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Article abstract

Indigenous health research should reflect the needs and benefits of the participants and their community as well as academic and practitioner interests. The research relationship can be viewed as co-constructed by researchers, participants, and communities, but this nature often goes unrecognized because it is confined by the limits of Western epistemology. Dominant Western knowledge systems assume an objective reality or truth that does not support multiple or subjective realities, especially knowledge in which culture or context is important, such as in Indigenous ways of knowing. Alternatives and critiques of the current academic system of research could come from Native conceptualizations and philosophies, such as Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous protocols, which are increasingly becoming more prominent both Native and non-Native societies. This paper contains a narrative account by an Indigenous researcher of her personal experience of the significant events of her doctoral research, which examined the narratives of Native Canadian counselors' understanding of traditional and contemporary mental health and healing. As a result of this narrative, it is understood that research with Indigenous communities requires a different paradigm than has been historically offered by academic researchers. Research methodologies employed in Native contexts must come from Indigenous values and philosophies for a number of important reasons and with consequences that impact both the practice of research itself and the general validity of research results. In conclusion, Indigenous ways of knowing can form a new basis for understanding contemporary health research with Indigenous peoples and contribute to the evolution of Indigenous academics and research methodologies in both Western academic and Native community contexts.

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If We Show Them Will They Come? Attitudes of Native American Youth Towards Higher Education

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Introduction

Graduation with a university degree is rarer among Native Americans than any other student group in the US (Kidwell, 1994; Reddy, 1993 as cited in Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001). As Ponterotto (1990) points out, the college graduation rate among these students is highly disproportionate to their numbers in the general population. The literature is rife with documentation that, while most Native American students opt to study at tribal colleges; a significant number do not. The research makes it clear that those who choose non-tribal institutions face a myriad of institutional barriers to their success such as unsupportive institutional climates, inadequate academic preparation, and few Indian role models. The matriculation of Native American students at the host university where the authors conducted this research is about as rare as what is revealed in the literature overall for Native American students.

Texas is one of eleven states in the US with a population of greater than 100,000 Native Americans. Native Americans and Alaska Natives make up .7% of the total population of Texas and represent 25 tribes, 3 of which are federally recognized. About 8,300 American Indians and Alaska Natives were added to Texas' population between July 1, 2006, and July 1, 2007. That is the largest numeric increase of any state (US Census

Abstract

Indigenous health research should reflect the needs and benefits of the participants and their community as well as academic and practitioner interests. The research relationship can be viewed as co-constructed by researchers, participants, and communities, but this nature often goes unrecognized because it is confined by the limits of Western epistemology. Dominant Western knowledge systems assume an objective reality or truth that does not support multiple or subjective realities, especially knowledge in which culture or context is important, such as in Indigenous ways of knowing. Alternatives and critiques of the current academic system of research could come from Native conceptualizations and philosophies, such as Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous protocols, which are increasingly becoming more prominent both Native and non-Native societies. This paper contains a narrative account by an Indigenous researcher of her personal experience of the significant events of her doctoral research, which examined the narratives of Native Canadian counselors' understanding of traditional and contemporary mental health and healing. As a result of this narrative, it is understood that research with Indigenous communities requires a different paradigm than has been historically offered by academic researchers. Research methodologies employed in Native contexts must come from Indigenous values and philosophies for a number of important reasons and with consequences that impact both the practice of research itself and the general validity of research results. In conclusion, Indigenous ways of knowing can form a new basis for understanding contemporary health research with Indigenous peoples and contribute to the evolution of Indigenous academics and research methodologies in both Western academic and Native community contexts.

Bureau, 2008). Yet, there is no tribal college in Texas; the nearest are in Oklahoma and New Mexico (US Department of Education, 2006). These circumstances make a compelling case for universities in Texas to consider the dire impact on the future of Native American youth.

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Literature Review

Theoretical Perspectives

This study is based on risk/resiliency theory and Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy theory. Although the researchers explored different theories related to indigenous youth and higher education, Bandura's (1986) theory was selected as the conceptual framework for the study. Briefly, the underlying thought in self-efficacy theory is that, unless people believe their actions can produce desired outcomes they have little incentive to pursue a particular direction and to persevere in the face of challenges. Risk-resiliency theory considers variations in response to risk and the prevention of harm through protection. According to Hawkins, Catalano and Associates (1992) risk/resiliency theory is based on the premise that, to prevent a problem, we must first know what risk factors increase the chance of the problem's occurrence. We must then identify ways (e.g. protective factors) to reduce the risks. Both risk and protective factors can occur at the individual, family, or community level.

