

EXPLORING THE EDUCATIONAL HISTORIES, PERCEPTIONS,
AND EXPERIENCES OF SUCCESSFUL EDUCATORS
OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY.

By

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in

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this research to the wonderful teachers, principals, and superintendents I encountered throughout this research. I felt privileged that they shared so much with me and every time I left the schools I felt inspired and uplifted! Thank you so much!!

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ABSTRACT

Native American education has gone through many phases from the assimilation practices of removing Native children from their homes, family, and culture all the way up to Native Language Immersion schools where the curriculum is taught in both English and the Native tongue. Throughout all the educational changes one thing remains; Native American students are dropping out of school at an alarming rate. In order to improve education for Native students there must be a change in pre-service teacher preparation. The problem addressed in this study is that instructors of pre-service teachers need to understand the educational histories and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment in order to learn how to better prepare undergraduate education majors. This qualitative multiple case study focused upon effective educators of Native American students. The following questions guided the inquiry: What is the formal educational (academic) history of successful educators of Native American students? What is the informal educational (non-academic) history of successful educators of Native American students? What experiences in their own classrooms have teachers identified as contributing to their success with educating Native American students?

This research included a questionnaire and interviews with 32 teachers working in elementary schools located on reservations in Montana. A combination of whole staff focus group and individual in-depth interviews took place. The results of the transcribed and coded interviews were grouped under the main themes which emerged out of the three research questions and a few unique questions asked of the individual interviewees. Out of the four main themes; Effective and Successful Educators of Native American Students, Formal Education, Informal Education, and Classroom experiences, 17 subthemes emerged. The findings resulted in the following recommendations for new teachers of Native Americans: mentors; real life applications and cultural integration; community involvement; relationships; high expectations; self reflection. Also recommendations for Higher Education were presented: new class creation/offering; tribal college collaboration; utilize Native Americans as a resource; include information on teaching in low socioeconomic areas; student teaching/internships on a reservation. My hope is that these recommendations will improve education for Native American students.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The early phases of Native American education in the United States stressed separation of the student from family, culture, and traditions. Native American education from the late 1800's up to the Indian Self-Determination period of the 1970's was based upon assimilation policies. The White settlers, teachers, and government officials believed that education was the only way to "civilize" these Native people. The education of Native Americans in the late 1800's focused upon forced separation through vocational training in boarding school settings (Bill, 1979; Agbo, 2001). Teachers in these boarding schools believed that Native culture and tradition was a negative influence on the student's learning abilities (Brown, 1979). Compared to their White counterparts, educators thought that Native American children could not learn and prosper in school (Agbo, 2001). Even after the boarding school period ended, school practices which assume that the experiences of the dominant white culture are the norm continued to enforce a de facto separation of Native students from their home culture (Pewewardy, 2002; Agbo, 2001; Sobol, 1990). Pewewardy (2002) goes one step further in stating that "most United States federal and state initiatives focused on changing the Indian without allowing for cultural differences" (p. 30).

Researchers in the field of Native American education have noted the ongoing problem of Native student's high dropout rates (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Powers,

Potthoff, Bearinger, & Resnick, 2003; Zimmerman, 2004). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2008) in 2006, the national high school dropout rate of Native Americans was 15%. Jeffries & Singer (2003) state that when comparisons to other minorities, Native Americans have the highest dropout rate “of all U.S. racial and ethnic groups” (p. 41). Educators are looking for the reasons behind, and ways to address, the problem of high dropout rates of Native American students.

For the state of Montana, these issues are particularly salient. According to Montana’s Office of Public Instruction’s (OPI) statistics for the 2005 - 2006 school year Native Americans make up the largest ethnic group in our schools at 11.4% of K-12 enrollment representing 16,715 of 146,788 total students (Enrollment by REO, 2006). Many of the state’s school districts have over 50% Native American populations. Similar to other national statistics, Montana’s Native American dropout rate statewide is substantial: “On average American Indian students drop out of grades 7 and 8 at a rate more than 6 times that of white students and out of high school at a rate of more than 2 times that of white students” (Montana Statewide Dropout and Graduate Report, 2008, p. 10).

Montana law makers recognize the historical struggles of Native American students in conventional educational environments. Montana has come to the national forefront in Native education due to the passage of House Bill 528 in 1999, commonly known as “Indian Education for All.” For 38 years, the following wording has been included in Montana’s Constitution of 1972, Article X, Section 1(2): “The state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and is committed

in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity” (Montana Indians, 2004, p.82). The Indian Education for All bill codified this constitutional statement into the educational policy of the state of Montana. In 2005 Governor Schweitzer and the Montana State Legislature set aside \$4.4 million to fund the law for the first time in its history. Indian Education for All (IEFA) requires every school to expose all students, both Native and non-Native, to the unique culture and contributions of Native Americans. This is accomplished through curricular enhancements integrated into every subject area and across all grade levels.

Culturally sensitive teachers and curriculums are a first step in changing the classroom environment to include diversity and reduce stereotypes (Starnes, 2006). Schools that respect and support their students’ cultures have shown positive gains in both student achievement and lower dropout rates of Native American students (Jeffries & Singer, 2003). Not only do culturally sensitive curricula have an impact upon student success, but teachers that have been educated to work with diverse populations also have a strong effect.

The majority of teachers in schools with high native populations are White (Agbo, 2001; Hjelmseth 1972; Garmon, 2005) and unfortunately, many of these teachers have not had enough training to be able to effectively incorporate Native culture in their classrooms. Researchers agree that teachers must be aware of the cultural and value differences that will affect the educational process (Agbo, 2001; Jeffries & Singer, 2003). With a background in the cultural similarities and differences of the Native community,

teachers are better able to create relationships with both the students and their parents which will benefit the educational process.

In order for teachers to be more culturally aware, institutions of higher education need to take an active role in the dissemination of Native American traditions and values. Pewewardy's (2002) research concluded that the "lack of understanding is not necessarily the fault of the teacher. Many teacher education programs do not provide the kind of experiences that allow prospective teachers to develop the skills necessary to identify and address the learning styles of American Indian/Alaska Native students" (p. 24).

Teachers gain knowledge about their practice from many different avenues. Formal (academic) educational experiences such as their college education, teacher in-services, and professional development classes inform their practice. Informal (non-academic) educational experience such as interactions with parents, community, and knowledge gained from observations and personal insights also influences the curriculum. Lastly, teacher's hands-on experiences and knowledge gained from their own classrooms and learning from experience cannot be overlooked. Current research suggest that in order to decide what institutions of higher education need to teach to prepare future teachers for diversity in their classrooms, there is a need to look at the educational histories of effective teachers (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Hollins and Guzman (2005) state the following after their review of current literature on preparing teachers for diverse populations:

Instead of starting with questions about what good teacher education ought to be, we should start with good teaching and ask research questions that work backward to teacher preparation. There is a significant gap in the literature in this area. Although we know a great deal about effective

teaching practices for diverse students, not much is known about how teachers who are effective with diverse students acquired the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed. Examining the practices and teacher preparation history of effective teachers could provide insights into what candidates need to know (p. 513).

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study is that instructors of pre-service teachers need to understand the educational histories and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment in order to learn how to better prepare undergraduate education majors.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area. For the purpose of this study, successful educators of Native American students will be defined as those individuals identified by their principals and peers as being successful.

Research Questions

This study focused upon effective educators of Native American students. The following questions guided the inquiry:

- What is the formal educational (academic) history of successful educators of Native American students?
- What is the informal educational (non-academic) history of successful educators of Native American students?
- What experiences in their own classrooms have teachers identified as contributing to their success with educating Native American students?

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Much has been written about multicultural education of diverse groups, but due to this researcher's focus upon Native American students the literature was limited to issues directly impacting these students and their education. The conceptual framework of this research was based upon several theories of how mainstream curriculum, lack of knowledge of Native history and issues, and teacher dispositions impact Native American students' learning. With these issues in mind, chapter 2 Literature Review includes the following: historical background of Native American education; calls for curricula change to reverse high dropout rates and apathy; formal and informal educational experiences of teachers; teacher classroom experiences; teacher dispositions; and effective practices. In order to improve education for Native students all of the aforementioned components must be discussed and analyzed.

Powers' et al. (2003) "Cultural Discontinuity Theory" explains the apathy and high dropout rates of Native students. According to Powers et al. (2003), "cultural discontinuity theory is based on the axiom that behavioral, communication, instructional,

and curricular expectations of the school contradict and undermine those of Native youths' families and communities" (p.24). Cultural differences between Native American students' home life, traditions, and values and the school environment affect learning.

Garmon's (2005) research of pre-service teachers found that there are six factors that influence whether a pre-service teacher will change their views about diversity. Garmon (2005), states that one's "dispositions (referring to a person's character traits and tendencies) and experiences" are key in changing pre-service teacher's "attitudes and beliefs about diversity" (p. 276). Garmon's six factors for changing attitudes towards diversity highlight the importance of teacher's attitudes and dispositions which influence classroom culture and the teaching/learning process.

Lastly, the theory of the importance of culture to "meaning making" is central to how teachers integrate Native issues into their curriculum and classroom practices. Since culture plays such a central role in meaning making (Agbo, 2001) its inclusion in the curriculum with culturally relevant standards will address Native American's feelings of isolation and lack of relevancy. In order to include culture in the classroom teachers need to have background knowledge of history and best practices with teaching Native students.

These three theories emphasize the importance of both a culturally sensitive curriculum and teachers who are aware of diverse populations and how this impacts the learning process. Teachers come into the profession with varying prior experiences and beliefs. Since the majority of teachers in high Native population schools are White

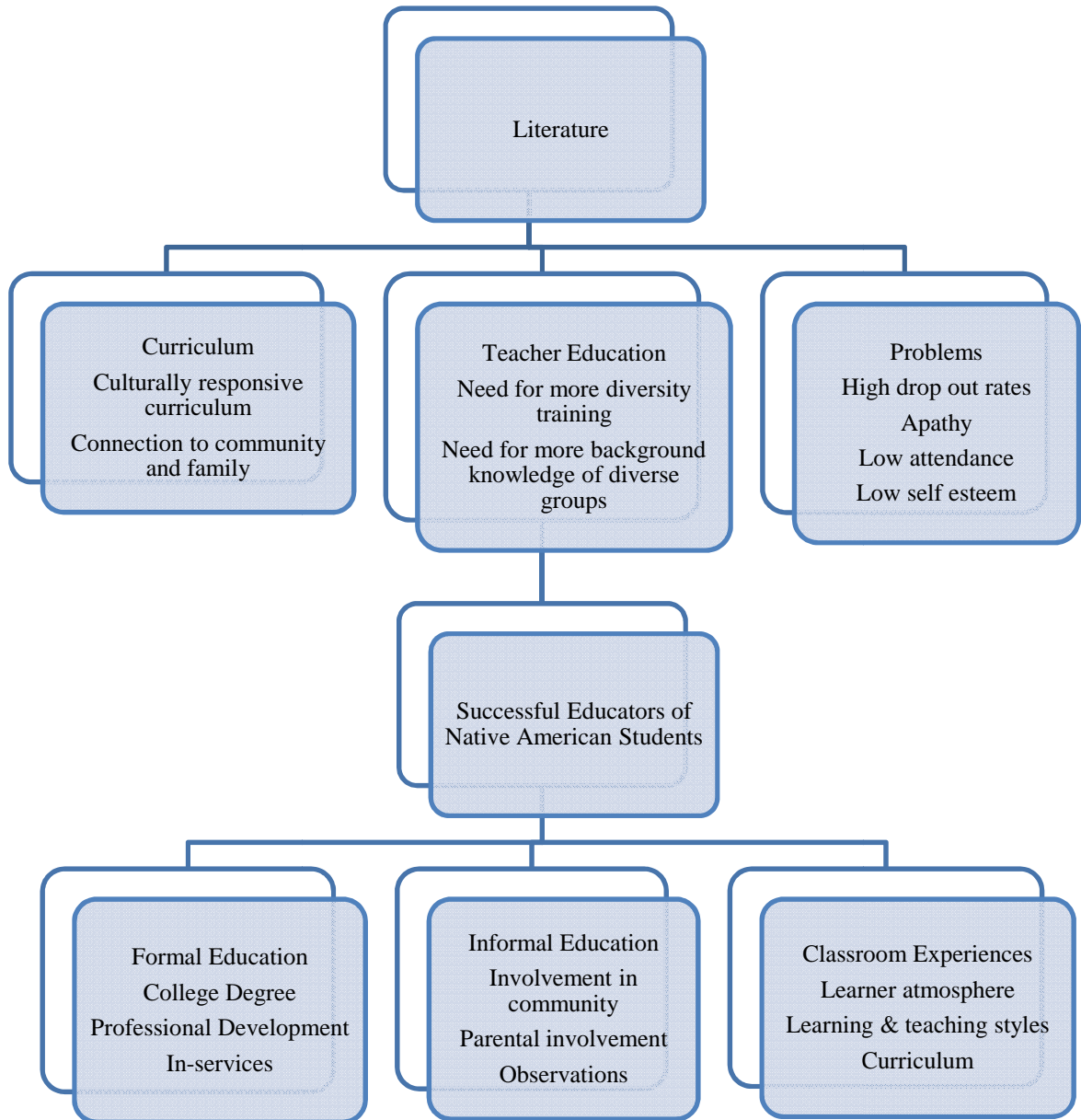
(Agbo, 2001; Hjelmseth 1972; Garmon, 2005) teacher training programs need to provide all pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively teach these students.

The literature describes numerous factors that have an impact upon the education of Native American students. At the heart of this study are the teachers identified by their principals and peers as being effective educators of Native students. Their educational histories' including formal and informal academic experiences, coupled with reflections upon classroom interactions was the basis of this research. These factors are shown graphically in Figure 1. These concepts provided the conceptual framework for this study.

Significance of the Study

With the passage of IEFA and similar legislation in states with high Native American populations, higher education institutions need to prepare pre-service teachers to address the educational needs of this unique population. Hollins and Guzman (2005) suggest we need to study effective educators of Native students to ascertain how they acquired their skills and what education led to their success. In order to improve pre-service education we must discover what effective teaching of Native Americans looks and feels like through the experiences of successful educators. This study examined the experiences of effective educators through a combination of focus group and individual in-depth interviews, coupled with written responses to an educational history questionnaire that included demographic information. With the findings of this study

Figure1. Conceptual framework consisting of literature review topics and research categories examined



instructors in pre-service teacher education programs can revise their curricula to better prepare teachers for diverse populations.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study of effective and successful K-8 teachers of Native American students. I chose the qualitative research paradigm in order to conduct an in-depth study and to learn from the participants experiences. Qualitative research provides a window into what the participants know, what they think, how they feel, and what they learned through this process. Glesne (2006) states that “qualitative studies are best at contributing to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes” (p. 29).

This multiple case study enabled the researcher to learn from these teachers’ experiences and insights in order to inform pre-service education in this area. “When the instrumental case study involves looking at several cases..., it becomes a ‘collective case study,’ and allows you to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Stake, 2000, cited in Glesne, 2006, p. 13). Qualitative research is focused upon the experience of the participants and includes their attitudes and beliefs about the incident or phenomena studied. This research lends itself to data collection methods that include observations, interviews, and document analysis.

Access to schools was gained through a gatekeeper who had personal contacts with K-8 principals and superintendents in high Native population schools. I conducted a purposeful sampling of teachers identified by their principals as being successful educators of Native Americans. Teachers were selected from schools chosen for their

high percentage of Native Americans students. The data collection methods utilized included an open ended questionnaire of teacher educational histories, focus group interviews, and individual in-depth teacher interviews.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study the following definitions were used:

1. Native American/Indian: Refers to the original or indigenous inhabitants of the Americas prior to European arrival (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, n.d.). The terms “Indian”, “Native American”, and “Native” are used interchangeably throughout this document.
2. Multicultural Education: According to Banks & Banks (1995) "Multicultural education is a field of study and an emerging discipline whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups" (p. xi).
3. Culture: According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary culture is defined as “the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations, b: the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” (2008). Oliver & Penney-Howley (1992) expand upon this definition by stating that culture “governs how people share information and knowledge, as well as how they construct meaning” (p. 1).

4. Successful Educators of Native American Students: Teachers identified by their principals and peers as being successful with Native American students.
5. Formal Education: This includes college degree and minor, any additional coursework taken, teacher in-services and training, and ongoing professional development.
6. Informal Education: These learning experiences include involvement in the community, Native mentors, parental involvement, and observations and understanding gained through personal contacts in the community in which teachers work. This may also include information gained independently by the participant such as visiting museums, reading, or watching documentaries.
7. Classroom Experiences: This includes the classroom environment, curriculum changes and enhancements, observations and interactions with Native students, teaching and learning styles, and lessons learned through their daily classroom contacts.
8. Teacher disposition: According to Garmon (2005) refers “to a person’s character traits and tendencies” (p. 276).

Limitations

The following are limitations of the study:

1. The research was conducted at a small number of K-8 schools and therefore is limited to the experiences of the teachers in those schools.

2. The study was limited in the fact the individual teachers interviewed were chosen by their principals as effective and successful educators.
3. The study was limited by the skills of the researcher to pose relevant questions, and by the willingness of the interviewees to be open and honest with their responses.
4. Due to the small sample size the researcher chose multiple data sources to triangulate the findings.
5. As with all qualitative studies, the ability to generalize the findings beyond the sample investigated is limited; however the knowledge gained here is of interest to all educators involved with improving education for Native students.
6. As the researcher, my own biases and views on the research could be a limitation due to interpreting interview responses through my own lenses. To avoid this, I journaled about my own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions during the data collection process to limit the imposition of meaning or individual bias into the research.

Delimitations

The following are delimitations of the study:

1. The teachers interviewed for the in-depth interviews are ones identified by their principals as successful educators of Native American students and participated voluntarily, so could have limited access and information from all teachers at these schools.

2. The researcher was limited in the contact with these teachers and involved one interview per participant.
3. Due to limiting the research to K-8 schools the study focused upon these grades and did not include high school teachers.

About the Researcher

I have been involved in teaching for more than 14 years with over 8 years in higher education. For over 30 years I lived in states with Native American populations. Research both formally and informally into Native American education, spirituality, and customs have informed my interest in this topic. I have conducted both qualitative and quantitative research of the current state of Native American education including views of pre-service education students' knowledge of and perceived ability to incorporate Native culture into their future curriculums. I believe that in order to improve education for Native students a change must take place in the K-12 schooling environment.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area. Before transformative models and teaching strategies can be initiated, we must first discover what effective teaching looks like and feels like from the

reflection and interpretations of successful teachers. I gained this insight from the retrospection on experience these teachers divulged.

Chapter 1 provides the reader with an introduction to this study as well as the statement of problem, purpose of the study, and the questions investigated. I have presented the conceptual framework, significance of the research, definitions, limitations, delimitations, and my background. The remainder of the study is broken into chapters that present the following: literature review; methodology; results; and conclusions. Chapter 2 presents literature detailing the following topics: history of Native American education; problems with apathy and high dropout rates; current review of teachers' formal, informal, and classroom experiences; teacher dispositions; and effective teaching strategies to improve education for this unique group of students. Chapter 3 presents methodology including the design of the study; participant selection and information; data collection and analysis procedures; and timeframe. Chapter 4 introduces the participants and defines the four main themes and 17 subthemes that emerged from the research. The final chapter, conclusions, reviews the entire study and presents recommendations and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In this country, the inclusion of culturally relevant Native American issues into school curriculums is virtually non-existent (Williams, 2005; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2001). The extent of exploring Native American culture in the classroom consists of making paper bag vests and headbands to “celebrate” Thanksgiving. Students graduating from high school know more about European rather than Native American history. Ignorance of cultural differences results in stereotypes that hurt all Americans. For Native American youth not experiencing any of their traditions and cultures in the curriculum the result is apathy and the highest dropout rates of any minority (Powers, Potthoff, Bearinger, & Resnick, 2003; Zimmerman, 2004). It is clear a change must come in order to address this pervasive problem. Montana has come to the forefront in this educational change due to the passage and funding of House Bill 528, commonly known as “Indian Education for All.”

