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American Indian Education: How Assimilation Decreases Retention

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AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION: HOW ASSIMILATION
DECREASES RETENTION

A Capstone Experience Manuscript

Presented by

Sarah E. Stone

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Approved By:

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ABSTRACT

Title: **American Indian Education: How Assimilation Decreases Retention**

Author: **Sarah E. Stone, History and Psychology**

CE Type: **Course Capstone Thesis**

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In today's society, American Indian retention in school is one of the lowest based on ethnicity. Many factors impact the issue of retention including money, familiar support, and the inclusion of culture in the schools. Unfortunately, the assimilation efforts that are present in all school systems greatly impact the retention rates of American Indian students. This assimilation first began with the original Indian boarding school and continues today in both public and reservation schools.

Assimilation takes many forms in education especially through time and school system. Historically, assimilation was demonstrated through physical acts of actively removing the cultural marks of the students' tribe and family. More recently, assimilation takes the forms of not having any culturally relevant course material, or requiring American Indian students to take and pass a test that is not culturally relevant to them. The veiled goal of American Indian education to assimilate American Indian students into mainstream American culture encourages the already low level of retention of American Indian students in the various school systems of today.

The affects of this forced assimilation not only affect retention levels of American Indian students, but are forms of structural and cultural violence against American Indian individuals and culture. By assimilating a student into mainstream American culture through not teaching about American Indian culture or language, cultural violence is committed against that individual. Structural violence is demonstrated through the governmental acts and policies that inhibit the success of the American Indian student

and population. By allowing practices and laws to exist that only encourage retention of American Indians to drop, acts of violence are being allowed to occur.

This violence and assimilation is demonstrated in all forms of schooling, including boarding schools, public schools, and tribal schools. Although tribal schools offer the most cultural inclusion into the curriculum, a lack of funding and governmental support limits the availability of the tribal schools and the ability for them to meet government requirements. Boarding schools and especially public schools tend to get more governmental funding and support, but American Indian language and culture is less frequently included in the income. All types of schooling have their problems for American Indian students and communities, and each of these problems adds to the low retention rates.

The government of the United States has a long historical role with American Indian education. This role includes the 1972 Indian Education Act and continues to the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. Until very recently, the No Child Left Behind Act has been the school of thought for the United States, and although some tribal schools enjoyed the funding it was supposed to provide the schools, the Act limited the success of American Indian students even greater than before. In 2011, President Obama explained his plan to be rid of the No Child Left Behind Act and replace it with a plan titled "Race to the Top." A comparison between the old and new policies and an outlook to the future will be included in this document.

The research conducted for this paper has provided evidence that a problem with American Indian education does exist. It also has suggested possible solutions, mainly stemming from incorporating American Indian language and culture into all types of

school systems. With an increased relevancy in the curriculum, it is hoped that the retention rates of American Indian students will only improve. The increasing number of tribal colleges and the end of the No Child Left Behind Act adds hope to this goal.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The goal of education in the United States is to prepare students to have jobs and to be a functioning and beneficial citizen. In terms of American Indian students, the goal of assimilating the students into mainstream United States culture also exists. The attempt to rid the American Indian of the American Indian culture encourages many Indian students to leave the schools that are orchestrating this cultural genocide. Although a large amount of research on assimilation of American Indians and on the retention rates of American Indians has been conducted, a far lesser amount has analyzed the correlation between assimilation and retention. By reviewing the extensive research on assimilation and retention separately, and by factoring in research conducted on the different school systems available to American Indians and governmental influence, conclusions can be reached on the relationship between the forced assimilation of American Indian education and the retention rates of the American Indian students.

The most general aspect of the research question at hand is the assimilation of the American Indian, and for this reason, the majority of the research is centered on assimilation. There are two parts of assimilation, the pre-assimilation, or the traditional values still followed, and the post assimilation, which results in the Anglo-American ideals. Kip Coggins and Norma Radin, professors of social work at the University of Texas at El Paso and the University of Michigan, respectively, along with Edith Williams, discuss the relationship between both parts of assimilation. In their article "The Traditional Tribal Values of Ojibwa Parents and the School Performance of their Children: an Exploratory Study," the affects of traditional values on school-aged children

are analyzed. By examining nineteen Ojibwa families, the authors discovered that children whose mothers held onto their traditional values excelled in school, suggesting a positive correlation between traditional tribal values and mainstream United States education (Coggins, Williams, and Radin). Similar research by Linda Van Hamme, Director of Research at St. Joseph's Indian School in Chamberlain South Dakota and author of "American Indian Cultures and the Classroom" concludes that by integrating the culture of the American Indian student with concepts necessary for the larger society, the American Indian student will excel academically (Hamme). By incorporating traditional tribal values with mainstream education, these authors' research support the argument that such meshing of cultures is beneficiary for the American Indian student to succeed in school.

On the contrary, research has also concluded that maintaining tribal traditions can be detrimental to an American Indian student's education. Terry Huffman, author of the article "Resistance Theory and Transculturation Hypothesis as Explanations of College Attrition and Persistence among Culturally Traditional American Indian Students" performed a study finding just that. Huffman has been a Professor at George Fox University since 2003 and his research on American Indian education was recognized by the South Dakota Council for Reconciliation.

In his study, Huffman discovered that although some traditional American Indian students were able to succeed academically while holding onto their culture, an equal number of students were unable to do this. Huffman concluded that both categories of students were challenged by cultural discontinuity and macrostructural explanations (Huffman 3). Huffman describes cultural discontinuity is a problem at the individual and

interpersonal level, whereas macrostructural problems are at the societal level (4). The traditional values that Coggins, Williams, and Radin discovered to benefit academics would be considered a means of overcoming cultural discontinuity. The Ojibwa values of sharing, harmony with nature and others, and peace, for example, would allow culturally traditional students to excel in mainstream education (Coggins, Williams, and Radin). Huffman discovered that the resistance theory predicted which students would fail, and which would succeed in getting their education, based on who was willing to intertwine cultures. Traditional students who resisted transculturation would fall behind in mainstream education (Huffman 25). Although research has found that traditional values combined with education can benefit the American Indian student, mixed with other attitudes and challenges, they can also be detrimental to the individual.

With the known benefits of incorporating tribal traditional culture into the academics of American Indian students, a balance must be met between culture and the set standards in the schools in order to provide the best possible education. Authors Gerald E. Gipp and Sandra J. Fox analyze the complexities in balancing these two ideals in their article, "Promoting cultural relevance in American Indian education" in *Education Digest*." Gipp is the executive director of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium 2001 and he works with the nations thirty-two tribal colleges and universities. Fox earned her Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico and is a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Both authors therefore are extremely qualified in writing on what is needed in American Indian education.

In their article, Gipp and Fox discuss the Effective Schools program, which works to incorporate relevant culture in schools, while keeping the school at a standard where it can still be accredited. By reaching the five goals Gipp and Fox deem necessary (instructional leadership, good community relations, supportive environment, high expectations, and the opportunity to learn), schools will be able to include cultural relevance in their curriculums while meeting the nation's standards (Gipp and Fox). In agreement with the necessity of including relevant cultural history into the curriculum, Bobby Ann Starnes describes the importance of the Indian Education for All Montana State Law passed in 1999 (Starnes 186). Starnes received her doctorate in education from Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1990 and is now a professor of Education Studies at Berea College. With a strong background in education, she is well qualified in writing about what American Indian students need in order to succeed and remain in school. In her article, "Montana's Indian Education for All: Toward an Education Worthy of American Ideals," Starnes outlines the requirements of the law, which include lessons on the history of the twelve tribes in Montana for both Indian and non-Indian students (186-187). By bringing programs that incorporate American Indian cultures to the classroom, American Indian students can relate better to the curriculum, which as Coggins, Williams, and Radin pointed out, increase performance and decreases dropout rates of these students.

While the benefits of transculturation vary from student to student, the means of assimilation are also dependent on the student, the school, and the location. Thomas W. Cowger, author of *The National Congress of American Indians: the Founding Years*, also wrote the article "Dr. Thomas A. Bland, critic of forced assimilation", where he analyzes

Dr. Brand's opinion of proper assimilation. According to Cowger, who is also a doctoral candidate in history at Purdue University, Bland supported gradual and voluntary assimilation of the American Indian into mainstream United States culture (Cowger 77). Although Cowger focuses primarily on assimilation in terms of land conflicts, his ideas can be carried over to education as well.

Another practiced researcher of the means of assimilation is Jack D. Forbes, author of the article "The New Assimilation Movement: Standards, Test, and Anglo American Supremacy." Forbes is Professor of Native American Studies at University of California at Davis, as well as the author of numerous books and articles. In his article, Forbes argues that in today's society, cultural assimilation of all minority groups is being forced upon students in the forms of standardized testing and national textbooks. He claims that by using the same testing geared curriculum across the United States, the unique cultures of each region, including those of the American Indians, is being collected into one (Forbes 2). Forbes focuses primarily on the situation in California, the state with the greatest American Indian population combined with other minorities. He argues that the goal of testing and assimilation through education is to insure Anglo-American culture remains dominant (10). Assimilation specifically conducted through national standard testing and teaching supplies, is just one way American Indians are forced to surrender their culture in order to do well in school.

