

RACISM, EDUCATION AND THE  
AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENT

by

Rhonda Shimek

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Investigation Advisor

The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin Stout  
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The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin Stout  
Menomonie, WI 54751

*ABSTRACT*

(Writer)	Shimek (Last Name)	Rhonda (First)	L (Initial)
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Racism and Euro-American education have played huge roles in the destruction of identity in the American Indian population. This research paper explores research about racism toward the American Indians, past American Indian education and the present status of American Indian education to give educators a better understanding of their American Indian students.

This research shows the torment that American Indian students go through in school. There is also a brief description of what many American Indian students went through in boarding schools. The discussion continues on to give background information on the progression of American Indian education during the past century. Also, the paper brings together what the present status of American Indian education looks like.

In spite of continued dismal dropout rates, there are schools and programs that have nurtured successful students. These successes appear to be a result of respecting the American Indian student's culture, integrating American Indian culture into the curriculum, involving community members and parents in the education process, and teaching culturally relevant and appropriate material. Being able to bring all the pieces of the puzzle together in education equals meaningful and successful outcomes for many American Indian students.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Racism has long been an issue in education. Many people do not want to address racism because it brings up too many emotions. When people do not talk about racism, they seem to forget that it happens or ignore that it happens. With the population prediction of American schools becoming 40% students of color and the teacher population at 80% of European decent, the conversation needs to begin in earnest (Delpit, 1995). This researcher feels that this discussion needs a new focus. In the past, much of the discourse has been about the black and white issue. However there are many other groups of people in our educational system who have also felt the effects of racism. This paper will focus on American Indian students and how they can succeed and have succeeded in school, in spite of racism and the many other roadblocks they have to encounter.

In general, racism is something that many people in our society experience; yet, to others, the idea of racism is very illusive. It is possible that the concept evades these “other” people (mostly immigrants from Europe), because there are many definitions for the term racism. As stated in Tatum (1999), “racism is a system of advantages based on race” (p. 7). In contrast, some people may view racism as the severe actions exhibited by white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan. This researcher feels that the main reason these “other” people do not understand the reality of racism is because they have never experienced it. As Tatum discussed, many of today’s children grew up in communities that were made up of a population of people who were similar to them. For children of European decent, this means they were afforded many privileges that children

in other communities can only dream about having in their possession. Also, these children may never have had contact with a person from a different cultural background until they left their community. At that time their perceptions start to show and the stereotypes that were built in their families, communities, and schools are challenged. Due to these random influences, racism exists to varying degrees in our public schools.

There are many ways that racism is perpetuated in our schools. Students are contributors when they exhibit racist behaviors towards other students. However, teachers, texts, teaching styles, and mascots are also contributors to racism. In a paper by Jones (2000), it was shown how a student teacher took on the “racist” attitude that her supervising teacher held towards a student in their classroom. Teachers are thought to be people who students can look up to for some guidance through school. One would hope students would not be afraid of teachers as a result of racial attitudes the teacher possesses.

A subtle example in which a teacher greeted a European American kindergartner more warmly and more welcoming than his African American classmate was addressed in Delpit (1995). The teacher was not aware of her action until the parent of the African American student brought it to her attention. Racism does not stop with teachers’ own biases; it also arises in the lessons they teach to students. Discussing one aspect of slavery or one view of the “discovery” of America can skew children’s perceptions of people who were affected by those events. The atmosphere of a school can also have a detrimental effect on all children. For example, school mascots depicting an American Indian and children running around performing “war chants” can confuse American Indian children as well as the children who interact with them.

Racism towards American Indians started as soon as Europeans set foot on the land now called America, “the land of the free.” The European immigrants used a quote from Aristotle that “a portion of mankind was set aside by nature to be slaves for the service of others.... and that as slaves, this part of mankind did not have property rights” (cited in Duchene, 1990, p. 20), to strip away the land that belonged to the indigenous people. The other concept that contributed to racism was the anthropologists’ invention of racial terms, which the European immigrants followed through with when naming the indigenous people the Indian race (Duchene, 1990). Of course, because the Indian “race” was not European, they *had* to be inferior, thus be treated like chattel. The Europeans also used this notion to “civilize” the indigenous people of this land.

The way the European immigrants tried to “civilize” the indigenous people was through education. Their educational system was based on racism. The theory was to “kill the Indian and save the ‘man’” (Howard, 1999, p. 42). One goal of the European immigrants was to convince the American Indians that they were trying to help them and make the American Indians’ lives better. Many chiefs believed the immigrants and agreed to teach their children the way of the immigrants (Spring, 1996). Unfortunately, the immigrants did not feel they were succeeding in their civilization plan and took it one step further. Allowing the children of the tribes to be at home with their families still practicing tribal rituals seemed to be anti-productive to the civilization process (Spring, 1996). Therefore, in order to truly “transform” the Indians, the children were taken and put into boarding schools, often times hundreds of miles away from their families. There, they were forbidden to speak their language, play games from their culture, or practice their spirituality.

In today's society, American Indian children are not swept away to boarding schools. However, they have their own challenges to deal with in school. According to Pagano, (2002a) American Indian graduation rates are lower now than they were twenty years ago. In 1992, Minnesota public schools enrolled 945 American Indian ninth graders in the class of 1996. Of these students 350 or 37% graduated from high school in 1996 (Pagano, 2002a). The classes of 1997 and 1998 followed similar trends with graduations of 41.4% and 43.4% respectively (2002a). With rates less than 50%, and only approximately 23% of these students going on to continue their education, there appears to be a strong need to have a focus on what has been happening to these students.

Much of the research has shown that the lack of knowledge about American Indian students has led to racism against them. The racism against American Indian students has occurred on many different levels in schools. American Indian children are confronted with teachers who lack training on educational issues related them. Furthermore, these students have to face a curriculum that can be biased against their culture. Albert and Peacock (2000), who are both professors at the University of Minnesota - Duluth, examined thirty-six Minnesota American Indian students' perceptions of why schools are not meeting their needs. One student commented, "In English I have never heard nothing about an American Indian author, nothing about American Indian language"(p. 13). This showed the school's curriculum was ignoring the fact that American Indians are a part of history. The American Indian students also come into contact with other students who lack the understanding of their American Indian culture. Another student in Albert and Peacock's research commented, "I would get teased everyday, 'Pocahontas' or 'Chief' or 'Warhawk' and all this other stuff. I was just so sick of it and I had to leave that school" (p. 14). Unfortunately, the daily trauma

has not ceased for many American Indian students, and schoolmates often continue to torment them.

Even with the tragedies that have occurred in education in relation to American Indian students, there are also positives that have taken place. American Indian Nations have taken on the responsibility of educating their students and in many cases have developed exemplary programs (Lipka, 2002). Many of these programs focus on some of the same themes that have been shown to improve American Indian students test scores. Some of the themes that have been identified are “teaching the indigenous culture, language, parent involvement, community involvement, and having more American Indian teachers”(¶ 7.). Schools like the one in Rock Point, Arizona can be used as examples of things that have been working. Students there are taught in the Navajo language; therefore, they learn the culture as well as the language. The Navajo students attending this tribally controlled school went from the lowest standardized test scores in the Navajo Nation to consistently scoring higher than other Navajo reservation students’ scores (Lipka, 2002). The students also showed considerably more confidence and pride in themselves.

