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INDIGENOUS RESOURCES AND OTHER MATERIALS FOR MINNESOTA  
STUDIES

By

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

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To Corrine Isle, for being an amazing mother and to Kacey Isle for being a wonderful sister. To Adam Banse for going that extra mile and making sure I was okay during a rough time in my life. To Catie Jacobs, Kristopher Peltier and Emily Anderson, for being amazing mentors and inspiring me to become the best teachers I can be. Finally, to Dennis Grahek for changing the lives of so many people and for being my grandfather.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Background

Throughout my time in the public education system in the United States, social studies was always my favorite subject. Though I experienced some social studies in elementary school, it wasn't introduced until middle school. Unlike most sixth graders today, I took world history and loved learning about ancient civilizations that helped shape the current world that we live in. In seventh and tenth grade, I also got to learn about the history of the United States. It was during this time that I first learned in depth about the various Native American tribes that have lived in North America for thousands of years prior to any colonization that took place. This history that my teachers taught to my class made sure to include details that would help fight some of the racist and inaccurate myths that have been commonplace in United States history for centuries. Such things as Native tribes having vast trading networks, complex burial practices, various farming techniques and oral storytelling were just some of the facts that weren't taught to me until my sophomore year of high school. Though I had learned about Indigenous people on a national level, I didn't know much about the various tribes that call Minnesota home until I was pursuing my college education.

It was during my time at Anoka-Ramsey Community College and the University of Minnesota that I took two different college classes that presented me with two starkly different views of the history of our state (and our nation) and how it is taught. The first Minnesota history class that I took ended with our entire class being presented with a nostalgic view of our state. Though we covered tough issues (such as the effects of the

war), a lot of tough conversations were avoided and one of the biggest events that happened in our state's history wasn't examined thoroughly and through a different lens of those who participated. The event that I am talking about was the U.S.-Dakota War. Prior to this college class, I wasn't even aware that this conflict even happened. After this class was completed, the realization came to light that all of these classes were taught from a Eurocentric perspective.

During my time at the University of Minnesota, I took a course that examined the culture and history of the Dakota people who call *Mni Sota Makoce* home. This course offered a stark contrast to previous classes that I have taken. Though this course examined a lot of the passion that the Dakota people have for their home and their culture, it also examined a lot of important events that happened in our state and the effects these events had on the various tribes that live in Minnesota. The stark contrast of the examination of the U.S.-Dakota Conflict, for example, showed that the event was more of an injustice towards the Dakota people that led to countless deaths on both sides rather than it being a war that was started for no clear reason. The effects of this conflict and centuries of abuse and broken treaties are felt in the 21st Century. This has created copious amounts of trauma, oppression and devastation among not only the Dakota, but other tribes in Minnesota as well.

### **Research Question**

In the fall of 2012, the state of Minnesota changed its social studies curriculum in order to update the standards to reflect some of the growing trends in education. One of those new changes involved requiring school districts to implement an official Minnesota studies class that would allow students to learn not only about the history of our state, but

the contributions of the various people who live here. Currently, a lot of the standards that were introduced to the state about ten years ago do a wonderful job of making sure that marginalized groups are highlighted as well as making sure that the contributions they make to our state are featured. Minnesota studies also does a wonderful job of making sure that an analysis is given to the various tribes and Native Americans who have lived in the state long before any French fur traders came into the area in the 17th Century. Though Minnesota studies highlights the historical aspect of our state, it also teaches about: the customs, cultures, foods, phrases, flora and fauna that live in the land of 10,000 lakes. What is unchanged however, is how these standards are often taught. A lot of teachers still teach and develop lesson plans for Minnesota Studies through a Eurocentric and white lens. This takes away the critical aspect in social studies of making sure that everyone's voice is heard and that every group has the opportunity to have their story told.

One of the potential solutions that could work would be to help teachers diversify how they teach Minnesota studies to their students. This led me to forming my research question that would allow me to find a solution. *How can we give teachers resources to reshape how Minnesota studies' is taught through the lens of Indigenous people?*

### **Why Rethink Teaching Now?**

On February 6th, 2021, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz held a press conference where he announced that he was going to not only seek to increase funding for education in the state of Minnesota, but seek to rework how educators teach Minnesota studies by teaching an accurate version of Indigenous history. The point of this conference was to help introduce a series of grants and scholarships to school districts that have heavily



Indigenous populations as well as districts with populations that are diverse or mainly white. As Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flannagan said in the press conference:

Our young people should know the background of where they live and whose land this is. Right now, Minnesota sixth-graders have a Native history unit. But it's got no teeth to it, and most teachers will hardly go at all into the true history and Native culture. (Condon, 2021, para. 4)

A reworking of Minnesota studies is also important, because it seeks to help provide a more equitable education for students of color. This can also help close the achievement gap that is a stain on our state, by providing students with the tools to fight racism on any front. Currently, a lot of classrooms do not give students these tools and it instead leads to students of color feeling marginalized. The marginalization leads to students not feeling comfortable in the classroom, which doesn't create a safe learning environment. When this happens students struggle to learn. A rethinking of teaching Native studies also seeks to increase the recognition and understanding of those who have lived in Minnesota for thousands of years. As previously highlighted, Minnesota studies is more than just teaching history and rethinking how we teach, "it can shed light on Indigenous contributions past, present and future, to help people understand tribal sovereignty, and tribal contributions to local economies" (Condon, 2021, para. 19).

Though teachers are beginning to rethink how they teach social studies on a large scale, due to several different reasons, it is all tied to one single factor that occurred over the past year that has led to tough conversations taking place. This factor that I am talking about were the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery at the hands of a racist and unjust system that creates a lack of opportunity and equity for people of

color. By rethinking how we teach social studies we can give our students resources to make sure that our future is not only more equal, but equitable as well. In our current world, we cannot have any sort of equity until we provide the poor, Indigenous and people of color with equality of opportunity as well.

