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**HISTORY OF NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION  
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

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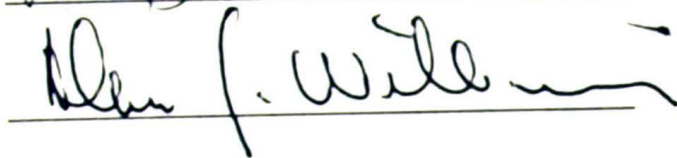
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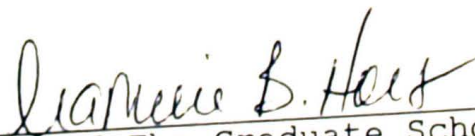


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HISTORY OF NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION  
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A Field Study  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay state University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Education Specialist

by  
David J. McNeal  
August 1996

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to express sincere appreciation for the encouragement of my wife, Sandy, without whom the successful completion of this research would not have been accomplished.

## ABSTRACT

This historical study examined Native American education programs created by the colonial and United States government. These programs, either official or unofficial, have been attempting to educate Native American children since the first European stepped on the North American continent.

The research was concentrated on programs developed by the Colonial government and the United States government. The results of the research are very conclusive. Most of the government programs developed to educate the Native American students have failed because of the lack of understanding of the Native American culture and traditions. As a result of over-regulation of education for Native American students, the government did more damage than good for the Native Americans within the United States.

The research also concluded that recent government policy changes concerning the education of Native Americans seems to be effective. Tribal autonomy and control, parental involvement, and incorporation of Native American culture, traditions and language into the regular school curriculum seems to be creating positive educational results for Native American students.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Education for the Native American child is not a new phenomena that has occurred only since the first white men discovered the America's. There has always been some form of education for Native American children since the beginning of time. The Native American child started his education at birth and was originally the responsibility of the family (Szasz, 1988).

Some Native American tribes had certain expectations of a person before they were considered adults. In many Native American cultures the men were not considered warriors until they earned the title by proving themselves in battle. In other Native American cultures a boy was not considered a man and allowed to marry until he was a proficient hunter. The girls were not allowed to marry or considered women until they were able to take care of a family (Pettitt, 1946). Each tribe or culture had different educational requirements for the children before they were considered adults. All of the Native American cultures were consistent in their educational objectives. The men had to learn to be hunters and warriors and the women took care of the families and in some cultures even planted food to supplement the mean in their diets (Reyhner, 1988). All of the tribes



created a system that allowed them to exist for thousands of years.

When the first "white men" appeared in North America, the Native American flourished and it is estimated that there were approximately two and a half million Native Americans living in North and South America (National Geographic, 1985). However, within 50 years of the initial contact more than half of all Native Americans were killed by diseases brought to this continent by Europeans.

The first western culture education attempted for the Native Americans was religious in nature. The European explorers felt that the Native Americans needed to be converted to Christianity. This was done by force in most cases. Additionally, the Europeans either forced the Native Americans to give up their land, leave their homeland, or be subjected to extermination or slavery (Pettitt, 1946). The failures of the priest to adequately convert or educate Native Americans frustrated many European leaders. Most of the European countries decided to colonize America and also to colonize the Native American students.

After several hundred years of constantly fighting with the Native Americans for their land, it was decided that creating treaties and leaving the Native Americans alone might be the best solution. This solution only lasted until more land was needed by European settlers. By the late

eighteenth century, it became obvious that the Native Americans must become educated to understand the western culture (Reyhner, 1992). All of the colonies attempted to create legislation that would assist in the education of the Native American. The pattern of education for Native American students was basically the same in all of the American colonies (Szasz, 1988). Native American children were offered the opportunity to be educated in institutional educational settings. The students would be taken from their village to a boarding school. The students were only taught western cultural education values such as reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Some Native American students learned the educational values being taught to them but most of the Native American students who were sent to educational institutions ended up failing or running away. The students did not understand how educational values such as reading and writing would help them survive on a day to day basis.

The educational objectives of the early educators of Native American students were not relative to the students and this simple fact is the basis for all Native American education problems that still exist to this day (King, 1967). There were successes for some Native American students. Sammuel Occum and Joseph Brant were two Native American students who mastered all of the educational



objectives created for them (Szasz, 1985). They both became great teachers of the Oneida, Tuscarora, and Iroquois tribes. Educators such as the Reverend Wheeler proved that Native American students could learn the educational values of the western culture but their success was rare and not felt by most educators of the Native American student.

