

Succeeding in School: The Online Reflections of Native American and Other Minority Students

BRETT ZYROMSKI
ALFRED BRYANT JR.
EDWIN R. GERLER JR.



This phenomenological study of students' online responses to the Succeeding in School program offers rare insight into how Native American and other minority students perceived and experienced their school environment. Students' strategies regarding behavior and attitude changes they would use to improve their success and counseling implications are discussed.



Counselors in schools, community agencies, and other settings are often called upon to work with students whose behaviors and attitudes do not lead to academic success. Carbonaro (2005) and Marks (2000) found, not surprisingly, that how students listen in class, behave, and participate in the learning process relate directly to how well they achieve academically. Constructivist and humanistic issues in school counseling frame both how teachers inspire students with hope, encouragement, and support and how teachers build on students' existing strengths (Hazler, 2001). As students explore the meanings behind their feelings toward school, they actively explore humanistic issues related to their personal and academic success (Robinson, Jones, & Hayes, 2000). The classroom environment, particularly the manner in which teachers inspire student interest, also influences academic achievement (Kelly, 2008; Lister & Ansalone, 2005; Marks, 2000). Humanistic educational environments are supportive, warm environments in which students can explore their own worth, create positive relationships with others, increase self-awareness, and pursue knowledge in an environment uniquely tailored to meet their individual needs (Hazler, 2001; Robinson et al., 2000). Counselors may contribute to success in school by offering students opportunities to reflect on the school environment and to consider what behaviors and attitudes are needed for success in school. The online program, Succeeding in School (SIS; Gerler, n.d.), assists counselors in this

Brett Zyromski, Department of Counseling, Social Work, and Leadership, Northern Kentucky University; Alfred Bryant Jr., School of Education, University of North Carolina at Pembroke; Edwin R. Gerler Jr., Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Counselor Education, North Carolina State University. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Brett Zyromski, Department of Counseling, Social Work, and Leadership, Northern Kentucky University, BEP 203C, Highland Heights, KY 41099 (e-mail: zyromskib1@nku.edu).

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process. The SIS program encourages students to explore when and why they are comfortable in school and to reflect on behaviors and attitudes useful for academic achievement.

Success in school is a particularly salient issue for the Native American population. Although estimated to be 4.5 million in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), the population is very young compared with the total population in the United States. One third of all Native Americans are under the age of 18, compared with 26% for the total U.S. population. Native Americans experience numerous issues that affect their educational achievement. According to Sue and Sue (2008), Native American students achieve academically similarly to other students through the fourth grade but seem to experience a drop in achievement motivation around the seventh grade. This seems to be the time when Native Americans realize their "Indianness." They begin to view themselves as being different and have a clearer understanding of the reality associated with being a Native American in a Eurocentric society. This loss in achievement motivation becomes visible once this population reaches adulthood.

Although Native American students are being lost around middle school, the impact is not seen statistically until the students fail to graduate from high school. According to Faircloth and Tippeconnic (2010), Native Americans graduate from high school at a rate of 44.1%, compared with the national average of 69% for all students. They

have a dropout rate twice the national average; the highest dropout rate of any United States ethnic or racial group. About three out of every ten Native students drop out of school before graduating from high school both on reservations and in cities. (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010, p. 1)

Statistically, only 11% of Native Americans have bachelor's degrees, compared with 24% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), and the poverty rate of Native Americans is twice that of non-Natives (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010). The inability of Native Americans to complete an education continues the cycle of poverty that leads to high suicide rates among adolescents. Breaking this cycle of poor educational achievement is paramount in reducing the poverty rate of this population.

Given these statistics, it is evident that more focus needs to be paid to the elementary and middle school years. The areas Native American students identify as important to achieving success in school are unknown. Also unknown are the factors they feel improve relationships, enhance success, increase self-awareness, and help with goal setting and goal attainment. Exploring the experience of these students in the educational environment is a first step toward understanding how to remove barriers to their success. This study is the first attempt at a greater understanding of holistic issues surrounding Native Americans students' experiences in school. The purpose of this study, then, was to examine the results of an intervention using the SIS program to determine if a mostly Native American population identified barriers or supports to their academic success in school.

Past paper-and-pencil versions of the SIS program have shown positive and promising results for increasing students' attitudes about school, positively affecting academic achievement, and reducing dropouts. Gerler and Anderson's (1986) original implementation of the program with about 900 fourth- and fifth-grade students of varied economic, social, and cultural backgrounds from 18 different schools located across North Carolina resulted in positive increases in students' attitudes toward school, classroom behavior, and language arts grades. Gerler and Drew (1990) conducted a follow-up study involving 98 students of varied economic, social, and cultural backgrounds who were identified as potential dropouts in Grades 6–8 from five middle schools in urban North Carolina, resulting in an increase in students' positive attitudes toward school. R. S. Lee's (1993) replication of the study utilizing more than 200 students of varied economic, social, and cultural environments in Grades 4 through 6 in Long Beach, California, found a significant increase in students' mathematics achievement. Gerler and Herndon (1993) studied 104 students of varied economic, social, and cultural environments in Grades 6–8 and found a significant increase in students' awareness of how to achieve school success. Ruben (1989) also utilized the SIS program as a dropout prevention program with Latino and African American elementary students in Miami Beach, Florida, with results showing that participating students perceived themselves in a positive manner and predicted personal successes in their future.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perspectives and voices of the mostly Native American students who responded to the online SIS program. The main focus of the study was to uncover themes related to students' responses to the SIS instrument (Racher & Robinson, 2002), as well as their perspectives regarding their feelings about school. The qualitative examination was conducted from a phenomenological perspective, illuminating themes associated with the perspective of the participants, their feelings and ideas related to their interaction with the SIS program, and their responses to the prompts of the instrument (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In short, this article examines perspectives of a majority Native American population of students' in the Southeast regarding their feelings about their school environment and examines these students' thoughts about what behaviors and attitudes contribute to success in school.

