, they often are ethnographic or case studies, which, although rich with detail and understanding, may be limited in their generalizability and are not necessarily the best method for producing knowledge that can be turned into strategies to better serve American Indian and Alaska Native children.

There is a strong consensus that American Indian and Alaska Native children bring unique aspects of their culture and background into Head Start. Based on studies and practitioners' observations, it is likely that many American Indian and Alaska Native children have learning approaches, develop language skills, exhibit behavioral characteristics, and are affected by health matters in ways that are different from those of other racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, American Indian and Alaska Native children differ from each other across tribal and ancestral affiliations and across the cultural norms that affect their families and the types of environments in which they live. Any research efforts must take into account the unique cultural characteristics of the children and families served as well as the goals and directions of the local communities in which they live.

Although AI/AN children are often absent from data analysis and reporting, it is important to note that they are included in existing large scale data sets compiled at the national level, such as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Studies (ECLS-B and K). We need to ask what can we learn from such data sets and how can we facilitate the systematic analysis and publication of these data? What we do know is that preliminary analyses of these data indicate differences in early childhood disability status based on location. For example, in one study, researchers found that rural students were 60% more likely to be placed in special education in kindergarten than their peers in other settings (National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives, 2005). Additional informal analysis shows that young American Indian students are disproportionately represented in

special education programs and services in public schools.[2] Although this is a starting point, this database again does not include a large sample of American Indians thereby limiting the generalizability, reliability, and validity of these data. However, one of the exciting things about this database is the potential to recommend to the National Center for Education Statistics or other research groups skilled in large-scale quantitative data collection and analysis, that this study be replicated solely with American Indians and Alaskan Natives in order to provide more useful data.

In addition to quantitative analysis using large-scale data sets, there are a number of other questions that can be addressed using more qualitatively based methods of research. Questions to consider include:

- What is the current status of early childhood education among rural American Indian/Alaskan Native children with or at risk of developing disabilities? (e.g., How many eligible children? What are the most prevalent conditions? Are these children located in rural or urban areas?)
- What types of services are provided? What types of training and professional development are available for early intervention service providers? To what extent do available services meet the unique cultural and linguistic characteristics of American Indian and Alaskan Native children, their families, communities, etc.?
- Is there a correlation between residence (e.g., rural, urban, suburban, etc.) and the incidence of disability? If so, why? How does location of residence impact access to and provision of early intervention, as well as preventive services for young AI/AN children who have or are at-risk of developing a disability?
- What are the current best practices in the field of early childhood education as it relates to the education and care of young

[2] The author has received a small grant from The Pennsylvania State University's Children Youth and Family's Consortium to analyze the data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study to factors that place American Indian children at risk for receiving special education programs and services.

American Indian and Alaskan Native children with disabilities?

- Does the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act recognize the role of language and culture in the development and implementation of Individualized Family Services Plans and Individualized Education Plans? If so, how? If not, what can we do to ensure that such provisions are mandated and implemented?
- Are there differences in the provision of early intervention services in rural versus urban areas? If so, what? Why?
- What is the role of tribal governments in providing early intervention services?
- What is the role of the Indian Health Service as well as tribal health care programs in providing services to AI/AN children with disabilities?
- What is the role of Head Start, Early Head Start, Family and Child Education programs (FACE) and BABY FACE programs in the provision of early intervention services?
- What is being done to ensure the seamless transition of AI/AN children from early intervention services to school age special education services? What needs to be done to improve this transition?
- What happens to the provision of services among transitory children who migrate between rural and urban areas? How can we facilitate the seamless provision of services?
- How can early intervention programs interpret and operationalize the definition of parents to facilitate extended family and community involvement in the special education process?
- What can school leaders do to facilitate the seamless provision of early intervention services? Are school leaders adequately prepared to assume responsibility of school-based early intervention services?
- Are definitions of disability culturally bound?[3] Do Native communities view disability in the same way educators and other service providers do? What implications do these differences or similarities have for the provision of early intervention services?

- How can we make the assessment and identification process more culturally appropriate and relevant for use among young American Indian and Alaskan Native children?

Regardless of what questions are asked or how the data are collected and analyzed, we must be careful to avoid the frequently occurring disconnect between research and practice.

In addition to the lack of research, an ongoing area of concern is the use of standardized tests in the assessment of AI/AN students. This practice has been linked to the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse children, including AI/ANs, in special education programs and services (Hammer & Demmert, 2003). Dynamic assessment, which is a comprehensive approach to assessment that takes into account linguistic and cultural diversity, has been suggested as an alternative or compliment to standardized testing (Ukrainetz, Harpell, Walsh & Coyle, 2000, as cited in Hammer & Demmert, 2003). Banks (1997) has also studied the perceptions of caregivers and professionals regarding assessment of American Indian/Alaskan Native families. Her research found a disconnection between current "best practices" in assessment and actual practices in the field.

Another ongoing concern is the need to develop and implement effective means of preparing, recruiting, and retaining highly qualified cadres of Native special educators (e.g., early intervention specialists, speech and language therapists, etc.) as well as early childhood educators and care providers. Current models such as the one at Northern Arizona University Reaching American Indian Special/Elementary Educators (RAISE) (see http://coe.nau.edu) are instructive as to how we can grow our own and provide incentives for them to work in their own communities upon earning their degrees. Just as training

[3] For example, Beiser, Dion & Gotowiec (2000, p. 435) (as cited in Demmert & Hammer, 2003) found that " 'there is nothing culture-bound about the symptoms of either hyperactivity or attention-deficit.' " However they recommended that researchers examine ways in which " cultural context may affect the response of parents and teachers to these potentially long-lasting problems of childhood."

of staff is important, parents also need to be made aware of and encouraged to access all available early intervention/early childhood services for AI/AN children with disabilities. One way to facilitate this is the development and implementation of parent training and information centers such as the Native American Families Together Parent Center in Moscow, Idaho, which is specifically designed to serve American Indian and Alaskan Native parents and families (see http://coe.nau.edu). This can serve as a valuable resource to all involved in the education of young AI/AN children with disabilities.

Next Steps: Where Do We Go From Here?

