

EMPOWERING NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS: APPROACHES TO ENHANCING THE
TRIBAL COLLEGE WRITING CLASSROOM

A Paper
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Department:
English

May 2018

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

Empowering Native American Students: Approaches to Enhancing the
Tribal College Writing Classroom

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this *disquisition* complies with North Dakota
State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to address the writing methods and strategies used within the Tribal College Writing classroom by providing insight into best practices to improve writing at Tribal Colleges. While elaborating on classroom environment, I expand on what is currently happening in the classroom by assessing methods that work and enhancing strategies that could be improved. An anecdotal approach is applied to the observations of Tribal College Writing instructor's methods and strategies in their classrooms. The goal is to orient myself in the Tribal college classroom and administration environment. I hope to offer tools and knowledge from experienced authors and educators with the hope of creating a comfortable space for students to thrive and understand the importance of writing within the Tribal College classroom and beyond.

DEDICATION

To my collaborators:
Kelly, Betsy, and Denise.

To my tiwahe (family):
Kunsi (Grandma) Elissa,
Ina (Mom) Terri,
Ate (Dad) Bryan,
Micinksi (Son) Hayden,
Micunksi (Daughter) Hailey and
Kicica (Companion) Josh

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INTRODUCTION

“Anpetu de cante iyuskiya nape ciyuzapiye. Heather Flute emakiyapiye ka Damakota winyan etanhan Lake Traverse Reservation.” The translation of this Dakota greeting is the following: Today I greet you with a joyful heart and hand shake. My name is Heather Flute, and I am a Dakota woman from the Lake Traverse Reservation.

I am fortunate enough to have the tools to both speak and write in my Dakota language. Today, there are roughly 60 fluent speakers on the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Lake Traverse Reservation. Though I can speak some of the language, I am not one of the 60 fluent members. According to Sisseton- Wahpeton Oyate Dakota Language Institute Director, Tammy Dacoteau, If the language is not revived within ten years, it will be lost. With that loss, follows the loss of culture. Without language and culture, the people are not able to carry on the Dakota traditions. With this in mind, I set out on my academic journey to North Dakota State University to obtain my master’s degree in English Composition. Gaining a degree in English Composition has provided me with the tools to teach the fundamentals of writing. In doing so, given my background in Dakota culture combined with the experience of teaching writing, I can now use these tools to teach writing in a positive way, as opposed to the negative way that writing, was forced onto many Native American people throughout colonization.

Throughout the journey of my education, my goal was to return to my reservation to create change for my people. With an educational background of rhetoric/ composition studies in English, I wondered, “What can I do to help the people and how can I create change for the betterment of my people?” With this question in mind, I veered towards researching tribal colleges in much of my graduate course work. The research field is large when it comes to exploring the tribal college classroom. It’s because of this large field full of capabilities and the

research on tribal colleges which lead me to focus on writing—an area that had rarely been mentioned by the mainstream scholars of rhetoric and composition.

I chose to focus on the writing classroom in the tribal college—how writing is taught, and which approaches are successful. With this in mind, a few inquiry questions are helpful: How can we encourage positive writing practices among Native American students at the tribal college? How can we teach Native American students to value writing when the culture didn't incorporate the written word until it was forced during assimilation? Lastly, what methods and strategies are used are used to blend culture with writing to build effective writers?

Along with these questions, it's important to keep the goals of creating a road map for future tribal college teachers in mind. While researching the inquiry questions, I naturally gravitate towards research by honorable Native American authors in the field of Native American rhetoric and composition—Scott Richard Lyons, Malea Powell, Joyce Rain Anderson, and Lisa King, and Paul Zolbrod. These scholars have inspired me with their concepts of teaching Native American students and encouraged me to discover my own research in their footsteps; the path of Native American teaching and storytelling.

Gwen Westerman and Bruce White also discuss story in their book, *Mni Sota Makoce: The Land of the Dakota*, “It is through our stories that we all understand where we come from, regardless of our heritage or background or religion” (16). I hold this phrase close to me as my Dakota history plays a large role in my everyday life. It's who I am, how I was raised, and where I come from. The past of the Dakota people is kept within my beliefs. Though the past events of Native American people leave my heart full of sorrow, it's never to be considered a tragedy. The Dakota people are resilient and continue to strive and survive every day.

Native American people incorporate storytelling as a form of rhetoric in the teachings of the people. Storytelling has become our mode of communication—a means of handing down lessons and teachings from generation to generation. Many times, the stories are left open to interpretation for the audience to make their own meaning. The tradition of storytelling leads to the next section of this paper, the stories of three Dakota women.

STORIES OF THREE DAKOTA WOMEN

Heather's Story

Picture a young, fourteen-year-old Native American girl, lounging in bed, reading a book intently. She has dark hair and eyes; her skin is light with an odd olive undertone, and she enjoys reading novels such as *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*, and the *Harry Potter* series all through the night. She reads to escape life's pressures. She has attended both tribal school and public schools where she never fully fit in at either school. She realizes that her skin color does not match either school's occupants. She drowns herself in books and novels that help her forget what she looks like, where she does not fit in, and what others think of her. Her books are her freedom and her voice that has been muted by teachers, family, and friends. Teachers that never called on her in class, never pushed her to succeed because she was "just another Indian kid" in the public school and by classmates that made fun of her for "looking like a white girl" and at the same time, "not looking Indian enough." That girl is me. I never fit in because my skin was too light in the tribal school, and too dark in the public school. Reading allowed me, to be me, free from judgement.

My story is about overcoming odds, finding my voice, and giving back to my community. It was not until attending the Sisseton-Wahpeton Tribal College on the Lake Traverse reservation that I had discovered the joys of writing.

One day in Mastering Life Skills class, the college dean, Susan, substituted for the teacher. Susan gave a writing assignment: “Write about an event that changed your life.” That was the only instruction she gave the class. I wrote avidly about the birth of my son, Hayden, and the spark of clarity he instilled in me to attend and continue college. The next class period, the substitute returned my paper and had written “I enjoyed reading your paper, you have so much to write about. One day we will write a book together.” Her comments changed my life.

Susan had ignited something within me, something deep that I didn't know existed. It was a passion of wanting to succeed. That thought sparked another fire. I wanted to go to college and better my life. All of this insight and passion, from a teacher telling me she wanted to write a book with me someday. Susan had instilled within me something that I didn't realize. She gave me confidence. She made me feel accepted. She did not criticize me for living on a reservation and laugh that my biggest life accomplishment was giving birth. Rather, she encouraged me. Her reaction to my writing gave me confidence to believe that I could try new things and not fear the outcome because I was good enough and I could do anything I set my mind to. Confidence is an important asset to possess, especially in a reservation community. Confidence within the tribal college writing classroom is even more important.

Ina's (Mom's) Story

I don't remember my mom ever reading to me, but my dad tells me she would frequently do so when I was young. He once told me that she started reading to me when I was growing inside of her belly. Several times she's expressed how she doesn't like to read or write. In 2007, she graduated from our community's tribal college—it took her ten years to accomplish her goal. Despite having three grown children and working a full-time job, she persisted and finished her Associates Degree in Early Childhood Development. I remember how happy she was when she

graduated. Upon her graduation, she gave me her English Composition notebook. Curious, I thumbed through it and came across a journaling assignment. I expected to find old assignments, maybe something that could help me because I had just enrolled in the same tribal college that year. Her writing was extremely truthful, to the point, and somehow, sad.

One journal assignment read, “I am supposed to free write about a topic in writing, but I really don’t like writing and I don’t think I’m that good at it.” It was only a few lines and though it wasn’t poorly written, it was like she was stuck at a roadblock and literally couldn’t write. All she had to do was write about whatever came to her mind. It wasn’t that she didn’t have experience or subject matter to write about, because my mom is a strong, opinionated woman, but she literally couldn’t force herself to write about anything. I remember the tone of her work was fearful, or rather, embarrassed about not wanting to or even liking to write. Reading her free writing leads me to wonder how many other people face this same roadblock when it comes to writing. What is it that makes them fear writing? Was it because she was raised by my Kunsi (great grandma) who attended a boarding school? Or did she fear writing because, as Native American people, we are taught not to boast about ourselves? Freewriting can bring up such issues, and this could be a daunting task for a person whose cultural practices are to be humble. Or is the fact that she had a writing teacher who didn’t express the importance of writing? When I ask her why she doesn’t like writing, all she says is, “I just don’t like it.”

