INCULCATING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND SPIRITUALITY:
A Siksika (Blackfoot) Theory of Learning

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Electronic Journal
February, 2007

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> Cultural action is always a systematic and deliberate form of action which operates upon the social structure, either with the objective of preserving that structure or of transforming it. As a form of deliberate and systematic action, all cultural action has its theory which determines it ends and thereby defines its methods (Paulo Freire, 1992, 180, italics mine).

John Dewey once said that the difference between educational practices that are influenced by a well thought-out philosophy and those that are not so influenced, is the difference between practice that is impelled by some clear idea of the ends to be achieved and practice that is conducted blindly, under the control of unexamined customs or traditions (Archambault, 1964, 17). Dewey went on to say that it would not necessarily make any difference to the end result even if the "blind" form of education was conducted under the guise of philosophical deliberation. Clarification and analysis of aims, objectives, and ends to be achieved are most effective when elaborated before practice is undertaken.

The First Nations of Canada should never be indicted for proceeding pedagogically or with regard to any cultural practice without relevant theoretical backup. Granted that their philosophical backdrop was anchored in the oral tradition and shrouded in metaphysical mystery (at least it appears so to outsiders), but their varied cultural content including legends, rituals, sacred ceremonies, and objects comprised a massive curriculum to be appropriated by every neonate, without benefit

of written form. The underlying rationale was grounded in and derived from a series of specific philosophical assumptions backed by centuries of practice.

General Learning Theories

Educators have long been confronted by a myriad of learning theories going back to Plato and Aristotle. In modern times, two theoretical poles of learning have emerged, and still reign. For lack of more sophisticated terminology, they may be labeled behaviorism and humanism.

The postulations of modern theorists are usually traced to the period beginning with Amos Comenius (1592-1671), a Moravian educator, who prognosticated that the rhythms of nature should be utilized in formulating educational methods. Among his observations was the notion that "nature observes a suitable time" (Bayles and Hood, 1966, 31) which translated means that children should be taught when they are ready to learn. Comenius wrote several well-known books explicating his ideas, the most popular being his Didactica Magna (The Great Didactic), which was to contain all knowledge of his day. His penchant for wanting to adhere closely to the patterns of nature modeled a great many subsequent theories.

John Locke (1632-1704), a forerunner of behaviorism, took an opposite stance to that of Comenius, and laid the foundations for faculty psychology and formal discipline. Locke believed that manipulating sensations could produce acceptable habits that would produce character. Character development, of course, was to provide the foundation for the finishing of English gentlemen, the object of Locke's undertakings. Locke advocated the enforcement of good habits through

the manipulation of students' mental muscles.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), probably inadvertently followed up on Comenius' line of thinking by projecting the notion that education is a case of unfoldment, that is, since "everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Creator," (Rousseau, 1911, 1). Therefore, only good can come from letting young children roam freely in the woods. In fact, children should be encouraged to unleash their natural tendencies. Rousseau denied having provided his imaginary pupil, Emile, with any form of guidance, but a closer examination of the work will reveal that Rousseau did a little manipulation of events so that Emile would come to "correct" conclusions about the workings of nature.

It was Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), education's "most successful failure" (Bayles and Hood, 1966, 98), who patterned the education of his own son, Jacobli, after Rousseau's instructions. Pestalozzi tried three times to incorporate his theory of sense impressionism into the workings of orphanages he established, but they all withered away. He even wrote a very successful book, Leonard and Gertrude, to illustrate the art of sense impressionism, but before it became a success he sold the copyright for very little money. Moreover, people who read the book liked the plot, rather than appreciate its underlying theory. What did remain of Pestalozzi's influence motivated the formation of the child-centered movement in education. Educators from the United States and various parts of Europe visited Pestalozzi's experimental schools and modeled their systems accordingly. One could go so far as to say that Pestalozzi's idea framed the foundation of the progressive education movement in the United States.

Pestalozzi believed that what children see, hear, smell, taste, or

touch forms the basis of their vat of knowledge. It therefore behooves educators to see that children fully experienced everything around them via sense perception. One of Pestalozzi's students, Ramsauer, left a record noting that the schools Pestalozzi started had no regular plan nor lessons, and Pestalozzi did not limit himself to any set time when he discussed matters; he often went on with the same subject for two or three hours (Bayles and Hood, 1966, 104). Rarely did Pestalozzi examine the work of his students but let them draw whatever they felt like drawing; after all, true education burgeoned from within.