Native American Youth: A Population At Risk

Native Americans are an at-risk population. They are not only at risk of failure to pursue higher education, but approximately 75% of those who enter college drop out before graduation (Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; Wells, 1997, as cited in Saggio, 2001). This is not surprising given the historically strained relationship between Native Americans and European Americans in which the latter have sought to "civilize" and "assimilate" Native Americans by whatever means necessary (Woodcock & Alawiye, 2001). Despite repeated Congressional action to end discrimination and level the educational arena for Native Americans, as recently as 1991 a report by the US Secretary of Education indicated that:

Many Native students still attend schools with 'an unfriendly school climate that fails to promote appropriate academic, social, cultural and spiritual development among many Native students. Such schools also tended to exhibit a Eurocentric curriculum and "overt and subtle racism." These factors contributed to Native students having the highest high school drop-out rate (36%) of any minority group in the United States. (Reyhner, 1994, np).

Reports on higher education (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 2001; Minner, Bizardi, Arthur, Chischille, Holiday, Pyron, Rezzonico, & Yellowhair, 1995; Montgomery, Miville, Winterowd, Jeffries & Baysden, 2000) are similar in finding that persistent barriers to access, retention and graduation inhibit Native American students. Other educational risk factors for Native Americans include inadequate preparation for college,

poor adjustment to the college environment, personal and family problems, lack of transportation, low self-esteem, no cultural diversity on campus, education is not a cultural priority but the tribe is pushing educational achievement, self-sufficiency and financial difficulties (Minner, S., Bizardi, Arthur, Chischille, Holiday, Pyron, Rezzonico, & Yellowhair, 1995; Wells, 1997).

In recent years, tribal leaders recognize higher education as an asset for the tribe encouraging youth to pursue higher education (Larry Williams, personal communication, January 23, 2007). They see the value of a cybernetic system in which knowledge and skills learned in the educational process can be reinvested into the tribe for the future.

Native Americans are also resilient

Despite attacks on their identity and assaults on their culture, Native Americans embrace their distinction consciously and unconsciously. This is true both within and between tribes and serves as a protective factor.

As Native American people we inherit an innate sensibility about the world that originated far back in our ancestral past. That consciousness, that psychology if you will, developed separately and apart from the experience of other peoples who were not indigenous to the land. It is a worldview that is inherent in Native American tribal traditions, most of which were handed down orally in the tribal languages (Horse, 2005, 61).

Horse (2005) explains that tribes are sovereign nations in which their governments are the sole authority that can determine who is, or is not, a member, or citizen, of a given tribal nation. This sovereignty is vested in the tribe as a whole, not in individuals; sense of community is strong. It is common to first identify with one's tribal affiliation and secondarily as an American Indian.

Finally, protective factors identified in the literature (Wells, 1997) to promote student success include pre-collegiate programs, organized tutoring, developmental courses, Native American counselors, Native American content courses, Native American Student organizations, distance education programs, intern and mentor programs, liaison with tribal officials for scholarship procedures/ admissions, American Indian advisors and increased financial aid.

Increasing Community Capacity through Asset-Building

The local tribes, as well as the host university, have strengths and assets on which to build to promote success in higher education for Native Americans and increase cultural competence across the University. As Kretzman and McKnight (1993) point out, the key to successfully building capacity in a community comes from locating

all the available local assets and then connecting them with one another in ways that multiply power and effectiveness. This involves building relationships among locals; mobilizing the community's assets; convening a broadly representative group to build a community vision and plan; and leveraging activities, investments and resources from outside the community to support asset-based, locally defined development. Among the tribal assets to harness for the proposed project are the protective factors noted above. Others will be revealed through this collaborative research. The host University Strategic Plan calls for ensuring that educational support programs are in place to help students succeed and making cultural diversity an integral part of the educational experience (SFA, 2003). The university also has a Multicultural Center and a history of successful, though discrete, involvement with nearby tribes. A key asset within the university is the School of Social Work that is recognized as a leader in rural research and scholarship and it reflects the diversity of the community. The workshop and research was conducted by faculty members from the School of Social Work. As social work educators in a rural context the authors were motivated to empower the workshop participants and guide them towards exploring higher education as an option.

