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James D. Autio  
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TEACHING THE CULTURES OF MINNESOTA NATIVE AMERICAN TRIBES:  
REPORTED COMFORT LEVEL OF TEACHERS IN MEETING  
MINNESOTA ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

Hamline University

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	v
Chapter One	
Introduction.....	1
The Question of Terminology.....	2
On Being Native.....	3
Research Question.....	7
Conclusion.....	9
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature	
Introduction.....	11
“The Student Will Be Able To...”.....	12
Indian Education for All .....	13
Background.....	14
First Factor: All Montanans.....	14
Second Factor: Montana’s Twelve Tribes.....	15
Third Factor: A Culturally Responsive Manner.....	16
Alaska to Minnesota.....	17
Alaska’s Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge.....	17
Alaska’s Standards-Based Reform.....	18
Minnesota’s Students: Native and Non-Native Alike.....	20
Content for Elementary Students.....	21
Holistic/Multidisciplinary Approach.....	21
Development of Intercultural Sensitivity.....	24

Differences of Worldviews.....	25
Myths and Stereotypes.....	26
Double Consciousness.....	27
Resources and Rationale for Teaching About Cultures.....	29
Summary.....	31
Chapter Three: Methods	
Research Context.....	33
Qualitative Research Paradigm .....	34
Human Subject Review.....	35
Setting .....	36
Data Collection.....	36
Data Analysis .....	37
Limitations.....	38
The Interview.....	40
Coding Terms and Topics.....	41
Conclusion.....	44
Chapter Four:	
Results.....	45
Data Analysis.....	46
Themes and Patterns.....	46
How the Results Respond to the Research Question.....	50
Interpretation of Data.....	53
My Biases.....	54

Connections to Literature Review.....	54
Explanatory Synthesis of Data.....	56
Summary.....	57
Chapter Five: Conclusion	
Major Learning.....	59
Possible Implications for Stakeholders.....	60
Recommendations for Future Research.....	62
How to Communicate and Use the Results.....	63
Reflections.....	64
References.....	66
Appendix One: Teacher Interview Questions.....	70
Appendix Two: Letter of Informed Consent.....	71
Appendix Three: Minnesota English Language Arts standards (handout).....	75

## Abstract

The issue of how to teach about Minnesota Native American tribes in elementary school intrigues me because of my personal experiences growing up as an Ojibwe/Finnish person. As an adult, I became an educator and wanted to improve my craft while also helping other teachers to feel better about working with this topic. The Minnesota English Language Arts standards specify a need for second- and fourth-grade teachers to teach about Dakota and Ojibwe people, but teachers report varying levels of comfort. This paper examines similar state-mandated situations in Montana and Alaska, and different ways in which the schools tried to meet their standards. Through interviews with teachers at a small suburban public elementary school, data was collected about the level of comfort and knowledge reported by second- and fourth-grade teachers. The analysis included identifying trends in thoughts and opinions about comfort level, available resources, and how to best meet the standards.

*Keywords: Minnesota, Native American, Ojibwe, Dakota, standards, comfort*

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

*How do second- and fourth-grade teachers describe their experiences of educating students about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, as prescribed in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards?* Again and again, this question has led to interesting conversations among teachers, administrators, and parents regarding ways in which the mostly middle-class, Caucasian, and female elementary teaching staff can try to address issues of a culture that for many individuals may be foreign. All too often, these stakeholder conversations have been sidetracked by tangential issues for which there seem to be no easy answers. A few of these additional issues that appear repeatedly include the following questions: which cultural depictions are preferred, who should be the one to decide on appropriate cultural depictions, is there a place for teaching stereotypes and if so, to what end, and can an individual respectfully and successfully teach the culture of another group without a close examination of the individual's personal biases, prejudices, and expectations?

Another level of question arises out of the fact that I am a teacher of Ojibwe and Finnish descent, teaching alongside a mostly Caucasian district teaching staff. As such, the question is asked of me in its many variations, at least partially because I am perceived as having cultural knowledge and insight regarding the Native American community that other educators lack. Whether this assumption is true or not, there is likely an identifiably racial element attached to this unfair presupposition. That being said, I am quite interested in the issue of how to teach the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes in elementary public school systems. Even if I am not an expert on

appropriate curricula, teaching materials, cultural competency, or even especially insightful about Minnesota Native American tribes and the issues related to teaching about their cultures, I am very interested in this topic. Perhaps, through this capstone research project, I will be in a better position to help myself, my students, and my fellow educators, whether in my school district or across the state of Minnesota.

This chapter discusses the question of terminology related to Minnesota Native American tribes, provide a personal narrative of my process of defining and continually refining cultural identity through my background and personal experiences, and discuss the importance of my burning question as it pertains to my teaching and that of my colleagues.

### **The Question of Terminology**

When I was a member of my school district's American Indian Parent Advisory Board, one of the first issues that arose was the question of terminology. "American Indian" is a term that appears frequently in treaties and other legal contexts, and also within the Minnesota English Language Arts standards (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). "Native American" is another term that appears frequently in various contexts. I also often hear or read about "Indigenous Americans," "First Peoples," and "First Nations." Within the online Native community, I encounter the newer phonetic term, "NDN," which sounds like "indian," used as a common blanket name for all Native people. More often, if the referent is a member of the same tribal community, she or he might be mentioned by a shortened version of the tribal name, such as Shinnob (short for Anishinaabe, the internal name for the Ojibwe, Ojibwa, Ojibway, Chippewa



people). The more frequent native term is to call someone “friend” or “cousin” in the appropriate native language.

For the sake of clarity and consistency, the term “Native American” is used to refer to all or any of these American Indian/Indigenous American people. Within the state of Minnesota, there are two federally recognized tribes of Native Americans: Dakota and Ojibwe. As with the Ojibwe people, the Dakota go by numerous names, including Lakota and Sioux. The terms Dakota and Ojibwe refer to the specific tribes within Minnesota.

Within these two tribes, there are numerous bands with their own designated reservation land bases. The Dakota tribe includes members of the Lower Sioux Indian Community, Upper Sioux Indian Community, Prairie Island Indian Community, and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community. The Ojibwe tribe includes members of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Grand Portage Band of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, and White Earth Nation (Indian Affairs Council: State of Minnesota). Any reference to a specific band or tribal member will be by individual name.

### **On Being Native**

My father was a first-generation Finnish immigrant, whose family settled on northern Wisconsin farmland. As he became an adult, he traveled the country working odd jobs before eventually ending up working in the shipping industry out of Superior, Wisconsin. It was in one of Superior’s many bars that he met my mother, a much younger Native American woman from the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Ojibwe.

I am the fifth of six children in our family. Growing up in Superior during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a great deal of racism surrounding us. Native American people were not uncommon in the area, though interracial couples were still a cause for concern amongst many Caucasian residents. Most of my siblings and I experienced frequent name-calling, racially-based taunts, and occasional physical assaults, mostly at the hands of young pink-skinned people in the neighborhood who felt that we were somehow worthless by virtue of being “injuns” or “chinks.” Lack of specificity notwithstanding, those taunts hurt. The experiences shared by my family members may have created some distrust in others, but they likely added to other unexpected outcomes: empathy and achievement.

I went through the public elementary school system in northern Wisconsin during the 1970s. My memories of Indian education (as it was called then) involved only a few mentions, mostly grouped around the Thanksgiving holiday, and almost all embarrassing for me as a shy student of mixed ethnicity. I disliked being singled out in my classroom as a representative of all Native Americans by virtue of being half Indian. I had no memories of bringing a delicious feast to the struggling pilgrims; I did not paint my face and run naked through the woods; and I always had the nagging sense that Christopher Columbus was not quite the noble hero that he was made out to be.

As young people, we were well aware of racial and gender-based discrimination in society. Though our father was White, we were all Native American because we were not as White as we should be. As such, I grew up as a brown-skinned Native American boy in a society for which these traits were not necessarily a benefit. That awareness helped to build in me a sense of concern and empathy for others, particularly young

people and the unfairly treated underdogs of society. My siblings and I were all very well-behaved and obedient children (at least in public), and highly motivated and studious about academic achievement. I was always aware of the need for a strong educational background to help prove my worth to society, as well as to myself.

Many Native Americans speak of a sense of double consciousness. There is the nearly constant sense of being Native American in a White world, able to navigate both worlds, but rarely able to feel completely at peace with either. As a young Ojibwe person, I was always aware of being a darker shade of skin color than the majority of people in my hometown. When I went into a dime store, I was usually followed around by an employee, and I knew it was because they viewed me as an Indian and that meant that I could not be trusted. I would steal if they did not prevent it. I never did though. I was exceptionally well-behaved, polite, and studious, as were my siblings. Knowing what the dominant culture expected of us made us act in a very different way. There was a clear divide between who I really was as a thinking, feeling young person, and the expected role thrust upon me by a society that tolerated perceived differences without ever fully accepting them. This sense of duality has always been a key aspect of my sense of self-identity. This sort of alternate conceptualization about the self is common in Native communities, and likely needs to be taught about for students to understand something of the experience of being Native American. While it could be a complex and abstract idea to attempt to teach, it may also have greater benefits for students over teaching them about moccasins and teepees.

I always wanted to help other people who needed help. For many years of my young adulthood, this tendency led me to live around the edges of society among artists,

musicians, homeless youth, alcoholics and drug addicts. I counted myself among the artists, but I was also one of the few people in my circles to maintain a steady job. I used my paychecks and apartment to help others whenever and however I could. This desire to help others eventually led me to return to school to become a teacher.

I am currently in my tenth year as a teacher. During the course of my career to date, I have continued to work at the same location, in a school at which Caucasian students are now the minority. Our students come from the neighborhood and around the district and from many different countries of the world. There are currently over twenty-five home languages spoken by our students. Many of the students are English Language Learners, and many have special needs. I have worked in Title I, reading and math intervention, and also as a classroom teacher in kindergarten through second grade. I often teach Targeted Services intervention classes outside of the regular school day. I have taught summer school, spring break school, and volunteered to chaperone overnight camping trips during the summer months for underprivileged and struggling youth. I volunteer to teach young people how to play guitar, and I use my skills as an artist to do projects with students. I have also served as our building's Cultural Equity Coordinator, as well as on the district's Native American Parent Advisory Board (renamed after the first meeting).