Indian Education for All (IEFA) comes after 38 years of the following wording included in Montana’s Constitution Article X, Section 1(2): “The state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity” (Montana Indians, 2004, p.82). The passage of the law, MCA 20-1-501, clarifies the objective of the constitutional amendment of 1972. From this declaration has grown the codification of

this statement into the educational policy of the state of Montana. In 2005 Governor Brian Schweitzer and the state Legislature set aside over 4 million dollars to fund the law for the first time in its history. Not only does the law call for curriculum enhancements, but addresses the training of teachers to be aware and sensitive to the cultural differences of the Native American students in their classrooms.

Now that the law has been funded and teachers are expected to know about Indian Education for All and its subsequent standards and benchmarks, what experiences do effective educators of Native Americans identify as leading to success in the classroom? Do they credit their success to their formal education, informal education, or classroom experiences? The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to this study. The themes consist of Native American educational history, current educational issues facing Native students, and the review of effective teaching strategies and curriculum changes to reverse apathy and soaring dropout rates.

Criteria for Selecting the Literature

An effort was made to review the most current research in the field of Native American Education. Journals, articles, dissertations and thesis, national databases, and new literature were reviewed in order to gather information. Montana Office of Public

Instruction's Indian Education website was very helpful in gathering current data and learning background information on the state's tribes and history. Some of the literature reviewed was up to 30 years old, but was invaluable in the depth of information reported and used to compare to current issues that are still at the forefront of the problem of how to best teach Native American students.

Native American Educational History

Native American education has followed a very rocky path spanning from the first encounters with non-Natives to the present. Long before this continent was "discovered" Native Americans have schooled their children in the practical skills necessary to survive. These skills were taught by elders of the village in open classrooms with lots of hands-on learning. Women taught their daughters how to gather berries, nuts, plants, and tan hides. Men taught their sons the art of hunting and warfare. Artisans handed down their crafts of quillwork and pottery to the next generation. Besides skills, the elders taught the history of the tribe and passed down oral traditions, customs, and stories.

Missionaries were interested in educating Native youth since the initial contact. Mission schools were the first to set up boarding schools to educate Native Americans and by the 1870's and 1880's were the main educating force. The major change in Native education came in the late 19th century. Once Native Americans were forced onto reservations and became the wards of the government, many treaties were signed that included Indian education. Once the government started opening federal boarding schools the funds to the mission schools dwindled.

Native American education in this country from the late 1800's up to the Indian Self Determination period was based upon assimilation policies. The White settlers and instructors believed that besides Christianity conversion, education was the best way to "civilize" the indigenous peoples. The education of Native Americans in the late 1800's focused upon forced separation from cultural influences, and vocational training in boarding school settings (Bill, 1979; Agbo, 2001). The teachers in these schools believed that Native culture and tradition was a negative influence on the student's learning abilities (Brown, 1979). Other educators thought that Native American children could not succeed in school as their White counterparts (Agbo, 2001). Through the early phases of Native American education, separation from family, culture, and traditions was stressed.

As mentioned previously, Missionaries were the first to educate the majority of Native students. Once Native Americans were forced onto reservations in the late 19th century, mission schools were the primary boarding schools to educate their children. Many of the mission boarding schools were federally funded with an annual allotment limited to keeping the facilities open and running (Marr, 2004). These missions were located on the reservations to aid in tribal conversion to Christianity. Many of the mission schools were unique when it came to language. Bowker (1993) revealed that "missionary groups who had been given the responsibility of education of native youth supported a bilingual instructional policy" (p. 31). This was very different than the "English only" instruction policy stressed in all the other federal boarding schools.

In 1893 the federal government passed the “Compulsory Attendance Law for Indian children.” This law stated that Indian children on reservations must attend school or supplies and food rations were withheld from their immediate families. The law gave the reservation Indian agents the right to the following:

...prevent the issuing of rations or the furnishing of subsistence either in money or in kind to the head of any Indian family for or on account of any Indian child or children between the ages of eight and 21 years who shall not have attended school during the preceding year in accordance with such regulations (Montana Indians, 2004, p. 80).

To prevent from starving to death or the threat of jail, parents were forced to prove their children attended school. Since most of the reservations did not have schools many of these children were shipped off to federal off-reservation boarding schools all over the country.

Education of Indians in the late 1880's to the 1920's included a curriculum of assimilation. In order to “civilize” this “wild race” of people the government believed that transforming the Natives to resemble White children in looks, manners, clothing, and values was crucial. “Until 1926, Indian education was viewed as a ‘civilizing’ or ‘assimilation’ process. The ‘assimilationists’ saw the non-reservation boarding school as the best way to make young Indian children accept white men’s beliefs and value systems” (American Indian Education Foundation, 2004, p. 1). Assimilation began in the mission schools and continued in the federal boarding schools. Recognizing the number of Native American children needing an education the government realized that off-reservation boarding schools were necessary due to the poor conditions on many

reservations. Most reservations were road-less, sparsely populated, and not able to support a school and the necessary personnel.

Another major factor in the off-reservation boarding school movement was to separate the children from their relatives. Marr (2004) pointed out that “the policy makers believed, young people would be immersed in the values and practical knowledge of the dominant American society while also being kept away from any influences imparted by their traditionally-minded relatives” (p. 1). According to Mann (2004), many Native American parents had to sign a “3 year contract to not contact their child” and then these children were sent to off-reservation boarding schools across the county. The idea was the further away from their family influences, the more assimilated into the white culture. Mann continued by stating the government said that the “Indian had to die as an Indian to live like a man” (Mann, 2004). Off-reservation schools emphasized a curriculum that included Basic English and mathematics, and also taught the students a practical skill such as carpentry, blacksmith, farming, domestic service, and other vocational training.

Children in the off-reservation boarding schools were very lonely, felt isolated, and homesick. Diseases were also prevalent in boarding schools due to the lack of good medical care and cramped conditions. Many children ran away or their family members came and took them back to the reservations (Juneau, 2001). With so many children running away from off-reservation boarding schools the Indian Policy turned to building and funding federal reservation boarding and day schools. These reservation schools were funded and administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). BIA schools were

placed in an area that could maintain a settlement for teachers and school personnel. The curriculum at most of the BIA boarding and day schools “stressed farming and homemaking, English, and the three R’s. Speaking the native Indian language was commonly forbidden” (BIA, 1973, p. 55). BIA day schools were also started on reservations where there was a large enough local Native population to attend.

Due to changes in several government policies towards Native American tribes throughout the 20th century, funding to reservation schools decreased causing most schools to close. The closing of federally funded reservation schools resulted in many Native American children pouring into public schools with unique educational needs. Some governmental programs were enacted such as the Johnson O’Malley Act approved in the 1930’s which allocated funds to help educate the growing Native American population in public schools. The Johnson O’Malley funds were originally meant to be used “for supplemental education programs that identify with Indian children” (BIA, 1973, p. 47). These programs could be for counseling, hiring of Indian aids, and enrichment programs that emphasize Native cultures. Studies have revealed that the federal aid given to state public schools from 1928 to 1973 did not help the population it was targeted for (Juneau, 2001, p. 33). High dropout rates and poor attendance remained the norm for Native American students attending public schools through most of the 20th century.

Bill (1990) stated that “a significant legislative development occurred in 1965 with the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act, which gave Indians the opportunity to participate in, and to control their own programs” (p. 9) Other new laws were enacted

that gave the tribes more control over education on their reservations. This started the era of Self-Determination where some Native American tribes began to take control of the education of their children. Native Language immersion schools began opening doors on reservations and many Native educators demanded that culture be integrated in the curriculum. During the Self-Determination era, two items became very clear in improving Native American education: they need to have their culture, traditions, and language included in the curriculum; and they need to be in control of their own schools.

From the 1990's to the current era in education, Montana has stressed the importance of recognizing Native American tribes and cultures in the schools. As of 1991 the mission statements for each tribe puts an emphasis on education which includes a curriculum that reflects their own unique Native culture and traditions. Montana law makers recognize the difficulties that Native American education has encountered and also realize there are current struggles that need to be overcome.

Need for Improvement in Teacher Education

Even with the changes in Native education the statistics are still dismal. Educators are looking for ways to address the ongoing problems of apathy and high dropout rates of Native American students. Researchers in the field of Native American education have noted the high dropout rates of Native students (Powers, Potthoff, Bearinger, & Resnick, 2003; Zimmerman, 2004). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2008) in 2006, the national high school rate of Native Americans was 15% compared to 7% for White students. Jeffries & Singer (2003)

declare that comparisons to other minorities “recognized American Indian/Alaska Native students as having the highest dropout rate of all U.S. racial and ethnic groups” (p. 41). In Montana according to the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) Native Americans make up the largest ethnic group in our schools at 11.4% of the total K-12 student population. Many of the state’s school districts have over 50% Native American populations. According to the 2006 – 07 OPI statistics, Native American junior high dropout rates are six times that of White students. Similar to other national statistics the Native American high school dropout rate statewide is over 2 times the rate of White students: 5.2% Native to 2.3% White dropout rate (Montana Statewide Dropout and Graduate Report, 2008).

Educational researchers have attributed the high dropout rates to “cultural discontinuity” (Agbo, 2001; Powers et al., 2003). According to Powers et al. (2003),

Cultural discontinuity theory is based on the axiom that behavioral, communication, instructional, and curricular expectations of the school contradict and undermine those of Native youths’ families and communities. Recently, schools with high Native student enrollment have begun to address the issue of cultural discontinuity by infusing Native culture into the curriculum and instructional processes (p.24).

Cultural differences between Native American students’ home life, traditions, values and the school environment affect learning. The emphasis on the individual and competition goes directly against most Native American’s cultural understandings (Agbo, 2001; Hjelmseth, 1972; Brown, 1979; Whitbeck et al. 2001; Pewewardy, 2002). When Native students enter a classroom and do not see anything that represents their culture on the walls, in the texts, in the classroom materials, this leads to a lack of self confidence and self esteem (Whitbeck et al., 2001; Kelting-Gibson, 2006). With the lack of representation in the curriculum Agbo (2001) states, “White education does not give

American Indian children any avenue to dignity, honor and pride nor does it ensure their mutual interest, American Indian children are bound to fail in school” (p. 11). With the lack of relevance to Native American heritage or culture, this leads to an increase in dropout rates and apathy (Powers et al., 2003).

To change this trend in Native American education many educators are calling for a more culturally sensitive curriculum (Liston & Zeicher, 1996; Pewewardy, 2002; O’Neil, 1979; Agbo, 2001). The idea of “Multicultural Education” has been around since the 1960’s. Forbes (1979) commented that “‘multicultural’ means, really, many paths, many roads” (p. 4). For the Native American community, multicultural education means the return of traditions, values, and language into the teaching and learning process. Since culture plays such a central role in meaning making (Agbo, 2001) its inclusion in the curriculum with culturally relevant standards will address Native American’s feelings of isolation and lack of relevancy. Researchers agree that a more culturally relevant curriculum have increased academic success and lowered dropout rates amongst Native American students (Whitbeck et al., 2001; Powers et al., 2003; Zimmerman, 2004; Starnes, 2006). Jeffries & Singer’s (2003) findings conclude that “schools that respect and support a student’s culture demonstrate significantly better outcomes in educating American Indian and other marginalized students” (p. 53).

Culturally sensitive teachers and curriculums are a first step in changing the classroom environment to include diversity and reduce stereotypes (Starnes, 2006). Schools that respect and support their student’s culture have shown positive gains in both student achievement and lower dropout rates of Native American students (Jeffries &

Singer, 2003). Butterfield (1994) asserts that research has shown a “high correlation between educators’ sensitivity, knowledge, and application of cultural awareness information and students’ successful academic performance” (p. 3). Sleeter (1993), states that “students who are not achieving and succeeding may require bridges between their backgrounds and the schools to make the curriculum more ‘user friendly’” (p. 53). Not only do culturally sensitive curriculums have an impact upon student success, but also teachers that have been educated to work with diverse populations are another important element of a successful learning experience. Research has found that the majority of teachers in schools with high native populations are White (Agbo, 2001; Hjelmseth, 1972; Jeffries & Singer, 2003). Many have not had enough training to be able to effectively incorporate Native culture in their curriculums. Researchers agree that teachers must be aware of the cultural and value differences that will affect the educational process (Agbo, 2001; Jeffries & Singer, 2003).

In Hjelmseth’s (1972) study of teachers across Montana he concluded that “many teachers of Indian children possess little knowledge of the cultural and life style differences of the Indian learner. Because of this, teachers may develop and harbor attitudes toward the Indian learner which decrease the ultimate effectiveness of instruction” (p. 10). Teachers today still face these same issues including lack of background knowledge of Indian culture. Most teachers have an educational background that does not include Indians except for an occasional mention of a famous chief or a “massacre.” Warren (2006) reflected that “even a growing emphasis on multicultural education often overlooks Native voices and perspectives” (p. 199). With a background

in the cultural similarities and differences of the Native community, teachers are better equipped to create relationships with both the students and their parents that in turn will benefit the educational process.

As of 2005 school year there were 16,715 Indians in public schools in Montana representing 11.4% of total enrollment (Enrollment by REO, 2006). The passage of Indian Education for All law in Montana is a bold step towards a culturally sensitive curriculum for the state's Native American and non-Native Students. According to the OPI website:

Every Montanan...whether Indian or non-Indian, be encouraged to learn about the distinct and unique heritage of American Indians in a culturally responsive manner. ...all school personnel should have an understanding and awareness of Indian tribes to help them relate effectively with Indian students and parents....Every educational agency and all educational personnel will work cooperatively with Montana tribes...when providing instruction and implementing an educational goal (Indian Education for All, 2005).

Distinct IEFA standards and benchmarks have been created across many content areas including Social Studies, Reading, Literature, and Science. All of the standards and benchmarks are based upon what is called the *Seven Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians* that are the underpinnings of all IEFA materials (IEFA, 2005). The following is a listing of the *Seven Essential Understandings*:

- *Essential Understanding 1*: There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories, and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.

- *Essential Understanding 2:* There is great diversity among individual American Indians as identity is developed, defined and redefined by many entities, organizations, and people. There is a continuum of Indian identity ranging from assimilated to traditional and is unique to each individual. There is no generic American Indian.
- *Essential Understanding 3:* The ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral history beginning with their origins that are as valid as written histories. These histories pre-date the “discovery” of North America.
- *Essential Understanding 4:* Reservations are land that have been reserved by the tribes for their own use through treaties and was not “given” to them. The principle that land should be acquired from the Indians only through their consent with treaties involved three assumptions:
 - I. That both parties to treaties were sovereign powers.
 - II. That Indian tribes had some form of transferable title to the land.
 - III. That acquisition of Indian lands was solely a government matter not to be left to individual colonists.
- *Essential Understanding 5:* There were many federal policies put into place throughout American history that have impacted Indian people and shape who

they are today. Much of Indian history can be related through several major federal policy periods. Examples: Colonization Period; Treaty Period; Allotment Period; Boarding School Period; Tribal Reorganization; Termination; and Self-determination.

- *Essential Understanding 6*: History is a story and most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. Histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from an Indian perspective conflicts with what most of mainstream history tells us.
- *Essential Understanding 7*: Under the American legal system, Indian tribes have sovereign powers separate and independent from the federal and state governments. However, the extent and breadth of tribal sovereignty is not the same for each tribe (2006).

OPI is working on creating curriculum guides according to the standards to assist teachers in integrating Indian issues into their curriculum. Educators across the state are asking for teacher training to prepare their faculty to incorporate IEFA into their different subject areas. Messinger (2006) concluded that “high-quality professional development for Montana educators must be one of the top priorities if we are to implement IEFA effectively” (p. 203).

Effective Practices

Cleary & Peacock’s (1998) *Collected Wisdom* became a great resource and inspiration for my research. This book includes interviews with 60 teachers both

American Indian and non-Indian on or near reservations all across the United States. They also interviewed 50 teachers from Australia and Costa Rica that taught indigenous students. Besides interviews they observed in the schools to gain a better understanding of the issues facing both the teachers and their students. The authors interviewed experienced and inexperienced teachers; some positive about their work in these schools and others that were frustrated in their situations. After these interviews were transcribed and coded, each emerging theme became a chapter. Cleary & Peacock state that “Many American Indian people learn their way in life through stories. So in being consonant with our topic, much of our material is introduced with stories” (p. 2). Through stories that included teachers own words, the authors illustrated issues facing Native American education and revealed many effective classroom practices.

While much has been written on educational teaching practices that support diversity in the classroom, we are just beginning to share best practices with Native learners. This unique group includes an educational history that has not supported their needs in the past. While we must not stereotype the Native learner, research has found the following strategies effective in the classroom: cooperative learning; hands-on learning; oral and visual teaching techniques; and holistic approaches. These teaching strategies can enhance learning and create a classroom environment that affords success for all students.

Cooperative learning groups are an excellent way to include Native learners in an informal and flexible learning environment that is not based upon competition (Butterfield, 1994; Starnes, 2006). Competitive classrooms that focus upon individual

achievement go against many Native American cultural norms (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Agbo, 2001; Hjelmseth, 1972; Brown, 1979; Whitbeck et al. 2001; Pewewardy, 2002).

The following is a definition of this type of student group work:

Cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. Each member of a team is responsible not only for learning what is taught but also for helping teammates learn, thus creating an atmosphere of achievement (Cooperative Learning, n.d.).

Cooperative learning helps student develop their communication and social skills, and by working together to achieve goals students feel a sense of belonging and accomplishment. These types of teaching strategies are conducive to student achievement and learning regardless of ethnicity or culture.

Cleary and Peacock (1998) mention that many Native American children will not try something new until they watch the activity many times. Native students do not want to be “put on the spot” and will not try something until they are confident they can do it (Fox, in Zehr, 2007). White children will often jump in and try something several times in order to get it right, where Native students may prefer to observe longer before engaging. In the classroom teachers need to be aware of this need for feeling confident and do not force students to be involved in an activity unless they feel comfortable.

This learning by observing also may be that many Native students are highly visual learners (Starnes, 2006). Cleary & Peacock (1998) concluded that “many of their American Indian students were visual, image-driven learners” (p. 158). When the teachers noted this, they adjusted their classrooms and teaching environments to include various visuals such as maps, graphs, pictures, and outlines of subject matter. Inclusion

of the visual arts also allows Native students the opportunity to express themselves in a manner that is comfortable and more culturally relevant.

Oral learning is also a very powerful tool to utilize in classrooms with high Native populations (Starnes, 2006). Storytelling is a great way to incorporate culture into the curriculum. Cleary & Peacock (1998) noted that “teachers also believed the strong oral tradition of American Indian tribal groups remains a potent influence on the ways many of the students learn” (p. 160). This was especially true for students from more traditional Native backgrounds. Including reading aloud, group oral presentations, discussions, and storytelling in the classroom can address this type of learning strategy.

Another teaching strategy that works well with Native learners is the holistic approach where students are presented with the big picture first, before the concept is broken down into small segments (Starnes, 2006; Butterfield, 1994; Cleary & Peacock, 1998). Teachers need to assess their own learning and teaching preferences in order to determine what changes they can make to address the needs of Native students in their classrooms. Integrating culture, creative expression, cooperative and hands-on learning opportunities all aid in “bridging the gap” between traditional mainstream classrooms and Native ways of learning. Cleary & Peacock (1998) remark that “classrooms that adopt active, project-based experiential learning address learning from all angles and all learning styles” (p. 164).

