

A Native American Perspective on Curriculum

By: Alana Stone (Rosebud Sioux)

“The Native American child has a need to have their history, heritage, language, and culture valued and appreciated at all levels of education.”

- Bendtro, L. K., Brokenleg, M., & Bockern

One of the most crucial issues affecting Native America today is the curriculum being taught in our public school system. There is a trickle-down effect that exists from the lack of information being provided to our children in schools. This effect is ignorance and misguided information about Native Americans living in America today. Ignorance and this misguided information have led to racism and stereotypes. By working toward the educational goal of improving the curriculum in the public school system will help Native Americans to feel more respected and will help to diffuse racism, injustices and stereotypes.

My educational goal is to obtain my doctorate in History with a concentration in Native American history and Indian studies. My professional goal is to use my education to become a professor of History at the collegiate level. In addition to working at a University, I would like to help implement new history books in the public school system in the United States to include more in-depth and correct history about Native Americans. I would also like to introduce curriculum about the modern day Native American and how we live today.

Over the last couple of Centuries, the Native population has increased exponentially. But with this increase comes great weariness. "...as population increases, Native American languages and cultures are being lost, partly as a result of federal and state education policies over most of the last two centuries that called for the "Americanization" of Indian students." (cited: http://www2.nau.edu/jar/AIE/Ind_Ed.html). This Americanization has not only affected Native Americans but it affects all American people with the exclusion of correct Native American history being taught in schools. Many Native Americans live in metropolitan areas or off the reservation, subjecting them to an education system not structured for the urban native. So, not only are these urban natives losing their identities by living away from their tribal communities but they are a forgotten culture in comparison to the all the other ethnic groups that are given a larger and more in-depth scope of their histories in schools. For example, while I was in middle school in Lincoln, Nebraska, we spent a week and a half on Native American history. During that time, my fellow students asked questions such as, "Are Native Americans still alive?" and "Do they still live in tipis?" I was horribly shocked by this. The history provided did not give a good understanding of the hardships that Native Americans have gone through when America was settled by the Europeans. Then in comparison, when my class began studying the African Americans, we spent weeks, even a whole month, on the hardships they went through to live in this country.

The lessons focused on how African Americans were abused, lived in harsh conditions, and enslaved. Native Americans experienced some of the very same hardships such as

being uprooted from our homelands, our people being killed and sometimes being sold like a piece of furniture.

Stereotypes, of who Native Americans are, plague our youth. It is difficult growing up, period. But to be faced with negative stereotypes, half truths and just out right lies about who we are make it even more difficult. Native American children are faced with dual identities and living in two worlds. I believe we live in one world, we must learn to bridge the two and be responsible for who we are in this world. We need to be given the tools as children to become these responsible adults to face adversity such as racism. This becomes more difficult when most of the general public has been misinformed and believe they are neither ignorant nor racist. They quote their history books and history teachers. These are verifiable sources of information that they have been provided by trusted individuals such as their parents and teachers. We need to change these sources, correct them and therefore change our future. And hopefully, give one less difficult hurdle for our children to overcome.

“... they want to regain their Native identities, including their languages and traditions that historically were suppressed in schools. By recovering the past through a strong sense of identity and by using culturally appropriate curriculum and instruction, some Indian and Alaska Native students are achieving educational success that heretofore proved elusive.” (cited: http://www2.nau.edu/jar/AIE/Ind_Ed.html)

Some public schools have already begun the process of adapting a new curriculum to include more history about Native Americans. The information is vast and so diverse that it cannot simply be condensed to one chapter nor can it include all the 565 Federally recognized tribes in the United States. Every state and local school should be given the

opportunity to explore local tribal community histories. Native American people need to be more responsible in this process by becoming actively involved with the schools in the decision making process. There should be an emphasis on local tribes to include the language, music and arts of the region, and perhaps a discussion of cultural beliefs that would be relevant when meeting another Native person, such as shaking hands or looking someone in the eye.

Living on the Reservation means that you are surrounded by family, friends, and culture all the time. Living in an urbanized area means that you are surrounded by friends, maybe some family, and other religions and ethnic groups. You start to slowly see that other people do different things than you. They don't know what sweat lodges are, they don't understand what a Reservation is and they don't understand why you think that war hooping is offensive. Surrounding yourself with friends doesn't always mean they are going to understand what you've gone through in life. They might think that their lives have been hard. But when you are taken from one place and one culture and put into another, it changes you, maybe into a better person, and maybe not. You have to be able to tell the difference. Increasing my education and going to college means that I have an opportunity to open doors for myself; to become the history professor that I've always wanted to be. I will not only get to educate people on my culture and history, but I get to educate people about other great histories. I will be impacting someone else's life, helping them learn things that they didn't know before or understand. I will have the opportunity to change Native American's future in this country.

Essay Works Cited:

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