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This Digest briefly describes four goals for using schools to heal American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities. They include: (1) facilitating the learning of dispositions honored by the community and practical skills for enhancing community health; (2) incorporating into schools the awareness that children are highly valued and respected, and that spirituality is vital to successful teaching and learning processes; (3) using schools as venues for adults in the community to engage with children; and (4) creating opportunities for sharing Native perspectives with global communities as a way to regain dignity.

Before discussing the efficacy of these goals, it may be useful to briefly identify the maladies or "dis-eases" in need of healing that exist among AI/AN people. Numerous reports and research studies have documented major disparities between key health indicators among AI/AN and White populations (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997; Gray & Starr, 1993). According to the most recent available report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Indian Health Service (1998), death rates from the following seven causes were considerably greater for Native people than for the general population (all races):

1. alcoholism--627% greater

2. tuberculosis--533% greater

3. diabetes mellitus--249% greater

4. accidents--204% greater

5. suicide--72% greater

6. pneumonia and influenza--71% greater

7. homicide--63% greater (p. 6)

Further, life expectancy (at birth) is 5.4 years shorter for AI/AN people than for Whites.

Beyond the influence of poverty on wellness, historical trauma responses may also be a significant cause of mortality and morbidity (Braveheart-Jordon & DeBruyn, 1995). The injustices of the past against Native Americans have not been adequately resolved in the psyche of many Native people (Adams, 1995). The inability to resolve them may continue to have health consequences as long as this tragic history continues to repeat itself in ways that undermine authentic tribal sovereignty (Cook-Lynn, 2001). Psychological healing is unlikely until those working with AI/AN people come to respect and accept the Native perspective on conditions and events affecting the lives of Native people, and to understand that continuing to view these conditions and events from a

Eurocentric perspective only fosters misunderstanding and inequity (Duran & Duran, 1995). (1)

TEACHING DISPOSITIONS AND SKILLS

Giving and sharing are vital components of Native value systems (Shutiva, 2001). Unlike contemporary learning goals, which focus on the skills needed to become a good employee, in a traditional AI/AN upbringing, the major purpose of education for an AI/AN child was to learn how to be a good person (Bayne, 1969). If schools are to be successful in helping to bring back health and wellness to AI/AN children and communities, a range of virtues must be woven into daily curriculum in ways that allow students to regularly reflect upon and experience them (Jacobs & Jacobs-Spencer, 2001).

Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock (2003) found in their interviews with 120 Native youth from across North America that finding and staying on "The Good Path" entailed learning about dispositions of respect, upholding promises, kindness, peacefulness, courage, and moderation. The result of cultivating these dispositions was resilience and the ability of individuals and communities to regain their traditional role of protectors of the Earth.

Work skills are also important, but students should learn them in concert with AI/AN cultural values and virtues, and in terms of sustainable economic goals for the community (Drost, Crowley, & Schwindt, 1995).

RESPECTING CHILDREN, OFFERING A SPIRITUALLY ENRICHING CURRICULUM

Clarke (2002) describes tragedies of depression, alienation, and anger experienced by Native youth. This author proposes that one significant contribution to this dispiritedness is that many schools do not treat children as respected (or sacred) beings, a traditional imperative in AI/AN cultures. A child's value and place in the world is not traditionally seen in terms of grades, testing performance, or potential for economic success in the workforce. One way for teachers to help AI/AN children regain an awareness of their inherent value is to read Native stories that reveal the magic of children and the path to a balanced life. (2)

Bergstrom, Cleary, and Peacock's (2003) study revealed other qualities of good teaching as identified by Native youth: having cultural knowledge, encouraging, explaining, using examples and analogies, having high expectations, being fair and insisting on respect, being interested in students, and other positive approaches. Students also responded well to teachers who were fun and who exhibited caring, "mellowness," open-mindedness, patience, respect for students, and a commitment to staying (i.e., not leaving after a year or two).