Backlash to Cultural Integration

Some educators believe that too much emphasis has been on multicultural

education (Liston & Zeichner, 1996). They believe that teachers have to be sensitive to some difference in culture, but it would be ridiculous to understand the differences in every ethnic group represented in a classroom. These educators believe that we need to return to the basics. “All of this attention to the nuances of multicultural difference need not diminish the need to highlight a core set of common understanding and experience. Certainly a democratic nation needs to prepare its citizens for participation in that society” (Liston & Zeichner, 1996, p. 91). Educators and Native community members agree that although culturally relevant curriculum increases student success, the students also need to be aware of the society around them. Agbo (2001) found “that confronting two cultures, children need a level of proficiency in each culture in order to make a living in present-day American society” (p. 26).

With all the attention in the schools on the No Child Left Behind Act, many schools are returning to the basics to improve their test scores and achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP). Ben Chavis, a former principal of the American Indian Public Charter School and keynote speaker at the 2007 Indian Education Summit in South Dakota said that Indian students are better served by a return to the core academics such as math and language arts. He turned his school around from holding one of the worse academic records to the best by eliminating daily “Native talking circles” and moving cultural electives to after school programs (Zehr, 2007). Many of the attendees at the conference stated their focus upon reading, math, and after school programs focusing upon homework and tutoring skills have increased Native American student’s participation and overall test scores.

Even with Montana's new IEFA law and the push for cultural infusion into every subject, their own research includes some interesting findings. According to the Montana Statewide Dropout and Graduate Report:

Policy implications that were identified by research studies as critical to the effectiveness of dropout intervention strategies included: The choice of teachers is more important than the choice of curriculum; the high school level may be too late to begin implementing intervention strategies; and data is needed to design appropriate strategies to prevent students from dropping out (2008).

With such a high rate of Native American dropouts there is still much work to be done to address these issues.

Teachers' Educational Experiences

Formal Academic Education

There is also a call to make changes in teacher education programs to aid in the implementation of IEFA. It is the job of the Montana University system to provide training for pre-service teachers, and those in the field, in order to gain knowledge of the local tribal customs and traditions. All of the state's institutions of higher education are to include Native American Studies departments and teacher preparation programs that include Indian issues in their curriculums. A review of the curriculum for Elementary Education undergraduate programs across the state do show at minimum a requirement of either one multicultural class or a 3 credit class in Native American studies. Currently at Montana State University education students are encouraged to take classes in Native American Studies, and required to take a Multicultural Education class regardless of their major. The University of Montana offers an "American Indian Education" course which

is a “study of modern Indian education to the present; examination of Johnson O’Malley funding for Indian education; and a look at the unique needs of the Indian child” (2008, p.1).

Pre-service teachers need to be exposed to the educational history of Native Americans in order to understand the current issues facing these students. The forced assimilation practices of the past have translated to a deep distrust of the educational system that many Native Americans still harbor today (Powers et al., 2003; Pewewardy, 2002). Elona Street-Stewart, president of the National School Boards Association’s American Indian/Alaska Native caucus, states that “we should not be surprised that for most Indian families, schools aren’t a very comfortable place to be” (as cited in Dillon, 2007, p. 22). There are also many Native Americans that understand their children need education in order to succeed in today’s world. So there is this constant push and pull placed upon Native children in the educational system. The high dropout rate and apathy experienced by many Native students can be directly correlated to their unique educational history (Powers et al, 2003). This history is very important for teachers to understand and be sensitive to when dealing with Native American students and their families.

In order for teachers to be more culturally aware, institutions of higher education need to take a more active role in the dissemination of Native American history, culture, and traditions. Pewewardy’s (2002) research concluded that the “lack of understanding is not necessarily the fault of the teacher. Many teacher education programs do not provide the kind of experiences that allow prospective teachers to develop the skills necessary to

identify and address the learning styles of American Indian/Alaska Native students” (p. 24). Many universities do not include in-depth studies in Native American culture which would aid the pre-service teachers. Teachers also stated they would have liked more offerings at their universities on Native cultures to enhance their instruction (Agbo, 2004). Many stated that the university should be an active partner in collecting information about the Indian communities, inviting Native speakers, and infusing that information into teacher education classes.

Some researchers are calling for field experiences where pre-service teachers go out into diverse communities where they may teach in the future to get firsthand knowledge of these educational settings (Coballes-Vega, 1992; Butterfield, 1994). Coballes-Vega (1992), comments that “prospective teachers can benefit interacting with these students before they enter the field and while they are still able to dialogue with teacher educators” (p. 3). Most colleges of education include student teaching as part of their program of study, but these researchers are emphasizing that teachers need to be exposed to classroom diversity before they encounter it in their own classrooms.

Montana is not the only state to start implementing changes to higher education in order to graduate more effective educators of Native students. In 2007, South Dakota passed the Indian Education Act. This created a permanent Indian education office and the “law required for the first time that all teachers take a three-semester-hour course in American Indian history and culture to become certified to teach in the state” (Zehr, 2007, p. 3).

With the passage of IEFA in Montana teachers are more aware of the issues of Native American education. Not only does the law call for curriculum enhancements, but addresses the training of teachers to be aware and sensitive to the cultural differences of Native American students in their classrooms. In order to be sensitive to cultural differences many teachers need to face up to their own deeply held beliefs about equality and race. Pewewardy & Hammer (2003), state that “overcoming ethnocentric outlooks is hard work and must be viewed as an ongoing process” (p. 2). They recommend teachers be self-reflective practitioners that constantly evaluate, study, and revise their teaching strategies in order to create opportunities for all students to succeed. Reflecting upon issues of ethnicity and race can be a difficult issue to address in the classroom, but efforts need to be taken in order to tackle this element of education which all teachers will have to reflect upon. Cross (2001) reminds us that “doing something about the dismal state of Indian education requires that we confront deeply embedded historic, cultural, and legal biases. These biases have long frustrated attempts to reform Indian education” (as cited in Juneau, p. 5).

In addition to teachers addressing their own biases, they will have to find ways to integrate Indian issues into all their subject areas. As mentioned previously, distinct IEFA standards and benchmarks created across many content areas, are based upon the *Seven Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians* that are the underpinnings of all IEFA materials (Indian Education for All, 2005). OPI is currently creating curriculum guides aligned to the IEFA standards to assist teachers in integrating Indian

issues into their curriculum. A component of the state standards is that each school must report annually on how their teachers are satisfying IEFA standards.

Included in Montana's IEFA Law are the priorities and expectations in place for the role of higher education in implementation and dissemination of information. In *An academic plan for Indian Education for All for the Montana University System* (2007) priority number 1 states the following:

All teacher education programs in the Montana University System have an obligation to ensure that their pre-service teachers have acquired the knowledge, skills and dispositions to meet the statutory mandate. At a minimum, that obligation includes instruction in the seven essential understandings, developed by the Office of Public Instruction (OPI), so that pre-service candidates are prepared to incorporate that material appropriately into their classrooms or their work in the K-12 system (Swaney).

In order for pre-service teachers to integrate appropriate cultural topics into their curriculum they require the background knowledge and understanding of this concept. Sandra Fox, an educational consultant, emphasizes that "the injection of culture brings a reference point, a familiar foundation" (as quoted in Dillon, 2007, p. 25). Fox continues to state that culturally infused curriculums make learning more relevant by allowing Native students the ability to relate educational content to their everyday lives.

Informal Academic Education

Much of the research has focused upon the formal education of pre-service teachers and professional development courses for teachers in the field to address the needs of Native learners. Many of the new researchers who have had experience in classrooms with high Native populations have expressed informal academic learnings

that have contributed to their success (Starnes, 2006; Cleary & Peacock, 1998). These learning experiences include going out into the communities in which one teaches to find resources. According to the *National Indian Education Study:2005* by the NCES in 2006, the most common informal academic resources reported by teachers of Native American students were “living and working in the community and teachers’ own personal or family backgrounds and experiences” (p. 47). Being involved in the community, going to a basketball game or community event, will inform teachers of the issues, values, and culture in which they teach.

Starnes (2006) urges teachers to find Native mentors within their own schools to help bridge the cultural gap. She writes that this is not an easy thing to do and takes time and patience. The right mentor will enlighten the teacher about the community and culture, inform their teaching, and aid the infusion of appropriate cultural traditions into the classroom. Other resources include tribal elders who can come in and share stories and knowledge with your students.

Teachers need to inform themselves regarding the tribal histories and backgrounds of the students they service (Starnes, 2006; Dillon, 2007). There is no generic tribe or cultural history; they are all unique and different. Teachers should learn about the community, tribal government, and key leaders in the tribe. Through culturally appropriate websites, books, and courses teachers can increase their knowledge to transfer to classroom activities and curriculum enhancements.

Many of the researchers have noted that bringing community resources, namely people, into the classroom is invaluable. Agbo (2004) says that elders are a great

resource for not only storytelling, but also for gathering information for reports. The inclusion of Native craftspeople to teach beadwork, quillwork, and traditional arts and crafts is also another benefit of reaching out to the community and making school relevant to student's home life. Parental involvement is a big factor in engaging students in their schoolwork and increasing motivation and self-esteem (Oliver & Penney-Howley, 1992; Coballes-Vega, 1992; Butterfield, 1994). Oliver & Penney-Howley (1992), state that "cultivating links between home and school also proved essential" (p. 3). Parents are an invaluable source of knowledge and help in the classroom. Their presence in the classroom creates a feeling of inclusion and importance in the educational process.

Some schools are infusing Native languages into their classrooms in order to connect to the community and their students. Many Indian tribes have almost totally lost their Native language with just a few elders in the community who still speak it. Cleary & Peacock (1998) caution that "tribal language will survive only if it is taught to children and if there is a natural use for it" (p. 134). Other tribes are experiencing a reemergence of Native language. One of these success stories is the Piegan Institute's Nizipuhwahsin School which opened in 1995 in Browning, Montana on the Blackfeet Reservation. This school is a Language Immersion school where students learn all their subjects in the Blackfoot tongue; Piegan. The curriculum of the elementary and middle school is based upon current "research that shows academic advantages for children who speak two languages" (Cameron, 2004, p. 5). It is estimated that out of a tribe of 15,000 only "500 to 600 Blackfeet speak the Piegan language fluently" (Ivanova, 2002, p. 2). Language

immersion schools are a bold statement that culture and the survival of tribal languages are very important to Native Americans.

Teachers learn informally through experiences outside the classroom which inform how they teach. Whether it is attending local events, finding a mentor, or bringing community members into the classroom to share their knowledge and language, all of these factors will impact learning. According to the literature, bridging the gap between Native students home, community, and school will create an inviting atmosphere where students feel included and recognized.

Classroom Experiences

Some of the most intense and long lasting lessons are those teachers experience in their own classrooms through student involvement. Bobby Ann Starnes, an 18 year veteran of teaching found out she had a lot to learn about Native American students:

I thought I knew enough to teach Indian children. I was wrong, and I learned new lessons every day, most of them hard, ego-wounding lessons. Of all I learned in those years, perhaps two facts are most important. The first is how very little we know about the ways Native American children learn. We don't recognize the chasm that exists between their needs and our traditionally accepted curricula and methods. The second is how difficult it is for even the most skilled and dedicated white teachers to teach well when we know so little about the history, culture, and communities in which we teach (2006, p. 385).

Starnes (2006) urges educators to not over generalize or stereotype Native learners but has stated there are three main teaching strategies that work well in classrooms with high Native populations. These teaching strategies include a classroom that utilizes active hands-on experiences, flexible and informal learning environments, and one that values and includes the student's culture and Native identity.

Cleary & Peacock (1998) recall an experience an Art teacher had at his school regarding symbols. Some of his students wanted to put a snake on their clay pots because of its symbolism to their tribe. Another student in his class after looking at some magazines decided to put a cobra on his pot. When the student brought the pot home his parents were so enraged they wanted to have the teacher fired, and had to hire a medicine man to destroy the pot and the evil it brought. "So now I don't allow snakes on anything no matter what clan or tribe I think the students is from. For one clan the snakes are okay, but for another tribe it's a big no no. So it's very easy to degrade or insult, even when you're not trying to" (p. 7). These experiences are learned on the job, through daily interactions with students and parents.

Teacher Disposition

As stated above that the choice of the teacher is more important than the curriculum, it raises the question of what type of teacher does well in a multicultural classroom. Teacher dispositions go beyond curriculum enhancements and impact everyday interactions with students. Garmon (2005) states that a teacher's disposition, defined as "a person's character traits and tendencies" (p. 276), and experiences have a profound effect upon their attitudes towards diversity. In Garmon's (2005) research on how multicultural courses affect pre-service teachers' attitudes, he found that there are several key factors to changing these students' view of diversity.

It is important to realize that a person's prior experiences, emotions, and attitudes affect the learning and teaching process. Garmon's (2005) study found that those pre-service teachers who were open and receptive to multicultural education had certain

common disposition traits and prior experiences. Garmon (2005) stated the “dispositional factors are openness, self-awareness/self-reflectiveness, and commitment to social justice. The experiential factors are intercultural experiences, educational experiences, and support group experiences” (p. 276). When teachers are open to new ideas and viewpoints they can see the world through another’s eyes which will aid them when teaching in a diverse classroom. Being aware of one’s own beliefs, long held assumptions, and reflecting upon these ideas will allow a teacher more insight into their student’s views and attitudes. “Regular reflection on one’s teaching is considered an essential practice for teachers, and it is equally important in developing multicultural knowledge and sensitivity” (Garmon, 2005, p. 278). Lastly, a commitment to social justice where teachers act as a change agent to improve student achievement through their belief in equality was noted as an important disposition in the study.

Prior experience is a major aspect in how a prospective teacher views multicultural education. Intercultural experiences can be either a positive or negative influence upon their views on diversity. According to Garmon (2005), teacher education programs need to offer their students many opportunities for positive intercultural experiences both in the classroom and in the field. Garmon also suggests that support groups are very important to offering a safe environment where prospective teachers can discuss their views and investigate diversity in a protected and accepting environment. Support groups are very important for personal learning and growth. The experience factor cannot be understated with Garmon (2005) citing that “teacher candidates with

considerable intercultural experience are more likely to develop positive attitudes and beliefs about diversity than those with little or no experience” (p. 280).

Teacher attitudes towards diversity may also stem from their feelings of self-efficacy. Albert Bandura coined the term self-efficacy which is one’s “judgment of capability to perform a task or engage in an activity” (Pajares, 2000, p. 8). Teachers who are confident in their ability to teach are more prone to take risks in order to make a change that will aid their students’ academic abilities. Teaching diverse students can be difficult and if the teacher does not really believe that altering the curriculum will make a change, they may not take that risk. Pajares (2000) reflects upon Bandura’s theory stating “unless people believe that they can bring about desired outcomes by their actions they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (p. 4). Teacher attitudes towards diversity and transformative educational experiences greatly impact their teaching and classrooms.

Chapter Summary

The literature review highlighted the challenges in education regarding Native American students. The historical content reviewed emphasizes the unique academic history of Native Americans which influence education today. Researchers are calling for a change to existing curriculums in order to reach all students and reduce apathy and dropout rates of Native Americans. These changes need to start at the beginning, at the university level, so new teachers entering the field can make an impact.

The literature reviewed was a mixture of quantitative and qualitative studies. Of all the literature reviewed, Cleary & Peacock’s (1998) qualitative study of over 60

teachers involved in teaching Native American students focused upon the teachers' own experiences. This research told their stories through interviews that included personal accounts of both the teachers' successes and their failures. These accounts have influenced my choice of a qualitative study focusing upon teacher's own experiences. Only through the reflections of teachers identified as successful educators of Native Americans, can one understand how they have achieved this recognition. What experiences do they believe have led them to being effective educators? What are their formal and informal educational histories? What classroom practices do they perceive as making an impact upon their success? These are the questions I set out to explore in my study. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area.

Chapter 2 presented the literature concerning the state of education for Native American students, suggestions for change, and effective teaching strategies. Chapter 3 will present methods used to collect and analyze data for this qualitative study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area. Before instructors of pre-service teachers can create a model of effectual teaching strategies for Native American students, we need to understand what successful teaching is from the reflections of effective teachers in the field. Their experiences and reflection on practice can inform pre-service education.

The focus of this study was to understand the experiences of educators identified as being effective with Native learners. In order to understand this phenomenon, these teachers participated in individual in-depth interviews that included their reflections upon education and the Native learner. As these teachers reflected upon their experiences what do they perceive as attributing to their success? Was it their formal education, informal education, or classroom experiences and things they learn daily from their students? These are the questions I investigated in this multiple case study.

Design of the Study

People view the world around them in differing ways. Some see the world in absolutes: black and white; right and wrong. Others see varying shades of gray, and are

drawn to more in-depth understanding of complex issues and situations. Qualitative researchers want to investigate those gray areas and try to make sense of phenomena from the participant's views, feelings, and reflections. Glesne (2006) writes that "qualitative research methods are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved" (p. 4). This is why I chose the qualitative research design in order to conduct my investigation.

The qualitative methodology utilized for this research was a multiple case study. Creswell (2007) declares "case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system" (p. 73). The objective of case study research is to understand a matter or issue by investigating through the use of multiple sources such as interviews, observations and document analysis. Creswell continues by stating the case study methodology is a good choice "when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases" (p. 74).

While investigating these case studies I utilized a phenomenological approach to my research. Phenomenology is the study of an event or phenomena from the participant's viewpoint. The researcher must be willing to set aside any preconceived notions or assumptions of the subject studied and approach the research with an open mind and willingness to learn from the participants. The first thing a researcher needs to do in order to truly understand the experience is to commit to experiencing the phenomenon up close and personal. Patton states that this type of inquiry "leads to the importance of participant observation and in-depth interviewing" (p. 106). Through both

focus group and in-depth interviews coupled with recording my thoughts and perceptions I described these educators', whom I consider the experts, views on successful and effective teaching of Native American students.

Participant Selection, Criterion, and Site Selection

Patton (2002) writes that one major difference between quantitative and qualitative research is the use of purposeful sampling. "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ($N = 1$) selected *purposefully*" (p. 230). This research was focused specifically upon educators in K-8 schools in Montana that are identified as effective teachers of Native students. With this in mind my criteria for selecting the research sites were schools with high Native American populations located on Indian reservations in Montana that were willing to participate in this study.

I began my selection process by researching schools that had high Native American populations according to state records. I then utilized a gatekeeper who was familiar with high Native population schools, and had a personal relationship with both principals and superintendents to recommend my research and gain entry into their schools. After the superintendent expressed interest in my study, I engaged in a personal phone call followed up with an email detailing my study and what I was interested in doing. I also attached my questions so they were aware of what I would be asking the teachers.

Once my research was accepted the superintendent contacted the principals to make them aware of my approval to enter their schools. I then followed up with personal phone calls and emails to each principal. For those who agreed to identify successful teachers that I could interview, I began with a school visit to meet with the principals and discuss my research in person. After discussing my study and letting them know what I wanted to do at their school the principals identified teachers for me to interview, and set a date for a whole group focus interview during a staff meeting. These series of interviews took place over the spring of 2010.

I then followed through with the teachers at each school either in person during the principal visit, or by email. Each principal set up the individual interviews on either the same day as the focus group meeting, or a day adjacent to it so I only had to make one more trip to each school. As I followed up on a time to interview each of the teachers, I again explained my research so they had an idea what the interview would entail. All of the interviews took place during teacher's prep time in their own classrooms, or on the school grounds.

The schools visited were all located on Indian reservations with a 90 to 100% Native American student body representing a few different tribes. All of the schools were either elementary or K-8 grade levels. The research sites were small rural schools with student body populations ranging from 100 to 150. Some of the schools had up to 90% of their students bused in from the surrounding areas. One of the schools had almost a 50% Native American faculty and staff, to another school with less than 10% Native. The emphasis of the schools visited ranged from focusing upon tribal culture and

its integration in every subject, to a heavy focus upon academics and attendance. All of the schools had one thing in common; they were invested in a quality education for their students.

