Conclusions and Commentary

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In a special workshop titled, "Improving Academic Performance among American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian Students," held in Santa Fe, NM, in March 2005, an update on current research and practice specific to Native American students was solicited from several researchers and educators in the United States. The workshop offered pertinent presentations and discussions that addressed three major questions. First, what are the major educational challenges facing Native American people especially in relation to culture and language, and what solutions have been identified to address these challenges? Second, what other challenges need to be considered, and what research-based approaches are the most appropriate for improving academic performance of Native American students? Third, what are the implications for changing current practice, especially in the classroom, that lead to increased academic success for Native American students? Similarly, participants were asked to discuss the implications of health, social, and psychological issues, whether there are specific instructional and/or interpersonal approaches that might optimally be used to enhance the development of Native American students, and what practices might be used to enhance academic performance and social and cultural maturity. Finally, participants were asked to consider research approaches and methods and their potential implications. At a follow-up meeting held in Washington DC in August 2005, and via email for those who could not attend, additional input was sought on the topics and recommendations that were drawn from the Santa Fe participants.

This paper, in keeping with this thematic issue of the *Journal of American Indian Education,* presents the major issues and current challenges to addressing the above-stated issues. While there is overlap, we have done our best to tease apart the practice and research components, but view them as necessarily integrated. Neither the research nor the practice community can accomplish what is needed without working cooperatively and collaboratively with each other and with the Native American communities whose children are the subject of these discussions.

Major Issues and Challenges

Colloquium participants identified several major issues that must be addressed, if we are to move forward in research and practice to achieve a quality education for Native American students in U.S. schools. There were three general areas offered for discussion. First, how Native American students are viewed and how they view themselves in the classroom, the community and society. This is crucial if we are to keep students in school, and constructively engage them from

Kindergarten through High School graduation. Second, capacity building at all levels is a challenge that continues to plague education systems and schools that educate Native American students. The symposium participants indicated that capacity must include teachers, administrators, and support for teachers. Teacher capacity relies on teacher quality, and must encompass both the number of highly qualified teachers graduating from institutions of higher education with the skills and knowledge to be effective in the classroom, and on-going teacher professional development and retention. Administrators require knowledge and experience with education systems reform that is inclusive of Native American students and their specific perspectives and needs. Overall support was defined as a priority in the context of building sustained capacity. Support for teachers is needed in the form of professionally developed aides and paraprofessionals, targeted resources, infrastructure and the systemic reorganization of schools based on student results that incorporates a consciousness of Native American issues and concerns. And all who work with Native students must possess or develop cultural competence[4] in order to optimize the educational process. Third, we must quickly translate research findings into practices that enable teachers to use current knowledge to alter the academic lives of Native American students. It is imperative that the community find ways to disseminate the information about "what works" to teachers and other key educators in order to implement researched practices in the classroom and community setting.

Students First

It is clear after analyzing the discussions that took place during the symposium that both research and practice must include additional and current theories of optimal Native student education. These theories must acknowledge the necessity of motivation and its links to achievement in the Native American student. A sense of self and the placement of self in the community, along with a strong personal identity, are established indicators that assist Native American students to succeed in the education environment. In addition, teachers and administrators must be aware of and sensitive to the concept of (and can avoid working from) a deficit model that views students as the problem in educational failure or mediocrity. The Standards Based Reform movement, codified by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (PL 107-110), requires that systems change to meet the needs of all students in a school setting. There has been a significant national focus on the education system and its need to change. However, this national discourse has not effectively included the specific articulated needs, cultural characteristics and language requirements of Native American students. It was noted that examples of this oversight are prevalent in language education approaches. Both Native language and English language development and their application to understanding core academic content in reading and math were identified by several researchers as challenges that must be addressed for Native American students to succeed in the classroom. Many of the Native schools are either teaching English to non-Native speakers of English or teaching native

English-speakers tribal languages without a thorough understanding of the instructional approach necessary to reach the desired linguistic and academic goals of the students. For this reason, several programs with innovative practices are highlighted in this issue, and what data are currently available on their successes, are provided. As programs attempt to meet the needs of Native students, incorporating evaluation plans and tracking student progress in a formal way are key to knowing which practices hold greatest promise, under what conditions. This also highlights the importance of collaborations among educators in the field and researchers.

