

How does the lack of educators' cultural understanding of Native American norms affect Native American student productivity? What are the most effective ways for educators to engage in a cross-cultural understanding of Native American norms?

Sarah J. O'Kane

Senior Project Advisor: Jessica Morrison

Abstract

Native American students' productivity has been affected due to their educators' lack of knowledge in regards to Native American norms. To resolve this problem Educators should make alterations to the content they produce and due there best to become informed about the Native American Culture this why they will have a better understanding of their communication styles and events that may accord in the students lives such as ceremonies. This well not only allows for improvement in the Native American students' work quality but invites a broader diversity of life styles into our schools preparing all students for realistic life sarnerios.

12th Grade Humanities

Animas High School

April 12th, 2021

Part 1:Introduction

Due to cultural disparities and group traumas, educators' cultural perception and knowledge of Native American norms influence Native American student productivity. The most important way for educators to participate in the cross-cultural interpretation of Native American norms is to rethink their existing curriculum and incorporate more anti-racist lenses. As well as think about their interactions with Native American students.

Part 2:Historical Context

Part 2.1 Native American Boarding Schools

In the 1800s Native American boarding schools were created in an attempt to strip away Native American culture which at the time was viewed as having barbaric habits. The best solution for what was viewed as a problem was education. Thus Native boarding schools were created as places of assimilation. The article “Indian Boarding School Experience, Substance Use, And Mental Health Among Urban Two-Spirit American

Indian/Alaska Natives" explain what the schools did to strip away the culture of Native American children,

“At the schools, students were forbidden to engage in cultural practices or speak their languages and suffered harsh punishment if they disobeyed. Instead, they were raised in institutional settings with few adult role models and forced to take on new, often foreign ways of life. Reports of child abuse and neglect at the schools were common and cultural disruption was profound.”(paragraph 2, Evans-Campbell, Teresa, et al)

Sadly the effects of Native American boarding schools didn't end with the abuse, neglect, or deaths of the students that had attended them. It led to further destruction of the community. In the article “ The Impact of Historical Boarding Schools on Native American Families and Parenting Roles” Rebecca Peterson describes what the students of Native American boarding schools had learned through experience.

“Who took their children as far away from home as they possibly could and taught them to fear and hate their ancestry, their parents, and their homes. They often abused them, beat them, and taught them to hate the color of their skin. And when the damage was done they released them back from whence they came, never to be the same again.”(paragraph 3 page 7 Rebecca Peterson)

As a result of these actions, children returned home. With no awareness of the culture, language, or identity. Only knowing what they were taught by strangers who mentally, physically, and sexually abused them and their peers. Later these children would become adults with little to no knowledge of parenting.

Part 2.2 Native American Traumas

Native Americans have a wide range of historical trauma from the events such as Native American boarding schools. Effects of historical trauma according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration include things such as alcohol abuse, substance abuse, child neglect, domestic abuse, breaking of traditional Native American values, self-hatred, general loss of meaning or hope, post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, and suicidality.

Part 2.3 Native American Norms

There are multiple differences between the Western culture and the Indigenous culture. The main things that differentiate these two cultures are the communication styles, world views, and view of knowledge. These differences can make it difficult to understand each other. These differences aren't things that affect an individual once in a great while. But, contribute to their everyday lives. Some examples are used in "Teaching/Learning Across Cultures: Strategies for Success." By Ray Barnhardt. Spirituality is embedded in all aspects of the universe, humans have responsibility for maintaining a harmonious relationship with the natural world, there is a need for reciprocity between the human and natural worlds - resources are regarded as gifts, and nature is honored daily through spiritual practice, according to the Native American worldview. Whereas spirituality in traditional Western culture is based on a single Supreme Being, humans have dominion over nature to exploit it for personal and economic benefit, natural resources are available for unilateral human exploitation, and spiritual activities are sporadic and separate from daily life. This being said there are also similarities between the Western cultures and

Indegounse cultures. The similarities can be found as little things in these categories and even other categories unmentioned above.

