



State of the Field in the Early Childhood Education of American Indian and Alaska Native Children

Susan C. Faircloth, Ph.D.

Pennsylvania State University
Partnerships for Promising Practices in Indian Education
Rapid City, South Dakota
July 7, 2008



Early Childhood Care and Education

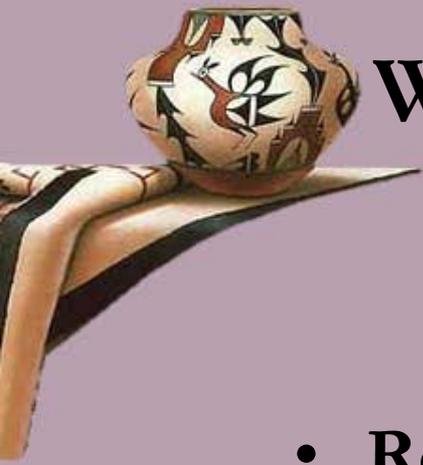
- According to the 2000 Census (cited in Yazzie-Mintz, 2006) – 54% of 3 and 4 year old American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children (54%) were not enrolled in formal early childhood education programs
- On average, AI/AN children were less likely than their non-Native peers (49%) to be enrolled in early childhood education programs.



Early Childhood Care and Education

(continued)

- What these data do not tell us is the extent to which parents and families have *access* to early childhood education or the *quality* and *overall structure* of available programs and services.
- Access to quality early childhood education and care is critical. Effective programs have the potential to facilitate children's social, emotional and cognitive growth and to ease the transition to school (Yazzie-Mintz, 2006).



Why is Early Childhood Education Important?

- Research indicates that children who come to school prepared to learn experience increased growth in academic achievement resulting in a more upward educational trajectory than their peers.



Research and Publications Regarding Early Childhood Care and Education

- The following findings are based on a review of literature (2003) regarding the early childhood education of American Indians and Alaska Natives. This review was commissioned by the Administration for Children and Families.



Findings

- **Culturally appropriate curricula and practices**
 - **Including Native languages and cultures in the curriculum**
 - success dependent upon cultivating partnerships with parents, families, community members, childcare providers, etc.
 - **Role of schools in helping to restore/revitalize Native languages**
 - **Learning styles**
 - **Teaching and instructional styles**
 - **Need to avoid stereotypes and overgeneralizations**



Findings (continued)

- **Language and literacy acquisition**
 - Need for more research on the role of children's linguistic and cultural environments on language development
 - Need to differentiate between language deficits and language differences
 - Importance of the oral tradition to linguistic development
 - Opportunities to connect families, tribes, and communities to education in real and meaningful ways
 - Need for research on language development among Native children
 - Most of the existing research focuses on assessment



Findings

(continued)

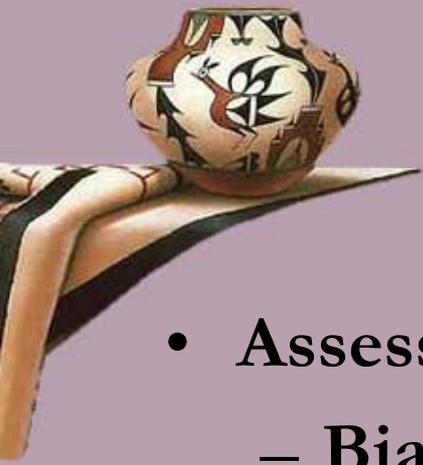
- **Teacher training and professional development**
 - Need to recognize that not all teachers are formally trained as teachers – especially important in the teaching of language and culture
 - Large numbers of AI/AN Head Start teachers and staff
 - Many Head Start staff began their work with Head Start as volunteers
 - “Programs that build and enhance the Native culture and language depend on a stable, consistent group of local educators” (Begay et al., 1995)



Findings

(continued)

