

August 2011

# American Indian Reservation Schools: The Achievement Gap

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AMERICAN INDIAN RESERVATION SCHOOLS:  
THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

A Capstone Experience Manuscript


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Completion Date:

April 29, 2011

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Professor Kathleen A. Brown-Pérez, Commonwealth Honors College

## ABSTRACT

Title: **American Indian Reservation Schools: The Achievement Gap**

Author: **Caitlin Daley, History**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Horace Mann, often called the father of public education, said that “Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery.” Schools on American Indian<sup>1</sup> reservations, however, do not provide an education that is of an equal quality to the schools in the rest of the United States, including the public schools in the surrounding areas, and education there does not have the opportunity to act as “the great equalizer.” American Indian reservations are home to some of the most impoverished people in the nation and the lack of quality education is making it difficult to change that. The link between the level of education one receives and the salary one is paid has been proven by years of census results, so by denying American Indians the same quality of education as other students, the federal government is also creating an obstacle to the means to improve their standards of living. The continued avoidance of this problem and lack of solutions to fix it is an injustice to American Indian people today. For American Indians on reservations to escape poverty, the federal government needs to change the way that reservation schools are funded and the atmospheres of the schools so that students can receive a quality education.

This paper specifically deals with schools on American Indian reservations.

Although only about 10% of American Indian students in the United States attend these

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this introduction and subsequently throughout this paper I use the term “American Indians” to describe the general population of the hundreds of nations of people that were living on the American continent before the European invasion and continue to exist on the continent. Although it is preferred to refer to each nation by its own name, because this topic is not specific to one nation, but to all of the nations that the United States recognizes and which have reservations, I chose the term American Indians. The sources that I used for research on these topics favor this term over others, so I incorporated that feeling into my own choice.

schools, because I am focusing on education as a means to alleviate poverty on reservations, focusing on reservation schools is appropriate. These schools are funded through the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) under the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The BIE was established in August 2006, and was formerly the Office of Indian Education Programs. There are 184 schools funded by the BIE, 59 of which are directly run by the BIE, and the remaining 125 are run by the tribes (United States House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor 20).

There is an achievement gap between American Indian schools and other schools in the U.S. that is evident in the low graduation rates, college attendance rates, standardized test scores, etc. The only way to close this gap is to look at the system currently in place and to fix its problems. For instance, currently the schools do not receive adequate funding from the federal government. In addition, a large percentage of these funds need to be allocated to fixing the physical school buildings, leaving an even smaller amount for schools to use to improve the curriculum and attract and train teachers, both of which are crucial to providing a quality education to American Indian students (United States Commission on Civil Rights 91). Until this problem is fixed, we will likely see no improvement in the achievement gap.

This funding problem has worsened in recent years due to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This act measures schools performances through required standardized testing in schools. Each school is given a performance goal to meet each year and, if those goals are not met, the school is punished through funding cuts. Because these standardized tests are designed for students who speak English as a first language



and for more Anglo-centric test takers, American Indian students do not do as well on them on average, and therefore lose even more funding (Fox 165).

In addition to issues with funding, the curriculum that is being taught in BIE and tribally run schools is not always culturally relevant to their students. American Indians have their own unique cultures and languages. Having these unique cultures means that American Indian children have different world views and different approaches to questions than children of the mainstream American culture. It also means that they have their own stories, literature, history, language that they should learn in school, just as children in public schools learn literature and history of the United States. Because the reservations operate within and are dependent upon the United States, there should still be lessons from United States history and literature, but there also needs to be an addition of Native culture in the classroom.

Cultural values and traditions are passed on through the generations not only through traditional celebrations, but also through stories. For many American Indian nations, the stories depict their myth of creation, life lessons, how to do something, and pieces of their history. They are important additions to school curriculums, and they are proven to keep the students more interested in school. Likewise, they have their own histories. American Indians are rarely present in American history books, especially not after the Civil War period. The students have a right to know the history of their own people, especially from a point of view that does not celebrate the European conquest.

Likewise, American Indians have their own languages. Language is an essential part of culture, and the survival of these languages is important to the nations. Language inclusion can be important for different reasons depending upon the tribe. For some

tribes, the students' first language is the native language, so switching completely to an English-only setting can impede their understanding of the subjects, and can make students feel anxious or unwelcome, which are factors contributing to the high dropout rate in reservation schools. For other tribes, their languages are in danger of being lost due to years of assimilationist policy in the United States. It is important to these tribes to teach the younger generations the languages so that their languages are not lost completely.

The people that can be agents of change and improvement in these schools are the teachers. Cultural and language inclusion is a difficult task because it involves finding materials other than textbooks to teach from. It is especially difficult because the majority of teachers on the reservations are non-Indians, who have to learn the culture. Because the funding is so low for American Indian reservation schools, they cannot offer as much compensation for teachers as public schools can. This leads to a high turnover rate for teachers, which makes it hard to have culturally aware and experienced teachers. Until this issue of funding can be fixed, American Indian communities have to help train their teachers; otherwise the students are further disadvantaged.

All of these factors together, the way in which BIE schools are funded, the inclusion of culture and language in school curriculum, and training teachers to know how to better the classroom environment and to incorporate tribal knowledge, have a bearing on the achievement gap for American Indian students. In order to successfully alleviate this gap, the solution needs to address all of these areas together because they affect the others.

## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In the United States, education is viewed as the great equalizer, because hard work is supposed to bring success. This system, based on merit, should create equal opportunities to students of all ethnicities. However, the education that is being provided on American Indian reservations today is not of the same quality that the average public school provides, leaving American Indian students with fewer options and a greater hurdle to success in their professional lives.

American Indian students in reservation schools are not receiving the same quality of education that students at public schools are. This inequality is seen in several comparisons between the performance averages of each school type. Jon Reyhner, an associate professor of teaching bilingual multicultural education courses at Northern Arizona University, highlights the education gap in terms of student dropout rates. He brings to the reader's attention that, in 1989, the dropout rate among American Indian students was twice the national average at 35.5% (Reyhner, "American Indians Out of School" 38). He cites some reasons for such a high dropout rate such as having too long of a commute to school, feeling lost in a big school with large class sizes, and failure to motivate students, among other things. Using the Navajo school as an example, he reports that 45% of Navajo students that dropout receive grades of B or better (Reyhner, "American Indians Out of School" 43). The issue of retention is cited as a cause for concern and proof of an issue with the education system on the reservations in most modern evaluations, but Reyhner proposes reasons for a high dropout rate that are not suggested by many other scholars. Although Jon Reyhner wrote this piece over two decades ago, these facts have changed very little. I chose to include this, along with

several other pieces by Reyhner, because he is cited in the articles of experts in the field of American Indian education.

The tendency of other scholars analyzing the achievement gap between American Indian schools and public schools is to look at the social factors affecting the lives of students. Lana Shaughnessy, a group leader at U.S. Department of Education, Sonal Doshi, an evaluator at Centers for Disease Control, and Sherry E. Jones, who holds a Ph.D, an MPH, and a JD, are three such authors who looked into the social stresses affecting communities on reservations. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among American Indians aged 15 to 24 (Shaughnessy, Doshi, and Jones 170). They look at the percentages of these young adults who had committed attempted suicide who had drunk alcohol, driven with a drunk driver, carried a weapon, put themselves at sexual risk, etc (Shaughnessy, Doshi, and Jones 178). Although these facts and statistics are valuable and cannot be ignored or left out, there are reasons besides destructive behavior that affects the lives and achievements of American Indian students.

D. Michael Pavel, a Skokomish man who holds a Ph.D. and is an assistant professor of higher education in the College of Education at Washington State University, acknowledges the alcohol and drug abuse on reservations, but looks at the quality of the teaching staff in reservations schools as one of the reasons for the achievement gap. The average salary for a teacher in a BIA funded school is \$19,141 per year (Pavel 11). Principals with more than a master's degree earn salaries that are on average \$10,000 less than they would make at public schools (Pavel 11). The low salaries for educators make working in a BIA funded school less desirable than public schools, and more often than not a last resort. In addition to low salaries for teachers, only 3

percent of tribal school/BIA school teachers received a major or a minor in Indian Education (Pavel 11). Having teaching staffs that are undereducated in the culture of the majority of its students and with meager compensation compared to what it could be earning in other schools is an arguable reason for having underachieving schools compared to national averages.

Looking at the issues with retention, motivated teachers, and substance abuse are viable places to find evidence of the achievement gap, but it can also be seen in the top performing students when comparing the national advance placement exam scores of American Indian students against white students. George Moore, who earned a Ph.D. and is employed as a Sewall Academic Program Senior Instructor at the University of Colorado, and John R. Slate, who earned a Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee and is employed as a Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations at The University of Texas at El Paso, both analyzed the national AP score results from the 2007 exams in biology, English language and composition, U.S. government politics, U.S. history, and psychology. According to their report, not only are American Indian students not enrolling in AP classes at the same rate that white students are, but they are receiving worse scores (Moore and Slate 90). When considering AP tests as college credit, a score of 1 and 2 are disqualifying. 55.54% of American Indian students overall scored a 1 or 2 on their AP exams, compared to 36.16% of white students (Moore and Slate 90). Looking at difference in scores between the AP exams is further proof of an achievement gap because AP students are the top students in schools and cannot be overlooked as easily as students affected by substance abuse.