This shows that even with the tremendous feats that the American Indian students have had to overcome in the past and present, there are many success stories that exist. Even though there is a long road to perfection in the education system, we need to focus on the positives so students have something to look forward to instead of perpetuating the pessimistic view of their lives.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The purpose of this study is to gather research about the education of American Indian students. There will then be a critical analysis made about the present status of American Indian education.

### *Research Questions*

This study will try to answer the following questions:

1. What is the history of American Indian education?
2. What kind of changes has American Indian education gone through?
3. What is the present status of American Indian education?
4. What strategies are used in American Indian schools to make them successful?

### *Definition of Terms*

The following is a list of terms that will be utilized in this study.

*American Indian/ Natives/Native American/ Indian/Indigenous* - individuals who identify themselves as belonging to federally recognized tribes (Linton, 2002).

American Indian will be used as the preferred designation in this paper unless specified in a different form such as in quotes.

*Europeans/European immigrant/Euro-American* – individuals who colonized America from various European countries or who have a European lineage.

*Ojibwa/Ojibwe*- An American Indian Nation of people who today reside in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota and southern Canada (Peacock and Wisuri, 2002).

*Assumptions*

The researcher has the following assumptions about the study:

1. There will be sufficient research on American Indian education.
2. The research on American Indian education will be accurate and reputable.

*Limitations*

The following are a list of limitations to the study.

1. Because American Indians make up approximately 1 ½% of the overall population, limited research exists.
2. The research on American Indian education is not current.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

This chapter will review the literature on the various definitions of racism. It will also discuss literature on the types of racism that exist. The forms of racism in education as it relates to American Indians in the United States will also be discussed. Lastly, this chapter will review literature on past and present experiences of American Indians in education.

#### *Racism Defined*

Racism has been a term that was popularized during the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1960's (Spencer, 1998). It is a term that has a variety of definitions all depending on the person defining racism. Banks and Banks (1989) defined racism as "the belief that one's own race is superior to another. This belief has been based on the erroneous assumption that physical attributes of a racial group determine their social behavior as well as their psychological and intellectual characteristics" (p. 45). Beswick (1999) stated that racism is a "set of attitudes that include antagonism based on the supposed superiority of one group or supposed inferiority of another group, premised solely on skin color or race" (¶ 4). Similarly, Dube (cited in Haynes-Duhon, Ross-Duhon, Sells, & Sells-Duhon, 1999) defined racism as a "psychological phenomenon rooted in the belief that a causal relationship exists between certain inherited physical traits and certain aspects of personality and intellect" (p. 14).

All of these definitions have a connection in the fact they address a belief that one group of people is somehow inferior to another, and that inferiority is based on biological predilection. The major downfall of these definitions is that many people assume that only white supremacy groups carry out racism. These uninformed people can be blind to

the fact that racism could have perpetuated within the society they live. Carter and Thompson (1997) believed many people view racism as something that only a select few commit and is a piece of our history. Unfortunately, racism has not become extinct in our society and occurs on a daily basis in many environments. That people do not have an understanding of racism points to the fact that there needs to be a more coherent way to define it and a continuous discourse about it.

Tatum (1999) addressed the definition of racism from a different perspective. Unlike the above definitions that portray racism as a personal ideology, Tatum discussed it on a systems level. She quoted Wellman's definition of racism as a "system of advantages based on race" (p. 7). The United States functions by giving privileges to whites and denying many of the same privileges to people of color. This definition has also been related to another commonly used definition of racism, "prejudice plus power." Tatum defined "prejudice plus power" as specifically combining racial prejudice with social power, and can lead to institutionalization of racist policies and practices. Many people, specifically whites, do not feel they have power and also deny prejudices they may have, in turn rejecting the fact racism exists. As Tatum stated, people do not want to acknowledge the advantages in our society that are based on race, so the system of advantages and disadvantages perpetuates itself.

### *Types of Racism*

There are many ways racism has been inflicted upon people in our society. The "old fashioned" racism is in many cases described as being overt racism (Fighting words, 1999). This type of racism is very visible to everyone, not only the person being subjected to the act. When people think of this type racism, they think of the "Archie Bunker" character who blatantly stated his negative view of people of color on American

television in the 1970's. Tatum (1999) defined these intentional acts of discrimination as active racism. Over the years this type of racism has sunk in popularity and can now be seen as only an act that extreme groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, practice. However, even the KKK has become more covert in their actions.

Today's modern racism has become more subtle, "safe", and easily rationalized (Fighting words, 1999). Haynes-Duhon, Ross-Duhon, Sells, & Sells-Duhon(1999) described this modern racism as being covert racism. Acts of covert racism are much harder for people to identify. In Tatum's (1999) book, this subtle modern racism was described as passive racism. She stated this type of racism could range from laughing at a racist joke to letting exclusionary hiring practices continue without questions.

Covert racism can be expressed on two different levels in today's society. The most common form is on an individual basis. Individual racism usually takes place as in the example above of where a person laughs at a racist joke. A person may not agree with the joke, but because he/she is with a group of friends, he/she does not voice his/her opinion. The type of covert racism that many white people are not aware of or truly understand is institutional racism. In Hansman, Jackson and Spencer (1999), institutional racism is defined as "personal and cultural racism...that is supported by the institutions' formal and informal policies and practices for the benefit of a particular group and at the expense of another group"(p. 17). In essence, a company could talk about promoting diversity in their mission statement, but do everything to deny their employees of color the same opportunities as their white employees.

In schools, this type of racism can appear in the curriculum taught by teachers. Tatum (1999) gave an example of how eliminating a cultural group from curriculum can

affect students. One of Tatum's students, who was going to be an English teacher, revealed her anxiety about teaching her future students about African American authors. This young woman's anxiety stemmed from never having learned about African American writers anywhere in her education. The most interesting fact about the story relayed by Tatum (1999) was the response given by another student. The young white male student responded in his journal, "It's not my fault that Blacks don't write books" (p. 5). Unfortunately, because this young man was never exposed to any authors who were Black, he concluded that they must not write any books. In many cases like the above, schools and other institutions perpetuate the power and values of the dominant culture without having to say a word.

#### *Forms of Racism in Education*

In today's schools, children have to battle with more than achieving good grades in reading, writing, and arithmetic. As the diversity of our schools continues to increase, so increases the chance that our students of color will have to face some form of racism at school. Schroeder (1995) stated that 77 % of students responding to a Career & Colleges magazine poll of high school students across the country believed there was racism in their school. He also stated that 44 % of the students felt that teachers or administrators discriminated against students based on race. These grim statistics are an indication of how our students feel the effects of racism in their school.

Many educators are appalled at the thought of fellow educators discriminating against students. As Parks (1999) stated, "Fair-minded, service oriented educators consider racism to be inconsistent with the values that attracted them to teaching and therefore do not recognize that their own attitudes and behaviors may be tinged with its effects"(p. 125). Unfortunate, but true, many educators do discriminate against students

they are trying to inspire to learn. Derman-Sparks (as cited in Spencer, 1998) found one in four high school biology teachers felt that people of certain races were more intelligent than people of other races. One teacher in a school holding this belief can be detrimental to students. The teacher may give the students of color “less challenging activities, refer the student to remedial classes or even misinterpret behaviors, such as non assertiveness, as lack of ability or interest” (Spencer, 1998, p. 283).

