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The Blood Runs Through Every One of Us
and We Are Stronger for It:
The Role of Head Start in Promoting Cultural Continuity in Tribal Communities

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Abstract

This multiple case study examined American Indian Program Branch Head Start directors' perceptions of the role their particular Head Start program plays preserving cultural integrity in tribal communities. Of specific research interest were the unique aspects of the tribal customs of child rearing and early childhood educational practices within each community. Another area of research focused on exploring each director's vision of how the Head Start experience contributes to the future of the children. Ten tribal Head Start directors from the Great Plains region were interviewed. The grand tour question addressed how participants described their perception of the role of Head Start in promoting and preserving cultural integrity in tribal communities. Directors shared their insights on the importance of Early Head Start as a presence or a perceived need in their tribal community. The participants' advocacy efforts on the behalf of the tribal community also helped to promote the preservation of cultural integrity. All of the directors expressed their belief in the important role that Head Start programs play in providing information and support to parents involved in nurturing and raising their children.

The Blood Runs Through Every One of Us
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Head Start is a comprehensive child development and family services program. Administered by the United States Department of Health and Human Services since 1964, Head Start has been an advocate for low-income children and their families. In 36áyears Head Start has served nearly 11 million children. This federal matching grant program aims to improve the learning skills, social skills, and health status of poor children. Head Start's mission helps children begin schooling on an equal footing with their more advantaged peers.

Administrators of Head Start programs provide educational practices that support each child's development. These programs also offer an array of social services that nurture each family's development. In 1995, 40% of the income eligible children ages 4 and 5 were being served. Enrollment in Early Head Start programs serving children birth to 3 was limited. In 1995, the "first wave" of Early Head Start programs were funded. Sixty-eight programs across the country began services to children birth to three.

The problem of appropriate service delivery is especially critical for children who are members of ethnic and racial minority groups. According to Dr. Alice Paul, American Indian and Alaskan Native children represent the least academically successful minority (Paul 1991, 1). The need for high quality early childhood programs is acute for these populations (Paul 1991). Many Americans Indians are also deeply concerned with the preservation of their tribe's cultural identity (Paul 1991).

American Indian Head Start Programs

The American Indian Programs Branch (AIPB) funds 150 Head Start and Early Head Start programs. These programs are operated by federally-recognized Tribes, consortia and Alaska Native corporations. In 1999, AIPB programs operated in 26 states with an enrollment of more than 19,000 3- to 5-year old children in Head Start programs. Nine hundred eight infants and toddlers were enrolled in Early Head Start programs.

A rich diversity of languages, traditions and heritage exist in the American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start programs. AIPB programs vary greatly in size, geography and population of those they serve. Some reservations, communities and villages are located in extremely isolated areas of the nation. Others are located near urban centers. American Indian programs are typically small. Approximately half of the programs serve 100 children or less. The average classroom size is 18áchildren. Nearly 80% of the AIPB programs provide center-based services. The remaining programs offer a combination of both center-based and home-based services. In both options, a holistic approach encompassing comprehensive services are provided to the child and family.

The purpose of this research was to learn about each director's belief regarding the role of Head Start in preserving and promoting cultural integrity in their tribal community. Specific research questions were raised about community practices. These questions examined the unique aspects of the tribal customs of child rearing and the importance of early childhood educational practices. A second research area explored each director's vision of the future. The study explored ideas about Head Start contributions to the children's future. Two sets of Head Start directors from the Great Plains region were interviewed. One group, consisting of five directors, was highly experienced and regarded in their field. The second group of five directors had less than three years of service in their current position. Comparison of these two sets of directors was undertaken to determine any differences that may exist based on the number of years of service as a Head Start director.

Significant challenges face the directors of American Indian Head Start programs. The presence of seriously embedded social problems add complexity to their work. To broaden our understanding of the significant role Head Start administrators play in their respective American Indian communities,

information was obtained from directors of programs that are implementing educational programs and providing linkages to an array of social service programs.

One issue that American Indian Head Start programs face is the question of how to best provide developmentally appropriate educational practices that are respectful and supportive of the transmission of tribal culture. Another issue concerns how Head Start administrators advocate for program needs with the tribal council. Further questions arise when the unique nature of individual American Indian Head Start programs and the variability among such programs are considered in regard to the impact of the director's role in their implementation.

The purpose of this research was to describe the role of Head Start directors in tribal communities. Specific interest was directed toward understanding how the Head Start program may contribute to the continuity of cultural patterns in tribal communities. Four areas of primary areas of research foci were identified. Several exploratory questions guided the investigation. How do Head Start directors advocate for their programs? What are the pressing social issues of the tribal community? How is the tribe's cultural integrity and language preservation promoted in the Head Start program? What is the Head Start director's vision for the future is in regards to the children's opportunities?

This study was designed to describe the role that American Indian directors play in the implementation of Head Start programs in their tribal communities. There have been no previous studies of this problem, despite the fact that it is the director who sets the standard for early childhood practice and social services intervention in the local Head Start program. This study considered issues of local transmission of culture, the preservation of tribal language, and the role of advocacy.