Though rethinking how we teach Minnesota studies is only a small part of a much larger solution, it is a small step in the right direction in how we have these tough conversations that need to be had. Currently, we do not have equality of opportunity in our state, because of an achievement gap that puts Black, poor, Indigenous and students of color at a disadvantage. Teaching an authentic version of Minnesota studies by viewing it through the lens of Native Americans can help people understand why some of the lack of opportunities exist. Currently, a majority of school districts provide lesson plans, learning targets and educational standards based on a Eurocentric view of learning. "Public schools are built on the white lifestyle. That's the first thing people need to understand" (Condon, 2021, para.10). If we rework how we teach Minnesota Studies, then we can make sure that anyone, especially Indigenous people, are given an equal platform.

### **Chapter One Summary**

Chapter One examined several factors that led to my decision to rethink how we should teach Minnesota studies. One of the first reasons was my own upbringing in the public education system. I didn't have in depth lessons on the Native tribes who live in Minnesota or our country until I was in tenth grade. It also occurred to me that a lot of the issues that Native Americans face weren't really introduced to me until I was well into my collegiate education. Though the state of Minnesota has implemented standards for

the past nine years to sixth grade students, a lot of teachers create lessons and projects around a Eurocentric perspective. This doesn't create an inclusive environment that allows for all voices to be heard. By rethinking how we teach Minnesota studies and putting an emphasis on teaching it through a Native American perspective, we can also take a step in the right direction by closing our state's achievement gap and creating equal opportunities for poor, Indigenous, Black and students of color that can give an equal platform. This can be done by teaching an authentic version of our state's history, giving students the tools to fight racism, making students of color feel welcomed in the classroom and making sure teachers have resources to help implement these changes.

The second chapter will examine several pieces of literature that will shed light on teaching in the social studies classroom. The research that has already been provided will be examined through literature to provide insights to how we should teach history and other social sciences through the perspectives and voices of other groups of people. This will also lead into the exploration of several sub-topics that will tie back to my research question. These sub-topics will include: the history of teaching Minnesota studies, what the shifting focus of teaching looks like, how we can de-colonize Minnesota studies and how teaching of our state's history can be connected to the national level. Overall, our state is a great place to live. It is the people of our state who make it what it is today. Whether your ancestry is European, African, Asian, Indigenous, Hispanic or something else, at the end of the day we all call ourselves Minnesotan.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

Beginning last year, the state of Minnesota began to re-examine and rethink how it teaches social studies. This re-examination of the social studies standards is required to take place every ten years. Currently, the state has several learning standards that cover the various tribes in Minnesota, but the current first draft of the new standards has yet to be fully written. The overall goal of the new standards will be clear, “ensuring that what's taught in Minnesota classrooms is up to date and includes more people, perspectives and concepts” (Golden, 2021, para. 2). The first draft that has been released also seeks to make an acknowledgement of a group of people that have been vastly underrepresented not only in curriculum, but in the classroom as well. “Minnesota is the contemporary and ancestral home of the Anishinaabe and Dakota peoples, social studies education on this land will acknowledge and honor their contemporary and historical voices” (Golden, 2021, para. 6).

Though there are only a few standards that have been written so far, the rest of the standards will be written by 2023-2024. The point of this project is to give teachers resources that allow them to rethink how to teach Minnesota studies from the point of view of Indigenous people. This also leads to the overall question of my project, *How can we give teachers resources to reshape how Minnesota studies' is taught through the lens of Indigenous people?*

This chapter will examine what research has been done as well as some examples that other teachers, states as well as the federal government, have done to include Native

Americans in social studies curriculum. In order to examine what is currently taught or recommended, we have to look at some other topics in history in order to fully comprehend the transformation that is reshaping the whole field of social studies. The most important part of this chapter and the entire project is to give an equal platform for Indigenous communities. It is paramount that an examination and a list of resources includes Native sources and authors. The chapter will wrap up with a conclusion on some of the current ideas that are being proposed as well as some of the ongoing efforts by the Indigenous tribes in Minnesota to change how we teach social studies.

### **Connection to a National Level**

In order to get a better sense of how the field of social studies is changing, it is important to look at how our nation as a whole currently teaches on a national level. Unlike most countries, the United States doesn't have a centralized education system. Though the United States government does have certain themes and standards that states have to follow, the planning of curriculum and expectations is left to each state. It is with this sense that certain subjects that are often tough to talk about are either barely mentioned or entirely ignored. This section will detail several examples of how states tackle different sensitive topics. After that it will take a look at how social studies is mainly taught around the country, in terms of content delivery. Finally we will look at how the Smithsonian is trying to bring together educators by offering different ways to teach about Native Americans (as well as a lesson plan from the National Endowment For The Humanities).

One such example of this is the topic of slavery. I am using this example, because there are no true federal standards that cover Indigenous people and slavery is one of the

most common subjects covered in U.S. history. In an analysis of state standards and curriculum CBS News found that “seven states don’t mention slavery and another eight don’t even mention the Civil Rights Movement” (Duncan, 2020, para. 3). It is also important to note that though many states plan their own curriculum and write their own standards, how the standards are taught is also left to local school districts, “Some state standards focus on the process of learning and development of skills, leaving it to the local school districts to determine what specific historical figures and topics are taught” (Duncan, 2020, para. 12). This process can lead to an unequal platform in a classroom when examining historical events that can marginalize certain groups of people. The examination of tough subjects through certain perspectives is also challenging to some, because it often becomes tangled up by policy makers who aren’t experts in planning or writing curriculum. “There are ideologies and beliefs that tend to guide the decisions that are made at the policy level in states to determine what can be included and what cannot be included in standards” (Duncan, 2020, para. 26). This can further add to covert white supremacy by enforcing a single viewpoint on how an event played out.

This single viewpoint has been at the forefront of teaching U.S. history for well over a century. This is especially true when it comes to teaching about Native Americans within the schools across the country. Though states have different standards, many states often barely touch on Indigenous people or their contributions to our country.