Participant Demographics

The interviews took place at three schools and included 32 teachers and staff members. I will firstly discuss the entire group of interviewees which includes both the focus group participants and the individual interviewees. 90% of the participants were female with roughly two thirds of them originally from the state of Montana. The majority had an elementary education degree with the minority attaining secondary education degrees. The age breakdown is the following: 22% between 20 – 30 years of age; 9% between 31 – 40 years of age; 41% between 41 – 50 years of age; and the remaining 28% aged 51 or older. The majority of the participants were between 41 to 50 years of age. Interviewees ranged from first year teachers to a veteran of 35 years in the profession. The norm was 11 years teaching in general, with an average of 7 years teaching at the school they were in. 38% had attained or are currently working on an advanced degree. Lastly, of the group interviewed 63% had either Indian Education for All training or some professional development classes that dealt with Native American issues and education.

The individual interviewees are summarized in Table 1 below. As noted in the chart, the years of teaching range from four on up to fourteen with almost nine years the average. All but one of the participants were from Montana and 50% of them are

working on or already have an advanced degree. Two thirds of the individual interviewees teach at the elementary school level having obtained their elementary education degrees. One third of the teachers have never had any Indian Education for All training or professional development classes that dealt with Native American issues and education.

Table 1. Demographics of Individual Interviewees

Adv. Degree or in process	In/Out State	Education: Bachelor Degree	Prof. Dev. & or IEFA	Grades Taught	Age	Years teaching
No	In	Secondary	Yes	5 - 8	41-60	6
Yes	Out	Secondary	Yes	5 - 8	41-60	14
Yes	In	Elementary	Yes	K-4	41-60	13
No	In	Elementary	No	K-4	20-40	4
No	In	Elementary	Yes	K-4	20-40	4
Yes	In	Elementary	No	K-4	20-40	12

Instrumentation

Each interview session began with handing out the Informed Consent form (Appendix D) and reviewing it with the participants. After they agreed to participate and signed the form, we proceeded with the interviews. An interview protocol (Appendix A) was utilized to guide the individual in-depth interviews but allowed me the latitude to

follow through on certain themes the participants revealed to me. The focus group interview guide (Appendix C) was utilized for the whole group meetings and included more general questions addressed to all teachers and staff. Both interview protocols were reviewed and revised by my committee members. I then met with a teacher who had taught at a high native population school to review my questions. I was very interested in finding out from this former teacher if my questions would elicit the information I wanted for my study. We worked together to revise the questions and make sure they were relevant. The interview process on both the individual and focus groups began with an open ended demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) that I used to gather information on teacher education and background information.

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative data collection and analysis procedures afford the reader in-depth rich descriptions of the researcher's findings. To accomplish this I collected three different sources of data; individual interviews, focus group interviews, and a demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to record demographic information and educational history. For the interviews I gave the participants the Informed Consent form (Appendix D) at the beginning of the process which I read over and reminded them that their participation is voluntary. Before beginning the data collection process the Informed Consent form was submitted and approved by my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee. I informed the participants that they may choose to end the interview or decline to answer any questions. I insured their confidentiality by not

using their real names and omitting any references that could uniquely identify them. The interviews took place either in the teacher's classrooms or for the focus group interviews in the school library. All interviews were recorded at the teacher's permission in order to be transcribed later. An interview protocol was used to guide the interview but allowed both the participant and myself latitude to investigate areas of interest. I personally transcribed each interview afterwards and noted my thoughts and perceptions in brackets to delineate the interviewee's words and my insights during the interview.

Once the interviews were transcribed I sent each individual interviewee a summary of my findings for member checking. Each participant was given the chance to review the findings, add any other thoughts, and revise any statements or ideas to make sure I was correct with my conclusions. The respondents agreed the summaries were accurate, with some including additional information or insights.

Verification/Trustworthiness

I verified my findings by collecting a few different types of data. The use of multiple data collection called "triangulation" increases the trustworthiness of data (Glesne, 2006, Patton, 2002). I used the open ended questionnaire to collect information on demographics and educational histories. The individual interviews expanded upon the questionnaire items in order to learn from these participants' reflection upon their practice. Focus Group interviews with all the teachers added additional information on the topic of teaching Native Americans. These three types of data collection methods support the triangulation of data that adds to its trustworthiness.

I maintained a journal on my own thoughts throughout the data collection and analysis process to make sure I kept my own biases out of the research. My gatekeeper who aided me in gaining access to the schools was involved in a peer review of my findings to make sure I am interpreting the data accurately and to add their knowledge and insights. Member checking verified that what I had recorded accurately reflected what the participant relayed to me. The collection of data from multiple schools added to the verification of findings. All of these procedures increased the trustworthiness and verification of my findings.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned” (Glesne, 2006, p. 147). To make sense of all my data collected I looked for patterns and themes. I transcribed each of the interviews and then looked for common themes and quotes that described these themes in the participant’s own words. The themes were then color coded and grouped under common categories.

The process of coding involves reading and rereading over all the data collected and grouping it under common themes, categories, and sub categories. Glesne (2006) states that “by putting like-minded pieces together into data clumps, you create an organizational framework” (p. 152). My analysis process included the use of a concept map and visual representations of each theme noted. I created a concept map using the color coded themes mentioned above. Then each emergent theme was grouped with each

of the research questions in order to discover those answers. In addition to the research questions I also had other categories that emerged from the data. Each category was arranged on color coded poster boards with corresponding participant's quotes for a visual representation of the data. Once completed, these categories were compiled and presented in Chapter 4; the findings.

I began my data analysis by transcribing all of the interviews. The interview guides for both the individual and focus groups followed a distinct pattern which covered each one of my research questions. With this interview structure I was able to see the emerging subthemes as I progressed through the transcription process. Once completed I looked for the subtheme threads and used colored markers to highlight the participants' words that went along with those subthemes and created the concept map and color coded poster boards. On the computer I compiled all of the participant quotes under each of the subthemes and summarized the findings pulling out the best quotes that exemplified each theme.

Each one of the instruments added to the data collected and was used to cross reference my findings. The demographic questionnaires described the participants and aided my search for commonalities in educational histories. The individual in-depth interviews afforded the participants the time to ponder each question and to share their experiences and perceptions in a personal one-on-one conversation. The focus group interviews added another dimension to the data collection process by hearing the voices, experiences, and ideas of all the teachers and staff in the schools. All of the findings were compared to the literature review to look for commonalities and differences.

With this analysis process I have described the experiences of my participants. Patton (2002) reflects that “phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (p. 482). It is this “essence” that I set out to discover, analyze, and create meaning for myself and my readers.

Timeframe

The entire process from proposal acceptance to final draft of my dissertation took two years. My doctoral committee approved my proposal with some modification during the spring of 2009. Acceptance and entry into the schools took a couple of months, beginning in November 2009 with final approval in January 2010. Before I could begin data collection my Informed Consent form and research had to be approved by my university IRB committee. This final acceptance came in January 2010 at the same time I was given permission to conduct my research at the schools. Onsite visits with principals took place in late January and early February immediately following my research approval. Data collection began spring 2010, with monthly school visits from February through April 2010. Transcription took place over summer & fall 2010. Data analysis was completed January 2011.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native

American students in the K-8 environment which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area. Chapter 3 presented information concerning the design of the study, participant demographics, sampling procedures, and the qualitative methods that were utilized to collect and analyze the data.

Chapter 4 will present the results of the study, describe the phenomenon researched, define the themes, and compare the findings to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area. The focus of this study included interviews at three separate elementary schools located on two reservations and servicing multiple tribes. These results of these three case studies were combined to present a full picture of the experiences of teachers of Native American students. I wanted to know how these teachers became successful: was it their formal education; informal education; or everyday classroom experiences that they attribute to their effectiveness with this unique population.

Participants

In order to investigate my research questions I conducted individual and whole staff focus group interviews, along with collecting demographic information through the use of a written questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire was used to compare back to the transcripts of the interviews, and also to create a spreadsheet of participant data.

Individual Interviewees

The individual interviews included six teachers identified by their principals as being successful and effective Native American educators. This group of mostly female teachers ranged in age from middle twenties up to late forties. Over 80% were born and raised in Montana and half of the interviewees grew up either on a reservation or adjacent to one. 67% had an Elementary Education degree and three of the teachers had already attained an upper level degree or working towards one. Together these teachers represented 53 combined years of teaching with 96% of those years in high Native population schools.

These interviews were longer in duration than the focus group sessions and more in-depth about the topics I was interested in. Each interview took place either in the teacher's classroom or in another room on site. The majority of these teachers were non-Native, but not all of them. This afforded me the opportunity to include another perspective to my questions for a richer view of the entire phenomenon studied. One thing all of these teachers had in common was an unwavering passion for teaching and a love for the students they taught. Their passion and dedication was so inspiring to me I considered giving up my current life to join their world which included such unique and rich cultures, in order to work side by side to improve education for Native Americans. I left every interview session feeling privileged that these teachers were willing to open up their lives and share their distinctive perspectives on teaching with me.

Focus Group Interviewees

The focus group interviews included all of the teachers at two of the case study sites and incorporated more general questions from my research. Each focus group interview took place in the school library after school. These interviews gave me the chance to hear the views of all the teachers. The focus group interviews included 26 teachers and staff members. Of the 26, twelve were Native American and represented 46% of those interviewed. The participants were 92% female and 17 of the 26 were born and raised in Montana.

With such a rich variety of participants I heard all sorts of wonderful tribal specific stories which I cannot include because interviewees may become identifiable. I also recorded some unique and very important information from a Native point of view which I have presented throughout the findings.

Reporting of Results

The results of the study are presented below in an outline form so the reader can view each of the themes and subthemes that came out of the data analysis. The first main theme arose out of two unique questions I only asked the individual interviewees identified by their principals as being effective and successful teachers of Native Americans. The next three themes centered on the study's research questions. Each one of the research questions became a main theme and after analyzing the data and putting like minded quotes from the interviews in categories, the subthemes emerged. Due to my focus on the participants as "experts" I have presented the reader with various

interviewees' quotes that illustrate and add depth to each one of the subthemes. My goal is to give a voice to my participants' views and allow that voice to be heard in the research results.

- I. Effective and Successful Educators of Native American Students
 - a. Why were you identified?
 - b. How became successful?
- II. Formal Education
 - a. K-12 education
 - b. College education
 - c. Professional development
- III. Informal Education
 - a. Community involvement
 - b. Parental involvement and contact
 - c. Native mentors
 - d. Elders and community members utilized in the classroom
 - e. Native language role in the classroom
- IV. Classroom Experiences
 - a. Poverty
 - b. Cultural differences
 - c. Trust/bonds/relationships
 - d. Transiency
 - e. Language barriers

- f. Teaching strategies
- g. Native learning styles

Effective and Successful Educators of Native American Students

When I began my individual interviews I asked the participants two unique questions that had each teacher evaluate why they were chosen, and how they became successful. These answers will allow the reader an understanding of their self perception and why they feel they were identified as effective and successful teachers of Native American students.

Effective Educators: Theme 1: Why were you identified?

When I began my individual interviews with teachers identified by their principals, the first question was the following: “Why do you think your principal has identified you as being an effective and successful teacher of Native American students?” The answers ranged from improving test scores, to personal relationships, to having high expectations for their students. All of the teachers though had one thing in common. They were committed to education and improving the lives of their students.

Many of the teachers interviewed discussed improving their students test scores as a reason their principal had me visit with them:

I have proven test scores which have become very important to our school district. Over last year’s class out of 15 kids I had nine in the 90th percentile both in reading and math. So I think that has a lot to do with it.

One interviewee stated that every year when they take the national standardized test “on average I have brought each year my kids up 1, over 1 grade level.”

Another recanted how beneficial it was to teach various grade levels so she had “a good feel of where they need to head.” A participant felt they were identified by their longevity and knowledge of the school:

I think I have a broad knowledge of different things. Through the years at [school] I have been on just about every committee. Retention committees, those kind of things. So I have kind of a vast knowledge of where [school] has been, where we are now, and hopefully where we are headed.

Some of the teachers also stated that they had good rapport with both their students and their parents. Relationships came up a lot in the research. Not only creating good relationships, but also maintaining those relationships. One teacher shared her experiences with parents:

I have a good relationship with all of my parents each year. I keep in contact with them quite a bit, so I am constantly talking to them and letting them know what we are working on or what I would ask them to work on.

Another felt they were identified for their relationship with the students:

Probably because I am able to have a good rapport with the kids. I try to get through the whole curriculum, and I have had pretty good success teaching Native American kids....You know, it is still everyday in the classroom working with kids. Basically that is why [principal] identified me.

A good relationship with coworkers and staff was also noted as a reason they were identified. One teacher reminisced about when she first started there and taught alongside the current principal. “I felt that at that time we both were

having a lot of success teaching reading to the early grades.” Those successes and the close personal relationship she built with her fellow teachers was why she felt she was identified.

All of the teachers are interested in expanding their education through professional development opportunities, or advanced degrees. One teacher mentioned “I also organized a lot of professional development for teachers and I think that is another reason [principal] would say that I have good experience.” Another stated “I am constantly trying to better myself, my education....I am always trying to find out more about...different cultural things. I am kind of an outspoken type of person so if I do not understand something I will just ask you.”

Lastly, a commitment to high standards and a passion for the job is why these teachers felt their principals identified them. “Well, I guess I really do have high standards for all my kids and I lay that out for everyone. I demand a lot from my kids and I let my parents know that I demand this.” Another commented the following:

I think that children are our future, and when I am older these are the people that are going to be taking care of things in the world that have to do with me. So I just take my job very serious. So I think that is just relating to the children and just...wanting to better myself education wise.

All of these teachers had one thing in common; they were passionate about their jobs.

Effective Educators: Theme 2: How became successful?

One of the other questions I asked my individual interviewees was “How did you get to be successful with teaching Native American students?” The answers here

centered on relationships, connecting prior knowledge to the curriculum, and getting to know the culture. As mentioned previously, relationships are a key component of an effective and successful educator working with Native American students and their families:

A lot of it is my relationship with my families and my relationships with my students. I think in order to teach a child you have to get to know them and have a bond with them. And in order to teach a child you must have a bond with their parents. Because as much as we say it doesn't happen, a child hears what their parents say and the parents are going to tell their kids if you are good or not good, and it will wear off on how they feel about you and what their child learns from you. If the parent doesn't like you, the kid is not going to learn as much from you. You know, it's going to cause a relationship friction I guess I would say. And by having a good strong quality relationship with all my families, it helps me to teach my kids because then they are more open to work with me.

One of the interviewees brought up the relationship she has with a Native American aid in her classroom. When she does not understand something she feels comfortable asking her aid "why is someone doing this? And she is not judgmental, like oh here is a lady who doesn't get it. And she explains it to me; I think that is probably the most helpful thing right there." Respect also emerged when discussing relationships:

I think it is a matter of really having respect for students and their families and understanding where they are coming from and trying to make a connection. That is a great question. I think it really is respect, and understanding, and developing relationships with people. I think if you cannot do that you better move on. I do think the relationship piece is just so important, not just with parents and students, but with your co-workers as well. Yea, but I think, definitely relationships are the key.

Several of the teachers mentioned how important it is to integrate culture and prior knowledge into their curriculum. They achieved this integration by getting to know their

students outside the classroom. Whether that is sitting down and eating lunch with their students, or seeing them at sporting or community events. Observing their students in different social settings in order to learn more about them, find out their interests and what sparks them. These teachers would then bring that insight into the classroom to connect to whatever subject they taught:

Connecting and relevance, kind of a constructivist approach. Finding out the knowledge they have and build on it. You know, even now I spend a lot of time in the lunchroom or outside with the kids because that is when you find out “Hey what did you do this weekend” or what they are into outside of school, and those are the kind of things that you...build on.

Lot of trial and error, a lot of coming to the realization that even though these kids have some reading issues, even though they may come to us a couple grade levels behind, they have a rich wealth of knowledge either cultural or just social, and they bring that with them to the classroom. And figuring out how to tie that stuff in with teaching...is kind of what made me a better teacher. Learning about the culture or what makes the kids tick and fitting that in with what [subject] I would be doing.

Four of the six teachers shared stories with me regarding cultural norms and values that are very important to know up front so you do not offend anyone. One of the cultural norms has to do with relationships within the family and extended family. There are some members of the family that cannot talk to other members. So when this teacher was trying to pass on messages to family members, they were never delivered:

They lived in the same house and never talked to each other. Yes, and so you know, she would ask how her grandson was doing and I would talk ... and I never knew things were not being passed on between the two of them. I would say, “Well could you let him know,” and nothing was ever said to me at first and I just assumed we were having this open communication relationship...Finally someone just said to me “well you know I am not supposed to be talking with [them]” and this is months down the road...Yea, and just things like that, and me being the kind of

personality I [said] “Well why?” You know, it is just because. So I think it is just getting to know the culture would be overall the biggest thing.

I come from a family that we are just very open and hugs here and so that was just very interesting. And coming from a culture where a lot of folks are related here, and this person cannot talk to this person. It just kind of makes for, you know, you have to find out who can’t talk to who. I just made a lot of assumptions, and then I go “Why not?” And that is very rude and disrespectful until it is explained to me.

This teacher said that getting to know the culture was their biggest challenge.

Learning about the cultural norms to avoid offending anyone was a common theme amongst all of these interviewees. They all though made an effort to learn, and this understanding and respect for their students and families is why they felt they were chosen as effective educators.

Formal Education

For the sake of this study, I defined formal education as any academic educational experiences such as college education, teacher in-services, and professional development classes that informed these teachers’ practice. The research question that guided this section of inquiry is the following: What is the formal educational (academic) history of successful educators of Native American students? As I conducted my research and created the individual interview protocols I discovered that discussing teacher’s K-12 educational experiences also informed the study so I included this as a section of inquiry.

Formal Education: Theme 1: K-12 Education

During the individual interviews I asked questions directed at investigating the teachers’ K-12 experiences. These questions focused upon the communities they grew

up in and what experiences they had with Native Americans. I also asked them all to remember back to their K-12 education and how Native Americans were depicted in their curriculums.

The teachers interviewed were split down the middle concerning their experiences growing up with Native Americans. Some grew up near reservations, or were part to whole blooded Native American. “I grew up with a lot of Indians. And I thought I knew a lot of Indian people, and I did, but when you actually live on the reservation and work with reservation kids you are like, I did not know anyone, did not know anything.” This same teacher reflected on growing up with Native friends and that the lifestyle was so different than her own. She stated that there were four in her family and she had her own bedroom, and that was all that lived there; just her immediate family. This was in stark contrast to her Native friend’s house. “I would go to my friend’s house and they would be on the couch and grandma and grandpa have a bedroom, and mom and dad have a bedroom, and there is typical people coming in and out....” These experiences taught her some lessons about the culture and gave her an inside understanding to the lifestyle.

Other interviewees had varying degrees of contact with Native Americans from absolutely no contact to hardly any, and some even grew up in communities that were prejudiced against Indians. One teacher recounted her experiences growing up in a small town:

Coming from [a] very small town, I am going to admit, kind of prejudice towards the Native American culture. But I have never been the type of person; my parents raised me that you just accept people for who they are. So I guess that has never been an issue with me. Other people may be like that, but I just accept people for who they are. I’ve never had say a bad incident, so that has never been an issue.

When asked how they remembered Native Americans depicted in their own K-12 curriculums, they all agreed there was a lack of Native Americans in their educational experiences. One of the teachers stated “I really don’t, I remember one year we had Native American week and they had dancers come to the gym. That was it, that was all we did.” Another reflected “You never heard much about them except for wars....Even in [her home town which was on an Indian reservation] we did not talk much about Native American history.” Another recounted they did not recall much about Native Americans:

In the history books...certainly we heard about Custer....But it was really not that pervasive in the curriculum at all. Most of the images you would receive from cowboy and Indians were from movies. I remember Jeremiah Johnson, that movie. My exposure to Native Americans was extremely limited until I went to college.

