

Developing Positive Parent Involvement  
In Indian Pre-School Programs  
Through Appropriate Program Orientation

by  
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Cohort 49

A Practicum Report  
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## ABSTRACT

Developing Positive Parent Involvement in Indian Pre-School Programs through Appropriate Program Orientation. King, Karen K., 1991: Practicum Report, NOVA University, Master's Program for Child Care Administrators.

Descriptors: American Indian/Indian Education/Native American Education/Multi-Cultural Education/Cultural Isolation/Parent Involvement/Parent Teacher Cooperation/Parent Education/Home School Communication/Early Childhood Education/Preschool Curriculum/Child Caregivers/Parent Workshops

The practicum was designed to increase positive parenting skills and parental participation in American Indian pre-school classroom activities. Data collection and observations were methods employed to determine outcomes of the practicum. Twenty resources from tribal efforts across early childhood programming were cited along with periodical articles, conference presentations and nationally recognized references. Current parent involvement practices were not maximized due to historic precedent, distrust of federal education policies and less than appropriate program orientation sessions.

The author facilitated a re-examination of parent involvement which was to result in increased participation in classroom volunteerism. An orientation session was developed and implemented which expanded awareness from the traditional parent involvement practices to more empowering activities. A composite of positive Indian parent involvement activities was developed and made available to other programs, families and staff.

The results showed an increase of positive parent involvement as demonstrated by subsequent increase in classroom volunteerism and parental participation in policy decision-making functions.

Appendices include In-Kind Form, Positive Parent Activities Poster, and Orientation Evaluation Form.

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VERIFICATION FORM

Verification of Practicum Activity

Dear Verifier:

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I confirm that Karen King completed the activities detailed in her Practicum work. I personally attended one orientation session, have knowledge of the PPC empowerment activities and am in receipt of the parent activity poster.

Should additional information be needed, please advise.

Practicum Title: Developing Positive Parent Involvement in Indian Pre-School Programs through Appropriate Program Orientation

Student's Name Karen King

Cohort 49 Date December 5, 1991

Verifier's Name D. Duncan Perrote Original Signature -----  
(Please print-----and sign)

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## AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

Dec. 29, 1991

Date

Karen King, (Original signature)

Signature of Student

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

A unique work setting on an Indian reservation in the west-central region of the United States was impacted by this practicum. Over 12,000 enrolled members of two Plains Indian tribes inhabit the 2.6 million acre reservation which extends east from the Rocky Mountain continental divide, across foothills and high plains to low-lying river valleys and near-desert prairies.

An estimated 1,200 children between birth and five years of age reside on the reservation, making the very young the largest population segment in the community. From 1968, the setting was the only pre-school program serving the entire reservation. Since 1989, four additional pre-school programs have been initiated in public schools and under tribal auspices.

The program impacted by the proposed practicum provides comprehensive early childhood services to 175 children and their families in three pre-school centers and one home-base option for 4 hours/day, Monday-Friday for a total of 160 days/year. The program employs 40 staff members for eight hours/day for 220 days/year and 36 staff members for six hours/day for 180 days/year. Breakfast, lunch and snacks are served daily. Transportation is provided daily with six vehicles logging over 100 miles/vehicle/day.

The author directs three early child care programs (Head Start and two state projects) which impact young children and their families regardless of tribal affiliation or official tribal enrollment. Supervision of 39 staff, administration of policies, fiscal accountability, coordination with local assisting agencies and other pre-school programs,

and overall daily operation of three centers across the reservation are responsibilities of the author. Under the tutelage of a community child care coalition, which the writer co-founded in 1989, additional funding applications are currently being developed to provide comprehensive collaborated services to all children living within the service area.

Life-long affiliation with Indian communities serve as background experience coupled with 15 years' work experience as a federal program director in public schools, institutions of higher education, and early childhood programs with the tribes of the area. Past training expertise includes legal research on Indian issues and national conference presentation. An undergraduate degree in Communications and Theatre with a teaching endorsement from the University of Colorado and 30 graduate credits from various institutions with an emphasis on education, early childhood services and Indian studies are held by the author.

## Chapter 2

### STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

#### Problem Statement

Positive, meaningful, and endearing parent involvement activities are not maximized in current program operations. In order to best meet the goals of the program and the needs of an in-crisis community, providing positive parent involvement practices is deemed essential. The program maintains adequate parent involvement per required in-kind documentation. However, parent involvement is based in fund-raising activities as opposed to effective parent-child practices.

#### Documentation

Like many reservation communities, the setting is impacted by rapid population growth; increasing numbers of single, teen mothers; devastating economic hardships; excessive unemployment rates; and, high incidence of alcoholism, domestic violence and child abuse/neglect. Sufficient evidence documents the American native as today's poorest of the poor.

Of specific concern is the rising suicide rate of 53.6 per 100,000 in 1980 to 124 per 100,000 in 1985. In 1990, seven teen-age suicides ravaged the community targeted for this practicum. The ratio of suicide among Indians to all other United States residents is 2:1 according to Indian Health Services 1990 information.

Additionally, the target community has the highest ratio of years of productive life lost among the eight tribes in the Great Plains region. The biggest cause is accidents, 76% of which are alcohol related. 95% of the child abuse/neglect referrals were alcohol related in 1985 with



chronic liver disorder and cirrhosis the second leading cause of death among all Indians living on the reservation.