“Twenty-seven states did not name an individual Native American in their history standards” (Diamond, 2019, para. 2). Often these standards only touch on certain events and for many students their only knowledge of Indigenous people comes from, “re-enacting the first Thanksgiving, building a California Spanish mission out of sugar

cubes or memorizing a flashcard about the Trail of Tears just ahead of the AP U.S. History Test" (Diamond, 2019, para. 1). It is also important to note that much of the history that is taught about Native Americans is only examined through the perspective of three-hundred years of U.S. history. This fails to acknowledge the thousands of years that Native Americans have lived in North America.

One thing that has begun to change across the country is how we teach about Indigenous people and cultures. An example of this that has become popular throughout the country is the tireless work done by the Smithsonian to rethink how we can teach about Native Americans. The work that they have done with Native communities has been to review certain subjects that are taught and to give educators the tools to try and analyze how certain events and subjects are covered in classrooms. These subjects include Thanksgiving, treaties between the U.S. government and American Indian nations, the Trail of Tears and the Indian Remove Act of 1830. By elevating various Native voices as well it allows Indigenous people to tell their own story. This also helps add to an additional push across the country, which is to link concepts being taught in history to the struggles and challenges that people face throughout the United States. There is also a push to try and relate concepts to real life situations for students so that they can become more engaged in the classroom.

Though there are many different ways to deliver content, one teaching method has become popular at the secondary level. This strategy often involves tying themes, events or places in the past to current events or issues that are affecting the 21st century. "Using the present to teach history is a sound pedagogical approach that allows us to engage with our students' lived experiences" (Harter, 2019, p. 207). This sort of teaching technique

has become incredibly popular during 2020. Connecting the past to the present serves as a valuable tool to help see many of the challenges that Indigenous communities experience. It's especially true when it comes to the hardships that Indigenous students face in schools. "Current research on the brain demonstrates that using something familiar to teach new information helps develop the cognitive structures to retain that information" (Harter, 2019, p.212). It helps not only relate to students' past experiences, but also helps activate any knowledge they might know about a subject beforehand.

One such lesson plan that has become popular in the Midwest uses a combined lesson to teach students about the Anishinabe. The essential guiding questions that are used to link the past to the present involves finding out how Native people lived in the past versus how they live in the 21st century. In the lesson plan, the essential questions ask students to examine similarities and differences between the past and present for the Anishinabe. The other question asks students to consider what has led to the significant changes for Native Americans. (*Anishinabe/Ojibwe/Chippewa: Culture of an Indian Nation*, n.d., para. 4).

This type of lesson involves using a compare and contrast model to look at how the past is relatable to modern times with activities that the Ojibwe do that their ancestors also partook in centuries ago. The learning objectives also do a wonderful job of explaining why connecting the past to the present can also help students, "understand the history and background of this Native American tribe and relate these to cultural changes and the group's way of life today" (*Anishinabe/Ojibwe/Chippewa: Culture of an Indian Nation*, n.d., para. 4).



This section looked at how the United States as a whole teaches social studies. The lack of a central set of standards leaves each state to plan their own, which is given even more control at the local level. This allows for local municipalities to either skip certain topics, historical figures or consequences of past actions. The final part also dealt with how the Smithsonian is trying to piece together a central framework for educators to deliver content. The next section will detail how growing trends in education are driving the field of pedagogy and social studies.

### **The Shifting Focus of Teaching**

Some of the changes in education that have been helping shift the way we teach involve student centered learning, inquiry based learning and a mixture of the two. This change has only become prominent within the last couple decades and has only started to help close the egregious achievement gap that stains public education. This section will look at what is causing the growing trends in education. It will also detail different examples of how teachers are changing the way they teach and how this is going to impact their students. The section will conclude with why it is important to teach social studies through social justice and why connecting the classroom to the larger world isn't just important for students, but the community as a whole.

The term achievement gap means any large difference, in terms of statistics, between groups of students. These specific groups often include white students and students of color. The achievement gap also takes into account different categories such as income, socio-economic status and living situation (*Unpacking the Achievement Gap in Minnesota*, 2020, para. 2). The achievement gap has not only plagued the country, but also the state of Minnesota. Though there are some solutions promised, such as an

amendment to the state constitution for an equitable education, a lot of the discussions around solving the achievement gap aren't able to satisfy every group that is involved in education. That is why it is important to emphasize that there is no one-size fits all approach. This is especially true in social studies.

Some of the other driving factors that have helped widen the gap between white students and students of color has been the lack of training for teachers or the quality of teachers that apply for positions. The further segregation of students based on where they live in relation to school districts is also another large point that drives achievement gaps. These gaps grow even larger when it comes down to the city block that can divide two school districts. Schools that have inadequate funding often have limited access to resources such as books, desks and technology. (*Unpacking the Achievement Gap in Minnesota*, 2020, para. 3). Some of the ways these issues are being solved in social studies is implementing several different techniques that help not only keep students engaged, but also allow for the student-centered classroom and discovery learning to flourish in an ever changing classroom environment.

One of the primary reasons why it is important how educators teach is the content we deliver needs to adapt with the changing demographics of our country. Though a lot of history is taught through a Eurocentric lens, a lot of social studies teachers are already changing the way they teach. In the latest census, a lot of students who are in school tend to be from minority backgrounds:

The Latino or Hispanic and Asian American population shares showed the most marked gains, at 18.5% and nearly Six percent, respectively. While these groups

fluctuated over the past 40 years, either upward or downward (for whites), the Black share of the population remained relatively constant (Frey, 2020, para. 3).

Current trends also indicate that Native American populations are also increasing as well throughout the country. “Between 2000 and 2018, the number of American residents who were at least partially Native American increased 39%” (*Native Americans and the US Census: How the Count has Changed*, 2019, para. 1 ). The overall population of Indigenous people has increased as well over the last twenty years “In 2018, there were an estimated 2.8 million people identifying racially as Native American” (*Native Americans and the US Census: How the Count has Changed*, 2019, para. 5 ). The future of the United States is also predicted to become even more diverse as well.