One would be remiss not to note what was happening on the behaviorist side of the fence with the work of psychologists Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949) and John B. Watson (1878-1958). Thorndike's theory gave rise to such concepts as reflex-arc and psychological connectionism, implying that learning is a matter of stimulation, excitation, efferent transmission, central adjustment, and response. In short, this projected series of desired developments was soon labeled stimulus-response theory (Herrick, 1924, 121). Thorndike's contemporary, John B. Watson, set out to repudiate the introspective method in psychology and contended that the chief function of the nervous system was simply to coordinate senses with motor responses. Watson posited that the senses are not only capable of gaining knowledge of the world but are also instruments in guiding activity. Watson therefore rejected such concepts as purpose, feeling, satisfaction, and free will because he believed that they are not observable and not capable of scientific treatment or measurement (Ozmon and Craver, 2003, 204).

The efforts of Thorndike and Watson were followed up by B. F.

Skinner (1904-1990), sometimes called “the high priest of behaviorism.” Skinner denounced philosophical approaches to psychology and argued that much error and misunderstanding about teaching and learning originated with “armchair scientists” who tried to deduce understandings of these processes by relying on a priori generalizations. Skinner allegedly replaced these humanistic musings (and the notion of “self”), with scientific language that included such concepts as “conditioned” or “reinforced behavior, repertoire of behavior responses,” or “operant conditioning” in regard to a specific organism known as the individual. For behaviorists, the notion of “self” or “self-concept” is too strongly tied to mental constructs and the danger exists of being misled in the direction of imputing mysterious, internal driving forces to the organism to explain “its” behavior (Ozmon and Craver, 2003, 205).

Perhaps just to add confusion, or simply to underscore the point that things are not always what they appear to be, another theorist, Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) appears to have attempted to develop a crossover theory from humanism to behaviorism. Herbart, a German professor of philosophy, visited Pestalozzi in Switzerland and was impressed by what he saw. Determined to bring “order” to Pestalozzi’s learning theory, Herbart set about formulating a set-by-step explanation for what Pestalozzi was attempting. Herbart rid himself of John Locke’s faculty psychology, as well as Locke’s assumption that mind has the power or capacity to analyze ideas. Instead, Herbart insisted, ideas are active, and their activity accounts for the flow of mental life. The end result of Herbart’s deliberations found him formulating such concepts as conscious and subconscious divisions of the mind, apperceptive mass as the vat of accumulated insights, and correlation,

and concentration as vital factors in remembering. The “doctrine” of concentration refers to the use of “core” ideas around which subject matters are correlated, and the doctrine of correlation means that curricula should be so organized that similar or related ideas are presented together or in sequence, for such presentation promotes apperception of their relationships. Herbart also labeled broad classes of interest, that is, (i) empirical, speculative, and aesthetic, and (ii) interests directed at people—sympathetic, social, and religious. Since individuals learn best when they are interested in subject matter, it becomes the responsibility of educators to develop interest in all these areas.

Herbart, who is sometimes called “the Father of American Psychology,” will perhaps best be remembered by educators for his five-step plan for teaching (which bears some resemblance to the Aboriginal model that will later be introduced). Primarily concerned about clarity in presenting new ideas as well as sequencing new information in logical order (Fain, Shostak, and Dean, 1979, 42), Herbart’s approach incorporates these concerns. The five steps are: (i) preparation—preparing the student to receive new information by arousing interest or recalling past material or experiences; (ii) presentation—presenting new material; (iii) association—helping students see the relationship between old and new ideas; (iv) generalization—formulating general ideas and principles; and, (v) application—applying new ideas or principles to new situations (Webb, Metha, and Jordan (2000, 148).

Enter John Dewey

> John Dewey may not have been the world’s greatest educational philosopher, but he was a pedagogue who inspired widespread rethinking of educational objectives,

> principles, and procedures....The philosopher-educator's ideas continue to be discussed, his language to be quoted, and his books to be reprinted in English and to be translated into foreign tongues. –William W. Brickman (Brickman and Lehrer, 1961, 10).