A study by Kailin (1999) discussed white teachers’ perceptions of racism in their school. In Kailin’s study, she quoted teachers responses given at a mandatory in-service. Many of the teachers’ own beliefs about children from different races came out in their comments. One of the teachers from an elementary school commented “ It’s hard to teach children who come from a culture where they don’t value education and their home life is so chaotic”(p. 727). The teacher was making an assumption that the students and parents of color in his/her school did not value education. This type of attitude/belief could have affected how the teacher taught the students of color in the classroom.

A prominent theme in Kailin’s (1999) study was the language the teachers used. Kailin stated that the language the teachers were using was a coded language, which could be viewed as covert racism. Many of the teachers made comments such as “Well, you know, *those people* always...” or if something bad happened in the school, a teacher said “It was probably a black student!” (p. 736). Kailin’s study also found that the teachers were more likely to ignore racist comments or jokes made by other teachers, rather than address their concerns. One teacher stated, “ I could’ve taken a risk and said how the comments sounded to me and had a discussion about it, but it would’ve been a risk to say something to colleagues who don’t know they are so ignorant” (Kailin, 1999,

p. 731). As stated by Tatum (1999), ignoring racist comments allows racism to perpetuate itself in the school. Kailin (1999) coded all of the responses collected from the teachers and found that the teachers were more likely to attribute the racial problems in their school to the students of color. Some of the teachers were unaware of how their own comments were racist and hurting students. Unfortunately, racism exhibited by educators has been only one of the many types that students of color encounter in school.

Another form of racism students are faced with at school has been in the curriculum teachers have been using. In Kailin's (1999) study, only 4 of the 189 teachers mentioned that the curriculum contributed to the problem of racism in their school. Often, lessons teachers use lack comprehensive and recent information about different cultural viewpoints on the subject matter. The students' worldview of people of color has then been lost in many subjects to an ethnocentric view. Frequently, this ethnocentric view has only been composed of the white, European, middle class, and male point of view (Spencer, 1998). It also does not offer students the opportunity to discover and understand other viewpoints, which preserves the ethnocentric belief that one race of people is superior to others. Oftentimes, this occurs in history class when teachers discuss the discovery of America. Students many times learn only about Columbus and his "great discovery." They may never discuss the detrimental effects this "discovery" had on the indigenous people of this land. But racism found in the curriculum has not been limited to history; it has been found in many classes where teachers only discuss the white heroes or heroines of the subject matter.

An additional form of racism in curriculum has been found in the books used by teachers. Duren (2000) wanted to expose her predominately white elementary class to the life experiences of people from different cultural backgrounds. She utilized some multicultural children's books to accomplish her goal. The books Duren used discussed racism and gave her a good starting point to create a discourse about racism in her classroom. On the other hand, she found the books had several downfalls. In many cases the books did not challenge racism or discuss why the characters in the book were being treated in a racist manner. She also noted many of the books portrayed whites as being sympathetic to the racism inflicted upon the other characters. Furthermore, much of the discussion in the books used by Duren was about how the people of color needed to overcome and conquer racism. There was no dialogue about how whites have to struggle to overcome their own racist or prejudice biases. Duren's article helped to illustrate that even when teachers try to incorporate multicultural aspects into their classroom, they need to be cautious of the materials they use.

In addition to racism imposed by the teachers and curriculum in school, students of color also have to deal with their uninformed classmates. Savord and Aragon (cited in Beswick, 1999) found that the most frequent forms of racism in an Oregon school were racial jokes, racial slurs, derogatory racial stereotyping, and violent acts. Many of these incidents went unpunished by authorities at the school. Often teachers or other staff members viewed these acts as "kids being kids." Kailin (1999) indicated that several teachers thought that it was natural for their students to segregate themselves from one another. The teachers did not understand that the separation was a form of racism being demonstrated by their students.

Lastly, racism has been found to exist in school mascots. Mascots that portray American Indians have been the center of a heated debate in the past few decades. The article *Fighting words: The school mascot debate* (1999) stated that more than 2,500 schools in the United States use American Indian characters as their mascot. Numerous American Indian activists and organizations have stated that using the mascots perpetuates the stereotypes of American Indians (1999). Slagle (2002) discussed the California bill AB 2115, which if passed, would have required 181 Californian schools to change their mascots. People of non- Indian background have not been able to understand why they need to change the mascots of their schools. In many cases, they have not realized how offensive the mascots could be to an American Indian. As Slagle stated, “the Webster’s Dictionary, the American Heritage Dictionary, and the Oxford English Dictionary all define redskin as a racial slur” (p. 34). Yet, others have felt that American Indians should be proud that the schools chose to honor them as their mascot. Barbara Munson (cited in Slagle, 2002) responded to the idea of being proud and honored:

We are proud and we don’t want them [warriors] demeaned by being ‘honored’ in a sports activity on a playing field. Our warriors gave their lives often in vain attempts to protect the land and preserve the culture for future generations. Football is a game (p. 34).

Opponents of the mascot change have made comments towards American Indian students to the effect “If the Indians have a problem, they can leave. There’s a hundred of us and one of you” (*Fighting words*, 1999, p.3). In many cases it has been thought that because American Indians have only made up about 1% of a school’s population, this

debate would vanish. Fortunately the debate has continued and some students from the University of Northern Colorado decided to make a visible statement against American Indian mascots. A group of students of diverse backgrounds formed an intermural basketball team and called themselves the “Fighting Whities” (Slagle, 2002). The team designed t-shirts and made national news. All this was done to shame a local high school that refused to change their team’s name from “the Fighting Reds” to something less offensive. According to the article *Fighting words* (1999), 600 schools in the United States have already stopped using their American Indian mascots in recent years.

As stated by Spencer (1998), racism in schools can lead to a “lack of attachment to school, loss of cultural identity, lower self-esteem, and a decline in aspirations” (p. 27). All of these can lead to an increase in dropout rates, suspensions, expulsions, and decreased academic achievement. In order to stop the destruction caused by racism, educators need to be aware of and admit to themselves racism exists in their schools.

#### *Past American Indian Education*

In order to understand the present conditions of American Indian education, there must be an understanding of what occurred in the past (Eder & Reyhner, 1992). Before the European immigrants came to this land, education of the indigenous children was the responsibility of their tribe (Taylor, 1976). The idea was that only tribal members who had a great understanding of tribal ways could benefit their community. In the case of the Ojibwa people, Taylor stated that learning took place everywhere in their camp. Children would learn through real life experiences, legends, and stories of others’ experiences. One of the main concepts the Ojibwa tried to instill in their children was that sharing should be a way of life.

Unfortunately, sharing was a value that clashed with the European immigrants' beliefs about how people should exist. In all actuality, the American Indians' entire way of life was not acceptable to the immigrants. In turn, the European immigrants felt they needed to "*enlighten and civilize*" the "*savage*" people of this land (Howard, 1999). The only way the immigrants could think of to civilize the Indigenous people was to educate them about the superior, white, European ways.

The major push for this so-called civilizing came with the election of Thomas Jefferson (Spring, 1996). The government wanted the American Indians to learn how to farm so they could live on small pieces of land. Subsequently, their hunting land would be sold to white settlers. The government, in combination with missionaries, felt they needed to educate the indigenous people about farming. In order to fulfill this plan to they needed to establish schools wherever the indigenous tribes were located. As time went on, the Federal Government realized that allowing the American Indian students to stay in their homes and attend day schools was not productive towards civilizing them. According to the Federal Government, because the American Indian children went home and continued to practice American Indian lifeways, they did not assimilate to the European ways fast enough. Due to this belief, the Federal Government decided to set up boarding schools, which were designed to "kill the Indian and save the 'man'" (Howard, 1999, p. 42).

