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Some Elements of American Indian Pedagogy from an Anishinaabe Perspective

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In 2005 I published an article discussing the teaching method we used for an introduction to American Indian studies course at Iowa State University.[1] As might be expected, since the publication of that article my career and teaching have continued to develop. I am no longer at Iowa State but have moved to the Department of Native American Studies at Montana State University—Bozeman. Under these circumstances, a pedagogy based on American Indian approaches has become that much more appropriate. Additionally, I have more years worked with the teaching method in question, and as a result, I have refined the technique some, although the basic approach remains intact. In my previous piece, I did not delineate the elements that go into an American Indian pedagogy. I will address that issue here. Because I am most familiar with Anishinaabe culture, I will primarily limit my remarks to that nation.

My article about teaching American Indian studies explained a blended teaching method we used at Iowa State University that drew from American Indian pedagogical approaches as well as methods traditional to the academy. I discussed the history of the teaching method and the theory informing the technique; briefly outlined some elements of American Indian pedagogy and the logistics of the class; and ended with some observations on the effectiveness of the technique.

For this article, it is important to have an understanding of the course assignments. Students are required to write a four- to five-page paper about their family, community, and place and about their interest in and/or knowledge of the course topic and how it developed. Students are encouraged to talk with their family members in order to get material. The material from the paper is given in an oral presentation. Students are informed they will all receive an A for the oral presentation. The idea is to allow students to be the complete authority in the classroom when they do their respective

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presentations. Additionally, every week, except for the last week of class, students have to write a one- to two-paragraph participation paper about ideas generated from the readings and lectures. Students suggest their own grade. This gives them the freedom to discuss their reaction to the class material openly and honestly. I adjust the grades up or down depending on the degree to which students provide detailed evidence that they did the reading. Thus, it is mandatory for them to provide page numbers and/or quotations for the readings. Finally, the students expand the first paper into a ten-page research paper by adding a five- to six-page research component. The research portion follows the dictates for a paper of this type, with requirements for a thesis, theme, or topic, and proper use of citations and references.

As far as Anishinaabe pedagogy is concerned, two important earlier writers are Francis Densmore and M. Inez Hilger. Densmore spent time among the Anishinaabeg in northern Minnesota in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and she wrote extensively about her experiences. One of her more important works is *Chippewa Customs*.[2] Although she does discuss the life cycle of the Anishinaabeg, she does not include a great deal of information about Anishinaabe pedagogy.[3] Much the same can be said for Hilger's *Chippewa Child Life and Its Cultural Background*.[4] Hilger also worked among the Anishinaabeg in northern Minnesota but at a later date than Densmore. Most of Hilger's observations were made in the 1930s and 1940s. She includes a section on training children, but, like Densmore, her writing does not address the philosophies informing Anishinaabe pedagogy.[5] Although her work provides valuable ethnographic information, the work is more descriptive in nature and of little help in getting to the heart of Anishinaabe teaching methods.

I find Roger Spielmann to be one of the more astute observers of Anishinaabe culture. Spielmann spent some time with the Pikogan and Winneway Anishinaabe communities in Canada during the 1980s and 1990s. He wrote about his experiences in *"You're So Fat!": Exploring Ojibwe Discourse*.[6] His comments on teaching and learning are worthy of note:

> It seems to me that the foundation for traditional teachings is the belief that true learning is flexible and open-ended, that change is a permanent part of life, and that absolute knowledge is not the goal of the quest. What can be learned is the capacity to pay attention to all the details which may influence the outcome of a particular course of action, a capacity learned as much by the way one lives as by what one hears. . . .
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> From the perspective of the elders in the communities of Pikogan and Winneway, teachers are those who can demonstrate the relationship between philosophy and practice. It is important to remember that one's way of life is a model for what one is trying to transmit. Who do people in a community seek out for advice, prayer, guidance, instruction, and so forth? Different people in a community have different powers and different ways of gaining knowledge, and therefore, have different responsibilities to those around them.

> The elders at Pikogan taught me in subtle ways that everyone is at times a teacher and at times a learner, from children, strong dreamers, interpreters, visionaries, and skilled hunters to storytellers, orators, and ethnohistorians. Traditional education prepared Aboriginal children to become fully functioning members of their communities and nations. . . . This form of education is practical, life-long, and integrated into the fabric of community and society.[7]

I especially appreciate the way Spielmann provides a very accurate explanation of the dynamics involved in Anishinaabe learning. However, his book centers on the nature of discourse in the culture rather than pedagogy. So even though his remarks are insightful, they are too limited to give us a fuller picture of Anishinaabe pedagogy.

