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**IN THE HEART OF INDIAN COUNTRY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF
NATIVE AMERICAN ADULT LEARNERS AT A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE
UNIVERSITY**

A Dissertation in

Adult Education

by

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ABSTRACT

Native Americans are the least likely minority to enroll in public four-year institutions and the least likely to persist to graduation in those institutions. It is also well documented that being an adult learner, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, etc., presents an all-together different set of challenges, as they are often the most time-limited group of the college population. Consequently, the experiences resulting from the confluence of being both a Native American and being an adult learner at the university may not yet be fully understood.

This qualitative study used a hermeneutic phenomenological design to investigate the lived experience of nine Native American adult students at the University of the Great Plains (UGP), a predominantly White university. The study sought specifically to understand what it was like, from a Native student's perspective, to be in a cross-cultural pedagogical relationship with a non-Native instructor. The theoretical framework I used measured education against the Native concepts of sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonization.

I collected data primarily through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I analyzed data according to phenomenological procedures of data analysis, methods of reflection, and writing. The findings of this study highlight the inherent complexities of being a Native American adult learner, endeavor toward understanding that certain ways of knowing for Native Adult students are indispensable to self-education and self-determination, unravel discontentedness and decolonization at the university, and

accentuate an education that is socio-culturally and politically relevant to Native adult students.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated:

To my wife, **Becky**, whose unconditional love, steadfast companionship, and endless support and patience was the key to my success. Your sense of adventure and humor along with your many sacrifices made this experience worthwhile.

To the memory of my friend, **Gordon Oliver**, 1970-1995.

To the project of **Native Sovereignty** and **Self-Determination** in Indian Country and beyond.

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

I am, however, not naïve enough to believe that simply having my students' respect or understanding their struggles is going to change everything for the better with Native students. Many face institutional, societal, community, family, and personal issues that can be overwhelming for them. A lot of things must improve before we can turn the corner with regard to Native student achievement and completion rates. Teaching is one of them. (Peacock, 2006, ¶ 4)

Coming to the Question

“Joining the Journey”

The time I get to spend with one of my best friends, Reynold, is what I consider treasured time. Reynold, a Native American and Rosebud Sioux Tribe member, is a talented and highly sought after professional in surgical medicine and one of the wisest people I know. In our conversations we cover the gamut of topics—politics, sports, race, culture, medicine, education, our college days, etc. We laugh and argue, we discuss and debate, we talk about theory and practice. It is one of the most gratifying friendships I have.

One calm summer night about three years ago, Reynold and I were having a beer at a bar and grill that sits on the banks of the Missouri River. As we looked across the river Reynold asked me, “When you are a college teacher someday, how are you going to teach Indian students in your course?” I really did not know what to say and asked him why he asked this question. He told me:

Indian students have experiences at college that White people don't understand, like racism. The school expects Indians to assimilate and become White. Plus the Native way of seeing the world is very different from the way White people see the world. Profs usually don't understand our culture, or the concept of self-determination, sovereignty, and treaties. The Indian experience at college is all about contradictions...how are you going to deal with that?

When I asked him to elaborate he told me a wonderfully precise and articulate story. As we watched the variety of boats that were on the Missouri River that evening, Reynold said:

A good way of thinking about it is to relate the journey of education to a journey down this river, where the teacher is in a boat leading the students down the river. The Native student chooses to navigate the river by using a canoe, which is a little bit different from other students sailing downriver.

A lot of times we encounter the 'motorboat teacher,' who is leading us. This type of professor/boat has a huge motor and makes a lot of noise. This is what I relate to academic arrogance. The bigger the motor, the bigger the ego. And that big motor obviously makes big waves and in that wake it becomes very difficult to maneuver the canoe. Natives do not often relate to the motorboat teacher.

Other times at the university we encounter what could be called the 'sailboat teacher.' This type of teacher needs air to fill his sails. In other words, this teacher's students need to 'kiss his ass' to get good grades. I can tell you one

thing; Natives are not good at the whole ‘kissing ass’ principle. We will certainly give respect, but only when respect is earned and deserved.

Another type of teacher we find at the White university is the ‘jet ski teacher.’ This is the teacher who like a jet ski, is able to maneuver very quickly on the journey. This teacher is ‘all over the place’ and the student often has trouble ‘locating’ this type of teacher. Inconsistency and unpredictability are what this type of teacher is known for and the student often has trouble on a journey led by the jet ski teacher.

So I asked my friend, “What kind of teacher, or watercraft, does a Native student prefer?”

Reynold replied, “Actually there isn’t really a boat. It takes a teacher who can think a little bit differently. The best place for the teacher is to be in the student’s canoe.”

“What does that mean?” I asked.

He replied:

That means that the teacher is so genuinely interested in the Native student’s adventure, that the teacher gets in the same boat and actually helps with the paddling—the teacher *joins the journey*. While the student sits in the front of the canoe, since it is his journey after all, the teacher sits in the back and supports the trip. They may take turns paddling. They may paddle on the same side or different sides of the canoe, depending on the situation. They can communicate because of their close proximity. Their canoe positions allow for different views of the river and landscape and each will bring different ideas to the journey. They

depend on each other for success. They will take turns leading the adventure, but they are in the same boat, on the same journey.

Reynold's story led me to this question, "What does it mean to join the journey, or be in the same canoe?" I tend to think it is hard for a teacher to really engage a student unless they, in a meaningful way, are willing join the journey.

Inspired by this strong friendship with Reynold and other Native friends of mine, I have come to strongly believe that being a teacher in my home state necessarily imbues a responsibility to teach from a standpoint that acknowledges the unappreciated historic, socio-cultural and political nature of being a Native American.

My interest in the Native American adult learner comes from three close friendships of mine. Reynold, Michael, and Gordon all grew up on the reservation but left after high school to live, work, or study in predominately White and non-reservation areas in the state. Michael, Reynold, and Gordon are some of the most intelligent, witty, and insightful people I know. They all are relatively soft-spoken, reflective and very open to examining crucial aspects of the White/Native relationship. To say that I have learned many lessons from my Native friends is an understatement.

Gordon, brilliant in chemistry and biology, was very social and never missed a chance to be with people. A former marine, he was constantly looking for high adventure activities, and at the same time was also known as a kind and gentle soul within our circle of friends. He was headed for medical school but sadly committed suicide in June of 1995 presumably due to his arduous battle with alcoholism.

Michael, a short order cook, has a wonderful, smart sense of humor. Michael is liked by everyone and always amazes me with his knowledge on various topics. Michael

quickly dropped out of college after only two weeks and has jumped from job to job for the past 10 years. He is a loyal, dedicated, and competent worker and is now gaining a fine reputation as a dependable and very talented cook around town.

Reynold, because of his talents in medicine, is a highly sought after emergency room physician's assistant. Until recently, Reynold contracted his services to a number of rural I.H.S. hospitals on various reservations, but now he works solely at an ER in the Black Hills. In many of those rural and reservation emergency rooms, where the luxury of a surgeon during emergencies is often unaffordable, Reynold assumed those critical duties.

All three of these friends have many talents and abilities, but because Native Americans are typically a silent population among the White, non-reservation culture, these talents are not manifested until after a trusting, relationship has formed. I have come to believe that this is the case with a many Native Americans who live in the Great Plains region; they are a silent population—under-appreciated and have under-recognized talent.

It could be argued that only one of my three close Native friends, Reynold, was able to successfully navigate higher educational possibilities despite all three being extremely intelligent, talented, and open to new experiences. Among these friends of mine and other Natives I have known, there is an impressive collection of talent and wisdom. I wonder if the majority of non-Native educators in higher education understand the importance of knowing how to engage these adult Native learners, who no doubt, have something important to offer.

In my privileged role as a White male, I've always been afforded opportunities in education. Success in college was never a question for me, I had the resources and I had the support. Now I have come to understand that I was situated right in the middle of the mainstream status quo. Thanks, however, to the many conversations with my Native friends, I have come to understand that the game is different for those outside the mainstream.

I do not enter into this study flippantly. I know that my work has consequences and frankly, I worry about entering this area of study as a non-Native. I am sensitive to the criticisms from Native scholars about non-Natives doing research with Native participants. Precisely because of White researchers, the terms "education" and "research" have become problematic for Native Americans, and I think I can understand why. The history of research from many Indigenous perspectives is so deeply embedded in colonization that it has been regarded as a tool only of colonization and not as a potential tool for self-determination and development (Smith, 2005). Therefore it is crucial that I examine all of my White, middle class, mainstream assumptions continually during my engagement with this study.

Thanks to many Native friends and profound experiences on the Rosebud, Leech Lake, White Earth, and Red Lake Indian Reservations, I have come to understand that teaching and research needs to be about establishing, maintaining and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships. As Worby and Rigby (2002) say, "The dynamic relationship between giver and receivers of knowledge is a reminder that dealing with Indigenous issues is one of the most sensitive and complex tasks facing teachers, learners and researchers at all levels" (as cited in Smith, 2005).

I think that being sensitive to the issues, concerns, and critiques from Native scholars and thinkers will bring rigor and integrity to my study. I do not approach this study with a naïve sense of being a neutral, objective researcher. I know that I have had privilege as a member of the mainstream, which may lead to bias. Bias is human nature. But using a research methodology which stresses a certain “openness to the phenomena”, a theoretical framework articulated and advocated by Native scholars, and most importantly being inspired by real-life, personal friendships with Natives, it is my hope that this work is active in pursuing social and institutional change by creating spaces for Indigenous “way of knowing” at the university and with a critical view of power relations and inequity.

I do not approach this topic in the manner of an anthropologist, historian, or sociologist seeking the title of “expert of Native Americans.” I do not wish to be among the so-called “culture vultures” who descend and exploit Native culture for their own private interest. I do not even wish to become Native, not because I do not find these cultures interesting, but rather because they are not mine. And I respect the Native culture too much to be a “wannabe.” Instead, I am approaching this endeavor as a teacher who is deeply interested in pedagogy and relationships and widening the door of education for Native students. I have listened and learned from my Native friends and taken to heart the notion that the educational experience off the reservation is problematic for Natives and thus need to be approached in a different manner than what mainstream institutions prescribe.

I am approaching this study as a teacher who is trying to understand how ‘place’ and ‘home’ rightly deserve a place in education. And in my home, despite being forgotten

or ignored politically and socially, Native Americans are indeed a significant socio-cultural and historic part of this place and rightly deserve attention. Not merely as way to inculcate them into the White mainstream, capitalist society, but rather to honor them: their history, their traditions, their sovereignty, their resistance, their ways of teachings, and their ways of knowing so that they may live in a way meaningful to them, as determined by their families, communities and tribes.

Statement of the Problem

Native American students are one of the most underrepresented groups in higher education. Among those who do find their way to the university, an alarming 85% will not finish (Tierney, 1992b). Beaulieu (2000) said that Indian students, in comparison to all others, are still the most disproportionately affected by poverty, low educational attainment, and limited access to educational opportunities (as cited in Grande, 2004). Further, they exhibit the highest drop-out rates, the lowest academic performance rates, and the lowest college admission and retention rates in the nation (American Council on Education, 2002 as cited in Grande, 2004, p. 5). This observation should be a cause for concern for all those in higher education, as the departure of these students diminishes a rich cross-cultural educational resource for all (Larimore & McClellan, 2005).

I think that teachers, researchers, and program planners need to rethink how they understand the unique experiences of Native American adult learners and how they perceive the pedagogical relationship they have with their non-Native teachers. I am interested in what matters most to these learners during their educational journey, what

they say educators are doing to enhance pedagogy and engagement, and what ways their teachers' actions adversely affect the educational process.

Rationale

In my home state there are several Indian Reservations. Native Americans make up roughly 8% of the population, while at the two largest state universities, they are only 1% of the population. I wonder why these universities, situated in the heart of Indian Country, aren't attracting a population ratio that is comparable to the state's general population. Since nearly 90% of Natives are taught by non-Native teachers, I am very interested in understanding this seemingly important phenomenon: the relationship between the Native student and the non-Native teacher at the university.

Research shows that being a Native American in a mainstream educational institution is difficult. Pavel (1999a) identifies Native Americans as the least likely to enroll in public four-year institutions and the least likely to persist to graduation in those institutions. It is also well documented that being an adult learner, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, etc., presents an all-together different set of challenges. Adult students are likely the most time-limited group of the college population; nearly all adults commute, most work, and many enroll part-time, leaving them with less time than traditional aged students (Kasworm 1990b, Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989 as cited in Lundberg, 2003). Consequently, the confluence of being a Native American *and* being an adult learner brings forth consequences that may not yet be fully understood.

While there exists a modest yet insightful amount of research detailing the struggles of traditional aged Native American students in college, it should be noted that

Native American adults have not yet received the research attention that other minority groups, such as African Americans, have (Imel, 2001). I suspect that the goals, needs, and aspirations of the Native American adult learner are distinctly different and warrant research that asks new and different questions. Imel concurs, “before the field of adult education can serve Native Americans adequately, this deficiency must be addressed” (Imel, 2001, ¶ 3). Only when we address the needs of all peoples in this land will our country be positioned to continually meet the complex challenges of a highly interdependent world (Inglebret & Pavel, 2000).

Ross-Gordon (1991, p. 12) offers a challenge, “The rate of research and publication on racial and ethnic minorities needs to be increased if we expect to rectify the situation of under representation of minorities in adult education programs” (as cited in Aragon, 1996). From a university perspective, it makes good sense to broaden the personal and professional perspectives and range of understanding about the complex web of human relationships that make up the higher education enterprise (Tippeconnic Fox, 2005). Only an education program that researches Native issues and trains leaders and community members with contemporary knowledge and brings the skills of higher education to Native communities will help in supporting Native nation building and continuity (Champagne, 2006).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe and reflect upon how Native American adult learners experience non-Native teachers at a university that is not located on the reservation. As such, my research question was: How do Native American

adult learners experience cross-cultural pedagogical engagement with their non-Native teachers at a predominantly White university located in the heart of what is commonly known as “Indian Country”? The sub-questions of this inquiry were: What were the epistemological contradictions, conflicts, or tensions the Native American adult learner faced in the classroom and how did the participants deal with them? From the students’ perspective, in what ways do non-Native teachers negotiate, accommodate or ignore any discontentedness that the student experiences in the learning environment? What are the educational goals that the Native American adult student brings to the university? How do Natives incorporate their goals and their cultural-historic selves into the knowledge-making process? What roles do the notions of sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonization have in the educational process?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Sandy Grande’s *Red Pedagogy* (2004), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005), Devon Abbott Mihesuah & Angela Cavender Wilson (2004) and Bryan Brayboy (2006) all contributed to a framework that seeks to understand the complex and intersecting components of power shaping the historical-material conditions of education. Red pedagogy challenges teachers of Native Americans to reflect and recognize the controversial intersection of traditional knowledge systems with mainstream Western knowledge system (Begaye, 2004). This framework provided inquiry and analysis that reveals, challenges, and problematizes the continuing colonization of Native land and resources and seeks greater political, intellectual, and spiritual sovereignty for Native peoples (Grande, 2004). Red Pedagogy is grounded historically in local and tribal

narratives, informed intellectually by ancestral ways of knowing, centered in issues of political sovereignty and decolonization, and inspired by the deep connections among the Earth, its beings, and the spirit world.

Limitations

No study is perfect and all have limitations. Ultimately, the main limitation of this study was the cross-cultural nature of the study. Renowned Lakota Philosopher and Scholar, Vine Deloria, Jr. (2001) once said that the fundamental factor that keeps Indians and non-Indians from communicating is that they are speaking about two entirely different perceptions of the world. Researchers must guard against the imposition of methods of collecting, analyzing and reporting “fact” in ways that are not culturally sensitive and that fail to safeguard the lives of the people they study (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). For example, a seemingly simple interview question concerning ‘goals and aspirations’ may be internalized in a whole different way by a Native American student than what the researcher had in mind. Therefore, if not bracketed, the researcher’s mainstream assumptions may cause a misrepresentation of participant’s notion of ‘goals and aspirations.’ Bracketing is the process of setting aside, as much as humanly possible, all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of the participants in the study (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing White, mainstream educational assumptions were an important part of this study and are discussed further in chapter three.

Access was potentially another source of concern. There is often skepticism toward non-Native researchers on the part of Native Americans. Sometimes researchers are “blocked” by participants who decide they are unworthy or not to be trusted with

local “insider” information (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). Uncertainty regarding motives and the non-Native’s ability to accurately assess and comprehend certain aspects of Native culture, tradition, philosophy and wisdom are reasons for apprehension. Also traditional Native peoples are often suspicious of scientific research and non-Native researchers due to negative past experiences (i.e. forced assimilation through boarding school and land allotment) (Herring, 1999). Crazy Bull (as cited in Nichols & Kayongo-Male, 2003) cites many incidents in which university researchers have exploited Native people and communities for their own personal or organizational gain—taking from them their time, insight, and culture, while offering nothing in return. Prominent Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. offers, “We seem to occupy the curious position of being pilot projects and experimental subjects for one group of educators, and the last communities to receive educational benefits as determined by another set of educators, primarily administrators” (Deloria, 2001b, p. 135).

In order to rectify this, I worked hard to maintain an authentic, respectful relationship with these students. Additionally, my research agenda was focused on working toward goals that benefit the participants, their community and/or future Native students in some way. The knowledge shared from the participants was respected, the relationships were genuine, the process had integrity, and the results, hopefully, had value to these and other Native adult learners.

The value to the participants was that they might have learned more about themselves and/or came to better understanding of how education impacted their life. The participants might also have realized that others have had similar experiences as they have. Additionally, their perceptions may resonate with other Native students in

predominantly White universities. Finally this study provided a better understanding of how non-Native teachers could provide more effective learning experiences for Native American adults. This information could help plan programs and make student services better. This information might assist Native students to have more success in college.

Chapter 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Deyhle and Swisher (1997) do an excellent job in chronicling the salient authors and their respective research regarding Native American education occurring within the past thirty years. Research topics receiving attention in the past include: essays, tribal histories, boarding school histories, research on language and cultural issues, history of tribal colleges, higher education research, research and policy issues and others focusing on K-12 students and traditional-age post-secondary students. Swisher continues by saying that a scan of the literature reveals that most of the books and articles focus broadly on two topics: the history of Indian education and effective teaching practices (as cited in Mihesuah, 1998).

It should be clarified that the term Native American is often used to describe Indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere in an effort to provide recognition, viewed by many as long overdue, of the unique history and status of these people as the first inhabitants of the American continent (Garret & Pichette, 2000). The terms American Indian, Native American or Native people, Native(s), and Indian were used in this study to refer generally to those Native peoples Indigenous to the United States who self-identify as Native American and maintain cultural identification through membership of a federally or non-federally recognized tribe. This includes Alaska Natives and Hawaiian Natives as well.

The majority of my literature review pertains to manifestations of the various teaching relationships between Native American students and their teachers. With the

exception of a few sources, I found that very little of the research literature focused specifically on the adult Native American learner and instead were centered around pedagogy principles, beliefs, or philosophies intended for the K-12 and higher education of traditional aged students. It seemed that much of the literature revolved around what could be termed as multicultural education, which may provide a decent foundation for K-12 education but seems a bit incomplete for teaching the adult learner. Reviewing theoretical and conceptual literature seemed to fill this gap and address some of the needs of the adult learner. Additionally, I believe that it is important to understand the boarding school era assumptions and thus did an abbreviated review on this topic in an attempt to situate the inquiry in a socio-cultural and historical manner. I also thought it was important to review a number of writings on the topic of non-Natives doing research with Native participants. Understanding the critiques of various Native American scholars on this topic is an attempt to bring rigor to my study and increase the study's credibility among Indian audiences.

Much of the research shows that being a Native American in a mainstream institution is difficult to say the least, as the non-reservation university has not typically been a site conducive to the realities, hopes, and dreams of Native American students. Pavel (1999a) identifies Native Americans as the least likely to enroll in public four-year institutions and the least likely to persist to graduation in those institutions. It is also well documented that being an adult learner presents an all-together different set of challenges. Adult students are likely the most time-limited group of the college population; nearly all adults commute, most work, and many enroll part-time, leaving them with less time than traditional aged students (Kasworm, Schlossberg, Lynch, &

Chickering as cited in Lundberg, 2003). Consequently, the confluence of being a Native American *and* being an adult learner brings forth consequences that may not yet be fully understood.

Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) believe a primary focus of research and practice must be the teaching-learning relationship between Native American students and their teachers. Since most teachers of American Indian students are non-Indian (Pavel, 1999a), it seems that the relationship between the Native American learner and the non-Native faculty member is a crucial connection that needs continuous and critical examination. This relationship is the most basic interaction that takes place in schools each day and one that determines whether students will persist or not (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). Taylor's (1999) work supports this notion when he indicates that the two strongest factors for Native students attending college and persisting were supportive people (instructors, advisors, parents) and their own determination. Brown and Robinson Kurpius (1997) add that that non-Native staff and faculty must play a key role in shaping campus environment that are welcoming, supportive and affirming of students who are Native American (as cited in Larimore & McClellan, 2005).

Before a non-Native educator can truly enter into an authentic learning partnership with a Native American adult learner, it is imperative that the educator works toward a better understanding of why the Western notion of "education" may be problematic for Native American learners. A critical educator will quickly perceive that there are many conflicts between Western ways of knowing and Native ways of knowing within the educational context.

Boarding Schools

While it falls outside the bounds of this study to give a complete history of Indian education, its importance is most certainly noted. An important starting place for non-Native teachers is to try to gain an understanding of the assumptions and injustices that characterized Indian education beginning with European contact and that included federal and missionary boarding, trade and labor schools. I believe it is imperative that an educator is knowledgeable of the socio-cultural and historical background of the various imposed forms of education that Native American students and their families endured in the name of colonization. Once one gains an understanding of this history, it becomes clear why the notions of “education” as defined by non-Natives are problematic for Native Americans and have ramifications even for students today. The following section is a brief overview of the general assumptions of the educational systems imposed on Natives after European contact.

The record of understanding between Indian Country and mainstream America holds many harsh memories for Native families (Connell-Szasz, 1999) as the clash of Western education systems and Native educational philosophy has been documented in a variety of ways. Grande (2004) and Connell-Szasz (1999) organize Indian education into three eras as defined by the prevailing power system: the period of missionary domination (contact through the mid-1880s), the period of federal domination (mid 1880s through the mid 1900s) and the self-determination era (1960s forward).

The beginning of American Indian/Native American education is the story of how Euro-American policy makers sought to use the schoolhouse—specifically the boarding, missionary, and labor schools—as an instrument for annihilating and acculturating many

Indian young to “American” ways of thinking and living (Adams as cited in Pewewardy, 2002). The federal government took, often forcibly, young Indian children miles away from their homes and placed them in boarding schools far removed from reservation life in order to prevent them from running away and to keep them away from the influences of their family and the tribe. These highly important years of youth formation were marred with strict discipline that prohibited them from speaking their Native language, practicing their religion, and having contact with their families. Essentially, teachers and schools took their culture from them.

In these schools Native American students moved in an alien world that taught them to deny any merits of the education long transmitted by their people (Connell-Szasz, 1999). Through its ethnocentric lens, governmental educational policy asserted that mainstream culture and the means by which that culture was transmitted should be adopted by all who lived in the United States (Connell-Szasz, 1999). Such imperialist purposes were reflected in curriculums that included teaching allegiance to the U.S. government, exterminating the use of Native languages, and destroying Indian customs, particularly religion (Spring as cited in Grande, 2004). This concept of de-culturalization combined education for democracy and political equality with cultural genocide—the attempt to destroy cultures (Pewewardy, 2002).

Grande (2004, p. 12) observes, “Perhaps at no other time in U.S. history did the church and state work so hand in hand to advance the common project of White supremacy as it did during the period of missionary domination.” During this era, missionary groups acted as the primary developers and administrators of schools while

the federal government served as the not-so-silent partner, providing economic and political capital through governmental policies (Grande, 2004).

The “history of Indian education,” as it is widely written, tends to be a chronology of federal policies experimenting with reinventing Native American people in the likeness of White people (Begaye, 2004). “Indian education” or a colonized form of education has been practiced by educators for the past century in federally operated schools under the false assumption that the goal of “education” is to mold all students to become a part of the mainstream (Grande, 2004). Grande continues with this important analysis, “Indian education was never simply about the desire to “civilize” or even deculturalize a people, but rather, from its very inception, it was a project designed to colonize Indian minds as a means of gaining access to Indian labor, land, and resources” (2004, p. 19).

It wasn't until 1928 when the release of The Merriam Report served as the official end of the boarding school experiments. The report harshly criticized not only the existing educational policies of removing Indian children from their homes and communities, but criticized the institutional practices of forced manual labor and severe discipline (Grande, 2004).

The political liberalism of the 1960s spawned the legislation of the 1970s that provided Natives with the potential to become self-determining in their schooling, health, and economic status (Connell-Szasz, 1999). American Indian leadership was crucial for passage of measures such as the Indian Education Act of 1972 and the Indian Self-determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (Connell-Szasz, 1999), which led to the contemporary era of Indian education.

Implications for Non-Native Researchers

The literature provides mixed reactions towards non-Native's access, methods, and motives for research as Native ways of knowing are often in sharp contrast to Western scientific research methods. Peacock (2006) warns that the educational issues facing Native students at both tribal and mainstream schools are complicated. These issues cannot be approached in a piecemeal or programmatic fashion but must be viewed holistically (Peacock, 2006). Cultures can be studied but not necessarily in the same kinds of ways that most biologists or Western social scientists often test in a laboratory or replicate in linear causal models (Wildcat, 2001c).

There is often skepticism toward non-Native researchers on the part of Native Americans. Uncertainty regarding motives and the non-Native's ability to accurately assess and comprehend certain aspects of Native culture, tradition, philosophy and wisdom are reasons for apprehension. Also traditional Native peoples are frequently suspicious of scientific research and non-Native researchers due to negative past experiences (i.e. forced assimilation through boarding school and land allotment (Herring, 1999). Crazy Bull (as cited in Nichols & Kayongo-Male, 2003) supports this citing many incidents in which university researchers have exploited Native people and communities for their own personal or organizational gain—taking from them their time, insight, and culture, while offering nothing in return.

Deloria advises, “We must not, however, rely on the assistance of sympathetic non-Indian thinkers for guidance, as they often do not see the kinds of relationship that traditional Indian knowledge reveals” (Deloria, 2001a, p. 5). Herring (1999) calls for a

response to the urgent need for academic research created and conducted by Native researchers, rather than non-Native ethnic perspectives (Herring, 1999).

Larimore and McClellan (2005) indicate that there is room, however, for non-Native researchers in Native American educational issues:

Research on Native American higher education should not be the sole responsibility of Native American scholars. Non-native scholars from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds must become engaged in research in this multidisciplinary field as well. Non-native researchers must first recognize that they, like all other people, have their own biases (for example gender, ethnicity, culture) and should seek out ways to conduct research that is culturally sensitive and Native-centered. (p. 27)

Deloria (2001a, p. 5) continues, “Without the voices of respected White scholars, there is little chance that we can get sufficient attention from the scientific community to plead our own case. But we must remember that every article attempting to discuss these problems should be understood as a call of each of use to enter into the exchange of knowledge.”

Rose (1992) also says that non-Native researchers—given the right intent and integrity—can be an aid in the empowerment process:

The fear exists among non-Native writers that we are somehow trying to bar them from writing about Indians at all, that Indian people might be “staking a claim” as the sole interpreters of Indian culture, most especially of that which is sacred, and asserting that only Indians can make valid observations on themselves. We accept as given that Whites have as much prerogative to write and speak about us and

our cultures as we have to write and speak about them and theirs. The question is how this is done and, to some extent, why it is done. (as cited in Deyhle & Swisher, 1997, p. 181)

Researchers in higher education must work to come to a better understanding of the diverse and complex nature of the Native American experience in the United States (McClellen & Tippeconnic Fox, 2005). Both Native American and non-Native scholars must engage in exploring the important unanswered questions regarding the experiences of Native American students, staff, and faculty on our campuses (McClellen & Tippeconnic Fox, 2005).

Native/Non-Native Teaching Relationship

The university is filled with contradictions and conflicts for the Native American learner. In a context where knowledge is valued, epistemology, or “ways of knowing,” becomes a contested space. Additionally, where there is contested space, issues of power are also inherently manifested. The burden of this conflict is cast upon the Native American learner, as the Native “ways of knowing” or worldview is often incongruent with that of institutional and/or mainstream “ways of knowing.” These contradictions often lead these students to believe that their worldview, stemming from Native American culture, religion, and traditional teachings are wrong and unvalued, thus having no place in the mainstream world of the university. One place where these contradictions most often reside is in the interactions/educational relationship between the Native American student and the non-Native teacher.

Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) believe a primary focus of research and practice must be the teaching-learning relationship between students and teachers. Since most teachers of American Indian students are non-Indian (Pavel, 1999b), it seems that the relationship between the Native American learner and the non-Native faculty member is a crucial connection that needs continuous and critical examination. This relationship is the most basic interaction that takes place in schools each day and one that determines whether students will persist or not (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). Taylor's (1999) research supports this notion when he indicates that the two strongest factors for Native students attending college and persisting were supportive people (instructors, advisors, parents) and their own determination. Brown and Robinson Kurpius (1997) add that that non-Native staff and faculty must play a key role in shaping campus environment that are welcoming, supportive and affirming of students who are Native American (as cited in Larimore & McClellan, 2005).