A traditional form of assimilating the American Indian student into mainstream United States culture was to send the student to one of the many boarding schools. Through these boarding schools, a cultural genocide erased the traditions of the American Indians and forced Anglo culture upon them, as Scott Laderman describes. Laderman,

Assistant Professor of History at University of Minnesota, Duluth, has published many books and articles on a variety of subjects and has received numerous honors and awards, the most recent being the Imagine Fund annual award from University of Minnesota in 2009. Laderman also wrote the article “It is Cheaper and Better to Teach a Young Indian than to Fight an Old One: Thaddeus Pound and the Logic of Assimilation,” where he focuses on the life of Thaddeus Pound in his article, whom helped to create the American Indian Boarding School system in the late nineteenth century. The goals of these boarding schools as Laderman states were “to ‘civilize’ the Indians through the inculcation of so-called American values and norms” (Laderman 92). The means of doing this were quite uncivil themselves.

The ways of filling these boarding schools varied from location to location and by family. Scott Riney, author of *The Rapid City Indian School*, as well as several other books on boarding schools and assimilation, describes in the chapter “Many Roads to Rapid,” how some students went willingly to the schools to receive an education and to meet people from other tribes, whereas some students were forced to go based on poverty. Some students were taken by police and sent to the schools, putting a real truth behind the term “forced assimilation” (Riney 19). Once at the schools, the students were stripped of the culture as if it were clothing. In the book *Away From Home: American Indian Boarding School Experiences*, the authors describe how when arriving at the boarding schools, the students were given government issued clothing, had their long hair cut, were given English names, and were forbidden to speak in their native languages or practice any native custom (Archuleta, Child, and Lomawaima 26). By forcing any hint

of Indian culture out of the student, boarding school proponents thought they could force the American Indian into Anglo culture.

The authors of *Away From Home: American Indian Boarding School Experiences* have a strong background in American Indian studies, and specifically the boarding school system. Author Margaret L. Archuleta is the Curator of Fine Art at the Heard Museum (Phoenix) and has a BA in art history and Native American Studies, with an emphasis in Federal Indian Law from the University of California at Berkeley. Her experience is similar to that of fellow author Brenda J. Child, Associate Professor of American Studies and American Indian studies at University of Minnesota. Child is also the author of *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900 – 1940* and winner of the North American Indian Prose Award. She has a Ph.D. in history from the University of Iowa. Finally, K. Tsianina Lomawaima, the third author of the book, has been a Professor of American Indian Studies at University of Arizona since 1994, having received her M.A. and Ph.D. in anthropology from Stanford University. Lomawaima is also author of *Prairie Light: the Story of Chilocco Indian School* (1994) and winner of the 1993 North American Indian Prose award and American Educational Association 1995 Critics Choice Award. Combined, these three authors are extremely knowledgeable about the boarding school system, particularly on the abuses and ramifications of the system.

With the boarding school system, the many abuses and forced assimilation on the students lead many students to drop out, even to commit suicide. As Riney describes in his chapter “Discipline, Punishment, and Violence”, the students at the boarding schools greatly outnumbered the teachers and supervisors, which forced a strict regiment on daily

life (Riney 38). Riney further describes the harsh means of punishment, which often turned into violence. Archuleta, Child, and Lomawaima support Riney's description with further evidence of corporal punishment, sexual abuse, and gang warfare (42). Children were constantly running away from the schools, and numerous students killed themselves out of desperation.

In today's society, American Indian students are more commonly enrolled in reservation or public schools than in boarding schools, but suicide is still a major concern for these students. Arlene Metha and L. Dean Webb, authors of *Foundations of American Education* (2009), also wrote the article "Suicide among American Indian Youth: the Role of Schools in Prevention." In this article, Metha and Webb state the statistics of suicide today and the role schools must play in order to reduce the number of American Indian student suicides. In terms of boarding school suicides, a main factor is a lack of interpersonal and familial support. For the general American Indian student, suicidal risk factors include:

Frequent interpersonal conflicts; prolonged, unresolved grief, chronic familial instability; depression; alcohol abuse and dependence; family history of psychiatric disorder-particularly alcoholism, depression and suicide; physical illness; previous suicide attempt; frequent encounters with the criminal justice system; and multiple home placements (Metha and Webb).

Although the harsh regiments of boarding schools have been lightened due to more personal rights laws, the numbers of American Indian suicides are still at a high, which brings the retention rates of American Indian students down.

Much more research has been conducted on American Indian boarding schools due to the extremities that were involved, however a fair amount of scholarly research involving American Indians in the public school systems has also been done. This research is necessary when looking at the broad picture of American Indian Education and how assimilation affects the retention rates of American Indian students. Delores J. Huff is a Professor of American Indian Studies at California State University, Fresno, and the former Director of Education for the Boston Indian Center and principal of the Pierre Indian Learning center in South Dakota. With a strong background in American Indian education, she wrote *To Live Heroically: Institutional Racism and American Indian Education*, in which she describes the background to the history of public education and the various opinions the town, the reservation, and the school administration have on the enrollment of American Indian students (Huff 73- 83). The increase of enrollment of American Indian students in public schools is simply demonstrated in the table in *American Indian Education: a History*.

American Indian Education: a History was written by Jon Allan Reyhner and Jeanne M. Oyawin Eder. Reyhner is a professor in the Department of Educational Specialties at Northern Arizona University, has written over fifty articles and books, and has given over one hundred presentations. Partnered with Eder, a children's and young adult's author and author of *The Dakota Sioux* and *The Makah* both published in 2000, the two authors have the experience necessary to compile such a scholarly novel. In this source, a table illustrates the enrollment increase of American Indian students in public schools from 177,436 in 1938 to 353,462 in 1986 (Reyhner and Eder 284). More recent data is not available from this source, but based on the older results, speculation would

hypothesis a continuation of this increase. By analyzing the enrollment of American Indian students in public school systems, comparisons can be made on the curriculums of these school systems and those at boarding schools, to discover how the curriculums carry out assimilation, and how this affects the retention rates of American Indian students.

A final component of research necessary to make conclusions on how assimilation affects retention rates is research on reservation school systems. Research in this area is like public school systems, far less extensive than boarding schools, but still readily available. In her well rounded book *To Live Heroically*, Huff discusses the history and difficulties American Indians had with gaining control administering their own education. The main difference between public and tribal schools, Huff points out, is that tribal schools incorporate culture, family and tribal life into the students' education (174). Huff continues to analyze the benefits of this non-assimilating system on the retention rates of American Indian students in comparison to public and boarding schools.

Authors Jennifer Gilliard and Rita A. Moore support Huff's research in their article "An Investigation of How Culture Shapes Curriculum in Early Care and Education Programs on a Native American Indian Reservation." Gilliard, a professor at University of Montana, and Moore, a professor at Willamette University, claim that because children learn best when their home and community culture is involved, reservation schools that employ teachers of the same culture are the most effective in reaching academic goals (Gilliard and Moore 251). Together Huff, Gilliard, and Moore present the argument that in order to receive the best education possible, and to make the American Indian student

feel inclusive in school and therefore maintain a high retention rate, reservation schools are the most promising component to the American Indian students education.

As demonstrated, an abundance of research is available on all aspects and theories of assimilation, as well as the different methodologies of enforcing assimilation (boarding school, public school, and tribal schools). There is also that focus on similar research in respect to retention specifically. This research claims that culturally driven programs directly affect retention rates. One such researcher, Raphael Guillory, Professor of Counseling, Educational and Developmental Psychology at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Washington, agrees with this claim in his article “American Indian/ Alaska Native College Student Retention Strategies.” Guillory’s main argument is that there are many factors going against the American Indian student such as money, a lack of cultural and social support systems, and instances of cultural hostility, that many students do not see the plus side of going to college through all the bad (Guillory 11). Guillory furthers his argument with statistics, and concludes with the suggestion of increasing cultural programs in colleges as a way to increase entrance and retention rates.

Further research has been conducted on the retention of gifted students in school programs, and has seen a similar need for more cultural programs. Grantham Ford, a professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt, focuses her work primarily on recruiting and retaining culturally diverse students in gifted education and minority student achievement. Gilman Whiting, the Assistant Professor and Director of the Undergraduate Studies Program in African American and Diaspora studies, is author of more than thirty scholarly publications and has a Ph.D. from Purdue University. Together Ford and Whiting wrote the article “Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

students in Gifted Education: Recruitment and retention Issues” which focuses on why multicultural students (statistics for American Indians are included) do not enter or stay in these special programs. Ford and Whiting discovered that a sense of deficient thinking and a lack of interconnectedness to teachers and students (because of racial differences) lead to the student dropping out of the program (Ford and Whiting 292). Comparison of the Ford and Whiting article with Guillory’s article suggests that at all levels of schooling, retention of American Indian students needs to be improved by adding culturally relevant programs.

