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Qualitative Case Study Of Parental Perspectives On Education Among A Midwest Native American Reservation And English Traveller Community

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QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION
AMONG A MIDWEST NATIVE AMERICAN RESERVATION AND ENGLISH
TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

by

Cheri Francine Poitra
Bachelor of Science, University of North Dakota, 2001
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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

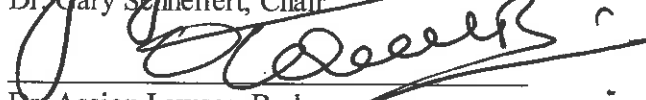
Grand Forks, North Dakota

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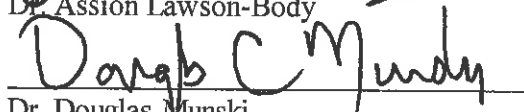
This dissertation, submitted by Cheri F. Poitra in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.



Dr. Gary Schnellert, Chair



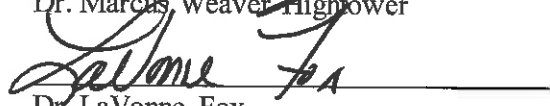
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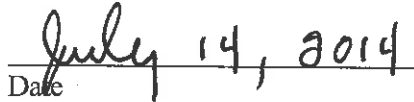


Dr. LaVonne Fox

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.



Wayne W. Swisher
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies



Date

PERMISSION

Title Qualitative Case Study of Parental Perspectives on Education among a
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Community

Department Educational Leadership

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Cheri F. Poitra
July 7, 2014

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Dissertation Committee

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of four Native American mothers and one English Traveller parent regarding their children's educational experiences. A comparative case study was used with a qualitative approach that presented a framework for international comparative studies in education, which can be helpful in better understanding and meeting the needs of all learners from culturally diverse backgrounds. The case study identified the relationship between two very different cultures, schools, and demographical areas with many common similarities. Some of the most serious problems confronting Native American and Traveller children are low academic achievement, a high percentage of students identified with special needs, and a high dropout rate. Through this analysis, the comparison identified the relationship between socioeconomic conditions, culture, student achievements, and school-to-parent relationships through the eyes of the parents. All parents had a voice and maybe one day they will help educators understand how factors within the home, school, and community affect student achievement.

The populations that were chosen in this study were two very diverse groups that helped to identify the relationship between the educational experiences of culturally diverse children. This qualitative study identified (a) the world of socioeconomics in education through a parental lens emphasizing how influential cultural practices are on a students' academic ability, (b) the generational cycle of poverty and its recurring effects,

and (c) the connection between culture, social class, and relationships. The conclusion addresses these concerns and provides recommendations in regard to how to improve the education and higher expectations for culturally diverse children, how to communicate and educate parents in a more equitable manner, and ultimately how to work to educate diverse learners. Utilizing data from the research findings titled “Building Bridges,” provides educational interventions that can be quite potent in raising student achievement, attainment, and parent involvement.

Keywords: poverty; cultural beliefs; parent perspectives; grounded theory; Native American, Traveller/Gypsy

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I am a Native American educator who was born and raised on an Indian Reservation. I grew up in a low-income, dysfunctional family. My brother, sister, and I were raised by our mother and grew up in a very nontraditional household. My parents divorced when I was three-years-old because my father was physically abusive to my mother. When my mother finally gained the courage to leave my father, she gained independence and freedom; however, this freedom and independence came with a price. Not knowing how to deal with her newly gained freedom or the post-traumatic effects of physical and emotional abuse, she started self-medicating with alcohol. My mother became an alcoholic who drank for days on end while leaving my siblings and me at home alone or with babysitters. Years after my parents divorced, my father was incarcerated for 10 years for his physical violence. Growing up in this environment was very difficult and challenging; however, without these hardships, I would not have become the person I am today. I am a strong, independent, educated, Native American woman determined to make a difference in the education field.

As a young girl, I was very determined to break the cycle of alcoholism, bad parenting, and ignorance towards education. One day, as I sat in my empty bedroom reflecting on my life, I made a promise to myself that when I had children of my own

they would never experience the wrath of poverty, alcoholism, neglect, and physical or emotional abuse that I had experienced. Today, through the power of education and healthy relationships, I was able to break this vicious cycle. Unfortunately, many of my family members and childhood friends continue to fall victim to the malicious effects of poverty, neglect, and alcoholism.

As I reflect on my life, I often ask myself, “Why was I able to go out the front door, while so many others went out the back door?” In other words, when two individuals grow up in the very same household or under similar circumstances, what makes one go out the front to a better life while the other goes out the back to a similar life of misery. Is it because of the relationships one establishes, the supporters one has, the education one gains, or a combination of these? If it is a combination then we, as educators, school officials, parents, and community members need to acknowledge the power of relationships in education to break the cycle and ensure our students and children all go through the “front door”.

Statement of Problem

During past two decades in the United States, a demand has been placed on providing equality for all learners. President George Bush’s promises in the No Child Left Behind Act and high stakes testing was to close the achievement barriers and end the “soft racism of low expectations” (Executive Summary, 2002). While other minority groups have shown academic improvements, there have been virtually no improvements towards Native American student achievement. In fact, according to The Education Trust (2013) these gaps have actually widened. In 2011, only 18% of fourth grade Native students were proficient or advanced in reading and only 17% of eighth-graders were

proficient or advanced in math, and nearly half—46%—were below the basic level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), when compared with 42% of white students (The Education Trust, 2013). These statistics are even more frightening for Native American students attending Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools, who score fare worse in achievement. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), BIE students averaged 25 points lower in reading than the general population in fourth grade and 23 points lower in eighth grade. In Math, BIE fourth grade students averaged 20 points lower in than general population and nineteen points lower in eighth grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). American Indian students are still identified as low achievers and reservation schools are being labeled as failures.

In the United Kingdom, their government promises to enable every child to fulfill his or her potential, which is at the heart of our government's drive to raise school standards (Wilkin, et al., 2010). While their hearts maybe in the right place, they are still failing young people from minority ethnic groups because the achievement gaps remain unacceptably wide. According to the Department for Communities and Local Government (2012), Gypsy/Roma pupils and pupils of Irish Traveller heritage (GRT) are amongst the lowest-achieving groups in education. Traveller children's educational status is considerably lower than that of their peers. According to the Census of 2002, 54.8% of Travellers obtained only a primary level education and 63.2% of Traveller children under the age of 15 had left school (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre, 2013).

Two nations committed to ensuring the well being of students and the quality of education, yet there is clear-cut evidence of striking disparity in both educational systems. These disparities lie deeper than the content and methods of education. In order

for our government to raise educational standards, they need to view the world through the internal lenses of the individual learners.

In understanding poverty or culture, seeing and understanding are not always the same thing. For example, intellectually, one may have some understanding of the effects of poverty, but emotionally and physically one cannot have a clue, unless he or she has lived it. Historically, children from poverty, racial or cultural backgrounds have been disproportionately placed at risk of academic failure (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). In order for schools to create and implement effective strategies and new programs to address poverty or cultural issues, educators, leaders, and stakeholders need to see and understand these challenges through the lenses of the individuals who live it: parents and students.

Purpose of Study

The purpose, at the beginning of this dissertation, was to better comprehend the challenges and to gain insight into parent perspectives of the educational experiences of children living in poverty. As sometimes occur, when concepts and processes emerge in grounded theory, the purpose changes. This is true in this study whose emerged purpose was: (a) to further elucidate the experiences and consequences between culture, socioeconomic, and education through parent perceptions, of their children's educational experiences and (b) to formulate a logical, systemic, and explanatory theory of culturally responsive teaching and interpersonal relationships.

This dissertation was comprised of three major components: cultural impacts, environmental impacts, and improved academic outcomes for culturally diverse populations. Part I concentrated on the environmental components of children living on

Indian Reservations and Traveller sites. Part II focused on how these living conditions and cultural practices impacted educational outcomes. Finally, this study highlights for educators, parents, and stakeholders what needs to be done to counter the effects of these low performing students.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, it was assumed the participants perceive education as important and desirable for their child's success in life. A second assumption was that parents desire a high quality education for their children regardless of economic or cultural background. The third assumption was that students' growth and academic development was highly influenced by external factors that include living conditions from birth to adulthood. The fourth and final assumption for this study was that all participants were truthful with their responses.

Pilot Study

A pilot study for this dissertation was conducted in 2012. The purpose of the pilot study was to bring validity and add parent perspectives to improving educational outcomes for Native American children living in poverty. This qualitative research was part of a larger study of an international comparison between the educational experiences of children living in poverty in a Midwest Indian Reservation and in an English Traveller Community.

A convenience sample was used in the pilot study. A total of four Native American families were recruited during January 2012 to May 2012 from the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, which is located in North Central North Dakota. Criteria included (a) families who volunteered to participate, (b) Native American students

attending school on the reservation, (c) families of low-income level, and (c) children ages 14-17 years of age. The data was collected through interviews, observations, field study, and school data.

In this study, I found many similarities between my childhood and that of the participants. Like the participants, I was born and raised on an Indian reservation and grew up under poor conditions. Education was not valued in the sense of career advancement nor was it expected; however, unlike my participants I achieved a formal education, broke the cycle of poverty, and now view education through different lenses. In completing this study, I was hopeful in finding out why “I was able to go out the front door while so many others went out the back door.” What I have learned through this process is that qualitative research is messy and it does not always go according to plan. In beginning this research, my aim was to examine the effects poverty had on student achievement. Although I found poverty to be a contributing factor as to why Native students struggle academically, it was not the underlining factor. It was a combination of internal and external barriers that strained student achievement, which ultimately affected student progress and outcomes.

When relationships are established between home and school, children will increase academic performance. Teachers can establish positive relationships with parents by making them feel welcome and by encouraging two-way communication (Olsen & Fuller, 2012). When teachers have an understanding of the student’s home life, the teachers are able to use that insight to understand the student behavior. Throughout this study, student behavior appeared to be the primary reason for why a student struggles in school. If school officials, teachers, and parents developed open communication and

respect for one another, then a student's behavior and academics generally improved. Children who know that their parents, teachers, and school officials are working together as a team tend to be more emotionally secure in the learning environment and are more likely to reach their full potential (Call & Featherstone, 2010).

The schools in this community were providing all of the necessary events and programs to engage parents and students. They were providing the educational support and community functions to get parents activity involved socially, but the important component of building relationships was sometimes left out. If relationships were not established and mutual respect was not shared, all of these parent involvement activities were not productive.

Utilizing a grounded theory approach, I developed a theory from the initial data I collected and made adjustments along the way to develop a stronger theory (Creswell, 2007). The theory behind the parent perceptions on the impact of poverty in education supported the initial assumption and created other questions for the larger study. In the larger study, I created more questions focused around establishing relationships and perceptions of school culture.

Importance of the Study

The importance of this dissertation was to gain insight into parent perspectives of the educational experiences of children living in culturally diverse populations. This international case study will identify the relationship between the educational experiences of children living in a Midwest Indian Reservation and in an English Traveller Community. An understanding of the impact of cross cultural environments and how

these influencing factors affect student achievement from the parents' perspectives was developed.

Research Questions

Literature has shown the relationship between culture, poverty, and education; however, through this study, insight through parents' perspectives of their child's educational experiences was gained. This international study exemplified a particular sharpness that provides a unique comparison between educational systems with two very similar populations. The research questions studied were:

1. How do parents in a high poverty school district describe their child's educational experiences?
2. What are the aspects of the internal and external factors that contribute to a student's educational outcomes?
3. What are the differences and similarities based on these two different parent perspectives?
4. What are the parents' perceptions on the relationship developments within the school system?

In this simplified model, there were multiple steps that were determined to be the fundamental pathways that link poverty and culture to student achievement. Through in-depth parent interviews it was identified that: (a) these students encounter enormous educational challenges that may be related to poverty or cultural influences; and, (b) parents have certain perspectives of the educational system that relate to student outcomes.

Scope of Study

This study identified the relationship between two very different cultures, schools, and demographical areas with many similarities. One of the most serious problems confronting children living in poverty is the low achievement and high percentage of students identified with special needs. Through this analysis, the comparison identified the relationship between cross cultural identities, socioeconomic conditions, and student achievements through the eyes of the parents. Likewise, I believe that the findings of this study will help educators understand and politicians realize how factors within the home, school, and community affect student achievement.

Theoretical Framework

This study began by developing a conceptual model of how cultural differences affect student development across international borders. Poverty is an issue seen around the world and it does not discriminate. Many people have fallen victim to this vicious cycle. More than 2.8 billion people, which is close to half of the world's population live on less than the equivalent of \$2 a day and 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 dollar a day (United Nations Cyber School Bus, 2013). There have been numerous studies documenting how poverty and related social conditions (e.g., lack of access to health care, reality of childhood education, stable housing, etc.) affect child development and student achievement (Borman & Rachuba, 2001). While this research has been important, it does not tell us much about parent perspectives of the causes and consequences of poverty in education. In completing an international comparison of parent perspectives in education, this study provided insight in regards to the impacts of poverty and culture,

and identify, whether it is in fact, “poverty” and not “cultural differences” that hold back student achievement.

According to Borman and Rachuba (2001), the relationship between race, poverty, and education, mistakenly leaves the impression that learning gaps are related to skin color. Although there is a significant difference between race and achievement gaps, this study gained insight through parents’ perspectives of their children’s’ educational experiences. This study focuses on invoking the voices of parents by utilizing a theoretical framework influenced by a critical theory. By utilizing this framework, I was able to explore their stories about their child’s education in their own words and from their own stories. This study addressed the relationship between socioeconomics and student achievement. One of the most serious problems confronting children living in poverty is the low achievement and high percentage of students identified with special needs (Jensen, 2009). Through this analysis, the relationship between culture, school, and parent expectations; high dropout rates; and student achievement through the eyes of the parents was identified. Parental voices may help educators understand how factors within the home, school, and community affect a child’s academic ability.

This study was comprised of three major components: external factors, environmental obstacles, and improved academic outcomes for children. The first part concentrated on the socio-economic environmental components of Native American and Traveller students. Second, it identified how these living conditions impacted their growth and academic performance. Finally, it will bring awareness to educators, parents, and stakeholders of what needs to be done to counter the effects of poverty in diverse populations.

The data collection methods identified through the analysis of this qualitative study included interviews, observations, field study, and documented data. The interviews were conducted with Native American parents from an Indian reservation located in North Central North Dakota. The English Traveller families were from a Traveller community located in the United Kingdom. The evidence gathered across international borders was used to support the findings. Using a grounded theory approach, a theory was developed from the initial data I collected and adjustments were made along the way to develop a stronger theory (Creswell, 2007). The theory behind the parent perspectives was developed as the study progressed. This research supports other researcher's findings and creates probing questions for further study.

Data from this study identified the relationship between poverty, culture, and the student's academic ability and helps professionals and parents to gain an understanding about how these adversities affect student achievement. Educators, parents, and stakeholders are provided with fresh ideas and the tools needed to work together in providing a high quality education for Native American and Traveller children.

Researcher's Experience

I am an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. I reside on an Indian reservation located in North Central North Dakota and have for the past 38 years. Our tribe has 34,000 enrolled members; we have a population of 5,815 that reside on the main reservation and another 2,516 that reside on off-reservation trust land. Our school system has a 99% Native American student enrollment with 100% free and reduced lunches (DeCoteau, 2011).

I was born and raised on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation along with my brother and sister. We were raised by our mother and grew-up in a very nontraditional household. At a very young age, I had taken on many roles that required me to grow-up quickly. Although my childhood was very difficult, I still managed to attend school daily, not because it was expected, but because it was safe. However, this safe place soon became a place of displeasure and dislike. In not having any guidance or support in the home, my academic achievement began to diminish. Due to my failure to read, I was retained in the third grade and placed in special education. Later, the behavioral problems started and I was labeled the “problem child.” I can recall not being a very pleasant child and from that moment on, I hated school and everything it represented. As I reflect on this difficult time, I recall not having any educational support in the home and within the school system. If only my teachers would have been aware of what was going on in my life outside of the school walls, maybe they would have understood the root to my behaviors.

As a young girl, I was very determined to break the cycle of alcoholism, bad parenting, and ignorance towards education. Although my childhood and educational experiences were very difficult, I still managed to successfully put myself and little sister through school. The summer after I graduated high school, I started taking classes at our local community college. In pursuing my educational dreams to make a better life for myself, it was not an easy task because I had to reteach myself how to read and write. I was determined to show the educators who failed me as a child that I was capable of learning. In 1997, I graduated with honors with an Associate of Science degree. In the fall of 2001, my husband and I moved with our three children to Grand Forks, North

Dakota so I could further my educational dreams. In the spring of 2003, I graduated Cum Laude with a double Bachelor's degree in education. Then, in the spring of 2004 I graduated with honors to achieve a Master Strategist degree in Special Education. I am very proud to say that I was the first of six generations to graduate with a college degree.

I have been a professional educator since 1997. Since then, I have worked as a paraprofessional, transition specialist, and special education teacher in a school district located on an Indian reservation in north central North Dakota. The book you are reading is the culmination of my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. Because I believe that in order to succeed in my endeavors to break the cycle in Indian country, a doctoral degree in education will ensure that my story and beliefs of individuality will become true. This will demonstrate to others that one's past does not define nor dictate one's future. Today my primary leadership goal after my doctorate is to be a positive role model for my children and our young Native children, and to become a strong advocate for Native American progress and personal achievement through education.

As I was preparing for this dissertation, I reflected on my life and role as a Native American educator, and, for the first time, I realized the importance of relationships in education. I have realized that the importance of conducting research in understanding this topic plays a key role in the success of our young Native children. The reasons for writing a dissertation in this area are both personal and professional. As a Native American researcher, I have experienced and witnessed many challenges in Indian education. Our people are facing extreme poverty, limited access to healthcare, inadequate housing, and high incidences of substance abuse, which then impedes the cultivation of a safe learning environment for Native American children. Our students are

not like the "average" student. As a community and school system, we must work together to meet the unique needs of our student population. When working with Native American children, I believe we need to educate the whole child. Most importantly, we need to acknowledge the culture, environmental surrounds, as well as the social and emotional needs which impact each Native American student.

Personal Interest

From my personal perspective, I believe there are multiple factors that impact a fundamental assumption regarding some of the challenges and barriers within Indian education. These factors include: a lack of positive parent involvement, a sizable dropout rate, high absenteeism and truancy of students, high risk behaviors on the part students (e.g. alcohol, drug, violence, teen pregnancy, etc.), low academic achievement, social promotions, high incidences of mental health and social issues, erratic staff attendance, economically disadvantaged students, perceptions of a community having low expectations, and political issues. In addition, recruiting and retaining highly qualified professionals to fill essential positions is extremely difficult.

The goal of this research is to better understand children from diverse populations. In addressing our educational challenges, I first felt it was necessary to understand the dynamics of parenting in the context of poverty or cultural environments. Parent perspectives and voices must be heard in order for change to occur.

Delimitations of the Study

For this international comparison case study, parents and school personnel were selected based upon relevant criteria (ethnicity, location, lifestyle, income levels, and parents of children between the ages of 14-16) to the study and desired participation. In

conducting research in the United Kingdom, the amount of time spent with the Traveller families was limited; therefore, most of the information gathered was confirmed in written text. All parents who participated were female; therefore, fathers were not identified in the study. Parents of children attending the school where I serve as an educator were not excluded from the study. This study did not include the perceptions of parents with a moderate to high-income status or other cultural identities outside of the Traveller and Native American populations. The perceptions of parents in this study may reflect those in other environments; however, they do not imply the views of all economically disadvantaged parents or communities.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used throughout this study. The definitions of these terms clarified the meanings within the context of the study. The terminology in identifying both ethnicities can be contentious due to how individual groups identify themselves; therefore, this study will use “Gypsy, Traveller, and Native American” as a general phrase to include people falling within the pragmatic definition of Gypsy/Traveller and Native American. The terms include the following:

Caravans. Mobile living vehicles used by Gypsies and other Travellers. They are also referred to as trailers.

Circus families. Both British and international, also travel for work purposes around a single business interest and are just as distinctive by virtue of their lifestyle, professional structure, and organization.