It is clear that higher education does not yet provide a hospitable environment that attracts and holds Native American students at a satisfactory rate (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). One of the paradoxes of educational institutions is that they are assumed to be providers of opportunity, yet Native Americans do not always perceive of the university in that manner (Tierney, 1992a).

Ways of Knowing – Learning, Schools and Education

Because various Native epistemologies indicate that learning and doing are inherently connected to knowing and knowledge (Cajete, 2005) it is necessary to look at ways of knowing as they are enmeshed in both traditional and modern forms of Native

education. Cajete (2005) says that in order to understand the nature of American Indian epistemologies, it is useful to explore the realm of cultural ideals from which the learning, teaching, and systems of education of Native America evolved.

Prior to the influx of Europeans, each Indian nation had its own forms of education characterized as oral histories, vision quests, teaching stories, ceremonies, apprenticeships, learning games, formal instruction, tutoring, and tag-along teaching (Hampton, N.D.). Indian education historically occurred in a holistic social context that developed a sense of the importance of the individual child as a contributor to the larger social group (Cajete, 2005). Tribal education revolved around experiential learning (learning by doing or seeing), storytelling (learning by listening and imagination), ritual or ceremony (learning through initiation), dreaming (learning through unconscious imagery), the tutor (learning through apprenticeship), and artistic creation (learning through creative synthesis) (Cajete, 2005). Knowledge gained through these vehicles is then used in everyday living and essentially becomes education for life's sake (Cajete, 1997).

Another realization was that the world constituted a social reality, a fabric of life in which everything had the possibility of intimate knowing relationships because ultimately everything was related. Indigenous education is, at its very essence, learning about life through participation and relationship to community, including not only people but plants, animals, and the whole of nature (Cajete, 2005). The web of relationships included special connections to nature, family, community, and spiritual ecology (Cajete, 2005). This world is a far cry from the disjointed sterile and emotionless world painted by Western science (Deloria, 2001a).

Often Native American traditions say that learning is a subjective experience tied to a place: environmentally, socially, and spiritually (Cajete, 2005). It is a process of education that unfolds through reciprocal relationships between one's social group and the natural world (Cajete, 2005). Because relationships are the primary organizing philosophy for the Lakota and Dakota peoples, for example, ranging from direct relatives, to all human beings, to the four-legged, two-legged, and winged animal world, trees and medicine plants, to the very land itself, Western European educational systems stand opposed to Indigenous paradigms and worldviews (Fenelon & LeBeau, 2006). Thus, learning comes not through lectures but through experience: habits, customs, and practices (Wildcat, 2001a).

Indigenous peoples are generally at odds with the ground rules of the mainstream school systems because they do not necessarily share the values of individual capitalism, secular civic culture, and individual achievement, at least not in the same patterns as mainstream communities (Abu-Saad & Champagne, 2006). American Indian notions of knowledge remind us that ultimately, understanding or wisdom ought to be the goal of education (Wildcat, 2001c). The ideals of such a process naturally became founded on the continuous development of self-knowledge, on finding life through understanding and participating in the creative process of living, on direct awareness of the natural environment, on knowledge of one's role and responsibility to community, and on cultivating a sensitivity to the spiritual essences of the world (Cajete, 2005).

Traditional tribal education regards accomplishments as the attainment of the family. Western notions of "success"—school credentials, individual careers, and individual economic prosperity—do not reflect those of many Native cultures (Deyhle &

Swisher, 1997). Success from a Native perspective, is often judged in terms of intact extended familial relations, where individual jobs and education success is used to enhance the family and the community, and aggressive individualism is suppressed for the cooperation of the group (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). As such, Native students tend to be less comfortable within the requisite formal educational organization structures that emphasize individual status and competitiveness over consensual decision-making and group identity (Carney, 1999). Individual success is underscored by appreciating the proper relationship that the individual has in respect to the larger community. Deloria explains (2001b):

We share our failures and success so that we know who we are and so that we have confidence when we do things. Traditional knowledge enables us to see our place and our responsibility within the movement of history as it is experienced by the community. (p. 46)

Elders serve a vital role in educating the young in the community and are often considered the first teachers of the young (Pewewardy, 2002). Elders are seen as the best living examples of what the end product of education and life experiences should be (Deloria, 2001b). Native wisdom, or knowledge of what is true and right, coupled with good judgment, comes from reflecting on the values that are passed on through the stories of the elders (J. Orr, 2000). Thus, tribal elders are seen as an indispensable resource in the Native educational process.

Classroom and Learning Experiences: Epistemological Conflicts

As one begins the long and important journey of trying to come to an appreciation

of Native American ways of knowing and learning, non-Native educators must next be patiently willing to decipher, empathize, and then work to rectify the inherent conflicts that Native American adult learners face as they enter into mainstream universities.

Although the horrors of governmental boarding schools and other duplicitous efforts under the guise of education are in the past, there are still institutional practices that are rooted in assimilationist ideals and have consequently caused Native American learners to feel a great sense of alienation at the university. Native American students have not been well served by the current educational paradigm including in higher education. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) say:

It is presumed that the university is an established institution with its own long-standing, deeply-rooted policies, practices, programs and standards intended to serve the needs of the society in which it is imbedded. Students who come to the university are expected to adapt to its modus operandi if they wish to obtain the benefits (usually translated to mean better, higher paying jobs) of the knowledge and skills it has to offer, the desirability and value of which are presumed to be self-evident. From this point of view, when particular clusters of students, such as those from First Nations backgrounds, do not readily adapt to conventional institutional norms and expectation and do not achieve levels of “success” comparable to other students, the typical response is to focus on the aberrant students and to intensify efforts at socializing them into the institutional milieu. (Coming to the University vs. Going to the University section, ¶ 1)

Many Native students find little in the curriculum that match their own culture and even find perspectives and history that devalues their history, culture, and

communities (Champagne, 2006). Deloria (2001a) says that Indian students today are confronted with the monolith of Western science when they leave the reservation to attend college. In most introductory courses their culture and traditions are derided as mere remnants of superstitious, stone-age mentality that could not possibly understand or distinguish between the simplest propositions (Deloria, 2001a). Additionally, non-Native teachers seldom understand the cultural and political issues undergirding curriculum and instruction (Burke & Johnston, 2004).

Western thought and approaches to education have resulted in categorical and separate systems (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). Thus, the holistic integration and internal consistency of the Native worldview is not easily reconciled with the compartmentalized world of bureaucratic institutions (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) say, “We often say, as Native people, we view the world holistically. The relationships among the parts are important to understanding the whole. Our thinking about education must reflect this comprehensive and holistic view of teaching and learning” (p. 305).

The clash of worldviews may alienate Native students and thus influence students to assimilate or at least show outward signs of compliance and assimilations. Students with stronger Native identity, values, and commitment to their Native communities and families may have greater difficulty accepting, participating, and graduating from mainstream schools and colleges (Champagne, 2006).

Native American students and their families have seen their hopes and dreams shattered by collegiate institutions that have either ignored Indian students or sought to remake them into different people (Tierney, 1992b). Deloria (2001) explains that one of

the most painful experiences for American Indian students is to come into conflict with the teachings of science that claims to explain phenomena already explained by tribal knowledge and tradition. The assumption of the Western educational system is that the information dispensed by colleges is always correct, and that the beliefs and teaching of the tribe are always wrong (Deloria, 2001a).

Burke (2004) says that marginal students experience a duality of damnation: first they experience the discouragement of high stakes competition in college and the fear that they will fail, but secondly, they experience the cultural/spiritual gap between campus and home and the accompanying fear of success. Survival often requires the acquisition and acceptance of a new form of consciousness that not only displaces, but often devalues their Indigenous ways of knowing, and for many, this a greater sacrifice than they are willing to make (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). The painful denial of self that is necessary for many to be successful in White institutions has been referred to as “forced racial suicide,” indicating the extent of violence to the identity of students (Wilson, 2004).

Students from ethnic groups rarely have the opportunity to use the tools of their cultures within the classroom setting (Aragon, 1996). Non-Indian academicians often do not realize that for American Indian students (LaFramboise, 1979) university attendance is a situation of cross-cultural transition that is associated with severe psychological stress (Hampton, N.D.). Instead of appropriating the cultural capital of mainstream society, many Native students either decline to participate in higher education or they resist the dominant ethos at work in White institutions and leave (Tierney, 1992, p. 81). Tierney continues:

The point here is straightforward: for Indian students their cultural background frames their understanding and action of education in a manner fundamentally different from that of White students. Their perception of home and family create stronger allegiances than that of educational opportunities that appear elusive and contradictory. The opportunities are elusive because of the hurdles Indian students must overcome, and they are contradictory because their perception is that the world they come from, and the one for which education prepares them, are oppositional. Students have dreams, but they do not fit into the framework of mainstream institutions. If students are to survive, then it appear as if they will have to either alter their dreams or look elsewhere to fulfill them. (1992, p. 81)

The educational journey of modern Indian people is one spanning two distinct value systems and worldviews. It is an adventure in which the Native American sacred view must inevitably encounter the material and pragmatic focus of the larger American society (Deloria, 2001c). Ideally, Western education forms, skills, and knowledge will be critically assessed and if appropriate and necessary, combined with Native forms of education, skills and knowledge in order to find culturally unique solutions to contemporary and future social, economic, and cultural conditions (Champagne, 2006). The personal and professional challenge that we share is to make these two systems work (Deloria as cited in Hampton, N.D.). In that meeting ground an opportunity for the two cultures to both teach and learn from each other exists (Deloria, 2001c).

LaDuke (2005) says, “In a millennium filled with Dodge trucks, iPods, computers, and hip-hop, Indigenous knowledge is still alive and present in aspects that will always remain essential to Natives: language, spiritual practice, food, and

ceremony.” Revealed truth from spiritual and natural sources is tested against experience and usage by Native people to form the basis for Native ways of knowing (Calsoyas, 2005).

As the world changes, Indigenous communities will also change but in ways that they believe work from within their traditions and community relations and ways of knowing (Abu-Saad & Champagne, 2006). Education will play a significant role in this process. For American Indians a new circle of education is evolving that is founded on the roots of tribal education and reflective of the needs, values, and sociopolitical issues as Indian people themselves perceive them (Cajete, 2005).

Research for Improved Practice – Understanding Culture

Orr (2000) says that educators are more likely today to focus on cultural practices that fostering Native identity. Hornett (1989) states that professors can create an appropriate, positive, academic environment in which to learn, “It isn’t required that the faculty be Indian, they only need to be student-oriented, caring individuals who are open to innovative ideas that may change the normal routine of their teaching styles and classroom presentations” (p. 13). While teachers cannot be expected to carry the major responsibility for facilitating the development of Native identity, they can honor the important contributions of families and elders (Pewewardy, 2003).

Teachers who are sensitive to Native issues and concerns (Herring, 1999) will have a greater opportunity to enhance authentic learning in the classroom. Peacock’s (2006) research lists other personal characteristics of the teacher that are favorable including: being friendly, being fun, being mellow, being open-minded, having patience,

respecting students, and staying (as opposed to leaving the school or community).

Students interviewed for The Seventh Generation project identified important teaching characteristics including having cultural knowledge, using encouragement, using explanation, using examples and analogies, having high expectations, being fair and demanding respect for all learners, being flexible, being helpful, being interested in students, listening and understanding, and using multiple approaches (Peacock, 2006).

Often times the teacher or university official act in a manner comparable to a gatekeeper. Beaty and Chiste (1996) suggest that the gatekeeper relationship with a student involves face-to-face encounters in which the teacher can affect the social mobility within an institution. Because Indian students are expected to adjust to the university system, and few adjustments are made to accommodate the cultural and social needs of Native students (Champagne, 2006), conflicts in the educational process are inevitable. The Native student's chances of success can be affected by the presence or absence of "co-membership" with the gatekeeper and by their individual communicative styles (Beaty & Chiste, 1996). Thus a clash of values, ideas, and worldviews of Native students that does not fit neatly into the Western idea of appropriate classroom decorum and participation may be negatively interpreted as lack of interest, intelligence, or manners (Beaty & Chiste, 1996) and may ultimately affect passage through the educational gate as determined by the gatekeeping teacher or school official.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) recommend starting with "the four R's" to build teacher/student relationships conducive to learning. Teachers who create learning experiences that *respects* Native students for who they are, that is *relevant* to their view of the world, that offers *reciprocity* in their relationships with others, and that helps them

exercise *responsibility* over their lives. In addition to “the four R’s,” it is important to give consideration to differences in communication styles, perceptions of trustworthiness, gender roles, and support networks (Herring, 1999).

Becoming a teacher who is culturally sensitive to Native learners is not a simplistic task and cannot be reduced to a prescriptive checklist or learned through the reading of key texts. It is crucial to recognize that true appreciation and respect do not come easy when teachers are not members of the culture to which their students belong (Garcia & Ahler, 1992). Additionally, the existence of an educational exchange does not automatically infer cross-cultural understanding (Connell-Szasz, 1999). The non-Native teacher will need to be patient, committed, and willing to “unlearn” certain education principles that confine and define knowledge from solely a Western perspective.

To reduce ethnocentrism, racism, and stereotyping thinking, Reyhner (1992) suggests that teachers use the concept of cultural relativism, which favors viewing cultural groups from their own vantage point. Cultural relativism necessitates that non-Native teachers perceive cultures from their unique perspective rather than from the view of mainstream American. Cultural relativism should not be perceived as nihilism, where “anything goes,” but rather as a way of building acceptance toward the Native American culture (Reyhner, 1992).

Although the task of trying to understand aspects of Native American culture and its implications for learning seems like a daunting task for the non-Native teacher, it is a goal that is both essential and attainable. While in no way advocating that non-Natives speak and act for Native peoples, it is important for Natives to have informed allies on the campus as such allies can play an important role in helping Native students deal with

the cultural, psychological, and environmental devastation of colonialism (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Pewewardy (2003) is encouraging in saying teachers need not be experts in Native culture to provide an inclusive atmosphere in their classrooms. Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) suggest that a mutually respectful and caring relationship is essential to educational success. Calsoyas (2005) adds that modesty coupled with honoring others' lives should be emblematic of the relationship between students and teachers.

Pavel (1997) found caring to be essential in making higher education accessible to tribal college students. Caring is central to education in Native communities and important to the process of planning and implementing curriculum (Inglebret & Pavel, 2000). Deyhle and Swisher (1997) suggest that teachers who watch and listen to their Native students, as well as have high expectations for their achievement, are demonstrating caring behavior.

Research shows that teachers should understand that culture plays an important role in the educational process of the Native American student. Teachers in a multicultural society should hold an attitude of respect for cultural differences, know the cultural resources their students bring to class, and be skilled at tapping students' cultural resources in the teaching-learning process (Pewewardy, 2003).

Some research assumes that cultural differences, by themselves, cause difficulty in maneuvering through the system of higher education. Huffman (2001) cites a number of sources that indicate that no other single factor has been more frequently identified as a contributing reason for poor academic achievement among American Indians than cultural conflict.

When Native students do not see their history and culture mentioned or valued highly in the curriculum, they tend to have little or no motivation to participate or succeed in education (Champagne, 2006). Without being intellectually engaged Native American students are not truly prepared for the culture of academe in colleges and universities (Burke & Johnston, 2004). Beaty and Chiste (1996) question the practice of universities pushing Native students to begin abandoning their traditional views, when this is an important source of self-esteem which is a necessity for effective learning.

McClellan and Tippeconnic Fox (2005) insist that professionals in higher education must seek to gain greater knowledge about Native American history, culture, and contemporary issues, as well as the experiences of Native American students, staff, and faculty. Semali and Kincheloe (1999) say that an appreciation of Indigenous epistemology “provides Western peoples with another view of knowledge production in diverse cultural sites” (p. 17). Anderson’s research (1988) says that one of the most critical problems encountered by students of color is that college faculty are not equipped to identify, interpret, and respond to the variant styles of multicultural populations (as cited in Aragon, 1996). Teachers must learn to be reflective practitioners and develop observational, empirical, and analytical skills necessary to continually monitor, evaluate and revise the respective teaching styles (Pewewardy, 2003). This will help professionals in higher education to think in new ways about our definitions of multiculturalism, pluralism, and inclusion (Tippeconnic Fox, 2005).

Critique

Moving Beyond Cultural Accommodation

As stated earlier, cultural differences can adversely affect both the academic and social progress of a Native student, but I think what has been left out is the understanding of how these cultural differences are enmeshed with power relations. Often non-Native teachers view the Native students' cultural differences as deficits, the inherent antecedent for academic and social difficulties. Cultural difference studies, several of which that were mentioned above, that ignore the larger political, social, and economic context provide only a partial picture of Indian students' experience in the university classroom (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).

For instance, Vincent Tinto's academic and social integration theory has become a widely accepted theoretical foundation regarding college students and their persistence (Tierney, 1992b). Tinto (1993) seems to view college participation as if it were a "ritual of passage" where academic and social integration is essential to student persistence. The assumption is that a common set of values and attitudes exist in an institution and that it is the individual's task to adapt to the system. Failure to adapt to the academic and social norms of the university culture greatly increases the chance for failure. As such, conformity is the norm and is the responsibility of the student (Tierney, 1992a).

This assumption implies that the problem is in the student, or in the student's culture, when she fails to persist at college. This sense of cultural deficit fails to recognize that the problem may in fact lie in how the teacher is teaching a class or how university officials are administering programs at the institution. Rather than defining

Native Americans as the ones who have the “problem,” we might think of the institutions as having the problem. The problem might be defined not at an individual’s lack of acculturation, but rather as an institution’s inability to operate in a diverse world (Tierney, 1992a).

Richardson and Villenas (2000) say that researchers in education have so fetishized ‘people of color’ as the ‘problem to be solved’ that the mainstream, in all its glistening privilege, has evaporated beyond study and has the ironic ability to escape social and intellectual surveillance. Tierney suggests that instead of a “ritual of passage,” universities are better off employing a “ritual of empowerment,” where the education process enables students to unearth their subjugated histories and voices, not so that they can assimilate into the system, but so that they will be able to challenge and change it (Tierney, 1992b).

Along those lines, Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) reject the “age old deficit and stereotypic approaches to education” (p. 295) and support the concept of self-determination in education. Self-determination puts Native people in control and uses Tribal languages, cultures, and values to enhance student work and research in higher education and other areas in education. The struggle then is to investigate how students might develop strategies that are framed by a concern for redefining the parameters of education (Tierney, 1992b).

Resistance theories offer explanations of how individuals negotiate and struggle with structures and create meanings of their own from these interactions (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Brayboy’s (2005) study examines how Indian students use transformational resistance in Ivy League schools to enable them to serve their tribal

communities. Solorzano and Bernal (2001) say that with a deeper level of understanding and a social justice orientation, transformational resistance offers the greatest possibility for social change. This is manifested in creative individuals from traditionally oppressed groups who know how to use the educational tools and credentials they have acquired toward liberatory ends unseat the assimilationist influence of Western schooling (Brayboy, 2005). Brayboy says that using transformation resistance techniques “highlights the complicated relationship between American Indians’ uses of Western education and initiative to assert tribal sovereignty and self-determination” (2005, p. 194).

According to Hornett (1989) institutions of higher education must ensure that faculty and staff are culturally aware and prepared to employ different methods than they use with White students. Further, the use of Euro-American theories, models, and practice may be inappropriate or inadequate when working with Native American people. For example in a review of Beaty and Chiste’s 1996 article “University Preparation for Native American Students: Theory and Application,” I noticed there was one thing missing, a Native American perspective. The works that were cited made reference to only three works that had “Native American” in the title, instead choosing to privilege the theories of Knowles, Kolb, Erickson, and Mezirow...all non-Native theorists. Additionally there were no sections highlighting the voice of the Native student in this article. Professionals need to become aware of and make use of Indigenous theories, models, and practices in seeking to serve and support the success of Native American students, staff, and faculty (McClellan & Tippeconnic Fox, 2005). Without Native voice, stories, theories, and perspectives, researchers and teachers risk inaccurate research

accounts and will probably fail to gain the respect of those the community were initially trying to serve.

Burke and Johnston (2004) say that the world of higher education is not going to become a better place for marginalized students by converting individuals to “right beliefs” and “right behaviors.” Teachers must be prepared so Western (European American) paradigms can coexist with Native worldviews about life’s complex interconnections among peoples and with nature (Pewewardy, 2003). The learner and teacher are both embarked on a journey of self-examination as they come together. If the mind is open, free of boundaries created by greed, selfishness, fear, pride, it is possible for bodies of knowledge to connect and meaning to be transmitted (Calsoyas, 2005).

Rather than assimilate minorities into the organization, the conditions must be created where alternative discourses can be heard (Tierney, 1992). This would allow for an equalization of voices that promotes a shared ownership of knowledge and collective responsibility for learning (Orr, 2000). Hassel’s notion of “cross cultural engagement” (CCE) calls for a broader, more inclusive approach considering various alternative (primarily local and Indigenous) worldviews in the synthesis of knowledge at the university. Ultimately CCE stimulates innovation and discovery by bringing together divergent ways of knowing (Hassel, 2005). In this context, the university researcher or teacher, who is generally faithful to Western canon, must be able to refuse its status as universal and seek to rethink and recontextualize questions that have been traditionally asked about knowledge production (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Hassel indicates that CCE aligns with the mission of the land-grant university as it allows the university to

serve as a resource through which to access, network, exchange, and navigate the many different forms of expertise within academic and non-academic communities.

Moving Beyond Multicultural Education

Much of the literature reviewed seems to have either implicit or explicit grounding in the ideals of multicultural education. Multicultural education is one of those terms that has been used in so many contexts, to depict so many different things, that its meaning has become virtually useless. Instead of using this term as a way to juxtapose the differences of the appearance and the lived reality of democracy, it is often reduced to celebrating Cinco de Mayo or bringing in a speaker for Martin Luther King Day. Prakash and Esteve (2005) even call multicultural education an “oxymoron” implying that anything bearing the label ‘education’ is a Western-only construct.

While prescribed multicultural teacher characteristics such as being caring, being open, being respectful, and being inclusive are certainly noble, they generally are apolitical and reflective of personality types, individual values, and personal predispositions (Bartolome, 2008) and ignore the larger issues of examining the socio-political nature of the classroom. Often the assumption of prescriptive “effective teacher characteristics/techniques” is that the teacher, classroom, curriculum and school are neutral. The argument of teacher neutrality is immediately lost when teachers ultimately make decisions about what to emphasize, or exclude, in classroom discussions and lesson plans. This is indicative of a silent logic that reveals the teacher’s way of seeing the world, and necessarily is political. Giroux (1988) adds that it is important to recognize that schools are historical and cultural institutions that always embody ideological and

political interests and thus far from neutral. More specifically, schools establish the conditions under which some individuals and groups define the terms by which others live, resist, affirm, and participate in the construction of their own identities and subjectivities (Giroux, 1988).

The principle of inclusion within multicultural education actually seems to reinforce the ideological charter of public education, which hasn't changed since the early 19th century: to socialize students and assimilate them into the labor market and international division of labor (Giroux, 1989). In this ideology exists the belief that school knowledge is objective, as something to be merely transmitted to students and ignores the possibilities that school knowledge is a representation of the dominant culture (Giroux, 1989). This type of ideology perpetuates (or reproduces) the social relationships and attitudes needed to sustain the existing dominant economic and class relations of the larger society (McLaren, 2007). As Indian students work to rebuild their communities and nations, the reproduction of class and the continued dominance of colonial entities in mainstream schools greatly obstructs the goals of sovereignty and self-determination and needs to be addressed.

McLaren and Munoz (2005) accuse multiculturalism as creating an educational diversion because while it brings awareness to “psychological disposition, pathological attitude formation, and epistemological claims” (p. 181) it actually reifies a master narrative of singularity (Richardson & Villenas, 2000). This notion of inclusion often ignores unique cultural knowledge and histories of resistance and resilience –like those of Native Americans (Grande, 2004), important socio-historic components of both self-determination and sovereignty.

McLaren and Munoz (2005) insists that although multiculturalism advocates a “democratic model” premised on the incorporation of all peoples and values, multiculturalism paradoxically operates in homogenizing way; manifested in creation of a grand narrative called “common humanity,” which ironically tends to be directed by the dominant culture. Native Americans are not like other marginalized groups struggling to define their place within the enterprise of democracy. Specifically they do not seek greater inclusion; rather, they are engaged in a perpetual struggle to have their legal and moral claim to sovereignty recognized (Grande, 2004).

Teaching from a multicultural stance often leaves Native American sovereignty is question. Richardson and Villenas (2000) says that multicultural education implies that educators work toward the goals of a democratic and egalitarian social order, which are considered the epitome of modern civilizations and heralded as the only possible choice for a society or its members. This leaves the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain Indigenous sociopolitical systems in the name of sovereignty as inconsequential (Richardson & Villenas, 2000), unrealistic, or even unpatriotic.

Research has made a difference in Indian education. We know more about cultural differences, learning styles, preferred teaching styles, and persistence. But as Deyhle and Swisher (1997) point out, still more is needed in the interpretation of what this research means in the way teachers, including non-Native teachers, are trained, schools are organized, curriculum is designed, and instruction is delivered.

Sleeter (1993) points out that White teachers often have a knowledge of race based on their own life experience and vested interests and the idea of what is “correct” comes from the White perspective (as cited in Pewewardy, 2002). The perspective of

most White teachers about race is “dysconscious racism,” defined by Joyce King (1991), as a form of racism that accepts without cultural awareness the dominant White norms and privileges (Pewewardy, 2002). These perspectives, when manifested in educational practice, are located somewhere between racism and assimilation and are detrimental to the Native learner. The negative impact of historical and contemporary discriminatory policies and practices on Native peoples has devastated their standard of living and created major cultural conflicts (Herring, 1999).

Swisher (1998) reminds us, “Non-Native teachers and researchers must understand that Native students have many educational needs that differ from those of mainstream society...and that the assimilation objectives of American education are detrimental to the social, economic, and political well-being of their communities” (p.191). While researching the relationship between culture and education is important, it seems that a greater emphasis should be placed on understanding the larger relationship between culture and socio-economic and political conditions, the cause for the cultural conflict in schools in the first place. Otherwise Native Americans will continue to struggle in their attempt to be sovereign and self-determining nations. Grande (2004) continues:

The struggle for self-determined schools must be engaged alongside other revolutionary struggles, specifically those that seek to end economic exploitation, political domination, and cultural dependency...Unless educational reform happens concurrently with analysis of the forces of colonialism, it can only serve as a insufficient (if not negligent) Band-Aid over the incessant wounds of imperialism. (pp. 19-20)

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Definitions

Three important terms emerged during the review of theoretical and conceptual framework literature: sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonization. Research that addresses these three important notions are more likely to produce knowledge that seeks justice for past and enduring injustices, combats continuing colonization, safeguards treaty rights, and advances the general well-being among Indigenous communities (Clark, 2004).

Non-Native people often have great difficulty understanding the concept of Native sovereignty and how it fits into democracy. Although Native peoples never have needed clarification as to what sovereignty means, the Marshall Trilogy (1823, '31, '32) came to define this unique status in federal court. Supreme Court Chief Justice Marshall ruled, among other things, that Indian nations shall be considered a distinct, independent political community, retaining their original natural rights (Deloria & Lytle, 1984). From a Native perspective, Scott Richard Lyons puts it succinctly, "Our claims to sovereignty entail much more than argument for tax-exempt status or the right to build and operate casinos; they are nothing less than our attempt to survive and flourish as a people" (as cited in Grand, 2004, p. 31). Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) say that sovereignty is the inherent right of a people to self-government, self-determination, and self-education and includes the right to linguistic and cultural expression according to local languages and norms.

Self-determination is another consideration that educators need to be cognizant of and ultimately serves as a reminder that Indian education/research needs the voice and perspective of the Native American. The Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 allowed for the possibility of Native nations to gain more control over the education that their children receive (Connell-Szasz, 1999). Inglebret and Pavel (2000) state that “The journey begins with Native peoples deciding the paths to be taken, the rivers to be crossed, and the mountains to be challenged as they strive to develop knowledge that promotes the well-being of their peoples” (p. 9). Indian people believe that they have the answers for improving Indian education and they must have the opportunity to speak for themselves (Swisher, 1998).

Additionally Indian education and research has to include an understanding of decolonization. Alfred (2004) describes the true meaning of colonization as how Indigenous people have lost their freedom to exist as Indigenous peoples in almost every single sphere of their existence—the fundamental denial to be Indigenous in a meaningful way, and the unjust occupation of the physical, social, and political spaces they need to survive as Indigenous peoples. Wilson (2004) states, “We do need to sort out that which has been imposed on us, consciously and critically assess whether it supports or harms Indigenous value systems and worldviews, and make appropriate changes” (p. 79).