The proposed practicum problem was affected politically as two tribal governments function autonomously on one reservation. Federal and state political structures along with tribal autonomy compound difficulties for federal program managers who must address compliance and funding issues with all involved parties.

Further socio-economic conditions impact the problem including the fact that the two historic tribal enemies were militarily placed on the same reservation just over 100 years ago. Hostile results pervade although certain observable positive inter-tribal relationships have increased during the author's tenure in the community. However, the problem of continuing the cycle of poor self-image, inter-tribal conflict, related social ills and incompetencies grows with less than optimum parental involvement in programs providing effective parent training, open communication strategies and policy decision-making opportunities.

The parent involvement component is one of five critical areas of Head Start services provided nationally. Mandates require opportunities for parents to provide input in curriculum design, program options, specific program operations, policies and procedures, special events, staffing and budgeting. Training, progress reports on children's development and classroom participatory activities are also guaranteed all parents or guardians enrolled in the Head Start program.

Local communities are required to design and implement programs that comply with national mandates. Clearly, options for operation are largely a matter of proper "grassroots" orientation to federal guidelines and empowerment of the community to manage programs impacting the lives of young children.

As early childhood developmentally-appropriate practices are often analyzed in terms of classroom activities, appropriate practices for parent involvement must similarly be scrutinized and evaluated. Therefore, the following local data documents the problem of less-than-optimum parent involvement practices. The following information purposefully analyzes six types of activities program participants engage in per documented in-kind reports from September and October, 1990. Comparable data was collected in September and October, 1991, to determine the impact of improved program orientation and related strategies measuring subsequent change of participant activity in the parent involvement component as a result of practicum implementation.

Documentable in-kind contributions are required by the federal funding agency to verify parent, community and non-federal entities' involvement in program operations. The program is required to match 11% of all received federal funds in the form of in-kind. Appendix A is the sample form used for reporting in-kind which is completed by any non-federal employee or organization that contributes goods, services and/or time to the program. Table 1 represents the types of activities and the in-kind dollar value assigned to the activities contributed by Head Start program participants.

Table 1: Type and Monetary Value of Parent Involvement Activities  
September-October 1990 and 1991

ACTIVITY	\$100-300	\$500-800	\$1000-1600	\$1900-2400	\$2900-3500
Fund Raising 1990 1991			\$1601		\$3355
Classroom Activities 1990 1991	\$120			\$1907	
Special Events 1990 1991		\$557	\$1209		
Donated Goods 1990 1991	\$338		\$1127		
Training 1990 1991	\$272				\$3143
Transportation 1990 1991				\$2317	\$2991

Additional in-kind information is available from 1987 which would provide a more longitudinal study. However, the program has changed dramatically in terms of increased enrollment, expanded staff-related trainings and overall management modifications. Therefore, the following Program Information Report (PIR) and Self-Assessment Validation Instrument (SAVI) data from 1989 and 1990 is determined to provide an additional reflection of pre-practicum parent involvement practices.

The PIR is an annual required federal composite evaluation of the entire nation-wide Head Start operation. Parent involvement, social services, health, education/handicap services, enrollment, staffing patterns, personnel turnover, disability services and one-time questions are

responded to after careful calculation and analysis is completed by each local program. Data is then forwarded to federal offices and compiled nationally for Congressional review.

Table 2 demonstrates documentable evidence of relevant local volunteer and parent involvement from 1989 and 1990 PIR findings. The need for improved parent involvement was evident when one notes the disproportionate number of volunteers between the two years. With the increase in enrollment from 125 to 165 children/families between 1989 and 1990, volunteer hours and contributions would be expected to be higher in the 1990 PIR.

Table 2: PIR Volunteer Data

CRITERIA	1989	1990
Total Volunteer Hours	4,559	5,938
Past Participants	1,810	1,124
Current Participants	2,749	3,814
Total Number of Volunteers	233	276
Total Number of Classrooms Receiving Volunteer Services At Least 50% of the Days Classes Were Held	5:6	6:10
Current or Former Head Start Parents in Program Operation		
As Volunteer	281	353
As Paid Staff	16	41
Number of Parents Attending Trainings	69	52

An annual SAVI is conducted on all five component areas in a comprehensive manner with a standardized federal tool by program staff, parents, partners and tribal leaders. The reasons for short-comings or non-compliance are noted by a consensus of the SAVI team members. “Lack of sufficient parent involvement” is a reason provided for non-compliance on

the national instrument. Therefore, the frequency of the response, “lack of sufficient parent involvement” is measurable and further indicates the seriousness of the problem.

Table 3 symbolizes frequency of the “lack of sufficient parent involvement” responses for non-compliant standards in all Head Start component areas on the 1989 and 1990 SAVI instruments. The changes in responses of lack of parent involvement for non-compliance between the two years is illustrated with “+” indicating fewer such responses in 1990 and “-“ indicating more such responses than in 1989. The discrepancy between the two operating years is indicative of the fluctuation experienced in the parent involvement component each year.

