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Examining American Indians' Recall of Cultural Inclusion in School¹

Scott Freng, Adrienne Freng, and Helen Moore

This research examined American Indians' recall of cultural inclusion from their elementary through high school education. Sixteen American Indians described their experiences of schools to peer interviewers. Analysis of interviews revealed three themes: the nature of cultural inclusion, factors influencing cultural inclusion, and recommendations for ideal cultural inclusion. Most participants recalled very little cultural inclusion. However, when cultural inclusion was experienced, it could be categorized into five types ("Indian pride," mismatched specific tribal information, negative/stereotypical, student initiative, and inclusion due to parental, familial, and/or community involvement). Participants' experiences most closely resembled Charleston's (1994) *pseudo* or *quasi* Native education. However, some elements of *true* Native education were also reported. In addition, respondents stressed the important role of teachers in experiencing cultural inclusion. Finally, participants discussed their visions of ideal American Indian education and offered their recommendations. The results are discussed in terms of their implications for American Indian education.

The debate over multicultural education remains at the forefront of discussions in education (D'Souza, 1995; Hess, 2004). This discourse is likely to continue in the climate of "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) policies, which prolong the practice of "legislation without Indian consultation" (Williams, 2003, p. 54) and "one-size-fits-all" curriculum (Manuelito, 2005, p. 84). Unfortunately, an unintended consequence of NCLB may be for educators to focus on skills measured by standardized tests to the detriment of promoting multicultural education (see Fusarelli, 2004 for a discussion).

Meanwhile, the population of the United States continues to shift. By the year 2060, it is estimated that People of Color will become a numerical majority in the United States (Feagin & Feagin, 1999). In addition, by 2020 almost half of school age children in the United States will be Students of Color (Banks &

Banks, 2001). Therefore, the inclusion of multiculturalism in the classroom continues to gain in importance (Fusarelli & Boyd, 2004). The significance of cultural inclusion within the classroom may be especially evident for certain populations that have historically been the focus of United States' assimilation policies. Specifically, American Indian tribes have long been targeted by both explicit and implicit assimilation policies (see Reyhner & Eder, 1992 for a discussion). For American Indians/Alaska Natives to counteract these policies, cultural inclusion within the education system may not only be essential for the perpetuation of their cultural practices, language, and history, but for the academic success of American Indian/Alaska Native students (Ball, 2004; Johansen, 2004; Lipka & Mohatt, 1998; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2001).

To gain a more complete understanding of the possible impact that including American Indian/Alaska Native culture and language may have in the classroom, this study examined American Indians' recall of cultural inclusion in their elementary through high school education. We begin by briefly discussing the often debated importance of cultural inclusion for American Indian/Alaska Native students. Charleston's (1994) models of Native education are introduced to provide a template for understanding American Indian/Alaska Native cultural inclusion. Through analysis of interviews with American Indians, we classify the various ways cultural inclusion was experienced, as well as identify which of Charleston's (1994) models were characterized by these experiences. In addition, we discuss factors that American Indian participants identified as influencing cultural inclusion, as well as their suggested recommendations for American Indian/Alaska Native education. Finally, implications of these recommendations for American Indian education are explored.

Impact of Cultural Inclusion on Academic Success

The impact of multiculturalism on academic success for American Indians/Alaska Natives has been intensely debated. Historically, educators have taken a deficiency or "culturally disadvantaged" approach (Fayden, 2005; Reyhner, 1992; Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996). This perspective assumes that American Indian/Alaska Native culture interferes with Native' ability to learn (Cummins, 1992). Lower performance and high dropout rates among American Indian/Alaska Native students is then taken as evidence of "cultural inferiority" (Beaulieu, 2000; Coladarci, 1983; Cummins, 1992; Deyhle, 1992).

However, educators and researchers have also posited the cultural discontinuity perspective (Jones, 2004; Lipka & Mohatt, 1998). This approach argues that the clash of dominant European American culture (of the school) with American Indian/Alaska Native culture and tradition creates confusion and difficulties for American Indian/Alaska Native students. From this perspective, the inclusion of American Indian/Alaska Native culture and language, rather than its exclusion, in the classroom facilitates academic performance and lowers dropout rates (e.g. Deyhle, 1992, Lipka, 1991; Montgomery, Miville, Winterowd, Jeffries, & Baysden, 2000; Reyhner, 1992; Whitbeck et al., 2001). However, it

is important to recognize that cultural discontinuity is only one of many factors that influence academic performance among American Indian/Alaska Native students (Beaulieu, 2000; Deyhle, 1992; Ledlow, 1992; Reyhner, 1992; Swisher & Hoisch, 1992). In addition, even proponents for the inclusion of American Indian/Alaska Native culture and language in education debate the exact nature of cultural inclusion, the way in which language should be used, and the role of the tribe in school control (Hermes, 2005; Lipka, 1994; Watahomigie & McCarty, 1994). Furthermore, it is possible that the nature and types of cultural inclusion may have unique consequences on academic performance, dropout rates, motivation, and ethnic identity of American Indian/Alaska Native students. For instance, having elementary students dress up as pilgrims and “Indians” during Thanksgiving could be construed as cultural inclusion by some teachers. However, this type of activity would likely impact American Indian students differently than if an elder from the community came into the classroom to discuss cultural traditions. Unfortunately, to the researchers’ knowledge no such investigation has identified the nature or types of cultural inclusion in American Indian/Alaska Native students’ educational experiences.