Theory

Lowe (2005) says that qualitative research takes time, but already too much time has gone by without an adequate volume of research on the experiences of Native American students. Native students need to be asked about their experiences and given

the opportunity to tell their story. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005), Devon Abbott Mihesuah & Angela Cavender Wilson (2004), Bryan Brayboy (2006), and Sandy Grande's Red Pedagogy (2004) all contributed to a framework that works to understand the complexity of the notions of power that shapes education. Red pedagogy has ties to critical theory but has advanced to encompass various Indigenous principles. Red Pedagogy is historically grounded in local and tribal narratives, intellectually informed by ancestral ways of knowing, politically centered in issues of sovereignty and decolonization, and morally inspired by the deep connections among the Earth, its beings, and the spirit world.

The theory's utility depends partly on people recognizing that it expresses accurately the yearnings they have for a better more authentic way to live (Brookfield, 2005). Without theory, Brookfield says, "it is easy to fall prey to the danger of unjustified self-laceration as we fail to see how many of our private troubles are produced by systematic constraints and contradictions" (2005, p. 5). Embedded as we are in our cultures, histories, and contexts, it is easy for us to slip into the familiar interpretations of familiar events, theory can jar us in a productive way and suggest other ways of working (Brookfield, 2005).

Tierney (1992a) says, "In the case of American higher education we find that colleges and universities reflect the culture of the dominant society. In America, that dominant culture is White" (p. 142). Thus the university is inherently filled with contradictions and conflicts for the Native American learner. In a context where knowledge is valued, epistemology, or "ways of knowing," becomes a contested and privileged space. Additionally, where there is contested space, issues of power are also inherently manifested. These contradictions often lead these students to believe that their

worldview, stemming from Native American culture, religion, traditions, and heritage, are wrong and unvalued and have no place in the world of the mainstream university and thus becomes a reason for early departure. When the distance between teacher and student is collapsed, the student is given power. Sharing social control aids in the construction of mutually respectful relationships and two-way learning paths (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). In essence, the negotiation of power relations between the non-Native teacher and Native adult student is critical if the student is to be engaged fully in the educational process.

Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy

As opposed to traditional researchers who assume that they can discover causal relationships from the manipulation of statistical variables, the critical theorist works toward coming to terms with the multiple understandings that exist within a classroom (Tierney, 1992b). Critical theory in an educational context considers how “knowledge is constructed, how it is valued, and how it is negotiated and how the nature of its construction can liberate or dominate” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 350). Because we live in a world where power and knowledge are continually negotiated, adult educators need to understand how power relations in the wider society are being enacted in the specific locations of adult education (Cervero & Wilson, 2001). The power relations that structure our lives do not stop at the doors of the classroom or the institution that provide adult education. In the other direction, Cervero and Wilson (2001) say that “our educational effort always play a role in maintaining or reconstructing these systems of power” (p. 11).

A critical study of how knowledge is valued/not valued in the classroom looks at the hidden barriers that exist for the Native American adult learner. Implicit in the structure of academe is a system that seeks to exclude some individuals and reward other because of the lack of “cultural capital,” or the accumulation of it (Tierney, 1992b). Thus critical theory seeks to investigate conflict, not only when someone speaks up because of an injustice, but also when there is silence on the part of the voiceless (Tierney, 1992b). As opposed to traditional researchers who assume that they can discover causal relationships from the manipulation of statistical variables, the critical theorist works toward coming to terms with the multiple understandings that exist within a classroom (Tierney, 1992b).

Critical Pedagogy is Henry Giroux’s extension of critical theory to the field of education. Giroux’s work argues against the traditional view of classroom instruction and learning as a neutral or transparent process removed from the juncture of power, history, and social context (McLaren, 1998). Critical pedagogy’s charge is to unravel how schools “reproduce the logic of capital through the ideological and material forms of privilege and domination that structure the lives of students from various class, gender, and ethnic groupings” (Giroux, 1998, p. xxix). Giroux’s work is fundamentally bent on obstructing those prevailing ideological and social practices in schools that are at odds with the goals of preparing all students to be active, critical, and risk-taking citizens (McLaren, 1998).

Indigenizing the Academy

Mihesuah and Wilson’s book, *Indigenizing the Academy* (2004), calls for educators, scholars, and researchers to empower Native students in the face of the

Native/Western way of knowing conflict by working to carve out spaces where Indigenous values and knowledge are respected, to create an environment that supports research and methodologies useful to Indigenous nation building and to compel institutional responsiveness to Indigenous issues, concerns, and communities. This is a steep task as James (2004) says that the structure and procedures of higher education flow from, build on, and reinforce values, norms, identities, and status systems of maintaining the mainstream majority. The academy has not typically valued Native knowledge and Wilson (2004) confirms by claiming that the university often dismisses any knowledge that challenges the status quo and Western ways of knowing and has only accepted knowledge that can be used for colonial purposes.

Thus, Wilson (2004) suggests that efforts made to restore traditional ways would need to be matched by a strong decolonization agenda. A reaffirmation of Indigenous epistemological foundations in contemporary times offers a central form of resistance to the colonial forces that have consistently and methodologically denigrated and silenced them (Wilson, 2004).

Native students need institutions that create the conditions where the students not only celebrate their own histories but also are helped to critically examine how their lives are shaped and molded by society's forces (Tierney, 1992). Wilson (2004) quotes Cree scholar Winona Wheeler, "Decolonization entails developing a critical consciousness about the cause(s) of our oppression, the distortion of history, our collaboration and the degrees to which we have internalized colonialist ideas and practices."

Red Pedagogy

Red pedagogy has roots in critical theory but has advanced to encompass various Indigenous principles. This framework challenges educators of Native Americans to reflect and recognize the controversial intersection of traditional knowledge systems with mainstream Western knowledge system (Begaye, 2004). Red pedagogy seeks to enable education and pedagogy to extend beyond the classroom and institution and allows Indigenous communities to theorize their own lives and that connects to their past histories with their future lives (Marker, 2003 as cited in Smith, 2005). This framework provides inquiry and analysis that exposes, challenges, and disrupts the continuing colonization of Native land and resources and seeks greater political, intellectual, and spiritual sovereignty for Native peoples (Grande, 2004).

While acknowledging the usefulness of critical pedagogy, Sandy Grande stops short of a full endorsement and offers this critique of critical pedagogy/critical theory from Native perspective:

Critical pedagogy is born of a Western tradition that has many components in conflict with Indigenous cosmology and epistemology, including a view of time and progress that is linear and anthropocentrism that puts humans at the center of the universe. Moreover, one of its key informants, Marxism, is prone to promulgating its own oppressive grand narratives by dismissing Indigenous cultures as “primitive” or pre-capitalist entities (Grande, 2004, p. 88).

Further, while critical pedagogy compels students and educators to question how knowledge is related historically, culturally, and institutionally to the processes of

production and consumption, a Red pedagogy compels students to question how (Whitestream) knowledge is related to the processes of colonization (Grande, 2004).

Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education (TribalCrit)

Brayboy (2006) says that TribalCrit endeavors to expose the inconsistencies in structural systems and institutions—like colleges and universities—and make the situation better for Native students. Practitioners with an understanding of TribalCrit take part in the process of self-determination and in making institutions of formal education more understandable for Native students and Native students more understandable to the institutions.

As Brayboy explains, “TribalCrit holds an explanatory power; it is potentially a better theoretical lens through which to describe the lived experience of Tribal peoples” (2006, p. 441). TribalCrit provides a way to analyze data in a way that centers Native ways of knowing and positions it toward the end goal of Tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

Summary

Previous efforts to educate American Indians tend to resemble indoctrination more than teaching because it insists on implanting a particular body of knowledge and a specific view of the world, which often does not correspond to the life experiences of Native people (Deloria, 1990). Educators need to abandon the assumption that teaching focuses primarily on the transmission of predetermined knowledge and skills if

students' non-school experiences, reflecting their community's culture, are to be incorporated into the school program (Cummins, 1992).

First hand knowledge that comes from authentic conversations and experiences can be regarded as the ultimate way for understanding something outside one's own worldview and perspective. According to Badwound (1991), "The most effective way to learn about Tribal culture is to live among and interact with the Tribal community" (p. 19). In this way an instructor can gain valuable insights into Tribal views of what constitutes knowledge, dominant values and beliefs, and issues of particular relevance to the community (Inglebret & Pavel, 2000). These first hand experiences with Native peoples are means for reducing the cultural gap between teacher and student and initiates the process of creating new pathways for trust, empathy, and respect.

Rigney (1999) says that researchers must continue to be active in developing methodologies that privilege Indigenous knowledge, voices, experiences, reflections, and analysis of their social, material, and spiritual conditions (as cited in Smith, 2005). Smith (2005) recommends that research must continue the decolonization project in its search for sovereignty, reclamation of knowledge, language, and culture, and social transformation.

If the university hopes to recruit and retain Native American learners, it must be able to present itself in ways that have instrumental value to Native students; that is, the programs and services must connect with the students' own aspirations and cultural predispositions sufficiently to achieve a comfort level that will make the experience worth enduring (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Only an education program that researches Native issues and trains leaders and community members with contemporary

knowledge and brings the skills of higher education to Native communities will help in supporting Native nation building and continuity (Champagne, 2006). From a university perspective, it makes good sense to broaden the personal and professional perspectives and range of understanding about the complex web of human relationships that make up the higher education enterprise (Tippeconnic Fox, Lowe, & McClellen, 2005).

Chapter 3. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In my home state Native Americans make up roughly 8% of the population, while at the two largest state universities (non-reservation), they are only 1% of the population. I wonder why these universities, situated in the heart of Indian Country, aren't attracting a population ratio that is comparable to the state's general population. Since nearly 90% of Natives are taught by non-Native teachers, I sought a research question that would help me to understand this phenomenon. My research question was: How do Native American adult learners experience cross-cultural pedagogical engagement with their non-Native teachers at a predominantly White university? The sub-questions of this inquiry were: What are the epistemological contradictions, conflicts, or tensions the Native American adult learner faces in the classroom and how do the participants deal with them? From the students' perspective, what ways do non-Native teachers negotiate, accommodate or ignore contradictions in the learning environment? What are the educational goals that the Native American adult student brings to the university and have they changed as a result of any pedagogical relationships they've experienced? How do Native students see non-Native teachers encouraging (or discouraging) the use of their Indian cultural-historic selves into the knowledge-making process? How do the notions of sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonization play out in the educational process?

Ethical/Political Considerations

Just as the exploitation of American Indian land and resources is of value to corporate America, research and publishing is valuable to non-Indian scholars.

As a result of racism, greed, and distorted perceptions of Native realities, Indian culture as an economic commodity has been exploited by the dominant society with considerable damage to Indian people. Tribal people need to safeguard the borders of their cultural domains against research and publishing incursions.

(AISES as cited in Swisher, 2004, p. 6)

It is important that I address some of the ethical and political considerations up front and directly instead of slipping them in at the end. This is done in an attempt to be transparent about my positionality and as a way to self-monitor my motives for writing about Indian education to ensure that they do not involve writing for power and authority. Instead my motive includes focus on writing about a topic that has not found its way into mainstream. As Swisher (1998) says writing about Indian education “must focus on what is missing from the writings heretofore, i.e., an understanding of the issues of sovereignty and self-determination that distinguish American Indians...as Indigenous people of this country from other Americans” (p. 197).

Additionally, research is often assumed to be beneficial simply because it is framed as research; its benefits are regarded as “self-evident” because the intentions of the researcher are “good” (Smith, 2005). On the contrary, for Native people and other Indigenous nations, the “researcher as expert” representation of who they are is an experience Indigenous communities associate with colonialism and racism, with inequality and injustice (Smith, 2005).

I do not subscribe to a naïve realist view of qualitative research, where the researcher innocently and objectively claims to simply “give voice” to the participants of the study. This assumption has proved problematic in study after study, especially in

studies that involve Native American participants. As Fine (2002) argues even a “giving voice” approach involves the researcher’s purposeful selection of pieces of narrative to be used to strengthen the argument (Braun & Clark, 2006). As such, in this study I am co-constructing the ‘reality’ on the basis of my interpretations of data with the reflective help of participants who provided the data in the study (Patton, 2002).

Smith (2005) says that like schooling, research, once the tool of colonization and oppression, is very gradually coming to be seen as a potential means to reclaim agency through languages, histories, and knowledge to find solutions to the negative impacts of colonialism and to give voice to Native ways of knowing. Qualitative research can be a tool for Indigenous communities because it seems to be able to wage the battle of representation (Fine, 2000); and helps to situate, contextualize, and create space for decolonization (Tierney, 1992).

It should be noted that the terms Native American, American Indian, Native, and Indian apply broadly to the many traditional and tribally oriented groups of people who are identified with a specific place or region and whose cultural traditions continue to reflect an inherent environmental orientation and sense of sacred ecology (Cajete, 1997). Other terms such as First Nations, Indigenous, and Tribal were also used by various authors who were cited in this research. All the terms mentioned will be capitalized to denote greater emphasis and respect.

Finally, although many of the core traditional values permeate the lives of Native Americans across Tribal groups, Native Americans are not a completely homogeneous group, differing greatly in their level of acceptance of and commitment to specific tribal values, beliefs and practices through a variance of customs, language, and family

structure (Garret & Pichette, 2000). Grande (2004) articulates it nicely when she says that while Indigenous people resist the kind of essentialism that recognizes only one way of being, they also work to retain a vast constellation of distinct traditions that serve as the defining characteristics of Tribal life. Further, there is no such thing as a monolithic American Indian entity; Tribes and American Indian nations are bewildering in their diversity (Horse, 2005). Professionals must keep in mind that there are distinct differences among Tribal affiliations, Tribal cultures, senses of Native American identity, and experiential backgrounds (including whether someone is from a reservation, non-reservation rural, or urban environment) that are important to consider when working with Native American people (McClellan & Tippeconnic Fox, 2005). One might say there are as many epistemologies as American Indian tribes (Cajete, 2005). Thus with officially 562 federally recognized tribes, it is dangerous to make broad generalizations when regarding Native peoples.

Overview of Methodology—Approach and Rationale

Teachers generally care about their students and subject matter. Educational research employing phenomenology as the methodology challenges teachers to extend beyond simply ‘caring for students or subject matter,’ and provides a means by which one can thoughtfully do so (Madjar & Walton, 1999). Munhall (1999) says that in order to be ‘authentically present’ to a student, teachers need to take an open stance and recognize that they do not know the other person and his or her subjective world (as cited in Madjar & Walton, 1999). For instructors who think about changing, persisting, or

reflecting upon pedagogy, a phenomenological sensitivity to the learner's lived experience can be very useful.

Van Manen (2003) concludes that pedagogy requires a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomena of the lifeworld in order to see the educational significance of situation and relations of adult learners. As a methodology, phenomenology attempts to extract the richness of an individual's experience. Mary Hermes' chapter (1999) titled "Towards a First Nations' Methodology" calls for a research emphasis that shifts away from "research for research's sake" (knowledge in the abstract) and to research that serves a specific purpose or need of the community within which it is situated. This purpose is realized in my everyday practical concerns as teacher, or a teacher of teachers. As an educator my charge is to act responsibly and responsively in the relations with my students (van Manen, 2003).

Qualitative methods are especially useful in "describing multidimensional, complex interpersonal interactions where the limited focus of quantitative measures would be inadequate" (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 243). Phenomenological questions are meaning questions that may potentially cause teachers to act more thoughtfully, more tactfully, and more responsively with regards to cross-cultural pedagogy and relationship. Knowledge that is a result of phenomenological inquiry becomes practically relevant in its possibilities of changing the manner in which a teacher engages/teaches/communicates with a Native American student—this knowledge transforms our understanding, it affects us, and leads to more thoughtful pedagogy (Van der Zalm & Bergum, 2000).

Phenomenology

I used a methodological approach that helped me to “really understand” how adult Native students experience education at one of my home state’s largest universities. Since the research methodology was determined, in part, by the nature of the research questions (Krathwohl, 1998), I chose phenomenology because, according to taxonomies of qualitative research methods (van Manen, 2003), phenomenology clearly fit with my curiosity about the lived experience of the participants.

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences (van Manen, 2003, p. 9) in a way that is systematic, reflective, and consensually validated. This translated into an approach of studying the problem that included entering the field of perception of participants; seeing how they experience, live and display the phenomenon; and looking for the meaning of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenology asks the question, “What is this experience like?” or in the case of this study “What is it like to be a Native American adult learner in the classroom of a non-Native teacher?”

However, I was not just interested in the subjective experiences of the participants for the sake of being able to report on how something was seen from their particular view, perspective, or vantage point. Rather, the aim was to collect examples of possible experiences in order to reflect on the meanings of those lived experiences (van Manen, 2002). The phenomenological approach constituted a determined attempt to enrich the world of our experience by bringing out neglected aspects of this experience (Spiegelberg, 1982). It was a dialogic-dialectic interpretation of the research data, which

reflected on the parts (themes) and moved to the meaning of the whole in relation to the respective theory (Ray, 1994).

While in no way advocating that Western peoples speak and act for Indigenous peoples, Semali & Kincheloe (1999) suggest that it is important to have informed allies outside their local communities. Through a study like this one, it may be possible to articulate the shared nature of the lived experiences through a description of feelings, thoughts, ideas, and various events, even across cultures. I also believe that the lived human experience is more complex than any singular description can depict. Rossman and Rallis (2003) remind not to seek a single causal explanation, prediction, or generalizations, but rather to tell a richly detailed story that respects these contexts and connect participants, events, themes, experiences, or discourses to larger issues or theories (p. 289). Van Manen continues, “Phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather is offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world” (2003, p.9).

The results of phenomenological inquiry are descriptive and interpretive in nature depicting multiple possible experiences. All phenomenological descriptions can be challenged by other phenomenological descriptions, as the complex lifeworld does not remain static. As a result, a full explanation of the world is not possible; nor it is possible to obtain causal certainty or the production of law-like statements (van Manan, 2003).

Phenomenology’s discovery of knowledge, or revealing of meaning, is found in sharing common meaning of mutual history, culture and language of the world as it is lived (Van der Zalm & Bergum, 2000). The reader of the report should come away with

the feeling that “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989). Phenomenological descriptions are validated by mutual recognition given by the “phenomenological nod” which says ‘yes, that is an experience I could have’ (Van der Zalm & Bergum, 2000).

Phenomenology offers a means of attending to human experiences that lie at the heart of teaching, and the possibility of understanding such experiences in a way that can change how we teach. To change things, however, we need to understand our own and our students’ “being-in-the-world” in a way that is both deep, and true to individual experience (Madjar & Walton, 1999).

Phenomenology’s orientation to concrete experience and to persons in relationship with others, to beliefs and practices, and to the intent to understand the meaning on one’s personal experience holds particular appeal for educators engaging across cultures (Van der Zalm & Bergum, 2000). Although interpretive inquiry, such as hermeneutic phenomenology, does not offer prescriptions for actions in the teaching-learning relationship, it does influence thoughtful reflective attentive practice by its revealing of the meanings of human experience (Van der Zalm & Bergum, 2000). Good description and interpretation takes the reader into the center of the experience. A phenomenological approach to adult education opens up new directions for research and uncovers new layers of clarity in perception, conceptions, action, and practices (Stanage, 1987).

Van Manen (2003) says that phenomenology does not solve problems—it does not produce the “effective procedures,” “sequential steps,” “winning strategies,” or correct solutions or knowledge that gets results. I think non-Native researchers have

provided enough “answers” in the past which have included assimilation strategies, boarding and labor schools, resource exploitation, abandoned treaties, relocation/termination legislation, No Child Left Behind, and a litany of others. Instead of proving more answers, I think educators need to think differently about the questions we are asking and do so in a way that privileges the voice and experiences of the Native American adult learner.

Role of Theory

In general, the role of theory in phenomenology is controversial (Ray, 1994) or is even considered antithetical to phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). However, I tend to agree with Lincoln and Guba (1985) that the recognition of the ideological nature of inquiry leads inescapably to the conclusion that inquiry always—repeat, always—serves some social agenda. Without admission that inquiry is value-bounded, “There is no hope of dealing with the influence of values” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 185-86). While trying to remain true to phenomenological openness, it is unrealistic to assume that theoretical perspectives will not play a role in the design, data collection, or analysis. It is important to note that the theoretical framework and methodology matched what I wanted to know, and that I acknowledge and recognize them as decisions (Braun & Clark, 2006). I admit that my values did play a significant part in this inquiry. I did my best to expose and explicate them and took them into account to whatever extent I could (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 186).

Researcher Identity

I have used William Tierney's work frequently, as he used critical theory to address the university's non-responsiveness to Native American students' issues. Despite really liking his work, there is one area in which I find dissonance. In his book, *Official Encouragement, Institutional Discouragement* (1992) he purposely omits a preface, acknowledgement section and does not use a first person reference until the appendix (pp. 170-171). Tierney's goal was to "lessen the author's explicit role within the narrative." This is where I take issue with Tierney's assumption. Although this study was "not about me, the author," the position of a neutral, objective authorship seems unattainable. I think it is important to state, up front, my positionality, my background, my experiences, and my theoretical framework as a way of situating this study for those who choose to read it. For as Lincoln and Guba (1985) said, "to be openly ideological seems to be preferable to becoming covertly ideological" (p. 185). Choi (2007) continued, "I want to turn to the experiences of the participants as they lived them and, at the same time, I let my understandings, beliefs, biases, presuppositions, and theoretic understandings work freely to facilitate reflection" (p. 52). My goal was to reflectively articulate those biases to myself and to the readers of the report.

Trustworthiness

Often times the trustworthiness section is toward the end of the methodology section almost as an afterthought. I believe it should be mentioned near the beginning. I want to 'frontload' trustworthiness and credibility into my study in an attempt to keep

these important issues at the forefront of my research methods. I have found that many principles of trustworthiness are actually enmeshed within the methods. So instead of retroactively examining trustworthiness, I will briefly mention it here so readers will recognize these principles when they are manifested in the rest of the methods section.

Lincoln and Guba's book *Naturalistic Inquiry* (1985) proposed trustworthiness by using the following question: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audience (including self) that the findings are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (p. 290). Patton (2002) weighed in on the issue of trustworthiness describing it as a way of enhancing the quality of qualitative research by using rigorous and systematic data collection procedures.

I used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notion of trustworthiness as a benchmark for my study. Trustworthiness is embodied in credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which are the naturalist's equivalents to internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

Trustworthiness is established through prolonged engagement with the participants. One way I was able to establish trustworthiness was to spend time getting to know the participants and other people they knew. I was able to spend ample time at the Native American Cultural Center near campus. This revamped house adjacent to campus was the informal social place for many Natives within the campus and community. It was a comfortable place with several amenities: office spaces, couches and big screen TV, a computer lab and other technology, a kitchen and dining area, a study area, and a resource center with books, magazines, journals, and videos that pertain to Native issues. Elton, the director of the center, was extremely generous and hospitable to me. He

offered me desk space and resources to help my study. Elton and I were both from the same part of the state, and having that commonality helped to establish a positive relationship. On several occasions he invited me for coffee, and we just talked informally about people we knew, jobs we each previously held, and other interesting items. Elton is known for his sense of humor, and I got a taste of that during our visits.

Another way I tried to establish trustworthiness was by being present at different functions. I was lucky that during my time at UGP, the law school hosted an “Indian Law Symposium,” which was a very informative daylong event. In addition, I attended and supported the Native Student Association’s chili feed fundraiser. I bid on and won some books in the accompanying silent auction as well. On Inauguration Day, the Center hosted a “viewing party,” and I spent several hours watching the coverage of President Obama’s inauguration with some students and staff of UGP. This was a time to talk about politics and other things and just hang out.

An interesting quandary happened during my time in Plainsview, which dealt with trustworthiness. One of the most respected local newspaper reporters in the area, and good friend of mine, contacted me about doing a feature story on me and what I was doing with my research. I reluctantly agreed to do the interview and photo shoot. However, the day before the article was to run, I asked the reporter to pull the story. I was sure that my reporter friend was not happy with me, but my sense was that the angle of the story was going to glorify me as the “local boy who went off to the big university and is doing well” type of story—the kind of story a hometown mainstream audience wants to hear. I really felt this would overshadow the real issue at hand and mark me, in the eyes of local Native Americans and the participants of the study who may read the newspaper,

as the type of White, arrogant researcher who was doing this only for selfish personal interests—reminiscent of the early colonizing researchers. If I had felt that the article would have brought awareness to the issues that Native American adult learners face, I may have agreed to let the story run, but that was not the angle I thought the reporter was going after. Establishing trust is not always about what you do, but sometimes what you do not do.

Another issue of trustworthiness that I addressed was accountability. Some of the students in this study had participated in another qualitative study approximately two years earlier. Several mentioned that after the interviews were over, they never really heard the results and they wondered whatever became of the study. Hearing this, I made a decision to host a barbecue get-together in June for the participants and their families. At this time I will present the results, provide directions where to access the study in its entirety, be available to answer any questions and most importantly just hang out with the participants and visit with them. I wanted them to know I am accountable and that I am willing to share my results and interpretations and also listen to further feedback from them.

A way that I confirmed the credibility of my study's findings was to see whether the participants recognize the findings to be true to their experiences. Lincoln and Guba have called this activity "member checking" (1985, p. 314). Member checking allows the participants to argue, extend, confirm, or re-examine certain data or findings. During the second round of interviews, I reviewed what we talked about in the first interview in an attempt to seek clarity or confirmation of my thoughts and ideas. Sometimes I was right on and sometimes the participants helped me to better understand what they had said and

meant. After I transcribed all of the interviews, I e-mailed each participant a copy of the transcriptions from both interviews and gave them the opportunity to review, revise, delete or add anything from the transcriptions.

Next I visited with my Native friend Reynold about some of the findings of my study. I then forwarded a part of my analysis to Dr. John Tippeconnic, Director of the American Indian Leadership Program at Penn State. He said that he thought many of the experiences I mentioned are common for many Native higher education students, especially for students who have a strong background and grounding in their Tribal cultures/languages/histories. He also said that he often hears these things orally from individuals.

The notion of triangulation was important to this study. “Triangulation of sources” (Patton, 2002, p. 556) is a method that uses multiple sources of data to paint the picture that is under investigation. This ensures that I have not just studied a fraction of the complex phenomenon that is under investigation (Rossman and Rallis, 2003).

Credibility of the researcher is dependent on a researcher’s “training, experience, track record, status, and presentation of self” (Patton, 2002, p. 552). Peer review was also a strategy I used that assures credibility. Peer review is the process of ascertaining feedback on data collection and analysis of findings from colleagues, my advisor, and committee members. I met with my advisor on a weekly basis, and via phone when I was in the field. I also consulted with some of my colleagues, Edith and Will, at various times throughout the study, including phone visits while I was in the Great Plains. Additionally, I met with various committee members on occasion for research and analysis advice and insight.

Data Collection

Site Selection

“Look what this state is doing to her Indians, you know. They show in a glowing picture. Those of us who live within the state really know the spirit of this state’s non-Indian world. It’s not a true reconciliation. They won’t recognize our Treaty Rights. They won’t recognize our jurisdiction.” --Earl Bordeaux, Tribal councilmember (Fowler, 2007, p. 211)

I believe that pedagogy should be tied to place. Inhabitants of a place should understand the socio-cultural and historic significance of that place. Further, David Orr (1992) said that knowledge of a place—where you are and where you come from—is intertwined with knowledge of who you are. My home’s Indian population is an important part of that place. Unfortunately, Native Americans have been a silenced population, often forgotten and left out of significant social and political circles, spurned to nine reservations that are generally out of the consciousness of the mainstream of the state.

The University of the Great Plains is a public university situated in the ‘heart of Indian Country’ and has a responsibility to be responsive to the state’s Native American population. While the Native student population hovers just under a meager 1% at UGP and the four-year retention rate is between 5-10% for these Native students, questions remain why Native students at the University of the Great Plains are not coming and staying. My interest lies in studying classrooms and pedagogical relationships as

inevitable intersections and pivotal portals for Native students. This seems to be an important relationship and I think it deserves critical examination.

Population, Sample, and Unit of Analysis

Phenomenological studies describe the meaning of a small number of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Dukes (1984) and Riemen (1986) recommended no more than 10 participants in a phenomenological study (as cited in Creswell, 1998). I used purposeful sampling (criterion sampling) and focused on the experiences of nine individuals. The target population was self-identified Native American adult students enrolled at the University of the Great Plains (UGP), a predominantly White midwestern university. The units of analysis were Native American students over the age of 23 who were attending UGP. Several key people at UGP helped me identify a list of potential candidates for this project. This study included both full-time and part-time students, and both undergraduate and graduate students. There were five women and four men in the study representing eight different tribal affiliations. I verbally recruited four participants when I met them at the Cultural Center. A friend of mine who works at the university childcare center recruited three participants, and two participants saw one of my flyers posted around campus and called me.

During the initial visit with each participant I outlined the details of my study and gave them time to ask any questions. I consented them using the Penn State Office of Research Protection approved consent form prior to the first interview. I informed them that the conversations would be recorded digitally and stored on my password-protected computer. Additionally, they were informed that their identity would remain confidential

and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I gave them a copy of the consent form at the start of the second interview. Participants received either a \$10 gift certificate to a local restaurant or \$10 cash, their choice, for every interview they granted. See Appendix A for a copy of the consent form.

