

The quote in the title of this paper comes from one of the students in the 2002 class of the Tribal Resource Institute in Business Engineering and Science (TRIBES), a summer program for Native pre-college students at the University of New Mexico. Although leadership skills are one of TRIBES' priorities, student participants tend to arrive with embedded leadership qualities, and these qualities are often part of their motivation to attend a program like TRIBES. The student who said "I came here to learn how to be a leader" was already a leader based on his decision to spend his summer before college in an intense academic program. His quote implies foresight that the TRIBES experience would be one where he would learn the skills, values, and knowledge of what it means to be an Indigenous<sup>1</sup> leader.

This paper demonstrates how TRIBES, a 25 year-old program that serves Native American and Native Canadian students, employs Indigenous educational values and methods to assist students in attaining a form of critical consciousness that I call a critical Indigenous consciousness. Students who develop a critical Indigenous consciousness acknowledge, respect, and embrace the role Indigenous leaders play in providing service to their community and people. David Lester is a member of the Creek Nation and the executive director of the Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT), the organization that created TRIBES. In 1995 Lester explained the purpose of this program for teaching Indigenous leadership:

The paradox of the CERT Education Program is the realization that as individual Indians, we are of great value and high worth; but we can only realize this great value when we dedicate ourselves to the service and well-being of others by placing what is good for The People ahead of what is good for the person (p. 2).

This statement about the TRIBES' goal to inspire students' commitment to their communities is rooted in Indigenous educational philosophy. Students in TRIBES become more connected to Indigenous values in education and in life. They learn that to have a meaningful life one must act in service to others. This goal resonates with philosophies of critical pedagogy that advance social transformation and social justice, but at the same time, the Indigenous educational philosophy challenges some of the assumptions of critical pedagogy regarding liberation and emancipation. Thus, the TRIBES program is an example of an intersection between critical pedagogy and Indigenous thought.

The purpose of this paper is not to romanticize Indigenous educational practices or philosophy, but instead to demonstrate how TRIBES, through its philosophical educational approach, both engages and confronts critical pedagogy in order to restore Indigenous goals in education. The purpose is also to demonstrate how education can be meaningful and relevant for students who have historically been marginalized, neglected, and abandoned through Western forms

of education. The ways in which TRIBES forms a crossroads between critical pedagogy and Indigenous education will be demonstrated based on the author's work in the program as a residential advisor, instructor, and director for over five years, and through students' perspectives of the program's influence on their sense of self and life goals. As this analysis will demonstrate, the result of this intersection between Indigenous values and critical pedagogy is the empowerment and decolonization of the Native student participants. The students become reconnected to their Native heritage and communities in new and provocative ways, and they become motivated to serve their communities.

In the sections that follow, this paper will offer a conceptualization of Indigenous educational philosophy and the importance for Native youth to return to this philosophical approach. The paper begins by addressing how TRIBES serves as an example of the intersection between critical pedagogy and Indigenous education. I'll follow this discussion by describing both the TRIBES program and the research methodology utilized, and then culminate the discussion with a demonstration, through student narratives, of TRIBES' effect on students' lives.

### **Indigenous Educational Philosophy**

Learning how to become a complete human being is the essence of Indigenous educational philosophy. It involves finding one's identity and passion rooted in life experiences that are shaped and influenced by one's cultural community and their resulting communal attachment (Cajete, 1994). Indigenous education is also rooted in place, which includes a local environment, people, spirituality, and culture. Place is significant because it is where one learns about their connection to a community through their participation in community life and their relationships with one another (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999). For Indigenous peoples, education has traditionally been a way to learn about life in ways that are directly tied to learning experiences involving nature, participant observation, hands-on practices, and storytelling. These educational experiences take place in one's own community for the purpose of cultural transmission. The ultimate goal of Indigenous education is to learn how to become a contributing member of one's community, and this happens by locating students' experiences in their communities (Benham & Cooper, 2000; Cajete, 1994; Johnson, 2000; Kawagley, 1995).

Greg Cajete (1999), a Native scholar and educator from Santa Clara Pueblo, believes that Indigenous educational philosophy encompasses the development of a child into a complete human being through Indigenous-based practices and knowledge. He states:

Indigenous education is rooted not only in place but also in the development of a whole sense of being human... It is really a concern for children that motivates Indigenous education since the ultimate purpose of education is the transfer of culture and an accompanying worldview to the next generation (pp. 194-195).

TRIBES embodies the philosophy of Indigenous education by creating a curriculum that focuses on student self awareness and identity, and that promotes critical thinking and critical consciousness. Through the TRIBES curriculum, community-based experiences, and personal development activities, students become aware of what it means to become a complete human being. TRIBES creates an Indigenous community where students learn various perspectives of what it means to be Native based on their experiences with each other, the Native people with whom they interact through the program's activities, what they learn about the oppression and resilience of Native nations, and the expressed values and hopes for them to serve Native America. TRIBES helps students learn how to become a complete human being by encouraging students to become committed to their communities and take on leadership roles in providing service to those communities. This goal is politically oriented as it is important to the future of Native nations to have Native youth who are committed to protecting, preserving, and revitalizing their land, language, culture, and people. But the communal goals are also intended to inspire commitment to community and an Indigenous expression of self determination in education. In the TRIBES handout provided to students, Lester (1995) explained the program's purpose in this way:

You have a unique opportunity to experience your Indian identity in new and exciting dimensions. You will learn, as I have, that *becoming* a complete human being is what *being* Indian really means. Our culture guides our personal development toward becoming true human beings (p. 4, emphasis in the original).