These three authors are the major commentators on Anishinaabe pedagogy. As can be seen, it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand Anishinaabe pedagogy from these works. Rather than relying on secondary sources, my remarks will be informed by my own exposure to Anishinaabe culture. In that regard, I would like to say that I make no apologies for writing as an Anishinaabe. I am a member of the White Earth Nation in Minnesota and proud of it. To pretend that I am some kind of disinterested academic or curious outsider would do a disservice to my identity as an Anishinaabe and to the Anishinaabe people. By the same token, I must humbly state that I cannot claim as great a familiarity with the culture as I would like. For example, I am still working on my Anishinaabe language skills. However, I have spent enough time among my people to develop an adequate sense of the culture. As much as the following delineates some Anishinaabe elements of American Indian pedagogy, they also represent my own thinking and experience.

At least nineteen elements go into Anishinaabe pedagogy. They include:

1. Maintaining a sense of family.
2. Maintaining a sense of community.
3. Maintaining a sense of place, especially in seeing the land as a teacher.
4. Oral tradition.
5. Storytelling.
6. Relationships.
7. Balance.
8. Uniting past, present, and future: that is, acknowledging the past to imagine a better future to work toward in the present.
9. Remaining open to mystery.
10. Observation.
11. Visioning/creativity/imagination.
12. Preserving a positive self-identity.
13. Developing forgiveness.
14. Pragmatism.
15. Training to task mastery as opposed to grading level of task achievement.
16. Accretive thinking.
17. Recognition of the complex nature of truth.
18. Respect for people outside one's culture.
19. Humor.

Some of these considerations describe Anishinaabe ways of knowing, or Anishinaabe epistemology. Others describe Anishinaabe ways of being in the world. To put it in simple terms, these elements outline how the Anishinaabeg think and act. In that regard, it might seem that I am not discussing pedagogy. However, if pedagogy is imagined as training individuals in the ways of thinking and being of a given culture, then it would make sense to apply those very ways of knowing and being to pedagogical practices. I would argue that these elements do constitute as least some of the pedagogical aspects of Anishinaabe culture, and I will discuss these elements, explaining how I see them acting in Anishinaabe culture and giving examples of how I bring the given element into the university setting.

Maintaining a sense of family and community are closely related and do not require a great deal of analysis. For me, one of the most important defining characteristics of Anishinaabe identity has to do with families. As I tell my students, in order to ascertain whether someone is American Indian, ask the individual to name his or her Indian relatives. From my experience, those Anishinaabeg who are vested in their communities have a very strong sense of who their family members are and can easily start naming relatives going out several degrees, such as second and third cousins. The knowledge of relatives stretches back in time as well. Some families maintain stories going back many generations, and I have heard stories involving my great-great-grandfather. Thus, it is common for the Anishinaabeg to immerse their children in stories related to their families.

It is interesting how family stories can also provide a continuing sense of connection between people. For example, my grandmother took care of an old Anishinaabe gentleman by the name of Billy Hill. Not long ago, when I was an independent researcher living in Bemidji, Minnesota, the then-president of Leech Lake Tribal College, Leah Carpenter, invited my wife and me to the free Monday lunches for the students at the college. Later, one of my aunts told me that one of Leah Carpenter's great-grandfathers was none other than Billy Hill, which I relayed to Dr. Carpenter at the earliest opportunity. With family connections spanning the generations like this, one almost feels as if one is living a Louise Erdrich novel.

Another aspect of maintaining a sense of family is the clan system. As is well-known, traditional society was clan-based, and although Anishinaabe clans have been under assault for a number of years, my experience in Anishinaabe communities indicates that the importance of clans is starting to make a comeback. For example, the Anishinaabeg are taught to give their clan when introducing themselves. It is true that the functional meaning of clan identity for the Anishinaabeg has not recovered fully. I have not heard of individuals practicing exogamy, for example. However, Anishinaabe culture continues to evolve, and I suspect clan practices will grow as an important component of Anishinaabe life. Maintaining a sense of family is still important for the Anishinaabeg. I will discuss my classroom practices for this and maintaining a sense of community after introducing the role of place in Anishinaabe society.

Community can be defined in a number of ways for the Anishinaabeg, from the village level, to the reservation, and on up to the nation as a whole.

Most Anishinaabeg have a historical sense of what communities their families originate from, including those Anishinaabeg who no longer live on a reservation. As part of introducing themselves, the Anishinaabeg are taught to relate their reservation of origin. This notion of introductions is not just a social matter. It is very serious because giving one's name, clan, and reservation is part of praying, at least in the way I was taught. At the start of prayers one is to announce to the *manidoog*, or spirits, one's Indian name, clan, and reservation, preferably in the Anishinaabe language. I cannot discuss certain aspects of prayers. However, because spiritual growth and learning are an important part of traditional Anishinaabe practices, it should be evident that knowing one's family and community form the foundation of all Anishinaabe education.