I conducted a pilot study approximately six months prior to this study. Of the three students in the pilot study, one student, Mato, was available to also participate in this study. Although I did not use any data from the pilot study in this dissertation, the pilot study provided an opportunity to validate the interview protocol including the interview guide questions to determine the participants' potential reactions to the questions as they were worded. Findings from the pilot study helped me refine the questions to determine if they were worded in a way that was both culturally sensitive and clear in terms of what I was asking.

In-depth Interviewing

The primary means for collecting data was through in-depth interviewing grounded in the theoretical genre of phenomenology (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). According to Polkinghorne (1989), phenomenological research provides a deeper and clearer understanding of what it is like for someone to experience something, allowing someone else to be more sensitive and appreciative of those involved in the experience. In phenomenological interviewing, according to Kvale (1996), the researcher asks short, descriptive questions that hopefully lead to long, detailed descriptions of the experience being studied. This method of in-depth interviewing provided an understanding of the

meaning individuals attached to the experiences that emerged from their day-to-day interaction with their world.

The questions in my semi-structured interview focused on the experiences of the participants. Polkinghorne (1989) suggested questions like, “What did you experience?” or, “What was it like for you?” I asked questions that allowed participants to describe what was it like for them to be in a pedagogical relationship with a non-Native instructor with respect to issues such as respect, understanding, cultural empathy, and appreciation. The contexts of interest were inside the classroom, within individual meetings with the instructor, or other locations/situations. The discussions sometimes led to descriptions of occurrences outside of the classroom, like for instance, at home or in the local community or talking about issues that occurred at the department or institutional level. I asked questions that probed how the participant gave meaning to class discussions, assignments, or general assumptions of the education process. The interview guide is located in Appendix B of this dissertation.

The interviews borrowed from Seidman’s (1998) approach, which called for iterative interviews for the phenomenological data-gathering process:

- Interview 1—the focused life history/the details of experience.
- Interview 2—reflection on the meaning of the details of the experience.
- Interview 3—follow-up, if necessary.

Interviews lasted in length from 45 – 75 minutes each. Loosely, one-third of these semi-structured, face-to-face interviews took place at the Native American Culture Center on campus, a location that was familiar, convenient, and comfortable for some of these participants. Some of the interviews took place in the student’s departmental

building (the medical school, the education building, etc.), and a couple of interviews took place at a location that was convenient (a local coffee shop or the university library).

I wanted to avoid the “researcher/researched” dichotomy if at all possible, and instead sought a reflective discussion with the participant on the phenomenon at hand. However, to ensure that the interview stayed somewhat “on task” I used a semi-structured interview guide with the intent of systematically and comprehensively delineating the issues to be explored in advance. At various times in the interviews my thoughts, feelings, and personal stories surfaced, although my goal was to keep them to a minimum, as I was mainly interested in the participant’s perspective. Comments I made served the purpose of making the conversation as natural as possible in an attempt to access how the participant made meaning of the phenomenon. Because of the cross-cultural nature of this research, I asked a lot of follow-up and clarifying questions to make sure I understood the participant’s reaction. For instance, during an interview Anna talked about how she is relearning “traditional dancing,” and I followed up by asking her if this dancing was similar to “jingle dancing,” a powwow dance I was more familiar with. Additionally, I would frequently use the phrase, “tell me more” in an attempt to allow the participants to extend their responses if they wanted.

I arrived on the UGP campus on December 3rd. Since I was very familiar with the campus, I was able to locate buildings, places, and people relatively easy. I visited with as many people as I could, both Native and non-Native, to try to establish connections and set up informal meeting times for coffee or lunch. I had several close acquaintances from previous professional experiences at UGP and I wanted to make sure they knew I was on campus and what my research was about. For instance, I used to play basketball

with Robert, who now is one of the directors for student services at UGP. He was very interested in my study, as one of his responsibilities is to recruit Native students. He told me that he was on a couple of committees that dealt with the recruitment of Native students and invited me to attend the next meeting. Also a college friend, Marge, worked at the university child care center and helped recruit some of the participants. She also let me use her office when I needed a place for interviews.

The participants were very helpful and willing to accommodate me in finding a time to do the first interview in the short time before the end of the semester. I conducted seven first round interviews prior to the holiday break. I used the time during the break to transcribe the first round interviews and build questions for the second round of interviews. When classes resumed in January, I finished up the final two first round interviews and moved to the second interview. During the second interview I reviewed some of the key ideas from the first interview, asked any questions that were not addressed in the first interview, and clarified any questions that I encountered during the transcription and coding of the first interviews. The interviews ended when I felt that the participants had exhausted their descriptions of what it was like to be in a pedagogical relationship with a non-Native teacher. I knew I was reaching “saturation” when the participants would give me a look and reaction as if they were saying, “Haven’t we already talked about this?” or “I thought I answered this question already?” I concluded all of the interviews with the following types of questions: Is there anything else that you would like to talk about or that you think I missed? Are there any questions that you think I should have asked? Are there any questions or unfinished thoughts from earlier that you would like to come back to?

After all of the interviews were completed and transcribed, I e-mailed each participant verbatim copies of their interviews to review and make any revisions, additions or deletions and to ask for clarification, verification, and feedback. Finally, the participants were again encouraged to call or e-mail me at any time if they had any questions, concerns, or comments.

Researcher's Journal and Field Notes

During my time in the field, I stayed with my wife's parents in a town that was 20 miles from Plainsview, the home of UGP. It was often during the drive home, after a day in the field, when I reflected upon the interviews. I used my digital recorder and made voice memos. This allowed the opportunity to verbalize my thoughts, reactions, and reflections from the interviews of the day. At other times, sometimes in the evening or in between interviews while I was at the UGP library, I took written notes. The intent of these various forms of notes, both the written and digital recordings of my voice, were to document the reflections regarding how I felt during the interview, the atmosphere of the interview, the participants' interest in the study, and/or whether the questions seemed to resonate. This reflexive journaling was an introspective journal that displayed my mental processes, philosophical position, and basis of decisions about the inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Deciding how and in what ways my personal experiences would be introduced into the study (Creswell, 1998) were an important part of this inquiry and this journal was a place where I fleshed out some of these issues.

Document analysis

I analyzed documents and websites that were pertinent to the study. For example, I found that the local newspaper had interviewed Mato, a participant in my study, after he had recently received a national scholarship. This story provided a means of triangulation for this study, as he was asked about his experiences at the university. Another story in the university newspaper talked about the challenges that the personnel in the UGP Diversity Office face as they work to recruit and retain Native students. Additionally, I looked at the various websites that were concerned with Native issues at UGP. It was interesting to see that Rob, another participant in my study, was in a leadership position for the Native student association and that Tricia was a graduate assistant for the Cultural Center. These tidbits and others helped me formulate discussion and person-specific questions. Various websites also helped me to become oriented with the faculty and staff in the Department of American Indian Studies (A.I.S.). I also paid close attention to the notice (bulletin) boards in the Cultural Center and the floor of the Department of A.I.S. to look for events and people that may have been relevant to my study.

Data Analysis Methods

On paper, an inquiry's analysis looks like a linear process, occurring after the data has been collected. I agree with Merriam (2002), however, that data analysis in qualitative research actually begins with data collection. Nonetheless, a great deal of the analytic work that I did was after the data was transformed into text, where it was organized and reorganized systematically or semi-systematically.

Writing was an integral part of analysis, not something that took place at the end, as it does with statistical analysis. Anticipating this, I wrote from the very start, jotting down ideas and potential coding schemes, and continuing right through the entire coding/analysis process (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Polkinghorne (1989) said the goal of phenomenology is to reveal and unravel the structures and interrelationships of the phenomenon under inspection. Phenomenological analysis is principally concerned with understanding how the everyday, intersubjective world (the lifeworld) is constituted. Thus, phenomenological analysis required that I approach the texts with an open mind, seeking meaning and structures that emerge. My goal was to extract from the data an accurate, essential description of the contents and the structural relationship that coheres the elements into a unified experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). In other words, I sought to make sense of this experience—to inquire what it meant to be an adult Native student in this particular place.

Phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people (Patton, 2002). In order to do this, I tried to be “deliberately naive” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Additionally, my analysis involved a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that I was analyzing, and the analysis of the data I was seeking to produce (Braun & Clark, 2006).

I think being able to understand and deal with ‘analytic tension’ was crucial to my inquiry. I favored Holstein and Gubrium’s (2005) term, “analytic bracketing,” which is a back and forth strategy of conscious bracketing, knowing when and how to bracket. More important than merely bracketing, it is the “knowledge of the principal of bracketing”

(Holstein & Gubrium, 2005, p. 497) that is important. To me, this meant being able to distinguish when the researcher's subjective thoughts, feelings, and preferences may tempt a premature or unreflective interpretation of a situation preventing an understanding of the actual lived experience itself.

For instance, when I reviewed Rob's first interview transcript and I asked the question "What advice would you give to non-Native teachers in order be more responsive to your needs?" Rob's response, "Nothing, because I am fine with all of my instructors," baffled me. His response did not match what the literature said about Native Americans' experiences at the university. It was at this point that I had to bracket my assumptions that I had gleaned from the literature and return to Rob's statement, in its context. In other words, I had to set aside my preconceived notions to best understand Rob's experience. So, I went back to the digital recordings and re-listened to the interview and tried to look for other interpretations of his statement, while I tried to keep my presumptions in check for the time being. In the end, Rob's statement contributed to the theme that highlights the inherent complexity of being a Native adult student, one that opposes an essentialized version of what a Native student does at the university.

Horizontalization of Textural Descriptions

After receiving permission from the participants, all interviews were digitally recorded, assuring confidentiality to the participants. I transcribed all of the interviews myself. Transcription is often thought of as tedious, frustrating, and monotonous but can be an excellent way of deeply orienting oneself with the data. Bird (2005) even called this process a "key phase of data analysis within the qualitative methodology" (as cited in

Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 87). I used a voice recognition program called *Dictate* to aid in this process. I listened to the digital recording of each interview, phrase by phrase, in the headphones and repeated each phrase into the microphone headset. The program then transcribed my voice into text in a Word document. To ensure accuracy, I re-listened to each interview and double-checked the program's preciseness. The process of repeating the participants' words, in some small way, seemed symbolic to me. As I searched for meaning in these words, the fact that I had to think about them and verbalize them aloud, may have contributed to the analysis, as I constantly wondered what it was like to be a Native American adult learner at UGP.

I felt that I had a good grasp of the interview data partly because I did all of the transcription work myself and partly because I went over the data several times. Taking a cue from Braun and Clark (2006), I focused on reading the data in an 'active way' for the purpose of getting a feeling for the depth and breadth of the content.

The process of horizontalization included working through the data systematically, giving full attention to each data item and identifying interesting aspects that may form repeated patterns. Patton (2002) described this process by saying "the data are spread out for examination" (p.486). The interesting aspects, verbatim examples known as textural descriptions of an experience, were abstractions of the experience that provided content and illustration (Patton, 2002).

It was during this phase that I generated a listing of what was interesting about the data and signified these meaning units by using codes. I printed a hard copy of all the interview transcripts and put them in a three-ring binder. I carried this binder everywhere and whenever I had time, I did some coding. On the interview transcripts, I highlighted or

underlined units of discourse, assigned each an initial code, and wrote it in the margin. A unit of discourse is a word, phrase, sentence, or even paragraph that contains meaning. For example, during an interview Mato said, “I have a Nation waiting for me.” I initially coded this statement as “anticipating returning home.”

I did not limit individual extracts of data to only one code, and instead I was open to using multiple codes per data extract. Returning to Mato’s statement of “I have a Nation waiting for me,” on a different day when I looked at the data, I decided to also code this as “the concept of Native Nationhood.” During these codings and re-codings, I tried to allow my mind to go back and forth between ‘letting the data emerge’ and using the literature I reviewed, including the theoretical framework in addition to my personal experiences and friendships with Native students who have had similar experiences. In other words, I wanted to turn to the participants’ lived experiences with a sense of openness while at the same time allowing my understandings, beliefs, biases, presuppositions, and theories work freely to facilitate reflection (Choi, 2007). When I re-coded Mato’s statement, I had the feeling that his use of the word ‘Nation’ was intentional and had a deeper meaning; thus it deserved a second concurrent code.

Thematizing—the Structures of the Experience

In order to come to grips with the structure, or meaning, of the text, it was helpful to think of the phenomenon described in terms of themes (van Manen, 2003). Phenomenological themes may be understood as structures of experience (van Manen, 2003); and they capture something important about the data in relation to the research

question, and represent some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The analytical process of thematizing began as I started to look for patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). This process actually started during the data collection and initial ideas were documented in my field notes and research journal.

Thematizing involved clustering the invariant constituents of the data of the experience into a thematic label. This process required a shift from the participant's original language given in the raw data to the thematic descriptions in my words (Polkinghorne, 1989). As an example, several participants talked about the challenges associated with going home. Lucy mentioned it was like "crabs in a bucket," Mato said it "felt risky," and Tricia talked about the "drama of going home." These statements were coded as "tough to come home," which were eventually included in the "going home" sub-theme.

Polkinghorne (1989) explained that this process is not accomplished by technical procedure as it is in quantitative analysis, such as the transformation of a group of raw scores into standard deviation and mean scores, but rather requires the linguistic capacity to understand the meaning of statements (p. 52). Van Manen 'ups the ante' and suggested that making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery, or disclosure—grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of "seeing" meaning.

At this point, I copied all of the codes I had written in the margins into a Microsoft Word document and organized them in various ways. I created approximately 15 sub-themes. Examples of these sub-themes were: escaping stereotypes, good teachers, connections, self-determination/sovereignty, and others. Next I went back to the interview data and cut/pasted the units of discourse that corresponded with each sub-theme into a Microsoft Word notebook application. I found the Word “notebook” feature was more efficient to use than just a typical Word document. Some of these sub-themes were split further into multiple sub-themes, some were renamed, and others were dismantled.

These invariant constituents point to the unique qualities of an experience that emerge (Moustakas, 1994). Certain data extracts and their corresponding sub-themes, for instance, led me to think about things that shaped how these students experienced life at the university. Returning to the “going home” sub-theme, I recalled that the literature referred to this as ‘ways of knowing’ and was frequently tied to home and family. This was confirmed by some of my personal relationships and acquaintances along with the interview data. The connections between home, way of knowing, and the student’s university education eventually transpired into a theme titled, “Ways of Knowing for Native Adult Students are Indispensable to Self-education and Self-determination.” To see an example of my thematic organization of clustered invariant constituents, please refer to Appendix C.

Thematizing was one of the most challenging parts of the analysis for me. Rossman (2003) said that thematizing demands a “heightened awareness of the data, a focused attention to those data, and an openness to the subtle, tacit undercurrents of social

life.” Thematizing, like coding, should not be thought of as a “one shot” technique. As I spent time with the data, I often clustered and re-clustered the data as a way to expand versions of themes. At different points in the analysis, I created at least four different sets of themes, ultimately deciding on the finalized set of themes because they seemed like the best marriage of the experiences of the participants, the literature/theoretical framework, and my personal history and experiences with Native peoples.

Textural-structural Synthesis

The textural-structural synthesis integrated the textural and structural descriptions into an account of the ranges of experiences representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). My goal was to create an integrated composite of the textural and structural descriptions that provided sufficient evidence of the themes within the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Textural descriptions need to be embedded with the structural analysis in a way that compellingly tells the story beyond the mere description of the data and ultimately makes an argument in relation to my research question.

The final step was to validate the analysis by checking with the participants to see if they agreed, extended, or disputed my judgments of what was important and interesting (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). There was an attempt made to establish equality between the researcher (myself) and the participant by sharing interpretations and asking for the participant’s input to the interpretations and sharing the final manuscript. Polkinghorne (1989) said that the researcher is to return to the subject and ask, “How do my descriptive results compare with your experiences?” and “Have any aspects of your experience been omitted?” (p. 53).

The goal of my analysis was to find common themes in the written descriptions and to find language that captures these themes. In the end, the analysis sought to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience for a group of people (Patton, 2002) experiencing the phenomenon.

It is interesting to note the tendency of many Native Americans in the company of fellow in-group members to refer to each other as Indian or Native whereas in the company of “outsiders,” there is a tendency to refer to themselves as Native American and to expect non-Indians to do the same out of respect (Garret & Pichette, 2000). I capitalized the words Native American, Indigenous, Tribal, Indian, Native, etc. throughout this dissertation as a way of denoting respect for the various Tribal peoples and nations.

Chapter 4. INTRODUCTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

This chapter will introduce the nine adult students who participated in my study. Their past experiences and background set the context for who they are today. Each participant had a unique personal story that they related to me. This brief introduction is included as a preface to the research findings. Pseudonyms have been used in place of the participants' real names to ensure confidentiality and to protect their identities. Additionally, the names of family members, professors, staff, friends, and other students along with various details (Tribal affiliations, academic majors, and locations) were altered for the same purpose. The participants are presented in random order.

Profiles of the Participants

The nine participants in my study were all self-identified Native Americans representing eight different Tribal nations. The ages of these adult learners ranged from 23 to 42. Five women and four men participated. Some of the students were working on an undergraduate degree and some were in graduate school. This was the first experience in college for a couple of the students, while others had previously attended college. No two students in this study were currently in the same academic program.

Anna

"I'm just in love with medicine. It is ridiculously and insanely difficult but I'm just baffled at how the body works, and that it is just amazing."

Anna worked as a waitress for ten years before coming to the university. She had always thought about a career in medicine but did not think she was smart enough to do

it. It was not until she discovered that a learning disability was impeding her ability to learn, that she realized she was not, as she said, ‘stupid.’ As she came to understand her disability, she realized that she did have the capacity and the intelligence to tackle the program requirements for this career. Of the 140 students that applied for the program, Anna was one of the 50 that were accepted. She is the only Native adult learner in this class.

At the university, she works as a mentor with a program designed to assist Native American students in their first year at the university. She knows that the four-year retention rate at UGP has hovered between five and 10 percent in the last decade, and she helps students with the “culture shock” of coming from the reservation to the university. Anna understands that at UPG there are a number of cultural contradictions for these students in terms of food, spirituality, academics, and lifestyle, and works with these students so they are able to survive the first year.

Anna described herself as outgoing and joked that she is blessed with “the curse of Native humor.” She credited her grandmother as being ‘the rock’ in her life. She is a member of a Northern Great Plains tribe but has not lived on the reservation for a number of years.

Matthew

“The fact that I am as old as I am coming into the university, I was able to be more serious about it.”

Matthew looks the part of a boxer. During both of our visits he donned Adidas sweats and a dark stocking cap that hovered just above the frames of his glasses.

Matthew's round face and broad shoulders seemed to enhance his boxer's image. Matthew grew up in a family of boxers and said that he knew how to throw a punch before most of the kids in his neighborhood knew how to go to the bathroom. It was a good thing for the kids in his neighborhood that Matthew was softhearted, not prone to losing his temper, and would rather walk away than fight anyone. Despite describing himself as skinny, poor, small, and Native, his boxing skills seemed to level the playing field as a kid. He said that no one teased him about being Native, no one teased him because his family did not have very much money. He earned respect because if someone said something negative, he could shut them up.

Nowadays, Matthew is a family man and is pursuing a degree in the College of Media Arts but brings the focus of a boxer to his academic work. He said, "I have to be serious because I have a wife and kids, and I am here for a purpose and I know why. I'm not just going through the motions." Matthew said that when he first started there were four or five other Native students in the program, but now there is only one other Native student still in the program and they do not have any classes together.

Matthew spoke highly of his older brother, who also lives in Plainsview, and has enjoyed the opportunity to connect with him now as an adult. Matthew, his brother, and his siblings were raised by their family in a town about an hour off the reservation.

Kim

"It wasn't easy. I just stuck with it, I prayed, I relied on (Native) community members. When I wanted to leave and go somewhere else they said 'no you're

doing really good. If you need help, we are here.' It's the community that's here. Without them, maybe I wouldn't be here."

Kim was raised in New England and is a member of an Eastern Tribe. She came to UGP because of the reputation of the school's American Indian Studies (A.I.S.) program. Kim has a young daughter and is currently going through a divorce. She recently graduated with a degree in Fine Arts and a minor in A.I.S.

Kim's face would light up whenever the topic turned to her art. But along the way she faced some challenges from a few professors who completely ignored certain Indigenous ways of knowing and had unwavering preconceived notions about who Native Americans are.

Kim talked about the difficulty of being light-skinned and having blue eyes. Sometimes she felt that because she did not really look Native and she did not really look White, she did not fit in with either group. She said that her time at UGP has been challenging and gave credit to the Native American community in town for supporting her.

Tricia

"I'm here to educate myself and further my people. That's why I'm here."

Tricia, originally from the Southwest, was raised traditionally by her grandparents and her mother. Her grandparents still live traditionally, without telephone service, running water, or electricity and to this day do not speak English. Tricia admitted that because Navajo is her first language, she still has a hard time writing in English.

Living in this conservative Midwestern state has been difficult as compared to living in various other places which are more diverse. Tricia was moved to tears when she recalled the looks she received when going to local restaurants and stores, “they look at you like you’re that Indian person, like you’re just some stupid person, uneducated and whatnot and just really disrespectful.”

Tricia shared that she has had some really good instructors, both Native and non-Native and mentioned that she has had positive relationships with almost all of her instructors. She gets frustrated, however, that UGP does not have more people of color and indicated that diversity of thought and ideas would strengthen this university.

Tricia described herself as reserved, structured, responsible, hard-working and friendly. She hopes to go to law school eventually. She credited her mom as being an inspiration for going to school; she graduated with a nursing degree. Tricia’s husband is Native and is from a Plains Tribe. They have one child.

Bev

“This is who I am. This is a part of my identity, and I’m not going to just smile as they talk about you with wrong perceptions.”

It was easy to see where Bev’s daughter, Sky, gets her ‘spunk.’ Sky, a beautiful five year-old with long, dark hair and adorable eyes, was constantly on the move during the couple times I met her and her mother. While Sky’s energy was geared toward being an active, on-the-go kid, Bev’s energy seemed to be directed toward representing her Native heritage and fighting stereotypes at the university.

Bev's mom passed away when Bev was only 5 years old. She said she spent much of her childhood in "the system," the foster care system and treatment system. She remembered her mother beading and doing other cultural traditions, but it was not until later in her childhood that she identified with her Native identity. It was not until a Lutheran Sunday school teacher told her that she was not "worthy of God" that she began to seek out her Native culture.

Never one to back down from a challenge, Bev is not afraid of taking on a teacher or classmate when their perceptions of Native people or Native culture is contrary to what she thinks. Bev said that she knows she is going to "piss people off along the way," but to her it is more important that she says what she thinks and feels as opposed to letting incorrect assumptions about her or her culture remain unchallenged.

Frank

"I've gone away to school, but I'll always come back to the reservation. And I think that's the general objective of getting educated and becoming more skilled in life is to help your own people."

Frank is a guy who seems to exude wisdom. As I visited with him, his long dark hair braided and pulled back underneath his Nike golf hat, he spoke carefully and thoughtfully in a calm, deep voice. It was a demeanor that commanded respect.

As a 40 year-old, he has seen a lot. He has lived in many parts of the country, both reservation and non-reservation. It was evident that he has thought quite a bit about race relations in his home state. He believes that both Natives and non-Natives need to do

a better job in ‘opening the doors of communication’ if these relationships are going to improve.

Frank was recruited by several law schools, including a couple in the Southwest and also by UGP. He ultimately chose UGP because he wanted to help create a different culture in his home state’s law school that was sensitive to Indian students. As the president of UGP’s American Indian Law Student Association, he has worked hard to educate his fellow classmates, many of whom will inevitably work with Native Americans at some point, on a variety of tribal issues dealing with sovereignty, self-determination, and treaty rights.

Rob

“I’m looking for more knowledge, my mind wants knowledge, and that’s what I’m really looking for when I go in there (class). Teach me and don’t feed me a bunch of PowerPoint’s, or say ‘go home and read this and come back, then we can go over some more PowerPoints.’ I hate that.”

Next to the coffee shop that I frequently visited in Plainsview was an art gallery that featured the work of Oscar Howe, an internationally acclaimed Yanktonais Sioux artist. Little did I know that one of the participants in my study would be Mr. Howe’s great-grandson. Rob said he is really proud to be a part of his family and enjoys walking into places that feature his great-grandfather’s art.

Rob went to an all-Native elementary school and then went to an all-White high school. His experiences in both of these schools, along with a six-year stint in the Army

helped him adapt to almost any situation and as he said, allowed him to get along with almost anyone.

Although Rob never really thought he would be a college student, just an ‘Army robot drone’ as he said, he is on the verge of graduating. Rob has a very pragmatic approach to school. He said he will just learn it, if it needs to be learned and read the chapter as many times as necessary to understand it. Rob told me that he is not shy about answering questions in class either, like a lot of students. He said that if the teacher asks something and if he knows the answer, he will speak up and say something about it.

Lucy

“I know there are Native people all over the country, and health care is needed everywhere, but these are my people...so I’d like to stay there.”

In playing phone-tag with Lucy, I discovered her wonderful voicemail message, “Hello this is your favorite person!” she begins playfully. Lucy has a contagious laugh that is readily available. She seemingly has a gift for articulating serious issues in thought-provoking ways and also has a delightful way of not taking irrelevant things too seriously.

Lucy is a single mother, grandmother, and Army veteran who spent time in Saudi Arabia. Now she is preparing for a career in medicine and is doing so as the only Native in her class. She was excited at the thought of graduating and going back to her home reservation, located on the Great Plains, to practice medicine.

Lucy is making some significant cultural sacrifices to get her education. Although she is an avid pray-er and smudges frequently, she said that being at UGP has taken her

away from many of the ceremonies and the language from her home reservation. She said it is a part of the bigger sacrifice of learning things that will eventually allow her to go back and contribute to the people who are important to her.

Mato

“I’m the product of countless strong and beautiful men and women.”

Mato, like so many Native students, has an unmistakable sense of pride of his home. That pride is a part of what also is calling him home, after he graduates, to the reservation where he grew up and learned the many values that his family instilled in him. He was quick to give credit to many people for his successes, but most of all he credited his mom for her unwavering support.

Mato has faced some very steep challenges in his life. Most recently Mato and his family have been dealing with an unexplainable rash of suicides at home including a brother-in-law, 2 first cousins and his *fourteen-year-old brother*, all within a four-month time frame. He told me that he believes there is an understanding in all of this, “not why it happened, but how we pick ourselves up and overcome and persevere.”

I get the sense that Mato is a guy who has persevered through many challenges in his thirty-some years. As one professor said in local newspaper, Mato made a complete 180-degree turnaround. On the verge of facing felony charges and unable to shake alcohol and drug problems, Mato had a legal intervention that changed his life five years ago. That 180-degree turnaround recently resulted in being awarded a prestigious national scholarship. Mato was one of 80 nationally, and the first-ever Native American to receive this scholarship at UGP.

Chapter 5. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Brayboy (2006) said that the everyday experiences of American Indians have essentially been removed from the awareness of dominant members of the U.S. society. As a White, male teacher, who has had all the privileges that go along with being in the dominant mainstream, I really wanted to have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the nature or meaning of the Native American adult students' experience.

Phenomenology, as a research method, lent itself nicely to my query, as it asks a very important question that has pedagogical implications, "What is it like to be a Native American adult learner at UGP?" It is important to understand that I was not trying to create a list of 'characteristics or tendencies' that define the Native adult student in a way that can be generalized to all Native American adult learners, but rather I was interested in what it was like for this group of Native students at this particular place and at this particular time. If it implied anything, this study suggested that there was an inherent complexity to being a Native adult learner at this predominantly White university.

This chapter presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews and data collection. The findings of this study are organized into four major sections based on the following themes: The inherent complexity of being a Native adult learner, ways of knowing for Native adult students are indispensable to self-education and self-determination, discontentedness and decolonization, toward an education that is socio-culturally and politically relevant to Native adult students.

Theme #1: The Inherent Complexity of Being a Native Adult Learner

Theme: The Inherent Complexity of Being a Native Adult Learner
Sub-themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lived Experience • Racial Tensions • Escaping Stereotypes

What I have found is that the lived experiences of these learners were diverse, engaging, and intriguing. The experiences of these students were complex and varied, and could not be easily generalized. The Native identity of some of the learners played an indispensable role in shaping how they approached or responded to certain situations, while others were more conscious of the fact that they were older and that their identity as an adult played into how they perceived the world or how they felt they were perceived by others. Both identities worked concurrently for a couple participants.

The Lived Experience

This sub-theme highlights four aspects that were routinely talked about by the participants: their initial thoughts, fears, memories, concerns; nuances of the experience; what it was like to participate in a discussion during a class; and what the Native adult learner sought from the experience.

Initial thoughts, fears, memories, concerns—“When I first got to the university.”

When I asked Rob what he remembered from his first class at UGP he told me that the first thing he did when he entered the class was to look for other Native students to sit by. In his first class, Native students were few and far between. Rob recalled:

It was pretty overwhelming. My first class was general chemistry; there were 200 and some students, mainly White. I thought I saw some Natives in there but I wasn't sure. Eventually there were, there were actually two others, but they eventually dropped out and I ended up being the only Native American in the class.