Kunsi’s (Grandma’s) Story

I remember visiting my grandma Kunsi’s home every Christmas. We called her “grandma Kunsi,” which is essential to saying “grandma grandma” in Dakota. She was my maternal great grandma and she lived alone in the hills 20 miles away from town. That Christmas when I was 6, I recall getting ready to go to church with her as I asked, “Kunsi, why do you go to church and

inipi?” (inipi is a Native American cultural practice where people go for prayer—it’s considered to be a spiritual practice rather than a religious practice). Her response was, “Because I like to.” I remember asking, “OK, but why?” She never explained why.

Years later, I realized the answer to that question--she wanted to go to church because that’s what she had learned, and she wanted to practice her spirituality because that’s who she was—that was her spirituality. So, when I asked her why she would do both, it’s because she had the opportunity to choose, an option not all Native American people had after the 1900’s.

My Kungsi was born in 1920 and at one point, attended a boarding school. To this day, I don’t know her whole story, because she never spoke of it. I can also remember her answering the phone, and then having long conversations in Dakota. It was as if she were speaking in code because she knew no one could understand her. She would talk and talk, and then laugh and talk some more. When she would hang up, I’d ask, “Who was that and what did you talk about?” She would say, “My friend.” Again, no explanation.

Eight years later, my mom asked Kungsi how to say “watermelon” in Dakota and my Kungsi hesitated to respond. She liked to avoid those types of questions and would often change the subject. My mom finally asked her, “Why didn’t you teach me Dakota?” All my Kungsi said was, “I don’t like to talk about it.” That was the night my mom told me Kungsi went to a boarding school and that was why she won’t teach anyone the language.

All three stories tell of different events, but they also have the similar points. Story is important and needed to understand our history and as Native American people, a form of communication and teaching. My story is about student teacher engagement and how I came to value writing. My mom's story is of understanding how a generation may fear writing, and my Kungsi's story begins the historical trauma through language and culture loss. But this is not a story about shortcomings, it's a story about learning from story, overcoming odds, and empowering students. But in order to discuss empowerment and engagement, it's also important to know a bit more history to better understand Dakota people.

DAKOTA HISTORY: THE GREAT SIOUX NATION, THE WRITTEN ALPHABET, THE DAKOTA CONFLICT, AND THE HANGING OF 38 DAKOTA MEN

The Dakota people were known as the Great Sioux Nation and consist of three major dialects in proximity; the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota. They roamed the territories that are now known as Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Northern Nebraska, eastern Wyoming, southeastern Montana, and north into Canada. The three dialects each evolved into distinct areas along the Missouri River. The Dakota lived east of the Missouri River, the Lakota, west of the River, and the Nakota alongside the River (Knudson, Snow, Canku 3). Today, it's still an indicator of which dialect you come from based on whether you are east river, west river or along the river.

The early 1800s were known as the Missionary Era. Samuel W. and Gideon Pond were two known missionaries that insisted on “saving” as many Indians as possible by learning the language and culture of the Dakota. In 1833, The Pond brothers then developed an English alphabet for writing the Dakota language. The more the Pond brothers learned the language and culture, the better it became to converse with the Dakota regularly and eventually, the brothers began to understand the culture (Knudson, Snow, Canku 4). This is an important event to recall because it was the first-time Native American people were exposed to writing—it was an Anglo way of documenting communication to one another, which was something new to Native American people.

This is not to say Native American people didn't have their own form of communication other than oral recollection and memory, but it was the first time they were exposed to a European form of written documentation that was not inspired nor crafted by Native American people, but rather created by outsiders. This also does not mean that Native American people

didn't have their own form of documenting language as they may have used their own symbols to mark language, it's just to say that an outside influence began the whole new era of written documentation through an outsider's perspective. An outsider's form of symbols (alphabet) initiated a new system of communication unfamiliar to Native American people.

In 1837 the Dakota gave in to the pressures and sold their land east of the Mississippi to the Government. At the same time, the Government was forcing missionaries to confine the Dakota to reservations, where it would be easier to control the Dakota. The missionaries would then push education in reading and writing in English onto the Dakota. "Treaties signed at Traverse de Sioux and Mendota in 1851 took away their remaining land in Minnesota except for a small reservation along the Minnesota River" (Gibbon 5). Food rations were allotted to the Dakota by the Government but were not always paid on time or were hardly of good sustenance. This, along with other issues, lead to the Dakota Conflict of 1862 (Gibbon 5). The Dakota Conflict marked the beginning of many devastating acts done to the Dakota.

According to University of Minnesota's Dakota Conflict of 1862 web page, The Dakota Conflict only lasted five weeks but resulted in turmoil. It began when a Dakota hunting party stole eggs from settlers. I could imagine they were hungry because the government wouldn't give them adequate food rations and they were not always reliably given. The raid led to the death of five settlers. Little Crow decided to continue the raid and held another against the Lower Sioux Agency near Morton, Minnesota. Because of the Civil War, the Government was slow to send troops. "On September 23, federal forces defeated the Dakota at the Battle of Wood Lake in Yellow Medicine County. Three days later, the Dakota surrendered, releasing nearly 300 captives. The Dakota who surrendered were held until military trials could take place that

November. Hundreds of Dakota were held at Camp Release, near Montevideo” (Holocaust and Genocide Education).

In November 1862, the 498 trials began. Three hundred out of the four hundred and ninety-eight Dakota men were sentenced to death. The Dakota were not allowed legal representation. Following the trial, “President Abraham Lincoln commuted all but 39 sentences, deciding only the Dakota involved in civilian massacres should be executed. On December 26 1862, 38 Dakota men were hanged in Mankato. An event which remains the largest single execution in American history (Dakota War of 1862, Holocaust and Genocide Education). To this day, Native American people from all over come to remember the Dakota 38 that were hung: A horse ride takes place all the way from South Dakota to Mankato, Minnesota every year on the anniversary of the hanging to honor those who stood up to the government and fought.

A few years after the Dakota Conflict, in “1869, herds of bison were slaughtered for their hides which were shipped back east in boxcars. By the mid 1870’s bison were nearly extinct in the central plains, and by the mid-1880s they had disappeared in the northern plains” (Gibbon 6). This was the main food source for the Dakota people but also, a huge cultural devastation because the bison was viewed as “Wakan” or holy and were a part of the Dakota people’s way of life. During the 1890s, aside from being forced to live on reservations, many children were taken from their homes and placed into boarding schools to learn the American way of life. One boarding school was called Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, where Indian children were forced to abandon their ways of life, which included their culture and language. They were forced to speak only English (Gibbon 7). Though that is not all that happened to Native American children. The following section discusses Native American assimilation and boarding schools in further detail.

ASSIMILATION AND BOARDING SCHOOLS: CARLISLE INDIAN SCHOOL

The assimilation of Dakota people eventually leads to the placement of Native American children into boarding schools. “The Assimilation Policy enacted the most destructive actions to Native American people. The prohibition of self-governance resulted in total economic and political dependence of the Dakota people on the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)” (Knudson, Snow, Canku 5). The goal was to assimilate all American Indian people into European society and to abolish reservations. Next, the government took Dakota children from their families and placed them in boarding schools. The goal of the boarding school was to convert the Indian to be a functioning person in the US society. In these schools, children were forbidden to speak their languages and the consequences for disobeying the rules were horrid. Generations of Dakota people lost the ability to speak Dakota. Loss of language leads to loss of culture since the two are so closely intertwined (Knudson, Snow, Canku 5). Author Sandy Grande also revisits boarding schools in her book *Red Pedagogy*:

The era of Indian boarding schools reigned from the nineteenth century through the early twentieth century. Such schools worked explicitly with the U.S government to implement federal policies (i.e. allotment) servicing to “kill the Indian, save the man.” The process began with the (often forcible) removal of young children from their homes and community and transporting them to geographically and ideologically foreign places. Upon the arrival children were subjected to English-only and Anglo-only centric curricula (Grande 14).

Grande quotes Richard Henry Pratt’s motto, “kill the Indian, save the man,” which expressed his attempt to colonize Native American people through the creation of the first

boarding school, Carlisle, located in Pennsylvania. In order to fully understand this phrase, a bit more information must be shared about Richard Henry Pratt.

