DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 427 915 RC 021 811

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TITLE Research To Support Improved Practice in Indian Education.
PUB DATE 1999-00-00
NOTE 14p.; Chapter 13 in: "Next Steps: Research and Practice To Advance Indian Education"; see RC 021 798.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Alaska Natives; *American Indian Education; American Indians; Cultural Maintenance; *Culturally Relevant Education; Educational Change; Educational Cooperation; *Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Native Language Instruction; *Research Needs; *Self Determination; Teacher Student Relationship; Tribally Controlled Education

ABSTRACT

In recent years, various task forces and studies, including the White House Conference on Indian Education, have established that research on Indian education, history, and culture must consider the Native perspective and involve Native researchers. Improving Indian education depends upon good research. Aspects of Indigenous education and community life that need study include: the teaching-learning relationship between Native students and teachers and how a good Native teacher can enhance that relationship; how to attract and retain effective principals or leadership teams in order to maintain stability for planning and implementing improvements; school collaborations with nearby colleges, including distance learning and culturally appropriate programs; how agency workers serving youth and families can collaborate more fully in creating conditions for educational success; developing systems to help students with the transition from one phase of schooling to the next; expunging stereotypes about Native peoples from curricula and teacher education programs; broadening Native education research beyond the reservation context; how Native Americans can educate America and the rest of the world about the unique Native political status; building coalitions between Native Americans and Indigenous people from other countries; educational effects of recent tribal economic development programs such as gambling operations; how to make more connections between schooling and daily life, consistent with the holistic nature of Native worldviews; and building coalitions for research and development among tribal governments, federal agencies, colleges, and the private sector. Contains endnotes. (TD)

CHAPTER 13

# Research to Support Improved Practice in Indian Education

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This book is our attempt to pull together some definitive thoughts about the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives from a Native perspective. A field as complex as *Indian education* is not easily defined and packaged into one book; therefore, we hope this is one of many books by Native authors that will present issues and ideas for discussion and study in college and university classrooms.

Readers will notice two major and related themes among the chapters. The various authors support the concept of tribal self-determination in education while they reject the age-old deficit and stereotypic approaches to education. This paradigm shift represents a fundamental change in thinking, attitude, and approach to research and practice in Native education. Self-determination puts Native people in control and uses tribal languages, cultures, and values to enhance student work, research, higher education, and other areas related to education. Educators who work from this paradigm face a challenge because the deficit approach, with assimi-

lation as a goal, remains deeply entrenched in schools. The effects of the deficit approach reveal themselves in drop-out rates, attendance rates, academic achievement test scores, and enrollment and graduation rates in colleges and universities. The individual chapters in this book stand alone as excellent readings on a variety of topics, but together, they represent an in-depth look at current Native thinking about topics ranging from the historical foundations of Indian education, to theoretical and practical aspects of curricula at all levels of education, to research-based recommendations for the future.

So what *are* the next steps we need to take to advance research and practice in the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives? Clearly, based on chapters in this text, our endeavors must be guided by tribal self-determination. The education of Indigenous people is complex given the various circumstances and cultural differences of students and their families. Although progress toward tribal self-determination has been made over the past 30 years, we continue to see the results of past assimilation and termination policies and practices play themselves out in the lives of students today. Much more needs to be done to ensure full participation of all students in achieving community and individual goals.

This final chapter begins with a description of the student population referred to when we discuss Indian education. We then review the research needs articulated by several authors over the past 10 years or more. We discuss several philosophies and approaches, some of which are research based, that show promise for improving practice. We conclude with recommendations for the next steps that must be taken by researchers and practitioners.

## The Student Population

Although American Indian and Alaska Native students generally attend public, private, and parochial schools, most of the research and writing in Indian education emanates from the 187 schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The BIA-supported schools are located on 63 reservations in 23 states; more than 60 percent are tribally controlled, funded through contracts or grants from the BIA.

About 90 percent of the 600,000 Native students in the United States attend public schools. According to the National Center for

Education Statistics, 1,260 public schools have an American Indian and/or Alaska Native student enrollment of at least 25 percent. Another 78,625 public schools have enrollments of American Indian and/or Alaska Native students that number less than 25 percent. The small number of Native students in most public schools makes research and dissemination activities a daunting task. It is much easier to do these things in the BIA-funded schools, which is why the knowledge base in Indian education is generated largely from these schools.[2]

While most Native students are successful, too many are not. For example, Native students have the highest drop-out rate (around 36 percent) of any racial or ethnic group. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that Native fourth-grade students score below basic levels in reading, math, and history. D. Michael Pavel points out that Native students are less likely to be college bound and their SAT and ACT scores are lower compared to national norms (see Chapter 10).

