

# **Voices of Native Resiliency: Educational Experiences from the 1950s and 1960s**

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*The purpose of this study was to examine the lived educational experiences of American Indians who grew up during the 1950s and 1960s, known as the termination period in American history. The research for this phenomenological study consisted of interviews with eight participants who were willing to share their personal experiences from this selected time. Ten reoccurring themes were uncovered: chaos brings balance, challenge to become bi-cultural, the importance of teachers, external support systems, spirituality, tribal influences, influences of economic resources, cultural awareness and value, relevant curriculum, and recruitment of Native teachers. By uncovering these stories, it is hopeful that educators would benefit by being able to further illuminate and contextualize an understanding for more culturally responsive pedagogy. Key Words: American Indian Education, Termination Period, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Institutional Racism, Phenomenology, and Lived Experiences*

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## **Introduction**

As a human being, one can always reflect on the past, examine the present conditions of society, and prepare for the future generations by sharing cultural stories. Throughout history, stories have often been viewed through the eyes of the dominant society of the White man (Yellow Bird, 2004). A broad range of educational and social research has converged on the issue of social dominance and as Howard (1999) has explained, the true “enemy” is dominance itself and not White people.

The study of dominance has been related to research on issues such as prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, racism, social identity theories and work in the field of political socialization (Sidanius & Pratt, 1993). Characterized by *institutional racism* in the public school arena, there has been a long history of misunderstanding traditional American Indian cultural values and beliefs on the part of the dominant culture (Deloria, 1991). *Institutional racism* has been defined as the power systems to control the behavior of nonwhites (Spring, 2004b). There has been a long history of misunderstanding of traditional American Indian cultural values and beliefs and discrimination on the part of the government and its policies during five recognized stages (Deloria, 1995).

## **Purpose of the Study**

A variety of research has focused on American Indian students who have experienced limited educational opportunities, societal stigmas, and unemployment as adults (Alfred, 1999; Griffin, 2000; Pewewardy, 1998). The purpose of this study was to

explore the *lived* educational experiences of American Indians who grew up during the 1950s and 1960s, known as the termination period in American history and how these experiences influenced their career decisions. This study investigated the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of American Indians attending boarding school?
2. What are the lived experiences of American Indians attending traditional public school?
3. What factors influenced American Indians in making their career decisions?
4. What recommendations do American Indians make for culturally responsive teaching?

### *Historical framework*

Governmental policy throughout the United States has transformed American Indian culture through the implementation of political policies. These major stages of governmental policy in which political and cultural misunderstandings have occurred are the removal period from any colonial occupied land, the restricted reservation, reorganization within tribes, termination of the people, and finally self-determination on Indian education and political awareness (Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990; Spring 2004a).

### *Removal*

The first increment of time was considered to be the removal period which began in the 1600s and lasted through the 1840s and was characterized by the statement, “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” (Heinrich et al., 1990, p. 129). Congressional approval of the Naturalization Act of 1790 highlighted the racial and cultural attitudes of early government leaders which excluded from citizenship all nonwhites, including Indians (Spring, 2004a).

### *Reservation*

According to Heinrich et al. (1990) the reservation period began in 1860 and lasted to the 1920s. This era was characterized by the statement, “kill the Indian, but save the person” (p. 129). This era of time included Noah Webster’s dream of the common-school movement which was part of an attempt to halt the drift toward a multicultural society (Heinrich et al.). Thomas McKenney, the first head of the Office of Indian Affairs implemented his final solution for acquiring the lands of the southern Indians by forcing them off their lands and removing them to an area west of the Mississippi River (Spring, 2004a). Upon completion of this forced removal, the southern tribes were to be civilized through a system of segregated schools (Spring, 2004a).

### *Education as key*

Thinking of Indians as children who only needed to be protected from evil and sent to school, McKenney concluded that under the conditions of isolation and education, Indians could be civilized in one generation (Spring, 2004a; Viola, 1973). The key to fulfilling the humanitarian goals of removal would be education (Reyhner, Lee, & Gabbard, 1993).

### *Boarding schools*

As the government geared its educational efforts, Hoxie (1984) noted that there was an early optimism regarding how easy it would be to assimilate Indians into the general population by giving them a White man's education for a few years in a boarding school. This optimism was based largely on the apparent success of students of the first off-reservation boarding school established in Carlisle, Pennsylvania (Hoxie). The Carlisle Indian School was operated by its founder, Richard Pratt, whose primary goal for educating the Indian children was to instill a White man's work ethic through manual labor and to immerse them in the Baptist doctrine until "thoroughly soaked" (Spring, 2004a, p. 28).

Between the founding of the Carlisle Indian School in 1879 and 1905, 25 non-reservation boarding schools were opened throughout the country (Spring, 2004a). In *A History of Indian Education*, Jon Reyhner and Jeanne Eder (1989) demonstrated connections between the establishment of boarding schools for Indians and the history of Black education in the South. In 1889, Thomas J. Morgan, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, wrote a bulletin on Indian Education that outlined the goals and policies of Indian schools that included teaching colonial patriotism and allegiance to the U.S. government.

As boarding schools returned more and more students to reservations that seemed to blend back into the population rather than transform it, criticism of Indian education and especially boarding schools increased (Reyhner et al., 1993). During the 1920s, a variety of investigators of Indian schools were horrified by the conditions they found Indian children subjected to. In addition to a poor diet and extreme manual labor, overcrowded conditions contributed to the spread of tuberculosis and trachoma.