Charleston’s Models of American Indian Education

One way to approach multicultural education and cultural inclusion for American Indians/Alaska Natives is through the framework of Charleston’s (1994) three models of American Indian/Alaska Native education: *pseudo* Native education, *quasi* Native education, and *true* Native education. These models present a continuum that exists in American Indian/Alaska Native education, from the most assimilationist to the truly inclusive and multicultural. *Pseudo* Native education teaches American Indian/Alaska Native students a standardized curriculum of English language and European American interpretations of history and culture, with the goal of assimilating Native people into “American Society” (Charleston, 1994). By presenting a monolingual and monocultural experience, students’ own cultural background is removed or subtracted from the educational process (Cummins, 1993). *Pseudo* Native education reflects the deficiency or “culturally disadvantaged” approach.

The second model proposed by Charleston (1994) is *quasi* Native education. This is a reformist approach “that sincerely attempts to make education more culturally relevant and supportive of Native students and Native communities” (Charleston, 1994, p. 27). These programs attempt to include aspects of American Indian/Alaska Native culture and language in the mainstream curriculum. The goal is to “teach about Native cultural topics with a heavy emphasis on the material culture” (e.g. beadwork, crafts, etc.) and the history of American Indian/Alaska Native peoples as it relates to European Americans (Charleston, 1994, p. 27). Under *quasi* Native education, American Indians/Alaska Natives are rarely in positions of leadership. Charleston (1994) argued that *quasi* education is better than no cultural inclusion (e.g. *pseudo*). However, it is possible that under *quasi* Native education, well intentioned teachers may

actually spread distortions and stereotypes of American Indian/Alaska Native groups rather than truly educating students about culture and language.

The last model is *true* Native education (Charleston, 1994). This model rests on several “guiding principles” (Charleston, 1994, p. 32). One guiding principle of this approach involves a genuine commitment at local, state, and national levels to protect and teach American Indian/Alaska Native culture and language. In addition, *true* Native education involves partnerships between parents, elders, and community members in which these stakeholders influence curriculum and evaluation. Finally, *true* Native education draws on American Indian/Alaska Native world views and provides an enriched curricula that fosters “basic and higher order skills,” which promote students’ abilities to “move freely between the tribal cultures and other American cultures and to contribute to the society in which they live” (Charleston, 1994, p. 32). Therefore, *true* Native education combines “high quality academics” (Charleston, 1994, p. 30) and Native culture. The potential consequences of *true* Native education include: improved self-esteem, motivation, and academic performance among students, increased expectations from parents, teachers, and students, and expanded community involvement. *True* Native education is more applicable in certain educational settings (e.g. on reservations, in tribally operated schools) than others. However, aspects of *true* Native education can be incorporated anywhere by respectfully including community members, elders, and parents (as cultural resources) in the educational process.

Purpose of Study

While previous research has examined the importance of cultural inclusion in the classroom for American Indians/Alaska Natives, there is a surprising lack of research examining students’ perceptions of cultural and language inclusion in the educational arena (but see Deyhle, 1992; Montgomery et al., 2000; Ovando, 1994). While some researchers have examined students’ perceptions of their educational experience, this research has focused primarily on investigations of student dropout (Deyhle, 1992, 1995; Deyhle & Margonis, 1995). Furthermore, to the researchers’ knowledge, previous research has yet to determine the types or nature of cultural inclusion students remember in their schooling. Additionally, a paucity of research exists examining the model of education in place as described by students’ own experiences (Freng, Freng, & Moore, 2006). Finally, students’ voices and recommendations regarding cultural inclusion are rarely considered.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to expand the literature by examining these issues and to investigate the nature of cultural inclusion American Indians recalled from their elementary through high school education. More specifically, this research had three goals. First, we examined whether American Indians perceived their culture and language being incorporated into the classroom and if so, the nature of that cultural inclusion. We assessed the nature of cultural inclusion by comparing respondents’ reports with the models of American

Indian/Alaska Native education identified by Charleston (1994). In addition, we identified the different types of cultural inclusion reported by respondents. Our second goal was to identify factors that fostered cultural inclusion. Specifically, we examined the role of teachers in cultural inclusion. Third, we present the recommendations voiced by American Indian respondents regarding the inclusion of their culture in the classroom. These results are discussed within the context of their implications for educators and American Indian/Alaska Native education.

