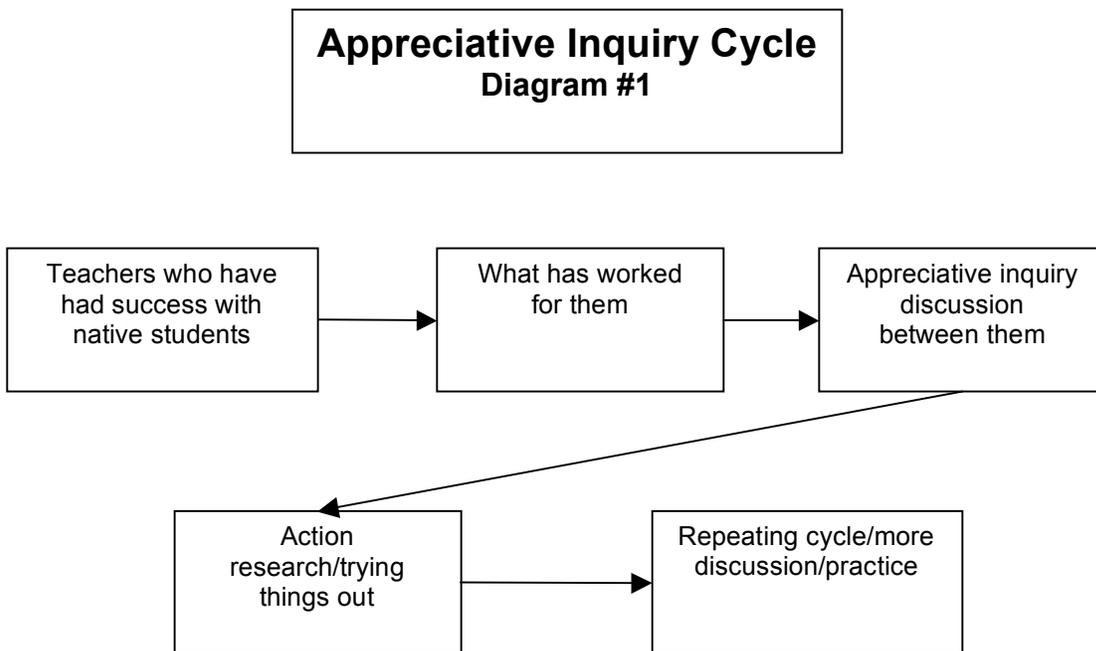


Introduction

The following is a compilation of a set of interviews with educators who have been successful at educating Native students. It is done in the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry and Action Research.

Appreciative Inquiry assumes that most of what we need is somewhere hidden within current practice. If we systematically examine “what works” in existing practice, we are often able to find many of the answers to important current dilemmas. It is meant to increase what is already working. Though national and local education of Native students has a record generally of being unsuccessful, there have always been those educators who have found ways through education to unleash the wonderful abilities of Native students. It only seems logical that we then ask these educators, “what do you that works for Native students?”

Action Research is a process of finding very practical practices that are continually grounded in day-to-day instruction. The effectiveness of these practices is measured, formally or informally. This sets the stage for a dialogue based on practice and measurement of effectiveness. See Diagram #1



Purpose

In this work, I hope to capture the wisdom of educators who have been successful with Native students. In this process eleven teachers have been chosen based on their effectiveness with Native students. I engaged each in a “dialogue” inquiring of them, “What do you do that ‘works’ with Native students?” The hope was that a composite of these discussions would inspire discussion among educators of Native students about “what works”.

This is in no way meant to be an authoritative “Bible” of how to work with Native students. I would guess that most readers would find some things to disagree with. As it inspires an “appreciative inquiry” “action research” discussion, the hope is that the dialogue itself on this web site or coming from this web site will help us all to find ways to increase the effectiveness of our individual instruction and give us clear ideas on what to expect of educators of Native learners. Hopefully, it will also give us clues as to how to better develop schools that will be successful with Native students.

General Comments

As you go through these pages you will probably notice that most of what is mentioned could be categorized as “just good teaching”. In this work however, I am trying to bring to the forefront things that were emphasized by the interviewees as being important to the success they have had with Native students during their careers. These elements, then, I believe are critical to a “what has worked” discussion of education of Native students.

All of this is meant to be an ongoing dialogue as a part of the Phillips Indian Educators Web site (Pieducators.org) and other discussions of educators seeking to find the very best ways of bringing about learning for Native students.

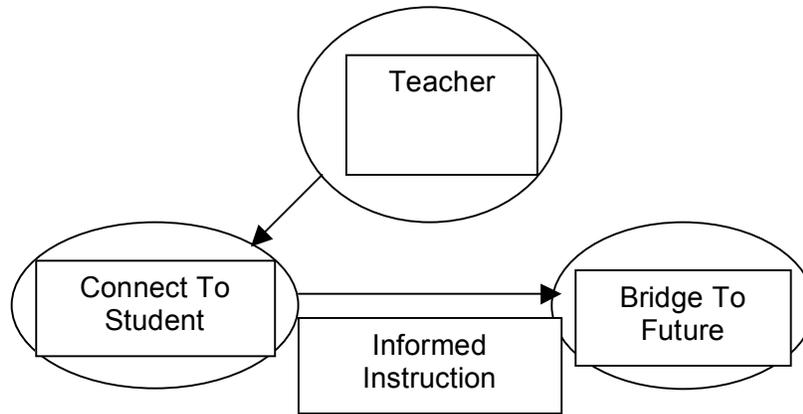
In interviewing my eleven teachers, I was struck first by their commonality in approach. Despite being at many grade levels (Kindergarten through Post high school), despite the fact that few of these teachers knew much, if anything, about each other, and despite the fact that the interviews were carried out individually rather than as a group.

The general approach of all interviewees was simple, and at first sight, obvious. Each made it very clear that their first job as a teacher was to connect with the student in a very real and insightful way, regardless of the fact that each was dealing with fairly large groups of students in their classes. They seemed to make it very clear that, without this first step, everything else is futile.

The second general approach was to exert a “power of their will”; as a teacher, one must bridge students to a future understanding, knowledge, or skill.

This should also be obvious, but in a normal workday, we can often forget one or both of the above. In this case, we are missing the whole point of teaching. One without the other would seem like a rather inefficient waste of our time. Teachers falling into a day-to-day worksheet or textbook rhythm are surely missing both points. Diagram #2 is an attempt to make a “right brained” picture of this process.