With all of the research on assimilation and retention, it is also important to consider research done on the legal movements affecting assimilation and retention of American Indian students. David Beaulieu, Professor of Education Policy Studies at Arizona State University, Director of the Center for Indian Education, editor of the *Journal of American Indian Education*, and 2005 President of National Indian Education Association discusses the effects of the No Child Left Behind Act on American Indians. In his article “Comprehensive Reform and American Indian Education,” Beaulieu states the goal of governmental reform as American Indians achieving the same standard in education as all other students by meeting educational and cultural requirements (Beaulieu). Beaulieu later describes the various policies and laws implemented in an effort to meet this goal. Similar research was completed by Richard B. Williams, President and CEO of the American Indian College Fund and receiver of the Educator of the Year award from the National Indian Education Association. William’s article “Voices: Will Indian Education Be Left Behind”, also focuses on the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, and claims that this act only hinders American Indian students, especially

American Indian students at reservation schools (Williams). These two articles are an asset in determining whether government involvement by passing laws and policies, creates a greater need to assimilate the American Indian student into mainstream United States culture, which only furthers the drop-out rates of these students.

Researching whether forced assimilation of American Indian students affects the retention rates of these students is significant for multiples of reasons. First of all, it is important to increase the retention rates of students of all ethnic backgrounds in order to better the individual and society. Also, this research could help end the cultural genocide of American Indians. Another possible benefit is that it could help prevent what is happening in the United States elsewhere, and prevent the people in other places from having to go through what the American Indians as a whole have dealt with. For example, Anne Paulet, Professor at Humboldt State University, wrote the article, "To Change the World: The Use of American Indian Education in the Philippines." The thesis of this article is that "American actions in the Philippines had a precedent in American actions at home with American Indians" (Paulet 175). This demonstrates the interconnectedness of policies and actions around the world. Paulet's research is beneficial to the thesis that assimilation of American Indian students affects the retention rates of these students by providing a different viewpoint and subject, with the same problems.

When determining whether forced assimilation of American Indian students into mainstream Anglo-American culture affects the retention rates of these American Indian students, it is important to analyze the research on all aspects of the question. Luckily, an abundance of scholarly research has been conducted on assimilation, the different forms

of schooling available to American Indians, and retention rates of American Indians. With this and future research, conclusions can be made directly about the correlation between assimilation and retention. With the support of past and present scholars, solutions increasing retention rates and for ending cultural genocide, such as through incorporating American Indian culture into the school systems can be found.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND PURPOSE

Research Methods

This research is concerned primarily with how current education of American Indian students inadvertently forces assimilation on these students, and therefore increases the dropout rate of American Indians from school. The research attempts to analyze all sides of the argument in an effort to find the best possible solution for this problem. One of the problems that came up when conducting this research was that so many different school systems exist with their own methods of incorporating American Indian students. Finding one set answer to the issue is difficult and, in most instances, too broad a generalization. By incorporating research about each type of school system, however, this problem can be addressed. Hopefully through thorough research, the low retention rates of American Indian students in the various school systems will be able to rise with the solutions proposed in this thesis.

The methodology of this research is to collect and review scholarly works on the subject of American Indian education and retention rates of these students. These sources include a collection of peer reviewed articles from an assortment of online journals, as well as several peer reviewed and published books that provide a broad analysis of the subject. These sources were collected over a nine-month period with a focus on thoroughness and accuracy. Although future research on this subject could include a broader spectrum of sources such as surveys and interviews, the research collected for this manuscript is sufficient in supporting the thesis and in proposing possible solutions.

Purpose and Scope of the Paper

From the very first American Indian boarding schools to today's public schools and schools on reservations, the retention rates of American Indian students have been consistently low. The purpose of compiling this research and writing this thesis was to better understand the various reasons behind the low retention rates of American Indian students. This essay not only looks deeper into the retention statistics but also into what goes occurs on a daily basis in each of the different major forms of school systems in an effort to connect the forced assimilation that occurs with the retention rates. Also included was research conducted on how governmental actions have either improved or hurt the retention rates of American Indian students and whether assimilation has been encouraged through these government acts. I conclude by suggesting possible research that could be conducted in the future, as well as potential solutions for increasing the retention rates by eliminating methods of assimilating the American Indian students into mainstream American culture.

CHAPTER FOUR

BOARDING SCHOOL EDUCATION

Brief Overview

American Indians have been educated in Euro-American style education for hundreds of years. Boarding schools were created in an effort to assimilate the American Indian into a white man's culture through education. Boarding schools for American Indians still exist today, though they are losing popularity as public and tribal school enrollment increases. Many American Indian students went to these boarding schools for various reasons. Some children were forced, either by their family or tribe, or by the government. Other children wanted to go in order to have a chance to meet different people. In any case, however, the boarding schools were very strict, especially when they were popular, giving them a negative connotation in terms of education.

Description of Carlisle

In 1879, the Carlisle Indian School was founded by Army Captain Richard Henry Pratt. The school initially enrolled two hundred Indian students, who, through physical labor, academic and vocational learning, were taught to be "real Americans" (Boyer 11). The goal of the school was to assimilate the American Indian students into white culture by completely removing any traces of the Indian cultures the students brought with them to the school. Pratt explained what the Carlisle school was based on as his view that he "believe[d] in immersing the Indians in our civilization and when we get them under, holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked" (Boyer 12). Views similar to this governed the ideology of most boarding schools of the time.

Assimilation at Boarding Schools

One of the main goals of American Indian boarding school was to assimilate the American Indian into mainstream American culture. Prior to educating the American Indians, the United States government wanted to get rid of the tribes through fighting and structurally violent laws. But as the continuation of this method began to make people question the United States government, the government decided getting rid of American Indians by destroying their cultures and forcing them to participate in Anglo-American culture was a more politically correct way of destroying the American Indian. By “civilizing the Indian,” the United States government was able to have the same effect of destruction of tribal culture, but it was also considered to be more humane (Laderman 92). The United States government was able to hide under the excuse that it was trying to “help” the American Indians by educating them. Once the American Indian students were at the boarding school, most pretenses like these disappeared.

Upon arriving at most of the boarding schools, the American Indian students were stripped of their past identities. The schools took away everything that resembled anything American Indian. The children’s hair was cut short and they were forced to get rid of their tribal clothes and any memorabilia. Speaking a native language was forbidden, and most schools gave each student an Americanized name. One account from an American Indian student at a boarding school, Lilly Quoetone Nahwooksy, says:

When they first took us in school, they gave us government lace-up shoes, and they gave us maybe a couple pair of black stockings, and long underwear, about a couple of them, and slippers and dress. Then they gave us a number. My number was always twenty-three (Archuleta, Child, and Lomawaima 26).

As Lilly described, the American Indian students were given new, Anglo-American identities with Anglo-American wardrobes. Transformations like these are direct illustrations of forced assimilation and a demonstration of the effort the United States government put in to destroy American Indian cultures.

Why Students Went to Boarding School

With these horrible acts of assimilation taking place in most American Indian boarding schools, the prevailing question is why American Indian students went to these schools.

American Indian children had little say in where they went to school. Especially earlier in history, the government and local authorities forced many parents to send their children to boarding schools for financial reasons or as blackmail. In some extreme cases, children were taken by these authorities simply to increase the assimilation effort. On September 30, 1896, Commissioner Daniel Browning said that American Indian parents did not have the right to send their children wherever they wanted, that this right belonged to the United States government (Lomawaima and McCarty 47). This policy, known as the Browning Rule, was overruled in 1902 but was still frequently practiced. On the other hand, some American Indian parents sent their children by choice in order for the children to have an easier life by assimilating into mainstream American culture (Riney 19). More often than not, the children were not asked to give their opinion on where they wanted to go to school.

In some instances, however, the children were given the option of choosing their own educational destination. Some children chose to go to boarding school in order to meet people, to experience life outside the reservation, or to get to know different tribes'

customs. An example of this is Luther Standing Bear, an American Indian student who chose to go to Carlisle Boarding School in order to seem brave by going east. At the end of each school year, Luther Standing Bear returned home to his reservation and tried to recruit other children to attend the Carlisle School as well (Riney 20). This suggests that despite the hardships and assimilation reported to have existed at Carlisle and other boarding schools, some students were satisfied with their educations they received at the boarding schools.

Chapter Summary

Boarding school education was just one option available to American Indian students, one that was definitely more popular at the time when American Indian education first began, but still available today. The goal of many of the boarding schools was to erase American Indian cultures by forcing the students to participate in Anglo-American traditions and activities. Students arrived at these schools in several different means, some by choice, but most by force of either their parents or some governmental authority. The forced assimilation of the American Indian students did not go unnoticed, however, and did give the boarding schools a negative reputation.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCIPLINE AND VIOLENCE AT BOARDING SCHOOLS

Brief Overview

Overall, most of the early American Indian boarding schools employed the use of a strict military regiment and harsh discipline in order to increase the effectiveness of the forced assimilation of American Indian culture to mainstream American culture. This difficult lifestyle at the boarding schools did increase the number of students who got sick, both physically and mentally. The Merriam Report of 1928 exposed the high rate of abuse in boarding schools that included physical abuse, mismanagement, and a diet that could lead to slow starvation (Boyer 16). Many students suffered from depression due to the harsh environment and from being forced into developing a new culture and having to leave their old culture behind. While some recovered from the physical sicknesses and depression, others did not, as demonstrated by the high rates of alcoholism, suicide, and alienation of those who still suffered from the “boarding school mentality” (Swisher and Tippeconnic 111). Many boarding school students are still alive and it is from their accounts that this mentality is known of.