Several limitations to the research must be noted. Every American Indian Head Start director interviewed was a representative of one American Indian Programs Branch Head Start. Each Head Start program reflected the tribal beliefs unique to that particular culture. Another limitation is that the researcher is not an American Indian. This may have influenced the nature of the responses to the interview questions. In addition, the length of time spent at each of the ten American Indian Head Start programs did not provide adequate opportunity to fully represent all aspects of the program. Only American Indian Head Start directors were interviewed. This study did not interview other members of the tribal community or Head Start staff. In addition, this study was limited in its geographic scope. It focused exclusively on tribal communities located in the Great Plains.

The complex task of providing culturally appropriate practices for American Indian children enrolled in Head Start programs is evident when considering the diverse number of tribal cultures and the multitude of native languages that are found in tribal communities. At present, 289 tribes reside on tribal lands, in urban enclaves or on one of the 286 reservations in the United States (Iverson 1998). There are 207 American Indian languages. Some of these native languages do not have functional alphabets and are currently being preserved through tribal elders (Medicine Bow 1980). Due to the reduction in the number of fluent native speakers, American Indian Head Start programs are responding to the priority some tribal families have identified to maintain the home language through native language education and preservation.

Pulitzer Prize winning author, N. Scott Momaday (1969), a member of the Kiowa tribe, expresses the importance of language to the Kiowas in this way:

> A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things. By means of words can a man deal with the world on equal terms. And the word is sacred. A man's name is his own; he can keep it or give it away as he likes. Until recent times, the Kiowas would not speak the name of a dead man. To so would be disrespectful and dishonest. The dead take their names with them out of the world (p. 33).

Head Start programs on many reservations are encouraging groups of elders to preserve the native languages for the next generations. In many American Indian cultures the risk of losing the original language can be interpreted by tribal members as equivalent to the loss of a way of thinking. Language is a world view that has been handed down from one generation to the next through oral

traditions since the origin of the race (E. Old Person, Chief of the Blackfeet Nation, Browning, MT, personal communication, February 1999).

Many tribes are making efforts to promote the use of tribal language and preserve cultural traditions for young children. Some tribal educational leaders have expressed difficulty in coming to consensus within their community in regards to implementation of traditional cultural practices and use of native language in Head Start classrooms. One director describes the issue,

> The children are mostly learning English unless Navajo is spoken in the home. I am very concerned about this practice because it means the children are not learning about our culture, and our culture will be lost without exposure to our elders' stories. It is our history and our vision for our life. Nothing is more important than our continuing with our traditions but many of our families don't want their children to learn the old ways.

Implementing Developmentally and Culturally Appropriate Practice

Early childhood education programs for young children need to provide high quality teaching practices and social services that support children's development. The reauthorization of the Head Start Act in 1994 specifically charged directors of Head Start program to "add new resources to model high quality child development and family development services for young children and their families" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1993, p. 3).

A controversy affecting the delivery of developmentally appropriate services in American Indian Head Start programs is best summarized by Linda Williams. Williams suggests that in many American Indian cultures the cooperative nature of the child's peer group takes precedence over the prominence of individual development (Williams 1994). Jipson (1991) underscores Williams point of view by examining the concept advanced by the National Association of Educators of Young Children (NAEYC) guidelines in regards to developmentally appropriate practices. Jipson concludes that these guidelines emphasize a child's autonomy and individuality which are more reflective of the North American and European cultures.

Literature on American Indian Children in the Early Childhood Classroom

Alice Paul, professor emeritus of education at the University of Arizona, was a member of the NAEYC steering committee. This committee guided the development of Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines for the 1998 NAEYC position statement. Dr. Paul (1991, 1) stresses that, "If it were not for Head Start programs on many reservations there would be minimal, if any, organized effort of early childhood education." She advocates for early childhood programs designed to reflect the American Indian child's home language, family and culture (Paul 1991). Dr. Paul recommends building tribal identity with American Indian children. This process involves combining teaching traditions and history while maintaining the tribal language in the home and the classroom. Paul states,

> As Native people within a larger society we must also remember that our children must be able to live in two worlds and not caught in-between as has happened to too many of our tribal people…. Children need to know that knowing two languages gives them two ways to view the world (Paul 1991, p. 3).

Lee Little Soldier describes the role of American Indian cultural values in education. She advocates for a bicultural educational policy for Indian children. Such a policy would ameliorate the discontinuity between the home and school environments. Little Soldier contrasts the childhood experiences that shape the values of many American Indian children with the childrearing practices of the larger Euro-American dominated society. Little Soldier asserts that early childhood educators attempting to understand cultural differences that impact developmentally appropriate practices in American Indian classrooms, must be aware of the vital differences that exist among tribes as well as the degree of assimilation of each individual American Indian family (Little Soldier 1992).