THE SIS PROGRAM

The SIS program is a web-based classroom guidance program that can be used as a counseling intervention at school and in community agency settings (Gerler, n.d.). In 1986, the program was designed as a paper-and-pencil instrument to help counselors improve academic achievement among fourth- and fifth-grade elementary school students (Gerler & Anderson, 1986). As mentioned, the paper-and-pencil program had been used to improve mathematics achievement (R. S. Lee, 1993), to reduce dropouts (Ruben,

1989), and to contribute to student achievement in other ways (Gerler & Drew, 1990; Gerler & Herndon, 1993). The SIS program was moved online during the late 1990s. It contains 10 sections related to student achievement. This article focuses on five sections of the SIS program that reveal aspects and characteristics students feel are important to successfully navigating the school environment. These five sections of the program are titled (a) Being Comfortable in School, (b) Being Responsible in School, (c) Listening in School, (d) Asking for Help in School, and (e) The Bright Side of School.

Teachers coordinated the students' responses to the online instrument. As students responded to prompts in the five sections, they examined and expressed their ideas related to the school environment and to their own success. Specifically, these sections helped students explore how to be comfortable and responsible in the school environment, how to improve their environment by listening and asking for help, and how to focus on the bright side of the environment to stay positive about school. The program uses visual and written prompts to encourage student exploration of the school environment. Students respond to the prompts in writing, a form of journaling. The written response form is an important aspect of the SIS program, as journaling has been shown to have many positive therapeutic and educational benefits (L'Abate, 2001; Pennebaker, 2001). The foundational structure of the SIS program utilizes a multimodal framework (Lazarus, 1997), represented by the acronym BASIC ID. Each letter of the acronym BASIC ID represents the following interacting modalities: Behavior, Affect, Sensation, Imagery, Cognition, Interpersonal, and Drugs/biology. Recognizing the interaction among the seven modalities is critical, as issues in one modality have ripple effects across others. Changing aspects of one modality causes reciprocal changes in others. Through the SIS program, students explore their thoughts, behaviors, feelings, and environment, touching on each modality within the BASIC ID.

METHOD

The online SIS program was given over 10 weeks, a collaborative effort between classroom teachers and counseling personnel. The teachers allowed the students to access the online program once per week as a class. They covered one section per session. The teacher did not process the responses, nor did they provide feedback regarding responses. The web-based delivery system allowed for student self-exploration and was an effort to replicate the structure of the original paper-and-pencil intervention. The SIS intervention was coordinated by the school counselor and delivered in the computer lab with teachers observing, after which we gathered the data. Each of the modules examined in this article had questions, comments, or pictures that prompted student thought on the subject. Students then journaled their responses. When they were finished with each module within a section, they submitted that module.

Participants

Participants in the study were fourth- and fifth-grade students, mostly Lumbee Native American, attending a rural elementary school containing kindergarten through sixth grade in southeastern North Carolina. The classes and student participants were a convenience sample. University and school system institutional review board procedures, which included parent consent, were followed in obtaining the convenience sample for this study. The participants ranged in age from 10 to 11 years old for the fourth graders and 11 to 12 years old for the fifth graders. Three classes of fourth graders and three classes of fifth graders participated in the study. A total of 77 fourth graders (42 males and 35 females) and 62 fifth graders (24 males and 38 females) participated in the study, for an overall total of 139 participants. Of the 77 fourth graders, 69% were Native American, 17% were Hispanic, 8% were African American, 3% were White, and 3% were multiracial. Of the 62 fifth graders, 74% were Native American, 17% were Hispanic, 6% were African American, 2% were White, and 1% were multiracial.

This school enrolls 544 students in kindergarten through sixth grade, 73% of whom are from the Lumbee tribe. English is considered the students' first and only language. The majority of Native American students in North Carolina identify as from the Lumbee tribe (Public Schools of North Carolina, State Advisory Council on Indian Education, 2009). Native American students perform below the state average on their end-of-course standardized tests (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2009). In math, 59.1% of Native American students passed their test, whereas other student populations within North Carolina passed at a 71.0% rate. In reading, 40.8% of Native American students passed their test, whereas other student populations within North Carolina passed at a 56.8% rate. Native American students also drop out of school at a higher rate (6.99%) compared with White students (4.25%) in the same county (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2009).