Culture. Consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human

groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consist of traditional (i.e. historically derived and select) ideas and especially their attached values (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 86)

English Gypsy/Gypsy. A term originating in Egypt which refers to a range of different ethnic and cultural groups who live a nomadic lifestyle. Member of one of the main groups of Gypsy/Travellers in England. Romany Gypsies trace their ethnic origin back to migrations, probably from Northern India, taking place at intervals since before 1500. Gypsies were recognized as an ethnic group in 1989.

Generational poverty. Being in poverty for two generations or longer.

Gypsies and Irish Travellers. Minority ethnic communities protected by the 1976 Race Relations Act in the United Kingdom.

Irish Traveller. Member of one of the main Gypsy/Traveller groups in England. Irish Travellers have a distinct indigenous origin in Ireland and were recognized as an ethnic group in England in 2000.

Native American. A culture identified by aboriginal ancestry and people indigenous to the land of what is now the United States.

Native American poverty. Poverty on the reservation is generational, absolute, and rural. Families are isolated in rural areas where the cycle of poverty continues and they are not equipped with the tools to move out of this situation. They are living in the United States without scarcity necessities such as proper shelter, running water, electricity, food, and are living day-to-day for survival.

New Traveller. Term used here to refer to members of the settled community who have adopted a nomadic lifestyle. New Travellers are sometimes also referred to as New Age Travellers.

Parent Involvement. Parent/guardians participation in all school functions including school school-oriented activities and home-school oriented activities.

Poverty. A chronic, debilitating, and financial conditions that results from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors and affects the mind, body, soul, and financial hardship (Jensen, 2009).

Roma. Gypsies originating from Eastern Europe.

Showmen. Business and cultural community members, who by their organization around a single business for generations and with a history of planned movement, are distinctive from the other Traveller communities.

Traveller. There is no single group of Traveller's. Traveller is a collective term for all those ethnic minority and cultural communities of people who travel around the country for economic reasons or as a lifestyle of choice. In their own communities the families may assert their specific identities as Gypsy (English, Welsh) Traveller (Irish, Scottish), Showmen (Fairground) and Circus. These are the traditional communities in the United Kingdom.

Traveller poverty. Families working day-to-day solely dependent on a flexible income.

Traveller site. An area of land laid out and used for Gypsy/Traveller caravans. An authorized site will have planning permission (and a site license if privately owned) for use as a Gypsy caravan site. An unauthorized site lacks planning permission.

United Kingdom. A country of western Europe comprising England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Acronyms

| | |
|-------|---|
| ACT | American College Test |
| ASD | Autistic Spectrum Disorder |
| BESD | Behavioral, Emotional, and Social Difficulties |
| DCSF | Department for Children, Schools and Families |
| GCSE | General Certificate of Secondary Education |
| GRT | Gypsy/Roma pupils and pupils of Irish Traveller heritage |
| IEA | International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement |
| IGCSE | International General Certificates of Secondary Education. |
| MLD | Moderate Learning Difficulties |
| N. A. | Native American |
| NAEP | National Assessment of Education Progress |
| NCLB | No Child Left Behind |
| SENCO | Special Education Needs Coordinator |
| SES | Socioeconomic Status |
| SLD | Severe Learning Difficulties |
| SpLD | Specific Learning Difficulties |
| TANF | Temporary Assistance for Needy Families |
| TIMSS | Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study |
| TMBCI | Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians |

U. K. United Kingdom

U. S. United States

Organization of the Study

Chapter II contains a comprehensive review of literature. This chapter will examine five areas of the literature related to Native American and Traveller education: (a) historical perspective and overview of Native American and Traveller culture, (b) cultural impacts on student achievement, (c) importance of parent involvement, (d) the significance of personalization of education and establishing relationships, and (e) the learning gap and status.

Chapter III includes an explanation of the methods adopted for this qualitative study. This chapter includes a discussion on ground theory approach, research procedures, researcher's role and subjectivities, the forms of data collection, data analyzed, and the validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter IV includes the data obtained from the five individual parent interviews. Parent responses are summarized in narrative form according to the five themes identified in the coding and analysis process. This chapter concludes with a summary of finding of all participant responses.

Chapter V includes a discussion, summary of findings, conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with recommendations for educators, stakeholders and parents, including a new description about the importance of building relationships.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

When it comes to understanding education in diverse populations, what really matters to minority families living in low-income environments? Is formal education viewed as a priority or valued in the same respect as non-minority groups. In the United States and United Kingdom societies, schooling is seen by many as the embodiment of meritocracy. In meaning, they believe that a child's experiences in the educational system will allow them to succeed without regard to family structure, race, ethnicity, or gender. If this statement holds true then all children will succeed, regardless of one's personal experiences, cultural values, or external factors that lie outside of the school walls.

According to Lee and Burkam (2002), Americans' beliefs about their educational system are inconsistent. They recognize that children neither begin nor end their education on an equal footing, but simultaneously believe that schools are places where social inequalities should be equalized. Americans believe the advantages and disadvantages that children experiences in their homes and families should not determine what happens to them in school and that school is a place where all students are seen as equals. It is the American dream that all children's educational experiences will allow them to succeed without regard to their family circumstances, race, ethnicity, or gender. Yet, it is the American public school system that magnifies these social inequalities

through standardized academic achievements that are associated with family background, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

During the past two decades in the United States and the United Kingdom, there have been demands for equality in education for all learners. President George Bush's promises in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and high stakes testing was to close the achievement barriers and to end the "soft racism of low expectations" (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Yet, American Indians students are still identified as low achievers and reservation schools are being labeled as failures (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In the United Kingdom, their government promises to enable every child to fulfill his or her potential, which is at the heart of the government's drive to raise school standards (U.K. Department of Education, 2013). While their hearts maybe in the right place, they are still failing young people from minority ethnic groups because the achievement gaps remain unacceptably wide. According to the Department of Communities and Local Government (2012), Gypsy/Roma pupils and pupils of Irish Traveller (GRT) heritage are amongst the lowest-achieving groups in education. These are examples of two nations committed to ensuring the wellbeing of students and the quality of education, yet there clear evidence and striking disparity in both educational systems. These issues of disparities lie deeper than the content and methods of education.

This chapter begins with a historical perspective sharing views on early Native American and Traveller education from more than 200 years ago to recent views from 2013. The literature explores the following areas related to education: (a) how early educational beginning and challenges impacted the development of learning, perceptions,

and school success for culturally diverse learners; (b) impacts on student achievement; (c) the importance of parent involvement; and (d) the learning gap and status.

Historical Education

In order to address the problems facing Native American and Traveller students, it is important to discuss historical factors that have contributed to their early educational experiences. Before embarking on this analysis of parent perspectives of their child's educational experience, it is important to establish the historical background of the existence of Native American and Gypsy/Travellers as well as the context of race in which educational inequalities for these groups occurred.

North American Experience

Before European settlement in North America, Native Americans were a group of nomadic people who were noted for their continual movement, work ethic, and pride. Native American children were educated by their parents, elders, and tribal members. Children were taught lessons according to their gender roles. According to Cajete (1999), males were trained to be hunter-warriors which required them to act individualistically, yet to always conform to the demands of a communal, conservative, homogeneous society. Females were trained to be planter-gatherers and homemakers. At a very early age children were expected to adopt the clearly defined gender roles assigned to them. Educating their young was primarily, but not exclusively imparted by the example of elders. Religious and moral training came from the parents with support from the whole tribe. Children were taught lessons through visual and kinesthetic learning styles, seeing and doing, oral literature of storytelling, and conveying cultural beliefs and practices (Cajete, 1999).

When Europeans began settling on the continent they brought with them a newly formed European-American government that enforced an onset of governmental interventions which included plans for a transcontinental railroad and intermittent Indian-white warfare that led to the creation of reservations (land reserved for Indians) in the late 1860 (Herman & Johnson, 2007). In the next few decades, continuing conflicts were resolved through the United States government's policy of forced assimilation which required Indian children to attend white schools where they were expected to forsake their culture for the European American culture. This new form of education was originally used as a tool to reform estranged children from their parents, people, culture, language, and values in an effort to force assimilation and conversion to Christianity (Adams 1995; Butterfield & Pepper 1991; Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

The British Experience

Gypsies first migrated into Britain from Northern India in the early 1500s and at that time were thought to be Egyptians on a pilgrimage. They were given safe passage by the king that led to the settled populations calling them Gypsies (O'Hanlon & Holmes, 2004). However, their unique and distinctive lifestyles soon became a dislike to local villagers and the first anti-Gypsy act was passed. As a result, any Gypsy entering England could have his property confiscated and be ordered to leave within two weeks (The Pariah Syndrome XI Treatment Elsewhere in Europe: England and Scotland, 2000). Villagers started portraying the nomads as idle, dirty, criminal people that often posed a threat to the women and children of sedentary society. They were perceived to harbor diseases and to be responsible for carrying it from place to place (Carter, 2002). Therefore, from 1550 to 1640, a number of laws resulted in deportations, slavery, and

executions of persons being, appearing to be, or keeping the company of “Egyptians” (O’Hanlon & Holmes, 2004). After the 15th century, their failure to leave the country, language, traditions, values, work interests, and nomadic lifestyle resulted in them being more marginalized, stigmatized, and penalized. By the 16th century, it was a capital offense to be a Gypsy (O’Hanlon & Holmes, 2004).

Like Native Americans, Gypsies and Travellers were known as a group of nomadic people who were noted for their craftsmanship, work ethic, and strong family kinship. Although the terms Gypsy and Traveller hold different meanings, both communities historically have much in common as nomadic groups. According to O’Hanlon and Holmes (2004), both groups share a history of travelling for work purposes and hold a strong tradition which puts family loyalty above all else. They both traditionally operate outside of the mainstream wage labor system as extended-family, mobile workforces, and child-rearing practices that support and teach their children as trainee adults to be inducted into the family work traditions as mature workers at 12-13 years of age. Their children’s first education started with family education, which was strong, effective, and predominantly promoted through visual and kinesthetic learning styles.

Early Native American Education

The United States began the official education of Native American children in 1802 with the Act of Congress authorizing an annual appropriation of \$15,000 for the purpose of civilizing the Indian tribes. A second Act followed in 1819 that established a permanent annual sum of \$10,000 for the same purpose (Jerome, 2006). As these Acts of

Congress evolved, policies creating assimilation and termination of Native Americans followed. The Act stipulated:

The President may, in every case where he shall judge improvement in the habits and conditions of such Indians practical, and that the means of instruction can be introduced with their own consent, employ capable persons of good moral character to instruct them in the mode of agriculture suited to their situation; and for teaching their children in reading, writing, and arithmetic. (Fey & McNickle, 1959, p. 108)

These funds were distributed to various religious organizations to be used for the sole purpose of educating the Indian people. Contrary to the idea of the separation of church and state, the federal government and the church were closely aligned in educating Native American children. According to Garrett and Pichette (2000), the federal government wanted to ‘civilize’ Indians and the churches wanted to ‘Christianize’ them. Churches became the United States government’s instrument in educating Native American children.

In 1824, the Bureau of Indian Affairs was created to handle all matters relating to American Indians. Their ultimate goal was not to protect American Indians, but to assimilate them into white society utilizing the power of education. Indian education was viewed as a “civilizing” or “assimilation” process (Hunt, 2012).

In 1879, Carlisle Indian Industrial School was created in Carlisle, Pennsylvania under the management of Richard Henry Pratt, a former Army officer. Educational reform was to complete assimilation by transforming Native children into white farms. Pratt’s educational philosophy was simple: “kill the Indian in him and save the man” (Fey & McNickle, 1959, pp. 30-31). Pratt’s strategy was straightforward: the children will be taken away from their parents and reprogramed under the auspices of the government

(Hunt, 2012). Native children who attended boarding school were forced to wear standard uniforms, cut their long hair, were given new Christian names, and endured daily punishments for speaking, writing, or acting in an Indian fashion. A typical day was spent learning in the morning, attending church, praying throughout the day, and doing manual labor (C. Lilley, personal communication, January 25, 2013). As a result, successfully changed students would return to their tribes representing a new, better, civilized, cultural missionary. One goal of this type of education was that the nuclear family would replace the extended family structures of the tribe (Buffalohead, 2003). The Native American Boarding School approaches not only attempted to physically and mentally alter Native students' perceptions of their place within their community, but it also defined what family and community meant as well as what was culturally accepted by the dominant white culture.

Early Traveller Education

The first educational clause relating to nomadic children in the United Kingdom was the 1908 Children's Act. The Children's Act made education compulsory for travelling Gypsy children, but only for one-half of a year (Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month, 2013). The sentiment behind Clause 118 of the Children's Bill was paternalistic rather than repressive. The clause 118 of the original draft of the Bill held that an offense had been committed:

If a person habitually wanders from place to place and takes with him any child above the age of five . . . unless he can prove that the child is totally exempt from school attendance or that the child is not by being so taken with him prevented from receiving elementary education. (Carter, 2002, p. 3)

The penalties for the offense of preventing a child from receiving an education through wandering were to be harsh. The guardian of the child could be apprehended without a warrant and fined up to 20 shillings if found guilty while the child was to be sent to an industrial school. The bill represented a desire to bring about the assimilation of nomadic people and was based upon the long-standing argument that the surest means to put a stop to the nomadic life was to work with the children of wanderers. The purpose behind this bill was to bring assimilation to the nomadic people and to put a stop to the nomadic lifestyle of wandering children (Baird, 1839). The hope was that if children could be prevented from following in the misguided ways of their parents, then within one or perhaps two generations, the problem of the wandering peoples would be resolved without resorting to more openly repressive legislation (Elwood, 1973). The Children's Bill was soon supported by the Education Committee of the Free Church of Scotland which had campaigned for assimilationist legislation since 1896 and the Scottish Chief Constables Club who expressed hope to enable the children of all wanderers to be committed to industrial schools which was compared to forcing Huguenot children into Catholic convents in the 16th century (Carter, 2002). Huguenot was the name given to the Protestants in France who were reformists and followers of John Calvin. They were revoked of their equal rights with Catholics and Protestantism was declared illegal. This led to wide-spread religious persecution where 200,000 Huguenots fled their homes in France between 1685 and 1700. The individuals who were caught were either executed or made to work as galley slaves in the French fleet on the Mediterranean. Women were imprisoned and their children sent to convents to be converted to Catholicism (The Huguenot Society's of Great Britain and Ireland, 2014).

Although the sole purpose of the Children's Bill was to assimilate the nomadic people into the proper British lifestyle, this was soon presented with many mixed receptions. There were advocates for and against the bill. Some argued that educating the Gypsies would empower them to be better thieves and others opposed segregating Gypsy children into industrial schools. Therefore, advocates of the bill were persuaded to agree to the inclusion of an amendment to Clause 118 exempting the Children of Travellers between the times of the year when they took to the road for reasons of trade (Carter, 2002). In hopes of passing the bill, the Gypsy Travellers would settle for the winter; however, this theory did not last long in local communities. The nomadic people were being harassed by police and authorities in hopes of driving them out of their communities quickly. This treatment continued after the passage of the Children's Act and, in November 1909, *The Sanitary Record and Journal of Sanitary and Municipal Engineering* actually advised Sanitary Inspectors of local councils that the Children's Act could be used to drive Gypsies from the area (Carter, 2002). Not only were they being driven out of the communities, they were also being denied enrollment into the public school system. According to the 1910 subcommittee appointed by the Surrey Education Committee on School Attendance of Gypsy Children, school managers throughout the county were making it a policy not to accept the children of Travellers and in their opinion "their physical and moral condition renders them unfit to associate with other children" (Carter, 2002, p.8). According to Carter (2002), the debate over the 1908 Children's Act goes a long way towards illustrating the problems faced by itinerant minorities in Britain both during the early twentieth century and in the present day.

Impacts on Student Achievement

In order to address the impacts of education, it is important to first acknowledge the many challenges that encompass Native American and Traveller communities. Before embarking on this analysis, the many challenges that contribute to the educational impacts within these two populations must be identified. The relationships between cross cultural expectations, socioeconomic conditions, and the learning gaps will be highlighted. To avoid retention, absenteeism, and school failure, educators must possess an understanding of the culture with knowledge, confidence, and expertise of the community to help the students reach a level of proficiency. According to Henson (2010), educators who are unaware of the cultural expectations will result in a cultural disconnect which will have negative results on students' outcomes. Unless teachers understand that students' backgrounds, needs, and perspectives towards education are different, the needs of at-risk students will go unmet. This understanding is extremely important for teachers working in high minority and poverty stricken school districts. Many of these teachers have never known poverty or cannot relate to culturally racial issues in the lives of Native American's or Traveller students.

In understanding poverty or cultural issues, seeing and understanding are not always the same thing. For example, intellectually, they might have some understanding of the effects of poverty, but emotionally and physically they do not have a clue, unless they lived it. For the purpose of this study, in identifying these complexities, the researcher will try to make sense of the concepts and their impact on education. Therefore, before addressing the interrelationships between student achievement and

parent perspectives, it is important to first discuss the concept of poverty or low-income status.

The Effects of Poverty

Poverty is a word that often triggers many strong emotions and many questions. Obviously, one can spend an entire life's work exploring the meaning behind the concepts (and, indeed, many have). For the purpose of this study, poverty is defined as "a chronic and debilitating condition that result from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors that affects the mind, body, and soul" (Jensen, 2009, p. 5). As defined by Sen (1992, 2001), poverty is a condition that results in an absence of the freedom to choose arising from a lack of the capability to function effectively in society.

Defining the term poverty appears to be complex because it does not hold the same meaning for all people. In the United States, there are poverty thresholds that are set to define poverty levels. According to the Office of Management and Budget, individual's with income insufficient to purchase basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, and other essentials are designated as poor (Jensen, 2009). Poverty is shaped not only by income, but also by important elements of culture and the economic environment in which people live and have accessibility. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, ill health, and lack of access to education and other basic services. It is also manifested in increased morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness, inadequate housing, unsafe environments, social discrimination, and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social, and cultural life (Jolly, 1999). Poverty is not only measured by these multiple dimensions, but it is the denial of opportunities and choices that are widely

essential to lead along, healthy, creative life, and enjoying a standard living with freedom, dignity, self-esteem, and respect from others.

According to Jenson (2009), there are six different types of poverty: (a) situational poverty which is caused by a sudden crisis or loss and is often temporary; (b) generational poverty which occurs in families where at least two generations have been born into poverty; (c) absolute poverty which involves a scarcity of such necessities as shelter, running water, food, and focuses on day-to-day survival; (d) relative poverty where the economic status of a family's income is insufficient to meet in society's average standard living; (e) urban poverty where there is a population of at least 50,000 people and they are forced to deal with a complex aggregate of chronic and acute stressors; and (f) rural poverty where there is a population of less than 50,000 people, there are single guardian households, and there is limited access to services.

According to Mather (2010), poverty and low-income status in the United States has increased dramatically, especially among those households headed by women. The effects of growing up in single parent households have been shown to go far beyond economics, increasing the risk of children dropping out of school, disconnecting from the labor force, and becoming teen parents. Research has identified children growing up in low-income and single-family households face the most significant barriers to success in school and adulthood.

Native American Poverty

It is difficult to categorize and describe Native American poverty into context because its form of poverty is like no other. Poverty on the reservation is generational, absolute, and rural. Families are isolated in rural areas where the cycle of poverty

continues and they are not equipped with the tools to move out of this situation. They are living in the United States without scarcity necessities such as proper shelter, running water, electricity, food, and are living day-to-day for survival. According to Rodgers (2014), Native Americans are among the poorest in the country with a median annual income of \$33,627. One in every four (25.3%) lives in poverty and nearly one-third (29.9%) are without health insurance.

Today, Native Americans are identified as having the highest national poverty rates at 27.0% followed by African Americans who are at a 25.8% poverty rate. These rates are even more devastating for Native Americans living on Indian reservations which are the poorest places in the country with over one-third of all Natives living on reservations with annual incomes as low as \$1, 539, which falls well below the National Poverty Guideline (Liberation News, 2012). The average unemployment rate ranges from 50-69%, which is devastating considering the national unemployment rate at the very peak of the Great Depression was approximately 25% (Rodgers, 2014).

