

Book Reviews

***School-Parent Collaborations in Indigenous Communities: Providing Services for Children with Disabilities*, by Iris Manor-Binyamini New York: Springer, 2014, 198 pages.**

Globally, Indigenous communities face roadblocks that hinder their success in educational settings. These roadblocks include poverty, lack of social supports, limited access to education, and a high risk for health problems. Indigenous students with special needs face even greater challenges. *School –Parent Collaborations in Indigenous Communities: Providing Services for Children with Disabilities* provides a comprehensive overview of the context of disability within indigenous experience. The study comprehensively examines the uniqueness of indigenous communities on a global scale, psychological models of reactions to disability, the benefit of multidisciplinary teams in working with schools and families, factors affecting collaboration between indigenous parents of children with disabilities and school professionals, and core values of indigenously attuned collaboration. Manor-Binyamini discusses her pilot study conducted among the Bedouins of Southern Israel to illustrate the ways that special education teachers and personnel engage Bedouin parents in interventions for their children. Rather than focusing solely on cultural sensitivity as a guiding force, the model Manor-Binyamini advocates, “Knowledge in Action,” calls for special educators and professionals to be cultural mediators between family and schools. When working principles of professional intervention, for example, are not suitable for the community in which they work - and might be inconsistent with the contextual boundaries of a particular indigenous community - professionals need principles that will guide them to adjust their strategies to the culture of the client. The Knowledge in Action model has the potential to impact the ways in which special educators work with indigenous communities globally and locally to improve the health and well-being of indigenous students with special needs.

The book is laid out in two sections. The first section encompasses the first four chapters of the book and deals with the theoretical framing of the study. It provides an extensive literature review of the unique characteristics of children with disabilities. Key terms such as culture, lands and territories, indigenous knowledge, and indigenous psychology are introduced that serve to help the reader understand the context of the study and the educational psychological theoretical framing of the study. The author argues that more often than not the focus on education in indigenous communities revolves around language acquisition and fails to take into account traditional culture and self-determination. She says,

There is a critical need for a more holistic approach that would move indigenous education beyond the language agenda. Such an approach would involve

indigenous education breaking through the cultural domination of national education authorities, by empowering communities to strengthen, implement, and control their own visions of educational programs and practices (Manor-Binyamini, 2014, p. 11).

The project uses a phenomenological case study approach in which the researcher “attempted to understand the perceptions and ways in which parents of children with disabilities in the Bedouin community and the professionals who treat these children comprehend and define both parenting and the concept and practice of collaboration in the school” (p. 169).

Binyamini-Manor asserts that in addressing issues of disability in the context of indigenous groups it is critical to understand concepts such as “culture”, and “indigenous knowledge” as well as how individual groups view lands and territories. Also required is a discussion of “indigenous psychology.” The second section provides an in-depth look at the specific case study of a Bedouin community in Israel. The historical background of the particular community is introduced and then compared with the challenges and difficulties the Bedouin community shares with other indigenous communities worldwide. Next, the very specific ways that children with disabilities and special education are addressed in this Bedouin community are examined in detail. Finally, the particular case study of the collaboration between professionals and parents of children with disabilities in the Bedouin community is presented in detail.

The introductory chapter broadly surveys the sources of the difficulties and challenges that face indigenous communities globally - a very ambitious undertaking. Indigenous peoples face a high frequency of health risks, elevated school dropout rates, child labor, the need for more extensive support services, a lack of financial resources, and generational (perpetual) poverty, as well as acts of dispossession and spirit-breaking (Manor-Binyamini, 2014, p.4). The author structures this chapter as a “mosaic” using specific examples from different countries to illustrate each topic of concern. She cites studies that illustrate the issues of indigenous child labor in the Philippines and the lack of support services due to remote locations of villages in El Salvador (Reyes-Boquiran, 2001, p. 26; Lopez, 2007; and Larsen, 2003). At times, the sheer amount of data sources presented in the first half of the book can be overwhelming for the reader, especially as the author also extensively reviews the literature on children with disabilities in the same chapter.

Chapter two introduces concepts that are critical to understanding how indigenous parents view disability. In a conceptual discussion of what “culture” means, an understanding of how indigenous communities differ in understandings of disability. In particular the specific ways that parents of children with disabilities approach collaborating with school professionals, is presented through an educational lens. Of concern, however, is the framing of the experience of indigenous peoples globally as universal, particularly when examining indigenous children with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities. While the author convincingly argues in the first chapter that there are aspects of the indigenous experience worldwide that can be shared, such as land dispossession and loss of sovereignty, it seems important to acknowledge the differences in experience as well.

The next chapter introduces the importance of school for children with disabilities. It includes details about the particular research study in a Bedouin community in Israel that located children with disabilities. Indigenous parents of children with disabilities were interviewed about

parenting and the author considers the psychological models of parental reaction to their children's disabilities in the context of educational systems in Israel.

Chapter four discusses parental collaboration with school professionals in indigenous communities and presents the particular study on which the book is based. The specific research goals are finally laid out in this chapter: to identify, describe, and construct hidden and manifest aspects of collaboration between the interdisciplinary team and parents in daily practice; and, to identify, describe, and construct behavioral expressions that comprise or are embodied in the hidden and manifest aspects of collaboration between the interdisciplinary team and parents in day-to-day practice.

Chapter five focuses on the background of the Bedouin community in the Negev desert, and examines the characteristics that this particular community shares with indigenous communities on a global level. Chapter six reviews the special education framework in the Negev region of Southern Israel available to the Bedouin community.

In the concluding chapter, the author seeks to "give voice" to the Bedouin professionals working with children with disabilities and well as to the Bedouin parents of children with disabilities "whose voices are not heard in the existing research" (Manor-Binyamini, 2014, p. 169). Phenomenological methods, the researcher argues, allow insight into the "intersubjective" world, the world that people have in common. For this particular study, the parents and the school professionals share a world of imposed constraints that were defined by existing social and cultural structures. Findings included various themes that represented the perceptions of parents and professionals. For professionals working in the Bedouin community, 100 percent believed that raising a child with disabilities in the Bedouin community was more difficult than in other communities. A majority expressed the idea that parents perceive their parenting in terms of shame, abandonment, or denial of the child's presence. Raising a child with an intellectual disability brought up strong emotions. Many parents used faith in God as a way of coping. Parents viewed collaborating with professionals on a continuum; the particular needs of their children determined how much or how little they became involved with school professionals.

This study has important implications for parent-school professional collaborations, particularly in indigenous communities. The author concludes that professionals must have resources that help bridge the gap between school and indigenous culture, which allow them to adjust their strategies to the particular culture of the client. She presents eight principles of "indigenously inclined collaboration" to help professionals become more culturally responsive and to provide a backdrop for the formulation of new questions that increase the capacity and understanding of true collaboration. The idea of indigenously inclined collaboration has potential uses beyond just collaboration between indigenous students with special needs, their parents, and school professionals. The model could prove useful in teacher education programs, special education graduate programs, social work graduate programs, and in professional developments with teachers or anyone working with indigenous peoples. While the author argued for "giving voice" to the indigenous parents and professionals in the work, the majority of the book was focused on a review of the literature and data in support of the case study in a particular Bedouin community. In spite of this, there are few qualitative research studies that address issues of indigenous children with disabilities, and even fewer that attempt to examine the role of collaboration between indigenous parents of children with disabilities and school professionals. While the author could have incorporated more of her actual study into the first half of the book,

it is still an important contribution to research in which the needs of indigenous communities are explored.

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References

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