There can be no doubt about John Dewey's (1859-1952) impact on twentieth century educational theory. Dewey believed strongly in democracy as a political system and pragmatism as a working philosophy. Like Herbart, he endorsed the value of experience in education and extended this idea to include the value of the individual's interest in seeking meaningful educational experiences as well as the development of discipline in knowledge seeking. True learning, therefore, is the accumulation of individual insight as well as the continuous reconstruction of experience.

John Dewey's name is often associated with the progressive education movement that he influenced, but unfortunately, as the movement grew it too often incorporated ideas of other educators that tended often to cloud Dewey's contributions. Much of Dewey's thinking went back to Jean Jacques Rousseau's notion of unfoldment—students should be viewed as human beings in the process of development, each of them with a unique, distinctive personality that must be understood and treated accordingly. As a result, Dewey's approach was sometimes called "child-centred education."

Dewey believed students naturally interact with their environment, and they should be encouraged to develop personal perceptions of all ongoings surrounding them. Resulting insights should continuously be reconstructed in light of new experiences, with the end result that knowledge perceived and accumulated by students would be

unique to them. The process of guiding experience to new perceptions should be disciplined, and when analyzed or evaluated, incorporate acknowledgement of the fact that each student's perceptions are different from those of all others. For this reason, Dewey's approach is also known by such labels as experimentalism, Gestalt-oriented, instrumentalism, progressivism, reconstructionism, and relativism. More recently, Dewey's theories have been warmed over and labeled constructivism.

As the "new kid on the block" of educational theory, constructivism rests on the foundation of progressive education and gives new hope for direction to 21st century education. Constructivists are very concerned about school reform and believe that the success of a genuine school improvement effort requires selecting and maintaining a clear, long-term focus on a few important points. Following up on Dewey's passion for democratic input, constructivists argue that all players—teachers, students, parents, and community-- should be consulted in formulating these goals and they should all be involved at each stage of development (Wagner, 1998, 516). There is also some hope that the new emphasis will acknowledge and accommodate the diversity of North American society (Parkerson and Parkerson, 2001, 216).

Similar to John Dewey's approach, the philosophical underpinnings of constructivism are essentially pragmatic in nature, namely that knowledge exists in the minds of individuals only, and is constructed internally and derived from interrelation with the world (Friesen and Friesen, 2001, 76). The meanings which individuals assign to encountered phenomena depend on their previous experiences. Thus

knowledge is constructed through perception and action. The good news is that there is a vat of common knowledge "out there" that derives from a common brain and body that are part of the same universe. In terms of educational application, this means that fundamentally teachers and students can share the same perceptual knowledge that forms the basis of school curricula. Granted that the perceptions of young students may not be as "accurate" as those of trained scientists, but since they will be functioning according to those perceptions that may be deemed an equally valid form of knowing. In order for these perceptions to constitute a fuller comprehension of reality, it is suggested that teachers encourage students to discuss, explain, or evaluate their ideas and procedures (Hendry, 1996). The objective is that in such a milieu, all participants may come to a fuller knowledge of "the truth."

The Siksika (Blackfoot) Way

Traditional cultures that revered the oral tradition had at least one advantage to their way of thinking—the oral tradition was flexible and geared to the times. The celebration of sacred ceremonies and rituals were often observed and passed on virtually intact for centuries, but in the end, even minor modifications due to a variety of factors were always a possibility.

The Siksika First Nation is one of three Indian nations who are part of the Blackfoot Confederacy—Siksika (for a long time simply called Blackfoot, or Blackfeet in the United States), Kainai or Blood (many chiefs), and Peigan (known as southern Piegans in the United States). In addition to sharing a common language, the three tribes have much in common, and together once considered the southern third of the Province of Alberta as their territory. This changed with the signing of

Treaty Number 7 with the Government of Canada on September 22, 1877. Today Siksika youngsters attend tribally-run schools on reserve or public schools in nearby towns. Many of their teachers on reserve are members of the Siksika First Nation.

Despite being hammered by many outside influences over the years, much of the traditional Blackfoot culture remains intact. This includes both cultural knowledge and practice; the philosophy of "this is the way things are done," still prevails even with reference to teaching and learning. Following the humanist side of educational theory, the traditional Siksika approach to learning comprises four specific steps: (i) listening; (ii) observing; (iii) participating; and, (iv) teaching. The fact that there are four steps to effective learning is not surprising since the sacred number four figures in so many Siksika practices. There are, after all, four directions, four faces of the human being—the face of the child, the adolescent, the adult, and the aged. There are four kinds of things that breathe—those that crawl, those that fly, those that are two-legged, and those that are four-legged. There are four things above the earth—sun, moon, stars, and planets, and there are four parts to green things—roots, stem, leaves, and fruit (Friesen, 1995, 119).

