

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

10th Annual National Conference (2005): Different
Perspectives on Majority Rules

People of Color in Predominantly White
Institutions

November 2005

Understanding the Effects of Dominant Institution Acculturation on the Culture and Leadership of Indigenous People, Based on a Study: “Exploring Indigenous Tribal Leadership.”

Jeff G. Hart

Extension Educator, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpwi10>



Part of the [Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies Commons](#)

Hart, Jeff G., "Understanding the Effects of Dominant Institution Acculturation on the Culture and Leadership of Indigenous People, Based on a Study: “Exploring Indigenous Tribal Leadership.”" (2005). *10th Annual National Conference (2005): Different Perspectives on Majority Rules* . 15.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpwi10/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in 10th Annual National Conference (2005): Different Perspectives on Majority Rules by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Understanding the Effects of Dominant Institution Acculturation on the Culture and Leadership of Indigenous People, Based on a Study: “Exploring Indigenous Tribal Leadership.”

Abstract

What effect has forced acculturation had on Native American people? This presentation will present ideas on ethnocentrism, Manifest Destiny, and the issues between indigenous cultures and dominant institutions. Participants will be invited to ask questions and participate in a discussion about how strengthened partnerships between different cultures might help to bridge institutional gaps.

Jeff G. Hart

Extension Educator, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

What effect has forced acculturation by white dominant United States institutions had on Native American people? This session will consist of a presentation and discussion about the challenges of “fitting in” and being part of the dominant white institutional society. The presentation is based on a 2-year qualitative research study with the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, but will also present ideas on ethnocentrism, Manifest Destiny, and the issues between indigenous cultures and dominant institutions. Participants will be invited to ask questions and participate in a discussion about bottom line issues and how strengthened partnerships between different cultures might help to bridge institutional gaps.

The Research:

The research explored leadership with the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, its history, culture and traditions, and how the tribe has been affected by acculturation from the dominant society. The findings were developed from an ethnographic design consisting of observations, conversations and interviews with Winnebago tribal people over a two-year period.

Traditional tribal leadership, tribal leader characteristics, and tribal interventions and acculturation emerged as major theme areas from the findings. Winnebago tribal leadership is a shared leadership, organized by the clan system, guided and sustained by elders and a Tribal Council through the teaching of language and telling of stories. A true Winnebago leader has vision for the future, knows traditional ways, shares and develops leadership, serves and protects the tribal community, develops trust and shows respect for all tribal people.

Non-tribal organizations, institutions and individuals must know and understand that true Winnebago tribal leadership is centered on culture and spirituality, language and stories. It is not centered on elections, money, politics or religion, and certainly not the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Knowing these things and understanding all the dominant society interventions that contributed to forced acculturation can help to develop trusted partnerships and relationships with Winnebago people.

Imagine if a group of people forced themselves upon you, took away your home and your land, moved you to an unfamiliar place, forced you to speak another language and not your own, changed what you eat and how you dress, tried to save your soul by creating new religions for you, and forced you to exist under a new form of leadership and government. What would you do? Manifest Destiny was and still is a killer disease. It has an effect on all indigenous people. It takes away their land, language and culture. Manifest Destiny, inflicted by the white dominant society, annihilated 70% of the indigenous tribal people in the area renamed the United States (Pevar, 1992).

Acculturation has been forced by the dominant society. Tribal people, because of their desperate need to survive, have also accepted acculturation to some extent. There are many factors that have caused this acculturation and cultural destruction of traditional tribal leadership, mostly due to one identifiable source, the white dominant culture. Boarding schools provided education, but it was the white man's education. Churches provided a place for tribal people to gather, but it was the white man's religion. Commodity food was provided and alcohol was cheap, but it has created many negative health conditions. Money was given to tribal members based on blood quantum, but there were very few jobs and there was not much acceptable educational job training.

Finally, the dominant society allowed the existence of a tribal government with a tribal leadership organization. But the structure of this new government was mandated with strict compliance requirements and the local Bureau of Indian Affairs Superintendent approved most business decisions before 1970. A Tribal Council made up of tribal members is now in control, but there is still a fear that tribal members are only in that leadership position because of receiving the most popular votes in the tribal election. It is important for other cultures, and especially dominant educational institutions, to know this information and to understand what it means to be acculturated by many negative interventions from an outside culture. Continuing to live under these circumstances becomes a matter of survival, holding on to who you are and having the vision to pray for seven generations into the future.

The Challenge:

Most educational institutions, what they teach and the tools they used to teach, have been influenced by a dominant society. The current dominant society in the United States consists mostly of white, second and third generation, "Americans". The real challenge is how can changes occur that will decrease the ethnocentric views of this dominant society and its institutions and allow for more diversity in educational institutions with respect to people, curriculum, programming and methods of instruction.

Presenter Education

Dr. Jeff G. Hart, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension, Ed. D. in Human Sciences and Leadership, UNL; and Bachelors and Master degrees in Education, UNL.

Professional Career Areas: elementary, secondary and post-secondary teaching; workforce development & job training; federal grant administration and juvenile justice;

governmental and university liaison with tribal governments and tribal colleges; 1862 land grant institution Extension Educator.

Additional Professional Training: proposal writing-UNL Research/Grants/Contracts, early childhood education, juvenile justice, family preservation & support, health promotion & education, developmental disabilities, child & adolescent behavioral health, gangs & youth violence, career & employment counseling, grant management, Tribal government relations, evaluation & budgeting, community development, facilitative leadership, alternative education, self esteem & goal setting, asset development, peer mediation/conflict resolution, diversity issues, institutional review board.