Native Americans have a different communication style than people of Western culture. In Western culture there tend to be four types of communication seen as passive, passive-aggressive, aggressive, and assertive. As discussed in the article “4 Types of Communication Styles” western culture views assertive to be the most effective way to communicate is by being assertive. The assertive communication style is thought to be the most powerful because it maintains an open line of communication while not being overbearing. However, if you look at “Communication Styles of Indian Peoples” It states that in the Native American Culture “It is inappropriate to directly say that someone is wrong, again because of the value of arranging social situations so that no one is threatened and that individual autonomy is maintained.” they also indicate that it is impolite to look someone in the eyes the whole time they are speaking. It is also unacceptable for a speaker to stare directly at his or her audience all of the time, which is consistent with non-directive, inexplicit, and general responses. You will find that what is deemed appropriate with verbal and nonverbal communication of Native American cultures is also defined as passive as described by “4 types of communication styles” that passive communicators also avoid eye contact, have poor body posture, and can't say "no." If not aware of these cultural differences when communicating with each other a difference in culture can often be mistaken as a disregard for what the other person is trying to communicate ending up coming across as rude or disrespectful.

The difference in worldviews when it comes to Western culture in comparison to Indigenous culture is quite significant. When it comes to this it is not very often you find common ground between either of the cultures. There are a variety of things that are seen differently by both groups as explained in the article “Teaching/Learning Across Cultures: Strategies for Success.” By Ray Barnhardt, There is a list of Indigenous worldview in comparison to Western world view from spiritually, relationship with nature, view upon natural resources, relationship with other forms of life, the perspective on knowledge gained and its value, and perspective on life.

However, the effect of differences in worldview is not based entirely around a fear of change and lack of understanding of the other culture. Issues such as how to interact with our planet, natural resources, and other life forms are constantly in question when it’s affecting people of western culture and Indigenous culture. Native Americans practice there spiritually through daily rituals and ceremonies in everything they do whereas westerners view spirituality as something personal and separate from their work. Natives view others' life forms to be equal and sometimes of kin. Whereas westerners view themselves as separate from other life forms.

Unlike the how conflicting their world views maybe they do share some similarity in their view of knowledge between the Traditional Native knowledge System and Western science as shown with a Venn diagram in the article, “ Teaching/Learning Across Cultures” in this diagram it shows that we may have some different view but we also share some around the organizing principles, habits of mind, skills and procedures, and overall knowledge.

Part 3: Research and Analysis

Part 3.1 Educators' cultural understanding of Native American norms relation to Native American student productivity

Educator awareness of Native American Norms affects their productivity due to cultural differences. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reports that culture has a significant impact on productivity.

Currently, our school system holds a Western Culture foundation. I will say this isn't a negative thing however this does affect Native American students being that the education system is made to support the majority of the student with home base westernized culture. This has an effect on those with Native American Culture That may be seen as a negative according to Teresa L. McCarty and Tiffany S. Lee in "Critical Culturally Sustaining/ Revitalizing Pedagogy and Indigenous Education Sovereignty"

Western schooling has been the crucible in which these contested desires have been molded, impacting Native peoples in ways that have separated their identities from their languages, lands, and worldviews (see Reyhner & Eder, 2004). As a consequence, we argue that in Native American contexts, CSP must be understood to include culturally revitalizing pedagogy. (page ,paragraph ,Teresa L. McCarty and Tiffany S. Le)

This means that our education system has been designed for those of Western culture but is built to maintain or permit the much loved and finishable diversity of our communities. Thus the result of this Native Americans Students' sense of identity may become an

obstacle in allowing them to feel comfortable enough in a work environment to be productive. However, some educators or parents may feel unsettled by the idea of providing a more diverse curriculum or becoming more knowledgeable of other cultures. The article "Fear-Free Cross-Cultural Communication: Toward A More Balanced Approach With Insight From Neuroscience" by Nguyen-Phuong-Mai, Mai suggests that :

This is due to a fear of change and the unknown according to there seems to be prevailing literature in cross-cultural communication that tends to emphasize the “dark side” of cultural differences. This hinders us from unlocking our creativity and understanding the benefits that cultural diversity can deliver.

