School Counselors’ Perceptions of Native American Students

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Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton (1967) were the first to use the term “institutional racism” to describe the inequalities for people of color that are built into the systems and bureaucracies of the United States. Racism is well documented in the institution of education. Sleeter (2004), Deyhle & Swisher (1997), Freire (1970), among many, document the presence of institutional racism and oppression in schools. It follows that school counselors are subject to perpetrating the same racist and oppressive principles in-built to the systems in which they’re embedded.

While they have the same risk of poverty as Black and Hispanic students, Native American students are the smallest ethnic group recognized in the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) survey, with only 1% of the total student enrollment (Aud et al., 2013). Children’s preference for peers of the same race (Braddock & Gonzalez, 2010) leaves Native American students vulnerable to greater social isolation than any other group.

This risk of social isolation for Native American students creates a high need for support and advocacy in the school. The American School Counselor Association (2013) clearly states the importance of the school counselors advocating for students:

Professional school counselors serve a vital role in maximizing student success (Lapan, Gysbers, & Kayson, 2007; Stone & Dahir, 2006). Through leadership, advocacy and collaboration, professional school counselors promote equity and access to rigorous educational experiences for all students. Professional school counselors support a safe learning environment and work to safeguard the human rights of all members of the school community (Sandhu, 2000), and address the needs of all students through culturally relevant prevention and intervention.
programs that are a part of a comprehensive school counseling program (Lee, 2001). (ASCA, 2013)

The purpose of this study is to understand the current state of racism among school counselors, especially concerning Native American students. Using an electronic survey, school counselors from across the country will be invited to respond to a vignette depicting a student who is one of five races, including Native American. They will rate the student on several scales to indicate their perception of him overall, his personality, and his likelihood for future success. The results of the surveys will be compared between groups to understand the differences in how school counselors perceive and subsequently treat students.