In the National Center for Native American Youth study (2011) concluded that “some of the poorest counties within the United States are located on Indian reservations. Numerous tribal communities have unemployment rates near 70% and more than 23% of all Native Americans live in poverty, of which 32% are under the age of 18” (p.1). In addition, American Indian populations have been increasing at a rate of 20% per decade since 1980 also resulting in a deficiency in adequate housing. There were 3,885 children ages 0-17 living on and near one North Dakota reservation in 2007 with 1,690 (38%) identified as living in poverty. This is three times the North Dakota and United States poverty rates. In 2000, one-half of all children living on a North Dakota reservation aged

0-17 lived with a single parent (40%) or with grandparents (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2009).

According to Lyle Poitra (2010), American Indians living on reservations have long suffered from severe poverty and accompanying social stressors that have threatened the social fabric of their communities. In 2000, the median household income was \$24,514, just 58% of national levels while the average per capita income was \$8,855 which is less than one-half the United States average. In 2008, there were 1,733 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients among children and youth aged 0-19 which is 23% of the caseload statewide for that age group (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2009). Sixty-five percent of adults on the reservation are unemployed (Freeman & Fox, 2005) compared to 4.1% in North Dakota and 9.7% in the United States (L. Poitra, 2010).

Socioeconomic status is a huge part of the equation that contributes greatly to the damaging of the physical, socioemotional, and cognitive well being of children and their families. Children raised in poverty are much less likely to have their emotional health needs met and, as a result, creates emotional dysfunction (Jensen, 2009). Behavior research shows that children from impoverished homes develop psychiatric disturbance and maladaptive social functions at a greater rate than their affluent counterparts do (McCoy, Frick, Loney, & Ellis, 1999). Extreme poverty often manifests itself in malnourishment, high rates of mortality, and suicide. The number of behavior problems directly correlates with the degree of poverty (Henson, 2010).

According to L. Poitra (2010), Native American children face emotional and social instability which correlates with suicide and related behaviors (suicide ideation,

planning, and attempts) and are major escalating public health concerns for Native Americans. According to National Center for Native American Youth (2011), the child rate for Native children has increased 15%, while the mortality in the United States has decreased for children aged 1 to 14 years. It also notes that suicide is the second leading cause of death in Native children aged 15 through 24, a rate that is 2.5 times the national average. Another study (L. Poitra, 2010) concluded in 2003-2009, a northwestern Indian reservation had 144 youth, ages 5-24 years exhibit suicide behaviors: there were seven deaths. Sixty-six percent of the children said they had thought about suicide and 42% of the suicidal behaviors involved substance abuse.

Native children and families are living under an accumulation of generations of unresolved historical trauma and cultural breakdown, severe poverty, social deprivation, community disorganization, family conflict and management problems, all intensified by alcohol and drug abuse. These children lack positive role models that could bring them hope (L.Poitra, 2010).

According to Jenson (2009), children who are surrounded by a vast amount of chronic socioeconomic deprivation and in unstable households it creates an environment that undermines their development of self and the capacity for self-determination and self-efficacy. These children have issues including depression, chemical dependency and other mental health problems that contribute to very high rates of learning problems, conduct disorders, running away, and suicide attempts among the youth. According to data from L. Poitra (2010), two-thirds (67%) of the 2,521 charges and citations brought against youth in Tribal Juvenile Court between 2005 and 2008, were for: unruly child (401 charges, 16%), truancy (349 charges, 14%), zero tolerance (258 charges, 10%),

disorderly conduct (241 charges, 10%), burglary and theft (172 charges, 7%), malicious mischief (124 charges, 5%), and assaults (116 charges, 5%). Drug and alcohol evaluations were part of the disposition in 21% of the cases. Native children violence, including intentional injuries, homicide, and suicide, account for 75% of the deaths of Native children aged 12 through 20 (National Center for Native American Youth, 2011).

Traveller Poverty

Although there is no national data available on Travellers' poverty or low-income status, there is evidence of the inequalities experienced within Gypsy and Traveller communities. Due to their lack of formal education many Travellers are denied employment opportunities. According to Clark (2006), many Gypsies and Travellers do not have academic qualifications by reason of leaving school at a young age, illiteracy, or cultural resistance to secondary education and are denied equal employment opportunities (Cemlyn, Greenfields, Burnett, Matthews, & Whitwell, 2009). Individuals with low levels of skills, education, and training tend to have the highest rates of poverty and unemployment (Raffo, Dyson, Gunter, Hall & Jones, 2007). Cemlyn et al. (2009) found that Travellers tend to have low rates of employment and high poverty rates, that are in direct correlation with children having mental health and other personal issues contributing to very high rates of learning problems, substance abuse, conduct disorders, high suicide rates, and criminal activity.

A census report had never been conducted in the United Kingdom on Gypsies and Traveller populations until 2011. According to the United Kingdom National Census (Bowers, 2011), Gypsies and Travellers were not recognized despite being part of the British society for over 500 years because of their fear of revealing their ethnicity at work

or school which oftentimes resulted in hostility, racist abuse, or worse consequences. For the first time, Gypsies and Travellers volunteered their ethnicity and 57,680 were identified (Bowers, 2011). Since this data is relatively new, there is no other statistical data pertaining to Traveller or Gypsy communities.

Although there is not any direct data linking income to the disparities within the Traveller population, there are many barriers amongst the community. According to Cemlyn et al. (2009), there is significant poverty and hunger in the Roma population. They have high unemployment rates, poor access to health services, high premature death rates, teenage pregnancies with little or no health care prior to birth, low life expectancy, and poor access to accommodation services including welfare rights advice, tenancy support, and Gypsy/Traveller site provisions.

In the United Kingdom, there are high percentages of Traveller caravans on unauthorized residential sites, extremely high unemployment rates, lower life expectancy, high infant mortality rates, and poor literacy and numeracy skills. These barriers often lead to difficulties for this population in obtaining proper identification cards, accessing local services, high school abandonment, and many Travellers become victims of prejudices and hate crimes. When they do access community resources, the Travellers and Gypsies often face professionals who lack knowledge, confidence, and expertise about their culture which creates barriers in obtaining proper health care and services (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012).

In identifying these impacts, it is apparent that students of Native American and Traveller communities share many barriers that are bordered within their cultural environments. In comparing both groups, it is apparent that American Indians and

Traveller communities have the most severe health problems of all United States and United Kingdom groups, including the shortest life expectancy and highest infant mortality rates, alcohol and substance abuse, sensory impairments, diabetes, learning disabilities, fetal alcohol syndrome, and accidents and injuries at alarming rates (Cemlyn, et al., 2009; United States Department of Education, 1998). Native and Traveller children who are exposed to such living conditions are struggling with multi-generational trauma and poverty. They exhibit severe risk factors including: family dysfunction; suicide attempts; depression; hopelessness; despair; loss of family or friends by death or suicide; alcohol, methamphetamine, and/or other substance abuse; increased anger, conflicts, aggression, and violence; isolating behaviors; and academic failure (Poitra, 2010; Cemlyn et al., 2009).

Both Native and Traveller communities continue to encounter population growth and isolation within their larger communities that has placed extreme hardships amongst these families. Native people living on reservations are facing many external factors such as housing shortages, homes without running water and electricity, and extremely high unemployment rates (Hunt, 2012). These hardships all contribute to poor quality and social exclusion from surrounding townsman. Many Gypsies and Travellers also live in poor quality homes and are socially excluded from neighbors. They are either on deprived housing estates or sites in bad locations with high rates of unemployment and poor quality living conditions. People who are socially excluded in employment terms are also disproportionately likely to experience poor physical and mental health (Cummins, Stafford, Macintyre, Marmot, & Ellaway, 2005).

The Educational Effects

In almost every school, regardless of student race or social class, teachers can identify children who are under achievers due to problems beyond the school walls. There are multitudes of reasons and characteristics that contribute to student outcomes, but none are greater than one's own socioeconomic status. Coleman et al. (1966) and Jencks et al. (1972) found socioeconomic status and family background to be the single strongest predictor of student achievement. The child poverty rate in the United States is among the highest in the developed Nations (Thomas & Bainbridge, 2002). This is most painfully apparent in low-income and minority groups. There is a direct correlation between an individual's status as a racial or cultural minority living in poverty with academic risk (Gordan & Yowell, 1994; Natriello et al., 1990). These studies found that the school itself minimally affected student achievement. The factor of race or ethnicity is closely associated with that of poverty as a predictor of achievement (Thomas & Stockton, 2010).

Poverty involves an array of complex risk factors that adversely affects the family in a multitude of ways such as emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, as well as health and safety issues which contribute greatly to the student's educational outcomes. It is probably an accurate assumption to believe that poverty and its attendant risk factors are damaging to children and their families physical, socioemotional, and cognitively (Klebanov & Brooks-Gunn, 2006; Sapolsky, 2005). According to Bradley, Corwin, McAdoo, and Coll (2001), 40% of children living in prolonged poverty displayed deficiencies in at least two areas of functioning such as language and emotional responsiveness by the age of three. Another study also found that

family income correlates significantly with children's academic success, especially through the early childhood development years (Van Ijzendoorn, Vereijken, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Riksen-Walraven, 2004). Coined by Heckman, the family factors can influence children from as early as when they are in the womb. By the time these children enter school; they already possess lower levels of cognitive and non-cognitive skills and lag far behind their more advantaged peers. Even more disturbing, these gaps have shown to persist well into adulthood (Heckman 2008, 2011). This factor, encompassed with limited access to adequate medical care, results in many children who experience cognitive or emotional damage, mental illness, depression, impairments in vision or hearing that oftentimes goes undiagnosed and untreated, as well as undiagnosed behavior disorders such as Attention Deficit Disorder or Oppositional Personality Disorders (Jensen, 2009). These issues usually have a direct impact on absenteeism and dropout rates.

Attendance issues appear to be a contributing factor to low student achievement among poor children. Freiberg (1993) found that attendance issues often correlate with parent's negative attitudes toward education. For example, parents who did poorly in school or had negative experiences may have negative attitudes towards their children's school. In effort to protect their children, they may discourage them from participating in school or provide very little academic support in the home. These parents are also less likely to be involved in parent activities or school events, less likely to contact the school about academic concerns, or to attend parent-teacher conferences (Morrison-Gutman & McLoyd, 2000).

The Home Effects

Cultural background and parenting styles of a child are the single most important factors influencing educational outcomes and academic motivation (Usher, Kober, Jennings, & Renter, 2012). According to Grolnick, Friendly, and Bellas (2009), cultural parenting styles are like parental involvement because they shape the background factors and context, as well as the unique values of each parent. Therefore, parenting behavior is different among different cultural populations, and as parents express different values and behaviors, children's motivation is affected differently (Grolnick et al., 2009). Parental influences may explain why children of various cultural backgrounds engage in school differently, as the educational values of their culture are reinforced by their surroundings and families.

Culture can be defined in a multiple of ways and there is no clear-cut definition.

For the purpose of this study, Kluckhohn's (1951) definition will be utilized:

Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling, and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. (p. 86)

An individual's culture not only shapes their ethnicity, but also shapes who they are as human beings. The family structure, teachings, and values are all encompassed into our environmental surroundings. Income status within a family structure can have severe and deleterious effects on family life and becomes part of one's culture. These financial altercations then take on new meanings and become part of an individual's cultural lifestyle.

When children grow up in a structured, secure, loving environment they are more adaptable to establish relationships outside of the home. According to Jenson (2009), when a child establishes strong relationships with parents or caregivers it forms a personality that is either secure and attached or insecure and unattached. Securely attached children typically behave better in school (Blair et al., 2008). When socioeconomic status factors into this equation, the children do not choose to behave differently, but their behavior is often contradicted by the overwhelming challenges they are confronted with on a day-to-day basis. Jenson (2009) explained: “When a child is raised in poverty, they are faced with many overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance” (p. 14). According to Bradley and Corwyn (2002), when a child comes from a stressful home environment, they tend to channel that stress into disruptive behavior at school and are less able to develop a healthy social and academic life. When these factors are combined with academics and social success they present massive challenges which impact a child academia success.

When children grow up in poor environments that are disproportionate than that of more fortunate children, they are exposed to adversely social and emotional environments. For example, low-income neighborhoods or housing sites are likely to have lower-quality social, municipal, and local services (Jenson, 2009). According to the National Commission of Teaching and American’s Future (2004), this is due to the higher traffic volumes, crime rates, and unsafe playgrounds which are often hazardous. These children are more likely to breathe in contaminated air and consume impure water. There homes are overcrowded with extended family, are physically deteriorated, and

contain a high percentage of safety hazards (National Commission on Teaching and American's Future, 2004).

A child's social and emotional needs are also impacted greatly by their environmental surroundings. When a child grows up in a stressful home environment they tend to channel these stressors into disruptive behaviors at school and are less able to develop a healthy academic life (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Jenson, 2009). These disruptive and impulsive behaviors are more apparent with students from low-SES backgrounds. According to Jenson (2009), these are exaggerated responses to the stress of their environmental factors, which become survival mechanisms. Each risk factor these students experience increases impulsivity and diminishes his or her capacity to defer gratifications (Evans, 2003).

Students raised in poverty are surrounded by many stress factors such as abuse, unsafe environments, poor parenting skills, and chronic or acute stress that contribute greatly to their behavior and undermine school behavior and performance. Jenson (2009) explained that girls exposed to abuse tend to experience mood swings, while boys experience impairments in curiosity, learning, and memory. Students who have to worry over unsafe and violent home environments tend to underperform academically. In addition, stress resulting from school bullying and school violence impairs test scores, diminishes attention spans, and increases absenteeism and tardiness (Hoffman, 1996).

Jenson (2009) explained that there are numerous factors that contribute to a student's academic achievement, but no greater than the home environment. It is well documented that the effect of environmental stressors is cumulative. Children who are exposed to abuse, neglect, danger, loss, or other poverty-related experiences are more

reactive to stressors. Each stressor continues to be building blocks, which slowly changes a child. Students will experience depression, hopelessness, and learned helplessness. They will drop out of school or become pregnant in their teens. It is these very stressors that often make life challenging and miserable for many poor children.

Parent Involvement

In understanding parent involvement, a clear definition and measurement of parent involvement needs to be examined and determined. Some research studies use a definition that focuses exclusively on school-oriented activities (Shaver & Walls, 1998), while others use a broader definition that includes a range of home and school oriented activities (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). For the purpose of this study, parent involvement will be defined as parent/guardians participation in all school functions including school school-oriented activities and home-school oriented activities.

One of the most important areas of research in education is the role of parents in student achievement. Parents are a child's first teacher and the most influential teachers (Fielding, Kerr, & Rosier, 2004; Olsen & Fuller, 2012) and parents who are actively involved in their child's education influence their success in school. Research has also revealed that parent's level of education is the most powerful predictor of how well a child will do in school (Rossi, 1994). Olsen and Fuller (2012) noted, "It is through families that children learn how to live in their worlds" (p. 4). Research has shown repeatedly that parent involvement and education are key factors in students' success.

Parent involvement is now being seen as equally important in increased awareness of the importance to educations and to support all levels of parents support. On

February 28, 2009, President Barack Obama addressed the Nation about the importance of parental involvement when he said:

In the end, there is no program or policy that can substitute for a parent-for mother or father who will attend those parent/teacher conferences, or help with homework, or turn off the TV, put away video games, read to their child. I speak to you not just as a President, but as a father, when I say that your responsibility for our children's education must begin at home. That is not a Democratic issue or Republican issue. That's an American issue. (Henson, 2010, p.24)

Parent involvement is positively correlated with student academic performance and increasing parent involvement maybe the contributing factor in reducing the achievement gap between high and low performing students (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Geenen, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2001) concluded that United States schools are becoming more and more diverse with increased numbers of low-performing minority students. Therefore, it is important to understand factors related to parent involvement, particularly in minority populations. Poverty, lack of parental education, and single parent households are negatively related to student achievement gains (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2004).

It is important for educators to understand that there are many barriers that contribute to the lack of parent involvement in families from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Christenson and Sheridan (2001) identified some of these barriers which include: feelings of inadequacy; adoption of a passive role by leaving education to schools; linguistic and cultural differences; lack of role models, information, and knowledge about resources; suspicion about treatment from educators; and economic, emotional, and time constraints. Constantino (2003) found that the largest barrier for the lack of parent involvement to be time. According to his study, many families indicated

that they have little time for their children and even less time to involve themselves in their children's school life. This was especially true amongst single-parent families or families in which there is one parent, guardian, or family member who is responsible for children. Other barriers and challenges pertained to culture or language, school size, location, curriculum, adolescence, and the number of teachers in the school (Constantino, 2003).

In understanding educational issues in minority groups, it involves understanding the history and culture of these groups and parent perceptions and personal experiences of education. Native American and Traveller/Gypsy communities have a long history of negative educational experiences, which still impact their perceptions on education today. In both of these minority groups, education was used as a weapon of cultural genocide. The United States and United Kingdom governments have used education to culturally transform Native Americans and Traveller communities. Education was to transform them into an acceptable, ideal model of the dominant society. Today, these early practices are some of the reasons for low parent involvement and are thought to be rooted in parents' negative historical and personal experiences related to federal government policy on education (Butterfield & Pepper 1991; Cockrell, 1992). Children who attended boarding schools lived under poor conditions and suffered psychologically and culturally devastating experiences that are well documented (Adams 1995). These policies and practices have left an everlasting impression on education and are still seen today between schools and parents (Butterfield & Pepper, 1991). This historical trauma of the parents who attended boarding schools where they were mistreated and subjected to racism and prejudice may pass these negative perceptions of education on to their

children. While they may want a better education for their children, their own schooling experiences cause them to be leery of even setting foot on school grounds (Mackety & Linder-VanBerschot, 2008).

A case study from the United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2006) found, in public schools with 25% or greater of American Indian enrollment, teachers identified the lack of parent involvement as one of their schools' most serious problems. However, there are very few studies about American Indian parent involvement in the education of their children. In exploring school-related barriers to involvement, Cockrell (1992) observed that some parents of American Indian students' found communication from schools to be inadequate or hostile and most often geared toward health or disciplinary matters. Butterfield and Pepper (1991) identified such home-based barriers to parent involvement as poverty, health issues, and a perceived lack of ability to assist students with homework. A case study conducted by Mackety and Linder-VanBerschot (2008) about Native American parent perspectives on parent involvement found the lack of parent involvement was developed from a parent perception of an unwelcoming school environment, previous negative experiences with education, perceptions of a school's lack of cultural sensitivity, and different styles of interpersonal communication.

A case study conducted in the United Kingdom by Wilkin et al. (2010), interviewed school staff and parents about the challenges, key factors, and successful strategies associated with the attainment of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller pupils. Most of the schools felt that the attainment outcomes for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller pupils were low in academic terms because of parental and community attitudes. Several educators

mentioned that parents did not attach the same priority to formal education as the schools did. One senior teacher suggested that:

Parents are colluding, sabotaging aspirations. Achieving undermines community engagement. They could access the curriculum but from on they start sabotaging their own success . . . It's just cultural. If no-one in the community goes out and gets a [mainstream] job, they do not know where they're going. (p.14)

Wilkin et al. (2010) found that schools identified a tension between family aspirations and those of the school with students sometimes caught in the middle. Teachers identified attainment outcomes for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller students to be low because of parental and community attitudes; however, parents viewed educational facilities as culturally insensitive. Parents' educational aspirations for their children were influenced by cultural expectations and their own limited educational opportunities. School officials recognized the need to encourage parents to engage in dialogue and establish relationships. They found when relationships were established and parental support increased, Traveller students made gains and were more likely to remain in education post-16 years of age. Therefore, many schools made reference to raising expectations of students, their families, and their own staff. Other school related barriers that contributed to parental involvement were poverty, health issues, lack of engagement, lack of cultural sensitivity, interrupted education, and negative experiences of school. Marks (2006) also noted that parental concerns about negative cultural influences, bullying, and racism contribute to a "significant cumulative effect" on attendance and involvement.

It is clear that in order to improve academic achievement, parent involvement, and attendance, school administrators and teachers need to appreciate the customs, values,

and beliefs of culturally diverse parents (Wandersman et al., 2002). Parent involvement has a long history of being connected with increasing academic achievement and decreasing minority dropout rates.