One teacher remembered, “Looking back very inaccurately. The typical, what pops in to your head when you think Indian, Pocahontas or somebody with a feather, you know very stereotypical images.” An interviewee said they touched on it a bit in History, but the Native American culture was never brought into any other subject like the push is today. She agreed with the move towards cultural integration stating “I think is a great thing because so many people assume so many things and really don’t know how things are.” One thing they all agreed upon was the omission of Native Americans in their early education no matter where they were raised, which included some of them near or on Indian reservations.

Formal Education: Theme 2: College Education

Of the individual interviewees, five of the six teachers said that their formal college education did not prepare them for what they would have to face in a high Native population school. These sentiments were also reflected in most of the focus group interviews but not everyone agreed. I will present the negative cases following these summaries.

The first sentiments from the teachers about their education degrees that they received at various colleges were that they did not prepare them to face the stresses of everyday teaching. Most of them agreed that their degree gave them a good background in how to write and prepare lesson plans, how to connect student learning to objectives and standards, but did not give them enough hands on experiences in a school setting. The following teacher's reflection is very indicative of many of the interviewee's conclusions:

No, I was very ill prepared to go into the working world, honestly. You know I walked out of there thinking, Oh, every job I go to I am going to have to write a lesson plan or it is going to be all structured and I will create these great elaborate activities for every little thing I teach and it is not like that. It definitely is not like that, and I do not feel that my college classes did justice for what I have to do in the classroom. I feel it helped, you know, it got me somewhat prepared, it got me to look at objectives, it got me to look at standards, to be aware of them, but it didn't show me the stresses of actually knowing what you are going to do. I was put into all sorts of practicum, from day cares to preschools to, really you are just observing and it is totally different from, to observe, especially at lower levels than it is actually to be placed in it.

One interviewee stated that the best learning experience she encountered was during her practicum where her cooperating teacher not only made her teach most of the time she was in it, but also acted as a guide. After each of the lessons she led, the

cooperating teaching would sit down and they would discuss what worked, what did not, and how she could change things for a more positive outcome the next time. This teacher stated she learned some valuable lessons during these hands-on experiences in the classroom:

She would have me create a lesson plan and she said if this is not working, you feel it is not working, you need to be able to change it immediately. And I was like “What?” If you are in a classroom and it is not working you have to be able to switch it off and find something else, you know. You can’t, it is just painful to continue doing something that is not working and I was not aware that I would have to be switching around like that. So, that was an eye opening experience.

I asked the interviewees if they had taken any multicultural classes during college that included information on Native Americans. I also asked if they had a multicultural class, did the class influence how they teach now to an almost 100% Native American population. The comments on this question were interesting in that most of them said if they learned anything about Native Americans it was not through the Education department. The respondents mentioned that the multicultural class offered through the Education department either did not cover, or devote enough time to, Native Americans. One teacher declared that “everything discussed in ours was all about African American when they talked about multicultural background.” Another teacher stated:

I just figure when you are dealing with multicultural you should try to at least, you know a semester long class you have plenty of time to cover a lot of different cultures. So, include Native Americans. Because when I got here I did not know a lot of the history, and all my kids tell me about it and I am just like “Wow, I never knew that and I have taken a lot of history classes.”

Some of the teachers mentioned that they had taken very informative classes through their college's History and Native American Studies departments that were helpful to them.

Any...education that I received regarding Indian people or Native Americans in Montana were through courses that were not in the Education department. I had a Native American class and then I had a couple of outstanding History classes and that is where I really learned more of an accurate history. Nothing in my Education classes pertained to issues on reservations.

A few of the interviewees revealed that they learned more about Indian issues from the Native people that were students in their college classes. One of the teachers who had been teaching on the reservation for a while recounted a class he took and said the professor "...just kind of relied on me for the Native American perspective because at that time I had been teaching for a number of years." The following sums up the interviewees thoughts on the subject: "Yea, well, I did not walk away enlightened...but the Native people in the classroom were a very important part of learning about Indian schools and issues."

The last subject that was discussed included the overwhelming poverty and low socioeconomic issues they faced teaching on the reservations. Most of the teachers had no understanding of the high level of poverty that existed on the reservations and its impact upon education:

We did not talk about teaching kids that live in high poverty areas. We did not talk about that at all either on or off the reservation, I think. That is something that definitely needs to be covered. It doesn't matter what your race is there are a lot of issues, there are a lot of ways poverty impacts education and I think we need to be more prepared to handle that.

The consensus was that their college education taught them how to teach in a “perfect world” and only prepared them for the best scenarios. It did not prepare them to step into the situations they had to face teaching in such an impoverished community.

Not all the teachers felt that their college education failed to prepare them for teaching in a high Native population school. One teacher mentioned that their education gave them the tools to survive:

In my college days I had very good teachers in History that taught me how to think, taught me how to find what you need to do. So once I started here I think I had the skill set to pretty quickly figure out where these kids were coming from....So I would say yes from the standpoint that it allowed me to learn how to think and do what I need to be successful.

Another teacher said it was not the college’s fault that she was not prepared to teach on a reservation, but attributed it to her own unpreparedness. She was young, and did not concentrate on her studies as much as she should due to working full time and enjoying the freedom of living on her own. Once out of school with her education degree she was hired into a school that included “no books, no textbooks, no nothing. It was quite an experience. I mean, the college really cannot prepare you for that.”

Formal Education: Theme 3: Professional Development

Professional development courses that addressed Native Americans were very beneficial to the teachers interviewed. Four of the six individual interviewees mentioned they had taken professional development courses offered through their school or local tribal colleges. All of the four agreed these classes were very beneficial and applicable to their teaching. 77% or 20 of the 26 interviewees included in the focus group interviews had taken some professional development or continuing education courses that focused

upon Native Americans. Many of these teachers commented that the professional development offered through their school “was better training than I had received in college. And I think all the training, professional development that I have attended, have been more applicable to teaching than the information I received in college.”

One of the individual interviewees shared some great stories about the classes she took through the local tribal college. One of the classes was all about the local tribe and through that experience she learned about their past and present history which helped her understand the Native people she encountered every day. There was also a lot of cultural information that informed her about the different lifestyles of the tribe:

It broke down lifestyle and it told us historically why grandparents are raising grandchildren. So a lot of it has to do with history. It doesn't have to do with the parents aren't going to raise them or whatever, it is a very historical reason, a very cultural reason, cause a lot of parents do not raise their children since it was the grandparents duty.

Teachers also shared stories about the local tribal college that were useful in choosing appropriate and relevant materials for the classroom. Another class taught Native American activities that one teacher incorporated to integrate culture into her curriculum:

I take them [students] outside and teach them the history of the games and a lot of the games had reasoning. I do one with my kids when they are supposed to make a short spear out of a chokecherry bush. We just use wooden clothespins and we decorate them and make them fancy. What they would do is that the children would race and they would have to yell and every time they stopped yelling you had to stick your stake in the ground. And whoever would get the furthest is the winner. The historical reason for it was when they were attacked those kids would be able to run and yell to warn any of the men who were not in camp. They would run and yell to build up their lung capacity.

Utilizing lessons that address Native American traditions have made a difference in their classrooms. Not only are the teachers incorporating culture but their students recognize

they are making an effort to include their Native history and traditions. This inclusion adds to the students' feelings of belonging.

Informal Education

Informal education is defined as any non-academic educational experience such as interactions with parents, community, and knowledge gained from observations. This also includes personal insights gained through the teacher's own quest for knowledge such as visiting museums, watching documentaries, and reading about the culture. I categorize informal education as any learning that takes place outside of the formal traditional learning vehicles such as college or professional development courses. The research question that guided this section of investigation was the following: What is the informal educational (non-academic) history of successful educators of Native American students?

The themes that emerged under informal education included the following: Community involvement; Parental involvement and contact; Native mentors; Elders and community members utilized in the classroom; and the role of Native language in the classroom. The first three themes came up again and again in the interviews. The importance of being involved in the community and Native mentors were agreed upon unanimously among the individual interviewees. The latter two themes evolved out of questions on how informal educational resources were utilized in the classroom.

One main agreement that came out of the interviews was the importance of their informal education to teacher survival. "As far as teaching Native Americans...my

informal education has been a lot more useful for me...It is a huge benefit, I would have been loss here without having other resources. I think that is why other people do not stay.” Many stated that what they learned on their own, informally, was more useful teaching in a high Native population school than what they learned in college.

Informal Education: Theme 1: Community Involvement

Every one of the individual interviewees mentioned they were involved in the community outside of school and how important that was for them. A lot of the community involvement revolved around attending sporting events that the school participated in such as basketball. Also, venturing out and attending cultural events was very important to their relationships with their students and parents. The communities where they teach are very close-knit and multigenerational. By being involved in community events it shows the Native Americans that these teachers are interested in their culture and want to be included. “You really have to be involved in the communities. I go to pow wows, I go to basketball games. And you just put yourself out there, you have to be involved in what you can be involved in.”

Everyone in both the individual and focus group interviews mentioned what a close-knit Native community they teach in, and how important it is to reach out to be seen and also to understand the culture.

I think I am pretty visible in the community to my students because I do go to hand games, I do go to [local fair] every year, I go to Native days. Make sure I get to the kids basketball tournaments or games. I think that is important to them. It is important for you as a teacher because you get to know your students in a different way than you do just watching them in a desk. I think that is very important to understand. You know, what they do on their own time, and how they interact with everybody. And it

gives you an opportunity to know their families a bit better. And when they see you there that helps you in your classroom. They will actually behave better for you if they know you went to their basketball game. It is amazing, all you have to do is go to a basketball game and you have a couple of kids go “How come you were at my game?” and I said “I came to watch you”, “You did?” And it is really important and when they see you at [local cultural events], they know you are interested in their culture.

Many of the teachers agreed that going out into the community is not always a comfortable thing to do. Being non-Native and going to cultural events where you are the minority forces them out of their comfort zone. Even so, they all agreed on the importance of “putting yourself out there.” One of my interviewees really brought this point home when they spoke of the importance of being involved in the community. This was very evident in their recounting of going to a pow wow:

Get involved, you know I think it is scary to get involved...since most pow wows are not getting going until 10 O'clock at night. I am not going to tell you going to a pow wow you are going to be just fine, since you are going to be scared to death going somewhere pitch dark by yourself. But you have to do it, you have to put yourself out there. Once the parents see you places, and the kids see you places, that makes a huge difference.

Community involvement was a main theme in all of the interviews. Going out into the community to learn more about the culture and connect with families is very important.

Informal Education: Theme 2: Parental Involvement and Contact

Parental contact and involvement varied quite a lot amongst the three research sites. When asked about their contact with parents the remarks ranged from very little contact, up to great relationships with their parents. I also asked how involved their parents were in their children's education both coming into the classroom and also helping outside of school with homework and projects. These answers also were widely

varied depending on the school site and teachers interviewed. One thing was consistently agreed upon though by all of the individual interviewees; favorable parental contact and involvement was key to a successful educational experience for their students.

One of the three schools researched mentioned their parental contact and involvement was pretty low, with one teacher stating there was “truly no parent involvement at home.” When discussing below average reading and comprehension skills in the lower grades one teacher replied that most of her student’s parents were not reading with them at home. “I would say most are not. You can tell, I would say two or three, you know they do.” Many of the teachers mentioned that their parents told them they do not have any books for their young children to read. A lot of this goes back to the poverty issue that will be discussed later. Many of the teachers agreed that “parent involvement is huge and you can tell when there is no parent involvement.”

The other two research sites stated their parental involvement was fairly strong. “Yea, believe it or not it is pretty good. Considering most of our students come from families that are living in poverty, and we are out in the middle of nowhere.” Several of the teachers mentioned that their parent teacher conferences were a great success, but credit this also to the schools by holding them out in the communities so their parents do not have to travel as far to attend. One teacher shared “I think it is a matter of the schools making an effort to get out in the community that makes that successful...[making it] a little bit easier for parents to participate.”

All of the individual teachers interviewed stated they made an effort to reach out and involve parents on every level they could. Many of the parents, or care givers, of the

teacher's students do not always feel comfortable entering and participating in the school environment. That is why involving the parents whenever is possible was so important to the teachers interviewed. Every one of the teachers stated they ask parents to be involved in the classroom helping out with reading, coming on field trips, or just visiting in the classroom. One teacher spoke of inviting the parents into the classroom for student presentations and how important that is not only to make the parents feel welcome, but also to build upon her student's public speaking skills:

So then by having them [parents] come in we are showing them, and it works on their public speaking skills which a lot of Native American's struggle with. You know cause, it's a very shy community. Unless you are involved in it they are shy to speak out among other people. So it really works on that public speaking skills and then they [the students] own it, and the kid, I mean they are just excited about it. And their parents are invited here, which is rare to have families in our school.

Communication with parents is also very important due to the rural nature of the communities in which they teach, and the lack of phones within the home. One school has utilized post cards as a creative way to communicate. The teacher commented about this unique communication vehicle that "anybody can read it and you are sending positive things. I even have the kids write to their parents about something they are enjoying doing at school." Finding ways to reach out and involve parents was a very important component of parental contact.

Another obstacle to parental contact and involvement that emerged was the young age of many of the parents. Many of the teachers stated they had quite a lot of very young parents that not only did not know how to help with homework, but also unsure how to best care for their children. One teacher recounted her struggles to get parental

help at home, even sending home instructions and answer sheets to aid the parents. She lets the parents know if there is something they do not understand to call her. “So I think that is something if the parents are not understanding, how can they help the child. I have ... a couple of parents that are quite young and I do not know what their education was, so ... these are all things you want to take into consideration.” Another teacher went so far as saying she feels she has to take her parents through “Parenting 101”:

Oh yes, I will use last night as an example. I have one student that is been just tired and really sluggish and [to] the parent, I said “So and So, your kid is smart, he is really a smart kid but he is lacking sleep. You need to get him to bed, and make sure he falls asleep so he can get all those hours. When these kids do not get the hours of sleep it is really hard for them to focus, and not only that you need to make sure he is eating. Breakfast is such an important part of their diet as in staying functioning and staying alert in class. You have to make sure he is eating and going to bed early because he is falling behind. My kids that were struggling have caught up to him and now they are passing him.” And she said, “Oh my God,” and I know she is going to school and she is a single parent. But she is young, and more and more of these [parents] are getting younger and younger having kids and they themselves do not understanding being parents. That is what I see, me myself I do not have kids, I am not married. But the first parent teacher conference I have to take them through 101 Parenting, like “What are you doing?”I am telling them as kids what they need to do for their kids.

One thing they all agreed upon is if the students are not getting the help and support at home, they need the support at school.

Another factor to parental involvement is the relationship teachers build with their parents. Five of the six individual interviewees attributed their good relationship with their parents to their success teaching Native American students. By gaining the trust of their parents they were able to learn more about their students which gained them a deeper understanding. “I think one thing that is very special about [school] is the small

class size and that really gives you an opportunity to get to know the parents of the students, and understand where each student comes from. Some of the parents were students as well.” By getting to know the families better one teacher commented that the parents “really appreciate that, but I also think that it motivates you to work harder.” One teacher mentioned sometimes there is a challenge to the familiarity with the families:

You know everybody here so when the kids come in and they are tired, and more than likely the kid’s parents were probably drinking the night before, possibly at home. I think that is a challenge to try to meet everybody half way because I know a lot of the parents in the community. And when the kids come in and they are burned or tired and just having a hard day and they want to argue with you about something and you try to meet them along with this other student, and treat them fair across the board. I think that gets hard because a lot of the time you know what is going on in the home out there and that gets hard for me.

So building good relationships is a key, but does bring up other issues such as fairness, and also trying not to excuse behavior due to the inside knowledge of the student’s home life. Many mentioned it should not be an excuse for the student, but helps you as a teacher understand their behavior.

Informal Education: Theme 3: Native Mentors

Every one of the individual interviewees agreed that they would have been lost if they did not have Native mentors in the school, the community, and their classrooms. These relationships are so important to understanding the cultural norms and values, and helping to avoid any uncomfortable situations. Some of tribes serviced by these schools actually adopt non-Native teachers. These Native mentors take teachers under their wing, invite them into their family, and help them maneuver in these strange cultural waters they are immersed in daily. The teachers all mentioned this mentoring has been

invaluable to their teaching and learning process. The importance of Native mentors was also reflected in the responses from the focus group participants.

Not only did non-Native teachers feel accepted and guided by their mentors to understand the culture and relationships, they also received help with choosing culturally appropriate classroom materials. Many stated they had taught for years, but this was the first time in a high Native population school and how different it was:

I think one thing that really helped me informally was the first year that I was here I was adopted by...our counselor here at the time. And she was so helpful to me about everything. She really took me under her wing and I would do something...that was inappropriate or offensive she had no problem telling me: "You know, we don't do that" or "we don't make jokes about that." One time I made a joke about little people and she let me know right away that that was inappropriate. And that meant a lot to me. And so having her as a friend and a sister was really helpful, and I know there are others that have had that same experience. It is the family atmosphere and being accepted and welcomed. And being accepted as I am and knowing there are a lot of things I don't know. That has just been a huge part of my informal education.

One teacher shared that the most helpful experience she had since beginning work was that she found a teacher who had been there for some time and just told her she needed help. This mentor guided her, and made suggestions to aid her teaching. She mentioned that "I would have drowned that first year and not wanted to come back if it was not for her." Most of the teachers shared stories similar to the following:

I have a lot of people, I have an aid, she was my aid up until this year...and she was a big mentor to me. She really helped me know what, "well you can't, or that is their life, this is how it is, or this is how it is going to be," you know. She will tell you how you can approach parents. Oh yea, it really helps you out and that along with being involved in the community. You are not going to find those people unless you step out there.

Not only did these Native mentors teach them about the culture, but invited the teacher into their homes. “I became very close with her family, am very close with her family, and I don’t think if not for that relationship I would know what I know about students.”

One teacher told me a story about her mentor and how helpful she was to review some “culturally appropriate” activity books she had purchased at a local teacher bookstore. The teacher bought a set of books that she was very excited to use in her classroom. She recounted, “And thank God I asked my aid to look through it and really what applied. And I think there were only two things out of the entire book that really addressed the true Native American culture. Other than that she was like ‘I don’t even know where they came up with this!’”

Some of the Native teachers actually laughed and joked about helping non-Native teachers. One reflected about the relationship and why it works so well:

I think the willingness on both parts. The welcoming of the [tribe] people but also like these ladies who have been here with us, they’re open to it too. And they want what is best for the kids and you sense that about them, and they show that by what they do. It is kind of on both sides that [is] what keeps them here you know.

One thing they all agreed upon is that Native mentors in the school and community is one of the main reasons non-Native teachers survive and remain in high Native population schools.

Informal Education: Theme 4: Elders and Community
Members utilized in the Classroom

Three of the six individual interviewees mentioned that they utilized elders or Native community members in their classrooms either as presenters or for information that they could incorporate into lessons. Storytellers, artisans, and Native historians have been invited into classrooms to talk to and work with the students. Other teachers have brought in student's relatives: "I had grandmas come in and read to them, and grandpas come in and tell stories." Community members involved in traditional events such as pow wow dancers have been invited to teach the students the meaning behind the dances and encourage participation.

One non-Native teacher mentioned the importance of checking with elders or community members before integrating culture and traditional items into the curriculum.

Below is a story that illustrates this importance:

Other things, trying to tie in science with the culture, you know there are some things you need to check out before you do it. I thought it would be very cool to get some kids wired up to an EKG and a respirator and then have them go into, like a sweat, and see what the physiological aspects were, what would happen. And so I approached an elder named [name omitted] and said "What do you think of this?" He said "Oh that would be perfectly fine, but before you do that we are going to put a microphone on you. And we are going to get a group of people outside your church, and when you go to confession we will just broadcast it to everybody." And I said "Oh I get it!" It was his way of saying that is something sacred and if you want to put them in a finish sauna or do that, fine, but some of the traditional stuff...and so in Montana always check it out with an elder and there is a big support group for that.