The founders of TRIBES hope that in learning to become a complete human being, students will also realize that contribution and service to their Native communities should be important goals in their lives.

At first glance, some may argue that the TRIBES philosophy essentializes Indigenous education. Essentialism is defined as the condition present when categories of race, gender, and other social groupings—in this case American Indian-ness and Indigenous education—are considered homogenous, stable, and unique to a particular group. The extent to which one holds these characteristics is related to the degree of authenticity and authority one holds for representation of their claimed group. The dangers of essentialism with regard to Native American experiences have been thoroughly articulated by many Native scholars

(see, for example, Cook-Lynn, 2001; Deloria, 1970; Grande, 2000a; Warrior, 1995), who assert that in the case of Indigenous identity, essentialism perpetuates stereotypes of Native peoples and serves whitestream<sup>2</sup> America's need to dehumanize Native Americans and relegate them to a romanticized image of what Grande (2000b) calls "nature-loving primitives" (p. 348).

However, the TRIBES philosophy does not assert a uniform, structured, or correct way of practicing Indigenous education. Rather, its philosophy acknowledges the diversity of Indigenous cultures and educational approaches by recognizing how they are rooted in and shaped by the cultures of those communities. Learning how to become "a complete human being," as Cajete (1999) and Lester (1995) note, takes place in the context of one's cultural community, worldview, values, beliefs, and practices. The TRIBES philosophy allows for this diversity of learning contexts but situates them within Indigenous communities instead of in public school settings.

Duane Champagne (1995) made a similar argument in his discussion of an inherent conservative orientation among Native peoples' worldviews, cultural organization, and social and cultural institutions. He argued that Native peoples' central concern is community preservation and cultural survival. However, he stated that "each Indian nation defends a different cultural and institutional order from the others" (p. 18). Like Indigenous educational philosophy, there are commonalities among Native nations' goals for their children, but there is a diversity of cultural characteristics and educational approaches and methods of implementation.

### **Significance of Returning to Indigenous Educational Approaches**

The importance given to Indigenous educational approaches lies in the need to counter assimilationist forms of education that have permeated Native students' educational experiences within public school settings throughout history up to the present day. The colonization of Native people included the mindset among colonizers in the late 1800s to "kill the Indian and save the man." This mindset was made manifest through the imposition of Western forms of education on Indigenous peoples, first for the purpose of religious conversion, then for the purpose of assimilation to Western American society. Initially, Native people were forced to attend missionary schools, and then boarding schools run by the federal government's Bureau of Indian Affairs (Connell-Szasz, 1977; Holm & Holm, 1995; McCarty & Watahomigie, 1998; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Western educational approaches implemented through boarding schools, and which continue on today within public schools, directly contrast with Indigenous educational approaches. Western educational approaches emphasize objective

content and experiences that are detached from community and people. In these approaches, knowledge is compartmentalized into subject areas and the interconnectedness of those subject areas is lost (Benham & Cooper, 2000; Cajete, 1994,). Consequently, Indigenous worldviews and educational approaches have been jeopardized (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1999).

Boarding schools had an especially negative impact on Native children, as the primary purpose of these schools was to teach Native students how to become like white Americans. Native children were told that their culture, language, and identity were worthless. Children faced inadequate food, overcrowded conditions, and forced manual labor. Another purpose of the boarding schools was to exclude and eventually exterminate Native languages. Students were forced to speak in English and were physically punished for using their Native language (Meriam, Brown, Cloud, Dale, Duke, Edwards, McKenzie, Mark, Ryan, & Spillman, 1928). Native students were sent to schools far from their homelands, many were sexually and psychologically abused, and many more perished from illness, loneliness, or from trying to escape these prison schools (Child, 1998). The schools failed at assimilating Native students to American society but succeeded in alienating many from their home communities.

Native students' personal experiences and analyses of these boarding schools have been documented by many scholars (Adams, 1995; Coleman, 1994; Colemant, Schultz, Robbins, Ciali, Dorton, & Rivera-Colemant, 2004; Lomawaima & Tsianina, 1994; McBeth, 1983). These brutal accounts of past experiences can be linked to many Native Americans' present day social and personal problems. In fact, in 2003 several Native Americans who attended these schools filed a class action lawsuit against the federal government for the abuse they suffered while attending government-run boarding schools (Colemant et al, 2004). Since the 1950s and the implementation of the Johnson O'Malley Act, which provided federal funds to state-operated school districts on reservation lands, Native students living on reservations have increasingly attended public schools run by the state (Connell-Szasz, 1977). However, the educational services provided to Native students continue to be inadequate (Cleary & Peacock, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1991; U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of the Interior, 1992; Willetto, 1999). Cultural ignorance and insensitivity, ineffective curricular strategies, and inadequate funding continue to permeate many of these schools. Likely the largest problem is the lack of Native control and voice in these schools' educational approaches, as they must abide by state-mandated curriculum and licensing restrictions. In response to the poor American educational system for Native students, many educators of Native students are working to reform educational practices and assert more control, provide Native people with a voice in the education of their children, redefine what counts as knowledge in educational systems, and in

essence, indigenize education for Native children (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

The following section discusses critical pedagogy, as it is one educational approach that serves to transform education for purposes of social action, change, and justice. The movement to indigenize education is related to critical pedagogy in that both promote social justice. In particular, TRIBES, one of the programs working to indigenize education, is an example of the intersection between critical pedagogy and Indigenous education. While TRIBES aspires to create social change and eliminate oppressive conditions (the goals of critical pedagogy), it works to accomplish this change by inspiring students to come to know their Native identities through commitment and service to their communities (the tenets of Indigenous educational philosophy). Examining the intersection between critical pedagogy and Indigenous education is important for this analysis because it provides a more comprehensive conceptualization of how TRIBES affects its students and can, perhaps, provide a conceptual lens through which to analyze other Indigenous educational programs.