Researchers have shared the influence and power parents possess in assisting their children in succeeding. The literature also suggests the importance of teacher's perceptions of minorities and how this plays a role in their academic success. According to Weaver (2005), educators need to be conscious of their own values, attitudes, and perceptions and reflect on their attitudes to see if they are indeed keeping them from developing a positive relationship with minority parents. When educators and minority parents are able to establish a partnership it contributes tremendously to minority children's matriculation (Espinosa, 1995). It is important for educators, administrators, and stakeholders to understand the culture and values of minority parents. Failure to understand these values and culture will continue the cycle of negative outcomes for schools, students and parents. It is through parent involvement that student development will flourish and increase student achievement (Mackety & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008).

The Learning Gaps

Researchers, educators, and statisticians measure student achievement through two primary indicators: achievement on reading and math assessments and graduation rates. Examination of both of these assessments indicates that poor and racial minority students' gaps remain because not all groups of students are advancing at the same rates. These racial achievement gaps have been manifested through standardized test scores, high school dropout rates, high school completion rates, college acceptance and retention rates, as well as through longitudinal trends. While efforts in the United States and United

Kingdom are attempting to close the racial achievement gaps, studies have shown that disparities still exist between achievement levels of minorities compared to Caucasian counterparts (Editorial Projects in Education Research, 2011).

In December 2012, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) released national average results from the 2011 administration of the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The results of these assessments reveal that the achievement gaps are continuing to rise amongst minority groups. In a press release, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called the results “unacceptable” and they “underscore the urgency of accelerating achievement in secondary school and the need to close large and persistent achievement gaps (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2013, p. 1).

What are the contributing factors that permit racial gaps to still remain in the 21st century? According to the National Education Association (2014), there are many contributing factors to the achievement gaps such as ethnic, racial, gender, disability, income, and social class. Figure 1 identifies some of the factors that contribute to the achievement gaps.

The achievement gaps appear to occur in multiple and complexly interrelated circumstances that vary from school-to-school, district-to-district, and community-to-community. The most relevant factor identified in multiple studies as contributing to achievement gaps is poverty or low-socioeconomics. Research shows the effects of children living in poverty on their ability to academically achieve in the classroom are pervasive throughout the literature and correlated to many additional variables affecting the achievement gap (Murphy, 2009).

| Within Schools' Control | Outside Schools' Control |
|---|---|
| School-wide Factors Low expectations for student achievement; Lack of rigor in the curriculum; Large class size; Tracking groups of students into a less demanding curriculum; Unsafe schools; Culturally unfriendly environments; and Poor, or no, instructional leadership. | Factors in the Local Community Economic opportunity for students' families; Access to health and social services; Community safety; Access to libraries, museums, and other institutions that support students' development; and Access to child care and after-school programs and facilities. |
| Teacher- and Teaching-Related Factors Uncertified and inexperienced teachers; Insensitivity to different cultures; Poor teacher preparation; Low expectations of students; and Inadequate materials, equipment, and resources, including technology-based resources. | Students' Background Families' income level; Students' birth weight; Students' diet and nutrition at home; Students' mobility; and Students' primary language (if other than English). |
| Student-Related Factors Students' interest in school; Students' level of effort; Students' feeling that they are, in part, responsible for their learning. | Education Funding Shortfalls State budget deficits; Unfunded federal mandates; and Inequities in funding among school districts. |
| Families' Support of Students' Learning Families' participation in school activities; Families' skills to support and reinforce learning; and Students' TV watching and at-home reading. | Families' Support of Students' Learning Time family members are able to devote to support and reinforce learning. Other Factors Societal bias (racial, ethnic, poverty and class) |

(National Education Association, 2014)

Figure 1. Factors That Contribute to Achievement Gaps.

According to Kober (2001), the achievement gap is a result of the school rather than the differences in children's innate ability to learn. School factors contributing to the learning gap include limited participation of minority students in rigorous courses, watered down instruction, teachers with lower expectations and fewer qualifications, a school climate that is less than conducive to learning, student performance anxiety, negative peer pressure, and disparities in high quality preschool experiences. Kober further explained that societal, community, and home factors also contribute to the learning gap, including the effects of poverty, discrimination, limited learning supports in homes and communities, and access to parent education. Gay (2004) also indicated that

disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes among ethnic groups have caused the achievement gap to reach crisis proportions, due in part to socioeconomic factors. The impacts of poverty contribute greatly to a child's academic ability. By the end of fourth grade, poor students of all races are two years behind their peers in both reading and math (Rebell, 2008). It is not usual for many parents themselves to be illiterate or have learning difficulties.

Native American Achievement Gap

Native American populations throughout the United States face special challenges in terms of education. There are approximately 1.96 million persons or roughly 1% of the United States population identified as American Indian or Alaska Native in the 1990 Census (United States Bureau of the Census, 1996). These individuals, representing approximately 500 tribes, were widely dispersed across the United States; although one-half of the population lived in the 12 western states. Less than one-quarter of the population (22%) lived on 314 reservations or trust land (United States Bureau of the Census, 1996). Education is a quality that Indian students experience little success in when compared to non-Indian students, especially when measured in terms of standardized assessments, frequency of dropouts, graduation rates, and levels of educational attainment (Reyhner, 1992). According to Indian Nations at Risk Task Force (1991), Indian education in this country serving these children have failed to nurture the intellectual development and academic performance of many Native children. This is a concerning topic given that American Indian and Alaska Native students are overrepresented in special education programs and classes. These students are 73% more likely to be enrolled in special education services (United States Department of

Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2014). Today, Native American students are identified as having a dropout rate twice the national average, the highest dropout rate of any United States ethnic or racial group. About three out of ten Native students drop out of school before graduating from high school both on and off reservations (Reyhner, 1992).

L. Poitra (2010) conducted a study on a Midwest Indian reservation that showed the average educational attainment for tribal adults was 10 years, with 55% graduating from high school compared to 89% in North Dakota. Between 2007 and 2010, the three public school districts serving tribal members reported graduation rates ranging from 60-65% (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2011). Of some 2,295 youth between the ages of 16 and 24, at least one-third, nearly 800 youths, dropped out of school and are unemployed (L.Poitra, 2010).

In comparing the achievement gaps between Native American students and non-native students there appears to be significant difference across all subjects (reading, writing, math, and science) and across all grades when compared to their peers. Covert (2013) found that there has been no improvements in the academic achievement gaps among Native American students. In fact, a new report from The Education Trust (2001) finds these gaps between Indian students and white students are actually widening at higher levels of cognitions. According to Covert's report:

Eighteen percent of Native American fourth graders were proficient or advanced in reading on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), while 42% of white fourth graders had reached those levels." Meanwhile, fourth grade reading performance for all other major ethnic groups rose between 2005 and 2011, but results for Native children stayed flat. The results for eighth grade math showed 17% of Native students were proficient or advanced on those tests and nearly half were below the basic level. However, 43% of white students were

proficient or advanced and just 17% were below basic. Between 2005 and 2011, Native children barely saw improvement in their scores while other groups made advancements.

These achievement gaps continue to follow Native students well beyond middle school with less than 70% graduating high school in four years and less likely to graduate at a college ready level. The Native American students who do graduate from high school are also less likely to enroll into college and for those who do enroll in a four-year college, just 39% complete their degrees in four years (Covert, 2013).

Traveller/Gypsy Achievement Gap

According to Wilkin et al. (2010), GRT students in the United Kingdom are among the most vulnerable in terms of academic underachievement and face special challenges in the educational system. These students are among the lowest-achieving groups at every key stage of education. In 2011, just 25% of GRT pupils achieved national expectations in English and mathematics at the end of their primary education, compared with 74% of all pupils. At the end of secondary education, just 12% of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller pupils achieved five or more good International General Certificates of Secondary Education (IGCSE), including English and mathematics, compared with 58.2% of all pupils. These attainment gaps are a complex issue and the underperformance of GRT pupils may be due to a combination of factors including financial deprivation, low levels of parental literacy and aspiration for their children's academic achievement, poor attendance, and bullying. There is a particularly strong link between deprivation and underachievement and in primary schools, 43.2% of all registered pupils registered as either Gypsy, Roma, or of Irish Traveller background are currently eligible for free

school meals. This figure rose to 45.3% in secondary schools and 57.5% in special schools (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012).

It is clear that GRT pupils are among the lowest achieving ethnic groups within schools in England. GRT pupils are more likely to be identified as having special educational needs (Derrington & Kendall, 2004) and are four times more likely than any other group to be expelled from secondary school on account of their behavior (Department for Children, Schools, and Families, 2007; Department for Education Schools, 2005).

There is a general concern with the over-representation of Traveller pupils being identified as having special educational needs. According to (Cemlyn et al., 2009), socio-economic disadvantages and gender have strong associations with overall prevalence of being identified with special needs than any other ethnicity. Results indicate that Irish Traveller pupils are 2.7 times more likely than other white British pupils to have special needs, and Gypsy/Roma pupils are 2.6 times more likely to have special needs. Irish Traveller and Gypsy/Roma pupils are more likely than other white pupils to have moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD), specific learning difficulties (SpLD), behavioral, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). These high levels appear to have a number of contributory factors, including negative teacher attitudes, racism, bullying, and a curriculum that does not take sufficient account of Traveller cultures and mobility. However, they did add that the research base is limited and this is an area that requires further investigation as part of any racial equality strategy (Cemlyn et al., 2009).

A case study (Wilkin et al., 2010) identified a number of barriers preventing GRT pupils from fully accessing the curriculum including lack of engagement, interrupted education, negative experiences, and lack of continuity. The National Strategies guidance pointed out that even where students have relatively stable school experiences “their achievement rates are still significantly lower than those of their peers” (Department for Children, Schools, and Families, 2007, p. 13). The guidance found that “poverty indicators (free school meals eligibility) are only marginal contributors to the underachievement of GRT pupils; the causes of their underachievement lie beyond these factors” (Department for Children, Schools, and Families, 2007, p. 13).

Nationally in the United Kingdom, GRT pupils have significantly higher levels of absenteeism from school than pupils from other ethnic groups (Wilkin et al., 2010). In reviewing research conducted on attendance, the presence of GRT students continues to be identified as a significant problem, particularly in the secondary phase (Ofsted Publications Center, 1999, 2001, 2003). Day-to-day attendance is regarded as problematic throughout the literature and as Lloyd et al. (1999) and Derrington and Kendall (2004) pointed out, this applies to housed or otherwise settled GRT pupils as well as those that maintain a mobile lifestyle. Persistent absenteeism has been found to lead to incremental discontinuity in terms of academic attainment, which, in turn, can lead to further absence and disaffection (Reynolds, 2003). They also added exposure to racism that impacts Traveller students from coping with conflicting cultural expectation and norms, low teacher expectations, and a curriculum which often fails to acknowledge the existence of their culture are all contributory factors that can affect young Gypsy and Traveller pupils’ educational engagement (Derrington & Kendall, 2004)

It is clear that both ethnic groups are faced with many challenges and barriers that are contributing factors to Native American and Traveller student's academic achievement. In identifying these educational statistics it confirms apparent efforts and targeted interventions aimed at improving educational outcomes are needed in supporting both ethnic groups.

Closing the Learning Gaps

Much of the literature on the achievement gap attempts to distribute responsibility for the gap between society and schools. This section will focus on the primary causes of the achievement gaps among minorities, which have roots that extended far beyond the school walls. The literature and research on the achievement gap has a clear correlation between the gaps of race and poverty. Because of the difficulties in clearly defining the relationship, research has not clarified the nature of the relationship between race, poverty, and the gaps. This section focuses on the cultural components of poverty as it relates to the achievement gap. In identifying these conditions and their correlations, it will create awareness in these two factors and bring us closer to closing the gaps between poverty and minority groups.

Researchers can all agree that there are many variables that contribute to the learning gaps identified amongst minority groups. Porter (2006) captured the difficulty of addressing these achievement gaps when he stated:

Closing the achievement gap in one of the most diverse school systems in the nation, one in which more than 160 different nationalities are represented, 120 different languages are spoken, and more than 26% of the students are living below poverty level is not a mission of the weak-hearted. The socioeconomic factor of low income and poverty filters through the other variables that impact student achievement. (p.26)

Every child, regardless of race, enters school with varying degrees of readiness for academic learning and differential patterns of support for educational pursuits. It is the responsibility of educators to be adaptable to these different characteristics and circumstances to guide all children toward the goals of achievement. In efforts to ensure that all children are given an equal opportunity to pursue their educational dreams the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed in the United States which focuses on schools located in poor communities. The government's attempt in closing achievement gaps among ethnic groups became a focus of federal education accountability. In identifying these discrepancies, it has brought greater awareness of racial inequalities and raised concern about the achievement gaps. This attention led to more targeted interventions for minority groups of students. Schools have employed a variety of tactics to address this concern such as reducing class sizes, creating smaller schools, expanding early-childhood programs, raising academic standards, improving the quality of teachers provided to poor and minority students, and encouraging more minority students to take high-level courses (DeCoteau, 2011).

The success of this academic progress is divided or non-existent among minority groups, especially Native American student progress. According to Henson (2010), the goal behind this act was to bring all schools to an equal playing field in performance and equality for all children. Neill (2003 as cited in Henson, 2010) added that the 1990s test-driven approach have produced a much increased drop rate among minority students. That contributed to a 50% teacher turnover rate in higher-poverty schools, "consigning students to a continual parade of ineffective teachers" (Darling-Hammond, 2003, p 9).

In the United Kingdom, it appears the central government commitment to promoting equality in education for Gypsy and Traveller children is reflected in a range of policy statements, guidance, and case studies available through the website of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and a letter from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools and Learners, Lord Adonis, to the Directors of Children's Services in November 2006. Two important Department for Education Schools publications were developed to address this concern: *Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Gypsy Traveller Pupils* (2003) and *Aiming High: Partnerships between Schools and Traveller Education Support Services in Raising the Achievement of Gypsy Traveller Pupils* (2005). Their main focus in closing these gaps include: addressing the barriers to inclusion through race equality strategies and clear policies for tackling racist bullying; a welcoming ethos and culture of respect; high teacher expectations for the achievement of Traveller pupils; ethnic monitoring to measure and address differential achievement levels; an inclusive curriculum that values Gypsy and Traveller cultures; involvement of parents and the communities; encouraging regular attendance; and promoting innovative methods for ensuring continuity of learning (Cemlyn et al., 2009).

Perhaps the most important consideration in closing the achievement gap is simply acknowledging Native and Traveller cultures as being very personal and establishing relationships. When parents are made to feel welcomed in the school and the school takes responsibility for communicating with them in a respectful manner, parents will feel more accepted and respected. Parents often report that they feel awkward, devalued, or intimidated in approaching teachers or administrators and often fear they

will be judged or misunderstood because of cultural characteristics. When schools create a warm friendly ambience and not a cold foreboding environment that permeates classrooms and offices, it seems probable that school climates will influence student performance and parent involvement (Rossi, 1994). In order to address the learning gaps, we must first acknowledge the relationship between poverty, culture, and low achievement at school to bridge the gaps. This will provide support to families in combating the long-term causes and disadvantages as well as to provide help in breaking the cycle.

Description of the Next Chapters

Chapter III includes an explanation of the methods adopted for this qualitative study. This chapter includes a discussion on ground theory approach, research procedures, researcher's role and subjectivities, the forms of data collection, data analyzed, and the validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter IV includes the data obtained from the five individual parent interviews. Parent responses are summarized in narrative form according to the five themes identified in the coding and analysis process. This chapter concludes with a summary of finding of all participant responses.

Chapter V includes a discussion, summary of findings, conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with recommendations for educators, stakeholders and parents, including a new description about the importance of building relationships.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter includes a detailed description of the research methodology that was utilized in the study. The chapter is organized into eight sections that provide a framework within that describes the research plan. It presents the research method, research questions, study area, participants, the forms of data collection, data analysis, the validation strategies used to increase the validity, and potential ethical issues.

The following sections consist of an outline for the qualitative study. It begins with the role of the researcher and research questions that guided the study, followed by descriptions of sampling procedures, data collection and analysis procedures, and procedures to establish the trustworthiness of results.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research has been defined in a variety of ways. In one definition, Lichtman (2010) identified qualitative research in the following manner:

It is a way of knowing in which a researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information obtained from humans using his or her eyes and ears as filters. It often involves in-depth interviews and/or observations of humans in nature and social settings. It can be contrasted with quantitative research, which relies heavily on hypothesis testing, cause, and effect, and statistical analyses. (p. 5)

Strauss and Corbin (1998) elaborated on this definition by indicating that qualitative research is best used when the methods are (a) complementary to the preferences and

personal experiences of the researcher, (b) congruent with the nature of the research problem, and (c) employed to explore areas about which little is known. Creswell (2007) expressed an expanded position and indicated a “good” qualitative study includes (a) rigorous data collection, data analysis, and report writing; (b) frames the study within the assumptions and characteristics; (c) begins with a single focus; (d) writes persuasively so that the reader experiences “being there;” (e) reflects the history, culture, and personal experiences of the researcher; and, (f) demonstrates the qualitative research is a good, ethical study. Based on this collection of reasons, qualitative methods were appropriate for this study.

The best-suited approach to this particular case came from the ground theory perspective. According Slavin (2007), ground theory grows out of an acculation of observations made in a variety of settings. Minority students from low socioeconomically backgrounds continue to be identified as “at risk” and are more likely to have lower educational levels. There has been rigorous research conducted in establishing theories, patterns, and interventions, yet there is still a need to explore parent perspectives from a holistic perspective in addition to an experimental perspective. This study will explore the perceptions of parent perspectives to gain insight and understanding of their thoughts about why their children are not doing well in school.

Researcher’s Role

As a Native American researcher looking at issues from Native American parent perspectives, I implemented “backyard research.” One of the benefits as a minority researcher conducting “backyard research,” is that I was familiar with potential participants, and they were more receptive to the research (Glesne, 2011). Native

Americans are very cautious about sharing their cultural beliefs with an outsider. It is a practice that is very seldom accepted within tribes or by tribal members. As a member of the community, I had already established trust and rapport which set the stage for in-depth interviews. According to Fontana and Frey (1998), rapport is an important part of the in-depth interview and allows for a deeper understanding of the respondents as well as seeing their perspective. However, they also cautioned that this rapport may become problematic, “as the researcher may become a spokesperson for the group studied, losing his or her distance and objectivity” (p. 60). In reducing the risk that my conclusion will reflect only the systematic biases, I incorporated a triangulation approach. I gathered multiple resources that involved a cross-check of the data and resources that revealed multiple perspectives. I conducted numerous parent interviews, reviewed documents and audiotaped interviews, and also observed multiple school, community events, and parent teacher conferences. Once data was collected, I employed a peer debriefing and triangulation method to avoid biases. According to Glesne (2011), the triangulation method will counteract the threats to validity and increase confidence in research findings.

Researcher’s Bias

As a Native American educator, I was continuously aware of biases and avoided interjecting my subjectivity into my research. When completing the compilation of data, I was allowed to view the world through old and new lenses that captured the complexities of poverty in education as viewed by parent perspectives. This framework became the foundation for constructing meaning and providing understanding of the participants’ perspectives of their encounter with diversity, poverty, and education.

Methodology

Interpretivism naturally lends itself to qualitative methods. In layman's term, interpretivism is an ideal of exploring individuals' interpretations of their experiences when faced with certain situations or conditions (Lichtman, 2010). To gather qualitative data in accordance with an interpretivist posture, I conducted in-depth and open-ended individual interviews with participants. Qualitative interviews are an essential part of this study in an effort to examine parent perceptions of the possible factors that contribute to their child's educational outcomes.

The groups selected for this multiple case study are two minorities groups across international borders with similar educational outcomes. Case study research, according to Creswell (2007), is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case), or multiple bounded systems (cases), over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based-themes. In this case study, I chose "critical sampling" to show the perspectives of both Native American and Traveller communities of parents (Creswell, 2007).