Maintaining a sense of place relates to knowing the land. This aspect of Anishinaabe teaching is closely related to observation. For now, suffice it to say that it is important to maintain a close connection to the land. One of my cousins, who will remain anonymous, told me about how he was taught the watercourses on White Earth Reservation by Thomas Shingobe, an old, respected elder in the community. The Anishinaabeg have close relations with water, and one cannot understand Anishinaabe culture without understanding water. For example, many years ago, a causeway was built across Rice Lake on the White Earth Reservation in order to accommodate Minnesota State highway 200. The elders in the community expressed concern that the causeway would interrupt the flow of water necessary for the wild rice. To this day, people still talk about how those elders were correct, and how the causeway has had a negative impact on the water flow, and thus the wild rice, in the lake.

This example speaks to the importance of the land being a teacher. I maintain that the land teaches human beings how to live on that particular land. Through years of observation and direct experience, the Anishinaabe elders developed a sense for how water moves through their territory. They developed an understanding of how to live on the land. Examples of this can still be found. On the Fond du Lac Reservation, an effort was made to clear the movement of water through the reservation in order to maximize the wild rice crop.[8] In this sense, the land is a teacher, and the Anishinaabeg are taught to learn from the land.

I use these three elements in my college teaching by having the students write an essay about their identity in terms of family, community, and place. Two things are worth mentioning, however. First, as the years have gone by, I have come to appreciate this assignment much more. It helps me make a connection with the students on a personal basis. I find I am a more effective teacher by knowing at least something about the background of each individual student. Second, I find that students have a difficult time relating to maintaining a sense of place, especially students from urban areas, whereas, quite often, the students from Montana and other rural states can understand this aspect of the assignment readily enough. I have read a number of essays since I have been at Montana State in which students from rural areas talk about spending hours just sitting in one place absorbing the surroundings.

Urban students do not understand this part of the assignment nearly as well. Of late, I have taken to using a suggestion from my colleague at the University of Wyoming, Christopher Russell, who employs the same teaching technique and with whom I used to work at Iowa State University. He tells students to think about a place they go to in their mind to feel a sense of peace or to think of the place where they would like to be buried when they die. For urban students it might also help to tell them to think about the human infrastructure of their place, the buildings, roads, and bridges, as well as the parks and other natural areas. How do those factors combined lend feeling to maintaining a sense of place, even in an urban area? Is there any place they like to go just to get away from it all?

In discussing the oral tradition and storytelling with my students, I generally follow the conventions of Anishinaabe culture. Oral tradition relates to the sacred stories and important myths and legends of the people. These primarily concern Bebaamosed, the One Who Walks Around, otherwise known as Wenaboozhoo. The Anishinaabe tradition is a bit different from other American Indian societies in which the telling of legends is reserved for a special group of people. It is also different from scripture-based traditions. For scripture-based traditions, it is doubtful many people know the scriptures by heart and probably could not relate them orally. For the Anishinaabeg, people are encouraged to learn and tell the ancestral legends, especially those involving Wenaboozhoo. What this means is that each Anishinaabe individual carries a corpus of sacred stories within him- or herself. The corpus will vary from person to person. Nonetheless, for the Anishinaabeg, the sacred stories are not written on paper but in the hearts of the people.

Storytelling involves narratives about everything else, but most are personal stories about oneself and one's family, including one's ancestors. As Christopher Vecsey explains, the Anishinaabeg of old were great storytellers and could commence telling stories in the fall, not quit until spring, and never repeat the same tale twice.[9] The Anishinaabeg still relish storytelling, and Jim Northrup's short story "The Odyssey" provides a good example of this.[10] The story talks about three Indians driving from the Fond du Lac Reservation to St. Cloud, Minnesota, in a van to pick up some furniture: "The monotony of the trip was broken by more stories. By the time they got to St. Cloud, the back of the truck was full of them and their embellished outcomes."[11] Although it is a work of fiction, the piece gives a good sense of the current-day storytelling tradition of the Anishinaabeg. From my experience, it is also true that the Anishinaabeg encourage their children to become storytellers. The ability to tell stories, both the old legends and modern tales, is actually considered an important teaching goal for the Anishinaabeg.

Much like the assignment in which students write about their identity in terms of family, community, and place, I have also come to value the role of storytelling in my class, especially the oral presentations about the material in the autobiographical essay. As I tell students, everyone is going to encounter problems in life. At those times, it is important to tell one's story instead of spiraling down into a self-destructive cycle. Lately, with the economic problems the world faces as a result of the recession that started in 2007, I have

noticed an uptick in the number of news stories about shootings. Oftentimes, the stories involve individuals who had a hard time coping with financial stress. The affected individuals take out their problems on their families or coworkers. I suspect part of the problem is that these individuals either did not know how to tell their stories or refrained from telling them. Doing so might help mitigate some of these troubling acts. I encourage students to learn how to tell their own stories, to give them the skills necessary to deal with hard times like these.