Table 3: SAVI 1989, 1990 Results  
Frequency of Non-Compliance Responses Of  
“Lack of Sufficient Parent Involvement”

Component Area	1989	1990	+/- Change
Education	4.2	3.1	+ .9
Social Services	2.0	4.1	-1.9
Parent Involvement	5.1	6.3	-1.2
Nutrition	5.5	1.0	+3.5
Health	5.0	1.5	+3.5
Handicap Services	4.5	3.0	+1.5

Personal observation further serves as documentation of the problem of effective Indian parent involvement in early childhood programs. Comments made by program participants include the following. “We worked 10 hours at the concession stand and didn’t make enough to pay for the supplies.” “Only four of us did the bake sale and there are 51 kids at the Center.” “How much do I have to donate this time?” “I’m burned out. No more fund raisers for me!”

A most disturbing observation was noted while attending planned fund-raising events. Parents were often busy focusing on fund-raising rigors which left children unsupervised, fending for themselves or otherwise in situations potentially threatening to their safety. Making

money to buy the children Christmas gifts then displaced the opportunity for effective parent/child positive interaction.

The author works with several other Indian pre-school directors who have also shared the same concern of appropriate parent involvement activities. One colleague commented, “If we could get parents to understand that their job as teacher to their kids is more important than their success at raffle ticket sales, then we would be making a BIG contribution. This way we’re just furthering a tradition---slave labor.”

### Analysis

To more fully understand the causes and symptoms of the problem of appropriate, positive Indian parent involvement, an historic perspective is needed. An estimated 14 million Native Americans thrived on this continent when Columbus arrived. In less than 300 years, an approximate surviving 46,000 Native Americans were forced to live in some of the least hospitable regions of this country. Today there are almost two million Native Americans in the United States according to 1990 census figures. Historic oppression and inherent negative self-concepts of that history has most dramatically impacted Native American family structure within the last century.

With the establishment of the reservation system in 1866, by the U.S. Department of War, many predictable problems in Native American family structure arose. Changes in the cultural essence and century-old patterns of Native American life were irreversibly made in a wink of an eye. Clothing, shelter, diet, custom and ways of life were never to be the same for the first inhabitants of this continent. Parenting, traditionally a shared responsibility throughout the extended Native American family with certain lessons to be taught by the elders, the

recognized clan system and/or other tribal members, was most disrupted by the reservation system established across the country by the 1880s.

Another crisis to the Native American family came with the myriad of treaties many based on educational trade for lands. Vine Deloria (1968) cites historic atrocities which were brought about by the promise of “education.” Reservation boarding schools were established and charged with the education of every reservation child from age six. Armed with educational goals to eliminate cultural practices altogether, education came to mean the physical, cultural and philosophical separation of many young Native Americans from their inalienable rights. Actual kidnapping by school officials is well-documented. (David 1972)

Native American spiritualism was equally challenged. Foreign religions were imposed throughout reservations. With the resulting coupling of education and religion, mission schools were born often with total disregard for ancestral cultural religious practices. Thus, parent involvement was the last strategy on the agenda of early federal Indian education programs. Rather, termination of all native practices was priority.

Furthermore, the standard curriculum of public education then and now does serious disservice to the first people of this country. Planned omission, direct falsehoods or mere ignorance of native contributions, accomplishments, and successes throughout American textbooks and media resources historically attests to the perpetuation of negative images of Native Americans.

Although the American film industry has glorified certain native attributes, even the positive characteristics become stereotypes. An Arapaho woman film-maker offered the following comment to the author regarding dominant society’s internationally acclaimed film “Dances with Wolves”. “It’s just another cavalry story to me.”

Furthermore, literature exaggerating savagery and cruelty to the “pioneers” serves little use in developing positive images. Annual Thanksgiving token Indian units teach children relatively insignificant and somewhat humiliating characteristics about the indigenous people of this country. Teaching that Columbus discovered America nullifies the very existence of Native Americans! Therefore, positive and realistic images of Native Americans’ endurance and strength seem necessarily the first strategy on the agenda of present-day Indian education.

The problem facing Indian education today is how to gracefully make the quantum leap from total absence of cultural heritage and parent involvement in the education of young Indian children for the last four generations to the total absorption in that process for future generations’ benefit. Many initiatives have been legislated to assist the transition. Bureau of Indian Affairs, Office of Indian Education programs, Department of Education Indian set-aside programs, self-determination projects, multi-cultural curriculum development projects, housing and urban development programs, Indian Health Services and many other health and social service allotments have been authorized to impact the discrepancy of what is and what should be in Indian education. Federal and tribal educational programs from pre-school to post-graduate levels have been attempted in the last 30 years targeted to specifically serve Indian populations. However, the problem of effective positive parent involvement in Indian education programs continues. Could families be disoriented by the rash of services, regulations, required paperwork and relatively sudden change in parent involvement philosophy? Yes, surely.

Within 100 years of American history, the parenting cycle of the American Indian was totally broken, and then legislatively mandated to recycle. Approximately \$12 million in federal education, health, and welfare programs are available annually to enhance social competence, eliminate disadvantages, and develop long-term benefits for the community



affected by the practicum. Inherent within various federal financial assistance opportunities, parent involvement in advisory or advocacy roles is typically attached.

Thus a unique relationship emerges as local Native Americans readily make use of federal services, but remotely involve themselves with program management, policy revision or development and program operations. To evidence, the writer directs an early childhood program impacting 175 children and families. Operation and policy decisions are reached by a Board which requires a quorum of only three. The quorum has been a challenge to achieve at times when critical management issues, such as employment, must be addressed.

In summary, an analysis of the problem showed that positive Indian parent involvement in the education of young children is adversely affected by history, a basic distrust of the federal education system, a precedent of little parental input in program operations, lack of orientation to program goals as well as personal reasons affecting reservation families.