The nature of this study allowed for the discussion of educational experiences to be analyzed according to the codes, themes, and patterns identified in the interviews. Through carefully analyzing and chunking meaningful texts, themes emerged in the study that distinguished a case. Utilizing a constant comparison approach, it allowed me to identify important themes systematically and provided an audit trail throughout the research (Lichtman, 2010). Next, I incorporated multiple methods of data collection,

analyses, or theories that served as ways to ensure the validity of the qualitative data and establish trustworthiness. Lichtman (2010) described this process of checking triangulation, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Research Questions

This study focuses on the perceptions of Native American and Traveller parents regarding education. The question guiding this study is:

1. How do parents in a high poverty school district describe their child's educational experiences?
2. What are the aspects of the internal and external factors that contribute to a student's educational outcomes?
3. What are the differences and similarities based on these two different parent perspectives?
4. What are the parent's perceptions on the relationships development within the school system?

Research Design

In this study, I employed a grounded theory approach that served as a particular purpose which was to move beyond description, to generate, and to discover a theory (Creswell, 2007). The goal of the ground theory approach is to generate a theory explaining the conceptual level, process, action, or interaction about a topic (Creswell, 2007) and for this study the goal was to generate a theory that explains the perceptions of low-income parents regarding their child's education. I also felt it was important to focus on the sensitizing concepts that provided a theoretical perspective that were relevant to understanding behavior and "self" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). By utilizing a

theoretical framework influenced by a critical perspective, I was able to examine the participants' own words and stories to create an authentic picture of the struggles, perceptions, and aspirations. To provide more clarity, I used in-depth and open-ended interviewing processes to explore the different perspectives of each participant. In interviewing school officials, I utilized in-depth interviewing which allowed me to do the following:

Understand the meaning people make of their lives from their own experience. The in-depth interview takes serious, the notion, that people are experts on their own experience and are best able to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon. (Darlington & Scott, 2002, p.48)

In interviewing the parents, I felt it was best to approach participants utilizing an open-ended or grand tour questions approach, which allowed the individuals to tell their story, respond at length, and lead the discussion (Slavin, 2007). In establishing a rapport, it helped to solicit parents' beliefs and experiences within the school system. The open-endedness allowed for important sources of knowledge, beliefs, and experiences to surface. Parent interviews allowed me to gather information about parent beliefs about their child's education and about what they believed impacts their child's academic success or failure.

In conducting ground theory open-ended interviews (Slavin, 2007), I introduced the process and collected some background information. Next, I obtained written permission before individual interviews were conducted and with permission the interviews were audio recorded to ensure participants voices and comments were retained and valid.

My analysis of the interviews was an on-going process. Before transcribing the audiotapes, I took time to carefully listen to each recording. When I completed transcribing the interviews, I carefully read over the data to identify emerging themes (Creswell, 2007). Throughout this process, I took notes in the margins of the interviews and highlighted repeated trends. After repeating this process with all of the interview data, I organized the material into groups and arranged tables of different categories. I immediately realized from my initial analysis that many of the themes emerging were similar to the pilot study conducted in early research.

Populations

The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to further elucidate the experiences and consequences between culture, socioeconomic, and education through parent perceptions, of their children's educational experiences and (b) to formulate a logical, systemic, and explanatory theory of culturally responsive teaching and interpersonal relationships. The two sites chosen in this study were an Indian reservation located in North Central North Dakota and a Traveller population located in the United Kingdom. Two high poverty school districts that were defined as Title 1 school wide or having a poverty percentage of 40% or greater based upon free and reduced lunch (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2012).

Parents with children ages 14-16 and identified as low-income were the targeted population for this study. More specifically, parents needed to be a direct decedent from either a Native American or Traveller ethnic background. Those parents who qualified as potential participants were contacted.

Sampling Procedures

Theoretical sampling is used in qualitative research to focus on the perspectives of those who are known to experience the phenomenon of interest. In conducting in-depth interviews I allowed for conversation and the participants' voices to be heard in their own words and voice (Lichtman, 2010). Therefore, I targeted a sample of five to 20 individuals to participate who fit the criteria. The logic behind this decision was to gain an in-depth understanding of parent perceptions of their child's educational experiences. The number was determined in an effort to have a minimum of four participants from each group. As expected, with time restrictions and limited time spent in the United Kingdom, I had a difficult time establishing rapport and building relationships among the Traveller communities. There were two scheduled interviews in the United Kingdom; however, one family pulled out due to a death in the family. A total of five parents were interviewed, four Native American mothers and one Traveller mother. Once participants had been confirmed, individual interviews were conducted, ranging from 60-90 minutes. Although, there was only one interview conducted in the United Kingdom, the findings were found to be substantial for the overall study. The correlation between parent interviews had astonishing similarities that proved to be an important component throughout the study.

On the Indian Reservation, I started by doing nonparticipant observations at community events, visiting Tribal programs, and Tribal leaders' meetings. As a member of the community, nonparticipation observations allowed me to keep my objectivity and come to identify the individuals whose role I would be sharing (Slavin, 2007). In being an observer, I gained insight into possible candidates for the study. I then gathered school

data to help identify the low achieving students and lower socioeconomic status (SES) students.

In identifying these students, I consulted school personnel and county experts for on-site visitations and interviews. I recruited participants for the study, asking individuals in person to participate, and using informal contacts and other participants to suggest people who might be appropriate to contact. In the United Kingdom, I had a “gatekeeper” school personnel and county experts that managed the recruitment and data collection. Parents interested in participating in the study were contacted, arrangements were made in person, or I made a phone contact. Next, an interview was scheduled at a time and place of the participant’s choosing. All five participants were mothers. Although, I was open to interviewing fathers, no fathers volunteered to participate in the study and in some situations the mothers were single parents.

Next, I travelled to the United Kingdom to continue the same collection process with a local Traveller Community. I accessed this group by a gatekeeper, the person who helped me to gain access to the people I wished to study (Slavin, 2007). The planning process included school personnel and county experts. The agenda included on-site visitations to a Traveller community with school personnel and individual interviews. In building relationships, I planned on developing an understanding of the relationship between socioeconomic conditions and student achievement in two districts through parent perspectives.

Data Collection

I used individual interviews with five low-income minority parents as the main source of data for this study. I also used written material, videos documentaries,

observations, and/or field notes to help identify or verify what was said during the interview. For example, the home environment might provide evidence to support a parent's comments about their child and help me to get the ideas and feelings of those being interviewed or observed.

To capture descriptive accounts of parent experiences towards the development of this study, a ground theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used for data collection and continuing analysis. Additionally, a ground theory paradigm was utilized to reinforce the study.

Data was collected between February 2012 and June 2013. The qualitative data that was collected included in-depth and open ended interview transcriptions with audiotape recording if permission was granted. Field notes were also taken, along with qualitative articles and interview documentaries that were analyzed in all their richness as closely as possible. The participants were provided a privacy and confidentiality form for their protection throughout the processes of qualitative data collection. The locations for interviews were places or facilities which were mutually agreed upon. All parent interviews were conducted in individual's homes or outside of the homes. A few of the participants did not feel comfortable having me inside the home because of the conditions, so I respected their wishes. All participants were provided with both a written and verbal explanation of the purpose of the research project as well as the techniques and procedures of the questionnaire survey. An interpreter was provided if needed.

Data Analysis

For this study, I incorporated an interpretive approach by acknowledging my own background, position myself and how my interpretations shaped my experiences, which

in turn made sense of my participant's experiences of poverty and student achievement (Creswell, 2007). To clarify the participant understanding of education, I employed the approach of Verstehen, Garfield, and Brimley (2011) to understanding the participants. They believed researchers needed to treat the people they study "as if they were human beings," and to try to gain access to their experiences and perceptions by listening to them and observing them (p. 7). In doing so, the participants guided the methods involved in (a) developing codes, categories, and emergent themes that supported the theory; (b) generating hypotheses, searching for meaning, validation, narrative support shaping shared experiences; and (c) analyzing narratives of participants experiences of poverty, struggles, survival, and educational challenges and aspirations.

Immediately after the interviews, I typed my field notes into a word processing and printed a hard copy for analysis. I used a ground theory data analysis approach to make sense of the data and emphasize on a specific approach in coding the data (Lichtman, 2010). I used both open coding and axial coding to identify common themes within my field notes and interview transcriptions. First, I started with open coding to help identify the major categories. These categories then emerged into axial coding which identified open coding categories of importance that provided groups around the core phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). I also incorporated an inductive analysis which provided insight to hidden patterns within the participants. As explained by Lichtman (2010), inductive analysis can be used to generate patterns, themes, and categories that emerge out of the data collected. I used the inductive method which provided insight to the interactions and identify of the hidden patterns in the multiple participants "perspectives," as specified primarily in their words. In this regard, I studied words, lines, phrases, and

paragraph segments of the transcribed interviews and field notes, which created the codes and concepts. The nonparticipant's observations and interviews served as equal importance in developing codes, categories, and themes. Each code identified was compared with other codes to identify similarities, differences, and general patterns. The themes emerged from the data in making connections with the interview questions, responses, observations and what was learned during the literature review.

I analyzed the data using the inductive method by building patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom-up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units (Creswell, 2007). Utilizing this approach, combined with my interpretation of events and situations involving school events and parent/educator interactions, I was provided building blocks for theory construction. Throughout the study, I utilized the constant comparative method to reread and recode previously collected data for categories and themes that emerged from later collections.

Document Analysis

Creswell (2007) referred to document analysis as public or private records, about the participants in a research study (p. 130). The retrieved documents used in this study were student summary reports, and state-wide assessment scores, and district student profiles.

These documents were reviewed as a means to identify student population within the school district, identify student achievements, and gain additional insight into participants' child's academic experiences.

Participant Profiles

Qualitative research involves the study of individuals and focuses on their voices being heard (Lichtman, 2010). The participants bring meaning and interest to the study; therefore, after interviewing the participants and collecting the data, I constructed a profile of each participant. These profiles included general information about their childhood experiences, educational backgrounds, personality characteristics, and current lifestyle status in order to develop an image for each individual. This served to introduce the participant and to facilitate a characterization to be associated with each individual. These profiles were developed in an effort to enable the reader to formulate an image and connection to the individuals who were willing to allow for their experiences to be shared in this study.

The stories entailed a vivid description of the individuals who were willing to share their experiences in an effort to aid my study. The stories contain quoted information from the participants' perspectives as they were entrusted to me for the intended purpose of this study. The documented stories were written as such in an effort to view the participants from their perspective as childhood background and perceptions of the educational experiences they had as parents. The profiles were written using a narrative form, which were created in ordinance to the data gathered from the interview protocol (Appendix B). I created the profiles of the participants by structuring each one according the data retrieved from the interview that emerged into the following themes: (a) personal, family, and community background; (b) the child's background and educational experiences; (c) experiences that contribute to the child's education outcomes; and (d) parent perceptions of school relationships.

Validity

Angen (2000) suggested within interpretative research, validation is “a good judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 387). While quantitative research relies heavily on measures of collecting numerical data, reliability and validity to evaluate the effectiveness of a study, qualitative research can be evaluated by its “trustworthiness.” Lincoln and Guba (1985) agreed that “trustworthiness” in qualitative data, whether collected from direct observations, focus groups, or interviews, is evidenced when following the construct of (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. In utilizing these constructs, they proposed techniques such as prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of data of sources, methods, and investigators to establish credibility. A detail description of how each of these concepts was utilized throughout the study to reassure “trustworthiness” is included in the following paragraphs.

Credibility

As Eisner (1991) stated, the truth-value or credibility, “seeks a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations, and conclusions” (p. 110). Lichtman, (2010) suggested that research results be scrutinized according to five fundamental questions:

1. Does the researcher convey reflexivity or the ability to stay open to the participant’s experience?
2. Does the researcher show credibility or validity and accuracy?
3. Is transferability observed or the ability to generalize?
4. Is there an audit trail?

5. Is there conformability or objectivity?

In establishing credibility throughout this study, I relied on triangulation and member checks to enhance credibility. According to Crewell (2007), “triangulation is the corroboration of multiple and different sources of data that sheds light on a theme or perspective” (p. 208). Lichtman (2010) explained that triangulation refers to the idea that multiple sources bring more credibility to an investigation. Consultation with county experts in the field of Traveller education was also utilized as an alternate data source. In addition, results of this study were presented to participants during a concluding interview, which was to serve as a method to enhance the credibility of this study’s results.

Transferability

Similar to the concept of external validity in quantitative studies, transferability seeks to determine if the results relate to other contexts and can be transferred to other contexts (Lichtman, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I sought to enhance transferability by providing a richly detailed description of the contexts, perspectives, and findings that surrounded the participants’ experiences. In a “cross-case comparison,” transferability was increased by providing adequate details to be drawn from the context, which allowed readers the opportunity to decide for themselves whether or not the results were transferable to other circumstances (Lichtman, 2010). Maintaining field notes, audio recordings, contacts, and keeping reflective journals of my research journey experiences allowed me to provide a rich description of the findings.

Reflexive Journal

Soon after the pilot study, I began a journal that I used throughout the research study. The purpose of this journal was to record the activities, ideas, and decisions I made during the research process. My intention was to use the journal as a master calendar of events as I made interview appointments, set deadlines, and identified the stages of my progress. Additionally, the journal became my personal diary of notes regarding my own perceptions, feelings, and interactions with participants.

Dependability

Dependability is similar to the concept of reliability in quantitative research. According to Lichtman (2010), dependability refers to “whether or not the results of the study are consistent over time and across researchers” (p. 228). To ensure dependability in my study, I relied on audit trails, rich documentation, and data/environmental triangulation. In utilizing these instruments I was able to transcribe any changes that may have occurred and how these could have affected the study.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree in which results could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Lichtman, 2010). In this study, I pursued to enhance the validity by utilizing member checking. When conducting the interviews, I would repeat and summarize their responses to confirm accuracy (Creswell, 2007). I also identified my own biases and perceptions which enabled me to reflect solely on my participants’ perspectives as evidenced in the data. By sharing my assumptions and interest in relationship to my own unique contributions, I gained awareness, which enhanced the confirmability.

Human Rights Considerations

Personal, professional, and social ethical codes require human rights considerations when research is conducted on human subjects. The University of North Dakota has an obligation to ensure that all research involving human subject meets regulation establish but the United States Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). To ensure the protection of human subjects, the proposal for this research was examined and approved by the Institutional Review Board for the protection of Human Research Subjects at the University of North Dakota (IRB-201203-347).

Description of the Next Chapters

Chapter IV includes data obtained from the five individual parent interviews and observations reflected in the conceptual framework presented in Chapter III. Parent “responses are summarized in narrative form according to the four themes identified in the coding process: (a) personal, family, and community background; (b) the child’s background and educational experiences; (c) experiences that contribute to the child’s educational outcomes; and (d) parent perceptions of school relationships.

Chapter V includes a discussion, summary of findings, conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with recommendations for educators, stakeholders and parents, including a new description about the importance of building relationships.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter will present a grounded theory, which was developed through the interviews, observations, and data collected and analyzed using the grounded theory methodology as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). According to Glesne (2011), a grounded theorist seeks to “understand what is going on in a substantive area.”

The purpose of this small-scale qualitative study was twofold: (a) to further elucidate the experiences and consequences between culture, socioeconomic, and education through parent perceptions, of their children’s educational experiences and (b) to formulate a logical, systemic, and explanatory theory of culturally responsive teaching and interpersonal relationships.

This qualitative case study was built around five participants from a Midwest Indian reservation and English Traveller community. The following five participant narratives—one each from Lacy, Martha, Ann, Kelly, and Katie—contain stories about their childhood experiences, family history, child’s educational experiences, and perceptions on school relationships. Participants’ names have been changed, although gender identification has been preserved.

In establishing relationships with the five participants, I felt it was my obligation to tell a story that enabled readers to make a connection with these families. The stories

of these families may help to dispel the stereotypes that accompany individuals of different ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds.

As a result of in-depth and open ending interviews, interviewed documentaries, document analysis, and the use of a reflective journal, the five profiles emerged. The profiles represent the stories of those families and individuals who chose to share and reveal how their experiences as minorities and a different social class impacts their child's education and personal outcomes. The names chosen for the individuals have been changed to protect the participant's and family identities.

Thematic Findings

This chapter presents a description of the themes that were gathered from the findings from participant interviews as they related to the research questions composed for this study. It is important to point out that the data collected from the interviews were not equal. For instance, four parents were Native American and one parent was from a Traveller community. In order to understand the research findings I used grounded theory data analysis. This section is organized by four broad themes that emerged from the analysis process: (a) participant profiles—personal, family, and community background; (b) the child's background and educational experiences; (c) experiences that contribute to the child's education outcomes; and (d) parent perceptions of school relationships. These sections correspond to elements of the research questions.

Participant 1: Lacy

Personal, Family, and Educational Background

Lacy is a 35-year-old mother of four. Her oldest son lives with his father off from the reservation and graduated with a certified diploma. He is now attending a school-to-

work program for cognitive disabled adults. A few months ago, Lacy's 16-year-old dropped out of school, while her two younger children are still attending school. Today, Lacy lives at home with her three children and two friends. There are total of six people living in a three bedroom home.

Lacy, along with her two younger siblings, was born and raised by both parents on an Indian reservation. She grew up living in a housing project with both parents. Her mother was a teacher's aide and her father's occupation is unknown. In 1995, her father committed suicide. After Lacy's father committed suicide, her life spiraled into self-medicating. "I fell into drugs and alcohol and all of it. It took me a while to come out of that. Now things are better, but you realize as you get older that you can't do that shit."

Lacy attended the local high school and entered her freshman year pregnant with her first child. Her son was born with many health complications, which hindered her ability to attend school. As a young mother with a sickly child, she dropped out of school. Lacy's parents supported her decision. "They really did not try to talk me out of it." Lacy shared that her parents really did not stress education. "They really never did say that they wanted me to finish high school or have goals towards the future."

In her early 30s, Lacy completed her GED and took a few college classes at the local community college. Today Lacy is currently unemployed raising her three younger children. All four of her children have been identified with special needs and are receiving special education services.

The Child's Background and Educational Experience

Lacy's oldest son John is 21-years old. As a young boy, John moved with his father and attended school off the reservation for most of his life. He graduated from high

school with a Certificate of Completion, which is a diploma for students with disabilities who have completed their individual education plan goals, but did not meet requirements for a high school diploma. John is currently attending a transitional living assistance program for individuals with special needs. Lacy's 16-year-old son, Mark has dropped out of high school. Lacy shared that Mark has many emotional and anger issues, which makes it difficult for him to attend school. Mark did not have very good relationship with some of his teachers, had other issues in school, and he refuses to go back. Mark feels like he is treated unfairly by the staff so he refuses to go to school. Lacy is trying to encourage him to go to alternative settings such as Job Corps, which is a free educational and training program that helps young people earn a high school diploma or GED and find a job. Lacy's 12-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son have been both diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorders; however, they are both doing very well with school support and medication.

Experiences that Contribute to the Child's Education

Lacy shared that her 16-year-old did not always have emotional or anger issues. Mark was once a straight "A" student who participated in band, basketball, and many school events, but when he entered the eighth grade everything changed. Lacy was not sure what triggered Mark's behavior, but he start having a relationship with a girl. During that time, his behavior and attitude changed. Mark's behavior was out of control and escalated, which resulted in Lacy sending him to an Indian boarding school. While at the boarding school, Mark passed all of his classes with honors; however, when Mark moved back home to attend the local high school, his behavior changed, and he started to dislike school. He started hanging out with the wrong group of kids, which Lacy believes had a

lot to do with his change in behavior. Mark was surrounded by an enormous amount of peer pressure that resulted in experimenting with drugs and alcohol, which led to juvenile crimes.

Parent Perceptions of School Relationships

Concerning Lacy's insight on school relationships, she has had different encounters within the school system. When asked questions pertaining relationships established within the school system, Lacy would often sigh with a smile. She said:

My experiences for each of my children are different. With Mark's teachers it is kind of a struggle. He blows up so fast. He's got depression and is on medication and they know that. But they add to the flames. If a child is having a hard day in school instead of calling him out in front of the whole class and embarrassing him because they are already having a hard day, give him some time or ask what seems to be the problem. If you're having a bad day is there anything I could do to make it better. Do you need a few minutes by yourself? My younger ones I had no trouble with the schools at all. My youngest one is ADHD and on medication, but I had a lot of support from the school. I haven't had any issues with my daughter.

