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The Roles of Storytelling in Adult Education

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Abstract

This paper describes a journey to uncover whether or not Indigenous Learning techniques can be applied to modern adult education venues. It begins with an exploration of the value and role of storytelling. It explains the psychological foundations of storytelling and the effects thereof. It continues with a description of a variety of stories both from the personal life of the researcher and from adult education literature. It examines a multi-tribal American Indian project at certain Tribal Colleges and Universities to reclaim the stories of a number of tribes and to apply the cultural values of those peoples to American Indian-sponsored higher education programs. The journey provides the backdrop and inspiration for future adult education programs targeting low-income families which will attempt to draw upon the power of storytelling and the educational methods of American Indians.

The Roles of Storytelling in Adult Education

Introduction

In Ancient Greece, the city-states of Athens and Sparta waged war for several decades during the Fifth Century, B.C. and it is in this setting that the Father of Modern History, Thucydides, wrote his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. The average person today knows little of this war or of Thucydides' work...with the exception of Pericles' funeral oration which provided the inspiration for President John F. Kennedy's famous line, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country!" What is remarkable about Thucydides' work is that it was meant to be read instead of recited. (The History Channel, 2003) History is, in the end, but a story of people and places in times past. Throughout the world, cultures have passed on their stories verbally. Memorization of long stories was a prized skill, the ability to retain and repeat a story being critical to maintaining a culture's history and values. A culture without a sense of its history loses its place in the Universe. After all, when an individual has amnesia and cannot remember his past, s/he does not say, "I don't know who I was." Rather, they say, "I don't know who I *am*." Without that sense of where we came from, we lose our way.

Stories have value beyond the teaching of history and regardless of how far we have come in modern Western culture, and how little the average citizen understands of our history, people still love a good story. This was demonstrated to me when my children were young. I used to take them out to the lake regularly. On the way home, after the exertion of swimming and hiking up and down hills to get to the water, the kids would be in a quiet, contemplative state and sooner or later my daughter would say, "Dad, tell us a story from your youth." You see, I made a point to tell them about things that happened to me as I grew up. These stories generally included

my parents or my grandparents. They especially liked the stories about the Chihuahua that tormented me on a regular basis. She was a bit loopy after having survived several run-ins with Volkswagen Beetles. She could change from loving pet to snarling beast in the blink of an eye. The image of big, strong Dad running in terror while being pursued by a dinky little Chihuahua delighted them to no end.

My lifelong interest in stories originated with my grandfather. He was a minister and whenever he and my grandmother came to visit, he would always come to our room at bedtime and tell me and my brothers a story from the Bible. Jonah and the Whale especially fascinated me. The idea of surviving whale vomit really got my attention. My interest in stories grew and was largely responsible for my choice of a major in college. That is what I loved most about history. I loved the stories...especially the stories passed down by people who experienced those times. After I graduated, my life took some unexpected turns and I eventually found myself involved in creating drug abuse prevention programs for children in public housing. At that time, a federal agency, the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, sponsored various training events around the country on how storytelling could be used in prevention programs. One training event was especially useful. It took place in Prescott, Arizona at a resort which was part of a reservation. Although the hotel was modern, the general setting and the quality of the workshops made an indelible imprint on my mind. I especially recall the Hawaiian storyteller and dancer, who was also involved in the creation of a documentary film called *Once Were Warriors* which chronicled the corruption and decline of the proud native Hawaiians. I also learned about some of my ancestors' stories – tales of dragons and warriors from the Celtic remnants in Ireland. When I returned to the job, I began to look at ways that we could inspire a sense of history and

indigenous culture among residents in public housing. Since our children were of mixed heritage, it was fitting that we had a Native American storyteller who was of German and Comanche descent. He spoke of respect for elders, taught the children how to make a talking stick, and he told a Native American story that was so much like the story of Cinderella, it was uncanny. This vividly exemplified the universal nature of stories.