Method

Participants

Sixteen participants (10 males and 6 females) were interviewed, a sufficient number for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998). Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 25, with a mean age of 21. All respondents had attended Nebraska public schools at some point in their education.² Eight participants attended only non-reservation schools, four attended only reservation schools, and four attended both non-reservation and reservation schools. The final pool of participants included a range of American Indians across five tribes (Ho-chunk, Omaha, Santee, Lakota, and Cheyenne), with educational outcomes from college attendance to those who left school without a high school diploma. While respondents were not queried about their specific linguistic abilities, respondents did report having relatives with wide ranging linguistic capabilities (from “just a few words” to “being very fluent”) in a variety of languages (e.g. Dakota, Lakota, Ho-chunk, Omaha, Diné, Choctaw, Northern Cheyenne, and English).

Qualitative Analysis

Phenomenology was chosen to complete the qualitative analysis of the research problem. Phenomenology was chosen for several reasons. First, phenomenology allows for an investigation of individuals’ experiences through their own words.³ Phenomenology is concerned with the wholeness of experience, while trying to capture an experiences’ essence (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, phenomenology allows for flexibility. The methodology for this study was modified slightly from traditional phenomenological investigations. In this study, the researchers did not personally conduct the interviews. Instead, a peer interviewer methodology was utilized.

Peer Interviewing⁴

The current trend in research with Indigenous Peoples calls for culturally respectful and competent practices (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Cleary & Peacock, 1997, 1998; Smith, 1999). To gain access to the depth and complexity of American Indians’ educational experiences of public school education our role as “outsiders” was considered (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Smith, 1999). As non-Indians and representatives of a large university, it was believed that respondents’ willingness to provide answers would be compromised had the researchers personally conducted the interviews. After discussion with American Indian

colleagues and students, a protocol was established to bring American Indian student peer interviewers into partnership with the research team. Potential peer interviewers were identified through the Nebraskan Indian Education Association and the University's Native American Studies Program. Four American Indian students from Nebraska were recruited as peer interviewers. After training, peer interviewers used snowball sampling to conduct interviews with non-family members. These one-time interviews were approximately 45 to 90 minutes in length. Peer interviewers and participants were paid for their time.⁵

Prior to the interviews, respondents signed an informed consent form. Interviews were taped and then transcribed. To ensure the confidentiality of participants, taped interviews were identified by number instead of by the name of the participant. After transcription, the original tapes were destroyed. The semi-structured interview questions⁶ focused on three areas: student experiences and role expectations in elementary and high school, student perceptions of their family and community interactions, and students' perceptions of the inclusion of American Indian culture and language in the curriculum. For the purposes of this study, we specifically examined only the third area of interest, students' perceptions of cultural inclusion.

Data Analysis

Participants' interviews were analyzed using Creswell (1998) and Moustakas' (1994) recommendations for phenomenological data reduction and analysis. Data analysis began with the full reading of all transcripts. Statements were then horizontalized with each statement having equal worth. Statements irrelevant to the focus of this study were removed. The remaining statements were read several times to determine possible themes and were then clustered into preliminary themes using an iterative approach. Themes were utilized until statements were discovered that were not sufficiently explained by existing themes. When this occurred, the researchers returned to the data and adjusted themes to more accurately capture the meaning in participants' statements. Finally, the researchers sought to verify or confirm these themes across participants. Examination of cultural inclusion in the education of American Indians produced three themes. These were: 1) the nature of cultural inclusion, 2) the role of teachers in cultural inclusion, and 3) participants' recommendations for ideal cultural inclusion.

Results

Nature of Cultural Inclusion

No Cultural or Language Inclusion: In their educational experiences, the majority⁷ of respondents did not recall being taught about their culture or tribe in school, regardless of the type of school respondents attended (reservation vs. non-reservation). Respondents described their history classes as being about "non-Natives," "Europeans," or only covering history that was "post-Columbus." D⁸ stated, "We are part of this country. Our history is important in this country. They talk about slavery in history, but they don't talk about Indians." In other words,

participants felt “American” history had forgotten Native Peoples. Some participants were not bothered initially by the lack of Native history, but over time, their views had changed. For instance, *A* responded that the lack of cultural inclusion did not bother her “at the time, but it does now.” In one class, *D* remembered writing “about people from Brazil or something. And I find that odd now. Why would they not have us write about Winnebago?”

There were also very few reports of language inclusion, “not even on the reservation.” Specifically, only five participants made any mention of language inclusion occurring at any level of education (elementary through high school) and among the multiple schools attended. Ironically, participants reported that Spanish and French were the “second” languages offered at schools. The dearth of Native languages was interpreted as “not right” and participants reported having a desire to learn their own Native languages. *K* commented, “I wanted to learn my own language and I always complained to my parents about that.”