I feel very strongly that I have some outstanding and unique skills that I bring to the world. I cannot hit a baseball and I have never been able to carry a tune, but I write poetry, I make art in many different media, I play a guitar and a banjo, and I understand the importance of education. I am interested in learning. As part of growing up more Native American than Caucasian, I embraced many elements of a traditional Ojibwe life

through a process of learning and refining my cultural knowledge as I went along. I now participate in Anishinaabe ceremony as part of my spiritual life. I burn sage and cedar and sweetgrass to purify my home, my body and my spirit. I go on occasional prolonged fasts in a wigwam at Lac Courte Oreilles. I dance at powwows. I make pipes out of red pipestone and soft wood. And with much of my time and energy, I commit my time to helping family and community.

Drawing together these threads of ethnicity, childhood experiences, social disposition, educational background, artistic abilities, and desire to help others, I now bring the reader back to an earlier statement: If I am not an expert on appropriate curricula, teaching materials, cultural competency, or even especially insightful about Minnesota Native American tribes and the issues related to teaching about their cultures, I am very interested in the topic. I have some knowledge and experiences from which I am able to draw. I have a strong desire to learn in order to improve myself. I also have a strong desire to help others whenever I have the indication that the others could use my help. I am not an expert on pedagogy, nor the Minnesota English Language Arts standards, but by virtue of my various threads, I may have some insights to offer.

### **Research Question**

*How do second- and fourth-grade teachers describe their experiences of educating students about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, as prescribed in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards?* Good question. From my experience with this topic, many of my fellow educators are struggling with how to incorporate these specific standards into their teaching and curricula in positive and respectful ways. Me too. Some may feel as though they are blindly stumbling along and

most likely making mistakes. Some may feel like teaching a lesson about moccasins and “indian” houses is good enough. Some are already asking complex questions about the nature of culture, the commodification of artifacts, and the self-examination of one’s own privileges and biases. I do not have all the answers. One possible place to begin is to look into how the Minnesota Native American people, themselves, wish to be depicted. This certainly includes the names by which they would like to be known.

As an American of Ojibwe and Finnish ancestry, one of the two cultures carries with it the racialized marker of browner skin color. Due to the prevalent social culture of northern Wisconsin during my formative years, I was always considered to be a Native American. This designation carried with it many side effects, including questioning my self-worth, needing to prove myself academically, embracing the traditional culture of Ojibwe people, and having a strong desire to help others within my community. So this question of how to properly and effectively teach the elementary English Language Arts and Social Studies standards affects me in many ways: on a personal level, on a professional level, on a cultural level, and on an intellectual level.

One day early in every fall season at school, the local Indian Center would visit my building and provide free used winter clothes for any Indian children. I remember being surprised to see other students who did not look like Indians, picking out their coats and mittens. I was simultaneously pleased to get these new articles of clothing and embarrassed to be singled out as different among my classmates. Invariably, after collecting the new clothes, I would be subjected to inquiries and downright rude comments from other children. For me as a quiet and introverted child, being a Native American was not something of which I should feel proud, and it was not something that

I was taught about in school, other than being taught that it was something negative that I had to learn to live with. I have ideas about Native Americans. I have beliefs and biases.

### **Conclusion**

Based on specific mentions in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards, there is a need for educators in the state's public schools to teach the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, specifically the Dakota and Ojibwe people. For the sake of this research project, the question of terminology is resolved by naming individual tribes or bands, and by using the term Native American to refer generally to the people of the tribes. Because of my background and upbringing as a mixed-race Ojibwe and Finnish child, I developed a sense of empathy, respect for community, desire to help others and the need to excel academically. These factors come together in me being a public school educator, and in me choosing this topic for my research project.

The literature review explores what exactly the public school elementary student is supposed to be able to do, based on the Minnesota English Language Arts standards that mention Dakota and Ojibwe people. The review discusses how school districts in the state of Montana implemented a similar piece of legislation called Indian Education for All (Recognition of American Indian Cultural Heritage, 1999 & 2015), and draws correlations with the situation in Minnesota public schools. Next, the review discusses Alaska's Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge (Alaska University-Fairbanks, 2000), and the standards-based reforms that effectively used the guidelines in building cultural awareness in Alaska public schools.

Next, the literature review returns to Minnesota public schools. One pronounced difference between Alaska's educational reforms pertaining to cultural knowledge, and

Minnesota's English Language Arts standards is that Minnesota's benchmarks are designed for all students, native and non-native alike. The literature review explores ideas about content for elementary students, including using a holistic/multidisciplinary approach, building intercultural sensitivity, differences of worldviews, the place of myths and stereotypes in education, and the pan-Native concept of the double consciousness.

The literature review concludes with a discussion of resources and the rationale for teaching about cultures.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

#### Introduction

There has not been a great deal of research or literature written specifically about the implementation of the Minnesota Academic Standards: English Language Arts K-12 (2010) that specify teaching about Minnesota Native American tribes. Other states, such as Montana and Alaska have attempted to define cultural guidelines and implement academic standards with regard to their local Native American populations for all students in their public schools (Fox & Montana State Office of Public Instruction, 2006; Guillory & Williams, 2014). Despite the different states and the distinctly different Native American tribes, there are clear parallels that may be drawn with regard to implementation of the academic standards in Minnesota. *How do second- and fourth-grade teachers describe their experiences of educating students about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, as prescribed in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards?* The exact nature of what and how to teach regarding Minnesota Native American tribes is not an easily answered question.

In this chapter, the review of literature discusses what the Minnesota public school student will be able to do, Montana's House Bill 528, which is commonly referred to as Indian Education for All (Recognition of American Indian Cultural Heritage, 1999 & 2015), Alaska's Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge (University of Alaska-Fairbanks, 2000) and standards-based educational reforms, and the educational needs of Minnesota public school students. The review discusses in great depth the ideas underlying appropriate content for elementary school students, including using a

multidisciplinary approach to curricula, developing intercultural sensitivity, delineating differences of worldviews, and exploring the use of myths and stereotypes in education, as well as the idea of the double consciousness in many Native American communities. The section ends with a discussion of resources and the rationale for teaching about cultures.

**“The student will be able to...”**

In the Minnesota English Language Arts standards, there are many skills throughout kindergarten to fourth grade that deal with such topics as compare and contrast, participate in collaborative conversations, and demonstrate understanding of various things (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). Many of the skills within the standards are related to one another, and many will eventually come into play with the standards directly referencing Minnesota Native American tribes. In kindergarten, first grade, and third grade, there are no English Language Arts standards that specifically address Minnesota Native American tribes. That language first appears in second grade standards, and then reappears in fourth grade standards. It becomes increasingly frequent as the student goes on to fifth grade and all the way up through twelfth grade. Native Americans are not specifically mentioned in the Minnesota Social Studies standards, despite there being numerous avenues for studying Native people (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011). The only Minnesota standards specifically addressing Minnesota Native American tribes that appears in the English Language Arts academic standards are as follows:

- 2.1.9.9 Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story (e.g., Cinderella stories) by different authors or from different cultures,

including those by or about Minnesota American Indians. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010, p. 14).

- 4.1.9.9 Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures, including American Indian. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010, p. 17).
- 4.2.6.6 Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account, including those by or about Minnesota American Indians, of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010, p. 20).

Based on the language of these standards, the skill of compare and contrast is the key concern for second- and fourth-graders in regards to the teaching about Ojibwe and Dakota people in Minnesota. It ends up being a complex consideration, though, in that the student is ill-equipped to make a meaningful comparison between two cultures or worldviews without having a range of knowledge and experience to build a comprehensive framework of concern for self and others, and from which to glean an opinion (Reidel & Draper, 2013, p. 115).

### **Indian Education for All**

In 1999, the state of Montana began to implement legislation calling for Indian Education for All (Recognition of American Indian Cultural Heritage, 1999 & 2015). This state act specifies three key factors that must be addressed. First, that the education is for all Montanans. Second, that the specific cultures of Montana's twelve

distinct tribes should be taught. Third, that the education must be in a culturally responsive manner. In this attempt to guide educators in Montana regarding best practices in teaching about their state's Native American population, there are clear parallels with the current issue of meeting the Minnesota English Language Arts standards.

### **Background**

In 1999, legislators in the state of Montana passed a law referred to as Indian Education for All (Recognition of American Indian Cultural Heritage, 1999 & 2015). According to Starnes (2006), the purpose was to fulfill an earlier constitutional requirement by addressing three key factors: IEFA will provide instruction in Native American histories and culture for “every Montanan, *whether Indian or non-Indian*,” IEFA will require special attention toward the state's twelve distinct tribal groups, and IEFA will be implemented in a “culturally responsive manner” (pp. 186-187).

**First factor: All Montanans.** Inclusion of all Montanans was a reaction to the longstanding federal policies of assimilation of Native people and the cultural genocide that had severely harmed most, if not all, Native American communities in the United States over the course of the country's history (Starnes, 2006, p. 186). While teaching about Native American history and culture is certainly appropriate and of interest to students and families within the Native communities, the goal of IEFA was to instruct, inform, and enlighten all residents of Montana regarding both contemporary and historical issues of importance to Native peoples and to United States' citizen as a whole (Starnes, 2006, p. 186). The key here is that education pertaining to Native Americans is not solely for Native Americans.

Carjuzaa (2009) wrote that the intention of IEFA was to address the oversight that the contributions played by Native Americans during the development of the United States were systematically downplayed or totally ignored. This certainly presents a skewed version of American history and contemporary society. While all people are adversely affected by this misrepresentation of history and the importance of various cultures, perhaps none more so than Native American students who are continually given the message that their families and ancestors contributed nothing to modern society, even worse, that modern Native Americans are unimportant and virtually invisible (pp. 29-30). The inclusion of Minnesota Native American tribes in the state English Language Arts standards is likely designed to address many of these same issues.

**Second factor: Montana's twelve tribes.** Minnesota's academic standards refer to Minnesota Native American tribes, more specifically, Dakota and Ojibwe people (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). Regarding the second IEFA factor, the Montana legislation specifies that attention will be paid to their twelve distinct tribes: Assiniboine, Blackfeet, Chippewa, Cree, Crow, Gros Ventre, Kootenai, Little Shell, Northern Cheyenne, Pend d'Oreille, Salish, and Sioux. Tied closely to the first factor, IEFA's second requirement is designed to highlight the rich and varied histories, languages, and cultures of these twelve tribes of Montana. There is also an element of combatting stereotypical perceptions of these Native American tribes exacerbated by incorrect information, racist depictions, popular media, and prior attempts to eradicate Native people through destructive federal policies. A fine example raised by Starnes (2006) is to consider the distinct languages, cultures and histories of the forty-five European nations, and then to apply that same level of consideration to the distinct tribes

of Native American people (p. 187). In consideration of the two tribes of Minnesotan Native Americans, the Dakota and the Ojibwe are not only distinct in language, history and cultural expression, they were long-time enemies and were frequently at war with one another over territory and resources (Densmore, 1979, pp. 132-135). Many Native people do recognize and acknowledge commonalities between different tribal groups, such as being a person of color in a country long-dominated by Caucasians, and being a living descendent of the defeated indigenous people who inhabited this part of the world for tens of thousands of years before Europeans began visiting (Bataille, 2001, pp. 3-7). There is also a level of respect and acknowledgement of the specific tribal background from which an individual comes. One goal of IEFA is to spread that level of understanding to all people in Montana.