Lacy shared Mark's social and emotional struggles, which she felt contributed a great deal to his education. She felt there was a disconnect between Mark and his teachers.

Lacy felt they lacked understanding on the root of Mark's behaviors in school and did not meet his academic needs. Lacy shared:

When Mark got mad during the day they would send him home. So if he had an episode during the morning, they would send him home for the rest of the day. Next they are taking us to court because of his absences. It was frustrating because they were the ones sending him home. Now he has these charges against him. You know there has to be something else besides sending him home or kicking him out. Mark has been on the list for the Day Treatment Program (in-school alternative educational setting) and Alternative School (out of school educational setting) for the past year, but we still haven't heard anything. Right now this kid isn't even in school. They just keep saying that they are going to have a meeting on it, but we still haven't met. Mark has been number 3 on the list and they still never got him in it.

When asked what she felt the school could do to better meet Marks academic needs, Lacy paused and said:

I think all the teachers need some type of social skills training and try to understand more about what's going on with our children. There should be rules against the way they teach our students and be courteous. They are teaching them that it is okay to yell. If teachers do not know what is going on in the home they are not going to know what's going on with the kids. If the child has a situation at home and the teacher is like who cares, just do your work. Then nobody cares and if the teacher does not ask then nobody knows and if you got somebody who has parents who do not care, then they are going to school, and they should help. It's like the teachers do not care.

Although Lacy felt the relationship between Mark and his teachers was disengaging, she still felt welcomed and supported within the school system. Lacy felt comfortable in attending school functions and meetings. She shared, "They treat me like a team member and I had a lot of support from them. They often ask my opinion in IEP meeting and I get to share the way I feel."

Participant 2: Martha

Personal, Family, and Educational Background

Martha is a 47-year-old mother of four. She has three daughters and one son. All children attended school on the Indian reservation. Martha's two older daughters dropped out of high school at the ages of 14 and 15. Her two youngest children are both currently attending school. Today, Martha has all of her children and grandchildren in the home. There are a total of eight people living in her three-bedroom house.

Martha, along with her three brothers and three sisters were born and raised by her mother on an Indian reservation. At the age of 14, Martha was removed from the home and placed in a group home off from the reservation. Martha remained in the group home until the age of 18 when she graduated from high school. Martha was removed

from the home because her mother was abusive and was abusing drugs. “My mother was very mean, and she did not want me. I was the only one taken out of the home, so I stayed in the group home until I turned 18.” After high school, Martha worked as a doughnut fryer. Martha had three brothers and three sisters who are all doing well, with the exception of one sister who died of a drug overdose. However, all siblings struggled with drugs and alcohol. Martha also struggles with substance abuse, “I lost my children four times.”

The Child’s Background and Educational Experience

Martha’s oldest daughter, Mary, is 22-years-old and was released from prison two years ago. Mary was 17-years-old when she was sentenced for accessory to murder. Prior to being sent to prison, Mary was in a treatment facility and did not attend high school. Martha is currently raising Mary’s child, which she gave birth to at the age of 15. Martha’s second daughter, Hillary, is an 18-year-old high school dropout who recently gave birth to her first child. Her third daughter, Dawn, had her first child at the age of 12. Dawn is in the ninth grade and is doing very well in school. Martha’s son, Ted, is 14 and in middle school.

Martha described her children as being able to get along with other children, but they are sometimes bullies. Martha shared that her children always valued school and enjoyed going, but they soon lost interest. “Surprisingly how my kids grew up education was always important to them. But, my girls lost it after tenth grade because I think of living in the housing and the friends they hung around with.”

Martha has dreams of her children one day attending college and finding employment. She shares:

I want all my children to go to college. I want them to get what they can out of education. I always tell them you want to wake up thinking where am I going to get my raise today or do you want to wake up with a dollar in your pocket because the only way you're going to do it is with an education! I tell them that everyday . . . My girls just want babies and to live on welfare . . . It's hard to break that way of thinking because they are surrounded by it every single day . . . I do not want them to live on welfare or social security.

Experiences that Contribute to the Child's Education

All of Martha's children have struggled with drugs, alcohol, fighting, and gang activity, which Martha believes have all contributed to their educational experiences.

When asked what the contributing factors to their involvement in these activities, Martha looked out the window and quietly said "living right here, it's all over. I hate it!"

Martha's family is currently living in public housing which includes approximately 120 housing units and a population of 350 to 450 people.

Martha's two daughters have been in and out of treatment facilities throughout their teenage years. Martha stated, "They were both sent to treatment numerous times and the school has referred them out many times." The school has been a vital factor in assisting Martha in treatment options and planning. Martha is currently raising her grandchildren because the mothers are unable to care for them at this time.

Martha believes that her current living conditions and environment contribute a great deal to her children's academic outcomes. "My children struggle in school because of the things that happen outside of school. My son says that he is in gang called the Crips and my daughters are always getting into fights, which is also brought into the school." Martha shared that she wants all of her children to attend school and, if they chose not to attend, "I have given my kids an alternative, if you do not go to school then you can't live here. They need to go to school or get a job."

Martha also shared that the gangs hangout in the housing site. According to Martha, there have been numerous drug busts and drug activities that happen daily. Martha stated, “Children are running freely in the housing site and there is little to nothing for them to do. We have one little park for the children to go . . . but it has only a few things and everything is broken or destroyed.”

Parent Perceptions of School Relationships

In relation to Martha’s insight on school relationships, she shared that she has always had pleasant encounters with the school system. Martha said that she has always felt like an equal partner. When asked to explain, she shared behavioral incidents that occurred in school. Martha’s communication with the school has revolved around discipline procedures and parent contacts. These encounters have rotated around behavioral issues and concerns. Martha shared that the school usually calls her when her children are absent from school “which I like sometime” or when they get into trouble. The only communication Martha has had with the school is “usually only when my children get into trouble.” Martha did share that there were a few teachers that have reached out to her and communicated; however, again this communication was dealing with behavioral issues. Martha said:

There was one teacher who would call. One morning I and my son got into a fight. He ran out the door to catch the bus and yelled that he is never coming back home. I called the teacher to tell her about our morning because I knew he would have a bad day and she already knew about it because Ted told her about it. She was really good with him, which I liked.

When asked how she acquires information concerning the school, she looked away and replied, “When I need to know anything I call the school.” When asked the

question if anyone from the school has ever reached out to try to understand the root of her children's behavior, she replied, "never." Martha said:

The school has never called or took the time to try to get to know the family. I'm not sure how I would feel about them knowing my personal business because there are some teachers in the community who I wouldn't want to know what's going on in my home because they would judge me and gossip. Our community is so jealous of one another and they like to gossip.

Overall, Martha felt the school was doing "ok" but she felt the teachers needed to communicate more with parents so they could understand what's going on in the home.

When asked if she felt the school was meeting her children's academic needs she replied:

The school focuses a lot on behavior . . . I think they need more advanced teachers. I went to school off the reservation and I know they are not as advanced as other kids. My children do want us to move and want to attend another school, but I'm scared I know they are not as advanced as they should be.

Martha also shared that she felt the school should offer more advanced classes.

When asked about parent involvement activities, Martha smiled and replied, "I really enjoy going to family night." Family nights are held throughout the school year, which involves a meal, music, games and prizes, and cultural activities. In attending these activities, Martha shared that there is very little contact between her and the staff; however, she still enjoyed going.

Participant 3: Ann

Personal, Family, and Educational Background

Ann is a 39 year-old mother of four. Ann dropped out of school her sophomore year at the age of 16 to help her mother raise her younger siblings. Ann did eventually complete her GED and took some college credits. She has one daughter who lives off

from the reservation with a high school degree, one daughter lives on the reservation with a high school degree, one daughter became pregnant at age 16 and dropped out, and one son who is still attending middle school. Ann is currently employed and lives at home with her children and grandchild. There are six people living in a three-bedroom trailer house.

Ann was born and raised on an Indian reservation along with her two younger siblings. She was raised by an alcoholic mother who often depended on her to care for her younger siblings. Ann's mother attended school until the eighth grade. When asked to describe her educational experiences, she said "I was a built-in babysitter." Since Ann was "a built-in babysitter," she had very poor school attendance. Ann decided to drop out of school at the age of 16 to raise her younger siblings. Ann described her schooling experience as enjoyable because she was "able to be away from home." She said, "I was really surprised I made it as far as I did because I was always home babysitting because I really never did go to school. But when I did go I enjoyed it because it got me away from home." When asked to explain how her mother felt about her dropping out of high school, she said with a disappointing sigh, "She did not care if I went or not and she did not encourage me to stay in school." Ann described her mother as unsupportive and lacked interest in education values. Ann said, "My mother never did tell me that she wanted me to go to school or encouraged me to stay in school. She did not care if I went to school or not."

The Child's Background and Educational Experience

Ann described her children's educational experience as unpleasant. Her children struggled academically with comprehension, attention deficit disorder, and learning

disabilities. Ann's youngest son is currently on a 504 plan for Attention Deficit Disorder and taking medication. She described her son as hyper with difficulties sitting still and comprehending. When her son is on medication, he does really well in school, but it was a struggle to get him special services. Ann shared:

I have been after the school since he was in the first grade to get him help and it was not until the sixth grade when he was finally placed on a 504 plan so I had to go through all of that!

Ann's three daughters all did well in school. Her two daughters graduated with their high school diploma, and one is currently pursuing her GED. Ann said one of her daughters never received the help she needed academically. When asked to explain, she said her daughter was supposed to be tested because of her ADHD and difficulties to comprehend, but she was never tested and it was just tossed aside. "She never got tested!"

Ann's dream for her children is to complete high school and simply be happy. She shares, "I just want my kids to finish school and be happy. Do what they want with their life . . . you know . . . do something with their life, not just live on welfare."

Experiences that Contribute to the Child's Education

Ann described her children's educational experiences as more of a social challenge. For example, Ann felt that her children were treated differently because of their social class within the community. When asked to elaborate, she rolled her eyes and said:

When my girls became teenagers they had problems at the school and I think it was because they did not have the right last name . . . they were not treated good. A lot of parents think if you do not have the right last names then you ain't nothing to them at the school . . . that's what the main problem was with my kids. The school would always call me into the office and I could see that

other kids doing the same thing as my girls and nothing happened to them. It's just about who you are in this community.

Ann's children have not struggled with drugs, alcohol, or gang activity; however, she did describe her daughters' behaviors as wild and unpredictable. When asked to elaborate, Ann rolled her eyes and said:

My girls went through what I believe everyone goes through . . . Where they get that little hair and think they got to run. One ran and I had to get the cops involved and she thought it was funny but she had to learn the hard way.

Ann's youngest daughter became pregnant and failed to graduate high school.

Ann contributed her behavior to peer pressure and getting involved with the wrong group of kids. Ann explained:

I think it's harder on kids who live in a housing unit because of the peer pressure . . . you have to try to fit in with them and that is how it is in the housing unit . . . they think they could do what they wanted.

The housing unit Ann is describing is surrounded with gang activity. This activity has been a community and school-wide concern and interventions are being implemented. Ann's daughter is planning on earning her GED.

Parent Perceptions of School Relationships

In relation to Ann's insight on school relationships, she shared that she has not always had pleasant encounters with the school system. Ann said that she does not feel like an equal partner or welcomed in the school. When asked to explain she said:

I do not like going to the school. They are not polite there. I'd rather not go there. I think if they were a little friendlier, then maybe it wouldn't be so terrible. When you walk in, they do not even ask you if you need anything. They will just look at you and talking on the phone. It's like a dungeon in that school. I really do not like it.

When asked what the school could do to improve this relationship, she smirked and replied, “They could contact me more.” Ann talked about how she often felt judged or looked down upon by individuals who worked in the school system. When asked to elaborate on her perceptions, she said:

I think some people in our schools, especially our own people, do not take their job seriously . . . because they got a job and paycheck. They have a degree and we do not. I think people in the schools look down on people who do not have a degree. They look down on us because of where we are and they’re not. Some of the people I went to school with look at me differently and think they are not doing nothing and look where I am. That’s how I feel sometimes.

Ann also shared her difficulties of being a single parent and having learning disabilities of her own. Ann has endured many hardships and struggles throughout her life and she felt that the school lacked understanding or empathy towards her family. In lacking this understanding, Ann felt that the school often judged her and her family because of their social class within the community. When asked to elaborate, she replied:

When I go to the school I do not think the people who work there realize the impressions they are sending, especially our own people. I think their jobs go to their heads. Do they not realize that they were once where we are before becoming a teacher or whatever they are. They are just really very judgmental. You go over there and some kids get better attention because of who their parents are and they should all be treated the same because we are all the same people. That’s how I feel.

According to Ann, she felt last names or status within the community weighed heavily on the school’s perceptions or treatment of certain individuals and student. She believed the school favored certain individuals based on who their parents were in the community.

When asked how she acquires information concerning the school, she smirked and replied “They do not call. My son will bring home report cards or some paper but the

school never calls to let me know how he is doing or if he has a test to study for.” When asked the question if anyone from the school has ever reached out to her or her family, she replied “No.” Ann shared that her older daughters often attend parent teacher conferences for her because she did not feel comfortable attending. However, she did share that she does enjoy attending parent and family nights. Knowing Ann’s discomfort in going to the school, I asked if she felt welcomed when attending family nights. She replied:

On parent or family nights everybody is doing their own thing. There is little to no contact with teachers and staff . . . everyone is just doing their own thing, but they have a meal, play some game, and have door prizes. But it’s different from when I was in school. Now it’s just games and whatever. I remember before you had to do little family projects and now it’s just go play bingo or cake walk. That is family night for them. It’s not like when I was younger when families played games together.

Overall, Ann felt the school was not very proactive in meeting her children’s academic needs. She felt the teachers could have made more of an effort in communicating with her and getting to know her family. Ann said, “If the teachers got to know the parents and know a little bit about the family and what is going on with the family they wouldn’t be so judgmental.” However, Ann did say that she did not feel this judgment from the non-native teachers. She said, “I never have problems with non-native teachers, but it’s my own people who are so judgmental to us.” When asked what the school could do to improve these barriers and help her children succeed, she replied, “Treat people the same because we are the same people.” Ann did add that there was one teacher that helped her daughter in math and her daughter still keeps in contact with this teacher.

Ann also shared how the school could play more of an active role in exposing the students to more career opportunities. She explained that she feels the school could provide a variety of vocational skills and on the job training for the kids. Living in such a secluded geographical area, our children lack opportunities to explore different job professions and the outside world. She adds, “Some people think some jobs are easy . . . well let them get out of this area to see what kind of work everybody does. Give them all a chance to see what they want to do and see if they are interested.”

Ann also believes the school could play a more active role in helping parents academically. She shared her struggles as a high school dropout and difficulties with reading comprehension. She expressed her desire to help her children with homework and playing a more active role in their education, but lack of knowledge prevented her from doing so. Ann shares, “I try to help them as much as I can and be there for them and help them with their school work, but sometimes it is hard for me. My older children mostly help with homework.” She suggested that the school could provide more one-on-one support for both parents and students. Ann shared:

Maybe the school could provide more one-on-one with the kids, let them stay after school if they needed extra help or let the parents go in to help their kids on certain nights of the week . . . and get help too. It could be a family thing where parents could go in with the kids and actually learn with the kids if they need help and do the work with them.

Finally, Ann felt that the school did not play a role in preparing her children for graduation. She explained, “I do not think they play much of a role. I think it is up to the kids if they are going to graduate. It ain’t up to the teachers, but I do not have anything good to say about that school.” When asked if she felt the school was meeting her children’s academic needs she replied “No, because my children did not get the help they

needed.” Ann’s children all struggled with ADHD and reading comprehension which made it difficult for them to succeed academically without special education services. Ann shared her struggles in working with the school in finding her children proper placement which was a very long process. When asked to explain further, she replied:

All my girls it’s hard for them to comprehend. If they read something they have to read it over and over . . . it takes them longer to comprehend. They had problem with that and the school did not do anything to help them.

Participant 4: Kelly

Personal, Family, and Educational Background

Kelly is a 35-year-old mother of four. Kelly’s oldest son dropped out of school and the other three are still attending school. Kelly is unemployed with a total of six to eight people living in her three-bedroom house.

Kelly was born and raised on an Indian reservation along with 11 brothers and sisters. She grew up in a single parent household with a mother who had emotional and dependency issues. As the oldest daughter, Kelly took on the responsibilities of raising her siblings. Kelly shared that she missed many days of schooling her seventh- and eighth-grade years. Because she lived in a small town where everybody knows everybody else, she feels that she was just passed along, and she did not realize her educational potential. Kelly feels that the school system failed her by passing her through school and feels they did her an in justice. In entering her ninth grade year, she and her siblings were removed from her mother’s care and placed in foster care off from the reservation. During Kelly’s 11th-grade year, Kelly was placed back on the reservation in the custody of her grandmother and she was looking forward to attending high school. She shared that she really enjoyed school and did not mind attending every day.

However, Kelly's excitement to attend school on the reservation did not turn out the way she expected and she eventually dropped out of high school that same year. Kelly shared that she struggles with drug and alcohol addiction.

The Child's Background and Educational Experience

Kelly's oldest son dropped out of high school at the age of 16 and is currently attending an educational and career technical training program. Kelly shared her son has special needs and received special education services. She believes the school worked to the best of their ability in meeting her child's needs. However, during his tenth grade, the last year he attended high school, John was being bullied by a group of boys and the school was notified. Kelly shared that this went on for almost the whole year and nothing was ever done. Kelly said:

It got so bad that I was willing to go to jail and allow my son to drop out of school because nothing was being done so I and my son felt the only option was to send him to Job Corps Center so he could complete somewhat of his education.

Kelly also has a 12-year-old-son, 10-year-old daughter, and 5-year-old son. All of Kelly's children are receiving social security and special educational services.

Kelly described her children as able to get along with other children and they appear to really enjoy school. Kelly shared that she always valued education and that her children share the same values and enjoy going. Her aspirations for her children are to be able to care for themselves. She wants her children to care for themselves and not have to depend on anyone for support. Kelly shared:

As a mother, I try to teach them to never depend on anyone. I believe our school system is teaching them be able to live independently. I believe our community and school try to enforce education. I believe so many of our kids struggle with

education and do not know why. I believe their home life has a lot to do with their struggles in education.

Experiences that Contribute to the Child's Education

Kelly's children all struggle with physical and mental disabilities which have made their educational experiences difficult. When asked about external factors that may contribute to their behavior, she hesitated for a while. When provided with examples such as behavior or getting into trouble outside of school, she admittedly said, "Well, yes, that getting into trouble thing . . . That ONE." Kelly justified these behaviors as trying to seek more attention. She also shared that these behaviors are then brought into the school system and are exacerbated by peer pressure. Kelly did not elaborate on any struggles with drugs, alcohol, fighting, or gang activity. I had a sense that Kelly did not want to discuss these issues; therefore, she was not asked to elaborate any further.

Parent Perceptions of School Relationships

In relation to Kelly's insight on school relationships, she shared that she has always felt welcomed within the school system. However, Kelly also shared that she is very outspoken and social. Kelly has always felt like an equal partner and that the school system was doing "great." When asked to elaborate she replied, "They answered all my questions, provided all the services, and did everything that was expected of them. They did everything wonderfully; I have no complaints about our special educational programs." Kelly felt the special education team was doing a "great job" and that there was open communication. When asked if this communication reached into the general education setting, she replied with a big sigh: "I think there is communication, but I do not think my son's teacher has enough patience for her profession." Kelly did share that

there were a few teachers that went above and beyond with her children and there were some that simply did not care; however, she did share that she appreciates everything the school does for her family. Kelly said:

You cannot have anything without education. I appreciate the education system. You know, as a parent, I would never be able to do it at home. They teach, educate, and teach them life lessons. This is something I can't do for my children. My kids come home with so many stories, which make me laugh. The school system does so many good things for my kids.

When asked how she acquires information concerning the school, she replied:

I have a very strong personality and I'm very out spoken. I call all my kids teachers and say 'hey, these are phone numbers and if you have a problem with one of kids call me. If they are doing something they are not supposed to call me!'

Kelly shared that there were a few teachers that reached out to her and her family. Some teachers were strictly about school, but there were a few teachers everything was involved." Kelly did not elaborate on what "everything" meant.

