

Running Head: Exploring Bi-Cultural Awareness through Outdoor Education

Exploring Bi-Cultural Awareness through Outdoor Education in  
Preservice Physical Education Teacher Preparation.

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EXPLORING BI-CULTURAL AWARENESS THROUGH OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN PRESERVICE  
PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER PREPARATION.

Abstract

This paper focuses on the use of outdoor-based experiential learning in an undergraduate physical education teacher preparation program to develop a culturally-sensitive pedagogy for work with children from different cultures. Applying the six-stage process for becoming a bi-cultural teacher (Klug & Whitfield, 2003), teacher preparation students participated in a model action research assignment that focused on the lived experience of the Seneca Indian in Western New York. The stages of this process included: 1) Learning stereotypes and prejudices of native peoples; 2) Confronting one's personal prejudice; 3) Redefining one's perceptions of Native American cultures; 4) Opening one's self to new experiences; 5) Adjustment and re-shaping of one's cultural identity; and 6) Transformation in one's practice as a teacher. Complimenting student interviews, school visits, field trips, and invited distinguished speakers, all students participated in a three-day backpacking trek through a region holding much historic significance for contemporary Seneca-US relations. Flooded in 1966 as a part of the Pittsburgh Flood Control Project, the upper Allegheny River valley was once home to more than 160 Seneca families and, is still, the spiritual birthplace of the Longhouse Religion founded by Seneca prophet Handsome Lake. An abrogation of the 1792 Pickering Treaty, the flooding of these lands represents a great injustice to many Seneca today. Through the use of a backpacking trek into this region, students visit a number of remote sites and observe and reflect upon artifacts of an earlier existence along the Allegheny River prior to the relocation of valley's inhabitants. Student action research papers, generated from individual data collection processes, personal journals and reflective insights are used to establish generative themes evolving throughout the action research process.

Overview of the Seneca Plight

The Seneca are among the 500 groups of indigenous peoples to have inhabited the North American continent. Until 1848, when the Seneca Nation of Indians was formed, they were recognized as one of the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy which included the Seneca, Mohawk, Oneida, Cayugas, Onandagas and the Tuscarora nations. Linguistically, the Seneca speak a dialect of Iroquois and have traditionally inhabited the area that is now recognized as Western New York in the United States of America. Because the Seneca inhabited the Western most region of the Confederacy, they were known as "The Keepers of the Western Door." It is believed that the first permanent settlement of these people was located along the banks of the Allegheny River near the present-day state-line between New York and Pennsylvania (Bilharz, 1998).

In 1794 the pressures of Westward expansion, war and a desire to contain the Seneca by the recently formed U.S. Government led to the drafting and adoption of the Canandaigua Treaty of 1794 (Abler & Tooker, 1978). In this treaty, a parcel of approximately 400,000 acres in Western New York was designated as the formal property, under U.S. Law, of the Seneca Nation as follows:

Now, the United States acknowledge all the land within the aforementioned  
boundaries, to be the property of the Seneca nation; and the United States will

never claim the same, nor disturb the Seneca nation, nor any of the Six Nations, or any of their Indian friends residing thereon and united with them, in the free use and enjoyment thereof; but it shall remain theirs, until they choose to sell the same to the people of the United States, who have the right to purchase (Bilharz, pg. 11).

In 1797, only three years after the Canandaigua Treaty was signed, land speculation involving financier Robert Morris, the Holland Land Company and the U.S. Government resulted in the Treaty of Big Tree where Seneca land holdings were effectively halved. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the holdings of the Seneca Nation were reduced to approximately 200,000 acres that were separated into ten separate tracts of land. One of which was a single tract of 42 square miles located along Cattaraugus Creek and the other was a single tract of 42 square miles located along the Allegheny River (Bilharz, 1998).

As the territory of the Seneca diminished, their lifestyle and traditions were increasingly threatened. One consequence of this was the emergence of two distinct political groups among the Seneca. One group, led by Chief Red Jacket emerged as a conservative force in defense of traditional Seneca ways. The other group, led by Chief Cornplanter, some of which existed as refugees on land granted to him along the Allegheny River in Northwestern Pennsylvania, encouraged the assimilation of European agricultural practices, language and religion in an effort to ensure the long-term survival of his people (Bilharz, 1998).