Pratt's life revolved around the military. The military shaped his life and provided him a model for dealing with Native Americans. In 1879, the Department of Interior and War allowed him to establish Carlisle Indian School. Pratt's logic came from the military, and this reflected in his treatment of Native American children in the boarding school. The Dickinson University webpage (Pratt's alma mater) describes Pratt's harsh rules and even harsher punishment:

Despite objections from several students, their hair was cut, and the boys were issued military uniforms and the girls were given proper dresses. The students were taught to practice marching and drilling. Each child was to select a new Anglo name. Students were forced to abandon their native language and began English lessons as soon as they arrived at Carlisle. They were punished, at times harshly, if they spoke their native tongues, even privately (Dickinson Chronicles, Richard "Henry Pratt").

Pratt's acts directly violated the morals of the children and their culture. Dakota people honor their hair and it is only cut in certain circumstances. For example, when a Dakota mourn the loss of a loved one when they die, they cut their hair. To have their hair cut from outsiders must have been traumatizing and confusing for many of the children who attended boarding schools. When children were "punished, at times harshly" they were being punished for speaking their own language. All of these acts done to Dakota children created a ripple effect of trauma that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Along with physical demoralizing and physical punishment, Pratt also enforced Christian religion onto the students. He called the students "Indian reformers," and it was his mission to reform all of the students into "civilized" people. Pratt has said, "In Indian civilization I am

Baptist because I believe in immersing the Indians in our civilization and when we get them under holding them there until they are thoroughly soaked” (Dickinson Chronicles). Pratt also had another goal called “The Outing System” where Native American children were able to venture outside the school walls into businesses but also into the homes of white families. Pratt’s objective was to scatter all 70,000 Native American children across the country and assign them to white families.

Some students died while at the boarding school. Many ran away to return home, only to find out that their home was no longer “home” because of the placement of reservations. The students had a difficult time finding employment because their language had been replaced with English, which didn’t aid them when they returned home.

The result of the boarding school era caused many Native American people to change; their language was stripped from them, forcing them to lose a sense of identity and respect in who they once were as people. This identity loss trickles down through generational trauma and many Dakota people still feel the effects today.

During this research, I came across many articles and books written about boarding schools. Growing up, I remember hearing stories of the violent acts that took place during the boarding school era. This causes my research to be heart-heavy, and I found it difficult to reason meaning behind white authors who were teachers at Carlisle—keeping in mind that during this time period, the majority of educated writers were white teachers and authors. For example, a brief article written in 1905 by Ann H. Stewart titled, “Work in the Carlisle Indian School” begins, “Considering the purpose of the Indian—which is to make him self- supporting as speedily as possible—the opportunities and environment at Carlisle seem favorable. Effort is made to arouse in the Indian youth interest and ambition in life, and the courage and ability to

compete in civilized industries” (571). Initially, this passage seems harmless, given, only one side to the story is presented—the teachers. The author continues, “all this manual training is found to be of great value with these children. It not only awakens their mental powers and sustains interests but is an excellent factor in discipline” (573). Again, only the teacher’s point of view of the classroom is presented.

Authors Jacqueline Fear-Segal and Susan D. Rose also mention that stories written from Carlisle appear skewed, “Although the stories of Carlisle and its legacies are complex, the sources through which these can be tracked are very one-sided because the official record was created and preserved by white officials. Those who did write mostly for school publications were under the scrutiny of white editors” (4). Fear-Segal and Rose continue to discuss what it was like for Natives on their return home from Carlisle Indian school:

Many students did not speak about their experiences but stories that were told and passed down the generations orally often remained closely guarded within the communities; for understandable reasons, they are not widely accessible. Yet it is an indisputable fact that the Indian school initiated a large-scale diaspora of Native children, and the geo-spatial dislocation they experienced as part of settler colonialism was grounded in a new and foreign place name that would soon become infamous in all Native communities as a major site of cultural genocide: Carlisle (4).

THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY: HISTORICAL AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

As mentioned earlier, my Kumsi attended a boarding school. Though her language never fully left her, she wouldn't teach it to my mother, who asked her several times, only to never receive a direct answer as to why she would not teach her the language. It's important to know history, where people come from, especially if we want to know where we are going. This goes hand in hand with storytelling. Though my grandma wouldn't teach the language, she did tell stories. I remember a story she told... a story about a little boy who couldn't find the Dakota word for train. We were not given context, or scenario, only that the boy had to explain to a non-Native American that he had to be on a train. The boy tried and tried to find the word, but in the end, he voiced the word as it sounded, what I've come later to find as an onomatopoeia. It was a hilarious story, and everyone laughed. That was closest she ever got to teaching the language. One thing is for sure, Native American people do like their stories and their humor. She turned the brief Dakota lesson into a funny story, something most Native American people are good at doing, telling stories and laughing. It's part of our culture—to not dwell on the sad past but celebrate our identity by telling stories that make everyone happy.

I am quite fluent on relating information through story, as it's something I've learned through teaching in the classroom, but more importantly, historically from my family. One particular family member I credit for this ability is my dad. For example, on my wedding day I walked down the aisle on my dad's arm. He noticed I was begging to weep. Naturally he whispered in my ear, "Hey, just think of *fat guy in a little coat* from Tommy Boy." My dad would often tell me this same phrase when I was younger, right before I would go out to competition during a powwow. It was a way to divert my attention, to think of something that

would make me laugh and make me happy: a way to divert my attention with a quick memory of a story (more like an inside joke we shared together). It was his way of telling me I was overthinking something and to lighten up. That is my family's way of moving past hardship—telling stories and laughing. We learned these techniques because we had something to overcome. My Kumsi had to overcome the boarding school era, and my dad had a hard upbringing as a child. They both had traumatic events within their lives that they had to overcome, and they both had their ways of dealing with the past. We learn through laughter with one another. That is why Native American people are not a tragedy--we are still creating our stories while learning and laughing. But in order to laugh, teach lessons and heal, a little more background is needed to understand why Native American people view certain instances, like writing or institutions, in a certain negative light—through the historical trauma influenced through boarding schools.

Not only Native American people see the value in teaching through story. Geneva Gay mirrors this concept in her book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, when she writes about the importance of story when teaching:

A story perspective allows the integration of more types of information and styles of presentation than are customary in more conventional styles of scholarly writing and research. This demonstrates how research, theory and practice are woven together to develop major ideas; establish the fact that school achievement involves more than academics; attempts to convey a feeling for the personhood of the students of concern in the analysis; and explains why culturally responsive teaching is a dynamic process. (2) Every person has a story, but the story of boarding schools is not such a pretty story; it is traumatic, including; assimilation, colonization, and boarding schools. These acts can be linked to historical trauma, or intergenerational trauma.

Maria Yellowhorse Braveheart describes historical trauma as, “cumulative wounding across generations” (246). This cumulative wounding is sometimes passed down from generation to generation, sometimes without even knowing it is being imprinted. My Kumsi unintentionally carried this burden when she stopped the learning of our language and didn’t pass it down to my mom and, in turn, I hadn’t had the privilege to learn the language first hand.

Another term for historical trauma is known as intergenerational trauma, which is defined as, “Living with historical collective traumas experienced by their ancestors” (Bombay et al. 321). Historical trauma has also affected other terms of Native American people, such as the First Nations people of Canada. Another term that has the same meaning is intergenerational trauma. The term intergenerational relates psychological, physiological and emotional effects and disorders to intergenerational trauma of offspring of First Nations people who experienced harsh trauma in Indian Residential Schools (IRS). The 19th century in Canada was marked by government policies to assimilate First Nations people based on the assumption that Whites were inherently superior to Indians (Bombay et al. 322).

As a result of this trauma, the article on IRS trauma mentions children of IRS showing signs of many disorders. These signs are also linked to a number of health disorders and behaviors as well as an increased vulnerability to negative effects of stressors among IRS offspring and poor coping strategies (Bombay et al. 324). Bombay et. al also highlight cultural identity and how it may also be a contributing factor in the issue of transgenerational trauma, as the goal was to assimilate aboriginal children and, “instill a sense of shame regarding their culture, it might be expected that these experiences had effects on aspects of aboriginal identity” (Bombay et. al. 327). These factors seep down the generational lines in many Native American

people—whether they are Dakota or First Nations people who live in Canada. The effects are still being felt in today’s generations of people. These effects may show themselves in different ways, shapes and forms. For my Kungsi, she would not teach her family the language. For others, who are children or grandchildren of the Boarding school and IRS era, these experiences may present themselves in different ways, such as behaviorally, through health disorders or even as difficulty coping with stressors.