We say "Gakina indinawemaaganag" (all my relations) in Anishinaabemowin, the Anishinaabe language. As A. Irving Hallowell has pointed out, Anishinaabe conceptions of relationships extend beyond the human realm to include other-than-humans.[12] Forming relationships is part of learning to maintain a sense of place. Continuous observation helps the Anishinaabeg develop a relationship with the land and all the other beings with whom we share Anishinaabeaki, the Anishinaabe land. However, the relationship extends into other areas. As Hallowell noted, a sense that the animals can communicate with human beings exists. As one of my teachers puts it, the animals speak Anishinaabemowin and will never speak English. When I asked him if he meant that the animals literally speak Anishinaabemowin, he said, "Yes." Animals can come to individuals in spiritual ways; I will not go into detail about this out of respect for the spiritual life of the Anishinaabeg. It should also be noted that relationships are something that take work. Again, without going into details, we have ceremonies in which we take care of our relatives, human and nonhuman, remembering that nonhuman relatives can include such animate beings as drums and songs. The Anishinaabeg are taught to nurture their relationship with other beings.

In the classroom setting, the importance of relationships mainly involves getting to know the students on an individual basis through their autobiographical essays on family, community, and place and through their oral presentations of the same material to the entire class. One thing I have noticed is that getting to know the students on an individual basis helps develop trust. I have been known to go off the course syllabus if I have something of importance to discuss with the students. Generally, the students tolerate this, especially because we have found that some of our best learning occurs during these course digressions.

It is vitally important for the individual to maintain balance in life and in society in general. For the Anishinaabeg, maintaining balance is closely related to *mino-bimaadiziwin*, or a good life. I have discussed the concept of *bimaadiziwin* in another article, so I will not go into detail here.[13] Some aspects of a good life include rising and going to bed with the sun and following other practices in order to help maintain health and well-being. The importance of balance manifests itself in other ways in Anishinaabe life. For example, it is important to keep one's desires in check in order to avoid overexploitation of natural resources. In his column, "Fond du Lac Follies," Northrup talks about harvesting natural resources. When relating how much wild rice they harvested or maple syrup they made, he has often written, "enough for a Shinnob, not enough for a Chimook," or enough for

an Anishinaabe but not enough for a white man.[14] This stress on conserving natural resources is aimed at maintaining a balance between human beings and the natural world.

Instances in which the Anishinaabeg do not honor balance are telling. Recently, the Red Lake Nation has exercised its sovereignty over Upper Red Lake, cutting off non-Indians from fishing in the lake. The results have not been so encouraging and point to the fact that Indians can violate their ideals as well. It turns out that the Anishinaabeg have been overfishing the lake, and so the stock of fish has dropped precipitously. The elders' reaction has been intriguing. Their view is that the Anishinaabeg are not following ceremonies in harvesting the fish, and because of that the fish are not sacrificing themselves anymore. The elders teach that if the Anishinaabeg started fishing in a spiritual manner again, human desire would be held in check, and, as a result, the fish would be willing to offer themselves to the people again.

In the classroom, balance entails maintaining a sense of equality between the instructor and the students as much as possible. Much of this approach relates to the co-construction of knowledge as presented by William Tierney in his book on Native Americans in the academy.[15] Allowing the students to tell their own story and listening to their voices in the weekly participation papers they have to write about the readings and lectures opens up new avenues for learning. I commonly read short excerpts from the participation papers in class, responding to the students' comments and questions. Maintaining that balance helps me to be a better teacher and gives me ideas that find their way into my research.

Of all the elements listed, uniting the past, present, and future seems to be the one that best resonates with my students, who primarily are non-Native. The idea is to acknowledge the past in order to imagine a better future to work toward in the present. This means that we do not get stuck in the past, dwell in the past, and play the blame game. Also, this approach is proactive in nature. It is more than simply saying that those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are bound to repeat them. That is a negative approach, pointing out what not to do. Instead, we look for positive ideas that can be drawn from history in order to create a better world for all people. Usually, at the end of the semester I will ask the students for their ideas regarding how they can create a better future for Indian people and for their families, communities, and places. Hopefully, their ideas will one day find expression as their lives and careers continue to develop.

Remaining open to mystery speaks as much to an approach to knowledge as it does to keeping an open mind to the wonders of the universe, recognizing that human beings cannot know the answer to everything and do not need to know the answer to everything that exists. This does not mean that knowledge cannot be pursued. Certainly it should be. However, it is also recognized that human beings will never know everything. Two conclusions result from that observation. First, there are times and ways in which knowledge presents itself in the most surprising and unexpected ways. How and why that occurs remains a mystery, and the process cannot be controlled or reduced to a formula. It certainly cannot be shaped into a method such as the

scientific method. Second, simply put, it also means that the mysteries of life are to be savored and not solved.