Military Regiment

At many of the boarding schools, a strict military system was believed to be the best system when handling a school full of American Indian students for several reasons. First of all, at many of the schools, the instructors and other adults running the schools were vastly outnumbered by the students. This instilled a fear based need to maintain control. One system that had been practiced before when American Indians were held prisoner was this military system (Riney 38). Like the teachers, the prison guards were

outnumbered by the inmates and therefore they needed a strict system to maintain order. The transformation from prison to board school was easy in terms of disciplining.

The military system was also used as a way to continue the assimilation from American Indian into Anglo-American culture. According to Riney, “nothing so quickly erased the image of the “savage” in the white mind as a haircut, a uniform, and the abilities to stand at attention and march in step” (Riney 140). Enforcing a military regiment erased any tribal traditions from the daily routine, since the entire day was expected to be followed as if in the military. This further removed the American Indian student from their culture.

Depression and Suicide

The strict disciplining system and military lifestyle affected many students mentally. Also, the fact that the students were forced to give up their cultures, languages, and even their names affected the students’ physical and mental health. A particular example is the story of Charlie, an Ojibwe student away at Flandreau boarding school. While away at school, Charles came down with a fever, of which his mother was informed weeks later. After his fever subsided, Charles was not his happy self. He was “tainted by the spiritual malaise common among boarding school students” (Archuleta, Child, and Lomawaima 40). Although it was reported that Charles recovered from his bout of depression, cemeteries strategically placed next to boarding schools like Carlisle, Chemawa, and Haskell suggest that not every sick and depressed child recovered.

Depression and suicide was a big part in boarding schools. There are multiple factors causing American Indians to be twice as likely as any other population to commit suicide, especially factors affecting American Indian students at boarding schools.

According to the research, American Indians who have experienced past abuse and have little connection to their family and community are more likely to commit suicide (Metha and Webb). Students at the boarding schools often received physical punishments if they did not follow the rules, which are considered physical abuse (Archuleta, Child and Lomawaima 42).

As described in the previous chapter, the students were not allowed to be connected to anything in their tribe or culture. This greatly limited the relationship between student and family and tribe. An example of such is told by Dillon Platero, the first director of the Navajos Division of Education and it is the story of “Kee.” “Kee” went to a boarding school where he was punished for speaking Navajo. Because he was only allowed to go home for Christmas and the summer he lost touch with his family. He withdrew from the Navajo world and the white world, making him non-lingual. He was a “man without a language” and by the time he was sixteen years old he was an alcoholic, depressed, and uneducated (Reyhner, *Education and Language* 8). Specifically to boarding school American Indians, less family support, poorer health, greater instances of consuming alcohol and a greater chance of knowing someone else who has committed suicide, increases the chances of American Indian students at boarding schools to commit suicide themselves (Metha and Webb). The number of factors that could lead to an individual to commit suicide increases if the individual is an American Indian and increase again if this American Indian is a student at a boarding school living under strict rules and regulations.

Chapter Summary

The harsh military regiments and disciplinary systems were believed to be necessary by the administration of most boarding schools. The added bonuses of accelerating the assimilation of the students encouraged many schools to use the system as well. The reaction of these systems by the students however including physical sickness, depression, and even suicide suggest something was not working. The high numbers of deaths and suicides at these boarding schools do not help the already low retention rates of American Indian students overall. As Archuleta, Child and Lomawaima suggest in their book, the number of suicides at boarding schools suggest that something was not working towards the best interest of the Indians (Archuleta, Child and Lomawaima 42). From the very beginning however, the government made it clear that it was not attempting to work towards the best interest of the Indians, first demonstrated by imprisoning them, and then demonstrated by assimilating them with these boarding schools.

CHAPTER SIX

AMERICAN INDIANS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Brief Overview

An alternative to going to boarding school, and one that is much more popular now than boarding school, is for American Indian students to attend public school. Public schools are governed by the state, so what is taught is also controlled by the state. Attending public school as an American Indian student does provide for problems, including a sense of not belonging and a loss of culture. There are advantages when American Indian students attend public schools and these include financing, solid academics, and integration with people of different cultures. Statistically, an increase of American Indian children in public schools has and continues to increase, suggesting that the good parts of public schools outweigh the bad aspects.

Problems with Public Schools

Like boarding schools, there are both good things and bad when it comes to American Indian children attending public schools. One of the problems is when American Indian students attend a public school for the first time, especially if they live on a reservation; they become completely surrounded by a culture unfamiliar and impersonal to them. When mainstream children in the United States enter public schools, they enter into a culture already familiar to them (Coggins, Williams, and Radin). Therefore, these mainstream kids can give their full attention to their academics. American Indian students are faced with the challenge of focusing on their academics, fitting in, and trying to figure out the culture they have just entered and to which they do not belong. The extra situations facing the American Indian students do not allow them to

focus solely on their schoolwork, which hurts their grades. A combination of poor grades and not having a sense of belonging lowers retention rates.

Other problems with public schools have caught the attention of American Indian parents, ranging from cultural to convenience. In her novel, Huff describes a list of complaints held by American Indian parents whose children attend public school. The first problem, as just described, is the lack of tribally relevant material (Huff 80). The parents are worried that by attending public schools, their children will not learn necessary information about their tribes. Another problem the parents have is with the teaching methods available at public schools (82). Because public schools are administered by the state, the schools have to achieve good scores in tests run by the state. This means that many teachers teach in a way that focuses on scoring well on these tests, and not on learning and maintaining important general knowledge. Finally, some American Indian parents have complaints about the busing system and cafeteria food available in public schools (83). These particular complaints are held by many parents of various cultures, as most parents want what is best for their children. Of these problems however, the greatest circles around the American Indian students not being able to relate and fit in culturally.

Positive Aspects of Public Schools

Interestingly enough, the good aspects for American Indian children attending public schools are also concerned with convenience and culture. Conveniently, public schools are open to the public and are free to attend. Also, depending on the area in which the public school is located, most public schools are able to provide students with good resources and tools with which to learn from. These tools include paper, writing

utensils, books, and computers. Culturally, because the public schools are available for everyone, a diverse student population exists, again depending on the location. An example of this is the Madison School System in Wisconsin, a public school where American Indian students are put into classrooms with white and black students (Huff 73-79). By integrating different cultures into one student population, the students will gain a broader understanding of the world around them. This will allow them to learn how to interact with people different from them, a skill necessary as an adult in the working world. Some very important life lessons can be learned in the public school atmosphere.

Statistics

Statistically, it is clear that the benefits of convenience and cultural integration are dominant over the negative aspects when American Indian children attend public school. Prior to World War II, many public school systems denied American Indians enrollment. In fact in 1900, only 118 American Indian children were enrolled in public schools (Lomawaima and McCarty 47). The statistics available are a little dated, and more recent ones will be provided, but according to the research conducted by Reyhner, in 1968, 177,463 American Indian children were enrolled in public school systems throughout the United States. Eighteen years later, in 1986, there were 353,462 American Indian children enrolled in public school systems. As of 2007, only 1.2 percent of national public school enrollment is of American Indian students (Zehr). (Please see Appendix A for a detailed chart comparing American Indian enrollment in several states.) In less than two decades, the number of American Indian students in public school systems more than doubled. This suggests that the benefits of public schooling outweigh the negatives.

Chapter Summary

With the public school systems in the United States, there are problems that affect all students and problems that primarily affect American Indian students. The convenience and quality of transportation and food can be a problem for a student of any ethnicity. The problem of not fitting in due to culture and not being able to relate to the subject material or methods of teaching is a problem felt primarily by American Indian children and other minority students. The positive aspects of public schools for American Indian children include providing the children a way to learn about the world outside of the tribe and reservation. This allows the students to develop the skills necessary form the future when they have to interact with someone different from them. Statistics demonstrate that an increasing number of American Indian students are attending public schools, implying that the public schools are doing something right.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AMERICAN INDIAN RESERVATION SCHOOLS

A Brief Overview

Another option available to some American Indian students in terms of receiving an education is to go to school on their tribe's reservation. Some tribes, however, do not have a reservation, and, even if they do, not all reservations have tribal schools. Others problems exist besides the question of availability. Many tribes do not have the resources necessary for operating a school that meets governmental standards held against the education received. Also, some parents disapprove of the lack of broader education students receive from tribal schools.

The schools on reservations do have many benefits, however, for the American Indian student. Besides the convenience of location of the schools, the reservation schools also provide the students with an experience that combines their culture with their education. Studies have proven that incorporating culture and having classes taught by someone relatable provides students with a better understanding of the subject material and better personal development. Although there are negatives aspects of reservation schools, the benefits of the availability of the student's culture in the classroom are very pronounced (Williams).

Problems with Reservation Schools

Like any system, there are multiple problems at the reservation schools ranging from financing, academics, and culture issues. The primary issue at schools on reservations is that the schools do not have enough financing to provide schools in good condition to properly educate the students. In 2006, of the 184 reservation schools under

the Board of Indian Affairs control, sixteen percent were in bad condition (Illia). The BIA was aided with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act with financial support to rebuild the schools, but not all schools were affected and improved (Illia).

Without these resources, an education equivalent to that of government supported public schools was very difficult to come by. In his chapter on reservation schools, Riney describes the frustration that father Nicholas Ruleau has with the lack of progress his daughters were making after three years at the Holy Rosary Mission School at Pine Ridge (Riney 30). Ruleau ended up transferring his daughters to the Rapid City Indian School, a boarding school for American Indians that was considered to have a much better quality of education.