Methods

This multiple case study involved ten American Indian Head Start directors. The grand tour question explored the directors' perceptions of the role that Head Start plays in each tribal community to preserve cultural integrity. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted on the site of each Head Start program. Site visits afforded the researcher an opportunity to more deeply enter into each director's frame of reference. Visiting sites also created opportunities for the researcher to examine personal documents or artifacts. The use of multiple cases and data collection techniques strengthens the study's reliability (Marshall and Rossman 1995).

Purposeful selection of participants provided small samples of highly descriptive cases of individuals, settings, and processes (Schumacher and McMillan 1993). Maximum variation in sampling enhances this study's ability to generalize to other settings (Marshall and Rossman 1989). Differences in geographical location, size of the service population, local resource support, and type of programs offered were important research considerations. The directors were drawn from different American Indian reservations or urban enclaves in the Great Plains states. The selection of participants was made to provide a mix of tribal affiliation, leadership indicators and length of service. In addition, all of the Head Start directors agreed to be interviewed at the program site.

The data collection occurred during an eight-week period in February and March, 1999. Initial interviews extended from 60 to 90 minutes in length. The interviews were guided by 28 questions (Appendix A). The interviews were audio tape recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The semi-structured interview was designed to provide comparable data across all the participants. Participants were encouraged to talk freely about the area of interest. Topics and issues that the participants initiated were probed (Bogdan and Biklen 1992). The initial interview was followed by a telephone call several days after the initial intake to allow participants to expand on their views. Electronic mail was used for clarification and expansion of views as well.

A variety of interpretive methodologies can be used in qualitative research (Denzen and Lincoln 1994; Merriam 1988). Site visits were used to supplement the interviews. A field notebook was used to record observation. The research also included examinations of relevant personal or tribal documents. Initial data analysis identified the critical issues related to the preservation of culture integrity in tribal communities. The data were analyzed during the collection process. Notes were made directly on the printed transcripts of the audio taped interviews. Following the guidelines suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) a more formal analysis began when most of the data were collected. This analysis created manageable units of information drawn from the interviews and site visits. These units were color coded and clustered to identify recurring themes (Miles and Huberman 1984; Tesch 1990). All major themes were identified and coded on the transcripts using the process of de-contextualization and re-contextualization (Tesch 1990). Portions of the data were separated from their original context. This separation formed coded categories. The major themes were then categorized into sub-themes. The sub-themes were identified by short description.

Several strategies were employed to assure the validity of this study. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. All interviews were stored on computer disk. Participants were given the opportunity to review interview transcripts. The participants were also encouraged to make additions or corrections.

Triangulation, described by Lincoln and Guba (1985, 47) as "The act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point" was utilized. To provide triangulation data collected from the ten interviews was supplemented with site visits. Field notes were documented with digitally dated photography of the Head Start center sites and any artifacts that were examined.

The Participants

The participant population consisted of American Indian Program Branch Head Start directors who were enrolled members of the tribe that serve as the Head Start program grantee. Each participant was a member of a different tribe. All the participants had a minimum of one year experience as the director. All participants had also held the position of director within the last two years. The Head Start directors were drawn from two distinct groups. One group of directors was recognized for distinguished service to the Bureau. The other group of administrators was less experienced. These directors had less than three years of service in their current position. Five of the participants were former Head Start parents. Eight of the participants were born on the reservations where they were Head Start directors.

The participants' length of service ranged from 1.3 years to 19 years. The level of educational achievement ranged from high school to Master's level. Nine of the participants had held staff positions within their tribal Head Start organization prior to assuming the director's position. The majority of the participants started their service at entry level Head Start positions. Many directors started as former teacher's assistants or bus drivers. Participants administered programs ranging in enrollment size from 30 children to well over 200. The number of staff positions supervised ranged from 9 to 75.

The Sites

The sites of the American Indian Head Start programs were located in 6áMidwestern states. Two of the sites were located in large urban areas, both of these sites served Indian families who had transitioned from reservations located nearby to find employment. The remaining eight American Indian Head Start program sites were located on tribal reservations. Five of the American Indian Head Start centers also operated Early Head Start centers offering services to children between the ages of birth to three years old.

Discussion and Results

The major focus of this research was to examine each directors' perceptions of the ways in which Head Start programs preserve and promote cultural integrity. In analyzing the data five central themes emerged. These themes included the role of Head Start in promoting cultural continuity, the director's role as an advocate, the importance of Early Head Start services, key experiences as a Head Start director, and the way each director envisioned the future for the children in her program. One of the areas that generated a great deal of discussion from all the participants concerned the important role native language plays in preserving and promoting tribal traditions. Two of the most important issues identified in the study were the efforts that are being undertaken to preserve the tribal languages and the use of tribal language in the Head Start classrooms.