With the reports of the inferior quality of education that BIA funded schools provide, the BIA sent professional monitoring teams to the 184 schools that it ran or provided funding for. Richard St. Germaine, a Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa who is an associate professor in the Department of Foundations of Education at the University of Wisconsin in Eau Claire both participated in the evaluation of two dozen BIA funded schools and wrote a journal article reporting its results. The report cites several areas that need improvement in a large number of BIA schools, like 42% of schools need to develop their written curriculum, 40% need to provide teacher training in current methodology, and 36% need to improve their facilities (St. Germaine 35). This is a report of the BIA itself acknowledging the need for reform in its schools.

Despite these findings and recommendations, however, there is evidence that the achievement gap is not only remaining, but it may be widening. Steven Nelson, who has a Ph.D. and is administrative director and office planning and service coordinator at Education Northwest, Nicole Sage, who holds a Ph.D. and is a research advisor at Education Northwest, and Richard Greenough, who also holds a Ph.D. and is planning senior advisor at Education Northwest, collaborated to write on the widening gap. The basis for this claim is their comparison of the scores of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading and math in 2005 and 2007. Between the two years, the achievement gap had widened from a 14 percentage point difference to an 18 percentage point difference (Nelson, Greenough, and Sage 4). This however is solely based on the results from two years of standardized tests, so it may not be convincing evidence of a widening gap, but it does display at least a continuation.

One of the reasons for this achievement gap that is widely accepted by experts is the funding of BIA/tribally run schools. Through a series of legislation, the way that the schools on reservations are funded was decided, and now the means to funding through the BIA are convoluted and do not always benefit the student.

Linda Sue Warner, a Comanche woman who holds a PhD. and is CEO of the Indian Community School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, writes about all of the legislation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that affects the way that funding is allocated to BIA/tribally run schools. She writes about 18 pieces of legislation that affect the way that BIA/tribally run schools are funded, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which made curriculum reforms applicable to American Indian schools, and several laws that outline how funds are allocated to the public schools that educate a student body made up of a large percentage of American Indians (Warner 68). Her outlines of these laws make it more clear how money is allocated to American Indian schools. Warner's piece was written before the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. This controversial piece of legislation is critiqued by many scholars in American Indian education.

Tsianina Lomawaima, a Creek woman with a Ph.D. from Stanford University and currently a professor at the University of Arizona, and Teresa L. McCarty, who earned a Ph.D. from Arizona State University, argue that, while it is an improvement to hold schools accountable for the education that is provided for American Indian students, NCLB is "inadequately funded to enable tribes to meet its mandates" and "have not included a native voice" (Lomawaima and McCarty 156). NCLB is forcing teachers to "teach to the test" which takes away from lessons that develop critical thinking and reasoning skills (Lomawaima and McCarty 156).

Another place where concern is shown for the way NCLB affects American Indian students is during a Congressional hearing in 2008 on the challenges facing the BIA schools in improving student achievement. During this hearing Dr. Willard Sakiestewa Gilbert, a Hopi professor of Bilingual/Multicultural Education at Northern Arizona University, also the president of the National Indian Education Association, spoke at length on the ways NCLB is affecting the BIA funded schools. NCLB measures a school's success by whether or not it meets Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and only about 30% of BIA schools had met the AYP in the three years prior to his speech (Gilbert 12). There is a process for tribes to waive the definition of AYP, but the length and deadlines of the process combined with the resources needed makes it so that only a very few tribes actually apply for a waiver (Gilbert 12).

In addition to analyzing the effectiveness of the standards used to measure American Indian students' success, Gilbert addresses the lack of tribal input and the need for the inclusion of culture and language in American Indian education standards. The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) has proposed amendments to NCLB to include tribal input in the developing of standards that tribal schools and BIA schools need to meet (Gilbert 13). He also stresses the continued importance of the Johnson O'Malley act (JOM), which helps to "level the playing field by providing Indian students with programs that help them stay in school and attain academic success" (Gilbert 16). This is important because NCLB does not provide funding for programs including Native youth leadership programs, college counseling, culturally based tutoring, financial aid counseling, resume counseling, etc, that American Indian students utilize to be able to compete with students coming out of public schools (Gilbert 16).



Both Gilbert's work and Lomawaima and McCarty's book *To Remain an Indian* show concern with the fact that American Indian students are held to the same standards that public schools students are held to without the input from the tribe or adequate government funding to successfully meet these standards. The difference between these two sources is the motivation for speaking to the NCLB act. Lomawaima and McCarty wrote their book to outline the last century of American Indian education including present time. Because the book looks at boarding schools and the struggles of nation to regain language through education, the final chapter on today's education reflects the attitude that education is still a tool for colonization. They do make valid arguments about how NCLB is forcing American Indian education to take on a curriculum that does not include culture or native languages, but it is still part of an agenda to prove that until American Indians have more of a say in the curriculum of their schools, it will still be part of colonization. Gilbert, in contrast, is looking at the NCLB not to simply criticize and point out that it is part of colonization, but to propose amendments to Congress and to find a way to make it work for American Indian students now. Both are in agreement with what the issues with NCLB are, but Lomawaima and McCarty are using it to express continued social oppression while Gilbert is looking at how to better the act to help American Indian students that are currently being affected by it.

Dr. Bobby Starnes, professor of Education Studies and chairperson of the department at Berea College who holds an Ed.D. from Harvard Graduate School of Education, also wrote an article on the effects of NCLB on American Indians. She says that "most NCLB programs use the methods and materials that are the exact opposite of those known to be effective with Native American children" because there is no

connection to their own culture and language (Starnes, "Same Story" 331). She writes with a similar opinion to that of the Lomawaima and McCarty book, which is that NCLB is having the same effects on American Indian students as the boarding schools of the past did because the standards on which they are judged and taught by ignore the need to incorporate cultural pieces into the curriculum.

Dr. Sandra Fox, an Oglala Lakota woman with an Ed.D., who is currently on the National Indian School Board Association in Polson, Montana, also wrote an article on the affects of high stakes testing on American Indian reservations schools and students. Fox argues that the standardized tests that are required through NCLB are culturally biased, and that children with other cultural values or who speak English as a second language are at a disadvantage when taking the test (Fox 165). She also points to evidence linking test results to the socioeconomic class of the test taker to the subsequent scores. With the evidence that poverty and a different cultural view hurts test scores, there is a reason for poor test scores other than the academic ability of the students.

This call to include culture and language in curriculum is seen, not only when discussing current legislation mandating standards, but also when looking at studies done on improving the retention rate and school achievement from within the native community.

In his book *Teaching American Indian Students*, Jon Reyhner looks at the use of textbooks in American Indian education as an example for the need to incorporate American Indian culture into education. Textbooks are generally written from the dominant culture's point of view and produces students that accept the information as facts to memorize. Not only does this lead to student boredom with their education and

are more prone to dropout, but it also reinforces the opinions of the dominant culture (Reyhner, *Teaching American Indian Students* 103). Teaching from a textbook can also make it difficult for American Indian students to relate to course material. Reyhner uses the example of the “Dick and Jane” stories that were used to teach students to read, and how talking about the nuclear family and a house with a picket fence probably does not make sense to a Pueblo Indian student (Reyhner, “Teaching American Indian Students” 98-9).

In addition to a lack of connection to the curriculum, this form of forced acculturation can psychologically affect the students. Johanna Nel, an assistant professor of social and cultural foundations in the College of Education of the University of Wyoming, Laramie, looks at this possibility. By enforcing a culturally irrelevant curriculum in the education of American Indians, the schools are forcing a new set of values on the students. This can account or part of the high dropout rates among American Indian students, as well as contributes to feelings of anxiety and rejection (Nel).

Although Nel makes good points about the values of the dominant culture possibly displacing the values of American Indian communities through education, she refers to a set of “Native American Values” throughout her article, as a singular set of values that is culturally relevant to all American Indians. It is for this reason that the arguments made by Reyhner is stronger because there is more of an advocacy for cultural relevancy from each community of American Indians as opposed to the entire population as a whole.

This need for culturally relevant curriculum is cited in several sources and studies on how best to teach American Indian students. Jack Forbes, who holds Ph.D and is a Professor of Native American Studies at the University of California, Davis as well as the founder of Degoniwida-Quetzacoatl University in Davis, suggests that the current curriculum that is being supported by state standards perpetuates a focus from a white, male, U.S. born point of view (Forbes 8). He argues that, as displayed by the timing, the emergence of these set standards for education is a response to the “new immigration” and a growing trend of bilingualism in the United States (Forbes 1). He argues that this is an effort to keep white, English speaking culture as the dominant one, but it is only forcing an irrelevant curriculum onto minorities and is not educating them as well as they could be.

Dr. David Davidson, a professor of math education at Montana State University Billings wrote about the need for including cultural context in Math. Through making simple changes, like having the students write their own word problems to be more culturally relevant or by teaching in a way that makes more sense to the students, teachers can help students to improve their understanding of mathematical ideas.

Another chapter that was arguing for cultural confusion was written by Dr. Carlos J. Ovando, a Professor of Education and a faculty honors advisor in the School of Transborder Studies at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Arizona State University. Ovando argues for cultural inclusion in science class. He argues that there are many fields in which American Indian tribes have made discoveries or have gained extensive knowledge. This is especially true in botanical science, traditional tribal

knowledge used for food and medicinal purposes, traditional knowledge can be incorporated into science lessons.

In conjunction with teaching culturally relevant curriculum is the inclusion of indigenous languages in education. Phyllis Ngai, who holds an Ed.D. and is a professor at the University of Montana in the department of communication, argues that there is "two way reinforcement" between American Indian studies and native languages (Ngai 6). She suggests the creation of standards for American Indian education that includes not only the mainstream requirements for curriculum, but its own set of requirements at the same time (Ngai 11). This is a fittingly multicultural education for an American Indian student that lives within his/her own native communities and as a citizen of the United States, but also for a world that is becoming more globalized.