Types of Cultural Inclusion: Because the majority of respondents reported little to no cultural inclusion, identifying the nature or types of cultural inclusion became more difficult than expected. However, isolated instances of culture being included in education were reported. Cultural inclusion, when it did occur, fell within five different types. These were general “Indian pride,” mismatched specific tribal information, negative/stereotypical information, inclusion due to students’ initiative, and inclusion facilitated by parental, familial, and/or community involvement.

General “Indian” Pride: Cultural inclusion sometimes included information about “Indians” as a whole and being taught “Native” pride. Therefore, information was not specific to the individuals’ own tribe or family. For example, *L* recalled participating in Indian Caucus. Indian Caucus involved “not really teaching about my tribe or my family history, but just pride in who you are.” *N* remembered on American Indian Day being taught to be, “proud of ... values of American Indians.”

Mismatched Specific Tribal Information: On the other hand, there were instances where specific cultural information was provided. However, this did not ensure that the information was linked to the individual’s tribal affiliation. For example, *D* recalled attending a boarding school where “they talked about Indian stuff, but most of it was Sioux because probably we were in South Dakota, but the population [students in the class] wasn’t Sioux.” *J* was angered because cultural inclusion focused on Cherokees and the Trail of Tears, not on regional tribal history. *J* commented: “We were on [a Midwest] reservation and they had the nerve to teach us about a tribe all the way down in Alabama. And that got moved to Oklahoma.”

Negative/Stereotypical Information: The third type of cultural inclusion occurred when American Indian culture and language was portrayed negatively, stereotypically, or made students aware of American Indian stereotypes (e.g. educators failed to challenge stereotypical portrayals). For example, *H* recalled

having a teacher talk about culture and drugs, “he just kind of explained that ... every culture has ... some kind of drug and I just remember him saying peyote was the American Indian [drug].” *O* recalled the content of the history books used in school. “The history books that we read, they were all written by non-Indians. They had nothing to do with American Indian[s] in it. Um, and the small pieces they did have in there were negative towards American Indians.” *J* remembers learning about American Indians around Thanksgiving when the portrayal was “real stereotypical, you know pigeonholed time.” In addition, *J* recalled

one negative thing about American Indian culture. I remember we were in second grade, our teachers made us make feather like war bonnets out of construction paper for Thanksgiving. And I distinctly remember this, [be]cause now as I’m older I’m like that was really racist of her to do that.

L remembers other students expecting him “to be living in a teepee and wearing moccasins and speaking Indian and whatnot.”

Student Initiative: Four respondents recalled that cultural inclusion happened as a direct result of their personal interest and initiative. One way this was manifested included students’ involvement in “American Indian Caucus.” As a member of Indian Caucus, *K* reported arranging for Native dancers and singers to perform in front of the whole school, “but that was just on my own initiative.” Other students reported incorporating American Indian culture into their schoolwork. For example, *I* remembered, “we had to do a report on anything that we wanted to that had to do with American History and I did mine on my tribe.”

Three respondents reported learning language of their own initiative. *I* recalled reading books “that were translated into English on one page and then on the other page it had them in Ho-chunk.⁹ And I tried to make it out best you can with what you know, but I have very limited vocabulary.” *J* remembered using Native language during classes “interchangeably with English. And sometimes that was to mess with the teacher and sometimes it was just part of normal conversation.” Other respondents reported capitalizing on language being learned in school in order to use it outside of school. *B* mentioned: “Yeah, it was fun because when ... I’d bring a friend home we would talk to each other in Winnebago and then mom or [grandmother’s name] would be like ‘What are you saying? Tell us, teach us what you learned.’”

Parent, Family, and/or Community Involvement: The fifth type of American Indian cultural inclusion stemmed from parental, familial, or community involvement. For example, *E* reported that his uncle was a teacher who “taught a class on tribal government.” *K* remembered, “culture class” where “elders of the community would come in and they’d teach the ... religion.” *H* recalled how the involvement of both parents facilitated cultural inclusion.

He’d come in and he actually did a like a workshop with some other teacher and talked about the American Indian culture to the whole like fourth grade class ... but it was through my dad. He ... got him to come in and present it and I remember also we had a ethnic day or something we called it and

everybody brought in some kind of ethnic food and I believe that I think it was my mom came in and she made fry bread for the other students.

Charleston's Models of American Indian Education

The educational experiences of the respondents most closely resembled Charleston's (1994) *pseudo* or *quasi* Native educational models. Participants either experienced no cultural inclusion (*pseudo*) or when cultural inclusion was incorporated, it was piecemeal, or on a special day¹⁰ (*quasi*), rather than integrated into their educational experience. *Quasi* Native education was reflected in cultural inclusion representing general "Indian" pride, mismatched specific tribal information, and negative/stereotypical. No participants convincingly reported experiencing *true* Native education. However, some glimpses or elements of *true* Native education appeared when the respondents or their parents, family, and/or community facilitated the inclusion of American Indian culture in the educational process. Thus, while examples of Native education that transcended *quasi* Native education existed, the experiences fell short of Charleston's *true* Native education.