When schools and communities view children as sacred, children begin to feel significant, welcome reflection on life's mysteries, and realize they possess a power that it is their legacy to have (Carmody & Carmody, 1993; Jacobs, 2002).

USING SCHOOLS AS VENUES FOR ADULTS IN THE COMMUNITY TO

ENGAGE WITH CHILDRENWhen generations of Native children are taught to venerate Western science, technology, and arts as superior to their own tribal ways of knowing, doing, and creating, they may internalize a belief in the limited usefulness of their own culture. Schools, for example, continue to teach Native children that the ancient Middle East and Mediterranean regions were the "cradles of civilization," while nearly ignoring the civilizations and cultures of the Western Hemisphere. Nor do schools credit Native cultures with the many gifts they have given to our food supply, pharmaceuticals, and other societal knowledge (Weatherford, 1988).

Native communities have resisted such attempts at deculturalization and have "struggled to pass on their traditions and languages to their children," Spring (2001) explains, but "as parents and children resist attempts to strip them of their cultural heritage, they often also resist other educational programs. In other words, deculturalization programs might turn both parents and children against all educational programs offered by schools" (p. 177). Over the years, schools serving Native communities have largely been isolated from the communities and have used few Native teachers (Lomawaima, 1999; Spring, 2001).

However, in some communities, the schools have begun to help students understand and respect the knowledge that is derived from both traditional and modern sources. Place-based education, which grounds the curriculum in the local ecology, history, and culture of the community, actively seeks the involvement of parents, elders, and other adults in the education of children, viewing them as valuable sources of knowledge needed to sustain the community (Rural School and Community Trust, 2000). The Alaska Native Knowledge Network has worked for years to integrate traditional knowledge with the science and mathematics curriculum. Among the "givens" of their approach are the following understandings (Kawagley, 1996, p. 8):

Within our Native mythology and stories are the sciences and within the Native sciences are the mythology and stories.

Native Science is concerned with asking the right questions to learn from nature and the spiritual worlds . . . .

A belief in everything having a spirit establishes a sense of spirituality which is inseparable from everyday life. This spirituality is embedded in respect which gives honor and dignity to all things. "We are biologists in our own way."

Native science deals with all aspects of life: health (healing plants), psychology, weather prediction, earth science, shamanism, animal behavior according to seasons, stars and constellations, reincarnation, natural permutations, rituals and ceremonies to maintain balance and many areas of life. . . .

Clearly, the best teachers of Native science and other Indigenous knowledge are community members. When both educators and community members respect each other's knowledge, alienation can end and schools can become integrated parts of the communities they serve.

GLOBAL SHARING

An old adage is that "the best way to learn is to teach." When Native people share their unique perspectives and observation skills with the non-Indian, not only is there potential to make the world healthier but also to validate Native wisdom so Native communities become more confident in the old ways. Many scholars have called for such a sharing. For example, Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern (1990) say that traditional approaches to positive discipline that come from American Indian philosophy are far more beneficial than other theories on child development. Parker Palmer has referred to the deep knowing of the American Indian people as "one of the most neglected and abused resources of our continent" (Jacobs & Jacobs-Spencer, 2001, back cover). In "Curriculum Development for Post Modern Education," Slattery maintains education must include "the wisdom embodied in Native American spirituality" (1995, p. 45).

Can schools become healers in the communities they serve? Communities across North America are actively exploring the answer to this question, finding ways to teach dispositions that will strengthen and sustain individual and community health, build strong Native identities, and integrate Indigenous knowledge with skills and knowledge needed to succeed in today's economy. Their efforts deserve attention by both the education research and practice communities.

NOTES

(1) For more on how Native concepts about healing can be quite different from the dominant culture's, see reference for the video "American Indian Concepts of Health and Unwellness" (Native American Research and Training Center, 1990) and Grim's book on patterns of shamanistic healing (1983).

(2) See, for example, "I Become a Part of It: Sacred Dimensions of American Indian

Life" by Dooling and Jordan-Smith (1992).

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