### *The Meriam Report*

The publication of the *Meriam Report* in 1928 began the process that ended this massive educational effort to change the language and culture of an entire group of people (Reyhner & Eder, 1989). Louis Meriam, the principal investigator, criticized the removal and isolation of Indian children from the family, argued that the length of manual labor was too heavy, and that the routine and harsh discipline destroyed initiative and independence (Spring, 2004a).

### *Reorganization*

Meriam's report led to community schools on the reservation and the rebuilding of the cultural life of American Indians (Reyhner et al., 1993). The third governmental policy was viewed as the Reorganization Period, beginning shortly after the economic depression and lasted up through the pre-baby boomer generation of the 1940s and 1950s (Deloria, 1991; Locust, 1988).

### *Indian New Deal*

After Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), led by John Collier, instituted an *Indian New Deal* (Reyhner et al., 1993). This New Deal allowed for more day schools to be established on reservations, provided native language textbooks, and placed greater emphasis on teaching Indian cultures and languages (Reyhner & Eder, 1989). Despite the progress made toward educating Indian children, by the end of WWII a more conservative attitude set in to domestic affairs and the former policies established by Collier (Szasz, 1999).

### *Day schools*

An investigation criticized these day schools stating that the Indian children were "handicapped of having to spend their hours in tepees, in shacks with dirt floors and no windows, in tents, in wickiups, in hogans where English is never spoken...and where there is sometimes an active antagonistic indifference to the virtues of education" (Szasz, 1999, p. 109). The investigation committee found the answer once again to be the old off-reservation boarding schools. This policy continued until the 1950s. The final solution Congress came up with for the Indian problem was to allow them to be free by terminating their reservations (Reyhner & Eder, 1989).

### *Termination*

During the fourth stage of policy (1950-1960), which was named the Termination Period, relocation programs were created with the intention of some social integration and the end of dependence on the government, resulting in the sale of Indian lands and increased poverty (Heinrich et al., 1990). The typical reservation school during this time has been described by Murray Wax (1971) as both caste-like with strong social barriers and typified by the fences which surrounded the compound. Parents rarely visited these schools which often led to uncomfortable social interactions with the teachers.

### *Self-determination*

According to Reyhner et al. (1993), through educational involvement with federal programs and generally increased experience working with White America, a core of leadership developed that could tell the federal government what American Indians wanted. The last phase of governmental policy to be implemented promoted the idea of self-determination during the early 1970s to the present, where tribal sovereignty and

American Indian activism increased (Heinrich et al., 1990). Tribal sovereignty has been described by Spring (2004b) as the freedom to establish and operate one's own governing body and laws without any interference from local or federal authorities.

There have been many obstacles for the American Indian family to confront and overcome. The use of boarding schools was one of many obstacles that proved to be one of the most detrimental experiences ever encountered by the American Indian family (Diller & Moule, 2005). Many of the social problems that are prevalent today stem from these boarding school experiences.

### *Cultural responsive pedagogy*

According to Smith (1991), *culturally responsive pedagogy* has been described as the educational instruction most beneficial to all students in a positive manner. This type of teaching has used the child's culture to build a bridge to success in school achievement (Singleton & Linton, 2006; Smith). Such an endeavor has required a degree of cultural literacy often absent in mainstream classrooms, whereas the vast majority of American Indian students are taught by non-Native teachers (Smith). No attempt to remedy problems in education can occur apart from an understanding that the United States has been so unsuccessful in producing educational equity (Razack, 1998).

Fuller (1996) has noted that cultural responsive pedagogy involves providing the best possible education for all children, preserving their own cultural identity, in order to ensure meaningful relationships with other people. In his book, *Look to the Mountain: an Ecology of Indigenous Education*, Cajete (1994) has advocated developing an environmental educational process which lays the foundation for American Indian life and learning. This also has included living productive lives in the present society without sacrificing their own cultural perspective (Banks & Banks, 1995; Cajete). According to Gay (2000), high quality educational experiences will not exist if some ethnic groups and their contributions to society are ignored or demeaned.

## **Methodology**

The design of this study was a qualitative phenomenology using a narrative reporting approach to uncover the stories of American Indians who experienced either boarding school or the traditional public school during the 1950s and 1960s and to identify factors that contributed to their personal and professional success. The use of inquiry enabled these stories to be revealed by those who were willing to share their perspectives from this selected time in history of reorganization, termination, and self-determination.

The use of a phenomenological study was selected because it identifies the "essence" of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by the selected participants in this study. Understanding the "lived experiences" marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and themes for meaning (Moustakas, 1994). In this process, the researcher "brackets" his/her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study (Nieswiadomy, 1993).

In addition, phenomenological studies respond to historical events (like that of assimilation and termination) whose cultural and political ramifications continue to be enacted in the present (Casey, 1996). Phenomenological design yields a study that provides a common feel for life in a different cultural group so that readers truly gain an understanding about a particular culture (Neuman, 2000).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) insist that relationships are at the heart of phenomenological studies where various relationships are fused when storytelling is the research location. First, a connection which leads to a relationship is established between the researcher and participant. Second, a relationship between the researcher and the participant involved in the research exists. Both the researcher and the topic merge as the narrative reporting connects the phenomenon either directly or indirectly (Van Maanen, 1990).

This study used the direct approach where the researcher asked participants to reflect on, and talk about, their subjective experiences of phenomenon in interviews. The researcher transformed these subjective constructions through interpretation to re-present them, faithfully, as objective constructions which increases potential for transferability (Van Maanen, 1990). Thus, Van Maanen states another way of looking at this perspective is to think of being- in-the-world, known through senses and shared meanings. It is only the unlit, pre-cognitive, background of phenomenon that enables us to assume but not to explore (Van Maanen).