Just like other minority groups, Native and Indigenous students have been affected by hundreds years of trauma and oppression as a result of imperialism. Many Indigenous students often struggle to learn in the classroom due to our education systems Eurocentric way of delivering content. This has caused generations of Native students to feel ostracised and abandoned by the very education system that is trying to make a difference in their lives. “Often ignored in the national conversation about the public school achievement gap, these students post some of the worst academic outcomes of any demographic group, which has been exacerbated by decades of discrimination” (Green & Waldman, 2018, para. 6). This has also led to “underachievement and limited emotional support, which can lead to a number of even worse negative outcomes” (Green & Waldman, 2018, para. 7 ).

Some of the ways these issues are being solved in social studies include implementing several different techniques that help keep students engaged. One such way

is to make sure that teachers build and maintain an effective relationship with their students, while promoting a student-centered learning environment. “Activities include solving relevant and real problems, providing resources, using contracts for planning and evaluation, forming learning groups, programmed instruction adapted to individual needs, encounter groups, using the community, and peer tutoring” (Cornelius-White, 2007, p.114). Another concept that is being pushed within the classroom is to make sure that the content that is delivered is culturally relevant to the changing demographics of younger Americans. “Developmental, feminist, and multicultural models also drive current research on teacher-student relationships” (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 115). These specific factors, alongside teachers, provide a warm empathetic environment for students to learn and help to build better classrooms. “Positive relationships, non directivity, empathy, warmth, and encouraging thinking and learning are the specific teacher variables that are above average compared with other educational innovations' ' (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 132).

Another change that is allowing the continued shift in education towards closing achievement gaps is the shift in social studies towards teaching in classrooms with an emphasis on social justice. This emphasis also highlights the needs to prepare students for an increasingly connected, globalized and diverse world. “Some of these ideas include connecting global topics with multiple perspectives, authentic engagements and the experiences of students and teachers” (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016, p. 2).

Another shift that is becoming more common not only throughout the country, but the state of Minnesota as well is the shifting focus on how instructors, schools, administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals deliver content to students. Throughout the

history of the United States education has been delivered mostly through a teacher centered classroom. Even with the growth of public education from a single room schoolhouse to large buildings and campuses that hold thousands of students, the delivery of content has still been centered around what the teacher plans and delivers to the students. Though this may be a successful way of teaching to some students, this educational philosophy goes against citizenship which includes the close connection between a local and global world mixed with intercultural understanding and communication. It also teaches students how to take political action wherever they are situated (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016, p. 4). Within social studies classrooms as well, teachers are beginning to examine issues, events, topics and people through multiple lenses and perspectives that encompass the diversity that is reflected in the classroom “In doing so, students may become comfortable with their layered identities, value diverse perspectives, and build skills in reflexivity and dialogue that leads to understanding of different lived realities among interconnected global actors” (Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016, p.7).

This section detailed the definition of the achievement gap and what is causing increasing segregation in schools, lack of resources, support and disparities in graduation rates. We also looked at how teachers are trying to make a difference by creating classrooms with positive relationships, student-centered lessons and empathetic curriculum. The final part looked at why teaching social studies with an emphasis on social justice is helping create classrooms of action that are encouraging students to make a difference in the world and to make sure the future is more equitable. The next section

will detail why decolonization of social studies is an important aspect of giving students the opportunity to succeed and to make sure that each student has an equal platform.

### **Decolonization of Social Studies**

Though many teachers often try to give an equitable education, it is important to note that there is another step that educators are actively taking in trying to close the achievement gap. That is the active work of trying to decolonize their classrooms. It's especially important to do in social studies, because many of the standards that are taught are often only delivered in one learning style or from a single textbook that is often out of date. The decolonization of a classroom is something that isn't a single step, rather a multi-faceted approach that often takes a while to accomplish. This section will take a deeper look into what decolonization looks like and it will include a brief history of the word and it's meaning along with what teachers can do to try and decolonize their classrooms. This section will include a look at two states that have successfully engaged with creating curriculum with Indigenous tribes that seek to teach an accurate history, as well as, the politics that goes along with learning tribal sovereignty. The final section will include a look at the state of Minnesota and why it has decided to reshape its Indigenous studies.

The definition of decolonization, according to Raymond Betts is, "a political phenomenon soon extended in meaning to include all elements incurred in the colonial experience, 'whether political, economic, cultural or psychological'" (Betts, 2012, p. 23). The first step in decolonization often comes from teachers themselves. According to Terry Kawi, "Being an antiracist is an active and ongoing practice one engages in for life. It takes patience, reflection, and commitment" (Kawi, 2020, para. 1). It means that the

whole process of being an active anti-racist teacher is something that doesn't happen right away, but it can take the rest of our lives. Teachers have the unique ability to help break the systems that hold people back. "Educators have a responsibility to dismantle racism that is built and wired into schooling, testing, response to behavior, and curriculum."

(Kawi, 2020, para. 4). The scope goes even further into social studies by making sure that we include those people that not only helped shape the country we live in today, but those who have also suffered at the hands of our nation as well. "It is our responsibility as educators to take steps in finding texts that not only showcase the voices and stories of our students and their ancestors, but prioritize and humanize them beyond a month on the calendar" (Kawi, 2020, para. 7).

In terms of teaching about Native Americans in classrooms, it is important that educators begin to implement curriculum and lesson plans that teach an accurate version of American history. One state that Minnesota can look to for decolonization of its Indigenous studies is the state of Montana. In the early 1970's, the state passed the Indian Education for All (I.D.E.A.) Act, which sought to, "mandate a 'culturally responsive' curriculum approach that requires school districts to collaborate with tribal leaders and provide every student a comprehensive education on Native history, culture and tribal sovereignty" (Constantin, 2015, para. 6). Though the state mandates all students take the course, one thing that makes Montana a standout in its work with Native American tribes is the fostering and understanding of getting its students to explore the cultural links within their communities.

Another state that has had success with trying to teach an accurate version of Native American studies is Wisconsin. Like Montana, the state of Wisconsin has become

active in trying to work with it's Native community by trying to build an active social studies curriculum that involves not only first hand accounts of the Ho-Chunk people, but the other tribes as well. Wisconsin has a similar law to Montana, in that it also requires school districts to plan curriculums that recognize the various federally recognized tribes. One example of this decolonization is the work done by Paul Rykken at Black Forest High School.