Another problem with many reservation schools was the fact that little to no integration existed between American Indian children who went to the tribal schools and the rest of main stream United States. At least when Indian children attended public schools, they were able to interact with children of other ethnicities and cultures at a greater extent. Another concerned father, A. Hankass, pulled his children out of the school on his reservation because, "I put them there to learn white man way instead of that they learn how to talk Indian" (Riney 30). As in any culture, the parent initially decides whether or not to raise their children into that culture or to integrate them with another culture. Hankass wanted his children to be integrated into mainstream white society in order for his children to be able to function better in this dominating society and therefore he was not satisfied with the education that focused s much on the tribe and its values. Some parents however, would embrace this specialization in tribal culture.

Incorporating Culture

There are benefits of American Indian students going to reservation schools, the most significant being the feelings of inclusion and academic achievement given because of the incorporation of culture into their school experience. Because tribal schools do not separate family, culture, and education, they are, for the most part, considered to be the best schooling for American Indian children (Huff). One example of this is Lloyd Elm, director of a public school that integrates American Indian culture, history, and language with its regular studies (Huff 174). Elm's school has had a greater success at American Indian grades and retention, suggesting that the inclusion of their culture helps these students both to learn and to want to go to and stay in school. It therefore can be assumed that because tribal schools include similar amounts of culture as Elm's school, that the grades and retention rates would be similar at the tribal school level, not considering other factors like financing as mentioned above (Huff).

Another effect of the tribal schools is that the students will be presented with more if not all teachers who have the same culture as they do. Studies have been done on the effects of students being taught by teachers all of a different culture than they. Results found that when American Indian children are taught by all Anglo-American teachers, the students have trouble relating to the teachers and their grades slip (Gilliard and Moore 251). At reservation schools, because many of the teachers are from that reservation or tribe, the students have an easier time relating to the teacher's culture, since it is usually theirs as well (251).

Similar results have been found concerning the content of reservation school lesson plans. When the academics draw from the student's language and culture, the student tends to be more interested in the material and therefore tends to put more effort

into their studies (Gilliard and Moore 252). This ability to relate to the content taught at tribal schools creates a sense of belonging for the student. Also, it impresses the importance of respecting the tribal culture and the student's family. Reservation schools are able to better educate the students by incorporating culture, and at the same time, teach the students the history of and the traditions of their tribe.

An additional program that is currently increasing in popularity among tribal schools is the National Wildlife Federation's Schoolyard Habitats program. This program certifies gardens at schools to help connect kids with nature, and for many American Indian students, to their heritage (Cubie). The first tribal school to take on this program was the Southern Ute Indian Academy in 2005. Since then, nine other tribal schools have joined. It has been found that the NWF program helps bring academic success to the American Indian students. For example, the students with this program had increased math scores on standardized tests than the students who had more of a traditional math curriculum (Cubie). By incorporating programs like this in tribal schools, academic success could improve which in turn can help the retention rates.

Chapter Summary

For many American Indian children, reservation schools are the best answer at maintaining and raising retention rates. Although some of these schools struggle financially and are not able to stay at a satisfactory academic level, many tribal schools are academically equipped. Reservation schools have the ability to incorporate American Indian culture into daily life, providing the students an easier transition growing up, knowledge of their people, and a sense of belonging. These qualities allow the student to focus more intently on their academics which improves grades and retention.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE TO MAINTAIN RETENTION

Brief Overview

Language is the way people distinguish other groups of people. According to Swisher, language is critical to identify and maintain culture and identity (113). Therefore without language, and individual or a group of people has no identity. As of 2006, if people do not start to learn endangered languages, ninety percent of the worlds 6000 languages (plus), will become extinct. As an example, of the three hundred known American Indian languages, only 57 are spoken (Ngai 220). In order to fight this disappearance of languages, language programs need to be developed to meet everyone's needs. In terms of American Indian languages, programs need to satisfy the Indians in the school systems and the non-Indians in the school systems (222). Only with this cooperation will the endangered languages prevail.

Why American Indian Language is Essential in Education

The way many schools were handling the language question was to teach the students English and not incorporate their native language. The problem with this approach is that there are two types of language: conversational language and academic language (Reyhner 99). Conversational language is the easier of the two to learn, because it is more frequently used. But by the time a student has learned the academic language needed to understand the subject material, the student is already behind in the subject matter (11). Language learning needs to be incorporated into subject material in order for the student to make progress in both areas. Many language programs are only

short term solutions and are disconnected from mainstream education and activities (Ngai 221). Continuity between mainstream education and language education is a necessity.

Solutions to the Language Problem

In order to improve language learning in a way that also improves academic success and increased retention rates, the language program must have longevity and community ties. By increasing the common language curriculum's longevity, it will remain applicable to students from kindergarten through tribal colleges (Ngai 224). Additionally, connections will be able to be made between Indian language education programs, Indian language classrooms, mainstream classrooms, and native language education and American Indian studies (220). The interconnected of such a program assists the student at all stages and situations of their life. Also, learning the language of the community a student is born in not only creates pride in the student and a sense of identity, but it is part of the communities right to self determination (221). The option of having the language is a right. As research has increased on the importance of American Indian language in respect to education, exemplary programs have increased around the nation. One example is the Hualapai Bilingual Academic Excellence Program in Peach Springs, Arizona (Swisher 125). This program is based on the culture and language of the community, and reinforces the values and beliefs of the community. To see other statistics of successful immersion programs, see Appendix B. By creating language programs based out of the community and ones that can survive the entirety of a student's education are the most successful ones.

The Salish Example

A specific example of why language is important in an American Indian student's education can be seen by the research on the communities at Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana. This reservation is seventeen percent Indian and is home to the Confederated Salish-Kootane Tribes. Only one to two percent of the tribal members speak Salish language (Ngai 221). The curriculum devised to fix these low statistics was a curriculum based over a long period of time with suggested content, but the flexibility to multiple teaching methods (223). The results of such a program were very positive. The Salish language education was a tool to teach about the history, ceremonies, views and values, traditions, customs, and nature of the Salish culture. Additionally, the language program reinforced academic skills with competent communication (226 – 227). The Salish-Kootane Tribe is just one example of many demonstrating the success and importance of language learning on American Indian education.

Chapter Summary

In order for schools of all styles to improve the retention of American Indian students, language needs to become a key focus in the curriculum. Time has shown that forcing the English language on American Indian students has had detrimental effects and little positive ones in terms of academic success and retention. By incorporating American Indian language and culture into the curriculums, the gap between American Indian students and their non-Indian peers in respect to academics and retention can become less dramatic.

CHAPTER NINE

GENERAL ASSIMILATION

Brief Overview

The definition of assimilation as stated in the 1913 Webster Dictionary is “The act or process of assimilating or bringing to a resemblance, likeness, or identity; also, the state of being soassimilated; as, the assimilation of one sound to another” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). In terms of American Indians, it is the process of changing the American Indians to resemble Anglo America and taking away the American Indian cultures. Assimilation is forced upon American Indian students in all different types of schooling, including boarding schools, public schools, and schools on reservations. There are multiple problems surrounding assimilation, one of the biggest is its effects on American Indian students and retention rates.

Assimilation in the Various School Systems

Assimilation of American Indian students into the dominant white society is present in the many different school systems throughout the United States. It takes different forms, but it is present in boarding, public, and even reservation schools. It is because there is assimilation in the different school systems that it is difficult to label one system better than another.

In the boarding school systems, assimilation is very apparent. From something as obvious as cutting the students hair and taking away their tribal clothes to erasing the native language from the student, assimilation took all forms. Commissioner J.D.C. Atkins noted that, “The first step to be taken toward civilization, toward teaching the Indians the mischief and folly of continuing in their barbarous practices is to teach them

the English language” (Riney 74). This quotation fits the definition of assimilation perfectly. It describes the transformation of one culture into another, because the United States government and society deemed the American Indian culture to be inferior.

In public schools, forced assimilation is less obvious than at boarding schools, but still very present. The American Indian students have trouble relating to their predominantly white teachers and classmates, and to coursework that is not applicable to American Indian cultures (Huff 81). By only providing this limited selection of instructors and class material, the public school systems are forcing assimilation indirectly upon the American Indian students.

Even at the reservation school level, assimilation is present in the form of forcing the American Indian students to make a choice. Going to school on a reservation greatly limits the interaction one would have with people of different cultures, and this limits personal and interpersonal skill development. Reservation schools put limitations on American Indian children by not showing them what else is available in the world (Riney 30). This lack of integration forces assimilation on the student, but in forcing assimilation from a possible integrated intercultural individual to an American Indian with one culture. It is the opposite assimilation than the boarding and public schools, but assimilation nonetheless.

Problems Surrounding Assimilation

There are multitudes of problems with assimilation that American Indian students in any school system have to deal with, especially dealing with the results of actively trying to resist being assimilated. The obviousness of assimilation efforts pushes many American Indian students to actively fight against losing their culture and adapting to

Anglo-American culture. Holding onto values can be detrimental when in mainstream society, because most students are assimilated (Huffman 3). This means that because assimilation efforts are often successful, most people become assimilated. Therefore, when an individual refuses to be assimilated, not only are they a minority because they are American Indian, but they are a minority among their culture because many American Indians do become assimilated. This singles out the non-assimilated individual. As discussed in the chapter on discipline and suicide in boarding schools, a sense of being alone or singled out increases the risk of depression and suicide in American Indians (Metha and Webb). Actively resisting assimilation can be a very harmful path.