When asked the question if she was ever unhappy with anything concerning the school, she replied in a stern voice:

Let's break that question up, like I said all my children are receiving special education services. I had a lot of problems with one of my son's teachers. I feel that she isn't adequate enough to take care of special needs children, because in my personal opinion, she does not have the patience to deal with children like that. She is very negative!

However, when asked to elaborate on how this situation was handled in the school system, Kelly stated that she has not mentioned these concerns to school administration and that she tried resolving these issues personally with the teacher in the classroom, but nothing has worked.

When asked if she felt the school was meeting her children's academic needs, she replied:

You know what, personally I can't answer that question because I do not know what the expectations are for other schools. I do not know what their academic goals are and I can't compare my child because I'm uneducated on what everyone else's education is.

However, Kelly felt that her oldest child is academically ready to attend college or find employment.

When asked about parent involvement, Kelly stated that she was always involved in her children's education. She would often call the school to check on her child's progress or the school would often call her. Kelly shared that the school usually calls when her children are absent from school. "I attend everything at the school. I do everything a parent is supposed to do because I am self-involved. I want to make their education better and little bit easier for my children."

Overall, Kelly was happy with the school and felt they were meeting her children's needs; however, she felt that they should be meeting all of the students' needs and not just a selected few. She shared that the school cannot place all the special needs students in one classroom and expect that to work. She did share "I feel these poor teachers get so stressed out and I do believe they need more support in the classroom, especially when there are so many children with special needs."

Participant 5: Katie

Personal, Family, and Educational Background

Katie is a 35-year-old mother of four. She has four children ranging in age from eight to 19. Katie was born and raised in an English Traveller community along with her siblings. Growing up in a Traveller community, Katie and her family travelled around the country quite frequently. Katie entered school at the age of five and periodically

attended until the age of 16. Since Katie's family travelled the country for employment, she did not complete a full year of schooling because they were moving from place-to-place. Katie recalls, "When I did attend school, I was always behind and did not get much help." When attending school, Katie's parents were not actively involved. She shared, "My parents did not attend any parent involvement functions. Many of my family members, my two older children, parents, and extended family are all unable to read and write."

The Child's Background and Educational Experience

Katie's children have all attended some formal schooling. Katie's oldest son attended school until the age 14 and was married by the age of 16. Her second son attended school until the age 10 and is currently working with family. Katie's daughters, who are 12- and eight-years-old, are both currently attending public school.

Katie shared that she has experienced different challenges within the school system with each of her children. Katie's youngest daughter, Bella, struggles academically. Katie shared that she has been fighting for Bella to receive special educational support. She elaborated:

Bella requires a lot of help. It's been a long push because we have been fighting for the help she needs. It's been two years. I told the teachers that Bella needs help, but when they tested her she did not qualify for services and she got turned down. She only missed the cut off by a few points, so we are going through the process again and getting her tested from an outside agency. We are trying to gather evidence so she could get the help, but I'm worried because it has been so long fighting to get her the help that she needs and if we have to move again, then we will have to go through this process again and then she will be too old and then she will be further behind."

Katie's educational experience with her sons has been quite different because of their lack of interest. Both of her sons are nonreaders and did not take an interest in education which made it difficult for Katie to encourage them to stay in school. Katie shared:

My oldest son can't read or write and he did not get the help he needed in school. Jimmy entered school at the age of four and did not go beyond the age of 10. Since we moved around a lot, he missed out on so much. Jimmy just lost the confidence to go to school because he did not get the help that he needed.

When asked to elaborate on the schools' efforts to keep her child in school, she paused and said:

They stop at the age of 10. The school just lets them go because we moved from place-to-place. They lost track of them. My sons work with my husband and that is where they got their education from. Jimmy knows enough to get by. He did pass his driver's test. He knows enough and manages to get by. He has a lot of skills. He is a daddy. He come out ok. I can't say he came out brilliantly because he can't read and write properly, but he gets by.

Katie shared that Jay, who is 14-years-old also lost interest in school. He shares the same struggles as Jimmy in reading and writing. When asked if their struggles in school contributed to any behavioral issues. Katie said, "No my children did not get into trouble in school." This could be contributed to their early departure in education.

When asked what her dreams and hopes are for her children, she replied:

I want my children to be the best they can and be happy, do the best they can. I want them to go through life, not get into trouble, not hurt anyone else, and just be happy. My oldest son did not go through school very long and can't read or write, but he has a beautiful wife, baby, and has a very happy, lovely home. He supports them and do not get help from anyone else. He was 16-years-old when he got married. Someone that age to support his own family and he has never asked us for help or money. We are very proud of him and (he) has never gotten in trouble with law.

Experiences that Contribute to the Child's Education

Katie shared that her children did not have very many challenges outside of school other than peer pressure. However, she did share that Jimmy did go out into the country to hang out with a group of friends. She described the "country" as an area where teenagers hangout and often got themselves into trouble with alcohol and drugs. Katie shared that she often tried to get her sons involved in sports such as boxing and football. This strategy seemed to work for Katie because she indicated that neither one of her boys were every arrested nor did they get into trouble.

Katie also shared that there was peer pressure amongst Traveller families. She said, "Traveller families often complete and some are wealthier than others. When there is a wedding, the girl will wear a beautiful dress and then others want to have a bigger better one, so there is pure pressure."

Parent Perceptions of School Relationships

In relation to Katie's insight on school relationships, she shared that she feels welcomed. When asked to elaborate Katie paused, "Mmm, when I go into the school it is just general chit- chat but I'm a fairly friendly person." When asked if she has shared in conversations with school administrators or educators, she replied, "No." Therefore, school officials and educators are probably unaware that Katie is a Traveller. Katie shared:

I tend to blend in very well, but the minute you mention that you're a Traveller you could see the expression on their face and it seems they take a step back. But they do not know us. We are Travellers not like Gypsy, right. You know, keep away from them and keep away from him. They do not know what we are like. They got no idea. They look at you by what we got on and they say you're Gypsy.

She continued to share that many of the Traveller children are stereotyped and treated differently:

Our children are brought up with the upmost respect for themselves; probably, more than anyone else in the world especially the girls. They look at the girl's short skirts, earrings, makeup, but they do not think about how they are really brought up. They are so judgmental, you know.

When asked about parent involvement, Katie shared that she tries to be involved in school functions as much as possible. She said, "I go as a parent as much as I can. I do try to get involved. When I do go, I go alone." When asked if she ever shares in conversation with any staff, she replied, "No, I just go through the motions really because no one has ever approached me to have a conversation. I do not' think they are aware of our situation at home with our land issues." Katie is currently being forced off the property in which she resides because of land bylaws.

When asked what she felt the school could do to improve relationships, she replied:

Not all schools are Traveller friendly, really. When my grandmother was a girl there were signs in the windows that said 'NO Travellers or Gypsy's allowed' even though they do not have that sign in the window today, things haven't changed.

Katie ended the conversation in sharing her hopes and dreams for her children. "I want my all my children to simply be happy and to live a good life."

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to further elucidate the experiences and consequences between culture, socioeconomic, and education through parent perceptions, of their children's educational experiences and (b) to formulate a logical, systemic, and explanatory theory of culturally responsive teaching and interpersonal relationships. The findings of this study would add to the body of knowledge related to educational achievement among minority students and the important barriers that contribute to their educational outcomes.

Participants in this study were parents from an Indian reservation in the Midwest and English Traveller community. All of the five participants were mothers who attend some formal educational settings and have children who attend public schooling in high poverty school districts. These mothers had been selected to participate in the study based upon characteristics of ethnic background. Applicants to the study must have been from a Native American or Traveller heritage, had children ages ranging from 14-16 attending public schooling, and identified as living in poverty or low-socioeconomic status.

The participant interview questions were developed by categorizing findings from the pilot study previously conducted on Native American parent perspectives of their

child's educational experiences. The questions were created to conduct in-depth interviews which would allow for conversation and the participant's voices to be heard in their own words and voice (Lichtman, 2010). The elements were divided into three major categories: (a) parents' educational background, (b) children's educational background, and (c) perspectives towards education. The interview questions also addressed the elements of parent involvement, educational services, as well as internal and external barriers.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

The findings of this case study about Native American and Traveller parent perspectives in education are divided into three sections. The findings are summarized in narrative form according to the research questions. The discussion section is written in first person and presents personal interviews, observations, and literature research. The chapter concludes with recommendations for administrators, educators, stakeholders, and families to bridge the gaps in education by bridging the gap in relationships. The conclusion will examine a number of suggestions of ways to improve educational outcomes, higher expectations for culturally diverse children, how to communicate and educate parents in a more equitable manner, and ultimately, how to work together in educating diverse learners.

The findings of this case study of five minority low-income parents weave together the participants' interviews, observations, and literature research on Native American and Traveller education. There were six patterns that emerged and were explored in depth. Parents (a) have hopes and dreams for their children; (b) desire to be respected participants within the school system; (c) believe their children have the

potential to complete high school, but are uncertain how to ensure school success because of lack of personal education and environmental circumstances; (d) believe educators lack understanding of external barriers and focus more on a child's emotional behaviors than academics; (e) are overwhelmed with financial burdens and cultural barriers; and, (f) perceive educational facilities at times as uninviting, judgmental, and a challenge in providing their children with educational services. These findings are summarized in narrative form according to the research questions.

Research Question 1

How do parents in a high poverty school district describe their child's educational experiences? The parents in this study all appeared to view education as important and as a means to a better life. All parents expressed the desire of wanting more for their children. They pointed out how important education is and their educational aspirations for their children, but struggled in knowing how to provide those educational implications to move them forward. They all expressed their desires for wanting more for their children and identified education as a contributing factor towards a "better life." All parents agreed that their children needed an education to get a good job and "not live paycheck-to-paycheck" or "worry every morning where they are going to find their next raise." All parents felt that the schools were providing extra support in trying to meet their children's needs; however, three parents felt school academic expectations needed to be higher. All parents referred back to their past experiences and struggles as learning tools to help their children to not follow the same path. As noted by Freiberg (1993), parents who did poorly in school themselves may have a negative attitude about their children's school, and in an effort to protect them, may even

discourage their children from participating. Although all of the parents in this study described their educational experiences as being a memorable and enjoyable place that diverted them from the home environments, none of them completed high school.

Four out of five of the participants were raised by single mothers who struggled with substance abuse, devalued education, and were victims of physical and emotional abuse. Although the fifth parent was raised under these extreme hardships, she did share that her family lived in a mobile home travelling from place-to-place, searching for employment. While on these excursions she did not attend school nor received any supplemental services.

Overall, all of the parents in this study reported having a pleasant schooling experience. They all shared experiences of enjoying school and the desire to want to stay in school. One parent shared how much she enjoyed school and how it was an outlet for her to escape her home life. "I enjoyed going to school because I got away from home." She was also surprised that she made it to the 11th grade because of the external factors at home that prevented her from attending school. Another parent shared how these external factors also played a role in her not attending school. "My seventh- and eighth-grade year, I should have never passed because I never went because I was home raising all my mother's children." She also add that the school system did "everything in their power to help me and I was passed," but included "I should have never been passed because they did not do me any justice in passing me along." She felt that she was prepared academically, but the school did not provide the support needed in dealing with the real issues that were going on in her home: "they should have intervened." Both of these ladies had to care for younger siblings which prevented them from attending school and,

ultimately, was the contributing factor to dropping out of school. Another parent also contributed her failure to attend school as the reason why she dropped out. This mother entered the ninth grade pregnant with her first child who was born with many health complications and was later diagnosed with cognitive disabilities. She added that her parents “did not try talking her out of dropping out.” Although all these participants did not graduate themselves, they all shared aspirations of their children completing high school.

My conscious effort to look at the lives of poor, low socioeconomic families beyond their living conditions and to base my insights on the perspectives and experiences of the parents themselves has produced a major point that was central in Chapter IV. That is, in contrast to much of the poverty literature which conceptualizes poverty as the main risk to a children’s academic achievement, in the parents’ accounts *negative relationships* emerged as a major factor adversely affecting their sense of acceptance and achievement. Negative relationships included conflict between and with teachers, conflict with administrators, and conflict with being socially accepted. The majority of these parents did not talk about their income as a risk to their child’s academic achievements. It appears that these parents were more worried by other risks such as conflict between educators, external factors (gangs, peer pressure, alcohol and drug abuse), and maltreatment or social exclusion from the hands of school officials or the community.

In reflecting upon the interviews, literature review, and documents, I realized these parents simple wish was to have their children complete high school, find a job, and be happy: all of these qualities are difficult for individuals outside of these cultural

environments to understand. It is not everyone's desire to have your children move away to college, find a career, buy a home, and venture out into the world. Native American and Traveller families share a very strong similarity in kinship. Both communities shared family structure, rituals, traditions, and the strong connection with extended family. Their relationships and desire to remain together under very close living quarters and to keep traditions alive are qualities that are very strong in both cultures. Although all families struggled financially, they did not view this to have a profound impact on their child's educational outcomes.

Their experiences of poverty and cultural barriers in their communities is clearly damaging and it permeates every facet of their children's lives from economic and material disadvantages, through social and interpersonal constraints, as well as the more hidden aspects of poverty or cultural differences associated with shame, sadness, and fear of differences. Yet, evidence from parents also shows how active, resilient, and resourceful they can be. They are not victims of their environment, but rather mediate, negotiate, seek to control the experiences of their children, and seek to change the generational patterns through education.

Research Question 2

What are the aspects of the internal and external factors that contribute to a student's educational outcomes? Parents' accounts of their lives revealed the challenge of managing family life under conditions of poverty and low-income which contribute highly to their children's educational outcomes and achievement. Their narratives expose the pervasiveness of disadvantages throughout all areas of life, which makes everyday life and educational attainment extremely difficult. There were many different factors that

influenced their child's educational achievement; yet, the most influential factors were the internal relationships and external factors that contribute to their educational perceptions to their children's education. All parents shared their frustrations and struggles in providing educational support and external factors that impacted their children's success.

During five interviews, these mothers expressed their struggles in trying to help their children complete homework because of their lack of knowledge. One mother shared, "I try to help my older ones, but their work is hard. I did not finish school, but I try to help my kids." Parents described children's struggles with alcohol, drugs, relationships, teen pregnancy, anger, peer pressure, gangs, and burglary.

All participants expressed their struggles with external factors, but always stressed the importance of having a high school degree and finding employment. Additionally, they all expressed how overwhelming external factors such as finances, living arrangements, gang activity, violence, alcohol, drugs, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, and cultural surroundings contributed to their struggles in knowing how to support or offer guidance to their children. Another mother shared, she was surprised with her children's home life that they still valued education, but as they grew older they lost that desire. She attributes their lack of desire to their home environment and group of friends. She explained, "My kids struggle, but they try."

In relation to school experiences, learning, and educational developments, all parents shared that learning for their children was a struggle. All parents claimed some or all of their children had some type of learning disability and were involved in individualized educational support programs which included building level intervention

team support, Section 504 plans, or special education services. All parents shared in the same struggles in trying to get their children educational support. All parents expressed the desire of wanting more for their children, but struggled in finding a balance between home, school, and cultural practices.

Research Question 3

What are the differences and similarities based on these two different parent perspectives? The parents in this study experienced many similar perspectives in having hopes and aspirations for their child. Parents expressed their desire of wanting their children to have a better educational experience and succeed in graduating from high school. They all viewed education as a means to a better life. Although all parents viewed education as important, the Traveller parent placed more value on her sons learning how to work from their father. Learning a strong work ethic and being able to support a family at a very young age was a quality upon which they looked very highly. For instance, her son dropped out of school at the age of ten to start employment. He married at the age of 16 and is the father of child. He works daily to support his family and maintains a household. This parent stressed the importance of family, tradition, and values. Although her family and ancestry are unable to read and write, they know enough to get by, are happy, and hard-working.

The parents all shared in the struggle of providing educational assistance to their children due to their limited education. All parents expressed their educational experiences and struggles which resulted in their failure to graduate from high school. These findings suggested some parent wanting and needing guidance to help their children academically. For instance, one parent shared how difficult her older children's

homework was and would like to attend after school tutoring with her children so she could learn along with them. Another parent shared that she sends her children to her mother's house because the work is too difficult for her to complete.

In relation to parents' internal and external barriers, all parents struggled with outside factors such as peer pressure, alcohol, drugs, violence, poor living conditions, and uncertainties of home stability. Although, one parent did not live in extremely poor living conditions, she was struggling with uncertainties of land and living arrangements for her family. These uncertainties weighed heavily on when and where her children will be attending school and if they will be receiving special educational services.

All parents claimed to be involved in their children's education by attending family nights and parent teacher conferences; yet, there was no evidence that their involvement went beyond social events. These findings suggested a lack of communication and concern by school officials and educators on issues that occurred outside of the school walls. Most of the parents claimed they felt welcomed within the school system, but the conversations were very simplistic and consisted of simple chit-chat. All parents agreed that educators or school officials never inquired of struggles or concerns they might have been having outside of school.

My analysis of the findings from this study revealed Native American and Traveller communities share many of the same outlooks and educational perspectives. For instance, parents claimed education was important and a means to better life and yet, there was no evidence that supported prevention of their children from dropping out of school. One parent claimed she allowed her son to move out of town because she was tired of the school harassing her and filing with the court because her son was not

attending school. Another parent allowed their ten-year-old child to drop out of school to start family employment. All parents struggled in preventing their children from dropping out of school and yet, they showed no evidence of the interventions or tactics they enforced to avoid this from happening. The research of this study supports the understanding that parents are uncertain “how” to enforce the importance of education: parents struggled in supporting their children with academics, parents did not show interest in their children pursuing post-secondary education, parents did not look past completing high school, parents were not aware of the resources or intervention programs within the school to support learning and achievement, there was very little evidence of education material in the home to support learning, and parents relied on the schools for preventing their children from dropping out of school. Overall, I did feel the parent participants had a good understanding of the value of education and the benefits of having a degree to make “money,” but lacked understanding about the importance of learning and the lifelong benefits it provides other than finding employment.

My intention was not only to look at factors that affected the children’s educational outcomes, but to also examine those that contributed to their sense of educational perspectives. As a guiding concept, “educational achievement” was useful to study the lives of the families beyond their economic status, including their strengths, positive cultural experiences, and pride in cultural beliefs. It also helped to bring the parents’ perspectives and their experiences of life into focus and to situate these in a specific socio-cultural context. The study, therefore, has brought together various concepts employed by diverse research paradigms: “culture,” “relationships,”

“perceptions,” “external and internal factors,” “social exclusion,” and “negative influences/experiences” and this can be seen as a significant contribution.

Research Question 4

What are the parent’s perceptions on the relationships development within the school system? In addition to wanting their children to achieve goals, the mothers who participated in this study showed a desire to build relationships within the school system. All of the participants felt that by establishing positive relationships it would offer support in and out of school. Their overall goals for the future are to be respected, treated as equal partners, and to not be judged for being “dirt poor.”

During the interviews, not all participants in the study felt welcomed in the school system. They often felt as though they were judged and looked down upon because of their socioeconomic background. One parent shared that she often felt ignored and disrespected. With a soft disappointed tone she said:

I do not like going to the school. They are not polite there. I’d rather not go there. I think if they were a little friendlier when you walk in, they do not even ask you if you need anything. They will just look at you and talk on the phone. It’s like a dungeon in that school. I really do not like it.

While two of the parents who appeared to be vocal felt very welcomed at the school. They both shared how vocal they are and would often speak up if they need to. One parent shared that she did not mind going to the school, but these visits only dealt with behavioral issues.

Participants felt that it was important for teachers to have an understanding about their children’s home life; however, at the same time, they felt if teachers did know, they would be judged or looked down upon. One mother shared: “Depends on the teacher. I

know some teachers in the community and I wouldn't want them knowing some things because they would judge me and gossip. We are dirt poor.” Others felt that this connection would give the teachers and administrators a better understanding and help to bridge a better relationship. Four mothers shared stories of having a special connection with someone within the school system. They reported these relationships made them feel welcomed and appreciated which opened the lines of communication for parents.

