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Cultural Integrationist:

A Study of Motivating Native American Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if adding a cultural integrationist to a culturally diverse public school will increase Native American test scores and improve absenteeism. The research tested the ability of teachers to educate Native American students and to better prepare them for standardized tests. The research also examined the number of Native American students who were motivated to attend school. Dakota Step test scores, Act test scores, and attendance records were collected from a culturally diverse K-12 school. The data was analyzed using NOVA and was stratified into Caucasians, Native American, and other ethnicity divisions. This study helped us to better understand how to motivate Native American students in a diverse school through the impact of educators working with a cultural integrationist.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This researcher, a public school teacher, has observed a poor attendance rate among Native American students. Studies have shown a discrepancy between standard tests scores among Native American students and Non-Native American students. Many Native American children are taught by Non-Native American educators. The study researches the affect of adding a cultural integrationist to a rural K-12 school and the effects this position will have on the standardized test scores and absenteeism of Native American children.

Background of Study

Across the country, Native American students are taught by teachers who are not a part of their culture and do not understand their culture. Native American students score lower on standardized tests than Non-Native American students. They also have a bigger problem with absenteeism causing the Native American culture to have a lower graduation rate than Non-Native American students. It has become apparent that Native American children need to be inspired to be educated. Educators involved with Native American students need to become involved with the culture of their students. The high quality education that Native American children deserve can only be attained when educators become involved with their culture and obtain a deepened understanding of how to build relationships with their students. The Native American culture is full of resilient youthful of dreams of a better life and a good education. These youth are in need of educators willing and able to assist them to reach their dreams by understanding them.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if adding a cultural integrationist to a culturally diverse public school will increase Native American test scores and improve absenteeism of Native American ~~test scores~~. *attendance records.*

Personnel Statement

The researcher is a classroom teacher at the research site and may provide some biased judgment on the importance of incorporating culture into the education of Native American students. The researcher has developed personal relationships with the Native American students, Non-Native American students, and staff in the rural South Dakota school where the data was collected.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the Literature Review and Methodology of this research study. Based on the purpose of this study, the two research questions are:

1. What will the numerical relationship be between the absenteeism of Native American students after adding a cultural integrationist to a rural K-12 school?
2. What will the numerical relationship be between the standardized test scores of Native American students after adding a cultural integrationist to a rural K-12 school?

Significances of Study

NCLB has helped educators to identify the gaps between Native American students and Non-Native American students standardized test scores and attendance rates. This research is important to educators who currently work with Native American students and those teachers who have yet to enter their profession. Most importantly, this research is

important to the Native American students whom educators are responsible to teach and inspire.

Assumptions

The test data was administered in a timely manner and conducted in such a way to ensure appropriate and consistent testing conditions as well as secure handling of all test documents.

Limitations

The sample was collected from one Midwestern rural school in South Dakota. The researcher did not have control over the data collection.

Delimitation

The study was confined to a Midwestern rural school in South Dakota with a multicultural climate which includes a large Native American minority population.

Definitions

For the purpose of ensuring clarity and uniformity in this study, selective terms were defined. The documented definitions were obtained from the 2009 South Dakota Test of Educational Progress Interpretive Guide. The definition without citations was developed by the researcher.

Dakota Step Test (DSTEP)-measures students' mastery of the South Dakota State Academic Standards (Pearson 2009)

No Child Left Behind Law (NCLBA)-requires states to implement rigorous annual testing programs in reading and mathematics and determine the proportion of students proficient in each subject area with the goal of all students reaching proficiency by 2014 (Pearson 2009).

Advanced level-A student performing at the advanced level exceeds expectations for that grade level. The student is able to perform the content standards for the grade at a high level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency (Pearson 2009).

Proficient-A student performing at the proficient level meets expectations for that grade level. The student is able to perform the content standards for the grade at the level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency specified by the standards (Pearson 2009).

Basic-A student performing at the basic level performs below expectations for that grade level. The student is able to perform some of the content standards for the grade below the level of difficulty, complexity, or fluency specified by the grade level standards (Pearson 2009).

Below basic-A student is performing below the basic level and is unable to perform the content standards for the grade; therefore, no description is provided for this achievement level (Pearson 2009).

Grade-level content standards-represent expected outcomes for students completing each grade level (Pearson 2009).

Cultural integrationist-This person is a staff member who has been hired to assist the incorporation of the culture of the student body into the classroom environment and lessons of the individual teachers. This individual must also bring about cultural awareness to the educational community.

