

Keynote: Sloan-C Conference, Las Cruces

I begin by thanking the Creator for this beautiful day, for this amazing land, for the wisdom of the elders, and for the conference organizers who invited me to speak today.

Our American Indian heroes teach us the way of courage. They look straight into the eyes of what others fear and speak out with their best voice. They listen intently to those whose voice is sometimes unsure. Our greatest heroes, with fearless eyes and caring heart, show us that there is power within us all (Dana Tiger, Creek).

Like our American Indian heroes, I hope to inspire you, to look straight into the eyes of what others fear and speak out. For some, you may gain courage from my words. For others, you may be moved to action. Many of you may dismiss my work and my words as Indian Hocus Pocus. My hope is, you listen intently in a good way with fearless eye and caring heart, and gain the power to mold your own personal connection to Indigenous and Aboriginal Education.

In the traditions of my ancestors, I will begin by telling a story:

Many seasons ago, as many seasons as there are in a handful of sand, there lived a people who in their language were called People of the Sun. One day a council of elders was called because The People were in trouble. Where once waters ran cool and clear and swifter than the running deer, there were only muddy pools where no living thing could drink. Where once bright colored birds flew among the trees, there were no trees or birds, only haunting noises that were not birds (Van Matre, 1980).

Today, all over the planet, Indigenous Nations are in trouble. From the Sami in Scandinavia to Amazonian Tribes in South America to North American First Nations and Australian Aborigines, traditional languages, educational practices, lands and life ways are being altered in the name of progressive development.

Families of Indigenous people are being disrupted, brought to settlement, made to move from traditional homelands, from the ashes of our grandfathers, from traditional hunting grounds, from traditional fishing territories. The activities are carried out without consensual agreements of the Indigenous people and the projects are affecting social, mental, spiritual, and physical health.

When Indigenous People speak about cultural survival, we talk about restoring the lands in the same breath. For Indigenous People, culture, language, education, spiritual values, and the land are all linked

The history of American Indian Education begins thousands of years ago with the organization of clans and tribes. Young people were educated by the extension of the immediate families, aunts, sisters, mothers, cousins, uncles, and other of the tribe. As Hilary Rodham Clinton (1999) once said, "It takes a village..."

In those days just like today, women versed in a particular skill taught young girls crafts, stories, lore, cooking, skinning and cutting up of animals. The women who were healers taught talented young girls the medicines of plants, when to dig the plants, which songs to sing for the plant and which parts to use for healing. Men taught young boys hunting skills, how to craft hunting tools, which wood makes the best spears or arrows, how to place the feathers on the shaft and which bird feathers brought hunting luck.

Over the course of the past three centuries, changes to the North American environment have been dramatic as a result of a collision of cultures and ethical world-views.

Focused on the Utilitarian and Anthropocentric world view, the Europeans who came to the Americas, saw natural resources which could be used and exploited according to their agenda for material gain. Indigenous People were seen as pagans, savage beasts and like the wilderness the Europeans sought to tame, were removed from their homeland and forced to relocate on Reservations to make way for cows, cattle, sheep and homesteads of white settlers. No one thought to acknowledge the wisdom and understanding that Indian People held about their own natural world- about their own educational practices.

Our culture tells us which songs to sing as we gather the plants and what ceremonies are used for healing. Our reservations are traditional lands that tribes have retained after treaties with the government in the Indian Removal policies. It is spiritual land and it remains today the link to our ancestors and the key to education.

1965 The Indian Self determination Act was passed by the US Congress to give Indian people freedom of religion, freedom to manage our own education, our own tribal governments, our own tribal health departments, if we so choose. It was during these times in the late 1970s that the American Indian Movement was founded and Indian activists initiated takeovers of Alcatraz Island and of Wounded Knee. It was out of the Indian Self-Determination Act that Tribal Colleges and Tribal Health Departments were born.