Lucy mentioned she also looked for Natives to sit by, but she was the only Native American in her program. Her next option was to look for the nontraditional-aged students. Lucy remembered that the adult learners sat together in the rear of the classroom and were highly outnumbered by younger students. She recalled, "Most of the pre-med, OT, and PT students are young, to me they looked all so young, and then the handful of us, the older students in our 30s or early 40s, and we were all kind of together in the back row."

Lucy recalled that it took her a little while to establish connections and relationships with the younger students, but eventually they invited her to participate in their study group. She recalled, "I remember thinking to myself, 'Would I be brave enough to start a study group and invite others? Because what if no one comes?' Well, luckily they invited me, and I got through that first semester."

At first Mathew was excited about going back to school and did not think much about the fact he was Native or the fact that he was an adult learner in his 30s until the first class actually began. He remembered:

The lead up to it, you know, getting my books and stuff, it really wasn't that apparent. I was going to college. I'm finally here, great, wonderful. There are so many things I wanted to do, so many things I wanted to accomplish and learn.

I think he came to the realization that once classes started he sensed that as an adult learner he might be little different from the others in the class. He assessed it this way, "So now I'm here with new people. I don't know anyone and I don't have anything in common, so I feel like an outsider." When asked where he sat in class he told me the following:

I always had a seat in the front. I just sat in the front of the classroom. For one I was guaranteed that I would see the board, guaranteed that I would hear the instructor, and it almost guaranteed that no one else would steal my seat, because the majority of other people would want to sit in the back or sit in the middle. And I always had seats next to me. If someone sat next to me it was because they had to. It wasn't a choice. So it was very intimidating and I don't know what could have made it easier.

Mathew said the combination of being an older student and a Native student made a big difference, as it make him feel almost like a double outsider. Mathew said:

I think the fact that I was Native played a little role in it because I don't think they would connect with me. If I were to sit down and talk to them, my fear was, for one, they would see that I was older, and they didn't want to talk to the old guy, and two, the fact that I was Native.

Mathew went on to explain:

If I was older and wasn't Native, if I was the same race as them, they might have connected and it might not have been a big deal to ask me how I was doing and what classes I was taking. But the fact that I had both of them, and the first one

really spring boarded them not talking to me, and the second one, sealed the deal.

I was just an older, Native guy.

In a large majority of Rob's classes, he was the only Native American student and the only adult student, but he told me that his adult-ness seemed like a bigger source of anxiety than his Native identity. Rob said:

My age was a big factor. You walk into a classroom and you are 22 or 23 and everybody else is 18 and fresh out of high school and I guess the obstacle is whether or not you're going to be able to be sociable or not. In all my science classes all the younger guys took chemistry and sciences in high school and it was fresh in their mind. So when they came in, they could sit down, read the book once and ace the test. Where on the other hand, I have to read it at least twice, do all the review stuff, and attend all the classes, just to get rolling. At first I kind of felt weird because I'm older but I adjusted to it really fast. I try to give myself a mindset that I'm here in class, and we are all here to learn, and express our opinions.

Tricia explained that it was just the opposite for her--the fact that she was Native had a more disorienting effect than being an adult. Tricia had come from Arizona with high hopes and did not give much thought to the fact that UGP may be a little different from a previous school she attended, Southwest State University (SWSU). At SWSU there was plenty of diversity, and she did not stick out because she was a woman of color. Going to a restaurant or going to class or walking on campus was not a big deal there. But deep in the heart of the Great Plains region and at UGP, it was a big deal. Tricia said,

“At first I didn’t think it was going to be hard...until I got in here, and then I’m like ‘oh my gosh, I am the only Native here’, or one of two, and he went to law school.”

Nuances of the experience

Through these interviews, I found that there were many subtle nuances about each particular individual that, in their own way, contributed to the overall experience of the Native adult learner. Too often, however, these nuances seemed that they may have been beyond the consciousness of the non-Native teacher. Some nuances were larger than others, but none-the-less all played a role in the student’s experience in school and thus are important. Here are some snapshots of some of the challenges that a Native American adult learner at UGP.

For instance, Tricia’s first language was Navajo, and I got the sense she was a little bit insecure when she wrote in English. She told me, “I have to make sure that my grammar is correct, because my mind says it in Navajo. I guess I have a hard time.”

Along those lines, Frank said that he thinks Native students process information differently. He continued:

I really think that we think differently, I really think that Indians process information differently, especially if your upbringing and your background is one which includes growing up on an Indian reservation where you are inundated with culture and language in all these different things. And I do think that we see things differently, at least that’s what my experiences have been. And it takes me a little longer to get certain concepts as opposed to a non-Indian person because I

have to process that through my life experiences and my life experiences as a Native American.

Frank was the first person in his family to attend college, and he said, “I didn’t have the advantage of basing (the college experience). I had no reference point; I had nobody to look to for advice.”

Lucy, like some others in the study, mentioned that every once in a while she would get a peculiar feeling, a feeling that she just did not belong at UGP. To snap her out of that moment, she thought of how proud her mother would be of her success in the program.

Lucy also reflected upon how she and the other minority students sometimes felt that they did not have a voice or a sense of agency against the dominant culture at the university. She told me, “As minority students, sometimes we just do what we are told, and we get it done and don’t complain. And maybe we should feel thankful just to be here.” Frank expressed a similar concern, “There have been times when I’ve been here where I didn’t think my opinion mattered as much as another person’s opinion, because I’m in the minority.”

Often Native students are singled out in class and expected to be the expert of Native culture. Kim said, “They will try to turn around where you’re Native American and so you should be the expert on everything in the culture.” Tricia addressed this by simply saying, “I don’t speak for all Indian people but this is how I feel.”

Frank and others had mentioned that often non-Natives do not understand that tribes, clans, and families may have different ways of doing things and are not all the

same. Frank said that non-Natives often believe sweeping generalizations regarding all Native peoples, all tribes, and all reservations. He said:

It's almost as if you have to qualify your statement and say that I don't speak for all Indian people. This is my opinion about something, I don't speak for the tribe, I'm not an elected official, I'm not a representative of the tribe, but this is just my common opinion about this thing.

Bev addressed it similarly, "I can tell you what my experience is, but I can't speak for all people because different tribes have different beliefs, different languages. I think all Native Americans from this state are grouped into one group."

Kim was very transparent about her identity and how, at times, it can be a stressor because of other people's misunderstanding. She said that being a Native American from a tribe that is not federally recognized and having blue eyes and light skin have been an issue for her. She said, "Being halfway in between Native and White is an obstacle, it kind of makes you not fit in with either category."

Dealing with the lack of diversity had been a challenge for Tricia who said, "It's been a really eye-opening experience and I think I forgot that many places are still predominantly White, and I think I learned how to deal with some of the intolerance."

Another student revealed to me that she was currently battling some pretty heavy demons—on top of trying to survive a very rigorous program of study. She revealed to me that she was a closet drinker and that she would get drunk before each test she took. She also told me about how she was sexually abused as a child and that her "dad was a drunk" and her "mom was a meth-addict." She was seeing a counselor and working hard to overcome these obstacles, which posed a serious threat to her finishing school.

Mato was also dealing with something very heavy at the time. In the past five months, he had lost four relatives to suicide back home. These included his fourteen-year-old brother, a brother-in-law, and two first cousins. Although he was in danger of failing his classes due to all the time he spent home on the reservation with his family during this difficult time, he persevered and somehow pulled B's and C's, and made it through the semester.

Responding in class

After visiting with several of the participants, I concluded that for Native adult students, expressing an opinion in class was not simply an apolitical act. A couple of the adult learners in this study mentioned that when they were asked to respond to an issue in class, they often got the feeling that the non-Natives will be taking their answer as if they were speaking for all Natives, everywhere. Also while mainstream, non-Native students frequently had the luxury of having someone with similar experiences, the Native student rarely had anyone to confirm her ideas. Some participants mentioned it would have been nice to have another Native student in the class, just for support.

Franks knows this all too well. He related, "It hasn't always been easy. It's been a challenge and sometimes you have to, whenever you open yourself up to discuss political issues, cultural issues, viewpoints that are kind of outside the scope of what we traditionally learned in law school, you kind of open yourself up to be a lightning rod for controversy sometimes."

Frank supported his comment when he told me about an incident that had just recently happened in one of his classes. He told me they were discussing a U.S. Supreme

Court Case, the United States vs. the Sioux Nation. As Frank explained, this is a case in which the Supreme Court had decided in favor of the Sioux Nation relating to when the Black Hills were taken from the Sioux Nation and the Treaty of 1868 was abrogated. The Court of Claims determined that this was an illegal taking. The Supreme Court heard it in 1980, and upheld the decision, and awarded a monetary settlement to the Sioux Nation for the taking of the Black Hills. As the discussion continued, the professor asked for students' opinions regarding the fact that as of today, the Sioux Nation had not taken the money from the government. Frank said that as the only Native in the room, he decided that he was not going to weigh in on the issue because as he recalled, "It just takes so much energy to respond to these things."

After hearing a number of his fellow classmates respond with little regard to Tribal sovereignty and self-determination, Frank felt that he had to say something. He said that he basically admonished his colleagues and fellow students by saying:

Don't base your opinion about an issue, or especially an issue that you know very little about, on what you read, on simply what you read, or a Supreme Court opinion, or a book or anything of that nature. It's part of learning, and I told them, that you basically owe it to yourself as professionals, you owe it to yourself as a person is going to become a lawyer, who's going to be working with the Indians and non-Indian clients and people of other ethnicities and cultures and backgrounds. You owe it to yourself to round out your education, not only by what you read, but what you experience. And I would encourage you not to form an opinion about this until you have taken the time to really understand the Tribal perspective on why they will not receive that settlement.

When Frank indicated that speaking about an issue like this “takes so much energy” I interpreted that he felt that way not necessarily because of the topic at hand, because he knew it inside and out, but rather due to the context and circumstance of the discussion. As the only Native American in the room, I would say that he probably felt that it was sixty-nine vs. one—sixty-nine non-Native students that looked at the world in terms of democracy and with an extremely limited understanding of Native culture, Tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and decolonization. I have a lot of respect for Frank for addressing his colleagues the way he did, and for having the courage and conviction to do so, but it must have been very, very difficult. I can understand why addressing such an issue would take so much energy.

Bev said she frequently interjected a Native perspective in a class and was often met with silence. The silence spoke volumes to her and did not exactly affirm what she was trying to add to the class. “It’s interesting because when I talk about Native American stuff in that class you could almost hear crickets chirping.” Rob had similar experiences, as he told me, “It seemed like when the issues got sticky, the non-Native students would not speak up.”

Bev indicated that students were not the only ones sending a message through silence. Often teachers had little or no response to her work. She said, “I think a lot of my teachers kind of think that saying nothing keeps them safe, but makes me think that they are not educated enough.” Bev continued:

Because a lot of the papers I write, you know, I have to get up in front of everyone and kind of talk about it and go and read about it. But people won’t respond. And even the teacher won’t have very many questions to ask.

While teachers think they are being neutral by not saying anything or by limiting their comments, it makes it difficult for a student to recognize the teacher's position, in terms of how she (the teacher) is receiving the information, which is ultimately tied to how the teacher evaluates the student.

I recognize that some teachers might be afraid of saying something that could potentially offend the Native student or maybe say something that is not quite politically correct, especially in a state where the Native/non-Native relationship is often politically charged. But while the instructor may think being silent is a neutral position, no feedback is still feedback to the student. I think that ultimately the student is forced to make assumptions about how the information is perceived or received. For the lone Native student in a classroom whose ways of knowing or perspective may be different from that of the mainstream culture, a teacher's non-response can be problematic and confusing.

Kim had similar classroom experiences when she offered her perspective relating to a Native issue in class. She explained:

I mean they would either ignore me and move on to something else or they would put in their two cents whether it was correct or not. And maybe they have the wrong information, but they are older and they are in a position so they must know better.

Kim's sarcasm was not lost on me when she said that the professors were "older and in a position so they must know better." This is an illustration of why it is crucial for instructors to have cultural knowledge and also to have a stance that is open to learning about and understanding different viewpoints, regardless of how long they have been in the academy.

What I want from my experience...

Like most of the adult learners in this study, Anna considered herself a student who was serious about learning. She said, “For me, my number one priority is learning.” Rob’s motivations were comparable. He told me, “That goes back to having respect for my elders, and wanting to learn everything that they have to tell me. Whenever somebody is older than me, I will let them talk, and say what they got to say, and the whole time just listen.”

I got the sense that Rob’s education was more than just earning grades and getting a degree. He continued:

I’m hoping that they can teach me something, something that will interest me and open my mind, something that will give me greater respect for this course. That’s really what I’m looking for. I really do want to learn when I go to class. I’m looking for more knowledge, my mind wants knowledge, and that’s what I’m really looking for when I go in there. Teach me and don’t feed me a bunch of PowerPoints, or say ‘go home and read this and come back, then we can go over some more Power Points.’

Tricia’s goal of getting her Master’s degree had not been derailed by the challenge of dealing with the lack of diversity in the state and at UGP. From our conversations, I got the sense that she keeps a bigger picture on the forefront of her mind. She said, “Sometimes you just have to ignore it and just keep on going and think about your kids and family.”

Mathew took pride in being focused on his academic work for similar reasons. He said, “I have to be serious because I have a wife, because I have kids, and I am here for a purpose and I know why. I’m not just going through the motions.”

Kim agreed and also acknowledged the role of others. She said:

I think you have to be self-determined, but you also need some other people’s support backing you up too. I mean, ultimately it’s up to you to take the step forward but it’s good to have people backing you up at the same time.

Mihesuah (2004) speculated that Native students with confidence, a strong belief in the importance of their cultures, strong study skills, parental support, a desire to succeed, and plans to work within their communities and reservations are more likely to complete their degrees. As I spent time visiting with these nine participants and listened to their stories and experiences, I was convinced that they had the attributes that Mihesuah outlines. Almost everyone in the study had particular anxieties or concerns at various times, I was really moved by the descriptive, thoughtful and insightful reflections they provided. These students, each in his or her own individual way, had overcome barriers and challenges that were inherent in an institution of the dominant culture. They are forging their way through the university with a type of courage, commitment, and vision that mainstream students and teachers may not be able to understand.

Racial Tensions

For Native adult learners, a wide variety of life experiences often shape who they are and how they experience events that occur at the university. I have found from visiting with the participants in this study and from many other personal conversations

that it is common for Native Americans in this area, region, and state to experience discrimination and racism. Some instances are blatant and some are subtle. Because of a cultural-historic relationship that has been tense and tenuous, the experiences described by the participants are not non-uncommon for Native students, and sometimes affected them as adult learners in a variety of ways.

Frank perceived these instances beginning in childhood:

What I experienced living in here as a youth, because in this state the racial demarcations are so much more clear...it's White and it's Indian, you're called names, and you're looked at it differently. And even though I grew up on a reservation, we went off the reservation for athletics and stuff like that. And you always got the impression that you are less than...as an Indian.

Frank reflected upon why this was so and concluded that non-Indians and Indian people tend to assume a lot about each other because the doors of communication seem to be closed. He told me the following:

When I was growing up, non-Indian people didn't want to know a lot about me and I didn't really want to know a whole lot about them. And the opportunities to really learn about each other were pretty slim and few and far between. I hate to say it but this state is very segregated in terms of its Indian and non-Indian relations.

Rob grew up both on and off the reservation and observed, "I never even thought of myself as different...until people started calling me the racial names." Anna grew up with a lot of the typical racial slurs. She told me, "I found a lot of racism, you know 'squaw' and the typical crap: drunks, whores, rez cars, and all the typical stereotypes that

go along with what people think about Native Americans.” At times when Anna was a young person, she admitted that she even denied that she was Native to avoid the conflicts. “For a long time, I was ashamed to be Native American,” She said.

Many of the adult learners in this study have lived in other parts of the country and almost everyone said the racial tension felt in this region was very different from what they felt in other places. When Frank returned to this state after living in other parts of the country, he said it did not take long for an incident to occur. He recalled, “I remember when I first got here, I confronted this good ol’ state, and this good ol’ state hit me in the face. I met a student and there was a comment made, and right away.”

Lucy, who went to school in the southwest and also spent time in the Army, said that she noticed these instances upon her return to the Great Plains. Lucy commented:

In terms of racism and discrimination and stuff like that, and it’s funny because when I was down in El Paso, I mean, if it was there, I didn’t feel it that much. Because you have Hispanics, Blacks, you have Native people and it’s just more diverse down there. So I moved back to this area. I remember stopping for gas and going into the gas station and you just get that feeling...that people are watching you, that the people that are working there are watching you, or worse it’s like you’re not even there, it’s like you’re invisible.

Tricia, normally very reserved and composed, broke down and began sobbing when she recalled some of her experiences in the Great Plains. Tricia came to UGP from the southwest also. She struggled to put the experience into words:

You can just feel it when you go to the store (deep sigh, works to regain composure) I’ve never felt it until I moved here and I’m just likeI just don’t

want to go out and about.... You can just tell (tears)...that's the part that really bothers me. My husband wants to live here but god I don't want to live here and deal with this on a daily basis, like going to River City and going to the stores—that's the part that just... cause I've never experienced that in Arizona, like in Tucson or Phoenix or going to California...the minority are the majority. People have been great to me here (at UGP), like my instructors, but not (unfinished statement)....they look at you like....you're that Indian person, like you're just some stupid person, uneducated and whatnot, and just really disrespectful.

Bev observed, "I think the face of racism has changed over the years, I think it's much more subtle. It's not so blatant, they are not going to call me a damn ignorant Indian in the middle of class, but I think that they find other ways to try make you feel like you are supposed to be less than."

Frank also mentioned that the feeling, 'less than,' is the result of something more than ignorance, and he attributed it to people's false presumptions. He said:

When people presume that you are less than, because you are an Indian, which is a common experience when you leave the reservation, it is so much more difficult to tolerate that. It makes you angry, and it's not so much that you pick it up in what people say to you. You pick it up from non-Indian people in the way they treat you and the general attitude toward you, and their general actions toward you.

Anna, who works with first year Native students, worried about incidents that happen off-campus in Plainsview that have an effect on the student's experience. She observed:

This isn't an academic setting but a bunch of Native kids walk into Value-Mart and they (store employees) are going to be staring at them. They look at us, they look at us different, and they're like 'are they gonna steal from us?' or 'are they gonna cause trouble?' It sucks when people stare at you. Because knowing the stereotypes...it's not an academic setting but this is the community that we live in. You go into a restaurant, maybe they're looking at you in such a way like maybe you're going to run and try to not pay, or whether you're at a gas station and you're walking the aisles and they think you're going to try to pocket something.

Escaping Stereotypes

Frank anticipated some of the challenges that he would face when he came to UGP. He had offers to attend graduate school at the University of the Southwest in programs that were, as he described, "Well-established in terms of its commitment to diversity, their commitment to Indian law, their commitment to recruiting Native American students in their law program, and so a lot of the battles that needed to be fought had already been addressed down there, and they have already broken down a lot of barriers." Frank talked about one of the professors who was trying to recruit him to enroll at the University of the Southwest, Frank recalled what she told him, "Well Frank, when you get tired of being the token Indian at UGP, give us a call and our door will be open to you.' And believe me when I first got here, I almost called her up."

It seemed that Frank understood the deficiencies that the law school in his home state had and he wanted to be a part of the process to change that, to make it more

empathetic to the needs of the state's nine tribes and the Native people who lived there. A part of doing so meant addressing stereotypes and assumptions that were present. Sitting in an empty classroom with me, Frank talked about what he experienced,

I guess to kind of summarize it I think my experience here has been negative in regard to some of the statements I have heard, some of the comments I have heard come from a couple professors and several students, but I think it's indicative that that these old viewpoints are still out there.

Frank told me about the time a high level state official, Mr. Henderson, spoke to his class. And in his presentation Frank said that Mr. Henderson basically described the reservation as an "awful, terrible place." Frank explained that although Mr. Henderson had seen some of the worst crimes to come off the reservation, it was the way he said it, implying that the whole reservation was bad. Frank's concern was that Mr. Henderson, an influential state employee, painted a harmful picture of the reservation to sixty-nine impressionable, non-Native law students. Mr. Henderson went on to highlight the three areas his office was working on: terrorism, Indian Country, and immigration. After the presentation, Frank went up to Mr. Henderson and said:

Mr. Henderson, I appreciate you coming to the law school and talking to the students. My name is Frank, I'm 42 years old, I've lived life a little bit, and I want to tell you that I appreciate you for the things you said about Indian Country, but is there any way possible in the future when you come and speak to other students, that you can qualify some of what you are saying? Because the way you spoke, you are painting reservations as strictly a bad place. And you know it's not just a bad place. There are good things there too. These tribal governments are

trying to make life better for their members. They are trying to make society better for their members on the reservation. We are fighting an uphill battle, we are lacking money, we are lacking infrastructure, we are lacking all these different things, we are at a disadvantage, but you know that it's not all bad, Mr.

Henderson. So is there a way that you can express that in a different way?

While Frank acknowledged that there were some serious crimes that were mentioned, he knew that the blanket assumptions that Mr. Henderson made about the reservation were not accurate. Smith (1999) agreed as she said that Indigenous identities have become regulated by governments to meet their interests rather than those of the people who take up these identities. The fact that Indian Country was mentioned in the same triad as terrorism and immigration shows vividly what this government official thought about the reservations in this conservative state. As I interpreted it, Frank challenged Mr. Henderson's assumptions head on. I got the sense that he knew that his classmates, future attorneys who could potentially be practicing in the state, would eventually come into contact with Native American clients, and if they knew Indian Country only as Mr. Henderson had described it, then the assumptions would be perceived as reality, and damaging to Native people.

Rob mentioned that he had also encountered assumptions and stereotypes. "You might run into some people who are maybe ignorant to the way that Indian people live these days. I've run into these people all my life." Kim also talked about people at the university who had assumptions about Native students, "If they had preconceived notions about what Native people were and if they were against learning anything new...not open-minded and stuck in what they thought a Native person was...that kind of puts a big

block up.” Kim continued and acknowledged that even though people might seem sensitive initially, that eventually stereotypes kick in. “It’s kinda weird because they might show interest at first, but then they turn it into whatever they think about Native American people.” Mihesuah’s (2004, pp.192-93) research seemed to confirm this, “There is still a lack of respect among university faculty, staff, and administrators for Native cultures...Insensitivity and stereotyping, both blatant and subtle, of Indigenous peoples are pervasive in classrooms.”

Because UGP is in close proximity to neighboring states and the fact that tuition is lower at UGP than at these other states’ universities, students have come to UGP from a variety of midwestern states. These students often have little or no experience or relationships with Native people and as Mato explained, “They see a Native American here, and it might be their first time and then stereotypes kick in.” Lucy mentioned the stereotype that really bugs her, “I know that you hear about stereotypes, that all Natives are alcoholics and this and that... I wouldn’t be able to do what I’m doing if I had a problem with alcohol or drugs.”

Mihesuah (2004, p. 192) said that a Native student unfamiliar with mainstream life can quickly become overwhelmed when encountering large numbers of non-Natives with “concomitant stereotypical beliefs about those who are from outside the dominant culture, insensitive teachers and classmates, and a stressful university life, in addition to being forced to conform to differing worldviews, values, and social skills.” When I asked Anna if she thought that upon graduation from UGP her classmates will go into the world and be sensitive to Native issues, she said with much frustrated, “It’s definitely my hope, but being realistic, Tom, there’s so much stereotyping here.”

Anna explained the prevailing stereotypes that accompany the concept of “Indian time” and then explained how she understood it:

You know Indian time isn't that we're just lazy and we are always late. It's emotional and psychological; it's hard to explain. It's however long it takes to do something is how long you're going to take to do it, and that's Indian time. But that doesn't really mesh with today's society, right?

Growing up in a town close to a reservation I have heard many of the stereotypes about Native Americans, including the one that all Natives are lazy. Mato understood the lazy Indian stereotype and worked hard to disprove it. “There's a stereotype of Native Americans being lazy so I took my job serious, a production job. I did work out there for two people and they knew it. I was sent wherever they needed me.”

Because the university tends to reflect the dominant society, it is important to address how to escape stereotypes and blanket assumptions. I am interested in Indian education because I believe that Native peoples deserve better than what they are “getting” from the state and the university setting. I particularly like Frank's analysis:

In other places that I have been the doors of communication, the dialogue between Indian and non-Indian people, is open. And in this state, I think that dialogue is not as open. I think we operate a lot on assumptions about each other. So I think the problem that we have here is that we are not willing to re-teach ourselves. I think non-Indian people here are not willing to relearn.

My study is guided, in part, by an appreciation of the importance of the socio-cultural and historical past of Native peoples in this state and region. But ironically, I think that those socio-cultural and historic notions are often selectively reconstructed and

negatively reinforced within the mainstream conservative, predominantly White society in this context. Instead of being something to be respected, socio-cultural and historic awareness manifests as the opposite, an attempt to impose a definition of the social world that serves the mainstream's own interest (Teirney, 1992). In short, much of society in this region is unwilling to let go of stereotypes.

Frank, one of the oldest participants in this study, reflected on why he thinks that stereotypes still exist in this region:

I think they base their perceptions of Native Americans on history. And it's not always been good history. I think they also base it on experiences, and I think the tensions between this state and Indian tribes in the Great Plains has always been one that has been somewhat tense. The relationship has been somewhat embattled, it's been conflicted. So I think that's the challenge facing the people of this state, Indians and non-Indians alike.

The Native adults in my study seemed to understand the damaging effect of stereotypes they face. Lucy's response to medical professionals who may not have taken time to understand cultural elements was, "Treat me the same as you treat one of your patients. Because I have the same feelings, I have the same things that make me apprehensive too. So we should just act respectful toward each other and not make generalizations."

Frank added, "I think the challenge we have is to let our guards down, and try to relearn, rethink our perceptions about each other. To open up the doors and open up the dialogue between one another. And so that we understand each other on a human level as opposed to Indian and non-Indian."

Mato is optimistic and offered this insight, “We all come from different cultures, different upbringings, whether it’s urban or rural. And I think it’s developing a relationship of some kind, and really feeling each other out, because all I can really do is to share my story.”

Frank commented on what he perceived as a major challenge that is present at UGP:

(The challenge is) to make our classrooms more diverse and to create the opportunities for Indians and non-Indian students to interact with one another, and to learn from one another, so that their prejudices and the assumptions that they grew up with can be challenged on a student-to-student basis and on a personal level. But without that, this university is disadvantaging its student body.

Theme #2: Ways of Knowing for Native Adult Students are Indispensable to Self-education and Self-determination

<u>Theme #2</u> Ways of Knowing for Native Adult Students are Indispensable to Self-education and Self-determination
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Sub-themes:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inevitable Intersections • Connections • The Importance of the “Native Community” in Plainsview • Going Home |
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I agree with Brayboy (2005) when he said that there must be recognition that Native students’ ways of knowing are vital to their self-education and self-determination. That is why I really valued the reflective descriptions that these students provided regarding their experience at UGP as a Native adult learner. My goal was to try to

understand how these Native adult students used their cultural lens to make sense of their experiences at the university.

Knowledge of how Native adult students experience various facets of their education at the university combined with an understanding of self-determination could potentially cause educators to re-think how they approach pedagogy and the instruction they provide for their Native students. This theme centers around the descriptions some of those experiences, grounded and informed by the students' various cultural ways of knowing.

Inevitable Intersections

The pedagogical relationship that Native adult learners enter into with their non-Native teacher is an inevitable intersection in the educational process. Since nearly 90% of Native students are taught by non-Native teachers (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999), this phenomenon has critical implications for the success of students.

Mihesuah, J. (2004) said that while Native students usually state they prefer to be taught, mentored, and counseled by Natives, they also respond well to non-Native instructors who are knowledgeable of tribal issues and student concerns. Tricia has had some very good experiences with her non-Native instructors, I suspect, due to this notion. She elaborated to me:

Well, my relationships have really all been good. I've never had any problems here at UGP that I know of. They've always treated me with respect, you know Dr. K, Dr. F, Dr. G, they've always made a point to refer to tribal government and tribal administration and personally we've never had a problem.

The question that represents this sub-theme is: what stance should a teacher take in order to engage Native adult students? While I suspect that most non-Native teachers tend to believe that they do a good job in being responsive to the academic needs of their Native adult learners, this study is only concerned with what the students think. I am sure that UGP is like many schools in the state where they have had their share of sensitivity training related to “Teaching Native Americans,” but to have a deep understanding of Native students and the culture from which they come, instructors need to re-think stereotypes and instead focus on a contextual and ever-evolving understanding of what it means to be a teacher of a Native American student. I was interested to hear how the adult learners in this study described the teachers who have earned their respect and trust.

A common emphasis that emerged from my interviews with the students was that they valued teachers who understood and were sensitive to the students’ needs when something happens to their family. Mathew said, “I know I’ve gotten along better with the teachers who have understood that family is important to me than teachers that didn’t.” Kim indicated that it is really nice when the teacher understands that the student has to take time off and gives them make-up work.