The intent of this study was to record the educational experiences and success factors of a cultural group of people focused on a specific era. Since “dynamic social conditions and people’s interpretations continue to change, [and] there is an overabundance of stories still waiting to be told and studied” (Casey, 1996, p. 240), narrative inquiry is the vehicle selected for capturing these stories.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommended that individuals should “listen to the bits and pieces of narrative form handed down to us” (p. 425). These bits and pieces exist through relationships that unite researchers, participants and an audience. Kaser, Mundry, Stiles, and Loucks-Horsley (2002) noted that it is through these relationships and the research that we see the possibility for individual change. The change referred to here is not necessarily a physical change but more of an emotional and psychological change by the participants. For example, stigmatized experiences provided the motivation to succeed in school for all the participants.

In reality, every society is the sum total of the people who work within a given space each day and the structures that organize them-policies, practices and the culture. According to Neuman (2000) and Crotty (1998), humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspective-we are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally.

### *Pre-Interviewing/Selection Process*

As a result of the researcher sharing the topic of attending school during the 1950s and 1960s, fourteen individuals were identified as possible participants. A selected sample from a state organizational meeting involving the Louisiana Indian Education

Association and the Coushatta Tribe's Annual Field Day began the selection process. The Coushatta tribe sponsors an annual gathering involving outdoor events that represent their cultural heritage. Examples range from bell dancing to Palmetto basket weaving. All fourteen participants for the pre-interview process were e-mailed four questions to identify eligible participants. The four questions used in the selection process were: What U.S. Tribal affiliation do you claim? Would you be willing to share your educational experiences as part of this research study? Did you attend K-12 school during the 1950s-1960s? Did you attend boarding school, parochial school or public school? Findings suggested that six of the fourteen were not eligible to participate in the research after their responses to question two. The remaining eight participants were then selected for the larger phenomenological study. This selection process resulted in a greater representation of tribal affiliation, gender balance and educational experiences.

### **The Participants**

The participants for this study after the eligibility screening from the pilot study included eight American Indians who grew up in various geographical locations during the 1950s and 1960s. All eight participants selected to be identified by using their own names.

Of the 14 candidates, eight were selected by a criterion-referenced questionnaire provided by the researcher through e-mail. Neuman (2000) asserted that purposeful sampling provides for greater triangulation of data collected. It is called for when the researcher wants to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation that is part of exploratory research. Also, Creswell (2003) noted that purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select cases that can show different perspectives on the problem. This may allow the researcher an opportunity to select "ordinary cases, accessible cases or unusual cases" (p. 62). Purposeful sampling relies on the discretion and judgment of the researcher to select cases to study that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions.

In this study, this sampling technique meant selecting individuals who were able to contribute to understanding the school experiences of American Indians in the 1950s and 1960s by answering the following primary questions during the first of three interviews: Why did you select education or related discipline as a career? Explain how attending boarding school influences your career choice? Explain how public school influenced you career choice? Explain how your tribal background influenced your career choice? Do you feel valued and respected by your peers in your chosen career? All eight of the participants selected for this study are American Indians who grew up during the 1950s and 1960s and are considered to be successful both personally and professionally. The definition of successful depends on the individual. According to contemporary standards, six of the eight participants are not wealthy or famous, but they are valuable contributors in the educational arena.

#### *James*

James is a Navajo Indian male originally from northeastern Arizona who works for Custer National Park in Montana as an archeologist. He has obtained his Bachelor's

Degree in Biology and his Master's Degree in Environmental Science. James has also worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in various environmental management projects and at the time of our interviews was assisting FEMA and several of tribes in the New Orleans area with the preservation of historical records and artifacts from the storm damage.

### *Joseph*

Joseph is a Cheyenne River Lakota Sioux male from Eagle Butte, Montana who works for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and is involved in crisis management programs as a liaison for the American Indian populations. He is currently living in Washington, D.C.; however, his job takes him across the nation to many localities to meet these American Indian populations and their specific needs as in wildfire management or landslide recovery programs.

### *Kirby*

Kirby is a Houma Indian male from Louisiana who works within the public school system for special programs and the Office of Indian Education involving American Indian students. He has obtained his Bachelor's Degree and Administrative Certification and works as a bi-vocational Methodist preacher part time. He has shared his interests involving the state census and identification of American Indians as a race and not just as *other*.

### *James C*

James is a Tewa Indian male from the Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. He has attended business school, worked with corporations as a skilled carpenter and is currently manager/war chief of the Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. He continues to keep active in cultural festivals events by creating authentic drums with detailed artwork in the traditional methods used from the elders and native materials within the Pueblo.

### *Pat*

Pat is a Houma Indian female from Louisiana who has had many years of educational experiences involving political affairs. She has her Master's Degree and was the former Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs in Baton Rouge and is also the Co-Chairperson for Louisiana Indian Education Association. She has been instrumental in coordinating many educational opportunities and grants for the American Indian populations within the state of Louisiana.

### *Corine*

Corine is a Houma Indian female from Louisiana who formerly worked in Office of Indian Education from its beginning stages in the mid 1970's. She worked in this capacity for twenty eight years only desiring to see education improve for American

Indian children. Corine has obtained her Bachelor's Degree in Business and is currently retired but stays very active and involved with the Louisiana Indian Education Organization. She has shared her interests in the awareness of and educational opportunities that are needed for the Indian children of Louisiana.