The boarding schools were usually located hundreds of miles from the children's homes and were dreadful places for them to live. To start with, many children were traumatized because they were literally kidnapped from their homes. If parents refused to send their children to the schools, they were denied "rations, clothing and other

annuities” (Adams, 1990, p.164). When the children arrived at the school, they were stripped of their American Indian identity. They were forced to cut their hair, wear uniforms, change their names, and forget the life they held dear (Taylor, 1976). The students also had to follow a very intense schedule based on a sequence of bells. The rationale behind the intense schedule was to keep the students busy and keep them from being “lazy Indians” (Spring, 1996, p. 141).

As Spring (1996) described, students would start their day at 5 A.M. with a morning worship service. After service, they had breakfast in complete silence, followed by an hour and a half of work. During work time, the boys were taught agricultural skills that would make them “good farmers” and the girls were taught housekeeping skills and how to be “good wives”. Following work, they would have a short time for recreation. This time was problematic for school administrators because students would engage in games from their homes. In order to discourage their play, students were harshly reprimanded. Often times they were whipped brutally for their “misbehavior.” After the recreation time, students had to study for the next three hours until lunch. The students continued their schedule with recreation time, 3 hours of study, and one-hour of work. Around four o’clock, students started to wind down their day with recreation time, worship, supper, and then bedtime.

In many cases the American Indian children would become so overwhelmed with their horrible situation that they would try to run away. According to Spring(1996), the students could not stand the beatings and overall mistreatment. Some of the students were found, returned to the school, and severely punished for leaving. In some cases, students neither made it home nor back to the school. The families of these unfortunate

students would receive letters informing them that their children had died. The grief and guilt these parents felt because they sent their children away to “better” themselves couldn’t be expressed in this paper. One thing that can be expressed, however, is what the education system of that time was trying to accomplish.

The boarding schools run by the government and missionaries tried to accomplish the same thing: make the indigenous people assimilate to the “right” culture. The term “apple” used in Spring’s book (1996) illustrated exactly what the European immigrants tried to accomplish while educating the American Indian people. The immigrants wanted the American Indians to become people who were red on the outside and “white” on the inside (1996). This meant the indigenous people were supposed to completely forget their beliefs, values, languages, and spirituality. The American Indian people were to replace their cherished culture and lives with the white man’s ways. The realities of the boarding school education was that in some cases, 95% of the students went back to their homes rather than try to blend into the white communities (Reyhner, 2001).

Consequently, when these young adults returned home they were discounted because they had lost their knowledge of the language, culture and ability to fit in with their own people. This situation continued with the government’s decision to try a different method of assimilating the American Indians.

In the early part of the twentieth century the government decided to send American Indian students to public schools. Schools that enrolled American Indian students were given tuition payments for these students. With the enrollment of many American Indian students in the public school system, the number of government run schools for American Indian students started to decline. Even though these students were

no longer in the boarding schools, some of the same concerns were raised about their treatment. In addition to worrying about the treatment, there was also the concern about the quality of education that the American Indian students were receiving. In 1924, the Committee of One Hundred Citizens came together to discuss the state of American Indian education and what could be done. Many of their recommendations still echo through to today's education of American Indian students such as, "better school facilities, better trained personnel, increase in the number of Indian students in public schools, and scholarships for high school and college" (Reyhner, 1990, p 96).

A few years later, in 1927, after huge criticisms emerged about the general treatment of American Indians, Lewis Meriam headed a government study (Reyhner, 1990). In 1928, Meriam's report recommended several ways in which American Indians should be free to have power over their own well being. He also recommended that no young child be sent away to a boarding school and suggested the implementation of more day schools.

Then in 1934, the Johnson – O'Malley (JOM) Act was passed. This act gave the Secretary of the Interior the power to pay states or territories for providing school services to American Indian students. It has been speculated that in the beginning the money that was given to the schools was used for the general operation of the school. This meant JOM funds could have even been used to aid in the education of non- Indian students (Reyhner, 2001).

As stated by Reyhner (1992) the Termination Era of 1945-1968 is when the barriers of education came to a head again. At that time, the government passed a bill that was to terminate the reservations the American Indians were living on. For a time,

many American Indians were moved off their land by the federal government to urban areas. As a result, the states took on more of the responsibility of educating the American Indian students in the public school system. As the Civil Rights Movement started to take hold in 1969, many American Indians realized they had to take control over their own destiny (Van Hamme, 1995). With the increased opposition to assimilation strategies, by American Indians and their supporters, the federal government passed the Indian Self-Determination Act in 1975. Relative to education, this meant American Indian Nations were able to have more control over the education of their children. This led to the establishment of tribally controlled reservation schools. Rough Rock Demonstration School, which was established in 1976 on the Navajo reservation, was the first school to be overseen by the local community (Van Hamme, 1995). The curriculum at the school incorporated the Navajo language and culture into every aspect of the students' education. After the establishment of Rough Rock, many other American Indian reservations began to contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to establish their own schools (1995). In Wisconsin, a state with many tribes, the Oneida, Lac Coutre Oreilles, Menomonee, and Band of Ojibwe tribes have all established their own schools.

Along with the movement to change the control of education on reservations, the same action was taken in the urban areas. With many American Indian students populating urban areas, "survival schools" were established to meet their educational needs (Van Hamme, 1995). These urban schools are American Indian controlled schools, such like the reservation schools with one main difference. The students who attend these schools come from many different Tribal Nations. The main focus of these schools to start with was to help American Indian students adjust to the mainstream urban society

without giving up their own culture (1995). As time has progressed, many schools dropped the use “survival school” and have become American Indian schools. The Milwaukee Community Indian School located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin has become very successful and well known. Even with the many different backgrounds of their students they try to meet the needs of the students and parents the best they are able to.

Another important event in the history of American Indian Education happened in 1969 during the Self-Determination time. During this time a special Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education issued the “Indian Education: A National Tragedy-A National Challenge” report. This report brought attention to the lack of educational support for American Indian and Alaska Native students (United States Department of Education, n.d.). As a result, the Indian Education Act was put into place to establish the Office of Indian Education (USDE, n.d.). Parts of this act also authorized programs and grants to assist Indian children and adults. In the past three decades, several amendments were made to the act to add teacher training programs and fellowship programs. Other public laws were also made to approve Gifted and Talented programs, allow Bureau of Indian Affairs schools to apply for grants, and add plans to meet the academic and culturally related needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students (USDE, n.d.).

In the mid to late 1980’s, Wisconsin felt a strong need to not only improve the academics of the American Indian students, but to also improve the climate of the schools they were attending. In 1983 the Voigt Decision, which recognized the Ojibwe rights under treaty, was finalized in court (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2000). Unfortunately, because many of the non- Indian citizens of Wisconsin lacked the “accurate information about tribal histories, cultures, and political status” (DPI, 2000),

their behavior was outrageously appalling when it came to interactions of any kind with the American Indian people of this state. Many people will never forget the scenes of protesters at the docks when it was time for the American Indian tribes to start traditional, treaty-protected spear fishing. Signs of ignorance were exhibited in the form of taunting, hateful signs, and the throwing of anything available at the American Indian people. Hundreds of non-Indians were arrested for their participation in verbal and physical assaults of Indian people.