I teach a politics course, and we started to teach the U.S., Wisconsin and Ho-Chunk constitutions in parallel. And that was kind of an interesting, non threatening way to bring that in. I've always thought that, if you could get the concept of sovereignty across well, many of the other things fall into place.

(Constantin, 2015)

Though Montana and Wisconsin require districts to work with Native American tribes, the state of Minnesota, does not have any such law or decree. This process has begun to change with the recent announcement from Governor Tim Walz to try and reframe how Indigenous studies is taught in the state. This shift from the state government came shortly after Minnesota elected its first woman of color to office as lieutenant governor. Peggy Flanagan comes from the White Earth Nation of Ojibwe. Under her direction the state, "wants to influence the development of a new social studies curriculum in public schools, currently up for cyclical review" (Condon, 2021, para. 6). Minnesota, as well, "has a history and identity that are interwoven with and influenced by the culture and experiences of Indigenous tribes" (Condon, 2021, para. 1). Though Minnesota is a Dakota word, there are many cities, schools, state parks, and lakes that carry the names that Indigenous people gave them. Though this push is a drive to try and



teach an accurate history, it is also a push to help close the achievement gap within our state. “Critics will be watching to see if changes proposed to better serve Indigenous and other students of color will bring measurable improvements in test scores and graduation rates” (Condon, 2021, para. 25).

This section detailed how decolonization of social studies is important in order to give all students an equitable education. This involves giving teachers resources to actively teach anti-racism in their classrooms. The next part looked at how Montana and Wisconsin have successfully created two different programs that have brought an accurate version of Indigenous studies to their classroom. The final part looked at why Minnesota has begun to improve its state standards and what caused this change. The next section will look at the current standards the state of Minnesota has and what the future state standards will look like. The final portion will examine some of the efforts that both Dakota and Ojibwe people have done to try and improve education in the state.

### **Minnesota Studies**

Every ten years the state of Minnesota remakes its social studies standards that school districts use to create curriculum. The overall standards often go into great depth in trying to get teachers to examine each subject in social science regardless of grade level. This section will examine the current state standards for Minnesota studies, and what is already included in the first draft for the new standards that are going to be written over the next few years. We will also look at some of the ways that the Dakota and Ojibwe are trying to reclaim their language, culture, customs and history.

Currently, the state of Minnesota mandates that all districts teach Minnesota Studies to all middle school students. Every sixth grade classroom in the state of

Minnesota also uses the same textbook that was written by The Minnesota Historical Society with consultation from various groups including the Dakota and Ojibwe. *The Northern Lights* textbook dedicates two chapters to discussing the various tribes and people that lived in Minnesota prior to European contact. Each chapter goes into great length discussing culture, customs and history. Even with a dedication to two chapters, the entire coverage of Native Americans in Minnesota covers less than ten percent of the textbook. Though the standards offer a variety of ways to try and teach students, there are only four standards in sixth grade that mainly focus on discussions around the Native American tribes. The following standards are as follows:

Compare and contrast the Dakota and Anishinaabe nations prior to 1800; describe their interactions with each other and other indigineous peoples. Analyze how and why the United States and the Dakota and Anishinaabe negotiated treaties; describe the consequences of the treaties on the Anishinaabe, Dakota and settlers in the upper Mississippi River region Explain reasons for the United States-Dakota War of 1862; compare and contrast the perspectives of settlers and Dakota people before, during and after the war. Describe Minnesota and federal American Indian policy of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and its impact on the Anishinaabe and Dakota people, especially in the areas of education, land ownership and citizenship. (*Minnesota Council for the Social Studies*, 2010, p. 4)

Though the state has begun to re-evaluate the standards, much of the new curriculum will not be written for an additional three to four years. In the initial first draft, the Minnesota Department of Education has begun to expand upon what school

districts will have as options to bring into their classrooms. This push to become more diverse has been both praised and drawn criticism from various groups within the state. “The draft standards, according to Doug Paulson, the state education department’s academic standards director, are ‘more inclusive’ and ‘culturally affirming’” (Verges, 2021, para. 3). Some of the new standards that will be expanded upon will include:

Explain the current and historical interpretations of the principles of due process and equal protection of the law in the 14th Amendment and analyze evolving civil rights in legislative action and court interpretation establishing rights for the disabled, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians, and other minority groups.

Describe the tactics used by the United States government to claim indigenous and Mexican land, including but not limited to an analysis of the ideology of Manifest Destiny and its relationship to whiteness, Christianity, and capitalism; and analyze the strategies used by Native Americans and Mexicans to respond to US settler colonialism. Describe Native American history before and during European colonialism by using oral narratives, written accounts, and other historical sources in order to understand how indigenous people, including the Dakota and Anishinaabe, as well as other tribal nations today understand their history. Analyze historical sources created by Native Americans in order to examine how indigenous people responded to changes in federal Indian policy, especially regarding forced removal, sovereignty, land ownership, education and assimilation. (*Minnesota Department of Education*, 2021, p. 1-32)

Though there are only four standards, these new ones do an excellent job of not only decolonizing social studies, but have begun to make sure that all voices have an

input in Minnesota Studies. Even with the state re-examining its own standards and biases, it is important to note that a lot of the Native American tribes in Minnesota have begun their own work to reclaim their Native identities. One such example of this is the work being done by the Lower Sioux community to try and revitalize their language within the surrounding area where they live. This work is being done to try and save the language of the Dakota people that has been largely erased over the last two centuries. Though the language is being taught to younger generations, the teachers themselves had to learn the language because, “Only a few people who grew up in the state and learned Dakota as their first language are still living” (Smith, 2017, para. 4). The paramount work is part of a larger trend state and nationwide to try and save the language and spread it to younger Native Americans. This small step is just one of many, “It’s part of a broader resurgence in keeping Indian culture and traditions alive in Minnesota — from playing lacrosse to restoring wild rice fields” (Smith, 2017, para, 9). Though this isn’t directly related to Minnesota Studies, it shows that a reworking of Minnesota Studies itself is part of a larger movement to try to give those who have been marginalized.