**Third factor: A culturally responsive manner.** The third IEFA factor specifies that tribal histories and cultures should be taught and represented in a “culturally responsive manner” (Starnes, 2006, p. 187). This factor has proven to be a little more involved than the others. There have been various voices heard, many perspectives considered, and different groups’ input brought in to try to define what this factor means. Educators and legislators have put in extra effort to collect or develop resources to meet these challenges. A key element has been the inclusion of different stakeholders’ perspectives and opinions. These stakeholders included representatives of government offices, teachers and school district administrators, community members and people from the twelve tribes themselves (Starnes, 2006, p. 187). As we will see, the question of implementation of the Minnesota English Language Arts standards involves many of the same types of considerations for the stakeholders in Minnesota communities.

## **Alaska to Minnesota**

The state of Minnesota has adopted sets of academic standards that reference Minnesota Native American tribes for the purposes of building greater cultural and historic knowledge about the state and the development of the United States, as well as helping to develop in our students a greater level of cultural competency to guide them in future endeavors (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). These academic standards are an important step toward helping students to build these skills, but do not provide enough information about how to make it happen. Educators and researchers in Alaska have already been making some strides to develop guidelines for the teaching of Native cultures and the ways in which they intersect with standards-based reform. Between Montana's Indian Education for All (Recognition of American Indian Cultural Heritage, 1999 & 2015) and Alaska's Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge (2000) and standards-based educational reform, some of the groundwork for implementing Minnesota's English Language Arts and Social Studies standards has already been laid. In this section, I will cover these topics and end with an examination of considerations specific to Minnesota.

### **Alaska's Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge**

Educators at Alaska University-Fairbanks (2000) developed a series of guidelines to help citizens use, convey and reflect Alaska Native cultural knowledge in respectful ways. This was a project sponsored by a number of organizations with direct interest in the topic, including Alaska Federation of Natives, Alaska Department of Education, and the Center for Cross-Cultural Studies, to name only a few. There were eighteen total organizations sponsoring the project, the majority of which consisted of Native

educators. The direct knowledge and culturally relevant experiences of many of these educators were used to develop these guidelines. Within this document, there are guidelines for specific groups of people, including Native elders, authors and illustrators, curriculum developers and administrators, educators, editors and publishers, document reviewers, researchers, Native language specialists, and the general public. The overarching concern is for education and the transmission of cultural knowledge.

A key aspect of the development of this work was the involvement of elders from the communities. These individuals were considered to be a primary source for living and evolving cultural knowledge, practices and teachings. Alongside Native educators, the elders comprised the bulk of the advisory group (pp. 2-3). The key consideration as it pertains to Minnesota's Academic Standards is that Native Americans, especially Native educators, and community elders are the richest source for respectfully implementing these culturally-based standards (Alaska University-Fairbanks, 2000, p. 1).

### **Alaska's Standards-Based Reform**

Fox (2000) examined standards-based reforms in Alaska schools and the benefits brought to Native American education. Fox looked at the ways in which the language built into the academic standards aligns with American Indian worldviews, ways of teaching, and culturally-based ways of interacting in contemporary societies. While the guidelines developed by Alaska University-Fairbanks (2000) provided some direction in educational settings for teachers and administrators, there remain some areas of concern for Alaskan Natives. Fox (2000) pointed out that by using multiple measures and "performance-based assessments," cultural bias may be minimized, but professional development opportunities and teacher preparation programs need to continue to develop



alongside standards-based reform for culturally responsive teaching and learning (pp. 1-5). These are important considerations for educators trying to implement culturally responsive teaching.

Guillory and Williams (2014) reported on focus groups that were interviewed in order to gain some perspective on incorporating the cultures of Alaskan Natives and American Indians into educational settings. The intent of the group interviews was to define the term culture and develop suggestions of how to implement the teaching of culturally-based content in the classrooms. The groups included fifty-three participants across the United States and were comprised of teachers, students, parents and tribal leaders. Across the multiple interview sessions, distinct topics emerged, including different definitions of culture based on traditional or contemporary viewpoints, and ways in which culture can and should be taught in educational settings in order to meet state standards (p. 155). While state standards vary in what they prescribe for benchmark indicators of successful learning, an important consideration is what the local community and educational stakeholders expect.

As one striking example, Fox (2000) wrote about the previously high rate of Native American students referred for Special Education services, and the connection that exists with Native perceptions of time and community and worldview. In keeping with the standards-based reform movement guiding Alaska's educational system, newer approaches to diverse learning styles, alternative assessment tools and other educational factors are lowering the numbers of Native students channeled into Special Education. Fox identified several key factors that are ongoing considerations: better professional development around culturally-based teaching, reexamination of standards

and assessments to gauge appropriateness for Native students, quicker and more thorough interventions for struggling learners, and greater district and state support for schools with high rates of underachieving students (Fox, 2000, pp. 3-10). As with the educational system and students highlighted in Fox (2000), Minnesota's schools and students are in need of a revised approach to meeting educational requirements.

### **Minnesota's Students: Native and Non-native Alike**

While much of the focus of research and standards-based reform pertaining to Alaska's Native American students has been devoted to the educational needs of those subgroups of pupils, Minnesota's English Language Arts standards are designed for all students. Montana's 1999 legislation, called Indian Education for All, was not about how to educate Native American students per se. Rather, it was intended to correct some historical inaccuracies and raise the cultural competency of all Montanans. Likewise, the inclusion of Minnesota Native American tribes in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards is not a special provision for the education of Native students. It is intended for Natives and Non-Natives alike.

Kelting-Gibson (2006) wrote about research that shows that Native American students very often attend schools "where they do not see themselves reflected in the school's guiding principles, in the curriculum, or even in their own classrooms" (p. 204). According to Kelting-Gibson, this issue is compounded when Non-Native students are not educated about historical contributions of Native Americans, or the social and cultural nuances of Natives (p. 204). Perhaps for these very reasons, the states of Montana and Minnesota both specify that American Indian education will include all students. Questions inherent in the academic standards are what should the student be

able to do, and which skills should the student develop as a result of education (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). How these questions apply to learning about Minnesota Native American tribes warrants further exploration.

### **Content for Elementary Students**

The question of which elements of Minnesota Native American cultures should be taught to public elementary school students is not an easy one. The Minnesota English Language Arts standards provide benchmarks for guidance, including comparing and contrasting two or more versions of the same story, especially those by Minnesota Native Americans. One way to approach teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes is to strive for a holistic/multidisciplinary educational paradigm. An important aspect of that approach is to try to develop in students a sense of intercultural sensitivity. This warrants some discussion about differences of worldview based on ethnicity and culture, the role of myths and stereotypes in Native American communities and American society at large, the pan-Native idea of a “double consciousness,” a term used to describe an internal conflict experienced by some members of subordinated groups and coined by W. E. B. Du Bois in his work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), and the training and resources that need to be made available for teachers to teach the topic.

### **Holistic/multidisciplinary Approach**

In writing about cultural competency in middle school language arts and social studies development, Reidel and Draper (2013) pointed out that with modern technologies, students have extremely quick and easy access to a wide array of information from around the world. With that ease of access, however, comes a “superficial understanding of other cultures” (p. 115). Reidel and Draper wrote that the

volume of images and ideas will likely compound misunderstandings about other people, unless the student is taught to critically evaluate material. One of their suggestions is to use an interdisciplinary approach in which skills and ideas are taught and retaught between multiple subjects, such as language arts and social studies (p. 115). This more holistic approach to education is a frequently used Native American approach, in that parts of the world are seen as dependent and integrated with each other.

As an example, Reidel and Draper (2013) discussed a multidisciplinary unit they taught about India with preservice teachers. They began by collecting information about the preservice teachers' prior knowledge and beliefs about India, via a Think-Pair-Share activity. Comments ranged from mildly positive ideas like India is colorful, to staunchly negative ideas such as India is dirty, full of beggars, stinky, polluted and backward. In a follow-up discussion, it was discovered that most of these impressions came from popular media, especially Hollywood movies. The participants identified various reasons why India might be portrayed in negative ways in films, and the most common reason was that the Caucasian American protagonist of the film needed to experience a strange, foreign, and dangerous culture to drive the film's plot. Despite this acknowledgement, the preservice teachers were still reluctant to accept that their impressions of India might be false.

During the India unit, the students read books, watched films, attended museum exhibits, researched educational issues and created artifacts to demonstrate depth of understanding about India. The students interacted frequently with cultural artifacts, and with other teachers from India. As the preservice teachers moved beyond surface understandings about the culture of India, their depth of thought improved, their critical

thinking skills grew, and their cultural competency expanded (pp. 117-120). The data collected by Reidel and Draper shows a number of positive effects of using this multidisciplinary approach to teach about another's culture through various activities in language arts and social studies, and with profound growth in participants' knowledge, understanding and openness for other cultures.

This same type of approach might be used with elementary students learning about Minnesota Native American tribes. The teacher researcher could collect data about the students' prior knowledge and beliefs, and provide multiple avenues to discovery and new understandings in different subjects and using various curricula. In this way, the academic standards can be met without substantially changing existing curricula, but rather, shifting the pedagogical approach to include contributions and perspectives of Minnesota Native Americans, as well as others. An important consideration, however, would be the level of comfort and cultural competency of the teachers providing instruction, as well as the resources that might be available.

So the question of what the student will be able to do as a result of meeting the Minnesota English Language Arts standards is not a simple matter. The student will not only be able to compare and contrast various books, themes, topics, and first or second hand accounts of events, but rather, to demonstrate a level of cultural competency and familiarity with the perspectives, histories and worldviews of Minnesota Native American tribes. The combination of skills would make these sorts of comparisons possible and meaningful.