Providing targeted resources to the students who need additional support in either language acquisition or academic content achievement is a challenge that needs to be addressed carefully and with expressed sensitivity to the student, family and community. How to provide needed services to students identified as "at risk," without assigning a label that will follow the student throughout his or her academic career, plagues many of the even most well-intended programs and service providers. Indeed, this is a challenge for all classrooms, not just those which serve Native students. But it is crucial that, as we seek and find solutions for these challenges, Native students be included.

Additional challenges discussed by many focused on the fact that Native American students are over-represented in special education programs; at the same time, there is an under-identification of those students who do have special needs (for example, for such problems as learning disability or emotional disturbance, (U.S. Department of Education, 1999) and are not appropriately assessed and placed in either classrooms or programs that meet the specific needs of Native students with special needs. Workshop participants discussed the importance of developing a specific research focus in the area of enhanced assessments and effective methods and instructional tools for the accurate identification and appropriate placement of special needs students. Such tools and methods must integrate an understanding of language and culture, and their impact on students with special education needs. Further, discussion acknowledged the limited resources for service provision for special needs students (both with disabilities and special gifts or talents), especially those who are in small, under-funded schools and districts and need appropriate accommodations for instruction and/or assessment. Creative approaches both to increase the resources where possible and to more efficiently use those available are needed.

A unique feature of primary importance to Native American communities that is especially relevant to education and the implementation of accountability systems is governance and control. Building educational institutions and systems that are congruent with the daily lives of the students and the communities in which they live has been and continues to be a profound concern that requires special consideration when communities and schools are in the throes of school reform and change. Historically, there has been a disconnect between schools and Native communities, so that what is meant by "local control" may not actually involve Native families and communities in a manner that addresses the needs

of the students or their families and communities in which they live. Often, schools, state, and federal governments may have different goals or different instantiations or interpretations of goals from those of the local Native communities. This disconnect can and does often isolate the student from the community and the community from the school. This isolation has often produced a sense of disenfranchisement as it seems to prepare students for life in the broader world, but not necessarily for life and leadership within their home communities. A positive approach to overcome historical oversight or insensitivity could include an aligned educational system with consistent goals and strategies from pre-K through university that includes elders and community leaders on local boards and in the decision-making process. This approach would assist in confronting and hopefully resolving legal issues that must be considered, which may often limit the integration of initiatives that include culture in education and even may hamper the creativity and innovation so vital to economic success.

Capacity

The concept of changing or reforming a system must include the capability for the institution to sustain change over time. In the case of institutional change in education, volumes have been written about the key elements that must be present for change to stabilize and become the foundation of the institution or the norm (Demmert & Bell, 1991; Woods, 2005). In many successful projects that have been researched as "best practices," capacity building is nearly always mentioned as a fundamental element that must be considered and established for continued reform (Cotton, 1991; Woods, 2002). It has been well documented in articles and several research projects and observational studies (Demmert & Bell, 1991; Demmert, Towner & Grissmer, 2006) that building capacity to sustain positive change in education that addresses specific issues for high academic achievement for Native American students is a must. The following discussion catalogues the areas discussed by the workshop participants as critical components to institutionalize change in an education reform movement in Native American communities nationwide.

First and foremost, we must develop professional teacher capacity that meets the required definition of Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT), as written in the No Child Left Behind Act (PL 107-110, Title II). Current statistics indicate that the majority of our most qualified and experienced teachers will retire in the next five years (American Association for Employment in Education, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002.) Research also states that students who do not have a HQT three years consecutively fall behind in classroom studies and never reach grade level academic proficiency (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996.) These students are identified as most at risk and tend to drop out of the system before completing High School graduation. Thus, certification and verification of competency levels of all teachers, administrators and paraprofessionals in the educational system is vital for student success. Professional preparation and development, certification, supervision,

recruitment, and retention of teachers are central to educational success in any school. In addition, all of these issues—background education and ongoing development, recruitment, and retention—are important for higher level administrators, as well as for classroom aides to assist teachers and students. Reaching a higher level of professional development requires not only a solid grounding in effective instructional methods and approaches in general, but also, as part of the development of cultural competence, an understanding of the role culture plays in learning, and an appreciation of Native languages and the growing priority among Native communities for the survival of Native languages. Schools should be encouraged to increase the use of Native language and cultural experts as primary teachers where certified teachers meeting these qualifications are available; where they are not, the use of individuals with expertise in Native languages and culture should be employed as support mentors in classroom.