Why Care About Difference in Native Learners? Diagram #2



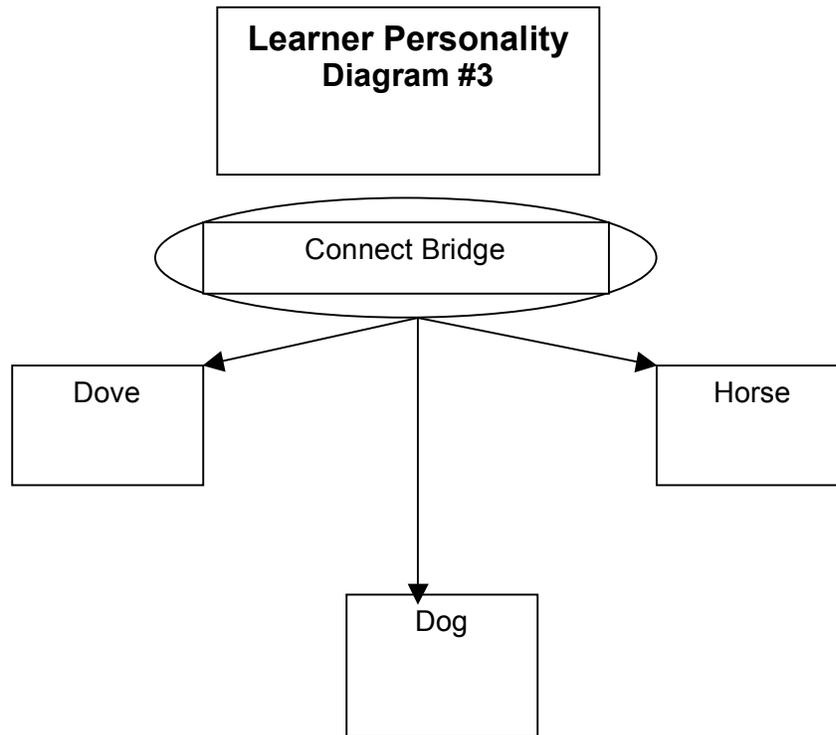
Once these steps are understood, the approach of each teacher getting from the “connection” to the understanding, knowledge, or skill is what the content of this work is about.

About half of the teachers interviewed talked about general instructor advice, such as collaboration with other teachers at adjacent grade levels being critical. For secondary teachers, collaboration with other teachers who are teaching the student is critical as well. One high school teacher mentioned that group meetings with teachers and support staff on a weekly basis after school, were invaluable. One teacher said, “I find things other teachers are doing successfully and do it”, “critique yourself often”, “reflective practice is critical”, “develop ‘best practices’”, “be a reflective learner as a teacher”. He felt expecting himself to be an excellent “learner” of teaching was the beginning point to sustained growth in the students’ learning.

One of the teachers mentioned above added that it is powerful when teachers have similar “systems” in place, so that a student doesn’t have to learn a new system each year. As a kindergarten teacher, this particular teacher teams with the High Five (preschool) teacher to bridge curriculum and classroom systems from preschool to kindergarten, allowing for students to more successfully transition into his kindergarten classroom. One would think this would apply to secondary situations as well across subject areas and grade levels.

Connection Dove, Dog, and Horse

In pondering the above, it occurred to me that, if one is teaching a skill to a horse, a dog, and a dove, one must have insight into each. Complicating things further, if one had them in a class of twenty-seven other personalities, this job becomes harder yet. All of the teachers I interviewed seemed to believe that, as hard as that task is, teaching is the art of doing just that. Diagram # 3 depicts teaching the horse, dog, and dove.



Lets just imagine trying to teach an extraverted dog, used to living in a pack (or in modern times a family). He is used to lots of tactile and verbal stimuli, has a very keen sense of smell, seeks to interact with others, and is very invested in receiving the approval of others.

Now imagine a dove. Perhaps he has spent much time during his life either by himself, or perhaps with one other dove, in a confined area. He has a very well developed sense of sight and sound. Singing is very important, what noise or song it is hearing is important. The same "tactile approval" a dog can thrive on would be a great threat to the dove. Verbal approval might be recognized in some way, but certainly not in the same way as the dog.

To my great surprise, during the short time I was involved with training a horse, I had to unlearn much of what I knew in training dogs, and yet retain some elements. (I only did this for a short time, and certainly knew little about what I was doing!) I was very impressed with how important social order was to the horse. "Who is the boss here" was a key. A horses "vulnerability" spot on his forehead just above and between his eyes seemed important to understand. My "vulnerability" in standing behind him also seemed pretty important.

As a result, the "tools" (methodology) of teaching these three would be completely different. Using the same tools to educate each might favor one but not likely all three. As each responds differently to social interactions and surrounding stimuli. In continuing to "miss" meeting the needs

of an individual learner the situation may only exasperate itself. In turn, one might choose to “drop out” because that “student” is not engaged in learning.

How then is one to teach them all? Recognizing that I needed to understand the “archetype” of the personality and thinking of each would be central to making any progress. Though this would be hard, teaching to one or two and excluding the rest would cause problems. Each would “misbehave” in a different way. In some cases that “misbehavior” would affect the others and in some cases the disaffected one would withdraw. The tendency might be to teach the one whom we understood the best or the one who made us pay attention to them by their behavior.

In teaching all three, one would need “insight” and planning that took that into account.

Organization of Notes

The piece of work I am presenting here is an account of some of the approaches educators have used in successfully reaching and teaching Native American students during their careers.

As I tried to organize the notes from these conversations into a usable and understandable format, I realized that the responses could be organized into four distinct, but occasionally overlapping, categories:

- 1) Whole Brain Research
- 2) Personality Type
- 3) Tribal/Relationship orientation
- 4) Undoing the Results of Failing Systems

See Diagram #4 below.