Another theme was the role of culture in the American Indian Head Start curriculum development and implementation. The culture of each indigenous tribe is intricately woven into every aspect of Head Start's program I visited in the various tribal communities. One director bluntly stated her assessment of how the tribal culture was incorporated into the Early Head Start curriculum. We don't take the tourist approach to the cultural aspect of our educational program. It is infused in subtle ways. The Head Start Performance Standard (HSPS) states, "The classroom must reflect the home culture of the child" (USDHHS 1993, 4). In tribal communities, this reflection of home culture mirrored the unique aspects of each tribe. Areas of commonality in curriculum development were numerous and included native language education, the teaching of traditional ways by tribal elders, story telling, the important role of nature in tribal belief systems, and various native arts forms, including basketry, beadwork, dance and song.

Differences in the type and quality of key experiences as a Head Start director emerged as a substantial theme. These differences allowed a comparison between the seasoned directors with five or more years of experience and those with less than three years. The study showed that the Head Start directors with the greatest number of years of field experience were also the most politically effective. These directors were involved in the widest range of advocacy issues. This group of directors were also

nationally recognized for their achievements and contributions to the Head Start programs in tribal communities. The directors with less field experience were more focused on enhancing the quality of the Head Start program that they were administering while establishing their leadership among the staff and members of the community. Dealing with the day-to-day issues that arise in early childhood educational settings was a major time and energy consuming effort.

The importance of the presence of the Early Head Start services as a vital part of the Head Start program was expressed by all the participants who were interviewed. Two of the participants who did not yet offer Early Head Start services were responding to a request for grant proposals from the Administration of Children, Youth and Families. Early Head Start was viewed as an essential element of social support to help strengthen young families.

The last theme identified concerns the director's vision of what the future may hold for the young children and their families participating in the tribal Head Start program. The exploration of this topic was articulated in the director's image of a child. The participants expressed many ideas regarding childrens' gifts, competencies, and possible hurdles to optimum development.

Advocacy

The directors' efforts to advocate for many different causes was a significant part of their work. Areas of advocacy included optimizing the rights of the children, parents, and teachers affiliated with the Head Start Center, and undertaking advocacy roles to raise awareness within the tribal council, Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start Bureau and the United States Congress.

National advocacy efforts were undertaken by many of the participants. In 1994, Congressional hearings were held to examine the status of American Indian Head Start Centers. Several participants were witnesses at the 1994 Congressional hearings which ultimately resulted in some important program changes. One of the important results of the hearing was a change in enrollment policy so children living off the reservation were allowed to attend Head Start programs on the reservation. This concession ultimately increased the number of Indian children receiving Head Start services.

In addition to the national arenas for their advocacy efforts, the participants also expended considerable energy in advocacy issues to benefit all the different constituents of their community. Advocating for parents and working with parent committee and policy council to identify and remedy issues was a significant part of the advocacy agenda. One director explained, "We would educate our parents on Roberts' Rules of Order and how to be a committee member, so when a school board member's term was up, our parents would run and get elected to the school boards. You have to do this kind of training for parents because there is a lot of politics. And when there's Indians and non-Indians, you know the politics can get pretty bad."

Much of the participants advocacy efforts were intended to benefit the Head Start staff. One director feels a large part of her job is to encourage the staff through the advocacy efforts. She states,

My number one priority is to advocate for people who don't have a [college] degree. I do not think that native women who want to work with infants and toddlers and have a gift for it should be penalized by a lack of opportunity for education. Salary differences are another issue tied to educational achievement. I will always do everything I can to make salaries reflect the staff person's contributions to the program. Education does not level the playing field. It has the opposite effect, and it doesn't always reward the people who work the hardest and are the most dependable.

Some of the participants also expressed the need to keep the tribal council focused on the needs of the children. This type of advocacy requires a great deal of energy. Many participants stated they put most of their efforts into keeping children in the forefront of the tribal agenda. One director emphasized why advocacy with tribal council was so important. She stated,

> Our history is still impacting us and we must never forget who we are or where we come from. It is one way I believe that we are preparing the children for the future. By carrying our heritage into the future, when my time is done, I am going to walk away and feel really good about it.

Importance of Early Head Start Programs

The importance of Early Head Start programs was acknowledged by all of the participants. One director reflecting on the needs of infants and toddlers, stated:

> When you help the parents, you help the children. So many of our parents are very young parents, single parents, we have single mothers, and I think home base is one of the best programs that ever came along. We just did it on a small scale but it is great to have this for the really young children because when their Mom is home with the little newborn babies and someone's coming to work with them, I think that it is so beneficial. They don't have grandmas like they had a long time ago to help them, or mothers, the mothers are usually working now. Because of welfare they can't live with their mother, they have got to get their own house, you know, so they're by themselves somewhere, being isolated. And young mothers just need so much more support than that.

Another director mirrored the sentiments of many of the participants. She addressed the advantages for the family and the tribal community that result from effective and intervention services that are administered in the early days of family formation, prior to birth. She states,

> They are just so wrapped up in the romantic idea of a child, before that child is born and you could just do wonders with the parents, developing rapport, providing prenatal services and child development information. It is important not to wait until the child is born, to capitalize on the excitement and energy that goes with expecting a new baby.

