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## Reconceptualizing Indigenous Parent Involvement in Early Educational Settings: Lessons from Native Hawaiian Preschool Families

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# Reconceptualizing Indigenous Parent Involvement in Early Educational Settings: Lessons from Native Hawaiian Preschool Families

## **Abstract**

Indigenous families are often perceived by teachers and school administrators as disinterested and uninvolved in their children's education. This article aims to complicate that longstanding stereotype. A detailed, qualitative case study of two Native Hawaiian preschool families reveals compelling counterstories of Indigenous parents who are deeply concerned about their children's education, but are limited in their family-school involvement by a range of (post)colonial, social, psychological, and economic challenges that make it difficult for them to engage with schools in conventional ways. The study raises awareness of the skillful resolve with which Indigenous families employ their limited resources to support their children's education. It challenges educators and policy makers to imagine creative possibilities for drawing Indigenous families into collaborative activity with contemporary schools.

## **Keywords**

Indigenous, education, parent involvement, Native Hawaiian

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## **Reconceptualizing Indigenous Parent Involvement in Early Educational Settings: Lessons from Native Hawaiian Preschool Families**

Increasing parents' involvement in their children's education is viewed as a cornerstone of contemporary United States school-reform efforts (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Educational researchers and policy makers alike contend that children learn more and schools improve when parents are involved in their children's schooling (Barnard, 2004; Demmert, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Tyson, 2009; National Parent Teacher Association, 2009). This finding has significant implications for Native Hawaiian students, who have historically demonstrated low-levels of academic achievement in conventional U.S. schools (Benham, 2006; Hammond, Wilson, & Barros, 2011; Kana'iaupuni, Malone, & Ishibashi, 2005) and whose parents have long been perceived as uninvolved in their children's education (Maielua, 2011; Yamauchi, Lau-Smith, & Luning, 2008). In an era when parent involvement (or lack thereof) is considered a predictor of Indigenous students' school success or failure (Friedel, 1999b; Goulet, 2001; Smith, 1999), educators who work in Native Hawaiian and other Indigenous school communities are challenged with the question of: How can we most effectively collaborate with the Indigenous families whom we serve?

This article is based on the premise that too often schools' efforts toward increasing Indigenous parental involvement are guided by longstanding stereotypes that oversimplify the complex challenges and motivations of contemporary Indigenous families (Friedel, 1999a; Maielua, 2011). For instance, according to Koki and Lee (1998), many Pacific educators contend that the Indigenous Pacific parents with whom they work do not "carry their share of the load." The educators perceive these Indigenous Pacific parents as simply "dumping" their children at school and relinquishing their responsibility for their children's educational development. Similarly, Mackay and Myles' (1995) study of Aboriginal student dropouts in Ontario, Canada revealed that the non-Native educators of these students largely attributed the high Aboriginal student dropout rate to their parents' lack of interest and failure to engender in their children an appreciation of the value of education. In each of these cases, Indigenous families are ahistorically depicted as failing at parenting and blamed for their children's school failure with virtually no recognition of the deep, colonial history that undergirds many of the ongoing challenges that Indigenous families and students have faced, and continue to face, in the contemporary (post)colonial society and educational system.

In Hawai'i, as in other Indigenous nations across the globe, colonial domination took our once healthy, thriving, and self-sufficient Indigenous society and horribly distorted it (Stannard, 1989; Trask, 1999). The journals and travelogues of Captain Cook and other early colonists in Hawai'i reveal numerous accounts of a thriving Indigenous community of strong, happy, and healthy Hawaiians, coexisting in self-sufficient harmony in a land of natural abundance (Cook, 1967; Edgar, n.d.). Now, a little more than 200 years later, statistics tell us that many Native Hawaiian families are poor, unhealthy, unstable, and uneducated, and that our children are consequently at risk physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally (Kamehameha Schools, 2009; Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 2011). What these statistics neglect to explain is that, sandwiched between these contrasting social portraits, is a history of invasion and colonialism: a story of theft, exploitation, and oppression that, when coupled with the forced imposition of devastating colonial educational policies, has enduring implications for contemporary Native Hawaiian home-school relations.