A review of the literature verified three basic percepts relative to the practicum.

1. Successful early childhood education programs integrate positive parent involvement practices that empower families, provide curricula endorsed by the families served in the program and share information about individual child's development frequently with families. A position statement by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAEYC 1990) succinctly summarizes a host of studies regarding the presence of positive parent involvement in education. NAEYC recognizes that when parents are meaningfully involved in the program, the program is more likely to provide an effective learning environment for all children.

Extensive evidence is available that supports various types of parental inclusion that have positive results including measurable academic gains. Gale (1991) provides a synthesis of several studies and suggests a continuum of practices from least effective to most effective that helps early childhood program administrators assess outcomes of parent involvement practices and best practices.

Hamburg (1991) continues support of meaningful involvement of parents in early childhood programs. “Family is central to every child’s life, but where parents cannot give adequate care, especially young parents who may not even have basic parenting skills, society should provide the kind of support and assistance that will teach them to nurture their children and help strengthen their family” (p. 31). This philosophy speaks directly to the program impacted by this practicum given the young age of single mothers enrolling children in the program.

2. Staff and parent positive relations are critical to successful early childhood programs. Coleman (1991), Abbott and Gold (1991), and Bundy (1991) ascribe to the precept that early childhood educators must make the critical first link between “school” and “home” a positive one along with offering specific strategies to assist such a process.

The mutual respect that must be fostered between educational settings and home environments is also well-documented. Of particular significance to Head Start programs with this ideology in mind is the text Promoting Mental Health in Each Child Care Setting, a collection of proceedings of the second annual UCLA National Conference on Preventive Psychiatry edited by Stephen Goldstone, 1988. Torres, Sale, Veenman, Feeney and Sysko, and Powell articles provide convincing evidence of the pressure on parents and early childhood personnel to establish and maintain a successfully positive relationship in the best interest of

children. Bundy (1991) also supports implementation of activities throughout the school year which assist an open communication between staff and parents with particular importance given orientation at the beginning of the school year.

3. Cultural sensitivity and awareness permeates successful early childhood programs. Numerous studies have been conducted that support the importance of a culturally relevant education. Gordon (1988) provides an historic perspective of the changing role of child care workers and adds that the call for sensitivity to various cultures came about largely incidental to the Soviet Union and United States space race. “We came to understand that when there is great dissonance between the culture of the learner and the culture of the learning environment, learning is impeded” (p. 229).

Clearly, most of the studies relevant to multi-cultural educational practices center on programs serving minority populations. Soto (1991) depicts demographic trends which impact early childhood bilingual/bicultural education practices and states that “minority” enrollments range from 70% to 96% in the nation’s 15 largest school districts. It then becomes apparent that “minority” is also a changing concept which further evidences the need for culturally relevant early childhood programs.

Lawrence (1976) provides an approach to developing positive identities for children among the Mississippi Choctaw which is inter-generational and culturally sensitive. The Exploring Childhood curriculum was developed in 1974 and assisted the Mississippi Choctaw Head Start program’s need to involve high school students and young parents. Furthermore, the Exploring Childhood curriculum provides an eclectic approach of observation skills and cultural practices which served the Mississippi Choctaw community successfully.

Exhaustive research of specific tribal early childhood programs is available. Most conclusively, the research demonstrates that effective early childhood programs incorporate meaningful parent involvement, positive relations between staff and parents, and culturally sensitive curricula.

## Chapter 3

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the practicum was to create an effective program orientation session that would enhance positive and meaningful parent involvement. To successfully attain this goal the following objectives were addressed during the 10 week implementation plan.

#### Objectives

1. 90% of families enrolled in the 1991-1992 program school year and 100% of program staff would attend a program orientation session during September 1991.
2. 50% of families would volunteer in the classrooms twice monthly for the months of September and October 1991.
3. An effective and culturally sensitive parent involvement activity idea book would be generated during the orientation session for future parent involvement enrichment.

The degree of attainment of these objectives was measured from in-kind documentation, personal and staff observations and the physical evidence of a completed Positive Parent Activities Poster, Appendix B.

Many enriching benefits were to be realized upon successful practicum implementation. The expected changes would help eliminate the reluctance of participants to attend effective parent-building activities, empower decision-making skills, and reduce negative attitudes/comments/perceptions of the program's parent involvement component. The success of the practicum was to impact the families participating in the program presently and in the future.

## Chapter 4

### SOLUTION STRATEGIES

#### Existing Programs and Models

Increased attention has been given to enhancing positive Indian parent involvement in early childhood programs. By virtue of a parent involvement clause attached to many current federal programs which permeate reservation education, health and social services, parent involvement activities are numerous. Voluminous amounts of information relative to specific strategies of parent participation could be gleaned if a composite of program progress reports were developed from a collection throughout Indian country. Unfortunately, the author has no access to such documentation, if the compiled data exists. However, there is general agreement among the experts that since parent involvement is an essential key to unlocking the gates to successful early childhood programs across mainstream America, the same value would prevail among Indian education programs. A major obstacle to this assumption is that tribal identities and cultural values and practices differ immensely from tribe to tribe.

