

Understanding Youth Cultures, Stories, and Resistances in the Urban Southwest:  
Innovations and Implications of a Native American Literature Classroom

By

Timothy Jose San Pedro

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Approved April 2013 by the  
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Django Paris, Co-Chair  
Mary Eunice Romero-Little, Co-Chair  
Teresa McCarty  
Simon Ortiz  
Beverly Ann Chin

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the multiple and complicated ways that Native American students engage, accept, and/or reject the teachings of a Native American literature course, as they navigate complex cultural landscapes in a state that has banned the teaching of ethnic studies. This is the only classroom of its kind in this major metropolitan area, despite a large Native American population. Like many other marginalized youth, these students move through “borderlands” on a daily basis from reservation to city and back again; from classrooms that validate their knowledges to those that deny, invalidate and silence their knowledges, histories and identities. I am examining how their knowledges are shared or denied in these spaces. Using ethnographic, participatory action and grounded research methods, and drawing from Safety Zone Theory (Lomawaima and McCarty, 2006) and Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogism, I focus on students’ counter-storytelling to discover how they are generating meanings from a curriculum that focuses on the comprehension of their complicated and often times contradicting realities. This study discusses the need for schools to draw upon students' cultural knowledges and offers implications for developing and implementing a socio-culturally sustaining curriculum.

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## PREFACE

*Who's wrong? [Who's] correct?  
It's all so subjective.  
Look back at life, it's hard  
Cuz your mind gets adventurous  
Dates get mixed up,  
Facts disconnected.  
The only thing you remember  
Is the feeling that you're left with.*

~Lyrics Born

What feeling will you be left with? When I look back at my experiences within and outside of school, I recall a memory and in that memory is a specific emotion that allows my mind to experience and recreate that event again, and, if someone's listening, retell it. After you read this dissertation, in its entirety, or in bits and pieces, you likely won't remember the specifics of the writing. However, if I am a good enough writer and thinker and re-teller of participants' stories, you may be left with a feeling that perhaps is closely replicated by the participants in this study, what they allowed me to see, and how they helped co-construct this dissertation with me.

I believe that we all see the same events a little bit (or a lot) differently based on our prior understandings—the lessons we've been taught and the social and cultural experiences we've had in life: “one and the same document may hold different places, have different meanings, in the separate discourses of competing social groups” (Collins and Blot, 2003, p. 140). Goodson (1992) says that stories are a construction of the person who is living and experiencing their lived realities; researchers have an amazing opportunity to retell these stories in collaboration with the storyteller to create a narrative. An important part of Indigenous methodologies is in the transmission of knowledge



through stories (Brayboy et al., 2012; Brayboy, 2006; Kovach, 2005; Smith, 2012). Relying on Indigenous Methodologies, there are different levels of the stories told herein. Because of this, I will begin each chapter of this dissertation about identity, motivation, and engagement in a Native American Literature class with a story told from the students' voices directly. By doing so, the words of the participants (their lived realities) are captured in the form they had hoped I—and in turn, you—would hear, less encumbered by my interpretation, analysis and retelling. At other times, I will start chapters with a vignette about the situations these students find themselves in. The stories, the vignettes, the conversations, and the events will fuel this dissertation so that you might come to your own conclusions—have your own feelings and beliefs—before I interject with my own interpretations and analysis. In a sense, I hope to place their voices at the forefront of each section so that you, the reader, will have an opportunity to feel the emotions and the messages that these students used to create their stories, to enact their *rhetorical sovereignty* (Lyons, 2000). In the end, there may be a collection of short stories that evoke an emotion, a feeling that you can connect with from your own experiences, a feeling “that you’re left with.”

By doing so, I am enacting a kind of narrative research called *narrative construction* (Barone, 2001) or *narrative analysis* whereby “researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995 cited in Barone and Eisner, 2006). I have come to understand that the narrative research process is very much tied to ethnography and humanization (Freire, 1970) in that it is not only something done at the end of the research process, but a state of being and becoming throughout the entirety of the all

stages of research. Herein lies the sociocultural foundation of narrative research, which Moen (2006) says “is the common belief that individuals learn and develop through participation in social activities in the world. Society—or the world, for that matter—has continuous influence on the individual or the mind and vice versa” (p. 2). As I am slowly and carefully invited into the research community, I develop and learn through the participation *with* my participants (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2013; Freire, 1970). As they are engaging and interacting and challenging and questioning their realities, so too am I. Together, we are weaving—braiding, perhaps—a collective narrative through stories. Brayboy (2006), discussing the main points of tribal critical race theory, says that “stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being” (p. 340). In fact, they are primary sources of knowledge in most every Indigenous community around the world. Stories are the foundation for education, for knowing, and for becoming: “none of the things we say or do, whether we speak, listen, write, read, or think, occur in a vacuum” (Moen, 2006, p. 3). Charlotte, a participant in my pilot study, perhaps said it best: “You can never forget where you come from and by telling stories, you’re telling your heart. The ancestors listen and sing when they know their spirit is still alive in the hearts of the next generation. I make mine proud because I don’t just tell stories, I live them” (Written reflection, Feb. 5, 2010).

Of course, I am not immune to this concept. What I have experienced in my life and in this research setting and the lessons I have been taught (by participants, professors, friends, community and family) provide a lens that clarifies and also blinds me to the things I see: “Knowledge is transmitted through stories that shape shift in relation to the

wisdom of the storyteller at the time of the telling” (Kovach, 2005, p. 27). After all, as Geertz (1973) points out, “science itself, certainly ethnography itself, is something made” (cited in Barone and Eisner, 2006, p. 99). At the center of any study are the researchers or researcher who construct words and paragraphs and papers. What you see within these pages is “something made.” Within each of our words and paragraphs and papers and worlds lies the influence of others’ words, thoughts, and lessons that we have either denied or accepted into becoming our own reality. Bakhtin (1981) refers to this as *citationality* or the process by which what we say is the citing of others’ words, ideas, thoughts, that—through our acceptance of those words, ideas and, thoughts—become our own. My truth that I write here is the direct result of how others’ have impacted me—their stories, their struggles, their successes, their ideological becoming—as I become. In this way, what is written here is a collection of their stories...and mine. Although my name leads this article, book, dissertation, whatever this becomes, between the letters of my name are the people and voices who have helped me see and become through the sharing of story. With that brief rationale, I’ll start with a story...

## **“We’ve Been Brought Up to be Afraid”**

*James<sup>1</sup> fought almost everyday when he went to school. He touts that he has the worst record in his reservation school for the fights he’s been in. Perhaps that’s why today, at the new school he was forced to go to, the students in his Native American Literature class refer to him as a “proud Indian.” He’s tried to figure out what that term means. Perhaps it’s that he corrects people when they are wrong, when they are ignorant about what they think they know. Perhaps it’s because he speaks his mind sometimes heatedly. Whatever the reasons he’s called proud, he’s okay with the term because he thinks he’s earned such a title for the shit he’s had to go through.*

*He remembers the school he used to go to: “That’s where somebody first put a gun to my head. That’s where I first got stabbed. That’s where I got my teeth busted through my lip and my skull cracked open. And that’s just the first grade through the sixth grade.”<sup>2</sup>*

*James thinks that rez (Native American Reservation) life is just different than the city. He realizes there’s a makeshift line in the sand that separates urban concrete sprawl from the open fields that the rez still has. He moves in and out of these two spaces on a daily basis and he’s still figuring out the rules for each.*

*During his sophomore year in high school, James was expelled from his school on his reservation. He doesn’t reveal why. Maybe he doesn’t have to. When he came to Desert View High School, he was scared—physically shaking scared.*

*“I was already used to being around black people and Mexicans,” he says with a laugh. “Basically, there was colored people everywhere on my reservation. It’s not hard to find at all. And during my first semester at Desert View High School, I was honestly*

*shaking. My first period I was shaking because I was afraid of what the white people were going to do to me and that's just how I grew up on my reservation was white people will get you. They can do this; they can do that. So in my head, even though I was mature enough to realize that nothing was going to happen, I was afraid of just the fact that people were white, and they were around me. It scared me to death."*

*It took James awhile to adjust to this new place, this new school. He still gets nervous when he's in a room full of people. It takes him a long time to feel comfortable around the people who are white. There's a long history of distrust. Many students—James is realizing by taking this new Native American Literature class—are not taught the painful history that exists between the U.S. government and sovereign tribal nations. They are not taught about the boarding schools that ripped students from their families like James' mother when she was growing up. They aren't taught about the often broken treaties, or the massacres of entire peoples on Native American soil. But for James, he's reminded of these lessons nearly everyday on his reservation by people in his community. Perhaps rightfully so.*

*But today, he's enjoying the lessons learned so far and that he has the opportunity to teach other students about who he is and where he comes from: "I feel really happy learning about myself because this class is basically me."*

*Beyond that, he's altering his preconceived notions of white folks because of the conversations he's had in this classroom that consists of Caucasian, African American, Latino/a and Native American students: "Where I come from, white folks are basically the devil. They can do so much to you, and it took me a long time to realize they're just people. I've met some really cool white people."*

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Cindy LaMarr, 2004 president of the National Indian Education Association, said that Native American students should receive “a high quality education that not only prepares them for the demands of contemporary society, but also thoroughly grounds them in their own history, culture and language” (2005, p. 1). When it comes to research that looks at Native American students in public schools, it tends to focus on poor performances of students in school and reasons as to why they are “failing” in the current school system, rather than looking at classrooms that may be working to help students prepare themselves for “the demands of contemporary society” by using Native American history, culture, and literacies to extend their understandings of their complex world. In Eve Tuck’s (2009) article titled “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” she asks the research community to move toward *desire based* research frameworks that “are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives . . . by documenting not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope” (p. 416). The classroom and curriculum studied here attempts to validate, honor, and learn from an Indigenous perspective that is different from the dominant viewpoint that takes precedence in nearly all our schools and classrooms. This viewpoint often refers to Native Americans only during Columbus Day and Thanksgiving as extinct peoples from our nation’s past, rather than contemporary citizens and students in our schools and society today (Butterfield, 1983; Sanchez, 2007). Schools and classrooms should rely heavily on the cultural experiences and knowledge from the communities from which their students come (Banks, 1993; Grijalva, 1997;

Larimore, 2000; Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010; McCarty et al., 1991). This study focuses on the interactions, the lessons, the writings and readings and the conversations that are spawned in one unique Arizona classroom that validates the Native American perspective within a public school.

James, whose story began this chapter, is just one of many stories told during the three years I conducted pilot and dissertation research in a unique classroom in a large metropolitan area in Arizona. However, with the development of this new class that attempts to center the content on Native American histories, perspectives, and literature, James and many other students reflected on the content of their other courses growing up. He says that as a Native American student "...going into other classrooms where everybody else is from a different race than you and you're learning about their race and you just totally feel like you shouldn't be there ya know? But this class I do think [students] do need to learn what really happened, you know what I mean? And I think they're understanding" (Interview, March 9, 2010). Charlotte, another participant in the study, felt the same way in her schooling: "Usually I'm just used to talking about presidents and stuff the past history of the white man and John and Clark or whatever — those discovery guys. I just know about the white man and what they did. It's like, I don't care, so..." (Interview, March 24, 2010).

The classroom that James and Charlotte are referring to is called Native American Literature. It is a senior English-elective course. It is within this classroom that I spent three years conducting ethnographic research. It is here that stories were heard, conversations shared, identities altered, and relationships formed.

## Navigation of Space: From Borders to Classroom Walls

Each day, I drive south upon a freeway that cuts through a corner of a Native American reservation. To the west, there is a wall in the sand—a line for miles where the city ends and the reservation begins. On one side of the wall: dense apartments, homes separated by inches, businesses. On the other: open space, farmland, homes separated by miles; a couple of casinos break the horizon. As I exit toward Desert View High School (DVHS), I cross this line. Everyday, I cross this line, this border.

Just before walking into Desert View High School—a high school whose mascot is a Native American fighter—there, ingrained in the concrete above the doors to the administrative offices, is the school symbol. It is a seal with five symbols on it: a weight balance, a torch, a scroll, a shoe with wings, and a feather pen. The seal is plastered onto the side profile of a cartoon-like outline of a Native American face. The nose — with its pronounced bulge in the middle — is disproportionately big to its face. The brow bulges from the forehead. Braided hair is attached by string and a feather.



*Figure 1. Seal and Symbol on the outside wall of Desert View High School depicting a stereotypical Native American*



Inside those doors, I walk by side profiles of more Native American caricatures: One, a metal cast plastered onto a cement post. Another, a painting on a drum, the colors of the school are prominent in the feathers. Another, a stained glass window complete with a headdress. Another, a Native American with large pecks, six-pack abs, muscular, standing in a pose as if ready to fight, his shield protecting his midsection, his gaze to the sky it can never see.



*Figure 2. Images of Native Americans as the Mascot for Desert View High School*

Walking through these same doors on a daily basis, seeing these same objects, is a large number of Native American students — about 10 percent of the school's population, which is the largest concentration of Native American students in an off-

reservation school in this area. Many of them are bused across this same line in the sand, this border between reservation and city, made visible by the stark contrast of city versus open space.

I sign in as a visitor, make my way through the administrative building that portrays plaques and newspaper clippings of the school's achievements. I stop by to talk with Vice Principal Davis (all names are pseudonyms) in her office. She is very eager to print out statistics of dropouts and student populations of the school for me. While I'm looking at these records, she asks me not to make the school look bad because they work hard doing what they do. She says it's not easy working in this area and that poverty spans all ethnicities: "It's more than just their skin color" (Personal Communication, October 7, 2011). I tell her that I will be as honest as I can to reveal the reality happening before me.

I ask her why she does it. She says that there's always that one kid that she sees turning their life around. She says this school has a huge amount of resources to help them succeed: "I tell them, they can do anything, *anything*, if they just put their mind to it, but I'm afraid that they can't see past tomorrow, they have a past of poverty, and they don't have the support at home that they need."

She explains that she grew up in a white family with two parents, but they worked on a farm, and they worked hard at what they did. They had to earn it. She knows that having been read to and having the support from her family was a huge reason why she succeeded.

She shares a story about a student who, during his sophomore year was often in trouble: "He was a thug, a gangster. We were about to kick his butt out of this place." But

then she talked with him and told him that he had a future in wrestling. Because of this talk, she says, he's now on pace now to get a Division 1 scholarship in wrestling. To see those students succeed that otherwise might not have gives her the hope to continue, she says.

She helps me with statistics of the school and tells me about how far they've come with being "P.C." (Politically Correct) in the yearbooks. I get certain copies of the 1969, 1971, 1988, and 2009 yearbooks. Beyond the continued caricatures and side profiles of Native Americans, there are pictures of white students who have painted their faces brown and are wearing headdresses in the yearbooks. One student has long black braids—not his own hair, a wig—and a loincloth over his khakis. Another white male student appears to be the mascot; he stands in front of two cheerleaders and holds the same pose as them — hands on hips, one knee in the air. He's got a chest plate of beads and a headdress on. Another photo: the same mascot being played by a different white male student in a different year. He's simply holding his fist into the air. Around him, the picture fades to black and the caption says, "Desert View High School: A First Impression."



I thank Vice Principal Davis for her time and depart. Just before I exit the administration building toward the central open-air courtyard, there is a glass display case as if plucked from a museum. The glass acts as a barrier to the contents inside: Native American dolls, weapons, tools, ceremonial pipes ... sacred.



*Figure 4. Glass case that houses traditional Native American artifacts.*

As I enter the central, fully gated in courtyard, I see two bicycles used by security to move around the campus quickly. Above, the faint rumble of an airplane on the final stages of its decent into the valley. The late bell has rung and some students are walking briskly, others are outright sprinting to their destinations. Two students leisurely walk toward a wing of the school. Two security personnel also see them and ask, “Where are you supposed to be?”

One student responds, “math class,” the other begins to say “English cla...” but is cut off by the security guard who says, “Get there.” Static voices come through their radios attached to their hips. Walking by, a police officer—his belt filled with a gun, hand

cuffs, Taser—also sees this exchange and gives a quick chuckle. Fearing that I, too, may be in trouble, I open the door for the security guards.

They look surprised at this gesture and say, “thank you.” Their confused looks make me think they aren’t sure if I’m a student or something else. By not scolding me for being late, I am guessing I fall into that “something else” category in their minds.

As I enter the B wing of the school, a poster on the wall says:

*We speak different languages,  
we come from different cultures,  
we keep different traditions.  
No matter who we are or where we are,  
we are not responsible for the past,  
but we are responsible for the future.*

“How convenient,” I think to myself, “to not have to be responsible for the past.”

Student-generated posters hang on the walls outside an American History classroom. They display the outlines of Europe, South and North America. There are arrows that flow from Europe to Mexico, South America, and North America. These posters are titled: Explorers in America!, The Discovery of America, Explore!, and Exploration in America. Many of these posters have pictures of white men who came to America: Cortez, Cartier, Cabot. One poster has a ship off the coast of the northwest United States shore and a man standing on the eastern board wielding a knife and holding out his hand.