### *Joan*

Joan is a Mohican Indian female from Wisconsin. She has obtained her Bachelor's Degree in pedagogical instruction and has been teaching in the public school system for more than twenty years. She was honored with the Teacher of the Year Award for Indian Education in 2005. She remains active in promoting tribal traditions for young people, even though she has never personally experienced education on the reservation.

### *R.C.*

R.C. is a Navajo/Ute Indian male from Arizona. He is a world premier performer of the Native American flute. He originally was trained in classical trumpet and music theory and later explored the traditional cedar wood flute. Since 1983, he has released over thirty-five albums with the Canyon label. In addition to his solo performances, he has worked with William Eaton, Paul Horn, James DeMars and Phillip Glass. R.C. has explored new musical settings including new age, world-beat jazz and classical. His career has been shaped by a desire to communicate a sense of Native American culture and society that transcends the common stereotypes presented in mass media.

## **The Setting**

The researcher conducted two of a total of three interviews with all eight participants which was obtained face-to-face at the location desired by the participant, typically at their home or office. Creswell (2003) explained the research should be conducted in the natural setting which "enables the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and to be highly involved in actual experiences of the participants" (p. 181). The third interview was conducted either face-to-face, telephone, or email, whichever was desired by each individual participant.

## **The Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher was to examine the meaning and significance of these lived educational experiences which were possible factors that led these eight participants to become successful despite societal stigmas and lack of equal educational opportunities. While the use of a phenomenological study is considered to be a way of discovery and understanding the "essence" of these lived experiences, each of the stories presented different perspectives. Qualitative researchers approach their studies with a certain paradigm, a basic set of beliefs or assumptions that guide their queries (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These assumptions are related to the nature of reality, the relationship of the researcher, the role of values, and the process of research.

In this study, the nature of reality was extremely subjective seen through multiple lenses embedded within the participants' stories. As for the relationship assumption, the researcher attempted to lessen the distance between her and those being researched. This can be problematic and qualitative researchers must be aware that they have to put themselves into the study and at the same time claim to have some expertise (Richardson, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) elaborate the role of values in which the researcher acknowledges that research is value laden and that biases are present. Additionally, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) warned researchers, "these relationships are vitally important in the process of qualitative research" (p. 189).

### **The Researcher's Cultural Epoche**

Prior to conducting the research, I collected cultural information and wrote about my ancestral heritage as suggested by Banks (1998) in constructing an epoche which identifies her own heritage with the American Indians. Through the use of the epoche, I identified and reflected on my own ancestral heritage lessening the distance, through the epistemological assumption, as the researcher when collecting and analyzing the data from the eight participants. Banks typology can be useful in situating oneself in the research as it provides a place for reflecting on the question, "Who am I as the researcher in relation to the research participants and their community?" (p. 7).

#### *Heritage*

I strongly empathize with American Indian cultures for many reasons. First and foremost, this culture is part of my own ancestral heritage. Cherokee tribes from Oklahoma and Mississippi were identified through my maternal grandmother's mother and father. I am truly blessed to have American Indian descent as part of my ancestral heritage. Additionally, in studying one's own culture, a wealth of knowledge and understanding of his/her beliefs and values is acquired. These indigenous cultures highly value the family unit and respect the wisdom given by the elders within the tribes as do many Eastern cultures.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were obtained through three interviews and post-interview emails or phone conversations with each participant about their lived educational experiences and their successful career choices. The data collection process for this study was complex. Each participant was given the opportunity to choose his or her date, time, and location for these interviews. This was difficult at times because the participants lived in five different states: Montana, Washington, D.C., Louisiana, New Mexico, and Wisconsin. The researcher conducted a semi-structured, open-ended interview; audio-taped the interview, and later transcribed the interview to assist in the collection of the data. This study employed personal journal writing by the researcher, archival documents from the participants and research interviews as the primary field texts. Each form of field text provided a layer of complexity that contributed to understanding each participant's tribal uniqueness and educational experiences (Creswell, 2003).

### *Field Text*

To assist in the data collection the researcher kept a journal, as entries are a “powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 102). The researcher recorded details related to her observations in a field notebook and kept a separate field diary to chronicle her own feelings, experiences and perceptions through the research process. Journal writing, in the field, can offer the inquirer an opportunity to reflect on what is felt during the research experiences. By simply asking the participant to tell about her/his past educational experiences, the inquirer embraces her role as the conduit for transposing her/his words into thick, rich descriptive stories using triangulation of data.

In addition to the individual interviews, other data was collected from archived documents and reference material in relation to the six tribal affiliations researched. Some of this archival data retrieved by the researcher included tribal records from six of the eight participants explaining their governing laws, past land deeds, and their schooling requirements.

### *Audio-taped information*

All orally-generated stories were recorded if participants did not object because of the cultural beliefs of American Indian populations. All eight participants allowed the researcher to record each of the face-to-face interviews for analysis of accuracy and member checked. Upon completion of the research all recorded material was disposed of as disclosed by researcher to each participant prior to the initial interviews.

According to Glesne and Peshkin (1992), qualitative researchers face many ethical issues that surface during data collection in the field and in analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports. The criteria of the American Anthropological Association reflect appropriate standards to ensure professionalism (Glesne and Peshkin). Written permission to proceed with the study was received from each participant before the initial interview process. Exemption for this research was received from the Institutional Review Board (See Appendix A). The researcher protected the confidentiality of all participants by using pseudonyms if they requested it. Furthermore, to gain support from participants, the qualitative researcher conveyed to participants that they are participating in a study, explains the purpose and does not engage in deception about the nature of the study.