By shedding light on this often-forgotten colonial history and its contemporary ramifications, this paper sets out to complicate the longstanding stereotype of Native Hawaiian families as disinterested and uninvolved in their children's education. It is premised on the understanding that if teachers and educational researchers are committed to sensitively listening and responding to the unique perspectives and concerns of Native Hawaiian families, they are likely to find that these families are deeply concerned about their children's education and are committed to doing whatever they can to support their children's schooling, but are often limited in their family-school involvement by a range of (post)colonial, social, psychological, and economic challenges that make it difficult for these families to engage with schools in conventional ways.

### **Existing Research on “Minority” Parent Involvement**

Although an extensive body of research documents the importance of parent involvement for student achievement (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002), parental participation in minority and disadvantaged communities is reported to be persistently low (Davies, 2002; Floyd, 1998; Moles, 1993). The prevailing interpretation is that less-educated, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and minority parents either cannot or do not want to become involved in their children's education (Chavkin, 1993; Lareau, 1996; Valdés, 1996). However, while educators and educational researchers frequently (mis)interpret minority parent non-involvement as evidence of deficiency or disinterest (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999), or demonstrative of a lack of caring (Carger, 1997), studies examining parents' perceptions of their role in their children's schooling have found that minority parents care very much about their children's education (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). They have high goals and aspirations for their children (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese & Garnier, 2001; Shannon, 1996), and they want to be involved (López, 2001).

Furthermore, while there is a persisting view that minority family values may conflict with the values necessary for school success, research on home-school “complementarities” (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995) suggests that the adherence to traditional cultural values in minority homes does not necessarily put children at a disadvantage in American schools. Instead, many of these values may actually serve to support or complement educational achievement (García, 2004; Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1995).

### **Existing Research on Indigenous Parent Involvement**

In addition to the existing research on minority parent-school involvement, which is largely focused on immigrant communities, there is a growing body of research on family-school participation in various Indigenous communities where the historical imposition of colonial educational policies has had profound and lasting effects upon contemporary home-school relations. For instance, a number of American Indian studies suggest that, in spite of legislation mandating that federally funded schools actively promote parent involvement, the on-site involvement of American Indian parents in public schools is dramatically low (Deloria, 1991; Noley, Armstrong, Downing, & Figueroa, 1995; Robinson-Zañartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996). While the National Education Association (1983) has cautioned against equating the lack of American Indian parent-school involvement with lack of interest, research suggests that educators and school personnel continue to “explain” American Indian parents' lack of involvement

with stereotypical and unsubstantiated hypotheses; often assuming, for instance, that “these parents don’t care about education” (Robinson-Zañartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996, para. 3; see also Dixon, Murphy, Estrella, Howe, Whitehorse, & Robinson-Zañartu, 1991).

More recent studies highlight historical explanations for the lack of on-site, Native parent-school involvement. Linking the colonial legacy of residential boarding schools with intergenerational cycles of dysfunctional relationships, deep mistrust of educational institutions, and the disruption of parenting skills within Native communities, these studies provide recommendations for culturally grounded school-community networks that foster healing and empowerment among Native families while rebuilding the social, cultural, and familial ties that have been severed by decades of residential schooling (Hirshberg & Sharp, 2005; Jamie & Russell, 2010; Lawrenchuk, Harvey, & Berkowitz, 2000).

### **The Current Study**

This study builds upon the existing body of Indigenous parent-involvement research and extends it to the case of Native Hawaiian communities, where a combination of colonial, English-language day and residential schools nearly eradicated our Native language and culture and effectively undermined the role of Native Hawaiian parents in the education of their young children (Benham & Heck, 1998). Now, over 100 years after the illegal overthrow of the Native Hawaiian monarchy and Hawai‘i’s forced annexation to the United States, the (post)colonial state of Hawai‘i remains economically and politically dominated by a colonial settler population that is predominately white and Asian American, while large numbers of Native Hawaiians remain politically, economically, socially, and culturally disenfranchised in our island home (Fujikane, 2008; Warner, 1999).