Although the questions we posed in the introduction are not fully answered, the most important lesson, I believe, gained from this discussion is the need to not only study and examine the current state of the education of young AI/AN children with disabilities, but to emerge from this forum, with a renewed commitment and plan of action to identify, develop, and/or implement effective practices that will ensure that our children, regardless of disability status, receive the most effective educational and supportive services, including the appropriate use of tribal languages and cultures. Such work requires that we, as a community of Native practitioners and researchers, and local, tribal, state and federal governments, collaborate specifically, as this is our focus, with rural AI/AN communities to address the issues outlined not only in this paper, but as a collective result of this forum. This type of approach recognizes the fact that the education of young AI/AN children, particularly those with or at-risk of developing a disability, cannot be adequately provided in isolation. Their education is, in fact, impacted by the cultural, social, economic, political, legal and historical conditions within which this population exists. The lack of a systemic approach to early childhood education, including early intervention, will result in the failure to provide appropriate services. In turn, we will continue to see the disproportionate representation of AI/AN children in special education programs and services not only from birth to age 5 but also throughout the school-age years.

In the end, it is not sufficient to pose research questions and identify areas in need of improvement. We must take this work a step further so that this forum will positively impact the education and care of young American Indian and Alaskan Native children with disabilities residing in rural or reservation-based communities, using the information gained from this forum, as well as the work that has been done and continues to be done in our own communities. In order to accomplish these goals, we will require adequate funding, commitment and ongoing collaboration. My charge is to leave this forum with a formulated plan of next steps that is not limited to discussion, but is actionable.

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American Indian and Alaska Native Early Childhood Family Involvement: A Review of the Literature

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Introduction

American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities (families, clans, tribes, etc.) have family systems, worldviews, and ways of teaching and learning that differ from those of White Europeans (Medicine, 1981; Red Horse, Lewis, Feit, & Decker, 1978; Tafoya, 1989). Understanding the cultural context of historical and contemporary AI/AN communities is critical as one seeks to examine families' and communities' involvement in early childhood programs and to understand the role that White European education has played. Through the educational system in the United States, the federal government worked to destroy tribal languages and cultures by removing children and young adults from their communities (i.e., The Boarding School Era). Families continue to face the realities of an educational system in which their children (a) are overrepresented in special education and underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented (Banks, 1997; Council for Exceptional Children and the National Alliance of Black School Educators, 2002; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2000; Garcia & Pearson, 1994; Reshley, 1988; Samuda, Kong, Cummins, Lewis, & Pascual-Leone, 1989); (b) are either underserved or not served at all upon being appropriately identified as having special needs (National Council on Disability, 2003); and (c) are exposed to experiences in schools that are often void of cultural and language curriculum and culturally responsive methodologies, further confounding the pursuit of equity in education (National Council on Disability, 2000; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Harry, Kalyanpur, & Day, 1999).

In spite of the fact that, of all Americans, as a group, Native students have the highest dropout rate from public schools, the lowest academic achievement levels, the lowest rate of school attendance,

and the lowest rate of participation in post-secondary education (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; National Council on Disability, 2003; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2003), the resilience of AI/AN children, youth, families, elders, and communities cannot be overlooked. Despite AI/AN communities being nearly destroyed by disease, war, and genocide and the overt attempt by the government to eradicate traditional Native cultures and languages (Strand & Peacock, 2003), Native people have been able to maintain their tribal identities (Johnson, 2003), including religions, beliefs, values, and cultural practices. The survival of AI/AN communities and their culture has been and continues to be dependent upon communities' support, circling all aspects of life.

Early childhood, elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education is but one thread of life's education; yet, that part of one's life is interconnected within all other aspects of life including emotional, spiritual, physical, and mental. The resilience to withstand, overcome, or recover from serious threat (Masten, 2001) of AI/AN communities speaks to the strengths within family systems, worldviews, and ways of teaching and learning. Red Horse et al. (1978) provided what Running Wolf et al. called "remarkable insight into the extended family system, identifying three primary differences between AI/AN families and White European or Caucasian families":

> The first difference they note is in the definition of extended family. The White European or Caucasian definition identifies the extended family as three generations living in the same household, whereas in AI/AN cultures it is defined as a village-type network construct which has a significant impact on behavior and socialization processes. Secondly, in AI/AN communities this extended family structure transmits culture and conserves family patterns, which in turn contributes to identity development. Finally, according to Red Horse et al. (1978), the family promotes accountability in that it sets standards and expectations which then maintain the wholeness of the group through the enforcement of values (Running Wolf

et al., 2002, p. 34).

Resilience among AI/AN communities and families also has been referred to as cultural resilience. Cultural resilience (Ambler, 2003; Heavy Runner & Morris, 1997) is a concept that has included being proud of one's heritage; having connections with traditional Native culture and the family, school, community; and the tribe's responsibility to nurture, protect and guide children. Heavy Runner (2002) defines cultural resilience as the strength that lies in the healing process within the Native culture. This cultural resilience is also embedded within the family systems, patterns, structures, and values that are upheld within the Native community.

Research on resilience among AI/AN people has yielded some promising findings. Waller and Patterson (2002) found that an informal network of family can serve as a protective buffer against sources of stress and can be a key factor in resilience. This informal network can consist of friends, relatives and neighbors and is not limited to solely blood or clan/tribe relations. Research has also found that strong connections and ties with parents, families, communities, and traditional Native culture positively predicted school performance, school retention rates, and emotional well-being (Cummins, Ireland, Resnick, & Blum, 1999; Hobfoll, Jackson, Hobfoll, Pierce, & Young, 2002; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben & LaFromboise, 2001). However there remains a paucity of research on cultural resilience among AI/AN families and early childhood involvement. Therefore, as one examines current literature regarding AI/AN families'/communities' involvement in early childhood service provision, it is important to reflect upon the cultural context of parent/family involvement; that is, what constitutes family/community involvement in early childhood among AI/AN populations.

Since President Clinton's Executive Order on American Indian/Alaska Native Education (Executive Order No. 13096, 1998) placed a significant emphasis on early childhood education and the importance of related research, it is indeed timely to examine the current efforts, barriers, and best practices that are beginning to emerge from

programs charged with meeting the needs of young AI/AN children and families. AI/AN infants and young children are served through a variety of programs including Even Start, Early Head Start, Head Start, FACE, Baby FACE, local non-profit tribal and non-tribal agencies, and tribal and public schools that have elected to serve 3- to 5-year-olds within their educational systems. When children are between the ages of 5 and 8 (early elementary) they are served in either tribally controlled, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), or public schools. Given the diversity of service programs, this comprehensive review of the literature regarding AI/AN family/community involvement in early childhood education was guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent are rural and reservation American Indian and Alaska Native communities (families, tribes, and others) involved in their children's schools and programs?
2. How do grade level, percentage of Native enrollment, teacher, administrator, curriculum, school governance, location of school, community characteristics and tribal differences affect involvement?
3. What are some of the best practices specific to American Indian and Alaska Native children for promoting family and community involvement in early childhood programs?

