Native American Leadership and Education
American Indian Educational Experiences
(Wealth, Justice, Knowledge)
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“In order help create the future one must know their past before their birth or they remain a perpetual child – Cicero – Roman Senator”.

The First Nations of America must recognize their global relationships and responsibilities to other indigenous people throughout the world. Our plans for the immediate future will need to include this liaison. These relationships must recognize each others view of democracy from the Native American perspective. The impact of our perceptions on a democratic state must related to capitalism and those institutional infrastructures which govern one’s people. The keys to securing a brighter future for Native American people lie in technical training and higher education. Native people cannot afford to be left out of the world’s development equation. Native people must have full partnership in this new world order. Native intuitive knowledge on globalization will help to shape the new exchange of ideas by being full participants in the economic growth world wide within this century. There is no more precise historical time or moment for Native American people then right now to encourage this union.

“The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it. You might as well expect the rivers to run backward as that any man who was born a free man should be contented when penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases –Chief Joseph-Hinmaton Yalatkit, 1830-1904, Nez Perce Chief”.

It is imperative for us to work together by combining our resources and building education bridges to reduce the knowledge gap amongst ourselves as well as between one another. The learning process for Native American children is the forum to unlocking a brighter future for indigenous people throughout the world. This educational strategy needs to be developed and realized by Native American leadership on their on terms. If the history of American Indian education in the United States has taught us anything; it was and continues to be terribly flawed. Here lies the true challenge for those who believe in sharing the wealth, justice, and knowledge of the United States with Native Americans people and indigenous communities. Second best for Native people cannot be an option anymore.

The American Indian educational field will have significant impact upon all indigenous people. American Indians must recognize and insist upon their recommend changes in the delivery of educational programs to their communities both Reservation and public. It must be clearly understood publicly for it relates to the present generation of Native American students at all levels of learning. Native students’ educational experiences in the present educational systems in the United States must have rational native input. The success and the failures actualized by Native American educators and students should be a wake-up call for native leadership and education. Putting the same solutions in the new paper sack of congressional educational policy call “No Child Left Behind” will not
secure a brighter future for American Indian students. The past treatment and negative practices of US Educational Policies must be seen as clearly connected to the future positive educational experiences of native students by including prescribed native learning processes.

“The American Indian is of the soil, whether it be the region of forests, plains, pueblos, or mesas. He fits into the landscape, for the hand that fashioned the continent also fashioned the man for this surroundings. He once grew as naturally as the wild sunflowers; he belongs just as the buffalo belonged.”- Luther Standing Bear (1868-1939) Oglala Sioux Chief.

The past educational experiences of native people have been well documented but not realized by non-native people who have not suffered through these systems. The continuing educational victimization of native children is to blame the victim. Reasoning knowledge of restructuring educational programs belongs to those who have survived and succeeded in spite of these related learning systems. Native leadership and educators must be the first dedicated to this coming change of restructuring native learning.

The new required native educational performance and initiatives must include purpose, practice, and place. American Indian leadership and educators will need to be included as interrupters of the new educational policy call “No Child Left Behind”. If left up to current educational policies, politics, planning and implementation at the State governmental level will only weaken a soaking wet bottom of the new paper bag of educational reform as it relates to Native American students. These bottom line results of educational reform will only have temporary success and continued satisfactory academics constancy will not occur. The use of public funds and time will be wasted and most of all, Native American students will again become the victims and blamed.

The three “P’s” (purpose, practice and place) are the major sign posts in the educational process of the native child. Where we do education is critical. The place is the school. Here is where native students must be understood with proposed statistics, standards, respect, and knowledge of who these students are. Place must be infused with the strong belief in the structure of the native family be it single, kinship, extended, clan, tribe or global. The relationship of the native family will need to be the underpinning of all learning for the native Child.

Strengthening the native family is paramount. To strengthen the native families’ role in the educational process will assist in making the indigenous people a strong positive part of America’s social order. The value of learning must include natives ‘life experiences both in school and out. Changing native family values relates directly to the quality of life experienced by native people must be strongly considered.

Communications through mass media and network time needs to show the value of the native neighborhoods, communities, governmental structures, how members spend their lives at home and at work. Native people must be heard and seen as contributing to the growth of their own nations as well as to the common good of society. Decisions need
to be made on what parts of the current native culture needs to be passed on from one generation to another. Where educationally native people are presently and where they want to accomplish educational has to be addressed. These native families must know their role in this place called school which is serving their children.