Beginning with the understanding that, prior to colonization, traditional Native Hawaiian families had a long history of supporting their children’s education (Chun, 2006; Pukui, Haertig, & Lee, 1972), this study aims to acknowledge the myriad ways in which Native Hawaiian families continue to support or complement their children’s schooling in the face of enduring, (post)colonial challenges. Instead of focusing on how educators can teach Indigenous families to become involved in their children’s education (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1986), this study considers what educators can learn from listening closely to these families. It seeks to legitimize what Indigenous families are already doing to support their children’s education and focuses on how educators can recognize, foster, and sustain these existing efforts.

### **Method**

This paper reports on a small section of an extensive, two-year case study aimed at helping educators to better appreciate the unique and diverse strengths, needs, and challenges of Native Hawaiian families with young, preschool-aged children. While the larger study included participant-observation sessions, surveys, and follow-up interviews with 16 Native Hawaiian preschool families, for the purposes of this article, I focus on just two of these families whose stories I found to be particularly compelling. I report the results through two narrative counterstories (Delgado, 1993) that detail these Native Hawaiian families’ experiences in accessing and participating in preschool education for their young children.

## **Counterstorytelling, Critical Race Theory, and TribalCrit**

In contrast to recent U.S. education policies that espouse a narrow definition of “scientifically-based” educational research (Education Sciences Reform Act, 2002; No Child Left Behind Act, 2001), Critical Race Theory and TribalCrit honor stories and oral knowledge as “real and legitimate forms of data and ways of being” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 439). TribalCrit acknowledges that stories are the foundations on which Indigenous communities are built and are vehicles for the transmission of our culture and knowledge. Stories serve as guideposts for elders and policymakers in Indigenous communities, and can serve as powerful data in Indigenous educational research (Brayboy, 2005).

Critical race theorists distinguish between two types of stories: majoritarian stories, or stories of those in power, which are a natural part of the dominant discourse, and counterstories, or stories of those experiences that are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society), which can serve as a tool for analyzing and challenging the majoritarian story (Delgado, 1993). While a narrative may support the majoritarian story, a counter-narrative or counterstory, by its very nature, challenges the majoritarian story and the “bundle of presuppositions” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462) that are embedded within it to “displace, jar, or reconstruct the dominant tale or narrative” (Delgado, 1995, p. xviii). Counterstories challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center, and provide a context to understand and transform established belief systems (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

In the following counterstories, I aim to challenge the dominant narrative of “disinterested” and “uninvolved” Native Hawaiian parents and posit a counter-narrative of dedicated and hardworking Hawaiian families who are steadfast in their commitment to successfully raising their young children amidst a complex combination of (post)colonial hardships and tribulations. Finally, I conclude by offering what I believe are important lessons that we can learn from these families, including specific policy recommendations for schools that wish to improve their Indigenous family-school collaboration.

### **Case Studies**

#### **Noe: “MacGyvering It” and Praying for Rain**

I begin with the story of Noe<sup>1</sup>. Noe has two kids and two jobs. She works as an educational assistant at a public elementary school and an after-school program coordinator. A few months prior to my interview with Noe, her husband, Ikaika, had been laid off from his construction job; Noe’s grandmother, who raised Noe, had just passed away; Noe’s mother was battling leukemia; and her family was forced to move homes twice. Life isn’t easy for Noe. As my research assistant, who transcribed Noe’s interview, noted:

You read about all those negative statistics regarding Hawaiians, and it sometimes seems like an exaggeration, or it doesn’t seem that real. But when you listen to Noe’s interview, you see all those statistics bearing true—in one family!

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<sup>1</sup> All names presented in these accounts are pseudonyms.

Noe and her family have had some difficult times, but she's not complaining. Instead, her interview (and her life) is an inspiring treatise on the art of "making do" (De Certeau, 1984) or in Noe's words, "MacGyvering It."