Listening, Observing, Participating, and Teaching

The traditional Siksika theory of learning, like every other aspect of their manner of transmitting cultural knowledge and values, was based on the oral tradition and founded on spirituality (Snow, 2005, 9). The Siksika approach generally paralleled the "Indian ways" of North America. Four Guns of the Oglala Sioux Nation affirmed this approach to learning when he stated, "The Indian needs no writings; words that are true sink deep into this heart where they remain" (Friesen, 1998, 53).

Chief Cochise of the Ciricahua Apache Nation echoed this sentiment when he cautioned, “You must speak straight so your words go as sunlight into our hearts” (Friesen, 1998, 50). A similar approach may be identified in the oral tradition of the ancient tribal Hebrews as expressed by King David in the Psalms; “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11 NIV).

The first step to effective learning is to listen and listen well. In traditional Siksika culture, the major portion of teaching was done by grandparents and elders who were highly respected. Herself a member of the Siksika Nation, Red Gun (2006, 1) says, “The elders are the key to survival and revival of the past.”

Elders possessing varied gifts traditionally served the Siksika people. There were elders who were acknowledged and consulted for their medicinal knowledge while others had the right to conduct certain ceremonies. There were elders who were simply wise people who were consulted as counselors might be today (Hare, 2003, 414; MacKay, 2003, 298). Lillian Crow Chief (2006, 2), also a member of the Siksika community states, “My grandmother was a medicine woman...I remember waking to the sound of her voice, singing her sacred songs and smelling the sweet aroma of her pipe tobacco....I felt so much peace, love and compassion radiating from her and together we silently sat and watched the early morning sunrise.” Lillian’s student colleague, Louann Solway (2006, 1) adds, “She [my grandmother] would often say, ‘What are they saying?’ And I would sit and listen to whatever noise I heard and often it was very peaceful and full of life....with all my listening and searching for new noises to hear, I have come to understand my purpose in life today.”

There were esteemed storytellers in Native societies. Mary

Muktoyuk of the Yupiaq First Nation described the attitude towards elders in this way; "The elders, in those days, we held in great respect. Whatever they told us, we would listen very carefully, trying not to make mistakes when we listened, because we respected them so highly, because they knew so much more than we did....(Friesen, 1998, 9). Parents were for the most part excluded from the responsibility of child-raising since it was thought that they were mainly involved in the day to day activities of providing food and taking care of home life. Generally, speaking, however, raising children was a community responsibility (Friesen and Friesen, 2005a).

It was traditionally considered a privilege to be taught by Native elders, particularly when they were relating sacred truths. At other times they would tell stories of entertainment or moral instruction, or stories to explain why things were the way they were. Commonly known as Indian legends, the essence of these stories was often common to Indian tribes all over North America, and although storytellers might adhere to a common storyline, each recognized storyteller could provide unique details as to his/her own preference (Friesen and Friesen, 2005b).

Legends have sometimes been identified as one of the most common means of transmitting First Nations cultural values and beliefs. There was a time when all cultures relied solely on the oral tradition and there were no written forms of communication. Legends or stories shared between families and communities conveyed important belief systems, ceremonial rituals, and cultural symbols. Aboriginal bands specialized in the use of this medium.

Today's Native youth are very fortunate in being able to access legends of their heritage. Appreciation for the preservation of

these tales must be extended to several sectors, particularly elders who took upon themselves the responsibility of maintaining the essence of the oral tradition during times when their people were under siege to abandon traditional ways. These guardians of revered knowledge have been successful in keeping many of their valued beliefs and practices alive through very turbulent times. Adherents to the written word who first came into contact with Indigenous cultures, such as traders, missionaries, and anthropologists also rendered a valuable service by committing to writing many stories they learned from their new found acquaintances.

Native legends have a unique identity. They are truly Indigenous stories, and as such they constitute the oral literature of each particular tribal cultural configuration. Indian stories are pictures of Aboriginal life verbally drawn by Indigenous storytellers, showing life from their point of view. Legends deal with spirituality, the origins of things, and various kinds of individual behavior. Legends are often entertaining and they may convey a vast range of cultural knowledge including folkways, values and beliefs. Legends often outline the very basis of a particular cultural pattern. The sacred number four frequently occurs in the content of legends.