Moving from trauma and boarding schools to my research topic for this masters’ thesis, I link historical trauma to writing. I consider why some Native American students find writing burdensome, especially when asked to express themselves through writing. Many may feel intimidated, scared, or even shame when it comes to writing for an audience in a writing classroom. The effects of boarding schools lead many Native American people to distrust the written word, as it is a communication tool introduced through outsiders, Anglo settlers. Scott Richard Lyons writes:

The duplicitous interrelationships between writing, violence and colonization developed between the nineteenth century not only in boarding schools, but at the signings of hundreds of treaties, most of which were dishonored by whites—would set into motion a persistent distrust of the written word in English, one that resonates with homes and schools and courts of law still today” (449).

Many Native Americans are still hesitant when it comes to the written word. Considering Lyons’ statement about distrust of the written word, how does this transfer into the writing classroom and what can be done to change the negative views of Native American people who distrust the written word? One way this can be accomplished is done through claiming or rather,

reclaiming our rights as sovereign people and use the craft of writing as a positive tool to create positive change and empowerment among the people.

This act of claiming, or rather, reclaiming is known as rhetorical sovereignty and Lyons describes rhetorical sovereignty thus:

Rhetorical sovereignty is the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles and languages of public discourse. Placing the scene of writing squarely back into the particular contingency of the Indian rhetorical situation. Rhetorical sovereignty requires of writing teachers more than a renewed commitment to listening and learning; it also requires radical thinking of how and what we teach as the written word at all levels of schooling from preschool to graduate curricula and beyond. (449-450).

Lyons' words hold the power to change the way Native American people view writing. The teaching of rhetorical sovereignty within the tribal college classroom has the capability to create positive change and rid the negative views of writing. The act of practicing rhetorical sovereignty has the potential to heal from within—to heal from the acts of historical trauma that have been imbedded into many Native American people who still feel the effects of this trauma today.

By using rhetorical sovereignty as a foundation in the tribal college classroom, teachers can vision the writing classroom as a space where students do not fear writing because of the past, where they can trust in their writing and use it as a tool to heal and grow. A way to use writing as a tool to create change and encourage inspiration and empowerment.

In my research path of rhetorical sovereignty, trauma, boarding schools, and writing, I came across an article written by teacher Paul Zolbrod titled, "*Reading and Writing in the*

CrossCultural Classroom.” His article intrigued me as I began to link his concept of writing with trauma. Zolbrod discusses a writing prompt given to his Dine writing classroom—a response to a piece that was assigned to read. He expected students to respond to five questions; instead, many students didn’t answer the questions at all in writing. Logically, he wonders why his students chose not to provide a written response to the reading piece and provokes questions of writing to surface when his students are asked how they view writing. His findings conclude that some students do not find value in writing, “students don’t see the value in writing because they only see writing as credentials to a job” (4). One underlying theory can be linked to historical trauma. This wounding over generations has been carried with Native American people alike since colonization and is still being carried with many Native American people today.

SPECIFIC WRITING ISSUES IN TRIBAL COLLEGES TODAY

Tribal colleges allow students to attend college where culture is relevant and part of the curriculum. Attending the tribal college also provides a foundation for students to gain valuable insights on academics by obtaining their Associate's degree. By attaining a two-year degree, students are (or should be) prepared to enter their careers or continue to a University to further collect skills to attain a bachelor's degree in their chosen field. Some issues that arise on the academic side of the spectrum include a lack of Native American teachers, lack of teachers prepared to teach Native American students in a way that is culturally relevant, and a lack of materials that promote engagement and interaction as a way to learn. Joseph Flynn, et al pose similar views when they discuss community colleges: "many community college faculty members are hired for their professional aptitude rather than their pedagogical preparation" (70). Flynn et al state that this reinforces the need for advanced professional development of pedagogical understanding for community college faculty" (70). These issues become further complicated when specific courses are visited. For this research paper, I focus on the tribal college writing classroom and all of the above-mentioned issues also reside with the writing classroom—poorly prepared teachers and teachers who may not fully understand the importance of teaching culturally, relevant materials within the classroom.

Guillory and Wolverton also mention the gap of underrepresented Native American teachers within tribal colleges. They address the lack of faculty, "Because there are so few Native American faculty in higher education." The authors also suggest that non-Native

American faculty and staff familiarize themselves with issues surrounding Native American students” (60). This gap may be addressed in numerous avenues, but I rely heavily on the degree of teacher engagement, cultural awareness, culturally relevant pedagogy, and historical trauma as determining factors when it comes to levels of student engagement and comfort within the tribal college writing classroom.

To further the conversation of writing, the problem lies with teaching the value of writing and whether the teacher is prepared to teach Native American students who attend the tribal college. One way to accomplish this is gauging the way students perceive writing by the methods and strategies for teaching writing—by incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy within the writing classroom. Jaqueline Irving explains culturally relevant pedagogy as an, “effective pedagogical practice is a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement, but also helps students accept and affirm their identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge in that school (and other institutions) perpetuate” (Irving, 469). This practice emphasizes identity, connection, and critical thinking—three areas that should be incorporated into learning of Dakota culture along with history. This way, students should gain a full understanding of their history, identity within that history, and establish a connection within themselves and the teacher.

Cody Wilson also explains concepts of culturally relevant pedagogy: “a key element to CRP is the trust and relationships that teachers build with students. Through these relationships, teachers learn the strengths, needs, languages, and lifestyles of their students” (Wilson, TeachforAmerica).

Geneva Gay has a similar term used to describe teaching a diverse classroom from which she calls culturally responsive teaching. She defines this term as: “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (31). Gay’s term culturally responsive teaching discusses students of color moving forward in higher education in a way that meets the student’s needs. Gay’s term also discusses tailoring the class content to gear towards all students of color. Though these terms are similar, they also hold differences. Both could and should be incorporated within the tribal college classroom, depending on the situation and context of that classroom and school.

If I, a Dakota woman, were to teach at a larger, tribal college with a diverse population of Native American students, I would most likely choose to use culturally responsive pedagogical approach because the students would have different Native American backgrounds. If I were to teach at my home tribal college, I would start with culturally relevant pedagogy because I am part of that community and people and move on to culturally responsive pedagogy once the students have mastered the history and established an identity to the Dakota culture. Both terms are situational; therefore, it would be best to assess the situation and choose which method applies to that individual classroom.

My situation calls for culturally relevant pedagogy because I plan to teach at my home tribal college. I will use the method and term culturally relevant teaching because this is where my teaching situation would begin. Culturally relevant pedagogy can be a way to gauge the classroom to better understand the needs of the students by paying close attention to the backgrounds and cultures of students. “Teachers must learn how to recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies. If this is done, school

achievement will improve” (Gay 1). Though Gay’s words are geared towards culturally responsive pedagogy, this phrase can also be applied to teaching a culturally relevant classroom.

While focusing on culturally relevant teaching in the tribal college writing classroom, the goal of this research is to pay attention to multiple teaching methods and strategies used by studying scholarly articles relevant to the tribal college writing classroom. My hopes are to offer a well-rounded example of culturally relevant teachings to develop confident student writers who know and understand the value of writing and how it impacts their lives once they learn how to use it as a tool.

This leads to Zolbrod’s issues in the classroom that arose out of a writing assignment given to the students—they were to write five response questions to a story they had read on their own. Zolbrod found that many students refused to answer any of the questions. Eventually, he discovered that students did not value writing as a valid tool. I understand Zolbrod’s findings in relation to writing—Why don’t his students see writing as a valuable tool? This made me question writing courses in tribal colleges and how students view writing, which further lead to my research questions:

- 1) If Native American students devalue writing, what are some ways to encourage the process of writing?
- 2) How can we teach Native American students to value writing when their culture didn’t incorporate the written word until it was forced during assimilation?
- 3) What methods and strategies are used within the classroom to blend culture with writing to build effective writers?

My research question stem from Native American teachers who have taught writing in tribal college. These authors include Joyce Rain Anderson, Lisa King, Scott Richard Lyons, and Malea Powell.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I started this master's paper with stories because many cultures, especially Native American cultures believe stories are a means of learning lessons. Authors such as Malea Powell, Scott R. Lyons, Joyce Rain Anderson, and Lisa King all incorporate storytelling into their classrooms, research, and scholarly work as modes of teaching and learning. They include storytelling as a way to connect with each other as colleagues, relate to each other as people, and engage with students as scholars.