However, the taunting did not stop at the docks. Many of the American Indian children had to endure racist remarks at school also. This intolerable behavior had to be dealt, with and the state of Wisconsin and tribal leaders put effort into getting legislation approved to educate the non- Indian students. In 1989, Act 31 was established to require all public schools in Wisconsin to teach the history, culture, and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized tribes and bands in Wisconsin (DPI, 2000). Act 31 was intended to accurately inform students about the American Indians and also to serve as a positive force to combat the misunderstanding and social unrest that had been occurring (DPI, 2000).

Even though the American Indian people have suffered many tragedies, especially in the education system, educators and American Indian Nations have been trying to work together to make the situation better. People recognized that the boarding school system was not working and needed to be changed. Then, legislation was passed to improve the situation that was put upon the American Indian students when they were sent to public schools. In the Midwest, Wisconsin legislation has been put into place to not only help educate American Indian students, but also to educate non Indian students

about their American Indian counterparts. The need to improve the education of American Indian children has not stopped, and there have been some wonderful strides made to help these students to succeed.

### *Present American Indian Education*

Too many times research done on American Indian education, as limited as it may be focuses on the obstacles of the students and the schools. In this section, there will be a brief discussion about obstacles in American Indian education. Yet, the main focus will be on the successes in American Indian education.

During the past few decades, the education of American Indian students has gone through many changes. In 1969, a Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education brought to the nation's attention to the national tragedy occurring in relation to American Indian education (United States Department of Education, n.d.). The Indian Education Act was established in 1972 to meet the unique needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students and help stop the tragedy (USDE, n.d.). There have been several amendments to the Act to add aspects like teacher training and availability of grants. Most recently the "2001 No Child Left Behind Act, reauthorized the Indian Education Act as Title IIV Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act." (USDE, n.d.) The United States Department of Education (n.d.) stated that the Indian Education legislation is unlike any other in the following ways:

It recognized that American Indians have unique, educational and culturally related academic needs and distinct language and cultural needs.

It is the only comprehensive Federal Indian Education legislation, that deals with American Indian education from pre-school to graduate level education.

It focuses national attention on the educational needs of American Indian learners.

It provides services to American Indians and Alaska Natives that are not provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. (USDE, n.d., n.p.).

Even with the legislation that has been put into place, American Indian students who are educated in the public school system are still lagging behind. For these students, the schools can be a very alien world, with the issue of racism as discussed before, as prevalent as ever. Also along with this is the fact that Euro-American students and teachers have placed value on very different activities and personal traits. Public schools have not used the most effective techniques in assisting American Indian students to be successful in school. As stated by Coggins, Radin and Williams “a belief by educators in the fundamental sameness of all cultures is coupled with the assumption that when there are differences the Anglo-American way is best”(1997, p.221). With this belief, many teachers have ignored the differences that exist between American Indian students and the Euro-American students. The American Indian students have had to try and exist in a bicultural world, which in many cases causes difficulty in their success in school (Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock, 2003). As stated in Coggins, Radin and Williams “studies have shown a negative correlation between the number of years in school and achievement levels of American Indian children” (1997, p. 220).

Coggins, Radin, and Williams (1997) suggested that up to grade four, American Indian students have been performing at average or above the average levels in the classroom. After grade four, though, the success rate of these students dropped off significantly. Coggins, Radin, and Williams (1997) stated that because the public schools start to focus on identity formation and social functioning after grade four, it could cause great stress for the American Indian students. These students may have felt that their cultural identity was being threatened and that they were being forced to adopt the

mainstream way of being. This concept may then have snowballed into damaging the students' self-esteem and self worth in relationship to their school and cultural environments. St. Germaine (1996) stated that because American Indian students feel forced into adapting to the school culture, their success in school becomes failure in their tribal community. Some students may refuse to participate in tribal traditions, because they may feel their classmates will look down upon them. Others may go to the extreme of completely disconnecting from their tribes, because they feel the traditional ways impede their success.

With the damage that has been done to the American Indian students' self-esteem, it is not surprising that in some schools the dropout rate for these students has been and still is as high as 50+% (Brady, Dingman, and Mroczka, 1995). Many schools that enrolled American Indian children have blamed the parents noninvolvement for their children's inadequate education and high dropout rates. A study done by Robinson-Zanartu and Majel-Dixon (1996) showed a different picture of the problem. In their research, they surveyed parents of American Indian students and asked them how they felt about the education their children were receiving. Many of the parents were disappointed that they were never asked what they thought would help their students succeed in school. The parents also felt the schools did not value their children or their culture.

There were parents from the study who felt their child's education was satisfactory and felt valued by the school. However, these parents were sending their children to tribal based or American Indian education schools. The fact that these parents were satisfied with the education of their children was congruent with research done by

Robinson-Zanartu and Majil-Dixon (1996). These researchers found from talking to American Indian parents that tribally run schools were significantly “more respectful of Indian children, held higher expectations of achievement and potential, and the schools were inclusive of the cultures and communities” (1996, p161). Several other sources relayed the same message stating the fact that American Indian education programs were more satisfactory than public schools. The reason for the congruence could be related to the strategies used in American Indian controlled schools to teach their students.

The current researcher has noticed throughout the articles regarding American Indian education programs there were many commonalties that led to successful outcomes for American Indian students. One commonality was the schools showed respect for the American Indian students’ culture. Robinson-Zanartu and Majil-Dixon stated that “the schools respect for students’ languages and cultures are related to students’ academic achievement”(1996, p. 200). Similarly, it has been found that in schools that promoted American Indian students culture the students had a stronger sense of self and therefore had higher success rates (Coggins, Radin, Williams,1997).

Going a step further, the literature shows that successful schools are not only promoting the students’ culture, but they are also teaching them about it. In the mainstream culture, education has always been a means by which a society transmits its culture unto its young (Synder-Joy, 1994). As stated previously in this paper, the discontinuity between the mainstream culture and the American Indian culture causes confusion on the part of many American Indian students. Therefore, creating an atmosphere that has been harmonious with the students’ way of life can bring about great success. In Cleary and Peacock (1998), it was stated, “The key to producing successful

American Indian students in our modern educational system...is to first ground these students in their American Indian belief and value systems”(p. 101). Also confirmed by one school’s cultural education teacher, “If you don’t have an identity you’d be lost in this world. We tell these kids ‘You’re Native American and you should be proud of it’” (Pagano, 2002b, n.p.). Allowing these students to identify with their culture not only helps them in school but also assists them in choosing a life path. Richard Littlebear, as stated in Reyhner (1992), commented that many of the urban American Indian children are looking to gangs to find some sense of identity. American Indian nations have all the characteristics in their tribal structures that can help reestablish the identities of their youth (1992). Also, many American Indian nations believe that the time is now for their children to learn the culture and bring their nations back to life. The proper education of their children has been seen as one of the ways to make this come true (Reyhner, 1992).