Organization Of Notes Diagram #4

Brain Dominance

- 1) Motivation
- 2) Thinking
- 3) Hands on/Experiential
- 4) Artistic/Visual
- 5) Story Telling

Personality Type

- 1) Teacher uses insight
- 2) Uses Groups and Opportunity/Choice are given
- 3) Feelings

Tribal

- 1) Honor Parents, Students, Families
- 2) Respect
- 3) Role Models
- 4) Group Dynamics
- 5) Spiritual

Systems Failure

- 1) Scaffold Success
- 2) Visualize Success
- 3) Teach Behavior and Expectations of self

As I researched these categories, I found that research has been done to support the belief that Native students often exhibit dominant “right brain thinking” and that they have a distinct “personality preference type”. It was a result of these discussions that I surmised that, in addition, they have distinct characteristic types as a result of their “tribal background”. The national and local statistics for Native students support the statement that “systems” of some type (as explained later) are failing Native students, teaching students they cannot succeed. Thus the fourth category became, “undoing the results of systems failure”.

Interviews

In order to capture common elements of practices that work for Native students across grade levels, I have interviewed a range of educators of Native students. This list includes educators at all levels except adult education.

Since this is done as an “inspiration of discussion” rather than as an authoritative document, I have kept the number of interviewees small, favoring instead an in depth discussion of common elements in their responses. The teachers together, however, represent a total of almost one hundred years of successful teaching of Native students.

Educators Interviewed

Greg Haugen, was an Art Teacher at Flandreau Indian School for over 20 years. During this time his students did rather amazing work, put on many public art shows at the Pipestone National Monument, in Minneapolis, Sioux Falls, and at the Flandreau Indian School. Many of his students

have gone on to do art in their own right. Many others learned of their own self-value and of their own ability to be successful at accomplishing things in their every day life.

Dawn Quigley, Native (Anishinabe, Turtle Mountain) Four Winds Kindergarten Teacher and Southwest Middle School (Forest Lake) Dawn was highly thought of by staff, fellow teachers at both schools, and by parents. She was made a mentor teacher at Four Winds school because of her demonstrated skills with Native students. Forest Lake public schools further honored this Native teacher's skills by making her a mentor teacher in Forest Lake.

Stephanie Thomas has been a Second Grade teacher at Anishinabe Academy. She is acclaimed by Native parents, her students past and present, other teachers Native and non-Native alike. She has worked under four different Native Administrators at Anishinabe, all of whom have recognized her extensive skills, ability to work with Native students and parents. Her student test scores are extraordinary. Her parental involvement has been over 75% consistently over the years. Stephanie has been a very willing participant in the Anishinabe Language Table since its inception.

Joe Rice is now the Director of Nawayee Center School . He taught Science and Social Studies in South Dakota for sixteen years, including stints at Little Wound High School, on the Pine Ridge Reservation and Rapid City Central High School. He was Rapid City Area Schools Teacher of the Year in 1993 while teaching Geophysical Science there. As director of Nawayee Center School in Minneapolis, he has overseen the reinvigoration of that program's cultural focus and been actively involved in bringing Indigenous educators together to synthesize an Indigenous Best Practices database (www.pieducators.com) and build a partnership between the local school district and the Native American Community.

Roxanne Gould has been a faculty member/teacher at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, a Director of Indian Education for the Sioux City Public Schools, the Director of the American Indian Learning Resource Center at the University of Minnesota, and is currently a Consultant for the Indian Education Department of Minneapolis Public Schools.

Pat Glynn was a Language Arts teacher at South High working with Native students for twenty one years. Pat was one of the teachers responsible for South High gaining a very positive reputation in the Minneapolis Native Community in the 1970's and early 80's as well as being a "mainstays" of the Partnership Program at South. During the years that Pat worked at South, South had it's highest number of graduating Native students before that time or since. One those years South had over forty Native graduates and the number generally ranged from 20 to 40. Many Native former South High students still remember Pat with great respect and caring!

Karen Lamere is a "state of the art" High Five (preschool) teacher at Anishinabe Academy. She has worked as one of the mainstays of the Ojibwe Language Emersion Program at Anishinabe. Karen's Native students have been extraordinarily prepared for Kindergarten. She consistently has high expectations while being a very caring teacher. She has been a very willing participant of the Anishinabe Language Table since it's inception.

Paul Bonik has been an amazing Kindergarten teacher at Anishinabe Academy. His students (most of whom are Native) have consistently ranked at the top of Minneapolis Public Schools Kindergarten students. He also has immersed himself in the Ojibwe Language Table and has consistently used Native Language as much as possible in working with his students. He maintains high expectations of himself and everybody around him!

Mary Cullen is a teacher at the Nawayee Alternative School in Minneapolis. She has been very innovative with Native students while keeping her expectations of her students high. She shows continuous energy for her students and staff around her. She is upbeat very caring with her

students, and her students reciprocate by being very caring with her. She is still full of ideas for the future of teaching her students!

Ty Dombeck is a Physical Education teacher at Anishinabe Academy. He has worked with Native students for 15 years at Anishinabe and Four Winds School. His students affectionately claim him as theirs. He has put in extra time to set up a morning extracurricular time, a time in which students are able to “check in”, where off some energy, and get ready for school.

Mario Galindo was the “other half” of the Physical Education team at Anishinabe and Four Winds. Mario was extraordinary at showing students respect and conversely receiving respect from students. Mario also worked the before school extracurricular time. Both Mario and Ty became excellent role models for students at the school in the way they treated students and did their job!

Brain Dominance

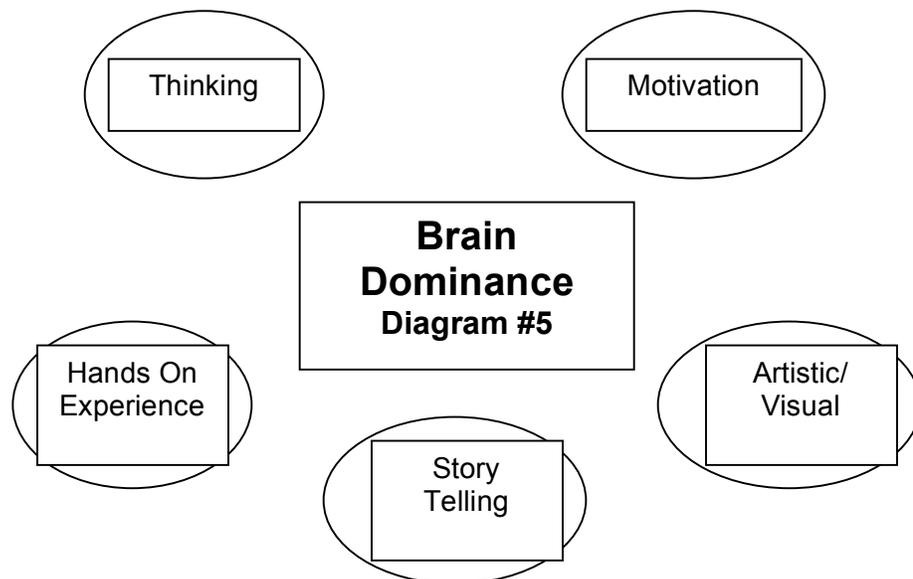
Research on Brain Dominance indicates clearly that Native students are very “right brained” in their thinking. Literature since the 1980’s has time and again come up with findings that support this statement. Among those researchers and authors are Allen Chuck Ross (1989), Jill LaBatte (1991) and R. Soleste Hilberg / Roland Tharp (2002). Dr. Sue Ellen Read, professor at Northeastern State University, most recently, has specialized on this approach to working with Native students.