Kim said that she respects a teacher who is open to the family dynamics of Native American students:

...because a lot of times, if there is a death in the family, it’s not just a funeral and it’s not just a few people. It’s a whole community coming together for four nights and it pretty much goes all day and all night. And that’s just the wake. Then you have the funeral and there’s food involved and everything and the reservations aren’t just an hour away, a lot of times they are half way across the state.

McClellan and Tippeconnic Fox (2005) insisted that professionals in higher education must seek to gain greater knowledge about Native American history, culture, and contemporary issues, as well as knowledge of the experiences of Native American students, staff, and faculty. Tricia described what made Dr. E different from other professors, “She is knowledgeable on what life is like for Native people. She is very knowledgeable on that...not ignorant. She is very interested in your background, in who you are, she’s an advocate, and I like that about her.” Dr. E may be an exception and not the standard, however. Mihesuah, J. (2004, p. 193) said, “Professors often do not understand or appreciate Natives’ need...to travel home to be near other members of their tribe. Many teachers do not want to or know how to discuss emotional, tribal, and cultural matters with students.”

Rob’s advice to professors was to, “Just be culturally aware. Just be diverse in your issues when you talk about them, and be accepting of my view, because my view is just as important as anyone else’s” Frank acknowledged the efforts of Dr. F., a non-Native instructor, “I think it’s because he has lived on the reservation, he’s worked with Indian people, he has a tremendous amount of respect for tribes and government and tribal sovereignty and our experiences as Indian people.”

For non-Native teachers, who have not lived on or near an Indian reservation, there seem to be a number of events on the UGP campus, sponsored by one of the Native American groups on campus, that provide an opportunity to learn and experience cultural-historic aspects. Kim said, “There are some professors who have been respectful and have taken an interest and even come and participate in some of the Native American events on campus or even in the community around us.”

During my time on the UGP campus I attended a chili feed and silent auction fundraiser at the Native American Cultural Center to help send a local Native student group to a national conference. One of the participants pointed out (not literally) various non-Native instructors who were in attendance. It seemed that those instructors who mingled and visited, gained respect from the Native students, not only for supporting this cause, but just for being present, making an effort to try to understand the culture and the Native students a bit better. As I found out, sometimes the best way to learn is through honest, open one-on-one discussions.

Those instructors who fail to connect with Native students outside of the classroom or disregard opportunities to participate in cultural activities are not likely to be responsive to Native issues when they come up in the classroom. They run the risk of not engaging the Native American student.

Amada said it well,

I just think that when people can't evolve past the basic, when I say basic I mean the typical story that's been taught for year after year after year and they don't really seek out and they are just regurgitating information, that's not inspiring.

They're just going through the motions. They aren't doing anything to inspire you as a student, or inspire you as an academic for the rest of your life.

Many participants also used the word 'open' when talking about the best teachers. Calsoyas (2005) remarked that, "The learner and teacher are both embarked on a journey of self-examination as they come together. If the mind is open, free of boundaries created by greed, selfishness, fear, pride, it is possible for bodies of knowledge to connect and meaning to be transmitted." Kim concurred, "I think that the best non-Native American

professors are just open-minded and not ignorant.” Rob recalled a teacher with whom he formed a good relationship. He said, “She was pretty open to everything we talked about, and she gave me great comments when I would relate something in class to my culture, and she seemed to like that.”

Knowledge of the culture, understanding of family values, and having the patience to grapple with different views and perspectives seem to be a key for teachers of Native students. Tricia said that professors should, “just be aware that there are different people out there. We’re just not all the same, not everyone’s a conservative Republican from the Midwest.”

Ultimately forming relationships with Native students seems to be the best way to engage Native students. Lucy said, “I really think there is an opportunity for these professors in these classes to make a connection with not only the Native American students but all the minorities.” Rob talked about another particular relationship that was positive:

I have a pretty good relationship with my general chemistry teacher, the first teacher I encountered. He was pretty happy and a good guy, easy to get along with. He was a White male, but I also had a class with his wife, so they knew me from both classes because I spoke up, you know, I spoke up in class. I didn’t sit back and not say anything. So I got to know him from our lab. He was my lab instructor too. I got to know his wife as I spoke up in her class also. So I formed a pretty good relationship with them. I was the same age as his son so that kind of kicked it off too. But it was a good relationship.

When I asked Rob how this cross-cultural relationship affected his academic work, he said, “It made me want to do better, it made me want to succeed and try harder.” I questioned him further because this professor taught a class of 200 students. He continued, “because you know this guy knows me, and I’m pretty sure if he sees my name on a list of 200, he is going to pay a little more attention to my grades since I have a relationship with him.”

Dr. C was a name that was brought up during a couple of different interviews and was credited as a professor who “gets it.” Native adults who spoke of him had confidence in his ability to understand their needs and the needs of the communities from which they come. This seemingly bright spot darkened when I learned from one of Dr. C’s colleagues, also a friend of mine, that he was recently re-assigned and would not be teaching the ‘Tribal Government’ class any longer. I am not sure exactly why the reassignment occurred, but I speculated that it will be very disappointing for Native students to “lose” one of the few non-Native teachers who was considered an ally. When I heard about this, it seemed like a setback for Native Americans at UGP.

As I tried to understand what it meant to be a non-Native teacher who is responsive to the needs of the Native learner, I called upon Hassel’s (1999) cross-cultural engagement again. He offered the following pedagogic advice that seemed to compliment what the participants have said:

- recognize and call in to question one’s own ideology without becoming defensive,
- be able to shift roles from expert to acolyte,
- step into and listen, learn and reason with entirely different worldview,
- suspend impulses to control program agendas and decisions,

- create an environment that facilitates sharing knowledge and navigating the many different forms of expertise within communities and the academy.

After hearing the descriptions provided by many of these adult learners, I tend to think that there are consequences if a teacher does not have the respect of her Native students. Tricia agreed:

If they are really respectful and really knowledgeable, I want to get as much (knowledge) as I can from them and get to know them better. But if they are really disrespectful and closed off, then I'm just like "you know what, just teach me, I got to go. I'm done."

Connections

Comments from some of the participants in this study confirm what Abu-Saad and Champagne (2006) said when they indicated that Native peoples are often at odds with the ground rules of the mainstream schools because they do not necessarily share the values of individual capitalism, secular civic culture, and individual achievement, at least not in the same patterns as mainstream communities. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) say that survival often requires the acquisition and acceptance of a new form of consciousness that not only displaces, but often devalues their Indigenous ways of knowing. To counter this, many Native students in this study mentioned the importance of the different connections they have formed—special bonds that connect them to things, events, circumstances or people that are representative of their home or something that is somehow related to their culture.

Several students described a type of connection related to circumstance, that which can be described as bonding with another person with a similar background (cultural) going through a similar experience (going to a predominantly White university). Kim recalled that there were only a handful of other Native American students in her school, “so I feel like we kind of bonded together because we were able to have that in common.” Anna described this special relationship to other Native people, “We are Native, that is a strong connection. It’s a real strong, unspoken spiritual connection.”

Lucy talked about the importance of having other Native students in the various programs and how it would make the educational experience better she were able to connect with other Natives. She said that even though she and another Native student might be from different parts of the country, there is still a connection that is important. Lucy said, “Even two students to be able to go through a program together, I mean, you can be a Native from down South but you’d still have things (in common). Like Tricia, we are from two different areas but we still understand what we need to do and why things are the way they are.”

Lucy said that at times she gets these fleeting moments when she feels like she just does not belong at UGP. Champagne (2006) said that many Native students find little in the curriculum that match their own culture and even find perspectives and history that devalues their history, culture, and communities. To help alleviate these moments, Lucy would seek a connection to home. She recalled her strategy:

I just tell myself that during my next break I’ll go and talk with Elton or talk with my advisor. I needed just to step away and remind myself that I’m not the only

Native on campus. And there are others on campus too. Dr. Brave, he is a Native, he's gone through it. He's a doctor and he works for the University.

Alfred (2004, p. 91) said, "Mainstream culture tends to disconnect Native people from their lands, their communities, their histories, and their language, the very things that give them strength, health, and happiness in their lives." The fact that these students are experiencing life in the dominant, mainstream culture away from the socio-cultural and historic aspects of their home and family life means that finding these connections are important to maintaining the strength, health and happiness that Alfred mentioned. Mathew recalled, "I found out that they had an American Indian studies program here, so I started taking classes. And when I started taking classes, I wanted to take more classes because it kind of gave me that connection to home."

Lucy expounded on connecting with people through events, such as the many social gatherings held at the Native American Cultural Center:

All my aunts and uncles and grandma and cousins and relatives are all back on the reservation, so when I need that support and when I need to make that connection with other Native people, I can go to these (events), and they know. I think that's why they have so many functions. It's your chance to see everybody.

A couple of the participants mentioned the importance of forming a connection with their teacher. Rob recollected bonding with his Native teachers as an elementary student but as he moved off the reservation and into public schools, he lost that connection. He said:

I guess I remember when I used to go to school how the teachers were Native and it made me want to learn more because they were Native. There was a strong

interest or bond between us, at the younger ages. As I got older I felt like, I went to middle school in the public school and the high school public school I felt like I was just a number. I didn't feel that close connection.

Mathew told me about a teacher who grew up on the Flandreau Santee

Reservation:

And so she asked me a few questions because one of her nieces was part Native, and she just wanted insight on the culture. So I started talking to her and then after that, because we made that connection, we had a better relationship.

Mathew also talked about a connection he had with Native teacher:

One specific instructor reminded me of like an uncle or a grandfather and it was fun taking his class. Because throughout his class he would maybe slide in one of his (jokes), something he would say reminded me of home, so it felt comfortable, it made it easier to go UGP.

Tricia talked about a connection she had with a non-Native teacher. She described this teacher:

She is knowledgeable about what life is like for Native people. She is very knowledgeable on that. And she's not ignorant on how we grew up. She is very interested in your background, in who you are. She's an advocate, and I like that about her.

As a White male who is a member of the mainstream culture, the importance of these connections are not immediately important to me and my lived experience. This is because I am familiar with and have benefited from my status in the context of the predominantly White university. However, I have come to understand that Western

thought and approaches to education have resulted in categorical and separate systems for Native students (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999). In other words, the lived experience for many Native adult students juxtaposed against the backdrop of the dominant culture of the predominantly White university provides a context where the student may feel alienated or out of place. The various connections that Native students form are ways of countering that alienation and are crucial to their perseverance and survival at the university.

The Importance of the Native American Community in Plainsview

Kim grew up on the East Coast and coming to the Great Plains was a challenge. When I asked her what her initial thoughts were when she got here, she said, “Flat,” and laughed.

As a single mother living far from her home and in this, her first experience in college, geographical landscapes were not the biggest challenges Kim would face. Kim, who recently graduated from UGP with a degree in Art and American Indian Studies, told me about a variety of cultural collisions, occurrences when the dominant mainstream and Native ways of knowing met in the university setting. This was manifested in her art, spirituality and the refusal of an astronomy teacher to acknowledge Lakota Star knowledge.

In the end, Kim persevered and has just recently graduated. When I asked her about what it took to make it, she said:

It wasn't easy. I just stuck with it, I prayed, I relied on community members.

When I wanted to leave and go somewhere else they said ‘no you’re doing really

good, if you need help we are here.’ It’s the community that’s here. Without them, maybe I wouldn’t be here.

I asked Kim to tell me more about this “community” that was so important to her.

She expounded:

There is a Native American community in town that actually works with the University, and as soon as I got here I got involved with them. I sang with them, I went to powwows with them, even though I’m from a different tribe, I still joined the ceremonies out here, and I began to learn those ways.

Others, as well, mentioned this “community.” I found out that the community was not a group sponsored by the University, although many members attend or work at UGP. This Native community is a powerful, yet informal group. There are no formal leaders and there are no formal public relations. It is a network of mostly Native people who are interested in supporting Native students, faculty, and staff.

Bev talked about the importance of this network:

But when you come here (to Plainsview), you feel like there’s a community here already, and it’s not too much different than being back home. A lot of these kids come from living on the reservation and having that support system. I think that’s one thing that UGP has that is kind of unique.

Lucy understood the impact of the community. She described it more after we had both attended a lunch at the Cultural Center:

I think that the Native community here in Plainsview is really welcoming. You’ve probably noticed that at the Native Center today for lunch there’s a lot of support, and is not all Native people, there’s a lot of interest about American Indian

studies, and that's what I like about this community here. I mean, when you first come, you kind of get a sense of (non-Native) people saying go here or go there...that's why we tend to hang close to like Dr. M and Elton and Becky and Karen and the elders in the community. They are always willing to (be there)... even if it's just a hug or encouragement. You know that you can go to them. They won't bad mouth you or anyone else. Because it's already tough enough being here, being away from your family, your home, and other things that you come up against, and those are the ones that you know that you can count on. Because when my mom passed away, and I've had other things with my family, and it's tough.

Bev also gave credit to this network that is simply known as the 'Native community':

I definitely think that one of the positives being here in Plainsview is the fact that they've got a really strong Native American community outside of the school.

There are a lot of people who are involved with that who are also involved with things on campus.

While not all of the participants in this study were fully connected with this community, those who were seemed to place an emphasis on the importance of finding that cultural support in the midst of a predominantly White town and campus. Finding support that is reminiscent of home seems to be important for these Native students. Kim said, "If it wasn't for them, I don't know if I would have made it."

Going Home

“I used to live a crazy life,” Mato told me one late winter afternoon as we met in the library. He wasn’t kidding. Alcohol and drug abuse, running with gangs and dealing with the accompanying violence, manipulating and scheming, and drug sales. It was indeed a crazy life.

This crazy life culminated with the death of a close friend and a separate incident that included a high-speed chase that landed him in serious trouble with the law. The day I sat down with Mato was serendipitously the five-year anniversary of a night that landed him on the TV show *Cops*. Mato’s story is amazing, but even more remarkable is the way he has responded to the adversity in his life. At one point he thought he had burned all the bridges and relationships from home and had to deal with the possibility of maybe not being able to return home.

Mato recalled the painful sequence of events that led to his legal intervention:

I lost a lot of good friends in gang violence. I lost a lot of good friends to drugs and alcohol. I lost a really good friend from Minnesota to gang violence. It would have been five years ago last July. There was a big gunfight, and he ended up dying, and his first cousin, my other good friend, got shot five times and lived. So him being buried was like ‘hey you need to straighten up, that’s going to be you, you’re going to do this to your family.’

Shortly after that, Mato was involved in a dangerous high-speed chase that involved 13 cops and that lasted over 30 minutes. Mato remembered going of speeds reaching 110 mph, including time on gravel back roads. After it was all over, Mato recalled taking his bitter medicine, “I had to sit in jail for 90 days. I was facing 20 years

of state time with the grand theft auto, a felony eluding, two felonies and nine misdemeanors.” Although many of the charges were dropped, this “legal intervention,” as he called it, was a turning point in his life.

Mato spoke to me with a sense of conviction that will stay with me for a long time. It is evident that he has done a lot of reflecting in the past five years. Now, as he finishes up a double major in alcohol and drug studies and American Indian Studies, he is poised to return home: clean and sober, focused and committed, accomplished and armed with the tools he needs to help others to overcome their addictions. “I’ve come a long ways and I have so far to go. I have a nation waiting for me back home,” he affirmed.

Mato continued, “I could say that I *have* to go home but I *want* to go home. That’s where my teachings were inbred in me. I’m going home, I’m going home to give back. I received a lot from there.” He credited his mom for being there for him and also the fact that he was able to mend some of the relationships that needed mending. He also told me that among the many blessing in his life, he was especially grateful for the teachings of his elders, “I was really blessed in gaining those teachings from my great-grandfathers, my grandmothers and grandfathers, my aunties and uncles.”

Lucy, an aspiring medical professional, had just finished a clinical rotation at an I.H.S. (Indian Health Services) clinic near her hometown when I visited with her over a cup of coffee. This was the very clinic where she went when she was a child, and later where both of her parents worked. Lucy has been to other parts of the country and has even served in the Army, including a tour of duty in Saudi Arabia, but she is excited at the possibility of coming back to work at this place, her home. She said, “I know there

are Native people all over the country, and health care is needed everywhere, but these are my people so I'd like to stay there. That's what I want to do...is be at home."

She continued, "And if I can help them in any way, that's exciting to me. And just the ideas I have for community stuff with the obesity, especially women, and I really get excited."

For Lucy, being away from home and working on her degree is bittersweet. Although her family and friends seem to be proud of her, attending UGP means some personal sacrifices for Lucy. She told me:

I'm kind of guessing that they are thinking that it's good for me to be off the reservation, because life there is hard, and it's getting worse as the years go on. So when they say that I'm doing a good thing...but I really don't feel that lucky, because my family is back there, my relatives. I'm away from the ceremonies, and the cultural part, the language. There are not very many people (at UGP) that speak the language.

Lucy mentioned how she felt that she may be sacrificing some cultural aspects as she raises her children, but in the end it is for a greater cause of helping at a place that needs her. She explained:

But for me to be away from that and now my son is away from that, my daughter never really grew up around that, I feel that it's a part of the bigger sacrifice that I am doing when I'm over here (at UGP). And learning what I'm learning in hopes of going back and contributing finally to the people who are a part of who I am.

I think Lucy's fortitude is what Wilson (2005, p. 77) talked about when she said, "Fortunately there seems to be a growing number of Natives who are less concerned

about their status in the White world and more concerned with helping their respective nations with long-term survival.” Lucy, a single mother, was motivated and decided to go to school on a full time basis because, as she explained, “The quicker I could get out there, the better, because I really want work with Native people.”

Lucy also knows that she has an opportunity to inspire young Native students who may or may not be contemplating a career in medicine. She said:

So my thinking is that if I go back and they see me, the younger ones coming up, and they see me working like this and think that they are more apt to maybe (be inspired to do the same). I get excited about the things I could do for high school students.

She continued, “If they can see me there and maybe someone would say to someone else ‘maybe you could do that’...that’s my hope, if they need help with an idea of which direction to go.”

Frank has left his home a couple of times to go to school, but has always thought it was important to return. He explained:

I’ve gone away to school but I’ll always come back to the reservation. Following high school, or whenever I would graduate, I always came back home because that’s where I thought I could make the biggest difference in people’s lives. And I think that’s the general objective of getting educated and becoming more skilled in life is to help your own people. I’ve always done that and I owe that to my roots, my family roots, and roots I have on the reservation.

Frank’s thought regarding the purpose of getting an education reiterates what much of the Native literature regarding ‘home’ said. That is, the idea and purpose of

students attending the university is for them to gain skills and credentials at the institution that they could use in ways that would benefit their Native community (Brayboy, 2005). In this way, education becomes a tool for empowerment and liberation for the community (Brayboy, 2005).

After spending time with Frank, I came to think that this notion ultimately describes his reasons for coming to the university. As I listened to Frank, I really got the sense that he is passionate about his people, their values, and their sovereignty. Frank believes that in order for Native people to continue to function in the dominant society, both Native and non-Natives need to learn how to communicate with each other better. Frank said:

But one of the bonuses of getting an education is to also learn how to explain things to non-Indian people in a way that they understand, and you are still able to get your perspective across. This is important and necessary for social change to happen. I think we stand to gain more by gaining a mutual respect and mutual understanding of one another, because you gain and I again and together we can make this change happen.

After Bev finishes her degree, she wants to use what she learned in the American Indian Studies program and return to her home reservation with specific goals in mind. She said, "I would love to work for the tribe to try to reform some things, to try to take back our identity, and reclaim some of our traditional styles of dealing with government." This supports Champagne (2006) when he said that ideally, Western education forms, skills, and knowledge should be critically assessed and if appropriate and necessary,

combined with Native forms of education, skills and knowledge in order to find culturally unique solutions to contemporary and future social, economic, and cultural conditions.

Bev, like Lucy, understands that her presence may have an impact on young Native people, “I want to go back home and hopefully inspire some of these kids going to the Indian schools to stick with it, because I think there is such a high dropout rate and there doesn’t need to be.”

I like how Brayboy (2006, p. 435) summarized the role of academic knowledge that is acquired from educational institutions:

In many of our communities this is often referred to as “book knowing,” or “book smarts.” While Indigenous ways of knowing and book smarts are often seen as diametrically opposed, these different forms of knowledge do not necessarily need to be in conflict. Rather, they complement each other in powerful ways. This blending of knowledges, academic and cultural, creates knowledge that is key to survival. For example, knowledge learned in school can be used in conjunction with Tribal knowledge toward social justice for these communities. The strategic use of multiple forms of knowledge generates power that is situated, dynamic, and historically influenced.

Tough to come home

Native communities in the Great Plains seem to be complex places. My friendships with Natives from “the Rez” have helped me to understand certain dynamics there. This complexity may be a result of the mixing of incompatible colonist and Indigenous ways of life that has been happening for a long time. The reservations, like

many places, have their share of challenges but the importance of family and maintaining strong ties to the culture always seemed like the primary milieu whenever I spent time there. Tribal members have a strong sense of family and the commitment to the extended family typically has a priority over all other matters.

For Mathew it seems there is a certain amount of pressure to be successful and he is motivated to accomplish his goals. He said, “I don’t want to go back (home) unless I’m somebody.” Tricia echoed a similar sentiment:

I don’t like to fail and I don’t like to go home with my tail between my legs. I don’t like to fail, I don’t like to not finish things, because when you go home people say, ‘well she did this, but she didn’t really finish’ because everyone knows each other at home.

Frank and Tricia described a type of pressure from family members, that to me, sounded like they (family members) were, in a certain way, trying to provide motivation. Frank termed it “reverse Indian psychology.” Frank went away to boarding school against the advice of his father. He recalled:

I left when I was 14 years old, kind of against my dad’s will, but with my mother’s encouragement. In Indian culture, we have what’s called ‘reverse Indian psychology.’ I don’t think my dad was ever against me leaving home but he basically was just trying to encourage me in other ways. The first thing he told me when I left when I was age 14 was, ‘you won’t ever make it, you’ll be home.’ And of course I went out to prove him wrong, and as painful as it was to be away from home, I stuck with it.

Tricia also mentioned this family pressure to succeed. She told me:

My family will make small comments and my mother would be like ‘what, you couldn’t hack it?’ and she’ll bring it up somehow, someway and when we’re having a difficult discussion and she’s like ‘well, you couldn’t deal with it there, how can you deal with this or hack it here?’ I guess just going home and facing my family or facing my mom or my grandparents.

Along those lines Mato reflected:

It’s a tough path because my own relatives and my own family are even going to be critical of me when they don’t feel that I’m doing what they want me to do.

There are a lot of people to please back home.

Although the literature strongly advocates for Native students to acquire the necessary education and credentials and then return to the reservation or home community, some of the participants in my study suggested that “going home” is not without some very significant challenges. Although a revered notion in the literature, going home may be more complex than simply finding a place to live, finding a job, and beginning to work, help others, and make positive social change.

Mato thought it was important to go home for sweats and ceremonies. He said, “It is tough back home, but if I could go home every weekend, I would.” But also for Mato, as he commits to a life that is free of alcohol and drugs, he knows it is very risky to go home. He said:

It’s been five years sober and clean, but I spent at least 11 or 12 years in that lifestyle. And in order to be sober, they say you have to at least be 11 or 12 years sober to really say it.

I could tell that Mato didn't want to focus on it, but I knew from first hand accounts how prevalent alcohol and drug abuse is on his reservation. To combat this social challenge local agencies, such as the Indian Health Services and schools, provide support, coursework, and intensive counseling to help. Mato told me that many of his close friends and his family are still struggling with addictions and there will be temptations for him.

Mato understood the difficult task which he will be soon undertaking by going home, he speculated, "And it's going to be a tough path and sometimes I wonder, why me? But I know everything I did in the past and the path that I led before is building up to this."

I was humbled by the fact that Mato was so open and transparent with me. I interpreted that to be a sign of his unwavering diligence and commitment to creating a different and honorable path, as he determines it.

For Lucy going home will also present some obstacles. She candidly talked about how sometimes relatives or others at home are critical of her because of her success off the reservation. She talked about the implications of going home:

I know it's mostly the elderly when they say "you need to go and get your education so you can come back." But then when you do come back...(it's like) the analogy of crabs in a bucket. Kind of like that. Whereas instead of celebrating with me they are trying to pull me down. I have a relative who never has anything nice to say, so when he comes by, I just try to avoid him because I'm like him, my life in Plainsview is not that easy either, and (I'm) having hard time financially,

stuff like that. And (I'd like to say) 'encourage me, help me' But I think while he's around, he's older and I just keep quiet, but I don't forget what he's said.

Lucy also worries a little bit about moving back to the reservation because she is concerned for her son. Because he is a teenager and is shy and reserved, she worried:

Because my son, the age that he is, the teenage years, a boy on the reservation...it's hard, really hard. If he got into the crowd, he could easily fall into some things that happen there.

A normally reserved and thoughtful Tricia quickly became tearful when she talked about the biggest issue making it difficult for her to go home to her southwestern reservation. It seems that there is a formidable bureaucracy that Tricia and her husband have to face in order to build a house. She explained:

You can't just build a house (on the reservation) because these people say you can't build a house, and it's just frustrating. That really frustrates me, because there's so much bureaucracy, and it's hard because you just want these things, a home and you want to live your life but then you can't do it. Then you think that maybe I'll just live in Flagstaff or Phoenix or Tucson and I'll have my own house there, where you won't have to deal with grazing rights or grazing permits or different things that reservations have to deal with. It's just so frustrating to be at home.

Tricia's conundrum is apparent. She wants to be home, but does not want to endure the struggles that are required to build a house. If she lived off the reservation, she could have a house of her own, but wouldn't be near her family.

Tricia's family back home has had experiences like this before. She explained:

We are trying to get running water and there are people that stand in the way of that. There is just so much bureaucracy and politics. I'm trying to balance the two of going home or living elsewhere.

Tricia told me about the politics getting land and building a house. She said there is so much drama involved with going home. Tricia continued:

I mean not my family, my family is pretty non-dramatic, but it's just the people around you who just have that sickness of trying to bring each other down. And you're just like 'god, I don't want to be there', but you miss home.

My goal is not to paint a picture that the reservation is a bad place, instead I want to convey that there are a variety of issues that Native adult learners face, issues that are not often on the radar of the non-Native teachers at a predominantly White university. It just is not a simple matter of getting a degree and going home to work. It seems that it can be more complicated.

The reservations that I have been to are not bad places at all, but rather, I would characterize them as complex places. Some of the reservations in the Great Plains region have been ranked as some of the most poverty stricken areas in the country, and it seems that inhabitants of these reservations, like any number of other places, are susceptible to certain pitfalls including drug and alcohol addiction, domestic and sexual abuse, high unemployment rates, violence, and recently spiked suicide rates. Tribal sovereignty, as I understand it, is a very different concept from that of democracy; and the dual-status citizenship that most Natives are entitled to is a unique status not understood by most non-natives including lawmakers, government officials, and educators. Treaty rights, or what is left of them, are tricky, as states often do not want to deal with them or honor

them as they were originally written. Land recovery and preservation, although being made vogue by the “green revolution” have always been a virtue of Native peoples.

There are complex issues in Indian Country that require thoughtful answers. For the last century White “leaders” have offered solutions that have been inadequate to say the least. Leadership to finding answers to these complex issues must come from Native people themselves. As Natives already know, many of these answers come from the teachings of the Tribal elders through traditional knowledge. There may be some knowledge at the university that will help Native continue the project of Nation-building. Maybe this knowledge can compliment Native ways of knowing to provide answers to the plethora of complex issues that Tribal members face.

I fear that by re-telling some the participant’s stories about the challenges of the reservation, that some will make broad generalizations about the reservation and mark them as horrible and awful places. I know what the statistics say about some of the challenging issues that are present on some of the reservations. However, whenever I have visited a reservation in the region, nine out of ten times I had good experiences, meaning the people I have met were warm, hospitable and helpful. As one elderly Native woman from Rosebud once told me, ‘for every bad apple here, there are nine good ones. It’s just that the bad apples get all the attention.’

Theme #3: Discontentedness and Decolonization

Theme: Discontentedness and Decolonization
Sub-themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discontentedness • Carving Spaces

Conflicts are not easy to talk about. Very few people like to dwell on negative parts of an experience, and I found that to be true with the participants in this study. But I think that student discontentedness is an important issue to understand, and it warrants attention if the university and its faculty are genuinely concerned about the recruitment and retention of students, including Native students, whose population typically has been underserved at the university.

This section describes some of the conflicts, contradictions, and discontentedness that Native adult students encountered at UGP. Of course, not all experiences at the university were negative for these students. On the contrary, I found the participants in this study to be optimistic and confident about the paths they had chosen and the opportunities that may be open to them when they finish. I appreciated the fact that these students were open and honest when I asked them to talk about certain experiences that caused them to be discontent.

Discontentedness

Brayboy (2006) defined colonization as the European and American thought, knowledge, and power structures that dominate present day society in the United States. Brayboy then quoted Battiste (2002) and explained further, “Eurocentric thinkers dismiss Indigenous knowledge in the same way they dismissed any socio-political cultural life they did not understand: they found it to be unsystematic and incapable of meeting productivity needs of the modern world” (2006, p. 430).