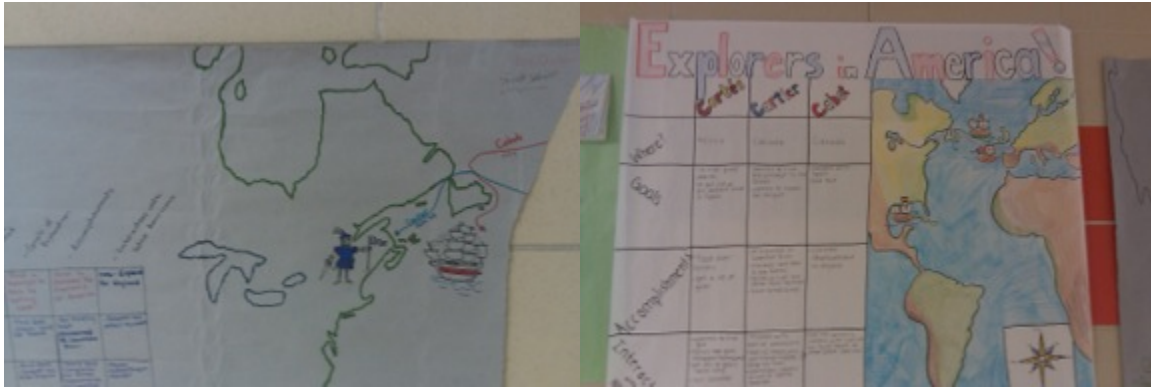


Figure 5. Posters depicting the “noble exploration and conquering” of the United States

Close by, also taped to the wall, is a printout with many bullet points, a few of them are highlighted. This printout is titled “Dress and Grooming,” a summary of the district’s policies when it comes to how students can and should dress and groom themselves. One portion of the policy that sticks out to me says:

Students will refrain from displaying tattoos or wearing clothing, jewelry or other accessories that communicate, whether through language, images, symbols, artwork, color schemes or clothing styles:

- A message that advocates or promotes violence or terror.
- A message that is sexually suggestive, vulgar, obscene or plainly offensive.
- A message that would cause a reasonable person, as a student or staff member, to feel threatened, intimidated or harassed because of the person’s race, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation.
- Students are expected to bathe and groom themselves regularly so that any lack of personal hygiene is not annoying or disruptive to students or staff.

Without drawing attention to myself, I quickly, secretly, wave my nose above my armpits to make sure I have bathed and groomed myself properly so as not to disrupt those around me. Good to go.

### **Desert View High School: Student Population**

It is the school’s 50-year anniversary. As such, old pictures of the students from the class of 1969 are strewn throughout the halls. From the pictures I see there is not one

student of color pictured, which makes sense since back in the 1979-1980 school year, the population of white students at Desert View was 85.4 percent. Today (2011-2012 school year), that percentage has decreased to 30.6 percent. In contrast, in 1979-80, the percentage of “Hispanic” students was 7.9 percent. Today, that percentage is nearly half the student population, 49.3 percent. All other minoritized populations increased during this time as well. For Native American students, the population has hung right around 10 percent (give or take .8 percent in either direction) since the 1999-2000 school year. This school year, Native Americans make up 9.7 percent of the total school population or 316 students in grades 10-12.





*Figure 6. Pictures hung on the walls of Desert View High School in honor of the 50-year reunion. Those pictured are from the class of 1969, the first class ever at DVHS.*

The hallways are laid out so that one main hallway runs east and west, while four other hallways — A, B, C, and D wings — perpendicularly insect this main hallway going north and south (++++). This layout creates cluttered chaos at these intersections when classes are dismissed like a rush-hour traffic intersection with no stoplight. Students have to slow down and navigate through people, around people, by people in

order to get to their destination while avoiding students they don't know and seeking friends they do know. They seek to find the path of least resistance through this territory of complication and confusion.

Ms. Bee's Native American Literature classroom lies at the heart of all this chaos and confusion. Her door opens directly into this intersection in B wing making it sometimes difficult to enter and exit this classroom. Often times, though, students from this Native American literature classroom greet others at the door with a hug or a hand slide to fist bump (like a high five, but more sophisticated).



*Figure 7. Hallway intersection at DVHS. The door on the left is Ms. Bee's classroom door.*

### **New Beginnings: The Classroom's Creation**

Parents of students who attended Desert View High School prior to this classroom's beginning voiced their concern to the administration that the DVHS was neglecting Native American voices and perspectives in the school. To heed these parents' and students' concerns, during the winter of 2007 the school district's diversity specialist sought the advice of a team of people to construct a curriculum that would validate,

teach, and support the perspectives of the Native American peoples in the Southwest United States. To do so, two university professors (James Blasingame and Simon Ortiz), one ASU instructor (Kyle Wilson), three graduate students (Victor Begay, Natalie Tsinnijinnie, Laura Walsh), and one undergraduate student (Denise Olivas), held a total of twelve meetings and sub-meetings with 10 school district partners (including DVHS's principal, language arts coordinator, social studies specialist, director of Curriculum and Instruction, director of Native American Education, and others), and two education and community representatives from two area Native American nations.

8/25/2008 Meeting with District Administrators  
9/16/2008 Steering Committee Meeting  
10/20/2008 Full Curriculum Committee Meeting  
11/17/2008 Full Curriculum Committee Meeting  
12/12/2008 English Language Arts Subcommittee Meeting  
1/23/2009 English Language Arts Subcommittee Meeting  
1/30/2009 Curriculum Design Team Meeting  
2/6/2009 Curriculum Design Team Meeting  
2/9/2009 Meeting with (two area Native American) Nation representatives  
2/12/2009 Curriculum Design Team Meeting  
2/25/2009 Meeting with Mesa District Administrators to unveil fully articulated curriculum (i.e. Arizona Department of Education English Language Arts Standards for Reading and Writing, objectives, teaching activities, literature selections, assessment)  
3/31/2009 MPS Curriculum Council Hearing on New Curriculum

According to Arizona State University professor James Blasingame, who was instrumental in creating and implementing this program, it was created for two reasons: "One, Native American students are being harmed when none of the curriculum reflects their culture, their heritage, or their identity, and two, the other (non-Native) students are not getting the true picture when they're studying American literature devoid of any Native authors in North America" (Personal Communication, 2009).

Further, Simon Ortiz, also an ASU professor and an instrumental influence in the development of the curriculum, said that Indigenous knowledge in this metropolitan area has been “missing since the very beginning” and needs to be “recognized in the public school ... because teaching knowledge is primary and fundamental to any society and nation” (Personal Communication, 2009).

Blasingame explains the process of representation and construction of the curriculum:

The committee first set itself with the task of identifying all stakeholders in this endeavor and giving each person or persons fair representation in the process of creating a Native American Literature curriculum for [the school district]. After this, we began to discuss the needs of the communities, schools, students, and teachers, and how to best meet them with a Native American curriculum...

Everyone agreed that creating and implementing curriculum of this kind is essential to establishing and maintaining equity in our society. Everyone also agreed that many perspectives needed to be sought and included, not only perspectives about the history of Native American peoples and their literature but also perspectives about what should be in a class of this nature and how it should be taught...

Our ASU partnership with [the school district] provided the perfect consortium for addressing these issues. Although the [city] educators recognized their need and listened to the outcry of their patrons, it was ASU that was uniquely suited to provide much needed resources, such as literary expertise, educational pedagogy, and a deep understanding of the nature of real cultural equity. These were not nearly enough, however, officials from the [the two area Native American Communities], as well as the Arizona State Library’s Tribal Librarian and other recognized representatives of Indigenous nations of Arizona provided input on what the curriculum should be and how it should be delivered.

After many meetings and consultations, we created a Native American Literature course for high school students with a detailed curriculum that met the Arizona Department of Education Standards for the English Language Arts and satisfied the expectations of the [the school district’s] administration. In the fall of 2009, the course design was presented [and] approv[ed] by the [the school district’s] Curriculum Committee for implementation in the spring of 2010.

The creation and implementation of this new curriculum that attempts to center on Native American histories, knowledges, and literacies, brought about much reflection by

students who, according to my participants, have never been taught this sort of content in a public school. I sought to understand what some of them were experiencing in this classroom.

For James and Charlotte, they may have been expressing their frustration with the dominant<sup>3</sup> practices of schooling that many non-dominant students face in which their “funds of knowledge” are denied, ignored, or invalidated either intentionally or not. González et al. (1995) describe funds of knowledge as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). Essentially, what may have been important lessons for their own well being in their communities, both on and off the reservation, were not of importance within the school. Conversely, the lessons taught in the school were not experienced as being of import by James, Charlotte and many of the other participants in this study: “...John and Clark or whatever —those discovery guys,” as Charlotte stated while attempting to recall the lessons taught to her about explorers Lewis and Clark.

For James, this was more than just another class: “This [Native American Literature classroom] is the only reason I came to school for the first two weeks actually. Cuz I was gonna drop out, but I wanted to come to this class. And by luck I happened to stay in school” (Interview, March 9, 2010). According to James, the anticipation of what this course might be was enough for him to stay in school and graduate. Knowing that Native American students “are 237 percent more likely to drop out of school and 207 percent more likely to be expelled than white students” (National Caucus of Native American State Legislators, 2008, p. 5), this was an important accomplishment for James and a testament to what a classroom space like this might be able to do for students, but

why was this one classroom so important for James? Why did he need this class to come back to a school he had given up on or that had given up on him?

Despite this metropolitan area's location near numerous Native American nations, some that share borders with the city, this is the only classroom that emphasizes Native American literature. Such a class is an accomplishment in itself because of the political climate in Arizona. Known for its conservatism, Arizona has been noted as having the harshest anti-immigrant laws in the U.S. with legislation such as SB 1070 and HB 2281. The latter, often referred to as the Ethnic Studies Ban, prohibits schools from teaching courses that focus on perspectives, knowledges, and understandings that differ from a dominant Eurocentric one.<sup>4</sup>

Housed within this ban on ethnic studies is a glaring hypocrisy: All studies within our schools are ethnic studies; albeit, they are taught from a white, Euro-centric ethnic perspective on literacy, history, science, math, etc. It is damaging to all peoples to think that ethnicity lie only in people of color. Every one in the United States, apart from Native American tribes and peoples, come from somewhere, someplace, thus they have an ethnicity—a place where they themselves or their families immigrated. What is taught in our schools (apart from very few classrooms) is ethnic studies from the dominant, white, Eurocentric position and perspective that often devalues, plagiarizes, silences, and removes voices and understandings from people of color. In this case, when there is an ethnic studies ban, fair questions to pose are: Whose ethnicities are we banning? And whose ethnicities and perspectives are we privileging in schools?

This metropolitan area is void of classes that focus solely on the peoples who originally settled this land and who still make up a large portion of the state's population:

More than 295,000 Native Americans live in the state and more than a quarter of the state's land is reservation and tribal community land (U.S. Census, 2010). Naturally, the next question needing to be answered is: how is it possible for a Native American literature classroom to continue after the passage of the Arizona Ethnic Studies Ban? Arizona's House Bill 2281 states that school districts are not allowed to include any (non-white) "ethnic" studies program of instruction that:

- Promotes the overthrow of the United States government.
  - Promote resentment toward a race or class of people.
  - Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group.
  - Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.
- (HB2281, 2010, p. 1)

In addition to this, the bill "shall not be construed to restrict or prohibit: courses or classes for Native American pupils that are required to comply with federal law" (HB2281, 2010, p. 1). There are a number of federal laws that this bill might be addressing: The Indian Education Act of 1972, Title VII of No Child Left Behind, Native American Languages Act, the Indian Education and Self-Determination Act of 1975 or the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934. However, as Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) suggest in their book *"To Remain an Indian": Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*, the issue underlying the creation of laws such as HB 2281 may be better understood by looking at it through the safe/dangerous paradigm or the "Safety Zone Theory," which "traces the 'swings' of Indian policy—including educational policy—to an ongoing struggle over cultural difference and its perceived threat, or benefit, to a sense of shared American identity" (p. 6). In this case, I would argue alongside Lomawaima and McCarty that because of the smaller numbers of Native Americans and because they do not represent a single speech community, they are not

perceived as “dangerous” or “threatening” to dominant interests such as those that constructed the bill.

Conversely, the Latino community—because of their large numbers in the state and because they *do* have a single speech community—are being targeted by Arizona lawmakers, whereas at earlier points in American history, this effort was concentrated on Native Americans (and it may be that way again depending on the swings) (McCarty, Personal communication, 2011). Despite this, Native American communities as with many non-dominant populations have been living on the edge. By this I mean that whether non-dominant populations are inside or outside of the metaphorical safety zone, they are constantly on the edge of what is accepted and what is denied. Physically, many of the Native American students in this class travel off of the reservation to attend this non-reservation school. In this way, many of these Native American students live on the edge as they travel back and forth to the space that has been “reserved” for them on their bordering reservation. They live this line, as did I growing up.

### **I’m “scared that this class is going to go away”**

This law and the man who fought to pass it, former superintendent of public instruction and current state attorney general Tom Horne, have come up in classroom conversations. During a class discussion, one student asked: “Now whatever happened to Tom Horne?” Ms. Bee replied, “He’s the one that banned ethnic studies because he thought it was teaching students to hate the government. They can’t touch this [Native American literature] class though. I’m more worried about my multicultural classroom than this classroom. He can’t touch this” (Classroom discussion, Aug. 30, 2010).



Still, despite Ms. Bee's saying so, in conversations between the two of us, we realize that this classroom is not immune from the political workings in the state and in the country. Likewise, Michael voiced his concern in our first interview saying, "That whole situation with [then Arizona Superintendent] Tom Horne trying to get rid of ethnic classes is a big ordeal, and it made me scared that this class is going to go away because we barely had it. It's the first year; they've just implemented it. I don't want to see it taken off like that" (Interview, March 9, 2010). Perhaps Michael is already well aware of the "Safety Zone Theory" and the way policies shift and swing, which may have had immediate effects on his life. (I think back to whom the Montana superintendent of instruction was when I was in high school. I couldn't even pick his or her name out of a short list.)

### **Ever-Evolving Research Questions:**

In my first semester of coursework at Arizona State University, with the prompting and pushing of my advisors and mentors, I applied for IRB approval to conduct pilot research in this brand new classroom. By far, this was the best decision I made in graduate school for a few reasons: 1. The empirical data and experiences within this research setting and the conversations and interactions with my participants made the knowledge I was exposed to in my courses more relevant, immediate, and applicable in the research setting. I was able to question that which did not match my understanding, record that which did, and further clarify or complicate that which I was exposed to. 2. In my courses, not only did I have a voice, I had the voices and experiences of my participants; I was able to practice the telling or retelling of their narratives orally and in

written form. Having been exposed to their stories made the readings and writings at the university not a chore as I had felt in most of my prior interactions in academia; instead, the lessons learned were internalized and applicable. There was a direct give and take from research setting to coursework and vice versa making my assignments and papers more robust, my thinking more dynamic. 3. As I was exposed to more experiences, more voices and stories from both the research setting and my coursework, I was able to see my growth as a researcher and as a person.

The simplest way to show this growth is in tracking the evolution of my research questions. Initially, my focus question for IRB was: 1. *Is there a need for a Native American studies course at the high school level?* However, as I began conducting research in this classroom every week, I began to notice certain themes emerging from the data, so this seemingly simply yes or no question evolved into: 2. *Why are the four Native American students I am focusing on less willing to vocalize their opinions during discussions?* As I continued to read research studies and articles that pertained to Native Americans in education, I began to notice a bias in the second question that was approaching a dangerous deficit based positions that some researchers—whether right or wrong—have accepted: looking at certain communities or groupings of people as if they are all the same and have generalizable traits across all peoples. Question #2 was generalizing all the participants’ experiences unfairly. Students came to the classroom with different understandings and with different upbringings. If I continued to answer this question, I may have fallen into a *damage-centered* research approach, something that Tuck (2009) warned against: damage-centered research “involves social and historical contexts at the outset, the significance of these contexts is highly submerged. Without the

context of racism and colonization, all we're left with is the damage" (p. 415). I could feel that I was answering this question by only revealing the damage and not seeing elements of colonization and racism in the process that perhaps led to their learned behaviors in the classroom, what I have since called *silencing experiences* (see chapter 5), which are the events and learned practices for students that have led to their forced silence in the classroom. For this reason, I have altered my question to ask:

*3. In what way or ways is the Native American literature curriculum in this Southwest Urban High School denying, affirming, or challenging the identities of students taking this course?*

By continually being honest and candid with myself, a recommendation I took from Wolcott (1990), I constantly looked inward at who I was, who I was becoming, and how the words from others—participants, researchers, professors, friends, theorists, family, etc.—were allowing me to change and grow as a human. As I made sense of their words in relation to this study, I found solace in the words of grounded theorist Cathy Charmaz (2006), who said, “Grappling with analytic problems is part of the research process. Feeling confused and uncertain—but learning to tolerate the ambiguity—shows your growth as a researcher” (p. 105) (See chapter 3 section: Who Am I?). As I write, I continue to grow. As I interact, I continue to become. As I speak, I continue to be taught. I move forward with the understanding that, even when completed, this project, this study, will forever be a work in progress.

In a chapter I co-constructed with Valerie Kinloch (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2013), we acknowledged this strange feeling of having to stop our thinking in order to lock it in via the written word in published form: “By co-constructing this chapter based on the

dialogic spiral (see chapter 4), we acknowledge that the document we have created is alive, moving, and continually recreating. Eventually, however, we have to take a snapshot of it, and pause to reflect on it, which you see here. This does not mean that it stops” (p. 33). Ricoeur (1981) provides some relief for this feeling of being fixed in time or locked in text by stating that the words have the potential to go beyond the moment from which they were created and can, thus, enter new ways of thinking beyond what the words, stories, analysis were originally intended to express. Moen (2006) adds that this allows the work to become an “open text [which] makes it possible to engage in a wide range of interpretations” (p. 6). This is where you, the reader, come in. By connecting or denying, by affirming or questioning, by adding your words or striking mine out, you are engaged in a dialogic conversation with the participants, with me, with the narrative structure of this study. Your subjectivities, your perspectives, your identity make the words here move beyond space and time. Knowing this gives me hope, and, at the same time, terrifies me. With that hope and terror, I attempt to show as much of the process as I do the final product of my thinking. In this way, I hope to track my growth within a study that focuses on the learning, teaching, and knowledge construction in this Native American literature classroom.

### **Purpose and Positioning**

The purpose of my study is to examine the interactions of students in a classroom that shifts the content from the mainstream narrative curriculum toward a curriculum that complicates, contradicts and challenges what has been taught in schools about Native American peoples. My primary goal is to better understand how students, both Native

and non-Native, are interacting, communicating and complicating a classroom space that attempts to center the knowledge on a variety of Native American perspectives.

So as to avoid a teacher-to-student relationship and move closer to a student-to-student relationship, I have removed myself from the teaching of the curriculum; however, I *have* aided Ms. Bee in the creation of the course content and have provided feedback and support. By being a participant rather than a facilitator and co-teacher, I believe I gained greater trust from the students, which might have been more difficult if I had co-taught this course and formally evaluating students via official grades.