MacGyver is the hero in a 1980s TV series who has the cunning ingenuity to make use of mundane materials around him to escape dire situations, and is able to cobble together unorthodox solutions to any problem he faces. Unlike secret agents in other films, MacGyver has no high-tech weapons or tools, but relies only on his Swiss Army knife and duct tape. He can fix a broken fuel line with a ballpoint pen, repair a blown fuse using the aluminum wrapper from a stick of chewing gum, or build an ultra-light airplane with bamboo poles, heavy-duty garbage bags, and a cement-mixer engine.

A self-proclaimed Hawaiian, female MacGyver, Noe has similarly mastered the art of making do with little and demonstrates the creative ability to adapt in the face of challenging situations by drawing upon her only consistently available resource—her extended family network. Noe, her husband, and their two kids have always lived with extended family out of necessity. Not in the *kauhale*, traditional style with many houses on a compound, but in the postcolonial, struggling-to-survive style, with various families and generations crammed under one roof.

Noe, her husband, and two kids used to live with her husband's family with a total of seven adults and two children, spanning four generations, including her husband's mother and grandmother, as well as his adult siblings, and 18 year-old cousin. However, they recently moved out when her husband's 21 year-old sister, who used to babysit their 2½-year-old son, began using drugs and was behaving erratically. Wanting to remove their children from that influence, they moved in with Noe's sister's family, where they now live as an extended family of four adults and four children.

No longer able to rely on her sister-in-law as a babysitter, Noe enrolled their 2½-year-old son, Keoni, in preschool. However, the preschool that Noe had chosen for her son required students be potty trained and Keoni was still having trouble staying dry. Thus, Keoni was put on a modified school schedule that would allow him to go to school for shorter periods of time for the first couple of months while he continued to work on his potty training.

For those first few months, Noe, who worked at a public elementary school (where her daughter also attended) that was a 15-minute drive away from her son's preschool, was challenged daily to come up with creative solutions for dealing with Keoni's modified schedule. As Noe explains, it was a delicate balance of utilizing various family members while trying not to overburden any one family or person. She says:

When Keoni was on that modified schedule, it was horrible. I felt like I was MacGyver. My daughter, Malia, is in kindergarten at the same school where I work. But she has to be in school by 7:30 and I can't drop Keoni off until 7:45. So, I'd drop Malia off at 7:30, take Keoni to preschool at 7:45, then race back to my school where I'm supposed to start work at 8:00. Then when he was on that modified schedule Keoni would be *pau* [finished] with school at 10 o'clock. So he'd be in school from 7:45 to 10, and 10 o'clock was my recess. So at recess, I gotta tell my teacher, "Kay wait. I gotta go pick up Keoni and come back."

So I would have to pick him up during my recess and drop him off with one of my relatives. But mostly everyone is working, so it was hard to find someone who could take him. At one point, I had asked my cousin, who has a younger son and probably didn't want to watch my son. I was like, "Just watch him until I can get to lunch—for 2 hours. Just watch him for 2 hours. I'll pick him up at lunch, then I'll keep him with me at work 'til 4:00."

I know that I probably wasn't supposed to bring him to my class, so I had to "hush hush" him, you know. Like just hide him in the corner, because I gotta do my own work. But I didn't want to leave him with my cousin 'til 2:00, you know. I just felt that was unfair. So I said to my cousin, "Pleease, just help me. You know it's just till noon. I'll do whatever for you—but I just gotta get past this." She was like "O-o-okay." So, like I said, recess was like picking him up, dropping him with my cousin or one of my relatives for a couple of hours. At lunch I'd pick him up and bring him back to my class. You know it was this big ordeal I had to do. At that point, Ikaika [Noe's husband] was working construction, so I couldn't rely on him at all. The only time I could rely on him was if it rained, you know. And at that point, I would pray for rain.

Noe continued MacGyvering it day after day and "praying for rain" when things got too hectic. As she explains:

You know, it was really difficult. I had like all these MacGyvers. I had to MacGyver my whole life! At one point, I tell you, I was gonna give up. I was gonna say it wasn't for me. I need to pull him from the preschool and put him in [a daycare] where they'd take him in diapers because I couldn't do it already. I just couldn't do it.

But his teacher kept telling me she saw potential in him. She was like, "If you can just stick it out with the modified schedule until he's potty trained, I think he could do really well in this school." And I knew that she was probably right, 'cause I think he's really smart, and I knew it was a really good preschool, so I stuck it out.