## Research

In 1989 dialogues sponsored by the College Board's Educational Equality Project and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) were held regionally throughout the country to discuss what educational changes American Indians wanted for American Indian youth. The National Dialogue Project on American Indian Education resulted in *Our Voices, Our Vision: American Indians Speak Out for Educational Excellence.* This report clearly states that research on Indian history and culture must consider the perspectives of American Indian people and that American Indian scholars must "become involved in producing research rather than serving as subjects and consumers of research."[3] In the three years after this report, this position was supported by two other significant events in which the voices of Native people were heard, recorded, and reported, namely the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force hearings and subsequent report and the White House Conference on Indian Education and its final report. Both reports call for basic research, applied research, and the development of programs and materials from a Native perspective.

In 1993 the *Tribal College Journal* published a special issue on

research. An editorial essay, "From Passive to Active: Research in Indian Country," concludes the following:

> As we approach the twenty-first century there is a strong collective and collaborative voice of Indian (and non-Indian) people speaking about the role of research in the lives of Indian people. Included in this voice are professors at tribal, public and private colleges and universities; teachers and administrators in tribal, public and private schools; policy-makers at the local, state and national levels; and last but not least, the tribal leaders who envision the lives of their people being improved by research.[4]

The need for authentic knowledge developed by Native researchers has been established, but what aspects of Indigenous education and community life do we need to study and how will our methods differ from what has been done before? Several documents in recent years have identified many nagging questions that must be researched and reported.

One report calls for studies of intertribal communication styles, learning styles, cognitive skills, alcohol and drug abuse among families, development of industry on reservations, the climate at the university for Indian professionals and professors, educational relationships between American Indian tribes and other sovereign countries/nations, and leadership power in education. Similarly the authors of this chapter have suggested pedagogy, curricula, teachers, achievement scores, drop-out rates, higher education, and parental involvement as areas in need of more research.[5]

The reports of both the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force and the White House Conference on Indian Education call for applied research in the following areas: extent of adult illiteracy and adequacy of current adult literacy funding and programs; unmet needs in higher education; progress in higher education including enrollment, retention, and graduation; elementary and secondary enrollment and achievement; identification of gifted and talented individuals; and demographic characteristics. Development needs outlined in the reports include alternative assessment or unbiased standardized tests to assess student achievement and abilities; effective parent support programs; instruction, curricula, and program ad-

ministration for exceptional students of all ages; and alcohol and substance abuse issues.[6]

The value of research to decision making is more widely appreciated in Native communities where Native people have become active researchers, looking for solutions to critical issues facing their governments and communities. The insider perspective is valuable in setting research agendas and in situations where proper protocol must be followed to gain access to information. Two recent examples of redefined research paradigms come from the Southwest. Mary E. Romero of Cochiti Pueblo directly involved Cochiti (and other Keresan Pueblo) elders in every aspect of a study that developed a definition of giftedness from a Keresan Pueblo perspective. Romero's knowledge of Pueblo protocol was important in this study. By following protocol, she gathered rich data and, in the process, developed a new and culturally appropriate research methodology.

In Arizona, members of the Education Standing Committee of the Gila River Indian Community Tribal Council helped design a study to learn about the choices made by their youth to persist or drop out of high school. This partnership included the Center for Indian Education and the Strengthening Underrepresented Minorities in Math and Science (SUMMS) Institute at Arizona State University (ASU). Committee members and ASU faculty defined the role of each partner in gathering, processing, interpreting, and reporting data, which eventually yielded substantial information about their youth and the drop-out problem in their community. Both of these examples exemplify tribal control of the research process, thus creating models for other communities to follow as they find answers to their own perplexing problems.

## Practice

Much of what needs to be done to improve practice depends upon good research. While effective practices can be cited in a number of schools attended by American Indian and Alaska Native students, those practices are not pervasive enough and are not sustained over sufficient periods of time to produce measurable and generalizable effects.

Several studies indicate that Native language instruction enhances academic success (as measured on tests) or shows positive results in

maintaining or revitalizing Native language use in the community and schools. An excellent example of combining local control and local knowledge to produce effective practices is found in a public school district serving Hualapai students in Peach Springs, Arizona:

> Since bilingual education began at Peach Springs in 1976, student attendance has significantly improved, and Hualapai students now graduate from eighth grade (when the program ends) and from high school in far greater numbers than their peers in conventional school programs. In 1989, 100% of Hualapai students who had completed the eighth grade went on to graduate from high school. These instructional changes, in which the Hualapai language and culture were authentic and integral parts of the school, along with an increase of Native teachers enhanced the integration of the school with the community, resulted in Indian students' increased success in school.[7]

The *Indian Nations At Risk* report also identifies successful practices in Native education. For example, the Denver Indian Center is recognized for its Circles of Learning Pre-K Curriculum, an American Indian culturally based model for early childhood education. Crazy Horse School in South Dakota and St. Peter's Mission School in Arizona have service integration programs that promote student health. The Pennsylvania State University's American Indian Leadership Program is noted for preparing educational leaders. Wounded Knee Elementary School in South Dakota is noted for parental participation. Peach Springs School in Arizona is recognized as a model for its culture-based Hualapai language and technology program.