In contrast, there are arguments that American Indian education should be taught only in English. Glenn Latham, who has an Ed.D. and is a professor of education at Utah State University, Logan, argues that as a citizen of the U.S., for social and economic success, American Indians need to speak English (Latham). He does not think that native languages should be banned completely from schools, but he argues that all instruction should be in English to prepare students for the real world.

Reyhner specifically addresses Latham in his article "American Indian Cultures and School Success." He says that Latham's article reflects an attitude of assimilation and that, although English should not be excluded from education, English only education is failing because it hinders the enthusiasm of students. In the book *Teaching the Native American* he writes that if the parents of a child aren't fluent in English, but try to teach the child English instead of the native language, then the child could start school not

being fluent in any language, which will put the child at a disadvantage from the beginning (Reyhner, *Teaching the Native American* 140). Besides the detrimental effect that denying a first language can have, “bilingual children are more cognitively flexible in certain respects and better able to analyze linguistic meaning than monolingual children” (Reyhner, *Teaching the Native American* 140). Being bilingual can be beneficial to a student.

One example of a successful bilingual system in an American Indian school is that of the Rock Point School on the Navajo reservation. The language of instruction for kindergarten is 2/3 in Navajo and 1/3 in English, for grades 1-3, it is half in Navajo and half in English, and in grade 4-12, lessons are taught 80% in English and 20% in Navajo. Through this system, students do not need to be held back if they are not fluent in English because high quality subject matter is taught in Navajo until students are literate in English (Reyhner, *American Indian Cultures and School Success* 36).

Although Latham makes a good point in that the students are U.S. citizens, and for functional purposes it helps to know English, Reyhner makes a better argument because the students can know both. I am including Latham’s article because it is a good articulation of the counterargument on language of instruction, and because Reyhner’s article specifically is responding to his writing.

For good language and culture representations in the classroom, more community involvement is better for the schools. John Tippeconnic III, a Comanche man who earned a Ph.D. and is a professor at the Pennsylvania State University, advocates for the tribes taking over the schools from the BIA as allowed in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. He says that “when the intent of the school is to integrate and

assimilate, it is difficult to achieve priority status for meaningful educational approaches that build on tribal languages and cultures” (Tippeconnic 9). Also, when a tribe takes over a school from the BIA, they avoid having to go through BIA bureaucracy and difficult processes to implement change in the way students are educated.

Tippeconnic’s ideas on better implementing cultural curriculum through tribes taking over their own schools systems is a good compliment to Reyhner’s ideas on how native languages can be used together with English for American Indian schools. Reyhner’s specific example for a successful system was that of the Navajo, who took their schools over from the BIA in order to facilitate these programs.

In addition to finding a way to incorporate culture and language into school curriculum, it is important to find textbooks in standard subjects that do not ignore the existence of American Indians. American history is one such subject in which this is difficult because American Indians are rarely mentioned after the Civil War. In *Teaching the Native American*, Jon Reyhner, Hap Gilliland, a professor of education at Eastern Montana College, and Adrian Heindenreich, a professor of Native American studies at Eastern Montana College, all suggest finding supplementary materials for history classes taught to American Indian students that involve American Indians, specifically their own people if possible, throughout history (88). These three authors all worked together at Eastern Montana College, and Gilliland and Reyhner have years of experience teaching American Indian students, so they have tried and know what works from experience as well as from their research.

One other aspect of the atmosphere of American Indian classrooms that need to be looked at for improvement is the teaching staff. Ann Ritchey, an Umpqua of the

Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon who works as a tutor in the writing center of a community college in Washington, writes on her experience in a BIA funded school. She recalls a time in second grade when a teacher was yelling at a student who did not understand a question, and then she heard the teacher sigh and say “Indians can’t learn.” She later dropped out of high school, returning to school as an adult (Ritchey 386). Although this is a writing of personal experience as opposed to an analysis of studies like most of the others, when talking about the experience of racism in the classroom, experience pieces can be just as useful. She heard her teacher say that Indians could not learn, and she carried that with her until she ultimately dropped out. This negativity of teachers does affect students.

Racism in the classroom is not the only issues with teachers, however, but a high teacher turnover rate in reservations schools is also an issue. According to Dean Chavers, a Lumbee man who is the Director of Catching the Dream (formerly Native American Scholarship Fund) in Albuquerque, New Mexico and who holds two master's degrees and a Ph.D. from Stanford University, the typical teacher in a reservation school stays for 1 to 2 years (3). They are often teachers who looked for jobs in public schools and took jobs on the reservation as a last resort (Chavers 4). This means that the typical reservation school teacher is not experienced in teaching American Indian students and would prefer to be teaching in a different school district. This is especially a problem when trying to implement ideas like those proposed by Tippeconnic, Reyhner, Gilliland, Heindenreich, and others on including native culture and language in the curriculum because these teachers were not intending to teach American Indian students and are most likely not knowledgeable on the culture of the tribe.



Bobby Starnes a white woman who has years of experience teaching American Indian students, offers advice to teachers on American Indian reservations in her article “What We Don’t Know Can Hurt Them.” She suggests that the best way for non-Indians to teach on a reservation school is to first find a mentor teacher or administrator that can help to make sure that everything is being taught correctly. She also suggests participating in community events and reading up on tribal history to immerse oneself in the culture of the tribe one is teaching (389).

Starnes has written several articles on the topic as well as having experienced teaching in a reservation school. She is a good source on how to improve the quality of teachers in reservation schools, especially if her advice was implemented into a mandatory teacher training, but until the issues discussed in the Chavers article are solved, there is still going to be a percentage of teachers that are there by lack of option and will be less willing to do the work of learning the tribal culture.

Drawing from these works, it is clear that American Indians in BIA/tribally run are not receiving the same quality of education as students in public schools. The amount of funding allocated to these schools needs to be increased in order to create an equal opportunity for the students that attend these schools. There has also been much research done on the most effective ways to teach American Indian students, concluding that culture and language must be a part of the education to promote better student achievement and retention rates. Educators need to turn to the communities of the student in their schools to help make these culture programs a success.

## **Chapter 3: Explanation of Methodologies and Goals**

### **Research Methodologies**

The main issue that this paper addresses is the gap in achievement between American Indian schools on reservations and American public schools. The research aims to identify the reasons that American Indians are underachieving in education compared to national averages, and from there, offer potential solutions to these issues. Research is straightforward on issues of funding and federal legislations, but when it comes to less concretely identifiable issues like racism and the psychological effects of forced assimilation, there is an issue quantifying its harm. These topics are discussed through the use of studies and examples instead of the statistics of funding and legislation.

To research this topic, I reviewed scholarly peer reviewed journal article and books from the W.E.B. Du Bois Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, as well as government documents like a congressional hearing, governmental studies, and federal laws. This approach yielded adequate information to address the research topics in support of this thesis.

### **Goals**

American Indian reservations experience some of the worst poverty in the United States. In this paper, I first present evidence to establish the extent of this poverty. I also present evidence to establish that education can be used as a means to increase one's salary and, consequently, one's economic standings. Finally I establish that the existence of a gap in performance in education between American Indians and U.S. averages. The paper will then attempt to explain why this gap exists and is persisting, and how to possibly change education on reservations to eventually close this gap

## **Chapter 4: Quality of Education**

American Indians have been placed on small reservations throughout the United States, and have gradually had their sovereignty taken away through hundreds of years of court cases and laws. As a result of this direct, cultural, and structural violence against American Indian people in the United States, reservations are some of the most impoverished areas in the country. One of the best ways to increase income and improve living situations is to get a higher level of education.

### **Salary as Determined by Education**

One of the main factors in determining salary, and consequently a person's standard of living, is that person's level of education. The U.S. Census Bureau compiled data between 1998 and 2000 that explored the connection between people's degrees and their yearly salaries. (U.S. Census Bureau 2). These results showed that the average yearly salary of a person who did not graduate high school is \$18,900, (looking at only full-time workers brings this average to \$23,400). However, a person who graduates from high school makes an average of \$25,900 (\$30,400 for full-time workers), a significant difference. The salary increase/degree level relationship continues until the doctoral level, which results in an average salary that is only slightly lower than the earnings of a person with a professional degree (but is still over \$80,000). This trend shows the importance of a quality education, and the need to provide a better education to lower income areas to improve their economic standings (U.S. Census Bureau 2).

### **Poverty on American Indian Reservations**

It is clear that there is a link between education levels and salaries, but when talking about American Indian education, it is also important to know about the living

conditions that people currently face on reservations. Although there are some reservations that are well off and can adequately sustain themselves, most experience extreme poverty. Some of the most impoverished places in the United States are American Indian reservations.

Compared to average American households, households on American Indian reservations are disproportionately impoverished. As different indicators of this, I looked at statistics on health care, housing, food distribution, and unemployment. Indian Health Services (IHS) is the health care provider on American Indian reservations. However, IHS spends about 50% below what public and private insurance plans pay per capita. Even compared to other federally funded health plans, IHS is severely underfunded. In 2003, the per capita funding for health care on medicare was \$5,815, for the VA \$5,214, and for federal prisoners \$3,803, compared with the per capita medical care for IHS of \$1,914 (United States Commission on Civil Rights 44).