How can one practice remaining open to mystery? According to my elders in the Anishinaabe community, it is through developing the power of observation. I believe this stress on the power of observation can be found in other Native cultures as well. In the case of the Anishinaabeg, I have often heard elders discuss the importance of paying attention to the smallest details. We are encouraged to observe the behavior of ants, leaves in the trees, songs of the birds, and so forth, and work to discern what our observations can tell us. In science it is recognized that serendipitous discoveries come to those who are prepared to recognize them. The same can be said of remaining open to mystery. Observation is the method that prepares the individual for those times when the mystery of life reveals something of importance.

Both remaining open to mystery and observation find their expression in my college teaching in the form of visioning/creativity/imagination, which can be seen as an extension of remaining open to mystery and observation. It might be seen as observation in a different vein. However, a couple of important points need to be made. First, when it comes to the academic setting, we are not encouraging students to go on vision quests or anything of the sort. Instead, the notion of visioning is used as a heuristic device to lead us into the area of creativity and imagination. Again, among the Anishinaabeg, I find the degree to which teachers encourage people to exercise their creative mind interesting. In my case, I am working with a recognized spiritual leader in our community. One of the first things he had me do was make a warrior's pipe out of pipestone. Pipestone is sacred, and I had never worked with it before. A warrior's pipe has a fairly complex design as well, with an axe blade beneath the bowl part of the pipe. The directions I received from my teacher were vague at best, and I was more or less thrown into the project. About two months later, I had my pipe, much to my surprise and my teacher's delight. A large part of this exercise, as my teacher related to me, was to get me to learn how to work with my hands. He sees it as being very important to Anishinaabe identity to be able to work with one's hands. In the case of the Anishinaabeg, creativity and imagination are based in the creative arts, much more so than in the so-called life of the mind. Still, the stress on imagination and creativity can certainly be said to form an important component of the pedagogical approach of the Anishinaabe people. As might be expected, in the classroom setting, I encourage my students to exercise their own creativity and imagination. Knowing that they are free to take control of the topic and carry it to areas of their own choosing is an empowering experience for the students. I believe they create better work all around in having the freedom to explore the course topic on their own.

My experience making the warrior's pipe under my teacher's limited supervision also allows me to talk about forgiveness and developing a positive self-identity. It seemed that, for my teacher, the more important aspect of my making a warrior's pipe was not to have a pipe in the end but to have a learning experience. Several times it looked as if I would wind up ruining the pipe, and I did put a rather large crack in it. Fortunately, my teacher wanted

to have a flaw in the pipe, a wound, as it were, that would represent, or stand in for, the wounds suffered by veterans. We discussed the possibility that I might wind up wrecking the whole project. His reaction was that if such an event came to pass, we would simply bury the pipe in the woods and forget about it. Fortunately, the crack is now almost indiscernible, the pipe is functional, and it turned out almost exactly the way my teacher wanted it.

This sense of forgiveness and willingness to give people a second chance seems to have been a large part of traditional child-rearing techniques. I have yet to come across a Native culture that believed in and practiced corporal punishment as part of their standard cultural practices.[16] Instead, the emphasis always seemed to be on positive reinforcement, rewarding good behavior, and always, as much as possible, being gentle with children, not speaking to them in a harsh voice or an angry tone. Unfortunately, as is well-known, the boarding-school era introduced violence into our domestic cultures so physical punishment is now more common among Native people. However, if we concentrate on traditional child-rearing practices, it is clear that instilling a positive self-identity and practicing forgiveness should be important components of American Indian pedagogy.

Making the warrior's pipe is also an example of the pragmatic teaching approach of the Anishinaabeg. Although one of my teacher's goals is to teach me to work with my hands, he also encourages me to learn other practical skills of various sorts. For example, he wants me to take up archery, a skill set from the old days. Interestingly enough, he is also teaching me different songs. This might not seem like a practical skill. However, songs have life and power in Anishinaabe thinking. Learning songs becomes a very important task, one not to be taken lightly. For my college teaching, I concentrate on making the class as practical as possible for the students. Thus, I encourage them to write research papers that will be of practical value to them in their lives and careers. Having the students include a section in their autobiographical essays about their interest in Indians and how it developed often provides a gateway for their later research in the class.

Training to task mastery as opposed to grading one's level of task achievement can be illustrated by the work I did making the warrior's pipe. The important point in making the pipe was not to win an award or to be judged or graded on my degree of competence. Making mistakes was acceptable. The important point was that I learn how to make a pipe.

Accretive thinking is a process whereby the same topic is circled back to and discussed again. A useful image is to picture an upward spiral. Accretion comes from geology and refers to the building up of layers. In accretive thinking, as the topic is repeated, additional layers of meaning are added. This seems to be a common technique among elders. I have noticed that elders have a tendency to repeat themselves. When that happens, it is imperative for students not to roll their eyes and think, "There he (or she) goes again." Instead, it is better to think about the context in which the topic was raised before and to consider what has been learned in the meantime that adds to one's understanding of the subject. Additionally, if a person is really smart, he or she will consider when and how the topic might come up again

and then think about what one might know in the future that will add to his or her knowledge. This is how to build up layers of meaning and add to the depth of one's knowledge. It is also a way to encourage intellectual engagement with the topic so that one more deeply considers the complexity of the matter. Also, the accretive approach recognizes the limitations and idiosyncrasies of human beings. In most cases, people need to hear the same thing, sometimes many times, before there is that "aha" moment when they truly understand the teaching on a deeper, intuitive level.