Malea Powell and Andrea Riley-Mukavetz draw heavily from storytelling in their work, "Making Native Space for Graduate Students." Both use storytelling as a way to connect and engage with one another. "In offering these stories, we're trying to focus on the how. How we used indigenous rhetorical practices to develop a syllabus and strategize... An indigenous pedagogy appropriate for graduate education" (139). In this work, Powell and Riley-Mukavetz discuss stories of how to shape their classrooms and projects quite brilliantly by telling stories within their overall story of teaching. The authors communicate with one another in order to better the indigenous rhetorical practices of the classroom and learn one method of designing their syllabus: to "begin with Native stories" (146).

Joyce Rain Anderson fuses local knowledge into coursework in her chapter, "Remapping Settler Territories: Brining Local Native Knowledge into the classroom" (163). She draws story into her coursework and ties in cultural awareness to shape her classroom. Storytelling is a powerful tool when combined with the rhetoric of teaching. Anderson connects rhetoric with storytelling, culture, and coursework to create a well- rounded framework while she also bridges community within her classroom walls.

Though storytelling plays a large role within teaching, there are also some factors that inhibit students when it comes to writing. As Zolbrod has found with his class, some students don't find value in writing. This leads me to wonder, why? There are many ways to answer this question, but in this research, I focus on one main theory that contributes to this issue—the fear of writing and the lack of value within writing resides much deeper—the issue of historical trauma.

One underlying theory of the lack of value towards writing can be linked to historical trauma, which is defined as, “cumulative wounding across generations” (Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 246). This wounding over generations has been carried with Native American people since colonization and is still being carried with many today. Yellow Horse continues to discuss the ways of traditional Lakota culture and the imperative need to connect to the spirit world. “Traditional mourning, such as cutting breaved’s hair and body, are expressions of a loss of part of oneself with the death of a close relative. Grief was impaired due to massive losses across generations and federal government’s prohibition of indigenous practices of mourning resolution” (248). When cultural identity is stripped from one’s only known belief, a sense of brokenness is instilled within them. This “brokenness” becomes what is passed from generation to generation because the ones who faced the trauma may have never dealt with the grief and pain; therefore, they were not able to heal from the traumatic events.

As previously mentioned, boarding schools also play a large role in historical trauma and generational wounding. Boarding schools were constructed to “civilize” Native American youth. Combining colonization with boarding schools’ results in historical trauma. Everything in boarding schools screams trauma: Learning a foreign language, being forced to learn an Anglo curriculum with values that are far from comfortable, and as Yellow Horse Brave Heart

visualizes boarding schools as, “children being shackled and chained to bedposts and beaten” (246). This image resonates with the reader and allows them to feel the pain and trauma associated with boarding schools.

The traumatic events and historical trauma must be emphasized in order for Native American people as the product of trauma and allow them to heal in order to break the cycle of trauma. Historical trauma may not be viewed as an issue when it comes to academics and writing, but it is highly relevant and real. Therefore, incorporating culturally responsive teaching and material within the tribal college is so important. Creating a comfortable space—a space free of judgment and bias and a space where students can express themselves through writing. In this space, students should be able to construct their own meaning and interpretations of materials that are taught. I use the term culturally responsive teaching as a means of creating a space that fosters engaged students while paying close attention to culturally responsive teaching. This includes the materials that are taught in the writing classroom, the methods of teaching, along with the chosen texts. In this same space, it is the teacher’s role to bring forth that comfortability and awareness within their classroom by incorporating culturally relevant and responsive practices.

In the case of the tribal college classroom, this may be done by teaching *to* the student, not *at* the student. Acknowledging the students’ background and needs will determine how to allow the students to feel comfortable in the classroom and in turn, will allow the students to fully immerse themselves in the course.

As a Dakota woman, it would be difficult for me to teach a writing course in a room full of students from Finland because I do not know much about their culture—their cultural learning styles, cultural norms or cultural practices—this is why culturally responsive teaching within a

tribal college is so important, it serves as a foundation for teachers to base their strategies and methods and allows them to tailor their course *for* the student. Tribal college teachers who do not practice this method fail to acknowledge the students' core of learning—through learned practices that are passed down from generation to generation. An example of a learned practice that is passed from generation to generation is storytelling. Many lessons are imbedded within the story but it's the audience's duty to interpret and make meaning of that specific lesson.

Since storytelling, culturally relevant teaching, and the environment of the classroom have been discussed, it's important that I touch base on certain re-occurring patterns that are noted which contribute to the academic success of Native American students in order to fully understand the Native American student and their success.

These areas include family and academic support—two key components in the success of Tribal College students. Authors Guillory and Wolverson state the following: Numerous studies of Native American students who attend mainstream colleges and universities suggest factors such as pre-college academic preparation, family support, supportive and involved faculty, institutional commitment, and maintaining an active presence in home communities and cultural ceremonies are crucial elements that impact these student's ability and/or desire to persist in college (Guillory and Wolverson 59). These elemental factors hold true in the Tribal College classroom because of the unique dynamic of the Native American people, students, and overall community. The factors are key components when addressing the Tribal College and Native American academic success. I have witnessed the inadequate preparation and minimal amounts of familial support when attending the tribal college. Guillory and Wolverson's factors of success were lacking for many peers in the tribal college setting, and many of those peers struggled through fundamental classes. Lack of academic preparation and family support were the biggest

driving factors that inhibit student success. Author Terry L. Wenzlaff echoes Guillory and Wolverton's claim on factors that contribute to Native American student's academic success: "Students attribute their academic success to family support, former tribal college experience, a program peer group, mentors, and university professors. After reflecting on their experiences, a majority of students indicate two key motivators of success: family support and mentoring" (41). These factors continuously occur through the research in that Native Americans need familial attention and support in order to further their educational goals and careers. Now that we know what Native American students need to succeed, we must continue to empower and encourage them to continue forth with education and tailor the curriculum and methodologies of teaching in ways that fit the student's needs—and bring forth writing.

Allowing Native American students, a quality education in an environment that can empower students to grow and succeed. This can positively impact a student's life; inversely, not allowing the access to the educational environment can have adverse effects on the student's life, exposing them to negative lifestyle choices. A lack of teaching with a culturally responsive approach in a community's value system may lead to lack of identity. In turn, could result in a lack of confidence within the student. Terri L. Wenzlaff and Ann Biewer's, *Native American Students Define Factors for their Success*, the authors believe, "Tribal Colleges afford students the opportunity to build the self-confidence to move forward" (42). The exigency of students building self-confidence in themselves is crucial. In a tribal reservation community where many students are not expected to continue with education, where they are expected to drop out of school, teaching in a way to build self-confidence and a key to empowering efficient and confident writers.

BEST PRACTICES: APPROACHES TO CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Teachers in general have the opportunity to create change within the classroom and specifically within each student. Teachers of Native American students hold the power to create change within the student and within the community. This change is important to students and the way we teach. What students learn in the classroom will be carried with them throughout their lives. One way to approach this is realizing that rhetorical sovereignty is a tool to creating that change.

The teacher in the tribal college writing classroom should remember that writing was not always a value within Native American culture. The goal in the classroom should be to grasp this concept of rhetorical sovereignty and apply it to the best of the teacher's knowledge. This may require envisioning the classroom, thinking "outside the box," and becoming creative with the curriculum. However, the teacher decides to approach the class, it's important that the teacher is aware of the concept of culturally responsive teaching in the tribal college writing classroom. It is especially beneficial for non-Native American teachers to approach to concept of cultural relevant teaching delicately because though the intentions may be evident, it's also easy to misinterpret information. As I had mentioned earlier, as a Dakota, it would be difficult for me to teach writing to a room full of students who's culture I do not fully understand. I would approach my teaching strategies sensitively because I would not want my audience to think that I know more about their culture than they do.

Teachers of Native American students should also be well versed within the culture because the learning style usually reflects that of the culture. One way to assure teachers are utilizing their ultimate capacity of culturally responsive teaching is providing specialized programs for teachers within the tribal college, particularly those who are not Native American.

Jon Reyhner, Harry Lee, and David Gabbard stress the need for specialized Native American teacher programs. This may also be applied to teachers in preparation for teaching Native American students. Reyhner et al. state:

In the past few years the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has required member institutions to articulate what their students need to learn. Central to this effort is the establishment of “knowledge base” that all professional educators must know. The rhetoric of “professionalization” promises to promote greater social and financial status for classroom teachers. But this solution to the alleged crisis in American education contains a hidden agenda. For the demand for an articulated “knowledge base” is little more than a sophisticated means of standardizing teacher education programs” (25).