### **Digital Communication**

The decision to move closer to a student role and away from that of a teacher, I believe, opened up for greater avenues of communication and understanding between my participants and me, such as Facebook, texting, and other forms of digital communication. These digital avenues of communication are major players in how students today relate to each other and develop trust, rapport, and friendship. As an ethnographer, I feel I would be losing rich communication opportunities with participants without these digital tools. As such, when my participants asked to become my “Facebook friend” or asked for my cell phone number to text back and forth, I willingly accepted. I did so full well knowing the responsibilities that carried with it. They knew that I was there in this classroom with them to understand how they were making sense of a classroom that attempts to center its content on Native American stories, knowledges, and understandings. By becoming a Facebook friend to many of them, I was invited into a Facebook group. The closed group’s purpose states: “WAZUP ALL NDNS OF [Name

of city] ARIZONA! OR [Bordering] REZ! WELCOME TO THE PLACE WHERE US NATIVES CAN ROAM AND DOMINATE ON A LIL WEBSITE KNOWN AS FACEBOOK! HAHA LETS HAVE A POW WOW AND THIS WILL BE OUR GATHERING OF THE NATIONS!!”

Our Facebook and texting conversations were based on the course content and their interactions with it. Since they shared many of their personal feelings and responses with me, I thought it only fair to give back to these conversations by being human. In that, I mean that I sympathized with them, laughed with them, shared with them my feelings and my responses as well. By doing so, rapport was established in a two-way street whereby both players shared in the content being discussed rather than me simply asking calculated and sometimes cold questions that, quite frankly, they can see through and could become disengaged if they wanted to. As a result, there were moments on Facebook where there were “shout outs” to Ms. Bee and myself for participating in activities that were important to them. For example, Neena attached our names to a Facebook update the day after we attended a pow wow in which her family set up a food stand. She said in her Facebook status:

“Dude selling frybread is sooooooo hard!!! :D

I'm tiiiiired!!

p.s.

Thanks Ms.Bee & [Tim San Pedro](#) for stopping by! :D

Your money goes to our family reunion thanks! :D”

Facebook also provided an avenue to continue sharing materials, ideas, and voices. For example, Neena—long after Ms. Bee’s class had concluded (10/22/2012)—updated her status to: “Does anyone still have the papers about Chief Joseph from Ms. Bee’s class? :( I need them...” Having had collected almost every handout from class, I messaged back to her, “I do!” then emailed an attachment of the handout, which she used to construct a college paper about a historical analysis of Indigenous leaders.

However, there were moments where this line was pushed and tested. For example, Damon—who constantly tested the boundaries of authority, of friendships, and relationships—texted me one evening asking if I could buy him and his friends alcohol. I replied, “I am always here to listen, but this is something that I will never be willing to do. I hope you understand.” To which he replied, “Of course! Have a great night.” Thereafter, Damon continued to text me about things that occurred in class, but never again was this subject brought up.

### **Near End to a Classroom’s Beginning**

It is important to note that this classroom was almost discontinued and will likely face pressure in the future to not be offered at this school. During the spring semester of 2011, students were asked to fill out their registration form that has all the classes that may potentially be offered at the school. One of those classes on the list was “Native American Literature.” Only juniors were given this option since this classroom is a senior English elective course only. Because of slashes in the district’s budgets, classrooms had to have at least 35 students in them in order for the administration to consider certain elective courses to be worth the time to teach them. Only 15 students had marked this

classroom on their registration, and the administration made the decision not to include this course for the 2011-2012 school year. Ms. Bee informed me of this decision. I then informed James Blasingame and Simon Ortiz of this decision. Blasingame personally visited the administration to see if we could recruit students in to the classroom and offer incentives to the school like field trips to the local state university to hear guest Native American speakers, and further financial support. They agreed and 38 students were enrolled in the class allowing it to continue. A crucial fact in this near shut down was not that the administration was seeking to shut it down (at the same time, they were not seeking ways to allow it to continue), but that not enough students were interested in taking this course despite the positive feedback that Ms. Bee had received from her first two classes.

In a personal conversation with Ms. Bee during the fall of 2010, she informed me that she visited an afterschool Native American student group to inform them of this class that they might be interested in taking. She said that she was met with responses like, “Why would we want to learn something that we already know from home?” and “Why would I want to learn this from you?” The last question impacted her the most, she said.

### **Ms. Bee: The Classroom Teacher**

While much of my focus is on the students in this study and how they are interacting and making sense of this classroom, I quickly realized that Ms. Bee’s stories, ethnicity, culture, and positions were very important to this study. Ms. Bee is in her early 40s. She says she is a mixture of Opata, Mayan, Cherokee, Mexican, and white but she



acknowledges that all people see when they look at her is the “white girl.” She grew up hearing her grandparents speak Spanish

“...whenever they didn’t want us to know what they were talking about ... or when I was in trouble with them. They didn’t want my mom to learn Spanish because in their experience when they went to school and spoke Spanish, they would be punished for it. So they wanted their children to grow up ‘white.’ So my mom and uncle grew up speaking English and transferred that to me. (Interview, Oct. 4, 2012)

Ms. Bee acknowledges that, although her grandpa’s grandmother was full blood Opatá, her mom and grandparents, “never really told stories” about that culture. She wishes she could have those conversations with her now deceased grandfather: “I would have asked my grandfather more questions. For me, I wasn’t at that point yet where I truly appreciated his stories and who he was and the way he was raised. That taught me that death can happen at any time so know who you are, know your family and who they are before they go” (Interview, Oct. 4, 2012).

Ms. Bee started teaching at Desert View High School in 1998 thinking that it was a place “just to get my feet wet with these kiddos and then move on, and I just fell in love with the kids and stayed” (Interview, Oct. 4, 2012). She began working with sophomores before asking to teach the multicultural literature course to seniors three years later. She has been teaching that course ever since (while also teaching the Native American literature course three years ago). She says that she was glad to teach the Native American literature course

...for selfish reasons because my own history and my own, I guess, lack of knowledge of my Native American ancestry, and my own sensitivity for what Native Americans have been through. I wanted it not only to be a learning experience for the students, but for me as well and to acknowledge cultures and peoples that have been unacknowledged in our schools for so long and wanting to dispel ignorance in others. (Interview, Oct. 4, 2012)

Early in the first year of the study, I asked Ms. Bee to reflect on why she decided to teach this class and what it has meant to her. It wasn't until the final week of the final year of collecting data—three years later—that she wrote this letter to me. I give you her letter in its entirety so as to give her the opportunity to share with the reader directly her positionality, her justification, and her understandings over the prior three years:

### ***Native American Literature Class Reflection***

*When I decided to take on teaching the Native American Literature class, I was both ecstatic and terrified. I am Native American to a small degree; on my mother's side, I am Opatah and Mayan, and on my father's side, I am Cherokee, which, I have learned, elicits eye rolls and "ughs" from my full-blood Native students. As such, I wanted to know more about my own tribes and their histories as well as educate our Native and non-native students about the beauty and complexity of Native Americans, their histories, and the literature that has arisen as a direct result of these histories, but seeing that I look "white," I was afraid my Native students would have a hard time accepting me as the teacher. To some degree I was correct on the first day of school, but as I showed the students pictures of my mother in her Native American regalia and told them the sincerity of my intent with the class, I think the students were willing to "give me a try" with what I had to share. I told the students up front that they will be the driving force behind the class; I had a tentative curriculum, but I wanted the class to be meaningful to ALL of them, Native and non-Native alike, so I would gladly throw out the entire curriculum if the students wanted to go in a different direction. I was also up front in telling them that they would be the true teachers, since I was not going to pretend to know everything, or even much more than "academic" knowledge about individual tribes.*

*I had spent well over a year researching Native American history and literature, focusing on local tribes as well as basic history and events I thought every student should know before graduating. I wanted the curriculum to be relatable and interesting to the students. I had been teaching a unit for 10 years on Native American Literature in my Multicultural Literature class, but the more I researched, the more I realized how sad that little unit was and that I could never do justice to the immensity of what constitutes Native America issues (past and present) and the literature derived from these issues in just 3 short weeks.*

*I was initially scared that I didn't have enough information or literature for the pilot Native American literature class, but now that I have taught the class twice, I think this should be a year-long class, seeing how one semester is not nearly enough to adequately educate the students on what they have NOT been taught over the past 12 years of their schooling about Native Americans and their*

*contributions to the continual formation of the United States and its literature. My students agree.*

*My first goal was to establish a community in which all students would be comfortable sharing knowledge, or lack thereof, about Native American tribes, histories, leaders, issues, and literature. But I also knew the sacredness and protection of such knowledge to many of my students. I first needed to create a comfort zone for the students to openly acknowledge their misconceptions, stereotypes, and lack of information about Native American tribes without fear of judgment, so I had them write a letter to me with guided questions. This also gave me an intimate look at their initial attitudes coming into the class in a non-threatening medium. Many students wrote at least a page to me, and most of the responses were the same: They knew nothing about Native Americans or their literature. Not even my Native students knew much about their own tribes (Written, Dec. 16, 2011).*

While Ms. Bee's words inspire thoughts of my own and have implications of identity, pedagogy, conscientization, discourse, and many other categories relevant to this study, I will honor her words by not offering my analysis of them until later points within this dissertation.

**Terms:**

In the United States, as with other countries, the terms used for Indigenous peoples vary. For legal purposes, "American Indian" or even just "Indian" is used since that was the term given to them by the colonizers and written into legal documents like treaties. However, many people prefer the term "Native Americans" or "Indigenous Americans" or "Alaska Natives" or "Native Hawaiians" because they were Native to the land and here long before white colonizers. Here, I will use these terms interchangeably with the intent of these terms referring to the more than 560 federally recognized tribal sovereign nations in the United States. Normally, I would heed the advice of the Native American communities I have interacted with who ask to be referred to by the specific tribal orientation and sometimes clan name. Unfortunately, for anonymity through the

International Review Board, I have promised participants every avenue to keep their identities anonymous, that includes their tribal affiliation.

Culture is also an extremely debated term. What was once thought of as a “biologically innate human behavior” should be seen as that which humans learn over time (Anderson-Levitt, 2006, p. 280). Stolzenberg (2001) warns us to “Stop thinking of [culture] as a name for a thing, and come to view it instead as a placeholder for a set of inquiries – inquiries which may be destined never to be resolved (p. 444). Brayboy’s (2005) discussion of culture has helped me the most conceptually. He uses this term as a concept that is “simultaneously fluid and dynamic, and—at times—fixed and stable. Like an anchor in the ocean, it is rooted to some place....The anchor shifts and sways, like culture, with the changing tides, ebbs, and flows of the ocean or the life, contexts, and situations for Indigenous peoples” (p. 943).

### ***Rez Dogs and the Open Road***

*As I make my way through the hallways with taped up dress code handouts, American history posters, pictures from the class of 1969, I finally come upon the Native American Literature classroom. Walking through the door, I can't help but notice the amount of papers stapled to the walls. Dictionaries lie in the wire baskets under the seats. At the front of the class is Ms. Bee's podium where she explains the activities for the day: "Today is all about telling and reading stories," she says as she hands a packet of 18 poems she's photocopied. Tony, after hearing this, smiles and nods his head. He's been known to tell a story or two, and he's also been known to wear politically charged T-shirts like the one he's wearing today: It's a red shirt with a silhouette of a man sitting in a slouched position on a horse. The flag he is carrying is still waving in the wind. Six arrows penetrate his back. He is either dead or dying. On the back of this graphic shirt says the words: IT WAS A GOOD DAY TO DIE! I wonder if this will pass the dress code I just read: (A message that would cause a reasonable person, as a student or staff member, to feel threatened, intimidated or harassed because of the person's race, ethnicity, religion, gender of sexual orientation.) Reasonable person...*

*Ms. Bee begins reading the first two poems: One is called Birdfoot's Grampa by Joseph Bruchac and the other is called My Father's Song by Simon Ortiz. In these poems, both authors discuss the lessons learned from their elders. One such lesson is about the importance of life and how we should protect it. From these poems emerges a conversation—a story, really—that Tony wants to share:*

*"My grandma when she was young there were a lot of stray dogs and cats. So what her dad would do was put them in a sack and tell her to go to the cliff and just let*

*them go, and it kinda hurt her every time she did it,” he says as he looks down at his desk and then every once in a while shoots his eyes up to meet his peers. “So right now, any stray cat or dog that comes into her yard is basically going to stay there because she feeds them. So we got like five rez dogs around our house and like mountains of cats. It’s crazy.”*

*The class laughs, maybe because some of them connect to what a rez dog is and how plentiful they’ve become in their communities.*

*Ms. Bee prompts Tony to talk more by asking him, “Is she trying to make amends for what she did?”*

*“I think so,” Tony answers, “but she doesn’t like to talk about it, but you can kinda tell because whenever you go to her house it’s just cats and rez dogs. They just sit in the yard.”*

*“Isn’t it amazing that animals just know who in the community is going to feed them, like who has a good heart,” she says in response to Tony’s story.*

*A little later in the discussion after a couple of other students share their stories about rez animals, Tony shares another story about one of his favorite dogs:*

*“I had this great dane. It actually wasn’t that old, and she had puppies and those puppies had puppies, but then they all started dying and then she started dying and then she had one left and this one was sitting on the road, I don’t know why, but it sits on the road like there’s no reason for it, but it sits on the road like it’s dead, so I have to come out and check if it’s dead or not, but I came out one day and it was sitting there on the road, and I didn’t think anything of it and this car comes along and doesn’t even bother to swerve. I mean cars come along and swerve, but this car kept coming and then boom! And it didn’t*

*even slow down; it just kept going. I saw the dog, it got up and was staggering, and I don't know what happens, but they take off somewhere, but they don't die, it's weird, but, I don't know, I just take care of the dog now. It's a rez dog. Yeah, she got hit by a school bus, she got hit by big ol semis. She got hit by cars and then she got some sort of disease but she survived all of those. She finally just died of old age." (Classroom conversation, Nov. 17, 2010).*

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Conceptual Understandings:**

As human beings, we are constantly shifting, changing, evolving the way we think, the way we see, the way we believe in that which we see and hear. As such, I am not attempting to state in this chapter any concrete truths, since even truths shift and change and evolve, revealing that the only real truth is that there are not any. Instead, I employ a “natural history of inquiry [which] give[s] the reader some access to the researcher’s thought processes as the study evolve[s] and new understandings [emerge]” (Eisenhart, 2006, p. 572). From what I have learned with my participants in the research setting of my three-year study, the following is a snapshot of how I have comprehended the information presented to me both in oral and written words, read and told to me. In no way is this complete, nor will it ever be; I am simply attempting to place my participants’ voices and my own voice in the context of the conversation that has been happening for thousands of years before us: this is merely a snapshot of our understandings at this moment in time.

Here is what I comprehend now (this will change as I change): Many Native American students have had to negotiate an education that is often at odds or in competition with one another. Wenger (1998) describes education more broadly as *communities of practice*:

Being alive as human means that we are constantly engage in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds, from ensuring our physical survival to seeking the most lofty pleasures. As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words we learn.



Over time, this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It makes sense, therefore, to call these kinds of *communities of practice* (p. 45).

Where we learn, how we learn, what we learn are all very important questions to answer, and yet we cannot answer these questions without placing education in the realm of power struggles, colonization, and culture since education is “a process by which individuals learn the culture of a society and become its members” (Pai & Alder, cited in Agbo, 2001, p. 33). That said individuals have the enormous and often times confusing task of deciding whether or not to hold the beliefs that are taught at home, at school and in the community and society: “Knowledge...is often derived from outside [ourselves]; that is, information is objectified, logical, and provable. Listening to the Elders and other community members, knowledge for them appears to be generated from within oneself, and set within the context of their reality” (Ball, 2004, p. 470).

In what ways are students engaging, accepting and rejecting the knowledge in this Native American literature class? How are their realities reflected in this space? It is at this intersection where knowledge enters these students’ understanding, where they decide to accept or reject certain teachings. And, in a space that is exposing political injustices, issues of race, colonization, ignored histories, how are students accepting or denying their ability to be critical of their social, political, and economic realities?

One way of viewing how these students are accepting or rejecting certain teachings or knowledges in this classroom is by using Lomawaima and McCarty’s *Safety Zone Theory* (SZT) discussed in chapter 1 in a different context. As a reminder, they defined SZT as “trac[ing] the ‘swings’ of Indian policy—including educational policy—

to an ongoing struggle over cultural difference and its perceived threat, or benefit, to a sense of shared American identity (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 6). For me, in this classroom specifically, I have come to see this *safety zone* as a physical space that has the ability to expand and contract based on the conversations, trust, reciprocities, and topics discussed and our positioning to them. For many of the students in the class, both Native and non-Native, this classroom was unlike any other they have had prior. Some could verbalize what this difference was, others couldn't.

For Michael, he said he knew that his education had been taught from a dominant perspective. He says that Native Americans are talked about in classes as though they were just a "small happening." Teachers he has had "don't have enough time in their lesson to go over [what happened to Native Americans], and they go over more important things that happened to colonists." He has often asked, "oh, well, we're not important enough to cover?" (March 9, 2010). Moreover, when Native Americans are discussed in this context, instead of attempting to challenge the teacher, he becomes silent and lets the lesson continue so that other students aren't affected by his interruptions. His frustrations remain inside him, festering, lingering.

### **The Erasure of Knowledge**

Perhaps Michael was experiencing what Collins and Blot (2003) discuss as the "erasure of Native writing" (p. 128). They explain that there is a long history of colonizers using the written language to devalue the histories of Native Americans that were and are passed on through stories orally. Today, Native languages are being lost at a rapid rate and with them perspectives, teachings, and understandings disappear as well.

Replaced is a new language that writes “the history of conquered peoples, ... incorporate(s) them into the history of the West, and ... *represent(s)* natives to themselves through European eyes (Collins & Blot, 2003, p. 130). Michael seems to see this same process happening in his classrooms and acknowledges that there is a difference within a classroom that values the Native American perspectives and the lives of the Native American students in this classroom.