The results of this review will be followed by a discussion of the implications for practice, research, and policy development.

Extent of American Indian and Alaska Native Community Involvement In Early Childhood Education

The extent of AI/AN communities' involvement in their children's early childhood schools and programs must be framed within current, often White European definitions of parent/family involvement. Herein lies one of the challenges for researchers and practitioners; that is, to go beyond such views and definitions to collect data on all facets of communities' involvement from AI/AN cultural

perspectives. It is within this context that a review of the literature for empirical studies, program reports, and related nonempirical articles were examined. The review included an exhaustive search of the ERIC data-base including government documents, Office of Indian Education publications, PsychInfo data-base, Head Start and Early Head Start reports, the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, FACE and Baby FACE reports, as well as Symposiums related to early childhood education and testimony before the U.S. Congress related to AI/AN education inclusive of early childhood education. The results indicated that since the Executive Order 13096 on American Indian and Alaska Native Education signed by President Clinton on August 6, 1998, (and before) research (empirical) in AI/AN early childhood education is scarce especially when one contrasts this with the ever increasing body of knowledge within non-Native early childhood educational arenas (Demmert, 2001). There were no empirical studies found in this review (1998-present) on the extent of AI/AN families'/communities' involvement in early childhood education; however, there were data from several reports, symposiums, and congressional testimonies that warrant discussion. There were also several studies on related service provision; wherein, AI/AN families' expressed their perceptions regarding involvement in their child's early education. These studies will be presented within the "best practices" section below.

It is also important to note that some studies and reports were conducted in which AI/AN families and children were purported to be included, yet data were reported in aggregate so that one cannot evaluate the extent to which the findings do or do not hold true for AI/AN communities. For example, in the results presented in *Celebrating Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Head Start* (Joseph & Cohen, 2000), data collected included African Americans, Asians, Hispanic, and AI/AN, but results were not provided according to ethnic groups. Therefore, any data from AI/AN populations are hidden and non-accessible to the AI/AN families/communities, researchers and/or practitioners. The resulting data represents generalizations about culturally/linguistically diverse populations. Generalizations are subject

to extreme caution especially when applied indiscriminately across diverse populations.

Reports Specific to AI/AN Populations

A national evaluation of the Even Start Family Literacy Program was conducted and a descriptive analysis of the Tribal Even Start Program and families served in 1995-96 were reported (Tao, Khan, & Arriola, 1998). Eight of nine projects were described and compared to 563 projects reporting nationwide; approximately, 326 parents and 507 children were represented in the tribal data set and 32,814 parents in all Even Start programs. The ethnic background of participants in the tribal projects were 83% American Indian, 11% Caucasian, <1% Asian, 4% Hispanic, and 0% African American. In terms of family/community involvement, the report addressed parents' participation in adult education, parenting education, and the extent to which their children participated in early childhood educational services. The report also described the extent to which parents were engaged across all three services, the types of services received, the prevalence of children with special needs and the extent of retention and goal completion by participants.

The results indicated that parents'/families' participation in home visits varied across tribal projects ranging from none to 52 over the course of a year; the average across projects was 11 in contrast to 9 reported in the national Even Start. The model of Even Start stipulates that at least one parent and child participate in all three of the services that the program offers. The reported data indicated that more than 90% of parents in the tribal Even Start project participated in the parenting opportunities (i.e., parenting classes on parent-child literacy, child development, child's language and thinking skills, etc. and parent-child activities that included social development, arts and crafts, gross motor activities, reading, storytelling, pre-reading etc.) in contrast to 88% of all Even Start projects. The rate of participation was 20 hours for tribal parents and 27 hours for non-tribal. Nearly half of the parents, 44%, participated in adult secondary education

or GED programs that were available, in contrast to 40% across all Even Start projects. However, the number of hours that parents spent in adult education was significantly lower than that of parents in non-tribal projects, 25 and 93 hours, respectively.

The type of participation of tribal parents' children indicated that the majority were served via individualized home-based programs (78%); while, 32% participated in center-based, 18% compulsory schooling (K-3) coordinating with Even Start, 16% in services for school-age children outside of school hours, 2% daycare with educational component, and 6% in no services for their children. The extent to which tribal parents participated in all three services was 71% in contrast to 75% of all Even Start projects (Among the parents not participating in all three services, most (93%) participated in the parenting opportunities or early childhood services (96%). Early childhood education had the most scheduled contact hours; for children over 2 years old the scheduled hours were 27-32 hours per month, children younger than 3 received approximately 3 hours per week in educational services. Parent-child joint activities participation rate was reported as 3 hours per month with respect to home visits, 4 hours per month in-center/classroom, and 5 hours per month in field trips, meals, or social functions. The numbers of children with special needs were 6%, in contrast to 12% of all Even Start projects. The retention and successful goal completion reflected that tribal families were continuing their participation similarly to that of non-tribal, 62% and 60%, respectively. However, of all families for whom year-end data were received, less than 1% of tribal families compared to 6% of all Even Start had completed their goals and left the program.

This data provided some general information on the types of parent/family involvement in early childhood education (i.e., parent-child activities and parenting education activities). However, the data does not reflect traditional educational activities of families or types of activities that families engaged in within the home and community that were done outside of the program contact activities.

In a more recent report on AI/AN Head Start programs (Marks & Graham, 2004), subjects voiced their perspectives on goals for

their children, including the strengthening and continuation of tribal identity via language and cultural skills, basic academic skills including literacy and math, as well as respect for diversity by integrating other ethnic group traditions into the curriculum, health and wellness, social and personal growth, self-esteem, respect, moral sensibility and personal responsibility, contributing to society, and confronting prejudice and racism. The subjects indicated that parent/family involvement and safety and stability were critical for family/community well-being. Tribal leaders, parents and family members, and Head Start staff shared the impact that many programs had on language acquisition and cultural activities that children were benefiting from as well as family engagement in education. They also identified the need to increase family engagement in the education of Native children and the need to encourage more men to participate in AI/AN education of young children and youth.