I mainly use this method in discussing genocide in my survey course on American Indians. Rather than teach a unit on genocide, I return to the topic in different ways throughout the semester. By the end of the course, students have developed a greater appreciation for the hardships endured by American Indian people. I use this method in my American Indian religions class to stress the importance of relationships. Rather than have one unit on the topic, I discuss the role and function of relationships in the religious life of American Indians. By the end of the semester, I have dissuaded most of the students from their romantic notions about Indians being close to nature and instead have instilled them with a sense of the hard work and satisfaction that can come from maintaining healthy spiritual relationships with the Creator, spirits, other-than-humans, and human beings.

As far as I can tell, American Indians in general as well as the Anishinaabeg are not interested in truth with a capital "T." Instead, there is a recognition that multiple truths can exist, and the existence of multiple truths is an acceptable state of affairs. This approach to the truth finds expression in at least two forms. First, on the individual level, the Anishinaabeg, along with other American Indians, have their own take on epistemology. I have heard elders and others explain that what one individual experiences the Creator has put there for that person, and that two people can encounter the seemingly same event and have completely different experiences. One of my teachers told me a story about two Indians at a powwow who looked up and saw some eagles, which they pointed out to each other. Two white men standing behind them looked up, too. One white man said, "Some Indians. They can't even tell buzzards from eagles." My teacher's commentary was that those white men did not know what the Indians saw. Instead of insulting the Indians, they should have been asking themselves why they saw buzzards when the Indians saw eagles.

The second manner in which the recognition of the complex nature of truth manifests itself in Native American cultures involves accepting that different groups live by different truths. I have noticed that when Native Americans get together, they exchange information about their respective beliefs and practices. I have yet to hear a traditional Indian tell another, "Well, if you believe in that, you're going to hell." Instead, an interest in learning from each other exists. This sentiment is expressed in a probably apocryphal story about an anthropologist visiting a Native village. He was told that a certain spot in that village was the center of the world. They then went to visit another Indian village, where one of the Indians said a certain spot in their village was the center of the world, to which the Indian from the first village

agreed. While returning to the first village, the anthropologist asked the first Indian how he could agree with the Indian in the second village that their spot was the center of the world when he said a spot in his own village was the center of the world. The Indian replied, "Well, when we're in our village, our spot is the center of the world. When we're in their village, their spot is the center of the world." Effectively, this means that Native Americans acknowledge that systems are true within their own respective systems. In that sense, truth exists. However, there is also recognition that the truth will probably not prevail outside of its given system. Note that this includes religious truths.

The notion that the complex nature of truth includes religious truths is obviously foreign to the Judeo-Christian-Islamic worldview, in which each respective branch claims exclusive privilege to the one, valid religious truth. From my understanding of Native American cultures, it is not necessary and can even be dangerous to proclaim one truth for all people in all times. The Native American point of view, including the Anishinaabeg, is that the Creator placed different people in different areas and gave them instructions—religious beliefs and practices—for living on that land. Thus, the religious beliefs and practices of the Anishinaabeg are appropriate for the Anishinaabeg, but not, for example, their Dakota neighbors, who live in a different area. Further, it would be damaging and dangerous for the Anishinaabeg to insist that the Dakota live by the religious truths and practices of the Anishinaabeg. The result would be social disruption and damage to the land. It is better to allow people to live by the religious truths and practices given to them by the Creator.

This does not mean that people cannot learn from each other, or even exchange beliefs and practices. When Native Americans get together, they often exchange information regarding their respective beliefs and practices. Sometimes, one group will even take up a practice from another. This is the case with the Anishinaabeg. Currently, some Anishinaabeg practice the Big Drum ceremony. I have been to some of these ceremonies. Interestingly enough, the keepers of the ceremony often point out that it was a gift to the Anishinaabeg from the Dakota. The way the Anishinaabeg tell it, a Dakota woman had a dream about the Big Drum ceremony and presented the ceremony to the Anishinaabeg. These are some of the kinds of teachings and practices connected with the recognition of the complex nature of truth. Suffice it to say, the Anishinaabeg, along with other Native Americans, are interested in emphasizing the complex nature of truth as part of a teaching strategy.