### **Development of Intercultural Sensitivity**

The study of foreign languages involves a level of growth and understanding through cultural competency as students develop their fluency in the new language and their familiarity with another culture (Garrett-Rucks, 2013, pp. 191-192). In a study conducted on language learners' cultural awareness and proficiency while beginning to study the French language, researchers found that the students' level of intercultural awareness and sensitivity grew considerably as a result of frequent online discussions about cultural topics between peers, coupled with the use of various online instructional materials based on language development and cultural awareness (p. 191). While meaningful discussions and interactions regarding the French culture were observed in higher-level language courses, the level of discourse in the introductory classes was hampered by the inability of students to communicate and understand in the new language (p. 193). It may be safe to assume that elementary students in Minnesota would fall closer to the latter group of students than the former.

Garrett-Rucks (2013) observed the college-aged participants begin the semester with highly limited cultural knowledge and almost nonexistent language skills. Throughout the course, language instruction was partnered with culturally-based discussions and experiences, mostly online using discussion board postings. The analysis of these postings after the course ended showed profound growth in intercultural sensitivity and competency via discussions about such things as smiling, personal space, alternative perspectives, and opinions about common French cultural practices (pp. 196-199). Open discussion and familiarity seemed to be the key factors in the growth of intercultural sensitivity during this introductory French course. These same educational

techniques can be used with the elementary students to help develop intercultural sensitivity and familiarity with Minnesota Native American tribes for the purpose of meeting the English Language Arts standards.

### **Differences of Worldviews**

Hain-Jamall (2013) identified clear distinctions between Native American and Euro-American worldviews. According to Hain-Jamall, the Native American worldview is one of holistic perception: society is collectivist and collaborative, people are dependent on one another and they place a greater level of importance on fitting in and fulfilling expected roles. Conversely, the Euro-American worldview is said to be individualistic, with individuals more focused on categorizing and decontextualizing information, and making the assumption that there is always one correct answer to a question (p. 14). Though the extent to which these observations are true is debatable, it is an observation worthy of consideration, particularly when trying to compare and contrast literature and personal viewpoints between individuals of these different cultures. This alone makes the topic worthy of attention in elementary classrooms.

Education for and about Native Americans should not be predicated on perpetuating myths and stereotypes. Aguilera, Lipka, Demmert, and Tippeconnic (2007) wrote about efforts in several language immersion schools in various places around the United States to preserve cultural identity. In one such school in Hawaii, the teachers are given training and support designed to help them teach not only with regards to the second language and linguistic needs in the immersion setting, but also to prepare the educators to interact and educate with respect to the indigenous Hawaiian culture (p. 4).

Hain-Jamall (2013) wrote of the indigenous perspective as a very different worldview than that of the dominant Euro-American culture. Hain-Jamall raised indigenous language as a key “conduit of cultural values and beliefs” (p. 15). Knowledge is said to be subjective and based on experiential learning. Natives are said to view themselves as a part of the larger living systems of the corporeal and incorporeal world, and cannot separate and compartmentalize themselves in ways that our educational systems often expect (pp. 15-17). In the educational setting, being cognizant of large-scale cultural differences between people is necessary, though one cannot assume that these sorts of tendencies are true for all members of a specific group of people.

### **Myths and Stereotypes**

There is a need in education to address mistaken ideas students may have, to provide guidance in developing greater levels of cultural competency, and to help students to understand their own beliefs and biases. Myths and stereotypes about Native American people abound in popular media (Fleming, 2006, p. 213). Storybooks, Hollywood movies, television shows, and Halloween costumes often portray Native Americans in generically offensive ways, including many turkey feathers and fringed outfits (Rollins & O’Connor, 1998, pp. ix-xi). Native Americans are still portrayed as face-painted savages grunting in broken English. These sorts of depictions are frequent and pervasive, and especially noticeable to Native Americans themselves.

Fleming (2006) identified myths and stereotypes about Native Americans that seem to be believed by many people, especially by those with limited direct experience and knowledge about Native people. Fleming posited that people tend to stereotype others as a shorthand way of getting to know them, instead of slowly building more



intimate and realistic relationships (p. 213). One of the stereotypes that Fleming observed is the politically correct perceived preference for the term Native American over Indian, both of which are, in fact, generally applied to encompass people of five hundred distinct nations and cultures. Most Native Americans prefer to be called Ojibwe or Dakota, Dinè, Inuit, or whichever specific tribe from which they come. Other myths include the ideas that Native people get special privileges, have specific physical features, feel honored by generically Native American sports team mascots, and have an intuitive understanding of Native cultures and histories (pp. 214-216). Because of the prevalence and pervasiveness of these stereotypes and myths, it is likely that students in elementary may come to school with some or all of these beliefs already in place. Part of educating students about Ojibwe and Dakota people in Minnesota involves addressing and seeking to dispel these types of ideas. Though all Native Americans do not closely follow the guidance of a “Brother Eagle” or a “Sister Wolf,” there are culturally-based ethnically-tied tendencies that occur frequently. One such item is a sense of double consciousness, originally used in Du Bois (1903) to describe a sense of internal conflict sometimes experienced by members of the African American community. In the present context, I expand the term to encompass a similar experience reported by some Native Americans.

### **Double Consciousness**

“Two-spirit” is a term used by some Native Americans for individuals who feel they contain the qualities or experiences of being both male and female, and also sometimes used in transgender communities to refer to the inner life of people who are unable to fully identify as one gender or the other (Researching for LGBTQ Health: Community Collaboration Change, 2016). In the pan-Native context, it sometimes refers

to sexuality, though it is also used more generally to refer to people who exhibit qualities of both genders. That includes many people, even those not identifying as transgender. Mayo and Sheppard (2013) shared the experiences of Michael Red Earth, a Dakota tribal member who straddled the conceptualization of gender binaries from a young age. Red Earth was exhibiting variance in gender from a young age. Tribal members noticed it and even commented to Red Earth's mother that he was gay (a dominant culture idea), but did not pass any judgement over the fact (an example of straddling two cultures). Red Earth was accepted into both traditionally female and male situations without any issue. Rather than being ostracized for his obvious tendencies, tribal members accepted Red Earth as a two-spirit, and they made space for him within society (pp. 263-264). This sort of acceptance of gendered variation and inclusion in society is common in Native American communities. As stated in Red Earth (1997):

In today's world, it is easy to become confused by titles: gay, straight, bi, winkle, or queer. For me, once I realized that my family was responding to me with respect and acceptance, and once I realized that this respect and acceptance was a legacy of our traditional Native past, I was empowered to present my whole self to the world and reassume the responsibilities of being a two-spirited person. (p. 216)

This sort of reaction is likely less accepted in the dominant White American culture that tends to treat people with obvious physical, emotional or behavioral differences with scorn, mistrust, hatred or even violence (Mayo & Sheppard, 2013, pp. 264-265).

Sheppard and Mayo (2013) wrote about the social construction of gender and sexuality. They cited several examples of violence toward homosexuals, lesbians, and

people who otherwise straddled assumptions of gender identities. They discussed the socially-defined expectation of gender binaries, particularly in a heteronormative society largely dominated by White males (pp. 259-261). They went into further examination of the role of two-spirit people in Native American traditions, the often honored role these individuals played in their societies, and the ways in which American society could be more accepting and welcoming to gendered and cultural differences (pp. 262-263). The role of this two-spirit tradition in elementary education is to serve as an example of cultural differences that involve threads in history, in culture, in personal identity, in social consciousness and acceptance, and in acknowledgement of one's own place in the interwoven fabric of physical and spiritual life. Being two-spirit is not a reason for fear, violence or even discomfort. It is a cause for celebration, as is every part of existence. Given a deeper understanding of cultural differences, a student will more likely be better equipped to compare and contrast the treatment of similar topics.

### **Resources and Rationale for Teaching About Cultures**

Based on conversations I have had with colleagues, teachers need training and resources in order to teach about the culture of Minnesota Native American tribes. The resources may be as simple as a selection of books by and about Minnesota Native Americans, or internet access to facilitate research, online discussions, or virtual experiences when authentic experiences are not an option. The teachers who have expressed discomfort or confusion about what and how to teach the Minnesota English Language Arts standards about Native Americans need training, experiential knowledge, familiarity and comfort to approach what might be at times difficult topics. In Tharp (2006), Native American educational pedagogy is about instructional choices and the

relationship between teacher and student (p. 6). In reviewing the efforts to prepare educators to meet the needs of Montana's Indian Education for All, several key components were defined: adequate funding, multiple professional development opportunities, authentic culturally-based experiences within the tribal communities, careful selection of materials, and attention to teacher preparation programs (Kelting-Gibson, 2004, pp. 204-206). Carjuzaa (2009) included many of the same ideas, with an emphasis on the professional development opportunities (p. 29). Outside of the specific considerations of funding, resources, staff development, and the like, the primary consideration is the commitment to change the way that educators conceive of teaching about cultures and the differing viewpoints to which we must be more open and accepting.

*How do second- and fourth-grade teachers describe their experiences of educating students about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, as prescribed in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards?* The level of comfort that is reported by second- and fourth-grade teachers regarding the topic of teaching the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes is likely an indicator of the teacher's familiarity with the subject, sensitivity toward the cultures of other people, and perceived access to resources and training to facilitate positive classroom experiences for their students.

I believe an important first step is to identify prior knowledge, beliefs and biases. For the educator, this will necessarily involve identifying previously formed ideas and beliefs about Native Americans and the power systems that perpetuate the teacher's beliefs, as well as some honest examination of where those beliefs come from. As Fleming (2006) states, this may involve having to acknowledge myths and stereotypes

that the educator embraces. This may not be easy and comfortable. It will likely require educators to have deep conversations about biases and stereotypes, particularly ones the teachers themselves may hold (p. 213-216). For the student, the starting point is similar in that prior knowledge, beliefs and mistaken ideas must be assessed. In keeping with educational best practices, and to drive future instructional choices, the educator would also need to know what the student wants to know more about Minnesota Native American tribes.

### **Summary**

According to the Minnesota Academic Standards: English Language Arts K-12 (2010), there are specific places in which the literature, history, and culture of Minnesota Native American tribes will be taught in order for the student to meet expected benchmarks. These tribes include two distinct and fluid groups of people, named the Ojibwe and the Dakota. In order to begin to examine what might be involved in teaching about these topics to young students, a number of adjacent ideas must be considered. These topics include learning culturally responsive education techniques for both Native American and Non-Native students, considering standards-based reform pertaining to Native Americans, exploring how other states have effectively brought Native cultures into the classroom, preparing educators to teach about other people's cultures, teaching deeper culturally-based topics, and thinking about the issues pertaining to cultural competency the educational setting. The overarching framework throughout this chapter has been the exploration of what the second grade student in one specific Minnesota public school needs to know about Minnesota Native American tribes and why.