### **Treatment of the Data**

According to Polkinghorne (1995), a narrative configuration in qualitative analysis was well-suited for this study due to the complexity of each participant and their unique experiences. Polkinghorne (1995) clearly delineated that narrative reporting walks the line between literature and scientific discourse. The primary strategy utilized in this research to ensure external validity was the provision of rich, thick, detailed descriptions so that anyone interested in transferability would have a solid framework for comparison (Merriam, 1988).

Three techniques to ensure reliability were employed in this study. First, the researcher provided a detailed account of the focus of the study, the researcher's role, the participant's position and basis for selection, and the context from which data was gathered (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Second, triangulation or multiple methods of data collection and analysis were used which strengthens reliability as well as internal validity (Merriam, 1988). When analyzing data, researchers collect descriptions of events and experiences and synthesize them by means of similar themes or stories. Phenomenological researchers are required to ascertain similar themes that display the linkage among the data as the stories unfold. Finally, data collection and analysis strategies were reported in detail in order to provide a clear and accurate picture of the methods used in this study. All phases of this research were subject to scrutiny by an external auditor who was experienced in qualitative research methods. The external auditor examined both the process and product, assessing their accuracy. In assessing the product, the auditor examined whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions were supported by the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) compare this with a fiscal audit which provides a sense of interrater reliability to a study.

### *Organization of themes*

After the transcriptions from the audio-tapes were made, the researcher considered the transcript as narrative field texts and developed themes from the texts. These transcriptions allowed for the participants' voices to be heard and were accomplished by organizing the transcriptions into story elements that supported common themes. This was done for both individuals and participants as a group through the process of *free variation* which defines the "how and what" of the experience involved (Moustakas, 1994). Free variation emerged within the dialogue and tones of the participants. For example, the response from each of the participants to their definition of success was similar and could have been used as a bracketing of a cultural definition. The use of free variation allowed the researcher to analyze the phenomena in multiple ways which allowed for differentiation between essential and unessential elements and their relationships (Polkinghorne, 1989).

### *Induction*

The next stage in analyzing phenomenological data was the inductive process known as *intuiting*, or inducting (Rose, Beeby, & Parker, 1995). This research relies on the utilization of tacit knowledge (intuitive or felt knowledge) because often the nuances of the multiple realities can be appreciated most in this way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additionally, the researcher relies on intuition, imagination, and universal structures to obtain a picture of the experience and uses systemic methods of analysis as advanced by Moustakas (1994). Marshall and Rossman (1999) emphasized the role of intuition in research allowing for more creative thought and reorganization without pre-determined outcomes

### *Description*

The final stage of data analysis was description or transformation (Rose et al., 1995). The description process allowed the researcher to write a full description of the phenomena, analyze the themes, and express the feelings of these experiences to others. In order to prepare for the description process the researcher divided the original protocol or line of questioning into statements or horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Meanings were formulated from the significant statements such as: chaos is part of the human experience, bicultural refers to establishing themselves within the greater society, spirituality referring to personal empowerment and economic resources: rural vs. reservation. These meanings were arrived at by reading, re-reading and reflecting upon the significant statements in the original transcriptions to get the meaning of the participant's statement in the original context.

The aggregate of formulated meanings was organized into clusters of themes. These clusters represent themes that emerged from and are common to all eight participants' descriptions such as: a necessary chaos for balance, challenge to become bicultural, importance of teachers as support systems, spirituality, tribal influences, the influence of economic influences, cultural awareness and value, relevant curriculum and recruitment of native teachers. These clusters were referred back to the original description in order to validate them. Each description was examined to see if there was anything original that was not accounted for in the cluster of themes and whether the cluster proposed something that was not original. An exhaustive description of the phenomenon was produced by the integration of the results of the analysis. Finally, these units are transformed into clusters of meanings expressed in phenomenological concepts and presented as narratives (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Provisions for Trustworthiness**

The phenomenological study portrays the meaning of lived experiences about a concept, a story, or phenomenon. As Polkinghorne (1995) explained, a phenomenologist explores the mind and human experiences. He further described phenomenology as the science of experience. This study accomplished this in a reliable and trustworthy manner by maintaining critical listening skills throughout the research process. In order to provide trustworthiness, the researcher used three techniques suggested by Creswell (2003), which included member-checking, presentation of confusing information, as well as the paper trail as previously mentioned. The use of member-checking determines accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking a final report back to the participants. The researcher corresponded via e-mail to clarify any confusing information that was transcribed after each interview to maintain validity throughout the study. A final validation was undertaken by returning to the eight participants and asking them if the description formulated validated their original experiences. The eight subjects contacted stated that the description they read contained the essence of their experiences.

### *Confidentiality*

Anonymity is an issue in any inquiry and this option should be guaranteed throughout the entire inquiry process for participants if they prefer anonymity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participants that were selected for this study chose not to be anonymous. However, the researcher remained cautious throughout the entire inquiry process because persons with whom we are engaged may be changing and perceive themselves as vulnerable. At the conclusion of the interview process, all eight of the participants indicated that their own names would be used in the study.

Narrative inquirers must listen to events described through interviews composing only what is presented without embellishing or sensationalizing the participants' stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In addition, researchers must have a sense of reflection from each of the participants' shared experiences which creates open and honest narratives that will resonate well with readers.

The researcher was aware of the method of inquiry used for this study and that it depended on archival data and the participants who provided field texts. Real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce, therefore, discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of an account for a reader. The researcher was honest with all participants and informed them that all information shared was reported as told. Spending prolonged periods of time in the field provided an understanding the phenomenon under study as well as credibility to the account. During this time in the field, the researcher established a positive rapport with each participant so that a relationship existed and served as the basis for trust during the course of their conversations.