The government responded to the Indian Self-Determination Act by allowing tribes the opportunity to administer programs that were run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service. This law provided a wonderful opportunity for Indians to manage their own affairs. But the problem tribes faced was the lack of educated Indian people to carry out the managerial work of these programs. The elected tribal councils lacked education and experience, as did the people they hired (McDonald, 1998).

So to become educated Indian people began enrolling in colleges and universities and by 1976 the number of American Indians in colleges had risen to 76,000 but the completion rate was very poor. The Congressional General Accounting Office audited ten colleges and universities trying to find out why Indian students were doing so poorly (Eschwage, 1977). They found that over one half of the first year students never completed their education.

It was out of this predicament that tribal colleges were born. A tribal college is a college declared by its tribe, governed by a tribally appointed board, and serves Indian students. Tribal colleges are the most successful access for reaching college aged people on the

reservation since pre contact with Europeans today, in the US there are 33 tribal colleges and one in Alberta, Canada.

Burke's research (Burke, 1996) found the main reason Indian students dropped out of mainstream college was because in order to succeed, they had to give up thinking of themselves as Indian.

So often schools in America treat Indians as if they only live in the past. In current events Indians do not exist. National polls relate that this percent of whites voted for President Clinton as did so many Blacks, so many Hispanics, so many Asians and so many others. The indigenous people of the United States, the people that have always been the United States, the "First Americans" are referred to in polls as a part of "other" Tribal Colleges encourage Indianess and return to cultural values. Tribal colleges honor Indian people.

What are American Indian learning styles? How is the Constructivist theory of education applied to educational technology for American Indians? What are the teaching styles of faculty in a tribal college? Can our experience help your faculty in construction of courses and retention of minority students?

Although online learning for American Indian people allows access to higher education for people living in remote areas such as Indian reservations, to be a successful program with a high level of retention, focus must be paid to understanding American Indian learning styles, social issues, pedagogy, and application of the Constructivist model of education to technology.

American Indian students at Salish Kootenai College, a bachelor degree granting tribal college on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana, were interviewed individually and tested for learning style preference with the Canfield Learning Styles inventory. In addition, the Canfield teaching styles inventory was administered to selected faculty online courses were developed for American Indian learners.

Perhaps our ancestors did not have the word "theory" in their vocabulary, but they understood the concept of theory. Perhaps to them theory meant "The way we pass on the knowledge" or "The way we protect the future."

Inuit people of Northern Canada say that "It is the way we understand things" (Kawagely, 1995).

Our ancestors knew that if the family unit was to survive, the children must learn the ways of the tribe. As they learn, they are mentored in the skills, the ceremonies, and the life ways of the tribe. Mentoring ensured cultural survival for the people.

If one were to study the theories of education for American Indian people, one would have to read: *Look Toward the Mountain: an Ecology of Indigenous Education* by Gregory Cajete. It tells the story of the unique ways of American Indian teaching and learning. Education for Indian people involves connections to nature, community, family, and spiritual ecology (Cajete, 1996, p. 23). In his book Cajete takes us on a wonderful journey of relationships that mirror the processes of wisdom of traditional tribal education: preparing, asking, seeking, making, understanding, sharing, and celebrating

Learning how to learn is a key element in Indigenous education. Skills such as listening, observing, experiencing, and intuition are time tested traditions of learning and form the basis for skills used in every process of learning and teaching. (Cajete, 1994). Tribal teachers begin by building on the common experiences that are familiar to students. Basic understanding begins with exploring how things happen and focuses on the heart as well as learning with the mind. (Cajete, 1994). The emphasis is on allowing for the uniqueness of the individual learning styles, and encouraging the development of self-reliance and self-determination. (Cajete, 1994).

People perceive the world in certain ways and they learn about the world in specific ways, but an individual's approach to learning and demonstration of what is learned, is influenced by the values, norms, socialization, and culture in which that individual was raised. (Swisher & Deyhle, 1989).

Observation, self-testing in private, and demonstration of a task for approval are essential steps in learning. Learning by public mistakes is not and was never a method of learning that is valued by Indian people (Brewer, 1977).

