

Journal of American Indian Education

Volume 38 Number 3
Spring 1999
Special Issue 1

Preface

If the Great Spirit had desired me to be a white man he would have made me so in the first place. He put in your heart certain wishes and plans; in my heart he put other and different desires. Each man is good in the sight of the Great Spirit. It is not necessary for eagles to be crows.

Sitting Bull [Teton Sioux]

The *Journal of American Indian Education* is dedicating this and two other forthcoming special issues to the wisdom and perspectives of recognized Native and non-Native elder leaders and scholars in the field of American Indian Education. As we enter the gateways of a new century and millennium, The *Journal* has asked them to reflect on the issues and insights that might be associated with this temporal intersection with Native education. In response, each in his/her own unique way, shares with us perspectives on the paths taken in the past, the paths that we are now following, and where they are likely to lead us.

As Native people, we recognize that the concept of time embodied in the Roman Calendar was brought to us by a race of people who colonized and ultimately assumed domination of our continent. As part of our adaptation to colonization, we have learned to define time and its measurement in a way similar to the manner in which we have had to define our outer sovereignty and nationhoods based in concepts of boundaries, property and treaties alien to us. However, we have also maintained our own time-honored ways of measuring the beat of our existence and acknowledging those events

and circumstances that we, in our hearts and spirit, hold sacred. While the contributors to the special editions pause in acknowledgement of the dominant concept of time as measured in years and centuries, their writings also celebrate inextinguishable tenacity, our *inner* sovereignty, and the will of Native people on this continent that cannot be measured in such a way. In this spirit, their writings are not a series of analytic summations. Rather, they are personal reflections of elders and leaders who have been vital intellectual and spiritual elements in an evolving, dynamic and resilient community of people. While they reflect on Native education, we collectively acknowledge and voice *our own* evolving role and influence within the framework of coexistence with our colonizers, regardless of time.

While our colonization is an irreversible fact, the contributors underscore the resilience of our identity and cultures. Our pride as Native peoples lies in the truth that we have managed to remain distinct and culturally vital in a society that has made many attempts to exterminate, homogenize, and assimilate us. We still manage our lives and measure time in cadence with our mother earth and in honor of and respect for our elders and ancestors. Now, as the dominant society realizes how it has exploited and despoiled mother earth, it increasingly looks toward us to guide a process of healing and living in greater harmony with her.

Constant and accelerating change has become the norm for all peoples on the North American continent. We know that the dominant culture imposed its form of education as a way to “civilize” and assimilate us. However, we have learned to adapt education in our own ways as an essential response to change. Native people have always had systems and ways to educate. We now enjoy unprecedented opportunities

to incorporate useful aspects of the dominant society's style of education with *our own* time-honored purposes and ways of educating.

In acknowledgement of the vitality of information technology in education as a 21st century issue, it is fitting that the inaugural entry in this first special edition is reprinted from a website located on the Rosebud Reservation, <http://www.tcsdk12.org/cmc/Lakota/perspective.htm>. As parent and Native educator, Lydia Whirlwind Soldier (Sicanju Lakota) aptly sets the theme for the special editions through her personal reflections upon the dawning of a new century.

William Demmert (Tlingit/Sioux) follows with reflections of his own schooling as well as on changes in style, form, and policies in Indian Education to which he has born witness during his illustrious career as an educator.

Historian Peter Iverson, recently named Regent's Scholar at Arizona State University, then recollects the early years of Diné Community College where he worked as a young history instructor. He provides insights on the birth of self-determination in higher education as the first tribal college struggled to its feet.

Based on his many years of work on the Navajo Nation, Robert Roessel, founder of the Center for Indian Education at Arizona State University, Rough Rock Demonstration School and Navajo Community College details problem areas in Indian Education and provides some uplifting predictions for the future.

Octaviana Trujillo (Yaqui), a successor of Robert Roessel as Director of the Center for Indian Education at Arizona State University, briefly outlines the history of the Center for Indian Education and its role in Indian Education since its inception forty years ago.

The final reflection, contributed by Margaret Connell Szasz probes the history of Indian education, focusing on the education connection as a cross-cultural phenomenon that moved in both directions among Natives and non-Natives.

In spite of Native strength and tenacity, there are still liabilities and pitfalls associated with change and adaptation in a context of colonization. In all things, there must be a balance between what is lost and what is gained. As this theme is threaded throughout the writings of our contributors, each guides us toward this balance with his/her unique metaphors, stories, philosophies, predictions and, entreaties.