Researcher as Participant

As an active participant in the research process, the lead researcher (first author) and research team sought to acknowledge and reduce the power of biases and personal perspectives throughout the analysis. In the analysis of the data, the lead researcher did not interact with students, did not influence student responses in any way, and was not involved in the students' interactions with the SIS instrument. The lead researcher led the analysis of the data resulting from the use of the SIS program with this sample. Hence, some of the bias that may have existed was mediated by the use of existing data. The lead researcher acknowledged his unearned privilege as a White American male in a society that bestows privileges and advantages

based on gender and race. Because life experiences shape worldviews and influence perceptions of people and events, the lead researcher and research team's approach and participation in the study were affected by their past experiences and worldviews. Researcher reflexivity strategies were used in an attempt to reduce researcher bias. Members each acknowledged possible biases, their worldview, and past experiences, while the lead researcher kept a journal throughout the analysis process. The journal was a vital aspect of researcher reflexivity used to identify values and preconceptions of the researcher in an attempt by the researcher to stay as objective as possible, while also attempting to understand how the researcher engaged with the analysis process with the data (Pillow, 2003). In addition, the journal was used as an outlet for emotions (both positive and negative) raised by the qualitative process of data analysis. Through the journaling process, including the process of raising questions about the researcher's influence in the interactive data analysis process, the strength of the qualitative analysis is increased and trustworthiness enhanced (Pillow, 2003).

Theoretical Framework for Analysis

Because the data were in the form of survey responses or journaling, a qualitative analysis using codes to discover themes was appropriate. The analysis was conducted from a constructivist epistemology, which proposes that participants' knowledge of reality is socially constructed based on interactions in the present and past with the world around them, that research is a product of the values of the researcher, and that research is an interactive process between the researcher and the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Racher & Robinson, 2002). Therefore, the theoretical framework acknowledged that students' responses were a product of their socially constructed reality, and the actual analysis of the responses was guided by the structure and the multimodal framework of the SIS instrument.

Coding and Essences

We conducted the research using a phenomenological perspective to uncover the meaning of the experience of the students who participated in the SIS program (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Racher & Robinson, 2002). The description of the participants' experience became accessible through coding and a code set that revealed themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schilling, 2006; White & Marsh, 2006). These themes illuminated essences, or common understandings, of participants' perspectives (Racher & Robinson, 2002). An expert in Native American adolescent identity development served as the auditor, examining the codebooks, a sample of the data set, and resulting themes to ensure accuracy. The auditor lived in the same geographical area as the students, has extensive experience with the population, and is qualified to provide insight and analysis of the results for trustworthiness.

Because the analysis was a phenomenological qualitative process, results of the study do not possess external validity or generalizability. The findings will be related to past research with the SIS program. We used kappa coefficients to measure interrater agreement and to strengthen interrater reliability. Interrater agreement is the extent to which the coders agree with each other in creating common codes to apply to the data. Kappa is a statistical analysis used to assess interrater agreement by measuring the amount of agreement between the coding team, above what might have occurred by chance alone. Although a kappa score of .70 is usually acceptable to support interrater reliability, the kappa score was above .80 for our team. Generalization of the results to internal groups, similar to those studied, or to external groups is unknown.

RESULTS

The results of this analysis focused on the following sections of the SIS program: Being Comfortable in School, Being Responsible in School, Listening in School, Asking for Help in School, and The Bright Side of School. Of the five sections analyzed in this program, two of the sections, Listening in School and The Bright Side of School, had a significant number of prompts with a very low percentage of usable submissions. The results of those sections are therefore not presented here. The prompts within the five sections that resulted in usable submissions are detailed below. The aim of the data analysis was to understand students' perspectives about how to be comfortable and responsible in the environment, how to improve the environment by listening and asking for help, and how to focus on the bright side of the environment. We hope student perspectives will assist counselors in personalizing interventions to the needs of specific student groups.

In the sections Listening in School and The Bright Side of School, responses are limited. One reason the responses are low may be due to students being absent on the day the data were collected or being out of class during the session participating in other school functions. For example, students were pulled out of class for reading, academically/intellectually gifted programs, or some other alternative educational experience. Another explanation may be that as teachers become more comfortable with students interacting with the SIS program, they stopped paying as much attention to the students while they were journaling and students engaged in alternative activities when they should have been journaling. As a result of the low number of responses, the essences of the students were not apparent, but some students' responses to various prompts within the two sections are listed below. Due to the lack of themes and essences in these sections, how students perceive the value of listening in class is not apparent, which would have been illuminated in the Listening in School section. Also, how listening may lead to academic improvement was not addressed by students in response to prompts in that section. In The Bright Side of School section,

students may have illuminated their perceptions of what makes school fun or what actions they could take to improve the school environment, yet the lack of responses made this impossible.

In the following reporting of results from usable responses, students' quotations are presented exactly as they were received and are reported in students' own words, although at times students' capitalized words were changed to lowercase for ease of reading. Often, words are misspelled and sentence structure and grammar are poor, which could be due to the students treating the online interaction as they would texting, instant messaging, or other brief interactions using technology. Or, some students may not have possessed the necessary skills to convey their emotional or thought content through written communication. The results of the students' interaction with the SIS instrument are reported using the general topic (content section), followed by the instrument prompts contained in the specific module, and then student responses are detailed in their own words.