Noe describes that, as Keoni slowly but surely got the hang of potty training and progressed to a regular schedule, her husband got laid off from his construction job, which Noe saw as a blessing. She explained:

Luckily at that point, you know—God forbid, I hate to say this—but at that point, November, Ikaika got laid off. So it was like, "Yes!" It was blessing. At the same time, it was like, "Oh my God, what am I going to do?" You know, like we needed that money, but at the same time it worked out perfectly.

As Noe explains, after her husband lost his construction job, he took on a newspaper route. This gave him more time to spend with his son, which Noe believes is important because her husband's dad committed suicide when he was young and her dad left her mother before she was born, so they both grew up without a father.

Noe also explains that, since Keoni has settled in on a regular schedule, they have been able to get assistance from her husband's mother, grandmother, and cousin, who also help with dropping off and picking up Keoni on their days off. Now between Ikaika, his mother, grandmother, and cousin, Keoni

always has one family member or another to be there for him when his class has parent-and-child activities or to accompany him as a chaperone on field trips.

While the adversity that this family has faced, and continues to face, is striking, perhaps more remarkable is their resilience, and the stubborn resolve on the part of this mother and the entire extended family to pull together and do whatever they need for their children's education.

In spite of the challenges dealt to her, Noe holds fast to her conviction that education can lead to success for her children. Her expectations for her children in school are in her words, "High—very high." As Noe explains, she is constantly comparing her kids with other kids the same age to make sure that they are "average or above average" and don't fall behind. If it seems that they are falling behind, she works with them at home. Noe also regularly checks in with her children's teachers to see how they are doing. She explains:

Every so often, I call the teachers up because I need to know. I need to know how my kids are doing. I'm constantly on it.

When asked to reflect on her values and her long-term goals for her children, they all revolved around the intertwined themes of education and family. First, she discussed the value of family:

In our family, we always say love one another. It came from my Grandpa who used to preach. One of the verses he used to preach was love one another. And right before my Grandpa died that was what he said, "Tell my family, love one another." And then he went.

From that, we always say, "Eh, love one another." 'Cause, you know, my grandparents had six kids, so my mom's generation had six brothers and sisters, so we have like *billions* of grandkids. Then we have like these *loads* of great-grandkids. So with all of us, of course when the family's that big, we all get *pilikia* [disagreements], you know. Someone's always *huhū* [angry] with somebody. It's ridiculous. So we always say, "Eh, love one another," because that's what we was always taught. You know, eventually get over it, move on. So that's what I always say. Especially with our kids, we always say, "Love one another." You know, "Love your brother. Love your sister." To me, that's my biggest issue because that was instilled in me so I instill it in my kids, you know. To love one another, value them. So that, I would say, is my value, love one another. I value that. I value my family.

Secondly, Noe discussed the value of education:

I also value my kids' education 'cause I want better for them. We always want better for them than what we had. You know, that's why I think our standards for our kids are so high, because we don't want them to go through what we went through, especially with my husband, Ikaika. Ikaika was on a bad road because he hardly had any guidance, you know. Their family had a lot of problems with drugs, so he had a lot of drama in his life, and he dropped out of school in ninth grade, you know. So I'm like, "You know, Ikaika, we want them to get what we didn't have. We want them to go farther than us."

So to me, my value is, we value family, education, and get them farther than what we have, because I want them to be able to—eh, when we're fifty can they take care of us? You know, I said that maybe they'll be able to take care of us. Like for me and Ikaika, we're not going to be able to take care of his mom. We're not in a place where we're doing well enough that we can take care of her, you know. Not that I'm complaining, because I'm not at all. You know, we're comfortable, but I would like my kids to be *plus*, you know? So that's where I'm at. Family and education is my main thing.