Resistance Theory in terms of American Indian assimilation is when American Indian students actively resist assimilation in the schools out of fear of their cultures dying out (Huffman 25). This is very similar to active resistance, differing only in the fact that Resistance Theory is encouraged by fear and desperation. Many students will drop out of school just in an effort to prevent their culture from disappearing (Ford and Whiting). This is a direct correlation between assimilation and retention, exemplifying a major problem of assimilation.

How Assimilation Affects Grades

Another way assimilation and retention affect one another is the relationship between assimilation and American Indian students' grades. The conclusions made here are on a general basis and do not reflect the truth for the grades of every American Indian student. The relationship between assimilation and grades is described as the "Estrangement Stages" (Huffman). The "Estrangement Stages" include initial alienation, disillusionment, emotional rejection, and disengagement (Huffman 10). Initial alienation

occurs when an American Indian student is recognized as an American Indian student. The difference is announce and made clear. Disillusionment occurs when the American Indian student believes that this initial difference will not matter. Emotional rejection occurs when this student realizes that unfortunately, the difference does matter whether it is in terms of finances, academics, socially. Finally, disengagement is when the American Indian student gives up and his grades slip because the student does not think they matter. This is the point when assimilation affects retention because the students are continuously doing poorly, because the programs are not designed for them to succeed.

Chapter Summary

Assimilation has many negative sides to it and unfortunately, assimilation is present in most school system. Every American Indian student has their own way with reacting to forced assimilation, but in many cases, the results are the same. Because resisting assimilation is so difficult, and because resisting has its downsides as well as not resisting, many American Indian students give in. This creates an ever going cycle of assimilation and resisting and finally, assimilating and giving up.

CHAPTER TEN

CHOOSING TO ASSIMILATE

Brief Overview

Because the pressure to assimilate is so strong, many American Indian students concede and allow themselves to become assimilated. This means that they gave up their values and traditions in an effort to adopt Anglo-American values and traditions. This usually occurred because of the lack of choice available to American Indians.

Lomawaima and McCarty define American Indian choice as “perceptions of and real opportunities for choice are deeply conditioned by generations of poverty, dissemination, federal control, oppressive schooling practices and economic and infrastructural underdevelopment” (9). Studies have been done on ways considered to be the easiest and best for the American Indian student. An extremely easy way of becoming assimilated is the existence of testing in schools. Academic testing looks for certain characteristics in individuals, uniting students of all ethnicities with the same goal of meeting these characteristics and passing the test. Once an individual gives in, the assimilation process is easy to follow.

Proper Assimilation

Traditionally, assimilation meant giving up the American Indian culture and adopting white American culture. The goals of interaction between white Americans and American Indians were to assimilate the Indian, not to “enhance the Indian student or the well being of their tribes” (Boyer 7). Any aspect of their old culture that violently contradicted a value in the culture they are assimilating with was more often than not removed, as demonstrated with the removal of American Indian culture in the boarding

schools. This process of relinquishing ones old beliefs and traditions for new ones must be a slow one (Cowger). Forced and fast assimilation is not only morally wrong, but detrimental to the assimilation process (Cowger 77). Therefore, slow integration is the best way of transitioning from one culture to another.

Because slow assimilation results in slow effects, most schools ignore Cowger's advice and try to force speedy assimilation upon the students. Especially with boarding schools, the extreme levels of immediate assimilation when the students arrive at the schools demonstrate the consequences. One of the reasons American Indian students have a greater chance of becoming depressed is that they are forced to separate themselves from their cultures at a very fast pace (Metha and Webb). In order for schools to make the assimilation process as easy as possible for the students, less dramatic methods need to be invented.

Assimilation through Testing

One less dramatic method could be considered the academic and skills testing that exist at state and federal levels. Testing assimilates students of different cultures and ethnicities by having the same expectation for all students. Tests provide the same standards for everyone and they "force upon states, localities, and regions a collectivist 'testing culture' that negates the unique heritages, dialects, and values of a particular area" (Forbes 2). One's culture does not matter in a testing society because they only culture they need is a testing culture. The practice of testing is assimilation however, based on that the tests are created mostly by high paid education psychologists and college boards. The goal of testing is to maintain Anglo-American culture despite the fact of a non-white majority (Forbes 10). Testing is an easy way of increasing

assimilation of minority students, especially when the tests are created by the top half of society's hierarchy.

More Modern Views on Assimilation

Historically, a more permanent line existed between choosing to assimilate and choosing not to assimilate. Experiences have proven however that integration between many cultures is possible and positive. Boyer quotes John Reyhner that "cultural adaptation and change can take place if it is not forced and if there is a free interplay of ideas between cultures", or as Boyer puts it "you can be a lawyer and dance a pow wow" (41). This idea of integration between two peoples is also reflected in education. A strong push for American Indian language and cultural inclusion in curriculums illustrates this coexistence of cultures. The goals of such curriculums are to reestablish traditional values and beliefs, while using them in modern times (Reyhner, *Education and Language Restoration* 64). Although assimilation through education is a constant factor, it is becoming more and more possible and easy to integrate American Indian cultures and mainstream American cultures.

Chapter Summary

Although most individuals want to maintain their traditional culture, some people find it easier to give in and meet the expectations the rest of society holds for them. Smooth assimilation provides the easiest transformation and most assimilation, one method being testing in the school systems. Although testing is much less dramatic than cutting the hair off of American Indian students as the boarding schools once did, testing is still in effect, assimilation of American Indian students into mainstream American

culture. The incorporation of cultural and language programs has made it possible for students to be integrated between the two cultures.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GOVERNMENT ACTS AND PROGRAMS

Brief Overview

The assimilation in the schools systems was initiated and continued by governmental encouragement. Therefore, inadvertently, the United States government is also responsible for the low retention rates of American Indian students. In an effort to deal with these retention rates, the government has created several programs in an effort to include American Indian cultures in the school systems. In order to improve the level of academics in general across the United States however, the government has also formed programs that increases assimilation.

Why the Government has Influence

Both the federal and state governments have influence of the curriculums American Indian students will receive. This influence has only increased over time. The 1972 Indian Education Act that recognized the unique needs of American Indian students (U.S. Department of Education). In 1975, the Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act gave Indians more control over contracts with the public schools (Swisher 37). In 1978, the Education Amendments gave American Indians complete control over Indian education. Since, the federal government has taken more control over American Indian education. It is federalized as of the Executive Order of 1998 signed by President Clinton (Beaulieu). The extra power of the federal government in terms of education takes power away from the tribes in determining what is required for the education they receive.

Incorporating Culture in Schools

The United States government has implemented multiple programs in an effort to make American Indian students feel more welcomed in the various school systems in the country. One such example is the Effective Schools Program, an effort of the Board of Indian Affairs that requires schools to include American Indian culture in their curriculums. This program requires several components including “good home, school and community relations, instructional leadership, safe supportive environment, high expectations, and the opportunity to learn and time to spend on the task” (Gipp and Fox). Finding all of these components takes time and money, but the existence of the program at least demonstrates the government’s awareness of retention problems.

Another program created by the government of Montana in an effort to make school more relatable for American Indian students is “Indian Education for All.” This program requires Montana school systems to have a curriculum on the local American Indian history, because it is relevant for both American Indian students and non-Indian students in the area (Starnes 186 – 187). This not only provides connections to relevant culture for the American Indian students but also does not single them out as different, since all the students have to learn it.

By requiring these and similar programs from the school systems, the United States government does demonstrate some concern or the education conditions of American Indian students. As long as programs like these continue to exist, perhaps the retention rates of American Indian students will increase in the near future and forced assimilation will be a concept of the past.

Negative Effects of Governmental Action

Just as the government has created programs that are beneficial to American Indian education and retention, the government has also created programs that encourage assimilation of American Indian students into mainstream American culture. As previously mentioned enforcing testing in the school systems encourages the assimilation of all students into a culture of testing (Forbes). The recent increase of testing practices increased with the Bush administration's passing of the No Child Left Behind Act, a policy that specifically goes against the Indian Education act of 1972. The Indian Education Act focused on the uniqueness of American Indian students (U.S. Department of Education). The No Child Left Behind Act focuses on standards that need to be met in education by all students (Williams). This lumps American Indian students with students of all other ethnicities and cultures. These standards, however, do not include aspects from the cultures of the American Indian students, and by making the standard resemble a different culture, the No Child Left Behind Act forces assimilation of the American Indian student into Anglo-American culture.

The No Child Left Behind Act

President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act on January 8, 2002. It states:

It is the policy of the United States to fulfill the Federal Government's unique and continuing trust relationship with and responsibility to the Indian people for the education of Indian children. The Federal Government will continue to work with local educational agencies, Indian tribes and organizations... (Reyhner, *Education and Language* 81).

This declaration directly goes against the recent relationship between federal government and Indian sovereignty that granted American Indians full control over their education.