Applying the concept of “knowledge base” that all teachers must know to Native American culture would help enhance the tribal college writing classroom. If it were mandatory for each teacher to enter the tribal college classroom with cultural knowledge, it may aid in understanding the student and the manner in which the students may learn. The problem with this is, if this were mandatory, it does not necessarily mean that the teacher will appreciate the culture-- knowledge and appreciation do not have the same meaning. Ideally, having knowledge of a culture would lead to appreciation, or at least, acceptance, but sadly, this is not always the case. When I attended the tribal college, I came across a teacher who didn’t mesh with the values of the culture and refused to honor some of the cultural norms within the community. The end result was the removal of that teacher because so many students complained about her teaching style and approach saying that it didn’t fit the role of the tribal college. That’s a whole other

story, this story is about creating change and promoting a comfortable learning space for students to become empowered.

Returning to Reyhner et al., they continue to discuss the importance of teaching specifically Native American students, “teachers teach the way they were taught and take "common sense" approaches to their work. A problem with Native American education is that non-Native American teachers and Native American students do not share a common culture within which to work and find mutual understanding” (27). This statement holds so much meaning in the teaching of Native American students. Though non-Native American teachers may enter the classroom with hopes to inspire and teach students, it may be hindering to those who are not in tune with the rich culture that surrounds many tribal colleges. For example, if a teacher enters the tribal college classroom with no knowledge of the culture or people, it could cause a disconnect between the student and the teacher, especially if the teacher enters the classroom with particular standards of the students. This is may also be what happened with my teacher while I was at the tribal college. She was a non-Native American teacher who was also not a part of the community. I believe she held all students at the same high standards, but within the community, her standards didn't meet the expectations of the of how she should teach. The community believed the teacher held too high of standards for the students and eventually, she resigned because of the disconnect between the teacher, student, and community. This is why culturally relevant teaching is crucial in light of teaching at a tribal college.

To further the conversation on Native American education, Elaine Chan provides recommendations for the Tribal College teachers of Native American students: “engage student’s diverse backgrounds through initiatives that involve learning about student’s cultural backgrounds as part of the curriculum” (3). It is important to combine both history and cultural

background into the curriculum of the tribal college classroom in order to produce a well-rounded, holistic student who knows who they are, where they came from, and in turn with a revamped curriculum, know where they are going in their life and career.

TEACHING THE WRITING PROCESS INSTEAD OF A FINISHED PRODUCT

As noted by Donald M. Murray, “The writer as he writes is making ethical decisions. He doesn’t test his words by the rule book, but by life. He uses language to reveal the truth to himself so that he can tell it to others. It is an exciting, eventful, evolving process” (4). When a student has many traumatic life events, this changes the way that person thinks, feels, and especially how they write. But if we teach writing as a process instead of a finished product, maybe this could bridge the gap dealing with the fear of writing as some students do as well as those who don’t find the value in writing. This method may help fearful and hesitant writers begin to open up and begin to view writing in a different light. Though teaching writing as a process is not a new idea, it’s important that teachers remember this could be a downfall when teaching in a tribal college.

The act of listening also plays a role in teaching and learning and allows the student to make meaning out of what is taught. Instead of telling them a “process” of how to complete a writing assignment, we must listen and let them create their own knowledge: “When you give him an assignment you tell him what to say and how to say it, and thereby cheat your student of the opportunity to learn the process of discovery we call writing” (5). For Native American students, it’s crucial for them to discover their own voice. This may be difficult to teach students who don’t fit the “educational mold” of standardized learning. Teachers should be aware of the way these unique students learn.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

Collaborative learning has positive outcomes by allowing the students the chance to learn from one another and interpret their versions of the material taught by the teacher. Kenneth A. Bruffee describes peer tutors and their importance in learning from one another. Collaborative learning puts the problem in the hands of the students and allows them to figure out a solution working together.

Bruffee emphasizes peer tutoring as, “a form of indirect teaching in which the teacher sets the problem and organizes students to work it out collaboratively” (637). Student reflective thought and conversation take place on numerous levels, internally and externally. The process of collaborative learning begins with thinking and having a conversation within the self before bringing the conversation to others. This is especially an important concept to uphold within the Tribal College writing classroom because it will give students the opportunity to figure out the concepts of writing together with the help of guided conversation by the teacher. This concept mitigates teaching writing as a process, a clear, but “one-way-fits-all” approach.

Collaborative learning in the tribal college classroom is essential when combined with culturally responsive teaching because it gives Native American students the opportunity to work together as a whole, to voice their opinions, and have a voice within the conversation. The culturally relevant piece fits the mold of teaching because the content should be geared toward the Native American student audience and in turn, should encourage engagement. This approach to teaching and learning can be incorporated in many different ways. For example, teachers can have students divide into small groups to further discussion amongst themselves and have students act as peer readers for writing assignments. The creativity and options are diverse.

TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE CLASSROOM

I taught English 120 for three years at the university level. I found it fascinating that so many students would think English classes focus solely on grammar and the five-paragraph format as ways to become well versed in English. In English 120, we focused on the genres of writing and within that, my classroom had a strong Native American influence. What I mean by influence, is that I would base many examples around Native American culture.

For one writing assignment, I had students journal about the pros and cons of the construction of a legalized marijuana resort that was to be built on a South Dakota Reservation. After I had explained the context of the situation, I asked questions such as, do you think this resort should be built? Why or why not? How could the creation of this resort help or hurt the tribe? How is a Native American tribe able to attain this type of resort when it is illegal in so many other states? The goal of the writing assignment was to be able to identify a controversial issue that may not be completely clear cut as the audience may initially view. These questions open the door for students to explore Native American sovereignty and the rights of Native American people along with weighing the good outcomes vs. the negative outcomes of the situation. In doing so, the topic was to engage students with critical thinking skills.

In English 120, we also discussed current issues such as the Dakota Access Pipeline. This was interesting because some students were completely put off by the situation, while others were passionate about what Native American people were standing for—exercising their right to sovereignty. I introduced this topic at the beginning of their commentary assignment. This assignment was to provide a side to a current controversial issue and persuade the reader why their argument is the best choice for the issue. Out of the three years I taught English 120 and spoke of this issue, one student chose to write about the Dakota Access Pipeline. She produced a

great argument. I believe this is because the topic was relevant to her as she was Native American, and I was also a Native American teacher. She was one of my three Native American students at the university. She connected to both me as and the topic and this is why her paper excelled—she was engaged.

TEACHING WRITING BY INFLUENCES OF SETTLER COLONIALISM

Many other writing teachers have with their own influence on writing topics. Christie Toth taught first year writing at Dine college on the Dine reservation. Her experience discusses ways to teach to a Native American audience while the teacher is a non-Native, all while influencing settler colonialism. She teaches writing in response to settler colonialism and challenges the students to uncover their history and past while learning about writing. Toth explains how she was, “eager to acknowledge and respect the unique linguistic resources in this setting, including the English language variety that most Dine College students now speak as their primary language” (20). Toth’s knowledge of the Dine is evident in her teaching. There is an imperative need that teachers recognize and respect the cultures and backgrounds of students within their classroom. By doing so, the space within the classroom will become more comfortable for the students. Toth states, “Basic writing courses can be spaces in which we help students become aware of the role language plays in both reproducing and reimagining these structures of power (Toth, 21). This means bringing language and writing together to help form a strong network tool for writing. Toth includes language in her writing classroom and instead of focusing on specifically grammar and sentence structure and encourages her students to write phrases and words from their language in their works. This way, pieces of their culture and language are incorporated into their writings.

As a second approach to teaching writing, Toth watches video clips such as *Trainspotting*, *The Wire*, *Smoke Signals*, and reality television, *here comes Honey Boo-Boo*. During class discussion, students identify defining features of the different English varieties used within the clips (21). While teaching English Composition, I too incorporated pop culture into the classroom. I used this as a means to connect with students by including popular clips and

videos into our lessons. One lesson consisted of analyzing popular tv commercials. Many of the students enjoyed this lesson because it didn't seem as if they were completing work, but in reality, they were exhibiting critical thinking and analyzation skills. At the end of the lesson, they were to create a final paper which includes methods of persuasion in writing.