Subjects in the study by Marks and Graham also identified some of the challenges to strengthening and continuing tribal identity and culture. Factors that were highlighted included disagreement regarding the proper place for such learning to occur, which languages to integrate into programs that serve multiple tribes, the declining number of fluent language speakers within some tribes, and competing with electronic media. Although this report lacked specific data on family/community participation, strengths and challenges were summarized which emphasized parent/family involvement/engagement as a strength of the tribal Head Start programs; while also emphasizing the need to build upon that strength by increasing and sustaining involvement throughout their children's educational pathways.

Some AI/AN families have the opportunity to participate in Family and Child Education (FACE) and Baby FACE programs, which are sponsored by the Office of Indian Education Programs and the BIA. The programs focus on family literacy and the "integration of tribal languages and cultures is fundamental" (Tippeconnic & Jones, 1995, p. 7). These programs also focus on "school readiness, high school completion, adult literacy, lifelong learning, and parental participation in education" (p. 6) through center-based and/or home-based

programs. Within this review of the literature, no current data on the extent of family/community involvement in FACE and Baby Face programs were found. There was a description of the FACE program and lessons learned (Momentum, 1999; Tippeconnic & Jones, 1995) as well as testimony provided by Potvin (2000) in the hearing before the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families of the Committee on Education and the Workforce House of Representatives, One Hundred and Sixth Congress, 1999. Potvin described the FACE model as a strength model:

> It builds on family strengths, rather than pointing out deficits. This is a factor in family involvement and helps develop a partnership with the school that continues when the children enter the Kindergarten-12 system. Many of the parents in our program did not have a positive experience when they were in school. When they voluntarily enroll in FACE, they are inviting us into their homes. The parents are the first teachers. Our role is to strengthen and support them as their child's teacher…there are currently 22 FACE programs in over 180 Indian schools. FACE is unique in providing services from prenatal through third grade. Waiting until a child is in kindergarten to start working on parental involvement may be too late (pp. 6-7).

Comprehensive ongoing research on early childhood education programs and models is critical to understanding the unique strengths and needs of AI/AN families and communities.

Reports that Included AI/AN Populations in Aggregate Results

Joseph & Cohen (2000) included data conducted on children enrolled in Head Start, 1992-1993 and 1998-1999, in which 3.8% and 3.4% of the populations, respectively, were AI/AN. The results included home languages status, recruitment strategies, staff-to-children ethnic ratios (AI/AN approximately equivalent), multicultural

materials and activities and parents' perceptions of these efforts, the importance of parent involvement and parent activities (i.e., "search for employment through classes on self-esteem building, goal setting, career options, self-marketing, job skills training" (p. xi), health services, and suggestions for improving the ability of Head Start programs to serve families from culturally/linguistically diverse populations.

Data on parent participation and perspectives were gathered utilizing focus group and interview methodology through site visits to 30 programs that served culturally/linguistically diverse children and families. The findings indicated that there were differing perceptions among program directors and other staff regarding parental involvement. The directors indicated very high involvement; while the other staff members indicated low involvement. Some of the difficulties that were reported to be barriers to involvement by staff were echoed by parents, including the need for translators, transportation, child care, developing and maintaining relationships between staff and families, and communication. Parents indicated that they were pleased with many of the services that they participated in. In addition, there were differences in how home visits were done (i.e., a continuum ranging from service providers who were aware of and responsive to cultural values and traditions of families while conducting home visits to those who conducted home visits that were not individualized and in some cases ignored the family's cultural values and traditions). The data were reported in aggregate which poses challenges for determining the extent to which the key findings on parent participation and perspectives (successes and challenges) relate to specific ethnic populations for determining aspects that are critical to obtaining as well as maintaining high levels of family involvement.

Recent Early Head Start and Head Start evaluation reports as well as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study were conducted with diverse programs. Some of the data results were compared utilizing a control group, while other analyses were examined within the program group only (Flanagan, & West, 2004). Upon examining those reports and related papers, data on various results including

those on parent/family participation in early childhood home visiting, and mixed-model programs effects (Administration for Children and Families, 2003), American Indian populations were either not reported on, mixed in within the demographic category of "other" or mixed in with all populations. Thus, the degree to which any of the results hold "true," in terms of effective models, parent/family participation, and challenges unique for AI/AN families/communities remains an unknown.

The extent to which grade level, percentage of Native enrollment, teacher, administrator, curriculum, school governance, location of school, community characteristics and tribal differences affect involvement in AI/AN early childhood education is unknown at this time. Studies have been conducted within Indian education that indicate that youth who develop strong cultural identities experience higher levels of success in education (Huffman, Still, & Brokenleg, 1986; Vadas, 1995; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2001). The importance of the role that caring families and teachers have on building resiliency as well as providing high expectations and opportunities to participate (Demmert, 2001) adds further support for the need to understand the factors that support family/community involvement in early childhood education and beyond. Students with involved parents, regardless of income or background, are more likely to experience success in academics and social skills, as well as persist through graduation and post-secondary education (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Best Practices for Family and Community Involvement

Promoting family/community involvement in AI/AN early childhood education is fundamental to ensuring physical, emotional, spiritual, mental health of tomorrow's leaders. Cummins et al. investigated the correlates of physical and emotional health among AI/AN adolescents and stressed that "the connection to family remains a consistently powerful factor in the lives of these youth" (p. 38). Further, Congress designed several specific procedural safe-

guards to allow parents/caregivers input into school decisions and to maximize the likelihood of providing an appropriate education for children and youth with disabilities (Yell, 1998). Therefore, identifying best practices for promoting family/community involvement is warranted. The best practices highlighted here are based upon a review of related literature (descriptive narratives of various programs and models, opinion papers, related research studies, etc.). The need for research (qualitative and quantitative) regarding the validity of these components/practices, as well as models utilizing various combinations of these practices, cannot be overstated.

1. Integrate language and culture (curriculum, methods) throughout service provision programs (Aakhus & Hoover, 1998; Banks, 2004; Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Pavel, Banks, & Pavel, 2002).
2. Acknowledge and build on families' strengths (Banks-Joseph, 2005; Potvin, 1999; Tippeconnic & Jones, 1995).
3. Build trust through respectful, reciprocal relationships between families/communities and service providers (Joseph & Cohen, 2000; Cross, Earle, Echo-Hawk Solie, & Manness, 2000; Harry, Kalyanpur, & Day, 1999).
4. Implement and/or develop programs in tribal-specific manners matching their unique family-based cultural values, beliefs, and kinship systems (Medicine, 1981; National Council on Disabilities, 2003; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999).
5. Involve families/communities (i.e., children, parents, aunties, uncles, grandparents, elders) in the decision-making processes (Demmert, 2001; Howard, Williams, & Lepper, 2001; National Council on Disability, 2003; Olson, Olson, Pingayak, Sterling, & Pierzchanowski, 2002).
6. Utilize mixed methods of service delivery (i.e., home-based and center-based) as opposed to a single method (Joseph & Cohen, 2000).
7. Recruit and retain AI/AN service providers (administrators and direct service providers) (Pavel, Banks, & Pavel, 2002;

Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2000).