First Area of Reflection: Being Comfortable in School (Section 2 of the SIS)

Student reflections in Section 2, Being Comfortable in School, focused on identifying fears related to school and how to overcome fears surrounding the academic environment (see Figure 1). The following content is presented clockwise, starting at the upper left of the figure, with "Origins of Fear."

Three modules within Section 2 of the SIS program, Being Comfortable in School, had 31, 24, and 36 responses, respectively. Although four of the prompts seemed to confuse students, overall, the student responses were clear enough to lead to trustworthy themes. The three modules within the Being Comfortable in School section led to themes related to students' fears. These themes are related in a five-part progression below and in Figure 1. Students identified different types of tests as causing fear. Students also seemed fearful of receiving poor academic results. Students specifically mentioned receiving poor results on the end-of-grade (EOG) exams as causing trepidation. These fears were intermingled with themes of punishment, usually in the form of corporal punishment. Themes emerged surrounding "EOG, failing, ReportCard, macking a F, and not passing," "padding, suspension, EOG, report cards, and failing," and "eog, reportcard, filling, paddling, making a f."

Students seemed unsure of what to do to overcome their fears. Many responses were vague and undefined. Some vague student suggestions included the following: "i would not be scared of getten it," "do good in school," "fine," and "brethe and dont do it agin." However, some students also realized that seeking help from others might help them overcome their fears. One student thought it might be helpful to "tell what happened." Other students identified resources they might seek out, such as "talking to a special person" or "Go to the guindence counler."

Two themes emerged as a result of students considering if and when they would work on overcoming their fears surrounding the school environ-

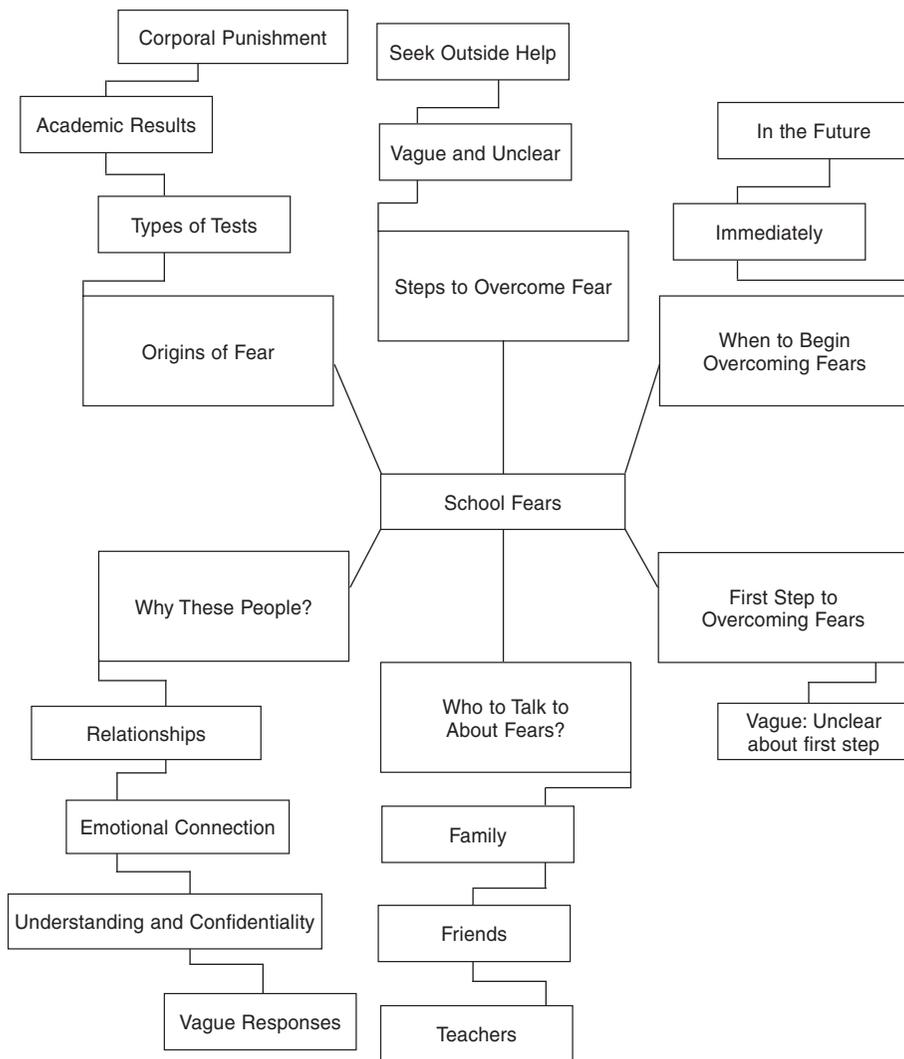


FIGURE 1

Concept Map, Section 2, Module 2—School Fears

Note. Concept map illustrates the different perspectives students have related to fear and the school environment.

ment. Students expressed the desire to begin working on their fears either immediately or in the future. Students wishing to begin work on their fears immediately expressed their desire in short, to-the-point submissions, such as “Right know” or “NOW.” Students focused on overcoming their fears in the future were more specific about when that might happen, stating they would begin “After I finish school,” “when I am older,” or “right after i get out of trouble.”