### **Intersections between Critical Pedagogy and Indigenous Education**

Critical pedagogy evolved from the theories of progressive educators who embodied radical principles, beliefs, and practices for the purpose of analyzing the effect of capitalism and gendered and racialized relations on marginalized and disenfranchised populations. The field of critical pedagogy attempts to link these radical principles, beliefs, and practices to transformative educational systems in order to create social action and social change in the interest of oppressed populations (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003). There is no single method of critical pedagogy. Rather, it is the heterogeneity of ideas used to express and implement critical pedagogy that constitutes its emancipatory and democratic nature. The desire and possibilities for social change and transformation of the lives of oppressed populations unifies critical pedagogy among the various forms of expressions manifested through educational ideas, methods, and curriculum (Giroux, 2001).

However, critical pedagogy has been critiqued for its democratic goals of emancipation and liberation, which preclude Native American interests and goals to maintain tribal sovereignty and separateness (Grande, 2000a, 2004). Grande (2000a) argues that critical pedagogy has “muted and marginalized the distinctive concerns of American Indian intellectualism and education” (p. 467) because it has ignored Native people’s unique experiences and distinct interest to maintain their tribal heritage. She sees a need to reevaluate “dominant views of democracy, and social justice, and of the universal validity of such emancipatory projects” (p. 468). Critical pedagogy’s democratic philosophy is at odds with

tribal sovereignty and the interests of Native peoples to protect and maintain their cultural heritage.

Understanding the limitations of critical pedagogy as it relates to Native nations, TRIBES is an example of an Indigenous educational program that utilizes many of the ideas and goals of critical pedagogy but redefines the desired outcomes from democratic notions of individual emancipation and liberation to commitment to a community, which fulfills and restores Indigenous educational goals and produces the equally desired outcome of social justice and transformation in Indigenous communities.

A second intersection between critical pedagogy and Indigenous education is evident in the way that TRIBES aims to develop students' sense of self. Critical theory and pedagogy include notions of what Giroux (2001) calls the "self-conscious critique" (p. 8), or critical consciousness, which can be defined as a critical awareness and knowledge of one's self and the nature and causes of one's social and political conditions. Freire (1993) clarifies critical consciousness as essential factor in gaining self-control and direction in one's education and as a means to empower and activate an individual's sense of learning. These ideas of critical pedagogy are significant for Indigenous people and Indigenous education because social change, action, and justice can be equated with a restoration of Indigenous values, knowledge, and ways of life. However, critical consciousness for Indigenous people includes the goal of serving one's community. Indigenous educational philosophy espouses the transfer of culture by teaching values, knowledge, and ways of life—in effect, ways to become a complete human being through contribution to one's community. Critical pedagogy provides the means to restore this Indigenous educational philosophy by calling attention to the effects of colonization and by empowering students to become critically conscious and aware of their own worth. However, a critical Indigenous consciousness emphasizes the notion that one's own worth is tied to their connection and service to their community.

Critical Indigenous consciousness is thus tied to communal and Indigenous educational goals of commitment to community because of the need to protect tribal sovereignty and self-determination. I equate critical Indigenous consciousness with what Graham Smith (2003) calls "consciencization." Consciencization is "the freeing up of the Indigenous mind from the grip of dominant hegemony" (p. 2) in order to achieve transformation in Native communities. He asserts that consciencization is important, as it allows Native people to understand and imagine their needs and goals from an Indigenous perspective that is not tainted by views of the oppressor. Consciencization involves acknowledging how colonization has affected an individual on a personal level. Moreover, consciencization, or a critical Indigenous consciousness, is vital for the protection and preservation of Native land,

language, culture, and people (Alfred, 1999; Cook-Lynn, 2001; Wilson, 2004). Indigenous land, language, culture, and people continue to be colonized and struggle to survive in a dominant, penetrating society. Dominant societal influences (for example, English language, American schools, American popular culture...) continue to penetrate Native communities and ways of life. Finding ways to experience Indigenous land, language, culture, and people outside of the influences of the dominant society must occur on Native people's own terms, and would constitute an experience of consciencization for Native people. TRIBES helps students develop a critical Indigenous consciousness by asking them to engage in activities where they come to know themselves and their communities on their own terms and from their own perspectives. These Indigenous perspectives offer students the meanings and values of life that are essential to becoming complete human beings. Essentially, TRIBES demonstrates an intersection between critical pedagogy and Indigenous educational philosophy by using critical pedagogy to inspire a critical Indigenous consciousness related to goals of social justice for Indigenous people, but it departs from critical pedagogy by inspiring students to commit to their communities, rather than promote the democratic goals of individual freedom and liberation. TRIBES students gain freedom and liberation by learning how to become complete human beings through service to their people.

