

# Educational Self Determination - Whitney Rencountre - OSEU #7

The opportunities are there, you know, for our people, our Native peoples, to use education as a great tool to better their families, to better themselves, put ourselves, our people, into a place where we're, you know, the current time we're in is self-determination. And so, through that process, the availability of more tribal colleges, the access to education, access to no longer have to deal with so many roadblocks, you know, that's great to have that, and it is there.

But I think also we need to take it a step further in terms of the powers that be, the individuals that have the power to teach, individuals that have the power to kind of create a society where we really have to do a little more than just offering, you know, the tribal colleges and scholarships and things.

I mean, those are great, but I think it also starts if we as a society could, our leaders in education, our leaders in South Dakota and throughout, if we show a willingness to kind of create, to go above and beyond in terms of, you know, not necessarily making up for what happened in our history, but at least showing a willingness to bring that to the table.

You know, what can we do to work together, what can we do to, because, you know, as the coordinator for the Ate Ape Program in Rapid City, South Dakota, for the last six years now, I've learned so much about how our culture and how we can help our Native students feel good about being who they are, and that they're no longer living in a society where they feel like they're a minority.

Maybe their traditional culture, their traditional ways, they don't connect that in their mind, in their hearts, with maybe a negative implication of, you know, they're different. But when we can kind of make that more of a mainstream, you know, acknowledgement, so to speak, between non-Natives and Native administrators, teachers, people in the, the leaders in the state, then it kind of gives you a sense of confidence. It gives you a sense of, you know, more better, you know, self-esteem.

All those things are risen to a point where just because we're different, we're no less, you know, and so you can kind of see. So the availability of all the tribal colleges, things like that, those are very, that's a great, and that's a great step forward, but now we need to take it a step further in terms of acknowledging, you know, our differences don't, don't divide us.