Fostering traditional child-rearing practices. The unique cultural aspects of traditional child rearing were addressed by several tribes in their Early Head Start parenting programs. Participants related the success with which traditional parenting classes were received by young parents. Parents were excited to learn more about cultural beliefs from tribal elders serving as guest instructors. One participant relayed favorable reports from young mothers attending a traditional parenting class. She said,

> Not only were these young women receiving information about sound child development practices while learning about our tribal traditions, we also had activities like making moccasins for the babies and beadwork. This is where they really got their licks in, trading information and supplying encouragement and support for one another, just like in the days of the old sewing bees.

Language development in infancy. All of the directors of Early Head Start programs emphasized the importance of introducing the native language during infancy. One director shared her perspective on native language acquisition and how the Early Head Start program was providing the basis for facilitating young native speakers. She related her program's practice,

> We have our elders work with the pregnant mothers, teaching them songs to sing to their babies. Our babies are hearing our language right in the womb so when they are born it is as natural as it should be for them. Many of our mothers grew up in homes where the language was not spoken, so their children really wouldn't have this exposure to the sounds and the lilt, the way we put our words together.

Language preservation and education is viewed as a critical aspect of Early Head Start services. The role of the elders in preserving language and working with the youngest children and their parents was acknowledged as the most important program priority by the majority of participants. One director describes the sense of urgency,

> I truly believe that if we are going to preserve the true rhythm of the language it has got to be heard while they are rocked and nursed. Our elders are leaving us fast and if you are going to get that pure rhythm you have got to do it now.

Vision for the Future

One area of interviewing focused on each director's perception of what the future could hold for the Head Start program, the children and their families. All of the participants currently administering Head Start programs without an Early Head Start component stated that infant-toddler services were their top administrative priority for expansion. Many of the same social concerns were shared by the directors. The directors felt that young people have many obstacles to overcome. Alcohol and drug abuse, depression, and suicide, family violence and child abuse are deeply rooted social problems in many tribal communities. All of the directors recognized that Early Head Start can provide teen mothers with the social and emotional supports to finish their education, learn positive parenting skills, and receive vital health services.

The directors's image of the child was the foundation for each participant's educational philosophy. Embedded within the educational philosophy is the abiding cultural view of the child as a spiritual being. This belief guided one director's vision for the future:

> I think we can get caught up in cognitive development and we forget to accept or facilitate the joy and sense of being, the wonder that is the lens for the way children view the world. A child is a spiritual being and anyone who cannot acknowledge this doesn't need to work with children. The social and emotional development, the physical, cognitive and language development are important aspects for growth, but if you think of our culture you have to consider a child's spirituality and foster it. That is how we can help build strong futures.

Dreams for the Children

Participants had different perspectives regarding their vision of the future for the children in Head Start programs in tribal communities. One director stated, "My dreams for the children are so basic, like achieving the low rungs of Maslow's ladder (of self-actualization). The children must be fed, their basic needs met, our community must heal. Wounded Knee was awful, just devastating." Pride is apparent in her belief in her tribe's ability to transform and transcend past tragedy. She continues, "Bad things have happened, but we have survived, and our children will survive and I hope, prosper. The blood runs through every one of us and we are stronger for it."

Many participants refer to the tribal children as "our center." Their perceptions are deeply influenced by the historical events of the past and the promise for the future. Everyone agreed that the greatest challenge for children is in providing opportunities to support optimal development. Participants also expressed the belief that the future of the children can be enhanced by meeting the needs of parents. One director states:

> When I dream of opportunities for the children, I think I see helping their parents first, because when you help the parents you help the children. People have a real misconception of people that live on the reservation. They think parents don't care, that they use a lot of alcohol and live on government handouts. It is simply not true: our parents work hard to [financially] support their children because they love their children, and we have to find every possible way to support them in return.

Often the participants turned their vision for the children's future back to cultural considerations. For example, one participant stated:

> Our value systems are so different [from mainstream American culture], it has caused a lot of confusion for everyone. My vision for our tribal children is to build a stronger cultural identity for them. That is where their strength will come from, their pride in themselves. How do you explain how you are, what it is like to be Indian? You can't see it. Our children must be able to

> live fulfilled lives, free from racial prejudice. It hasn't happened yet, but we must continue to work for change.

Key Experiences as a Head Start Director

All of the participants shared stories and images of their successes, challenges and frustrations as field administrators of tribal programs. Many of the participants had a great deal of commonality in their responses to the interview questions regarding administrative experiences. For example, all the participants acknowledged the sensitive nature of their relationships with tribal council and policy council members. A retired director was frank, "Politics. One word has so much influence on every situation, every outcome. You can't live on the reservation and not know this; it is a fact of life."