Research Methodology

With grounding in self-efficacy and risk/resiliency theories and the knowledge of the bleak future that the Native American youth of Texas have regarding higher education, the hypothesis of this study evolved: If Native American youth can see themselves succeeding in a day-long program of motivational activities on the university campus, it can possibly enhance their perception of themselves as more likely to attend university following high-school graduation.

The host university is within 160 miles of two reservations with combined populations of 2,000 tribal members. Pre-study interviews and the literature made a compelling case for examining whether partnerships between the university and local tribes can garner support for Native American students' success in Texas while simultaneously strengthening cultural competence among faculty and non-Native American students. It is hypothesized that the identification of risks that impede both can be overcome by uniting the protective factors within each through sustainable partnerships in which solutions can be found to promote higher educational success for these Texas youth. Through these partnerships, the host university can be an island of hope for Native American students in Texas. In turn, those students and their tribes can bring knowledge of their culture to the university. Among leaders in efforts to strengthen

tribal communities, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Boyer, 2000) believes that initiatives are more about collaboration than imposing requirements. Likewise, this study assumes that Native Americans should create their own vision and that together, through collaboration, we can take the next step to discover solutions, access resources to reach and sustain that vision in exchange for knowledge to create a more culturally competent curriculum and university environment

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore whether an educational workshop related to higher education would change the knowledge and attitudes of Native-American youths. This article provides information on the first step in the Participatory Action Process only. The study was based on the following specific objectives:

- The design and development of a workshop aimed to empower youths towards higher education
- Pre-testing of the attitudes of Native- American youths as it relates to higher education
- Post-testing of the attitudes of Native- American youths as it relates to higher education

Description of changes in knowledge and attitudes of Native-American youths when exposed to a workshop on higher education

Research Design

The research was exploratory and descriptive in nature. The study was guided by an open-ended question (typically a grand tour question in the PAR process). The question was:

"In what way can an educational workshop related to higher education change the knowledge and attitudes of Native-American youth?" A pre-test post-test design was selected in order to effectively measure the changes that took place during the workshop. The main purpose of the workshop was to motivate Native American students to explore higher education opportunities. De Vos (2002) and Rubin and Babbie (2008) stress the importance of using the pre-test post-test design as a way to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes and perceptions. This quantitative study was rooted in a larger participatory action research project (PAR). Participatory action provides an opportunity for researchers and research participants to work in a research team and to engage in collaborative research. The purpose of PAR is to allow research participants to become involved in all aspects of the research process. The PAR model is used with indigenous cultures as a method to enhance participation by all people involved in the project. Different researchers

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such as Lunt, Fouche & Yates (2008) and Roestenburg & Oliphant (2005) working with indigenous cultures report on the successful implementation of PAR in countries such as Canada, South-Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) emphasized the importance of issues such as respect and responsibility when working with indigenous youth and higher education. The PAR provides an excellent opportunity to develop mutual respect between researcher, research participants and community members. It enhances the responsibility of the research participants (PAR team) to participate in the planning and implementation of the project. The effective use of PAR implies that the research participants, in this case a Native-American community in Texas, became part of the research team. Members of the community gave input in the design and presentation of the workshop.

The workshop was designed based on the specific needs of Native-American Youths to learn more about higher education opportunities. The workshop “If we show them will they come?” was attended by 28 youths from a Native-American reservation in Texas. There were 14 boys and 14 girls in the group. The youths were all in high school. They were accompanied by three adult tribal members and everyone participated in the activities. The workshop included the following activities:

- Welcome Reception by the School of Social Work
- Introductions to Current Students, Faculty, and Staff of the University Multicultural Center
- Career Testing
- Lunch in the University Cafeteria
- Rock Climbing at the University Recreational Center
- Orientation by the Office of Administration
- A campus Tour Including Residence Halls
- Discussion and Question Sessions

Data Collection

An instrument was developed to pre-test and post-test knowledge about higher education, self-knowledge related to necessary skills to enter higher education and general perceptions related to higher education. The instrument gathered specific demographic data such as age, gender, current grade and family history related to higher education. Although the workshop was presented at a specific university, the instrument also focused on general knowledge about higher education. The instrument consisted of 17 items and a rating format was used. In order to enhance consistency the same instrument was used in the pre-test and post-test. The instrument was developed through the PAR process. Items were identified

by exploring relevant literature. The researchers and leaders from the specific community formulated the items based on the specific objectives of the workshop.