8. Provide interpreters consistently when needed (Joseph & Cohen, 2000).
9. Provide transportation and child care consistently when needed (Tao, Khan, & Arriola, 1998).
10. Utilize family liaisons/community friends/advocates when needed (Banks-Joseph, 2005).
11. Provide ongoing professional training (cross-cultural communication, learning styles, curriculum development, disabilities, etc.) (Demmert, 2001; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2000; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999).
12. Provide ways for families/community members to provide ongoing feedback (Banks, 2004; Harry, Kalyanpur, & Day, 1999; Hernandez, 2001; National Council on Disability, 2003).
13. Provide collaborative teaming networks with all agencies providing services to young children and families (Howard, Williams, Port, & Lepper, 2001).
14. Invite families whose children have moved on to elementary and/or secondary school to serve as support families (i.e., ongoing community involvement) (Bergstrom, Cleary, & Peacock, 2003; Barnhardt, 1999).
15. Set up family/community involvement transition plans.

AI/AN parents, families, elders, children and young adults, communities, teachers, and researchers have shared their concerns and suggestions for improving schools (i.e., BIA, tribal, public, etc.) and related educational services (i.e., general education, early childhood education, special education, etc.) for decades (Banks, 2004; Charleston, 1994; Cross Earle, Echo-Hawk, Solie, & Manness, 2000; Cummins et al., 1999; Cross, 1986; Medicine, 1981; Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996; St. Germaine, 2000; Running Wolf et al., 2002; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). It is imperative that as programs are implemented, developed, and modified, that data are gathered across multiple dimensions in a culturally appropriate manner. The need for such research is urgent given the ongoing failure of schools and

educational systems to facilitate the expression and growth of AI/AN children's gifts and talents.

Implications for Future Research

The results of this review of the literature on AI/AN family/community involvement in early childhood education, including special education, indicates the scarcity of studies, not only in this topic area, but also within AI/AN early childhood education more broadly. The extent of AI/AN family/community involvement in early childhood education is unclear. So, too, is how that involvement may differ according to grade level, percentage of Native enrollment, teacher, administrator, curriculum, school governance, location of school, community characteristics and tribal differences; and what constitutes "best practices" in promoting AI/AN family/community involvement. This is particularly disconcerting given the amount of research conducted in early childhood within the non-Native populations. Additionally, according to Banks 92004):

> In a report to Congress (2003) by the National Council on Disabilities, family/tribal involvement in general and special education, culturally responsive service delivery, reading and standard English performance, family/professional communication (cross-cultural communication) and collaboration, parent/caregiver information and resource dissemination, among other issues, were identified as needing improvement (National Council on Disabilities, 2003). Recommendations for improvement include establishing effective research-based interventions, developing and implementing culturally responsive curriculum, implementing language and cultural programs, developing Tribal policies regarding special education and disability services, developing inter/intra-agency collaboration/partnerships to effectively build seamless responsive services (driven by child, family, and tribal needs and priorities), cross-tribal advocacy for disability issues at the state and

> national levels (use sovereignty to effect educational change for all indigenous people), and incorporate Tribal consensus regarding accountability of any and all service delivery systems (p. 7).

Research that is funded and collected at national and state levels would be more beneficial to participants and programs if data were reported both in aggregate form and disaggregate form. Specific information is needed for making recommendations for funding, policy development, and refining future research questions as we seek to improve early childhood educational service access, delivery, and implementation for AI/AN children, families, and communities.

Family/community involvement research that clearly defines "involvement" from an AI/AN traditional contextual context is needed to insure that the research and subsequent implications are comprehensive and relevant. In addition to clear and culturally appropriate definitions of "involvement" in education, Johnson (2003) points out the need for research to be conducted in a postcolonial framework using an indigenous set of experiences, traditions and epistemologies. Rather than approaching educational research from an "at-risk" mindset with the sole focus on family and the children, it is important to also consider systems of power and colonialist educational practices that may be negating the resilience of AI/AN families in education and the traditional and cultural models of childhood development. The paucity of research on AI/AN family involvement could be due to the "at-risk" ideology which has led practitioners and educators to provide interventions and support systems outside or away from the family and culture (Johnson, 2003) and therefore making it difficult to understand, conceptualize, and research family involvement through an indigenous framework. Research needs to examine policies of social systems that support and enhance family and cultural resilience that in turn can positively affect early childhood development and education. The concept of cultural resilience can be strengthened by further refinement of the underlying constructs including ethnic identity and ethnic family schema which appear to

have protective value in promoting resilience in other indigenous groups (McCubbin & McCubbin, 2005). Such research could serve to empower communities as they seek to ensure that their children and youth are prepared to meet the successes and challenges that life long learning will surely present.

Conclusions

AI/AN families have been described as the most marginalized groups with respect to educational equity (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2003). Family involvement in early childhood education that extends to community, tribal, and intertribal relations are essential to effect systemic change for future generations. To accomplish this, outreach efforts (i.e., identifying, informing, training, soliciting input on services needed and the efficacy of those services, etc.) to address AI/AN families' needs in schools and related wellness areas on and off reservation are truly needed. How long will the children and families have to wait? All AI/AN children and families have precious gifts to share within their communities and beyond. Traditional, holistic, community-centered educational practices implemented within AI/AN early childhood education may facilitate growth, healing, and wellness for future generations – a goal in need of immediate pursuit.

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School Leaders

Roger Bordeaux, Ph.D.

Introduction

Effective educational leadership in rural and reservation schools and communities serving American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) children requires that leaders be sensitive to the needs and desires of the culture of the people served. Regardless of where the leader is – at home, in early childhood programs, at K-12 schools or in colleges and universities – the effective leader exhibits behaviors that influence the learning environment. The leader blends modern leadership theory and practice with American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) traditional leader practice.