Given this background in my experience, both personally and professionally, I was naturally attracted to the concepts of indigenous learning that were explored by Sharan Merriam and Rosemary Caffarella (1999) in *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*. I began to wonder how I might utilize concepts of indigenous learning in the program I currently administer for the local public housing authority. Briefly, Family Self-Sufficiency is a program designed to enable approximately 55 local families receiving housing assistance (out of a total of over 500 families) to reduce or eliminate their dependence upon public assistance and to become homeowners. This program was inaugurated locally in 1993. Almost from the very beginning, we recognized that in order to become economically self-sufficient, families must have access to learning opportunities. Some of the skills that so many heads-of-household take for granted, such as how to use a checking account, how to get and maintain good credit, and how to buy and maintain a home are terra incognita for many low-income families. Since we required program participants to learn these kinds of skills and since such learning opportunities were only inconsistently offered by other elements in the community, we were obligated to do what we could to provide – or at least facilitate – adult education programs. We had some experience in facilitating educational programs for youth and children but teaching specific skills to adults was a major challenge. The more I learn about the complexities of adult education, the more I am

amazed that we have done as well as we have. I attribute this to the sincerity of our motivation... our deep desire to see our families succeed. Of course, a burning desire may be necessary but it is not sufficient. We constantly struggle with the challenge of delivering timely, relevant, and effective instruction. We don't always succeed.

This is what attracted me to indigenous learning. Initially, as I began my exploration of the literature, I wondered: What were the potential roles of indigenous learning techniques in adult education? Almost immediately, I was directed back to a focus on storytelling and I acquired a greater understanding of its psychological underpinnings and its many applications and implications for the future.

How Does Storytelling Work?

My best source of information on how storytelling functions was from Craig Abrahamson (1998). In *Storytelling as a Pedagogical Tool in Higher Education*, Abrahamson discussed the theoretical values of storytelling within higher education. Although that aspect was outside my immediate interest the information he provided about storytelling's role in society and how it works its magic was fascinating. I thought *I* was the biggest fan of storytelling until I read this work. Abrahamson claims that storytelling is the "foundation of the teaching profession," and adds, "Civilizations survived because of storytelling." I happen to agree with him, I just never saw it quite that way before. Abrahamson says that storytelling reduces depersonalization in society and that it can help students to think critically and to better understand facts. He adds that storytelling can provide concrete examples of ideas presented in written material.

Abrahamson begins with a brief survey of the history and role of storytelling going back to the Egyptians around 4,000 B.C. and quickly moving ahead to the Romans, Medieval

troubadours, and finally to the folk tales collected by the Grimm Brothers and others. He makes reference to other studies which describe how storytelling functioned as a means to encode knowledge and pass it on more accurately than by any other means, at least prior to the development of writing. Abrahamson would say that storytelling remains the superior method. He notes that permeating events with emotion is what made the story – and made it memorable. In fact, he says the “technique developed in oral cultures for orienting emotions with events *was* the story.” [my emphasis] He describes storytelling as a “technical tool that has provided a measure of order and stability to human societies for countless millennia,” and that it is “one of the most important inventions of humankind.” See what I mean? If I hadn’t been hooked before, I was now.

Abrahamson had much to say about cognitive processing in storytelling but the comment below gave me pause to think about how different some of our program’s adult education classes have been from what they could be. Abrahamson said,

It is important to remember that students are multiform beings, therefore, inspiration, encouragement, satisfaction, and fascination must be integrated with information in order to provide an education that has meaning to the learner and will have true, lasting effects on that person's life and the society in which he or she interacts. What a person usually remembers the longest is information that has an emotional impact.

The idea of encoding information with emotion as an intentional technique was enlightening all by itself but it was his description of the “Implementation of Hypnotic Trance in Storytelling” that effected within me a much deeper level of understanding how storytelling works. The basic idea is that when we listen to a story, our everyday frames of reference are temporarily

suspended and we are receptive to new information. He describes the five stages of conversational trance induction, based on a model from Erickson and Rossi (as cited in Abrahamson, 1998). They are: fixation of attention, depotentiating habitual frameworks and belief systems, unconscious search, unconscious process, and hypnotic response. The following is an abridged version of Abrahamson's description of each stage:

Fixation of Attention: Through the years, this has been the classical approach for initiating therapeutic trance or hypnosis. It is the process of encouraging students to focus on sensations or internal imagery that leads attention inward (such as listening to a story and forgetting for the moment that one is having an exam in one's next class). The most effective means of focusing and fixing attention in conversational trance induction is to recognize and acknowledge the student's current experience. When the instructor correctly labels the student's ongoing here-and-now experience, the student is usually immediately grateful and open to whatever else the instructor has to say. Acknowledging the student's current reality thus opens a "yes set" for whatever content the instructor may wish to introduce. This is the basis of the utilization approach to trance induction, wherein instructors gain their students' attention by focusing on their students' current behavior and experiences.