In an interview with James, he also felt that something wrong was happening in his education that nearly led him to drop out of school during his junior year. It was the promise that this course was being offered in the spring semester of his senior year that he says allowed him to endure the other classes and graduate high school, which he did. He said, “I think it’s better that we learn about Native American stuff other than the stuff like in my history classes. Whatever they learn about, Columbus or whatever. That stuff don’t interest me, ya know. This stuff interests me.” I asked him why that other stuff don’t interest him. He replied, “Well, basically it’s all about people who are not from here. People who came here and destroyed and wiped out my people and they’re just like all right, let’s have a Columbus Day. Let’s celebrate, ya know? And to me that’s disgusting. And this is, this is class where we keep it real” (Interview, March 9, 2010).

“Keep it real” is a common phrase in youth culture, but I think for James, the realness of his education lies in a classroom that included him in the safety zone, a classroom that discussed the fact that there are many different perspectives in this world, and a class that attempted to discuss a perspective rarely taught or discussed. For James, the hope of what this class would be was enough for him to stick it out and graduate: “This [Native American Literature] class is the only reason I came to school for the first

two weeks actually. Cuz I was gonna drop out, but I wanted to come to this class. And by luck, I happened to stay in school” (Interview, March 9, 2010).

Erin’s class schedule has given her a firsthand glimpse of what Michael and James may have been feeling. Erin’s first class of the day was this Native American literature course. Her next period was spent as a teacher’s aide in a junior history course, where she noticed some stark contrasts between what was being taught during first hour and that which was being taught in the junior American history course. She said that the instructor for this history class:

kinda skips over all the Native American stuff a little bit like he says some things, but it’s like very tiny like a bullet on every PowerPoint maybe. Like we don’t go over it that much and he even said a comment, I don’t remember what it was, but ... (he said that a Native American event) wasn’t that important to go over .... It was something I learned in this [Native American Literature] class like the day before.... He was like this happened and that, but it’s not that important, so we’ll move on to the next slide. (Interview, Oct. 27, 2010).

Erin’s movement from the Native American literature class to her American history class closely resembles another participant, Eileen’s (see chapter 5), navigation between the same spaces. This navigation, I feel, is crucial in understanding how the spaces surrounding us interact with our emerging identities and understandings. As such, chapter 5 will further investigate this movement that Erin has touched on here.

Erin, Michael, and James have verbalized how the *safety zone* can shift, move and change from classroom to classroom and even from topic to topic. In most classes they have taken in their public education, they have been placed on the outside of this zone where their histories, ideas, perspectives and cultures were not a part of the classroom discussion. This outside-looking-in situation that all these participants discussed made them feel isolated, alone, ignored, so much so that they fell silent in these classrooms,

what I will refer to from this point forward as a *silencing experiences*. Further, this silencing experience, as McCarty et al. (1991) suggests in her study, may not be due to Native American cultural and learning practices, but because students may not know how to begin to speak up for the injustices done to their histories and their knowledge as they have been trained over time to be silent in this context. Althusser (1971) discusses how “children at school also learn the ‘rules’ of good behavior, i.e. the attitude that should be observed ... according to the job he is ‘destined’ for.... In other words, the school ... teaches the ‘know-how’, but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its ‘practice’” (pp. 103-4).

However, for Erin, Michael, James and many other non-dominant students in this Native American Literature classroom, the safety zone shifted and changed to include students’ perspectives whose histories had been ignored and invalidated, particularly Latino/a students who often drew parallels between the Native American histories of injustices and their current contemporary struggles in the face of damaging laws like SB 1070 and HB 2281. For many of these marginalized students who were on the outside looking in, they often times found themselves at the center of this safety zone in the Native American literature classroom as the content, discussions, and teachings encompassed injustice, racism, and issues of inequality.

James perhaps showed this shift of the safety zone best by comparing other classes to this Native American Literature class. He mentioned earlier that he was frustrated learning about “...people who are not from here. People who came here and destroyed and wiped out my people and they’re just like all right, let’s have a Columbus Day. Let’s celebrate, ya know? And to me that’s disgusting.” However, when discussing

the Native American Literature class he says: “I feel like a part of me has been shattered, and I feel like I’m picking up pieces that I need. Ya know?”

This shifting, moving, and changing zone of safety may also place students from the dominant perspective on the outside for the first time since, for the most part, their education has reflected their culture and teachings from their communities. Abby, a Caucasian student, graciously allowed me to hear and see her confusion, her reality, her frustrations in this Native American literature classroom. An account I will further investigate in chapter 5 as I juxtapose her account with Eileen’s.

### **The Authoritative Voice from a Native American perspective**

To better understand how this movement of the safety zone occurs, I turn to the theoretical understanding of Bakhtin (1981) who differentiates between two distinctly different categories of discourse—the authoritative discourse and the internally persuasive discourse:

The authoritative word is ... so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact...for example, the authority of religious dogma, or of acknowledge scientific truth. (pp. 342-3).

The conflict that may arise with the authoritative discourse is that “although some people take authoritarian words as authoritative, ... some may resist” (Ball and Freedman, 2004, p. 8). Some may completely disagree with the decisions made by those in power. It is this tension at this moment that Bakhtin calls the “zone of contact” (1981, p. 345). Within this zone, there arises a struggle where ideas do not match, do not agree: “what we think as an individual is not the same as some aspect of the official doctrine of our larger world. It is

those moments of struggle that we develop our own ideologies” (Ball and Freedman, 2004, p. 7). The authoritative word “demands ... that we make it our own” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342) and when we disagree, a tension and struggle happens, while, at the same time, we begin to form our own ideologies, which may be positioned closely to the authoritative discourse or far from it.

However, as we form these ideologies, we still exist within society and interact with society and must make sense of how to position ourselves within our communities and schools. This process, Bakhtin (1981) says cannot happen in isolation, which is where the second discourse comes into play: the internally persuasive discourse. The internally persuasive discourse is “denied all privilege, backed by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society” (p. 342). In other words, it is the ideological battles—the words of others—we wage in our own head that persuade us on the inside how to ultimately act or react on the outside. We process that which has been given to us, and we ultimately allow or deny the access of certain ideas and beliefs to become our own. Again, this process is never done in isolation: “The discourse of others also influences the ways we think and contributes to forming what ultimately is internally persuasive for us ... [it] is subject to change ... with our ever-evolving ideologies” (Ball and Freedman, 2004, p. 8). This zone of contact, where differing ideologies and positions overlap in schools, in the community and in the home, is where knowledge emerges.

**In this one-size-fits-all approach to education, it seems as though that one-size fits one group of people. What about the rest of us?**

In the United States, there are many different cultures within our society. We are far from homogenous and yet the trend in our public educational system is moving

toward a unified, one-size-fits-all curriculum that leaves many children behind whose backgrounds are not congruent with that of the dominant perspective teachings: "...when a mainstream, standardized, one-size-fits-all curriculum is all that is offered, too often the result is a homogenizing, monocultural, colonizing approach to community and human service development that is inappropriate for the varied social ecologies of Indigenous children and families" (Ball, 2004, p. 457).

As with all students, Native American students are influenced by the practices, activities and values of their home culture (Van Hamme, 1995); however, Cultural Discontinuity Theory argues that what makes the educational process difficult for Native American students is the large discrepancy between their home and school cultures (Au, 1993; Huffman, 2008; Ogbu, 1982; Pewewardy, 1994; Philips, 1983; Reyhner, 1992; Van Hamme, 1996). This theory argues that whereas a student from the dominant society also has different practices, activities and values at home (or what González et. Al (1995) have referred to as *Funds of Knowledge*) those differences are slight—like a crack in the sidewalk—and can be easily overcome by students. When the fundamental concept of education—cooperation instead of competition (McCarty et al., 1991)—differs for Native American students, the gap between the home and the school is enormous—like a crevice in the Grand Canyon, according to this theoretical perspective.

While these and many other disconnections exist, school personnel often fail to see that "American Indian students undergo traumatic cultural conflicts while attending school" (Surwell cited in Reyhner, 1986, p.vi). This cultural trauma and alienation often times results in the psychological and, in time, physical withdrawal of American Indian students (Reyhner, 1986). Often times Native American students choose to drop out of



school because they are forced to choose between their indigenous culture and an educational system that often ignores such important student identities (Grijalva, 1997; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

The discontinuity between home and school cultures lead to mounting difficulties and barriers that many Native American students in schools cannot overcome, according to this theory. Among some of the findings and claims of Cultural Discontinuity Theory are:

- many teachers are unwilling to examine cultural assumptions/stereotypes (King, 1991)
- Native students are denied curriculum that includes their perspectives and culture (Reyhner, 1992)
- schools are denying culturally appropriate assessment (Reyhner, 1992)
- communication patterns differ between home and school discourse (Little Soldier, 1997; Philips, 1983; Van Hamme, 1996)
- educational settings are built upon competition instead of cooperation (McCarty et al, 1991)

However, the Cultural Discontinuity Theory has been challenged as recent studies have contradicted the very foundation of this theory—the greater the gap in home and school culture, the greater chance of failure. Huffman (2008) found that Native American students who retained their cultural identity and continued to practice their cultural traditions were better equipped to navigate academia successfully. Such “culturally traditional students did not assimilate nor did they succumb to the cultural difficulties confronting them. The cultural discontinuity perspective simply does not adequately explain their ability to succeed” (Huffman, 2008, p. 180). Deyhle (1995) came to a similar conclusion: Navajo youth are “more academically successful when they are more secure in their traditional culture” (p. 403).

Lomawaima (1994) explains that while there is a cultural disruption and loss happening in our schools for Native American students, this disruption and loss may be attributed to many psychological and social dislocations that are prevalent in today's Native Societies. Further, the history of education in relation to Native American populations is one that places knowledge in a hierarchy where Indigenous Knowledges are viewed by many as deficient, unimportant, not worth the time to learn in public schools, and less than dominant teachings in schools (Adams, 1988; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002, 2006), which adds elements of power, colonization, and oppression to the discussion.

This hierarchy of knowledge predominantly come from a group that Banks (1993) refers to as Western traditionalists, who “believe that Western history, literature, and culture are endangered in the school ... curriculum because of the push by ... ethnic minority scholars ... for curriculum reform and transformation” (p. 4) and from liberal assimilationist notions of citizenship that “assume that individuals from different groups have to give up their home and community cultures and languages to attain inclusion and to participate effectively in the national civic culture” (Banks, 2008, p. 129). This siege on academic knowledge is an ongoing battle, especially in places like Arizona. However, as Battiste (2002) says, “Knowledge is not what some possess and others do not; it is a resourceful capacity of being that creates the context and texture of life. Thus, knowledge is not a commodity that can be possessed or controlled by educational institutions, but is a living process to be absorbed and understood” (p. 15). This understanding of knowledge as living and in process provides a broader understanding to investigate this Native American Literature classroom.

It is within schools that much tension has resulted in U.S. history with non-dominant populations, and it is here, within one public school that I will view a curriculum that perhaps may be a key to including Native American students into the classroom by attempting to understand the complexities, the contradictions, and the multiple realities of Native American students in urban settings. This classroom curriculum attempts to include knowledges students receive at home and in their communities by relying on the emerging understanding of what socio-culturally sustained schooling (defined later) can and should be. It is crucial to include that

The mere existence of materials...has not guaranteed their usefulness or eliminated the failure and alienation that Indian students are experiencing in school. The more important consideration when examining culturally appropriate curriculum for Indians involves *how* the curriculum is used once developed. It is not enough to bring resources into a school system. (Butterfield, 1983, p. 59)

There is a growing body of research that discusses the need to include non-dominant perspectives into the classroom pedagogy. There are a few pockets in U.S.'s public education system in which American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian cultures, communities, and languages have been and, in some cases, are currently being used in school pedagogy and curricula. These schools have incorporating what Castagno and Brayboy (2008) discuss in their literature review as "Culturally Responsive Schooling" or CRS. CRS is a place and language based education whereby a firm grounding in heritage language and culture indigenous to a particular tribe is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of culturally-healthy students and communities associated with that place, and thus is an essential ingredient for identifying the appropriate qualities and practices associated with culturally-responsive educators, curriculum, and schools (Alaska Native Knowledge Network cited in Castagno &

Brayboy, 2008). Castagno and Brayboy discover in their review of CRS literature that students of all decent are much more likely to be engaged and are more willing to learn when the curriculum they are taught makes pedagogical connections to their culture, their land, their families, and their identities.

In the context of my study in the Native American class though, this connection to culture and land and identities did not only connect with Native American students; African American and Latino/a students were seeing similarities and connecting with the teachings in the classroom such as lessons and conversations about lost histories, power struggles, colonization, etc. I found this interesting since the language used in the ethnic studies ban states that teaching one ethnic perspective “Advocate[s] ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals” (HB 2281, 2010, p. 1). What I have witnessed in this classroom, did not reflect this statement; it reflected the opposite. Statements like the following, which were composed by a Latina student, were often heard in classroom discussions and seen in written reflections:

I am a totally different person. It feels like I gained more respect for everyone. I know a lot more life lessons and I know how fascinating the true Americans, Native Americans, Indians, or whatever you want to call them, are. I know that they are just humans like all of us. And now that is all I see through my eyes. I see human beings, the simplest race there can be. (Written reflection, Feb. 17, 2010)

Klump and McNeir (2005) discuss their findings on the implementation and outcomes of schooling based on CRS in a case study of the Russian Mission School in Alaska. The Russian Mission School blends academic standards with local Native knowledge. By using subsistence activities that the local community has been using long before European interaction, students have the opportunity to engage in real community activities that draws on local knowledge that has helped this community survive and

thrive in their environment. One teacher said: “We’re very aggressive about using the standards. But we see Native culture as the pathway to that” (Klump &McNeir, 2005, p. 12). Klump and McNeir (2005) showed positive results from this CRS program such as increased enrollment, decreased crime, and stronger connections between elders and the school.

In Arizona, teacher/researcher Grijalva (1997) taught summer school at the University of Arizona to Native American students from Tuba City High School. Grijalva quickly learned that these students were taught by teachers who didn’t believe that they could succeed in education and who viewed the students’ heritage negatively. Grijalva realized that in order to connect with these students, she must include their stories and their heritage into the curriculum in order to connect with them. However, it wasn’t as easy as picking up a book by famous Native American authors such as Sherman Alexie or Leslie Marmon Silko and telling them to read. She realized that these students had become ashamed of their culture; they had “enveloped ... a silence that seemed impenetrable. They did not want to open up and certainly did not want to talk about their cultural traditions” (Grijalva, p. 44). Estrada and Vasquez (1981) explain this situation in greater detail by looking at this situation from a psychological lens:

Unfortunately, if an individual accepts — consciously or subconsciously — the negative stereotypes of one’s primary identity group, a tendency may be to try and disassociate from one’s ‘despised’ group .... This insidious process often causes a person to turn against one’s self as well, and results in psychological damage to one’s self-esteem and identity. (p. 66)

Grijalva realized that it was only when she began to share her stories that the students were willing to share theirs (See dialogic spiral in chapter 4).

Years prior to Grijalva's discovery, (once students' perspectives, cultures and communities are validated and accepted, they are willing to read and write with vigor) McCarty et al. (1991) conducted a research study in the Rough Rock Demonstration School in northern Arizona, which came to a similar conclusion. This study implemented a social studies curriculum with the support of the Native American Materials Development Center. McCarty et al. (1991) intended to debunk the popular belief among the teachers at this school that "Navajo students won't *respond* to questioning" (p. 42). To do this, they based the experimental curriculum on the Navajo educational concept called *k'e'*. *K'e'* literally translated means "kinship, clanship" and respect for our connection to nature (McCarty et al, 1991, p. 46). In curriculum practice, *k'e'* means connecting prior knowledge to "higher levels of abstraction, generality and complexity" in a spiraling fashion where one element leads to the understanding and mastery of another (McCarty, et al., 1991, p. 46).

In implementing this curriculum, McCarty et al. focused the content on local content and then moved to national and world perspectives later. To do this, they asked students to help them in discovering what is important in their communities that they should learn. The same students that were characterized by local teachers as unresponsive to questioning were now jumping from their seats volunteering their opinions: "One staff member shook her head and smiled, admitting that Navajo students will indeed respond, eagerly and enthusiastically, to classroom questioning" when "they're learning about things in their own community" (McCarty et al., 1991, p. 49). Castagno and Brayboy (2008) say that in many schools in indigenous communities students "are likely to exhibit behavior at school that they have been socialized into valuing even when the school may

value very different behaviors” (p. 955). However, Native American students, when “knowledge is built through the recursive expansion of children’s prior understanding, in meaningful dialogue and socially significant interaction,” become active “seekers *and* users of knowledge” rather than the unresponsive students that these teachers thought they were before this curriculum was implemented (McCarty et al., 1991, pp. 51-2). A meaningful change in curriculum created a meaningful change in student participation and interaction in the classroom setting. It is here that I place my research: In what ways can a meaningful change in curriculum and implementation of Native American perspectives change the participation and interactions of students in this new setting?

Another state where CRS is happening is Montana (forever my home), which is the only state that has written into their constitution an obligation by the state to educate all students about American Indians called the Indian Education for All. It states that “all Montanans, Indian and non-Indian, must understand the history, culture, and contemporary contributions of Montanan’s Native American people” (Klump & McNeir, 2005, p. 40). On the Flathead Indian Reservation in Pablo, Montana, the Salish and Kootenai College has implemented the Flathead Reservation Culture Camp, which brings together teachers from schools on the reservation and tribal elders. The goal of this program is to have schools and the communities collaborate together for the common good of educating their students both inside and outside the school walls. Elders have the opportunity to teach teachers what is important to some of their Native American students in their classes, and teachers gain meaningful relationships with the elders and many have invited them into the classroom to talk to their students.