- **Parent Involvement**
 - Many parents continue to feel alienated from/by the educational system
 - Examples of barriers to parent involvement include: attitudes (parental and staff), mobility, lack of school choice, family dynamics, lack of understanding of parents'/families' culture(s)
 - Lack of parent education programs designed specifically for American Indian/Alaska Native parents and families



Findings

(continued)

- **Assessment Tools and Practices**
 - **Bias**
 - **Mismatch between assessment tools and practices and children's culture, language patterns, learning styles, and individual strengths**
 - **Potential for child's poor performance on assessments to be a result of a learning or other disability**
 - **Questions regarding need for/use of locally developed norms for standardized assessments**



Findings

(continued)

- **Health and Physical Well-Being**
 - Relationship between health disparities and socioeconomic and environmental factors, smoking, poor nutrition, poor health, increased stress, drug and alcohol use/abuse
 - High rates of speech-language impairments/delays
 - Relationship between health and physical well-being and learning



Findings (continued)

- Need to study the mental health needs of American Indian communities
- Importance of early intervention
- Caution urged in interpreting results of assessments of young children
- High rates of depression, abuse and neglect – relationship to behavioral problems, psychiatric symptoms, and risk-taking behaviors
- Relationship (or lack of) between culture and attention deficit disorder and hyperactivity
- Need for programs and services that address the needs of mothers



Findings

(continued)

- **Conducting Research**
 - Need to shift from “deficit models” to “asset models”
 - Need for research that focuses on the institutions and practices that serve children rather than focusing solely or most heavily upon children and their home environments as the source of their academic difficulties
 - Need for research that questions the accuracy and appropriateness of measures and expectations that are used to assess/gage the performance of Native children
 - Need for research that involves/engages communities (e.g., community based participatory research)



Examples of Other Studies with an American Indian/Alaska Native Focus

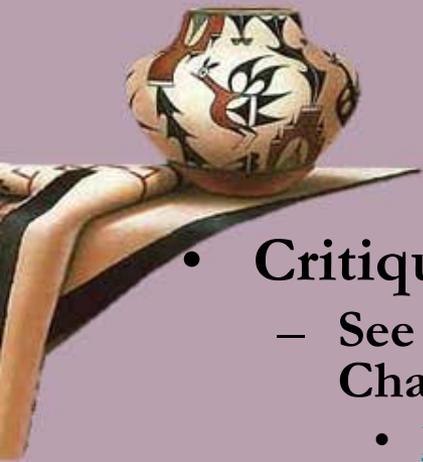
- These studies highlight the following themes
 - Importance of Parents and Families
 - Need to invest in early childhood education
 - Need for professional development and training
 - Questions regarding parents' and families' knowledge of available/existing services



Topics

(continued)

- Curriculum development
 - Identification of emerging practices
 - Gutierrez-Gomez and Pauly (2006) argue that “...educators have a responsibility to incorporate material that is authentic as well as developmentally and culturally appropriate for the children they are teaching” (p. 20).
 - They also urge teachers to “tap into” children’s prior knowledge about activities, events, and subjects, and to respond early to children’s stereotypes and misconceptions about others.



Topics

(continued)

- Critiquing children's literature
 - See work of Debbie Reese (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
 - <http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/>
 - Gutierrez-Gomez and Pauly urge educators to:
 - select books that represent children's tribes as well as the tribes indigenous to the area in which one is teaching
 - clarify the purpose of using the selected literature
 - select books that represent a balance of historical and contemporary accounts of American Indians
 - scan the literature for generalizations and stereotypes
 - examine the traits of characters portrayed in the literature



Topics

(continued)

- assess the accuracy of clothing, architecture, and art used in the literature
- consider the perspectives of the characters
- use the correct terms in referring to a tribe, tribal member, or group
- consider how Native peoples are represented in pictures
- consider the ways in which images in the literature portray Native people
- become knowledgeable of the person(s) writing the selected literature, and
- consider the extent to which Native people's voices are presented



Review of Early Childhood Literature by Patricia Cahape and William Demmert (2003)