### **What is TRIBES? Who are TRIBES Students?**

TRIBES is a seven-week program held at the University of New Mexico during the summer months. Thirty Native American students from across the country and Canada are selected to participate based on personal essays and recommendations from teachers, counselors, and community members. The program does not require a specific grade point average or even an official acceptance to a college or university. Rather, students must demonstrate in their essays motivation for attending an institution of higher education and an interest in learning about and contributing to the welfare of Native American people. As a result, TRIBES attracts students with varying levels of academic achievement and with diverse life experiences. The intention here is not to simply attract and qualify for admittance those students who have excelled in school and who may have had more opportunities for educational advancement. Instead, TRIBES recruits students from all walks of life, particularly those who may not have had the benefit of college preparatory courses or other educational opportunities available in more resourceful school districts. Despite students' diversity, they hold their Native heritage in common and come together for a summer to create a community with shared experiences.

TRIBES was created by the Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT), an organization made up of fifty Native American Nations. CERT was created in the 1980s in order to create an organized partnership of tribes with energy resources that can advocate on behalf of the tribes to reclaim authority over their natural resources and energy development plans. CERT became controversial (Fixico, 1998) because its decisions to protect or develop the tribes' energy resources did not always fall in line with governmental, corporate, or individual interests. However, its mission is to control the tribes' resources on their own terms. Although CERT may be considered a controversial organization, its educational program has been widely supported, and TRIBES is well known and respected among Native educational entities.

CERT's mission to make decisions that affect the future of its tribes was also a goal in creating TRIBES. In 1980 CERT tribal leaders met to discuss the crisis of Native education in America and to decide how to provide a more meaningful education for their children (Council of Energy Resource Tribes, 1995). They discussed what they wanted their children to learn and know in order to become contributing members of their communities. In designing the goals of the TRIBES program, these leaders drew from the values and experiences of their own communities, and thus laid the foundation for TRIBES' Indigenous educational approach. Similar to the tenets of both Indigenous educational philosophy and critical consciousness, CERT leaders believed that their children needed to experience and become aware of their own worth, potential, and values as Native people. The tribal leaders identified twelve values they felt were most important for students to learn and embrace, including respect, trust, honor, love, community, role modeling, commitment, participation, team work, sharing, and risk taking (Council of Energy Resource Tribes, 1995). Lester (1995), CERT's executive director, explained the importance of these values in helping students become complete human beings and in rejecting materialistic goals in education. He asserted that CERT tribal leaders have learned to put these values first in guiding personal development toward becoming true human beings. The tribal leaders wanted TRIBES students to use these values to shape what they do with their education and with their life. Their philosophical statement states: "The goal to assist TRIBES students in becoming academically competent is in some ways secondary to facilitating students' awareness of these fundamental understandings about life and about themselves" (Council of Energy Resource Tribes, 1995, p. 3). They went on to articulate the need for this goal:

Our tribes can't afford to wait for this generation of young people to turn forty-something when they may or may not experience an epiphany about the level of personal commitment life calls for from them. Young Indian people need to start thinking about what is truly important NOW and use that information as the basis for making other pivotal life decisions (p. 4).

The need for TRIBES students to embrace CERT's twelve guiding values, to understand life and themselves as Native people, and to think about what is truly important for Native peoples are extremely important given the "identity paradox" that permeates tribal communities. Grande (2004) defined this paradox as the competing pressures and changing conditions of Native identity that dominant identity theories fail to address. She writes, "at the same time American Indian communities face internal pressures (racism, sexism, homophobia, detribalization, urbanization) to mediate more fluid constructions of Indian-ness, they are also compelled by external threats (encroachment, ethnic fraud, corporate commodification, and culture loss) to maintain more restrictive definitions of Indian-ness" (p. 7). Indigenous criteria for membership and theories of identity prior to colonization among Native nations were excluded in the racialized, sociopolitical enrollment criteria that was imposed upon Native people and that is now maintained by tribal governments (Forbes, 2000; Garoutte, 2003; Sturm, 2002). TRIBES students arrive for the summer with these complex notions of their identity, but their identity is further complicated and layered with racialized notions of membership and authority. This identity paradox complicates students' connections to their communities as well as their understandings of themselves. TRIBES' goal is to strengthen students' sense of self as it relates to the goals of Native communities. Cecilia Fire Thunder, president of the Oglala Lakota Nation, articulated this need and goal well in a 2005 speech to Native educators. She said, "Before you can commit to your people, you have to love your people. But before you love your people, you have to love yourself." TRIBES attempts to stimulate this love for self and people through its focus on the strengths and resilience of Native nations, but also by demonstrating its love and affection for Native nations and peoples.

### **Research Methodology**

I have been involved with TRIBES for over five years at a number of different levels within the organization. I started working for TRIBES as a teaching and residential assistant in 1994 and then became an instructor of TRIBES' Native American Studies course in 1995. In 2001, I became Director of the TRIBES program and continued in this role through 2003. I have since left, but continue to teach the Native American Studies course, facilitate the Lobo Nation project (discussed later in this paper), and assist with overall TRIBES programming.

