Case Notes

# Chapter 9: Embracing Diversity and Inclusion

# Case 9.1: What’s in a Name?

## Case Summary

Springfield High School, a high school in a small town in the rural Midwest, experienced a challenge in updating the name of their athletic team from the Redskins to the Redhawks. When individuals came forward arguing that the “Redskin” name was offensive and not culturally sensitive, there was significant backlash in the town. Students voted to change the name to the “Redhawks,” replacing the “Redskin” name. Although the school board approved the motion by a 5-2 vote to change the name, community members, concerned with preserving the Redskin name recalled the five members of board who had supported the name change. This led to the two remaining board members holding a special meeting to change the name back to Redskins.

The state Department of Civil Rights and the state’s Commission for High School Athletics interjected and told the board that a name change could not be reversed, leading to no name for the high school teams. During that time, new board members were elected, and after four years had concluded, students voted once again for the “Redhawks” name. Despite the recognized change, a small contingency of adults still support the Redskin name, selling merchandise using the old name.

Case AnalysisThis case study demonstrates both cultural sensitivity and generational differences over the decision to change a mascot name. Table 9.2, which addresses *Changing Perspectives on Diversity*, can serve as a great model for this case, showing the differences between **assimilation**, **differentiation**, and **inclusion**. The generational differences in this case do not reflect inclusive best practices, as students appeared to be unphased by the name change, whereas older community members were much more offended by what was to them, an unnecessary change in tradition.

Table 9.4, highlighting Ferdman’s *Systems of Inclusion: A Multilevel Analytic Framework*, is another example of the differences in interpretation of this case study. What started as an individual inclusion experience with local Native Americans expressing desire for a name change transitioned to group inclusive practices, leadership inclusive practices (through the school board vote), implementation of organizational inclusive practices (through a name change) and societal inclusive practices with school-aged individuals accepting the name change.

It must be noted though that this decision was not without controversy. Other members of the community (noted as mostly adults) were opposed to the name change. This could be an example of practices moving back down the framework, as a “bump in the road” to a permanent change in inclusive organizational practices.

## Sample Answers to Case Questions

*1. Do you agree with the assertion the athletic team name should be changed?*

Yes. Local Native American families had expressed their opinions that the name of “redskin” was offensive to their culture and received national attention. Also, representatives from both sides were permitted to express their opinions, and ultimately, the local school board decided through voting in favor of a name change.

Although controversy was present in this decision (the recalling of the five school board members), when the state Department of Civil Rights and the state’s Commission for High School Athletics removed the name (for a four-year period), this essentially stripped the redskin name from Springfield.

*2. Describe how Ferdman’s Model of Inclusion Practices (Table 9.4) worked in this case. Did the influence for inclusive practices travel both up and down the model?*

The Ferdman Model of Inclusion Practices (Table 9.4) is a great example of inclusive systems changing throughout the narrative of this case. What started as an individual and small group requested change ended up being a leadership, organizational, and eventual societal change.

Yes, the influence traveled both up and down the model, but the name change, once accepted at the leadership and organizational levels, traveled back down the model, with resistance coming from groups and individuals opposing the change. Influence would once again travel back up the model, after the change in board members and legal intervention, but not without its casualties (five board members being removed from their positions and four years without a team identifier for Springfield).

*3. What barriers to embracing diversity and inclusion did the school board and community experience in this case?*

Both the school board and community attempted to embrace diversity in a legal and ethical manner. By having a school board vote (instead of just initiating a mandate) the school board followed a policy to establish and then maintain an inclusive organizational culture. However, community members and a minority of school board members (two out of seven) did not support the name change. By removing the supporters of the name change, outspoken community members were able to reinstate the name, albeit only temporarily. The school board members that had supported the name change had lost their positions (a major barrier – removal of their power) and it took a considerable amount of time (four years) until the Redhawks name was once again reinstated.

*4. Using the Inclusion Framework in Table 9.3, where would you place the Native American residents in the town of Springfield? What about Native American students at Springfield High School?*

The Native American residents would be classified in the assimilation quadrant, showing low value in uniqueness and high belongingness. Up until other members of the community started supporting the name change, Native Americans did not feel the need to speak up and protest the name change.

The Native American students would be classified in the inclusion quadrant. There is no evidence in the case study indicating they had any problems with the name change, noting that there was an entire generation of kids that didn’t have a clue that the name was ever different and it was “the adults who had the problem.”

*5. By changing the name of the athletic teams, do you believe the school board was showing inclusive practices? If so, which ones?*

Yes, the school board attempted to reduce the amount of prejudice and stereotypes associated with the “Redskins” name. The school board wanted Native American community members to feel safe, feel involved and engaged in the process of the name change, and to feel respected and valued that a new name would not judge and stereotype them within the community.

*6. What role does privilege play in the resistance of community members to change the athletic teams’ name?*

Privilege plays a role as a barrier to inclusion in this case. The community members supporting the “Redskins” name were not sensitive to the feelings and opinions of the Native American members of the community. In addition, it could be argued that many of these community members perhaps did not understand the meaning of the term, thus, creating a barrier for understanding inclusion. Also, it may be possible that age and tradition were major factors for the community representatives intent on retaining the name, as privilege can come from status of being in the community for a long time, and through social power.