In addition to underfunded health services, funds for housing are also low. As a result, overcrowding has become an issue. Overcrowding on Indian trust land is six times the national average, and eight times the national average in native Alaskan villages (United States Commission on Civil Rights 62). American Indians on reservations also have problems getting mortgages because federal trust land cannot be used as collateral (64). Many families find housing through Housing and Urban Development (HUD). However, funds allotted for reservations do not meet the demand for housing, and the tribal housing loan guarantee program lost about 70% of its funding power from 1999 to 2003 (65).

In addition to inadequate funding for housing and health care, unemployment and

hunger rates are higher on American Indian reservations. Although some reservations are in worse economic situations than others, the average unemployment rate for American Indian reservations in 2000 was 13.6%, which was twice the national average (United States Commission on Civil Rights 104). Since the recession this figure has only increased. The percentage of people living under the poverty line is also disproportionate to the national average. On reservations, 31.3% of people live below the poverty line, versus the 11.6% American average (104). Similarly food distribution is disproportionate. Food insecurity, defined as not having enough food to meet basic needs, was at 22.5% on reservations, versus 8.8%-10.5% of average Americans.

Given this evidence that American Indian reservations experience such poverty, and that a better education can result in a better salary (and consequently a better standard of living), it makes sense to invest in education on reservations as part of the effort to reduce the level of poverty. This, however, is not the approach that is being taken by the federal government. In fact, there is a significant achievement gap between the performance of American Indian reservation schools and the performance of public schools that makes it even harder for American Indian students to come out of poverty via educations.

### **The Achievement Gap**

Despite the clear link between levels of education and salaries, and the obvious need to improve the standards of living on American Indian reservations, American Indians are provided with a worse quality of education than that of the public schools in surrounding areas. This can be seen in a variety of areas, from the physical school

facilities, the gap in testing scores and dropout disparities, to dangerous student behavior, and advanced placement scores.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights did a study on the quality of general living on American Indian reservations, including the quality of schools in these areas. The commission reported that students commonly face deteriorating school facilities and outdated learning tools (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 114-5). Between 1989 and 1994, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) sent out a commission to monitor BIA-funded schools to determine what needed improvement.<sup>2</sup> During this review, the BIA found that only 33% of the “buildings and grounds [were] clean and attractive” (St. Germaine 35). Simply put before they even begin their education, American Indian students are put at a disadvantage with the substandard tools they are given.

This study also makes it clear that the physical buildings and supplies are not the only issues that the BIA schools face. Other equally disturbing figures were provided: only 30% of schools have teachers that are “academically well qualified,” 29% of schools have an “involved and knowledgeable school board,” and 42% of schools have yet to develop a written curriculum (St. Germaine 35). This means that the majority of BIA-funded schools are out of touch with their school boards, have an underdeveloped set curriculum, and have under qualified teachers.

From these statistics, it is not difficult to understand why the achievement gap between American Indian reservation schools and the average public school is persisting if not worsening. The achievement gap, as determined by the National Assessment of

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<sup>2</sup> The BIA is part of the Department of the Interior, which is responsible for the funding and running American Indian reservation schools unless a tribe files for the responsibility of running the schools, in which case the BIA is responsible only for the funding.

Educational Progress (NAEP), was a difference of 14 percentage points in 2005 and 18 percentage points in 2007 (Nelson, Greenough, and Sage 4). Additionally, although the performance of American Indian students on standardized tests, as outlined by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), is improving, it is improving at a similar rate as the students in the public schools. This means that the American Indian students are still being left behind the national average (Nelson, Greenough, and Sage 5).

In addition, some studies have raised concerns over the quality of education provided by curriculums that focus on NCLB guidelines. In 2005, The National Indian Education Association held eleven regional hearings on the effects that NCLB had on American Indian education. These hearings found that education that focuses on NCLB guidelines leads to “hyper attention to standardized tests at the expense of pedagogically sound instruction” (Lomawaima and McCarty 156).

The to this persisting achievement gap is also seen in the dropout rates in American Indian communities, which are also much higher than those of general U.S. schools. In 1989, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported that the American Indian dropout rate was 35.5%. Since this report, the number has not improved significantly (Reyhner, “American Indians out of School 38). According to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, in 2003 66% of American Indians graduate high school, versus 75% of the general population (86).

These problems are not phenomena that can be explained away simply by claiming that American Indian students are stupid or lazy; rather, they are caused by the quality of the schools these students attend. For example, on the Navajo reservation, 45% of students that drop out are students that, on average, get Bs or higher grades. These

students cited boredom with school as their main reason for leaving (Reyhner, “American Indians out of School” 43). Also, although the U.S. Department of Education determined in 1990 that smaller class sizes with a better teacher-to-student ratios help ease student dropout rates. Reservation schools, which are already lacking sufficient funding, generally cannot afford to hire more teachers or create more classrooms or schools (Reyhner, “American Indian Students out of School” 40).

Disparities in Advanced Placement (AP) exam scores between American Indian students and other U.S. students also further prove the point that stupidity or laziness on the part of American Indian students is not to blame for the achievement gap they face. AP classes are high school classes that teach beyond what is required of average high school students, and, depending on a student’s score on the national AP exam, can be counted for college credit. These classes are taken only by top students because of the extra work and the fast pace that is required to complete the course material.

A study of 2007 AP scores compared the performance of American Indian students and of white students. 55.54% of American Indian students scored a 1 or 2 out of 5 on the test. These scores meant that these students could not claim college credit for these classes. On the other hand, only 36.16% of white students scored a 1 or 2 (Moore and Slate 81). Just over a half of all American Indian AP students failed the final exam versus just over a third of white students (Moore and Slate 90). This disparity shows that the achievement gap permeates all levels of education, and does not just affect the lower level students.

Just as low exam scores mirror the lower quality of education and school environments, so too does the likelihood of a student to commit suicide. Attempted



suicide rates are significantly higher in American Indian schools; in American Indian reservation schools, 16% of students attempt suicide, versus 9% of the general student population (Shaughnessy, Doshi, and Jones 180). Although these figures can be partially attributed to the poverty on reservations and the violent history against American Indians in the United States, they can also be attributed to the continued oppression of culture in schools and the lack of quality teachers that could act as guides for their students.

These various studies and statistics concerning education in BIE-funded schools show an evident inequality in the education provided in these schools compared to public schools in the U.S. These inequalities shows themselves in a number of ways, in the poor physical condition of the school buildings, the underdeveloped curriculum, the challenges faced by even top students, growing dropout rates, and high attempted suicide rates. All indicate a larger problem of how the schools are funded and operated. If furthering education is a way to reduce poverty, then improving the education system of American Indian reservation schools must be made a priority if these students are to be given the same opportunities as other American students.

### **Cultural and Structural Violence**

When looking at the lives of American Indians on reservations, one unfortunate theme that has penetrated most aspects of life is violence. There are three types of violence, direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. Direct violence is the type that most people are familiar with and are able to recognize. Direct violence is physical or verbal behavior, and is visible (Galtung "Cultural Violence" 2). The types of violence that affect education on the reservations are mostly structural and cultural. Structural violence includes a system of interactions that are often hierarchical (Perez).

This is less visible than direct violence because it is violence through a system, and not through direct visible acts. The third type of violence is cultural violence. Cultural violence is violence that is normalized and acceptable in society. It legitimized structural violence, so the two often overlap (Galtung “Violence, War, and Their Impact” 292).

These types of violence that are normalized and invisible are the types of violence that currently affect education on reservations. The way that the schools are funded is a product of structural violence, and the topics that are taught are cultural violence. These ideas are explained with specific examples in chapters five and six. In order to remedy the inequalities in education, it is important to first understand why these problems are occurring.

## **Chapter 5: Funding**

As part of the federal trust agreements with American Indian tribes, the federal government is responsible for providing American Indian students with an education. The way that BIE and tribally run schools are funded is determined by several pieces of federal legislation. The most influential laws that affect funding are the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Johnson O'Malley Act originally passed in 1934.

### **No Child Left Behind**

Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 with the goal of “closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (20 U.S.C. 6319). This law seems beneficial because it is a federal recognition of achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, as well as between the monetarily disadvantaged and more advantaged students. As part of this recognition of issues in Education, NCLB outlines a plan to hold the government accountable and to fix the education gap. The way that the law proposes to carry out these goals, however, is where the law starts to have a negative effect on American Indian schools and on other minority students.

The law requires that each year, states and local education agencies provide report cards to the federal government, in order to determine whether or not they have met the adequate yearly progress (AYP) set up for the schools. These report cards are determined largely through the use of standardized tests. The tests are high risk tests because, according to title 1 section 1111 of NCLB, the determination of whether schools have met the AYP will determine whether the school is sanctioned or rewarded through

bonuses (U.S. Cong. “No Child Left Behind Act.”). This system of punishment and reward is meant to hold educators and school districts responsible for the progression of the education of their students.

The use of standardized testing to help close the education gap is where the law is failing to meet the needs of the students that it intends to help. Studies have shown that a students’ performance on standardized test is highly correlated with the socioeconomic class of the test taker (Fox 164). American Indian students have continuously been seen to score low on standardized tests because the tests are culturally biased (Fox 165). One example of how students of a non-dominant culture can be confused by a standardized test is the example taken from work done by Dorothy King who works with Navajo students. She says that there was a question with four pictures, one with two men hauling a net into a boat, one with a woman weaving and a woman a distance away grinding corn, one with a woman returning to a house in her car with a man working on the roof, and one with a girl mowing the lawn as a mailman walks by. The question asks which picture shows people helping each other to do a job. Most of the Navajo students wanted to answer all four because they consider doing diverse tasks is working together to better the community (Fox 165). In these sorts of questions, standardized tests measure the acculturation of students, not their academic abilities.