Community members are a wealth of knowledge regarding tribal history that teachers utilized for lectures on local places, battles, and geology. One teacher mentioned she brought in a Native substance abuse counselor to talk to her class. She said the kids were

very engaged in the presentation and the counselor provided her class with a different perspective on the subject of substance abuse than a non-Native speaker.

Informal Education: Theme 5: Native Language Role in the Classroom

Language emerged in the research in the following two themes: the role of Native language in the classroom; and language barriers. The latter will be discussed under “Classroom Experiences.” Only one of the six individual interviewees mentioned actually teaching some of the Native language within their classrooms. Native Languages in the curriculum was almost totally missing at one site, but language and cultural studies were a required component at other sites. The Native language/cultural studies class was in the process of being expanded to include more information, and additional sections for all the students.

The one teacher that mentioned she includes Native language in the classroom stated she teaches her students numbers, colors, directions, and simple words such as “Thank you, sit down, listen ...be quiet. They know what I am saying when I say it to them, so I can give a lot of directions in [the Native language].” An interviewee recounted that a lot of kids do not speak the Native language fluently and that some words are hard to translate into English. Speaking from experience, the teacher shared a story of trying to translate a Native word and it “can mean about 5 different words.” So not only is the Native language difficult, a lot of the younger kids do not speak it anymore.

The other teachers interviewed stated they do not focus on it or do not understand the local Native language at all.

But the same with the culture and the language. We can teach it and use it, but if [the parents] are not going to teach it, value it, and practice it then that is their values, that is what they believe apparently. It is not going to stick. I do not push it, there is no focal point in my classrooms on it.

Some of the non-Native teachers do know a few words, but unless English words were also included, they could not follow a conversation. Another teacher mentioned when they begin expanding the cultural studies class next year she was going to “take part in that class because I...don’t know any of their language.” This sentiment was reflected in the interviews with the other teachers.

Classroom Experiences

Classroom experiences are defined as on the job learning, things their students taught them, issues they face every day in their classrooms, and teaching and learning experiences that taught valuable lessons about Native American students. The final research question that guided this section of inquiry was the following: What experiences in their own classrooms have teachers identified as contributing to their success with educating Native American students?

The themes that emerged under classroom experiences included the following: Poverty; Cultural Differences; Trust/Bonds/Relationships; Transiency; Language Barriers; Teaching Strategies; and Native Learning Styles. The main overarching theme in this section is poverty and the impact it has upon education. Every one of the interviewees mentioned poverty or low socioeconomic factors that attribute to the

challenges they face teaching on the reservation. The latter two themes evolved out of questions on best teaching practices and what they found through classroom experiences that worked well with Native American learners.

Classroom Experiences: Theme 1: Poverty

All of the teachers interviewed said they were not prepared for the level of poverty they experienced on the reservations. They did not feel their formal educational background had taught them about all the consequences that poverty inflicted upon the teaching and learning process. These consequences include naming a few; the lack of books in the homes, poor health care, the absence of transportation, and the despair that poverty wrecks upon the minds of those immersed in it on a daily basis.

All of the individual interviewees and most of the focus group participants spoke about the “culture of poverty” they have learned about through their classroom experiences. “There is also kind of a culture of poverty, lower socioeconomic, you know, things that go on that I also had to learn here. So for me it was learning by doing, just all those experiences built up over the years so [the] last several years I felt pretty confident as a teacher dealing with these kids.” When one of the teachers stated she had to learn about the impact poverty has on education, she detailed those impacts:

Oh, gosh, access to quality health care, nutrition, a lot of things, transportation can get in the way of attendance. We talked yesterday a little about books in the home. Just things like that, the early education prior to coming to school. It really all creates an uneven playing field. I think there is a culture around poverty, but there are also some stereotypes.

One of the teachers mentioned that many non-Native teachers have a problem separating those two things; Native American culture and poverty. They see it as a cultural thing,

but it is not a cultural thing, it is a socioeconomic problem. Even though the Native culture is so strong, it is a culture of poverty that causes the problems. This teacher stated that a lot of teachers get that wound up together. That it is the Native American culture causing the problems. The interviewee stated that teachers must separate the two so that you can truly understand where the problem lies.

With high poverty, many of the families have to deal with other issues such as things that go on in the home that teachers have no idea and control over. “We do not know what happens at home. A lot of our teachers do not want to see past what these kids bring in. And when they bring in that baggage with them, they do not know how to unload like us adults.” One of the school counselors mentioned the challenges that they face on a daily basis:

I have challenges as a counselor. In our community we have a high rate of death. We have what we call the 4 D’s: death, dying, divorce, and drugs. And that is basically my poor kids. And my kids do not have any coping skills to deal with that stuff. We just recently lost a teacher today.... So there are kids coming, I see a lot of unresolved grief and because they are too little to understand what is going on around and the parents don’t know how to deal with that either, so it just becomes anger. The kids are angry and do not even know why, the parents are angry and they do not even know why. It is just constant anger. So they come to school and it is just the lack of skills and how to constructively deal with all that unresolved stuff.

Not only do the teachers and counselors have to deal with behavioral challenges, but also with governmental agencies such as Child Services. “I had some incidents where we know some of these kids come from, it’s just a very, very sad home life and you always take that into consideration. I’ve had to deal with the child services and you know it’s kind of hard for me because I never taught at another...public school [where] I’ve had that to deal with [this].”

Another thing that came up in the interviews was the lack of adults in some of the homes. Many of these students are in single parent homes so they go home to an empty house, or have older brothers and sisters that take care of them. One teacher said sometimes this causes a problem when it comes to homework. She mentioned that the older siblings “are not going to do their homework with them, they are going to do it for them.” Another teacher mentioned that these “kids deal with a lot of stuff at home that unless you live in a high poverty area” you are not aware of. She continued stating “and it would be hard not to bring that to school.”

Not only are these children dealing with issues at home that are out of their control, but some come in with extreme basic needs that must be attended to in order for them to go on with their day and learn. One teacher shared the following with me:

They do have poverty issues and that definitely affects them. I definitely have a bottle of lotion there. I have kids that come in and get lotion for their hands all the time. I definitely believe in doing all that because when their hands are cracked and bleeding, you need to do something about it so they will learn...Yea, and somebody loves them and cares for them and their hands probably hurt and don't want to write. So, we have those issues but that doesn't affect their brain, it affects their learning if you do not attend to them.

Another teacher recounted a story regarding books in the home. She was amazed as to how many parents did not have any educational or reading materials for their children. This was something she had to learn about through experience. Below is her story:

I was amazed my first couple of years as to the number of parents who sent a note saying, “We do not have books.” You know, and I just think about myself and all my friends' homes that I went to when I was young and there were books everywhere. You know everybody had books and you could just grab a book and read it whenever you wanted to. That was a big eye opener for me that they don't necessarily realize what it is they

should be doing. And I think that is part of the school's problem. We need to communicate with them; "This is what we want you to do, this will help your child having an enriched education. It will help with the struggles your child will face in the future if you are reading to your kid, you are putting a book in front of them and let them play with it."

You can tell at the beginning of the year there are kids that haven't been read to. Because when you start reading to them they cannot sit through the book. So they are up wandering around, and I let them because by the time I am done with the first month of school they are figuring out "hey she is telling us something, she is not just talking." Now then they are engaged in what I am doing.

Poverty came up so many times in our conversations. One of the teachers shared with me about how motivated the kids are in elementary school, but once they get to middle and high school things start to fall apart. The interviewee recounted how hard it is for these students when they have so many relatives around them that tell them that an education will not benefit them. These issues transcend ethnicity and are prevalent in lower socioeconomic communities across the nation. The teacher noted it does not matter what ethnicity you are, if the poverty is there, the despair is there, and it brings in the drugs, the alcohol, and that leads to depression. All of these matters make it hard to keep a job and provide for their children.

I want to be clear that these poverty issues are universal no matter what culture you come from. Also, not all Native Americans live in poverty either on or off the reservation. These findings are limited to the reservations and conditions that these case studies took place at. Also, not all families living in poverty devalue an education. One teacher stated that "families living in poverty do want what is best for their child's education but often times find that the stresses in their world leave too much for them to deal with and they rely on the schools to supply their child's academic learning." Many

parents are very supportive and encourage their children to study hard and get an education to break the cycle. I also interviewed a lot of Native teachers that went on to get their college degrees so they could return and give back to their communities. These teachers were truly inspiring and excellent role models for their students. The issue of poverty and all its consequences is a matter that cannot be overlooked, and these teachers learned about it through their classroom experiences.

Classroom Experiences: Theme 2: Cultural Differences

In the informal section of the research the Native mentor was mentioned quite often and how these teachers' mentors helped them learn about cultural traditions and norms. Many of the teachers also learned about the culture by experiences they encountered in the classroom. Three of the six individual interviewees mentioned they learn a lot from their students. Even the teachers in the lower grades find that their students are very good about informing them on the culture:

A lot of the students, if I say something that may be, I don't want to say offensive, but if I quote it wrong....they will say "this is the how it is." So like I said before, they teach me. In the culture you know like when it comes to the pow wow and the dance, that is where I am learning. And they will get up and like "No, this is how," and this type of dance. So I am learning things right there from them that's...I just thought there was one type of dance but no, there is the fancy dancer, and this type of dance. They just tell me different things and different stories. They are just fascinating, they really are. That is why I think I like working with little kids because they will just tell you how it is. If you are wrong they let you know. So, lots of knowledge there.

Another thing that came up through teachers reflecting upon classroom experiences was what they learned about body language, and especially eye contact with their students. One teacher mentioned that she learns so much just day to day in her

classroom, and interacting with students. “Little subtleties such as if they are in trouble some of them just don’t look at you.” Another teacher agreed:

Well I learned they don’t look you in the eye, I guess it is a culture thing, a respect, I guess, and when they are in trouble they don’t look adults in the eye. And I was always “Why don’t you look [laughing]... You are supposed to look me in the eye when I am talking to you” and I found out why...

The focus group discussed this matter a bit more and mentioned that in the mainstream non-Native society most of us believe that if someone does not look you in the eye when you are speaking to them it means they are hiding something, or not listening. So this idea of eye contact is more of a cultural expectation and these teachers found out through their classroom experiences that they had to reevaluate their own assumptions and preconceived notions regarding this matter.

Another teacher I interviewed had a unique viewpoint on this issue that was very intriguing and illustrates the cultural differences between Native Americans and non-Natives. She was recounting a story of a traditional family she was involved with:

We have some families where the girls are not to look up and stare at you in the eyes, they are not to look you in the face. Now some people are trying to say they need to or they are not going to survive in the modern world. Well your world or my world? Your world or their world? I don’t know, I never force it cause if I know as long as they give me an answer. If I know they are very traditional I never force those kinds of things but you have to know.

One of the teachers in a focus group interview shared a story about one of her students that also taught her a very important lesson:

Well I work with preschoolers and I was getting annoyed with one of my students in my class. He just kept making noises, and for some reason I never said anything to him. I would just talk to him about indoor and outdoor voices, and then it finally dawned on me one day that he was

singing. And since I am not totally familiar with the Native Americans singing and their style of music which I am much more now, I could have hurt his feelings really badly by saying something inappropriate to him [laughing]. I am kind of glad it dawned on me before I did that to him, cause he really had a lovely voice it is just not my style of music. So, engulfing yourself a little more in the culture and making sure you talk to the families. Then I talked to Mom and Dad and they both are very cultural, so that was just one of those eye opening things that cannot be taught in the university, and you learn in the classroom.

All of these stories illustrate the point that some things cannot be taught in a lecture hall and must be learned on the job, through experience.

Classroom Experiences: Theme 3: Trust/Bonds/Relationships

Building a strong relationship with students, parents, and community members was a theme evident in all of my interviews. All of the interviewees agreed you must build a relationship with not only the student, but also with their parents. Being non-Native in these communities is hard; you are not immediately accepted, and some have experienced reversed prejudice. Non-Native teachers do not garner the respect that teachers have in other communities; it is something you have to earn, and build upon. Much of this is due to past negative experiences of the community, and many non-Native teachers do not last for long. So having respect for your students, their parents, and doing everything to open up those lines of communication are very important.

Many teachers mentioned they build trust through being consistent and providing a stable classroom. “I think you need to build a trust with them ... and they know what to expect of you.” Another remarked “but to me kids are kids and I think you need to respect them, listen to them. I think you need to build a relationship. And to me, that is

in all nationalities, all kids.” One teacher pointed out the importance of understanding what the student is going through, and learning from every conversation:

And so every conversation I have I try to reflect somewhere just to try to think hard about how that is affecting the child and where we will go with that. And try to eliminate the excuses. You know that because we need to have the empathy, we need to understand. But what are we going to do with it to make it work for them.

I mean, so, you have to really, really listen to community members and your kids, instead of just having a conversation. So my best education from Native Americans has been really listening to what they are saying.

Open communication, fairness, and understanding were all keys to building good relationships with students and families.

Some of the non-Native teachers discussed that it took awhile for the community members and Native families to accept them. When I asked a few of the teachers about this they recounted that it was hard to build that trust, and they still struggle with this today:

For some of them that do not know you they do question you. And I do not know if it is, they do not trust you. I really do not know where that comes from, but you can just kind of tell just in, you know, say you are at a basketball game. You do get treated differently you can tell. And not by everybody, but there are some they do treat you differently. It’s just the way, they are not rude, but not the friendliest.

Others mentioned that they have even experienced prejudice from their students. These teachers mentioned how they have tried to counter this by openly discussing the matter:

And there has been a lot of, you know, what the children hear at home. I guess I always thought that say the white people were always racist, but I have seen it come the other way and I never thought that before. So that is one thing that I kind of found to be very interesting and I found that more through the children. And the way I look at it is they have to hear that from somewhere, and of course you are not going to be that [prejudiced] at a young age. So that has got to be my biggest challenge there.

These types of issues are often not discussed, and I felt very privileged that these teachers were so open and honest about their experiences. Not all non-Native teachers experienced this, and many of them said they felt accepted and part of a great family. It is always important when reporting findings to present the negative cases, and also important to inform other non-Native teachers that this is a possibility. As mentioned previously, good relationships with the students and their parents can build that trust and acceptance in these close-knit communities.

Classroom Experiences: Theme 4: Transiency

During the individual and focus group interviews one topic came up that I was unaware of. That is the topic of transiency. This is students whose families jump them from one school to another. When I mentioned this to one of my interviewees, she replied “Oh, the transiency between schools? It is an issue that you see on all reservations.” With this new information I began to inquire more about this subject with all of the interviewees. One teacher recalled her first impressions of the transiency issue:

I think the big challenge is that we play musical schools and a lot of they [the transient students] are at different levels. But it was a big culture shock for me...because where I moved from you go to the same school. You don't switch between, you know, one school here nine weeks and then another school the next nine weeks. I think that is a detriment to our students....So I think this whole school thing is just weird.

Another teacher explained that the transient issue arises from parents dislike for a teacher or a principal then “they will just up and leave. So they are a very transient population almost like an immigrant, like the beet workers that some of the college teachers talk about.” With this information I started delving deeper into the subject to find out more.

“It starts by parent’s kind of allowing it, if they don’t like it at one place then okay, we will go to the next school.”

After discussing this topic with quite a few of the interviewees some patterns began to emerge. One teacher gave her opinion: “I think it is trying to escape, you know, consequences at a school. Oh we will go to this school, and something happens we will go to this school. And it ends up being attendance, grades, and behavior that causes them to move from school to school.” Some other teachers mentioned that some families do not want their children to be identified as Special Education, so rather than be labeled they move to a new school. Another issue is students that are lagging behind and the threat of being retained for a year. With open enrollment across the reservation schools, they can move to whatever school they want with a minimum of restrictions.

Another issue in transiency has to do with attendance factors. “Attendance is a big thing. We will get kids that the truancy is finally on them at one school, and then they will try to get into another school. But at our school we try to really watch that and not taking in kids that are really chronic about their attendance.” One of the teachers mentioned that their school maintains excellent records, such as test scores, on all the students when they leave because they may return in the future.

We need to know where they were at when they left us...so we can get going again and not wait until October. We find that at our high school, out of 22 of them 5 might be kids who actually started in kindergarten and followed the whole system up. So that is hard for the high school to get that big of a transient rotation of kids.

The topic of transiency was a real eye opener for many of the teachers, and something they learned about only through their classroom experiences.

Classroom Experiences: Theme 5: Language Barriers

The theme of language barriers emerged from stories shared by both Native and non-Native teachers. Some of the teacher's I interviewed mentioned that even though not a lot of the students may speak the Native language, many hear it at home, and some of the extended family may speak it exclusively. I also heard stories from Native American teachers how growing up bilingual was very hard, and they shared the difficulties of deciphering the English language while comparing to their own Native language. It made me realize how hard it is for any student who is an English as second language (ESL) learner. School can be taxing enough but when you have to translate from one language to another in order to comprehend your studies, it just adds another roadblock to the learning process. Coming full circle now on this concept of Native languages in the schools, through the cultural studies classes now being offered Native language is now a component.

The research sites varied on how much the Native language are spoken and understood amongst the students and staff. One teacher commented:

Yes, cause my niece she knows how to speak [the Native language] but she will not speak it to us, she speaks it to the little kids. She understands it fluently, but she won't speak [it] to us unless she is trying to hide something from the other kids, then she will speak [it] to us. And then, she is in the same class with the other little kid that does speak [the Native language], so they will sit there and talk. They speak [it] but they won't.... it is crazy how they communicate, but it is dying out though. I know it is.

I also heard stories from some of the participants that none of the students speak the language anymore, and just a few understand it. Those students who did hear the Native language in the home would sometimes bring their studies home and have a relative

translate it from English into the Native language so they could understand the subject better.

Other teachers mentioned they felt the students who spoke the Native language at home had a lower vocabulary. “They don’t have a high vocabulary like other students who don’t speak [the Native language] with their parents or grandparents, or Auntie or Uncles.” These teachers had to adjust some of their lessons when they realized the students were not understanding due to their lower vocabulary skills:

And another thing would be, and I guess this kind of goes with the teaching, is the language, maybe their vocabulary. The way I may present something and I need to change it, just because there is some things...which they do not understand....So there is kind of that language barrier there, what they understand and you know, I guess just the language used at home.

Native language spoken in the home can sometimes be a barrier to learning due to the translation back and forth from English.

Where the Native language barriers really came to the forefront in conversations was from the Native American teachers and their experiences growing up bilingual. “It hasn’t been easy, especially in my reading, you know being bilingual. Cause I never learned how to speak English until I was in kindergarten.” They spoke of their frustration of falling behind in school because their teachers did not understand that they could not comprehend their studies.

For example, I couldn’t understand what they were reading. They could not take the time and were just pushing me on into the next grade and not sitting me down saying this is what this word means. Like “bad” means this and I had to translate it into [the Native language] saying this means “no good.” And that is how we would translate that. It was like they didn’t know how to communicate with the Native students because they were trying to translate it.

This same teacher told me that once she entered Junior High there was a Native teacher that spoke English and their language fluently. So he would translate the terminology back and forth for his students. This interviewee said that was just such a big relief, and opened up “a big door in my understanding.”

Another Native teacher stated that she felt her and a few other members of the staff are the last generation of Native speakers in the school. She said it was hard growing up and going to school when all the kids spoke the Native language, but it was not allowed in the classroom. So when the teacher would speak English they had a difficult time understanding:

And if we didn't understand something we had each other to turn to and say “what did she mean?” And we tried to interpret it for each other. But there is a big difference here after us because all these students here are English speaking students and there is just a few that understand [their Native language].

She also stated that it made going to school so much more difficult. “So if you are fluent [Native language speaker] I think it is kind of harder and takes a couple of seconds to get to the point, and vocabulary is lower so in class I would have to write everything they were saying and I would have my dictionary there....” She recounted having to look everything up in order to make sense of what she was learning.