### Significance of Study

Native Americans have been the overlooked minority in the United States due to their low population and regional isolation. Prior to the civil rights movement of the 1960's, most Native American students had been educated in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools and sent to boarding schools which were located far from their home or reservation (Finkelstein, 1985). This trend continued as a state government policy in Alaska until 1985. In 1985 the Molly Hootch law case was tried and because of the case the State of Alaska had to build and operate a K-12 public school in every village in the State of Alaska. This law created a major shift in the educational opportunities that were available to Native American students. After 1985 all of the tribes in the State of Alaska were given autonomy to decide if their children would be educated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs or if their school would be owned and operated by their local public school district. All of the villages chose to have the local school district provide



education to their children. Traditionally, the Bureau of Indian Affairs had been responsible for the education of Native Americans in all of the states.

During the 1960's the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of Interior came under public scrutiny. High rates of alcoholism, incarceration, unemployment, suicide and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome among the Native Americans stirred public awareness that demanded change (Senese, 1985).

This study will investigate the history of U. S. government educational policies dealing with Native Americans. It will trace the destructive education policies that were implemented by the United States government and how these policies had a direct effect on the failures of Native American students.

#### Statement of Hypothesis

For the purpose of this study, the following research objective and question were proposed:

1. The objective of this study is to identify historical government programs created specifically for Native American students and to identify the negative results of these programs.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In recent years a specific emphasis has been placed on the education of Native Americans by the federal government. It has become evident that many Native American cultures are being lost due to the overall impact upon Native Americans by a dominant western anglo-saxon culture. It is of no surprise to historians that Native American cultures are being lost due to the fact that as each generation of children is born they are being assimilated more and more into the dominant anglo-saxon culture.

#### Colonial Government Policies Concerning Education of Native Americans

When Columbus landed in the America's the first attempts to educate the Native American began. The earliest formal education for Native Americans was attempted by missionaries. Religion was the main curriculum and the reading of the Bible was the emphasis (Fuchs & Havighurst, 1972). The results of this type of education were failure or virtual slavery for the Native Americans.

When the missionaries could not educate the Native Americans as though they were Europeans, then the missionaries decided vocational work would be the best way to assimilate the Native Americans into the European culture (Fletcher, 1985). For almost 150 years the established

church in each colony took it upon themselves to educate the Native Americans. In 1619 the first attempt to educate Native Americans by governmental policy was established. The same year colonists of James City requested that a college be created and one of the policies created by the government for the college was that they educate the brightest Native American children in the area of communication skills (Eder & Ryhner, 1989).

In research conducted by Eder and Reyhner (1989) it was concluded that the early history of Native American education in all of the colonies followed a basic pattern. Church schools would be started and education in church doctrine was the emphasis. After a few years of failure the church would give up and the local colonial government would take over the education of the Native Americans. This occurred many times during the Colonial period. Usually within a short period of time it would become evident that the Native Americans did not wish to be educated in the ways of the colonist and the schools would eventually close (Jennings, 1971).

This trend occurred again and again throughout the colonies. Virginia was the first colony to try to establish colonial government policies that dealt directly with the education of Native Americans within the colony. In 1620 a school was established for the Opechaneough Indians in



Virginia. In 1621 the East Indian school was also established, however, due to an Indian uprising in 1622, the education of the Native Americans in Virginia was stopped for several years (U. S. Office of Education, 1885).

In 1693, William and Mary College was established and one teacher was hired to teach Native American students. The students were either sent by their tribes or forced to attend the college by the colonial government. This philosophy of forcing Native Americans to learn the ways of the colonist was very detrimental to the trust needed to accept the academic instruction being presented by colonial educators (Robinson, 1952).

Virginia was not the only colony to establish schools for Native Americans. According to Whiteman (1986) a school for Native Americans was established in Georgia by James Oglethorpe in 1713. In 1734 the Reverend John Wheellock established an Indians school in Pennsylvania. All of the colonies eventually established some type of educational services for the Native Americans. In a study completed by Deloria (1990) all attempts made at educating Native American students before the American Revolution failed because of the lack of understanding by the colonist of the Native American cultures. However, these attempts at education were the beginning of the end for the Native Americans and their cultures in North America.

According to Delgado-Gaitian (1991) the Native Americans in the Eastern United States crossed the cultural barrier in ways that seemed acceptable to the citizens of the colonies. However, the Native Americans in the Western United States have not had as much time to assimilate into the western culture and therefore, even today, there are many problems concerning self-identification and understanding the western culture that inhibit the education process of Native American students. In a study completed by Reyhner and Eder (1988), the Native Americans in the Eastern United States had been predominately subdued by the time the American Revolution began. This had a direct effect on the view of the Native Americans by the Continental Congress.

