

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO  
Department of Educational Studies: Elementary and Early Childhood

Research Project: Public Education and Teacher Understanding of Native American  
Dakota and Lakota Culture  
Elizabeth Sandell, November 2, 2009

1. Research Project Title: Public Education and Teacher Understanding of Native American Dakota and Lakota Culture
2. Research Questions:
  - a. Why do Native students and families find it difficult to communicate with and to trust public school administrators and teachers?
  - b. What do teachers need to know about past events and their continuing impact in order to improve the experience of Native students and families in public schools?

3. Significance of Research Project:

“Boarding schools were an important part of the American Indian experience. They still are a critical factor in why some American Indian parents find it difficult to communicate with public school system administrators and teachers – and even more difficult to trust them... In order to undo the boarding school legacy, it is important for every teacher with American Indian students in the classroom to have an awareness of past events and their continuing impact”  
(*American Indian contributions to the world*, Retrieved November 3, 2009 from <http://www.kporterfield.com/aictw/articles/boardingschool.html>).

Various researchers and reporters have documented the array of experiences that native students had in educational settings between 1879, when the Carlisle Indian Industrial School (in Pennsylvania) and others were established and youngsters were forced off the reservations, and the 1930s, when most boarding schools were closed.

This project will help to correct the lack of knowledge among future classroom teachers so that they are prepared to be better teachers of Native students. The project will also give Native elders an opportunity to record their education experiences in their own words.

4. IRB Log # 5341 – approved October, 2009.

5. Proposed Methodology: The data in this study will be generated through 10 to 15 interviews. Interviewees are projected to be adults within the range of 30 to 55+ years old. The research requires that respondents be of Dakota or Lakota membership. The principle and student investigators will locate available respondents based on convenience samples from among Native elders suggested by key informants: Mr. David Larsen and Dr. Gwen Westerman Wasicuna. The investigators will conduct one-on-one interviews about the respondents’ personal experiences relating to their own education and the education of children and grandchildren. Interview data will be collected primarily in person as much as possible, as well as by telephone to informants located elsewhere.

This study will use grounded theory, a theory that allows researchers to review qualitative data and to use inductive reasoning to support conclusions from that data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Charmaz, 1983 and 2000). Grounded theory will allow the investigators to develop a

theory *that explains why and how* “some American Indian parents find it difficult to communicate with public school system administrators and teachers – and even more difficult to trust them.”

Each interview will be videotaped and transcribed. Then, the investigators will review and categorize the data. This process is called “coding,” whereby “[r]esearchers create a conceptual interpretation of the data, impose an order on it, explicate the relationships between categories, and organize those relationships to communicate their ideas to audiences” (Charmaz, 1990). After coding a document one or more times, it will be analyzed further through the use of memos. Memos will be used for “...clarifying basic codes and revisiting and fine-tuning methodological issues and procedures” in this research,” as well as to layout specific ideas using evidence from the interviews to draw conclusions about what was being said (Lofland and others, 2006). By looking at and committing these “ideas, hunches, questions, and elaborated categories [I] define[d] what is implicit and what is explicit in the data,” so that important aspects could be identified (Charmaz, 1990). These ideas will be used to draw conclusions. The conclusions will be checked with the key informants to be sure that the researchers understood the meaning behind the interviews. Finally, the conclusions will be used to form the findings of the study and the script for the videotape program.

6. Anticipated Project Outcomes: Anticipated Project Outcomes: Work products will include a videotape program, a presentation for a professional conference and an article for a professional journal.

7. Timeline:  
September/October, 2009: Research Design, IRB proposal  
November, 2009: Write interview scripts, set interview appointments  
November/December, 2009: Interview 10 to 15 adults of Dakota/Lakota heritage  
January/February, 2010: Develop storyboard, edit videotapes of interviews  
February 16, 2010: Abstract for presentation proposal  
March, 2010: Final edits of videotaped interviews, rehearsal for conference  
April, 2010: Conference presentations and participation  
May, 2010: Write material for Conference Proceedings  
June, 2010: Write article for submission to a professional journal  
June 30, 2010: Conclusion

8. Bibliography:

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