### **Renee: "It's Like Having a Second Family"**

The theme of family also runs through Renee's story, but in a slightly different way. Renee had her first child when she was 17, and her mother played a big role in helping to raise him. Now, 15 years later, Renee has five children ages 2 to 14. However, Renee and her husband now live an hour away from her mother, so her mother's help is less frequent and less readily available than it had been previously. Renee's mother comes over every couple of weeks to help out and spend time with her grandchildren. For the rest of the time, Renee is on her own because her husband works as an elevator repairman on some of the more remote islands during the week and returns home on weekends.

When asked to describe her typical day, Renee recounts how she wakes up at 5:30 each morning to have a cup of coffee and a few minutes of silence before waking up her children. She then launches into the daily madness of getting five kids ready with one bathroom, and dropping them off at three different schools and a babysitter before driving to the neighboring town, where she parks her car at a municipal parking lot and rides her bicycle to the pediatrician's office where she works as a part-time medical assistant. She works for five hours before jumping back on her bike and repeating the same process on reverse. Upon arriving home, Renee oversees all of the children's homework and chores, while simultaneously making dinner and keeping the young ones entertained, and then makes sure that everyone is fed and bathed before they are sent off to bed.

When I commended Renee on single-handedly orchestrating this daily feat of getting her five children to and from school each day while also working herself, Renee declined the compliment, lamenting that in the craziness some things slip through the cracks. She explains:

Like, you know, I have hardest time remembering to bring in Kawena's library books. I feel so stupid when I have to explain it to her teacher because it's such a simple thing to remember to put the book in the bag and back in the car. But, you know, in the mix of all of the craziness sometimes it's a little hard to remember. It's difficult sometimes.

Renee also confides that she feels guilty when she has to miss the morning parent-and-child activities at her daughter's preschool because she has to rush off to work. However, she appreciates that the teachers fill in for her and do the activities with Kawena when she can't. Renee says:

It's frustrating for me when there's a morning parent-and-child activity and I have to rush off to work. I feel so guilty leaving and I really wish that I could stay and do the activity with Kawena, but when you work in a pediatrician's office, you can't just go in late. That would really mess up your doctor. But the good thing is that when they have those parent-and-child activities and I

have to leave, I can always take Kawena to Auntie Sheri or Auntie Lei and they'll take over for me and finish the activity with her.

Without the daily support of an extended family Renee looks for that support in the preschool community, which she considers a second family, with the classroom teachers assuming the role of surrogate aunts. She explains:

One thing that I really like about the preschool is how the children call the teachers Auntie Sheri and Auntie Lei. It makes the place feel more like a family. And I think that really made a difference with Kawena in helping her adjust to preschool.

A lot of Hawaiian children, I've noticed, have this hesitancy, this shyness towards their teachers so to speak like, "Hmm. I don't know if I trust you." I don't know why it is. I believe it's a cultural thing. But I do see that, in the beginning of the school year, there might be a couple of kids that are really out there, ready to volunteer, and they want to help and they want the teacher's approval. But then most of them are more reserved and go along kind of cautiously until they've really learned the way that the teacher is and get to know and trust them better.

So at the preschool, you know, it's really nice to be able to tell Kawena, "Okay. I have to go to work, but I'm going to leave you with Auntie Sheri or Auntie Lei." Because that immediately makes her think, "Oh, this is a family member." The cultural respect that we give to our aunts is there immediately; the trust is there immediately, which is important you know? At this stage of learning, it's so important. And the kids can move past whatever that barrier is and feel comfortable being at school.

Renee contrasts the family feel of her daughter's preschool with her boys' elementary school:

At my boys' elementary school, home and school are separate. It's like this is home, this is school. I just drive through and drop off my boys in the morning and drive through and pick them up in the afternoon. So I don't even really know their classmates, let alone their classmates' parents. But at Kawena's preschool, not only do we call the teachers "Auntie," but everybody's parents are like aunts and uncles. I feel like at the preschool there's that feeling of *'ohana* [extended family] where home and school are all connected, and I like that.

I also think it really helps that we have to walk our children into the preschool classroom and help them get situated each morning, and there's a lot of activities in the mornings for the parents to do with their kids. Even if we can't stay for them all, I think it makes the children more comfortable to see their parents talking and laughing with the other parents in the morning.