However, CRS is not just practiced in the U.S. One country that has invested much in CRS is New Zealand. New Zealand shares many similarities with the U.S. in that both countries face large challenges in educating very different populations of students. However, in New Zealand, they are primarily concerned with two major populations: European colonizers and the Indigenous Maori people (whereas the U.S. is composed of students from throughout the world). Still, much can be learned from New Zealand by way of how they are addressing their country's challenge of increasing the Maori students' success in school and the U.S.'s dilemma of serving the American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian populations. Russell Bishop, Chair Professor of Maori Education at the University of Waikato in New Zealand, and Senior Research Fellow Mere Berryman conducted research in which they used a professional development project called Te Kotahitanga to decrease the large achievement gap between Maori students and white students. In this project, Bishop and Berryman (2010) use the expertise of the surrounding communities – the voices of Maori students and Maori families, as well as teachers and principals who serve Maori students – to create a new curriculum that includes local knowledge and teaching practices. While much more needs to be done, Bishop and Berryman's (2010) project resulted in more effective classroom relationships, increased attendance among Maori students, and increased levels of scholastic achievement.

In Canada, Ball (2004) discusses the First Nations Partnership Program, which worked with a number of universities to incorporate Indigenous knowledges into twenty university accredited courses that taught more than 138 post-secondary students from 56 different First Nations attended. The staff used a “generative curriculum model” to



implement this transformative education, which “focuses on uncovering new, community-relevant knowledge sources, considers[s] knowledge that resides in communities, and creat[es] fresh understandings from reflection and dialogue,” rather than “promoting prescribed best practices” (p. 460). The program used a bicultural approach to teaching that discussed the Eurowestern perspectives on political, social, and theoretical stance, which aids in placing the Indigenous community’s knowledge and experiences within the context of contemporary Canada. They also relied on the “valuing of multiple voices” and insisted on “situating alternative constructions of experiences with reference to the historical, cultural, political, and personal contexts in which these constructions have been generated” by the students and staff (Ball, 2004, p. 461). About 75 percent of the students who enrolled in this program completed the two years of university-accredited courses. That juxtaposed with the “national completion rate of 40 percent and below among First Nations students in other diploma-level postsecondary programs in Canada” (Ball, 2004, p. 461). The success of the program was attributed to breaking down the barrier between schools and communities; in other words, they brought the program into the community by relying on the voices, perspectives, experiences, and understandings from First Nation communities into the classroom. They also put into focus the individual students knowledge and ideas, thus relying on the idea that central to everyone’s education is themselves or what Ball (2004) refer to as “lived learning” that provides students with “true engagement ...that is relevant and personally meaningful and that affirms the student’s own identity and experiences ... [which] empowers students, giving them a sense of self-direction and self-efficacy” (p. 472).

The Te Kotahitanga Project and the First Nation Partnership Program reflect what U.S. researchers and scholars have been saying for quite some time, notably, David Kirkland, who, in 2008, discussed the “New English Education (which) represents a movement in adolescent literacy studies to situate English language arts (ELA) in the lives and realities of today’s youth” (p. 69). Kirkland (2008) explains that it is crucial that teachers make sure that the texts and writings they expose their students to connect to the students’ lives. This notion of connecting the students’ world to the classroom is addressed in a crucial standard created by the National Council of Teachers of English that states:

Students will read a wide range of print and non-print texts *to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world*; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008)

However, there are a few gaps/holes in the implementation of Culturally Responsive Schooling, according to Castagno and Brayboy (2008): Self-determination and tribal sovereignty, racism, and Indigenous epistemologies had not been discussed in their literature review of CRS. In 2010, Tiffany Lee and Patricia Quijada Cerecer discussed “Socio-culturally Responsive Teaching,” or SCR, to the conversation. The inclusion of “socio” expanded the ideas of what CRS was to include “pedagogy, cultural values, educational and personal vision, teacher preparation, school climate, and assessment.... SCR education embraces pedagogy that incorporates students’ lived experiences, home-based knowledge, and local environment to inform curriculum design and content as well as how relationships are formed with students” (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010, pp. 199-200). They affirm that “youth identify opportunities to learn and

assert or reclaim their Native identity despite school, teacher, and peer-based influences that challenge them” (p. 199), which provide a new lens from which to view students’ interactions in a public school setting: In what locations, both in the school and in the community, are students learning, asserting, or possibly reclaiming their Native identity?

Another notable expansion from CRS to SCR is that SCR recognizes that “Native youths’ lives are not solely defined by their Native culture, but are also inclusive of social influences such as the mainstream media, family income and occupations, tribal economic development, off-reservation residence, and peer influences” (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010, p. 200). SCR scholars and teachers would argue that it isn’t enough to be simply aware of students’ cultural backgrounds; they must also recognize “how cultures are contextually based” and calls for educators to be “culturally competent in order to meaningfully and appropriately incorporate students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds into their teaching” (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010, p. 200). By including discussions of educational and socio inequities, by centering students’ ethnic and cultural identities, and by discussing issues of racism, self-determination, and sovereignty, the SCR approach promotes a “transformative academic knowledge [that] enables all students to have a sense of belonging...and provide[s] a way to create unity among a diverse student body by challenging students to be critically conscious and inclusive of diversity” (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010, p. 200).

Both SCR and CRS have since been questioned. Django Paris (2012) asked teachers and researchers if the terms SCR and CRS are going far enough to maintain and *sustain* the languages and cultures of non-dominant populations. Are they, instead, offering ways for students to become tolerant of and cope with and be further tricked into

the dominant standardized teachings? Instead, Paris (2012) offers the term “culturally sustaining pedagogy,” which “requires pedagogies (to) be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). Seeing language and culture and identity as sustenance rather than a barrier is a fundamental shift in thinking and one that pulls at the core of what this dissertation is about: “What is the purpose of schooling in a pluralistic society?” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Here, my participants and I attempt to add our collective answers to this very complicated, very political, very empowering question that strikes at the heart of our nation’s collective foundation.

### **Approaches to Education in Native American communities**

The history of education in relation to Indigenous communities and the U.S. government has been a painful one. Most educational policies throughout the world have been guided by policies geared toward an assimilationist agenda prior to the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Banks, 2008). Such policies advanced the creation and implementation of missionary and boarding schools that stole many Native American students from their homes and attempted to remove cultural and language practices from their home communities. Policies fueling the creation and implementation of boarding schools were designed to promote “the eradication of all traces of tribal identity and culture, replacing them with the commonplace knowledge and values of white civilization” (Adams, 1995, pp. 335-336). As such, one dominant culture, language, and

identity were forced upon Native American children with the sole intentions of eradicating tribal cultures, languages and identities. Also, such policies ignored, invalidated and stereotyped the histories of non-dominant groups in textbooks (Banks, 2008). The methods and intentions of numerous pedagogical and curricular practices over hundreds of years have resulted—and continues to result—in negative effects for Native Americans attending school-sponsored missionary schools, government sponsored boarding schools, and parochial schools (Collins & Blot, 2003; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

One way of viewing these painful educational practices in the past (and still today) is shown by looking at the differences in Althusser's (1971) two key definitions: *Repressive State Apparatus (RSA)* and *Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)*. Althusser (1971) explains that when a colonizing force or class enters into a new territory or encounters a new population of people, two apparatuses are at work simultaneously: the *Repressive State Apparatus* and the *Ideological State Apparatus*. The RSA functions by physical violence against a people such as massacres, genocide, rapings, and the physical abuse of peoples, which is clearly seen in the history of relations between European peoples and Native Americans. The difference between RSA and ISA, though, is that the ISA functions by ideology through institutions such as “Churches, Parties, Trade Unions, families, some schools, [and] most newspapers” (Althusser, 1971, p. 111). Missionary and boarding schools for Native Americans are clear examples of the blending of these two apparatus's (Lomwaima & McCarty, 2006; Reyhner & Eder, 2004) in that “Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks” (Althusser, 1971, p. 112).

For many Native Americans, missionary, and boarding schools were a place of punishment and physical abuse in order to conform to the dominant ideology and “teachers have historically been frontline actors in attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples” (Brayboy & Maughn, 2009, p. 72). Further, Lyons (2000) makes clear the use of RSA and ISA in education for Native Americans: “This forced replacement of one identity for another, a cultural violence enabled in part through acts of violence, was in so many ways located at the scene of writing” (p. 449). But no clearer statement could sum up this painful marriage between RSA and ISA than in Richard Pratt’s infamous saying: “Kill the Indian, save the man” (cited in Grijalva, 1997, p. 42). Here, the beatings and teachings to Native Americans during missionary and boarding schools was meant to conform this population to adhere to the new rules and ideologies of the ruling European peoples, while attempting to rid them of their language, identity, and culture.

When it comes to non-dominant populations of students and language and literacy in education, numerous stages of theoretical understanding and implementation have occurred. To better understand some of the different approaches to language and literacy, I use Pratt’s “Kill the Indian, save the man” statement to explain Paris and Ball’s (2009) four approaches:

- Deficit Approach – Language and culture are viewed as a deficit. The goal of education is to correct the deficiency, in this case by ridding the Native Americans of their culture and language, thus the phrase, “Kill the Indian, save the man.”
- Difference Approach – Language and culture are viewed as equal but different and only the dominant one should be taught in schools. In this case, Pratt’s statement might alter in saying: Acknowledge the Indian, save the man.
- Resource Approach – Language and culture are resources used to build toward the dominant way. The statement then would be: Help the Indian become a man.
- Critical Resource Approach – Language and culture are viewed as a resource to build dominant skills, critical understanding and provide a space for maintenance of marginalized ways. Statement: Help the Indian remain an Indian.

Many other theories relate to this final approach such as the Cultural Difference or Cultural Compatibility Theory, which posits that schooling is most effective when there is a greater match between the cultural norms and expectations of the school and those of the students. Learning occurs more readily when prior knowledge is activated and connected to new information being presented (Demmert & Towner, 2003). Studies have shown that cooperative learning approaches where teachers are facilitators (Freire, 1970) of knowledge, rather than acting as experts in the classroom, provide a learning environment that builds on students' prior knowledge both in their communities and at school, which has shown to improve the interactions of Native American students in the classroom (Larimore, 2000; McCarty et al., 1991).

Building from this, Gutierrez uses the term the “third space” to describe the area where two different spheres—the official sphere (sphere A from figure 1 below) where standards, the literacy canon and dominant American English dwell, and the unofficial sphere (sphere B from figure 1) where the interests of students lie—overlap like a Venn diagram. Within this overlap—this third space (area C from figure 1)—teachers and students share knowledge, construct agreed upon standards, and are allowed choice and voice. Gutierrez (2008) describes how this space, “rich [in] curriculum, dense with learning activity organized around sociocultural views of learning and development” can create lasting connections for students that reach beyond the walls of schools and classrooms and into students' homes and communities which help validate students' ideas, knowledge, and understandings (p. 148). Kirkland (2008) expands on Gutierrez' notion of the third space stating that “in this space, texts are variable, emerging out of students' lives, and English teachers are reflective practitioners, entering students' lives

to develop the capacities and dispositions needed to facilitate a process of critical thought and reflection” (p. 69).

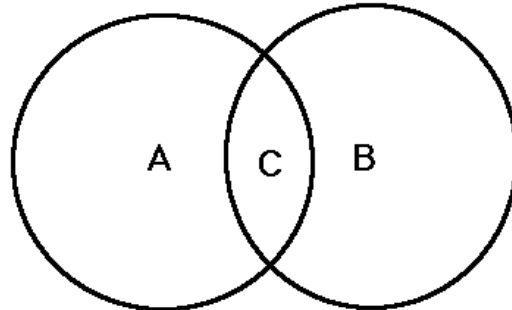


Figure 8. *Third Space Diagram*

Paris (2012) has continued this conversation in a call to create and teach “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies.” The difference between responding and sustaining, according to Paris is that we not only acknowledge and tap into the resources from the surrounding communities, but move toward providing spaces where students can sustain and strengthen their culture, while also exposing students to the dominant practices they may choose to use thereafter. Pedagogies such as this have been called for by Phuntsog (1998) to be more transformative, in that the curriculum “promotes equity in classrooms and to question the basic premises and assumptions of school knowledge. It is expected that a transformed curriculum will provide learning opportunities for children to enhance their critical thinking skills, which enable them to analyze their situation and transform it with the language of possibility” (p. 107).

Students in this class are exposed to an authoritative discourse from a Native American perspective. They are exposed to histories hidden from them in past courses, to literacies deemed unworthy, to stories once silenced. How this classroom environment



impacts their internal identity development through engagement in critical questioning and critical listening is of crucial importance to the writing hereafter.

*Are you Native?*

*by Charlotte*

*“Are you Native?” she says.*

*“No,” I say.*

*“Then why are you interested in looking at this classroom?” she says,  
wrinkles of concern appear on her forehead.*

## ***My Protectors***

***by Tim***

*I called them my bodyguards, my protectors, my angels. They were the toughest kids in middle school yet the kindest people I have had the pleasure of calling my friends. Whenever anyone even thought about picking on me because of my scrawny seventh grade stature—I hadn't yet hit 65 pounds when most had reached the elusive century mark—they were there to verbally and, if need be, physically put an abrupt stop to the potential bullying and abuse.*

*I often reminisce about one moment in particular: It was during lunch; the hallways were empty. They each placed their hands under my arms along my rib cage and, at the count of three, I'd hunch down and explode up to the 16-foot ceiling. With all their might, they pushed me higher than I have ever jumped before (or since). With them, I touched that ceiling, something I could never have done on my own.*

*They are Native American. They are Jesse Cook (Salish) and Shavonne Walker (Kootenai). They are women. They continually push me to reach higher.*

## Chapter 3

### METHODS

*“We all know that we can go through life convinced that our view of the world is the only valid one. If we are interested in new perceptions, however, we need to catch a glimpse of the world through other eyes. We need to be aware of our own thoughts as well as the way life is viewed by other people” –Leona Okakok (1989, p. 248).*

One way to “catch a glimpse of the world through other eyes” is through the analysis and the construction of realities through the guidance of grounded theory. As I have stated earlier, at the center of everyone’s education is themselves and that includes me. What I see, how I see it, where I have been, and the data I collect are centered around my perceptions and prior understandings. While this sounds self-centered, I intend it to mean the opposite: I am a product of my environment. Who I am and how I see my world is greatly impacted and altered by those surrounding me who have impacted me in person and in thought through conversation, action, and emotional connections. I have constructed this writing in order to reflect both the environment I find myself in—which includes the raw stories from participants free of my interpretation and analysis—and how I am making sense of that environment by connecting the stories, the empirical evidence, the situations with conversations that have come before me. I share Kovach’s (2005) belief that “knowledge is transmitted through stories that shape shift in relation to the wisdom of the storyteller at the time of the telling” (p. 27). As the storyteller in this setting, it is important to discuss my “set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). As Charmaz (2006) states, “We are not passive receptacles into which data are poured . . . . Neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world” (p. 15). So how do I move beyond that which I think I know in order to see and hear with and from the

participants in this study? One possible answer: it is important to establish my positionality as a person and storyteller in relation to the research and allow the reader to see how my identity, my reality, my understandings have shifted and changed as the lessons, the words, and the relationships that I have built with my participants make their way into who I am at the moment of writing this account. I do not pretend to trick you into thinking that my reality is Truth; rather, I want to attempt to show you how I am making sense of my reality in relation to this classroom and the students and teacher who compose it. I do so knowing that there are limitations in the translation from oral stories into written form. The act of storytelling itself, which is ... “an important research method used in Indigenous research, loses a level of meaning in the translation into written script” (Kovach, 2005, p. 27). I proceed knowing full well how much power is lost in this translation. I apologize to the reader and to my participants for this limitation, and move forward with the hope that my in-process capabilities as a storyteller do not tarnish the power that existed in this Native American classroom and beyond.

### **Who Am I?**

I come to this study with a heavy heart. Having been raised on the Flathead Indian Reservation in western Montana with the Salish and Kootenai tribes, I became aware, when I was about 16 or 17 years old, that something strange was happening in my school. At the start of my freshman year, my class started out with more than 120 students; we graduated with 92. Some of my friends who were Native American were becoming disengaged with the school. Many of those same friends either left school or transferred to a different school with a larger population of Native American students.<sup>5</sup> A selfish

question began forming: Why are my friends leaving me? As I was exposed to more realities and lived experiences in Alaska, in Montana, and in Arizona, this question later changed to: What is happening in their education that is forcing them to leave school?

There have been many moments in my life when the answers to these questions slowly become clearer. The first time I had a clarify moment was when I entered the second year of my masters in curriculum and instruction program at the University of Montana. Up until that point, I had grown up on a reservation, earned my undergrad from a university that is moments away from my reservation, and it took 19 years in education for me to first read about boarding schools. I remember sitting down to read this assigned reading and breaking down in tears, partly because of the heartache that most of those who were a part of boarding schools faced and partly because this story was hidden from me for that long. Why hadn't this history been told to me? Was it hidden on purpose? Who benefited from this concealment of information? What other histories were still out there that remained hidden from me? At this moment I realized that I had stumbled onto something much bigger than some of my friends leaving school, and I used that fuel, that passion, that desire to know more, to move forward, to take charge of my education.

In Alaska, I had another clarifying moment. There, I taught Alaska Native students in Anchorage, Alaska for the Cook Inlet Tribal Council as an English Language teacher to many of the Alaska Native Students that attended East High School. It was in this capacity that I began attempting to incorporate my students' funds of knowledge by including events that were important to them like the Alaska Native games into their reading and writing assignments while also incorporating, as best I could, the concealed stories of lands lost, of rights denied. I also asked elders to speak in the classroom as a

way to include voices from their communities. I welcomed this opportunity as I saw my friends' faces from my childhood in theirs. I wanted to see if I could make schooling meaningful in some small or big way. Perhaps I did. Perhaps I failed.

To better understand how I could be a better teacher to them and to teachers who might eventually teach in this capacity, I pursued the questions that have followed me from the reservation and from Alaska to Arizona where I have had an opportunity to dig deeper into answers to my questions as a PhD student. When I was given an opportunity to conduct pilot research in this newly formed Native American literature classroom, I did not hesitate as it reflected the type of classroom I taught in Alaska as well as the type of classroom I wish I had taken when I was in high school.