Basically this research indicates that we all normally have a “brain dominance” the equivalent to hand dominance. Many lists are available indicating characteristics of “left brain” verses “right brain” dominant people. Among the most mentioned “left brained” characteristics are; linear thinking, logic, analysis, reading, writing, details, goals, order objectives, planning, and neatness. (Ross, 1989) Schools would seem to have a strong tendency to be very “left brain” oriented, as would most educators. Among “right brained” characteristics are: non-linear, creativity, spirituality, holistic, perceptive, imaginative, dance, art, music, feeling, symbols, intuition, humor, and spatial. Other authors add: “big picture” orientation, using feelings, risk taking, insight, and being impetuous as being “right brained” and “looking at parts” as being left brained.

“Whole Brained” thinking would be the ideal goal of education. A “whole brained” thinker is able to incorporate “right” and “left” brain thinking. Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, and Picasso are examples often given of “whole brain” thinkers. The goal here then should be to use the “connection” of the dominant modality, and then work to help the student “bridge” the use of the opposite modality as well.

The following set of comments by the teachers I interviewed centered on issues that I believe fit into the category Brain Dominance. As you will notice later, there is some overlap with other areas mentioned later.

I have divided these “brain dominance” comments into five areas: 1) Motivation, 2) Thinking, 3) Hands On and Experiential Learning, 4) Artistic/Visual learning, and 5) Story Telling. See Diagram #5



Motivation

Teachers found that students have a special need to “express things from their center”. “They have a special need to desire what they want to accomplish”. “They need to do things that connect to their lives and are integrated into their lives.” These teachers felt most successful when they felt they were connecting with a student’s “center”.

They felt that it is critical that Native students know “why we are doing this”. This applied also to knowing the “why” of rules. These also would also seem to be part of a student “working from their ‘center’.”

Other teachers said that Native students have to be able to “make things their own”.

Finally, when a classroom environment is truly a learning environment, “they love being in the classroom”.

Analysis

It appears that these educators are successful when connecting with a student’s center. A characteristic of a “right brain” learner is often cited as “needing to learn from their center”. “Why are we doing this” is a student question that indicates this same need.

Thinking

A number of the teachers found Native students to have “adult like” concepts. Another stated that it was important to expect “depth of thought” from “students, parents and yourself”. Another said it was important to “catch, expect, and grow meta-cognitive thinking”. These could all be seen as being a part of a Right Brained thinker’s need to think of the large picture/large concept first, and then the pieces.

One teacher used the concepts “food web”, “interconnected relationships”, “energy flow”, and “plant life being the beginning of the food making process by making food from sunlight” and found students very able to deal with the concepts. He said he would often start out by saying that “you know these concepts”. It was his job to show them that, in fact, they do. He needed to create the “bridge”.

Many of these teachers mentioned such things as “nurture curiosity”, “capture the wonder”, “use wonder as a magnet”, and “let them in on the ‘mystery’” as ways to engage their thinking. Challenge their thinking by pushing them to “draw conclusions”.

Two of the early grade teachers mentioned that “physical cross actions” were very helpful to integrate “right brain” and “left brain”. This and “kinesthetic sound and movement” appeared to have a very positive effect on students thinking, by both integrating their thinking and waking their brain up. Both teachers used “Zoophonics” which was very effective in vocabulary building.

In building basic skills, the early grade teacher said, “once they have basic skills, growth comes”.

Analysis

These techniques emphasize starting with the large concept, bringing in curiosity, and wonder to create a student desire or “need” to learn. It implies that, presented in a way that meets their personal thinking process, students can learn otherwise inaccessible concepts. Further, “cross brain exercises” seemed to indicate a benefit of exercising both sides of the brain.

“Hands on”/Experiential

One of the teachers used what he called his “tennis ball method” to teach evaporation, weather systems, behavior of gas, etc. Another said she used a “theater production approach” in the way she taught her class. A third teacher talked about asking students to actually “building a fence” and using that experience to teach her lesson. Another emphasized the use of “hands on,” tactile techniques. Another discussed not doing “just one assignment (e.g. worksheets) or lesson, but

using many different and varied assignments". Another said "the more experiential, the better". Finally, one teacher stated that the classroom "needs to be rich in experience".

Even though the teachers involved in these conversations were all of different backgrounds, taught vastly different grade levels, very few have ever met any of the other interviewees, and each had their own very different persona, they were almost in a chorus on this item.

The teacher talking about building a fence said, "I say to them 'Here is what we have to do and here are the tools'". She wanted them to seek out their own way of solving the problem. Another teacher said, "teach them how to learn for a purpose", again asking the student to be in charge of their own learning.

Two teachers even talked about the importance to the students of "wrestling" saying, "wrestling is good for them". Further, in their Physical Education class they taught counting in Anishinabe (Ojibwe) while their students were doing exercises.

Two of the teachers interviewed who taught in the early grades mentioned the importance of "hands on" visuals and manipulatives, particularly to Native students. For some reason this, along with "hands on exploring", seemed to be an important connection to their Native students.

Taking this one step further, one of the teachers pointed out that if one is to expose students to a "gingerbread" story, then it was important to have made "gingerbread men" in a class beforehand. She mentioned the importance of "building background" to teaching a concept or skill.

One high school teacher mentioned the importance of field trips to much the same purpose.

Analysis

These educators have found "physical" learning is a precondition for their students learning process. Given this, they can understand abstract and complex material. Even in memorization, a physical side to the learning was effective.