One of the inhabitants of the Cornplanter Grant, Handsome Lake, emerges at this time as a spiritual leader for the Seneca people. According to Seneca history, Handsome Lake was a prophet who was visited with five visions that formed the basis for a social gospel that would become widely known as the Code of Handsome Lake. In part, the teachings of Handsome Lake did much to unite the factions of the Seneca and his social gospel provided much needed direction in making the transition from a hunter to an agrarian society. Handsome Lake was visited by his first vision at the Burnt Cabin settlement on the Cornplanter Grant along the Allegheny River. The Code of Handsome Lake includes the original spiritual teachings upon which the Seneca Longhouse religion was founded (Wallace, 1969; 1978; Bilharz, 1998).

In 1908, more than 100 years after the Treaty of Big Tree, The Flood Commission of Pittsburgh, led by H.J. Heinz was established to develop a long-term strategic plan for dealing with the perennial problem of spring flooding in the emerging industrial giant located just 130 miles downstream from Seneca

settlements along the Allegheny River. At that time, a series of reservoirs was proposed that would control spring flooding in Pittsburgh. As early as 1929 U.S. Army Corps of Engineer Surveyors had published reports identifying a proposed Dam location in the Big Bend Area in the upper Allegheny River just below the mouth of Kinzua Creek. Effectively, such a Dam, as proposed, would inundate Seneca settlements along the river basin including those located on the Cornplanter Grant Lands (Bilharz, 1998).

Dam construction at Big Bend would not be completed until 1966. One of the key events harnessing early political will for the project was the St. Patrick's Day Flood of 1936 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Though it would take nearly thirty years to pass legislation to completely gain land access and the necessary federal monies for the project, the Kinzua Dam was virtually a done deal once the progress-oriented Eisenhower administration began in 1953. In 1956 members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers entered and surveyed Seneca lands for the possible dam sight. In 1960 the U.S. House of Representatives approve 4.5 million dollars for the construction of the Kinzua Dam. Construction begins in October 1960 with clear intent to violate the Canandaigua Treaty of 1794 (Bilharz, 1998).

The Flood pool, rising a maximum of 1,365 feet above sea level, resulting from the construction of Kinzua Dam, would ultimately lead to the forced relocation of more than 160 families and at least 537 individuals from Seneca lands along the Allegheny River. Between 1963 and 1966 Seneca peoples were relocated to two separate nearby resettlement areas, each approximately 300 square acres and each providing modern single family dwellings located above the flood pool. Individual homes and out-buildings located within the flood plane were evacuated, razed and then burned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, --often under the protest of the home's owners (Bilharz, 1998). The flooding of Seneca Lands along the Allegheny River also led to the displacement of their traditional and originating place of worship, the Cold Spring Longhouse (Wallace, 1978).

While the impact of the Pittsburgh Flood Control Project and the subsequent forced relocation has had devastating effects on the Seneca, physical changes to the region have brought new opportunities to the region. Besides the development of hydro-electric power resources for the Seneca as well as non-Seneca in the surrounding region, the area now recognized as the Allegheny Reservoir draws Sportsman and other outdoor enthusiasts from the tri-state area including Western New York, Western Pennsylvania and Northeastern Ohio. The reservoir pool measuring approximately 24 miles in length and contained within

more than 90 miles of shoreline borders the Allegheny National Forest and has become a regional destination for Backpackers, Kayakers, and Anglers. One of the more developed features of this area, following the eastern shore of the reservoir is the North Country Trail.

Why Awareness of the Seneca is Relevant to My Students

St. Bonaventure University is located less than twenty miles up-river from the Seneca Nation. As a private Franciscan university, serving the region of Western New York, it primarily attracts students from areas surrounding Jamestown, Buffalo, Rochester and the smaller communities of the Finger Lakes region. At this time, the campus population is predominantly white and it draws from middle and upper middle-class suburban or small town communities. Though the Allegany Community of the Seneca Nation of Indians is only a short drive from campus, there is little evidence in either the demographic composition of the university community or the curricular or co-curricular offerings that acknowledge the existence of, or reflect an interest in, this distinct minority ethnic group. However, as a regional university with a strong commitment to teacher training, St. Bonaventure's School of Education often places student teachers in schools that enroll Seneca children.

Although Western New York is rich in a variety of natural resources, its economy since the 1970's has struggled to transform itself from a largely industrial and agrarian base to one that is more broadly defined to include contributions from the service and information technology sectors. As a result, Western New York has experienced significant out-migration that has dramatically reduced the size of the area's inner city populations, the middle class and the professional workforce. Recently, in an effort to generate revenue for their community, the Seneca Nation of Indians opened area casinos that provide legalized gambling and job opportunities for the surrounding area. Needless to say, because of the relative size of their community, the clientele of these casinos are largely non-Seneca. Though it is unclear at this time what the long-term impact these casinos will be, they have become regionally recognized as force affecting both local politics and the economy.