Where does this leave the student? Ideally, public education is about developing academic skills in young people, and turning students into intelligent people and critical thinkers. There are additional skills that students learn in school, such as leadership, ability to work with others, fluency with 21st-century technologies, and cultural competency, to name only a few. The teacher's ability to build these skills in their students is a key concern. Chapter three explains the qualitative focus, the setting, and the participants. It also describes the process of data collection and analysis used in this project.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

This chapter describes the research context and paradigm, the setting, the participants, the data collection method and analysis, limitations of the study, and approval to conduct research on this question: *How do second- and fourth-grade teachers describe their experiences of educating students about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, as prescribed in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards?* Included in this chapter is a description of the interview itself, and the subsequent coding of responses used to identify themes and patterns.

### Research Context

Minnesota legislators and the Department of Education have made efforts to revise academic standards for educating students about the histories, cultures, and worldviews of Minnesota Native American tribes, specifically the Ojibwe and the Dakota (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010). Standards that have been formally adopted to guide school districts and educators in developing curricula have been revised to include Minnesota Native American tribes as an ongoing criterion of successful and complete education. In kindergarten and first grade English Language Arts standards, there is no mention of the tribes, though the standards include a deep focus on skills and benchmarks that will come into play in later grades, such as learning to make comparisons, identifying the author and characters, and identifying differences between books on a similar topic. By second grade, the English Language Arts standards begin mentioning Minnesota Native American tribes specifically. Progressively greater attention is given to the topic of tribal cultures in subsequent years.

Many teachers in my school district have expressed confusion or discomfort with the topic of what to teach about the Dakota and Ojibwe tribes, and how it should be done respectfully and honestly. With the end-goal being student learning, teachers' knowledge and comfort with the topic are essential parts of a comprehensive approach to pedagogy. For this reason, a closer examination of teachers' comfort level with teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes as prescribed in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards is warranted.

### **Qualitative Research Paradigm**

Cultural perspectives and worldviews of Minnesota Native American tribes are based on personal experiences and perceptions of a living and fluid culture (Hart, 2010, pp. 2-4). Qualitative research involves personal narrative, observation and description, and is based partially on the research participants' perspectives about the topic itself (Mills, 2014, p. 6). The process of conducting this sort of research is based on identifying questions and allowing for an evolution of parameters throughout the research. Minnesota's public elementary schools base curricular and pedagogical choices on the requirements and benchmarks of Minnesota academic standards. Teachers are trained in how to use the standards to guide classroom practices and implementation of curricula. To gauge second- and fourth-grade teachers' comfort level in meeting the standards that specify teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, qualitative interviews are the most effective tool.

In my opinion, an attempt to conduct a quantitative study on the topic of Native American cultures would have severely limited the wide range of perspectives and voices that make up the cultures, thereby defeating its own purpose. In this research project, I



gathered and analyzed information on the perspectives and opinions of second- and fourth-grade teachers regarding the required need to teach students about the cultures of Minnesota Dakota and Ojibwe people.

### **Human Subject Review**

I requested approval for my research project from the Hamline University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I assured all potential stakeholders that the results of this research project would in no way adversely affect student learning or teacher standing within the specific school district and elementary school at which my research was conducted. Also, I assured district staff that confidentiality and anonymity would be strictly maintained throughout my research collection and analysis of data. My research and data collection did not involve minors or their families. The research was collected via a single interview with second- and fourth-grade teachers. All interviewee contributions remain strictly confidential, and the informants were notified of the potential use of information. I have gained approval to conduct this research study from my administrators and school district, as well as the Hamline University Institutional Review Board. All individual participants, the specific school, and the school district at which this research was conducted will remain undisclosed to protect the confidentiality of everyone involved.

Informants in this study are not identified by name, gender, ethnicity, or any other identifying feature. This consideration is because of the relatively small data pool, and the fact that identities might be revealed inadvertently. I will not release any identifying information in order to maintain privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. This attention to respectful anonymity allowed for a greater level of trust

and open participation in providing truthful opinions about the participants' level of comfort with the topic of teaching about Minnesota Native American tribes, and the usefulness of district-provided curriculum, training, resources, and materials.

### **Setting**

The research was conducted at a suburban elementary public school, whose students represent a wide range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The racial and gender distribution of elementary school teachers in the school district overall is almost entirely made up of caucasian, middle-class, female educators. The staff make-up at the specific school at which this research was conducted is skewed a bit more male and racially-mixed, than is the school district as a whole. The school district includes early learning facilities, elementary schools, middle schools, and a high school.

### **Data Collection**

This study was conducted with the teachers in the process of using the standards and materials being referenced in the interview. Information gleaned from the teacher responses was given on a strictly voluntary basis, though non-verbalized portions of the interview session were also analyzed for meaning. This study was completed during the first semester of the 2016/2017 school year. The purpose of using this approach was to collect information regarding second- and fourth-grade teachers' levels of comfort about teaching around the Minnesota Native American cultures, histories and worldviews of Minnesota Native American tribes. There were no follow-up questions with teachers participating in the interviews.

Collecting data using qualitative interviews with second- and fourth-grade teachers was my choice for obtaining information on the range of teacher opinions

regarding their levels of comfort in teaching the topic of Minnesota Native American tribes. The interview was conducted with a total of five second- and fourth-grade teachers being asked the interview questions as a group. This was meant to generate discussion between participants in order to provide a wider range of responses to each question. Second- and fourth-grade teachers participating in this study, and who work at the school at which the study is conducted, frequently undergo professional development training in how to access and utilize the Minnesota English Language Arts standards to guide classroom instruction and practices.

Authenticity of interview data is a key concern in the collection of qualitative data (Silverman, 2006, p. 20). Using open-ended interview questions alongside researcher observations provided the clearest understanding of teachers' opinions about their own comfort levels. The interview session was recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

For the purpose of collecting qualitative data, open-ended interview questions were used. In Silverman (2006), the reason given for this approach is to elicit responses from participants based on their own definitions of the terms in the interview questions (p. 25). In the case of this study, some of these terms included but were not limited to cultures, Minnesota Native American tribes, resources and training (to teach the subject matter). While individual perceptions and definitions likely played a role in the teacher's approach to educating students on the topic of Minnesota Native American tribes, that teacher's comfort level and understanding of the topic were factors worth considering.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. As the participants responded to interview questions, as well as responding to other teachers' comments, the researcher

made handwritten notes and observations about the participants' emotions, demeanor, and interactions. These observations appear primarily in summary form and in overall impressions in the final project, where appropriate (Creswell, 2014, p. 195).

Creswell (2014) points out that because of the variety of responses expected, the researcher necessarily makes choices about which data to include and which to not include. The information was used to identify common themes, and the data was grouped accordingly (p. 195). While the researcher had expectations and assumptions about these themes prior to conducting interviews, these potential biases were minimized through the use of open-response questions, recording and transcription of the interviews, and identifying response data themes only after the data was collected.

To aid the researcher in analyzing the collected qualitative data, hand coding was used to allow for the interviewer to more closely examine the interview recording and transcript, and to analyze and manage participant responses to the interview questions. This helped the researcher to identify the themes and descriptions that emerged from participant responses.

A final step in the analysis of the qualitative data was to interpret the meaning of the identified themes and descriptions (Creswell, 2014, p. 197). In this step, the researcher identified overall trends, made generalizations about the participants' reported comfort levels, and raised additional unanswered questions that arose from the research, data collection, and analysis (p. 200).

### **Limitations**

One clear limitation of the qualitative research approach in this study was due to the small sample size, which included a total of five respondents during the

interview. The inclusion of all available teachers as research participants is necessarily limited by those for whom the Minnesota English Language Arts standards specify teaching the topic of the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes. This included only second- and fourth-grade teachers. At the particular school at which research was collected, the available number of participants in the research study was five individuals.

A second limitation was based on the amount of time available for conducting interviews. In order to collect an adequate number of responses in the shortest amount of time, the interview was done in a single group session lasting thirty-five minutes. Knowing that participation was voluntary, and that the teachers have very little free time to offer for this research, participants were told that every effort would be made to minimize the amount of time required.

To that end, a third limitation was the small number of open-ended questions being asked. Participants were asked nine related questions as a group, and responses included direct answers to the questions as well as discussion and comments made between participants following other teachers' comments.

The focus of this research project was on how the second- and fourth-grade teachers describe their experiences. Necessarily, my data collection included quite a bit that was not described overtly by the participants. That was unplanned, but not surprising. I felt that there was a great deal of information that was readily available based on indirect evidence during the interview. One major difficulty with that, however, was separating my biases, expectations, and projections from the physical reality of what was being said and done during the question and answer session. A limitation of my

study was that I was the only interviewer/observer. It would have been good to cross-match observations with another researcher or even multiple researchers.

As a final consideration, I might have included Minnesota Social Studies standards, or grade levels beyond the elementary level for which more mentions appear in the standards about Minnesota Native American tribes. I intentionally set limitations in order to narrow the scope of my research. It may have unintentionally altered the results of the data collection as well.

### **The Interview**

In my initial and subsequent communications with potential participants, I explained the focus of my study would include a single group interview in which I would offer a small number of open-ended questions about the Minnesota English Language Arts standards that specifically mention Minnesota Native American tribes. These questions were designed to focus the responses and structure the conversation. I explained that the group setting was meant to elicit conversation and discussion, while minimizing the amount of time and commitment I was asking from participants for the interviews.

I prepared a handout for each participant (Appendix Three) which listed the Minnesota English Language Arts standards being discussed. These included one from the second-grade standards, and two from the fourth-grade standards. This was meant to be used as a reference for interview participants during the interview. There was nothing else written on the paper.

I recorded the interview. I tried to avoid participating in the discussion, with the exception of asking the interview questions and providing clarification when needed. In

conversations before the formal interview began, the topic of Minnesota Social Studies standards came up. I explained that my focus was only on the English Language Arts standards that specifically mention Minnesota Native American tribes, and that at the second-grade level there are no Minnesota Social Studies standards that specifically mention the Minnesota tribes.

### **Coding Terms and Topics**

Prior to conducting the interview, it already occurred to me that it might be interesting to see how much of the interview directly focused on Minnesota Native American tribes, including the Ojibwe and Dakota. To that end, I anticipated using the names of the two tribes as coding terms for the tribes themselves, specific Minnesota reservations or Native communities, and possibly for specific individual members of either tribe. Outside of those two terms, however, I approached the process of hand-coding the interview transcript with an open mind. As I read and reread the responses, I tried to code items that directly addressed the topic of the project while allowing for unusual and unexpected ideas as well.