### *Cultural Sensitivity*

Culturally sensitive research approaches use the particular and unique self-defined experiences of a specific race and/or group of people (Tillman, 2006). As suggested by Tillman the researcher should be committed to, and accept the responsibility for, maintaining the cultural integrity of the participants. First and foremost, the researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, values, needs and desires of the participants. For example, Sleeter (1992) wrote "that what White people know about the social world is generally correct, but for only understanding White people" (p. 211).

## **Findings**

### **Question One: The Boarding School Experience**

Five of the eight participants that were interviewed attended a boarding school with both positive and negative experiences embedded in their stories. The one single theme for this question culminated around: 'a necessary chaos for balance.'

The theme for this question centered on the Chaos Theory which Wheatley (1999) described as necessary to bring balance in life. Most individuals have experienced chaos at some point in their lives. According to Wheatley, "chaos is part of the human experience and when we reflect on these times we emerge into a stronger sense of who

we are and our purpose” (p. 119). This theory focuses on relationships being the basic organizing units of life and that chaos and change are the only routes for true transformation in a given society. In addition, participation and cooperation are essential to our survival in this interconnected world (Wheatley). James and Joseph both commented that even today they see unequal treatment from society, especially in the educational setting. In retrospect, both remarked that education is the only way to overcome past inequities. Yet, they both mentioned that boarding school did very little to prepare them for the future and all of the many roadblocks they would encounter growing up in the Anglo society. In fact, James commented, “My only thoughts of boarding school are never to endure it again.” James and Joseph both described their experiences in a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) boarding school as being in prison without just cause. Joseph mentioned that boarding school was too structured and rigorous yet, it provided a sense of motivation.

James C. and Corine both recalled their boarding school experiences as positive opportunities in life and the only way for a better education. James C’s grandparents sent him to a boarding school for Indians where he could stay out of trouble and at the same time refine his artistic talents. He remarked,

I am glad that I was sent to this boarding school because it kept me focused on skills which in turn provided more educational opportunities unlike so many tribal youths who seek their future in a bottle when they cannot feel successful in school.... Attending the Institute of American Indian Arts Boarding School in Santa Fe was a very influential and positive place for me to be at sixteen. This school provided the basic academics with pottery, printmaking, painting and sculpturing being more of the focal point for learning. I was also taught how to construct frames for the pictures that I painted. My boarding school experience helped me refine my carpentry skills which I still use today with some creative twist in making Native drums.

Corine mentioned that her transition was difficult and unsettling to her family but necessary in order to obtain a high school education. American Indians, especially females, living in Louisiana during the 1950s and even up to the early 1970s were only provided an eighth grade education by missionary schools. Upon completion of the eighth grade, they were forced to get a job or travel out-of-state to further their education.

As my parents deliberated over this decision and how they would manage with me being so far away, one of my sister’s friends offered to pay my way to attend her graduation to see what the boarding school was like and to keep me interested. That was all I needed to reaffirm my intentions in going so off I went with the Methodist missionaries to Vashti Boarding School in Thomasville, Georgia. I completed my studies and graduated with a diploma in 1961.

## Question Two: The Public School Experience

Six of the eight participants that were interviewed attended a traditional public school with positive experiences well-established in their stories. Two themes emerged: ‘challenge to become bi-cultural’ and the ‘importance of teachers.’

### *Challenge to become bi-cultural*

James, Joseph and Pat all viewed public school as an opportunity for the future. Joseph and Pat perceived education as a way to overcome economic hardships and poverty in their families. Joseph shared his thoughts of public school and the necessity to perform in academics in order for him to participate in athletics. He commented that participating in athletics was “the dangling carrot” in education for him.

If it were not for athletics I would not be doing what I am now, nor would opportunities have been as advantageous as they have been in my career as a senior program analyst. Athletics was the carrot and the homework and all of the other mundane things such as attendance were the burdens that I had to bear in order to participate. You had to do the right things in order to participate and I liked sports well enough to do so. Public school helped me socialize as an individual to the rigors of living and working in the dominant culture’s world.

Pat shared her thoughts of public school and the necessity to perform in academics in order to attend college and break the cycle of poverty which existed in her family. At age seven and being the oldest child, she had to read the mail for her parents because both were illiterate. Excelling in academics and helping others learn to read was the “motivator” in education for her.

Most of my elementary school memories are those of the mistreatment from students. I was teased and snubbed because of my poverty and my appearance which to most I was perceived as a light-skinned Black child. This was a harsh wakeup call for me as a child but it was reality and the sooner I understood this and of people’s ignorance and not the people, the better off I would be in life. This teasing seemed to have the reverse effect because it made me more determined to succeed and to help others that were in need.

James viewed his experience as an incredible library of subjects to explore as one does an uncharted island. He elaborated, “As you continue to explore, you open new horizons and you also begin to realize there is a whole new world outside and within your grasp to enjoy.” James’ public high school experience provided the opportunity to see the world through a different lens which has been invaluable in his professional career as an environmental biologist for the National Parks Service. The irony is his career choice was that the land that held no promise of a future motivated him to enjoy his studies in the science fields.

### *The importance of teachers*

James, Pat, and Joan commented that teachers were the ultimate catalyst in performing in school. All three could identify a specific teacher as being that source of encouragement.

Pat elaborated on her first grade teacher as being instrumental in her educational success. One good memory that Pat recalled from her elementary experience was the encouragement from her first grade teacher. "Her kind and motivating words encouraged me to perform, despite the teasing and discrimination from the students. This teacher took me under her wing and provided the academic support that was so desperately lacking in my household."