For those students studying to become physical education teachers at St. Bonaventure University, knowledge of the Seneca people and their history and struggles become important during their experience in PHED 309A Outdoor/Adventure Education. During this course students learn many of their wilderness-based skills in areas bordering Seneca lands. Among these, students will paddle canoes on the reservoir

that now covers the previous Seneca communities of Cold Spring and Corydon and they will backpack and camp in forests near some of the Cornplanter Grant Lands. During times when the water level in the flood pool is reduced, some of these excursions provide opportunities for students to walk along partially submerged roads, observe artifacts where inundated homes once stood and make note of charred remains and debris from the relocation action.

#### Outdoor/Adventure Education: From Skill-based teaching to transformative pedagogy

PHED 309A Outdoor/Adventure Education is currently in its third incarnation as a course in our physical education teacher preparation program at St. Bonaventure University. Initially, it was organized as a skills-based course that exposed preservice teachers to the basic “hard” skills associated with Canoeing, Orienteering, Backpacking and Rock Climbing to reflect the activities common to our surrounding community. Later, as equipment was acquired and the course became more established, the emphasis shifted to a focus on “situated” instruction and leadership in the outdoors. Basic skills were still taught, but they were integrated into instructional units that emphasized teaching and the practice of sound personal judgment in a wide range of outdoor learning environments. In its latest incarnation, PHED 309A has expanded its use of the environment to politically contextualize the work of teachers and the experience of learners. Examples of related topics covered in this course currently include a) Modernity and its Impact on our Relationship with Nature and b) The Power of Place: Sharing the Space of the Seneca.

#### Conducting Action Research on One’s Self

Action research is an iterative process whereby practitioner’s, such as teachers, engage in meaningful inquiry that has a direct impact on their practice. The basic steps associated with action research include: 1) data collection, 2) data analysis, 3) theorization, 4) action and 5) the evaluation of outcomes relative to one’s practice (Stringer, 1999). One of the most important themes connected with the Outdoor/Adventure course is the cultivation of personal judgment as it might apply to either a student’s career path or their life. The purpose of this particular assignment involved the critical self-examination of one’s teaching practice by employing a derivative method of action research focused on teaching students from other cultures. Applying the six-stage process for becoming a bi-cultural teacher (Klug & Whitfield, 2003), teacher preparation students participated in a model action research assignment that focused on the potential challenges of working as a teacher with Seneca children in Western New York. Complimenting

student interviews, school visits, field trips, and invited distinguished speakers, all students participated in a three-day backpacking trek through a region holding much historic significance for contemporary Seneca-US relations. Through the use of a backpacking trek into this region, students were able to visit a number of remote sites and observe and reflect upon artifacts of an earlier existence along the Allegheny River prior to the relocation of valley's inhabitants. Student action research papers, developed from individual data collection processes, personal journals and reflective insights were used to establish generative themes focused on the critical reflection of one's teaching practice from the perspective of the other (the Seneca). Following the exercise, the generative themes were presented by the instructor to the students for the purpose of member checking and to generating further interactive discussion related to the process.

#### The Process of Becoming a Bi-Cultural Teacher

1. Learning Stereotypes and Prejudices associated with Other Cultural Groups. This stage deals with developing a critical awareness of how stereotypes and prejudices are transmitted inter-generationally, within our communities, through our institutions and via the media to inform our perceptions about others who are different and reflexively about ourselves in the context of such relations (Klug & Whitfield, 2003). In thinking critically about this process, students are invited to list and discuss common stereotypes and/or prejudices associated with a specific cultural group. In this case the focus was on the Seneca People.

2. Confronting Our Prejudices. This stage of the process requires that we make familiar the strange and explore immediate personal relationships with members of a different culture or experiences that will more fully inform our insights of their culture (Klug & Whitfield, 2003). This stage is designed to test the assumptions supporting the stereotypes and prejudices associated with the way we have come to understand members of another culture.

3. Redefining our Perceptions of Native Cultures. Once we have tested the legitimacy of prejudices and stereotypes associated with members of a cultural group different from our own, we are then more free to address each person as an individual and from these experiences we are then able to reconstruct our perceptions about their culture and the possibilities we might share in relation to one and other (Klug & Whitfield, 2003).