This paper will discuss traditional AI/AN leadership and modern leadership theory and practice. It will also discuss the contextual factors necessary for consideration in AI/AN communities. The contextual factors include humans (learners, parents, teachers, etc.) and organizational structure including school improvement efforts. The paper will propose the characteristics necessary for effective leadership in rural and reservation schools and communities that serve American Indians and Alaskan Natives. Effective leaders in rural and reservation schools and communities serving AI/AN children, including early childhood and K-12 programs, must *seek visions*, *practice the oral tradition, gather goods*, and *put family first*.

Tribal Leaders: Past, Present and Future

Deloria (1969) declared "the Indian struggle for freedom was symbolized by the great war chiefs Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Chief Joseph and Geronimo" (p. 196). These leaders of the past were able to convince many Lakota, Nez Perce and Apache tribal members that freedom was worth fighting and dying for. These leaders had specific characteristics including oral expression, use of traditional

ceremonies, tribal loyalty, and sensitivity to their peoples' needs and desires. He also contended that the only difference in tribal leadership in two centuries is that the Bureau of Indian Affairs defines the ground rules. If tribal leadership has not changed, then current tribal leaders need to research previous AI/AN leaders' leadership knowledge, attributes, and skills. Current tribal education leaders must also investigate outside influences, such as bilingualism, biculturalism and the influence of acculturation.

While looking at her own tribe, Deloria (1969) identified the following skills necessary to be a quality member of the tribal community:

- One had to be a good relative.
- All had a job to teach children.
- Formal education was transmitted through ceremonies, precept and example.
- Giving was glorified (p. 17).

These skills or contextual factors are necessary to internalize and live if a leader hopes to be effective in similar AI/AN communities including leaders in modern business and education serving American Indian and Alaskan Natives.

Tippeconnic (1984) reported that leaders in AI/AN communities need the following knowledge and skills:

- Effective communication and meaningful contact with community
- Tribal education policy and practice
- Ability to integrate local tribal language and culture
- Parent and community involvement
- Ability to recruit and retain quality staff, preferably bilingual or bicultural

Effective leaders need to completely understand the modern and traditional culture of the local community, including the political

environment, the economic conditions, the family relationships, and the traditional communication practices.

In *American Indian Education*, Reyhner (2004) contends that the purpose of formal education for many years for AI/AN children was to "Christianize and civilize." The federal government and various religious orders were given the task of teaching the American Indian and Alaskan Natives the knowledge and skills that they thought were necessary for survival. Not until the mid-1960s were American Indians and Alaskan Natives allowed to be active leaders in their own education programs. The progress in AI/AN education has happened in the last 40 years. Tippeconnic (1999) concluded that the tribal control of education could benefit students attending those tribal schools, students in public schools, and colleges and universities primarily in the integration of Indian cultures and languages. Tribal control would also improve current and future AI/AN leadership in order to achieve greater tribal self-sufficiency and ensure cultural and language survival.

A case study (Fuentes, 1995) of the Maryetta School in Stillwater, Oklahoma, identified leadership strategies used by the superintendent so that the school would be successful. The school population was about 500 K-8 low-income students who were primarily American Indians. The strategies included gathering input from the community, implementing ideas from the community, grantsmanship, organizing special events, managing money wisely, and long term planning.

Allen (1993) contends that the use of AI/AN values, combined with modern leadership practice, provides a framework for effective management of educational institutions on reservations. The Lakota values mentioned are wisdom, fortitude, respect for others, timeliness, generosity, respect for Mother Earth, and bravery. Values-based leadership has always been at the heart of AI/AN culture. When going to war, praying for the ill, getting ready for a ceremony, or even waking up in the morning, many effective leaders used values to guide their everyday life. There was a time when all in the tribal community were leaders in their own roles whether hunter, child bearer, orator, or spiritual leader.

Young AI/AN learners appreciate the presence of native people in leadership roles in schools because it brings positive role models (Pavel, 1999). Educational institutions on reservations must always seek qualified AI/AN leaders who exhibit and model behaviors that will positively influence the learners. The success of AI/AN learners in schools include attitude, motivation, and parent involvement (Johnson, 2003). The following resiliency factors specific to American Indian and Alaskan Natives should also have an influence on school leaders in AI/AN schools; extended family system, positive tribal identity, and biculturalism, insight/understanding, self-reliance, relationships, and resilient perspective (Klassen, 1996) . The school factors influencing resiliency included having a culturally relevant teaching method, a culturally relevant curriculum, and having long term mentoring relationships.

A report of research (Bergeson, Griffin, & Hutado 2000) suggests the relatively low level of academic success among American Indian elementary and secondary school students, as a group, is largely the result of discontinuities between the cultures and languages of these students' homes and communities and the language and culture of mainstream classrooms. American Indian students also tend to perceive academic success as offering few extrinsic rewards, and they are likely to view learning much of what is necessary to succeed academically (such as the standard language and the standard behavior practices of the school) as detrimental to their own language, culture, and identity. The report suggests many strategies that teachers of AI/AN students can use to improve the success of those learners.

An instructional leadership research project by Eastman (2005) concluded that "first, teachers, in general, have a need to feel supported and backed. Teachers in Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) contract and grant schools that are contracted from year to year with no tenure policy applicable have an even greater need for support, especially teachers that are non-Native and non-tribal members. Secondly, it is critical for instructional leaders to have a thorough understanding of the culture or culture(s) of the students for which they serve. Additionally, they must utilize culturally appropriate and

accepted practices when interacting with students, staff, parents, and community members. Finally, principals must work closely with superintendents to properly train locally-controlled school boards to maximize their empowerment to improve education for their tribal children."

Ball and Pence (2001) report positive results of an innovative Generative Curriculum Model. The Meadow Lake Tribal Council and the University of Victoria collaborated to develop a Cree and Dene early childhood care curriculum and implemented the curriculum for 2 years. The program was primarily a professional development program. The key results included high rates of student retention and program completion, parenting and grandparenting skills improvement, increased cultural integration, and increased partnerships.

John (2001) discussed the importance of family involvement in early childhood programs. The family involvement included the recognition of American Indian history and culture. The "Hintil Kuu Ca," which means "house of children," is a preschool, summer school, and after-school program attended by 125 children age 3-12. The program has had positive influences including having more American Indian children graduating from high school and some attending college.

Lipka (2002) reported evidence supports inclusion of Native language and culture in educational programs as a strategy for improving outcomes.