Another example that is being led by the Dakota to try and change the narrative on how history is being taught is through the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (S.M.S.C.). Part of the problem with the current *Northern Lights* textbook along with the history books used for older grades is that they don’t use accurate images of Native Americans and images that only add to stereotypes and inaccurate portrayals of Indigenous people. This has led to the S.M.S.C. to work with local school districts and the Minnesota Department of Education to try and change those narratives. “A new \$5 million philanthropic campaign by the S.M.S.C. aims to change that narrative by funding

resources, curriculum and training for teachers and school administrators across the state” (Smith, 2019, para 3). This effort also seeks to educate non-natives about some of the hardships that Native Americans have had to face throughout the state's history.

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community has also been active in working with the state to draft new standards. The S.M.S.C. is also active in trying to get the state to try and address other areas as well, “schools should teach students about tribes' modern contributions — from being the largest employers in several counties to bringing forward such rising leaders as Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, the first Indian woman to hold statewide office in Minnesota” (Smith, 2019, para, 8). It is this work that is helping to reshape how the state is going to teach history.

In this section, we looked at the four standards that the state wrote along with some of the new standards that are being proposed. Though many of the new standards about Native Americans have been left out, what is there gives a glimpse about what direction the state intends to take. This section also looked at some of the ways that Native American tribes are also trying to reclaim their culture and how it is intertwined with the reworking of state standards. The final part also detailed how the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community is also one of the biggest contributors trying to change the narrative on how we teach social studies in schools.

### **Chapter Two Summary**

This literature review looked at what research has been done surrounding the question on how schools teach about Native Americans and the curriculum that is used to teach it. We looked at how there are no federal standards when it comes to teaching topics as well as some of the work being done by the Smithsonian to try and provide resources

to teachers nationwide. The next section dealt with how classrooms are changing in terms of delivery of content. The final section looked at how Minnesota studies is currently taught along with some of the new standards being written and the ways Native communities are reclaiming their identities.

### **Research Rationale**

The guiding question for this research is, *how can we give teachers resources to reshape how Minnesota studies is taught through the lens of Indigenous people?* The purpose of this research is to inform social studies teachers, educators, administrators and communities how social studies teaches not only Indigenous studies, but history as well. The growing trend in social studies is that within the next five to ten years social studies will be taught to a more diverse crowd of American youth. Within this changing demographic, I believe it is important that Native Americans should be included. Though there are some resources that are offered to classrooms that can help teach history through an Indigenous lens, those resources are often overlooked and often ignored. With the state standards being rewritten, I think it is important that teachers have easy access to resources about Native Americans that come from the Indigenous community. When those resources are included it can help to ensure that an accurate history is taught and that each group is given an equal platform. Many states are already reworking their curriculum to include more Native voices and it is time that Minnesota joins that trend.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Project

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of what my project will look like so that educators will be able to gather resources to help them rethink how Minnesota studies will be taught when the new state standards for social studies are released in the 2023-2024 school year. The question that is used for this project is *how can we give teachers resources to reshape how Minnesota studies' is taught through the lens of Indigenous people?* All the research that was provided in the previous chapter laid the groundwork for why it is important to try and provide resources to social studies teachers in their classrooms. It is especially important for Minnesota studies, because our state has an achievement gap that can prevent our schools from giving students an equitable education.

The layout of this chapter will explain what the website will look like, the target audience, why the choice of a website, a description of the project and a potential timeline for the creation of the website. The target audience will include teachers, educators and students. The choice of a website will explain why I believe it can help close the achievement gap. The description will include a breakdown of the different categories and ideas I have for my website. The timeline will include how the design will take place as well as future changes that I may make to it before the end of the semester. The final section of this chapter will be a restatement of everything that will be written in chapter three and a look into chapter four.

**Setting**

Currently, I am an 8th grade U.S. History teacher in a school district that serves a diverse population. Many of the sixth grade teachers that I work with have a lot of content that they use in their classrooms besides the *Northern Lights* textbook that is required for each class. Though a lot of the teachers I work with have attended workshops on how to teach about Native Americans, a lot of the content that is given to them often lacks resources to accurately teach lessons. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has also begun to change the face of education as well. Starting next fall, a lot of school districts in the state of Minnesota will begin to offer online classes to families that choose to keep their children at home. These districts include: Anoka-Hennepin, Austin, Burnsville, Elk River, Osseo, Owatonna, St. Cloud and St. Paul (Golden, 2021, para 8). This shift in education is one of the primary reasons why I will be creating a website. Another reason why I am going to create a website is to provide equitable access to anyone who wants it. This will be done by making sure it is accessible in a public domain.

When technology is used correctly, “Students have fewer barriers to learning when they can use their tablets or laptops not only to find homework instructions, read e-books, and share important information with their families” (Anderson, 2019, para. 4). The website I am going to create will offer resources primarily to teachers, but will also offer some things for students to use as well. By creating a website, teachers and students will be able to get an accurate picture of how to teach or learn about Indigenous people.

**Audience**

The main audience for this project will be teachers who teach Minnesota studies in schools. Unlike most other projects, the audience for my Capstone will be any teacher



that wishes to use the website that I will create to help their lesson plans align with the new state standards that are being written. As stated previously, a lot of the resources that I will be providing will be coming from Indigenous sources. As social studies standards are widened to include the views of other groups it is paramount that underrepresented groups are consulted to make sure that an equal platform is given.

### **Research Framework**

In my previous chapter, I wrote about some of the research that has taken place about various issues that are related to why it is important to rethink how we teach social studies. This aspect is especially true for Minnesota studies, because there are only four standards that address Native Americans in Minnesota. The new standards that are being written will do a better job at offering a more equitable approach to social studies and a website of resources will serve as an additional tool for teachers. Currently, there are few websites that offer any sort of resources for teaching about Native Americans in Minnesota that are curated by other teachers. Any website that is offered is usually hidden away behind pages of other information and is often limited to only suggesting Indigenous legends and stories.