Perhaps the most clarifying moment has been this one: Writing this dissertation. As I observed this class, interacted with these students, reflected on their stories and lived experiences, emotions began to creep up within me. As students came to realizations—many for the first time—I relived my own revelations/understandings all over again as it was happening in front of me. While this dissertation is not about me—it is about these participants and their classroom—I am realizing more and more that this process has been truly transformative for me as I see what is unfolding for them. While not exactly the same, I relate to their feelings, to their emotions, to their words.

While I am not Native American—I am Filipino-American—my life has been a navigation of being on the inside, while, at the same time, dwelling on the outside. Many families and friends from the Salish and Kootenai tribes graciously invited me into their homes and into their lives the moment I moved to the Flathead Indian Reservation in 1985 when I was 4-and-a-half years old. Having very little knowledge of my Filipino

ancestry when my mother, along with me and my two older sisters, left our father (who came to the states from the Philippines when he was 5), I clung onto the Salish and Kootenai tribal histories, knowledges, and cultures. This navigation of being both an insider and an outsider has helped me as an ethnographer by gaining insights and understandings of the participants in this study. Often, people I meet for the first time assume that I am Native American—perhaps because of where I come from, perhaps because they know a little about the work I have done and am doing. My outward appearance is perhaps the biggest detractor; people say I look Native (whatever that means). Always, I correct them, tell them my ethnicity and answer follow up questions that discuss identity, culture, race, ethnicity. I mention this because at one point or another, each of my participants asked if I was Native American. During the first semester of my research, one such conversation happened with Charlotte who asked, “Are you Native?”

“No,” I replied.

“You’re not? What are you?” she asked.

“I’m Filipino-American. I grew up on the Flathead Indian Reservation, which is right here in Montana,” I replied pointing to a map of U.S. reservations on the wall. “A lot of my friends and friend’s families kind of embraced me into that culture, which is why I’m here. It’s kind of a strange situation, umm...yeah.”

“So do you know about Native stuff or what?” she says with a cautious laugh.

“Mmm-hmmm, I do.”

“You do. Then you’re good to go.”



From this point, I turned off the digital recorder I was using, and had a conversation about Native knowledge that she and I felt should be kept secret to non-Native peoples, a conversation that will always remain between Charlotte and me. I did so in response to Kovach's (2005) question: "How much do we share? We need to ask how much knowledge do we share for the common good, and what knowledge needs to be kept sacred" (p. 31). My action of turning off the tape recorder kept this conversation in which I was the learner, and Charlotte the teacher, between Charlotte and me. I hope to always honor this knowledge, while, at the same time, offering research that gives voice to these students whose histories, whose knowledges, whose perspectives are often times invalidated, ignored, or overlooked in their public education. At the same time, I remain open and ready to learn from the hard lessons that walking this fine line between sacred and academic knowledge brings with it.

### **Opening research questions**

As researchers, we are asked by the International Review Board to have a research question that focuses our attention on the information and data we gather. As a grounded theorist, I am putting the cart before the horse since "data form the foundation of our theory and our analysis of these data generates the concepts we construct" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). As such, entering into a space without being open to new possibilities or denying new codes and categories simply because they don't fit our initial research question is absurd and counter-intuitive according to grounded theory: "grounded theory method stresses discovery and theory development rather than logical deductive reasoning which relies on prior theoretical frameworks...data collection and

analysis proceed simultaneously” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 110). Theory, empirical events, experiences, conversations, coding, data collection and memos help us to pursue our hunches about what might be happening in what we are observing and studying. Having conducted pilot research for two semesters has helped me conceptualize, refine, complicate, and focus my readings, my understandings, and my questions. Within chapter 1, I used the conversations of theory to expand my initial question so that I might open up my lens to new possibilities and new avenues of understanding or opening the research questions.

I described how my initial IRB questions transformed and changed as I transformed and changed. The question that I ask now is: *In what way or ways is the Native American literature curriculum in this Southwest Urban High School denying, affirming, or challenging the identities of students taking this course?*

Constructing this question over the course of three semesters has helped me conceptualize the data. During that time, I was observing, reading, coding, and analyzing the information that students’ provided me with. This process of analysis, rather than being a clarifying entity, has further complicated my ideas of what I thought I knew and what I think I may know now. But, rather than seeing this as a hindrance, I see it as an opportunity because learning, after all, is attempting to understand that which we don’t already know. The questions that came from chapter 1 were fueled by theories and by observations that I wasn’t able to pursue due to time constraints. Those questions were:

- In what way or ways does the teachings and experiences of this Native American Literature classroom make their way into the community?
- If the school teachings and practices like in the Native American Literature classroom approach a closer parallel to the teachings and practices of the home, what might the implications be?

- In what ways can a meaningful change in curriculum and implementation of Native American perspectives change the participation and interactions of students in this new setting?
- In what locations, both in the school and in the community, are students learning, asserting, or possibly reclaiming their Native identity?
- What are the implications of this knowledge for culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012)?

This is not an exhaustive list of questions. They may change; they may fade; they may become central to that which I see. Only through the process of examining and re-examining will I begin to form my own theoretical understanding from empirical evidence. As Charmaz (2006) states, “From early in the research process, you check emerging questions as you compare data with data” (p. 103).

### **Maintenance of Relationships**

By employing the relational theme of Indigenous Methodology, I have come to form lasting relationships and friendships with the participants in my research and the communities from which they come. Kovach (2005) discusses this theme:

The relational: Indigenous ways of knowing have a basis in the relationship...the philosophical premise of take what you need (and only what you need), give back, and offer thanks suggests a deep respect for other living beings. ...it honours the cultural value of relationship; it emphasizes people’s ability to shape and change their own destiny, and it is respectful...sincere, authentic investment in the community; the ability to take time to visit with the people from the community (whether or not they are research participants); the ability to be humble about the goals; and conversations at the start about who owns the research, its use and purpose. (p. 30)

As a bi-product of these Indigenous Methodologies, the lasting relationship with some participants in my pilot research allowed me space to compare conversations and settings in the first two years with the conversations and setting in the third year of research, which Charmaz (2006) suggests is needed to construct a whole reality in the research

setting. After the first two years of pilot research concluded within this classroom, some participants maintained communication with me via text, phone, facebook, and in person meetings to make sense of how this classroom impacted them after it concluded. At times, I would give them accounts of situations, of stories, of events that were happening in the third year of the study and ask for their reaction. Because much of the curriculum was the same, I would ask what they remembered from their experience with a lesson or a conversation centered on a similar issue. Through these conversations, they helped me in making sense of what I was experiencing and seeing in the third year of this study.

Some might call this form of communication member checking (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994)—the act of checking in or taking data and conclusions back to participants to see if there is some truth to what researchers are experiencing and seeing. However, Tracy (2010) suggests that rather than using the term member checking—which “assumes there is some universal truth that we are seeking”—to instead move toward *member reflection*—the investigation of “meaning making at this point in their lives, which will change” (p. 844). Just as my thinking will no doubt change when I look back at this writing and my understanding of this study, so too will participants’ understanding of this classroom change over time. When conducting member reflections, I understand that we are engaged in a form of collective storytelling or *story-ing* (see chapter 4) where my reality, my understandings and perspectives of the conversations, situations, and readings that participants are sharing with me are shared and retold based on how we are, together, making meaning of a situation set in a location and time. This understanding—by using the term member reflection, instead of member checking—allows for the continued construction of our realities over time, space, and

distance beyond the words here for meaning, reality, and identity all change with time as new lived experiences, lessons, and teachings impact who we are and how we see.

Having conversations with participants from three different years—from participants two years removed from the classroom, one year removed from the classroom, and currently taking the classroom—provided glimpses into the many layers of understanding, identity construction, and knowledge generation over time. By having opportunities to voice what I was seeing and to have participants from prior years give back to the conversation, it provided new lenses of seeing, new avenues I could not see alone, new directions for analysis, and new questions to pursue.

An example comes from a conversation with Edgar, a participant from the first pilot study. Edgar, who, at the time was a student at the local university, asked if we could get a coffee and chat. We had been texting back and forth about some of the happenings within the classroom like the Desert View High School's use of a Native American fighter as a mascot.

We sat, coffee drinks in hand. I asked him how he would respond to a particular student within this classroom, Vince, who does not think that a mascot representing Native Americans stereotypically is an issue.

**Edgar:**

I would say, do you know what the redskins are? That's the easiest place to look and to actually see that the symbol was very successful. What does that term mean? Where did it come from? Where does that symbol come from? Then, from there, I'd just talk about the way Native Americans used it. I'd talk about how those things relate exactly to how the mascots are used for dividing us, making us seem dehumanized. Then I would ask him if people that he considers Native American, if they look like the mascot. They represent those same things. Then I'd ask him how does Desert View High School relate to Native Americans. What is their relevancy to the Native American community?

**Tim:**

Why do you use questions to fuel the discussion?

**Edgar:**

Cuz then they have to answer for themselves. It's not me telling them what to believe. If I did, they would just fight against what I say. They have to question that for themselves.

**Tim:**

How did you learn this?

**Edgar:**

I got in a fight with a person at the museum I work at, and I just started asking them questions cuz they didn't want to admit to the negative impacts of boarding schools. They didn't want to admit that it was as bad as it seemed. Saying, "Oh didn't Native Americans learn English and learn these job trades? Aren't these colleges still around helping Native Americans?" I started asking him about those exact things. I filled in parts of the knowledge that he didn't know, but it made him look at it in a different way. It made him look at it, at the part of history I was talking about, a different way.

**Tim:**

What is it about questioning and listening that works, or doesn't?

**Edgar:**

It works. The other part of it too is if you just ask questions and then don't listen to their responses, they'll know you're not engaged in the conversation with them. I want them to know that I'm attempting to understand where they're coming from. Most people see it as a learning experience. Even if they disagree, they are engaged in the conversation and they'll talk again. (Personal Communication, May 21, 2012)

This conversation with Edgar allowed me to make connections to the ways in which Ms. Bee taught. Instead of telling students what to believe, she presented them with a historical event or a piece of literature and had students engage in small and large group discussions. She used questioning to push conversations forward by challenging them on both sides of the issue. She used conversations to fuel knowledge construction, something I will discuss in chapter 6. In addition, Edgar allowed me to expand my emerging understanding of a term I had been coming to understand, the *dialogic spiral*, which I discuss in the following chapter.

The point here is that the maintenance of relationships allowed stories to continue over time in relation to this classroom. Here, I offered Edgar a story and situation that happened in the classroom and then let him reflect on how this situation or story connects to his understandings. (This conversation is much like the construction and order of this dissertation in that I am offering the *italicized* stories as true to their original form as possible so that the reader or listener can connect with the story in their own way.)

After Edgar offers his analysis, I offer mine. My understandings mesh/blend with Edgar's in this sort of *dialogic spiral* where his insights inform, adapt, and perhaps change my own and vice versa. We are constructing our individual understandings from shared stories, thus the individual is part of a larger collective knowledge. Through conversation, we are making sense of this situation together. These conversations became crucially important over the course of my data collection and analysis.

After our conversation, Edgar became so interested in what students were experiencing that he requested to come in to the classroom from time to time. I asked Ms. Bee, and we got approval from the school. In addition, Edgar wanted the conversations that began within the classroom to continue into the community after school. He asked for my help in creating a discussion group, and I gladly obliged.<sup>6</sup>

### **Data Collections and Methods**

The methods I have employed are the blending of ethnography, case study, and narrative inquiry research while using grounded theory as a basis from which to gather, code, analyze, theoretically sample and interpret the information presented to me. According to Anderson-Levitt (2006) ethnography is useful for “describing and

interpreting cultural behavior” (p. 279) (See chapter 1 for definition of Culture). By employing parts or the whole of these different research strategies, I hope to enrich my study by collecting “Rich Data.” Rich Data “reveal[s] participants’ views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). Geertz (1973) and Denzin (1989) referred to this revelation of participants’ thoughts and actions as “thick description.” Thick description is the process of understanding the “multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which [we] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render” (Geertz, 1973, p. 10). More simply stated, “ethnography *is* thick description” (Geertz, 1973, pp. 9-10, emphasis added). Ethnography *is* “to understand a human being, her or his actions, thoughts, and reflections ... [by looking] at the environment, or the social, cultural, and institutional context in which the particular individual operates” (Moen, 2006, p. 8) i.e. the thick description.

This multiplicity or overlapping of events and structures is also at the core of case studies, which allow for an in-depth look at people within their complicated world and allows both researcher and participants a firsthand opportunity to understand the events and conversations that shape our lives (Yin, 2006). In addition, “good case studies benefit from having *multiple sources of evidence*” or what is often referred to as triangulation or to triangulate, which is the establishing of “converging lines of evidence to make your findings as robust as possible” (Yin, 2006, p. 115). Triangulation is the process of rendering thick description. All together, ethnography *is* thick description *using* triangulation *to create* narratives.



In my pilot study, I focused on six students as case study participants over two semesters. While this did focus my attention on the interactions of these students, it did not allow for voices from other participants, particularly non-Native students to emerge in the analysis and writing. However, while non-Native students are not my primary focus, they are an integral part of understanding how a classroom that focuses on someone else's history, perspectives, and culture might impact their own education and identity. Because of this, I have included three non-Native students into this study to further investigate how they are making sense of this classroom. As such, both Native and non-Native students have been asked to participate in conversations, interviews, and interactions outside of the classroom space.

I collected, copied and coded all the written works from students turned into Ms. Bee. Charmaz (2006) refers to this data as *elicited texts*, which “elicit thoughts, feelings, and concerns of the thinking, acting subject as well as give researchers ideas about what structures and cultural values influence the person” (p. 36). Bakhtin (1981) says that we have the ability to enact many different identities (what he refers to as *heroes*) depending on the context and location of the conversation. Li & Milroy (1992) refer to this more simply as code-switching (Li & Milroy, 1992; Martinez, 2010; Zentella, 1997) or our ability to enact different personas, different discourse, and project different actions in a variety of situations. As such, these elicited texts that are written for Ms. Bee as assignments (but which I have a small hand in the creation of the questions that fuel these assignments) may reveal a difference in the identities that participants may have.

For example, during my pilot study, Charlotte told me in her final interview that she thought Native American author Sherman Alexie—who they read in class and for

whom Ms. Bee did not hide her appreciation—was a joke. She didn't take Alexie seriously. However, in the final written reflection for class, when she was asked about him, she wrote that he was a wonderful author. Here, this difference in Charlotte's answer reflects how we may act differently in different situations (enacting different heroes, or code-switching). This difference is an area of conflict and one that these elicited texts when paired with observations and interviews might help me to better understand the contradictions these students face in this classroom: "Comparisons between fieldnotes and written documents can spark insights about the relative congruence – or lack of it – between words and deeds" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 38).

### **Participant Dialogic Selection**

The 10 student participants in this study were selected using a dialogic process whereby students select me as well: "...participants chose to work with me in addition to being chosen by me" (Paris, 2010, p. 140). This dialogic process is done over a period of time through the construction of trust. Once trust is established, only then will I invite participants to share more of their time with me through interviews, reading of their written works and assignments and outside of this one classroom context. Through this dialogic selection, the Native American students who chose to take part in this study come from very diverse backgrounds: Some live on the reservation that borders the city, travelling back and forth between these spaces on a daily basis. Some are from reservations outside this valley and have shown, through stories and pictures, their desire to return there (in this way, they may enact elements of a diaspora whereby people have had to move away from their ancestral lands and long for their return). Amy, a participant

in my pilot study said that she always wanted to be on her reservation which was more than 250 miles away from the valley, but could only make the trip every month or so because of gas prices. She said that her family was in the valley because of economic opportunities.

To better engage in the dialogic process and to have a richer sense of the happenings in this classroom space, I observed this classroom as a participant observer Monday through Thursday, while using Friday as an opportunity to review the fieldnotes from the week and create memos to help make sense of my process of understanding and realization. Since this class meets from 9 till 10:15, I have an opportunity in the morning to engage in theoretical concepts and other research that discusses similar populations and contexts. In this way, I was able to open up my lens to that which I might not have seen had I not engaged with academic conversations that have come before me. I saw this as an opportunity to add another lens from which to view the classroom, to see where the conversation had been, is currently, and where the participants' understandings and my own fit into that ongoing conversation.

### **Digital Recorder and Fieldnotes**

During the hour-and-fifteen minute class, I placed a digital recorder on Ms. Bee's podium as well as asked participants if I could place the recorder on their desks during small-group conversation in order to collect the verbatim conversations both at the whole- and small-group levels. I found it helpful that when I started the recorder (that was often in a different location), I simultaneously started a timer on my phone. When I deemed anything to be particularly curious, questionable, or (re)enforcing a previous

thought, I looked at my phone's timer and wrote down the time that it occurred and took brief notes or what Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) refer to as *jottings*, which anchor the writing process, providing a link back to the field" (p. 49). By writing the time down, I was able to do four things: 1. Focused my attention on the visual happenings during the time of the conversation rather than attempt to spend time writing down what was said. 2. Transcribed that portion of the classroom conversation verbatim (which allowed me to use direct quotes instead of indirect quotes based on memory) immediately after the period. 3. Recreated the conversation in my mind so that I could compose memos that helped me "stop and analyze [my] ideas ...that occurs to [me] during the moment (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). 4. Created richer and fuller fieldnotes that blended the visual with the oral happenings in the classroom. In this way, I created "fieldnotes [that] contain descriptions that are more akin to a series of stories portraying slices of life in vivid detail" (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995, p. 63). This technique works in conjunction with using narrative inquiry and counter-stories to fuel the research since these stories captured many of the intricacies of the language and also the context (non-verbal gestures) of the conversation.

Since stories fuel this study, I also used memos to create stories and ideas that might catch my "thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections [I] make, and crystallize questions and directions for [me] to pursue" allowing me to "actively engage in [my] materials, to develop [my] ideas, and to fine-tune [my] subsequent data-gathering" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). In doing so, I grounded my analysis in the process of gradual understanding by comparing new data with past data, which allowed me to begin to see patterns in the empirical world.