Overall, the parents interviewed shared that they view education as important and are active participants in their children's education; however, this active participation did not go any further than attending school family nights or parent teacher conferences. These parents were not active participants nor part of any parent committees or groups. Three of the participants shared that they always “felt welcome” and enjoyed collaborating with school staff. While the other two participants did not like collaborating with school staff and “did not feel welcomed.” All five of the participants stated that have attended school events such as family nights, parent teacher conferences, and parent nights. A few parents expressed their concerns about the limited interactions between parents and school staff at these functions. One parent explained, “Everybody is just doing their own thing. It's not like a long time ago where families actually built things together. Now all they do is play bingo and do cake walks.” Another mother shared that they go because “the younger kids like to go.” They also shared the importance that educators learn more about the families and the struggles they face. One parent stated, “they never asked me what is going on in the home” or “if teachers got to know the parents and know a little about the family and what is going on with the family, they wouldn't be so judgment” in dealing with behaviors.

Parents' accounts of their children's educational experiences revealed that parent perceptions and relationships established within the school system were influential in educational outcomes. This heavy hand of feeling excluded lies heavily on cultural insensitivity, which has an enormous impact on education. These parents revealed that building relationships and being respected were essential. An awareness of the influence of family life, culture, and external challenges is important for educators and administrators; therefore, it is important to work together as a team. All parents showed a strong desire for educators to be more empathetic to the children's home life, which they believed would help them to understand the root of many of their children's behaviors. Yet, the findings also indicated the parents who claimed to be actively involved in parent activity functions, did not serve on any academic committees to support their children's education. Although the purpose of this study was not to follow parent involvement, the theme presented itself throughout the interviews as a critical element that factored into parent perceptions.

Discussion

I began the study by reviewing literature about Native American and Traveller early educational beginnings, educational impacts, poverty and the experiences of families living in poverty from both Indian reservations and Traveller communities, and examining the theoretical and methodological frameworks informing this literature. This led me to conclude that despite the valuable lessons to be learned from this literature in relation to the outcomes of poverty and its impacts on parent perceptions about education and their experiences of environmental and cultural influences, perceptions and resilience were overlooked. This is particularly true for studies of participants with low SES and

minorities, whose methods excluded them from presenting parents as active subjects with agency and their own perspectives. Studies exploring children's perspectives and families' experiences of living in poverty using qualitative and mixed methods, on the other hand, have emphasized the agency and strength of families living in poverty (Ridge, 2009). This is particularly true of numerous qualitative and ethnographic studies that examine the lives of Traveller communities in the United Kingdom in the context of Traveller lifestyle, history, culture, community, and educational impacts, which document parents' perspectives of the role of formal education in their lives (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012).

The development of a conceptual framework helped me to answer my research questions, enhance parent perceptions, and identify an emerging theory. The central idea or phenomena that emerged from this analysis was how Native American and Traveller parents perceived education. After examining the interrelations of the codes and themes within the conceptual framework, it became evident there were three claims for emergent theory. The first assertion is parents' cultural environments impact academic achievement. The second assertion is parents emphasize the importance of acceptance, respect, and relationships established within the school system. The third assertion is the difference between what parents perceive as success and what schools view as success in education.

Discussion of Literature Review

In first starting this process, I felt it was important to explore the educational beginnings of Native Americans and Traveller/Gypsy communities. In first exploring Traveller/Gypsy history, I discovered that their lineage were very similar to those of

Native Americans in regard to educational beginnings, struggles, stereotypes, academic failures, and strong family kinship. Historically, Native American and Traveller education was utilized as forced assimilation; as a tool of cultural destruction. Education was implemented to estrange children from their parents, community, culture, language, and values in an effort to force assimilation and conversion to “kill the Indian or tame the half-breed wanders” and to end the nomadic way of life. These two ethnic groups have endured treatment that is unimaginable and dehumanizing. In both the United States and United Kingdom, places of business and community facilities had signs that read “No Gypsy’s allowed” or “No Indians or dogs allowed.” Although these images are no longer hanging in these local establishments, the mistreatment and stereotypes still exist today in both countries and many local communities.

These haunting images from their past have left a legacy of barriers between parents and educators. Many parents still perceive education as unfriendly climates that fail to support, have low expectations, poor academic achievement, lack parent and community involvement, and possess overt and subtle stereotypes. All parents interviewed saw education as important, but did not perceive it as a necessity or desire to advance to college. Sending their children to school was something they needed to do because it was the “norm or law,” not because it was valued but because it was expected. However, this does not mean they did not have aspirations for their children to complete high school because they did want them to graduate, find employment, and be happy. One of the most important factors that all parents shared was a simple wish for their children to be happy and to live a good life.

Academically, Native American and Traveller students experience little success when compare to their peers, especially when measured in terms of standardized assessments, frequency of dropouts, graduation rates, and levels of educational attainment. They are identified as having the highest dropout rate, poor attendance, low levels of parental literacy, and high rates of unemployment in both nations. There is also an over-representation of Traveller and Native students identified as having special educational needs. Both ethnic groups have been identified as “at risk.” Students traditionally regarded as “at risk” are poor children and children of color: these numbers continue to increase despite national initiatives to reverse this trend. According to some researchers, by the year 2020, approximately one fourth of children will live in poverty and children of color will comprise more than half of the students in public schools (Natriello et al., 1990). Already, in many districts in both the United States and United Kingdom, children of color comprise the majority of public school students.

There was a clear distinction between the level of poverty in Native American and Traveller families within both countries. Native Americans are typically isolated in desolated areas with very limited resources, while Traveller communities are typically located within the outer limits of the town. Poverty is definitely experienced differently, but the effects of poverty are the same. Although the risks of experiencing poverty vary, both populations suffer from a long history of medical conditions and mental health issues. There was also an interesting factor in how study participants viewed poverty because did not convey the belief that they perceived themselves as living in poverty. This may be a result of cultural factors or not having experienced anything different in their lives. Native American and Traveller communities typically share similar

environments and expectations: everybody lives in a structure of similar construct or lifestyles. Therefore, when an individual is not exposed to a different life style, they are not aware of differences and their surrounding is the “norm.”

There is growing consensus in regard to the need to raise expectations in regard to the educational achievement of Native American and Traveller students as educational success is tied to poverty, education, cultural expectations, and economic health. However; if these barriers surrounding poverty and cultural expectation which are linked directly to student achievement are not effectively addressed, then the cycle of despair will continue.

Limitations of the Study

Although the researcher received direction and support from an experienced researcher throughout all steps of the research, there were certain limitations of this study. First, the study utilized a new instrument developed by the researcher limiting the known reliability and validity of the study. The interview questions collected the perceptions of parents and therefore, included the assumption that participants were honest in their responses. The findings are also limited by gender and size of the sample group. Therefore, the results of this study are limited to the perceptions and experiences of one Traveller and four Native American women. Although this study included parents from both the United States and United Kingdom, the majority of the interviews were collected in the United States with Native American mothers. The five parents interviewed in this study were unique in giving minority, low-income parents a voice regarding their children's education. Increasing and balancing the number of participants

from both ethnic groups may have provided additional data and insight into the environmental factors that contribute to academic success or failure.

My overall perception was participants responded positively during their interviews, which was a limitation of the study. It is possible that parents answered questions in a way that pleased me because they wanted me to believe they were actively involved in their children's education and provided details they believed I wanted to hear. Although parents expressed confidence in their ability to prepare and support education, their children's educational success may have been affected by their perceptions and negative educational experiences.

Another limitation of the study is the lack of information on prenatal care, early developmental milestones of the children, and the overall physical well-being of the children. Including this component in the questionnaire and utilizing more probing questions during the interviews might have provided additional information about the parents' perceptions in regard to key factors contributing to early child development. Despite these limitations, it should be noted that an educational study of this nature would likely contribute to the generation of new ideas and perspectives about education and parent relationships.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this comparative qualitative study was twofold: (a) to further elucidate the experiences and consequences between culture, socioeconomic, and education through parent perceptions of their children's educational experiences and (b) to formulate a logical, systemic, and explanatory theory of culturally responsive teaching

and interpersonal relationships. During the research process, three areas were identified for further investigation.

The first opportunity for further research is to conduct the same study with an equal number of participants from each group as well as from all socioeconomic levels in each group. A larger-scale study may either confirm or reject the findings that emerged from this study.

A second opportunity for further study may is to compare the views of parents to educators and administrators. Perhaps the study might compare the perceptions of elementary, middle school, and high school teachers regarding their expectations for academic achievement with the perceptions of parents of low SES.

A third opportunity for further research is to conduct a similar study which explores the importance of building relationships between educators and parents. A larger-scale sample and more in-depth interviews may either confirm or reject that it is indeed school relationships that hold back student achievement.

Recommendations for Educational Stakeholders

The overarching recommendation for educational stakeholders including k-12 educators, school administrators, teachers, school board members, and policy makers is to embrace the characteristics of “building bridges.” I view building bridges as the umbrella for all other recommendations to address student achievement. In this section, I present four recommendations to establish building bridges. These recommendations align with the four domains of the research findings. The four recommendations support the school, parents, and children as well as enhance the new definition of building bridges. These recommendations are: (a) strong leadership, (b) welcoming environments,

(c) effective curriculum and instruction, and (d) family, school, and community partnerships (see Figure 2).

| Recommendations | Major Themes |
|--|--|
| Strong Leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a clear vision • Provide cultural professional development • Adopt a definition of building bridges • Build strong school culture • Create an atmosphere that empowers school culture and social structure. |
| Welcoming Environments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a warm, nurturing, and safe environment. • Provide an open door policy with parents • Incorporate parent/teacher programs • Adopt a policy and procedures for parent engagement and involvement |
| Effective Curriculum | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ effective, culturally responsive, educational materials and instruction • Incorporate a resiliency curriculum • Create a five-year strategic plan aligning school improvement efforts with assessments and student progress • Provide activities that respect cultural backgrounds and experiences • Teachers need to recognize and acknowledge that students from minority backgrounds live in two different worlds. Students need to be actively involved in creating and modifying the curriculum. • Provide training for parents on the curriculum and instructional practices taking place within the school system. |
| Family, School, and Community Partnerships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt Epsteins six part framework, schools, family, and community partnership: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. PARENTING: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families. 2. COMMUNICATING: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications. 3. VOLUNTEERING: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs. 4. LEARNING AT HOME: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions. 5. DECISION MAKING: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations. 6. COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community. • Provide opportunities for family engagement • Support, engage, and empower parents • Make connections with the community and incorporate local cultural practices • Provide all parents with an equal opportunity to be actively engaged within the school system |

Figure 2: Recommendations to Establish a Building Bridge.

Final Thoughts

In beginning this journey, I always believed that in order to write well you needed to write what you know. These are the truths I know today. I was raised in humble beginnings on an Indian reservation, attended Indian education, and have fallen victim to the many internal and external barriers that lie far beyond education. One day in sharing my story with a very close friend, he asked “How did you do it?” I paused and thought for a while because I really did not know what made me different from so many other individuals who shared the same past. This was the time I decided that my educational research would be geared towards discovering this phenomenon. Throughout this journey, it has brought me back to places I have desperately tried to forget. It brought me back to that vulnerable, scared, troubled, little girl who struggled to make sense of the world around her. It was a journey where rehashing my past, struggles, and successes, I discovered my truths. It is through this educational journey that I unraveled the truths that discovered the answers to my success as well as discovering the hidden truths behind this research.

Spending time with these families helped to put many things into perspective and made me want to share this story even more. Personally, I discovered the answers to my success lied within my resiliency and the relationships I established throughout my life. It was through these relationships that I gained the courage and confidence to pursue a better life and to achieve my educational dreams. Building relationships with these important people at crucial moments in my life helped me to understand and see the world through another perspective. It showed me another way of life and if it were not for these teachings and relationships, I would not be the person I am today. Through the love,

support, acceptance, and guidance of my in-laws, family, and friends, I was helped to walk through the front door to a better tomorrow and brighter future.

It was through these teachings that I realized if I was able to walk through the front door and break the cycle within my own circle, then our “at risk” students can achieve the same success through similar positive relationships. Today, our school system spends thousands of dollars each year searching for programs that will fix our floundering school in the depth of low test scores, high dropout rates, absenteeism, truancy, and lack of parent involvement. What I have learned from the interviews is that in order to fix these issues, we first need to conduct research in our own backyard. In conducting this research, we will be able to identify the issues in our community that are negatively impacting the academic achievement of our children. Next, in building relationships with parents, guardians, and community members it will bridge the gaps in making educators aware of the world that surrounds our students and will provide insight into the deeper issues that surround student achievement.

The parents in this study believe education is important and a means to a better life; however, it is not a higher priority than meeting the basic needs of their families. When parents and students are struggling to survive day-to-day and dealing with the many stresses identified within this study, education is not a priority. As educators, we need to acknowledge these barriers and address them with empathy so we cannot only educate our students, but also address their physical, mental, and emotional needs.

It is apparent that a “quick fix” is not going to come from an inner city intervention program or non-Native school programs: it is going to come from something as simple as knowing our own community and building relationships. If we do not begin

to acknowledge our parents as equal contributors and identify and effectively address the barriers that lie outside of the school walls, then we are never going to be able to understand these barriers that are impeding our students' success. It all comes down to respecting each other and valuing cultural beliefs and lifestyle. Regardless of one's SES, appearances, ethnic background, and educational status, we are all equal. As parents and professionals, we all want to see our children and students succeed. It is through acknowledgement, understanding, and relationships that we will all succeed in this endeavor.

The most important lesson I gained through conducting parent interviews is that parents simply want to be respected and valued. They would like to be seen as equal partners and not judged based upon their educational experience, income status, appearance, or community status. Although it was proven that their educational history, low-income/poverty, ethnicity, and parent involvement all contributed to Native American and Traveller students' educational success, it was parent perceptions of how they viewed relationships within the school system that contributed greatly to their children's educational achievement.

The combined findings of previously conducted qualitative studies and this study allow for generalizations about Native American and Traveller students' academic achievement. Identification of the barriers and contributors about why these students are identified as "at-risk" will provide educators and administrations with insight in regard to their world outside of the school structure. Teachers and administrators working in high poverty schools with minority children need clear definitions of their responsibilities and those definitions need to be clearly articulated to everyone within the school district.

Educators need to be culturally sensitive to the environments and communities that surround their school districts and be well adverse of the hidden cultural components that impact students. In order to be an effective teacher, one needs to know the environments in which their students live, understand the community dynamics, and build relationships outside of the school building.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

THANK YOU CORRESPONDENCE

Thank you for participating in this study on parent perspectives of how home, school, community, and culture contribute to the academic success of Native American and Traveller Community children from low-income and poverty households.

I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this important research. Your perspective on how you overcame adversity and achieved academic success is essential for identifying the environmental protective factors that promote resiliency and has the potential to inform the design of programs and services provided within a school district.

I hope that this study will be useful to professional administrators and educators in their efforts to strengthen and build home-school-community partnerships which provide more comprehensive services to underserved minority children and their families. I am particularly hopeful that this research will enable practitioners, scholars, funders and policy makers to design strategies and programs to aid high-achieving, low-income students in reaching their full potential.

Thank you again for opening your hearts and homes in participating in this important research. Your insight and contribution to this important research is invaluable for helping minority youth and their families in the future. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me; you can do so by emailing or calling.

Cheri F. Poitra, M. ED, Specialist
Special Education Instructor
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Belcourt, ND 58316
Email: cheri.poitra@sendit.nodak.edu

Sincerely,
Cheri Poitra

Appendix B

Educational Background

1. Tell about your childhood and schooling experience.
2. What is your highest level of education completed?

Children Educational Background

3. What grades are they in or have completed?
4. Have your children always attended school on the Reservation?
5. Do they receive any special services within the school system?

Perspectives towards Education

6. How do you find out how your child is doing in school?
7. How often do you attend functions within the school system?
8. Do you attend parent teacher conferences? Why or Why not?
9. Tell me the impression you get from your child(s) educators and administrators?
10. Have you always felt welcomed or as though you were part of the team within the school?
11. Do you feel the school is meeting your child's academic needs?
12. What were the challenges or struggles your children have encounter within the school system?
13. What do you believe to be the role of your school in preparing your child to be successful in graduating from a K-12 School?
14. Do you believe that schools are providing the needed support to help you and your child with academics?
15. What do you believe schools should do to be better?
16. What challenges do your children face outside of school?
17. Tell me what you value most about education and why?
18. Do you believe that other ethnicities encounter the same struggles and hardships as Native people living on Reservations?

19. What do you believe are the most important goals for your child to reach in school or in life?
20. What are you doing to help your child succeed in achieving these goals or plan for the future?
21. What do you think the school can do to help your children achieve these goals?
22. What does it mean to be successful in school in your community?
23. How can the schools help your children be successful? What do you want or expect from the schools?
24. What would help the teacher/school better understand your child and your family?
25. What can the teacher/school do to help you feel more comfortable contacting? Working with your child at home? Coming to school?
26. How can parents and teachers work together to help children do well in school?
27. How do you show a child you are proud of him/her and are pleased with what they have done?

Appendix C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Study: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION AMONG A NATIVE AMERICAN RESERVATION AND ENGLISH TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

Study Investigator: Cheri F. Poitra, M. ED, Specialist

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in research examining the impacts of poverty in student learning. This study will address the relationship between socioeconomics of a Midwest Indian Reservation and English Traveller Community. One of the most serious problems confronting impoverished school districts is the low achievement and high percentage of students identified with special needs. Through this comparison study it will identify the relationship between socioeconomic conditions and student achievements through the eyes of the parents. Parents' voices may help educators understand how factors within the home, school, and community affect their child's academic ability.

You are invited because you may have valuable insight and knowledge about this issue. Your participation is voluntary. Between 5 and 10 people will take part in this study. If at any time, you feel that you no longer wish to participate in this study you can withdraw without any penalty.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into parent perspectives of the educational experiences of children living in income disparity areas. This International comparative study will identify the relationship between the educational experiences of children living in a Midwest Indian Reservation and in an English Traveller Community. In this study I seek to develop an understanding of the impact of poverty and to understand how these deficiency experiences affect student achievement from the parents perspective.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this study, you may have your home observed and or interviewed about your knowledge, experiences, or opinions on school programs. These interviews typically last forty-five (45) minutes to sixty (60) minutes. Your participation may last up to 2 hours in total, but this varies.

You will be asked to participate in an interview which would be recorded. Such recordings will be used only for writing down exactly what you say. Your name will remain secret. Tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet after use. Being recorded is voluntary. You may still participate without being recorded.

WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

Information learned from this study will be used in scientific journal articles and in presentations. None of these will identify you personally. You will be referred to by a made up name instead. Interviews, notes, and any digital audio recordings will be stored in a locked cabinet when not in use. Any information from the data that could identify you will be removed.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS?

The risks involved with this study include the possibility of loss of confidentiality. Though I take many steps to ensure secrecy, the identity of participants might accidentally become known. This may cause embarrassment or discomfort. Some questions I ask about your experiences and opinions might cause worry, embarrassment, discomfort, or sadness. You may choose not to answer such questions. Referrals to counseling will be available should you experience bad feelings, but no money is available from the study to pay for such services. Another drawback for you might include the amount of time spent in interviews or answering questionnaires.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS?

No direct benefit is guaranteed to you from participating in this study. Your participation in this research, however, may benefit you or other people in the future by helping us learn about issues of the impact of poverty upon student learners.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.

(Sign your name here)

(Date)

Appendix D

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

District Permission Letter and Consent Document for Research Study in Belcourt School District and King's College

“A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF PARENTAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION AMONG A NATIVE AMERICAN RESERVATION AND ENGLISH TRAVELLER COMMUNITY”

Date: February 14, 2012

Re: Agreement for King’s College and Belcourt School District teachers and administrators to participate in a field research study

Districts have agreed to participate in a research study to gather information pertaining to parent perspectives on student achievement. The overall purpose of the study is to develop an understanding of the impact of poverty and to understand how these deficiency experiences affect student achievement from the parent’s perspective. The research results will provide an international comparison from a Midwest Native American Reservation and an English Traveller Community in the UK. It is understood all participation is voluntary and individuals can withdraw from the project at any time.

Sincerely,

Ms. Tracy Ward
Principal
King’s College

Roman Marcellais
Superintendent
Belcourt School District #7

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