All of the Native teachers interviewed mentioned how the use of their tribal language is dying out, and how sad it is. They mentioned that now in their schools they hardly hear any fluent speakers among the students. When asked why one of my interviewees felt this was, the following interesting perspective was shared:

Yes, so through that I saw some parents who were embarrassed that their kids were not learning and they wanted them to speak English, and not speak [the Native language] at all so they would understand the White man's way of thinking. It was almost like they were being robbed by what they were already being taught, and it was a big, like a, I don't know, like it was a slice in our culture. Like you slice something away and some people, they don't know how to adapt to it.

She also shared stories of the generation before her that when they would speak the Native language in the schools the teachers would slap their wrists with rulers. I commented how interesting it is now that the schools are bringing their Native language back through the cultural studies, and without slapping them. We both shared a laugh over this.

Coming full circle, in the case studies I investigated there is a reemergence of culture and language within the schools. Not only is this infusion of culture seen in the cultural studies class but also within classrooms and integrated into curriculums. Many of the teachers I interviewed mentioned how important it is to make a connection between home and school. "I think it is important to make that connection between home and school...They have [Native] speaking parents, so there is kind of a connection when they come into school they feel they belong." This connection to home and culture emerged in some of the teaching strategies the educators utilized in their classrooms.

Classroom Experiences: Theme 6: Teaching Strategies

Before sharing my participant's views on effective teaching strategies, I wanted to discuss one concept that was evident across all my research sites. Every one of the individual interviewees agreed that you have to come in with high expectations of your students. Some teachers enter impoverished schools and come in with the mindset that

since these students do not have the resources or help that students in more affluent schools have they lower their expectations. All of the effective and successful teachers identified by their principals mentioned that you have to have high expectations and not only let your students know this but also their parents. The following was one of the teacher's stories:

You know I would have to say that the things that shaped me were...I really had to learn that you can't judge a book by its cover. I can't bring in a kid that perhaps I can't understand because they have such speech problems and think oh they are not going to make it. You know because in a year that kid can grow immensely and be an on level child. They may still have speech problems, I'm not saying that in a year their issues are all cleared up, but you can't look at a kid and be like "oh, that kid is not going to make it." Because you are going to have some of your kids come in with the lowest abilities, could be your brightest stars in your room.

Besides having high expectations for their students many of the teachers shared their effective teaching strategies.

Even though the interviewees all agreed they taught in unique environments, their teaching strategies were very similar to those utilized in non-Native schools. Active learning and real life connections were a key component to their lessons. A teacher in an elementary classroom gave an example of teaching strategies that kept the students engaged and on task:

I am all about hands on, you know, the longest I like to talk to them is maybe 5 minutes. So, I use manipulatives all the time. We are constantly switching activities. I am still teaching the same topic but I am trying to switch it up in a different format. [For example] we are really working on addition and subtraction in here now and...recognizing the sign. So I give them an addition problem and a subtraction problem and they have to tell the difference. So I give them their marker boards first and first I will say the problem and they will have to write the sign, if it is an addition or subtraction problem. We will do that for a few minutes. We have these

little tongue depressors where they have written a plus sign on one side and a minus sign on the other. And I will say a problem and they will...have to decide if it is an addition or subtraction. Seven plus three, and then they have to do equals and write on their boards. They then have their little bears, and put seven here, their tongue depressor, plus three [bears], tongue depressor equal sign, and then they have to write ten. So I am still teaching the same concept but I am switching it around. Cause if I do one thing for too long I lose them.

Another teacher mentioned that they believe all kids like to be up and moving and they try to include that as much as possible. But the teacher also agreed it was their job to prepare them for the high school environment where “they are going to have to sit through a whole lot of lectures and I have to get them ready for that, we talk about that.”

One of the teachers at a focus group interview mentioned that exploratory learning is a very important teaching strategy for Native American students.

I also think that Native Americans kids grow a lot faster if you can do the gifted and talented style of lessons; the exploratory learning where they are allowed more freedom. Really the Native American people are so much ahead of everybody else in observation and our kids are too. But a lot of our questions do not deal with things that are observation. You know, they are natural scientist, and we kind of shut them down with some of the things we do like the reading program. I think we could be doing so much more to add to it and make it more exciting. And I see these people doing really well and I really think we have one of the best elementary staffs that I have ever worked with. They are doing a lot of exploratory learning with their kids whether they realize it or not.

No matter what teaching strategy these teachers included in their classroom, the one thing that was different from a non-Native classroom was the infusion of culture into the curriculum.

Although all of the individual interviewees mentioned including culture into their curriculums to one degree or another, two of the teachers gave me specific examples of

how they would do that. One teacher mentioned it is a great way to get students interested by tying their subject to real life experiences.

Well it is that same idea of finding out what makes kids tick, finding the cultural things that they already know. A kid knows when you throw an arrow that it is going to act a certain way. When you can take that which they are already into and get across the concept of air gravity and velocity, and trajectory, and air resistance...you can use all those things in a simple sport that they do. So anything like that when you figure what the kids are interested in...you find out what they are into in their culture and you kind of wrap [your subject] around it if you can.

Another teacher mentioned the class did a lesson about issues on the reservation. Each group chose a different issue facing the reservations and created graphs which they later discussed. The interviewee took me through the classroom pointing out the different graphs the students created:

And one was poverty, we were just doing a graph unit, [where they compared] median household income pairing that with Montana's average and United States average. So you can see where the US average was with the reservation. And this was...just Native population then in comparison to each other. And this one was tribal features over here. And the other one that was really interesting that got them really, sparked some really interesting conversations was Native lands and the [local] reservation is 2.5 million acres but the tribe actually owns 400,000 acres. And when they looked at that graph they just went, "What is going [on]?" "What is that?" And then we talked about Allotment and ... about the case, and when that settled. That created a lot of talk about the numbers and it was really great. So that is how I am incorporating that, but they really want to know why is this happening, why did this happen, and it creates some interesting conversations but it also puts some responsibility on them because their parents are not going to get the job done. So anyways it is a good way to involve them.

Taking things that impact their lives and discussing it in the classroom is a great way to involve students in their own learning. As this teacher mentioned "that was so interesting to watch the reaction of their faces creating those graphs and just looking at everything is

either higher or lower here. And it sparked some interesting discussions. So, if you can bring in things that are directly related to them, that is great.”

Classroom Experiences: Theme 7: Native Learning Styles

The last area of investigation focused upon Native Americans and their learning styles. I wanted to hear firsthand from teachers in the field if they agreed that there was such a thing as a “Native American learning style.” I was curious if they taught Native students in a different manner to make the information more relevant and understandable. Most of the teachers disagreed with this concept of a Native American learning style, while some did speak of their oral traditions and manners of learning. One thing that did come up several times had to do with raising your voice around these students. I was told Native American families rarely raise their voice in the home. Their children do not like or tolerate shouting. I was told about a teacher who almost lost their job due to raising their voice in the classroom, and how disruptive the shouting was to their students.

Another teacher mentioned that wait time when asking questions is very important. “I remember [a teacher] saying it takes them awhile to think, and they will wait. So I tried to be very patient when I ask them a question, and I wait for them to answer.” We proceeded to have a conversation about if that is our culture or theirs. Non-Native cultures want answers fast and if someone takes too long to answer a lot of teachers will answer the question themselves rather than give the students that “think time.”

The majority of the teachers though were adamant that there is not a dominant Native American learning style. Some of these teachers actually take offense to the

mention of this. One teacher stated “I don’t buy into it. They do not learn differently, and it makes me cringe when people say they learn differently. They don’t learn differently, that is wrong.” She did go on to explain that there are different expectations of these Native students compared to their non-Native counterparts in adjoining communities off the reservation. These issues have more to do with poverty than their culture. When speaking of the lack of parental involvement and how that impacts the education and learning process she stated:

Well our parents do not do that because our parents are at poverty level and they have all those poverty issues and whatnot so, if they [the students] get it, it is here. So it is not that their brains are any different, they just have a different home life.

And I have heard that from, in many of my [college] classes, “Oh, and what strategies do you use?” And I am like, “Well, the same strategies you are using and they work!” I just think there is that mentality that it really is not, but on the other hand, we cannot expect them to go home and read for 30 minutes. That don’t happen. So if they don’t get it in school, it [is] most likely not coming. And I think that is where they fall behind. At least for [neighboring non-Native schools] they expect them to go home and do homework for an hour so they get it all done. And we don’t, we can’t expect it, we do expect it but it doesn’t get done.

Many of the teachers agreed that some do have different expectations of Native students and therefore feel they should be taught differently in order to compensate for their perceived shortcomings.

I strongly believe that it is the expectations. Native American children shouldn’t be taught any differently than white children, but we are, we do teach them differently. And we do have different expectations of them. And those teachers that have different expectations for a child like that, well, they do not pull them along like they should.

This same teacher corrected the above statement during member checking and stated in an email that the terminology “‘do not pull them along like they should’ is not quite what

I was trying to say; maybe a better way would be ‘do not prepare them to be self-sufficient.’”

During our focus group interviews quite a few of the teachers had strong views upon the subject of Native American learning styles:

I think there is not one dominant learning style for Native American students. I don’t think that is fair to say. That is...like our Art teacher despises when she talks about what she does in Helena or Kalispell. And they say “Oh I bet they are all just wonderful artists.” It is the same thing, there is a lot of diversity. I have learners in here that love hands on activities and I have some that would just prefer to go read the book.

Many of the teachers were adamant that the Native students are just as diversified as other students. “I have some students that learn better if they have a visual aid, and I have some students who can learn when they write it down...I do not think it is fair to say that Native students learn this way....And I think you have to use all styles.”

Other teachers concentrated upon preparing their students to go on to high school and college and stated it was not fair to cater to one type of learning style.

I don’t actually agree that you should cater towards one learning style because they get to high school and college and nobody is catering to them anymore. They have to learn a certain way, and I think that is important that we, of course if certain kids learn, or are stronger visually, yea, that is important to incorporate that now. But we also need to prepare them for high school and college and you don’t see college professors you know incorporating a lot of.

Another teacher spoke of the dilemma they were having evaluating their students. Many Native Americans struggle with English, so their writing and reading skills may be lacking. So much of education now is focused upon testing, and these standardized tests are in a written format.

That has always been a conflict with me because I love to teach orally, I love to evaluate orally. I feel like if a kid knows it he can tell me. Ah, that is not the instrument we use to define success in our school system. And so, it is always a constant struggle how you balance this. You've taught the kid, he gets the written test, you know, very tricky questions, and he gets it wrong. That instrument shows this kid to be a D student. Over here, orally he got it. So that is one reason I have a [performance based projects] is the kids that do poorly in the written book type part, tend to shine because they are presenting orally to the judges....And so for me...I like to teach and evaluate from an oral perspective. The box that we are trying to fit into doesn't really allow for that very well. So for me that is a constant struggle. We spend a lot of time teaching how to take a test. But that is the instrument they are going to be measured on in high school, it is going to allow them to get into college. So I tend to work on both things. I think kids tend to learn by doing. More hands on and then if you can get it to transfer over to the question on the test, or the thing in the book. But I would say that would be my number one, try to do things hands on and finding a balance between those two things.

When asked if the interviewee feels the reason the students do well orally was due to the oral tradition of learning that so many Native Americans took part in, the following was their answer:

I think part of that is. The other part of it is, when you have a kid that is struggling with writing and reading their defense mechanism is to talk and speak about it. So if you can get them talking about the right things...for me that is a good enough evaluation. But we have kids that struggle with reading that piece of text. They can tell me [answers to certain subject related questions] but to get that into a written form is difficult. And that is one of the things we are struggling with Native American education. This is what we are using to test these kids, this is what we are using to evaluate them. So we got to get better at it.

The last comments that came up regarding learning styles refers back to the relationship theme. Teachers mention that building trust is far more important than any learning or teaching strategy used.

I think the child has to build trust with you and then after that you just teach the child, and they all have different learning styles. That is what I would say. You just have to earn that trust with the child and then you

just go with your different teaching styles and what works best with you. And it depends with the group of kids. If I compare last year's group of kids with this year I am talking about total opposites.

The consensus amongst the majority of teachers is that Native students should not be taught any different than non-Native students. They do struggle with written communication, but with high expectations and building good relationships they will succeed. Incorporating culture and real life connections enhances their education. As one Native teacher stated, the best advice for teaching in a high Native population school is to "love our kids."

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area. With this information instructors of undergraduate education majors may be able to better prepare their graduates to teach in high Native population schools.

This chapter presented the findings from six individual teacher interviews and two focus group interviews with the entire staff. These interviews were composed of three separate case studies at three different elementary schools on two reservations. To maintain confidentiality I chose to present all of the findings together as general themes. The results of the findings were grouped under the main themes which emerged out of the three research questions and a few unique questions asked of the individual

interviewees. Out of the four main themes; Effective and Successful Educators of Native American Students, Formal Education, Informal Education, and Classroom experiences, 17 subthemes emerged. My goal for this chapter was to organize my findings and present them through the voices of my interviewees.

Chapter 5 will summarize this qualitative study, compare the findings to the literature reviewed, and present implications for practice and further research. Also included will be recommendations for both new teachers, and educators of pre-service teachers.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area. For the purpose of this study, successful educators of Native American students were defined as those individuals identified by their principals and peers as being successful.

Research Questions

This study focused upon effective educators of Native American students. The following questions guided the inquiry:

- What is the formal educational (academic) history of successful educators of Native American students?
- What is the informal educational (non-academic) history of successful educators of Native American students?
- What experiences in their own classrooms have teachers identified as contributing to their success with educating Native American students?

Methods

I utilized a qualitative case study method to conduct the research. The research was focused specifically upon educators in K-8 schools in Montana that are identified as effective teachers of Native students. My criteria for selecting the research sites were schools with high Native American populations located on Indian reservations in Montana that were willing to participate in this study. At the three schools that participated, the principals identified teachers they deemed effective and successful with teaching Native Americans. I conducted six individual in-depth interviews with these teachers. The interviews took place either in the teacher's classrooms or on the school grounds. These purposefully selected participants answered questions and engaged in a dialogue about their educational history, classroom experiences, and views on teaching and the Native learner.

At two of the three research sites I conducted a whole group focus interview with teachers and staff members. These interviews took place on site in the libraries after school. These conversations included information on the teachers' educational histories, what they discovered living in the community, and things learned in the classroom. In addition to the interviews each participant filled out a questionnaire that was used to record demographic information and educational history. In all, 32 teachers and staff members participated in the interviews.

Data Collection/Verification

Three different sources of data were collected: individual interviews; focus group interviews; and a demographic questionnaire. Verification and trustworthiness of the findings was confirmed through the use of member checking, peer reviewing, and triangulation of data. The transcribed interviews were checked with the demographic questionnaires in order to cross reference and verify the results. Once the interviews were transcribed the individual interview summaries were sent to the participants for member checking. This gave the interviewees the opportunity to review and verify the accuracy of my findings, and offer any suggestions or edits. My results were sent to a peer reviewer to read over for their insights and suggestions. My peer reviewer was also my gatekeeper and possessed a thorough knowledge of the topic and issues involved in my findings. By collecting the three sources of data and cross checking the findings triangulation was achieved. The collection of data from multiple schools added to the verification of findings. All of these procedures increased the trustworthiness and verification of my findings.

Data Analysis

This multiple case study included data collection at three different research sites. These case studies were analyzed both individually and collectively. Each of the interviews were recorded, and during transcription I looked for like minded pieces of information. All of the transcribed interviews were color coded according to the emerging patterns. During the coding process I identified participant quotes that

illustrated the findings. These emergent themes were analyzed and compared to each of the research questions. By creating visual displays such as a concept map I organized the data and presented the findings in Chapter 4. Utilizing the teacher's own words I was able to discover the commonalities between the three case studies, and communicate the findings in general themes that represented the whole range of experiences that these teachers possessed. These general themes were grouped under each research question to discover and convey those answers.

Results

In this section I have summarized the findings organized under each of the main themes.

Effective and Successful Educators of Native American Students

The individual interviewees were identified by their principals as effective and successful educators of Native American students. When asked why they thought they were chosen for the interviews their answers ranged from improving test scores, to relationships with parents and students, to their belief in high expectations. Many of these teachers were leaders in the school and very passionate about their job. All of them believed in furthering their education through professional development or advanced degrees. They all took their jobs very seriously and believed in improving education for Native students.

These teachers recanted stories of how they became successful with Native students and the themes revolved around relationships and learning about the culture. Every one of the individual interviewees stated Native mentors and community involvement were key components to their success. Cultural integration was also very important to enhancing education for Native students. Respect for their students and their families were evident in the interviews, and this understanding of culture and social norms played a big part in their accomplishments.

Formal Education

Formal education was defined as any academic educational experiences such as college education, teacher in-services, and professional development classes that informed these teachers' practice. The teachers interviewed had varied educational histories but the majority of them held an elementary or secondary education degree. Most of them agreed their formal education prepared them to create lesson plans, look at standards and objectives, and teach under ideal environments. The majority of them did not believe their educational backgrounds prepared them to teach on the reservation under the conditions they faced daily. The low socioeconomic factors that have an impact upon the educational process were never discussed in their education classes. Most felt they did not possess an accurate history of the tribes they serviced. All of these factors have made their transitions to teaching quite difficult.

Where these teachers have learned the most about their communities and cultures have been through professional development courses offered either through their school or through local tribal colleges. All of the teachers who attended these classes said they

were more applicable to their teaching than any class taken in college. Not only did these classes teach them accurate tribal histories, but also provided them the skills, knowledge, and resources to succeed.

Informal Education

Informal education was defined as any non-academic educational experience such as interactions with parents, community, and knowledge gained from observations. I also included personal insights gained through the teacher's own quest for knowledge such as visiting museums, watching documentaries, and reading about the culture. For this study informal education was categorized as any learning that takes place outside of the formal traditional learning vehicles such as college or professional development courses.

The themes that emerged from this inquiry included community involvement, parental contact, Native mentors and how informal educational resources were utilized in the classroom. The most powerful of all these themes was the reliance on and importance of Native mentors. Every one of the individual interviewees, and all of the focus group members, mentioned if not for their relationships with Native mentors they would not have survived. Not only do the teachers enjoy these close connections, they are also very helpful to learn about the community and culture.

Relationships were another key component of the informal education themes. Relationships with parents, students, and coworkers are so important. By keeping those lines of communication open with parents many of the teachers detailed how this helped them in the classroom. Community involvement was also at the top of all the individual interviewees list of activities. This also ties into relationships since by the student and

parent seeing non-Native teachers out in the community it conveys to them that these teachers are interested in them and their culture. It takes effort to take part in community events, but everyone interviewed agreed it was well worth it.

The utilization of informal resources such as elders and community members in the classroom was very helpful to some of the teachers. The teachers took advantage of these resources to enhance their lessons and bring appropriate culturally related content into their curriculums. Only one individual interviewee mentioned teaching Native language in the classroom, but the new and expanding cultural studies program is being implemented throughout the schools visited.

In all my interviews, informal education was a crucial factor in the teachers' survival in the classroom. Many stated without all these other resources they would not have been successful. Native mentors and community involvement were key components to becoming an effective educator on the reservation. These relationships and experiences were very fulfilling to all the teachers both in and outside of the classroom. Many spoke of how close they are to their Native mentors and friends and even went so far to describe them as family.

Classroom Experiences

I defined classroom experiences as on the job learning, things their students taught them, issues they face every day in their classrooms, and teaching and learning experiences that taught valuable lessons about Native American students. The emerging themes were poverty, cultural differences, the importance of building good relationships and trust, transiency, and the barriers that language had upon education. In my

interviews I also asked questions regarding teaching and learning styles that became the last two themes.