Three of the directors were proud of their successes with staff. One director's sense of achievement was based on the loyalty and longevity of service of the Early Head Start staff that she supervised: "In three years we have had extremely low staff turnover, our families know their children's teacher, and the continuity of the relationship builds trust." She notes the importance of this trust: "There is still a sense of fear based on our history. Some parents still think if you leave your child with a white person you may never see them again. I don't think that ever enters their mind here."

The Role of Culture in the Curriculum

The importance of tribal language preservation and education was addressed by every participant in this research study. One director underscored the essential nature of her native language in this way, "Our language is our culture. It is one and the same. If we ever lost the language then our traditions would be gone." Another director offered a similar view, "We need to learn the ways. If we lose the language we will become separated from our true nature. If we lose our language, how will our Creator know that we are here?" She elaborates further on the interconnectedness of her tribal language and culture, "For our elders, language is a natural part of their being, and our sacred traditions are embedded in our language. Our religion is timeless and it is so much a part of our lives. Our language survives in our devotion to our religious practices."

One director proudly explained to me the history and the extent of native language education in her tribal community. The Head Start program was the driving force in promoting language education for the children. Throughout the day the teachers speak only in the native language. According to the director, the children learned their native language as part of the curriculum. The public school system became involved at the elementary school level as these children transitioned into their system. Eventually the high school and the university on the reservation offered credit hours in the tribal language as a general requirement for graduation. This community's focus on language has produced many bilingual speakers in the past 15 years.

Culturally appropriate curriculum. The Head Start curriculum in every center reflected the uniqueness of tribal culture in each community. One director remarked, "A lot of our tribal cultures came back because the Head Start law says you have to implement the culture of the children in the classroom." In answer to my question about cultural education prior to the new law, the director offered this response, "We were not doing much before because everybody wanted to be non-Indian. It was not like you were accepted by practicing the tribe's cultural activities. People went underground with their religion, their ceremonies. We just didn't want to call more attention to ourselves. There were prejudices everywhere. They still had signs in the town on the doors. No Indians or dogs allowed." She reflected further,

> With Head Start it has made every one look at themselves. Are you proud or are you ashamed? When people ask, What tribe are you, are you going to put your head down and not answer or are you going to be proud and say what you are? We are teaching the children who they are and they are proud and talking about it. That's what Head Start has helped to make happen.

Implementing culturally appropriate practice. Each Head Start site implemented cultural education in different ways and to different degrees. One Head Start program has been working for several years to develop a language immersion curriculum that could be adapted to any tribal program. The program's language component emphasizes bilingual communication skills. The Head Start director believes in starting early with vocabulary development in both languages. In this way the youngest children will learn their native language as they begin to communicate.

All the programs highlighted curricular experiences that were reflective of the tribal community. One director described how her husband, a native singer, taught the children to sing honor songs many years ago. These children are now Head Start parents, a group of singers with children of their own. Several directors described how community artists, many of whom are elders and Head Start parents, are integral to the cultural life of the program. Community members teach the children dances, pottery making, and weaving. Many of the directors also talked about collaborative efforts with other tribal Head Start programs. Often the collaborations were intertribal pow wows where the children from several tribes would dance together. It was described as a time for celebration. During the pow wows there were many opportunities for cultural sharing and exchange for staff, parents and children.

Nature was cited as a means of bringing culture into curriculum by several of the participants. A director described how the Head Start curriculum reflected the natural environment. "We studied our trees and animals and how our ancestors may have referred to them. Our curriculum followed the seasons, how the animals prepared for the winter." She added, "The elders would come in and tell the stories and the legends. Only the men could drum, in our tribe women didn't drum."

One director spoke of this aspect of the curriculum. She stated, "Nature is so much a part of us, our tribal identity. We draw on things from the children's immediate environment." She elaborates with an example, "Think of the buffalo, it is an important part of the culture of our reservation. Look at who greets the children when they first come into school every morning," referring to the buffalo sculpture the children stop to pet as they enter the building and the buffalo in the field adjacent to the playground. The director expressed the value system that is the basis of the natural sciences curriculum. She states, "Learning about the buffalo is one of the ways we teach the children by example. What we are saying is, This is how we should save our ancestors' teachings. We have survived off the land for as long as there is a memory of who we are. If we lose respect for that then we will have invited trouble to our lives.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, several recommendations can be made. One recommendation concerns the formation of social policy. The directors' vision for the future could provide a forum co-participatory explorations aimed toward crafting relevant social policy agenda regarding the preservation and promotion cultural continuity. AIPB staff and field administrators, policy council and tribal council members could engage in extending this dialogue in order to better ascertain tribal communities needs for the future.

A second recommendation regards the development of culturally sensitive curriculum. As sovereign nations with a long history of protecting important tribal traditions, often in the face of tremendous adversity, American Indian Programs Branch could sponsor the development of a comprehensive early childhood education curriculum. Based on culturally sensitive educational practices, this curriculum would serve as a nation-wide standard for other racial and ethnic groups seeking to construct culturally appropriate curriculum.