## **Online Mind Mapping and Clustering of Stories and Experiences**

As stated previously, stories were a main source of information that fueled not only the classroom, but also this dissertation. As such, I began to see many overlapping stories, stories from different participants that attempted (in my mind anyway) to portray to the listeners a similar message and feeling. In order to keep track of how these stories overlapped with my fieldnotes, their written works, their interviews and the happenings in class, I relied heavily on an online mind-mapping tool called Mind Meister (located at [www.mindmeister.com](http://www.mindmeister.com)). This tool not only provided connections to what participants said, wrote, and storied, it also provided a space in which I could connect the literature and research I was reading to help connect their stories, their lived experiences to what others had found in other places at other times. Mind Meister provided a way to use clustering (or circling main words/ideas and drawing links to them and others) as a strategy that, in the end, was a crucial tool that helped me to see how certain codes and categories were combining, changing, and/or making sense to me. In a sense, it was a map back to what I was thinking, what I was experiencing, and how that understanding was changing, modifying, connecting and adapting to the shared experiences—the shared stories and narratives that were occurring in the classroom as well as outside of it.



of the world, like each person's perception of her- or himself, is a continuously developing narrative that is constantly forming and changing form" (Moen, 2006, p. 5). Our—both the participants and mine—identities and understandings are constantly in a state of flux and growth. To not acknowledge this is to deny our human-ness and our amazing ability to be impacted: to learn, to adapt—and to impact: to teach, to transform—that which happens around us and within us. Unfortunately, this growth must become fixed within the written text here, which is good and bad. The good: The stories have the ability to transcend beyond the particular time in which they were created and reach perhaps, far more people than in its inception. In this way, new stories may “become relevant in other contexts” (Moen, 2006, p. 6). The bad: The limitation of the written word traps stories and understandings, as if frozen in that time and place. It does not allow for adaptations and growth in our ever-emerging realities; it does not show our growth and how we modify and change our stories because of that growth which oral storytelling provides.

This is a limitation that I will forever ponder, question, and wonder if there is a better way. For now, this is what I have, the written word, the freezing of stories though my and my participants' understandings at this point in time in this document. For now, I concentrate on the good: That the collection of conversations, stories, and lived experiences may be able to transcend beyond us and enact a new or altered thought, reality, and identity that may have some small or large impact on you, the reader.

## Coding

In order to create categories, I moved from initial coding to focused coding. This process of moving from fieldnotes to coding provides a “link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). By doing so I began to make sense of the circumstances, conversations and stories that present themselves to me. While there are different types of initial coding (see Charmaz, 2006, pp. 53-57), I used *incident to incident* coding rather than word-by-word or line-by-line coding. This provided a way to continue to use stories to fuel the knowledge construction and see how the experiences and stories—or incidents—impacted, overlapped, or complicated other experiences and stories. Incident to incident coding allowed me to view the events in class as a more holistic grouping rather than dissecting words and lines into fragmented pieces and helped to construct the following chapters that juxtapose experiences from incident to incident.

Coding forced me to see the material beyond what I was used to; it made me question my prior understandings and grapple with what I saw and analyze, perhaps, what I was not seeing. Kaomea (2003) refers to this process as making the familiar strange. Occasionally, I employed *in vivo* codes, which are labels for codes that come directly from the students’ language. For instance, in my pilot research I labeled two codes “A spark to know more” and “We’re not important enough to cover” to describe the emotion within the words used by my participants. This allows for stories to begin from their direct words allowing for an emotional connection to what they were feeling.

When moving toward focused codes, I referred often to the clusters of codes I created in order to sift through the large amounts of data so that I may begin to move



forward with the data collection concentrating on the codes that are making the most analytical sense and excitement. By focusing on certain codes, I was able to go back to previous data and analyze it with a new concentration, with new understandings, and with new ideas. By doing so, I began to form categories that, moving forward, I developed further with a focused lens of what I was seeing and experiencing. Many of these categories were further chunked into chapters that you will read hereafter. To do all of this, I used the qualitative software program, NVIVO (and all of the headaches, heartaches, and frustrations that came with this program).

### **Interviews as Storied Space**

Because participants usually make meaning in their heads that are not verbalized, it is crucial to employ interviewing because it “is the most obvious technique for making public and accessible some of what people are thinking” (Anderson-Levitt, 2006, p. 287). It also gives me the ability to answer some of the emerging questions from my fieldnotes. To do this, I conducted two forty-five minute interviews during school lunch in Ms. Bee’s classroom. In these semi-structured ethnographic interviews, I had a list of open-ended questions that were generated based on participants’ observed actions, their written reflections, and our personal conversations. However, I allowed the conversation and flow of the interview to be co-constructed by the participant and me, which provided a space to construct our stories. In many instances, I felt that as participants were constructing their narratives, they were, at the same time, making sense of their experiences, as was I. Moen (2006) explains that as we experience events and ideas through “participation in all sorts of social events in their infinite varieties, (we) also

learn to tell stories about them. In this way, (we) gradually learn what kind of meaning culture has imposed on the various events. Thus, storytelling as a way of recounting and creating order out of experience starts in childhood and continues through all stages of our lives” (Moen, 2006, p. 5). By having semi-structured interviews that are fueled by the telling of stories on both the part of the participant and the researcher, new ideas, topics, and information revealed themselves over the course of the interview. The interview became a process of discovery and self-analysis for the participant and myself. We were constructing and reconstructing our lived experiences by engaging in a conversation based on mutual trust and vulnerability through listening and speaking. As qualitative researchers, we are attempting to make sense of our research, what is happening in the setting, through participants’ voices and stories, which makes their point of view, their emerging stories essential to the research (Erickson, 1986). During the interview, I employed elaborating, clarifying, and follow up questions to probe parts of the conversation further. In addition, I gave verbal and non-verbal feedback that showed them I was genuinely interested in what they were saying and eager to make meaning of their words.

While writing and gathering data, I also used narrative inquiry in conjunction with counter-storytelling to fuel the emotional connection we have to stories and the experiences we connect with and relate when feelings from stories of inequality, racism, and access invoke and bring to the surface emotions and vulnerabilities from others (Brayboy, 2005; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Counter-storytelling is fueled by the connections metaphors have to deeper meanings either known to those telling it or perhaps not (Brayboy, 2005). Through counter-stories, youth participants have an

opportunity to challenge the dominant ideology of their schooling (Brayboy, 2005). By using narrative inquiry, which is based on story-ing (or telling stories about the living experiences of participants) I attempt to use humanizing research, which, first and foremost, relies on communication and relationship building to work and learn not only from but also with participants, rather than as separate entities, by employing what Kinloch & San Pedro (2013) refer to as the *dialogic spiral*. The dialogic spiral employs listening and story-ing as central agents to the co-construction of knowledge that occurs in humanizing research where the barrier and binaries of researcher and participant breakdown. What is left are two mutual learners, rather than a structure of power not based on trust, which may limit what is said because of whom it is said to. Trust and reciprocity are crucial here.

I have come to understand the dialogic spiral as the construction of a conversation between two or more people whereby the dialogic process of listening and speaking co-creates an area of trust between the speakers—the space between. In this between space, the speakers' discourse reveals their vulnerabilities and feelings. The conversation moves back and forth when the speaker becomes the listener and the listener becomes the speaker. In order for the conversation to continue, we must see and/or hear that the other is listening to what we are saying. We can see and hear this a number of ways: by seeing them nod their head, by hearing verbal callbacks like “mmm-hmm” and “exactly,” and by hearing the other person extend our ideas by adding their own thoughts based on their understandings and experiences. If constructive, this dialogic spiral moves back and forth, while also advance forward/upward by expanding our prior understanding by listening and story-ing. According to Bakhtin (1981), when we speak, we hope that those

we are speaking to—our audience—will listen and reciprocate our words by answering to them genuinely and sincerely. Words either grow by way of the dialogic spiral or—if our ideas are not reciprocated or are not validated by another—they may die within the world:

When discourse is torn from reality, it is fatal for the word itself as well: words grow sickly, lose semantic depth and flexibility, the capacity to expand and renew their meanings in new living contexts—they essentially die as discourse, for the signifying word lives beyond itself, that is, it lives by means of directing its purposiveness outward (1981, p. 353-4).

In other words, if a word is spoken and there is no one there to listen to it, to expand it, to try to make sense of it, does it exist? I argue alongside Bakhtin that it does not, and the effects of this invalidation and ignoring has been felt personally and seen through prior participants' voices while discussing an assimilationist education they have been exposed to. Storytelling in conversations and interviews can be “instrumental when the individuals understand that they are being heard” (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010, p. 201). Part of being heard is knowing that the other is giving back to the conversation by adding their own understandings, their own connections to the story being shared.

All the methods employed here—the blending of case study and participatory action combined with grounded theory, counter-story, and narrative inquiry methods—have the humanizing element of research that binds them together, while also revealing what Tuck (2009) refers to as *desire based* research frameworks that “are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives ... by documenting not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope” (p. 416).

In the following chapters, I hope to track the wisdom and the hope as well as the confusion and the contradictions of learning from a curriculum that relies on Indigenous perspectives and understandings.

### ***Love and Hate Onions***

*Ms. Bee takes out a picture that has two very different looking onions in it and walks the interior of the room trying to let everyone see the picture. The picture shows the two onions sitting atop pint glasses; their roots are submerged in the water. One onion has a label that says, "Hate," the other has the label, "Love." The "Hate" onion has black spots on it and looks shriveled. The "Love" onion is shiny and bright and full.*

*"For an entire semester, I had my students release all their anger on the hate onion and give all their good feelings to the love onion. I also did this at home. In both instances, the results were the same: The hate onion was shriveled and rotten, while the love onion was thriving and alive. Words hurt, and they can heal. If words do this to onions, what do they do to people?"*

*She pauses for a moment. Then continues, "Be careful with the language that you use, not only to each other but also to yourself. I had a hard time with this: when I started, both onions looked the same, and I had a hard time yelling at the hate onion, it didn't do anything to me. But as the onion gets uglier, it got easier for me to yell at it."*

*"That's messed up," one student says.*

*"That is messed up," she responds. "But it's easy for us to hate things that we think are ugly. But how do you define ugly? How do you define pretty? How do you define what is worthy of being yelled at and what is worthy of being praised? It's something to think about." (Figure 1 shows the hate and love onions and how they were placed within the classroom).*



*Figure 10. Love and Hate Onions. Ms. Bee displayed both in her classroom.*

## Chapter 4

### “WE A FAMILY, NOT A CLASS”: CONSTRUCTION OF SAFE SPACES WITHIN A NATIVE AMERICAN CLASSROOM

*(Note: The following events happened over the course of three weeks. For the sake of story-ing, or as Barone (2001) calls narrative construction, I piece together many events as though they took place in one or two periods. Time, although crucial in some settings, is fluid, flowing, and circular in stories. As such, time within this chapter, is not limited by a beginning or an end; it's an accumulation of many periods, many days, many events in order to construct a story that, I hope, moves you into this classroom with me and helps you see some of the students, the lessons, the readings, and the community construction that occurred in this first few weeks with the participants and me. I construct this chapter with multiple vignettes that are intended to illuminate, sketch out, and articulate the dimensions the construction of a Safe Space. Safe spaces come from Bourdieu's (1990) concept of social space, which examines issues of identity and difference and the ways in which we can engage in those discussions. Literature about safe spaces is rich in drama education and is seen as an important "precursor to any collaborative activity." Further, "...the cultivation of safe space is paramount in peace-building performance, which brings into play social and political tensions, with issues of place and space entwined in complex ways" (Hunter, 2008, p. 6-7). In this chapter, I separate elements that collectively make up the safe space in this classroom, and, at the same time, show the careful construction of safe spaces needed in order to develop the power that can occur within this classroom.)*



Between class periods, I seek the path of least resistance through the cluttered chaos in the hallway intersections to get to the Native American literature classroom. More and more, I am recognizing and energized by seeing familiar faces from the class. Like a lighthouse, Harmon and Vince are standing on either side of the classroom door. They give many of the ladies hugs and many of the fellas the common hand-slide-to-fist bump before they walk into class. All 6-foot-2 inches, 200-something of Harmon sees me, smiles, extends his arm to the side, his right hand's fingers are spread wide. I match his smile, extend my arm as well and bring it forward. We slap hands, slide them back toward us, then close our fists and bump our knuckles together.

“Good to see you today, Tim,” he says.

“Good to see you too buddy,” I say as I walk into the classroom.

### **Classroom Configuration:**

The college pennants hang from the ceiling. Posters with inspirational posters greet students. One says: “With freedom comes responsibility.” A Navajo clan chart, Mexican sombrero, and a map of U.S. reservations hang upon the cinder-blocked walls painted white. A fake plant stands in the back of the room. Good thing because there are no windows into this classroom.

So as to see and hear one another more clearly, Ms. Bee has placed desks in two sets of rows that face the middle of the room (Figure 2 shows the classroom layout). This configuration creates an aisle in the middle for her to walk back and forth. (It also allows students to exchange non-verbal looks with friends back and forth when something was said that they agree or don't agree with.)



*Figure 11. Native American Literature classroom layout*

Just to the right of the entrance, in the front right corner, is a table where students place their sodas, water bottles, and beverages (as per Ms. Bee’s classroom rules to not have liquids at their desks). This table, this spot at the entrance of the room is where I watch, observe, listen, talk, laugh (Table 3 shows the positioning of this table within the classroom). Although there are some desks open to sit in from time to time, this is where I halfway sit, halfway stand, above the garbage can, next to the projector, below a loose cable wire.



*Figure 12. Side-table seat. This picture illustrates the position of the table I sat/leaned on while observing the classroom*

Shila sees me and says, “Hey creeper in the corner,” while exhaling a laugh. Out of all the students, she asks me what, exactly, I do, despite me explaining to the whole

class in the first week that I am a PhD student at Arizona State University interested in the interactions and conversations that are happening in this classroom that is using Native American understandings, history, and authors as the knowledge base for the semester.

“You not a teacher, so what do you do?” she says.

Each time she asks, I give her an honest answer, but it doesn't seem to satisfy her curiosity, her suspicion, and—based on the horrific historical relations between Native American peoples and communities with researchers, universities, anthropologists, cultural inquirers, etc.—I understand where this suspicion comes from (See Smith, 2003; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Brayboy et al., 2012). In a couple of weeks, she'll ask this same question a different way, and I'll give her the same answer a different way. A ritual. In the mean time, I hope that my actions and the way I reveal her and other students' stories here eases some of that suspicion, that doubt from years of distrust before I stepped foot inside Shila's classroom.

“What are you going to school for? To be a counselor?” she asks.

“No, to be a professor in education,” I say. Beatriz, hearing our conversation, looks at me, smiles, and puts two thumbs up.

Nisha, too, is curious about my involvement with the classroom. She comes over to my table in the corner, grabs my field notebook and flips through the contents. At this point, I have to make a decision: 1. Take it back and tell her that the information is private and my own. Or 2. Allow her to look through it, see into what and how I am recording the happenings in this class (if she can read my sloppy writing and follow my disjunctured thoughts).

The information I am recording is not private; I do not own it. It is not mine to secure and for participants not to see. It is ours; the knowledge is shared. As such, I sit quietly next to Nisha, waiting for any questions or comments that might come from her reading my notebook. I want to show Nisha and others that, yes, I do record what I hear and see. Yes, I am very interested in what they have to say. Yes, what they say and do is important, and, yes, I am listening to them and interacting with them to make sense of what they are experiencing and learning. I don't have anything to hide in this notebook because it is with them that I collect information, not separate from them. I want them to be interested in what I do and what I record. Nisha sets the notebook down and walks back to her seat.

Other students walk in. I say hello to Keene, Neena, and Nisha. From her seat across the class, Neena says to me, "I saw you in the library this morning. I was going to shout your name, but I forgot it. I was going to say Tim, but..."

Keene laughs, "Yes. That is his name."

I say back to Neena, "At least you remembered my name now, Rebecca."

Students realize that I intentionally called her the wrong name and laugh at our exchange.

Ms. Bee asks if I can watch the class as she makes some final copies to hand out to class. I oblige. While she is out of the room, Damon throws a credit card across the room, and it nearly hits Harmon in the eye. Damon points to me and says, "It was Tim."

Students who saw him throw it, laugh and wait for my reaction.

"Sorry, Harmon, my bad," I say and then turn to Damon saying, "I'm gonna be the first college student ever put in detention at Desert View High School."

Harmon, Damon and others smile at the thought.

Here, I know that students are testing to see where I fit, how I fit, and if I fit into their classroom community, which is nothing new as I have had to navigate this liminal position all of my life. Damon, who is constantly testing the boundaries of issues, of rules, of authority, has, in my mind, given me one of my many tests. Ms. Bee placed me in an authoritative position—something I had hoped to avoid—and students wanted to see how I would react in this position. Consciously, I made the decision to be with them, to share in the happenings, the confusion, the knowledge construction, the laughter, and the family-building moments of the class. And because of this decision, I moved a little closer to sitting in the student desks within the classroom and a little further away from the standing/sitting position on the table in the periphery of the classroom. Instead of forcing my position, my place, upon them, it was important to me that my inclusion into the classroom space was their decision, their choice, their collective invitation.

### **Introduction and Vision for the Native American Literature Class**

Ms. Bee returns, places the copies she just made on her podium, and then asks the class: “By a show of hands, how many of you are Native American.” Twenty of the 32 hands go up—four students raise their hands high above their heads, while others have their elbows on their desks and a finger or two extended.

She then asks, “Those of you who are Native American, how many of you have heard about your culture?” The majority of the twenty hands raised stay up. She then continues the question by adding, “How many have heard about your culture...in school?” All of their hands drop, except one student whose hand wavers between up and

down. “How many of you have parents, grandparents or elders who have shared creation stories with you?” Ten hands go up. One student smiles while looking at another student across the room.

“How many of you live on the rez?” Six hands go up.

“Are Native Americans just in museums?” Students laugh at the question.

“We’re fossils” one says.

“Do we think this?” Ms. Bee asks.

“Some people do,” Keene says.

“Native Americans are alive and well and are our future,” she says. “Why don’t we teach about Native Americans?”

Keene answers: “Native American peoples were here originally, we should learn about them.”