This fear of change holds us back from reaching the full potential of the education system. This not only hinders our ability to learn how to communicate with those of different cultural backgrounds but also takes away Native American sense of identity given the history between Native Americans and the education system. I believe it is clear that in the past it has been shown that loss of identity and lack of understanding only harms education.

Part 3.2 Educators engaging with Native American norms

The most effective way for educators to engage in a cross-cultural understanding of Native American norms is by evaluating their current curriculum and providing diverse content, creating a welcoming environment, understanding different cultural communication and beliefs, and acknowledging Native American communities’ trauma.

Native American culture is something that affects actions that are taken daily. In that article " View Of Intercultural And Cross-Cultural Communication Research: Some Reflections About Culture And Qualitative Methods | Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research " by María Assumpta Aneas and María Paz Sandín says, "Culture is the reason why a given phenomenon, a specific form of behavior can be given a very different meaning according to the original culture of the person analyzing and interpreting the process." Meaning that how we learn and how we act naturally with no intentions is solely based on our culture. Thus the reason behind understanding different cultural communication and beliefs.

There are plenty of why to engage with Naive American culture however in Alaska according to "Teaching/Learning Across Cultures: Strategies for Success" by Ray Barnhardt, "Getting to know some of the Elders or other cultural bearers, as well as being acquainted with aspects of the local language, are two of the most useful steps a new teacher can take to begin to see beyond the surface features of a new cultural group." (paragraph 12) is one way that they have found to be most effective in connecting educators with their students. Doing things like this will not only help educators better understand a culture but also help them gain respect from their students due to the respect shown for their culture.

This being said I think it is important to note that wherever you go all cultures are different and there different beliefs across tribes as well as differences in ceremonies,

therefore, it is more useful to strategize or think or communicate rather than set rules. Ray Barnhardt states in “Teaching/Learning Across Cultures: Strategies for Success” that,

“your teaching approach in response to the conditions in front of you, and don’t assume that what worked in one situation will work the same in another. While it is useful to have a “bag of tricks” available to get you started, don’t assume the bag is complete—continue to develop new approaches through trial-and-error on an ongoing basis.”(Paragraph 17,Ray Barnhardt)

This can be said for not only differences between cultures but also tribes that have differences between them but also similarities. People tend to forget that Native Americans also have differences between tribes. So keep in mind a conversation between Southern Ute Native Americans about their cultural beliefs will be different from Navajo cultural beliefs.

Part 3.3 The benefits of cross-cultural understanding beyond Native American Students

Benefits of educators having a broader cultural understanding go beyond just helping Native American students become more proficient in their studies. Cross-cultural awareness also benefits students of western culture.

“Developing strong cross-cultural communication skills is the first step in creating a successful work environment that brings out the best in all of an organization’s team members” stated in the "How To Improve Cross-Cultural Communication In The

Workplace" article. This is not only a skill the student must occur for the sake of being able to work well in group projects, critique, and completion of school work. It is necessary to be able to work well and be aware of cultural differences in life. The main purpose of a school is to prepare children for the real world by giving them tools we see as necessary to survive. It is a fact that not everyone shares the same beliefs in the real world and this can affect a workspace or community. It should also become a goal to learn how to communicate or handle these situations.

Lien by example this dilemma of different cultures within one school system made to nurture one culture could become a system that supports people from different forms of life benefiting the community as a whole. One step toward this goal of moving towards the goal of diversity and the ability to formulate a creative and productive community for cross-cultural experience according to "How To Create Anti-Racist Virtual Classrooms: Strategies For Teachers And Families" from *Pittwire*

“It’s about moving toward co-constructing relationships with families, and how those relationships can look more reciprocal—and more focused on the collective good. And inviting discomfort into this space:" Thus we provide content with acknowledgment of minorities drama alongside the content which shows the great trumpets of US History.