Toth's third assignment includes charting distinctive features of Navajo English. I believe this to be quite interesting because it's a current and local instance that relates the students to their language in a real-time fashion. Toth says the students are usually quick to come up with lexical features and uses the example phrase for a common exclamation of surprise, "Is it?". These terms and phrases come from the students and the language they use to express themselves among themselves. By applying this approach to English, Toth is engaging her students in something that specifically relates to the student. She is engaging the student with something that interests them as if she tailors the class to the students, not around or above the students.

A fourth assignment Toth uses includes students reading through examples of writing in English varieties other than Edited American English or EAE as Toth exclaims. This affords students to view different forms of writing and how they are interpreted and produced. Students have the chance to analyze each text through a colonial lens. In turn, this connects students to their culture, both past and present.

TEACHING WRITING WITH NATIVE AMERICAN TEXTS

Michael Thompson, Lisa King, and Paul Zolbrod focus on how they teach reading and writing by incorporating Native American texts into the classroom. Michael Thompson's research questions depict the representation of the Native American author. He asks the questions, "How the oral tradition is currently "voiced" in tribal college and university classrooms?" He asks teachers, "How they approach literature and writing, particularly if the texts that they assign represent the value that Native American people have historically given to traditional stories, teachings, speeches, tribal journeys, and accomplishments" (2). Thompson states that it's taken him, "years to understand that the oral tradition could be fundamentally superior to written literature or that texts that privilege the Indigenous voice might speak more powerfully to Native students than literary masterpieces" (2). He continues to discuss how "Many Native communities generally value "the word" itself above the art of writing" (2). Many Native communities place higher value on the spoken word compared to the written word. This product of distrust formed as a result of the boarding schools and the forcing of writing onto Native American children.

In his article, Thompson interviews several teachers of writing in various tribal colleges. He discusses teacher Mary Hansen Saunders' classroom at Sinte Gleska University and emphasizes that her colleagues do not believe in "privileging the written" (2). Thompson discusses the book choice Hansen-Saunders incorporates within her classroom of Lakota Memoirs: "*With My Own Eyes: A Lakota Woman Tells Her People's Story*, by Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun and Josephine Waggoner, *Lakota Woman* by Mary Crow Dog, *Salt Camp: Her Story* by Ollie Napesni, *Bead on an Anthill and Turtle Lung Woman's Grandmother* by Delphine Red Shirt" (2). This method of teaching writing through Native American narrative creates questions

and inspires thought for the students to ponder and discuss. Through these texts, students can focus on the importance of orality within the culture of Native American writing.

Thompson continues on to discuss Haskell Professor Lorene Williams approach to teaching novels as a way to demonstrate storytelling and narrative. Williams teaches Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* in Composition 101 and *Bingo Palace* in Composition 102. Thompson writes about William's take on story, "Erdrich's work represents a slice of life reality that is easily recognizable to my students," says Williams. "Her characters represent people to whom they can relate." Erdrich's style which Williams tells her students is "circular" or "spiral" in nature, replicates in many ways oral storytelling" (Thompson, Michael 3). The concept of teaching in a circular or spiral pattern of storytelling is not a new concept to Native American people. We have been practicing this method for years, maybe without really realizing this was a form of teaching.

Lisa King approaches teaching Native American texts similarly to Thompson's. King asks questions such as, "Why teach Native American texts in the first place? How does one incorporate American Indian texts into an already crowded contact zone curriculum? "How does a teacher engage non-Native students in these texts?" King also addresses the concepts of "honoring sovereign rhetorical practices while building alliances between Native rhetoricians and non-Native instructors and students" (209). In doing so, King brings all three concepts of practice by bridging the gap between Native rhetoricians and non-Native teachers and students by bringing awareness to English literacy and its connection to the composition classroom and the text being discussed.

Practicing English literacy creates tension and goes against the grains of Native American culture. "Expressing oneself now in English, through writing English, is a literacy practice that

underscores loss.” (213). King continues, “English literacy has been a tool of assimilation, a way to destroy cultures, a way to erase the past, a way to promote imperialism, a way to speak as though sovereignty never existed” (213). Though the history of assimilation and Native American people is expressed through English literacy, this does not mean that Native American people today have not used writing as a tool to progress instead of regress. Many have used writing as a mode of healing and empowerment. This can also be implemented within the writing classroom.

King offers suggestions for different levels of teaching literature and writing courses. For example, she suggests using an Aristotelian approach when teaching first year writing when stating the, “Aristotelian model of logos- ethos- pathos, prompts critical thinking about the way global communities engage one another in public and historic discourse, and reveal Native writers as contemporary and present” (222). She also discusses ways Native American texts can be used within the writing classroom—by asking sets of questions that challenge the student to view the literature through different lenses. She asks questions like, “What do we already know about the text?”, “What does it appear to accomplish? Who is the speaker-writer, and who is the audience?” (222). The point of incorporating Native American texts into the classroom is to allow students--both non-Native and Native America--to view the texts as a mode of learning through the voices of Native American people who have been marginalized and demoted as the “other” group of people. Doing so teaches students the value of learning to read, write, and understand the importance of rhetorical sovereignty within the classroom.

A third approach to teaching Native American texts is Zolbrod’s example of a writing response on Canyon de Chelly from Laura Gilpin’s *The Ending Navaho*. This analysis slightly differs from Thompson’s and King’s approaches to teaching Native American texts. “The piece

identifies the canyon, reviews its prehistory, describes its typography, and explains its name” (Zolbrod 1). Instead of focusing on author, voice, and tone as rhetorical devices used by Thompson and King to initiate critical thinking about the text, Zolbrod adds other rhetorical devices such as scenery, context, situation, and physical description of the piece of work. Only, his findings didn’t reflect what he expected of his students. Many students didn’t respond at all to his prompt to write about the reading. He later discovered that students who enrolled in his composition course didn’t value writing as he had assumed.

He says, “Adults who enroll to become employable see courses only as credentials for jobs” (Zolbrod 2). These students only see their writing tools as means for attaining a job. Though this is important, students may be missing the fact that writing is a valuable tool to possess, not only for a job, but also for most careers. Zolbrod’s former student asserted, “literacy is not a survival skill” (3). Students don’t value writing or see it as a crucial skill for their future. In a rural community, this may often be the case teachers come into contact with while teaching composition, but how do we “correct” this thinking? One way may be through engagement. If students are not engaged with the content, they will most likely dismiss the content and material or may not fully connect with it. It’s essential that teachers find ways to engage with students in ways that enhance their learning.

Through Zolbrod’s insights into the tribal college writing classroom, he’s able to stress the importance of teaching the tribal college’s own identity, which is essential to teaching at any tribal college, “each tribal community has its own unique identity—its own story to tell, its own tradition worthy of a proper place in the worlds tapestry of cultures. And within each worldview lies a way of meeting the challenge that students face in adapting to the written word” (3). As aforementioned in the previous section, each tribal college has its own criteria, missions and

goals within the tribal college, but the common denominator is that all tribal colleges want to better their people and provide a higher education.

HEATHER'S TEACHING STORY: SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING WRITING BY AVOIDING TRAUMA

For many Native Americans or people who have faced traumatic instances with writing, the act and thought of writing can be daunting. So how can writing teachers teach in an effective fashion that focuses on a positive process of writing opposed to the negative elements (mental blocks or fears such as deadlines, edits, revisions etc.) associated with writing? By engaging students with instances that the student finds interesting. This topic will vary from student to student, but mostly, the goal is to determine that individual student's interests; hence student engagement. Through teaching English 120 for three years, I've found that 75 percent of the time, if a student is interested in their topic and engaged with it, their writing outcome is far more efficient and productive than a topic they are forced to write about. In my experience teaching, one key to engagement is through culturally responsive teaching. This means, teaching to the student's potential, not teaching in a box or in such a strict, linear fashion that the teaching approach and style are watered down and blanketed to a one-size-fits-all approach.

Through teaching English 120, my goal was to engage students and encourage them to be better writers. The term 'better' is a broad term, but I define this term according to the student. For example, if a student struggled with creativity, my goal would then be to draw that creativity out of the student. This would be done through various approaches. For example, I would have the class describe an event. What did they see, hear, taste, smell and feel? They would free write about the event and later, break into small groups to discuss what they had written. This activity was created to get students to imagine an experience and describe it in detail. The small groups would give students the chance to interact with one another and hear each other's stories to gain idea and insight if they were stuck in their writing process.