In recent years, the schools funded by the BIA through the Office of Indian Education Programs (OIEP) have concentrated on school reform and improvement. In 1987 the OIEP developed a plan to use the lessons learned in the effective schools research to improve their schools. Eleven correlates were used, based upon the assumptions that all students can and will learn, schools can make a difference, what schools care about is what they will teach and what students will learn, and evidence of school improvement is based upon student outcomes. One central correlate was cultural relevance or tribal culture integrated into all areas of the schools, which supports stu-

dent self-esteem, success, and respect. The effective schools research combined with the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* have resulted in school reform and improvement in BIA-supported schools. This reform focuses on developing challenging integrated curriculum-based content and assessment standards. Although these content standards and assessment strategies were developed for BIA-supported schools, they have the potential to influence public education where schools have significant numbers of Native students.[8]

The OIEP also developed a family literacy program that has been recognized as a model nationally. The Family and Child Education Program, known as FACE, was initiated in 1990 to serve children ages 0 to 5 and their parents in both home and school settings. It is based on the proven models of Parents As Teachers, Parent and Child Education, and the High/Scope curriculum for early childhood. A fundamental component of FACE is the integration of tribal languages and cultures in the operation of the program.[9]

As we have noted, many good things are happening in the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Self-determination efforts are evident in all aspects of education but especially in the control of schools on reservation lands. Research will play an even more important role as communities determine the effects of reform and improvement and frame the questions that still need to be resolved.

## Recommendations

What is Indian education today? What will Indigenous education look like in the future? We believe the momentum that began more than two decades ago will continue to grow. Young scholars like Tarajean Yazzie and Tim Begaye on the editorial board of the *Harvard Educational Review* will continue to influence what is published about Indigenous education in mainstream journals. Recent books—like *Collected Wisdom* by Linda Miller Cleary and Thomas Peacock, *First Person, First Peoples* by Andrew Garrod and Colleen Larimore, and *To Live Heroically* by Delores J. Huff—and the chapters in this book all tell the story from our perspective and will be joined by other Indigenous authors. We need many more Native researchers to write our stories and improve schooling for our youth and adults.

We believe a primary focus of research and practice must be the teaching-learning relationship between students and teachers. This relationship is the most basic interaction that takes place in schools each day and one that determines whether students will persist or not. A mutually respectful and caring relationship is essential to educational success. We believe that a good teacher *is* a good teacher, but when there is a good Native teacher, the relationship between Native student and teacher is enhanced. When examining the credentials of potential teachers, school officials and board members must also consider the qualities and characteristics that assure respect, caring, and communication of high expectations.

Equal in importance to good teachers is an effective principal or leadership team. Leadership development in education should not be left to chance but should focus on school improvement efforts. Anecdotal evidence in reservation schools suggests school stability is in jeopardy when there is a high turnover of principals. For improvements to take hold, a school must maintain stability long enough to plan and implement changes. We must ask research questions such as, How can effective practice be sustained over enough time to measure the effects? Fresh research approaches can help us address this sort of question.

Communities must join forces with schools to recruit and retain the best teachers and administrators. Grow-your-own programs, in which local people receive preservice and professional development training, represent hopeful new directions for stabilizing the workforce in reservation and rural schools. Distance learning and collaborations with nearby colleges—particularly tribal colleges—and universities now help communities overcome previous obstacles of isolation and scarce population. Culturally appropriate programs can be designed through such creative relationships.

In every community, the daily lives of our youth must be the central focus of our labor in schools. Adults working within institutions and systems serving youth and their families must begin to communicate with one another to collaborate more fully in creating conditions for educational success. The resilience of our youth should be celebrated and nurtured within the daily settings of families, schools, and communities, and also within the systems of health, justice, and social welfare.

We must make sure the connections between higher education and the elementary-secondary systems help students' transition from one phase of schooling to the next. The relationships that can be built between the two systems are unlimited and should include activities such as mentoring, advanced placement courses, and applied research.