Some of the aspects of research that I discussed that are common in social studies are connecting the past to modern times, decolonization of the classroom and making lessons student centered. When these aspects are written into a lesson plan or curriculum, it allows for platforms to be given to people that have often been underrepresented in the classroom. A lot of the resources that will be provided in my website will be connected to the research that has already been collected. The results have shown that when these aspects are applied in the classroom, students have the opportunity to succeed.

## **Project Description**

My project will be a website that will offer resources, lesson plans, authentic Indigenous sources and book ideas for a classroom. This website will be broken down into several different categories to encompass the different aspects of social studies that can be used in the classroom to help close the achievement gap. The main section of the website will include detailed lesson plans that are used by teachers across the state of Minnesota. These lesson plans will include various topics and events that both Dakota and Ojibwe have been a part of. Another section will include tools that teachers can use, specifically in social studies, to decolonize their classrooms. The decolonization aspect will also include a look at restorative justice. One final part of my website will include various Dakota and Ojibwe stories and legends to help students understand the viewpoint of how both tribes view their own culture and customs.

Most of the resources that will be used on my website will be from Native and Indigenous authors. Though there will be some non Native authors, it is important that those who have lived in Minnesota for thousands of years are the ones who should provide the resources to help reshape how we teach about Minnesota. Dakota and Ojibwe stories or legends also help to provide a sense of how Minnesota came to be called the home for many Native American tribes. Decolonization is also important, because the shifting focus in teaching allows an educator to reshape their classroom to create a welcoming environment. Restorative justice is something that means a lot to me personally. The process of restorative justice is something that fits into the mold of decolonizing the classroom. This is done by hearing both sides of an issue so the parties involved in a dispute can find a resolution that makes everyone else happy. Finally, by

using lesson plans from Indigenous people teachers will be able to create an authentic experience for their students.

### **Rationale**

The goal of my project is to provide resources for teachers, students and educators to effectively teach about the Indigenous people that call Minnesota home. The purpose of creating a website will allow anyone easy access to the resources that they need. Creating a website is part of a much larger trend in education of moving lessons plans, resources, data and entire classrooms online. Another reason for my rationale is that there are no clear themes or standards that the federal government uses to advise states. Even with Minnesota providing four state standards, the state doesn't specifically address Indigenous tribes outside of *The Northern Lights* textbook.

### **Timeline**

Over the course of the past few months, the first three chapters have been written that have laid the groundwork for how the rest of my project will look. The table provided below will show the potential timeline for my project, barring any potential changes.

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| January-May 2021         | Chapters One through Three Written   |
| June-July 2021           | Design Project, Write Chapter Four   |
| August 2021              | Finish Project, Complete Chapter Four  |
| September 2021-June 2022 | Publish Website, Work With Minnesota Studies Teachers to Implement Resources |

Table 1. Describes timeline of author's project.

Even though the pandemic makes schools adjust learning styles on a monthly basis, it doesn't change the fact that the face of online education is only going to become

more important as school districts begin to invest in online learning. The review of state standards is an important factor as to why this project is being written now. With the creation of new standards, it is important that social studies teachers have access to resources to teach equity in social studies. When I obtain a full time job in the fall, I will make sure to give teachers access to my website for potential resources as well as making sure to check in with them for feedback.

### **Chapter Three Summary**

Chapter Three provided an overview of what my project will look like. This overview included the setting of the projects, which mainly focuses on educators who teach Minnesota studies, as well as students, administrators and anyone else who wants to look for different ways to teach about Indigenous people in Minnesota. The audience of this project won't be a specific group of people; it will be anyone who wishes to help close the achievement gap in our state. The framework of this project included why it is important to rethink how we teach Minnesota studies. This included the type of resources my project will offer. Such resources include student-centered lessons, different ways to decolonize the classroom, Indigenous stories (as well as legends) and book ideas for students to read. The description of the project and the rationale gave insights into how my project will look, but why it is important to create a website. Chapter Four will look at the results of my project as well as the look at the finished website itself.

### **Chapter Four Introduction**

In Chapter Four, I will explain the overview of my website, the project and the outcome of the information that I have gathered. I will explain the analysis of my

research and how I can put that research into practice. The final portion of Chapter Four will discuss the future of my website and how I can add to it in the future.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

The first three chapters of this capstone along with the project sought to answer the question: *How can we give teachers resources to reshape how Minnesota studies' is taught through the lens of Indigenous people?* Chapter four will deal with a restatement of the first three chapters, a completed description of the capstone project, thoughts on the project, limitations, challenges and a short conclusion on the future of my capstone. The review of the literature will include a look back at the issues facing Indigenous students, the achievement gap and decolonization. The completed description of the project will include the types of resources used and the explanations given for the choices of each subsection. The major learnings will include insights I have gained during my time researching, designing and critiquing my project. It will also include the changes that have taken place in social studies over the last school year.

#### Review of The Literature

The first three chapters of my capstone dealt with various issues, topics and reasons why it is important to try and rethink how we teach Minnesota Studies in our sixth grade classrooms. One of the biggest reasons why we need to rethink how we reteach our students in social studies has to do with our state's achievement gap. Currently, Minnesota has one of the worst achievement gaps (in terms of graduation) in the country. This achievement gap mainly comes in the forms of a lack of resources, food, technology, living situation and sleep. This lack of technology and resources is especially important in social studies. Another reason why we are rethinking how we

teach social studies is the changing of our state social studies standards. As of 2010, Minnesota only has four state standards that deal with Native Americans in Minnesota. Though the release of the first draft of the new standards (that will be revised by 2023-2024) did a fantastic job of acknowledging the Dakota and Ojibwe, it doesn't go far enough.