Instrument

Pre-Post Questionnaire Number ____

Welcome to Stephen F Austin State University (SFA). We hope you will enjoy the day with us. Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.

Tell us about yourself:

I am ____ years old

I am in Grade ____

I am a girl/boy (Circle)

I have other family members who went to university – yes/no (circle), If so who _____

Did that person graduate? _____

I live on the reservation/off the reservation (Circle)

I live at _____ (address)

The name of my school is _____

I like _____

One day I want to become a _____

Key to questionnaire:

☺ **Yes**

☹ **No**

☺ **Do not know**

① What I know about the university...

a. I know what career opportunities the university offers	☺	☹	☺
b. I am aware of the variety of activities offered at the university (such as sports, music, spiritual, theater, etc.)	☺	☹	☺
c. I know what skills are needed to go to university	☺	☹	☺
d. I know what career I am best suited for	☺	☹	☺
e. The university offers more than just preparation for a career	☺	☹	☺
f. The university is a university that welcomes students from diverse backgrounds	☺	☹	☺

g. The university has resources which will help me succeed	☺	☹	☺
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② What I think about going to university...

a. I know what kind of work I want to do when I grow up	☺	☹	☺
b. I would like to go to university after completing high school	☺	☹	☺
c. I am currently making plans to go to university	☺	☹	☺
d. Going to university will help me to have a good life	☺	☹	☺
e. If I go to university I will learn more about the world	☺	☹	☺
f. If I go to university I can make many friends	☺	☹	☺
g. Having a university education will give me many opportunities in life that I might otherwise not have	☺	☹	☺
h. Going to university will help me reach my goals in life	☺	☹	☺
i. I know I have the resources to go to university	☺	☹	☺
j. I worry that I will not be able to "make it" when I go to university	☺	☹	☺

Thanks! You are a Star!

Data Analysis and Results

A descriptive statistical analysis was carried out in order to measure the changes in attitudes about higher education. The results indicated some increases in knowledge related to higher education. In general the workshop also changed some attitudes of participants. The sample was however very small and the researchers could not determine the significance of the differences. The results are only descriptive. The following results were meaningful:

Although the workshop did not specifically provide information about education and career opportunities, the participants indicated a knowledge change as it relates to career opportunities. The pre-test showed a 20% positive response and the post-test showed a 65% positive response to this specific item [*I know what career opportunities the university offers*].

There was a change in knowledge about the variety of activities offered at the university. In the pre-test 90% indicated that they are aware of the activities. In the post test 98% indicated that they are aware of activities offered by the university. Although this is a small change, it is

considered important in relation to the purpose of the workshop.

A change was also observed in the participants' knowledge about skills needed to go to university. Before the workshop 25% indicated they knew what skills are needed to go to university. After the workshop 52% indicated they knew what skills are needed.

The item on selecting a suitable career showed the most change. The pre-test indicated that only 25% knew what career suited them best. The post-test showed that 75% knew what career suited them after the workshop. Since career testing was one of the main activities this increase was anticipated.

Interestingly there was a change related to the diverse environment of the university. 90% of the participants in the pre-test indicated that this university welcomes students from a diverse context. The response changed to 95%.

In the responses to the university having resources which will help them, there was a change. 30% indicated that they did not know, 40% indicated that they were aware of the responses and 30% indicated that they did not know. After the workshop, 20% indicated they did not know, while 70% indicated they were aware of the resources and 10% indicated they still did not know.

In terms of university as a choice after high school, the post test showed that 60% indicated that they wanted to go to university, while 40% were undecided. The item on plans did not show a change and this is probably related to the fact that it is a question which focuses on pre-conditions. 35% indicated that they were making plans to go to university, while 40% were undecided and 25% indicated they were not making plans. Interestingly the workshop contributed to insight development on the value of university to quality of life. The item [*Going to university will help me to have a good life*] reflected a pre-test response of 70% who did not know. After the workshop 55% indicated that they think university will contribute to a better life;

The pre-and post test responses on university's contribution to a better understanding of the world showed little difference. In the pre-test 70% indicated that they will learn more about the world, while 30% indicated they do not know. The post-test showed a change to 75% with 25% still undecided.