Another theme noticed in the literature was not only teaching the American Indian students about their culture, but also their language. The importance of language is directly connected to the American Indian culture in more than one way. First of all, it has been found that the use of first language can help students acquisition of the English language (Reyhner, 1990). Also, building on a students language in the classroom can “create a climate where the development of linguistics and social knowledge is facilitated and valued” (Goddard & Shields, 1997, p. 250). In other words, having their native language in the classroom can assist students in learning and help them find value in education. Furthermore, language can give American Indian students a greater connection to who he/she is, but it is also important to saving their culture. As stated in Cleary and Peacock, “One common strand of belief is that if a language dies, the culture

also dies because the language contains the perpetuates, the depth, subtleties and nuances of culture” (1998, p.125). In some tribal schools this has been an easier task because there is only one language. Unfortunately, in an urban American Indian education school this task has become a little more difficult. Many of the students at these schools have varying backgrounds and it is hard to know what will be beneficial to any of them. Even with this difficult task, many urban American Indian education schools plow ahead and try to find tribal elders to assist them.

This brings to point another common thread found in the successful education of American Indian students. It has been found that having community members and elders involved in the schools adds a sense of honor and respect to the schools. One teacher stated that just having an elder from their community in the classroom changed how the students acted in class (Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock, 2003 ). The students were more apt to pay attention to the lesson, participate in class, and be respectful to one another. Elders are not the only ones that are important to the successful education of American Indian students. Parents also play an integral role in the education of American Indian students.

In too many cases, schools have blamed American Indian parents for the failure of their students. Instead, these schools should have been asking themselves what was keeping these parents from participating in the school. Many American Indian parents have negative feelings towards schools. These feelings can stem from what happened to them or a family member in the boarding schools. It can even come from parents’ own experiences in the public school system (Gillespie & Grant, 1993). Schools need to be aware that parents may not feel comfortable in the school environment and need to enable

them to gain confidence in their abilities as first educators of their children (1993). American Indian parents can have a strong influence on school attendance, homework and overall school success. As Robinson-Zanartu and Majel-Dixon (1996) found, many American Indian parents felt they were very important in the education of their children, but were not being utilized by the schools. Many of the parents could not understand why the schools did not want to listen to them, be informed about their culture or spend time in the tribal environment to learn their ways of living. Schools that have been successful in gaining back the trust of American Indian parents have done many home visits, shown interest in parents needs, created parent committees, and have after school activities that involve parents and culture (Gillespie & Grant, 1993).

An example of a successful school is Rock Point School in Arizona. Rock Point School on the Navajo Nation in Arizona has held parent involvement as a very high priority (Reyhner, 1990). The school holds quarterly parent teacher conferences, yearly general public meetings, has an elected parent advisory committee that observes school operations, and has school sponsored cultural events. With these types of activities, student attendance rates rose to above 94% and parent conference attendance rates have grown to above 80% (Reyhner, 1990). In schools like Rock Point that have held parent involvement as a priority, the cultural discontinuity between home and school can be greatly reduced (St. Germanie, 1996). Furthermore schools that have high success rates for American Indian students made the choice to find out what the needs were of the community, parents and students.

Many times, though, the students' needs are lost in the chaos of what everyone else thinks education should be like. When it comes to the needs of American Indian

students, there are differences within the culture, nations and clans that need to be considered. Literature has shown that in order to help American Indian students prosper in school, adjustments should be made in several areas to meet their needs.

The most critical change that has been made in some schools was to recruit more American Indian teachers. During the 1993-1994 school year, “less than 1% of 256,400 teachers at BIA/tribal schools and public schools were American Indian” (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Besides this fact less than 0.05% of teachers working with American Indian students had either a major or minor in American Indian studies. Students, no matter what culture, have a strong need to feel understood. Cleary and Peacock have noted in their research that “students need to be understood and inspired to develop their own sense of purpose and worth” (1998, p58). So it is very important to have teachers that can relate to the students experiences. Also, having a positive role model and positive teacher-student interaction was listed by students as one of the top influences to helping them succeed in school (Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock, 2003).

This is not to say that non-Indian teachers can not be effective when working with American Indian students. Students interviewed by Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock (2003) gave some examples of qualities teachers had that have helped them; having cultural knowledge, using encouragement, having high expectations, being flexible, being interested in students, listening and understanding, being open minded, being respectful, using multiple approaches to teach, and having patience, just to name a few. Gillespie and Grant (1993) stated that teachers have to take responsibility and become

knowledgeable about American Indian history, culture, customs and values. Teachers need to have a great desire to understand their students and their culture to be effective.

It has also been shown that many American Indian students have been bored out of school, or dropped out, because their teachers solely lectured to them (St. Germaine, 1996). Many of these students would have liked to have been active in the learning process. Gillespie and Grant (1993) stated that many non-Indian teachers put value on individual verbal abstraction and immediate attempts of new skills. These teachers view American Indian students as “lost and unable to learn a skill after failing at preliminary, isolated steps” (1993, ¶ 93). The truth of the matter has been that American Indian students learning style might be completely different from the expectations of the teacher. American Indian students may watch others perform the skill until he or she feels able to perform the skill proficiently (1993). Observation is key to the culture. Students, in research done by Bergstrom, Cleary and Peacock (2003), noted that they were most successful in schools that encouraged them to interact with peers, instructors, and their environment. It has been shown in much of the literature that education that promoted activity based instruction was the most complimentary to many of the American Indian students’ learning styles (Reyhner, 1992).

The last theme that echoed through all the literature, to help American Indian students, was to make the curriculum appropriate and relevant (St. Germaine, 1996). There were many heartbreaking stories in Bergstrom, Cleary and Peacock (2003) that showed how inappropriate curriculum could scar American Indian students. Celeste, who is Seneca, shared a story about her history class and the effect it had on her:

It was American History in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and the teacher wrote, ‘All Native Americans turned to alcoholism to ease their pain’ and she put all in like big letters and underlined it twice, and I said that was f\_\_\_ed up. And I walked out, and then I got suspended for three days and she did not have to apologize to me or nothing. Then, when I played softball...they called me an alcoholic. (p. 45)

Stories like this could have been avoided if the teachers were informed about accurate and suitable curriculum. Schools and teachers who have done the research have found out how to truly help make school a positive place for American Indian students. In relation to curriculum, literature showed focusing on American Indian achievements and historical contributions to the overall culture of this country has been very beneficial (Van Hamme, 1995). Students have stated that they would have liked to learn more about American Indian literature, American Indian history and American Indian people who contributed to the sciences (Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock 2003).

With the knowledge that has been acquired about American Indian students, one would think that schools should be able to incorporate some of the themes mentioned and assist in making the American Indian students successful. The best way to start this is by “going beyond the belief that these children come to school with deficiencies as a result of their background, choosing instead to view what the student brings to school as resources” (Bielenberg, 2000, p.41).

## Chapter Three

### Summary, Case Study, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations

#### *Summary*

In today's society there is still a strong need to take a look at how racism has changed and is still affecting people. Even though the "mainstream" society would like to believe racism has become extinct, the people who experience racism know it is all around us. Racism may not be as overt as having signs out in public stating that someone of a certain cultural background is not allowed to apply for a job with a company. This type of racism has become unfashionable in today's society. Racism has become more sophisticated, covert and to some degree almost socially acceptable. Companies may not outwardly tell their employees that candidates from diverse backgrounds will not be promoted. These companies would either not offer promotions to their employees of color or deny them by telling them they did not have the qualifications. This type of racism can also occur in general society by refusing to rent an apartment to a certain family, stating it was because someone else had already looked at the place when in fact there was no one else.