The main theme in this section was poverty and its impact upon education. All of the teachers I talked with in both the individual and focus groups interviews brought up the topic of poverty. They all agreed that their formal education had not prepared them in the least to face this issue. Through classroom experiences these teachers learned about the lasting impact that lower socioeconomic factors wreck upon individuals and the community. Even with all the odds stacked up against many of the families they serve, they shared wonderful stories of redemption and many have broken this cycle through education. The Native teachers and staff members I interviewed were very inspiring, and are wonderful role models for their students.

Relationships once again were highlighted in this section with a focus upon building trust and bonds that aid the teacher in the classroom. Understanding and identifying cultural differences was also very important to the interviewees. I listened to countless stories of how these teachers learned valuable lessons from their students, and how they avoided making mistakes or violating cultural norms. One thing all the non-Native teachers had to do when they first started teaching on the reservation was to reevaluate their own preconceived notions and attitudes toward Native people. Those who remain and are deemed effective and successful educators of Native Americans do so with an open mind, and open heart. Through building strong relationships and demonstrating they care about their students and families, these non-Native teachers have been accepted in the communities in which they teach.

Transiency was an issue I was unaware of but learned quickly how prevalent and detrimental it is to the educational system. With students moving from school to school on the reservation and nearby communities some schools are gaining and losing students on a regular basis. The case studies I investigated have procedures in place to prevent this from wrecking havoc such as a period at the beginning of the semester when they accept new students. Even with these policies, there is still quite an issue with transiency.

Language barriers were also a hindrance to education and I learned so much from the Native interviewees about this subject. Translating back and forth from Native language to English takes so much effort and is a detriment to comprehension. Education has now improved with the addition of Native speakers in the classroom. This addition has been a huge benefit for some to attain an education. The infusion of culture and language back into the classroom after such a long hiatus is very welcomed.

The last two themes under classroom experiences were teaching strategies and learning styles. These two themes evolved out of questions on best teaching practices and what they found through classroom experiences that worked well with Native American learners. I read countless times during the literature review that certain teaching styles worked best with Native American students. Most of my interviewees disagreed that one teaching style worked best with their students. They shared that they utilize all the different teaching styles with their students and they work. One thing many of them agreed upon was the use of active learning and the infusion of culture into the curriculum.

The most vocal feedback was over the idea of a Native American learning style. Many of the teachers were adamant that this does not exist and they were tired of hearing about this. They shared that Native students are as varied in their learning styles as non-Native students. Some of the teachers though did mention their students struggle with reading and comprehension, so they prefer to evaluate them orally or through project based presentations. Another teacher said Native students are natural scientists, so lessons that emphasize experiential learning work very well. Others mentioned the importance of teaching their students in a manner that will lead to success in high school and beyond where their teachers will not cater to one or the other type of learning style. In all it comes down to the fact that the teachers I interviewed vary their teaching and learning styles according to their subject and materials, but do not focus upon one type of strategy.

Comparison of Results to Literature

Much of the research reviewed does corroborate the findings of this study. It still remains that the majority of teachers in high Native population schools are non-Native (Agbo, 2001; Hjelmseth, 1972; Jeffries & Singer, 2003) but this trend is changing. Of the three case studies I researched one school had over 90% non-Native teachers, but the other two included a staff composed of roughly half or more Native American. With increased access and improved K-12 education many Native students are going on to attain a teaching degree and then returning to their communities to make a difference.

Sadly, many new teachers still do not possess the background knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in schools that service Native American students (Agbo, 2001; Hjelmseth, 1972; Jeffries & Singer, 2003; Pewewardy, 2002). Many of the teachers claimed they did not receive enough information in their education classes to prepare them for what they had to face daily teaching on the reservation. Even those who took multicultural classes said that information on Native Americans was either lacking or absent altogether. This is similar to the findings of Warren (2006) who stated that Native voices are often overlooked in most multicultural classes. Many of the teachers recommended that pre-service teachers get exposed to Native communities in their practicum's or student teaching so they are aware of the issues involved. Coballes-Vega (1992) recommended the importance of pre-service teachers receiving this type of exposure while still in college so they could discuss their experiences with their professors.

Informal education experiences were also evident in the literature review. Whether including community members in the classroom (Agbo, 2004), or the importance of parental involvement (Oliver & Penney-Howley, 1992; Coballes-Vega, 1992; Butterfield, 1994), or the inclusion of Native languages in the curriculum (Cleary & Peacock, 1998), all of these factors have an impact upon the classroom. Starnes (2006) also recommended Native mentors and community involvement as a key factor in teacher survival. All of the effective and successful educators I interviewed to some point or another recounted these same suggestions.

The effective educators of Native Americans that I interviewed did demonstrate some of the teaching strategies investigated in the literature review. Active hands-on learning, cooperative learning groups, and oral learning were all evident in these teacher's classrooms (Butterfield, 1994; Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Starnes, 2006). Although these teachers made an effort to integrate culture and different teaching strategies to reach all learners, they also agreed with the research conducted by Agbo (2001) that states we need to provide Native students with the tools to succeed in the mainstream society. The teachers were well aware that once these students left their K-8 schools they would go on to high school and colleges that do not necessarily adopt different teaching strategies.

The topic that came up quite a lot in this study that was not covered in the literature review had to do with poverty and how it impacts education. After reviewing my interviews and notes at the conclusion of the first case study I found myself writing "poverty" quite a few times. It was a big eye opener for me that I decided either not to include in the literature review, or was unaware of. Looking back through the literature I reviewed Cleary & Peacock (1995), did touch upon poverty when discussing the "five elements of oppression identified by teachers" (p. 95), citing the following:

Communities in trouble, including the usual array of issues common in many communities (crime, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, etc.) and some issues that may be unique to American Indian communities. This self-destructive behavior is characteristic of internalized oppression (p. 96).

So although issues of poverty were evident in the works I reviewed this was not my focus of the study. After looking at additional research on poverty and teacher education

programs Zeichner (1999) states there has been an increase of programs “initiated to especially prepare teachers to teach pupils living in poverty” (p. 9) but he continues stating that not much is known on “how this material is taught, how students understand and internalize it, or about students' dispositions to teach multiculturally and their skills in doing so” (p. 9). The issue of poverty and all the impacts of teaching in an impoverished community has to be addressed in the classroom before our teachers enter these types of situations. With this knowledge our graduates will be better prepared to face these issues once out in the field.

Although many of the themes that emerged from this research were corroborated through the literature review, what is most troubling is that the issues of high dropout rates amongst Native students still remain according to new research by Faircloth & Tippeconnic (2010). These researchers studied data collected in 12 states with high Native populations. They concluded that “findings indicate that the number of American Indians and Alaska Natives who graduate continues to be a matter of urgent concern. On average, less than 50% of Native students in these twelve states graduate each year” (p. 3). Even more concerning is the recommendations of all the research I reviewed still is lacking in education classes for pre-service teachers. With the results of this study my hope is that higher education can begin to implement changes that will have a positive impact upon education for Native American students.

Recommendations and Discussion

The teachers I interviewed had some great suggestions for new teachers beginning their journey teaching in reservation schools, and for changes they felt necessary at the higher education level. Their heartfelt recommendations come from experience, and their desire to ease the transition for new teachers. Many of their recommendations I felt very strongly about such as the collaboration with Tribal Colleges, finding a Native mentor, and the importance of community involvement. As I interviewed the teachers and reviewed the literature again I have outlined some recommendations.

In the following sections I will present recommendations for new graduates teaching at a high Native population school, and for higher education.

Recommendations for New Teachers

1. Mentors: All of the interviewees mentioned the importance of finding a Native Mentor. During member checking one of the non-Native teachers also included the following suggestion: Find a non-Native teacher mentor who has years of experience working on the reservation. “One of the biggest challenges is working with students that have many family members working at the school. Unfortunately, in my experiences the student is always right if it is coming from a non-Native teacher.”
2. Real life applications and cultural integration: Connect learning to real life examples and make it relevant to their world. Present your subject in a manner that makes it applicable to your students and their prior knowledge. Get to know

the culture and use it in your lessons; take advantage of that knowledge to teach better.

3. **Community involvement:** Be involved in the community to get to know your students and their families outside the classroom setting. Your students and parents will realize you are making an effort to learn about them and their culture. This will aid you in the classroom.
4. **Relationships:** Develop strong relationships with your students, their families, and your coworkers. Through these connections you will be able to collaborate with your coworkers, and reach out to your parents to help with their child's education.
5. **High Expectations:** Have high expectations for your students and surround yourself with others that feel the same. Never underestimate what your students can do, and the knowledge that they possess. Some teachers come in with different expectations of their Native students due to things they have heard, or previous experiences. Several of the teachers mentioned that due to the poverty and problems surrounding this issue, teachers have lowered their expectations. Some have even become negative, and these are not the ones you want to be around. One teacher told me that the negativity can be catching, and even if you lose friends, surround yourself with others who have high expectations and remain positive.
6. **Self Reflection:** If you are going to teach on the reservation, or in a high Native population school do some self analysis about your reasons to do this. You also need to delve into your preconceived notions regarding Native Americans. If you

are interested to go there and teach, and be open to a new experience you are going with the right mindset. If you are thinking you are going to the reservation to “save” them, you will not succeed. They do not need to be “saved.”

In order to be successful new teachers need to enter with an open mind and heart, a true willingness to learn about a new culture, and be involved in the community.

When Native Americans see new teachers making an effort, being involved, showing some vulnerability, they will reciprocate. This will help build the trust that is such an important factor in every relationship with your students and their families. It is these teachers who have earned this trust that survive teaching in a high Native population school.

Recommendations for Higher Education

1. New class creation/offering: Create a separate required class for pre-service teachers that is a collaboration between the Education, History and Native American Studies departments. Teach a combination of all the things the interviewees mentioned such as an accurate history of Native Americans, issues on the reservations, where to locate relevant and accurate materials, and the inclusion of Native speakers. This class would be very helpful to any teacher in Montana due to the high Native population we have in this state.
2. Tribal Colleges: Universities should collaborate with local tribal colleges to include education courses that are applicable to teaching Native Americans. Whether it is joining forces with the Tribal Colleges to teach classes, or offering

more professional development courses, one thing was clear that the participants thought very highly of the classes they took through these local colleges.

3. Utilize Native Americans as a Resource: Bring in more Native speakers into education courses. Also invite retired teachers from the reservation or Native American teachers to present in education courses.
4. Include information on teaching in low socioeconomic areas: Education classes need to teach issues surrounding impoverished communities and how to effectively work with families that are in poverty and crisis. The impacts of poverty on education are far reaching and transcend race and culture. These issues should be addressed early in the curriculum for pre-service teachers and addressed throughout the methods courses. Issues of poverty should also be addressed in Educational Leadership courses so that teachers have support from their administrators when dealing with the impacts this factor has on education. These classes should include more counseling information so new teachers know how to approach students dealing with different issues.
5. Student teaching/Internships on a reservation: Many of the participants in both individual and focus group interviews mentioned that part of student teaching should be some time in a reservation school. One teacher stated:

You know it is not something you are going to learn in a seminar watching a screen....And most reservations in Montana, I think there are a few that don't fit this mold, but you are going to find out how to teach kids not just the cultural way but also disadvantaged kids, lower socioeconomic kids if you go to a reservation and spend a month there. You are not going to learn everything but it will certainly open your eyes to what it is going to take to be an effective teacher on the reservation.

This teacher was not alone in their sentiment. Others stated they should spend half of their student teaching in a non-Native school and the other half on the reservation. It was obvious they all felt that pre-service teachers need to experience Native schools firsthand. I suggest that pre-service teachers have these experiences either as part of student teaching, paraprofessional experience, or internships. Many of the reservation schools have dorms where pre-service teachers could be housed during their time at the schools. Working alongside an experienced teacher and learning about the issues involved, the culture, and the joys of teaching on the reservation would be invaluable. Secondary education pre-service teachers could work as interns for a week or two at a time learning how to teach science, art, or physical education lessons. All of these experiences will benefit both the pre-service teachers and the reservation schools that partner with this project.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study was limited in its small scope of investigating three case studies on two reservations servicing K-8 students. The following are my suggestions to broaden and enrich this research topic:

1. Conduct a qualitative study similar to this research in high schools with high Native populations. One of the teachers stated to me that once their students move on to high school the dropout rate of Native Americans is substantial.

2. Interview teachers from other reservation schools to compare the findings to this study and see if these same themes would emerge.
3. Interview teachers in schools bordering reservations that have a lower Native population to see what their thoughts are on the Native learner.
4. Conduct a quantitative study including questionnaires on these same topics distributed to schools all over Montana.
5. Interview the principals involved in this study to determine why they chose the teachers they did for me to interview. What qualities did these teachers possess that informed their decision to identify them as successful and effective educators of Native Americans?
6. Interview principals working in high Native population schools to determine what skills and knowledge they deem important for teacher graduates.
7. Conduct interviews with teachers in low socioeconomic communities to discover their thoughts on poverty and its impact upon education.
8. Review the literature on poverty, low socioeconomic factors, and investigate other studies recommendations on how this impacts the teaching and learning process.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students in the K-8 environment which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area. As pre-service educators our job is to prepare graduates to enter

the workforce. We need to prepare them to enter various situations and not just the best case scenarios. If we want our graduates to enter the teaching profession prepared, we need to listen to the recommendations of successful and effective teachers of Native Americans. By starting at successful teaching and tracing their education back to their college experiences, I was able to present their stories through teacher's own voices. These reflections upon effective practice may impact how higher education institutions prepare their graduates. My hope is this preparation will improve education for Native American students and aid new teachers' transition to working in high Native population schools.

The teachers I interviewed were very passionate about teaching and really loved their schools. Many praised the small class sizes, available teaching resources, and welcoming communities. One thing they all had in common was their enjoyment derived from their students. The following teacher's comments summed up this sentiment: "I love the children! The children are great andthey just tell me different things and different stories. They are just fascinating, they really are." I believe with improvements in education all teachers in high Native population schools could experience this same passion and enjoyment with their jobs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Name:
 Date:
 School:
 Grade teaching:

Introduction:

I (Interviewer) will introduce myself and provide background and information about the interview. After stating this introduction I will review the Informed Consent form (Appendix D) with the participant:

I am interviewing you because your principal has identified you as being an effective and successful teacher of Native Americans. My study is all about discovering what you have learned about teaching Native American students. I would like for you to take this opportunity to share your thoughts, reflections, and opinions with me freely. What I am going to do is spend the next hour asking you questions designed to give me a full picture of your thoughts, ideas, and feelings. I am going to ask you questions about four categories that include your background, formal education, informal education, and classroom experiences.

I consider you the expert, and I am here to learn from your experiences and your honest opinions. Everything you say of course is confidential and I will not identify you in my research by name but will use a pseudonym to protect your identity. Results from my study will be reported as general themes. With your permission I would like to record this interview so as to accurately represent your thoughts in my study. If at any time you would like me to stop the recorder, or not answer a questions just let me know. Is it alright for me to record your interview?

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview?

Interview Questions:

Reflections and Perceptions:

1. Why do you think your principal has identified you as being an effective and successful teacher of Native American students?
2. What experiences have shaped you as a teacher in general?
3. How did you get to be successful with teaching Native American students?

Demographic questions:

1. I see from the demographic questionnaire that you were raised in _____ . What experiences did you have with Native Americans growing up?
2. As you remember back to your K-12 education, how do you remember Native Americans depicted in the curriculum?

Formal Education:

1. I see on your form you attended _____ for your undergraduate degree. Tell me about that experience?
2. Did you take any classes that addressed multicultural issues or diversity? As you reflect upon those classes how have they influenced your teaching today of Native American students?
3. In what ways do you feel your formal education did or did not prepare you to teach in a school with a high population of Native American students?
4. I see on your form that you have (or have not) taken professional development training focused upon Native Americans (ex: IEFA):
 - a. If yes: Describe what the training was, what you learned, and did you enact any of the ideas in your classroom?
 - b. If no: Tell me what type of Native American training would you like to benefit your teaching?

Informal Education:

1. How have you learned about the Native American culture in which you teach, and how has this knowledge influenced your teaching and curriculum? (ex: museums, independent reading, documentaries, etc.)
2. In what ways are you involved in the Native American community outside of the classroom?
3. As you reflect upon these experiences, what have you learned about the culture?
4. What have you learned about yourself?
5. What role does Native Languages have in your school &/or classroom?
6. Describe how you have utilized community resources in your classroom (ex:elders, artisans, storytellers, etc.).
7. One of the suggestions from my readings to help teachers incorporate Native issues in their classrooms is to find a Native mentor in the school to help you. Have you had a Native mentor? If so, describe this experience.

Classroom Experiences:

1. In my research I have read many accounts of things teachers have learned in their own classrooms from their students, and things they have tried. Can you share with me some classroom experiences that taught you important lessons about the Native American student?
2. What teaching strategies have you found works the best with your Native students? Please share examples with me.

Closing questions:

1. What advice do you have for a new teacher starting their journey working at a high native population school either adjacent or on a reservation.
2. What recommendations do you have for pre-service teacher educators to help new graduates become more effective and successful teachers of Native American students.

Closing:

I thank you for the time and insight you have given me during this interview. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience working with and in the Native Community? Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Date:

School:

Grade teaching:

e-mail address:

1. Tell me about your educational history (College/Colleges attended, Undergraduate degree, special certification or minors, any graduate level classes or degree)

2. What professional development or teacher in-services have you taken that address Native American students/learners? Any Indian Education for All training?

3. How many years have you been teaching? How many years have you taught classes that included Native American students? How many years teaching at this school and grades/subjects taught?

4. Demographic Information:
 - a. Male/Female
 - b. Age:
 - i. 20 – 30
 - ii. 31-40
 - iii. 41-50
 - iv. 51-60
 - v. 61+
 - c. Where were you born and raised?

 - d. Describe your nationality/ethnicity

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Begin by introducing myself, review my study, hand out informed consent form asking permission to record. Inform the participants that I want this to be a conversation where I learn from them, the experts. My hope is the information I learn from my research will help drive changes in pre-service education.

Begin with introductions: Explain I want to go around the room and if they will state their name and position.

1. What grade and subject do you teach here at _____ and how many years have you been teaching at this school?
2. Where did you get your teaching degree and in what subject?
3. What makes this school special?
4. What are the challenges of teaching here?
5. Where and how have you attained the knowledge and skills to effectively teach Native American students? Please share some stories.
6. How has your formal education prepared or not prepared you to teach here?
7. How has your formal education led to your success of teaching at a high native population school? Give examples.
8. What informal educational experiences have you participated in that attribute to your successful teaching experiences? Please share stories.
9. What lessons have you learned from your own classrooms that have informed your practice?
10. What suggestions do you have for university professors to better prepare teachers to educate Native American students?

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Subject Consent Form for
Participation in Human Research at
Montana State University

Exploring the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students: A multiple case study.

Dawn Silva
6 Cloninger Ln, Bozeman, MT 59718 (406) 570-3889

The research in which you will be participating explores and describes the educational histories, perception, and experiences of educators of Native American students which in turn can inform pre-service teacher education in this area. The researcher is a graduate student conducting dissertation research.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a 1 hour interview (taped with your permission) on your teaching experiences. The interview questions will ask you to reflect upon your educational history both formally and informally. I will ask you to share experiences and advice for educators of pre-service teachers.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to stop participating in the research at any time, or to decline to answer any specific questions. You may ask me about the research procedures and I will answer your questions to the best of my ability.

Your participation in this research study is confidential. I will not identify you in my research by name but will use a pseudonym to protect your identity. The information you provide during this interview will be used to inform pre-service teacher education in this area. Results from this study will be reported using general themes that arise from the interview. If I believe that information from this research could result in you being uniquely identifiable, I will decline to disclose this information.

I agree to participate in an investigation into “Exploring the educational histories, perceptions, and experiences of successful educators of Native American students: A multiple case study.” I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have about the research procedures. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying Dawn Silva at (406) 570-3889. Additional questions about the rights of human subjects can be answered by the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board, Mark Quinn, (406) 994-4707.

Participant Signature

Date