Journal #2 – Framing Hostilities: Analysis of Mission Statements

From Segregated Chicana/o Schools

Casey Michel

South Dakota State University

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Dr. Kenneth Rasmussen

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The vision and mission statements of a school set a tone of expectations for the school. They answer basic questions about what the school expects its students to achieve and what role the school plays in helping the students reach their goals. While mission statements are designed to be positive in nature, they can frame underlying negative expectations. Richard Orozco conducted a study for the *Journal of Latinos & Education* titled “Framing Hostilities: Analysis of Mission Statements from Segregated Chicana/o Schools” that was published in 2012. This study was aimed to determine if Chicana/o schools lowered expectations and perceptions of their minority population through the mission statements of the schools.

Orozco’s study determined that “The words and phrases used in segregated Chicana/o school mission statements produce… low expectations and negative attitudes compared to those used in segregated White schools” (p. 80). Through the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA), Orozco analyzed the language of mission statements and determined that schools that were at least 70% Chicana/o lowered expectations for their students through school mission statements compared to White schools. For example, Chicana/o school mission statements used words like ‘responsible’ compared to ‘quality’ and ‘excellence’ for White students (p. 88). Where Chicana/o schools prepared students for ‘home’ and ‘workplace’, White schools prepared students for a ‘global society’ (p. 88). Overall, 15 of the 19 Chicana/o schools’ mission statements “contain language suggesting pessimistic views of their students and their future prospects” (p. 88).

The statistics in this study are very alarming. The media and other sources already try to portray the Chicana/o population as uneducated and unmotivated for school, and the mission statements from these schools do nothing to erase that perception. In fact, they guide and influence that perception. One Chicana/o school even mentioned that they would provide for “all students, including those with special needs” (p. 87). It was as if the school was trying to say it
knew its students had special needs, but the school would try to educate them anyway. This is a perfect example of covert racism in our society. None of the mission statements appear that bad at face value, but they set negative perceptions and expectations for Chicana/o students, a fact that becomes more evident when compared to the mission statements of White schools.

Although South Dakota does not have a high Chicana/o population, we do have a minority population that is often cast in a similar light—our American Indian population. I decided to analyze five randomly selected American Indian tribal schools—Crow Creek, Pine Ridge, Todd County, McLaughlin, and Flandreau Indian—to determine the extent to which they used the same language as the Chicana/o schools. While four of the five districts (Flandreau Indian) did a better job in creating more powerful missions (‘empower’, ‘global and dynamic world’, etc.), all five still used passive language that could be seen as lowering expectations. Crow Creek insinuated local ties in helping students in their “everyday walk of life” (“Crow Creek Tribal School District,” n.d.); Pine Ridge explained they would “enhance the potential and well being of self, family, and community” (“Pine Ridge School,” n.d.); Todd County is going to “guide” and “prepare our students” (“Todd County School District,” n.d.); McLaughlin is going to “help” students (“McLaughlin School District 15-2,” n.d.); Flandreau Indian is going to help students “take their rightful place as participating members of their community” (“FIS,” n.d.).

If a school mission statement is to set up the culture, climate, and expectations of the school, then a generic and unassuming mission is going to set up a poor culture and climate that has low expectations. Districts with high minority populations need to hold themselves to the same high standards that White districts do. Otherwise, the media portrayal of minorities will be perpetuated through schools and a standard of low expectations for and negative attitudes towards minorities will continued to be cycled throughout our nations’ schools.
References


¹ All references, unless otherwise noted, will come from this article. Therefore, only page numbers will be used when referencing (Orozco, 2012).