Corine recalled her first five years of education in attending a missionary school as beneficial. When she first began school, Corine started with Methodist missionaries who came to Dulac, Louisiana in 1950. She attended this missionary school from the first to fifth grade. She was thrilled just to be able to attend school no matter if it was operated by a religious affiliation considering they were not allowed to attend public school with as the other children did. Corine loved all of her elementary teachers and desired to be one to help her people just as the missionary teachers helped her. She remarked, "Education held the key to bringing her people out of poverty." Joseph, Pat and Corine all saw education as a way for empowering their tribes both economically and socially.

### **Question Three: Factors for Career Decisions**

Six of the eight participants that were interviewed stated that their external support systems and economic resources were the most significant factors in determining their careers. Three of the participants also mentioned their spirituality as an important factor. Four themes emerged: external support systems, spirituality, tribal influences, and influence of economic resources.

#### *External Support System*

James, Joseph, Kirby, Pat, Corine, and Carlos all commented that their external support systems were invaluable to their career choices and opportunities in life. James, Pat, and Corine specifically mentioned teachers as the guiding force in pursuing their educational dreams. James remarked, "Kind words of praise and constant encouragement challenged me to excel."

Kirby commented that he could not see himself worthy as teacher material because his parents held teachers in such respect until the principal of the Indian school took him fishing and showed concern about his education. Another teacher took him hunting and shared the same concerns as the principal did. Even with the support of these two respected persons Kirby still did not feel as though he could cross the line of being an Indian to being a teacher who was Indian until after his college experience.

Carlos mentioned that much of his work has been influenced by elders of other tribal affiliations and others from the greater American society. Much of what he does comes from stories and admonition from the elders that life is about serving others. Many

of the people that Carlos has worked with who are elders of either the Cheyenne or the Kiowa Tribe have remarked that he shares information which is useful in transforming Indian people to coexist within the “greater society”.

### *Spirituality*

All eight participants mention the existence and importance of religion whether it was referred to as “The Great Spirit” or “The Creator”. Kirby, Pat, and Corine elaborated more about the “Great Spirit” as the most significant influence in fulfilling their life purposes. Kirby commented, “I firmly believe we need to empower people to do the right things in life and the good will come back to the giver.” Pat stated the “Great Spirit” guided her to the many opportunities in life in order to help others. She also commented that “I was sent to their state organization, the Louisiana Indian Education Association during an opportune season for a special and beneficial reason.” In retrospect, those participants who seemed to be more open to discuss the concept of spirituality were those from the Houma Tribe in Louisiana. Maybe this is due to the rural community structure of their tribe versus the reservation structure of the other five participants interviewed.

### *Tribal Influences*

Joseph and James C. identified their tribal influences playing a role in determining their career decisions. Joseph commented that nepotism and casinos are why “I stayed away from tribal politics.”

Casino gambling has increased this hold over tribal people to keep them in line. If you are not doing what you are told, they can drop your tribal enrollment and benefits are withheld from your family. Tribal members are much more docile now because of the casinos and the pressure put upon them to follow the rules. That is why I never wanted to take part in tribal politics then and now. I see the casinos for Indians as “the nail in the coffin” and the disintegration of the cultural way of life on the Lakota Reservation.

James C. mentioned being reared by his grandparents and his tribal elders as a priceless experience in any society.

I had no real parental guidance other than my elderly grandparents as a young child and so I had to grow up rather quickly and become self-sufficient to survive in the dominant world. As a pueblo male one was expected to develop skills that would benefit the tribe. I was taught by my grandfather how to make adobe bricks. We had to make a lot of bricks just to build this house I inherited from my grandparents after their passing. This house was made from adobe, straw, vigas (or vines) and mud. The skills my grandfather and other tribal members provided were so invaluable to me in becoming a productive member of my tribe.

### *Influence of economic resources*

James, Joseph, Kirby, James C., Corine, and Carlos all discussed how geography and the lack of economic resources played a significant role in determining their career paths. Carlos noted that both the locality and geographical culture were significant factors which influenced his involvement as a liaison educator for the tribal communities. Carlos came from a multicultural background with position and affluence who expected him to further his educational studies beyond high school. James, Joseph, and Kirby all commented on the lack of economic resources within their tribal geographical locations in which they had to overcome with two being on a reservation and the other in a rural setting. James remarked, “The irony involved is the land which held no promise for employment pushed me to study and work in the direction of environmental sciences.”

### **Question Four: Recommendations for Culturally Responsive Teaching**

All eight participants had suggestions on how public education could better serve the needs of the American Indian students. Seven of the eight suggested that educators develop a sense of cultural awareness of American Indians and their own uniqueness. Three themes emerged: *cultural awareness and value*, *relevant curriculum*, and *recruitment*.

#### *Cultural awareness and value*

Joseph, Kirby, James C., Pat, Corine, Joan, and Carlos all mentioned that educators need to develop a sense of understanding and cultural awareness of American Indians and their place in American history. Joseph emphasized that “Real understanding and acceptance of a culture is important to both parties involved.” James C. remarked, “Knowing who you are as an individual and as a culture is the most valuable asset one possesses.”

Kirby and Corine pointed out that educators need to build American Indian students’ self-esteem before any real learning can occur in the classroom. Kirby commented, “How can you make children feel valued when they are labeled as ‘others’ rather than American Indians?”

Pat mentioned that the plight of American Indians who attend college could be alleviated if educators really valued all cultures equally. She emphasized that educators need to develop an awareness of who American Indians truly are and accept their cultural differences in order for our 21<sup>st</sup> century society to progress.