Additionally, the No Child Left Behind Act focuses on English only learning which contradicts the Native American Language Act signed in 1990, by President Bush. This act stated that it was the “policy of the United States to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedoms of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages (Swisher 117). The No Child Left Behind Act undid this policy with its focus of English only learning (Lomawaima and McCarty 151). Not only does the Act go against several past legislative policies, it also does not have the American Indian students’ best interests at heart. It is felt that the new laws are unrealistic for reservation schools and will only increase the gap between American Indian students and their white peers (Williams). Financially, the No Child Left Behind Act again hurts American Indians by requiring teacher and paraprofessional training which is expensive and time consuming. Although the Lumina Foundation gave \$325,000 to the American Indian College Found for such training, donations such as this are rare and only go so far (Williams). Governmentally, academically, and financially, the No Child Left Behind Act greatly and negatively affect American Indian education by encouraging assimilation into American culture.

Chapter Summary

Although the United States government has made an effort to improve the education of American Indians by incorporating American Indian culture, the government has also increased means of assimilating the American Indian. This demonstrates how the government wants to appear as if it is helping the American Indian, when in reality, the government is not very different now than it was back when Indian boarding schools were popular. Assimilation is still a big part of American Indian education and until this is

dealt with retention of American Indian students will also be a problem. Hopefully, with President Obama's plan to replace the No Child Left Behind Act with the "Race to the Top" plan as described in his State of the Union speech in 2011, American Indian education will improve (Obama).

CHAPTER TWELVE

VIOLENCE THROUGHOUT AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION

Brief Overview of Definitions

When an individual thinks of the term “violence” most people envision physical violence between two individuals. There however, many different forms of violence, and all of which can have severe negative impacts. American Indian education has been surrounded by many different types of violence, including physical violence, cultural violence, and structural violence. Cultural violence is defined as “aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (Galtung 291). Structural violence can be defined as “an inherent and ineradicable component of social structures, emphasizes the social structural sources of conflict and holds that social structures shapes the specific form that the conflict takes” (Sluka 27). Each of these types of violence has once or is still affecting American Indian education.

Examples of Physical Violence

Many examples of the physical violence that was related to American Indian education were described in the chapter “Discipline and Violence at Boarding Schools.” These include the physical abuse reported by the 1928 Merriam Report and the bad diets provided to the students at boarding schools (Boyer 16). Another source claims that physical punishments were used if students did not follow boarding school rules (Archuleta, Child, and Lomawaima 42). Although these are general claims to physical

violence, they are certainly not the only instances in history of American Indians enduring physical violence in respect to education.

Examples of Cultural Violence

A great example of cultural violence, as defined by Galtung, against American Indians in terms of American Indian education is in respect to American Indian language. Before the Native American Language Act of 1990, many school systems forbade native languages from school instruction and classrooms (Swisher 111). Swisher writes “education should seek the disintegration of the tribes. Only English should be allowed to be spoken and only English speaking teachers should be employed in schools” (111). Cultural violence is the destruction or removal of some identifying aspect of a person’s or people’s identity, and any school system forbade the use of American Indian languages was committing cultural violence.

Examples of Structural Violence

Also in terms of language, structural violence can be seen with the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. This Act focused its educational policies solely around the English language (Swisher 117). By not incorporating American Indian language into its programs, the government was allowing its structure to commit violence against the American Indian people.

Another example is based on the general treaties from 1778 through 1871 that gave the United States government control over American Indian education (110). This power was used to subjugate and control the destinies of the American Indian people and turn them into “civilized Indians”. Because this power was achieved through series of

laws and other structural processes, the removal of American Indian culture and the control of education was structural violence.

Chapter Summary

Physical violence is often easy to identify. Cultural and structural violence are usually not so easy, especially if a governing body is the one committing the violence against a person or group of people. Slowly, the cultural and structural violence against American Indian language and education has been fought, and promises of improvement and the removal of such violence have been seen. In order for the retention of American Indian students to increase in the various school systems, further acts of cultural and structural violence in the school systems need to be prevented.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

RETENTION PROBLEMS

Brief Overview

Retention in the school systems is a problem for all ethnic and racial categories, across all different types of schooling. American Indian students have one of the lowest retention rates however, due to the many factors that are piled up against these students. Some of these factors include a lack of previous schooling, little family and teacher support, and cultural conflicts (Guillory 13). Even one of these factors would be enough to keep a student out of school, but when multiple factors come into play getting into and then staying in school is very difficult, as demonstrated by the high American Indian dropout rate.

Statistics and Mobility

Statistically, American Indians have the highest dropout rate in the United States. In 2007, 1.2 % of national public school enrollment was of American Indians (Zehr). In both federal and public schools, the dropout rates of American Indian students are twice the national average, with some districts having one hundred percent dropout rates (Reyhner, *Education and Language* 10). One of the reasons behind these staggering statistics is the rate at which mobility of American Indian students is occurring. The more a student moves between schools during their academic career, the greater the possibility the student will drop out of school. Zehr provides an example for North Middle School in Montana, where sixty-one percent of the school's enrollment is American Indian. She also states that these American Indian students switch between schools (frequently more than once in a K – 12 academic period), more often than other

students (Zehr). For example, 15.7 % of American Indian sophomores in 2002 changed schools in the last two years of high school while only seven percent of white students and 8.5% of Asian students moved (Zehr). These high dropout rates and high mobility rates are due primarily to financial issues with the American Indian students' families.

Financial Problems

Another problem many American Indian families face with their students is not being able to afford the education. Although some school systems are free (such as public schools), school materials, transportation, and school lunches all cost money. In terms of higher education, many American Indian students cannot afford to go to and then to remain at a college or university (Guillory 16). Although scholarships and funds are available for college aged students, the students first need to get through primary and secondary school before even considering college.

Financial problems are a great factor when it comes to frequent mobility of American Indian students and the high dropout rates. Poor families tend to have multiple moves during a student's K-12 career, due to a lack of stable housing and jobs (Zehr). Wealthier families who do have stable housing and jobs are less likely to take a student out of a school system and put them in another one. This mobility is especially high when a school system is close to a reservation. When a job becomes available on a reservation, students frequently leave school to attain that job (Zehr). The need to have a job is a great factor in mobility and retention.

Cultural Problems

As discussed in the boarding school and assimilation chapters of this thesis, in order to succeed academically and to be motivated to succeed, the American Indian

students need to be able to relate to their surroundings. The surroundings include the teachers and other students, and therefore when the race of the teachers and students are not culturally familiar to the American Indian students, these students cannot relate to them, and can struggle socially and academically (Ford and Whiting 292). At school, students need to feel welcomed and not singled out, which is why many American Indian students do assimilate. According to one American Indian student:

The way I see it seems like the whites don't want to get involved with the Indians. They think we're bad. We Drink. Our families drink. Dirty. Ugly. And the teachers don't want to help us. They say, "Oh, no, there is another Indian asking a question" because they don't understand. So we stop asking questions (Reyhner, *Education and Learning* 44).

Whether this account is accurate or an exaggeration on the part of the student, it is irrelevant. As long as students *feel* this way, they will not be able to bond with their teachers and will therefore have one more factor encouraging them to leave school.

Tribal School Retention

Because tribal schools and colleges have a greater focus on American Indian language and culture, the retention rates at these schools are still low, but often better than public and boarding schools. As of 1989, there were twenty-four tribally controlled colleges with a full time enrollment of 4,400 students and a part time enrollment of 10,000 students nationwide (Boyer 30). The reasons that tribal schools are able to keep their retention rates up are because they provide an atmosphere where it is desired that the American Indian student succeeds, culture is maintained and encouraged, and essential services are provided to the student and Indian community (2-4). These

statistics demonstrate the need for cultural inclusion in an American Indian student's curriculum, and the great affect that assimilation can have on retention.

Chapter Summary

Retention among American Indian students of all ages in all different school systems is a problem that has many different causes. A lack of financial, familiar, and teacher support is a huge problem in encouraging the student to go to and then to stay in school. Culturally, if the American Indian student cannot relate to or connect with their teachers and fellow students of different ethnicities, the Indian student is more likely lose interest in their academics and in going to school altogether.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HOW TO INCREASE RETENTION

Brief Overview

Increased retention of students of all cultures and ethnicities is a necessity for the progress of the United States as a whole. In terms of the retention rates of American Indian students, they also must be improved upon for the benefit of American Indian cultures across the nation, but also for the American Indian students individually. Multiple actions need to be taken in order to address all causes of American Indian students dropping out from school, in an effort to raise these rates. The availability of help must be increased in all aspects of a students' life, including their family, academics, culture and health, in order to cover any situation a student might be having.

Provide Family and Academic Counseling

For any student, the balance between home life and school can be a difficult one. In order to make this balance easier, counseling needs to be available to the American Indian student in both the family and academic areas of specialty. Studies have addressed both these target areas by suggesting that counselors need to handle the topics most prevalent in the homes of many American Indian children, such as divorced parents, pregnancy, poverty, and alcohol and drug use (Guillory 18). When the student no longer has to worry about these issues, or at least when they know they have someone to talk to about these problems, the student can focus more on their studies and doing what they have to in order to stay in school.

Similarly, academic counseling needs to be made available to help American Indian students relate to course material that does not incorporate their cultures, to help

them through being in a school where they are the minority, and to prepare the student for life after school, whether this includes higher education or seeking a profession. Perhaps peer mentoring programs would best improve the retention rates of American Indian students, because they allow the students to know they are not alone (Guillory 19). By expressing feelings similar to those of another individual in a similar situation, the American Indian student has the opportunity to not feel singled out in a school full of students of another culture.