Besides coding for specific tribes, I noted every use of generic terminology for any or all Native American people. These terms included “Native American,” “Natives” or “Native,” “indigenous people,” “Indian,” “tribe” or “tribal,” “those people” and “others.” The ratio of generic terms to specific terms during the interview was sixty to three. Of the three specific mentions of Minnesota Native Americans by tribal name, the Ojibwe tribe came up zero times and the Dakota tribe was mentioned three times, though two times the term used was Lakota, which is a dialect variation more common in states and communities west of Minnesota (Lakota People, 2016).

In addition to identifying these specific and generalized terms, I coded for specific mentions of Minnesota English Language Arts standards, which came up only four times in teacher responses despite the recurrent mention in my questions and the prepared handout given to participants. Minnesota Social Studies standards, on the other hand, were mentioned or used as the basis of answers to interview questions eleven different times by various participants.

While coding, I chose some terms and concepts because they seemed to come up frequently, including forty-two mentions of specific cultures other than Ojibwe and Dakota, thirty-eight mentions of inadequate access to authentic resources for teaching about Minnesota Native American tribes, and fifty-five directly mentioned or indirectly suggested feelings of uncertainty regarding the topic. This indirect suggestion of uncertainty was sometimes implied based on hesitation or body language, and sometimes assumed because of lack of participation in the discussion. I minimized the number of times I coded for my own assumptions, except where I had some evidence or reason to believe that the respondent felt uncertain.

There were also several ideas for which I coded that were a little more vague. I noticed that the majority of responses that mentioned Native American people appeared to position them in a culture frozen at some point in the past. In response to various interview questions, teachers brought up the Lewis and Clark expedition, how Native Americans eat, what they call their houses, Native American cultures represented by museum artifacts, movies about cowboys and Indians, several books that are set in the past, historical accounts of political and social events, and several mentions of the traditional Thanksgiving story of Pilgrims and Native Americans sharing a feast. Some



of these responses hinted strongly at stereotypical thinking about Native American people. There were three times as many mentions of historical Native American culture and traditions than there were mentions of modern Native people and living cultures. It is quite possible that my own assumptions and biases played some role in identifying these types of occurrences. To the extent that I am able, I coded only for these ideas when my biases had a minimal influence.

Finally, there were some behavioral codes I used for such things as hesitation in speech where it seemed pertinent. Several respondents would frequently pause just before using terms like tribes, tribal, Native American or Indian, and then say the word with a questioning inflection. This would usually be met with nods or affirmative acknowledgement from others. Even when responding to a question with a clear and direct answer, several teachers usually added a quick question at the end, indicating a desire for the same sort of affirmative acknowledgement. These ending questions were most often “Right?” or body language such as raised eyebrows and a look around the table which would be met with nods or vocalized affirmation of some sort. Lack of participation, disagreement between what a participant said and what she or he actually seemed to be saying, answering a different question than the one being asked, expressing discomfort and a lack of confidence, and demonstrating an incomplete understanding were further behavioral codes. Instances of the last item included such things as contradicting oneself, answering in a way that did not apply to the question or topic, and directly expressing only a partial understanding.

## Conclusion

This research project was designed to identify second- and fourth-grade teachers' reported levels of comfort in teaching about Minnesota Native American tribes, and to help to improve upon the teaching, learning and resources being used to ensure that the Minnesota English Language Arts standard mentioning Minnesota Native American tribes is fully met.

In this study, the methodology and research context involved the use of qualitative interviews with second- and fourth-grade teachers answering open-ended questions about their approach to teaching the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, their reported levels of comfort with the topic, and the teachers' level of familiarity with the cultural aspects of the Dakota and Ojibwe people. The interviews consisted of a single group session with nine open-ended questions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and data was hand-coded to help identify themes, trends, and personal definitions and understandings of interview questions and terms.

Limitations of this study were the small number of participants, the relatively short interview, the small number of open-ended questions being used to generate discussion, and the need for analysis to include both spoken responses and researcher interpretations of unspoken ideas, misunderstandings and biases on the part of the teachers being interviewed.

I recorded the group interview, transcribed and included notes about participant body language, demeanor, inflection and non-participation. In chapter four, I discuss those results, identify themes and patterns, analyze the data, and discuss my biases that may have played a role in the data collection.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

It was striking during the interview that teachers did not seem to know which specific tribes, communities, and cultural traditions we were discussing. Lacking specific knowledge and experiences, teachers again and again fell back on vague and generalized ideas about Native Americans, and usually had them locked in the past or in a museum display. There was very little discussion of modern Dakota and Ojibwe people, contemporary issues in Native American life, or the complexities of living and fluid cultural bodies. In describing their experiences with educating students about the Minnesota English Language Arts standards that mention Minnesota Native American tribes, teachers both directly and indirectly demonstrated a lack of experience and confidence regarding the topic.

One theme that came out of interview participants' responses was teachers frequently expressing uncertainty with interpreting the standards, and feeling that they have had inadequate professional development around the topic and limited access to authentic resources and comprehensive curriculum. Another theme came as part of my analysis of observations of body language, avoidance of questions, and hesitation. Teachers appeared to be quite uncomfortable with the discussion of the topic.

I begin with an analysis of the data, including summaries of interviewee responses. Where appropriate, I include actual quotes from the interview participants, though to ensure anonymity of participants, school, and school district, I do not include the transcription of the interview in its entirety. The interview questions, however,

appear in Appendix One and throughout the following chapters. Where necessary, teachers participating in the interview will only be identified as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so on. No other identifying information will be included. In the end, I explain some of my own biases that affected the project, and I interpret and synthesize the collected data.

### **Data Analysis**

Within days of conducting the group interview, I transcribed the recording in its entirety, including all questions and responses. During the interview, I had made comments and observations about silences, as well as thoughts on participants' body language and responses. Where possible and appropriate, I included those observational comments and notes alongside the transcription of verbalized responses. Then I reread the transcription many times and hand-coded responses for the purpose of identifying emergent themes and patterns.

### **Themes and Patterns**

The themes and patterns that emerged are based on the research question: *How do second- and fourth-grade teachers describe their experiences of educating students about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, as prescribed in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards?* I include in this topic directly overt descriptions of competencies and uncertainties, indirectly implied or unexpressed reactions and feelings to teaching the topic, and hints and suggestions based on body language, interpreted understandings, and even hesitation and avoidance of answering particular questions.

A teacher discussion began following my first question, "What is your understanding of the intent of the English Language Arts standards that mention

Minnesota Native American tribes?” (Appendix One). While directly expressing their experiences, the teachers would usually use specific terms for the Minnesota Native American tribes, specific names of literature selections, and examples of closely related groups of people, communities, and cultural traditions. For example, during an exchange between teachers regarding the vague wording of the Minnesota English Language Arts standards mentioning Minnesota Native American tribes, Participant One stated, “I’m thinking, yeah, they just added it in. I mean, they could have been more specific. They could have said, the Dakota. It seems like it was just thrown on there.” That was, in fact, the only mention of a specific Minnesota tribe during the entire interview by any participant, though at other times teachers offered very clear and specific answers that did not specify the Minnesota tribes.

During that same exchange, several teachers began commenting on the pertinent standards and the fact that the skill of compare and contrast seems to always be based on the point of view of the dominant culture. In some cases, teachers would state alternative interpretations of the meaning of a standard. For example, when asked about the intent of the standards addressing Minnesota Native American tribes, Participant Two said, “To compare and contrast different Native American groups and their stories, right? Through literature like, um, well we read Lewis and Clark in our classroom and the Native Americans are brought up in there and they talk about the different groups that they run across. Right?” Participant Three jumped in and said, “Ah, talking about this though, I don’t think the goal is comparing-” The exchange continued. Participant Two: “You don’t think?” Participant Three: “No no no! The goal isn’t the history itself as the comparison. The skill rather than learning about the Native. That’s how I see

it.” During this exchange, other participants were agreeing or nodding along with both perspectives.

At times, different interviewees offered different ways to teach to meet a specific standard with regard to drawing out appropriate connections between one culture and another, or between the ethnicity of one people and another. There were many instances of teachers responding to interview questions by talking about the inadequacy of professional development opportunities and access to resources.

Examples of indirect responses came in multiple forms, usually while other teachers were responding verbally. Several of the teachers responded to only one or two questions, and then very briefly. Overall, their lack of responses suggested more about their experiences of educating students about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, than did their verbalized answers. I asked the question, “What are your successes with teaching to meet these standards?” (Appendix One). Of the five teachers, two responded. Participant One stated, “I can’t remember what district it was here but they had boxes you could check out with um...” Participant Two jumped in with, “And they have like a resource center where you can borrow their stuff, and they had a lot of Native American stuff. So just to have a place where you can check out, like, actual stuff, like artifacts and stuff that you can bring in and show the kids. Whereas opposed to just reading about it or something like that.” Of the other three teachers, none of them gave an answer to the question. At one point, Participant Two even called out other teachers by name, telling them to jump in, but they did not.

The topic of artifact trunks was raised again in response to a later discussion about the need to teach using appropriate and authentic information about Native

Americans. Participant Three stated, “Yeah. The only problem where would you find that, for real? Like, where would you find these opportunities? Cause um, like even talking about those boxes we’ve come and borrow, what they have in them? They have feathers and what? What else do they have?” I stated, “Moccasins. The little doll dressed up in a fringe vest. Books.” Participant Two said, “Dried corn bunches, I think sometimes. Pottery. Sometimes pottery and stuff.” Participant Three then responded, “How is that related currently to the Native American? Cause, I think a lot of times indigenous people were wherever they were threatened or eliminated in every culture they were locked, and we only think of them in term of like 200 years ago.”

Though there were quite a few moments of expressed discomfort with the topic, there were more indirect suggestions of discomfort, including awkward silences. There were two instances of one teacher beginning to express disagreement with what another teacher had just said, and being interrupted in mid-sentence, followed by a long period of non-participation from the interrupted teacher. This may have been based on the personalities of the participants, or possibly differences in the number of years of teaching experience participants have had.