The study of Native legends can be a very rich source of learning. Traditionally, legends appear to have been told for a variety of purposes, both formal and informal. Listening to them was of utmost importance because they comprised the very essence of the oral tradition. Formal storytelling was usually connected to the occasion of deliberate moral or spiritual instruction. In fact, some legends were considered so sacred or special that their telling was restricted to the celebration of a very special event such as the Sundance. Others were

told only during specific seasons. On these occasions, only recognized or designated persons could engage in their telling. Nearly anyone could engage in informal storytelling, and such legends were usually related for their entertainment or instructional value.

It is possible to classify Indian legends into four categories (with some degree of overlap), each of which has a special purpose. The four types of legends are as follows.

(i) Entertainment legends are often about the trickster, who is called by different names among the various tribes. Incidently, as Grant (1993, 25) observes, the trickster figure is found in many world mythologies and his role may be interpreted in a wide variety of ways. In First Nations country the Blackfoot call him Napi, the Crees call him Wisakedjak, the Ojibway call him Nanabush, the Sioux call him îktômni, while other tribes have different names for him like Coyote, Tarantula, or Raven. Stories about the trickster are principally fictional and can be invented and amended even during the process of storytelling. There is never much difficulty in getting listeners to pay attention to trickster stories because trickster stories often involve playing tricks. Sometimes the trickster plays tricks on others and sometimes they play tricks on him.

The trickster appears to have the advantage on his unsuspecting audience, however, since he possesses supernatural powers, which he deploys on a whim to startle or to shock. He has powers to raise animals to life and he himself may even die and in four days come to life again. Aside from being amusing, trickster stories often incorporate knowledge about aspects of Aboriginal culture, buffalo hunts, natural phenomena, or rituals, or the relationship between people and

animals. In this sense trickster stories may also be instructional.

(ii) Instructional or teaching legends are basically told for the purpose of sharing information about a tribe's culture, history, or origin. These stories explain things. They often use animal motifs to explain why things are the way they are. A child may enquire about the origin of the seasons or the creation of the world and a tale about animal life may be told. For example, a child may ask, “Where did our people come from?” or “Why are crows’ feathers black?” Stories told in response to these questions could include adventures of the trickster.

(iii) Moral legends are intended to teach ideal or “right” forms of behavior, and are employed to suggest to the listener that a change in attitude or action would be desirable. Since traditional Indian tribes rarely corporally punished their children they sometimes found it useful to hint at the inappropriateness of certain behavior by telling stories. For example, the story might be about an animal that engages in inappropriate behavior and the child is expected to realize that a possible modification of his or her own behavior is the object of the telling. The onus was always on listeners to apply the lesson of the legend to themselves if deemed appropriate.

(iv) Sacred or spiritual legends should be told only by recognized elders or other tribal approved individual since their telling is considered a form of worship.

In traditional times, spiritually significant stories were never told to just anyone who asked anymore than they were told by just anyone. In some tribes, sacred legends were considered property and thus their transmission from generation to generation was carefully safeguarded. Selected individuals learned a legend by careful listening;

then, on mastering the story, passed it on to succeeding generations, with the liberty (or implied liberty) of perhaps changing aspects of the story to suit their own tastes. The amendments would center on a different choice of animals or sites referred to in the story and preferred by the teller.

Legends comprised only a part of a tribe's spiritual structure, which also included ceremonies, rituals, songs, and dances. Physical objects such as fetishes, pipes, painted tepee designs, medicine bundles, and shrines of sorts, supplemented these. Familiarity with these components comprised sacred knowledge, and everything learned was committed to memory. Viewed together these entries represented spiritual connections between people and the universe which, with appropriate care, resulted in a lifestyle of assured food supply, physical well-being and satisfying the needs and wants of the society.

The second step of the Siksika teaching/learning scenario occurred when an elder considered a youthful listener ready to observe the practice of certain cultural customs or even more sacred ceremonies and rituals. If deemed ready, an elder might invite a youth to observe the proceedings. Observers of a Sundance, for example, had to follow a strict protocol. The most inner circle of four at the Sundance would be reserved for the centre lodge in which revered ceremonies, such as the opening of sacred medicine bundles might take place. The second circle from the centre would be reserved for the dancers with the third circle was for observers. The fourth or most outer circle would be regarded as a place for more social kinds of interaction.