While we must directly address teacher core competency and teacher training overall, we must also work to increase the number of well-trained Native teachers and to develop a greater depth of knowledge of native culture in all teachers. Currently there is a relatively low number of Native teachers; these individuals can be anticipated to more deeply understand the culture and can serve as role models for students. In addition, the Native community is concerned that teachers from other ethnic and racial backgrounds may have lower expectations of Native students, which can lead to lower self-confidence among students and diminished student results. There is a continuing need for culturally appropriate teaching methods and materials that incorporate the knowledge and wisdom of elders in the community. Further, the use of Native language and culturally based curricula as a basic approach in schools serving specific communities, a priority for many Native communities, will require restructuring of and innovations not currently practiced, both in the organization of schools and in teacher training and professional development (Woods, 2005). Finally, appropriate resources are needed for teachers and for teacher training.

Capacity also includes the physical and organizational infrastructure of schools. There are limited numbers of preschools available to Native communities. In addition, the organizational structures of traditional public schools may not be conducive to the more community-based problem solving approaches that some Native schools have used to motivate students in content areas (such as science learning) through applying what they learn to, for example, students working with a tribal council or local community on real problems e.g., studying the negative impact of a dam built upon a reservation—one that has negatively impacted the ability to grow crops, and having the class create a set of recommendations for the tribe or community to consider once the class has carefully analyzed the problems and explored a variety of solutions.

Translating Research to Practice
The third topic identified as an issue of elevated importance to the Native American education community is expediently translating research to practice.

A comprehensive system must be developed nationwide to ensure that teachers use effective practices and current research-based information in the classroom, while allowing for promising innovations. Literature reviews and syntheses, of both quantitative and qualitative literature, to determine not only what research findings on Native American students exist can serve both to identify additional research needs and to offer evidence of effective or promising practices for use in the classroom. One such review is offered in the forthcoming research thematic issue of this journal (Demmert, Towner & Grissmer, 2006); more are needed. Research findings must inform not only practice but also policy, so that there can be an alignment between state and national standards and local student, family and community goals. This can enhance what is learned and implemented from monitoring student academic results, which can provide not only measures of accountability but also guides to tailoring instruction to student needs. One caution should be noted here regarding student assessment and monitoring for both accountability and the targeting of student learning needs: assessments must be linguistically and culturally appropriate. As current and ongoing research on assessment occurs, the rapid but careful translation to practice will be essential to meet the need for such measures.

Solutions

While the needs and challenges are large, and clearly additional, ongoing research on all of these topics is needed, there were some suggestions for potential solutions developed in the discussions that took place both in Santa Fe and in Washington. They are grouped to correspond as well as possible to the challenges outlined above.

Students

Native communities feel that Native American students should be taught within a context that values and promotes multiculturalism; this should include use in the schools of the knowledge and cultural practices of the local communities (Demmert & Towner, 2003). Related to this is the status of bilingualism in education, since language and culture are intricately linked. Workshop participants commented that there has not been a clear and consistent message about bilingual education in the United States, yet attitudes toward bilingualism can positively or negatively affect motivation and sense of self in teachers, students, and the community. The inclusion of Native or heritage language instruction is consistent with current federal legislation; schools may make every effort to take full advantage of the flexibility allowed with the No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act reauthorization to implement high quality, effective yet culturally appropriate educational programs (Whitehouse, 2004).

Another major area from which solutions should emanate is family and community involvement. Students self-identity depends at least in part on their own links to family and community values, goals, and the respect with which

they, their family, and their community are treated. This relates to local control, in that, if schools are welcoming places where parents and families can bring their own expectations and goals, and share these with teachers and school administrators, a more unified set of goals can be developed that address community needs as well as the schools' requirements for accountability. In addition, family and community can serve as a resource to infuse curriculum materials with information about the culture and the wisdom of elders in the community. While all of the programs outlined in this special issue incorporate such information, the curriculum by Hurtado and Constantino is actually being used with both Native and non-Native classrooms throughout the state of Washington to teach students about Native culture (Constantino & Hurtado, 2006).