Artistic/Visual

Oddly enough, as much as almost all of these teachers tapped into the Artistic/Visual side of their students, few talked directly about art. One of the interviewees explained this by saying that "Native students view art as a part of their lives instead of being a potential way to make a living or as academic discipline". He went on to say that it was a great motivating factor to do artwork when it was "for their grandmother or a relative". It wasn't that motivating to talk about careers or art shows.

One teacher talked about often presenting things visually, but went on to say that he encouraged his students to take visual notes. He felt that would help them to take the information in and remember it better.

Analysis

Visual connection can initiate understanding a concept, learning a lesson, and having a positive view of learning. It is a wonderful bridge in many different ways to many different "learning places".

Story Telling

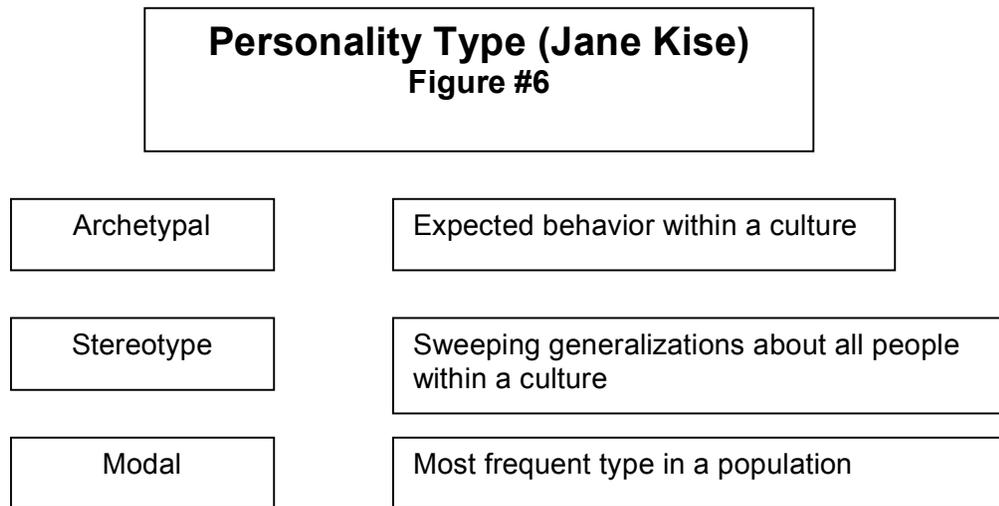
Two of the high school teachers mentioned that "story telling" was a very effective tool for student learning. One teacher said this is part of their culture. He also said that Native students really picked up metaphors quickly making that a very easy concept to teach in Language Arts.

Analysis

Although this could certainly apply specifically to "culture" the concept goes beyond that to connect with a "right brained" thinking predisposition.

Personality Profile

The following set of comments centered around issues that I believe would fit into the category of Personality Type. Research on Personality Type indicates that people have a personality “preference” which can be characterized by one of sixteen profiles. Jane Kise, in her book Differentiation through Personality Types (Kise, 2007) says, “Type theory holds that we have similar personality preferences for how we gain energy, take in information, make decisions, and approach life.” She later describes that beyond individual profiles, there are “archetypes” of a personality profile that are “ways of being or expected behavior that people within a culture tend to view as desirable”. She then describes “modal” types of personality as the most frequent type in a population. She goes on to say that the “archetype” and the “modal” type of a culture are not necessarily the same. See Figure #6 below.

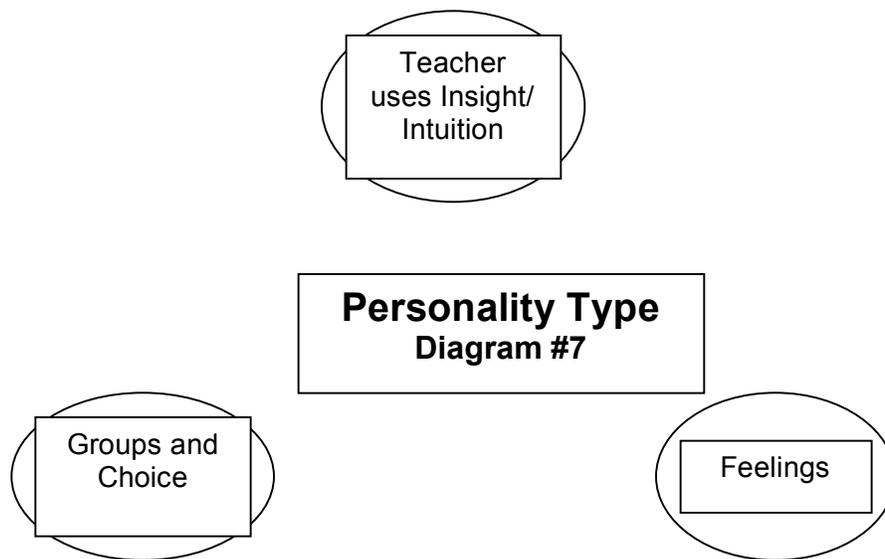


From her research and the research of others it seems as though the “modal” type, and perhaps the “archetype” for Native cultural groups seems to center around Introversion, Intuition, Feeling, and Perceiving (INFP). This does not mean that all or even most Native students have that profile, individual differences certainly abound. However, in some way many Native students fit part of this profile, and perhaps more importantly, this archetypal profile is what they expect of the world from being raised in a Native family environment.

Jane goes on to site characteristics from a study done with Pueblo students on what “Native American students learn best from” (Shade et al., 1997) and explains in “personality type” language why this would be effective. She says for instance that “cooperative learning groups” being effective can be explained by a “feeling” preference, “getting the big picture before isolated skills” would fit with an “intuition” preference.

The effectiveness of many of the techniques sited by teachers I interviewed could be explained by Native student “archetypal” and “modal” type. As a result I have listed these techniques in this section.

I have divided these comments into three categories within the Personality type section: 1) Teacher uses insight/intuition, 2) Use of Groups and Opportunities/choice are given, and 3) Feelings. Diagram #7



Teacher Uses Insight/Intuition

Teachers stated, “value your own insight into them”, “watch and learn from them”, “learn to accurately anticipate”, and “be self reflective”. Another teacher says she takes the time to enjoy the “personality quirks” of her students. She “is interested in their personalities, whatever they are”. Another teacher talks of “finding common threads of behavior”, and another talks of “sitting in the back of class at times just to observe”. “Value their insights,” says another. One teacher said, “The first thing I did was ‘watch’ when I became a teacher here”.