Factors Influencing Cultural Inclusion

Role of Educators: Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of teachers for the occurrence of cultural inclusion in the classroom. This connection appeared to be conveyed in two ways. First, non-Indian teachers were sometimes seen as role models if they demonstrated respect for Native beliefs, attempted to understand "Indian ways," had pride in American Indian students, or were open-minded toward cultural inclusion. *E*, for example, recalled teachers who "showed respect to the Indians and the students in school. They wanted to learn about our culture about what it's like to be Indian." *H* stated that one teacher "encouraged me to share with her what I knew about American Indian culture and some of the assignments I did so I kind of felt really good about that. I would consider her a role model." *D*'s teacher "always incorporated like Indian stuff into our history. And then he was like proud of us even though we were Indian students." Non-Indian teachers also fostered cultural inclusion through open-mindedness and allowing Native students to explore their history and culture of their own initiative. *G* reported one teacher

was very open to what I wanted to study. It was like a literature independent study class and so she let me pick out the books that I wanted to read and it was pretty much all Native books. And she would read them.

Second, participants saw having American Indian teachers as extremely important. Five participants discussed the importance and novelty of being taught by an American Indian teacher. *B* remembered, "that was kind of a cool thing to be in her class then ... they took pictures of us [the school] and put them in the paper and interviewed her and her class." Other participants saw a direct connection between American Indian cultural inclusion and the presence or absence of an American Indian teacher. For instance, *M* commented, "we had a teacher that was from here and she would try to say a few Indian words and stuff.

But that was probably the only teacher [to include American Indian language] because she was Indian.” *C* suggested that Native culture and language were not taught, “because all of our teachers were non-Native.” *C* also pointed out that having an American Indian teacher was important because their background prepared them to understand the relationship of school, work, and religion, while non-Indian teachers could only “understand ... school, work, and religion. And they didn’t understand that all these things are like intermixed.” Understanding that the elements of life are “intermixed” was summarized by *C*, who said American Indians:

walk in two worlds, we have to find a balance in between to um, to start from, you have to get the right amount of your cultural teachings. From that cultural teachings you’ll find that there are...an emphasis on your education from your family and from other members of your tribe. They all want you to go on to be the best that you can and they will support you because that’s how a tribe, a family that’s how they are, they will support you and they are there for you.

The belief that non-Indian teachers failed to understand traditional culture was accentuated by the fact that many teachers did not participate in community cultural activities. *J* stated that teachers commuted to the reservation school and did not want to live in the community. In addition, the teachers:

wouldn’t come to the powwow in the summer. They wouldn’t come to like hand games or war dances or anything, birthday parties. They didn’t come to nothing, cultural events. Nothing. Once three o’clock came, they were gone unless they were coaches, they were gone. They were totally gone.

American Indians’ Recommendations and Visions of Ideal Cultural Inclusion

The last theme evolved out of participants examining their experience of cultural inclusion and comparing it to their ideal vision for cultural inclusion. While respondents’ remembered educational experiences resembling *pseudo* or *quasi* Native education, their discussion of recommendations for American Indian education closely resembled Charleston’s (1994) *true* Native education. *B* discussed what she saw as language inclusion in South Dakota.

I see it in South Dakota high schools. They offer their language as a class that is a requirement for them to graduate. And once those kids get started, [be]cause I know a couple of them, once they get started they don’t want to quit. And I think that is just amazing and if we could just get something like that here I can just see where it would go from there.

K also discussed the importance of maintaining American Indian language.

They taught us about our culture and about our language and that’s something I want in my students, my kids to know because I was never doing it and I realize that it’s something that’s going to be gone pretty soon, our language and some of the things that we have in our culture, so I would want them to experience that and to know that.

O explored cultural inclusion through a discussion of modifying the history taught

in schools.

And I think that if they want to be realistic, they need to incorporate more Indian stuff in the history starting through high school and then maybe people wouldn't be so ignorant by the time they're adults. And I think that they should incorporate the other side of history everywhere not just at predominantly Indian schools, but everywhere because when you get to college, and you meet all these people and they don't even know what an Indian is. They don't even know about atrocities that occurred. They are like totally ignorant. They have no clue. And I think at least in the history department that is something that is included and maybe like in literature, that could be something that's included in all schools. Because we are part of this country. Our history is important in this country. They talk about slavery in history, but they don't talk about Indians.

Other participants felt teachers needed to make more of an effort to go beyond the "Eurocentric" teaching to incorporate American Indian culture into the classroom. For instance, *E* stated:

It would be nice if teachers would teach the children a little more about their [Native] culture, instead of about their [European American] culture. I went to an elementary class my senior year, they weren't really teaching the, they didn't teach nothing, but the same old crap that I learned.