Another example to teaching to the student who has a mental block with writing is having them do a lot of free writing and journaling. This activity creates openness and allows them to write without parameters and guidelines. I would usually give them a broad topic in case they struggled with generating a topic, but for the most part, I would leave it to the student to determine their topic. Sometimes I would have the students share their journal entries with small groups or a partner, and sometimes I would ask a handful of students to share their work with the class, if they felt comfortable. This gave students the opportunity to hear what their peers had wrote about. Again, the goal was to get their creative side to feel free to express itself through writing.

There are three important factors to consider in helping teacher engage with their students. These three factors are called “the three modes of persuasion” and were coined by Aristotle. They are called, ethos, pathos, and logos. It’s important that the teacher build ethos (credibility) with the students in order to engage with them on a cultural level—many of which deem important in everyday life. Building this credibility within the student-teacher relationship will help build stronger engagement because not only will the teacher understand the student, the student will begin to accept and understand the teacher. This will lead to stronger student engagement and, in turn, overall build a confident student. It’s also important for teachers to hone a sense of cultural awareness to better builds pathos (emotion) within the classroom. This gives the teacher the ability to sense, feel, and understand cultural identities and the struggles some students may have because of their cultural beliefs. The teacher also must have logos (reasoning) within the class. This deals with how Native American students may learn, not saying that all Native American students learn the same way, but it’s important to remember that all students learn in a variety of ways, particularly Native American students.

CONCLUSION

This masters paper focuses on creating a comfortable space for Native American students as means of producing empowered writers. I use the terms comfortable, safe learning space loosely in this research because I believe in order to have an effective classroom, the teacher must engage and connect with students while incorporating culturally relevant topics and apply them to writing. In turn, this creates a comfortable environment to allow the students to build their own cognitive writing skills. If a majority of students in a writing classroom cannot find value in writing, the environment should be secure, sound, and safe. The classroom needs to be a comfortable space, free of judgment, and free of bias. The term comfort means creating a space where students do not feel constrained to write but feel encouraged to write. A comfortable space should remove stigmas associated with writing; such as writing is only one process and can only be constructed in one process. Another stigma is that teachers should teach writing in only one approach. This is not true—writing can be created and taught in multiple methods.

The enhancement of a comfortable learning environment may not only help improve writing skills, but this may also give students confidence in their writing. I believe this starts with the teacher, the overall curricula, and the delivery of the learning materials. In teaching, one must develop a strong connection and relationship with students. Once students form a certain relationship with their teacher, they then learn to trust in their teacher.

In the beginning of my graduate courses, my goal was to learn something important that I could use as a tool to bring home to my reservation. Since I began my academic journey at a tribal college, many of my research topics naturally evolved around writing and the tribal colleges and ways to improve the tribal college. My main goal of this research project was to create a guide for Native American teachers who teach writing in the tribal college. I wanted to

offer suggestions and insights on what the best approaches are to teaching writing to Native American students. In doing so, I focus on the research questions surrounding writing; if students don't value writing, how can we encourage writing practices? How can we teach Native American students to value writing when their culture didn't incorporate the written word until it was forced during assimilation? What methods and strategies are used to blend culture with writing to build effective writers?

I began this research with my story and how I came to value writing—a teacher at the tribal college said she wanted to write a book with me. Her inspiration motivated me and forced me out of my self-consciousness of writing. I loved to write but never thought I was good at it, until the day my teacher connected and engaged me. I believe this is what is needed in all tribal college writing classrooms—engagement, encouragement, and empowerment.

My mom's story is a bit different than mine. Her story is one of even more self-consciousness in writing—so much that she feared writing all together. While attending a writing course at the tribal college, my mom was given a writing assignment—to free write. When the time came to write, all she wrote about was how she didn't like to write.

After reading her journal entry, I had asked her what she thought of writing and she said that she didn't like it. She also said that she doesn't like to talk about herself, so why would she want to write about herself? This made sense to me in the fact that many Native American people are taught not to be boastful. I gather, this is why my mom and I were hesitant when it came to writing.

My Kungsi's story centers around how she was affected by attending a boarding school. My Kungsi was never one to explain in detail and she always left me curious. Though she never directly said it, her language was stripped from her, and it inhibited her from passing the

language down to my mom. Once the language is lost, the culture will soon follow. Language, identity, and culture loss may transfer historical trauma onto the next generation. In my Kungsi's instance, she experienced trauma while in boarding school. Though she never spoke of it, it is evident that her language was taken from her when she was assimilated into the boarding school life. This reflects her denial in teaching my mom the language, and her refusal to tell me the explanation of why she attended both church and inipi.

Historical trauma was then transferred onto my mom and resulted in her fear of writing and speaking the language. Since she was never really taught to speak the language, my mother also is hesitant of speaking the few Dakota words she knows. She is also fearful when it comes to expressing herself through writing which could be an outcome of historical trauma. Historical and intergenerational trauma are passed down from generation to generation in many forms, and through this research, I've discovered that many Native American students are fearful of instances where people are not expected to be fearful. For example, speaking out loud in a classroom may trigger some underlying emotions of self-consciousness because that student may not feel comfortable enough to speak in front of that specific audience. Another example is students who do not fully understand the value of writing as in Paul Zolbrod's class response displays. Either way, these issues revolve around creating a comfortable space where Native Americans feel at ease to express themselves and open their minds to conversations within the classroom in hopes of engaging students to become empowered writers. I link my Kungsi's experience to how she raised my mom and how the lack of teaching the language resulted in my mother's negative perspective on writing.

All three stories prove different yet similar problems, but the message pertains to all—storytelling is important to Dakota culture and in the tribal college classroom. It's important because historically, the mode of communication once was through oral storytelling. In each story holds a lesson for the audience to create their own meaning. This still holds value within Native American communities. I chose to lead this masters' paper with the three stories because story and family are important to Native American culture. I also wanted to tell my story, my mother's story, and may Kungsi's story so someday my two children have a piece of history to look back and reflect upon. Though there are many, many more stories to be told for my children to learn, these three stories hold the importance and background of three Dakota women and their experiences with writing.

I also chose to mirror Malea Powell, Joyce Rain Anderson, and Scott Lyons element of story because they too include this method into their writings and teachings. The element of story within the classroom allows students to make their own connections and realizations of the lesson within the story. This is crucial because storytelling in the classroom can be an avenue of connection and engagement to students along with a communication tool.

The element of story plays a large role in rhetorical sovereignty within the tribal college classroom. Each teacher should be able to establish their own needs within the classroom and teach to those needs of the student. In this case, I argue that storytelling is an effective method to utilize while exercising the Native American teacher's rhetorical sovereignty.

In addition to teacher's rhetorical sovereignty within the classroom, I devise a plan of approaches for Native American teachers at the tribal college. This plan includes best practices from Native American teachers who have experience in the tribal college classroom setting

which include teaching through the Native American lens of culturally responsive teaching, collaborative learning, teaching settler colonialism, and storytelling.

Geneva Gay focuses on culturally responsive teaching, and I blend this within the tribal classroom. It's the teacher's duty to teach to the students, not at the students. In the unique tribal college classroom, it's important that teachers understand the culture along with the community norms and ideals. Once the teachers understand the culture, they may then begin to understand the learning style of the students. Though this approach may seem simplistic, it must be approached delicately. The teacher must first earn the trust of the students (as in any relationship) once she has background knowledge of the culture. If this step is skipped, the teacher risks the trust, relationship, and engagement of the student.

The second approach to teaching in the tribal college is teaching collaborative learning. This can be done with large and small groups where students have the opportunity to interpret and communicate their own cognition of the materials from that lesson or assignment. Group collaboration also allows students to learn from one another and creates a larger opportunity for students to voice their own opinions about the topic of discussion.

The third approach involves teaching settler colonization and teaching through a Native American lens. Christie Toth is a non-Native American teacher who discusses her experience while teaching at the Dine College. Though she is not Native American, she was able to engage with her Native American students and connect with them because she had knowledge of the culture and was not trying to pretend that she knew everything about the culture.

Lastly, the fourth approach to teaching in the tribal college is storytelling. As mentioned earlier, storytelling is a large part of many Native American cultures because of its area of lesson learning and the fact that stories were many Native American cultures' way of teaching. This

approach may be found to be a successful way to teach and engage students. This element combined with culturally responsive teaching, collaborative learning, settler colonization teaching, and teaching through a Native American lens may create a positively engaged tribal college writing classroom. Blending culture with all the mentioned approaches may increase student engagement, empowerment, and effectiveness within the Native American students.

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