Participants emphasized the importance of allowing for variation in what constitutes success or failure on a local level, linking this to educational goals of the state, district, school and community. In addition, there must be room for different educational trajectories. For example, at the high school level it is not unusual to have Native students drop out for a period, perhaps to perform some responsibilities within the community or meet some personal cultural goals, and then re-enter the educational system. Therefore, allowing for such periods of absence and facilitating re-entry is important to maximize educational opportunity for Native American students.

Capacity

Professional preparation and development must include both content knowledge and instructional methods, but specifically for Native American students it may also require a basic understanding of the connections between traditional practice and informed contemporary thought and research. It was suggested by workshop participants that some things that would help to accomplish this would be to identify teachers who have learned their language and culture in the community vs. in the classroom, and to link them with teachers with mainly classroom or academic learning of Native languages and culture. This could enhance the cultural knowledge and competence of all teachers. In addition, it is critical that schools and communities develop and promote efforts to identify potential teachers within communities who have Native language abilities and deep knowledge of the Native culture, perhaps exploring the development of innovative approaches to teacher accreditation for Native schools. Where certified teachers with Native language ability and cultural knowledge are not available, those with such expertise might be employed as support mentors to work in classrooms with the teachers. This could serve as an incentive to those individuals to gain the additional educational credentials to become classroom teachers, and could in the interim serve to assist both teachers and students. In addition, it might be helpful to examine past programs that worked and replicate or draw from them for new ones (e.g., Teacher Corps, or Canada's creation of a new college for teacher preparation that takes into account the social and economic constraints

of those who would otherwise be good teacher candidates). The recruitment and retention issues might also be addressed through providing incentives to encourage well-qualified teachers to go to or stay in rural areas. Finally, in conjunction with researchers, teachers and administrators should develop, test and implement ongoing professional development that is based on and incorporates attention to effective practices and to student and teacher needs.

It is important that there be some exploration of whether state and federal policy can be aligned with the unique expectations, requirements, and goals of Native-based education, and how states and federal entities can collaboratively support tribal community priorities and practices (Demmert & Towner, 2003). There is a clear need to involve the family and the entire community as integral in the education process; it was suggested that the community, in a close partnership with the school, might serve as the center of this involvement. Outcomes of activities that are community-centered might not be same as those that result from western-structured schools, but could be no less valuable educationally. A new kind of "extended family" may be in order—one that includes all of the partners.

Among workshop participants, there was a call for more and better preschools, with parent education and involvement and with high sensitivity to community, culture and language as priorities. Such programs should incorporate what is known from research about similar programs for other groups of children, and be adapted to be culturally appropriate to Native children and communities. For language revitalization programs, the preschool component of the Näwahï Hawaiian Laboratory School (Wilson, Kamana & Rawlins, 2006) might serve as a model. Assistance in developing and financing preschools might be sought through local public school programs, local service club organizations, or through special tribal initiatives.

Involvement of parents, family, and community leaders can ultimately help to address teacher capacity in two ways. There may be more Native students motivated to return to their communities as teachers, thus increasing the number of Native teachers. In addition, as non-Native teachers learn more about and become more involved with the families and communities in which their students live, their view of the students' abilities and potential and their attitude toward the culture and community in general should become increasingly positive. The innovative programs described in this issue indeed seem to demonstrate each of these.

Translating Research to Practice

Translating research to practice is not simple, and not strictly unidirectional. Rather, it is iterative, in that research that leads to practice can also be informed by practice. The next cycle of research can examine innovations in practice, or go more deeply into the *how* and *why* of an effective practice, if that practice is studied in varying contexts of implementation. Schools that have developed successful, innovative programs should share and publicize that information, but they should also evaluate those programs. Researchers and practitioners should

work together to gather, analyze, and disseminate information on high-performing programs involving Native students, and should work to develop and test programs that are effective without being prescriptive in ways that are not culturally appropriate for Native students.

Participants recommended the development of a central resource center for materials for Native students and teachers. This could be a repository web site of research projects and reports, thus encompassing research findings and their applications. In addition, it will be important to identify, describe and study programs which are actually closing the achievement gap for Native American students, and share that information broadly, perhaps through such a central repository or group. Similarly, it will be important to recognize programs that are increasing the gap for Native students, and implement changes rapidly in such cases, using available research information where available and using promising practices that have been identified when research information is not available. Centralized technical support could be instrumental in such efforts.