D agreed, "if they [European American teachers] want to come to [a] Native community and teach, they need to learn about the Native people there that they would be teaching. And incorporate that into their classrooms." *C* believed teachers should actively try to include community members "once and awhile maybe bring in an elder to teach to the class and help out with the class. Just to see how involved we are with our elders and to get us acquainted." *C* saw the need for more cultural inclusion to prevent total "assimilation."

They teach four years of English, sure that's English, but we're also American Indians. They should have American Indian language classes, American Indian culture. American Indian history, [be]cause we get all this white history, white English, and we're being assimilated into the white culture. I mean we are our own people, we should learn about our people.

Discussion

This research sought to expand the literature investigating cultural inclusion in the education of American Indians. The three goals of this study were: 1) Determine the nature and types of cultural inclusion American Indians remembered from their educational experiences. 2) Examine the role of teachers in cultural inclusion. 3) Discuss American Indian respondents' recommendations regarding education and cultural inclusion.

Through phenomenological analysis of interviews with former students, we found that American Indian respondents recalled very little cultural inclusion, reflecting Charleston's (1994) *quasi* or *pseudo* educational model. However, some elements of cultural inclusion did exist. These recollections fell within five

different types (general “Indian” pride, mismatched specific tribal information, negative/stereotypical information, student initiative, and parent, family, and/or community involvement). Furthermore, within some of these specific types of cultural inclusion, elements of Charleston’s (1994) *true* Native education were mentioned. These examples most often resulted from respondents’ own initiative or due to parental, familial, or community involvement.

In addition, American Indian respondents pointed out the important role of teachers, which influenced the experience of cultural inclusion in the classroom. Specifically, teachers who were flexible, open-minded, and caring were viewed as role models. These teachers fostered an environment in which cultural inclusion was possible. Respondents also recognized the importance of having American Indian teachers, which facilitated cultural inclusion.

Finally, respondents offered their view of ideal American Indian education. Their visions of education focused on the increased inclusion of American Indian culture and language. These recommendations reflected a model of education that closely resembled Charleston’s (1994) *true* Native education. The potential implications of these results along with recommendations are discussed next.

Recommendations and Implications

With an increasing multicultural society, understanding multicultural education becomes increasingly important, especially for American Indians/Alaska Natives, who historically have been subjected to a deficiency model of education (Banks & Banks, 2001; Feagin & Feagin, 1999). This study provides an important building block for future research by examining the types and nature of cultural inclusion that former students recall experiencing. These results, along with the recommendations provided by the respondents, impart insight into the current and future educational experiences of American Indians/Alaska Natives and serve as the focus of the following policy suggestions regarding American Indian/Alaska Native education.

Participants in this study reported very little cultural and language inclusion. However, they recognized that in order to maintain the balance between the “two worlds” in which American Indians walk American Indian culture, language, and history is imperative to their education. As discussed previously, according to the cultural discontinuity perspective, cultural inclusion is a necessary component for American Indian students’ academic success (e.g. Dick, Estell, & McCarty, 1994; Whitbeck et al., 2001). Thus, the need for increasing American Indian culture and language in schools is evident. Addressing this concern, according to respondents, includes implementing a diverse curriculum and hiring more American Indian teachers, which has been echoed as important in previous research with students (Deyhle, 1995). Existing programs that already target some of these recommendations (e.g. Rough Rock English-Navajo Language Arts Program) could be modified and incorporated into school curriculum elsewhere (Dick et al., 1994).

The recommendation most offered by respondents was to increase cultural

inclusion in the educational process. However, further investigation of the typology of cultural inclusion is needed to determine if the different types have unique consequences for students. For instance, does allowing for initiative positively impact students in the same way that bringing elders in, or is one more powerful in conveying the importance of culture? In addition, when examining the different types of cultural inclusion, it is apparent that not all types will foster positive consequences. The most obvious example in the present study is when cultural inclusion facilitates stereotyping. Teachers utilizing stereotypes or who are perceived as prejudiced may negatively influence American Indians' academic achievement, dropout rates, motivation, and ethnic identity (Deyhle, 1992). Charleston (1994) argues that *quasi* Native education is an improvement over *pseudo* Native education, because some Native cultural inclusion is better than none. However, if teachers' attempts at cultural inclusion foster stereotypes, then this may be more damaging than including nothing at all.

Unfortunately, the spread of stereotypes can occur even among well-intentioned educators who attempt to be "multicultural." Almeida (1996) reported that when teaching about American Indians/Alaska Natives, teachers tend to rely on overgeneralizations. Most likely, this reflects the teachers' lack of knowledge regarding American Indian/Alaska Native culture. Additionally, teachers sometimes consider "multicultural education burdensome, confusing, intrusive, and frustrating" (Fong & Sheets, 2004, p. 11). Teachers who are "confused" or "frustrated" may either ignore incorporation of culture or may settle for cultural inclusion, which is shallow and perpetuates stereotypes. Furthermore, it may be that multicultural training does not facilitate the types of cultural inclusion important to American Indian/Alaska Natives students. In these cases, general multicultural educational training may need to be supplemented with training augmented by the tribal community. Thus, researchers need to take a closer examination at the classroom to determine how multicultural training is translating into multicultural education for students (Sleeter, 2001).