Of general importance to addressing positive parent involvement in Indian family services and early childhood programs is the Family Systems Model (Turnbull 1985). Four subsystems which impact three different perspectives of family dynamics are offered by Turnbull. O'Connell (1985) relates how Turnbull's structure applies to the White Mountain Apache and became the basis for development of an early intervention program design serving Native American families in that community. The significance of family and culture in education through extra-familial support is the focus of O'Connell's work. Grandmothers, clanship influences, community values and tribal government influences are variables impacting the family system approach to service delivery among native people.

The existing parent involvement component in the program impacted by this practicum functions with values, tribal governments, clanships and family systems vastly different from the White Mountain Apache. Tefft (1968) suggests the change in values; socialization practices and family structure are statistically significant between two generations of the population targeted by this practicum. Parenting skills and demographic data in terms of Indian vs. White are explained while the data collected supports the hypothesis of a less Indian oriented value system within tribal families. Tefft's work of 1971 expounds on the earlier value position process and suggests additional hypothesis which would impact any solution strategy to improve positive Indian parent involvement efforts. Although the latest study continues stereotypic Indian vs. White values classification which the author finds extremely objectionable, there are numerous references to understanding the people served by this practicum more clearly. Tafoya (1982) offers another existing model of differentiating perception of values impacting Indian education and the role families and culture play in successful early childhood education programs. Extended family and values orientation are delineated from Standard Average European (SAE) and Standard Native American (SNA) perspectives with vivid distinction in terms of oral and written skill development, problem solving skills, learning preference modalities, parenting practices and world view disparities. In addition, spiritual perceptions in relation to Indian education are detailed and offer insight to the basic differences affecting Indian family participation in education.

Another model of fundamental value differences between Native American and non-Indian cultures and the impact parent involvement has in Indian education is offered by Locust (1988). Again, an understanding of the spiritual values and belief system of the community being served is purported. Locust continues by offering rationale for reticent parent involvement

in Indian education. “Avoiding disharmony is desirable in Indian cultures: disharmony is negative and pervasive and can result in un-wellness. For instance, Indian parents frequently refuse to go to the school when called because they have learned that being called means their child is in trouble. The negative situation that is certain to develop among school officials, the child, and the parents brings disharmony for all concerned and can result in illness if spiritual energy becomes low” (p. 322). Locust concludes that discrimination will cease only when tribal cultures and educational systems develop mutual respect.

Further Native American values classification practices and explanations are suggested by Foerster and Little Soldier (1978). Strategies for improving early childhood development is purported through use of culturally relevant open-education learning centers designed through mutual positive parent involvement and teacher competence that recognize the cultural attributes within the community being served. Foerster and Little Soldier support the following tenets for improved Indian education services.

- \* Active play, a basic Native American cultural value,

- \* Child-rearing practices among Indian parents within the home are promoted by teachers and the learning environment,

- \*Early childhood program staff is sensitive to traditional tribal characteristics.

In summary, a review of the literature showed that existing models for increasing positive Indian parent involvement in early childhood education programs include the following criteria.

- Tribal-specific cultural activities.

- Recognition of the values of the local culture.

- Cultural identity can diminish at a markedly rapid rate, within two generations.



-Indian educators must develop competency in understanding the cultural community being served.

-Native American learning styles are conducive to active participation.

### Solution Strategy

An integration of the criteria cited above was proposed as a solution strategy for the problem of increasing positive Indian parent involvement per the aforementioned goal and objectives.

Three important tasks served as solution strategies.

1. Develop a bi-level orientation program. The orientation process assisted staff and parents to understand their roles and responsibilities in developing and maintaining a positive parent involvement component throughout program operations.
2. Document the impact of the improved parent involvement in three specific stages.
  - A) Staff in-service documentation.
  - B) Parent orientation documentation, and
  - C) In-kind documentation of parent involvement activities.
  - D) A parent involvement activity booklet was to be developed to assist with continuation of positive Indian parent involvement activities.

The solution strategy was effective in terms of human, time and financial resources and addressed the specific problem. Additionally, the proposed solution strategy interplayed effectively with program improvement plans already underway, training/orientation schedules and documentation rigors previously established.

## Implementation Plan

The implementation phase of the practicum work is provided below in a chronological order of events detailing the adherence to the proposed implementation plan. Unexpected occurrences that impacted the outcome of the parent involvement improvement plan are described.

Information from five other Indian Head Start programs revealed the following similarities and differences relative to parent involvement in like programs. Three of the five Indian Head Start programs responded that parent orientation sessions are conducted at the beginning of the school year. Two of the programs indicated that a parent handbook was distributed to parents during the first week of classes. One program hosts Center Meetings and allows a period for questions and answers regarding the parent involvement component.

Family service/parent involvement staff met with the author to brainstorm parent involvement improvement project ideas and develop a commitment to the proposed goals and objectives of this practicum. Ideas were generated which included “Game Time” at each parent committee meeting; book rewards given to parents who volunteer in the classroom weekly or four times/month; parent trainings to be conducted at two different times (once in the day and once in the evening; both sessions will be provided babysitting services by the program); video equipment used in the classrooms highlighting successful parent involvement so as to encourage other parents; a Parent of the Day notice for each classroom to elicit more concrete volunteering; and, during the first parent committee meetings fund raising limits, amount of funds to be raised and use of funds would be established.

During staff orientation the parent involvement improvement project was detailed and questions and answers by staff were addressed for a program-wide commitment to the

practicum. The orientation session was planned with the staff for each center based on the following guidelines.