Respect for people outside one's culture is closely related to the recognition of the complex nature of truth and does not require nearly as extensive an explanation. Because the Anishinaabeg accept that the truth is complicated and that people should be allowed to live by the truths revealed to them by the Creator, it follows as a natural consequence that the Anishinaabeg have, as one of their ideals, respect for people outside their culture. This is not always the case in reality but is certainly an ideal toward which the Anishinaabeg strive and which they work to express. For example, the Anishinaabeg sweat lodge is built with twelve poles. Two poles go in each of the four cardinal

directions for a total of eight poles. This results in a square at the top of the lodge. The remaining four poles make an X between the cardinal points and, therefore, make an X in the square at the top of the lodge. On the four branches of the X the Anishinaabeg tie different colored cloth to represent the four races: red, white, yellow, and black. We are taught that when we are in the sweat lodge we should pray for all people, including the whites. I have heard elders say that it does not make sense to pray only for the Anishinaabeg or to pray for all the races except the whites. Those elders strongly emphasize the need to pray for all people because it is one way of teaching respect.

In our classes, recognition of the complex nature of truth and respect for people outside one's culture mainly find expression in the oral presentations. Each student tells his or her own story, and, in so doing, the students learn to respect each other and value each other's input. Especially when it comes to class discussions, students can feel free to speak from their individual experience and know that their input will be valued. They speak their truth as they know it. The oral presentations are very important in that they help move the class from being a collection of strangers to a group of colleagues learning together.

I have written about humor in relation to Anishinaabe culture elsewhere.[17] For this article, I am interested in how my teachers not only use humor in their own teaching but also how they expect me to use humor; so the humor cuts both ways. Additionally, the more ribald the humor, the better, it seems. As might be expected, a lot of teasing goes back and forth. This is not to say that there is nothing but humor. Obviously, there is a serious side to teaching. However, the use of humor is highly encouraged in the Anishinaabe teaching environment. I try to bring the Anishinaabe sense of humor into the classroom. I exercise quite a bit of self-deprecating humor but also like to tease the students. It is important to exercise prudence in using humor in this regard. It is easy for students to take the instructor as a fool if he or she plays one in class. To avoid this, I make sure the material presented in class has depth, and that I lecture on it with conviction. When it comes to teasing, it is important to know the students and keep the teasing within reasonable limits.

These elements of Anishinaabe pedagogy are used to develop an Anishinaabe human being, fully capable of functioning in the society and world of the people. Many of the elements listed can be found in other Native cultures. In that regard, the specifics would focus on the particulars of Anishinaabe culture, such as the sacred stories and other items indigenous to the nation. In bringing these elements into the classroom, the idea is not to try to turn non-Native students into Indians but to use these elements to help inform my own teaching and bring diversity to the academy. The elements discussed and the approach I explained in my earlier work on teaching American Indian studies has been successful, and the students report that they enjoy being exposed to a different teaching method. Over the years, however, my thoughts on teaching have continued to develop, and so I would like to say a few words about where my teaching currently stands.

In my paper, "Teaching American Indian Studies to Reflect American Indian Ways of Knowing and to Interrupt Cycles of Genocide," I included a

definition of *genocide* drawn from the work of Ward Churchill. Looking back on it now, it would have been better to use the definition of *genocide* found in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.[18] I appreciate Churchill's detailed definition of *genocide*. However, the United Nations Convention has the status of an international agreement, which the Churchill definition does not. In light of those circumstances, I ask readers to refer to the United Nations Convention on genocide when consulting my article on teaching American Indian studies.

When it comes to teaching my classes, I have made a few changes in the logistics on the first assignment and the student's interest in the topic and how it developed. In the past, I would allow students to rewrite the paper as many times as they desired up to a final deadline. However, I found that the students were not paying enough attention to my suggestions for improving their papers. To get their attention I now allow three rewrites of the paper up to the final deadline. I insist that footnotes and sources be formatted correctly and that the paper have a minimum of writing errors. For example, in order to earn an A grade, a paper must have two or fewer writing errors on any given page, three for a B, four for a C, and so forth. Although it might seem like a lot of work, after grading the first draft, subsequent grading goes rather quickly, and I rarely get more than four or five rewrites for any given class period. Using this approach, I am able to practice forgiveness and give the students a second chance. In writing an essay that truly deserves a high grade, this approach also helps the students develop a positive self-identity. Knowing that their story will be validated also contributes to the student's positive self-identity.

Unfortunately, one thing I have learned over the years is that students are not sure how to approach this type of essay. Most have never encountered an assignment like this before. In order to help them out, I collect electronic versions of good examples of this assignment. I have the students e-mail me a copy. After editing and adding comments, the paper is ready for distribution. I send the students several examples with different styles of writing, so they have a better sense of what I look for in the assignment. I find that this helps make the first draft stronger and speeds up the entire process of rewriting the papers.