After the completion of the workshop there was a 25% increase in participants who felt they will have more friends when they go to university. Of these 25% there were equal numbers of boys and girls.

In the pre-test, 35% participants did not know if a university education will give them many opportunities in life, 15% said no and 50% indicated that it will make

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a difference. There was a change in the post-test when 80% indicated that it will make a difference, 15% did not know and 5% indicated it will not make a difference. Interestingly, 80% of participants responded that going to university will help them towards reaching their goal and 20% indicated they did not know. Although this was a high response rate in the pre-test, the post-test was even higher. 90% indicated that going to university will help them reach their goal.

On the pre-test most participants indicated that they did not know if they have the resources to go to university (75%). Only 10% indicated that they did have the responses. This did not change after the workshop. It may imply that the question and specifically the concept “resources” is not clear.

Although 75% participants indicated they worry about making it at university, this number showed a decrease after the workshop. Only 40% indicated that they still think they cannot make it when they go to university.

The response to knowing what work they want to do when growing up showed no change. 80% indicated they knew what they wanted to do, 20% did not know. This item was probably confusing because there was an option of “no” and “I did not know”. The latter two were calculated in combination.

The following table provides a summary of the results.

Table 1: Student Knowledge Enhancement (Pre- and Post-test)

N=28

ITEM	Before Workshop Pre-test	After Workshop Post-test
Students who have knowledge about what a higher education institution offers	20%	65%
Students who know what skills are needed to attend a higher education institution	25%	75%
Students who know what career suits them best	25%	75%
Students who know what kinds of resources are available at higher education institution	40%	70%
Students who believe that higher education will make a difference in their lives	50%	80%

It is clear that the workshop enabled students to develop a better understanding of what higher education offers. In addition it enabled them to develop self-

knowledge related to their career plans. Taking Bandura’s (1986) self-efficacy theory into consideration, it is important to develop knowledge as part of visualizing outcomes. The results provided evidence that knowledge changes took place and it is anticipated that such enhancement could impact attitudes.

Study Limitations

Clearly this study is exploratory. The small sample size and purposive sampling make it unlikely that the results can be generalized to other places and times. Due to the small sample, the data was only used in a descriptive manner. The researchers could not apply more than basic descriptive techniques due to the fact that there were only 28 research participants. This type of study should be repeated on a continuous basis and the PAR team is planning more in-depth studies with a larger number of participants. The study is quantitative in nature and it would be valuable to add a qualitative section. By using qualitative methodology the authors will be able to collect in-depth information about the realities the Native American youth are experiencing.

In addition Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a lengthy and time-consuming process. This specific project needs to be implemented over a period of time (at least 5 years) before all members of the research team will see change.

Conclusions and Implications for Social Work

The literature paints a bleak picture for the future of Native American youth, not only in Texas but across the US, where higher education is concerned.

Multicultural education builds on the development of a comprehensive knowledge base related to different cultures. By using the PAR methodology to engage in research and community development, social work educators and researchers can contribute to the existing knowledge base. It is important to repeat this workshop on an annual basis and to implement more in-depth studies related to the impact of this project. Effective follow-up will enable the researchers and PAR team to determine the role of the project in choices related to higher education. It is clear from literature that this knowledge base should be expanded in order to effectively address the realities Native American youths are facing.

In considering social work practice, it is important to train Native Americans to become social workers. This will empower the community and provide the necessary services to Native Americans. However this specific project is more than training social workers. It is focused on empowering Native American youth and enhancing

their capacity towards higher education in general.

Social workers, more than any other professionals, have professional and ethical mandates to promote social and economic justice for this population at-risk. If we accept as true Bandura's assertion, that Native American youth must believe they can succeed in universities before they can experience success, we must create an environment where they envision themselves as winners. Social work educators must identify risks that inhibit their success and capitalize on cultural, economic, environmental, and educational factors that promote their success. Finally it is of utmost importance to listen to their voices to decipher solutions.

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