Disentangling the dominant culture's way of doing things from Native ways of doing things is a part of decolonization. As a former school teacher, Tricia talked about this disentanglement:

(It's) trying to remember that the mainstream way is not always the right way.

Like how they think about education. Let's say for example, I'm sitting in a classroom trying to find a way to improve my students' reading level, how can I get to my students? And instead of doing it the mainstream way, why don't I do it the Native way? Why don't I use the Native way of thinking? Sometimes we forget that and end up doing it the mainstream, textbook, dominant way.

Deloria (1999) said that sometimes education for Native students in the mainstream context resembles indoctrination more than it does other forms of teaching, as it insists on implanting a particular body of knowledge and a specific view of the world that often does not correspond to life experiences that Native people have had or might be expected to encounter. During various conversations, students told me about situations that had conflicts or contradictions between what was being taught and what they knew as a Native person.

Kim told me about a cultural conflict she encountered in an astronomy class:

I took an astronomy course and although there is a whole lot of information about Native American and Lakota Star Knowledge, the teacher completely ignored that it existed. He didn't want to hear anything besides the scientific part of it. That didn't sit too well with me.

I have come to think that if the non-Native teacher hopes to fully engage with the Native student, he will need to be patient, committed, and willing to "unlearn" certain

educational principles that confine and define knowledge from solely a Western perspective. Kim continued, “It made me feel like he never cared and it was going to be hard to get through that course, hearing only one side to something.”

Kim also experienced a professor who was insensitive to both her Native spiritual beliefs and her identity as an artist and photographer:

I did have a problem with a professor that was in my main core. He kept suggesting things that weren't acceptable. He wanted me to do pictures of ceremonies and that's not okay. I'd tell him that I wasn't comfortable with that and that it wasn't okay and that's not where I wanted my art to go. I had other ways of doing things.

Kim decided to bring in a mediator in to help this professor understand that taking photographs of some sacred ceremonies was inappropriate. She told me:

I brought someone in to speak to him and it didn't do any good. I just tried to ignore what he was saying about it and just tried to do my own art. I just had to let it go, because he wasn't going to change his ways.

Ultimately, Kim made the decision to persist in the class despite the professor's single-mindedness but mentioned that other Native students who were art majors decided to quit the program. She explained, “A lot of Native American students drop out of the art program because of the...not understanding of how Native American people view art.”

Brayboy (2005) said it well when he said that maintaining cultural integrity means that even though experiences in school certainly affect a person, they need not do so at the expense of that person's home culture. A teacher who is remotely aware of Native American culture should understand how important art is to some Indians. I can

understand that Kim might feel the professor was trying to exploit her integrity as a Native person, an artist and also the integrity of the ceremony. I can also acknowledge that this instance could be viewed as being reminiscent of the assimilationist ideals of the boarding school era, where colonization efforts were made in an attempt to de-culturize the Native students, instead of allowing them to self-determine what is or what is not culturally appropriate.

Bev talked about a time in a history class when her professor's historic interpretation was in conflict with the way she interpreted history. Never one to back down from a battle in class, she confronted the professor:

So, my teacher, who is a professor and has a Ph.D. in history, was talking about the savages and the Indian uprisings, and I was like 'are you kidding me? These people were here first, you know. Native people were here first. I don't think there's any way you can debate that. I mean what were we uprising against? We weren't U.S. citizens until 1924 and even then we didn't have full citizenship.'

This teacher got really angry with me.

Besides the use of the offensive word 'savage', Bev took issue with how the professor interpreted uprising. She continued, "I have valid points and I wasn't trying to start a fight, but I wanted to fight the perception out there." Bev's interpretation of history was justifiable and she continued:

(I wish some professors were) open to looking at it from the Native American perspective because history books aren't really written from that point of view. Native Americans weren't really in control of the pen when they were writing.

Kim, Anna, and Lucy mentioned how the religious practice of smudging was important to them, but was often misunderstood by many at the university. As I learned on a recent trip to Anishinaabe Country in Northern Minnesota, smudging is a ritual way to cleanse a person, place or an object of negative energies, spirits or influences. Smudging involves the burning of special, sacred plants and herbal resins, then either passing an object through the resulting smoke, or fanning the smoke around a person or place. The spirit of the plant then purifies whatever is being smudged. Kim commented that non-Natives are free to practice their religion without any hassle, but frequently, Natives who smudge usually received a visit from the campus police. While the university recognizes smudging as a legitimate spiritual practice and is completely 'legal' in university housing, it was the ignorance of the neighboring students, who called the police, probably because they thought the Native students were smoking pot. Kim talked about her frustration:

Trying to practice your spiritual beliefs and practices and having cops come to your door on more than one occasion... whenever someone's practicing their spirituality by using smudging, usually you get a cop at your door.

Lucy experienced another type of contradiction at UGP. She believed that sometimes the dominant culture at the predominantly White university encouraged a sense of unnecessary competitiveness, and because some Native students were taught by their elders that focusing on the group is more important than focusing on the individual, another contradiction surfaced. Lucy expounded, "There's just a lot of potential, and I know it's hard between cultures, because it seems like the mainstream culture is focused on the 'me' instead of everybody together." She continued:

I thought the competitiveness was just getting into the program. I thought once we're in the program, we're all here, we're all striving for the same thing, to be a good medical professional, so we can give good health care to our patients. That, to me, was the goal...to learn as much as you can. But people were very unwilling to share information. If they got something, they wouldn't want to share it, or if they did share, it was with a select few. And there were cliques and I had come to think that this is one of those classes that have more students that were right out of undergrad. And I was surprised it was like that because even for me culturally, the idea is for everybody to come together and do what you can to help everyone else. It wasn't like that, so that was surprising to me.

The notions of culture and community for Native American students sometimes frames their understanding of education in a fundamentally different way from that of White students. Understanding this may help administrators and professors to be more responsive to the needs of Native students at the university.

Semali and Kincheloe (1999) said that there are often power struggles involved in concerning who is allowed to proclaim certain knowledge. A discussion with Rob yielded this response that supported Semali and Kinchloe. Rob talked about a professor:

Maybe the way I see it is not the way they want to see it, but that's the way I see it. That's the way I grew up. It could be some issue we're talking about and I see it differently. That's the only time where I felt like I've had a different view. I think because the instructor was, well, she studied American Indian culture her whole life, she was from Philadelphia. I am pretty sure she had an open mind but sometimes my view was different from hers because I came from the reservation,

because I came from and I lived on the reservation. I've got family on the reservation and I go back to the reservation for holidays. So I think it opened her mind and at times I feel like we didn't see on some issues, but I felt the whole class felt like that. We all saw it a little bit different from her.

When their culture is not valued in the course, some Native students will have little or no motivation to participate or succeed in education (Champagne, 2006). Students with stronger Native identity, values, and commitment to their Native communities and families might have greater difficulty accepting or participating in these types of classes.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) said that it is presumed that the university is an established institution with its own long-standing, deeply-rooted policies, practices, programs and standards intended to serve the needs of the society in which it is imbedded. Students who come to the university are expected to adapt to its modus operandi if they wish to obtain the benefits (usually translated to mean better, higher paying jobs) of the knowledge and skills it has to offer--the desirability and value of which are presumed to be self-evident. Unfortunately, Native American students have not necessarily been well served by the current educational paradigm, higher education included, as indicated by numerous reports and studies.

Frank commented that the mainstream university's way of doing things may have in some ways hindered his education:

I always felt very guarded and still feel that way to a certain extent. We have a way of teaching law, and all law schools do this. They have a way of teaching called the Socratic method where you have to get up and recite on cases and so

forth. The one thing that always bothered me about law school was that when I was working in an Indian community or when I'm out on the powwow trail and I would get up and talk, I had no problem talking. But I always have had a very difficult time speaking in law school, and I think part of the reason why is because I know that I see things differently, and I know that I explain things differently, and I'm not sure if these people are interested in listening to me.

These contradictions that surfaced at the university, along with many more that probably went unspoken, more than likely triggered varying degrees of disorientation for the Native student. It seems to me that these dilemmas often caused Native students to reflect on the intersection of western and traditional Tribal knowledge as they converge in the university setting. Wilson (2005, p. 75) said:

While none of us seem prepared to reject everything from the modern world and return entirely to old ways, even if this were a possibility, it is only reasonable to critically assess the outside colonial influences that have so miserably failed to improve our lives and have instead subjugated us to such despairing levels.

Failing to recognize or understand these contradictions might be what Mihesuah, J. (2004) would call internalized colonization--the phenomenon of Natives thinking that the White dominant culture is superior, accepting negative stereotypes about Natives, not questioning biased classroom lectures, and acting negatively towards other Natives. Conversely, Native students who examine their discontentedness end up juxtaposing the resulting lived disparity of colonization and gain a space to better understand self-determination and decolonization.

Hassel (2005, p. 7) advocated a shift in thinking from a one-way process of assimilation into a dominant western perspective toward a two-way process of engaging multiple worldviews, each producing its own truths. This notion of cross-cultural engagement (Hassel, 2005) benefits not only the Native student, but more importantly benefits the university as a whole, as well. Semali and Kincheloe (1999, p. 47) suggested that the curricular inclusion of Indigenous knowledge grants Westerners a needed interaction with “difference” – a conversation that they believed leads to a heightened Western consciousness.

Carving Spaces

Brayboy (2006) said that it is important to recognize that governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous people have, historically, been oriented toward a problematic goal of assimilation. Assimilation in the educational setting requires students to replace cultural knowledge with academic knowledge.

Wilson (2004, p. 73) said, “The academy has not historically valued or respected our knowledge. Often, the university has accepted only what it can appropriate for colonial purposes and dismissed any knowledge that challenges the status quo and Western ways of knowing.” A Native American adult learner may likely face certain cultural conflicts at the university. The conflicts usually occur at the intersection of Western, mainstream university knowledge and Native ways of knowing.

The sub-theme, carving spaces, focused on instances when a Native adult student in this study addressed certain contradictions and in the process constructed knowledge that might be counter to the privileged, mainstream knowledge that was the norm at the

university. Mihesuah and Wilson (2004) said that carving spaces creates places where Indigenous values and knowledge are respected; creates an environment that supports research methodology, is useful to Indigenous nation building, and compels institutional responsiveness to indigenous issues, concerns, and communities. Spaces were carved for a number of reasons and by different means according to each unique person.

Mathew criticized Natives at the university who wanted to make change by “being loud and being mean and tough, shouting and a lot of protesting.” He said that while Natives at the university might think and feel that way because of the way they had been treated, many of these people were very intelligent and driven and that approaching it in a different way is more effective. Mathew called it ‘fighting fire with fire.’ He said, “They see that if they are going to get anywhere in the world, they are going to have to come here and get an education. And they’re going to be serious about it.”

Rob’s advice was to be proactive and address issues when they come up. He seemed to acknowledge that some issues might be sticky but he often took on the burden of opening the dialogue, which in the end helped everyone. He advised, “Go ahead and reach out and teach them something about your culture, let them know who you are, that way it’ll make it more comfortable for you and them because you’ll be able to talk about this kind of stuff.”

Tricia was hesitant to say that she carved space in her classes, although after reflecting upon it, she came to the conclusion that she did in fact do so in “my own little quiet way.” Although she did not see herself as outspoken, she thought it was important to pick appropriate spots and educate others when certain opportunities presented themselves. She said:

I'm a very reserved person. I don't go in there thinking here's my opinion, I want you to follow what I think. I feel that if there is an issue, I will give my opinion. I'm not going to go in there and be really outspoken. Because in my culture we were taught to be reserved, and not to be jumpy and pushy and to be in somebody's face. And you just say your bit and then you are done.

Tricia remembered several occasions when, in the course of certain presentations, she was able to teach her classmates something new about her Native culture. During a visit with her in the Cultural Center she told me, "My first semester I did a tribal government presentation and all the students in there were like 'I had no idea about any of that stuff' like treaty obligations and they also said 'you taught me a lot.'" Even though Tricia did not consider herself outspoken, Wilson (2004) suggested that by articulating Native knowledge, her actions became a consciously political act in which she actually actively resisted the forces of colonialism while at the same time building Native nationalism.

Deyhle (1995) contended that Native people must maintain a strong sense of their Indigenous identity as distinctive and as a source of pride. Tricia's stance appeared to be effective because she seemed comfortable with her Native identity in the midst of a predominantly White university. Tricia continued, "They're entitled to their views and I'm entitled to mine, and I just listen, and in my own mind, I educate them about my people." My impression was that Tricia, who was very thoughtful and deliberate about her words, is someone who commanded attention in a subtle and yet powerful way. My intuition told me that when she spoke, people would listen to her.

Bev's strategy was on the opposite end of the carving spaces spectrum. She said pointedly, "I'm probably going to piss off people along the way. I'm going to speak my mind." Bev seemed very purposeful in her attempts to create pockets of understanding of Native issues, perspectives, and ways of knowing. She continued, "I will put a conflicting opinion out there and they see how they react. I hate to say that I test my teachers, but I do."

Bev clearly understood that speaking up might have consequences, but to her, that did not seem nearly as important as seizing every opportunity to bring a better understanding of Native issues to the forefront. She told me, "I expect that there are going to be casualties along the way and I know not everyone's going to accept my opinion. But it's important that I speak."

Bev drew courage from the way she was raised, "I really use the fact that I'm Native American and that's something to be proud of." She also said that she felt it is her obligation to speak out when the time arises. Wilson (2004, p. 79) said that, "As humans, we have the right to argue that our ways of knowing are equal to any on earth and we have a right to challenge colonial claims to superiority." Bev continued:

We were taught respect, and taught duty and honor. We were taught not to act promiscuous or show too much skin, to be modest. Be humble. But when there is an issue, fight for it. When there is an issue of you being Native, or if it's causing problems or conflict or someone's judging you in a wrong way, I think that you have to defend that.

Bev's perspectives often offered an opportunity for a differing view to be presented in class. Bev talked about different instances when she battled a history

professor and another time an American Literature professor. She said, “I will say my piece and if that gets me in trouble...And for Native Americans, I think you have to be not afraid to speak your mind, and realize that your opinion, your beliefs are in conflict with the so-called master narrative, like to challenge manifest destiny.”

Teirney (1992) suggested that an educational process responsive to the needs of Native students should enable them to unearth their subjugated histories and voices, not so they can assimilate into the systems but so they will be able to challenge and change it. Bev’s courage and conviction was inspiring. Bev told me, “I’m not beaten back by challenges, they actually inspire me more. Like I said, I have really associated with my Native identity since I was a child, so I think that it really is a part of my core.”

I agree with Brayboy (2005) when he said that although some assimilation may be inevitable at the university, education for Native Americans is not rooted in the goal of assimilation. Bev concluded confidently, “This is who I am, this is a part of my identity and I’m not going to just smile as they talk about you with wrong perceptions.”

Brayboy (2005) said that there must be recognition that the ways of knowing for Native students are vital to their self-education and self-determination. Mato spoke of the notion of carving spaces as his obligation. He told me, “I realize I’m a representative of home. I’m the mouthpiece, it’s my duty, it’s my obligation to help educate others, and that’s the only way we are going to cross any barriers.”

Frank seemed to also feel an obligation to carve spaces. Frank told me about some very specific and challenging goals he had when he came to UGP, “My goal when I came to law school here at UGP was number one to get a law degree, but number two was to try to knock down some of these barriers that exist between Indians and non-Indians.”

Mihesuah (2004) said that Natives who come from a reservation or tribal community and have a sense of purpose as a member of that tribe feel that having outlets to express themselves is important to their sense of identity. One place where Frank had that kind of opportunity was in a group called American Indian Law Student Association (AILSAs), which he was the group's leader. He recalled:

It kind of gave me an outlet. It gave me a chance to express myself, because when I was in an AILSA meeting, I ran that AILSA meeting. I ran it the way I wanted to run it. I didn't have to go with the law school rules. I was able to say what I felt needed to be said. But unfortunately it was one of the few places that I felt like I could say what needed to be said in the law school.

As a White male, I do not recall very many times when I have 'carved spaces' in a way that these students have done; and I am not sure if I can fully grasp the difficulty of 'carving spaces' in a place where I am not a part of the dominant culture. As a teacher who is a product of the dominant culture, I feel it is important to understand this notion. It was indeed fascinating to hear why and how these adult learners were able to 'carve spaces' at this predominantly White university.

Many of the adult students in this study indicated that carving spaces, in either little or big ways, hopefully helped non-Natives come to a better understanding of some of the aspects of Native culture. Ultimately this may serve other Native peoples and Native nations in the future. Frank explained it to me this way:

If they (non-Natives) understand Indians better as a result of something I've said, and me taking five minutes of my time makes the world a better place, and makes it a better place for people like me, then I think that that's my goal. I've tried to

institutionally to make some improvements, and not just me, other Indian students also, but I've really made a concerted effort, a real deliberate effort to make that happen.

Amanda hoped that by addressing the contradictions she encountered in class and taking time to bring her Native perspective into the classroom, she could to be an agent of change. She said:

Because I think that even if you only have one Native American person in a room you could affect like six people and change their opinion about things. So I hope I change someone's opinion, because we're not all savages running around in feathers, in moccasins and buckskins anymore. We do want to be part of the world. We want to have influence, and we want to say that we are part of it.

Lucy, an aspiring professional in the medical field, gave a cultural gift to her mentors after each rotation in an attempt to create an awareness of her culture. Over coffee one day she talked with me about what she did after each rotation:

My grandmother always taught me that when you receive something you should give something back. And so what I received was knowledge and at the end of each rotation I gave them, well, I really like the story of the medicine wheel and what the colors mean, so I've given each of them something like that, and maybe they'll remember me and say I remember I had that Native student once. And maybe that will help the next Native student that comes along. Maybe they will be more open.

Frank recognized that every time he took time to address one of his non-Native classmates, it was usually time well spent. He expanded:

I've taken every opportunity that I've had to help my classmates understand, whether they show even an inkling of interest, I try to take that as an opportunity. Because if one non-Indian law student leaves this law school and becomes a practitioner out there and has a better understanding of Indian people, we have a better chance as an Indian people of having our interests (recognized), because that student might become a public defender, a prosecutor, the state's attorney, or he might become governor, who knows where these guys are going to end up.

I saw this come to fruition before I really even had a chance to visit with Frank. Just prior to our first meeting at the law school and as we were waiting for a space to open up for our interview, one of Frank's classmates came up to us and asked for Frank's advice. Since we were waiting, Frank took the time to address the questions his fellow classmate had about the upcoming symposium that dealt with law and economics in Indian Country. Several cultural issues came up and it was evident that this classmate had a limited understanding of the complexity of many of these Native issues. As I observed this conversation as an outsider, I was moved by the way Frank patiently informed the student. In the end, I thought that Frank had made the most out of this opportunity to address some cultural misinterpretations, and ultimately carved more spaces for understanding at the law school.

One way that I conceptualized the notion of decolonization is that it is an on-going activity with the assumption that situations can be transformed through a trust in Native peoples' values, and abilities, and willingness to make social change. Wilson (2004) said decolonization is about transforming negative reactionary energy into a more positive energy with the purpose of rebuilding Native communities. He continued, "It is a

means of restoring health and prosperity to Native people by returning to traditions and ways of life that had been systematically suppressed” (Wilson, 2004, p.71). Frank’s account of why he chose to attend UGP seemed to illustrate Wilson’s point:

I’m going to go back to my home state and I’m going to help create a different culture within my home state’s law school that is sensitive to Indian students and opens up the door for us to get that legal education in the Midwest.

Theme #4: Toward an Education that is Socio-culturally and Politically Relevant to Native Adult Students

Theme: Toward an Education that is Socio-culturally and Politically Relevant to Native Adult Students

Sub-themes:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Need for More Natives, More Diversity • The “State” of Disappointment • Sovereignty |
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Brayboy (2006) argued that race appears to be the main focus of how Native Americans are defined by most members of the dominant society in the U.S. He continued by saying (p. 433), “This status ignores the legal/political one, and is directly tied to the notions of colonialism, because larger society is unaware of the multiple statuses of Indigenous people.” During a conversation with Frank, in which we were talking about Tribal sovereignty and dual-status citizenship, he described how he experienced it. He talked about a time when he returned to his reservation and worked with Tribal leaders:

So I came back and I took that position and I was kind of introduced to Tribal issues and how federal law affects Indian people on a day-to-day basis. I always

knew that as an enrolled member of my Tribe, as a person living on the reservation, and growing up (in my home community), we were a little different, but I never knew exactly why, other than the fact that we were Indian.

Horse (2005, p. 67) explained further:

The practical benchmark for Indian-ness is a political distinction that tribes enjoy as sovereign nations. Members of tribal nations are thus dual citizens. They are citizens of the United States and of their respective Tribal nations. It is not simply a matter of American Indians being just another ethnic minority.

Grande (2004) concluded that sovereignty “becomes a project organized to defend and sustain the basic right of Indigenous people to thrive in their relations with other peoples” (p.171). Thus, education for Native students must be relevant to the socio-cultural and political goals for the student.

As I come to understand the concept of Native sovereignty, I find that education for Native students often becomes a socio-cultural and political activity, as it extends beyond the parameters of the classroom walls. Wilson (2004, p. 73) said, “Because these are ways that have been systematically suppressed, our alternative ways of seeing, being, thinking, and acting are necessarily political and a challenge to the dominant society.” Working toward the project of sovereignty for students is a process of helping their home communities to be in a position to sustain their cultural integrity, according to their self-determined needs. Further, students who seek an education that is in the best interest of their Tribe or home community will ultimately strive for the improvement of socioeconomic conditions in those places.

The Need for More Natives, More Diversity

Many of the Native adult students with whom I visited mentioned that the first thing they do when they enter a classroom is look for other Native American students. Rob confirmed this saying, “Yeah, that’s the first thing I do. I scan the crowd and if I don’t find Natives, I’ll try to find maybe someone with ethnic roots.”

Unfortunately for most of these students, they may end up looking for a long time and not see another Native American student. They are too often the only Indian student in the class...and in their program.

Anna was one of the few students who had regular contact with other Native students. In her academic program there were two other Native students. And in a rigorous program of study, Anna said it was really beneficial for her:

There were four Natives this year that were accepted. I don’t know if that was the record but probably. But this semester one of them dropped out, but the three of us that did get in...there is one from Pine Ridge, one from Eagle Butte and me, and we study together nonstop. I mean we were here for five hours yesterday. Tara would’ve been here, but she was up in City Falls, but yeah, I’m at Tara’s house as much as I’m at my house if not more. I mean we always study.

Anna said that there was comfort in having other Native students in her class: to be able to understand common experiences, to be able to laugh at certain stories, and to be able to help each other through tough academic and personal times. She said:

We have a good time, we joke around, teach each other, and we hold each other accountable for, I mean, if one of us doesn’t want to study, the other one is like ‘come on’ or ‘you did so well on the last test, so get over here.’

Frank speculated how his experience at UGP could have been better if he had other Natives to bounce ideas off of and converse with. He said:

I think it would have been more advantageous to me if I could have come in with some other Indian students during my first year. Because when I came here I was expecting at least one other Indian person to be in the law school with me, but if not another Indian person, I was expecting at least a minority person. And when I came to orientation, during the first year of law school, not only was I the only Indian, I was the only minority. I was the only person of color. And all my professors are all White.

Tricia explained what she thinks are the implications of a university that is not very diverse:

Because especially here at UGP...it's not very diverse, so you don't have that diverse opinion. Because everyone has grown up in the middle class home or the farm, and all they have had contact with are non-Natives. So they don't really get that (Native American) view.

Having attended a state university in the Southwest prior to coming to UGP, Tricia knew that diversity can make a difference in the experience of the students. She said:

I just like to see people of color in the classroom, different ideas. This is a very conservative state and they all walk the same line, and it's just that everyone has the same ideas and I miss that diversity, and I wish that was here.

Frank outlined how attracting and admitting more Native students to the university could benefit other Natives. I think it may even eventually have a snowball

effect and increase the recruiting and retention of Native students to a level that UGP would be proud of. He said:

I think that if there were more Indian students in a class, maybe Indian students would feel more comfortable, because I feel that if nothing else, there may be one Indian student out there who may agree with what the Indian student is saying. Or maybe that other Indian student is saying something in a way that the other Indian student can understand.

I could tell that Frank had thought this issue through very carefully. As with all of the students in my study, the combination of being a minority student along with the maturity of being an adult student provided a unique and thoughtful perspective and thus deserves to be taken seriously in my opinion. Frank offered, “And I think to do that successfully, they’ve got to rethink the way they teach, and they’ve got to rethink who’s teaching, and they’ve got to rethink who they are teaching.”

I could sense Lucy’s frustration with this matter as she felt like the university was not doing enough to increase the amount of Natives at UGP. She said:

It’s a case where you know something’s wrong and even though you might not know how to fix it, you have to try something. And that’s the thing that I really get frustrated with, is that you haven’t even really tried anything. Because we talk about what we need, we need this, we need that. Well, then, let’s do something!

In her book, *Indigenizing the Academy*, Devon Abbott Mihesuah (2004) addressed Lucy’s concern and said that universities must stand behind the programs and the professionals who work closely with Native students and that successful recruiting and retention must come from campus-wide efforts and commitments.

Frank gave credit to other law schools for their commitment to admitting Native students. He talked about the University of the Southwest (USW):

One thing I can say about the U. of SW, just looking at their law school, the number of Native Americans in their law program is reflective of their population in the state. But here at UGP right now, in the law school...out of 210 law students at the University of the Great Plains, there are only three Native Americans. No, it's not reflective of our population in the state.

Next I asked Frank to talk about how this lack of diversity, lack of Native American presence, affected him. He insightfully spoke about how it has been for him:

I mean I'd be lying to you, Tom, if I said that it didn't affect me. Because it has. Because when you look around, there's not one single person who can relate to your experiences as an Indian person. There's not one single person that can empathize or relate or even talk about it, and that's just the experience of life, not to mention about how you think and how you feel and how you reason and how you perceive the world. So, I'm not saying you're necessarily at a disadvantage, because you are here to get a legal education, but I think you are at a disadvantage because you have less people for your support system, and to help you through this process of getting a legal education. I think that is an experience that is common for a lot of Indian students on this campus, because they have less people to go to for support.

Lucy said that even though university officials may say that they want to increase diversity and retention of Native students at UGP, leaders often miss important opportunities to make connections with students. Since it was the beginning of the

semester, the Native American Cultural Center hosted a social event, with food, providing an opportunity for students to get to know professors and program leaders.

Lucy was disappointed in the lack of participation from campus leaders. She told me:

Everyone says that we need more Natives in PT (physical therapy), OT (occupational therapy), and med school, but it is sad to say that you never see any people from the programs go to these types of events. It's always, well the law school was always pretty good, and nursing is good, and then its American Indian Studies and education, but then it is 'where are all the medical school people?' And even the leadership in the other medical programs, have they ever gone over there? I don't think that I have ever seen them over there.

Often times we think of diversification as only benefiting the minority group.

Frank summarized the need for diversity in a way that also potentially strengthens the members of the dominant culture as well. Frank said:

To make our classrooms more diverse and to create the opportunities for Indians and non-Indian students to interact with one another and to learn from one another, so that their prejudices and the assumptions that they grew up with can be challenged on a student to student basis and on a personal level. But without that, this university is disadvantaging its student body. And they (the students) are going to go out there into the real world and learn some very hard lessons, especially in law school because if you are going to be an attorney in this state, you are going to have a client who is Native American. And it could be a very hard lesson to learn when they're out there with a client.

The “State” of Disappointment

As Frank and I were walking through the quiet, brick-laden halls of the law school on a late Thursday afternoon, I mentioned the game “Where’s Waldo” and Frank knew exactly what I was talking about. I noticed the continuous line of framed class composite pictures of the graduating classes hanging on the walls; they dated back many, many years. As I was peering at the pictures from the last 15-20 years, it was like I was playing a game of “Where’s Waldo” except instead of Waldo, I was looking for Native American graduates. They were as elusive as Waldo.

Frank reflected on my analogy:

Every day. I walk into this law school, everyday, I say every day because it’s a thought that I had even this morning. You are reminded that this is a predominately White institution. When you look around the walls, there’s not one Black person, there’s not one Latino, there’s not one Asian person, there is not one Indian person on the wall. Every single person, with the exception of some of the composite photos of students in classes, but donors and influential people and for whatever reason they put pictures of people on the wall, they are all Caucasian.

Native Americans make up around 8% of the state’s population, yet the population is only 1% in the law school right now. I would say that the law school produces some potentially very influential professionals that will be soon infused back into the state as attorneys, state prosecutors, judges, and legislators. Additionally, I would argue that UGP is missing a tremendous social justice opportunity by only enrolling 3 Natives out of 210 students.

The University of the Great Plains is not a private school; it is one of the state's publicly funded universities, and thus, I think should be responsive to the needs of the state's population. Clearly, 1% is not 8%. But that 1% mentioned above is a figure that is consistent with not only the law school, but also most the colleges and programs at UGP. Further the school's newspaper recently reported that the 4-year retention rate for Native students was only between an astounding 5-10%.