In a congressional hearing in 2008, Dr. Willard Sakiestewa Gilbert (Hopi) reported that in the three years prior to the hearings, only 30% of BIE funded schools had reached the AYP goals established by the state. This means that for three years, 70% of reservation schools were not eligible for the extra funding that schools that meet their AYP are eligible to receive. Because of this poor performance on the standardized tests,

BIE schools cannot receive much needed additional funding to improve their academic standings (Gilbert 12).

In title VII, part A, section 7101 of NCLB, the law specifically addresses the federal government's relationship with American Indian students. It acknowledges its "unique and continuing trust relationship with and responsibility to the Indian people for the education of Indian children" (U.S. Cong. "No Child Left Behind."). In the same section, it acknowledges the "unique educational and culturally related academic needs of these children" (U.S. Cong. "No Child Left Behind."). This acknowledgement is a positive step, because, as addressed in Chapter 6, the inclusion of culturally relevant materials is shown to improve the academic performance of American Indian Students. This title, however, does little to aid the current position of reservation schools under NCLB because although it acknowledges the need for culturally relevant materials, teachers often find themselves having to teach students to pass the test instead of teaching them the material itself (Fox 164).

Under NCLB, American Indian tribes have the option of waiving the AYP definition that is created for them in order to pursue an alternate definition. This process is complicated and requires cumbersome paperwork through the BIA. It is also a relatively new process, so it is unfamiliar to tribes. As of 2008, only two nations, the Navajo and the Miccosukee, and one tribal consortium, Oceti Sakowin Education Consortium (OSEC), have applied to waive their current definition of AYP (Holder 21).

It is clear from these examples that the process of waiving the current definition needs to be more defined. The BIE needs to establish a clearer set of guidelines and a time frame for responding to these requests. With the mounting evidence that holding the

current standards and emphasis on standardized testing only hurts American Indian students, there needs to be a timely way for the tribes to change this. This will allow the tribes to more immediately address the issues the AYP instead of constantly missing out on opportunities for additional funding under NCLB.

### **Johnson O'Malley**

In addition the funding given to BIE schools through the NCLB, the Johnson O'Malley Act (JOM) is another source of funding. JOM was first passed in 1934, and then reauthorized in 1991. This act gives money to public schools to provide for their American Indian student population that are not previously paid for because of the lack of state taxes on American Indians living on reservations. It also goes to support extracurricular activities for American Indians (Warner 67). JOM is a source of controversy in the American Indian community today.

The original intent of JOM was to increase the enrollment of American Indian students into public schools and to take the pressure off of the federal government to provide education on reservations, and to assimilate American Indian students with their non-Indian peers (Warner 67). This also became a way for public schools to increase their federal funding, because the money would be deposited into a general operations account, and not necessarily be used to benefit the American Indian students in the schools. Today, JOM requires that a local Indian parent committee approves how the money is spent, but it still not a perfect system (Warner 67).

The idea that JOM was founded on principles promoting assimilation is what makes this law controversial. Often, when American Indian children are put into a school with white children, or is taught in an Anglo-centric classroom, the forced assimilation

creates feelings of isolation, rejection, and anxiety as they try to navigate between their native culture and the mainstream white culture in which they find themselves (Nel). This feeling of being forced to give up their culture in order to fit into school can too often result in students leaving school (Nel). This also results in American Indian teenagers having a worse self image than any other minority (Nel).

While JOM is disliked by members of the American Indian community for promoting assimilation, there are others who see the benefits of the legislation. During the 2008 congressional hearing Dr. Gilbert urged the continuance of JOM grants in light of the shortcomings of NCLB. He argues that because cultural programs and additional resources for American Indian students are not being funded by NCLB, JOM is still necessary. Based on the studies that conclude that including culturally relevant curriculum improved the academic performance of American Indian students (further discussed in chapter 6), it is necessary to have at least one piece of legislation that will provide those opportunities to American Indian students (Gilbert 16).

In addition to providing cultural education opportunities, JOM helps to fund afterschool programs for American Indian students. The areas where reservations exist, mostly in the west, are often rural areas. It can be a 50, 60, 100, or in the case of the Navajo, 200 mile drive to the nearest boys and girls club who lacks any monetary support for transportation (Gilbert 42). Providing schools with the resources to run after school programs and to help cover some transportation costs, JOM can help alleviate the financial burden of parents that are trying to support their children and invest in their futures.

The debate of whether or not JOM is a beneficial law for American Indian students aside, it is not being funded the way that it is supposed to be, and is therefore failing the students that rely on its benefits. According to findings of the federal government in 2003 in California under JOM, the BIA provides \$85 per American Indian student in the public schools based on the figures gathered from 1995. Not only did this count exclude a large number of American Indian students from its figures, but between 1995 and 2000, the American Indian population in California increased by 38% (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 22). This means that JOM is not providing adequate funding for the students that are guaranteed a quality education by the U.S. government through the trust agreements. The example of the issue in California with the JOM is an indicator of a larger countrywide issue.

### **Inadequate Funding**

Yet another issue with the way that American Indian education is funded is that the amount is an inadequate to cover the expenses of providing a proper education. Not only is the funding provided for American Indian education an insufficient amount to properly educate students, but it is grossly unequal to their non-Indian counterparts.

During the 2001-02 school year, the BIA provided funding for schools that amounted to about \$3,000 per student. The 2004 school year marked the seventh straight year that American Indian BIA schools received that amount per student. Looking at the fact that for almost a decade, American Indian schools were funded an amount that was not adjusted for inflation is evidence enough that the schools are underfunded, but to put a perspective on how low this amount is, one can compare that to the amount that public schools received per student. In the 2001-02 school year, the average public school was



funded about \$7,500 per student, 150% more than the funding for American Indian students (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 23).

This underfunding has been taking place for years, only further exacerbating problems because they have been left unattended. The Congressional Research Service found that the BIA and the Office of Special Trustee budget between 1975 and 2000 had decreased at a yearly rate of \$6 million after being adjusted for inflation (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 24).

One aspect of schooling that has suffered due to the extended underfunding is the physical school buildings. What is happening now is that the BIA is spending only 50-60% on instruction that public schools are spending because the rest of the funds have to go to the upkeep of school buildings (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 91). This further takes away from the already small budget that American Indian students are allotted for their education.

As the problem is ignored or deferred, it is only getting worse. In 1997, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that the costs to repair BIE funded schools would be \$745 million. In the year 2004, the GAO found that that amount had risen to \$942 million (Gilbert 14). The Consensus Building Institute (CBI) is another institution that did studies on this problem and they reported that many of the schools are “unequipped for the information age,” and that “aging or poor design may lead to a substandard education environment (Gilbert 14). The deteriorating buildings are worsened due to overcrowding (Gilbert 14). On top of this, the Facility Management Information Systems (FMIS) found that BIE schools do not allow for educational programming needs, including “libraries, adequately sized classrooms and gymnasiums,

the wiring to allow for technological needs and partitions and noise reducing walls” (Gilbert 14-15).

Another consequence that the continuous low funding has on American Indian schools is that the educators are not always the best qualified people for the job because teacher and administrator salaries are so low in comparison to their public school counterparts. A 1995 article cited this problem with salaries in American Indian reservation schools. The average BIA funded school teacher would make a yearly wage of \$19,141 (Pavel 11). The average public school teacher at this time made \$35,675 per year (National Center for Education Statistics). Similarly, BIA funded school principals with more than a master’s degree earn on average about \$10,000 less per year than they would make in public schools (Pavel 11). This means that jobs in schools on reservations are not as attractive as public schools outside of reservations, resulting in difficulty staffing the schools, and a high number of teachers at these schools as a last resort. It is hard to attract better qualified teachers when they will take such a serious pay cut teaching in BIA schools. Although the implications of this fact is further discussed in chapter 6, it is important to recognize that funding issues affect the quality of educators that work in BIA funded schools.

### **Mismanagement of Funds**

In addition to the underfunding by the federal government, the funds that American Indians do have available to them are often mismanaged. The U.S. acts as trustee over Individual Indian Money (IIM) trust accounts, which hold earnings from land leases for American Indian nations. In 2001, the U.S. General Accounting Office reported that the Department of the Interior (DOI) was “unable to assure trust account holders that

their balances were accurate or that their assets were being properly managed” (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 17). Five years before this report was filed, a class action lawsuit was filed against the DOI of losing, destroying evidence of, or not reporting land leases which resulted in the loss of \$137 billion. The judge ruled that the DOI was either negligent, or incapable of managing IIM. Since 1996, the government has spent \$600 million to reform the trust, but issues still remain (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 18).

Both the funds that were lost in the mismanagement of funds by the DOI, and the money that was put into fixing the problems of the management of the account could have been used by tribes to aid in social issues like housing, healthcare, and education. The education achievement gap may not need such drastic help had funds been properly managed and monitored.

The funding for American Indian education does not equal the need. The schools do not have all of the materials that they need to provide an education for American Indian children equal to that of the education provided for by public schools. The NCLB is further inhibiting schools on the reservations because they are being disqualified for extra funding that could help the schools. They are not receiving this funding because the students in BIE funded schools are tested against the students in public schools by a test that is culturally biased in favor of non-Indians. Even the JOM, which funds extracurricular activities for American Indian students to support their culture and to help them catch up to non-Indian students, is being underfunded. Funds for American Indian education need to be increased substantially and managed properly in order to close the achievement gap.