INTRODUCTIONS: 15 Minutes  
Ice breaker activity, Indian blessing

DIRECTOR'S ORIENTATION: 15 Minutes  
Five components of Head Start  
Program Operations  
Program Management

GAME TIME: 30-45 Minutes  
Varying active, fun, inter-generational games

REFRESHMENTS: 30 Minutes

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT: 10 Minutes  
Brainstorm ideas for positive involvement

Orientation sessions were scheduled for each center. Children made Open House invitations and took them home to encourage family participation. Refreshments, space, blessing speaker and other pertinent details were arranged. However, due to a community tragedy, the Open House at one center was postponed and the Open House at a second center had less than desired attendance. (Four teenagers were killed in a car accident two nights before the Open House was scheduled to take place at one center which was the community most affected by the loss.)

The Open House which was conducted successfully sparked many ideas for Parent Committee work, limited fund raisers to four per year and was a very positive beginning to the school year. The Open House which was conducted the night of the wake for the teenagers had only 12 parents and 10 children attending. Because such a low turn-out was experienced, the decision to re-schedule the full parent improvement project introduction was reached.

A second attempt at the Open House/Orientation for the third center was conducted with 27 families attending; eight parents had attended during the previous week. Additional suggestions were obtained for inclusion in the Parent Activity Book. The other two centers' parent involvement/family service staff continued with efforts to secure classroom volunteers and plan a minimum of fund raising activities. The parent involvement/family service staff was advised by the author to use a variety of resources (video, personal observation and printed materials) to actively and positively involve parents in program functions.

The first Parent Committee meetings were held in two centers to plan the activities (training, classroom, fund raising and special events) for the school year. Staff observed that an effort to endear families to positive parenting was experienced with discussion centering on training instead of fund raising.

The author met with all staff during monthly staff meetings to evaluate the parent involvement improvement program. Staff offered suggestions for the Parent Activity Book and provided in-kind documentation from the previous month. At the time, 68 parents/guardians had volunteered in the classroom activities and only five fund raising events had been conducted involving 87 parents program-wide. The author designed an Open House Orientation Evaluation form, Appendix C. Responses were collected and mean averages derived. Overall, the orientation event was rated seven on a scale of one to ten by 94 Head Start staff and parent respondents.

Following the Open House Orientation, parent trainings were scheduled at each center. Standard First Aid was offered by a community member who is also a staff member. A program-wide total of 18 parents attended the first training. Public relation efforts on the local

radio and newspaper media sources were made and the program's monthly newsletter detailed the parent involvement improvement plan.

The Parent Policy Council (PPC), a governing board of the program, experienced a measureable increase in active participation mid-way through the implementation phase. In the past an average of seven PPC members attended the monthly meetings to determine budget issues, employment concerns, hiring and firing of staff and overall program operation. The first PPC meeting of the 1991-92 school year was scheduled after the orientation session and was attended by 16 members out of 24 program-wide elected representatives. Although this was not an objective of the practicum, the author surmises that the orientation sessions helped to increase the overall parent involvement in policy making issues as well.

The author met with all center staff for an update on the parent involvement improvement plan in mid-November. It was reported that 79 program-wide parents had volunteered in classrooms. Staff felt that a slight increase in positive parent involvement in center operations had been experienced. The reasons for minimal success were discussed and staff expressed concern for the large number of parents not actively involving themselves in the program or in any activity. Precedent, minimal available time, financial resources, lack of motivation, attitudes and resistance to change were cited as secondary reasons while babysitting and transportation problems were thought to be primary reasons.

The third center's Parent Committee Meeting to develop a Parent Involvement Book was cancelled because 18 inches of snow fell in 12 hours on the day the meeting was scheduled. The efforts to meet with the Parent Committee were not successful. Therefore, the total number of participants at the Orientation Sessions reflects only two centers in the compiled practicum results.

The 18 PPC members who attended the second meeting of the school year decided it would be beneficial to retreat to a location at some distance for three days without children, family and job pressures to review and update the written operational plans for the program. The author was instructed to arrange the event and agreed that the retreat would not only complete the required annual review of written plans, policies, procedures, but would provide in-depth orientation to the PPC members who had not served on the board previously.

The Parent Activity Book was revised to become a poster. The family service staff and the PPC felt a quick-glance catchy poster would better serve the parents rather than “just another book”. The compiled ideas were formatted and made ready for distribution to five other Indian Head Start programs and the parents served locally.

The parent involvement/family service staff evaluated the parent involvement improvement plan and offered suggestions for continued positive parent involvement. All data was collected for compilation including in-kind, orientation sign-in sheets, orientation evaluations, parent involvement component evaluations and staff/family observations.

Thirteen PPC members attended a retreat for two days and updated/revised the written operational policies and procedures. The retreat proved to be successful in terms of empowering the parents to make quality decisions and justify the policies to be implemented throughout the school year. Unfortunately, no evaluation devise was designed to collect information by participants as to the values they perceived from such an activity.

### Continuation

Based upon the completion of the 10 week implementation period for improved parent involvement, the following implications for continuation and/or duplication were considered.