The research questions guiding this study are: 1) How does TRIBES enrich a Native sense of self for the students? 2) How does TRIBES influence

students' sense of purpose and life goals related to Native communities? 3) How does TRIBES influence its students to commit to their communities? I constructed these research questions to provide a deeper understanding of the effects of TRIBES on students and to gain a richer understanding of the TRIBES pedagogy.

For the last three years, I collected data on former students' perceptions of TRIBES through informal and formal interviews, students' personal reflection essays, participant observations recorded in a personal journal, and a review of CERT's published literature and related documents. Approximately 90 students attended TRIBES during the years in which data was collected. The personal reflection essays were first introduced in the 2002 TRIBES program and were expanded upon in 2005 when I asked students to write candidly about their experiences and opinions of TRIBES at both the halfway and end of the program. In addition, for the past three years in which the program was offered (2002-2005) students have been asked to write a reflection essay on their experiences during the cultural campout, an event that will be explained later in this paper. The instructions for writing the essays were left very open-ended in order to promote students' candid and thoughtful remarks. Students were simply asked to first summarize some of the significant moments or events they experienced, then to address why they were significant and then to reflect on what they learned.

The student narratives come from students' reflection papers. I selected these narratives to demonstrate the impact of TRIBES on students, including the development of students' critical Indigenous consciousness and their commitment to community. The specific quotes I selected best highlight and articulate the perspectives of the students in terms of the impact of TRIBES on their identity and goals. I selected quotes from a pool of 55 reflection essays about students' experiences with the cultural campouts in 2002, 2004, and 2005. I also drew from a pool of 30 mid-point and final reflection essays from the 2005 TRIBES program.

My research with TRIBES can most aptly be described as community-based action research, defined as a collaborative process of inquiry, assessment, and reflection for creating positive change and improved outcomes (Stringer, 2004). Action research may involve both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and my research utilized both. In action research, the results of the study can be simultaneously or immediately applied to the community of study. Therefore, I have communicated student experiences with TRIBES to CERT in order to reflect and improve upon the program. My research and past evaluations of TRIBES have informed planning for TRIBES each year.

My intention for engaging in this research process was to use decolonized research methodologies. Historically, Indigenous populations have had negative experiences with research and researchers (Mihesuah, 1998; Smith, 1999). Many

researchers have engaged in practices that were disrespectful to Native communities, and have imposed themselves upon Native people and misinterpreted and misrepresented Native ways by judging them according to Western worldviews. In many instances the research did not benefit Native communities and was used only to further the researchers' careers (Deloria, 1997).

My research was intended to benefit the TRIBES community, and I believe my experience with the program and my perspective as a Native woman have shaped and enhanced the ways in which TRIBES is described in this paper. My position as someone who has close ties to the program, who has personally grown from the program, and who shares experiences and a common heritage with the participants and staff of the program strengthened the research process by allowing me to engage in the research as an insider. Insider perspectives are important in research involving Indigenous peoples because they offer unique insight and ensure more accuracy in the portrayal of the community of study (Smith, 1999). Because of my insider status as a member of the community of study by heritage, and by nature of my professional involvement in TRIBES, my research was truly community-based.

### **The Impact of TRIBES**

According to students' statements about their life goals in their reflection essays, as well as in their open conversations and class discussions, I concluded that the TRIBES was successful in its attempts to instill a critical Indigenous consciousness and a commitment to community within students. One indication of this came from students' testimonies during a final presentation event in 2002 attended by parents, CERT representatives, tribal leaders, and community members. After the presentations concluded, students initiated a spontaneous discussion with the audience. During this discussion, the students publicly shared their personal revelations and transformations they experienced while participants in TRIBES. Several of the students indicated that they had experienced pivotal life changes in terms of their educational and career goals as well as their sense of commitment to their communities. This testimony was a sincere expression of their gratitude to TRIBES, their families, and the tribal leaders for helping them to understand their roles and worth as Native people and for motivating them to do something worthwhile and purposeful with their education. How TRIBES came to have such overwhelming impact on many of these students can best be understood by categorizing their perspectives into two outcomes. Students expressed that TRIBES enhanced their critical Indigenous consciousness as well as their commitment to community. Data supporting these categories were drawn

from students' experiences in TRIBES' academic, residential life, and community-based educational components.

### *Critical Indigenous Consciousness*

In TRIBES' academic component, students earn nine units of college credit by taking an English course, a math course, and a Native American Studies (NAS) course. Both the English and math courses attempt to link their class readings, discussions, and projects with the NAS class, which serves to anchor program objectives within the curriculum. In the NAS course, students first learn about Native perspectives related to historical events in North America. They gain an understanding of the meaning of important concepts such as sovereignty, they learn about the broad effects of colonization, and they come to know in a more sophisticated way the effects of federal policies on Native land, language, culture, and people. The second half of the NAS course focuses more specifically on environmental issues affecting Native America. Students are encouraged to relate course content to their own community and family, and class activities help to contextualize the content for students. TRIBES instructors employ teaching methods such as group work, focused class discussions, and personal reflections to relate what may seem to be abstract ideas, distant and historical events, and complex policies in the readings to the students' lives in their own communities and within their own families. Students critically reflect on their lives and their families' lives with respect to the issues that arise out of the readings.