Depotentiating Habitual Frameworks and Belief Systems: As stated in the fixation of attention stage, if the stage is successful, consciousness has been distracted. In this second stage, as the student is consciously pulled into the story that the instructor is sharing, latent patterns of association and sensory-perceptual experience have an opportunity to assert themselves in a manner that can initiate the altered state of

consciousness that has been described as trance or hypnosis. There are many means of depotentiating frames of reference. Any experience of shock or surprise momentarily will fixate attention and interrupt the previous pattern of association. Any experience of the unrealistic, the unusual, or the fantastic provides an opportunity for altered modes of apprehension. Aspects in a story that create confusion, doubt, dissociation, and disequilibrium are all means of depotentiating students' learned limitations so that they may become open and available for new means of experiencing and learning, which are the essence of conversational (therapeutic) trance. In everyday life one is continually confronted with difficult and new situations that mildly shock and interrupt one's usual way of thinking. At times these problem situations will initiate a creative moment of reflection that may provide an opportunity for something new to emerge. If the story has some of these components, the students' interpretations can alter their frames of reference and create an opportunity for new insight and obtainment of new knowledge.

Unconscious Search: In the everyday lives of individuals there are constant circumstances by which they are exposed to new stimuli that require them to fix attention and depotentiate habitual associations. When these processes occur, they initiate an unconscious search for a new solution to a problem or seek out a new altering experience. In other words, when individuals are faced with a new experience, they often go into their memory banks in an attempt to locate a memory of some detail in order to resolve the particular experience. Like metaphor and analogy, these are all means of momentarily arresting attention and requesting a search, which is essentially a search on an unconscious level, in order to come up with a new association or frame of reference. With

the employment of storytelling as a trance-inducement mechanism in the manner in which this has been discussed, the opportunity is afforded for the student to creatively reorganize information and concepts to allow for the assimilation of new knowledge and concepts which can enhance the learning experience.

Unconscious Process: In utilizing a trance state through the storytelling methodology, the instructor initiates the unconscious process with indirect forms of suggestion. In essence, an indirect suggestion within the framework of storytelling initiates an unconscious search and facilitates unconscious processes within students, and they often find themselves open to ideas and concepts that in the past appeared closed. The indirect forms of suggestion are facilitators of mental associations and unconscious processes. The indirect forms of suggestion through the use of storytelling within the classroom help students bypass their learned limitations so they are able to accomplish a lot more than they are usually able to accomplish.

The Hypnotic Response: The hypnotic response is the natural outcome of the unconscious search and processes initiated by the instructor when employing the storytelling technique within the classroom context. Because it is mediated primarily by unconscious processes within the student, the hypnotic response appears to occur automatically or autonomously, much in the same fashion as when a person is sitting in his or her car at a red stop light and isn't aware when the light turns green until the person in the car behind him or her blows the horn. This response appears to take place in a manner that may seem alien or dissociated from the person's usual mode of responding in a voluntary manner. That sense of surprise can generally be taken as an indication of the genuinely

autonomous nature of the response. Many people look at the hypnotic trance as an occurrence that only happens in the company of a hypnotherapist, and when it does happen, the individual loses all control while under the control of the therapist. However, most individuals typically experience a mild sense of pleasant surprise when they find themselves responding in this automatic and involuntary manner. Contrary to public misconceptions, the hypnotized person remains the same person, only his or her perceptions for the moment are altered by the trance state. (p. 446 – 447)

I incorporated this rather involved explanation of the hypnotic trance as explained by Abrahamson because it provides an interesting contrast in values to the methodology espoused by the storytelling training I received in Arizona. The essence is this: When you are finished telling the story, remain silent and allow time for the lesson to sink in. Do not try to explain it. If the hearer(s) wish to discuss the story afterward, then do so but demonstrate that you value and accept the different interpretations and do not insist upon one, or your own. The lesson is encoded in the story, not in any one person's interpretation of the story. The same person may interpret the same story in different ways at different times of their life. In other words, stories can have more than one meaning and the meaning is not always obvious.