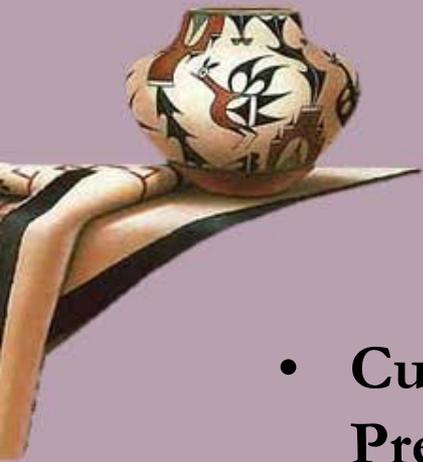
- This review of literature indicated that the bulk of research involving young American Indian and Alaska Native children has been conducted involving
 - Health disparities among young American Indians and Alaska Natives, and
 - Assessment and ability



Examples of Promising Practices

(<http://www.nccic.acf.hhs.gov/tribal/effective/effective.html>)

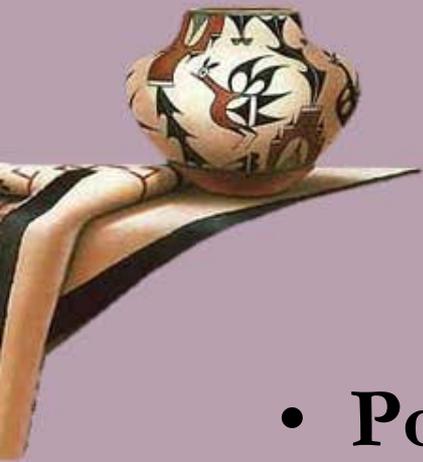
- Promoting involvement of fathers in early childhood care and education (Hawaii)
- Provider training (Alaska)
 - Required participation
 - Develop training based on a needs assessment
 - Utilize program's policies and procedures to identify training topics
- Partner with Boys and Girls Club to provide after-school care (Michigan)
- Leverage funds/available resources by combining services provided by Head Start and Child Care Development Funds (Oklahoma)
- Develop a policies and procedures manual for child care providers (California)
- Parent training (Alaska)



Examples

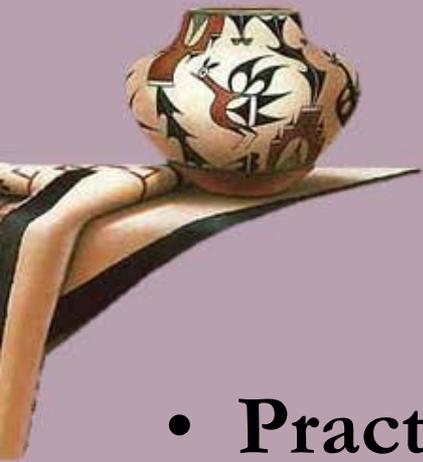
(continued)

- **Culturally-Based Literacy Program for Toddlers and Preschoolers (Washington)**
- **Literacy outreach to families (Oregon)**
 - Initially started to increase parent involvement
 - Literacy nights with dinner and books
- **Partnerships with tribal colleges and universities (South Dakota)**
 - Orientation and training for child care providers
- **Innovative Approaches to Providing School-Age Care (Oklahoma)**
 - Community service component in exchange for paying small fee for child care services



Implications for Policy, Practice and Future Research

- **Policy**
 - Ongoing need to connect research to policy
 - “The educational needs of AI/AN young children, particularly those with or at-risk of disabilities, 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 continued lack of a systemic approach to early childhood education, including early intervention, will result in the failure to provide appropriate services” (Faircloth, 2006).



Implications

(continued)

- **Practice**

- need for professional development and ongoing training of early childhood care providers and educators
- need for parent training/information
- need to recognize, affirm, and incorporate language and culture into the teaching and learning process



Implications

(continued)

- Questions to consider (see Leake and Black, 2005)
 - What language(s) is spoken by the child/family?
 - What are the family's views on personal/social development?
 - What are the personal/academic and other goals of the child/family?
 - What are the family's views on abilities? Disabilities?
 - What does the family unit “look” like?
 - How does the family make decisions?
 - How knowledgeable is the family/child of the education process?
 - What can be done to facilitate family/child advocacy skills?