Anna believed the stats, and as one who works on the front lines with first year Native students as a mentor, she had an opinion as to who on campus was working toward creating an awareness of cultural issues and an appreciation of diversity and who was not, "I will not credit UGP, I will not credit UGP for being culturally sensitive or culturally aware at this point. There are people on campus who are pushing for it, but UGP as a whole is absolutely not."

This particular state has the third highest proportion of Native Americans of any state (2009 Statistical Abstract: The National Data Book, 2009) and is home to nine reservations with five of the state's counties located wholly within Indian Reservations.

Lucy said:

I just think it's sad that in this state where the majority of the minority are Native American...mostly it's Native and non-Native here, and I think that the opportunity is there but maybe not knowing how to go about learning things (is the challenge). Because I feel like I live the other way, on a daily basis as far as...I'm living in a non-Native world, so to me it's like reciprocating and to take the time to get to know another, other people their right at your doorstep. The opportunity is there.

Although UGP's Native American Institute just celebrated its 50th birthday and appears to be strong, it only recently developed into a department at UGP. Further, the university does not offer a Master's degree in the area of American Indian Studies. Bev is contemplating going to another state to get a graduate degree in Indian Studies, she could not believe that one of the larger universities in this state has not developed a program yet. She said, "That is definitely something that should be happening here, this is ridiculous that we don't already have that."

Bev anticipated that more Native students could be coming to the university in the future and wondered if the professors will be able to engage these students:

I think there are going to eventually be more and more Native people who make it to the college system, so especially in a state like this one, some cultural sensitivity courses need to be taught to the professors.

Bev encountered a couple of professors who, despite being employed at one of the State's largest publicly funded universities, seem to be unaware of Native issues. She said:

But I think there needs to be (training), I don't know if they (the teachers) need a crash course on decolonization or what. I mean especially in this state, there needs to be history and cultural considerations for it, especially when you're talking about U.S. history, and the 'savage' Indians and all that.

Tricia was disappointed that there is not a greater Native presence on the UGP campus:

With such a high population of Native people in this state, I wish there would be more stuff for Native students, and also for recruiting quality instructors that know that material.

When I asked Rob if he thought more Native instructors would make a difference for him, his reply was, “It would be nice if there was a Native instructor that I could feel, I don’t know, closer to them for some reason.”

In Devon Abbott Mihesuah’s (2004) writing on academic gatekeeping, she indicated that hiring more Native faculty is not apolitical. She scrutinized the gatekeepers, those with position and power who determine who is hired and who receives tenure. Mihesuah (2004) said that gatekeepers are concerned about their jobs, promotion, profit, and power. The gatekeepers of academia are standard bearers of the status quo. They take advantage of the oppression of Indigenous peoples, and from their positions of power, they decide who is amiable enough to be hired, neutral enough in their writings to publish, and Euro-American enough in their outlooks to earn rewards or qualify for grants and fellowships. In other words, in order to be acceptable to gatekeepers, Indigenous scholars and their work must be non-threatening to those in power positions.

Sovereignty

Sovereignty has been a difficult concept for me to understand. Furthermore, I do not think that the mainstream U.S. society is easily able to reconcile how the concept of sovereignty fits into the picture of democracy. Also I do not think the majority of people understand the concept of “dual-status citizen,” let alone know it even exists.

I noted in my field notes the strong and clear socio-cultural and historic understanding that Mato had as he talked about the Nation he will be returning to:

It's always highlighted that we are poverty-stricken, but now through my experience, we're a Nation. We are a people; we are Tribe that is rich in heritage and culture. And if it wasn't for our ancestors generations ago, holding onto those, I don't know where we would be.

During various interviews the concept of the sovereign Nation was referred to and I was under the impression that Native students understood what it was and how it affected them as students. At the same time, I also thought that talking directly about the concept of Tribal Sovereignty in the context of a predominantly White university was difficult as it may conjure up "controversial" images of Russell Means and the American Indian Movement and the Wounded Knee incidents, which many conservative White Midwesterners classify as "radical" and "violent." It seemed to me that some Native students, while at the university setting, were not always comfortable with being in that type of role. Tricia mentioned how she does not like how some Indian leaders spoke for and represented all Natives. She said:

In the media, Russell Means does that all the time and I cannot stand that...and then everyone thinks that's how we think and I just don't like that. And he does that all the time and people think 'oh my gosh, there's going to be an Indian nation created like a state? What?' And I'm like, 'that's just him, he's just trying to rattle your cage, you know. That doesn't mean he's speaking for everyone.'

Bev also weighed in on the what sovereignty means, "I just don't think that it is as

in-your-face as it was in the 1970s with Russell Means and Wounded Knee. I just don't think it's as in-your-face."

The consequences of being labeled as a radical may be why I did not hear students directly speak of sovereignty as much as I anticipated. Tricia, for example, mentioned that she wants to get her education so she can help "her people." Mato said that he has a "Nation" waiting for him. Kim referred to "Native Pride." For me, I interpreted these phrases in a similar context as the sovereignty of their Tribal nation. I speculated that using this language is less controversial than directly using Tribal Sovereignty, a concept that is poorly understood, at best, by non-Natives.

Grande (2004) wrote that sovereignty should not be viewed in a separatist manner, but rather it should be viewed in a restorative manner. I have concluded that this is the idea that helps us understand the role education plays for Native students with regard to the project of Tribal sovereignty. Frank expounded:

One thing that I came away with from that job was the belief that we are sovereign as a government. And I guess I left there frustrated that we weren't doing better, but knowing that the potential is there for us to do better. And if I was going to continue to contribute, I'm going to have to improve my education.

Frank spoke in the same vein as Brayboy (2006, p. 436) who said, "Knowledge allows groups to change, adapt, and move forward in a vision related to sovereignty" and Justice (2004) who said, "The point isn't to abandon either our cultural roots or our academic training, but to bring them together in service to the people" (p.116).

I think that teachers working with Native students should have a better

understanding of the political implications of education and how they affect Native students. Brayboy (2005) suggested that education for Native students might combine the notions of culture, knowledge, and power with western/European conceptions in order to engage self-determination and tribal sovereignty.

Along those lines, Tricia had this advice for teachers working with Native adult students:

I guess educating yourself on Tribal relations, like state and federal relations with Tribes and trying to understand that whole concept of Tribal sovereignty, just be familiar with it, and how that all works, with taxes, concurrent jurisdiction. Maybe find a book and read up on it, especially in a state with so many reservations. And in public administration because you're going to have students who want to take your classes or if you're in the medical school you're going to want to be aware of the health issues concerning Natives.

The notion of self-identification is also an important component of sovereignty as the way a group defines themselves, their spaces and places in the world, and their cultures are a form of power. Brayboy (2006) comments, "...self identification is the ability and the legitimacy for groups to define themselves and create what it means to be Indian." Bev agreed, "I think that's probably the biggest key to decolonization. It is self-identity as tribes, and as people."

The nature of Native peoples' dual-status citizenship has opened various ways for the mainstream to make conclusions about Native people, often simply because of the dominant society's failure to recognize or understand the concept. Often the mainstream appropriates fixed or fetishized images of the past of what American Indians once were.

Smith (1999) wrote that Indigenous identities have become regulated by governments to meet their interest rather than those of the people who take up those identities. Recognizing this, I get the sense that Bev hopes to use what she has learned in the American Indian Studies program toward the idea of self-identification. She said, “I would love to work for the tribe to try to reform some things, to try to take back our identity, and reclaim some of our traditional styles of dealing with government.” Bev concluded:

We do want to be part of the world, we want to have influence, and we want to say that we are part of it. I think we realize our position but we want to reclaim part of our own identity as Tribes and as people, and I hope I get to be a part of that.

Grande (2004) said, “There is a hope that believes in the strength and resiliency of Indigenous peoples and communities, recognizing that their struggles are not about inclusion and enfranchisement into the ‘new world order’ but, rather, are part of the Indigenous project of sovereignty (pp. 28-29). Bev clarified how she sees sovereignty:

I really think that for Native people we’ve gone from a loss of the physical defense of our homeland to the legal defense and the spiritual defense. We still have a very strong connection to thinking that we are educating our youth and seeking an understanding of how to work within...their (White mainstream) system. I think there is greater awareness of that; how to interpret treaties, I think it has gone from physical defense to educating ourselves.

Chapter 6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PEDAGOGY

Introduction

Phenomenology, as a research method, led me to ask questions that sought meaning about the lived experience of these Native adult learners. I think that researchers and teaching practitioners might find this to be a useful approach to researching pedagogy as it might enable teachers to act thoughtfully and responsively with regards to their teaching relationship with Native students.

The students in this study were quick to bring their culture, stories from home, and life experiences outside of the university into the various discussions, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Whether it was talking about their children or spouse, family back home, certain activities, or their visions for the next phase of their life, all of these life experiences contributed to insightful, articulate and reflective discussions of their experiences.

My interpretation was that the students in this study did not want to be seen as victims, nor did they seek sympathy. In fact, every single student in the study mentioned positive relationships they have had with non-Native instructors at UGP. Further, I would speculate that of the eight students currently at UGP (one participant has just graduated), all would be able to complete their program of study, if they so desire.

That being said, I am not under the false assumption that the educational experience at UGP was easy for these students. On the contrary, this study showed that being a Native adult learner at UGP is complex, if not difficult. It seemed to me, however, that these Native adult students took it upon themselves to find ways to

negotiate and navigate their way through the university, despite the challenges, contradictions, and conflicts that were present for them.

Consequently, an important part of this study was the exposition of the wide range of lived experiences, not just the “good” ones. This study indicated that Native adult learners experienced some significant challenges that were a result of the mainstream bias often associated with both the dominant culture and the academic culture at the university.

This study did not attempt to create an essentialized definition of what a Native American adult student is or does. Nor did it indicate that there are inherent biological qualities of Native peoples that can be sorted, counted, and tabulated. Rather this study was interested in what it was like for this group of Native adult students at this particular place and at this particular time, and I do not presume that these findings are generalizable to all Natives in all parts of the United States. That is not to say that the findings of this study will not inform pedagogy and practice in other places where Native adults are students. I recognize that readers of this research are capable of transferring conclusions they make in a manner they deem appropriate.

From a thorough analysis of the data, four themes emerged. The conclusions stemming from these four major themes and sub-themes of this study are discussed in this chapter. Implications for pedagogy are also presented.

Conclusions

Theme #1: The Inherent Complexity of Being a Native Adult Learner

Brayboy (2006) said that the everyday experiences of American Indians have essentially been removed from the awareness of dominant members of the U.S. society. Previous research has shown that it is difficult being a Native American at the university. Other research has shown that being an adult learner at the university presents some significant challenges. This study demonstrates the complicated nature of being both a Native American and an adult student at a predominantly White university in the Midwestern United States.

It cannot be assumed that Native students have a common background in terms of beliefs, values, experiences, personal history, or paths that led them to the university. The lived experience of these participants and the socio-cultural and historic paths they took to get to this point in their lives were varied, intriguing, and diverse. By studying this phenomenon I found that generalized accounts of adult Native learners at the university do not work.

After spending time with and interviewing the nine adults in this study, I have come away with the notion that the combination of their Native-ness and adult-ness may have given them a sense of confidence and identity resulting, in part, from a strong belief in the importance of their cultural values instilled by their family. Further I found these students to be very serious about their academic pursuits, committed to the goals they have set for themselves, appreciative of the family support they have received, and steadfast in their desire to succeed at the university and complete their degree.

My interviews with the participants indicated that Native adult students were aware of the stereotypes and biases that non-Native faculty, staff, students, and community members still may hold. Many of the participants described stereotypical assumptions about Native peoples that were both blatant and subtle and ultimately yielded a lack of respect and denied an inherent human dignity for these students.

This study was guided, in part, by an appreciation of the importance of the socio-cultural and historical past of Native peoples in this state and region. But ironically, I think that those socio-cultural and historic notions are often selectively reconstructed and negatively reinforced within the mainstream conservative, predominantly White society in this context. In short, it seems that there are still many non-Natives who appear to be unwilling to relinquish stereotypes regarding Native Americans and re-think the Native culture as ever-changing and adapting.

Theme #2: Ways of Knowing for Native Adult Students are Indispensable to Self-education and Self-determination

Maintaining cultural integrity means that the experiences in school certainly affect a Native student, but the experiences need not do so at the expense of the student's home culture (Brayboy, 2005). Students' ways of knowing stemming from the values, knowledge, wisdom they learned from their family, their home community, or ancestral/traditional teachings play a distinct role the education process for the Native adult learner. Understanding the unique, culturally informed perspectives and the goals that Native adult learners bring to the classroom could cause instructors to approach

pedagogy in a different way: a way that increases the potential or capacity of a community to live well as defined by the community itself (Hassel, 1999).

Some statistics show that 90% of Native students are taught by non-Native instructors. Therefore, this inevitable intersection is worth studying if teachers and university officials are truly concerned with Native students' experience (impacting recruiting, learning, persistence, etc.) at the university. Many participants in this study said that they got along with many of their instructors and had good relationships with them. These students tended to respect and trust non-Native teachers who were sensitive, or "open" to cultural issues, stemming from having a certain amount of cultural knowledge. Also it was mentioned that instructors who understood the importance of family and the need to be with the family during certain times were often more apt to be deemed trustworthy or responsive by the students. Some students mentioned that seeing their instructors or program leaders at events sponsored by the Native groups on campus was important and showed that they (instructors) cared or were interested in learning about the Native culture.

The mainstream dominant culture found at the university often has ways of disconnecting Native students from the things, events, and people that play a significant role in their happiness, health and well-being. Students in this study mentioned that they sometimes seek connections that are reminiscent of home, family, or tribal life. These connections often provided some much needed respite from the mainstream culture and helped to recharge the students on their academic pursuits. These connections came in the form of various relationships with other Natives and sometimes occurred at gatherings, social/cultural events, the Cultural Center, or other places.

Several Native students made reference to the importance of the “Native Community” in Plainsview. The campus town had an informal network of mostly Native peoples who seemingly were interested in supporting, in a variety of ways, the Native students and families that attend UGP. Some students in this study mentioned that connecting with this community was critical to their success at UGP.

The idea of “going home” is a factor that directly affects how, what, and why some Native students learn at the university. Native students who indicated an interest in returning to their reservation or home community spoke with a sincere and passionate commitment to improving the lives of the people there. My interpretation was that these students, without question, seemed less concerned with their own personal or professional status and prestige and instead more focused on the well-being of their home community and what their role in helping will be.

The idea of going home was not unproblematic for a number of the participants in the study, however. Many outlined various challenges, such as housing politics, family jealousy, unhealthy lifestyles, and the potential confrontation of personal addictions as factors that will complicate the notion of going home.

Theme #3: Discontentedness and Decolonization

The discontentedness that Native students experienced at the UGP was often caused by colonialist manifestations present in the dominant culture and at the university. This discontentedness forced students to make sense of their experiences with institutional bias. This was in line with Grande’s Red pedagogy, in that, these epistemological conflicts also caused students to question how mainstream, university

knowledge was related to the process of colonization and to ask how traditional Indigenous knowledge can inform the process of decolonization (Grande, 2004).

Disentangling the dominant culture's way of doing things from the Native way of doing things was a way that decolonization happened at the university. Various participants talked about times when a professor's teaching method or ideas revealed a viewpoint ignorant to Native culture. The teacher's position of authority often served as an ideological microphone seemingly reifying the norms of the dominant culture and in the process alienating and causing a sense of discontentedness for the Native adult student.

Students who addressed the cultural contradictions they encountered at the university engaged in the decolonization process that I called "carving spaces." This notion of carving spaces seemed to calibrate the Native students' thinking with Native traditional knowledge or Native ways of doing things. Students carved spaces in a variety of ways. One student humbly said she did this in her own little ways (which to me were not little at all), while another student acknowledged that she knows she will 'piss people off along the way.' One student mentioned that he will take any opportunity to discuss misunderstandings with his non-Native colleague and professors, and another student said he just comes out and addresses cultural issues to get them out in the open.

Grande (2004) observed that decolonization (like democracy) is neither achievable, nor definable, rendering it ephemeral as a goal and perpetual as a process. Grande's concept of Red pedagogy addresses this, "That is not to say, however, that 'progress' cannot be measured. Indeed, the degree to which Indigenous peoples are able

to find and exercise political, intellectual, and spiritual sovereignty is an accurate measure of colonialist relations” (2004, p. 166).

For Native adult learners, understanding the nature of their discontentedness and doing things that carve spaces in the university classroom scrutinizes mainstream education and opens it up for critical analysis. Unfortunately the time, effort, and energy that it takes for students to engage in this process ultimately inhibits them from concentrating fully on their primary goals of obtaining their education, a burden not often recognized by members of the dominant, institutional culture.

Theme #4: Toward an Education that is Socio-culturally and Politically Relevant to Native Adult Students

For Native Americans, their unique status as dual-status citizens is a political distinction that is often unrecognized by educators and goes unmentioned at the university. As members of Tribal Nations, Native students are often concerned with how their education can work toward the larger goal of sovereignty. Grande (2004) concluded that sovereignty becomes a project organized to defend and sustain the basic right of Indigenous people to thrive in their relations with other peoples.

Native students who choose to return to their home communities might find that education becomes a political venture and ultimately extends beyond the parameters of the classroom walls. Students working toward the project of Tribal sovereignty engage in a process of helping their home communities position themselves to sustain their cultural integrity, according to their self-determined needs. Consequently, Native students seeking an education that serves the best interest of their Tribe or home community tend to strive

for the improvement of socio-economic conditions in those places, which often has political implications.

Many of the students in this study mentioned how they felt their experience at UGP could have been better if there were more Native students in their programs. The majority of students in this study found themselves as being the sole Native American adult learner in most of their classes. This almost entirely eliminated the opportunity for Native adult students to connect with others who have had similar socio-cultural experiences in their area of study. This sense of isolation and marginalization might be a rare experience for non-Native students at UGP. Native students also were disappointed that this lack of diversity, including Latino/as and Black students, greatly reduced the plurality of thought and ideas at UGP. Some Native students in the study were concerned that UGP is not preparing its students for the 'real world' where it is probable that they will come in contact with Native Americans, who make up the second highest racial population in this state.

Some of the Native adult learners in this study mentioned educational goals that corresponded with Tribal sovereignty and seemed to agree with Brayboy's (2005) notion of an education for Native students that combined culture, knowledge and power with western/European conceptions in order to engage self-determination and Tribal sovereignty. Grande (2004) discussed the belief in the strength and resiliency of Native peoples and their communities, recognizing that their struggles are not about inclusion and being assimilated into the mainstream but, rather, are part of the Indigenous project of sovereignty.

This study highlighted comments from Native adults regarding the importance of their Native identity and how it has shaped them as a person and as a student.

Sovereignty also gives Native peoples the right to define who they are, and several Native adult learners mentioned the importance of their Native culture to their identity. Brayboy (2006) defined self-identification as the ability and the legitimacy for groups to define themselves and create what it means to be Indian. Often the mainstream appropriates fixed or fetishized images of the past or of what American Indians once were. Education for Natives should honor the project of sovereignty and should give them the right to define themselves, their spaces and places, and their cultures as a form of power associated with the concept of self-determination.

Implications for Pedagogy

I think, frequently, about the implications of being a “White researcher” or conducting “outsider research” and worry about being lumped into a category of non-Native researchers who are unaware or unconcerned of the incessant exploitative nature of their work. Thus I resist the temptation to rush to impose colonizing “answers” or “solutions” that come exclusively from a western/scientific perspective and work to maintain the status quo.

Therefore, instead of offering “answers” or “effective strategies,” this study reveals some very important questions for non-Native teachers to reflect upon:

1. What stance should non-Native teachers take to engage Native American adult learners critically?

2. How do teachers understand the role of self-determination, sovereignty, and decolonization as they play out in education?

As an educator my charge is to act responsibly and responsively in the relations with my students (van Manen, 2003). Before instructors can begin to think about changing, persisting, or reflecting upon pedagogy, I think that a phenomenological sensitivity to the lived experience of the Native American adult learner is first needed. This idea of phenomenological sensitivity, seeking to deeply understand the lived experience of the student, may be necessary to fully engage, build trust, and earn the respect of the Native adult learner. Knowledge that is a result of phenomenological inquiry becomes practically relevant in its possibilities of changing the manner in which a teacher engages, teaches, and/or communicates with a Native American student—this knowledge transforms our understanding, it affects us, and leads to more thoughtful pedagogy (Van der Zalm & Bergum, 2000).

This study demonstrated that non-Native teachers cannot generalize the experiences of Native adult students, except perhaps, to acknowledge the inherent complexity of the confluence of being a Native American and being an adult student at a predominantly White university. This study also calls teachers to re-envision education of Native American students in a way that combines Native ways of knowing, culture, ancestral wisdom, and the needs of the student's home community with academic/university knowledge in order to engage self-education and self-determination. This requires the educator to think with a perspective that lies beyond the bounds of the mainstream, dominant culture. Educational leaders should re-imagine pedagogy that enhances opportunities to enrich the individual skills and abilities of their Native adult

students and also in a way that contributes to the collective, self-sustaining resources available in their home communities.

This study may help teachers rethink approaches pedagogy in ways that move away from a one-way dissemination of knowledge originating from the canons of western/scientific positivist notions. Rather, intellectuals, researchers, teachers, and program administrators may find ways to embrace other ways of knowing, especially forms of knowledge that are culturally relevant and historically significant to local place or area. In the Great Plains region of the U.S., it seems only right and just, to recognize the problematic intersection of Native ways of knowing and dominant mainstream knowledge and approach the resulting discord in a restorative manner of intellectual respect, curiosity, and openness.

Suggestions for Further Research

I have invested significant time, effort, and energy in this particular study and, with all due respect to Native peoples everywhere, I believe that my research has merit and is credible in both the Native and non-Native education arenas. I do not, however, want to overstep my bounds and impertinently make recommendations that are unwarranted. As I come to understand the principles of Native self-determination, decolonization, and sovereignty, I think this would be a good place for me to exercise humbleness and restraint, traits sometimes absent among university researchers, and at this time respectfully decline the traditional opportunity to make “suggestions for further research” in hopes of separating myself from notions of colonizing and imperialist research and its damaging effects.

I shall only to comment on the direction my research may follow. Since this study was only a 'snapshot' of the lived experience of these Native adult learners, I am interested in longitudinally following the paths of the participants in this study to try to understand how relevant their educational experience actually was for them once they have graduated and started their next venture--whether it be work, more education, family, or other. I am also interested in continuing to explore the nature of cross-cultural pedagogic relationships that occur in other locations and how non-Native instructors can best use theoretical and conceptual frameworks, like Red pedagogy and Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education, toward the goal of widening the doors for participation in education.

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Appendix A. Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: The Perceptions of Native American Adult Learners in a predominantly White University.**Principal Investigator:** Tom Buckmiller (PhD candidate)103 Haffner Hall
White Course Apartments
University Park, PA 16802
Telephone: 605-661-4327
Email: tmb973@psu.edu**Advisor:**Dr. Fred Schied
305E Keller Building
University Park, 16802
Telephone: (814) 863-3499
Email: fms3@psu.edu

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to better understand your experience (as a Native American adult learner) with non-Native teachers and faculty members at a predominantly White university.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to participate in 2 one-on-one interviews that will last about 45-60 minutes each. To best honor our conversation, I will record the conversation on a digital recorder to help me when I am transcribing the interview on paper. Only my advisor and I will have access to the recording, which will be stored on my password-protected computer. The recordings will be destroyed in December of 2012. I may need to ask you to participate in a follow-up telephone interview later on to ensure that I accurately interpreted your statements

3. Benefits: You might learn more about yourself by participating in this study. Your perceptions may resonate with other Native students in predominantly White universities. You might realize that others have had similar experiences as you have. You might get a better understanding of how your education impacts your life.

This research might provide a better understanding of how non-Native teachers can provide more effective learning experiences for Native American adult. This information could help plan programs and make student services better. This information might assist Native American students to have more success in college.

4. Duration: The interviews should last approximately 45-60 minutes.

5. Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured on my computer in a password-protected file. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. You will be asked if you give permission to be directly quoted. If permission is not given, no identifying information will be used.

6. Right to Ask Questions: Please contact Tom Buckmiller at (605) 661-4327 with questions or concerns about this study.

7. Payment for participation: For participating in this study, you will receive 2 - \$10 gift certificates to Subway—one per interview.

8. Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

___ I **give** my permission to be DIGITALLY recorded.

___ I **do not give** my permission to be DIGITALLY recorded.

___ I **do give** my permission for portions of this interview to be directly quoted, using a pseudonym, in publications/presentations.

___ I **do not give** my permission for portions of this interview to be directly quoted, using a pseudonym, in publications/presentations.

Participant Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix B. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Interview #1 Background information:

- a. Name, age, Tribal affiliation, hometown, important family members
- b. Childhood, education, degree sought, department, how far along are you

Talk a little about your experiences in school when you were a child?

Is this your first experience in higher education?

(If they had previously attended a Tribal college, ask about the differences?)

(If they attended a non-reservation university earlier in life, ask about difference?)

Can you tell me about the very first time you stepped into a class here at UGP?

In your experiences, what particular relationships (good or bad) with teachers here at UGP come to mind? How would you describe them?

Can you recall an instance in class where you thought the teacher was really interested in what you had to say? What was that like?

Have you ever had “issues” with a teacher here at UGP? What was that like?

When you think of the best non-Native teachers here, what comes to mind?

Have you ever felt that your identity as a Native was an issues in class?

What have been your favorite classes here?

Think of a teacher in your mind that you will always remember. Why is this teacher someone you will always remember?

Think of someone in your mind that you would like to forget. What qualities about that person caused you to want to forget them?

Have there times when something that has happened in a class has made you uncomfortable or angry? If so, could you talk about them?

What do you like most about your experience here?

What are the major obstacles that you face as your pursue your goals?

Do you feel you are supported here by non-Native teachers, advisors, or staff? What are some of the things they do to show they are supportive of you?

Interview #2 Review from Interview #1. (What issues need clarification for me?)

Have there been times during your experience at UGP, when you felt that you didn't quite agree with the way something was done or taught because it went against what you knew as a Native American?

What advice would you give to non-Native teachers that could help them to be better teachers for Native American adult students?

Do you think it is more difficult for a Native American "traditional aged" student (18-22) to get along in college or is it more difficult for the Native American adult learner? Why?

What are the differences? How does your Native American identity as an adult learner, differ from that of a traditional-aged Native American student at the university?

How do those teachers show that they value you as a Native American student?

Do you think that this campus honors the Native American heritage?

What are your goals in attending UGP? What do you want to do after you accomplish your goal? Are you interested in going (back) to the reservation?

As you consider your experience here at UGP, do you think being a Native American student gives you an advantage or disadvantage, or do you think you are on an equal playing field with all the other non-Native students?

Does racism toward Native Americans exist here? Do have any experiences you'd like to share?

Some have said that the White, mainstream university way of teaching and learning is very different from the Native way of teaching and learning. Have you ever felt that?

Appendix C. Example of Thematizing

Native ways of knowing are vital to self-education and self-determination

- Going home
 - Going home after graduation
 - good to go home
 - I have a nation waiting for me
 - excited to help
 - my family is there
 - good to go back
 - but I would (go home) every weekend if I could
 - these are my people, I'd like to stay there
 - For a purpose
 - going home to help
 - help with local health issues
 - right thing to do
 - want to work for the Tribe
 - role model
 - contribute to the people who shaped me
 - Tough to go home
 - risky to go home as an alcoholic
 - life is tough on Rez
 - family pulls down, tough to come home
 - relatives are critical
 - politics-house building
 - politics
 - drama
 - need tools before I can go home

Vita

Thomas M. Buckmiller

Education

- Pennsylvania State University, PhD, Adult Education, 2009
- Iowa State University, MA, Educational Administration, 2002
- Mount Marty College, BA, Elementary Education, 1996

Professional Experience

- Drake University, Des Moines, IA. (2009-present)
Assistant Professor of Education
- Sacred Heart Elementary and Middle School, Yankton, SD (2000-2006)
Administrator/Principal
- Hampton-Dumont Community Schools, Hampton, IA (1996-2000)
Fifth grade teacher, high school football/golf coach

University Teaching Experience (2006-2009)

- Graduate assistant teacher – Penn State University
- Freshman Education Seminar, face-to-face, undergraduate
 - Educational Research and Evaluation, on-line, graduate
 - Intro to Adult Education, on-line, graduate
 - Issues in Adult Education, on-line, graduate

Presentations and Publications

- Buckmiller, T. (2008). Joining the journey: Native American adult learners and non-Native teachers. Midwest Research-to-Practice Conference, Bowling Green, Kentucky.
- Buckmiller, T. (2009). Examining the lived experience of Native American adult learners at a predominantly white university. Adult Education Research Conference, Chicago, Ill. June, 2009.
- Buckmiller, T. (2004). The Everyday Superhero. Victoria, B.C.: Trafford Publishing.

Professional Awards or Honors

- KSFY-TV's (Sioux Falls, SD) "Hometown Hero Award"
- Named one of "Ten Outstanding Young South Dakotans" by SD Jaycees
- Mount Marty College's "Young Alumni Award"
- One of 35 selected nationally to attend National Catholic Education Association's Beginning Principal's Academy, Washington, D.C.