Within the context of Abrahamson's explanation of how storytelling can be used in higher education, stories are more focused and designed to achieve a specific result. He essentially acknowledges the reality that I expressed above even though he allows for course content, institutional goals, and the instructor's ideas and opinions to have influence in addition to the student's understanding. I suppose that those ancient storytellers with whom specific stories originated probably had similar goals.

Abrahamson goes on to describe communities as “communities of memory” and that storytelling is critical for their maintenance whether they are based on families, religions, businesses, etc. He mentions that storytelling is used by Alcoholics Anonymous and other programs patterned after the Alcoholics Anonymous methodology. These two aspects of storytelling provide the connection to the rest of my tale. I now narrowed my search to the role of storytelling in adult education but the reader will see how I came full circle to focus back on the indigenous learning techniques of American Indians.

Examples of the Role of Storytelling in Adult Education

I already mentioned the stories my grandfather used to tell me. In order to put the role of storytelling in adult education in a concrete perspective, I will use examples of other important stories in my life because those are the stories I understand the best. In the middle of another story about how alcoholism destroyed my family of origin are two stories from my father. He was a veteran of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. My oldest brother and I conspired to free him from a nursing home before he could be committed as my mother consolidated her hold on the family finances and upon his personal liberty. They both suffered from complications of alcoholism. The difference was that my father stayed in recovery, my mother did not. Nevertheless, my father has suffered a stroke which left him with aphasia and debilitating seizures. There was nothing wrong with his mind but he had difficulty communicating and needed proper food and medicine to keep the seizures under control. He hated the nursing home, which he called “jail,” and he asked me to help him leave it and go live with my brother. He wanted to go home but he feared that my mother would find a way to force him back to a nursing home and he said he would rather die than live with a wander bracelet on his wrist. On the way

to his new life, he told us of some wartime experiences. In World War II, he was a medic on a troop ship in the South Pacific. He had to move a dead soldier from a hospital bed to make room for the next casualty. With tears in his eyes he explained that when he did so, the body disintegrated in his arms. He had not been able to tell that story in 50 years. He also told a story from Vietnam. He was a Dustoff pilot, flying helicopters into firefights to pick up wounded soldiers and transport them to a hospital. His Huey was overloaded and became stuck in the mud of a rice paddy. An enemy mortar round came down, miraculously missing the rotor blades and sinking deep into the mud before it exploded. The deep mud stopped the mortar fragments but not the concussive force of the explosion which propelled them upward, out of the mud, into the freedom of the air and they got out of the area in one piece. He described it as “the World’s First Mortar-Assisted Takeoff.” By telling these and other stories that he could not tell for so many years, my father found peace and became the wonderful grandfather to our children that I always knew he could be. My family of origin fought over money and possessions but I and my father found emotional and spiritual sanctuary in letting it all go.

Around this same time, while attending a conference in Montana, I discovered *Iron John*, a work by Robert Bly (1990), the informal leader of the modern Men’s Movement. His exploration of the ancient fairy tale known as *The Story of Iron John*, among other titles, provided deep insight into the meaning of maleness and what boys need to grow into well-balanced, mature men. He honors the role of women in men’s lives but uses the story (and background from the stories of many cultures) help men to recover a part of their psyche that has lain dormant, awaiting the proper time for its awakening.

Another significant leg in my journey was found within the pages of *The Spirituality of Imperfection* by Kurtz and Ketcham (1992). This book is full of compelling stories from many traditions and it elicits a unique understanding of our role as human beings and how the acceptance of our imperfection leads us to nobility. Kurtz and Ketcham devote some attention to how the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill Wilson, rediscovered these ancient truths and in the process created the first reliable treatment for alcoholism up to that time. Today, the telling of personal stories, first developed by Alcoholics Anonymous in this context, is a critical component of the 12-Step Program used to treat many diseases of addiction.