Incorporating Culture in Education

One of the most important things school systems could do to improve their retention rates of American Indian students is to incorporate tribal values in education and to give students the opportunity to remain connected with their cultures. When American Indian students are able to stay involved with cultural ceremonies and to practice their family values, studies have shown that the students perform better academically (Coggins, Williams, and Radin 1). This academic performance comes from the student feeling more comfortable socially and less like they have to lose their old culture. When school systems provide the students opportunities like this, it demonstrates that the schools respect the cultures of their students, and this also improves the students' studies (Hamme 21-36). When schools allow for the students to practice and feel connected and open to their cultures, the students do better at school, and this encourages them to remain in school.

Provide Mental and Physical Health Solutions

One problem this thesis looks into is the mental and physical health of American Indian students when dealing when being forced to assimilate. Depression is very

common among American Indian students, and it is a common factor in causing American Indian students to drop out of school. Schools place a big role in health and suicide prevention of American Indian students by providing general health classes and information sessions (Metha and Webb). Perhaps by addressing and talking about the issue, it is less likely to happen. Intervention via counseling may be a way to increase the retention rates by decreasing drop outs due to depression or suicidal instances (Metha and Webb).

Mobility Improvement

The school systems cannot stop families from moving their students out of and between school systems. They can however, improve relations that will make the high mobility rates of American Indian students less detrimental to the students' retention rates. The schools can develop personal connections with the parents and between school systems, create portfolios for the students to take with them to their new schools, and to derive a standard and fast way to assess new students, so they will not fall behind (Zehr). These relatively simple methods will decrease the harm of a high mobility rate among American Indian students. Similarly, attendance improvement will help lower the dropout rates of American Indian students. Attendance could be improved through awards for showing up to class, or like the North Middle School did, have truancy officers go to the homes of students who frequently miss class (Zehr). Awards and additional positions like truancy officers can be expensive, so the school systems who take on these goals would need financial resources to implement them.

Chapter Summary

Introducing programs that address the needs of American Indian students into the school systems will increase the low retention rates. The students would be able to focus more directly on coursework and staying in school if they felt their other issues were being addressed. As demonstrated, tribal schools are already improving their retention rates through such processes.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CONCLUSION

Thesis Overview

This thesis looks into the question concerning how the assimilation that is present in the various school systems affects the retention rates of American Indian students. It analyzes research conducted by many scholars well rehearsed and knowledgeable in American Indian studies. The purpose of conducting this research was to discover if a correlation exists between assimilation and low retention rates and to determine how best to fix this issue for the future.

This thesis first analyzed the various school systems available to American Indian students, including boarding schools, public schools, and reservation schools. The history of American Indian education begins with boarding schools where harsh discipline and a military lifestyle dominated. Students were not allowed to bring any cultural aspect from their family or tribe with them to these boarding schools which forced the student to adopt the Anglo-American culture presented at the boarding school.

The lack of a gentle transition and lack of nurturing of the students led many boarding school students to develop physical or mental qualms. The most popular health issue in American Indian students at boarding schools was depression, and this depression often caused suicide, as reflected by the many schools that were built next to cemeteries.

Conditions were often slightly better at the public school level because such blatant assimilation processes were not used as they were at the boarding school systems. In public schools, assimilation occurred through curriculums relevant to mainstream

society and not to the cultures of the American Indian students. Because more often than not the teachers and administrators at the public schools were not of the same culture as the American Indian students, the students had difficulty relating to the teachers which in turn created a sense of disengagement between student and coursework.

A positive aspect of public schools on American Indian children that many parents welcome was that the children were made aware that other experiences existed outside the reservation and tribe. Children were able to meet people of different ethnicities and cultures and developed interpersonal skills that would one day be necessary as an adult and in the working world. Also, public schools provided free education that because controlled by the state, had certain academic requirements to meet, implying that any student who went to public school had to be getting a certain quality of education.

The other option of schooling analyzed in this thesis is reservation schooling. Reservation schooling also has its many negatives and benefits, but in terms of retention due to cultural needs, it is the best form. One of the negatives to attending a reservation school as expressed by several American Indian parents, the level of academia at the reservation school does not meet those of public or boarding schools because of financial reasons. Also, financially, many reservation schools are unable to provide their students with the tools necessary when developing a broad knowledge, such as books, computers, and outside resources. Also, the education can be very limited in information about other cultures of the United States, creating a belief that American Indian children will never have to interact with people of different ethnicities.

On the other hand, reservation schools provide the American Indian students a sense of belonging and pride in their culture. In other school systems, the American Indian student is most often the one of few students with their own culture, and this creates a sense of being alone and helplessness. Because on reservation schools everyone is of the same culture, the student never has to feel singled out. Also, tribal schools have the knowledge and the desire to incorporate culturally relevant material in their curriculums, which again, gives the American Indian student a reason to want to learn the curriculum and to want to stay in school.

Another source of assimilation the research provided looks into is the influence of the government over education. It was determined that the governments, both federal and state, attempt to provide programs that meet the needs of American Indian students, but that for the most part, the programs and legislations passed only increase the assimilation of the American Indian student into mainstream American culture. With this being the goal of original American Indian education, it is easy to believe that to a certain extent, this goal still exists.

Also in terms of the government, the testing requirements placed on the school systems create an additional method for encouraging assimilation. These tests are required by many states, many schools, and many colleges to progress to the next level, such as graduating or going to college. The assimilation aspect of the test is the fact that the material on the tests is predominantly relevant to Anglo-American society and has little to zero material on American Indian culture. Because all students including American Indian students in public schools must perform to a certain level on these

exams, the American Indian student is expected to automatically integrate their culture into the culture focused on by the tests.

The various sources of assimilation including the various school systems, the governmental legislation, and the testing system of the United States all have their pros and cons, but in general, promote the assimilation of the American Indian student into Anglo-American culture. This assimilation is responsible for the lack of retention of American Indian students in these school systems, and therefore, these school systems, the government, and the testing culture are all equally responsible for the lack of retention of American Indian students.

The Correlation between Assimilation and Retention

Assimilation of American Indian students into mainstream American culture decreases the retention rates of these students in the school systems because it so greatly affects the morale of the American Indian student. Whether the student decides to resist assimilation or agrees to fall to assimilation, the American Indian student in the United States has a difficult road through the pathway of education.

The research conducted determined that when students resist assimilation, a broad array of mental and emotional problems can arise, which in turn, can be detrimental to the student's academics and retention in the school. Factors such as Resistance Theory, depression, and the process of disengagement all contribute to these emotional conditions. When the student decides to resist assimilation, the student can no longer focus solely on their academics, causing their grades to slip and opening the chance for the student failing out of school. In some cases students actively leave school because they felt it was the only way to preserve their traditions and values.

Even when students accept being assimilated as their fate, a hard path lay ahead of them. They are still most likely the minority in the student population, which still creates a sense of being alone and a distraction from coursework. Also, assimilating can create a sense of guilt which also could cause the depression that so many American Indian students suffer from. Either way, American Indian students are forced with the concept of assimilation, and this presence in their lives and educations only decreases the chances of them going to or staying in school.

The Significance of this Correlation

The correlation between assimilation and retention is very significant in the fact that both parts of the equation can be fixed. By first acknowledging that a problem exists, the solution is that much closer at hand. The purpose of this thesis was to illustrate that a problem does exist and to provide suggestions on how to fix it. In the chapter on fixing retention rates, suggestions like incorporating American Indian culture into the curriculums at all the types of schooling is one way of handling this correlation. Also, by providing the American Indian students with resources that can help them deal with their non-academic problems, the students can focus more on their coursework. These types of resources include family and individual counseling and more available knowledge on the concerns and issues that are common to American Indian students, such as poverty or depression.

Also, the results discovered through this research can be applied to other cultures as well. There are many groups of people who are suppressed in some way because they are in a way forced to assimilate into mainstream dominant culture. An example of how this research can be used is from Paulet, who describes how studies on American Indian

research are used to analyze the education systems in the Philippines (Paulet). If results were shared at an international level like this, then ideally fewer minority groups would be forced to assimilate and repressed.

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Appendix A

Native American Enrollment

State	% Native American	Overall Enrollment
Alaska	26.3	132,970
Oklahoma	18.7	629,476
Montana	11.3	146,705
New Mexico	11.1	326,102
South Dakota	10.9	122,798
North Dakota	8.3	100,513
Arizona	6.2	1,043,298
Nationwide	1.2	48,359,608

Source: U.S. Department of Education, 2004 Data

Appendix B

“Achievement trends after the first seven years of Navajo immersion programming at For Defiance Elementary School”

<u>Assessment Type</u>	<u>Navajo Immersion (NI) Students</u>	<u>Mainstream English (ME) Students</u>
Local English reading assessments	Same as ME students	Same as NI students
Local Navajo assessments	Better than ME students	Worse than NI students and worse than their own kindergarten performance
Local English writing assessments	Better than ME Students	Worse than NI students
Standardized mathematics assessments	Substantially better than ME students	Worse than NI students
Standardized English reading tests	Slightly behind but catching up with ME students	Slightly ahead of NI students

Source: from Holm and Holm (1995) used in *To Remain an Indian* (Lomawaima and McCarty)