#### *Relevant curriculum*

Joseph, Pat, Corine, and Joan all commented that educators need to develop better lessons in teaching factual information about American Indians rather than using only the European version of American history. Joan and Corine also mentioned that the assessment of students needs to match the child’s cultural understanding and development to be reliable. Corine stated, “Until educators and administrators address the methods of assessment and low test scores, American Indian students will remain behind

in education.” Joseph remarked, “There needs to be a course for educators to discover the ‘nuts and bolts’ of the American Indian culture.”

### *Recruitment*

Kirby, Pat and Joan mentioned American Indians need to be more involved in the educational process to serve as positive role-models. Joan suggested school districts with high percentages of Native students need to recruit Native teachers to assist with tribal issues that arise through cultural misunderstandings. One of these misunderstandings is when most educators expect their students to pay attention and look at them when spoken to. For American Indian people, this is disrespectful and the children are punished. Another misunderstanding is assuming that all Indians are the same without any social or cultural differences. These misunderstandings seem to be more prevalent with the tribes who live on reservations rather than in the rural settings within the greater society. Participants noted how teachers touched lives as guides with skills and information, how mentors provided sound advice and became motivators who provided words of encouragement. Cultural awareness and value were vital to their existence within their tribal affiliation and in the greater society. All participants emphasized the importance of knowing who one is as an individual and as a cultural member of their tribal society. These findings provide insight into cultural equity.

One of the most revealing issues in the study was that each participant had a positive sense of who they were and the belief of interconnectedness to humanity and their outlook for necessary duality in the “greater society.” This suggested that perhaps the most crucial point for educators to understand as they try to help American Indian students achieve academic success is the importance of cultural values and community-based beliefs where collaborative efforts supersede competition and the attainment of possessions (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2001).

### **Educational Importance of the Study**

As a civilization, credence must be given to all cultural beliefs and uniqueness. In turn, each human being should be given the equal opportunity to learn and to feel confident with his/her own identity. All perspectives should be considered and valued, as everyone contributes to the greater society. In developing culturally responsive pedagogy and emphasizing this in staff development, educators can promote positive self-esteem and cultural value for all students (Hilberg & Tharp, 2002).

The participants in this study were primarily selected from specific time in history. Stories from their parents and children might provide additional data to reveal how their professional lives were impacted. Another beneficial exploration of successful American Indians would be to focus on one specific state and locate those American Indians who dropped out of school due to the lack of support systems.

These eight stories of successful American Indians indicate teachers are vital external support systems and acquiring duality may be necessary for establishing careers in the professional world. As Carlos and Joseph stated, one needs to adapt to the outside world in order to fit in and survive. They also give insights into what and how those who

teach American Indian children today should incorporate into the curriculum to encourage these youngsters to achieve academic excellence.

### Summary

This qualitative phenomenological methodology was appropriate in order to capture the honest feelings, attitudes, experiences, and emotions of eight American Indians involved in living during the termination period in the United States. For tribes that live on reservations, their struggles and inequities existed more so in the educational and environmental structures than the rural tribal communities. For instance, the Navajo, Lakota and Tewa Tribes all dealt with issues from the public school communities regarding policy.

The value of support systems was evident in all of the participants' stories. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2001), parental involvement and lack of preparedness were two issues of greatest concern by teachers. Some felt as though their parents and tribal elders played more of a role in supporting and encouraging, while others stated it was a teacher that made the difference for them in pursuing their educational dreams.

Literacy was another factor for each participant's career success. They were embedded with the concept that no matter what cultural group one belongs to, communication and basic understanding of one's cultural heritage were key factors for professional success. *The Kennedy Report* also identified schools as being essential to the social, cultural and intellectual health of communities as well as literacy, as being essential to the well being of American Indian people (U.S. Senate Report, 1969). A final point beneficial to education that came from this study was an understanding that American Indians believe collaborative efforts supersedes competition and the attainment of possessions.

Even though progress has been made for equitable opportunities in education and cultural awareness with establishing the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) and other state organizations, there is still a great deal of work to be accomplished for all indigenous cultures to realize their significant contributions to the greater society in America. As Freire commented (2003), until human beings are willing to develop a level of self awareness and critical consciousness, historical injustices, and inequities will continue to prevail in all industrialized and dominant societies of the world; so the cycle of oppression and poverty continues.

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## Appendix A

### *Consent Form to Participate in Study*

To the Participants:

- 1) All recorded interviews, written responses and any other collection of data by the researcher will only be used for scholarly research and in no way bound to submit information regarding the participant to the university or any other organization without the consent of the participant.
- 2) All information collected from these interviews, including the audio tapes, will be destroyed six months after completion of the study.
- 3) Each participant will also be given the opportunity to view their individual transcribed stories from the researcher prior to printing and binding for dissertation purposes.
- 4) There is no foreseeable physical or emotional harm as a result of participation in this research.
- 5) Anonymity will be granted throughout the interview process for those participants who choose this option to insure member checking and will be provided a pseudonym.
- 6) Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without question or penalty.

- 7) The researcher may be contacted for any questions concerning the study via telephone at 409-751-4236 and/or email at felix113062@cmaaccess.com or penlandjl@lamar.edu. For further assistance or questions regarding this study, please contact Dr. Jane E. Irons, Major Professor/Chair.

Lamar University - Beaumont, Texas  
409-880-7954 (office)  
jane.irons@lamar.edu

- 8) Each participant will receive a copy of the signed consent form for their files.

Researcher\_\_\_\_\_

Participant\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

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#### Author's Note

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