Students were prompted to consider the first step to overcoming fears about school. Submissions were vague, did not match the prompt, were blank, or were a jumble of letters that did not form a word. Because the student responses were either inconclusive or in such a way that coding could not occur, it was impossible to recognize what students identified as the first step to overcoming fear. Students may not have been clear about the first step to overcoming fears, but they did know with whom they would talk about their fears.

Students identified family, friends, and their teachers as their main resources for assistance. Some students would speak only to family about their fears: "My dad and my grandma" and "I would talk to my mom my dad my older sister and my aunt and uncles." Others expanded their circle to include friends and teachers: "My mom, my teachers, and all of my friends," "My teacher or parents," and "My friend Veronica and my mom and my brother and dad."

Students chose these people as confidantes because they had relationships with them built through an emotional connection, understanding, and confidentiality. One student expressed this connection by writing "because they understand completely," while another simply stated, "he is very special to me." Understanding and confidentiality are key components of this relationship: "I know they won't tell anyone" and "I would feel comfortable with this person because they will understand."

Second Area of Reflection: Being Responsible in School (Section 3 of the SIS)

The reflections in Section 3 of the SIS program focused on homework, responsibility, and relationships with parents and teachers. The prompt in this section was an incomplete newspaper article that announced various students' responsible actions. Students were assigned to complete the newspaper article with details regarding their own responsible actions. Of the 25 responses to the prompt, 11 did not apply to the prompt, five submissions were blank or a jumble of incoherent letters, and two were duplicate entries. The remaining seven responses expressed the benefit of changing negative mind-sets to positive. This change usually results in some accomplishment for the student in the story. These stories and submissions were longer in length than previous submissions. Two examples are included below:

My thoughts were low just like my teacher's but when i finally get through it i know i could do it. i was ignored until i pasted the e.o.g. test.

Last year when we had to take the E.O.G test I thought I wouldn't make it. Then the last week or two of May I got my test scores back and to my surprise I made two 3's. From then on I belived in myself and always knew what I can achieve in if I try.

Students felt positive with pride about their responsible behaviors. One student reported "It makes me feel real good." Others felt "proud and succesful," "i feel proud," and "good and happy."

Reflections about responsibility were initiated with a prompt asking students to describe times they felt adults were treating them like robots.

Students seemed confused by the prompt; seven of the 19 responses did not match the prompt. The other students identified times when adults yelled at them or provided discipline or directions as times that they felt like robots. One student used clear language to describe his or her feelings: "When the teacher yells at me and my parents yell and tell me what to do it makes me feel like a slave." Another student expressed feeling like a robot "when the teachers tell me what to do and order me around and when my mom yells at me."

When students were asked to put themselves in the place of teachers and parents and consider why they give students requirements and tasks, students responded that they thought adults were motivated by a strong emotional connection and that adults were trying to prepare students or motivate them to improve in some way. One student thought adults had requirements and tasks for students because "THEY CARE." Others thought adults were treating them like robots "so we can be prepared for the real world and not fail" and "so we can be smart and hard working." Other students seemed to think the adults were simply attempting to keep them occupied with constructive work so they would not distract the class or get in trouble: "why they try to keep on giving us class work so many times is because they don't want us talking so much." Another student answered, "They want us to be so busy we don't have time to do stuff we shouldn't."

Students expressed that following rules, having an increased focus, and working on academics were all beneficial aspects of school. Students felt if they followed the instructions of adults they would "do home work. do tests work. do AR sheets." Another student listed the importance of "1. do homework 2. ask for help 3. do class work." Following rules and focusing were expressed as valuable by students as well: "no playing or no running or no fighting," "listen to the teacher. do what your parents tell you to do. and stay out of trouble," and "listen to your teacher and directions carefully." Students felt their chores were their most important responsibilities at home. Taking care of siblings, cleaning, and helping do other chores were emergent themes related to home responsibilities. One student expressed that, at home, he or she was involved in "cleaning, taking care of pets, & helping out," while another listed his or her responsibilities as a "clean room, house work, and watch little brother."

Students were also prompted to reflect on issues surrounding homework. Only 12 responses were submitted in response to the prompt in this section, with seven of those submissions usable to create themes, weakening the trustworthiness of the themes. The first prompt asked students to consider why many students feel bad about doing homework. Students would rather be spending their time doing things other than homework because of the time commitment and because the other options are more fun: "because once we get home from school we're tired and don't want to do anything but relax," "Because there are better things they would do instead of home work. And it takes up valuable time," and "It takes up their time when they could be doing something fun."