4. Opening Ourselves to New Experiences. This stage focuses on accessing unique cultural experiences, suspending personal judgment and exploring the ways in which these new experiences, or the lessons derived from them, can impact our practice as teachers (Klug & Whitfield, 2003).

5. Adjusting and Reshaping Our Cultural Identities. As new experiences challenge us to take risks and begin to reflect upon ourselves and our practice through the eyes of those from another cultural group, we begin to step beyond our own cultural framework that had previously shaped both our beliefs and practices (Klug & Whitfield, 2003).

6. Approaching Our Teaching Practice as a Bi-Cultural Project. As our familiarity with the culture of our students evolves we are now able to deliver lessons and content that not only addresses the essential elements of the canon but also offers culturally relevant perspectives, critiques and alternatives for both the process and products associated with the teaching/learning project (Klug & Whitfield, 2003). (Klug & Whitfield, 2003)

#### Generative Themes

Although student papers discussed the various ways that each of the six steps were or could be addressed (step six was beyond the scope of this course), generative themes were drawn from discussions of steps four and five alone (Opening one's self to new experiences and adjusting and reshaping our cultural identity). Because earlier steps (steps one, two and three) were developed as a group, responses tended to be fairly homogenous. Common themes emerging from student discussions of steps four and five included a) How place affects who you are, b) The legitimacy of power and c) Making connections.

How Place affects Who You Are. The first generative theme emerging across a number of student papers focused on the importance of place in anchoring one's sense of identity. Clearly after conducting interviews, studying artifacts in the Seneca National Museum and listening to our guest speaker, the students were exposed repeatedly to the idea of the Seneca being displaced, as a group, through their forced relocation. However, the experience of actually living in the same forest, if only for a short time (3 days), gave new meaning to ideas that had been shared with them regarding one's relationship with the earth. In particular, the notion of a people belonging to the earth rather than the earth belonging to a people seemed to particularly resonate with many of the students. Evaluated within the context of these ideas, many of the



students reflected upon the loss of a lifestyle, a connection with the earth, old places called home and one's sense of equilibrium in the world.

The Legitimacy of Power. The second generative theme emerging across a number of student papers focused on the rightness of action and the legitimacy of power. This theme actually was supported by two sub-themes. The first sub-theme focused on the issue of fairness and respect for Native rights with regard to the abrogation of the Canandaigua Treaty of 1794. Attempting to adopt a Seneca perspective on the relocation action, a number of the students wanted to know "What gives the Federal Government the right to break its word to the Seneca?" The second sub-theme focused on the development of a critically self-reflective lens trained on the legitimacy of one's authority as a teacher when representing a culture that supports a government that violates Indian treaties. Essentially, student comments suggest a widely-held belief that teachers are agents of the state and that their authority in the classroom is derived from their affiliation with state-run schools. Consequently, it follows that if the state puts forth a policy of questionable legitimacy, subsequent actions stemming from such a policy may bring into question the legitimacy of a teacher's authority. Essentially, the students wanted to know, "Where would I stand if I were teaching in this community when the forced relocation occurred?"

Making Connections. The third generative theme emerging across student papers focused on reflections of teaching practice. Specifically, this theme dealt with the receptivity of students to participate in various relationships as an essential element of their teaching practice. The two relationships most commonly discussed by the students as essential to good teaching were: a) a teacher's relationship with a student's experience of culture and b) a teacher's relationship with a student's experience of place.

### Concluding Remarks

While it is currently not possible for members of the PHED 309A Outdoor/Adventure course to immediately put into action the results of their work in bi-cultural awareness, this project plays an important role in opening the dialogue between university students and their instructor about the importance of reflecting upon one's practice as a teacher through a culturally-sensitive lens. In many teacher preparation programs, especially in physical education, teaching is largely considered and presented as a technical endeavor comprised of those skills best suited for the delivery of content in places that are often sanitized of local culture. Though we have developed a high regard for technical proficiency in our

teaching, we often tend to overlook the richness of context in our movement-based pedagogies. Using a derivative model of the basic action research approach of “*Look, Think and Act*” (Stringer, 1999), this project turns the focus of each individual’s investigation on their own generalizations about Native Americans, it encourages them to think critically about the teachers they hoped to become and it challenges them to imagine themselves as not just effective teachers, but teachers who are also culturally-sensitive. This lesson was designed to bring into consciousness the many layers of context that bring meaning to a student’s “situated” learning experience and make relevant, and possibly even compassionate, the lesson’s their teachers’ might provide.

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