Summary

It is apparent through data collected in this study that Native American students have a problem with absenteeism. Native American students have lower standardized tests scores than Non-Native American students. Educators need to better understand the culture of the

Native American students for whom they are responsible to care. This research will elaborate on the impact that a cultural integrationist will have on the quality of education Native American students receive in a rural school in South Dakota. Educators will better understand how to inspire and teach Native American students through a better understanding of the Native American culture.

Chapter Two will provide the historical overview on the misunderstandings of the Native American culture in the past and present in education. Chapter two will also present current findings on the absenteeism problem and standardized test scores from Native American students.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature and Research

The purpose of this research study is to determine if adding a cultural integrationist to a culturally diverse public school will increase Native American test scores and improve attendance. There are several topics important to this research. The depth at which the educational staff understands the culture of its students has a direct relationship between the success of students and their desire to be in school. The fair treatment of all students in a diverse school can affect the school climate and the attitude of its students. The educational system designs curriculum around the culture of its students to help them see the relevancy of their classroom work.

Historical Overview

Native American children living in culturally diverse communities from the early 1900s to the present have been misunderstood by American education programs. There has been a misunderstanding of the behaviors of Native American children due to a misunderstanding of their culture. There is a cultural gap between Native American children and our educational system. This cultural gap often consists of a misunderstanding of the Native American culture by predominantly white staff in many schools. Many Native Americans continue to perform poorly in schools. Many low income students are negatively labeled as low achieving and disadvantaged. These students struggle so they frequently receive deficient information from school officials (Daniel & Robert 2007). All of the students at the research site are encouraged to take the ACT test. The researcher has heard some teachers and administrators express negative feelings toward this practice because it

appears to lower our ACT test scores when compared with the SD average test scores on the ACT. The researcher has heard staff members from a rural South Dakota school express feelings that some students are not good enough to take the ACT test.

Biased teachers and administrators may also lead to unfair curriculum tracking and the track assignments for students. The relationship between race/ethnicity and curriculum track assignments is clear. Minority students are underrepresented in high tracks and overrepresented in low tracks (Ballon 2008). The research site recently had upset middle school parents in the school because they had high and low level math classes. The enrollment in the low level math classes was almost 100% Native American students. The parents accused the school of being racist by placing Native Americans on the low track thus giving them fewer opportunities for successful admittance or work in college. In the past 5 years, the research has had 5% or less Native American students enrolled in college preparatory chemistry and physics classes. The researcher often wondered if American educators are discouraging Native American students about enrolling in college preparatory classes without realizing it.

Current Findings

According to the NCLB report card of the rural SD school for 2008 and 2009, the attendance rate of Native American students has been 4% lower than Non-Native Americans students. The Native American graduation rate is 33% lower than Non-Native Americans. Reading and math scores have been lower in grades 3-8 and 9-12. The overall percentage difference for all grades in math and reading scores indicates Native American students have less advanced and proficient test scores than the white students. There were also more Native Americans students in the below basic scores than Non-Native American students.

The researcher wanted to know if misunderstandings of the Native American culture or our resistance to include their culture in our lessons and rooms hinders their education and encourages absenteeism. Their lower test scores and failure to be understood may be their attempt to teach us a lesson. Native American educators need to learn how to work with Native American students so these students will reach their full potentials. The Native American culture contains unique strengths that can foster resiliency. The Lakota Sioux people, for example, identify core needs that foster resiliency and motivate individuals to reach their potential (Feinstein, Driving-Hawk, & Baartman, 2009). The research site recently conducted a panel discussion with struggling Native American students at a professional development day in November 2009. Many of these students felt that their teachers did not care about them and did not show concern for them when they missed school or had missing work. They felt that they may as well stop attending school as they did not have a chance to pass anyway. They also revealed that some staff felt that they should not look toward a college career because they could not pass high school classes. The researcher asked Native American students how their teachers could help them reach their full potential. The students told the researcher that their families were supportive or in some case a strain on their road to success. This information reinforces the researcher's beliefs that American educators need to better understand the Native American culture and the strains from their life of poverty and dysfunctional families in order for educators to understand how to help Native American students and build relationships with them.

Many of the Native American dropouts claim that the curriculum is disconnected from real life for them and that schools are impersonal systems where no one really cares about them (Harada & Yamamota, 2008). American educators need to better understand what

Native American students care about. The researcher has reached struggling Native American students through the use of a cultural integrationist who is a Native American. The researcher has added plants to her room with the names of the plants translated into the Lakota language. She has incorporated Native American medicinal plants into some lessons and decorations in her room. The researcher has seen a difference in the relationships with these students since adding these Native American artifacts to her classroom. Native American students seem more willing to ask questions and come in for help when they miss school or get behind in their lessons. The researcher also incorporated project-based learning so Native American students can utilize some of their own interests within the lessons. Project-based learning is a potentially powerful means to produce relevant and rigorous learning as it builds on students' individual strengths and allows them to explore interests in the structure of a defined curriculum (Harada & Yamamoto 2008).