You know, when Kawena comes to school each day she's greeted by a lot of aunts and uncles, in a sense, who are there in the class with their own children. They say hello to her and talk to her, and that makes her feel comfortable. It's like having a second family.

Renee wishes she had more opportunities to interact with this extended, second family. For instance, she wishes that she was able to attend some of the preschool's parent workshops—not so much to learn from the featured speakers or "parenting experts," but mostly to informally share concerns and exchange

parenting advice with other parents and perhaps develop an informal parent support network. Renee explains:

I didn't get to go to any of the parent workshops because I was working. But I would have loved to have gone. I would have really liked to hear what the other parents had to say about the problems that they're facing. Like maybe some of the other parents there might have some of the same challenges with their kids that I have. I think it would have been really good to be able to share the problems that we're having and exchange advice.

I also think that those workshops could be a good opportunity to meet other parents in the preschool, outside of our class, and maybe arrange carpools or take turns with childcare for afterschool. But I could never make the timing of the workshops, so I never had a chance to do that.

When asked to reflect on her goals for her daughter and what she sees as the role of the parents and other aunts and uncles in the extended preschool family in helping their children meet these goals, Renee's response echoed on a larger scale Noe's earlier reply that her success in raising her children would ultimately be measured by her children's ability, and their inclination, to one day take care of their parents. Commenting on her goals for her daughter, Renee says:

I hope that Kawena does well in school and chooses a profession that helps her and helps others. Doing well in school does not necessarily mean that she is, you know, top of her class genius. Doing well in school to me means that her peer relationships are good. She is not only absorbing good things from her environment that will carry her through life, but also influencing others with the good things that she has to offer. It's a give and take. I really believe that. I believe that you get good, true happiness from giving back to the community that you're in.

So when you ask what our role is as parents and aunts and uncles at the preschool, that's an overwhelming thought. We are shaping our future in a sense. These are the people that are going to run our country and care for us when we're old and make decisions about where we live. We need to be good to these people and teach them well.

### **Conclusions and Policy Recommendations**

So what can we learn from these counterstories? I conclude with what I see as specific policy recommendations for schools that wish to improve their capacity to support and collaborate with Indigenous families in Hawai'i and internationally:

#### **a. Appreciate Within-Group Variation and Various Measures of Success**

First of all, I believe that these stories help us to move beyond stereotypical views of Indigenous parents by reminding us, as Cornell (2006) has, that Indigenous families come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and living situations and, accordingly, vary in the strengths, challenges, and aspirations that they bring to their role as parents.

All of the parents whom I interviewed want their children to grow up to be successful. At the same time, however, as suggested by the Canadian Council on Learning (2007), there are distinct differences in how various families measure “success.” While for some, a successful child is one who graduates from a prestigious college and gets a high paying job, for others, like Noe or Renee, a successful child is one who stays close to home to take care of their aging parents or applies their education to give back to the community that raised them. Regardless of their definition of success, nearly all of the families that I interviewed view education as a means to achieving this success, and demonstrate a tremendous commitment to do whatever they can to support their children’s schooling.

### **b. Replace Pity with Admiration**

The story of Noe’s family serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring effects of the historical legacy of colonialism and the social, economic, and personal challenges that continue to plague many Indigenous families hundreds of years after the initial colonization of our people. At the same time that it gives us this solemn reminder, Noe’s story, like the writing of Xavier Albó (1999), also urges us as educators to view families like Noe’s with neither pity nor contempt, but with admiration for the skillful resolve with which these extended Indigenous families make creative use of their limited resources and work together to successfully MacGyver from day to day to support their children’s education and help their children succeed in the face of these challenges.

### **c. Broaden the Notion of Parent Involvement to Include Extended Family**

The counterstories that families have shared with me in these and other interview sessions provide an alternate perspective to stereotypical perceptions of apathetic Indigenous families for whom planning for the welfare of their children is a mere afterthought. I have collected many inspiring stories of large, extended families like Noe’s who have creatively pooled their resources and organized themselves into complex supportive networks for the primary purpose of providing and caring for their young children. These are families who resourcefully deal with difficult financial, work, and childcare situations by living in cramped quarters, under a single roof; families in which the financial reality is that many of the adult members need to hold multiple jobs, but who, nonetheless, are ever-mindful of carefully coordinating their work schedules to make certain that someone is always available to take the children to and from school and attend important school events.