“When a child my mother taught me the legends of our people; taught me of the sun and sky, the moon and stars, the clouds and storms. She also taught me to kneel and pray to Usen for strength, health, wisdom, and protection. We never prayed against any person, but if we had aught against and individual we ourselves took vengeance. We were taught that Usen doe not care for the petty quarrels of men. –Geronimo, Goyathlay, 1829-1909, Chiricahua Apache Chief”.

Native leadership and educators must review their own cultural values which will strengthen or has weakened the place called school. The schools themselves must recognize their own flaws in their governance, their community and in their court systems which presently serve native students. This lack of this wisdom from the schools in the past has meant:

1. Many native parents are afraid of their own children.
2. Native students don’t know who they are.
3. What role Indian parents and grandparents should play in this place called school as well as the role of school teacher in their homes and community?
4. What expectations and responsibilities Native parents and their community must instill in their children about this place called school?

Diversity of learning philosophies should be seen as strength and not a weakness; when it comes to Native American cultures and indigenous people throughout the world. These indigenous cultures remain the core fundamental learning processes for the entire world. Understanding of these fundamental learning processes from Native American peoples and other indigenous peoples have helped to create great empires (Mongols, Egyptians, Bedouins, Islanders, etc). From one century to another century indigenous people have seen fundamental learning processes created by governmental educational structures become insolvent (Fascism, Nazism, Communism, Dictatorships, etc.) because of the lack of understanding the fundamentals of acceptance diversity. Native cultural learning since their creation has recognized, lived with and accepted diversity amongst them selves long before Western civilization stepped upon their shores.

Diversity strengths are necessary for democracy to flourish for it recognizes class, race, and gender. Each must be served equally. The key stones to maintaining heritage, values, and learning are through education. It is here that native leadership and educators must focus. Inequity in shared learning leaves too many out of the equation.

The nature of inequity gets in the way of how a nation distributes knowledge, justice, wealth, income, values, and their effects upon the all children. The question then becomes,” How does one’s learned knowledge contribute to their contribution to a
democracy”? Privileged learning is inequity. What we want for the best and brightest students should always be made available to all children. This is perceived as educational institutional democracy or the public school. Before the vanguard of educational merit can progress on to a new frontier, a democratic society will need to bring the rear guard up by educating those who have been left behind. It is from this pool of new learners which strengthens the entire structure. The heaven can be conquered, new discoveries can be made, and knowledge of humankind can increase. This is perceivably why it must become foremost on the agenda for native leadership and educators. They must reconsider their enduring role in the education of the native child in the immediate future.

“The soil you see is not ordinary soil—it is the dust of the blood, the flesh, and bones of our ancestors...You will have to dig down through the surface before you can find nature’s earth, as the upper portion is Crow. The land, as it is, is my blood and my dead; it is consecrated”. Shes-his (late 19th century) Reno Crow.

The globe changes in population over the next 25 years will add and additional 2 billion people. What will native leadership and educators face with immigration patterns, employment requirements, inequity in wealth, distribution of health and educational programs? Without Native’s meaningful involvement, the indigenous populations throughout the world will gradually disappear. The new immigrants coming from diverse populations from throughout the world will occupy and demand the utilization of native lands and resources. Again, the cycle of demographic population shifts will place the native child at risk.

The role of tribal, state and nation will be needed more than ever since the beginning of the United States to protect native people’s liberties and rights. The question is “How do we educate for these changes in a democratic society”? Listen and here the footsteps of change coming to native cultures front doors as well as the other indigenous people of the world. Who need to protect native people’s liberty and rights? American Indian leader and Native educator that who! If we do not standup for those who have less, how can we be assured of our own rights and liberties? We are only as strong as the weakest link in this chain of democracy called the United States and global nations. Native education must be strengthened by its own people.

The great resources of the United States have and are still directly connected to Native American people. From oil, timber, natural gas, mining, and other natural resources the wealth, justice and knowledge of this United States continues to be born from Native American people and their lands. It is only right they should not only prosper but help in directing the future of the United States. These First Nations of America will be here for centuries to come for they have no place to immigrate. It seems only prudent and reasonable to make sure native leadership and schools understand their roles in making native education their top priority. Native children must come first. They will bring us all prosperity and a better life.