One of the biggest challenges I have faced is working with first-generation college students. Students who are first-generation college students usually say so in their oral presentations. Quite often, these are student athletes, but first-generation students can come from any rank within the student population. In my experience, first-generation college students have the hardest time with writing assignments. To assist these individuals, I am instituting a process whereby I will require first-generation students to sign up for consultation on the first assignment. Other students are invited to seek help as well. However, because of the unique status of first-generation college students, I am particularly interested in seeing that they get the help they need in order to succeed. The number of first-generation college students I have in any given class is limited. As such, I do not anticipate being overwhelmed with this approach to helping them.

It could be said that many of the features of American Indian pedagogy are common to people around the world. This is not too surprising in that humans have a generally limited number of responses to dealing with the challenges of life, including educating people. However, the particular constellation of elements in American Indian pedagogy also makes the approach unique. For example, the lack of punishment is striking and certainly stands in contrast to current Western and Asian approaches to learning. As we continue to develop an American Indian pedagogy, we should continue to consider what kind of human beings we want to create and how we can best help people succeed and express their full, individual humanity. In that regard, I would like to finish with what I think is at the root of American Indian pedagogy. If I may put it this way, the Creator has given each of us different talents and tasks to complete in this world. It is important for each of us to develop our own vision in life so that we may most fully express our talents and best succeed in our tasks. It is vitally important that we do not follow somebody else's dream or somebody else's dream for us. Having others impose their dreams on other individuals is, in effect, playing God, or interfering with those individuals' mission in life. It is incumbent on individuals to become most fully the person they are. Individuals should not fully develop their talents just for themselves, but do so for the benefit of their family, community, and place. Turning the analysis around, it becomes important for the community to encourage the development of strong individuals so the community as a whole may become strong.[19] In a very real way this is how we can use indigenous cultures, in this case, American Indian pedagogy, to understand indigenous people utilizing an approach developed from within the culture and to create a better future not just for Native people but also for all humanity.

NOTES

1. Lawrence W. Gross, "Teaching American Indian Studies to Reflect American Indian Ways of Knowing and to Interrupt Cycles of Genocide," *Wicazo Sa Review* 20, no. 2 (2005): 187–234.

2. Frances Densmore, *Chippewa Customs*, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 86 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1929).

3. Ibid., 48–72.

4. M. Inez Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life and Its Cultural Background* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992). Originally published as *Chippewa Child Life and Its Cultural Background*, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 146 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951).

5. Ibid., 55–60.

6. Roger Spielmann, *"You're So Fat!": Exploring Ojibwe Discourse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

7. Ibid., 91–92.

8. Jim Northrup, "Fond du Lac Follies," *The Circle*, 14 October 1994; 16 September 2001; 14 September 2003.

9. Christopher Vecsey, *Traditional Ojibwa Religion and Its Historical Changes* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983), 84.

10. Jim Northrup, "The Odyssey," in *Walking the Rez Road* (Stillwater, MN: Voyageur Press, 1993), 55–59.

11. Ibid., 57.

12. A. Irving Hallowell, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," in *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*, ed. Stanley Diamond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 19–52.

13. Lawrence W. Gross, "*Bimaadiziwin*, or the 'Good Life,' as a Unifying Concept of Anishinaabe Religion," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 26, no. 1 (2002): 15–32.

14. Jim Northrup, "Fond du Lac Follies," *The Circle*, 24 May 1990; 21 October 1990; 16 May 1998; 20 April 2000; 22 May 2004; 21 May 2005; 16 October 2005.

15. William G. Tierney, *Official Encouragement, Institutional Discouragement: Minorities in Academe—The Native American Experience* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1992).

16. Hilger, *Chippewa Child Life*, 59. She does cite instances of corporal punishment among the Anishinaabeg. However, other Anishinaabeg stated that people who hit their children are not real Indians. Remembering that Hilger made her observations in the 1930s and 1940s, I suspect the use of corporal punishment she discusses may have been introduced into the culture by Euro-Americans. In any event, it is clear corporal punishment was not accepted as a standard cultural practice among the Anishinaabeg. Spielmann's observations are closer to my own in this regard when he states, "In Pikogan parents rarely spanked or severely reprimanded their children. Children are disciplined, for sure, but in subtle ways." See Spielmann, "*You're So Fat!*" 39. In my own family, my great-grandmother raised thirteen children and did not hit them. My grandmother raised twelve children and did not hit them. My own mother raised nine children, and she never once yelled at us or hit us. I suspect my own family's practices are closer to the traditional practices of the Anishinaabeg than the instances of corporal punishment Hilger discusses.

17. Lawrence W. Gross, "The Comic Vision of Anishinaabe Culture and Religion," *American Indian Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2003): 436–59; Lawrence Gross, "Silence as the Root of American Indian Humor: Further Meditations on the Comic Vision of Anishinaabe Culture and Religion," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 31, no. 2 (2007): 69–85.

18. "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," The Human Rights Web, http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html (accessed 16 March 2010).

19. I am pleased Spielmann shares my assessment of Anishinaabe pedagogy. See Spielmann, "*You're So Fat!*" 39.