Research that informs practice need not be limited to this country. Information from international counterparts on how educational research and practices are proceeding among indigenous peoples or culturally distinct populations in other parts of the world, how they were developed and how and why they are successful, can offer both findings which may be applicable to U.S. classrooms as well as policies that may serve to inform our own. They may offer ideas that might be tried in U.S. classrooms. Always, with new practices that are used "experimentally," data should be gathered during their implementation in order to monitor whether they are working, and under what circumstances they appear to be effective. To do this, schools should examine existing approaches to program evaluation and incorporate evaluation in the planning and implementation of any new (or existing but unevaluated) programs. The fruits of any such program evaluations should be shared broadly, via a central clearinghouse or through publications. This underlines the importance of the communication and collaboration among practitioners and researchers, as researchers can be instrumental in assisting in designing, conducting and analyzing data from such evaluations.

Education is generally culture-based; that is, schools reflect the cultures of those in authority, often ignoring the language and cultural requirements of minorities, especially for colonized peoples. The issues concerning this issue are which culture or cultures should predominate and who makes those decisions. In the face of globalization, pluralism or multi-cultural approaches may be necessary in schools with representatives from different communities in attendance, and should be a consideration for all educators. Available research on all educational programs should be considered and incorporated where appropriate and feasible in education practices. Educators at all levels in all roles—teachers, administrators, aides, and researchers—must confront racism and stereotypes, training students of all cultures to bridge between communities and cultures, to be bi- or multicultural.

Summary and Commentary

The major issues, challenges and solutions that ran through the entire meeting in Santa Fe, the follow-up meeting in Washington, and that clearly are highlighted in the papers within this thematic issue of the *Journal of American Indian Education,* are those that should be thematic in any high quality educational setting. First, there are some specific themes that, while they may vary according to local contexts, are nevertheless themes that pertain to each local setting: retention of the different tribal/ Native languages is often an important priority; the use of Native speakers and historians is important to insure quality and accuracy of information and language instruction; the development of cultural competence among all who work with Native students must underlie the entire educational process; the monitoring of student progress must utilize instruments that are linguistically, culturally, and academically appropriate (i.e. are aligned with curriculum content), and that are used appropriately to monitor student progress and to guide adjustments in skill development, in pedagogy and in the curriculum, where needed.

There also were broader, overarching themes. We must be sensitive to student needs, and attempt to make the education that we offer students not only rigorous and but also meaningful, related to their lives both in and outside of school. To do this, we must ensure or increase the involvement of family and community, find ways to incorporate generational knowledge into the educational process, and find ways to ensure respect for tradition and integration of education with the real world and daily lives of students. We also must ensure that schools have the capacity to deliver high quality education, that they have not only the buildings, the materials and the systemic organization for integrated programs from preschool through high school, but also enough well-trained, culturally knowledgeable and adept teachers to deliver that education. And that education must be based on culturally appropriate approaches: educators and administrators must understand and incorporate both local tribal and community interests and those priorities necessary in the current educational environment, i.e. those academic requirements so necessary in the broader society and international community. Finally, we must be able to use what we know, to translate research into practice, and to continually enable teachers to make use of new information as it is developed. All of this will require collaboration, coordination, and constant and informed communication. It will also require the will to make all of these things happen, and that must exist across disciplines, across communities, and across cultures.

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Endnotes

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[2] The opinions and assertions herein are those of the author and do not purport to represent the policies or official position of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institutes of Health, or the Department of Health and Human Services.

[3] The opinions and assertions herein are those of the author and do not purport to represent the policies or official position of the Office of English Language Acquisition or the Department of Education.

[4] Cultural competence is used here as defined by Cross, Bazron, Dennis and Isaacs (1989), and as cited on the website of the National Center for Cultural Competence, at http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/nccc/framework.html#lc. The definition is paraphrased as follows: Cross Cultural Competences is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period, in which individuals and organizations develop a defined set of values and principles, demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally, value diversity, conduct self-assessment, acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge, and adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the individuals and communities they serve, incorporating these actions in all aspects of policy making, administration, practice, and service delivery and systematically involving consumers, key stakeholders and communities.

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