Implications

(continued)

- **Research**
 - need for ongoing research; increased quantitative data analysis, coupled with qualitative data that helps to tell our stories
 - Increasing opportunities to conduct empirical research using large-scale datasets, such as the kindergarten and birth cohorts of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, National Assessment of Educational Progress, National Indian Education Study (Parts I and II)



Implications

(continued)

– Possible Research Questions:

- How can we make the assessment process more culturally appropriate and relevant for use with young AI/AN children?
- To what extent do existing services meet the unique cultural and linguistic characteristics of young AI/AN children, their families, and communities, etc.?
- What is being done (what needs to be done) to ensure the seamless transition of AI/AN children from early childhood care and education to school-age programs and services? How can this transition be improved/facilitated?



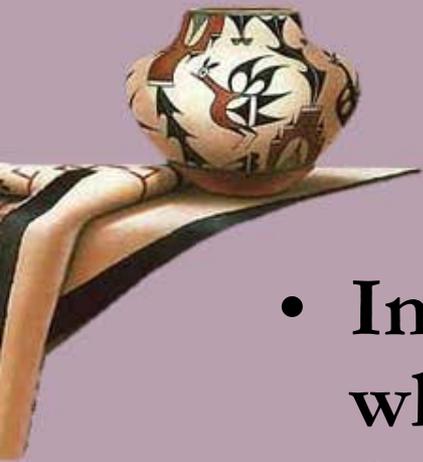
Implications

(continued)

- Kuhns and Webb (2003) – “Any research efforts must take into account the unique cultural characteristics of children and families served as well as the goals and directions of the local communities in which they live.”
- Current and future studies should be evaluated by asking questions such as:
 - “If the practice recommended in this study were followed, is there evidence to suggest that the investment in the practice would help young American Indian and Alaska Native children achieve better outcomes?”
(Kuhns and Webb, 2003)

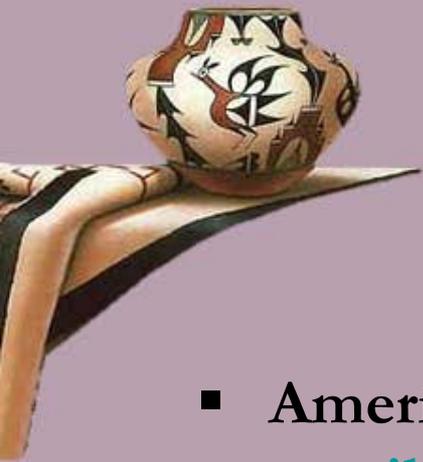


Identifying Promising Practices in Early Childhood Care and Education



Questions

- In your experience in Indian education, what constitutes a promising practice for use with young American Indian/Alaska Native children?
- What are some examples of promising practices in early childhood care and education that you are aware of?
- What kinds of questions should we be asking as we work to identify promising programs and practices?



Resources

- American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)
 - aihec.org
- American Indian/Alaska Native Head Start Research Center – The University of Colorado Denver and Health Sciences Center
 - http://aianp.uchsc.edu/headstart/headstart_index.htm
- Bureau of Indian Education (U.S. Department of Interior)
 - <http://www.oiep.bia.edu/programs.html>



Resources

(continued)

- National Indian Education Association
 - niea.org
- National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHY)
 - <http://nichcy.org>
- Office of Indian Education (U.S. Department of Education)
 - <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oie/index.html>



Questions/Comments



For additional information:

Susan C. Faircloth, Ph.D.

Suite 300 Rackley Building

The Pennsylvania State University

University Park, PA 16802

E-mail: scf2@psu.edu

Phone: 814-863-3775