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Indigenous and Mestizo Leaders' Perspectives on Culture, Education, and Health in Local Communities

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Introduction

The purpose of the study was to assess the perspectives and priorities of local Indigenous and Mestizo communities on education, culture, and health in the Pacific Northwest.

Methodology

The study was done using community-based participatory research with 11 participants. Those that participated were considered leaders within their respective communities in areas of culture, education, and health. Among those that participated there were 5 women and 6 men, three were Mestizo and eight were Indigenous from federally recognized tribes. Participants took part in an open-ended, semi-structured interview, which lasted for approximately one hour. The interviews were audio recorded then transcribed and analyzed using consensual qualitative analysis (Hill, 2012).

Questions

The following questions were asked of each participant:

1. What are the challenges facing your community in terms of culture, education and health?
2. Do you see any differences across generations in the issues facing your community?
3. What strengths do you see in your community in culture, education and health?
4. What experiences have you had with partnering with higher education institutions to help serve your community?
5. Have the partnerships been successful? What didn't work?
6. What do you think makes a successful partnership?

Results

After a process of consensual qualitative data analysis, the following themes emerged: revitalization of culture, generational change, access, power, and immigration. The aforementioned themes will be discussed at length.

Revitalization of Culture

Revitalization of culture was defined as the process of reclaiming of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and cultural practices.

“You need to get Indian educated first before you get a Western education.” – Indigenous Male, Culture

“But I guess it’s just with the revitalization... with the limited number of speakers..., and then we have lost so many elders... I think we are doing a lot better job now in getting our kids involved in the culture ” –Indigenous Female, Education

“When I say younger generation they’re not elders yet, they’re in their 30’s—40’s some of these people have really stepped forward and became leaders in cultural knowledge... were starting to reignite that back...” Indigenous Male, Language

“I guess in that way it seems like, but within that is a certain passion, like I said in the beginning, there’s a passion there to be Indian. But, we’re just not Indian on a daily basis anymore.”-Indigenous Male, Culture.

Generational Change

Generational Change was defined as the differences in health, education, and culture from one generation to the next.

“To bring parents to have this conference with teachers... you must add the language and cultural barriers.” -Mestizo Male, Education

“There’s no environment or avenue to encourage kids to be a certain way.” -

Indigenous Male,

“Elders and culture. It seems like their feelings are some of these things aren’t getting passed along. Then again it seems like there’s no avenue there really there’s no avenue there for them to be encouraged to do it. To pass on these things. Like... Cause some... a lot of the older ones they don’t really powwow very much and then so... if they go to powwow their kids follow. And that their avenue where they can share with their family I guess you know. And pass down what they’ve been told.” - Indigenous Male, Culture.

Culture and Access

Culture and access was described as the opportunity or right to experience or make use of resources, especially in healthcare and education.

“Latino’s, we’re not doing good in terms of education in the states.” - Mestizo Male, Culture

“Health wise, there’s no proper education.” –Indigenous Male, Culture

Power

Power is used to describe the capability of doing or accomplishing a goal or act.

“When we’re always in-fighting, we can’t work together to elect our people.” – Mestizo Male, Culture

“The tribe is very fragmented because of its geography.” – Indigenous Female, Education

Immigration

The theme of immigration emerged particularly in the Mestizo community as both a challenge and a strength of a divided community. For the purpose of this study,

immigration refers to a divided community as a result of the movement of people from their native country.

“What is the most important, most dangerous, most difficult obstacle that we have been facing for many years in the U.S. is the immigration stance.” –Mestizo Male, Education

“That’s the beautiful part, the most positive thing I could say of our community is that can do attitude. Goddamn I’m going to make it come hell or high water because I’ve got nothing go back to... We have to get back that mentality of those Mexican nationals. That take the food from somebody’s mouth, that’s-if you’ve got that hunger, then nothing can stop you.” –Mestizo Male, Culture

Discussion/Implications

The interviews included in this study illuminate the strengths and challenges of both Mestizo and Indigenous people within the Pacific Northwest. The initial analysis showed that within each cultural group, there were different areas of challenge and strength. The interviews also revealed similarities across cultures.

Although the Indigenous participants had more females than male participants, the data indicates a variance in funding support. Where one Indigenous nation did not face the need to seek outside funding support, another nation needed funding support to provide a culturally responsive education that included IKS. For further research, socio economic factors that influence access to culturally relevant education using language could be further analyzed. IKS in the classrooms, where language and culture were being taught, received funding support from their nation and/or government agencies. While IKS is a cultural way of being that includes daily interactions outside of the classroom,

with funding support, Indigenous nations that work in language revitalization may or may not necessarily have the funding support.

The passing along of culture to the younger generations was noted as a salient concern between both the Native American and Latino communities. For the Native American communities it was related to passing on traditional song and dance as manifested in cultural events such as pow-wows. For the Latino communities it was more related to a concern that their “Kids lack culture” in educational domains.

In addition, immigration was a theme unique to the Mestizo communities represented, as the politically charged topic was identified as strength of the community, inspiring passion and hunger within the Mestizo community as well as causing of fear and uncertainty as an immigrant. Many of the participants referred to “the immigration issue” discussing the ramifications and fear that many in the Mestizo community experience as the result of the push for immigration reform in politics. However, beyond the apprehension on the immigration stance, many of the community leaders discussed the strengths of immigration.

While this study included the three areas of education, culture, and health in the Pacific Northwest, participants also shared their lived experiences from other regions of their cultural background. For example, Mestizo participants shared what was happening locally in their communities, however, the professional and personal life experiences that contributed to their views on education, culture, and health was from a global perspective. The global perspective included cultural backgrounds and understandings, which included English as a second language barriers and access to health care and education. The participants from the Mestizo interviews did not include any females. The

outcome and data, without a balance gendered participant list, may or may not be an influencing factor. However, further research that includes Mestizo women's perspectives may or may include data that could implicate a gendered imbalance.

The preliminary consensus coding highlighted commonalities and differences across Indigenous and Mestizo communities. The study offers insight into these communities in the Pacific Northwest utilizing participant driven research, data was collected from individuals identified as a leader in their respective communities. The initial findings presented here can be used to inform change, as universities seek to partner with Indigenous and Mestizo communities in the Pacific Northwest.

References

Hill, C. E. (2012). *Consensual qualitative research: A practical resource for investigating social science phenomena*. (1st ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.