Another example of the power of storytelling may be found in a book called *Managing by Storying Around* by David Armstrong (1992). As the CEO of Armstrong International, Inc., a heavy manufacturing business, he was inspired by the effect of his pastor's recounting of a story from the Bible one day in church. He realized that although people had been nodding off during the sermon, when the story began people perked up and started paying attention. He began to wonder if this method of communicating could be used in his business. His book is the result. It is a collection of stories about many different aspects of how they run their business. The stories are designed to promulgate company values and even company policies. They replaced their employee policy manual with stories that illustrate how employees were expected to behave. As Armstrong puts it, "Rules, either in policy manuals or on signs, can be inhibiting. But the morals in stories are invariably inviting, fun, and inspiring." They collect new stories all the time in response to new and changing circumstances. He describes storytelling as "an amazingly effective form of communication." His book is fascinating and fun reading. There are many other examples of storytelling being used as a management tool.

Another business-related example of the power of storytelling comes from George S. Clason (1926), author of a collection of stories called *The Richest Man in Babylon*. Clason was a publisher. He had issued pamphlets about thrift and financial success based on his “parables” of ancient Babylon. He collected many of them in this work. In the Foreword he says, “Our prosperity as a nation depends upon the personal financial prosperity of each of us as individuals.” He compares financial principles to laws of nature and through simple stories he illuminates “Seven Cures For A Lean Purse,” and “The Five Laws of Gold.” We use this book in our program. That I have money in savings and have returned to school to pursue a Master’s Degree is, in large part, a result of having internalized the lessons of this book.

Armed with this background of the role of stories in my own education, I explored other literature more directly related to formal adult education. Koenig and Zorn (2002) describe the role of storytelling in a college-level nursing education program. They found that storytelling helped students to “explore personal roles and make sense of their lives,” and that it was an effective approach “to help diverse undergraduate students with diverse learning styles.” They provided the theoretical framework and a concrete example. The example they provided was not the kind of story I had imagined they might be using however. To me it read more like a case study but coming from my background of social service, this is more in line with my paradigm of service which is a more holistic approach that examines the social setting within which the patient moves. Someone trained in a more traditional – or shall we say *recent* – paradigm of medical training would probably view it differently. This is beginning to change.

In *Across the generations*, Kazemek, Wellik, and Zimmerman (2002) describe an intergenerational oral-history and writing project involving patrons of a senior center writing

group with children 9 to 12 years of age from a special education program. After some initial hesitancy on the part of the seniors, the program was very successful. The authors provide a concise description of what they view to be the critical elements of the program. I intend to pass this along to our Elderly Services Coordinator.

The icing on the cake for me was when I encountered a special edition of the *Journal of American Indian Education*. I initially found articles within it separately, only to realize later that they were part of a larger whole. Issued partly to commemorate the 30-year anniversary of the founding of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium by the first six tribal colleges in the United States, the articles describe the Native American Higher Education Initiative (NAHEI) which was funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The journal contains a record of how the project evolved, who the participants were, and what was learned. Five projects are described in a story format. The journal contains a brief summary of each project which provides insight into the scope of the program:

Brigham Young University - Hawai'i. The Center for Hawaiian Language and Cultural Studies. With an advisory committee of native community members, elders, educators and students, the center has successfully founded (within a mainstream institution with strong religious foundations) a cultural center of scholarship and learning that teaches native values and language, and creates cultural-educational projects that involve community organizations and are grounded on caring for the land and the sea.

Salish Kootenai College. Pablo, Montana, Eagle Project. The Eagle Project is a compelling example of successful partnerships involving a tribal college, mainstream institutions (Evergreen State College, University of Montana, and South Dakota School

of Mines and Technology), and private/public businesses to design, install and deliver, and evaluate distance-education programs to tribes that do not have tribal colleges. The program teaches lessons in effective strategic planning and partnering, culturally relevant pedagogy, and means of offering economically sustainable programs.

Fort Peck Community College. Poplar, Montana. Family Education Service

Model. The Fort Peck Family Education Service Model is a powerful family-centered, culturally appropriate program for marginal and disadvantaged students. At its beginning, the project included the participation of Blackfeet Community College, Salish Kootenai College, Stone Child College, and the University of Montana. The success of this family-centered model has been replicated in native/tribal communities as far away as Florida and Canada.