Apthorp, D'Amato, and Richardson (2003) reviewed research and related literature to summarize evidence on the effectiveness of instructional practices for helping American Indian students meet standards. The promising practices identified included teaching indigenous language first followed by instruction in learning to read and write in English, emphasizing reading comprehension, peer interaction, frequent monitoring of student progress, using culturally congruent materials and instruction in math, and collaboration with the community to create culturally congruent classrooms.

Demmert and Towner (2003) conducted a review of research literature on the influence of culturally based education on academic

success of Native American learners. They reported that culturally based education programs developed cooperatively with parents and community members strengthen relationships between home and school and that excellent language and culturally based education programs hold promise for improving academic success of learners.

Modern Educational Leadership

Leadership, second to classroom instruction, is the most influential characteristic in schools on student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The influence of educational leaders on student learning has been also reported in many other papers, research and books. The bibliography in this paper clearly shows the importance that effective leadership has on student learning. Leaders must always remember that what they do, every day and every minute, while in the presence of fellow leaders, parents, teachers and students, will determine the success of the school.

Covey (1990) includes the following principle-centered behaviors necessary for leader effectiveness: continually learn, be service-oriented, radiate positive energy, believe in other people, lead a balanced life, see life as an adventure, be synergistic, and exercise for self renewal (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual). These behaviors are identified as necessary for effective educational leadership and school effectiveness. Leaders need to model learning by reading current educational journals and books and actively participate in school-sponsored professional development activities. They need to balance their personal and professional life so that there will be time to have fun and time to work. The effective leader should always be positive in all environments so that modeling will radiate energy.

Sergiovanni (2002) stated that the following principles facilitate teaching and learning; cooperation, empowerment, responsibility, accountability, meaningfulness, and ability-authority. Since educational leaders should always be teaching and learning, they need to follow principles that facilitate teaching and learning. Educational leaders must always be in the continuous learning mode so they can serve

as models in their educational institution. Leaders need to empower parents, staff and students and give them the responsibility while making them accountable for their actions.

Senge et al. (2002) provides an excellent field book for all who work in educational settings. The field book helps educational leaders apply the five disciplines and also sets out four competencies for educational leaders. The disciplines are:

- Personal mastery
- Shared vision
- Mental models
- Team learning
- Systems thinking

The competencies necessary for educational leaders are engagement = mobilize to tackle tough problems, systems thinking = recognize systems and find leverage, leading learning = all learn and lead, and self awareness = know impact on people and systems. When applied on a daily basis, the competencies will increase teaching and learning at educational institutions. The field book provides contextual factors that the educational leaders must keep in mind when leading. The community characteristics in which the school resides need to be studied and analyzed in order to understand the many communities within the community.

Murphy (2001) contended that preparation of school leaders was not driven by education or leadership. He provided the following qualities for education leaders: an understanding of caring and humanistic concerns as a key to effective leadership, knowledge of the transformational and change dynamics of the superintendency, an appreciation of the collegial and collaborative foundations of school administration, and an emphasis on the ethical and reflective dimensions of leadership. These new qualities were developed into standards for school leaders by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (1996). The specific standards are:

1. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
2. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture.
3. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
4. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
5. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
6. A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Educational leaders have to be ethical. Strike, Haller, and Soltis (2005) reviewed numerous ethical questions and behaviors for educational leaders. Zubay & Soltis (2005) used case studies to raise various ethical questions facing educational leaders. They were able to raise issues that educational administrators confront every day. Issues such as cheating, racial and sexual orientation discrimination, and rumors were some of the ethical problems discussed in the case studies. The four ethical necessities for human beings proposed by the Dali Lama (1999) also relate to educational leadership. They are empathy, restraint, fortitude, and compassion. School leaders need to be well grounded in personal and community ethics. The four ethical necessities are: empathy = the supreme emotion, restraint = habit of

inner discipline, fortitude, and compassion.

Hunter (1998) states that the true essence of leadership includes listening and accomplishing tasks while building relationships. Monroe (1997) provides educational leadership lessons. The lessons provide additional skills and competencies that should be reviewed in order to formulate effective educational leadership. Some of the lessons include working from the heart, having a positive attitude, persevering, being an idealist in a less than ideal world, teaching and learning, and working toward making things new.

Kouzes & Posner ((2002) report on five practices necessary for effective educational leadership. The practices are model the way = model behaviors they expect of others, inspire a shared vision = what could be, challenge the process = innovate grow and improve, enable others to act = foster collaboration and build trust, and encourage the heart = carry on dramatic gestures or simple actions.

Deal & Peterson (1999) suggest there are symbolic roles that educational leaders must perform in order to be effective. The symbolic roles are:

- Historian: probe the past to give meaning to present
- Anthropological sleuth: look for present rituals and values
- Visionary: picture of positive future
- Potter: shape school culture
- Poet: communicate with language
- Healer: healing wounds during transitions

These symbolic roles would create an educational environment that would focus on teaching and learning. The leader would jump from role to role dependent on the specific situation. When transforming school cultures, Stolp & Smith (1995) report that a leader is a cultural leader. The effective educational leader must be a designer, teacher, and steward. The leader must design from within using available resources, modelling effective teaching strategies, and being a protector of the sacred children.

The Jossey-Bass *Reader on Education Leadership* (2000) is an excel-

lent resource for educational leaders. The book is a collection of 30 authors including Deming, Evans, Gardner, Glasser, and Lieberman. Each chapter provides a framework for educational leaderships. Some topics include leadership, management and organizational behavior, moral leadership, and shared leadership.

Connors (2000) contends, "successful schools only survive when there are successful administrators leading the way" (p. 12). The book provides specific characteristics of a well-adjusted leader. The characteristics are:

- Ability to care and be concerned for others
- Desire to be successful
- Ability to handle stress
- General feeling of good health
- Ability to think logically
- Ability to have fun

Connors (2000) also stated that great educational leaders use teachers as resources to serve as solution finders to provide feedback, to spread the good word, to share their talents, and to provide support.

McEwan (2003) identified seven effective steps for educational leaders:

- Establish, implement and achieve academic standards
- Be an instructional resource for your staff
- Create a school culture and climate conducive to learning
- Communicate the vision and mission of your school
- Set high expectations for your staff and yourself
- Develop teacher leaders
- Establish and maintain positive relationships with students, staff and parents

Keeping these seven steps in the forefront of an educational leader's every day life would insure a focus on teaching and learning.