#### United States Governmental Policies Concerning Education of Native Americans

The first United States governmental support for education of the Native Americans was in 1776 when the Continental Congress authorized and funded Native American schools in Delaware villages due to the Delaware Indian's support of the Continental Army. According to Fuchs and Havighurst (1983) the United States government started supporting Native American education due to the need for the support of the Native American tribes in the Eastern United States during the Revolutionary War. The United States



government first mentioned support of Native American education in 1781 by authorizing payment to Princeton College for the admission of three Delaware students into the college that year (U.S. Office of Education, 1885).

Since the United States government was formed after the American Revolution there have been many treaties between Native American tribes and the United States government. In some of the treaties education was offered but not in all of the early treaties. The first treaty providing education to a Native American tribe was made between the United States government and the Oneida, Tuscarora, and Stockbridge tribes. These tribes sent warriors to fight on the side of the Continental Army; and for this support the United States government created a treaty after the war that awarded these tribes land, tribal autonomy and guaranteed education for their children. In 1803 the second treaty providing for education of Native American children was made with the Kaskaskis tribe. The United States government agreed to provide \$100 towards the support of a teacher for this tribe. These were exceptions to most of the treaties signed by the United States government between 1781 and 1818 (Quain, 1937). According to Quain (1937) most of the early treaties only dealt with the purchase of land. These treaties were very simple in nature and only dealt with money and land.



In 1818 the House Committee on Indian Affairs completed a report to the Congress concerning the state of affairs between the United States government and Native American tribes. The committee reported that in their opinion, education of the Native Americans should have top priority and that if education of the Native American was not accomplished, then the problems of the past, due to poor communication, a lack of understanding for the Native American cultures would continue to persist.

This report did change the way the government viewed the problems of the Native Americans for assimilation into the American culture. By 1823, there were 21 Native American schools in the United States. All of these schools were being partially supported by the federal government. The total expenditure for these schools in 1823 was \$13,033.00 (United States Office of Education, 1885). The education in these schools consisted of the boys being taught to read, write, and compute mathematical problems. the girls were taught some academics, but their main educational emphasis was to learn spinning, sewing, and weaving.

For the first 50 years after the American Revolution, Native Americans in the eastern United States enjoyed a time of tolerance by the American public. However, by the 1830's the Native Americans in the southern United States had been

removed from most of their lands and the treaties being forced upon them by the United States government were unreasonable and unfair. The plight of the Cherokee tribe was a classic example of how changes in the political climate also changes peoples tolerance of minorities and their rights. Once Andrew Jackson became President of the United States, the fate of the tribes in the southern United States was sealed. The Cherokee's were forced to leave their homeland in Tennessee and Georgia and were force marched to the Oklahoma territory. An estimated 4,000 Cherokees died during the march (Knepler, 1943). This forced removal sent shock waves through all of the Native American tribes in the United States. The Cherokees had adopted the ways of the "white culture." They had developed their own written language and built hospitals and schools. They owned their own land and even owned slaves. These facts had no bearing because the Cherokees were still Native Americans and the United States government wanted their land and took it under less than honorable conditions (Adams, 1971).

The United States government slowly started to establish policies in the late 1800's that have effected the education of Native American students to the present. In 1882 the United States Congress funded the first off-reservation boarding school. In 1889 the Dawes Act was



passed by the United States Congress. This act gave the Bureau of Indian Affairs the funding to establish boarding schools wherever they wanted; and it established the laws dictating to Native Americans that their children had to attend these schools if a day school was not available near their home. This act was disastrous for the Native Americans. By 1900 there were only 5,000 Indian children attending day schools and an additional 17,000 were attending off-reservation boarding schools (Szasz, 1985). The Dawes Act was not very kind to the Native Americans within the United States.

The Dawes Act tried to complete the trend of assimilation that had started nearly 300 years before but instead of assimilation came destruction of the Native Americans. By 1920 the policy of assimilation had resulted in disastrous conditions for the Indian people. The Dawes Act destroyed the connection to the land that the Native American child was raised to know and respect. The reservations were known for their disease, starvation, and the short life expectancy of the Native Americans who lived on the reservation.