The misconceptions and stereotypes about Native peoples that persist in academic content and attitudes and behaviors of school personnel must be addressed through preservice and in-service teacher preparation, and in the curricular materials used to train teachers in colleges, universities, and school districts. We believe negative stereotypes coupled with inadequate and inaccurate information about this nation's Indigenous peoples, particularly in social studies curricula, damage the self-concepts and subsequent behavior of our youth. We must design and implement studies to determine if this belief is so. Teachers must be convinced that it is not appropriate nor feasible to reduce the history of more than 550 different Indigenous nations to instructional units of two to three weeks. Textbook producers, professional organizations, teacher preparation programs, and teachers must begin to question what is gained by introducing young children to Indian units if the children are not developmentally ready to understand the existence of Native peoples in the past and in contemporary times.

Native education research and research-based practice must broaden beyond the de facto reservation context, which has been its focus up to now. There is a great need to focus research and efforts to improve practice in public, private, and parochial schools, especially urban or off-reservation schools attended by 90 percent of Native students.

Native communities and individuals need to assume a greater responsibility in educating America and the rest of the world about our political status and the relationships between our nations and other sovereigns (e.g., state and federal government) in this country. The general public and others need to know that the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives has a historical beginning and developmental history different from the rest of public education in this country. Until they understand *why* there is a field of Indian education, people will not understand *why* there is a need to be concerned about it now and in the future.

Building coalitions for research and development among tribal governments, programs in federal departments, colleges and universities, professional organizations, and the private sector makes good sense. Recent executive orders have required federal departments to respect the government-to-government relationships between federally recognized tribes and the federal government and to interact or partner with tribal colleges to improve the health, education, and economic conditions of tribes. These kinds of partnerships also can be developed with mainstream colleges and universities and the private sector.

Through organizations such as the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education, American Indians and Alaska Natives must continue to build coalitions with Indigenous people from other countries of the world. The education-for-assimilation experience of other colonized Indigenous peoples has produced similar results. But Indigenous communities worldwide have also begun to experience a similar renaissance of the self-determination American Indian and Alaska Native communities have undergone in education, literature, and the arts in the last 25-30 years. By building on one another's successes, we can further develop and expand our thoughts about how to promote use of language and cultural bases for an Indigenous pedagogy.

With budgets subject to the uncertainties of congressional political processes, school building and renovation projects on reservations are frequently overlooked, and operating budgets remain low. However, tribes can now exercise full control over education on their lands. They have the authority to establish and enforce policies that define the nature of education for their constituents just as states do for their school districts. The example set by the Rosebud Sioux Tribe's Education Code demonstrates the impact this government has made in assuring that the language and culture of the Sicangu Lakota people will be significant forces in training teachers and developing curricula for schools on their reservation lands.

Educational conditions on several reservations will be affected by recent tribal economic development as a result of gaming operations. Anecdotal evidence suggests both positive and negative results. Positive results include the tribes having assigned high priority to education and other infrastructural systems; in some cases, reser-

vation education systems have received better funding than ever before. Negative results include the impacts on some home and family conditions. The overall effects must be studied sooner or later.

We often say that, as Native people, we view the world holistically. The relationships among the parts are important to understanding the whole. Our thinking about education must reflect this comprehensive and holistic view of teaching and learning. Western thought and approaches to education have resulted in categorical and separate systems in our lives. Schooling is often viewed as separate from other institutions that impact us daily. More connections need to be made between schooling and the other critical settings in daily life.

All in all, the situation for Indian education remains as it was in 1991 when John Tippeconnic stated:

> There is reason to be cautiously optimistic about the future of Indian education in the United States, but it will take a broader approach. This approach should include a partnership among tribes, states, the federal government and other interest groups that will provide leadership and minimize politics while maximizing quality education for Indian students.[10]

## Notes

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2. See National Center for Educational Statistics, *Characteristics.*

3. National Dialogue Project, *Our Voices,* 7.

4. Swisher, "From Passive to Active," 4.

5. See Robbins and Tippeconnic, *Research in American Indian Education* and Tippeconnic and Swisher, "American Indian Education."

6. See Cahape, *Blueprints for Indian Education.*

7. Deyhle and Swisher, "Research," 170. For additional informa-

tion regarding the Peach Springs bilingual education effort, see Watahomigie and Yamamoto, "Linguistics in Action"; McCarty, *Hualapai;* and Watahomogie, "Discussant's Comments."

8. See St. Germaine, "BIA Schools Complete First Step" and St. Germaine, "Bureau Schools Adopt Goals 2000."

9. See Tippeconnic and Jones, "Description of Family and Child Education."

10. Tippeconnic, "Education of American Indians," 202.

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