- Increased awareness among staff and parents of positive, meaningful and endearing parent involvement in the immediate work setting which helped equalize fund raising and classroom activities over the remainder of the school year and which would easily be duplicated in successive school years.
- A poster of community generated activities which are culturally relevant and distributed to five other Indian Head Start programs and local participants may contribute to more positive Indian parent involvement.
- The comprehensive plan also allowed for duplication by other team members in the areas of health and social services. Although certain basic component requirements would necessarily be transformed, the basic format of the parent involvement improvement plan would be ideal for replication in other component areas.
- Documentable in-kind results and the positive Indian parent involvement poster have become a permanent part of the program's resource materials for further use. In addition, the poster may serve as possible presentation material at national conferences.

## Chapter 5

### RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

To summarize the practicum results, the practicum goal is of prime importance. Overall, the parent involvement improvement program made strides to increase positive parent involvement in the program impacted by the practicum. Compilation of the selected documentation reveals the practicum specific objectives were not successfully met. However, the designed program orientation session proved effective in enhancing positive parent involvement particularly in terms of policy and decision-making areas.

Five additional general issues are relevant as a direct result of the orientation session and the practicum solution strategies. 1. The staff gained insight and practiced empowerment strategies by participating in the orientation sessions. 2. The parent involvement improvement program provided a team-building vehicle for the entire staff. 3. A central point for parent involvement efforts afforded focus for staff and families. 4. Program participants enjoyed themselves at the opening session setting the tone for the remainder of the school year. 5. Alternative ideas were generated from a bi-level structure comprised of parents and staff. Specifically, a measure of the objectives is detailed below.

STATED OBJECTIVES	ACTUAL RESULTS
90% of program parents will attend program orientation.	39% of parents/families attended program orientation.
100% of program staff will attend program orientation.	100% of program staff attended program orientation.
50% of program parents will volunteer twice monthly in 80% of the classrooms.	42% of program parents volunteered in classrooms once in two months.
Positive parent involvement book will be developed and distributed.	Positive parent involvement poster was developed and distributed.



There are many contributing factors to the unsuccessful completion of the practicum objectives. 1. The community was impacted by a tragic auto accident at the time of the planned orientation sessions. 2. Lack of transportation to the orientation sessions. 3. Precedent of fun and enjoyable experiences in parent activities was not established. 4. 50% volunteerism in the classrooms was too high an expectation. 5. Lack of confidence among parents and/or families to serve in the classrooms effectively. Although immeasurable, the reasons above represent realistic and professional assumptions and observations.

Similarly, many spin-off benefits of the parent involvement improvement program can be concluded. 1. Significant proportion of program participants rallied around the parent involvement improvement focus. 2. Parent involvement perception among participants was expanded to include fun and games. 3. The policy decision-making board will continue the practices developed during the retreat. 4. The precedent of positive parent involvement is established. 5. The positive parent involvement poster has been warmly received by other Indian pre-school programs. 6. Fund raising projects are empowering activities which can teach enterprise skills to families with little or no employment history. 7. Some participants consider fund raising activities to be positive, grass-roots economics activities where acts of generosity can occur although not comparable to classroom volunteerism or attending parent meetings or trainings.

The unanticipated outcomes of the PPC retreat, as a rather extended orientation session, were impressive. The retreat participants have commented that they now have a much clearer sense of their complex responsibilities to program management and understand that effective early childhood programs practice a variety of parent involvement activities. The empowerment effects, although again immeasurable, were demonstrated by the increased attendance at policy board meetings and advocating for employment resolutions with the Tribal Councils. An average of 14 PPC members attending meetings is significant growth compared to the previous average of five members attending 1990-1991 school year PPC meetings.

Furthermore, ten PPC members met with the Joint Tribal Business Council to address the recommended firing of two employees who were unacceptably performing classroom duties. This act was particularly noteworthy when one understands that employment termination because of incompetence was unprecedented in the program. The recommendation to terminate employment with the two employees had been recommended to two previous policy boards that

hadn't the determination to release the incompetent staff members. These are two specific examples which speak to positive parent involvement in terms of policy development and decision-making which was not a recognized or designed objective, but nonetheless was accomplished within the practicum process.

Foerster and Little Soldier's conclusion of active play which parallels much of Native American culture can again be drawn relative to this practicum. Somewhere in the "academics" and "hard work" of early childhood education, the wonder of joy, fun and games has been displaced not only for children but parent and family members as volunteers. The natives of this continent are seemingly and amazingly pre-disposed to enjoyment and could subsequently be identified as the richest of the rich in terms of teaching and learning that the spirit of play is a natural form of learning and living.

The idea of "play as only child's work" was challenged through the basic design of the orientation format. Structured team-building games were successful and obviously enjoyed by the participants attending the orientation sessions.

Therefore, the precept of fun and games is a prime recommendation as is capitalizing on an eclectic approach to Indian parent involvement activities which mix play and empowerment. Katz (1984) concretely supports fun, games and joy of play in her work NO APOLOGY FOR PLAYOLOGY by writing, "Play and laughter may be hazardous to your dis-ease" (p. 1). Many of her words and thoughts are used on the positive parent involvement poster.