Students were asked how they could improve their attitude about homework. Of the 12 submissions, four were vague and one was completely off task. The other seven responses expressed a need to renew focus and follow rules. Students felt they should "Listen and stop talking back." Others expressed similar sentiments: "stop talking and talking back and work" and "stop talking back." The only benefit students identified in doing homework was the increase in knowledge and education: "it let you learn something new." Students felt "it good for you to learn" and homework was beneficial because a student was "learning different things."

Third Area of Reflection: Listening in School (Section 4 of the SIS)

Reflections within Section 4, Listening in School, were initiated with picture prompts of faces with different expressions. Students were asked to identify what the faces might have heard in school based on the expression shown in the pictures. These four prompts each led to different reactions from students.

Twenty student submissions were used to identify themes in response to the four prompts. Students seemed unsure about how to react to the first prompt. Students described that the face had heard unusual auditory cues that were "weird" or "shocking" and were often described as something "funny and stupid and fool." The second prompt also resulted in vague and unsure answers about what the face might have heard. Those students who submitted clear descriptions described the face as hearing something positive, such as "Something Happy," or "something good," or maybe "that his teachers said he is the smartest in his classroom." The students were clear the third face had heard something negative. The face heard "something bad," maybe "something sad about her or their friends," or "he heard something scary." In contrast, the fourth face heard something funny, like a joke. Students sometimes even described the funny thing the face had heard. For example, one student thought the face heard that "the principal pants just came down." Another thought the face heard "something funny or crazy" or "something a little bit funny."

Reflections related to the second prompt, "Listen and Transform," were communicated through 13 submissions to five different prompts, a very low response rate. Prompts asked students to consider what different teachers had taught them about certain subjects at school. The answers to the responses were neither plentiful enough nor rich enough to lead to essences of experiences but did identify specific skills students learned related to each subject. For example, the first prompt asked students what they had learned in math by listening to their teachers. Students responded by listing math skills they learned. One student learned "how to find an area on a circle." Another learned "The length and width of shapes the volume of a shape the inches mm cm ml and things containing gallons or pounds." Themes related to academic subject continued through the

prompts related to what students learned in science, language arts, and social studies by listening to the teacher. Each prompt resulted in students listing skills they learned related to each subject. For example, in science, students reported learning "the way a fossil is formed." In language arts, students learned "the punctuation of sentences how to spell a word and reading well." Students learned "how to locate eroupe," "the longitude and latitude of a country or state and facts of citities," and "about differnt cultures" by listening to their teacher in social studies. The final prompt of the section asked students what they learned in other subjects by listening to the teacher. Of the 13 submissions, two were left blank and four were unintelligible mixing of letters. The other seven submissions identified language arts skills as the academic skills they learned from listening to their teachers in other school subjects. Students felt they learned "reading (liture)," "spelling," and "reading i lke to read the things i've learned is the purpose of a story how to identify a story."

Fourth Area of Reflection: Asking for Help in School (Section 5 of the SIS)

Reflections within Section 5 of the SIS program, Asking for Help in School, were initiated with prompts centered on students' experiences and feelings about asking for help in school. Thirty student submissions were used to discover themes related to students' experiences asking for help. Students expressed there were many times in school a student might need help but not ask for it because of fear of embarrassment, fear of punishment, or fear of the teacher. One student did not ask for help "because i think i might get in trouble." Another was afraid of being embarrassed: "i didn't know anything and everone eles did." Other students identified situations and teachers by name that intimidated them when they wanted to ask for help: "When I didn't understand math Equations and I was scared to ask Mrs. M. for help because she would have yelled at me" and "When it is math couse if i asked her she would have yelled at me for not listing."

Students asked for help verbally or by raising their hand when they needed help. "I shout out my teachers name," or "ASK TEACHER," or "by raising my hand" were all common methods of seeking help. One student summed up asking for help "by raising my hand and asking the question I need help on." However, students also responded to this prompt by again reinforcing that many times they don't ask for help when they need it. "I didn't ask for help" and "I didn't" are illustrative of this theme. Students reported that when they asked for help they usually received help with a positive end result. One student reported that when he or she asked for help, "I felt better and understood it better when I asked for help." Another student agreed, "I understood it better." A third student said that when he or she asked for help, he or she "got what i needed help!" The end result seemed to be that after receiving help, students "knew how to do it."

Fifth Area of Reflection: The Bright Side of School (Section 9 of the SIS)

Reflections within Section 9 of the SIS program were initiated with prompts that asked students to create words to a song describing the fun things about school. Of the 31 responses to the prompt, 27 were unclear. These responses were duplicate entries, did not match the prompt, or were vague and unintelligible.

The second prompt of "What's Fun About School?" asked students to report what they were thinking about as they wrote their song. Of the 31 entries, 15 were duplicates, one did not match the prompt, and six were vague and unintelligible. The remaining nine responses identified playing games, recess, and academic work as the thoughts behind their songwriting. One student wrote that during his or her songwriting, he or she was thinking of "Playing outside! Art class! Learnig." Another student was thinking of "going outside and playing with my friends and others, playing games with teachers and friends and others." A third was thinking of "math outside music."