There were quite a few sidesteps, in which I asked a question pertaining to Minnesota Native American tribes and the Minnesota English Language Arts standards, and then received replies about Aztecs, Chinese, and European culture, while the topic of Social Studies came up three times as often as English Language Arts. For example, I asked, “Regarding the Minnesota English Language Arts standards, which topics should be taught at your respective grade level and are there topics that should not be taught, with respect to Minnesota Native American tribes?” (Appendix One). Participant Two

answered, “Well, I think we have a pretty good standard for social studies for like teaching the kids about the Native American because they’re kind of their own little, they have their own laws, you know, living within the United States and stuff like that.” One teacher provided answers to the question that included Native Americans’ relationship with nature, differences of historical and modern context, and some ideas about the system of capitalism in the United States and the Native Americans’ role in it. Another teacher kept talking about social studies and the reasons we should teach students about Native Americans, and all references to Native American culture were based on historical perceptions of the people. At times, a respondent was making a valid and helpful connection between the question and another topic, but sometimes the answers did not seem to match the questions. In some cases, the frequent mention of inadequate training and resources seemed more to be an attempt to explain why that teacher could not or would not answer the question.

### **How the Results Respond to the Research Question**

During the interview and the coding afterwards, it became quite obvious that the teachers describe their experiences in both direct and indirect ways. Teachers responded to the open-ended interview questions in various ways, including these direct and indirect responses, as well as by suggestion and omission. The direct responses were generally easier to take at face value. Much of the indirect response data came from my interpretation of understandings, motivations, and body language, and thus, was likely more prone to error. Nevertheless, I tried to err on the conservative side by not ascribing too much of my own interpretation during the interview itself and the coding afterwards.



One of the most striking observations that came from the teachers' responses to the interview questions was that the teachers appeared not to know which tribes were part of Minnesota. In the aforementioned example, I asked "What is your understanding of the intent of the Minnesota English Language Arts standards that specifically mention teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes?" (Appendix One). The teacher's response was about comparing and contrasting different Native American tribes and their stories, and then the interviewee gave the example of Lewis and Clark and the different tribes they ran across in their expedition. Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery expedition did not enter the Minnesota area, and encountered many tribes, including among others the Shoshone, the Mandan, the Hidatsa, the Salish, the Nez Perce, and the Teton Lakota in the westernmost part of the Lakota homeland. They did not, however, come into contact with any of the Ojibwe and Dakota bands residing in what would become Minnesota (Lewis and Clark Expedition, 2016). Conversation between teachers then turned to books they use in their classrooms, though nobody mentioned a Minnesota tribe, an Ojibwe author, or a Dakota author specifically. The conversation at that point jumped to a number of different topics, including social studies, what teachers do for Black History month, multiple interpretations of what the standards in question might be asking students to do, and a critique of the insufficient wording in the standards that leaves teachers unsure of what to do to meet the expectations.

My next question was "What is your experience with teaching about the cultures of MN Native American tribes?" (Appendix One). Again, teacher responses indicated a lack of knowledge about which tribes are indigenous to Minnesota. One teacher spoke briefly about teaching a fifth grade project in a different school district using student-

selected tribes and culminating in a report on that tribe, but did not specify which tribes were included, and admitted doing nothing to meet the grade level standard at the present time. Other teachers spoke about having students study different regions of the United States and the traditional tribal cultures in the different regions. They also did not mention Ojibwe or Dakota by name, and stated that the unit was not specific to Minnesota.

The vast majority of responses that did not attempt to sidestep the questions entirely tended to answer specific questions by generalizing to all or any Native American groups. A few times, the generalization was appropriate and answered the question sufficiently. I asked the question, “Which topics related to meeting the English Language Arts standards that refer to Minnesota Native American tribes should not be taught at your grade level?” (Appendix One). Interviewee conversation began with addressing the bloody history of many Native American tribes’ interactions with the incoming Europeans and later the United States government. There was a little disagreement about whether the topic should be avoided at the elementary level or taught delicately by drawing out the discrepancies between different groups’ versions of the same history.

More often, the generalization indicated a lack of understanding of who the pertinent Native American groups are, what the groups are like in the present day and not frozen at an imagined idyllic moment of the past, and even what specifically the question was asking. The lack of responses and the hesitation about using some culturally sensitive words suggested a high level of uncertainty, even beyond the discomfort and uncertainty that was expressed outright. Several times, a teachers responded to questions

by saying that they did not know, did not know how to answer, or did not know how to meet the standard.

There were specific and clear answers to a couple interview questions as well. I asked, “What resources or training have you already received?” (Appendix One). All teachers responded by stating or agreeing that in the last year, each had received from the school district a small selection of grade-level appropriate books on historical and modern Native American topics, though nobody was exactly sure if they were about Minnesota Native American tribes. One teacher suggested that at least one of the stories was a Lakota legend. I also asked, “What resources or training would you like to have made available to you?” and “What would you like to have additional help with, in order to teach about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes?” (Appendix One). All of the conversation around those two questions was about the need for professional development, including training on how to use the Native American books, and finding authentic voices from the local Native American communities to help with advice, guidance, and professional development. A couple teachers suggested having better curriculum to help them know what to teach.

### **Interpretation of Data**

I could not even begin to interpret the research data without some examination of my own biases. My background, personal beliefs, and expectations all played a role in this project. Here, I attempt to interpret the data I collected with respect to the earlier Literature Review, and with full acknowledgement of my biases. At the end, I offer an explanatory synthesis of the data.

### **My Biases**

I am aware of holding some biases that could potentially affect the outcome of this research project. Prior to even beginning to look into the topic, I already held a belief that elementary teachers are not actually addressing the Minnesota English Language Arts standards that mention Minnesota Native American tribes with any real fidelity. This belief is experiential and anecdotal. Also, I have personal knowledge about the professional development training and resources provided by some school districts for their teaching staff to use, and that the resources are generally inadequate. However, because I am already expecting to find these things during the course of my research, I have made every attempt to allow the project to develop naturally and not to project my expectations on the outcomes.

That said, it has been difficult at times to know if I am actually seeing, hearing, and interpreting what I think I am, as opposed to perceiving to match my expectations. Even in the realm of collecting the raw data, the researcher necessarily makes choices and highlights one topic over another (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). I had already made choices about the topic, the scope of the study, the questions, the participants, and the setting, even before beginning to collect data. I certainly cannot separate who I am as a person from the process of doing this research. I have tried, though, to be consistently aware of my biases and the potential for skewing data.

### **Connections to Literature Review**

A primary consideration of educational standards is what the student will be able to do following instruction and learning. A point that arose during the interview was that even with the standards written down on paper, there was frequent disagreement between

participants regarding what they said, how they should be interpreted, and how one might go about teaching to meet that specific standard. In the interview, there were several moments of one respondent talking about the standard and another teacher interrupting to ask for further clarity or to say something along the lines of *I don't think it says what you think it does*. Though the standards are a good tool for guiding teachers and instructional choices, they do not always provide sufficient guidance to everyone. All three of the second- and fourth-grade Minnesota English Language Arts standards that mention Minnesota Native American tribes are based on the skill of compare and contrast. Though as interview participants observed repeatedly, the mention of the Minnesota Native American tribes seems to just be tacked onto a preexisting standard, and in their opinion, there is no real guidance for how one should compare and contrast with examples gleaned from another person's culture.

Montana's Indian Education for All (Recognition of American Indian Cultural Heritage, 1999 & 2015) made an attempt to provide more information for educators, by specifying which tribes were to be taught about and in a manner that was "culturally responsive" by intentionally involving various stakeholders in the decision making and implementation processes (Starnes, 2006, p. 187). Minnesota's English Language Arts standards still lack that level of specificity. As such, I could not tell for certain that any of the teachers interviewed for my research project knew which tribes are Minnesota Native American tribes and which are not. Again, it is probably difficult to compare and contrast if you do not know with whom or what you are comparing.

The intersection of Alaska's Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge (2000) and standards-based educational reform bring together direction for what to teach

and how to best accomplish the goals. Educators are not expected to have cultural knowledge without training, and are given relatively simple guidelines on how to respectfully address Native cultures. During my data collection interview, the topic of inadequate training and resources came up repeatedly. Several times, participants suggested consulting representative members of Native communities, talking with Minnesota Native American elders, and asking for professional development opportunities that not only addressed the issue of how to meet these standards, but that were conducted by members of the tribal communities themselves. There was frequent discussion during the interview about whether training and knowledge and resources were authentic or not. Authenticity seemed to be a key concern for the topic of educating students about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes.

Minnesota's educational standards are intended for all students, native and non-native alike. The content for elementary students should be considered more closely, as far as its use in building intercultural sensitivities, awareness and respect for alternative worldviews and ways of living, and the positive and negative roles of using stereotypes in society. Should these sorts of educational decisions be made by families, schools, teachers, school boards, cities, states, the federal government, or the individual? Perhaps that is a question for another research project.

### **Explanatory Synthesis of Data**

Do we want the student to be able to recognize an Indian if she sees a feather, or to understand why using Native caricatures and symbols as sports team mascots is not an honor for many Native Americans, and why many Native people feel a generalized distrust for the United States government and for law enforcement bodies, and why the

Dakota Access Pipeline controversy is not about our need for affordable and available oil in the present so much as it is about community, and stewardship of the land and natural resources, and doing what is right for our ancestors in the past and ourselves now and our children's grandchildren in the years to come? Simply put, to be successful, Minnesota educators would need to know who the Minnesota Native Americans are, and would need to feel that the educators are competent and confident in teaching students with respect to differences in both modern and historical communities and with cultural variations. One would not be expected to teach Physics without having some background, experience, and education in Physics. We cannot expect an educator to teach about another person's cultural paradigm without providing the training, experiences, and authentic resources necessary to make that teacher and those students successful.

In describing their experiences with educating students about the Minnesota English Language Arts standards that mention Minnesota Native American tribes, teachers both directly and indirectly demonstrated a lack of experience and confidence regarding the topic. That is no fault of teachers, of course. University education programs are charged with preparing pre-licensure teachers to meet the needs of their future students. School districts and school boards provide guidelines for educators, as well as professional development training and access to resources to ensure that standards and expectations can be properly met.

### **Summary**

The focus of the project was on how teachers describe their own experiences with teaching the Minnesota English Language Arts standards that mention Minnesota Native American tribes. Those descriptions ended up being clearly spoken at times, but also

implied by words and actions that indicated confusion, discomfort, and misunderstanding. Throughout both types of responses, the need for better training, access to authentic resources, and immersive cultural experiences came up again and again.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

#### Major Learning

The overall process of doing this capstone research project as the culmination of my MAEd degree has involved learning and growth that has occurred throughout my master's degree program, and also involved much that I learned as a pre-service education student, as well as in my ten years of professional life as an educator.