### **Structural Violence in Funding**

The way in which American Indian reservations schools are funded is a form of structural violence. The funding of American Indian education is a responsibility of the United States government through trust agreements. The failure to provide equal opportunities in education to American Indians is not only a failure to fulfill trust responsibilities, but also a form of structural violence.

The way that schools are funded under NCLB is directly related to the scores on the standardized tests. Under NCLB the schools that do not meet the AYP (about 70% of students attending reservation schools) are not only ineligible for certain funding bonuses, but are punished through sanctions. The AYP is determined by the state and enforced in the reservation schools. This is unfair to American Indian students, however, who come from a different culture and therefore learn and test differently. The tests are in English from an Anglo cultural point of view, but not all American Indian students speak English as their first language, nor do they think with the same cultural mindset that the test expects. Because the United States had acknowledged that there are separate cultures on American Indian reservations, but use the same tests to determine the following year's funding is structural violence because the American Indian children are generally less successful on a test which is geared toward mainstream American students.

In addition to missing opportunities for extra funding, the base funding for reservation schools on average per student were half of what was spent on the average public school student (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 23). This severe disparity in funding is further proof of the structural violence against American Indian students on reservations. The inadequate funding results in unequal educational opportunities for American Indian students. This inequality hurts students throughout the rest of their lives

because the level of education achieved by students determines their eligibility for better paying jobs and their ability to escape the level of poverty that has become common on reservations. And then to further demonstrate the structural violence in the funding of American Indian reservation schools is the general mismanagement of education funds within the BIA and the Department of Interior Affairs. Because of the evident lack of equal funding, the further mismanagement and misplacement of money within the department is unacceptable. The inability to have a functioning and organized financial system for the branch of the government in charge of American Indian affairs is also structural violence.

## **Chapter 6: Classroom Atmosphere**

American Indian reservation schools are not only behind because of the government's failure to properly fund them, but also because of the classroom atmosphere in which the students find themselves. In the history of the United States providing education for American Indian students, there is a history of an attempt to extinguish the unique cultures of different American Indian nations in order to solve the "Indian Problem." Although this is no longer the de jure policy of reservation education, by ignoring the current issues in the schools, it has inadvertently become the de facto practice.

Studies have shown that the inclusion of culture and language in the education of American Indian students improves their performances in school and helps to alleviate the dropout rates. Although these would be beneficial changes, current school policies do not reflect this observation.

### **Language Inclusion**

Preserving a people's language is a key way to help preserve their culture. The Native American Languages Act of 1990 recognizes that the traditional languages of American Indians are an integral part of their cultures and identities and form the basic medium for the transmission, and thus survival, of Native American cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions, and values" (U.S. Cong. "Native American Languages Act."). It also says "there is convincing evidence that student achievement and performance, community and school pride, and educational opportunity is clearly and directly tied to respect for, and support of, the first language of the child or student" U.S. Cong. "Native American Languages Act."). From these two sections alone, the

government recognizes the importance of the allowance to include American Indian languages in school as a means of improving school performance and continuing their culture. Under this law, the government gives schools the right to use American Indian languages as a medium for the classroom.

This law is a positive step for American Indian reservation schools, because until recent history, it was the policy to forbid the use of American Indian languages in U.S. funded schools. The law would, however, hold more weight if it was put into practice more often. Under title III, section 3102 of NCLB, however, it says “to help ensure that children who are limited English proficient, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency, develop high levels of academic attainment in English, and meet the same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children are expected to meet” (U.S. Cong. “No Child Left Behind Act.”) As discussed in chapter 5, BIA funded schools are held to state standards under NCLB unless they complete the complicated process of waiving the state’s definition of AYP. Under this law, passed after the Native American Languages Act, an English-only education is being pushed in reservation schools.

Other than pressure from NCLB, there is pressure from some scholars to push an English-only education in reservation schools. One such scholar is Glenn Latham, who has a Ph.D. in education. In one article, he makes the argument that because reservations exist within the United States, and citizens of a tribe are also citizens of the United States, reservation schools should be taught in English. He says that in order to be functioning, successful members of society, American Indian students need to be taught in English to ensure fluency (Latham 7).

Although Latham is an expert in education, this view is not a popular one within the community of scholars on American Indian education. One scholar who is particularly active in writing to advocate for cultural inclusion in American Indian classrooms is Jon Reyhner. He wrote an article directly addressing this argument by Latham.

In Reyhner's article, he sites Collier, who wrote an extensive review of literature on teaching English as a second language. He concluded that in order to find success in becoming academically fluent in English, there is "the need for continuing cognitive development in the home language" (qtd. in Reyhner, "American Indian Cultures and Schools Success" 33). Reyhner argues that while there are many historical references to successful scholars of a "white education" that are bilingual, the Merriam Report and the Kennedy report both show the failure of the monolingual education system for which Latham advocates (Reyhner, "American Indian Cultures and Schools Success" 33).

Along with the benefits of the student being bilingual, it can also have negative effects for the student if the English-only is applied. There are some cases of parents wanting their children to be successful in school, so they only speak English to the child, even if they are not fluent themselves. This can be harmful because by the time that child reaches school, they are not only not fluent in their native language, but they are also not fluent in English. This lack of language puts the student behind his/her peers. In addition to preventing the harm of suppressing the native language, bilingual children are found to be more cognitively flexible and are able to analyze linguistics of words better than monolingual children (Reyhner *Teaching the Native American* 140).



A modern example of a successful bilingual school model is that of the Navajo Rock Point School. The Navajo nation is one that took over its reservation schools. They used that opportunity to implement a system to use both English and the Navajo language in schools. In kindergarten, classes are taught in 2/3 Navajo, and 1/3 English. From first to third grade, half of classes are taught in English and half are taught in Navajo. For grades four through twelve, they are taught 80% in English, and the rest in Navajo. In this case, not only will students be fluent in both languages without being forced to choose one over the other, but they will not be held back because they cannot speak English. The students are given time to learn the language before implementing heavy subject matters in English, making sure that the student is graded on his/her academic ability and not their mastery of English like many were in the previous systems of education for American Indian students. In this school, the attendance rate is 94% (Reyhner, "American Indian Cultures and School Success" 36). When talking about implementing a bilingual education, most sources look to the success of this particular school as a goal.

Together through the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, and the Tribally Controlled Schools Act of 1988, American Indian communities began to take over the responsibilities of educating their own youth from the BIA, and today 125 of 184 reservation schools are run by the tribes themselves. The Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975 allowed tribes and American Indian Communities to take the responsibility for operating their own education and health services over from the BIA and Indian Health Services (Lomawaima and McCarty 117). The Tribally Controlled Schools Act of 1988 further reiterated this right of the tribe to take control of the schools. The law states that any tribe that completes an application to take control of its schools

receives the “highest priority for grants under this section” (U.S. Cong. “Trially Controlled Schools Act”).

From this movement of tribes taking over the education system and incorporating more traditional culture and tradition into the curriculum, grew the American Indian Language Development Institute (AILDI). AILDI was created to address the two needs that resulted from this movement, the need for teaching materials for Native languages, and the need for Native-speaking teachers (Lomawaima and McCarty 129). AILDI has grown and now enrolls 75 to 100 native and non-native participants to learn to teach a native language. Its faculty are also the drafters of the bill that later became the Native American Languages Act of 1990 (Lomawaima and McCarty 130).

It is also useful to have bilingual materials developed at a local level. Using this method, one can get the community involved in the process, making reading materials that could also depict cultural relevance while teaching the language at the same time. There is also the possibility that the students themselves can develop the reading materials. If they write pieces to practice in their own language, they will take an active part in their learning process, and in places where this has been implemented, the students are enthusiastic and excited about what they are learning (Reyhner, *Teaching the Native American* 143).

Even if the native language is not the student’s first language, it is still beneficial to teach in school. Preserving the language is an effective way of preserving the culture of the tribe as well. The subjects of the readings or stories that are learned reflect different parts of the traditional culture. Teachers can use language classes to incorporate the tribal history, mythology, ceremonies, worldview, etc. (Ngai 227).

It is important to incorporate these languages in education because the opportunities to have mutually enforcing culture and language classes are declining as the generations of native language speakers get older. Today in North America, only 57 of the 300 known American Indian languages are still spoken (Ngai 220). As this issue of language loss and the loss of the older generations that can still teach the languages are being noticed and brought up in American Indian communities, language revitalization efforts are becoming more common (Ngai 221). These movements need to be grassroots movements in order to find success. Making a conscious effort to teach and learn a language as a community requires community support and a lot of work (Ngai 221).

The issues that some communities are experiencing are that many reservations have non-Indians living on them and the parents of the non-Indian children do not want their children to be taught in a native language. There is the possibility of taking the language learning out of the school classroom and including it as an optional, after school class, but that suggestion has two problems, one is that fewer children are exposed to the lessons and the program becomes less effective, and the second is that many American Indian leaders think that it would be beneficial to have the non-Indians living in the community learn more about the people in the area. By learning a minority language, especially if they are growing up in an area that is largely populated by people of that nationality, the student will develop a “cross-cultural sensitivity” and become more aware of diversity (Ngai 233).

Language Inclusion is an important consideration for American Indian reservation schools because their purposes are either to teach the child in their first language so that they are not held back in an English-only school because of their language skills as

opposed to their academic performance, or to help revitalize an endangered American Indian language through the school system. In each situation, there is a reaffirmation of culturally relevant topics and a better understanding of the traditions of that tribe. This is an effort to reverse the harmful assimilation curriculums of the past and to help American Indian children have pride in their culture and more interest in their schooling. Not only will this help the future of the tribe because it reiterates the cultural values of the tribe, but also because it is more likely to keep children interested in school, therefore easing the achievement gap by lowering the dropout rate.