DISCUSSION

The goals of this qualitative study were to identify themes to understand the perspectives and voices of a mostly Native American sample of students in the Southeast who responded to the online SIS program. Learning what students identified as barriers to success is important to develop interventions that support Native American success in school. It seems that the stage of development occurring when students are in intermediate school (junior high, middle school) is particularly when students disengage, feel alienated and different, and lose motivation to succeed in school (Sue & Sue, 2008). School counselors can respond to this crisis in identity by addressing some of the issues brought up by the population in this study. For example, students were fearful of different types of tests and poor academic results, as well as corporal and other types of punishment. Students seemed unsure of what to do to overcome their fears. Even though themes related to student fears were trustworthy, many responses were vague and undefined. Therefore, school counselors can build on students' realization that seeking help from others might help them overcome their fears and help them expand their list of possible resources for help. From a humanistic perspective, the students' ability to participate in self-exploration, to believe in their ability, and to enhance self-awareness moves them toward increased health and ownership of their behavior in a purposeful direction (Fitch, Canada, & Marshall, 2001; Robinson et al., 2000). Students expressed the desire to begin working to overcome their fears immediately or in the future. However, they seemed unsure about the first step to overcoming fears about school.

The American School Counselor Association (2005) National Model makes clear that one role of the school counselor is to examine system barriers to

success, including the atmosphere and climate of the school. It is vital for the school to be a warm, welcoming, safe place for the sample population to feel engaged, supported, and motivated to set and reach goals. To reach goals, students felt they needed to build relationships with family, friends, and teachers to receive assistance and to receive help in overcoming fears. Students chose these people as resources because the relationships were built through an emotional connection, understanding, and confidentiality. Some students seemed to recognize the importance of turning negative attitudes into positive attitudes to achieve success. When school counselors intervene to support goal setting and tasks supported by these positive attitudes, perhaps Native Americans' graduation gap may decrease (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010).

Native American students present very different challenges than do non-Native students in their willingness to make themselves available for opportunities that might positively affect their achievement. Native American students are taught a sense of place by their parents and community from a very young age. They come to believe that their place in society revolves around remaining attached to their Native American community (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2001). In essence, Native Americans see themselves as connected to their tribal group (Sue & Sue, 2008). This sense of place and community may make it difficult for the students to imagine leaving the community to pursue postsecondary opportunities. School counselors working to encourage Native American students to take advantage of enrichment opportunities outside the community may find it very difficult.

School counselors will find themselves trying to encourage talented Native American students to participate in summer enrichment programs and eventually apply and attend colleges and universities far away from home. These attempts by the school counselor will often be met with resistance from both the Native American students and their parents. With little professional opportunities awaiting the students at home, the school counselor may become frustrated while trying to understand the root of this resistance. Native Americans enter college at lower rates than do other groups (Reddy, 1993). College persistence rates of Native American students are also extremely low. In National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I schools, only 33% of Native American college students make it through the 2nd year of college (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003). Only 16% of Native American students in this same study graduated (Jackson & Smith 2001). These statistics represent particular challenges that school counselors who work with this population may face.

Hence, exploring the foundation of Native Americans' perceptions of school provides valuable insights for school counselors. Further, if the SIS program has the potential to help Native American students change their attitudes about school, about seeking help, and about pursuing opportunities to achieve success in school, the positive impact would be significant. Previous studies by Gerler and Anderson (1986) and Gerler and Drew (1990)

with the SIS program suggested positive increases in students' attitudes toward school, classroom behavior, and language arts grades. Gerler and Herndon's (1993) results suggested a significant increase in students' awareness of how to achieve school success. In this study, in Section 3, Module 3, students expressed that following rules, increasing focus, and working on academics were all beneficial aspects of school. Journaling encourages learners to reflect, self-regulate, manage their own learning processes, increase their self-awareness, and engage in self-growth (L'Abate, 2001; McCrindle & Christensen, 1995). The SIS program uses a multimodal framework to deliver prompts that students interact with using online journaling. The present themes of students overcoming academic fear and anxiety, identifying ways to be successful in school, and identifying various resources to support their success relate to previous research using multimodal interventions with children. In the past, multimodal therapists have used the approach to help students improve their social skills (Keat, Metzgar, Raykovits, & McDonald, 1985; Stickel, 1990) and increase self-management skills (O'Keefe, 1985). Increases in students' self-awareness and awareness of how to achieve school success; increases in reflection, self-regulation, and self-management; and improvements in social skills are all essential components of a humanistic education (Robinson et al., 2000).

Results of the analysis indicate that counselors should focus their time and energy on building relationships with students to create a high emotional connection, a high level of trust, and a secure confidential relationship so that students feel safe enough to share their feelings related to school. Because of students' fears related to punishment, school counselors should also take immediate steps to ensure classrooms and schools are safe environments for student learning. Students also identified tests and other academic issues as areas that created fear, apprehension, and stress. Cox and Lee (2006) suggested that the U.S. educational system itself creates an oppressive system that "takes students who have less to begin with and gives them less in school" (p. 4). Further, the institutional oppression created by the U.S. system not only results in an increased experience of stress for minorities but also limits access to resources that could help mediate stress (Holcomb-McCoy & Mitchell, 2006). Therefore, school counselors must become social justice advocates and agents of change within their schools (Bemak & Chung, 2008; Cox & Lee, 2006; Howard & Solberg, 2006). School counselors must advocate for change at the systemic level nationally, at the state level locally, and at their own school, all the while implementing school-based curriculum interventions.

