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April 1998

Searching for Inclusion: Campus Conversations with People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions

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Eckloff, Maureen; Kelley, Venita; Hullinger, James Lee; Nelson, Alberta; and Russell, Valdez, "Searching for Inclusion: Campus Conversations with People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions" (1998). *Third Annual National Conference (1998)*. 4.

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“The purpose of this study is to share perceptions of students of color regarding their perceived acceptance and inclusion in Nebraska’s public schools and universities.”

In 1987 two of the presenters completed a research project, "Communication Patterns in Pre-adolescence and Adolescence Which Are Related to Later Criminal Behavior." The paper was presented at the Women in the World Research Conference at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. It was one of the papers accepted and printed in the *Women in the World Research Conference: Selected Readings*, published by the Pine Hill Press, Fredman, South Dakota. One of the significant findings of this study was that students who feel excluded tend to become juvenile delinquents. This points out the importance of feelings of exclusion and rejection as they contribute to acceptable social behavior.

It was impossible to predict which students would report feelings of exclusion, as their inclusion was not based on observable traits such as color or family standing in the community. In fact, one of the weaknesses of the study was that all subjects were from a white public school system. One of the authors, as a youth, was identified as a "half-breed" and suffered from feelings of exclusion by the in-group. He feels this exclusion was based on his race. The authors conjectured that many minority students of color might share these feelings of exclusion by the white power structure and by various hate groups who feel powerful when they brand minorities as "niggers," "half-breeds," "spics," "chili poppers" and "slant-eyes" and exclude them. Hopefully, the power of white privilege will decrease with time and education, but meanwhile, it is worthwhile to explore how students of color feel about their inclusion/exclusion in predominantly white elementary schools, junior-senior high schools and colleges and universities. The purpose of this study is to share perceptions of students of color regarding their perceived acceptance and inclusion in Nebraska's public schools and universities.

Two of the presenters will relate their inclusion/exclusion experiences. Two additional presenters who are in administrative positions will relate their observation of

inclusion/exclusion of students of color at all levels of education.

The study shows that feelings of exclusion by students of color in predominantly white institutions permeate all classrooms from kindergarten to college. Discussion will focus on possible means of alleviating the problem.

PRESENTERS

Maureen Eckloff holds a Ph.D. in Speech Communication and Theatre Arts from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. After a career as a broadcaster and telecaster, she has been a university professor for more than thirty years. She has published many articles, presented numerous convention papers, and currently serves as the president of the Training and Development Commission of the National Communication Association. Dr. Eckloff has completed significant research regarding inclusion problems of adolescents.

Venita Kelley holds a Ph.D. in Intercultural and Public Communication from the University of Kansas. Her lengthy service includes her former position as: Chair of the Chancellor's Commission on the Status of People of Color; a member of the UNL Presidents Intercampus Council regarding microcultural concerns; fellow of the Center for Great Plains Studies; and as a program coordinator of the preteen female Rites of Passage Program at Malone Community Center in Lincoln, Nebraska.

James Lee Hullinger holds a Ph.D. in Communication Theory and Social Psychology from the University of Missouri. He has taught at the University of Nebraska at Kearney for the last thirteen years. He has published numerous articles, made presentations at major national, regional and state conventions on the subject of inclusion. He has been very active in minority education, as an actor in theatrical productions, assisted in writing the Cultural Diversity Bill and is very active in local, state and national minority programs.

Alberta Nelson is the assistant principal at Bancroft Elementary School in Omaha, Nebraska. She has a Masters Degree in Education, Special Education, Specific Learning Disabilities and School Administration. Her tenure with the Omaha Public Schools expands more than twenty-four years. She is a strong advocate for community based programs which involve parents, students and community in the ideals of education and multiculturalism.

Valdez Russell is a senior at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He plans a December 1998 graduation with a Bachelor of Science degree in Organizational Communication. Since attending UNK, Valdez has played an active role in battling racism. His broad experiences in addressing racial tension have allowed him to travel across the state and to other states to speak on the need for equality and justice for minorities and mankind. Through extensive training, research and education Valdez serves on the Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran Church of America's Multicultural Education Task Force Team. Further, he is also the Multicultural Services Coordinator at Campus Lutheran. His university involvement affords him numerous opportunities to work with the administration and students on minority student issues.