### **The Benefits of Including Culturally Relevant Material**

Although language inclusion is one way to include culture into the classrooms to promote tribal pride and interest in school, another way is to find culturally relevant materials to include into the curriculum of American Indian schools. The United States has renounced its assimilation policies of the past in the imposition of boarding schools and the suppression of native languages, etc, but through the NCLB and standards movement, it is repeating those harmful mistakes. In order for American Indian children to retain interest in school and keep a positive image of their tribe, they cannot only learn American history from the conqueror's point of view, nor only learn the literature of white writers. A culturally relevant curriculum is one way that American Indian communities can change the poor quality of the schools.

The way that most of the students are exposed to literature and history will be through their school textbooks. However, these are vastly lacking in the representation of American Indians. In history textbooks, there is almost no mention of American Indians after the Civil War, and the literature books that schools provide are mostly pieces by

white authors. It is clear then, for teachers of American Indian students to find information on the history and culture of the students, that material needs to be found outside of textbooks (Gilliland 88). When finding these pieces, teachers must consider the readability of the articles they have chosen, as well as how interesting the information is. If either of these two factors are lacking, then the point of finding these materials is negated because the information will not be absorbed by the students (Gilliland 89). It is also important that the teacher checks the facts of the additional materials, because there are many inaccuracies about American Indian people in the world of academia, and it is very possible that the information may be incorrect (Gilliland 89).

One of the most obvious subjects in which American Indians are grossly underrepresented is history and social studies. American history textbooks are written with almost no mention of the peoples that first inhabited the continent before the European invasion. Europeans are celebrated for “discovering” a land that was already inhabited by a population of people about equal to that of Europe’s at that time. This is an accepted notion, yet it would sound ridiculous if an American Indian went to Europe at that time and claimed that s/he had discovered a new world. The history of the United States is written from the point of view of the conquerors.

When teaching American history, especially in a classroom of American Indian students, it is important to give American Indians their rightful place. In social studies, teachers can include the contribution of the Mayans, Incas, and Aztecs to astronomy, mathematics, and architecture (Heidenreich, Reyhner, Gilliland 83). When learning about the federal and state governments, teachers can talk about the structures of the tribal

government as well (82). It can also be useful to invite tribal elders into the classroom as an expert on their own tribal history, or to go on field trips to tribal offices (84).

Cultural relevance is not just an issue in the subject of social studies, however. In reading materials for reading and literature classes as early as elementary school, there are cultural biases that are not conducive to the education of American Indians as they are to their non-Indian peers. Although “Dick and Jane” books are no longer used to teach children to read, the cultural issues with this series is indicative of the issues with more modern examples. The William S. Gray, editor of the “Dick and Jane” series, purposefully left out the “sordid surroundings,” and “family conflict” of “deprived children” to let them “live vicariously in a pleasant attractive home” (qtd. in Reyhner, *Teaching American Indian Students* 98-9). Not only have psychologists found this reasoning to aggravate a child’s emotional problems rather than giving them an outlet for children that the series deemed abnormal, but children also had difficulty relating to the text (Reyhner, *Teaching American Indian Students* 99). For example, how can a pueblo child really understand a story about a house with a pitched roof and a picket fence? These texts made many children feel ashamed about where they came from, which is not only psychologically damaging, but can also make it hard to keep them motivated in school (99).

It is clear that these texts gave the impression that the white middle class way of life was the only right way, and they gave American Indian children a complex about their lifestyles. Although “Dick and Jane” books are no longer used, and there is a greater effort to include the stories of minority students, American Indians are still largely underrepresented. One percent of stories in first grade basal readers pertain to American

Indians, seven percent of third grade stories, and fifteen percent of fifth grade stories (Reyhner, *Teaching American Indian Students* 101). The stories that are used, however, often focus on American Indian figures that helped white men, or even aided them in an effort against their own people (102).

Despite a move in the right direction from the textbook writers, there is still a need to include relevant outside reading materials. One suggestion for American Indian classes is to develop their own materials. This can be done by recording the students' own experiences, or having the children conduct interviews with tribal members. There are also successful cases of students that produced a school newspaper, which kept them current with community events. Having materials that are so intimately involved with their own culture can help to promote a more positive self image for students than the textbooks' Anglo-centric pieces (Gilliland 93). The promotion of positive images of tribal figures and students' own culture can help lead to a better student retention rate and more interest in school, both key steps in closing the achievement gap.

According to the National Indian Education Study performed by the U.S. Department of Education, the majority of students in BIE schools already know something about their culture and participate in community events, and a positive reinforcement in school can help to emphasize the importance of this knowledge. Another thing that is shown from this study is that while 80% of students in BIE schools say they know about their tribe's history, only 68% know about current issues related to their tribe (Nelson, Greenough, and Sage 14). It is important to learn about the history of the tribe because it gives the students an awareness of where they come from and the events that lead to today, but it is just as important to keep the students knowledgeable of

current events. The students are the future of the tribe, so by having them informed on tribal issues from a young age will teach them to be involved in the tribe and will better prepare them to help the community when they are older.

History and literature are the subjects in which teachers can include information about American Indian students' culture, but math and science, although not necessarily about their culture, can be taught in a way that better accommodates the students. In mathematics, the mistakes that American Indian students are shown to have more to do with cultural differences than it does a failure to master mathematical skills (Davidson 242). The students are often unable to solve math problems that they do not see as culturally relevant, and by simply adding subjects to the numbers that make sense to the students, the students will be able to understand and solve better (242). It is also the general trend among American Indian students to understand a visual and spatial lesson rather than a verbal one (246).

There can also be an issue with American Indian students working on word problems due to confusion over language or context. In these problems, cultural context is part of understanding the questions, so while they often do understand the math involved in the problem, they are confused by the question (Davidson 249). One way that has helped students get used to the methods of solving these types of problems so that they are easier when they need to know how to do them is to start introducing the idea at a young grade level. If the teacher has the students write word problems themselves, they will practice using and understanding the dynamics of word problems, and also write more culturally relevant questions (249).



Although this may be the general trend among students, there are so many different nations and cultures of American Indians that not all American Indian students will learn best from the same learning style. Arthur More cautions educators of American Indian students against using this as a rule when addressing American Indian students (Davidson 246). The teacher needs to get to know the learning styles of the students that they teach rather than using these studies as a rule for all native students.

There are also ways of being more effective in teaching science in American Indian reservation schools. Different cultures have different traditional studies of science, like agriculture, traditional medicine, astronomy, ecological practices, hunting and gathering, etc, that can be incorporated into school science lessons (Ovando 224). Although this will not cover every type of science that the students need to learn, the inclusion of their own cultural knowledge as a contribution to the study of science can keep students interested in the subject and avoid the feeling of cultural inference that can come from stressing the importance of the discoveries of the scientific world in Euro-American fields, and ignoring native discoveries and their own tribes' discoveries.

### **Obstacles to Cultural Inclusion**

With this information on the importance of cultural inclusion, and the emergence of globalism and interethnic understanding, there is a concurrent backlash in education today that is pushing English-only, Anglo-centric education on all American schools (Forbes 7). In minority communities, like on American Indian reservations, this pushes a culturally irrelevant education and deprives students of learning about who they are and what their ancestors achieved (Forbes 10). Jack Forbes, a professor of Native American Studies, argues that this pushing of a distorted curriculum is an effort to assure that the

current minority cultures do not replace the white, Anglo, male culture as the dominant one in the United States (Forbes 11). The way that the dominant culture is still being perpetuated in American Indian schools today is through the standards movement and the culturally biased standardized tests required by NCLB.

The NCLB Act is preventing the widespread use of culture in the classroom. As explained in chapter 5, under the NCLB, the funding and operations of the schools depend on the students' performance on standardized tests. As a result, the teachers have to focus on teaching what will be on the tests and how to take them. This leaves little to no time for cultural inclusion in the curriculum, instead using methods and materials that are proven to be less effective when teaching American Indian students (Starnes, "Same Story" 331).

Although Title VII of the NCLB Act does acknowledge that American Indian children have "unique educational needs based on their cultures and backgrounds," it is not enough (qtd. in Gilbert 13). Title VII needs to be expanded to be sure that culture is not a victim of NCLB. The NIEA proposed amendments to Title VII to include cultural enrichment programs to be implemented in addition to established NCLC programs (Gilbert 14). By emphasizing the importance of the inclusion of a cultural curriculum in federal law, NCLB could improve the achievement of American Indian students.

One of the obstacles that people face who are arguing against the standards movement and NCLB is the lack of hard evidence that cultural inclusion education approaches are successful (Tippeconnic 46). Although there has been success from implementing culturally relevant curriculums in American Indian schools, there need to be widespread studies to provide more evidence to policymakers and people in charge of

budgets (Tippeconnic 46). Standardized tests provide policymakers with numbers and statistics, whereas other ways of monitoring the improvement of students are not as easy to compare and evaluate.

Under NCLB, American Indian students are taking the same tests as public school children. This means that they are being tested all in English, even though the law does not require the students to be taught in English, and being graded against students in public schools, most of whom speak English as a first language. They are also being tested on an Anglo-centric curriculum as opposed to their own curriculum, with their own cultural bias because the tests are standardized state-wide (Reyhner, “American Indians out of School” 45). Although it is permitted and encouraged by some federal laws to include native languages and cultures in the education of American Indians, the system of standardized testing penalizes this by not including these subjects on the test and comparing the scores of these students with those of the public school students who focus more class time on what the test asks.