For example, at the school level, school counselors can implement test anxiety interventions and classroom guidance focused on test preparation to help alleviate students' fears and anxiety. Leading classroom guidance identifying additional resources and ways to handle stress and anxiety might also help students deal with their school-related fears and anxiety. Students would also benefit from classroom guidance that clearly connect

academics to future career aspirations to help students focus and set goals for their future and to increase engagement (Hazler, 2001; Marks, 2000; Robinson et al., 2000). As school counselors work with students in classroom guidance, small groups, and individually, they should continually relate students' behaviors, attitudes, and participation in class and homework to increases in educational engagement, leading to increased academic, social, and career achievement (Carbonaro, 2005; Kelly, 2008; Lister & Ansalone, 2005; Marks, 2000).

Because students identified various issues related to teachers, school counselors could also create positive relationships with teachers and provide teacher in-service training related to equipping teachers with the tools and strategies needed to create a positive and inclusive humanistic classroom environment, in which students would not fear embarrassment, punishment, or the teacher when they ask for help (Kelly, 2008; Marks, 2000; Robinson et al., 2000). Native Americans are stereotyped as all looking similar. These stereotypes indicate that the skin color should be brown, their hair color should be black and straight, and their eyes should be brown or black. In reality, this is not the case. There is just as much physical heterogeneity in the Native American population as there is in the general population. However, these stereotypes cause esteem issues in Native American young people (Garrouette, 2003). If they look different from how society says they should look, they may be picked on by their classmates. Some teachers may also believe these stereotypes and treat Native American students differently based on whether they have various features. Native American students can be viewed as displaying various degrees of Indianness (Sue & Sue, 2008). Directing teachers toward cultivating engagement in students will directly affect students' attitudes, increasing hope and increasing their academic achievement (Carbonaro, 2005; Kelly, 2008; Marks, 2000). Creating a warm, safe environment in which students feel comfortable enough to self-explore, build positive peer relationships, and set future goals will improve a student's quality of life and ability to pursue knowledge effectively (Robinson et al., 2000).

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Although the present research provided insight into students' experiences with school, limitations exist that affect the external validity and depth of the study. Some submissions by students were vague, did not match the prompt, were blank, or were a jumble of letters that did not form a word. The section on "Being Comfortable in School" contained such responses. Other sections of the SIS were weak because of the small number of submissions. Some prompts seemed to confuse students. Perhaps the instructions were not explicit enough or perhaps students could not relate to the expressions on the faces of the figures. Native Americans do not often discuss emotions with others, and they are taught to not impose their emotions on others. Each

person is responsible for controlling his or her own emotions. Emotional control and physical modesty and humility are highly valued (Hendrix, 2001). This may explain why it may have been difficult for the students to label the emotions of others or recognize emotion through facial expression. Both sections within "The Bright Side of School" illuminated these limitations, as they resulted in incomplete or unclear submissions that were vague or incomprehensible. Each prompt within "The Bright Side of School" resulted in many responses that were inapplicable. Thus, in future updating of the SIS instrument, the prompts within each section should be carefully scrutinized and evaluated for effectiveness.

One limitation of this study is that if the students in this study perform poorly on state measures of reading ability, then these respondents do not fall within the norm group. This might explain the poor response rates on individual prompts. Additional limitations of the study included the lack of participants available for member checks, focus groups, or interviews. Students illustrated a lack of proper grammar and spelling within their responses, possibly as a result of the current instant messaging culture relying on short, quick phrases to communicate. Other possible explanations might be that anonymous responses on the Internet lead to careless use of language or that some students simply do not possess the academic skills needed to share their thoughts and feelings in written form. Some of the developmental issues mentioned in the introduction relating to being a Native American in a Eurocentric society may also help explain the poor grammar and spelling evidenced in students' responses (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2008). However, additional studies are needed to clarify these issues.

The results of the study reinforce the need for school counselors to implement programs "designed to promote school success, especially culturally relevant interventions that target youth from low-income and diverse backgrounds" (Howard & Solberg, 2006, p. 278). The large gap in achievement and graduation faced by Native American youth cries out for specific interventions tailored to the population's unique need (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2008). Most of the Native American students in this study suggested they desired a safe educational environment; needed trusting relationships with teachers, school counselors, and peers; and were open to building such relationships. Because the students were open to seeking assistance from people they trusted, it is imperative for school counselors to build such relationships, creating positive patterns of responding to academic interactions and directly impacting students' academic achievement (Howard & Solberg, 2006). Outcome research studies and action research would especially inform the experience of Native American youth and connect them to graduation rates and achievement scores. School counselors could use the data from such studies to design culturally responsive school counseling interventions to remove barriers to success specific to this population (C. C. Lee, 2001). Future research with

the SIS instrument could include replications of the study with different populations, as well as focus on updating certain sections of the instrument.

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