In the 1920's public pressure to correct these problems caused Congress to demand a report on the conditions of the Native Americans in the United States. This report became known as the Merian Report (Finkelstein, 1985). The Merian



Report made official what had been known by the Native Americans for decades. The boarding schools were revealed as overcrowded, under staffed, under funded, and basically detrimental to the health and well being of the children forced to attend these schools. Although this report made an official accounting of the problems with boarding schools, the only real change was a slight increase in the amount of food that was sent to the boarding schools (Szasz, 1985).

In 1928 there were 77 boarding schools in the United States for Native American students. By 1941 there were only 41 boarding schools. As of 1992 there were only 26 boarding schools being operated and maintained by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (White House Conference on Indian Education, 1992). Since the end of World War II there have been many changes in the ways Native American students are educated. As of 1992, 85% of all Native American students were educated in public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). These public schools are located near their homes on their reservations. More attention has been given to the individual students tribal identity and cultural awareness.

Government policy since the end of World War II has been to promote education of the Native Americans as a whole. There is no mention of assimilation in today's

Bureau of Indian Affairs Education Policy Manuals. Even though Native American culture and language has been offered in the public schools, the bulk of the academic subjects taught in all schools is still based on the philosophies and culture of the western anglo-saxon ideals and society (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### Statement of Hypothesis

For the purpose of this study, the following research objective has been investigated.

1. The objective of this study was to identify historical government programs created specifically for Native American students and to identify the negative results of these programs.

#### Materials

Historical data were obtained from United States government publications, Bureau of Indian Affairs Statistics, various books, and journal articles.

#### Procedure

The author researched historical materials related to government programs that were created for Native American students and the educational results of these policies.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Analysis of Data

The data presented in this field study shows a pattern of destruction of the Native American culture by the United States government disguised as education of the Native American child. Since Columbus landed in North America the Native Americans have lost most of their land, culture, language, and tribal identity. Recent educational patterns exhibit a change in the way Native American children are educated. These changes include offering native American children the opportunity to learn their Native language in public school and many public school curriculums also include studies concerned with the local Native American culture, history, and art. However, the major change in government policy concerning Native American students is the allowance of the tribal government and the parent's direct voice in how their children will be educated. These trends have been accepted by both public schools and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools.

#### Statistical Presentation

Evidence regarding the objective of the study can be enumerated as follows:

1. Early efforts at educating Native Americans focused on cultural replacement which was rejected (Fuchs & Havighurst, 1972; Fletcher, 1985).

2. The rejection of Native American culture by the church and the government set the stage for Native American rejection of programs and policies out of context and hence failure (Jennings, 1971).

3. Issues other than educational such as greed for land, open conflict leading to war and feelings of superiority on the part of whites overcame any progress which might have been achieved (Knepler, 1943; Adams, 1971; & U. S. Office of Education, 1885).

4. The history of education in all cultures indicates that success does not occur apart from the culture and seldom in forced relationships. Only in recent history have these lessons been put into practice for Native Americans (U. S. Office of Education, 1885, Szasz, 1985; & Finkelstein, 1985).

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND SUMMARY

#### Interpretation of Data

In the author's opinion, a true interpretation of the data cannot be obtained because of the difference in time between the policy of assimilation which was encouraged for over three hundred years and the current policy of tribal autonomy which has only been encouraged for the past 50 years. A preliminary interpretation of the data would ascertain that the policy of tribal autonomy and giving Native American parents a direct voice in how their children will be educated is reversing the patterns of the past. The life expectancy of Native Americans has risen drastically over the past 50 years, and the total number of Native Americans living within the United States has doubled since the 1930 census. Interpretation of educational data shows a positive pattern by comparing the percentage of Native American students who graduated from high school 50 years ago and the percentage who graduated in 1994. There seems to be an overall improvement of education for the Native American students over the past 50 years.

#### Instructional Implication of the Data

The data seems to imply that more research is needed concerning Native American students and effective teaching strategies. Less government intervention rather than more



also seems to be advantageous for the Native American student. Involvement of tribal government, parents, and Native elders in the education process also seems to yield positive educational results for the Native American student.

### Summary

The Native American has endured many injustices over the past 400 years. the destruction of their culture, language, and tribal identity under the guise of education of their children is, in this author's opinion, the worst of all injustices. Over the past 50 years many improvements have been made in the way Native American children are educated. Tribal autonomy and parent involvement seem to be the best methods of changing the educational process for the Native American child.

More research is needed to determine why Native American students are under-identified as gifted and over-identified as handicapped. The historical research shows that government programs of the past were vastly inappropriate for Native American students; and that less government control of Native American students has proven to be effective in changing the way these children view education.

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