This practice of extended family parenting, which is traditional in many Indigenous communities (Glover, 2001; Kolar & Soriano, 2000; Lafrance & Collins, 2003), may at first seem discontinuous with American-school models of parent involvement, which assume relations with a nuclear family. However, this study suggests that this seeming discontinuity can actually serve to support a school’s efforts if, rather than focusing exclusively on “parent” involvement, teachers are willing to acknowledge, invite and support the broader and more inclusive phenomenon of “family” involvement; thereby encouraging, embracing, and accepting school participation by not only mothers and fathers, but also grandparents, aunties, uncles, older siblings, or cousins, and all who share responsibility for childcare in many traditional Indigenous extended families.

#### **d. Be Prepared to Fill in for Missing Extended Family Members**

At the same time, consistent with the work of Castellano (2002), Renee's story reminds us that, in this (post)colonial, postindustrial society, our jobs often dictate where we live—frequently causing nuclear families to move far away from their extended family base and, sometimes, sending one parent to live and work in a remote location for weeks at a time. Thus, many Indigenous families who could really use extended family support no longer have it.

We are reminded that these overworked, overextended, and often isolated families may sometimes look to classroom teachers and administrators for additional support when, for instance, they are unable to stay at school for a morning parent-and-child activity. Furthermore, we are reminded that parents who are struggling with familial dislocation may look to the school community as a surrogate family network to fill gaps in their existing support networks and provide the support that one might traditionally receive from one's extended family.

#### **e. Provide Opportunities for Parents to Reconnect with Traditional Parenting Practices and also Connect with One Another**

While parent-involvement programs typically focus on increasing opportunities for effective parent-child and parent-teacher interactions (Jamie & Russell, 2010), Renee's story urges us to also consider the growing need on the part of increasingly isolated Indigenous families for more opportunities for parent-to-parent interactions. To this end, I see great potential in Renee's vision of parenting workshops that acknowledge the wisdom already inherent our parent communities by coupling lectures by "parenting experts" with parent talk-story sessions that provide families with an informal and supportive network for exchanging parenting advice and concerns. For, while there may be wisdom to be gained from lectures on white, middle-class ways of parenting, there is also a wealth of parenting wisdom in Indigenous communities, and this Indigenous wisdom should be acknowledged and respected in parent education programs and parenting workshops as well.

One Hawaiian example that comes to mind is 'Anakala Kawa'a's *mele inoa* (Hawaiian name chant) class (Groves, 2008). The primary aim of the course was to reconnect contemporary, Hawaiian families with traditional Hawaiian parenting practices and encourage these families to revive the traditional practice of composing chants or songs in honor of their children. However, 'Anakala Kawa'a found that in the process of composing their children's name chants, and tapping into and then sharing the very personal emotions that they feel toward their children, the parents enrolled in the course developed strengthened relationships both within their families and between families as well, thereby strengthening both the individual families and the community as whole (Groves, 2008). Perhaps schools could consider facilitating similar types of Indigenous parenting workshops that reconnect Indigenous people to our traditional parenting practices and simultaneously reconnect us with one another, so that we can once again trust and depend upon one another for support.

#### **f. Aim to Support and Strengthen Indigenous Families, Not to Replace Them**

Finally, while the painful legacy of colonial schooling in Indigenous communities across the globe should justifiably make us wary of teachers assuming the role of mother substitutes (Kaomea, 2005), Renee's story makes a case for the important function that could be played by a preschool teacher who is

willing to take on the role of a surrogate auntie—warm and loving, yet strict and demanding, and deserving of respect. For, ultimately, our goal as educators working in Indigenous communities is not to replace Indigenous families. Colonial schools sought to replace Indigenous families historically, and the effects were devastating. Instead, our goal should be to strengthen, support, and extend Indigenous families. For in strengthening our families, we strengthen our community as a whole.

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