The last recommendation is drawn from the participants' vision of the future for Head Start families and young children. Each director's vision for the future could facilitate co-participatory discussions among community elders, Head Start parents, policy council, Head Start staff and tribal council regarding the implementation of educational services for young children. The overarching goal of the Head Start program is to develop social competence in young children (USDHHS, 1993). American Indian Head Start programs could benefit from on-going discussions that address within tribal

communities how this view of social competency is culturally relevant and reflective of the tribal worldview and parental value systems.

Conclusion

This multiple case study examined American Indian Program Branch Head Start directors' perceptions of the role their particular Head Start program plays preserving cultural integrity in tribal communities. Of specific research interest were the unique aspects of the tribal customs of child rearing and early childhood educational practices within each community. Another area of research focused on exploring each directorÆs vision of how the Head Start experience contributes to the future of the children. Ten tribal Head Start directors from the Great Plains region were interviewed. The grand tour question addressed how participants described their perception of the role of Head Start in promoting and preserving cultural integrity in tribal communities.

Directors shared their insights on the importance of Early Head Start as a presence or a perceived need in their tribal community. Early Head Start was viewed as a way to connect young families with a myriad of culturally relevant social services. The Early Head Start program synthesized developmentally appropriate practices with tribal child-rearing practices. The tribal elders and native speakers were seen as important influences on the families' development and Head Start programs provided a point of contact for inter-generational interaction and cultural transmission.

The participants' advocacy efforts on the behalf of the tribal community also helped to promote the preservation of cultural integrity. Advocacy efforts were in evidence in the national arena as well as the local community.

All of the directors expressed their belief in the important role that Head Start programs play in providing information and support to parents involved in nurturing and raising their children. The children were described by many of the participants as the focal point of the tribal community, and the transmission of cultural heritage and native language was viewed to be of paramount importance in child-rearing practices.

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Appendix A.

Semi-structured interview questions: the role of Head Start in tribal communities.

1. Would you please share a little bit about your personal background as is relevant to your role as director?
2. What is your relationship to the tribe?
3. What is your tribal heritage? As a child did you spend time on the reservation?
4. What is your educational background?
5. How did you first get involved with Head Start?
6. Are there particular aspects of your personal background that relate to your initial and continuing involvement in the Head Start program?
7. What is your image of the child? How do you think this image is supported by the philosophical foundations of Head Start?
8. What do you see as the most pressing social issues for the families that you serve? For the children in your program? What are the most pressing issues for the tribal community?
9. What do you see as Head Start's role in supporting tribal families? How does this happen?
10. How is the tribal image of the role of children in their community reflected in the practices of your Head Start program? What are the benefits for children who participate in the program? Are there any difficulties associated with participation? If so, how would you describe these situations?
11. Do opportunities exist to increase the enrollment of more tribal children in your program? Please describe these. Are there barriers to enrollment?
12. How do you advocate for the needs of your Head Start program with the tribal council?
13. What is your educational philosophy?
14. How do you see your Head Start program preserving and promoting the cultural integrity of the tribe? Why is this important?
15. What is your perception of the role of your tribal language in preserving your culture?
16. What role do the tribal elders play in the cultural transmission of the tribe's customs and traditions? How are the elders involved in your program?
17. What programs do you offer to parents and teachers that encourage cultural continuity?
18. How do you involve the larger community in the life of your Head Start program? What particular project are you most proud of? Where did the inspiration for the idea originate?
19. What accomplishments are most meaningful to you? Would you describe these?
20. What frustrations are you currently experiencing?
21. What was the greatest challenge you faced as a director of this program?
22. Where do you find support? Is it enough?
23. How are you learning from other programs? What are you doing to share information with other programs?

24. Since I am not of Indian heritage, what limitations do you see as I gather this information and present it?
25. When you dream of opportunities for the children enrolled in your Head Start program, what do you see? How is the Head Start program contributing to your vision of the children's future?
26. What are you doing to make this dream a reality?
27. Is there anything else you would like to share?
28. Following the on-site and interview, my last question is: Have you had any further thoughts since we last talked? This question will be asked by telephone several days after the interview.

Summary

This research project examined American Indian Program Branch Head Start directorsÆ perceptions of the cultural role their particular Head Start program plays in tribal community. Of specific research interest were the unique aspects of the tribal customs of child rearing and early childhood educational practices within each community. Another area of research focused on exploring each directorÆs vision of how the Head Start experience contributes to her idea of what the future may hold for the children who are currently attending the Head Start program in the tribal community. Ten Head Start directors from the Great Plains region were interviewed.

This qualitative research project was conducted as a multiple case study. The grand tour question in this study addressed how participants described their perception of the role of Head Start in promoting and preserving cultural integrity in tribal communities. The interviews were guided by the use of interview protocols (Appendix A) that addressed the 28 subquestions.