Contextual Factors to Consider

Effective educational leaders must create a school environment that insures a safe and orderly environment. Effective leadership includes insuring that educational institutions are conducive to learning and teaching. Lezotte and McKee (2002) contend that effective schools research included instructional leadership as a key correlate within the context of continuous school improvement. Other correlates included a clear mission, focus on teaching and learning, availability of resources, frequent monitoring of staff and student success, and having a safe and secure environment. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (1992) stated the following characteristics as necessary for school change: be visionary, remember schools are for learning, value human resources, communicate and listen, be proactive, and take risks. The Council for Exceptional Children (1994) identified specific leadership characteristics necessary in order for a school to be inclusive for children with handicapping conditions. Effective educational leaders should create an environment so that children with handicapping conditions are safe and secure. The school characteristics necessary for inclusion included having a common vision and a sense of community, site based authority, shared leadership, scheduling planning time, staff development, and redeploying resources.

A review of literature by Hoachlander, Alt, and Beltranena (2001) provides leaders with guidance on school improvement strategies that work. The strategies included raising the bar: higher achievement standards for all students, increased student engagement and motivation, and focused sustained professional development. The review also reported that if school leaders also build linkages with parents and staff, there will be positive school success.

Barth (1990) stated students, parents, teachers, principals are/could be the community of leaders. The human resources involved in education can be the leaders. He (2003) later identified his own cruising and working rules, as well as his norms of personal behavior for

effective educational leaders. One of his norms of personal behavior is when a party is talking, do not interrupt, and pay attention.

Fullan (2001) states that when change happens, leaders can be the positive change agents and influence the change process. He reports that there are key roles that effective leaders need to use during the change process. The roles are to have a moral purpose, understand change, develop relationships, be a knowledge builder, and facilitate coherence making. When leaders change, an effective educational leader should define the desired results, and then grow people and processes to ensure those results (Martin and Mutchler, 2003).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper discusses the research framework of these two questions:

1. What are the characteristics of effective leaders in rural and reservation schools and communities serving AI/AN children, including early childhood and K-12 programs?
2. What are the key contextual factors leaders should consider and how do tribal languages and cultures influence leadership?

It is well documented that effective educational leadership has a monumental influence on teaching and learning regardless of environment. Whether at home or in a formal educational setting, the leaders set the tone and direction of the family or educational institution. It does not matter if the institution is a Head Start program, an elementary or secondary school, or a college or university, the educational leaders need to prepare learners (sacred children) to be good family and community leaders.

The characteristics of effective leaders have been researched for many years and there appears to be accepted standards for school leaders. There are specific knowledge, skills, and attributes that educational leaders must have in order to be successful. The current focus on accountability requires school leaders to always remember

the primary purpose of schooling is teaching and learning. The effective leaders must also be aware of the environment in which they practice. These contextual factors should be in the forefront, every minute, in order to survive and thrive in AI/AN communities.

The leaders now and in the future, in communities that serve AI/AN learners, must be well-versed in oral tradition (speaking and listening), seek visions (be a strategic visionary), gather the goods (use all available resources), and always think family first (be a community builder). These essential skills are based on my own review of the literature and over 25 years of leadership life with American Indians and Alaska Natives. Each of these essential skills necessary for leadership success is discussed in more detail:

1. To seek visions (be a strategic visionary), educational leaders in AI/AN communities need to have a clear and focused personal vision of leading, teaching and learning. The formulation of a vision takes years of seeking what is near and dear to a leader's heart. The vision should be values based and the values must be congruent with AI/AN values. The leader must also be able to help educational institutions and communities seek their collective vision and mission. Guiding all communities to a collective vision and mission will increase the likelihood of school success. Once the collective vision and mission are formulated then the task of developing and guiding a continuous strategic plan are essential. The basic part of a quality plan includes collecting and analyzing data, formulating specific objectives, designing actions or activities, evaluating the success of the plan, and then beginning the process again.
2. To use oral tradition (speaking and listening combined with reading and writing), leaders must be able to communicate their vision of teaching and learning as well as the mission and vision of the institution they are leading. Oral tradition in a modern bilingual/bicultural society means having the ability to speak, listen, write, and read. The necessity to speak well is an important presentation skill not only before parents, teach-

ers, and students but also on the phone, before tribal, federal and state legislators, and community organizations. The leader must also be a good listener. Gathering information by listening is an excellent data solicitation skill. The analysis of oral information is necessary so that leaders can access information from others who may not be able to communicate by using the written word. The skill of writing is changing so that it is now more important to able to write and edit text on computers and other text storage devices than it is to have good penmanship. It may even be necessary to learn voice recognition software so that leaders will be able to use oral tradition and technology at the same time. The ability to read and keep up with current education research is necessary so that leaders will know the latest leading, teaching and learning strategies. Leaders must have quality speaking, listening, writing and reading skills.

3. To gather the goods (use all available resources), educational leaders and AI/AN communities must always gather the best human and material resources necessary to guide schools and communities toward a collective vision and mission. Leaders must always seek the best available human resources. In AI/AN communities it is beneficial to seek AI/AN human resources. An educational leader must support a learning community within the AI/AN communities. The adults of a learning community are always learning, which provides young learners with models.
4. To place family first (be community builders), educational leaders must develop a sense of family within AI/AN communities. All in the community must believe that the sacred young learners are children to all the adults of the community. When the whole community believes in the sacredness of children then all will want to work toward the collective vision and mission.

The key contextual factors effective leaders in AI/AN communities need to consider are bilingualism, biculturalism, extended family

involvement, community partnership, and positive tribal identity. Communities on AI/AN lands are diverse in language and culture. There are many families that practice traditional culture, others that practice a mix of traditional and modern traditional culture and others that practice modern culture. The effective leader must be aware of the individual and collective cultures of the people they serve. The success of leadership includes the ability to rally the community to a common vision and mission. The leaders of today need to rally all cultures of the families to a common culture of the school. Leaders must get all extended families involved in the sacred learners' educational community. The sacred learners need to feel that they are an important part of the educational community and the tribal community.

The common leadership threads between past and present, and both AI/AN cultures and other cultures of the world, need to be further analyzed. The combined skills of leading, teaching, and learning are essential so that educational leaders in AI/AN educational communities can be the best that they can be in this bilingual/bicultural world. Leaders in AI/AN communities must have specific knowledge, skills and attributes and be able to know when to use which skills within the context of leading, teaching and learning.

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