In the master's degree program at Hamline University, from the very first meeting of my first class, we were beginning to discuss possible areas of focus for the capstone, and what exactly one would need to do to fulfill the expectations of the Hamline University School of Education. More importantly, however, it was always stressed that the capstone must be something meaningful to me. Besides the amount of time and energy one must commit to the project, it required a burning question that would light the spark that would keep the fire fed over time. As an undergraduate education student, I was an English major. My Minnesota teaching licensure includes English Language Arts as a grades 5-8 concentration area. I felt from the beginning that I would focus on something about the Minnesota English Language Arts standards. As a person of mixed Ojibwe and Finnish ancestry, I feel that I have always straddled a cultural divide. The intersection of English Language Arts standards and cultural fluency was what drove me toward my capstone topic.

*How do second- and fourth-grade teachers describe their experiences of educating students about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, as prescribed in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards? As one of the only educators in my*

school district who is of Ojibwe ethnicity, I have often been approached as a resource for information, a voice from another perspective, and even as an expert on Native Americans. I am not. Nevertheless, the topic interests and excites me, and I am not so much interested in how other educators describe their experiences of teaching to meet these specific standards, but rather, what the analysis of their descriptions might suggest for further learning and growth. I am less interested in identifying gaps and shortcomings in other teachers' knowledge and experiences, and far more interested in looking at what might be needed to make all Minnesota students and all Minnesota educators more successful in this educational journey we share.

### **Possible Implications for Stakeholders**

Earlier, I explored some ideas about content for elementary students, including holistic/multidisciplinary educational approaches, ways to build intercultural sensitivity, worldview variations, the use of myths and stereotypes in education, and the concept of the double consciousness. These particular items were meant to be raised as an example of the complexity of deciding what and how to teach young people, in order to be successful in the world. It is not an easy question and the answer falls well outside the scope of this research project. The question, however, lends itself to some implications for stakeholders.

The most important stakeholder in all this is the young person being educated. As an elementary educator, I have Minnesota state standards guiding me. The English Language Arts standards at the elementary level represent the groundwork that needs to be laid for much more complex thinking and tasks which appear in standards for middle and high school students. Nevertheless, the standards are not curriculum and do

not specify *how* to teach the student to achieve the benchmark. In some cases, I have school district approved curricula in my classroom and the expectation is that my students are using it to learn what they are supposed to learn. Regarding the MN English Language Arts standards that address Minnesota Native American tribes, there is currently no comprehensive curriculum for the second- and fourth-grade teachers in this particular district to use with students. One shared Google document per grade level is currently under development, yet they remain in an unfinished state. These documents are the school district's attempt to write a unit plan about Minnesota Native American tribes.

I have beliefs and biases as a parent, as an educator, as a man, as an artist and poet, as a professional entrusted with the safety and development of many young people, and as a Finnish Ojibwe person from a poor background. Despite the standards and the curricula and my mixed heritage and everything, my driving belief in working with young people is that each child is a gift. More than anything else, I would like to help the child develop her or his ability to think creatively. Creativeness of thought might be a bias, but I think it is a positive one to build in children. I believe that comparing and contrasting Cinderella with Pocahontas could be a hollow and pointless activity, or it could be rich with depth and complexity. One is probably a waste of time and the other has the potential for benefits that reach out well beyond the daily lesson. One example of a richer experience could be to compare and contrast the stories being told about the Ojibwe, the Dakota and the citizens of the United States, and from multiple perspectives. The Ojibwe and Dakota nations were traditionally in frequent conflict over land and resources. There are stark differences between the ways the two tribes describe

themselves, and how they describe each other, particularly in older accounts. The perspective of the conquering United States government may present one perspective that is markedly different from that of the defeated and subjugated Minnesota Dakota and Ojibwe. This type of analysis helps the student build critical thinking skills that could help the young people to see beyond stereotypes, and to be intelligent, educated, and critical participants in social and political life as Minnesota and United States citizens.

It may be safe to say that people generally go into teaching because they want to teach. During the group interview with second- and fourth-grade teachers, there were quite a few overt and implied expressions of uncertainty and discomfort with teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, namely the Ojibwe and the Dakota. Most teachers I have met continually pursue professional development opportunities and further their education throughout their careers. It is just what teachers do. I think most educators would benefit from having better and more authentic training and access to resources to help them teach about the cultures of Ojibwe and Dakota people, in addition to other groups of people in Minnesota. I also think that students would benefit from their teachers learning more.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Following up on the reported need for professional development, to hear authentic voices from the Ojibwe and Dakota communities, and to have access to better resources, a great research project for future consideration would be to implement those things and to track the changes that happen over time. This could even involve a similar type of qualitative data collection: teacher interviews in which the educators report on their own experiences.

It would also be great to look closely at students and what they know and what they can do, in regards to the Minnesota English Language Arts and Social Studies standards that mention Minnesota Ojibwe and Dakota people, and then introduce a variable, such as an elder from a Dakota community, who would be able to come into the school setting, begin to build relationships, share cultural knowledge and experiences, and then the researcher collects data of changes over time: level of cultural sensitivities, ability to think creatively or with depth of feeling and empathy. So many possibilities!

One topic that came up repeatedly in the group interview session was the idea of contacting representative members of the Native cultures, both as an authentic voice to train teachers about the culture, and also to have a person on hand from whom to find out what the Native person wants us to know about them, and what the students should be taught about the specific Native culture. That would be another informative and helpful research project.

### **How to Communicate and Use the Results**

Hamline University will make this capstone available as an online digital file. I will summarize the results for the research participants, district administrators, and any other interested stakeholders. If anybody would like to read the entire project, I will make it available. The school district in which I teach has made great progress in recent years with providing resources and access to artifacts, and they have recently begun offering professional development opportunities to help educators meet student needs with regard to the Minnesota academic standards that specify teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes. Several colleagues and district administrators have expressed interest in my research results. Again, I will first provide a summary of the

project, the data, and the results. Following that initial communication, if anyone wants to delve into the entire capstone, they are more than welcome to read it. I will make it available.

The primary result of the research project was that second- and fourth-grade teachers both said and showed that they would like better professional development, better access to resources and artifacts, and to involve authentic voices and input from Dakota and Ojibwe community members. That would be a great place to begin! It is important for a school district to know that educational standards are the guide for what the student should be able to know and to do, but curriculum is the vehicle used in the classroom to get the student to that point.

### **Reflections**

“Hamline School of Education is committed to developing educators and leaders who Promote Equity in Schools and Society, Build Communities of Teachers and Learners, Construct Knowledge, and Practice Thoughtful Inquiry and Reflection” (History and Structure: School of Education, 2015). This is the conceptual framework for educators studying at Hamline University.

As an educator and as a researcher, the top goal for me is student success. I hold a belief that student growth and success improves the future for everyone in our communities. I may not always know the exact effect I have on my students over time, or on society as a whole, but faith in the importance of what I do in my work with young people drives me forward everyday.

I make mistakes in the classroom everyday. Rather than try to hide them, I actually highlight them and demonstrate for students that we are all teachers and all

students, that it is okay to make mistakes, and that we learn from each other. I do not want to give out knowledge or to teach students what to think. Ideally, I want to help them to think on their own, and in creative and critical ways. I love it when a student asks questions or offers insight. The complex social and cognitive webbing we build together and share is what makes us all stronger.

My research project focused on only a few specific items out of a very large range of standards, expectations for teaching, and requirements for me to play my role in student development. The more I practice thoughtful inquiry and reflection, the easier it gets to do my part for our children and our society.

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## APPENDIX ONE

### Teacher Interview Questions

- What is your understanding of the intent of the Minnesota English Language Arts standards that specifically mention teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes?
- What is your experience with teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes?
- What are your successes with teaching to meet these standards?
- What are the opportunities for expanding students' knowledge, understanding and skills related to Minnesota Native American tribes?
- Which topics related to meeting the English Language Arts standards that refer to Minnesota Native American tribes should be taught at your grade level?
- Which topics related to meeting the English Language Arts standards that refer to Minnesota Native American tribes should not be taught at your grade level?
- What resources or training have you already received?
- What resources or training would you like to have made available to you?
- What would you like to have additional help with, in order to teach about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes?

## **APPENDIX TWO**

### **Letter of Informed Consent**

#### **Requesting Permission of Adults to Take Part in Research**

November 6, 2016

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research with second- and fourth-grade teachers in the elementary school during November, 2016. The purpose of this letter is to request your participation. This research is public scholarship. The abstract and final product will be cataloged in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. It may be published or used in other ways.

The topic of my master's capstone (thesis) is the reported comfort level of second- and fourth-grade teachers in teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, as specified in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards. I plan to interview second- and fourth-grade teachers about their perspectives and experiences with these standards and the available resources. The interviews will be recorded and last about 30 minutes. The interview questions will be provided ahead of time.

Participation in the one group interview is voluntary, and, at any time, you may decline to be interviewed or to have your portion of the interview content deleted from the analysis without negative consequences.

I have received approval from the Hamline University Institutional Review Board and from the Director of Curriculum in the district in which the study was conducted.

There is little to no risk if you choose to be interviewed. All results will be strictly confidential and anonymous. No identifying names for the school and participants will be used. The interviews will be conducted at a place and time that are convenient for you. The interview recording and transcript will be destroyed after completion of my study. The results of my study might be included in an article in a professional journal or a session at a professional conference. In all cases, your identity and participation in this study will be confidential.

If you agree to participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return it to my office mailbox or copy the form in an email to me no later than \_\_\_\_\_. If you have any questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

James D. Autio

### **Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Interview**

(Keep this full page for your records.)

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be interviewing second- and fourth- grade teachers related to their comfort level in teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, as specified in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards. I understand that being interviewed poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the interview portion of the project at any time without negative consequences.

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Signature

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Date

**Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Interview**

(Return this page to James D. Autio.)

I have received the letter about your research study for which you will be interviewing second- and fourth- grade teachers related to their comfort level in teaching about the cultures of Minnesota Native American tribes, as specified in the Minnesota English Language Arts standards. I understand that being interviewed poses little to no risk for me, that my identity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the interview portion of the project at any time without negative consequences.

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Signature

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Date



### APPENDIX THREE

Minnesota English Language Arts standards specifically addressing Minnesota Native American tribes:

- 2.1.9.9 Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story (e.g., Cinderella stories) by different authors or from different cultures, including those by or about Minnesota American Indians.
- 4.1.9.9 Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures, including American Indian.
- 4.2.6.6 Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account, including those by or about Minnesota American Indians, of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided.