

Ships Passing in the Night:
 EI Parents and School Officials-Are they listening to each other?



Edward M. Olivos
 Associate Professor
 Department of Education Studies



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Arguments

- ▶ Parental involvement practices often only reflect school values and priorities
- ▶ One-size-fits-all parental involvement paradigms often focus on school-initiated practices (i.e., volunteerism, etc.)
- ▶ Bureaucratic practices and systems of inertia often preclude authentic reform and change
- ▶ Institutional and personnel bias against bicultural communities and parents (e.g., embedded racism, classism, etc.) affect relationships
- ▶ Societal tensions are reflected in school relations



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Existing Paradigms and Mindsets

Bicultural parents are often working against the grain of the existing paradigms and mindsets for parental involvement:

1. Assumption that there is a right (and a wrong) way to have parents involved in schools (all forms are not valued)
2. Assumption that there are choices that can be made by bicultural parents with regard to their involvement
3. Assumption that bicultural parents are on the same page as other (mainly "mainstream") parents and that bicultural parents must and should learn from middle class white parents about parenting and school involvement
4. Assumption that all parents are treated equally regardless of race, culture, language, or social standing



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Reflection #1:

- ▶ How does your school's/classroom's approach to parents and families encourage and/or discourage their continued participation at schools?
- ▶ Are cross-cultural or language considerations taken into account?
- ▶ Does your school/classroom use the students' families and cultural backgrounds to enrich classroom instruction? School environment?
- ▶ At what "levels" are EL parents involved in decision-making at your school? In other words, what opportunities exist?

Source: Yashay Tabone

Oregon Latino Education Summit

School environments and community/parent engagement: Administrators in Oregon districts and schools generally saw themselves as having engaging and welcoming environments. This perspective was contradicted by the voices of parents and students in attendance.



Oregon Latino Education Summit (Key Issues)

Participants at the summit identified the following five key issues as requiring further discussion and action:

1. Discipline: Over-representation of Latino students
2. School environments and community engagement: Latino parents had contradicting views of what constituted "engaging" environments
3. Expectations: Concern over lowered expectations
4. Student voice and affirmation: Students didn't see themselves in the curriculum
5. Language and cultural affirmation: Language and culture treated as deficiencies and as barriers to academic success



Oregon Schools Are Moving Forward (Mixed Findings)

Successes	Opportunities	Challenges
Bilingual office personnel	More Latino teachers	Develop own voices
Bilingual information	More support for L1 and C1	Minimal or bad translations
Parent meetings and events	Scholarships	Funds for involving parents
Multicultural clubs	Advising and counseling	Representation
Bilingual administrators	Higher education	Lack of information

Moving forward:

- Additional supports
- Counteract “deficit thinking”
- Better bilingual programs
- Expand the evaluation process
- Higher expectations for Latino students and families

Reflection #2:

- ▶ What types of issues to bilingual/bicultural parents usually bring up at your school? How are they usually addressed?
- ▶ What positive changes have you seen in your classroom, school, district?
- ▶ What challenges still exist in your classroom, school, district?
- ▶ Do bilingual/bicultural parents know where to go when they have issues, concerns, etc.? Do faculty know where to direct them?

Navigating the Power Structure

- ▶ Existing paradigms and mindsets assume that bicultural parents can access the same power structure of middle class white parents within deeply entrenched political domains which are maintained through the PTOs, local school site councils and decision-making processes within schools



Issues in Bicultural Parent Involvement

- ▶ Bicultural parents may not have the type nor the kind of information which is essential for making educational decisions, and accessing that information is not easily made possible by contextual or prevailing political agendas
- ▶ Bicultural parents may react to educational concerns they encounter out of crisis, often requiring them to rely on one to one problem-solving from others, and not strategy building opportunities that enhance their abilities to manage and make decisions



Suggestions for Schools

- ▶ Structure schools democratically to provide opportunities for sincere and authentic participation: educators need to listen!
- ▶ Make each meeting an opportunity to learn about the family and the parents—not as an opportunity to “dump” on the parents
- ▶ Staff and faculty development on resisting bias and racism
- ▶ Be open to criticism and critique: understand that some bicultural families may be reacting out of frustration
- ▶ Understand which resources are available to bicultural families and which ones are unattainable or unrealistic
- ▶ Make efforts to learn more about the community and the valuable resources bicultural communities tap into to survive and make sense of their realities