Many students demonstrated a critical Indigenous consciousness during the class, and several students also illustrated how the courses contextualized the content so that they could relate concepts to their own experiences in their home communities. The overall experiences of TRIBES provided for similar contextualization and self-reflection. In writing about the academic challenge inherent in TRIBES courses or the overall TRIBES experience, students revealed changes in their sense of self and their life goals. Several wrote about their evolving critical Indigenous consciousness in their reflection essays, five of which are excerpted below:

- Before I came here, all I wanted to do was leave and start a new life off of the reservation. I think that I have a broader view on things and realized some of my mistakes that I have made before I came here. I have realized what I have to do to change my life and my lifestyle to better myself. I don't think I have changed yet, but I have had a lot of time to think and reflect on my life and are now able to change different aspects of my life before it is too late and I have matured throughout the summer.
- The academics were something to get used to. The instructors expected more out of me as a student and as a Native American. I was pushed to wrap my mind

around new ideas and learn how to speak my mind on an important subject. Through the class, I became a better Native and learned more the importance of being a Native American.

- I liked that the teachers did not let up on us to provide a challenge. A challenge is a very good thing for anyone. My grandpa always told me I should learn something new every day, and that's what we did. Another thing I liked were the English presentations. They were so educating. They made me understand some reasons why my tribe does certain things. I never knew why my tribe does some of the things that they do.

- The program has benefited my life because it made me feel more comfortable with myself. It made me realize that there is more to life than just staying at home.

- When I first started the TRIBES program, I had no faith or self-determination. My self-esteem was really low and I had a lot of fears that I thought I could never overcome. Now I am looking back on everything that I have done in the past six weeks and now I have high self-esteem, and I am self-determined.

Students also develop a critical Indigenous consciousness by living and learning among one other. It is in the residence halls that students engage in community building and are taught about the twelve values identified by CERT leaders to be important for Native American identity. TRIBES residence life helps students to learn about themselves through the relationships they build with one another and as Native people in ways that are more personal. For example, the staff engages students in weekly talking circles where they discuss issues related to family, college life, and identity. This positive and encouraging environment provides both structured and spontaneous opportunities for students to experience personal growth and to strengthen their connection to their Native heritage.

Every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday during the program TRIBES students and staff participate in community-based educational activities. These experiential activities are designed to improve students' awareness of contemporary tribal government issues and ventures, Native community life, and cultural events. For many students who come from urban areas or who do not have strong connections to their own Native communities, these activities help them reconnect to their Native sense of self and to the broader community of Native America. The activities resonate with Indigenous education because Indigenous educational approaches are rooted in place and contextualized by current realities of Native communities.

An example of one community-based educational activity from the 2002 program included a trip to the Jemez Pueblo Environmental Office, where students learned about and visited the sites of the Pueblo's sustainable energy projects, such as their wind turbines. They also visited the Walatowa<sup>3</sup> Woodland's Initiative, another of the Pueblo's economic ventures to produce and

manufacture wooden vigas<sup>4</sup> for residential and commercial builders. During this visit, students were hosted by a local family for lunch and during this meal visited with several members of the Pueblo's leadership.

Other community-based visits include attending the Pueblo de Cochiti Feast day<sup>5</sup>, meeting with the Pueblo of Zia tribal administrator and visiting that Pueblo's various cultural and business sites, and job shadowing Native professionals who work in the Albuquerque area. During these visits, students can observe similarities and differences to their own Native communities. Moreover, their connection and sense of belonging to the larger Native American community is reinforced. They are able to interact with community members who live and work in other communities or organizations, and are asked to apply and relate these experiences to their course topics and the Lobo Nation project. The community-based educational activities greatly enhance TRIBES course objectives and the students' overall experiences. Probably the most important community-based activity is the cultural campout, in which students learn more about themselves and further develop a critical Indigenous conscious.

The cultural campout engages students in many cultural activities and in self-reflection by camping in a traditional home setting of a Native family or in an isolated location in the mountains away from other public camping sites. In 2002, 2004, and 2005 students traveled to Canyon de Chelly, which is a beautiful, scenic canyon and a historic site for Navajo people located in the interior of the Navajo Nation. Students spent four days and three nights on the land of a local Navajo family in the canyon. Students were challenged by living without the conveniences of plumbing and electricity, and many found it difficult to go without a shower for the entire time, although there were opportunities to cleanse themselves through some of the cultural activities facilitated by the host family. In one activity the host family showed students how soap is extracted from the roots of a yucca plant and used to wash hair. Other cultural activities included a sunrise blessing, a Navajo stick game, storytelling, and a sweathouse ceremony. Students also hiked in the canyon, learned of its history, and were told many stories of encounters between Navajo people and Mexican and American forces.

During the cultural campout students are given time to self-reflect privately and are asked to share publicly about themselves during talking circles. Students are often very candid and emotional during the campout. They become closer to each other, and their sense of community is strengthened. The campout has become one of the most significant TRIBES events because of the effect it has on students. The campout provides another opportunity for students to "find their face and heart" as Greg Cajete (1994) has called the purpose of Indigenous education. In other words, the campout offers students another chance to reconnect with their Native sense of self.