Another reason why it is important to rework how we teach Minnesota Studies is the copious amounts of trauma, racism and colonialism that Indigenous students continuously face on a daily basis. As stated by Green & Waldman, "In 2014 President Obama declared Native youths and their education to be in a 'state of emergency'" (2019, para 6). As stated previously, Native youths often face higher risks than any other racial group. In school, this often leads to Native students often being turned off to the idea of learning. By shifting how we teach in our classroom and decolonizing it, we can give Indigenous students the opportunity to succeed.

### ***Project Resources***

My website was broken down into three different sections. The first section lays out several lesson plans that can be used in the classroom. These resources include a look at Ojibwe societal structure, Dakota history, curriculum that can be adapted into a classroom and resources on the U.S.-Dakota Conflict. It was important when I gave these resources to make sure that an equal amount of detail was given to both the Dakota and Ojibwe.

The second section looked at different ways to create an inclusive classroom. This included resources from authentic academic sources for teachers. Some of these examples

included various Indigenous pedagogies, resources from major universities and examples of inclusivity from Edutopia.

The third section included various Native American stories and legends. These resources came from authentic Indigenous authors and sources. Two of the websites that I used contain exclusively Dakota and Ojibwe. These stories tell the origins of the Dakota and Ojibwe people. *Spirit Car: Journey to a Dakota Past* is a personal favorite of mine that tells the story of a woman who retraces her ancestry back to the U.S.

Dakota-Conflict. Part of the literacy aspect that I took into account was to make sure that younger students and those that struggle with literacy have resources too. That is why several of the resources that I included also made sure to try and capture varying reading levels.

This section dealt with a review of the literature that was already provided alongside some of the sources that I have found in my research. The next section will deal with some of the major learnings that I have found during my projects design and my research. It will also detail some of the realities I have encountered during my first year teaching.

### **Major Learnings**

During my time researching for this paper and creating my Capstone project, I have found that a majority of teachers that I have worked with strive to try and deliver the best quality education to their students. During my tenure (as a long-term substitute) at Chippewa Middle School, I worked with several Minnesota Studies teachers that already used a variety of sources when teaching about Native Americans. The Mounds View School District has done a wonderful job of providing workshops, training, and q-comps



for their teachers in order to help them achieve equity in the classroom. Providing resources to teachers is also just a small step in the greater aspect of rethinking how we teach social studies. The shift in education has already begun and it is important to note that a lot of changes have taken place with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Some of the changes that have taken place in some of the schools that I work in include the use of restorative justice, the appointment of equity liaisons to schools, the use of professional learning communities and the development of equity plans that allow schools to develop a clear plan to close their achievement gap. Many schools have created American Indian programs to give Indigenous students additional resources, support and lessons to incorporate into their classes.

This section dealt with the major learnings of my research and design of my project, the next part will deal with how I will implement my project and how I can expand the lens and views of Native Americans in Minnesota.

### **Limitations of The Project**

This section will detail some of the limitations, challenges and roadblocks that I encountered during my project. These will include the overall idea for a website, the struggles of my teaching journey, the potential biases in my project and how accessible this project will be to the educational community.

As I began to think about the type of project that I wanted to design, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I wanted to do a potential thesis around something in social studies, but I didn't have the time to contribute significant resources to it. I wanted something that was equitable, because I wanted to make sure that all of my students had an equal platform in the classroom. Some of the ideas I had were current trends that had

been going on in education. At first, I wanted to design a poster or a powerpoint, but I then came to the realization that most teachers have already begun to rethink how they teach. So, I decided to design a website with several resources for teachers to choose from. This became the clearest choice to me, because it was also the most equitable. After the website became a concept, the next challenge became trying to find resources. This wasn't a big problem. A lot of teachers use different resources from different sources. Though I had my pick of the choosing, it was important that I try to find the most important.

Around the time I decided to try and begin constructing my website, I began my career as a teacher. Though I had spent ample time as a paraprofessional in different classroom settings. Becoming a teacher and implementing an equitable curriculum became a life changing experience. In one instance, I became an eighth grade U.S. history teacher at a middle school. This was my first experience working with a diverse set of students. The first thing I did was try to incorporate some of the resources that I had researched for this project into my classroom. One of the resources I used was an interactive exhibit from The University of Georgia. This resource involved the use of primary sources for students to use for projects, papers and assignments with an interactive spin during our Civil Rights unit.

One of the final challenges that I have run into with my project are the potential biases and trying to find how to distribute my project to the educational community. When it came to potential biases, one of the biggest that presented itself was my own. Though I am passionate about education, I didn't want to come across with a white savior complex. To avoid this potential bias, I tried to make sure to include sources that were

authentic, credible or from Indigenous sources. This authenticity helps to take away the bias, because they are from sources that don't present themselves in that manner.

The final challenge that presented itself is how I am going to spread my Capstone Project to the educational community. Though Bush Library is a public space, accessing the Digital Commons can be a bit overwhelming. It is often hidden away on the webpage behind several different tabs. To help overcome this, I want to make my website accessible to other public platforms for educators. I want to collaborate with other educators and exchange information to help other educators change social studies education.

This section dealt with several of the limitations and challenges that I have faced with my Capstone Project. These included my own educational journey, finding resources, my own biases and how I am going to distribute my project. The next section will detail my plans for the future and the conclusion.

### **Conclusion and Final Thoughts**

With the closure of my project and the first three chapters of my Capstone Project, I have sought to answer the question: *How can we give teachers resources to reshape how Minnesota studies' is taught through the lens of Indigenous people?* Chapter One dealt with my own background and decision to pick my topic and choice of a website. Chapter Two dealt with the literature review and what research has been conducted around teaching about Native Americans in public schools. Chapter Three dealt with the project itself. Including the look, rationale, description and timeline. Lastly, Chapter Four included a summary of the project, a description of my completed project, and the challenges that I have faced with my project.

Now that I have begun to wrap up the final details of my Capstone project, I have reflected on the journey I have taken. I am proud of what I have created and the passion I bring to the table. Education is a worthwhile career that I am proud to be a part of. I am excited to share my project with the educational community and I am eager to work with other teachers to close the achievement gap that our state has.

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