The local follow-on plan includes the above basic recommendations, the positive Indian parent involvement poster which can readily be adapted from year to year by participants, and continued PPC retreats for policy-making orientation. On a regional level, the positive Indian parent involvement poster and recommendations for fun and games will be shared with other northwest Indian Head Start programs through professional coalition-building and networking. Also, the practicum scope may be presented at regional and/or national conferences.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A

PARENT VOLUNTEER IN-KIND RECORD

Center \_\_\_\_\_

Month \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name	Date of Volunteer	Child's Name	Kind of Activity	No. of Hours	Dollar Value	Parent Meeting	Classroom Volunteer	Other

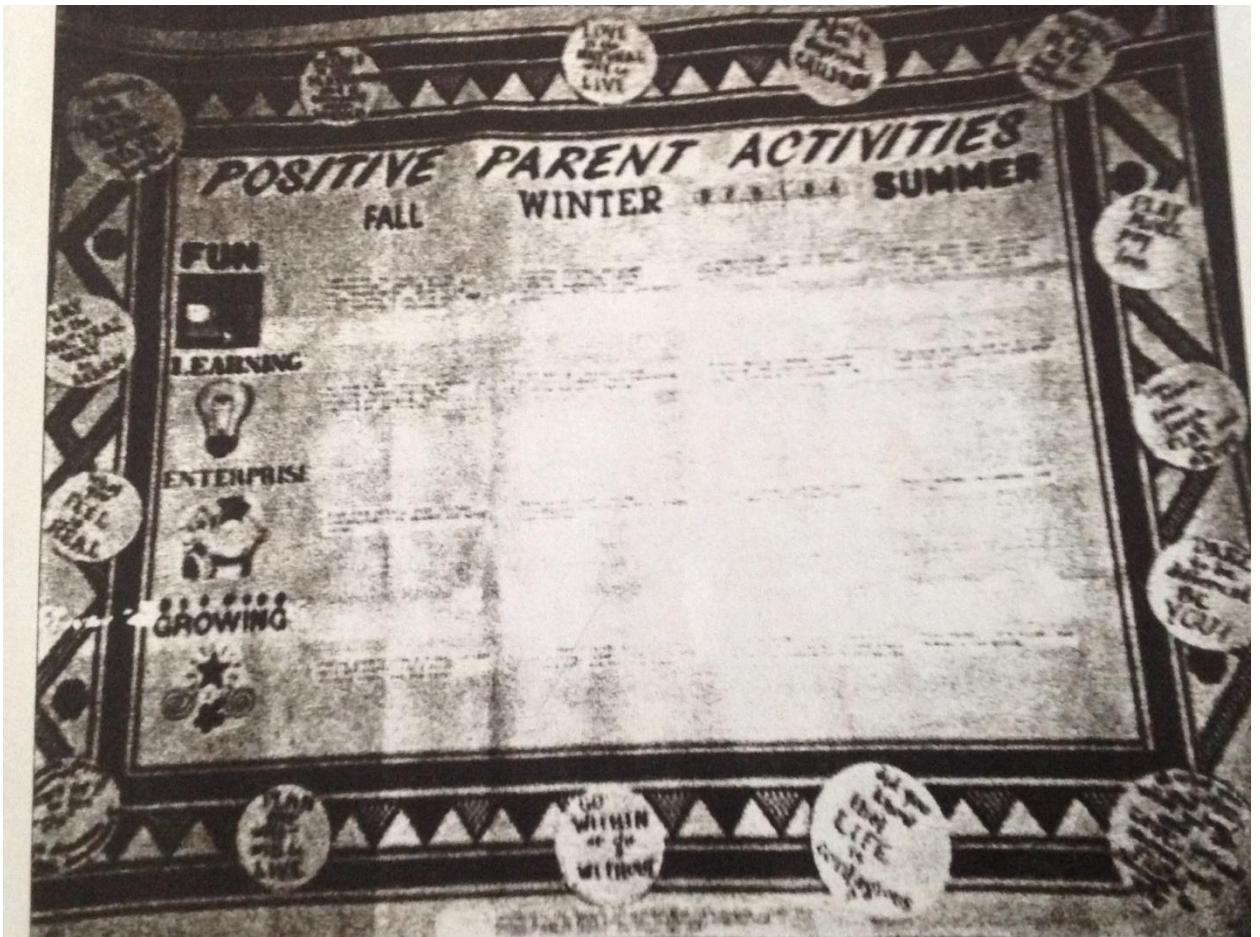
\_\_\_\_\_ Date

*I certify the above report is correct* \_\_\_\_\_ Staff Signature

## Appendix B

### POSITIVE PARENT ACTIVITIES POSTER

The photograph below illustrates the completed Positive Parent Activities Poster which was a direct result of the practicum work. The poster was distributed to five other Indian Head Start Programs in the northwest region and used to elicit more positive parent involvement in the program served by the practicum. The poster was developed by the family service/parent involvement staff with quotes from NO APOLOGY FOR PLAYOLOGY by Ellie Katz, San Diego, CA, 1984. Seasonal activities in four domains (Fun, Learning, Enterprise, and Growing) were detailed to capture practicum goals and resultant increased knowledge of positive parent activities.





Appendix C

PROGRAM ORIENTATION EVALUATION

\_\_\_\_\_

Center

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

Please take a few minutes to comment on the Program Orientation.

Rate the following items from 1 to 10, 1 = lowest score 10 = highest.

1. The Program Orientation was informative. \_\_\_\_\_
2. The Program Orientation was enjoyable. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I learned about parent involvement. \_\_\_\_\_
4. I learned about the Head Start program. \_\_\_\_\_

Please comment on the following.

I most liked the Orientation Session because

I think the Orientation Session can be improved by

I will encourage other parents to attend Head Start activities by

Other comments:

**THANK YOU!**

Form developed by Karen King, 1991.