

Family, School, and Community Connections Symposium:
New Directions for Research, Practice, and Evaluation
December 2, 2004, Cambridge, MA

Sponsored by

National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, TX

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Harvard Family Research Project

Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA

Summary – Diversity and Cultural Setting: Contextual Issues in Student Achievement

John Diamond, Assistant Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education,
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John Diamond considers how educational context influences parent engagement. Diamond begins with a sociological discussion of the structural barriers that exist in education that limit the potential impact of parent engagement among low income and minority families including low teacher quality, re-segregation, and wealth disparities. He goes on to argue that parent involvement is not an internalized set of beliefs, values, and orientations, but rather socially constructed by the resources and educational terrains that parents navigate. For this reason, parent involvement looks different among different groups in different contexts.

Diamond describes data from an ethnographic study of 10 schools in the Chicago area. He interviewed teachers regarding their ideas about parents and analyzed the role of culture and school context in shaping these perceptions. He found that the racial and ethnic composition of a school influences how teachers and parents think about and interpret parent engagement.

Diamond appeals for educators to acknowledge multiple visions and models of what parent involvement looks like. He also calls for the responsibility of parent involvement to shift towards the school. Implications for practice include respecting parents' culture, resources and involvement styles, acknowledging the structural realities faced by parents and understanding their frustrations, creating school environments that embrace all parents, and providing explicit information to parents about how to support their children's education.