Northwest Indian College. Bellingham, Washington. Oksale Native Teacher

Preparation Program. To attend to the vital need for Native American teachers in public, tribal, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and private schools (particularly in the Pacific Northwest), the Oksale Native Teacher Preparation Program is a collaboration involving Northwest Indian College, Washington State University, and Western Washington University to provide both an undergraduate and master's level native teacher certification component. Thus far, the partnership has resulted in a K-secondary school endorsement.

Crownpoint Institute of Technology. Crownpoint, New Mexico. The Kellogg

Navajo Initiative. To foster economic growth in the communities that Crownpoint serves (part of the Navajo Nation), this initiative has developed networks among educational,

industrial, and nonprofit organizations. By promoting the sharing of knowledge between Navajo medicine men and veterinarians, Crownpoint has developed high quality training, employment, and small business management in alternative livestock and animal health/range management. (Benham, 2002, p. 4 – 5)

The Family Education Service Model at Fort Peck Community College was of particular interest to me but more about that later. When the stories of these projects were told, the Project Elder, Henrietta Mann, provided her reflections on the stories, setting them in perspective and adding meaning to their lessons. The piece is moving and it serves to illustrate one way that the ancient art of storytelling can still come alive in a modern setting:

Dr. Maenette K. P. AhNee Benham of Michigan State University and Dr. Wayne J. Stein of Montana State University convened a group of native scholars and emerging scholars as a continuing phase of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) Native American Higher Education Initiative (NAHEI). Each two-person team conducted a site visit to one of four [Kellogg] projects, wrote a story, and gathered in what can be described as a contemporary storytelling session. They told their stories in the traditional verbal ways of the people, which they enhanced with visuals using state-of-the-art Power Point presentations. These narratives were powerful in that they blended the old and the new and brought native storytelling to a new time and place.

I offer these elder reflections against a seven-year backdrop of history in the work of "bringing out the stories." For indigenous nations, stories are cultural treasures that embody the soul of a people. They contain all aspects of a people's ways of life, and the totality of their individual and collective experiences throughout time. Stories are sacred

or profane, they teach or entertain, and they contain a people's worldview: genesis, history, philosophy, or tribal values. They also are stories of success and human drama. Contemporary native experiences are history in progress, stories in the making. They are the stories of the ongoing cultural evolution of a people who excel as storytellers. Modern storytellers have other roles, as scholars, professionals, educators, writers, researchers, and leaders. As pointed out in the stories, one of the key ingredients for success has been leadership, and Dr. Benham and Dr. Stein have modeled exemplary leadership in this regard. We come out of traditions of leadership and diplomacy and of respect. We are culturally and spiritually rich.

Everyone has done a stellar job in telling their stories and "capturing the dream." They are wonderful dreams, made more so by the fact that the projects are culturally based and spiritually rooted in this land. Furthermore, considerable thought has been given to the critical ingredients of language and culture, which are still at the forefront of where it is we are going. They are incorporated into TCU [Tribal Colleges and Universities] curricula, whether it is in native teacher preparation programs at Northwest Indian College; whether it is in the family education model of Fort Peck Community College; whether it is in the alternative veterinary program at Crown Point Institute of Technology; whether it is in examples and models of the Learning Lodge; or whether it is the beautiful shores of the Pacific paradise at Brigham Young University, Hawai'i. There is cultural continuity, and each of you brings that continuity to this good road.

The Road of Life we walk has a pattern to it. In response to a question about protocols, Native America has numerous protocols. There is protocol that governs when stories can

be told. Salish-Kootenai College schedules Coyote stories during the winter months, the only time Coyote stories can be told. Cheyennes tell their stories at night. There is a time and season for telling stories, there is a season for living, and there is a time for change. Native cultures have a system of checks and balances, which order life. Our philosophers studied life and concluded that everything in life is made up of four basic elements: earth, air, fire, and water. This was a part of indigenous knowledge before the importation of science courses that teach the same principles.

It is important to understand that creation stories provide a people's orientation to the world, their belief systems, and how they behave in relation to everything in their environment. They are a people's cultural foundation. As such, native creation stories are sacred. To understand this better, let us briefly explore the Cheyenne creation story.