Again in this area there was a “chorus” of similar statements from nearly all of these teachers. It seemed to say “take the time to learn about your students, be intuitive, and enjoy your students in their uniqueness”.

Teachers observations about their students included, “Native students have a special capacity to be silent for long periods”, “ student behavior changed when they were in teams”, “students did not open right away”, “Native students don’t exactly ‘jump’ when you say jump”, and “when a student is yelling it is sometimes a way of saving face”. These were all learning elements for the teacher to better know how to teach the students. They learned this through watching and using intuition/insight.

Finally, they said, “connection is all important”, “the first thing I do is develop relationship”, and “humor is really important”.

Analysis

Teachers who are successful with Native students use their own intuition to understand and connect with their students. They recognize that “relationship” is a NECESSARY first step. They wait for students to “open up” as opposed to forcing the issue. They don’t get into power struggles, but find other ways to be insistent. They make it a point to enjoy their students as they are, and then strive to bridge them to what they feel they need to learn. They are reflective about their students. They use humor, carefully!

All of these fit well into teaching an INFP (Introverted, Intuitive, Feeling, and Perceptive) student.

Use Groups and Opportunity/Choice are Given

“Use work stations”, “students worked together to find answers”, “give them situations to allow ‘cooperative learning’”, “allow them to have fun as teams”, “mix students in groups to allow difference”, “groups allow them to feel community”, and “partner them with students who can help them” are all statements made by the teachers interviewed.

One of the teachers suggested that one should “allow group and individual opportunities at the same time.” He further stated when asked that generally about 70% of the students would choose group participation and 30% would choose working individually. He also said “allow self chosen groups but use them as a means of exerting “group expectation”. “Balance a sense of your own personal will and student will.” Another teacher said many students had felt “they were a victim in the past and didn’t see choices. Therefore they need choices.” Another said “lead the way” rather than trying to force them.

Groups were mentioned as an important tool by nearly all of the interviewees from preschool to high school. Positive competition, students support for each other’s learning, and an enabling of the teacher to better focus on specific students need were all positives seen by teachers. It made assessment of students more doable. Another way of looking at it was that students didn’t have to compete with twenty other students instead they were competing with three or four.

Finally, a number of teachers mentioned that groups allowed and encouraged students to work independently. One group could be doing math games, an art project, etc. while the teacher could be working with another group on reading.

Analysis

Teachers successful with Native students use groups skillfully, while allowing students who want to work alone that option. They lead rather than push. Recognize the validity and value of student “will”. They use “cooperative-learning” skillfully, encouraging students with different skill levels to work together and help each other. They understand the value in “groups as community”. They allow students to actively discuss together. They recognize the potential embarrassment of an INFP student talking to a whole class. They allow students to choose among options that are acceptable to the teacher.

All of these methods are very consistent with research on Personality Preference and an INFP personality.

Feelings

Many of the teachers interviewed found “feelings” to be very important in working with Native students. Among the quotations were: “emphasize feelings”, “students know you care so they listen”, “students are uplifted by classmates”, and “students need a person to ‘check in’ with”.

Four of the teachers representing Kindergarten, Junior High, High School, and college talked about the importance of students “checking in” (especially in the morning for the younger ones). They said students would often “open up” during that time, enabling them to function well in school that day.

One teacher found that college students bond more easily in a small college and that this was important to their success.

One of the high school teachers mentioned that “comfort level” of students was important. This was taking a page from Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Once students have a comfort level with their environment, learning can more easily and freely take place. Always having a “base” was important to his students. Many of the teachers preschool through college, mentioned the importance of students having a place to “touch base”.

One of the high school teachers also mentioned that “outreach groups” were very effective. Among other things, this communicated to students that there were a lot of people there to help. He also mentioned that it was much less common for a student to miss school on a day when they were having support groups.

Analysis

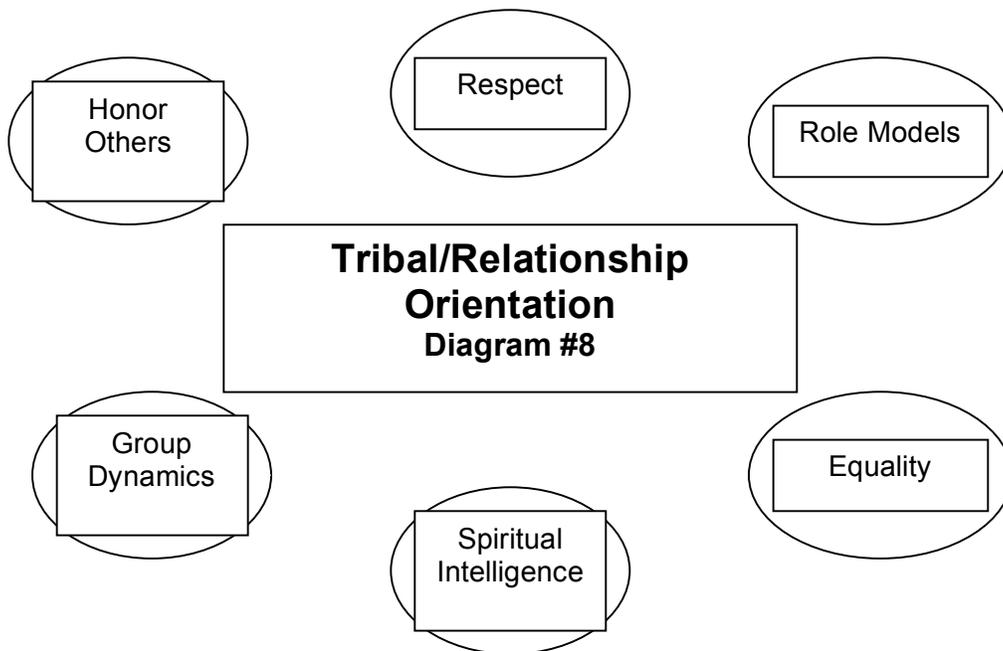
Teachers successful with Native students recognize the importance of stressing, “caring” and “feelings”. They recognize the importance of the “caring community”. They allow students to safely “check in”. They listen well on many different levels. They understand the potential danger to a student of being embarrassed, especially in front of a group. It is crucial that they connect first thing in the class or the morning.