There is also the issue of how intelligence is displayed across cultures but also among individuals. In *Sustaining Place, Language, & Culture Together.*” By Flora Ayuluk, James Ayuluk, et al.

there are multiple forms and ways of applying and displaying intelligence, and therefore, we need to provide multiple avenues through which students can demonstrate their competence. Recent studies indicate that there are at least eight prominent forms of intelligence, with each individual, as well as clusters of people, having strengths in some forms and weaknesses in others. These 7 include potential aptitudes in linguistic, logical-mathematical, naturalistic, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1991, Checkley, 1997). The problem is that schools tend to rely almost exclusively on the first two (linguistic and logical-mathematical) as the basis for measuring academic success, leaving other forms of intelligence largely on the sidelines.

As a result, testing is not a display of intelligence when intelligence is shown in multiple different forms. This also means that based on your culture your display of intelligence can heavily influence your culture's demise most effectively through their communication.

For example in 2018 the average test score for those who input the ethnicity/ race as white scored an average of 1123 on the SAT whereas those who put American Indian/ Alaska Native who scored an average of 949 on the SAT according to the National Center for Education Statistics. This test however is based on westernized culture. This problem doesn't just affect thoughts of different cultural backgrounds but also those who have different ways of displaying intelligence in general. Bringing this to the attention of all educators and the education system, in general, will help us move toward a better system. This being said the change that is needed is a long way from our grasp since the test integrated into our system is used to decide how to finesse the system all sent in a vicious

cycle of only benefiting those who do well-displaying intelligence through two of seven ways intelligence can be displayed. Thus resulting in schools punishing for hard more Westernized culture learning and not being able to support those who simply don't consume content in that form.

Part 4: Discussion and Conclusion

Educators' lack of knowledge about Native American norms affects Native American students' ability to effectively communicate with educators. Thus making it harder for Native American students to be interactive with their educators and peers. As well as the lack of information provided to educators about how to become more aware and understanding of these communities' norms can result in a conflicting sense of identity and feeling out of place.

To grow and better the education provided to students a more diverse content is needed. Alongside it should stand a change in the normalization of tests being the only way to prove intelligence. However, testing has become one of the foundational parts of the US education system and can not be so easily replaced. This is why I think the main priority should be on the content provided as well as helping educators become more aware and understanding of how the culture of their Native American students may affect how they interact with their educators, peers, environment, and work.

This will help students become more comfortable with communicating with their educators. As well as change their work environment in a way that they feel less pressured to interact in a way that feels disrespectful to them. Things like” ‘(1) strategize the body language, (2) strategize the context of cross-cultural encounters, and (3) strategize

cross-cultural theories.” According to, it should be added to an educator's bag of tools if finding it difficult to communicate with their student. As you can see the so-called steps for good communication are generally why they can not only work with only Native American students but go beyond that to students with other cultural backgrounds as well. As for Diversifying content, this may also take time due to the standards the content in schools is held to over time our content has become more diverse this being said it may take time for it to become up to the point needed for students to feel like they can relate with the content or well presented. In these situations recommending books or articles on the side for students could be beneficial. This well allows students to find content that they can relate to but also allow teachers to meet the education systems requirements.

Work Cited Page:

Adeyoyin, Samuel. "Managing the Library's Corporate Culture for Organizational Efficiency, Productivity, and Enhanced Service ." *Library Philosophy and Practices Vol. 8, No. 2*, Ajayi Crowther University, 2006, citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.489.2413&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Barnhardt, R., and A. Kawagley. "Indigenous Knowledge Systems And Alaska Native Ways Of Knowing". *Undefined*, 2005, p. ., <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Indigenous-Knowledge-Systems-and-Alaska-Native-Ways-Barnhardt-Kawagley/a8e24a1d2110749ca3cdacaa8f12436cbfa46d41?p2df>. Accessed 29 Mar 2021.