An examination of the nature and types of cultural inclusion creates a clear picture of American Indian respondents who experienced *pseudo* or *quasi* Native education, while their ideal educational experience closely resembled Charleston's *true* Native education (Charleston, 1994). This lack of congruence between real and ideal educational models could be addressed by the recommendation from respondents that schools utilize parents and community members as educational resources and create a partnership between parents, elders, community, and school (Ball, 2004; Beaulieu, 2000; Chavers, 2000; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Deyhle, 1992; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Epstein, 1995; Tippeconnic, 2000). Programs integrating school and community based efforts, such as the Community Based Education Model [CBEM] (Chavez & Pecos, 2000) are already being implemented in certain communities.

A successful collaboration between these groups would more closely mirror Charleston's (1994) *true* Native education, providing multiple benefits. First, a partnership would likely increase cultural inclusion, as American Indian/Alaska

Native parents and community members could serve as valuable resources for cultural knowledge and information (Ball, 2004; Charleston, 1994; Reyhner, 1992). Specifically, incorporating elders into students' education can facilitate authentic cultural representations (Fayden, 2005) and traditional ways of learning through storytelling (Cajete, 1994). Second, by drawing upon parents and members of the community as educational resources, teachers may have a vehicle for cultural inclusion that is less likely to spread cultural stereotypes. Third, by interacting more with parents and community members, educators will themselves learn more about American Indian/Alaska Native culture and become more involved in the community of American Indian/Alaska Native students. Finally, when teachers involve parents and community members in the educational system, students are likely to perceive that teachers "care," leading to possible academic gains (Cummins, 1993; Deyhle, 1992).

Some of the recommendations provided by respondents may seem daunting to elementary or high school educators. However, key factors mentioned by American Indian respondents can be addressed with minimal effort. As discussed earlier, teachers can integrate culture easily into the classroom by assigning literature written by American Indian authors, including language, or incorporating American Indian viewpoints into discussions of American History. Teachers can also foster an environment in which students are able to initiate cultural inclusion on their own. Specifically, respondents reported that teachers who were flexible regarding assignments provided students with an opportunity to celebrate and investigate their culture. For instance, students would be allowed to study their tribal history in the context of a history assignment. In addition, literary assignments could accommodate investigations of American Indian/Alaska Native authors or specific topics of interest to the student (Fayden, 2005).

Another factor important to the educational experiences of American Indian respondents was teachers who were perceived as respectful and caring. Educators possessing these characteristics were valued by our respondents and were seen as role models, even if they were non-Indian. According to Garcia and Ahler (1992), "appreciation and respect are the antecedent attitudes for teaching Indian children" (p. 14). The social relationship between teachers and Indigenous students is incredibly important (Lipka, 1991). In addition, the perception of teachers who do not care has been tied to student drop-out rates (Deyhle, 1992). Teachers who do care about American Indian/Alaska Native education can clearly project this to students through several acts. First, participants recommend that teachers need to become active in the community by participating in school and community activities and demonstrate that they care about American Indian/Alaska Native culture and language (e.g. Charleston, 1994; Deyhle, 1992; Epstein, 1995; Littlebear, 1992; Swisher & Hoisch, 1992). Second, teachers must be willing to provide additional assistance to students as failure to provide assistance have been linked to perceiving teachers as "uncaring" (Deyhle, 1992). Third, teachers who work to incorporate American Indian/Alaska Native culture and language will demonstrate that they recognize the importance of their

students' background and promote the legitimacy of these topics for education (rather than tokenism) and will foster students' belief that they care (Deyhle, 1992; Reyhner, 1992).

Limitations and Areas for Future Study

The results of this study provide unique insight into American Indian young adults' experiences of an education system that offered limited access to cultural inclusion. However, a few caveats are required. As exploratory research, this inquiry into multicultural or *true* Native education should be replicated both within specific tribal groups and with larger samples that include a range of tribal groups, geographic regions, and types of schools (e.g. reservation, non-reservation, etc.). Specifically, one area requiring further replication and exploration is the role of contextual factors on cultural inclusion. While the current research did not find evidence that cultural inclusion differed due to contextual factors (reservation vs. non-reservation), this was not the focus of this research. Thus, further replication and exploration on the role of contextual factors (e.g. attending a reservation vs. non-reservation school, in an urban vs. rural community) on cultural inclusion using larger and more diverse samples of American Indian and Alaska Native students is needed.

Another potential limitation of this research is that the types of cultural inclusion identified in this study may not adequately represent the diversity of American Indian/Alaska Native experiences of cultural inclusion. Specifically, it is possible that the types of cultural inclusion identified in this study can be expanded through discussions with American Indian/Alaska Native students who have experienced more cultural inclusion in their education. In addition, further investigation of the typology of cultural inclusion is needed to determine if the different types have unique consequences for the students. For instance, does allowing for initiative positively impact students in the same way that bringing elders in, or is one more powerful in conveying the importance of culture?