Tribal-Relationship Orientation

I feel one of the most obvious and least understood areas of concern in Native Education is that Native students find their roots in a tribal past. Aside from the details of Native culture that are so often written and talked about, there is the simple fact that that their family background comes out of a “tribal” existence in which “family”, “honor”, “respect”, and “group dynamics” are very different from that of the majority culture.

Teachers successful with Native students seem to find a way to get beyond the artifacts of their students cultural past to respond to the basic relationship orientation of their students. In addition to this, they respect the cultural past and present.

I have divided these “tribal relationship” comments into six categories: 1) Honor Parents, Students, Families 2) Respect/Recognize Culture/Family, Tribal Structure, Relationship 3) Use Role Models 4) Group Dynamics 5) Spiritual Intelligence 6) Equality. See Diagram #8



Honor Parents, Students, Families

Simply put, one of the interviewees spoke of “respecting their students as they are”. Another said, “honor their questions”. It was important to many of the teachers to “understand the extended family” and “assume parents want the best from their kids and expect the best from them”. Many of the teachers also mentioned not “shaming” their students.

One teacher said the “classroom is an extended family”. Another talked of “creating a system of communication with parents that is easy for them to access: newsletter, weekly routing slips, and frequent ‘positive’ phone calls” are useful.

Finally one teacher mentioned that the concept of “teaming” in schools uses an “extended family” approach to educating students.

Analysis

Teachers successful with Native students “tap into” the extended family structure when possible. They find ways to do this, and expect that it will happen in most cases. They respect the family. They tap into a strong need for students to feel they are part of a family structure at school.

Respect/recognize Culture/Family, Tribal Structure, Relationship

“Respect for elders is important,” said a number of teachers, “use examples of culture” said another. A number of them said in different ways “recognize and respect their will.”

Teachers mentioned it was important for teachers to “ground themselves” in Native language, and it was important for students to be able to see their Native language teacher and their regular classroom teacher together using the language.

Finally teachers said “do things in class that are ‘Native’”, “never box kids in”, and “work closely with parents”. The “caveat” one teacher gave was to “know her limits as to culture”.

One teacher noted that Native students are more “received and reciprocal in a ‘Native’ setting”.

Analysis

Showing “respect” to their culture and language is important. The teacher learning some of the student’s Native language can be very helpful, even if the student doesn’t know his/her language. Teachers successful with Native students make sure they don’t embarrass students. Teachers found that Native students were different when the setting was perceived as “Native”.

Use Role Models

One teacher stated “use relationships they have to others who have achieved”. “Use role models in books and in person”, and “they must see Native people doing Native and non-Native things”, were both seen as important by another teacher. One teacher mentioned that a Native basketball team that was participating in the state tournament stopped by and he could see how the kids really looked up to them and gave them hope.

It was pointed out by one teacher that “apprenticeship” is essentially a role modeling and suggested that such “programs” that used apprenticeship were on the right track.

One of the teachers said it’s important to tell them “I know you want to be excellent”. The same teacher said she tells them “you are put here to make the best of any situation”. One teacher said in “team” teaching the students will assign each teacher a “role”.

Finally the teachers discussed “recognizing and respecting that families expect you to be: organized, ‘in charge’, and expect that you teach their children ‘what they need to know’”. Another teacher talked of having conversations with students about “adult life”.

Analysis

“Role Models” are important on three levels

- 1) Providing opportunity to interact with positive role models is important, from elders to slightly older peers. Having them read and hear about role models is effective as well.
- 2) Giving them the opportunity to be role models for others is important to their own self-esteem.
- 3) The teacher as a role model is vital. This requires that the student and teacher can identify with them to some extent.

Group Dynamics

Teachers talked of “using group dynamics ”and “gauging group process”.

One teacher spoke of having a “special” part of the room could be used as a reward for a group doing well. Finally, one teacher discussed “recognizing achievement with in the group structure”.

Analysis

Group dynamics are “tribal” by nature. They act as reinforcement, a learning space, and a comfort zone. Group dynamics can, and often are, more effective than what an authority figure can exercise on their own.

Spiritual Intelligence

Two of the teachers talked of allowing encouraging “Spiritual Intelligence”.

Analysis

Howard Gardener, who invented the “Multiple Intelligences” concept, refers to “spiritual intelligence” as a possible 8th intelligence. It has a relevance to Native students which can have little to do with religion, or which may be very involved with a religious belief. Regardless, it is often a part of the student’s personal dynamics.

Equality

One teacher says carry a “sense of ‘presence’ not a vibe of ‘better than’ or less than”.

Analysis

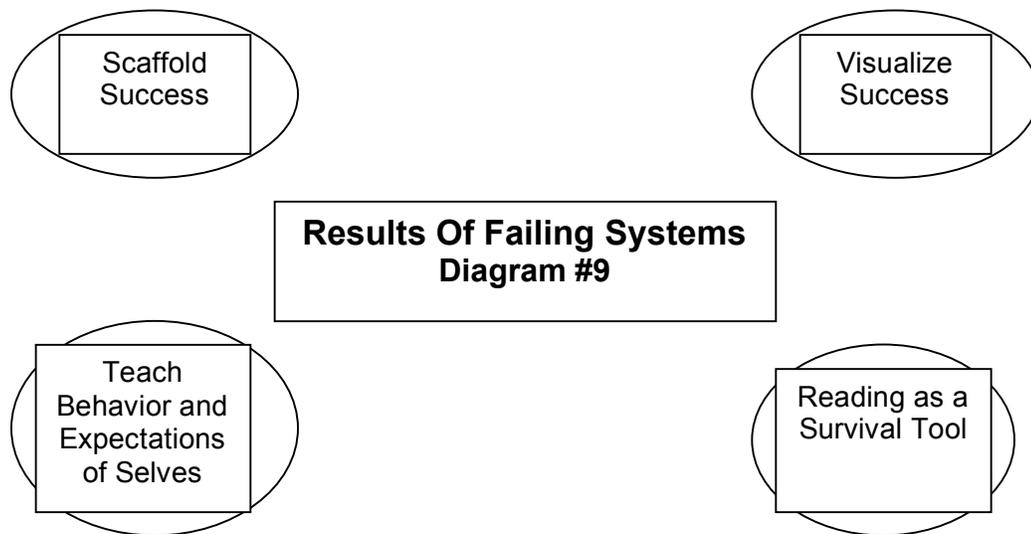
A sense of “equality” in some form is often a part of tribal existence. Example: the Anishinabe (Ojibwe) word for “girl” is Ikwesence, “Little Woman”. This concept is culturally very different than that represented in this culture by the slang “kid” (baby goat). This does not mean a teacher should try to be a “peer” of the student, but that students in some sense expect not to be treated like someone lesser than the teacher.