This effect is demonstrated in what students write in their candid reflections of the cultural campout experiences. The excerpts below demonstrate the importance of students' experiences to their sense of self and to their beliefs and values. The essays help show how students were evolving a critical Indigenous consciousness and how they were embracing the values reinforced through the program. In these excerpts, students addressed the power they felt from the landscape, their pride in being Native American, their observations of both the continuity and the changes (for example, assimilation) they see that have occurred among Native American people, their own sense of accomplishment, and their connection or reconnection to their heritage:

- Going to Canyon de Chelly was a great opportunity for us. It let us demonstrate how adept we are at working as a group. Our hosts showed us a lot about the history of the people that lived there for hundreds of years. I was so impressed with the scenery and I will forever remember the beauty and power the cliffs, rocks, and sand hold.

-I got a better understanding of my own traditions, and why it is very important. I experienced *Navajo* perceptions of life and not everything is about having a big house or lots of money but about your family and your traditions.

-This trip I am very grateful for taking because it not only taught me survival skills that the Navajos have used. But it has shown me how society has grown away from some traditional ways. We have grown technologically in the white society and have adapted to lethargic ways of life.

- On this trip I also seen the value of tradition is highly needed for my people and me. From what I witnessed, I have seen and heard the exchange of the Navajo dialect. It just amazes me so much how they can keep their language alive for this long. From as far as I could tell when you were sent to a boarding school, when times were rough, you would be punished for speaking your language. So to hear and see that the language can partly be spoken fluently between the young and old is overwhelming. Back at home, the call for learning the language is very low. So I'm just full of ahh to these Navajos for keeping the Navajo tradition alive. And I say the value of tradition is because that is how Indian people are unique.

- While we were there, we stayed with a Navajo family, and as a Navajo myself, I felt I was at home. They gave many teachings of our culture and since my grandmother had taught them to me, I also translated and helped people to understand a few of our traditions. I have always been proud of my heritage and taught people, all of whom were Navajo children, but these people were from different tribes. It was just a great feeling for me.

-My personal experience on the camping trip was enlightening and truly inspiring. Being from an area where I don't live on a reservation and don't have any cultural influence, it was very interesting to see the bonding, passing on of traditions, and listening to oral traditions. I finally felt apart of a tribe, a nation, a clan. That is a feeling that I will never forget and will always cherish.

-I am very thankful for my time there, even the hike up the canyon which pushed me to my limits, and I do mean limits, and the cultural sweat that put me back in touch with my traditional spiritual side that I at times feel that I lose touch with. But the week at the canyon put me back in perspective of where I come from and instilled it into my memory, in order that I will remain true, true to myself, true to my people.

The cultural campout is one important example of how TRIBES intersects with critical pedagogy and Indigenous education to achieve critical Indigenous consciousness by restoring students' Native values and sense of self. Given students' diverse backgrounds and sense of connection to their cultural communities, their experiences were all similar in that they expressed feelings of pride and respect for the host family's and their own Native heritage. Students' experiences in Canyon de Chelly helped to improve or strengthen a love of themselves and their people that, according to Cecelia Fire Thunder (2005), is an important first step to committing to community.

#### *Commitment to Community*

Commitment to community is profoundly encouraged through the Lobo Nation project. Students are encouraged to think critically about how the United States and Canadian governments have historically interacted with Native people. They are provoked to become critically conscious of themselves and their roles in the future by emulating the ways in which tribal leaders act when faced with complex problems and decisions. In this project, students create a prototypical tribal government and have an opportunity to apply the concepts they learn in their NAS course to their own Lobo Nation. They define their nation's values and priorities and grapple with how to maintain those values and priorities within the context of modernity. Students are often challenged to resolve what they are and are not willing to compromise. They create their own governing structure based on traditional or contemporary models of tribal governments, and make decisions about the social, environmental, cultural, political, and economic future of their tribe. To make the activity more realistic and compelling, students are given social and environmental dilemmas which they must resolve. For example, in 2004 students had to decide whether or not to close a coal company whose air pollution created health problems for Lobo members even though the coal company provided a significant portion of tribal income and jobs (Tribal Resource Institute in Business Engineering and Science, 2004). Students had to weigh the value of economic prosperity over tribal members' health. This sort of dilemma is especially relevant in today's tribal government activities. Recently, for example, the Navajo Nation banned uranium mining within its boundaries. Even though this decision was intended to protect water resources and the health

of the Navajo community, it also meant that the tribe would lose a significant portion of its income and jobs (Shebala, 2005).

The Lobo Nation project is intended to inspire students to become future leaders of Native nations and to commit to their communities. Its purpose is also to give them a realistic perspective on the kinds of issues Native nations face. Students' reflection essays<sup>6</sup> about what they expect from the Lobo Nation project demonstrate their evolving commitment to their communities:

-It will be our chance to create a "world" or "Nation" of our own to run and deal with issues that occur so that we can take home these skills to benefit our own tribes and Nations.

-I think the exciting thing about it is that, in a sense, your helping people. Not just any people but *your* people and that should be very rewarding.

-The exciting part about Nation building is actually getting to experience first hand what our tribal government has to do and that my decisions may be instrumental in future decisions of other Native Nations.

The intersection between critical pedagogy and Indigenous education in the Lobo Nation project is apparent in the way students are challenged to think about nation building from an Indigenous perspective. It is also apparent in how they challenge each other to examine the ways their Native communities and their Lobo Nation might be internally colonized or subscribe to oppressive conditions. For example, one issue of high debate and emotion in the 2005 program related to the identity paradox. Students were grappling with how the Lobo Nation should define membership. The debate was over whether to return to pre-colonial ideas of tribal membership (which were not based on blood or racial lines) or to continue with the American-imposed system of basing membership on "blood quantum"<sup>7</sup>. These issues regarding identity are extremely complex and personal, and resolving them required students to be especially thoughtful and critical while maintaining sensitivity to their fellow classmates. The students decided to loosen the requirements of a blood quantum system of membership to be more inclusive, but they issued a disclaimer that the policy would have to be modified in the future to prevent statistical genocide of their nation<sup>8</sup>. Their policy demonstrates students' own struggles with the identity paradox yet they remained committed to doing what they felt was best for their nation.