If a parallel may be made to the world of travel, one might say that it would be better to first read up on a place before taking a trip to a

particular destination. Being informed beforehand, one would know better what to expect on arrival. People who participate in field trips, for example, always return better informed if they are properly briefed or primed beforehand. This step nicely parallels Herbart's notion of preparation, namely to ready students to encounter new data.

In traditional Siksika culture observations of many kinds occurred, from the simple daily activities having to do with sustenance, to those held in highest regard. In summer, for example, when Saskatoon berries ripened, a Blackfoot child might observe an elder being presented with the first berry picked. The berry would be held in the air, and a prayer of thanksgiving would be uttered. The berry was then put into the ground as an offering to the Creator, as an expression of thanksgiving, and as an affirmation of communion with Mother Earth. According to Hungry Wolf (2001, 77), a member of the Blackfoot Confederation, states that she could remember when healing plants were picked a similar ceremony would take place, her grandmother putting a pinch of tobacco into the ground and offering a prayer of thanksgiving. Nothing was taken for granted; everything was considered a gift from the Creator.

The third step to effective learning is participation or, as the common expression has it, "learning by doing." It was probably Jean Jacques Rousseau who first emphasized the need to "get out there and let your senses go to work," but Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi actually applied the principle to the education of his five year-old son, Jacobli. Johann Herbart formalized such procedures, and John Dewey brought educators to the realization that the end result must be centered on the individual. According to Dewey, each person functions according to his or her accumulated perceptions or, in Aboriginal terms, has his or her own

journey to travel.

Traditionally, elders from many plains tribes insisted that children must learn their culture by accessing traditional forms of education on the land. A sense of connectedness to the natural world, as well as to people in it, was developed through extended experiences on the land, either in the company of an elder or alone (Ward and Bouvier, 2001, 8). When a youth was given the privilege of participating in a specific ceremony it was always under the supervision of a responsible individual. Participating in a sacred ritual or ceremony requires use of all five senses, encompassed in an attitude of spirituality. This, in Native terms, implied adding a sixth sense—spiritual awareness. Participating in a sweat-lodge ceremony, for example, would itself verify the readiness of the participant. If the lodge was entered with negative thoughts, the individual might afterwards experience uneasiness or even illness. If the participant had the right attitude, he or she would feel spiritually refreshed after participating.

Fourth, and finally, Siksika learning theory posits that there is no better way to affirm one's learning than by trying to teach others. I can provide a personal example. Many years ago, having completed a Ph.D. degree in philosophy of education I (John) was privileged to be offered the opportunity of teaching a summer class on the subject at a neighboring university. I can honestly say that I never studied as hard for anything. Many of my students were older educators and more experienced than I was, and I was quite uneasy as I entered the classroom for the first lesson. Gradually, my fears began to subside when I realized that I was probably more familiar with the specific subject matter than they were!

This would not necessarily be the case with regard to the experience of the Siksika cultural initiate who might be assigned his or her first teaching charge. In the first instance, by now initiates would be more mature adults, and would be likely be dealing with spiritual subject matter and procedures of a more sacred nature. In addition, their “subjects” would likely be just as familiar with (or more so) than they were with the significance and procedure of the particular enactment. No doubt they would have put into their hearts the sacredness of what they were about to do and they would be adequately prepared to undertake the task. The slogan, “earning by doing” would have special meaning in this scenario.

Anthropologists have described the function of the various Blackfoot secret societies or sodalities known by such names as Mosquitos, Buffalo Bulls, Horns, Crazy Dogs, Brave Dogs, or Pigeons. In many tribes sodalities functioned in a serving as well as preserving capacity, and were committed to passing along sacred knowledge and traditions to succeeding generations. Each sodality had its own special knowledge that was carefully and formally passed on to initiates following the four steps outlined in this paper.

Many First Nations of the plains, like the Siksika, believe that the end result of all human experience and learning is for the good of the community. True, each individual has his or her own journey to travel, and elders can be of great assistance in this pursuit, but the end result of that fulfillment must be for the benefit of the community.

It is a concept that could no doubt be appropriated by our generation of educators with great benefit.

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