Racism does not have a place anywhere in our society, but the most unfortunate place it has been found is in schools. Children today are affected by so many things that it is distressing to think students have to also overcome racism in school. Racism can occur between students by name calling, telling racist jokes, racial slurs, derogatory racial stereotyping, and violent acts (Savord and Aragon cited in Beswick, 1999). Teachers need to be holding these students accountable and not shrug these acts off as "kids being kids". In some cases, though, the teachers are the ones inflicting the racism. Some

teachers make comments like “Well, you know, *those people* always...” or if something bad happened in the school, a teacher may say, “It was probably a black student *they* are always causing problems!” (Kailin, 1999, p. 736). Or there are teachers who in the classroom will treat their Euro-American students more favorably than their students from diverse backgrounds. It could be as subtle as greeting one student with a warm smile and hug welcoming them to class and just saying hello to another student as they walk into class. Racism by teachers could also be as blatant as a teacher telling a student that “all the other black students who took my class bombed out” in order to convince the student to not take his class (Kailin, 1999, p.736).

Racism has not stopped with the teachers though; it also has penetrated the curriculum taught to our students. Most commonly, it would appear that the only viewpoint that is given in relation to any history or historic figures is the Euro-American view. The consequences of only teaching one viewpoint to students of color or any student is they come to assume other cultures are not valued or even to the extreme view that people from other cultures have not made any contributions to society (Banks and Banks, 1989).

One of the cultures that has been truly misrepresented in much of our curriculum and overall in our society are the American Indian nations. This is a culture that is finally starting to rebuild itself and take a stand against what has been done to them. In movies, our society often portrays the American Indian people as brutal savages inflicting pain upon the poor immigrants. In reality, much of the brutality was inflicted upon the American Indians by forcing them to give up their values, beliefs, language and overall culture. Literature seems to point to one of the most devastating offenses committed

against the American Indian tribes was the abduction of many children and then the subsequent placement of these children into boarding schools.

The purpose of the boarding schools was to change the American Indian children into “good” citizens without interference from their families. The children were completely cut off from their relatives and culture. The American Indian children were forced to change their appearance, cultural orientation, and their names were changed to Christian names. It was essential to the government’s plan to change these children and make certain they learned the way of the white man. The boys were taught how to farm to become prosperous men and the girls were educated to cook, clean, sew and be good wives. The education these children received did more harm than good (Spring, 1996). Unlike the predictions of the government that these students would go to live in the Europeanized communities, a huge majority of them tried to move back to their tribal nations. In many cases these students were outcast by their tribes because they had “forgotten” their “Indianness” and could not contribute to the well being of the Nation. Likewise they were not accepted into the European communities because they were not “white” enough (Spring, 1996).

With such a horrendous end result of boarding schools many government officials were not sure what to do in terms of educating American Indian children. In 1934 when Johnson – O’Malley (JOM) was approved many American Indian students were placed into public education. Many more were sent to public schools during the Termination Era, but the JOM funds the schools were receiving were not always being put to proper use. In turn, it would seem, the American Indian students were still receiving a substandard education.

Finally, in 1969, the “Indian Education: A National Tragedy-A National Challenge” report came out to truly show the disaster that was occurring in our education system in relationship to our American Indian (United States Department of Education, n.d., n.p.). With the establishment of the Indian Education Act, the education of American Indian students started the slow and tedious progression to improvement. Every state was to address the obstacles that were taking place in education that impeded American Indian students learning.

The State of Wisconsin seemingly has more problems than just the proper education of its American Indian students. The state needed to find a way to educate the general population about the history, culture, and tribal sovereignty of the American Indian nations of their state. This need came about when the Voigt Decision was finalized and the Chippewa Nation’s rights to spear fish under treaty were recognized. As a result, many uneducated citizens of the State of Wisconsin decided to protest the spear fishing by blocking docks, yelling hateful comments and threatening many American Indian people. In order to counteract the public’s social unrest, the state decided it was best to start educating all students and teachers about the American Indian nations and established Act 31 in 1989. Schools are now held responsible, by law, to educate all students about the American Indian people of Wisconsin.

Act 31 has had an impact on students, although there are still some things that need to be worked out. Many schools still hold mascots that portray American Indian people. There are also people in many communities who verbally express their unhappiness about the American Indians rights to spear fish. Similarly, the same goes for the education of our American Indian students. There are many things that are working

for these students and helping them succeed. For instance adding more American Indian teachers in schools can help American Indian students to have role models and people who understand their struggles. The numbers of American Indian teachers are still low, but hopefully with the tribal colleges that are opening these numbers will begin to grow. Also learning their American Indian culture and language has been huge in grounding students and helping them feel important in the general scheme of life. Along with their culture, American Indian students need to know their parents and community members support them and their education. Therefore, schools that find ways to get parents and elders involved in schools have found great success in their students. One of the last and very critical aspects of educating American Indian students has been to use culturally appropriate and relevant curriculum. Showing these students how what they are learning relates to their culture or their lives has been shown to be greatly successful. Also teaching American Indian students about important people from their culture that have contributed to literature, government, the sciences and math gives them dreams and aspirations. If American Indian students can see someone like them has succeeded and overcome, they can also strive for success.

Even with the great strides that have been made there are many more to be made in the future, although, current research seems to suggest that education of American Indian students is headed in the right direction.

### *Case Study*

The current researcher had the opportunity to visit a K-8 tribal school in Northeastern Wisconsin. During the visit the researcher was able to speak with several staff members, visit summer school classes, and tour the school.

While talking to the vice principal and other staff members, the current research found many of the themes that were the basis for a successful American Indian school or education program. The school building itself very obviously showed the school's respect for the culture of their students. The floors, walls, and structure of the building all had culture infused into them. Sections of the floor told the story of each season of the year, while the inner walls had designs of various basket-weaving techniques. Also, on the walls, were tile pictures of the tribe's creation story. Near the ceiling, the school had wallpaper boarder that showed the different clans from their Nation. No matter where you turned in the school, you were surrounded by the culture.

Like much of the research showed, just having the culture surround the students was not enough, students at this school have to take cultural classes at every grade level. Students at this Northeastern tribal school would take a culture class where they would learn not only about their own American Indian nation but about other nations across the country. The students in the culture classes would learn stories, traditions, history and many other things about their own culture. The students at this school also had the opportunity to take a beading class where they learn how to bead many items. The day the current researcher was there, students were making beading designs for moccasins, barrettes and pillows. They also had displayed beaded shawls, which they used in the Pow wow the previous weekend. The other cultural based class students take is a medicine class, where they learn about plants and the ailments that they treat. Students in the summer class were required to choose a plant and then put together a research paper about it. This is not the end of the cultural learning for the students in this school though.

The students also learn traditional dance and songs, which help them to participate in the pow wows each year. The songs and dances are also performed at cultural based school activities. The students also learn the language of their tribe, which has been shown in research as an essential part of making an American Indian school or education program successful.

The community, elders, and parent contributions have also been shown to add to a successful program. This Northeastern tribal school for the most part can say it has the involvement of all of these people. The tribe itself has a business committee that gives the school support in financial ways. Elders contribute to the school in various ways themselves. The school has a foster grandparent program, which gets the elders in the school and directly involved in the classroom. One elder has his own office at the school and goes into classrooms to read stories, teach songs and just be involved with the children. The students themselves reach out to the elders of their tribe. The tribe has its own nursing home, which students visit and sing to the elders.