Finally, because this research relied solely on American Indian students' reports of cultural inclusion, it only provides one piece of the educational puzzle. While American Indian students' perceptions of cultural inclusion are an important factor in the educational process, this research should be supplemented by triangulating student perspectives with the perceptions of teachers, both Indian and non-Indian (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Hermes, 2005; Suina, 2004), school administrators, and parents (Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996). By focusing only on the reports of former students, several important questions remain to be explored. For instance, do other stakeholders' perceptions of cultural inclusion overlap with American Indian/Alaska Native students, or are they unique? Additionally, by focusing on the remembered experiences of American Indian respondents, this investigation is subject to the distortion of memories over time. There is a difference between perception and reality (Coladarci, 1983). Therefore, the actual materials used by educators to teach American Indian/Alaska Native students should also be examined.

Conclusion

As we look to the future of American Indian/Alaska Native education, the obvious direction according to the respondents is to incorporate more American Indian culture/language in the classroom, utilize parents and community members as educational resources, and encourage teachers to be flexible, respectful, caring, and curious about American Indian/Alaska Native culture. Several theorists and researchers concur and argue that the goal for American Indian/Alaska Native education must be a blending of some traditional educational experiences and American Indian/Alaska Native worldviews (Charleston, 1994; Cleary & Peacock, 1998). This is especially important as new federal mandates in education may generate new “dangers incumbent in both the intended and unintended consequences of the No Child Left Behind Statute upon the future of Native education. It is clear...that these changes to date have not included the Native voice” (Beaulieu, Sparks, & Alonzo, 2006, p. 3). As a result, the NCLB emphasis on standardized test outcomes in Indian Country continues to challenge American Indian educators, who report that “this success [on test scores] has clearly been at the expense and diminishment of Native language and culture” (Beaulieu et al., 2006, p. 4). Specifically, students need to be able to “walk in both worlds” without losing connections to their American Indian background. Charleston (1994) argues that this can be accomplished by institutionalizing *quasi* Native education. While this does not reach the ideal of *true* Native education, it is a more short-term realistic goal. In addition, *quasi* Native education would be a first step toward eventually instituting *true* Native education. Examples of programs or curriculum improvement projects that incorporate American Indian culture/language and school, parental, community partnerships do exist and can provide the framework for other communities to address the educational issues for the next generation of American Indian students (Ball, 2004; Buly & Ohana, 2004; Manuelito, 2005).

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Endnotes

¹This research was supported by a grant from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Research Council: IRB # 98-07-422EP. The points of view in this article are the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the research council. We would like to thank the individuals who contributed their stories as well as the peer interviewers who listened. Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to Scott Freng, 1000 E. University, Dept. 3415, Department of Psychology, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071, 307-766-2955, sfreng@uwyo.edu.

²This paper developed out of research originally completed to examine the educational status of American Indians in Nebraska. Therefore, American Indian respondents were selected based on having first hand knowledge of schools in Nebraska. However, in some cases, American Indian respondents had also attended schools outside of Nebraska as well. This study utilized American Indian respondents' responses regarding schools in Nebraska, as well as reports from schools outside of Nebraska (e.g. South Dakota).

³One goal of this methodology was to avoid what Deloria (2004) calls a preoccupation with "a binary, yes/no method of determining truth" which excludes data and produces questionable conclusions (pp. 18-19).

⁴This methodology was also previously discussed at length in Freng et al. 2006.

⁵Participants were paid \$25 for their time. Peer interviewers were also paid \$25 for each interview they conducted. The purpose of payment was to make sure participants and interviewers were shown appreciation and recognized for their important contribution to this research (see Smith, 1999).

⁶Some sample questions include; "What kind of student did you think you were in elementary school? Why do you think this?" (student experiences and role expectations), "Did your parents ever come to your school? For what reason? Did they know your teachers very well?" (student perceptions of their family and community interactions), and "Do you remember anything about your elementary school days that taught you about your tribe or the history of your family? What did you learn?" (student perceptions of the inclusion of American Indian culture and language in the curriculum).

⁷Because participants reported on both elementary and junior high/high school experiences and half of the participants attended multiple elementary and/or high schools, it is difficult to quantify the exact number of respondents reporting no cultural inclusion. However, ten respondents specifically reported experiencing no cultural inclusion in at least one elementary school and seven participants reported no cultural inclusion in at least one junior high/high school.

⁸To protect the identities of the respondents, participants will be identified as: A, B, C, etc.

⁹Ho-chunk is the name that the Winnebago people give themselves.

¹⁰A few participants reported doing special American Indian activities on Native American Day. Native American Day was established in South Dakota in 1990, by then Governor, George Mickelson (Melmer, 2001).

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