Results Of Failing Systems

When students fail, we as educators tend to get into battles about who caused the failure. Likely candidates to take the “blame” in these discussions include: the school systems, the economy, parents, a culture of indulgence, T.V. and video games, budget cuts, bureaucracies, Republicans, Democrats, etc. or the students themselves.

This discussion avoids all of that by saying that “systems” of some type have taught them “how to fail” and that they generally “can’t succeed”. These teachers took the approach that despite how they got there; they can be taught how to be successful with what they do.

I have divided these comments into four categories: 1) Scaffold Success 2) Visualize Success 3) Teach Behavior and Expectation of Selves 4) Reading as a Survival Tool. See Diagram #9



Scaffold Success

Teachers had many suggestions in this area. Among them: “Emphasize ‘next step’”, “scaffold success”, “projects should be ‘doable’ and readily available”, “everybody gets to score”, “keep things simple without lowering expectations”, “don’t embarrass them with books that are too easy”, “remember that success is important to them”, and “remember they enjoy competing”.

In a different but related area, teachers said: “teach survival skills”, “tell them ‘slow down, understand that living is hard’”, “talk about resilience”, “teach the mindset ‘you can find a way if you find the right tools’”, “do a lot of cheerleading”, “give me work that shows me you are fighting hard to accomplish”, and “help them to understand they don’t have to be victims”.

Analysis

A lot of these seem to amount to scaffolding successful experiences. Using the opportunity to succeed and compete as positive motivators that are accessible to students in their minds. Also these teachers seem to find ways to help students to understand that making a “mistake” is not a failure but rather a part of finding a way to succeed. School itself, and being a part of a school, has become a part of their growing identity as being successful.

Visualize Success

In this section teachers were working on their students' ability to have a "picture" in their mind of being "successful" at what they do.

Teachers suggested "putting students in situations where they can visualize themselves in other contexts". Another said that students would use the teacher as a "launching place". Yet another said, "use reading to fill holes in their experience". Finally one teacher mentioned "emphasize student personal pride when their parent is present".

Common sense for an educator is, as one interviewee stated, "teaching to the highest level". Though this is common sense, it is often forgotten by educators in response to the failure we encounter in the deficits of the education provided for many Native students, the deficits of our children's performance on "data driven" standards, and the continuous din of short sighted, somewhat shallow, and often empty rhetoric spoken by the political world at large.

Often as educators, we unintentionally internalize this din and become the embodiment of the perceived failure. Our own self-image of failing can be the "driving wheel" of further failure for Native students. The interviewee above said, "I don't accept 'I can't do it' from my students", and "I teach to the highest level". He further made this much more than rhetoric by inspiring his Kindergarten Native students to perform at the top one third of all Kindergarten students in his district. In his second year, his students were on the very top of the district in vocabulary growth. He further stated, "we have to quit saying 'it's difficult'".

He finished his statement by saying what should be obvious, but often is not "every student wants to learn", and "I want my students to be 'better than average'". He felt teachers have the responsibility of continuously doing a "personal assessment" of their teaching.

Note: two years later his students, now in 2nd grade, were reported as being 80% "on track", an increase of almost 60% over previous years at second grade at his school.

Analysis

These teachers find ways for Native students to be able to see and feel themselves as being "successful". Having the imagination and determination to inspire growth is integral to students improving.

Teach Behavior and Expectations of Selves

Among the comments in this area were: "be clear with expectations", "deal with discipline without referrals when possible", "teach students what they need to know to do well in other classes", "you have to be willing to take risks", "teach a good work ethic", "teach students they have a responsibility to do their best for their family", "emphasize that 'we are in this together'", "don't take misbehavior personally", "teach the mindset 'you can be whatever you want to be'", and "let them know 'you can do it, you have the tools and resources'".

Three of these teachers added something to effect that "knowing that the teacher is 'in charge' allows them to relax despite what can seem to be a 'world of chaos'". In the same mode teachers talked about "being consistent" and students needing to know that someone cares enough to have 'consistent expectations'".

Two of the teachers said they use "please" and "sir" when talking to students, showing them respect.

Analysis

These teachers set very clear and understandable expectations that are consistent. These expectations have to be seen by students as being reasonable and caring. Students must see the teacher as a person who can help them to understand and act within these expectations, rather than just being the enforcer of rules.

Reading as a Survival Tool

Teachers suggested “connect and move them through reading”, “bring in books they otherwise can’t afford”, “teach library usage”. One teacher said “expose them to things they haven’t seen or don’t know about”, but also said “use readings about things they know about to connect them with reading”. She also said “teach Native and non-Native classics”.

Another teacher, teaching at the kindergarten level stated the importance of “leveled libraries”. He said, “Kids, at this age (kindergarten), consume books.”

Finally he talked about the cumulative effect of reading instruction methodology as having an additive effect if preschool, kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade methodology is clearly and carefully aligned from grade level to grade level. This has to be done consciously and consistently.

Another teacher, at the high school level talked about the success of an independent “reading time” which all of the adults were involved in. Parents, counselors, educational assistants, as well as, all teachers were involved. He stated, “Students would rarely miss the regularly scheduled days when the reading time was scheduled, even though the reading time was only an hour long.

Analysis

Reading is a very useful tool to visualize a future and give them knowledge of the world as a place they belong in and can be successful in.

Conclusion

It is my hope that this work can be of some value to educators of Native students and students in general. It was the original intent of this project that it include comments by parents of Native students, and Native students themselves as to what “has worked” in their educational past. This work became so much larger than was the original intent, that I felt it best to leave that for a separate work. I believe that work would deserve much the same depth and analysis. I also believe what could be learned doing this using this same format could be equally as valuable.

If this document inspires discussion, then it has been successful. If it inspires you to respond on this Webb site, it is doubly successful. If it inspires you to try out some new things, use a new way of thinking, do informal assessment of your teaching, or just get you to take note of what you and others do that “works” and then engage in “appreciative inquiry” discussion about that, then it has done what I had hoped.

I would personally be very interested in responses to this work on the Pieducators.org Website. Thank you for your interest!