As for parent involvement the, Assistant Principal said it varies as in any other school. She stated they have parents that are at the school everyday and others they only see if the children are in trouble. She also stated that the involvement of parents decreases severely at the high school level. Again, this also happens in various other schools, but the Assistant Principal did say the effects of the boarding schools still exist for many people. She stated that the parents of the K-8 students may not have been affected themselves but their parents or grandparents could have been placed in one. There was also the fact that some parents themselves did not have a good experience with school, be it in the public school or other.

The school has been trying to get more parents involved with school events and establish a Parent Involvement program. The Assistant Principal stated that this program did not do well for a few reasons. First, many parents work during the day, so it is hard for them to be involved with the school. Also, with the rise in school security, they need to be careful who they let into the school to work with the students. Because of this, anyone who would be allowed to have frequent contact with children would need to go through a background check. For some parents, the background check just seems like a hassle and another hoop they need to jump through. But even though the Parent Involvement Program did not take off, the school hold many events in the year to involve parents and community members.

The school events they hold are Cultural Days where students perform songs and dances they have learned. There are also cultural games, food and many other cultural based events that are held for two days. These events have turned out very successfully for the school; not only parents and students are involved, but also other community members will attend. The school also holds a feast every fall where they share the vegetables from their school garden with others. The school also shares with everyone the maple syrup they harvest each year.

With the amount of culture infused into the school and its activities, one would think this school is taught completely by American Indian teachers. When asked about the make-up of the school's staff, the Assistant Principal stated that it was 50:50 at their K-8 school. She did state that at the high school there is a majority of non-Indian teachers. The Assistant Principal of the K-8 school stated that all teachers must take a

one-hour long class each week of the tribal language. Even though 50% of the staff at the school are American Indian, they are not all part of the school's tribe.

It was obvious to the researcher that this school has been doing everything it can to make its students successful. The curriculum and the culture have been so infused it is hard to see where one ends and the other begins at this school. At the high school last year, they had a 100% graduation rate. The Assistant Principal at the K-8 school said that is because the school will do whatever they need to in order to help these children graduate. The problem then comes with how to help the students after high school.

When asked what the biggest hurdles are that need to be overcome to help American Indian students have a successful future, the Assistant Principal listed several things. First of all she stated that teen pregnancy was one of the biggest obstacles their people need to overcome. She also stated that on her best estimate the pregnancy rate at the high school was around 70%. The Assistant Principal felt that teen pregnancy has become too accepted. On one hand she said it is good, because the parents of the teens are willing to help them. But on the other, the teens do not understand until it is too late how having a baby so early affects the rest of their lives. The school, fortunately, has just received a grant to start an abstinence program with students.

Another obstacle the students have to overcome are health issues. The Assistant Principal stated that nearly every student either has diabetes or has someone in his or her family that is affected by this disease. The reason for this is that many of the foods that were introduced to the American Indian tribes were and still are unhealthy. The traditional foods that were produced and made by the tribes were extremely healthy for their people. This is just another case of how the European Immigrants effected the lives

of the American Indians. Fortunately, the school has received a grant to assist them in educating the community and students about diabetes. This will help to improve the quality of life for many people.

Furthermore, students need to overcome the instability of their families. The Assistant Principal stated that there are many students who come from single parent homes. In many cases, the single parent is the mother. There are also students who do not live with their parents at all. These students may live with grandparents or aunts and uncles. In most tribes extended families help parent all children when needed. The Assistant Principal stated that sometimes it is hard to keep track of where some students are staying. This instability can sometimes cause students great difficulty in school.

In addition to the above challenges, students need to overcome the view that all there is to life is working at the local casino. The Assistant Principal stated that this was a major problem for their high school students. Many of the students do not see the purpose of college or furthering their education because they are going to work at the local casinos. The Assistant Principal stated that the casinos can be a double-edged sword. The casino brings in money for their tribe and supports the schools, but it can also keep tribal people from pursuing better jobs for themselves. The school tries to get involved with different organizations that will help send American Indian students to college. The American Indian Physicians Organization has been a great help with supplying students with scholarships.

The last major obstacle students need to battle with are gangs. It was stated, during the visit, that over the past few years there has been a great increase in gang involvement in the school. This involvement in some cases can be directly related to the

instability of the children's homes and possibly lack of involvement in the tribe. The Assistant Principal stated that many times the gang involvement follows the students who have transferred from the public school. In many cases that is why the parents transferred the students, too. Many of the parents that transfer the students to the tribal school are hoping that it will ground them and help them learn.

Lastly, when asked what others should know about her school, the K-8 Assistant Principal stated several things. She started out with the fact that their school has really come a long way. They are now in a new school building that truly represents the culture all the way around. Also important to note is that the high school and elementary school were awarded North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI) Accreditation this year. This accreditation shows that their school is focused on raising student achievement, providing a safe learning environment, and that they are running an effective school with highly trained staff. Along with this, the Wisconsin Indian Education Association named their school administrator Wisconsin Indian Educator of the Year.

Many of these accomplishments are a result of the school's small class sizes, caring staff and tougher rules about violence in the school. School violence at the K-8 school has decreased 38.5% in the past year and the number of suspensions has decreased by 57%. The current researcher heard indications that this change could be in part due to the resignation of the former Principal. Information shared with the current researcher indicated that the former Principal was non-Indian, did not hold the students accountable and did not respect the culture of students. This shows a great example of how damaging someone without knowledge and the background can be to an American Indian school.

The last thing the Assistant Principal would like people to know about her school is that their students are very successful and involved in competitions like the National Science Fair that is put on by the American Indian Science and Engineering Society every year. The students compete locally and then head to Albuquerque, New Mexico. For the past 13 years every one of their students that have competed nationally has placed.

With results like that, and the awards that the school has received, it shows this school has been doing many things right to help their students succeed.

### *Critical Analysis*

The main purpose of this paper was to bring a different light to the topic of American Indian education. Unfortunately, when looking at the limited research that has been done on American Indian students, it was very difficult to find research that focused on the positives that exist. Most of the statistics and papers have focused on 50% dropout rates, suspensions, expulsions, and decreased academic achievement. Even more research has focused on the high rates of alcoholism, poverty, and unemployment. All of these show grim statistics with no light at the end of the tunnel for American Indians. Where are the statistics on the success stories? How can American Indian children strive to succeed when all they have heard are the negatives?

The current researcher understands that informing people about the current situations of American Indians helps in the development of a plan of action to improve the circumstances. Also, reading research report after research report about the adversity American Indian people have had to overcome can create a spark in people to become involved in correcting the situation. But in an educational setting, teachers need to share

with students how American Indians have and are still contributing positively to their tribal nation and the United States. Educators also need to be able to share with their students success stories so they can strive to pursue a career in any area their lives lead them.

As educators and researchers we are essential in showing American Indian students the path to success. Even though there is still limited research that shows successful school programs and ways to improve students' learning, there is a need for much more. However, the research needs to not only be on educational successes, it needs also include success in the business world, success in the medical professions, success in literature, success in theater, success in tribal government etc. There are many positives that exist in the daily lives of American Indians. These aspects need to be recognized and spotlighted!

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

Considering the fact that there has been a very limited amount of research done on American Indians in general, there is a lot to be studied. The following are areas the current researcher has been interested in and would like to see researched further:

1. Conduct a survey of American Indians who have become successful in their Nation and career.
2. Compare and contrast the successes of American Indian controlled schools in rural and urban settings.
3. Identify how public schools can implement the cross cultural curriculum effectively for all students.

4. Identify how tribal colleges have positively impacted tribal nations and their people.

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