

Report of a National Colloquium, I— Programs & Practices

Introduction: Improving Academic Performance Among American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Students

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On March 16-18, 2005, several federal agencies and professional organizations and associations joined forces to hold a national colloquium to address the educational needs of Native American students. Native American was defined for this meeting as including all indigenous groups of the United States: American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian. Researchers and educational practitioners met for three days at the Indian School in Santa Fe to discuss the key issues and challenges for improving educational performance among Native American students, and to begin development of a blueprint for practice and research. As a result of the presentations and discussions held at that meeting, two thematic issues of the *Journal of American Indian Education* have been prepared, one which presents information on innovative programs already being implemented, with data that are currently available on their progress, and another, which will present current research that deals with or has relevance for the education and development of Native American students. Each also contains the preliminary blueprint for, respectively, practice, and research.

In this, the first of those two thematic issues, Roland Tharp reviews the history of American Indian education. While acknowledging the various federal attempts to educate Native American students, he focuses on two educational reforms or innovations that actually succeeded in effecting behavior change, both of which were achieved by Native Americans themselves: (1) the organization of an orthography and literacy tradition among the Cherokee in the 19th Century and (2) the socialization and enculturation of whites into American Indian communities, which resulted in changes of behavior, values, and identity of the captors. Tharp then describes the historical evolution of research on the culture and education, tracing four stages through which such research has moved, which involve adapting schools to cultures; examining the different aspects of education and culture that were emphasized by researchers from different cultural

backgrounds; exploring how teaching might be conducted in multicultural, multilingual settings; and collecting that information into integrated programs and studying their effectiveness. Tharp outlines and examines the standards for effective pedagogy that have resulted from these last two stages of research, discussing their cultural bases, theoretical foundations, and implications. His bottom line is that we should put effort into the further development of culture based education because all children in this nation have a right to an education, and also because we all will learn a great deal from such efforts. To quote Tharp, since he says it so well, “Native America can, uniquely, be the seedbed for infusing fundamental human processes of teaching/learning into public education.”

The section on innovative programs is a compilation of programs that are currently being implemented with Native American students, in their schools, with any available evidence of their success. Four of these programs involve native language instruction—two American Indian, one Alaska Native, and one Native Hawaiian program. Window Rock is an immersion school which uses Navajo as the language of instruction. This school, which was started in response to community desire to make Native language and culture part of Navajo children’s education, is revitalizing the use of Dine (the Navajo language) in the community. Navajo is being taught through context rather than through direct study of the language, and thus becomes the basis for academic learning. Language and culture are integrated in the language learning, and the immersion program makes learning relevant to the students by reflecting on their life experiences. The Nizipuhwahsin School, at the Piegan Institute, is a private not-for-profit organization on the Blackfeet Reservation. This K-8 Blackfeet language immersion school is broken into three classrooms by age groups, and the entire curriculum in the lowest level classroom is in the Blackfeet language, while the middle classroom program is divided between English and Blackfeet, and the upper classroom, consisting principally of eighth graders, makes an intensive study of the Blackfeet language. The school, which has been in existence for nine years, has graduated several classes of eighth graders, all of whom are in public high schools and doing well. The Lower Kuskokwim School District (LSKD) in Alaska has developed a Yup’ik language curriculum based on English standard education, including a student assessment performance record and individual profile, a comprehensive literacy program, and Yup’ik adaptation of a math program. The program at the Nāwahī Hawaiian Laboratory School has had a high level of academic success, which they attribute to their focus on the primary goal effecting social change in Hawaii, to maintain the Hawaiian character through language, culture, and the Native Hawaiian population itself. They view language as the binding cord of culture, thus their first step has been to revitalize the Hawaiian language. Finally, the Northwest Native American Reading Curriculum was developed for use in the state of Washington. This curriculum uses English as the language of instruction. It contains a reading program created as a result of input from cultural specialists, curriculum specialists, and members of the tribal

community; the program is aligned both with state standards and with the tribal community. This curriculum, available in various media, has been used not only in Indian schools but also in non-Indian schools to develop a better general understanding of Native Americans as a people.

This issue on programs and practices also contains a paper by David Beaulieu in which he presents a summary and assessment of culture based education (CBE) programs. In this paper he asserts that, if CBE is to have any influence, it must be centered on social activity and teaching in schools. Beaulieu discusses the three federal laws which represent the possibilities for culturally based education in the United States: Title VII of the Indian Education Act, The Native Languages Act, and the Union Religious Freedom Act. The programs supported by these statutes include approximately 145 Native language preservation programs which include grants to American Indian tribes, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. He found that over 66 percent of all Indian education and formula grants were not culturally based, and there was a very high correlation between Native student population density and the presence of CBE programs. He describes five types of CBE: Culturally based instruction, Native language instruction, Native studies, Native cultural enrichment, and culturally relevant materials. Beaulieu concludes that CBE is not sufficiently prevalent to be responsible for the negative statistics regarding Native students' educational performance, but suggested a greater focus on the integration of the social linguistic fabrics of communities into the ways in which learning occurs in the schools.

To round out information on programs, several individuals responsible for funding and oversight of government programs for Native American schools and students summarize what is funded and what opportunities are available for funding of programs that could support, maintain and enhance improved educational programs for Native American students. Represented in this section is information on the programs of the Office of Indian Education Programs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, as well as information on a Department of Education-funded project called the *Reading First Teacher Education Network*.

Finally, the issue concludes with a commentary by the organizers of the Santa Fe workshop and its Washington, DC follow-up meeting. In this paper, they outline the issues and challenges in the delivery of improved educational opportunities to Native American students, as compiled from those two workshops. In addition, the authors address potential solutions, and some suggestions for practice. In the second thematic issue, a blueprint for needed research on educational practices as well as for foundational research on culture and learning will be presented. Since research takes time, and children's needs don't and should not wait, the current issue offers some thoughts gleaned from the workshops for what teachers, education administrators, and schools can do now to enhance education for Native students, based both on what is known and on promising practices.

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- Administration for Native Americans
- American Indian Higher Education Consortium
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- National Congress of the American Indian
- National Indian Education Association
- National Indian School Boards Association
- Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
- Santa Fe Indian School
- RAND Corporation

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Endnotes

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