Barnhardt, Ray. "Teaching/Learning Across Cultures: Strategies for Success." *Sharing Our Pathways*, 1997, ankn.uaf.edu/SOP/SOPv2i2.pdf.

"Becoming An Anti-Racist Educator - Wheaton College Massachusetts". *Wheaton College Massachusetts*, 2021, <https://wheatoncollege.edu/academics/special-projects-initiatives/center-for-collaborative-teaching-and-learning/anti-racist-educator/>. Accessed 11 Feb 2021.

Evans-Campbell, Teresa, et al. "Indian Boarding School Experience, Substance Use, And Mental Health Among Urban Two-Spirit American Indian/Alaska Natives". *The American Journal Of Drug And Alcohol Abuse*, vol 38, no. 5, 2012, pp. 421-427. Informa UK Limited, doi:10.3109/00952990.2012.701358. Accessed 26 Mar 2021

Feir, Donna. "The Long Term Effects of Forcible Assimilation Policy: The Case of Indian Boarding Schools." *University of Victoria*, 2013, www.uvic.ca/socialsciences/economics/assets/docs/discussion/ddp1301.pdf.

Gregg, Matthew T. "The Lasting Effects Of American Indian Boarding Schools". *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2016. Elsevier BV, doi:10.2139/ssrn.2776417. Accessed 25 Mar 2021.

"How To Create Anti-Racist Virtual Classrooms: Strategies For Teachers And Families". *Pittwire*, 2021, <https://www.pittwire.pitt.edu/news/how-create-anti-racist-virtual-classrooms-strategies-teachers-and-families>. Accessed 11 Feb 2021.

"How To Improve Cross-Cultural Communication In The Workplace". *Northeastern University Graduate Programs*, 2019, <https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/cross-cultural-communication/>. Accessed 22 Jan 2021.

Ing, N. Rosalyn. "The Effects Of Residential Schools On Native Child-Rearing Patterns".

University Of British Columbia, 1990, p. .,

<https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0102443>. Accessed 29

Mar 2021.

McCARTY, TERESA L, and TIFFANY S LEE. "Critical Culturally Sustaining/

Revitalizing Pedagogy and Indigenous Education Sovereignty ." *Sealaska*

Heritage, 2014,

nau.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/49/2018/04/McCarty-Lee-Critical-Culturally-Sustaining-Pedagogy.pdf.

Nguyen-Phuong-Mai, Mai. "Fear-Free Cross-Cultural Communication: Toward a

More Balanced Approach With Insight From Neuroscience." *Frontiers*, 2020,

www.researchgate.net/publication/319913529_A_critical_analysis_of_cultural_metaphors_and_static_cultural_frameworks_with_insight_from_cultural_neuroscience_and_evolutionary_biology.

Peterson, Rebecca. "The Impact of Historical Boarding Schools on Native

American Families and Parenting Roles." *Wisconsin*, 2012,

[minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/66821/Peterson.pdf?sequence=8&isAll](http://minds.wisconsin.edu/bitstream/handle/1793/66821/Peterson.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=y)

owed=y.

“The NCES Fast Facts Tool Provides Quick Answers to Many Education Questions (National Center for Education Statistics).” *National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Home Page, a Part of the U.S. Department of Education*, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics., 2019, nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=171.

Thomas, David R. "Understanding Cross-Cultural Communication". *South Pacific Journal Of Psychology*, vol 7, 1994, pp. 2-8. Cambridge University Press (CUP), doi:10.1017/s0257543400001346. Accessed 25 Feb 2021.

“UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL TRAUMA WHEN RESPONDING TO AN EVENT IN INDIAN COUNTRY.” *SAMHSA*, 2014, store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4866.pdf.

" View Of Intercultural And Cross-Cultural Communication Research: Some Reflections About Culture And Qualitative Methods | Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research ". *Qualitative-Research.Net*, 2021,

"When Culture Doesn'T Translate". *Harvard Business Review*, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/10/when-culture-doesnt-translate>. Accessed 22 Jan 2021