For Native American children, the relationships with members of the extended family are an integral component of learning how to live life in a good way. Relationships with aunties, uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers foster development and care. In a cultural aspect, Native American mentors guide young children through the religious ceremonies, the legends and the stories that are owned by the tribe. In the old days, the storytellers gathered the people around them for winter legends and history about their tribe. They were mentors for the people. They taught people to live life in a good way.

Uncles taught young boys how to fish, to hunt and to make tools. Girls were taught by aunties and grandmothers. It was through the mentoring of women that young girls learned their roles in the tribe, how to be a woman, how to care for the children.

What happens to our young native people today as they learn and grow in two worlds, the Indian world and the Western world? How does mentoring have any effect on their lives? I have a friend, an old grandfather who lives on a reserve in western Canada. When he was a younger man, he told me that he was an alcoholic and never paid much attention to his kids. There was no one there for his kids since both he and his wife were involved in their alcohol abuse. Today, as a grandfather he is sober, he is attending college in a course which will prepare him to become an alcohol counselor; his kids are grown with kids of their own. Most of his kids have problems, he told me because he feels there was no one there to help them. Because his kids are in trouble, he has become

the mentor for his grandchildren and especially for his eldest grandson. " I am teaching him the traditional ways," He told me.

The grandfather helped him to make an eagle feather bustle for his dance outfit. "...and last summer we went to 50 pow wows in the US and in Canada and my grandson won most of them." He continued to tell me that his grandson is in the public school system in Canada, but with his care and mentoring his grandson is learning the richness and the traditions of Indian people. "If he knows the Indian way, he won't go to drugs and alcohol like I did."

We are all learners. Most things we have learned out of school, from our families, our work, our friends. We learned how to solve problems and to perform tasks. We learned from the dilemmas of our lives. Some of what we learned is trivial; some learning has changed our lives forever. Sometimes learning is a struggle, sometimes it is a joy. Sometimes we wonder if it is all worth it.

Our students are no different. Many have sacrificed much to return to school. Education is important to them not simply because they see it as a road to a better life, but in some way, they hope education makes meaning for them in the fabric of their lives. A good education can help people understand changes in their lives. A good education can help enrich lives and nourish the minds of learners to ask more questions about what is important. As teachers-mentors and guides, our work is to grow students and to guide them on their journey.

Higher Education is certainly a journey of discovery. The process of education brings incredible changes into the lives of adult learners. Through the journey of gaining a degree, adult learners are able to cite which guides (teachers or mentors) have helped them through these changes. Learning is part of a lifelong process which never ends.

Mentors provide information, build relationships, serve as role models, provide the vision with the traveler on the journey. A competent guide/ mentor demonstrates skills by

interacting with the learner to support and advance learning, whether that learning is associated with gaining a degree or advancing a career.

The mentor's role in the education setting is to enable the learner to take appropriate risks, deal with stress in an effective way, develop self confidence, make informed decisions, and attain immediate and future objectives (Galbraith, 1995, p. 6). For mentoring to be a change agent for the institution as well as the person being mentored, the assumptions underlying traditional models (Western male, upper middle class) that aim for assimilation or conformity to one view may not be applicable. A vision of mentoring that emphasizes the acceptance of difference as enriching the world view and contributions of an institution could transform mentoring practices, making them congruent with our diverse societies.

What does education mean for people, anyway? Sometimes when people come back to school, their relationships with family members become strained. I remember a young woman whom I had in class. Before the final exam, her husband tore up her notes for the semester so that she couldn't study and she would fail her exam.

As a mentor in education this may be only one of many issues that students have to face. In these situations, it isn't easy to trust a stranger, a teacher or professor especially if there have been a lot of bad experiences with adults and with school. It may take a long time to build up trust. Given these difficult issues confronted by students and teachers, the mentor is there to offer critical support in helping that student to remain in school, or what is called, "student retention."

In another instance, there may be students who are unmotivated or who have low academic skills. These students also benefit from a close relationship with a mentor; it is important for them to know that there is someone "out there" who cares about what happens to them.