The American educational system has put massive strains on test scores at the research site. When seniors are granted senior privileges, the action is based on their standardized test scores. If students score in below basic, they do not receive their privileges as soon as other students who tested in proficient or advanced proficient. Many of the students have poor attitudes about test scores and some will even skip testing days. A large number of the below basic students are Native Americans. There are several factors about an individual that may influence how they interact with a test's content. Some of these factors could be their mother tongue, life experiences, and socialization practices (Okabe 2006). Among 1.1 million students with similar high school GPAs, Non-Native American students consistently outscored minorities by an average difference of over 60 points on the SAT (Micceri 2007). Currently at the research site, there is a Native American minority population

that upholds this trend. The ACT test scores in the science category were six points below the South Dakota state average during 2009. The research site has a large portion of Native American students who take the ACT, and many of these students are not enrolled in upper level reading and math classes. The demographics at the research site change as the students' progress in their school careers. In 2009 there were 70% Native Americans in the kindergarten classes, but only 39% continued on in the high school classes. The South Dakota NCLB report card showed troubling data. The Native American graduation rate was at 67% while the white graduation rate was at 100% for 2009. The Native American attendance rate was four points below the Non-Native American population. Every category of standardized testing showed far fewer Native Americans in proficient and advanced proficient areas than the Non-Native American population.

Summary

It appears throughout the literature and the experiences from the research site that Native American tests scores and absenteeism are bigger problems than in the Non-Native American population. The staff in a school with a diverse Native American population needs to have somebody who can teach staff how to incorporate culture into lessons and classrooms. Educators also need to be more aware of how to work with these children by better understanding their lives. Native American students need to be taught how to take tests that are not designed specifically for Native American students. The research does not show a difference in students' success between schools run by Native American educators versus white educators for Native American children. The research does show, however, a correlation between the feelings that Native American children have toward school, testing, and school staff. The researcher has not seen any research that says understanding the

Native-American culture better will hinder the progress of the education of Native American students.

Chapter three will provide the methodology of the research conducted in this study.

Chapter three will provide a brief review of the literature on important topics to the researcher. It will discuss the criteria that dictated the site selection and participation selection by the researcher. An explanation on the data collection process and data analysis will also be provided by the researcher in Chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The purpose of this quantitative study is to determine if adding a cultural integrationist to a culturally diverse public school will increase Native American test scores and improve absenteeism.

Brief Review of Literature

The depth to which the educational staff in a culturally diverse school understands the culture of its students has a direct relationship between the success of students and their desire to be in school. The fair treatment of all students in a diverse school can affect the school climate and the attitude of its students. This fair treatment will be made possible through a better understanding of the culture of all the unique students in a school.

There is a cultural gap between Native American children and the American educational system. This cultural gap often consists of a misunderstanding of the Native American culture by predominantly Non-Native American staff in many schools. Many of the Native American dropouts claim that the curriculum is disconnected from real life and that schools are impersonal systems where no one really cares about them (Harada & Yamamota 2008).

There are several factors about an individual that may influence how they interact with a test's content. Some of these factors could be the mother's tongue, life experiences, and socialization practices (Okabe 2006). The researcher wants to know if adding a culture integrationist will improve Native American tests scores and absenteeism by educating staff to better understand the Native American culture. The staff in a school with a diverse Native

the state of South Dakota. The ACT test is administered by our school counselor in the school on the designated days and under the strict guidelines dictated by ACT Inc. and the state of South Dakota. The attendance records are collected and recorded by the school secretaries after the teachers electronically enter the data every period of a school day.

The researcher will collect the data from the records available upon obtaining permission from the research site. The researcher will personally deliver the letter of permission to the superintendent in her office and collect it after she has given her written permission that access to the test scores and attendance records are granted. The school counselor will be notified that permission has been granted to the researcher to obtain the test scores and the attendance records. Upon that notification, the researcher will collect the data from the school counselor.

Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using a NOVA on collected scores of the reading and math Dakota Step tests divided into ethnicity divisions of Caucasian, Native American, and other. The researcher will analyze the ACT data adding NOVA on the collected scores of reading, math, and science tests divided into ethnicity divisions of Caucasian, Native Americans, and other.

Summary

After receiving permission from a rural K-12 South Dakota school, the researcher will collect data from standardized test scores and attendance records. The test scores and attendance rates of Native American students will be analyzed for statistical changes due to the addition of a cultural integrationist to this school.

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