

Understanding the Needs of American Indian Students in Our Nation's Schools

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STANDING TOGETHER



AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION AS
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

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Across the United States, there exist many false and misleading perceptions concerning American Indians and their cultures. These perceptions have proven to be detrimental to the success of Native students, especially where these practices tend to reflect “one-size-fits-all” educational programming. In an effort to ameliorate this situation, the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) created a Commission on the Education of the American Indian to address the needs of Native students and how to better prepare inservice and new teachers through new information to assist in changing the way Native students are educated in our schools.

The commission's efforts are presented in the newly released book, *Standing Together: American Indian Education as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy* (Klug, 2012). As stated by ATE Commission chair Jane McCarthy,

This volume represents some of the research and thinking that has resulted from our first three years of work. We have presented our work several times a year to diverse audiences at our Association of Teacher Education (ATE) conferences. Our work has been influenced by the input and feedback from our colleagues who have generously critiqued and responded to our papers and seminars. (2012, ix)

The book is divided into three sections, with Part I providing an overview of what has been done the current era of Tribal self-determination to promote successful educational efforts to grow and change institutions serving Native students. Readers are introduced to the early history of education for assimilation of American Indians to Western culture in the late 1800s through the large-scale, forced enrollment of Native

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children in boarding schools created for this purpose. This section also reviews the investigation into these practices by the Meriam Commission that reported its results in 1928, which shocked those in charge of Indian education and at higher levels of the federal government owing to its cataloguing of the failures of the boarding schools to educate Native students.

Those who did not perish in the schools due to abuses, poor nutrition, difficult manual labor, and disease outbreaks, were left to lead their adult lives in situations where they were not accepted by white society, nor were they able to communicate and understand the cultural traditions of their Native communities. This report concluded with recommendations for closures of boarding schools, elimination of abusive practices, and establishing day schools on or near reservations for children.

The remainder of this section details early efforts to teach American Indian students through what we now term as “culturally relevant” or “culturally sensitive” education. At the same time, readers learn of the history of Native peoples throughout the late 18th century into the latter part of the 20th century.

Part II of the book centers on the educational reform efforts of No Child Left Behind (2001) and how this legislation has negatively impacted education for American Indian students. It begins with an interrogation of the term, “no child left behind,” throughout the history of European-American Indian relations and how colonial practices are still impacting Native education today.

This section of the book features case studies of schools and their struggles with

finding a way to provide culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy in this time of one-size-fits-all education complete with sanctions against schools and teachers for non-compliance and low achievement of Native students. Chapters also focus on language retention and revitalization efforts for Native peoples through tribal efforts to reclaim their heritages and the effects of these efforts for students in schools.

Lastly, Part III of the book focuses on the future and developing Native leadership for schools while finding common ground that recognizes and respects the legitimacy of both Native American and European systems of education. Chapters focus on educational leadership programs in universities; integration of new ways of sharing problem-solving with stakeholders, including Native students; integrating the works of constructivists Piaget, Vygotsky, and Freire in the professional education; and introducing readers to contributions of American Indian leaders to education for their children.

In conclusion, the contributors share their work with readers, creating more effective, equitable, and exciting learning opportunities for our Native students. As stated by T. L. McCarthy in the introduction, *it is our hope that the ideas and research recounted in this volume will stimulate educators to think about the characteristics of the Native American students in their classrooms—both K-12 and college or university. We must think of the strengths American Indian students bring with them that can be built upon to facilitate powerful learning situations. We must utilize the richness of their diverse cultures to provide a stimulating educational environment that respects the dignity of all (see the work of Klug and Whitfield, 2003).*

Above all, we must listen to the dreams of the American Indian peoples for the education of their youth (see Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). We must empower American Indian students as citizens of a democracy to make decisions about their own futures (rich descriptions of such empowerment can be found in Abu-Saud & Champagne, 2006). This volume is designed to stimulate thinking and discussion and to spur action on the part of educators to work for social justice in all aspects of our educational system, and in particular for a much neglected sector, the education of the American Indian. (2012, pp. ix-x)

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