Despite the studies that American Indian students do better in school when their cultures are included in the curriculum, and the successful examples of BIE funded schools that implemented a culturally relevant curriculum, standardized testing enforced by the NCLB Act prevents the expansion of cultural programs to more reservation schools. Because the schools are penalized if they do not meet the standards of NCLB, there is yet another push to teach American Indian children from a white, Anglo-centric curriculum.

### **Teachers in BIE Funded Schools**

As mentioned in chapter 5, teacher salaries on the reservations are significantly lower than those paid by public schools. In addition to the low salary, American Indian reservations are often in rural areas which can lead to a feeling of isolation from the outside world for teachers. These factors are not attractive for the best qualified teachers, and often the job of teaching in a BIE school is taken as a temporary fix until they can find something better. In fact, only about 3% of BIE teachers reported having majored or minored in American Indian studies (Pavel 11).

One problem that is cited with the situation with teachers in BIE funded schools is that, compared to students of other racial or ethnic groups, few Indian students report that “discipline is fair” or that “teachers are interested in students” (Reyhner, “ American Indians Out of School” 41). In combination with the trouble that BIE schools attracting the highest quality of teachers, the fact that the tests for teacher certification have nothing to do with measuring a teacher’s commitment to the students or knowledge of the students’ culture (Reyhner, “American Indians out of School” 41). As a result, the students feel like the people in charge of their education do not care about them, and the psychological effects of this do not help the already high dropout rates.

Adding to the impression that the teachers in BIE schools do not care about the students is the turnover rate of teachers. The typical teacher in these schools is just out of college and stays for only one or two years (Chavers 50). Most of the BIE funded schools have a turnover rate of 35% or higher, but some of the more isolated schools see a turnover rate as high as 90% (Chavers 50). With such a high teacher turnover rate, there are few teachers that remain in the community long enough to learn about the culture enough to properly include it in the curriculum. The high teacher turnover rate further

supports the idea that teaching jobs are often taken in BIE schools because teaching jobs were not available elsewhere.

The issue of teacher isolation is another obstacle to the BIE schools to attracting and keeping quality teachers. If teachers continue to have an assimilationist view, they will continue to be isolated in the community on the reservation. In contrast, if teachers view education as a means of self-determination and local control, they are more likely to become part of the community and feel less isolated in their surroundings (Reyhner, "American Indian Cultures and School Success").

Furthering this issue of teachers that are not aware of the students' culture, there is an overwhelmingly low number of American Indian teachers. About 90% of the teachers in reservations schools are non-Indians (Chavers 53). On top of the low number of Indian teachers, only a handful of the schools leadership positions are held by American Indians (Chavers 53). Although there have been federally funded teachers education programs to help American Indians become teachers, the funding for these programs have been significantly diminished over recent years. One program through the Office of Indian Education was completely defunded in 1996 (Chavers 55).

Another issue with some teachers, but not all, is racism. There is still a sense of racism in some classrooms. One woman, Ann Ritchey, wrote of her experience with racism in the classroom. Although she mentions the use of Dick and Jane books, implying that this was several decades ago, the important thing about her writing is that she talks about the effect that the racism of her teacher had on her as a child. When she was in second grade, the teacher gave her something in cursive and asked her to read it, but Ritchey had only ever learned to read print. When she could not read the writing, her

teacher said to another woman in the room, “Indians can’t learn.” That day in school, she did not learn how to read cursive, she learned that she, as an Indian, could not learn, and that sentiment stayed with her. She eventually dropped out of school, completing school when she returned as an adult (Ritchey). If the teacher, the person in charge of the children’s education, believes that the students cannot learn, then the children will not receive a quality education from that person. Also, students will start to believe these sentiments about themselves.

It is important that issues with teachers are changed. In order to effectively include language and culture into the curriculum of American Indian schools is to have knowledgeable teachers that care enough to go beyond teaching from textbooks and standardized tests. According to the NIES, at least 95 percent of American Indian fourth and eighth graders had teachers that rely on state standards to some extent when planning reading and language arts and mathematics (Mead, Grigg, Moran, and Kuang 2). Although this study shows that there is a higher percentage of BIE schools that included cultural material than public schools with American Indian students, a large majority of teachers are relying on the states standards for lesson plans.

Bobby Starnes, an expert in educational issues, is a white woman who taught for years in a Chippewa-Cree school. She suggests that new teachers find mentors in experienced teachers at their schools so that there is someone available to answer questions. She also says that teachers should learn the tribal history and be involved in the community so they can learn about the culture from the people themselves (Starnes 389).

It is also beneficial to have a teacher in-service training for new teachers. With such a high turnover rate in BIE schools, there is a need to constantly acclimate new teachers to their environments, to teach them about the culture in which they find themselves, to give tips from experienced teachers, and provide them with ways to get to know the community. Having this training for the teachers will give them knowledge and resources that puts them ahead of where they would be if they had to learn from trial and error (Starnes 391).

American Indian communities can help with the current inadequacies in the teaching staff of their schools. By becoming involved in the process of training new teachers, the community can be in charge of what the teachers know about the culture and help them to adjust their teaching styles to the learning styles of the students. By being involved in the process of training new teachers, the community will be actively improving the education on their reservation.

### **Cultural Violence in the Classroom**

Cultural violence is seen in the invisibility of tribal culture in reservation school curricula. Although there has been a recent effort to include tribal culture and language into school lessons, the current standardized tests under NCLB do not allow for schools to stray far from the state-wide curriculum plan. Because teachers are forced to teach to the test under NCLB, and because many teachers are new to the tribe and are otherwise unaware of its culture, they are limited to teaching mainstream ideas to their students. This means that the invisibility of their culture in American culture is perpetuated in their own classroom. The absence of their culture from the history and literature books, and the

cultural disregard in their science and math lessons is creating a violent atmosphere for the students.

The forced invisibility of their cultures under the system set up under NCLB reinforces ideas of their inferiority. One example of this is the continued teaching of “Manifest Destiny.” This idea that it was the destiny of white settlers to spread across the empty west to fully develop the land of the United States not only ignores the violence that the American Indian tribes living there faced, but ignores the tribes’ existence all together. Through the use of classroom materials that do not include their cultures, and through a system that favors English over their own language, American Indian students are victims of cultural violence through forced invisibility in their own classrooms.



## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

American Indian reservations are some of the poorest places in the United States today. As part of the trust agreements under the assumption that American Indian nations are “domestic dependant nations,” the federal government is responsible for making the reservations livable and is responsible for the welfare of the people. Under these same trust responsibilities, the federal government is responsible for the education provided on the reservations.

In the United States, as seen from patterns in the census data, there is a link between salaries and level of education. The general trend is that the better educated people are, the more money they make. For American Indians on today to escape poverty, the federal government needs to change the way that reservation schools are funded and the atmospheres of the schools so that students can receive a quality education.

This, however, is not happening. There is an achievement gap between American Indian reservation schools and the national averages of public schools. This gap is seen in test scores, dropout rates, and in the number of students going on to higher education. If education is the great equalizer in the U.S., and by receiving a quality education can improve one’s economic status, than why does the federal government not give American Indian children the same opportunities as students attending public schools? There is a need to improve the schools, not only as part of the trust agreements, but also as a way to improve the future of these peoples.

Although there are a lot of issues facing American Indian communities today, and oversimplifying the issue to seem that improving education will fix everything is naive

and inaccurate, improving education has proven benefits and does improve the economic state of the community in the long run. An investment in education is an investment in the future of the communities by providing the youth with better tools to improve their situations than were provided to their parents and grandparents.

The inadequate funds and the national standards movement are hurting reservation schools. Problems that need to be addressed are being ignored because the funding is not provided for them. Likewise, the education methods that prove to be most effective with American Indian children are not being implemented because the federal education laws require that all students pass a standardized test that is set up by the states. Because these tests are statewide, they do not include American Indian culture or language, and teachers have to teach more of what is on the test and include less of the native cultures in the lessons. Yet, the inclusion of culture is proven to increase student productivity and to reduce the dropout rate. These issues have been made known to the government through a series of publications and congressional hearings, but still there has not been enough done to fix these problems.

There is a continuing history of violence against American Indian people in the United States. In the case of American Indian reservation schools, structural violence can be seen in the laws that dictate how the schools are funded and run. For example, the NCLB Act is a form of structural violence against American Indian students because under NCLB, the schools that don't meet the AYP (about 70% of students attending reservation schools) are not only ineligible for certain funding bonuses, but are punished through sanctions. The AYP is determined by the state and enforced on the reservation, which involves measuring a student's progress through the use of standardized tests. This

is unfair to American Indian students, however, who come from a different culture and therefore learn differently and consequently test differently. It is also a problem because the tests are in English from an Anglo cultural point of view, but not all American Indian schools are taught in English and center around Anglo ideas.

This Anglo point of view that is perpetuated in the schools is also a form of violence. This cultural violence of ignoring the cultural ideas and even existence of American Indians in the United States today is carried into the classroom. This can not only have negative psychological effects on students, furthering the retention problems facing schools right now, but it can also hurt their pride in their culture and their tribe. This is true for many American Indian students attending reservation schools, because not only are the textbooks ignoring the importance of their people, but so are the teachers and the schools themselves.

The United States, through the NCLB Act and other funding legislation, is exerting structural and cultural violence on American Indian tribes. It is important to acknowledge and stop the continued violence against American Indians, because it is still affecting them today. One way to do this is to reform the way that reservation schools are run and funded to make a more productive and welcoming learning environment for American Indian children.

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