Many students may have a vision of their future, many do not. We need to find out where our students are going with their education and what is their vision for their future. We need to discover how we can help them achieve those dreams.

Many students don't have a plan or vision of their life after they complete their education. Mentors need to help them create that vision or plan. After the plan is created, we have to find ways to help them achieve or define their goals. Things that seem easy or straightforward are often mysterious to those who are returning to school, especially for the older adult learners. In our society, many women return to school in their 30s; many men are in their 40s. These groups of adults have special concerns of how they fit into their world.

Mentors in the asynchronous realm of education are even more key to retaining students. They must be ready to deal with all of these problems and many more such as writing term papers, depression, final exams, financial aid problems. As they head off on their first journey of discovery, students often sense that their educational travels will require them to let go of old ways of seeing. For some students, they are ready to make these adaptations to their lives. For others, the journey is a challenge.

Mentoring has considerable importance as a means of strengthening the asynchronous system of secondary education. Given the difficulties of overburdened educators, the mentor approach offers important assistance in student retention and promotes educational achievement. As role models, mentors serve as observer, commentator, and advocate and counter the attitude that "nobody cares."

All of the current retention research in retaining native students (Tyro, 2004) in asynchronous classes points to the relationship of the student with the mentor or with the instructor.

To this end Salish Kootenai College has endeavored to create meaningful and asynchronous degree programs to improve the lives of Native Peoples in our communities and across America.

Asynchronous learning in cyberspace at Salish Kootenai College:

Today's technology may be different, but for Native Peoples, the philosophy of communicating at distance is not new. For example, Native peoples have been sharing information over distances in the form of picture writing in caves, petroglyphs on newspaper rocks, on wampum belts, with the drum, with trail signs, with messenger runners, with animal calls, and in any number of ways. So too, mentoring for distance education was also within the scope of the lives of our ancestors. Mentors taught the youth of the tribe to read the trails, to leave picture messages on rocks, to listen for the animal calls, to read the signs in the forest, to play the drum and sing the songs. This kind of communal learning must be preserved as we move forward with American Indian distance education.

In addition to the communal experience, the culture, so long beaten out of all Indigenous peoples by governments and religions, must be preserved and maintained in any educational endeavor. It is the culture and the community that connects Indian people to the past and to the next seven generations.

Research with American Indian people has demonstrated that American Indian people learn best in groups. Indian students learn best when the learning can be linked to previous knowledge and to life's work. The Constructivist Theory of education is a viewpoint in learning theory which holds that the learner actively constructs his own ways of thinking as a result of interacting with the learning experience (Molenda, 1991).

Prawat and Floden (1994). State that to implement Constructivism in a lesson one must shift the focus away from the traditional model to one that is more complex, interactive and evolving.

In the Constructivist model, Indian students extrapolate from the subject that which is meaningful to their own lives and life's experience. In other words, they will 'make meaning' of their learning. The first pilot test of courses happened in Fall Quarter 1998. Approximately 50 students registered for Internet courses. Today over 1500 students have successfully completed asynchronous courses. It is expected that over 150 students

will register for Internet courses every Quarter. Initial data gathered on the first year of classes demonstrates an extremely high level of student satisfaction with the technology, the format for the courses, and the ease of taking courses on the Internet. Students report missing face to face contact with instructors, but are willing to forgo that for the convenience of taking courses anywhere anytime.

“ Salish Kootenai College is developing a model of effective distance (education) delivery which will be the envy of many institutions.” Patrick O’Rourke, Northwest Accreditation, October, 1998

“ The Distance Education Program of SKC demonstrates that public (health) education can be implemented for people in remote areas in a stimulating and creative way which reflects the basic principles of the Ottawa Charter of the world Health Organization”
Dr. Eberhard Wenzel, Director, MPH Program, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia

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I believe our success comes from our dedicated faculty; caring mentors; developing courses that are designed with learning styles of Native Peoples; and keeping in touch with the lives of our students....every one of them.