The Great One first created four sacred beings, who were placed at the semi-cardinal directions of the universe to watch over human beings. When shown respect, they will protect us and guide our hearts and spirits. They are the sacred beings to whom our men offer their pipes. They are the sacred beings to whom our ceremonial women offer babies when they are blessing them. The Great One then made the world from four sacred substances, sinew, buffalo fat, sweetgrass, and red earth paint, which continue to be used in our major ceremonies today. The point is that our ceremonial ways have their origins in our sacred creation story, which continue to serve as the basis for Cheyenne ceremonies, belief, thinking, and actions.

The Great One also informed the people that they would come to new situations on the Road of Life. Indeed, the past 500 years have brought considerable change, some of

which has not been good, and there has been mistreatment. The beauty is that we have survived. We have survived the most methodical and lethal intentions to eradicate our cultures and spiritual ways. It did not work. You are evidence of that.

We have been engaged in an education Cold War for several centuries. We are sovereign nations, yet there is the reality that our languages and cultures have been affected by oppressive federal and state policy. After World War II, the United States of America enacted the Marshall Plan to rebuild post-war Germany. A Native American Marshall Plan would have been ideal. It did not happen, so the WKKF-NAHEI has become the tribal college equivalent of the Indian Education Marshall Plan.

As modern storytellers, you are painting our winter counts, with your gifted minds and indigenous thinking. All of you took me on an incredible journey with your stories. I was transported on my flying red buffalo robe across the Pacific and saw the Iosepa launched at sea, a canoe that floated despite predictions to the contrary. It floated because the curriculum focused on language and culture that was culturally based on the land and sea. I went to Fort Peck and saw their Family Education Model, which is a model of perfection because it focuses on family. The story of the Native Teacher Preparation Program at Northwest Indian College is not over. I had a view of the "cow babies," the elk people, and the land at Crownpoint. Yes, self-determination matters; language and culture matter; linkages with other institutions matter; and community building and economic support matter. I saw the magnitude of the "Eagle Project" at Salish-Kootenai College, which reaches Australia, Canada, and other places in the world. Then there is the Learning Lodge Project based at Little Bighorn College, which works with all seven of

the tribal colleges in Montana. Chief Dull Knife College is one of the multiple voices, as is Fort Belknap College, which looks upon education as the new buffalo. Ah, yes! It was a happy journey among great minds and good-hearted people. My prayers for your health, your long life, happiness, peace, and success cover you far, far into this millennium. Continue to walk in sacredness. Thank you for making certain that the stories of our spiritual and cultural richness are going to be alive for all our grandchildren yet to come. This story of reflection ends with love and respect. (Mann, 2002, p. 58 – 60)

After reading this, I had a better understanding of the hypnotic trance Abrahamson was talking about. I was not prepared for the emotional jolt I felt when Dr. Mann characterized the past 500 years and what the people had survived.

Implications for the Future

Having started my journey with stories from my grandfather and how my interest was renewed by being introduced to Native American stories, it is appropriate that I now look to the techniques being utilized by Native American survivors as they work to rescue their culture from annihilation. If they can save their languages and save their stories, they will survive. For me, the implications are tremendous. Many of the people I work with have very little connection to their heritage as a people. A few remember the stories of their elders but the process of assimilation into modern American culture makes it easy to leave your past behind. I feel that if I can help my people connect with their past, together we can build a bridge to the future. To that end, I plan to study Fort Peck Community College (or one of the other four projects) during my coursework this summer. Part of my efforts will be to locate a mentor from that school. I hope thereby to learn more about their Family Education Service Model and whether or not it could be useful for

our program. I will also be engaged in my Adult Education internship which will focus on creating a continuing series of community-based financial education classes and workshops. It is my hope that what I learn from this experience will help me to bring effective learning opportunities to economically disenfranchised families in my community.

Recently, I became immersed in Mezirow's Transformational Learning Theory. He says that transformations often follow some variation the following list of phases whereby meaning becomes clarified:

1. A disorienting dilemma.
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame.
3. A critical assessment of assumptions.
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared.
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.
6. Planning a course of action.
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.
8. Provisional trying of new roles.
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22)

To me, this fits quite well with the Native American projects described above and is very much in keeping with the social action components of Transformation Theory. My clients need transformation if they are to do more than survive. If the Native American experience can

provide a model for how to go beyond survival...to thrive instead, I would be wise to explore the concepts further. That is what I intend to do.

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