Directors shared their insights on the importance of Early Head Start as a presence or a perceived need in their tribal community. Early Head Start was viewed as a way to connect young families with a myriad of culturally relevant social services. The Early Head Start Program synthesized developmentally appropriate practices with tribal child-rearing practices. The tribal elders and native speakers were seen as important influences on the families' development and Head Start programs provided a point of contact for inter-generational interaction and cultural transmission.

The participants' advocacy efforts on the behalf of the tribal community also helped to promote the preservation of cultural integrity. Advocacy efforts were in evidence in the national arena as well as the local community.

All of the directors expressed their belief in the important role that Head Start programs play in providing information and support to parents involved in nurturing and raising their children. The children were described by many of the participants as the focal point of the tribal community, and the transmission of cultural heritage and native language was viewed to be of paramount importance in child-rearing practices.

The participants shared many examples of the important role that Head Start has played in facilitating cultural continuity within each tribal community. For example, educational services to children were cited as a product of the child's home culture and reflected in the curriculum in many different ways. Unique and important aspects of each tribe's culture, such as the teaching of native language, and traditional child-rearing practices were described by all of the participants. Of equal importance were the participants' descriptions of services to the Head Start parents that reinforced cultural integrity. Several of the participants recounted experiences where the parents were involved in learning about the traditional parenting practices and the tribal language as a result of parent education and involvement services offered through the Head Start program.

All of the participants expected that the role of their Head Start program in promoting and preserving the continuity of cultural integrity would continue to grow. Each participant indicated that she would continue to devote her energy and attention to this endeavor with the support of the Head Start staff, parent committee, policy council, and tribal council.

<u>Recommendations</u>

Based on the results of this study, several recommendations can be made for the directors of American Indian Head Start programs and AIPB administrators. This section offers recommendations for program directors and the staff of the American Indian Programs Branch of the Head Start Bureau.

Recommendations for Head Start Directors

One result of this research project was the gathering of oral history from Head Start directors in tribal communities. Eight of the participants were born and had lived a large part of their lives on the American Indian reservation where each individual was now serving as the Head Start director. In the words of one participant, this longevity residing in and sense of belonging to a specific place resulted in "a long view, particularly since as children we have grown up as members of an extended family with a strong sense of group orientation and membership. "

The gathering of oral history regarding the role of Head Start in tribal communities can provide directors with a viable means for personal introspection and professional reflection. Oral history when shared with other members of the Head Start community provides a vehicle for assessing a specific program's efficacy as well as its particular success and challenges.

Oral history shared within the context of the wider American Indian Head Start community offers an unique opportunity for directors and other field staff to define areas of commonality between tribal programs, and possibly share resources to strengthen individual programs through this important form of collaboration. Seasoned, highly experienced directors can be a valuable resource to less experienced Head Start directors. This mentoring process can be facilitated through the sharing of oral history.

A second recommendation is drawn from the participants' vision of the future for Head Start families and young children. Each director's vision for the future could facilitate co-participatory discussions among community elders, Head Start parents, policy council, Head Start staff and tribal council regarding the implementation of educational services for young children. The overarching goal of the Head Start program is "to develop social competence in young children" (National Head Start Association, 1990, p. 2). American Indian Head Start programs could benefit from on-going discussions that address within tribal communities how this view of social competency is culturally relevant and reflective of the tribal worldview and parental value systems.

Recommendation for AIPB Staff

Four recommendations for administrators and program specialists with the American Indian Program Branch of the Head Start Bureau have evolved from the findings of this study. The first recommendation regards the elements for potential collaborative efforts inherent in the gathering of oral histories from tribal Head Start directors. A foundation for assisting in the agency's continuing efforts to develop viable linkages and nurture strong systems for future collaboration between tribal Head Start directors could result from a sharing of these oral histories.

A second recommendation for the agency regards the director's assessment of current and future training needs and program support. All of the participants noted the importance of Early Head Start programs in creating a seamless service delivery system for families with children age birth to five years. Most of the participants also spoke of the crucial promotion of cultural continuity to which Early Head Start lends itself through various activities such as the traditional parenting classes and native language education for children and parents. AIPB could facilitate the proliferation of tribal Early Head Start program by supporting a venue for tribal grantees seeking assistance for all aspects of the Early Head Start Initiative such as proposal writing, start-up program design and management, staff training, and asset mapping.

The third recommendation for AIPB administrators concerns the formation of social policy. The directors' vision for the future could provide co-participatory explorations aimed toward crafting

relevant social policy agenda regarding the preservation and promotion cultural continuity. AIPB staff and field administrators, policy council and tribal council members could engage in extending this dialogue in order to better ascertain tribal communities needs for the future.

The final recommendation regards the development of culturally sensitive curriculum. As sovereign nations with a long history of protecting important tribal traditions, often in the face of tremendous adversity, American Indian Programs Branch could sponsor the development of a comprehensive early childhood education curriculum. Based on culturally sensitive educational practices, this curriculum would serve as a nation-wide standard for other racial and ethnic groups seeking to construct culturally sensitive curriculum.

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