Students revealed their desire to contribute to their communities in their reflection essays as well. The excerpts below exhibit students' inspirations or intentions to serve their communities based on their experiences in TRIBES:

-The TRIBES program has enhanced my understanding of Native Americans. I know now what is important and how we can help as far as politics, government, culture, and governing our tribe. I have more better understanding and different

views and aspects of Native Americans and events that take place in Indian Country, all due to the TRIBES program. I have more motivation and inspiration to finish college and help out my tribe.

-This class made me want to give a second thought on coming back to work for my tribe, whereas before, working for my tribe had no interest to me. I now feel that if I put work into it, I can help my tribe in the long run.

-Many of the speakers have also encouraged me to go on with my education and come back to my nation to help my people. I mean I've always wanted to do that, but they have just motivated me even more.

-Truly, I feel privileged to have been accepted as a participant for a program that has so much influence on the future. I am leaving as a better person that will not only contribute what I have learned to my tribe, but to my community, and the world.

The Lobo Nation project emphasizes to students the importance of their tribal government as well as its challenges and helps students learn how to become involved in the governance process. It plants a small seed of realism and new found respect for what tribal leaders must consider in making decisions about the future of their nations. It also gives students some confidence about their ability to create change in their communities—the objectives of critical pedagogy and Indigenous education—and stimulates their commitment to their communities.

### **Conclusion**

Because TRIBES intersects with both Indigenous education and critical pedagogy, it can provide insight into current work by Native scholars to develop and shape Indigenous critical theories to meet the unique and specific educational needs of Indigenous peoples (Grande, 2004; Martinez, 2003; Smith, 1999; Smith, 2003). TRIBES helps students learn about Native America and Native people's place within it in a way that is consistent with Native people's own terms and is rooted in Indigenous values and worldviews.

TRIBES also provides an intersection between critical pedagogy and Indigenous education by enhancing both a communal spirit and a critical Indigenous consciousness among its students. In this respect, TRIBES restores Indigenous educational goals by using traditional ideas of Indigenous education and weaving them into a college preparatory program that teaches students to use the tools of higher education in western society to serve Indigenous goals in Indigenous communities. TRIBES is also an example of critical pedagogy because it challenges the hidden curriculum and educational approaches taken by western educational institutions. Through its academic, residential, and

community-based activities, TRIBES transforms individual students by promoting the development of a critical Indigenous consciousness that also extends to how students relate to their families, their communities, and Native America. This extension of a critical Indigenous consciousness occurs as a result of course content, the problem solving and decision making students must perform in the Lobo Nation project, the personal interactions and self reflections students engage in during their residence activities, and the experiences of participating in the community-based events. TRIBES transforms Native communities by inspiring its students to become contributing members of their communities, a philosophical objective of Indigenous education. Students intend to return to their Native communities to become leaders who will promote Indigenous values.

As a result, TRIBES helps students to realize what it means to become a complete human being through the perspectives of Indigenous peoples. Commitment to community is of utmost importance to Native people because of the need to protect their land, language, culture, and human resources in ways that embody Indigenous values. In this respect, TRIBES is helping to build a future generation of Indigenous leaders committed to the welfare of their people and communities.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I use the terms Indigenous, Native American, Native, and tribal interchangeably to refer to the Indigenous people of North America. These terms are frequently used throughout the Native communities in which I have grown up as well as those I have experienced in professional settings. I also capitalize the word “Indigenous” as this falls in line with the United Nations’ and many Native academics’ usage of the term. Referring to “Indigenous” as a proper noun is a way to acknowledge and respect Native peoples’ existence as political entities with claims to ancestral homelands.

<sup>2</sup> I am employing Grande’s (2000b) use of the term “whitestream” (p. 343) to represent how American society remains structured primarily on the basis of Anglo-European experiences, although not all of America is ethnically white.

<sup>3</sup> “Walatowa” is the Jemez name for their people.

<sup>4</sup> A viga is a pillar carved from tree trunks. They are commonly used in homes and buildings in New Mexico.

<sup>5</sup> Cochiti’s Feast day is an annual event where the community dances a traditional corn dance in celebration of their harvest and of their patron saint, Saint Bonaventure. The other Pueblos of New Mexico also have Feast days that fall on various dates throughout the spring, summer, and fall.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from the 2005 reflection essays.

<sup>7</sup> The U.S. government has imposed standards for individual enrollment in Native nations based on levels of blood quantum (Thornton, 1987). In order to be officially recognized as a member of a federally recognized tribe, an individual must have inherited  $\frac{1}{4}$  blood quantum. Most Native nations continue to practice this method of enrollment, although a few have changed, redefined, and implemented their own membership rules.

<sup>8</sup> The policy comes from TRIBES students' 2005 Lobo Nation proposals, which are passed on to the next year's Lobo Nation to maintain, revise, or abolish.

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