She then gives them a note that she wrote to them about her vision for this class, which has adapted from year to year. It’s titled “From Code Talkers to Kinaaldas: A Native American History, Literature, and Writing Class.” She reads it aloud:

First and foremost, this class is designed to increase your knowledge about the beauty, tragedy, past, present, and future of Native American tribes throughout the United States. It is also formatted to increase your skills in critical thinking, self-analysis, and cultural identity. We will not only be doing a substantial amount of reading in this class, but we will also be doing a substantial amount of writing in order to find our own stories and histories, whether we are Native American, European American, African American, Hispanic...

In this class, we will be analyzing the beauty of different tribes and discussing their uniqueness as well as similarities with other tribes. The purpose of this class is to celebrate our newfound knowledge while making connections with others we may have thought have nothing in common with us. All reading, writing, videos, discussions and activities will be geared towards inner reflections of our own past misunderstandings, stereotypes, and prejudices as well as hopefully replacing them with factual research in order for us to maturely discuss the enormity and complexity of such an amazing people

If you are Native American, how much do you know of your own tribe? What about other tribes? What have you personally researched? What has been handed down to you from generation to generation? Do you know your original language? Why or why not?

If you are not Native American, what DO you know about the different Native American tribes that we interact with every day in school? WHY don't we teach Native American literature and history extensively in school? What DO you know about the history of the Native Americans in the United States from you 12 years of schooling? Is it enough for you to consider yourself "educated" enough to talk about the past, present, and future Native American issues?

I want this class to be a bridge for Native Americans to connect what they are learning at home with what they are learning in school. Native American students need to be validated that their culture matters! I also want this class to be a bridge for non-Native Americans to learn about how intricately connected United States history is with Native American history. We are all in this together!<sup>7</sup>

At the end of the reading, she adds: “We all have stories and we will all be telling our stories. What’s most important is getting your story out in whatever form you choose: poetry, song, rap, five-paragraph essay, whatever. As you share, you have the right to share what you want and preserve what information is sacred to you. I’ll never ask you to share something that I’m not also willing to share.”<sup>8</sup>”

### **Introduction to Participants**

Ms. Bee then asks them to do just that: Share a little bit about themselves on paper, so she can get to know them better. She reads the following letter to them:

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Dear Students,

Welcome to the Native American Literature class! I am so excited to meet each and every one of you. I would like you to write an informal letter to me (this will help me to get to know you better). In your letter, please include the following:

- If Native American: What tribe are you from? If not Native American:  
What is your culture?
- Why did you choose to take this class?
- Have you ever read literature about your culture in past English classes?  
Tell me about it!
- Have you ever felt your culture was not represented in English classes?  
Why or why not?
- What are your expectations of me in this class this semester?



- What grade do you want to receive in here at the end of the semester and why?
- What are your hobbies/talents...Are you in extra curricular activities? Which ones?
- What are your overall fears/frustrations about your senior year?
- What are your overall excitements/expectations about your senior year?
- What is the most important thing you want me to know about you?

As they begin writing, she says, “If you’re the type of person who needs to listen to music while they write, go ahead and put your head phones in, but don’t play your music so loud that we all can hear it.” I see nine students put headphones in. One student offers an ear bud to the student in front of her. They each have one headphone in, sharing the music as they write.

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***Eileen***

*Dear Ms. Bee,*

*Hello there (^.^)! I am half Navajo, half African American. I chose this class because I thought it would be great to finally be in a class where I can learn more about my culture. I don't think I have read about my culture in my English classes. It was never really brought up. Honestly yes, I feel my culture was not represented in classes because some teachers would say it's not important right now or it's not on topic, so yeah it wasn't really represented. My expectations are for you to help me understand mostly everything. I want to receive a good passing grade. Maybe from A-C, because I don't want to fail. My hobbies are things I like to do like*

*watching movies and dancing. Or that's all I can say for now. Looking forward to your class.*

*Eileen*

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***Abby***

*Dear. Ms. Bee,*

*I am Caucasian. The reason I chose to take this class was because my English teacher from last year said it would be a fun class. As far as I can remember from my past English classes in high school, I can't remember much on culture. I really don't even know my own culture due to my family's past, so this seems overwhelming. I really can't say I will stay in this class, but if I did stay in this class I guess my expectations would be not to be thrown into completely new and have some background knowledge. My family has never really had any cultural traditions. My family has never really bothered discussing them either. If I was to continue I would strive for an A. I want this grade because I want to finish high school knowing I gave it my all at the end. I guess the only talent I discovered about myself is drawing. My worst fear about senior year is the workload being too much and falling behind. I just want this to be the best year possible. I guess the most important thing I would like you to know is that as long as I'm comfortable in the situation, I will give it my all plus more.*

*Sincerely,*

*Abby*

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**Keene**

*Dear Ms. Bee,*

*I am Hopi and Navajo. You taught my sister already in a previous Native American literature class. I am glad to be in this class and hope to gain a lot of experience. I chose this class for I'm interested in the Native American cultures because I am Native as well. I have always wondered: why isn't my culture expressed in schools, media, or really in United States history as much? In this class, I hope I can express my feelings of how Native cultures are treated today, but also learn about other cultures as well. My personal interests are mostly artistic. I personally love film, and hope to become a director to show Native Americans in cinema the right way. I expect a lot of new information to enter my mind from this class. I'm also curious to know your opinion on certain topics and subjects. In all, I truly hope this is a whole new experience for me.*

*Sincerely,*

*Keene*

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**Vince**

*Dear Ms. Bee,*

*I am half Pima, half Mexican (but I usually say I'm just Pima). I chose to take this class because I figured it would give me an edge and advantage that I haven't had in most of my other classes. Also, because I figured it would teach me something about my people and our culture. I have not read about my people or culture before, so I'm sure this will be interesting. I don't really expect too much from you,*

*I mean, you seem pretty chill and, if anything, I couldn't have hoped for anything else otherwise. I hope to receive the grade that you think I deserve. I don't think I've ever had a grade handed to me before, so why start now? (An "A" would be nice though ☺). My hobbies and talents all consist with cars, my cars, and driving. It's my passion and I hope that one day it'll take me somewhere awesome. Fears and frustrations? I don't think I have any. I plan to do my best and maintain everything, most of the year, until I graduate. Also, I talk a lot... :-)*

*Vince*

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***Harmon***

*Dear Ms. Bee,*

- I am African-American.*
- I joined this class because I wanted to learn about Native Americans.*
- I have heard about African-American history. All the teacher did was have us watch movies on racism and how some people fault it.*
- No, I feel like my culture was represented even in the school I went to because they had African American history.*
- I expect to learn more about the Native American culture.*
- I would like to receive a B or higher, so I know I learned new things and got good information.*
- I played basketball, football and swim. I know how to play the guitar and piano.*
- The biggest fear of senior year is what am I going to do after high school.*

- *The most excitement is that I'm going to be done with high school.*
- *The most important thing you should know about me is I'm a great listener.*

*Thanks for reading.*

*Harmon*

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***Nisha***

*Hey Ms. Bee,*

*My name is Nisha.*

*I am Zuni and Apache. I chose this class because it seems fun and very educational where I can learn about the history of Native Americans and to also have a better understanding to what really happened to us. It really interests me when I heard about this class to where I can be around natives and be in a class to know their history.*

*I didn't read much literature about my culture when I moved here to Arizona from my reservation in New Mexico. Before I moved, I learned a lot about my people and knew the traditions, but not since I've come here.*

*In many ways I do want to know why my culture or any culture wasn't represented in classes. It would be a big help to everyone. I hope to receive an A or a B in this class. I know I'll enjoy this class a lot in getting more information from it. My hobby and talents are running, rez ball, helping my community—an example to the young ones.*

*My fear/frustrations—is getting working and finishing. Also working on my papers for the military and making it to graduation day and finishing with honor.*

*My excitement/expectations: finishing high school.*

*I can be silent. In many ways, I do not say much, but I do come out of the shell.*

*Sincerely,*

*Nisha*

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***Damon***

*Dear Mrs. Bee,*

*Hi, I'm Damon, but I prefer my last name. I am Hopi and Navajo, but follow the Hopi traditions. I chose to take this class because I want to know more about the other tribes and their history and stories. Well, I did go to school on the Navajo reservation, so even in my English class, we did talk about our ways, the old ways and how we need to keep our old ways going. My culture has always been talked about in all my English classes until I transferred here to Desert View High School. I honestly don't have any expectations from you. I don't have expectations because I believe if you set yourself up for goals you expect too much and fail. I want at least a C because I want to pass my senior year and just get out of high school, so I can go on and live life.*

*Damon*

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***Shila***

*Hi Ms. Bee,*

*I am Navajo. I am very looking forward to this class. My friends who graduated last year and took this class said you are a great teacher!*

*First of all, I took this class because I want to learn more about other cultures than my own. I heard stories about others but would like to know more in school. In my other classes I learned only about a paragraph about my culture, it's not enough information to where I can do a research project on it. I thought to myself that we, Native Americans, don't exist to this world now. Only on the Rez, because when we are spoken about, it's an issue that makes us look like we are bad guys.*

*What I look forward to in this class is a lot of information and emotions. To being mad, sad, and jealous to all issues that awaits during the semester. I can't wait! I would love to receive a B or higher in this class, because it will make my dad proud of me and to get credits to graduate.*

*Sports are the love of my life, I run, play basketball, and softball. I play for the varsity squad and have been playing basketball since I was about 9 years old. I am thinking about joining cross-country as well, but that is still in the air. As for softball, it's a family sport that we play for fun.*

*I am really excited for this year!*

*Shila*

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**Neena**

*Hiya! Ms. Bee.*

*Of course, I'm Neena. :)*

*I decided to take this class because I thought it would be really easy. I mean, I'm Native, duh, Pima. But then you said we would be teaching you, so I started thinking, what can I teach you? I then realized, not much. So it's kind of a good thing I did take this class.*

*I did learn a few things about my culture, but they were just tales and poems, child stuff really. We also watched a movie that was good, because I have the movie back at home too. =)*

*I do feel like my culture was not represented accurately. I honestly think that if they really want to understand and learn something about Native Americans, maybe they should ask the students themselves.*

*I expect that you will be very fun, easy to talk to, and willing to listen. =) I expect an A+ of course, because this is who I am. I honestly should pass this class; if I don't, I will only be disappointed in myself.*

*My hobbies are drawing, painting, sewing, and watching tons of movies!!*

*Thank you, for asking about me.*

*Neena*

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**Beatriz**

(Beatriz does not transfer into the class until week 2. Beatriz is Mexican-American. Most of her family lives on a border town in Mexico. She is quick to



smile, eager to participate in conversations and make connections with the themes in class and her own upbringing. She is very interested in others' cultures particularly Native American cultures, which has gotten her into trouble at times. She thinks this is the result of other students questioning her genuine interest in their culture, she says. She spends much of her time in the city library conducting her own research on what interests her at the time. In fact, she double-checks many of Ms. Bee's topics and readings here).

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Ms. Bee brings the class back together, and says, "I appreciate your honesty and your candidness in these letters. Many of you, I would say more than about 65 percent of the class, said that you had not heard your culture represented in English classes or even in history classes and you guys wrote that (she reads directly from one student's letter) 'it makes me feel like the education system doesn't feel like we're important.' That really hurts my heart, so again, I want you guys to feel validated, to feel that your culture, your stories, they matter in here. Doesn't matter if you're Native American, African American, European American, Hispanic; everyone's stories matter in here."

### **Ms. Bee and Indigenous Identity:**

Hearing this last statement, one brave student's hand goes up. She calls on him. He states what many of them may be thinking: "Ms. Bee, you don't look Native American. You look white."

She has received this question of identity each year she has taught this Native American literature class and, over the course of those three years, her answer has adapted. In the first and second year, she told students that, from her dad's side, she was

Cherokee. This year, however, as she answers this question, she removes this from her answer. Instead, she takes out a framed picture of her mother who is wearing traditional Indigenous clothing and says that from her mother's side, she is Opata and Mayan. She says that her father is a mixture of European ancestry.

Later, I ask her why she removed Cherokee from her introduction:

“I wanted the kids to take me seriously. It's not that I'm denying my Cherokee, it's just that, based on how the kids react, I think that they actually think you're less when you say that you're Cherokee, that you're a wannabe Native American, and so I don't want them to see that, if that makes sense. So I don't know if I'm doing myself a service or a disservice by not doing it, but I just made that option this year.”<sup>9</sup>

I then ask why she showed the picture of her mother and how that was received by the students.

“I think that it was positive. I think they kinda received me and embraced me just because they saw that I am relatively legit.”

Hearing this, I reflect on the confusing navigation of identity, of race, of ethnicity, of culture that the students share with me, that Ms. Bee shares with me, that I constantly experience and, to be honest, struggle with. Collectively, we are navigating who we are, who we appear to be, and how we are received and perceived in the different communities and contexts we live.

In a later interview, Ms. Bee says that she began teaching this course in the hopes that it would give her an opportunity to learn more about herself:

I don't know anything about my own culture and despite my grandparents always wanting us to know who we are, they never had gone into detail about our Native American culture, I had to go and research it. I don't want the students to feel the same way; I want them to feel validated in class. We never learned about Native

American history in any of my classes that I can think of growing up. (Interview, Oct. 4, 2012)

**Co-Construction of Curriculum/Syllabus:**

She hands them a list of the topics, subjects, and readings they will discuss in class broken up into four units and subsequent assignments, readings, and final projects for those units:

Table 1

*Ms. Bee’s Native American Literature Tentative Schedule of Readings, Discussions, Assignments, and Unit Finals*

Unit #	Assignments/ Discussions/ Events	Readings/Works	Unit Final
Unit 1: Finding Our Stories	1. First Day Letter to Ms. Bee. 2. The need for story-Discussion 3. What do you know about Native Americans?- Questionnaire and Discussion 4. Create and Describe your own logo 5. Personal Letter to Ms. Bee about students’ lives outside of school	2. <i>Warriors with Words: Toward a Post-Columbine Writing Curriculum</i> by G. Lynn Nelson	Feather Circle 1
Unit 2: Finding our	1. Lost History 2. Lesson: It’s all about perspectives! 3. Timeline Activity	1. Movie: Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee 2. Praise and Criticism of Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, the Movie. 3. Movie: Into the	Reflection 1 (Appendix 3)

		<p>West</p> <p>4. New York Times Excerpt about the largest mass hanging in US history.</p> <p>5. Bios: Henry Laurens Dawes, Charles Alexander Eastman, Sitting Bull</p> <p>6. Timelines of American Indian relations with US Government.</p> <p>7. Grattan Incident.</p> <p>8. Sand Creek Massacre</p>	
Unit 3: Finding our Tribes	<p>1. Map of National Tribes</p> <p>2. Map of Arizona Tribes</p> <p>3. How to Booklet</p>	<p>1. The Goat in the Rug</p> <p>2. The Threshold of Womanhood.</p> <p>3. Several Tribes Share the Man in the Maze, reznetnews.org.</p>	<p>Feather Circle 2</p> <p>Group Presentation</p>
Unit 4: Finding Our Warriors	<p>1. Chief Joseph</p> <p>2. John Trudell</p> <p>3. Anna Lee Walters</p> <p>*4. Leonard Peltier</p> <p>5. Sports Team Mascots</p> <p>5. Desert View High School Native American Mascot.</p>	<p>1. Incident at Oglala</p> <p>2. Should Fry Bread be Phased out of Native American Cultures?</p> <p>3. Chief Joseph Bio and Letter.</p> <p>4. Introduction to the American Indian Movement: 101 by Sherry Means.</p> <p>5. Concerning John Trudell...</p> <p>6. We've Got to Have a Commitment So Strong... by John Trudell</p>	<p>In-Class Essay Comparing and Contrasting philosophies and Struggles of Chief Joseph and John Trudell</p> <p>Socratic Discussion (Appendix 4)</p> <p>Reflection 2 (Appendix 5)</p>

		<p>7. Invocation by John Trudell</p> <p>8. The Warriors by Anna Lee Walters</p> <p>9. Excerpt from Prison Writings: My Life as a Sun Dancer by Leonard Peltier</p> <p>10. Local News articles centering on Desert Views decision to keep Native American Mascot.</p> <p>11. Go Fightin’ Whits: Mascot causes stir by Nick Wadhams.</p> <p>12. Indians hail stand on team names-Associated Press</p>	
Unit 5: Finding Our Inner Poetry	<p>1. Guest Speakers: Simon Ortiz, Kyle Wilson</p> <p>2. Constructing our Poems</p>	<p>1. American Indian Slam Poets</p> <p>2. Writing by the Sante Fe Indian School Poetry Slam Team</p> <p>3. Sensing the Rez by Chris Jay</p> <p>4. (Thanksgiving Readings: The Christopher Columbus Controversy: Wester Civilization vs. Primitivism by Michael S. Berliner, Ph.D., Deconstructing the Myths of “The First Thanksgiving” by Judy Dow).</p>	<p>Thank you letters to Kyle Wilson and Simon Ortiz</p> <p>Feather Circle 3</p>
Unit 6: Finding True Education	1. Mission Schools	1. Code Talkers – Joseph Bruchac	Reflection 3 (Appendix 6)

		2. Letter from Medicine Grizzly Bear 3. Rising Voices 4. Short stories and poems about the Boarding School Experience.	
Unit 7: Finding Our Future	Reader Reflections.	Absolute True Story of a Part Time Indian by Sherman Alexie	Native American Literature Class Final Reflection (Appendix 7)

She says, “This is a tentative schedule. Again, you guys are going to drive the class. If this syllabus isn’t working for you say, ‘Ms. Bee, let’s do this or this’. We will totally go in the direction of your choosing. I will throw this out the window in a heartbeat. I want this class to move in the direction that is meaningful to you every day<sup>10</sup>” (see Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

### **Constructing Safe Space: Story-ing**

Ms. Bee tells them that over the next few days, they will be constructing their stories in both words and in art so as to get to know one another better. As she gives them a handout, she says, “I’m going to be sharing a lot of information about myself. I don’t expect you guys to open up unless I do the same thing. Again, some of my colleagues are just like, ‘you share too much with your students.’ I respond to them and say, ‘if we’re going to ask them to share about themselves, I think it’s only fair to share about ourselves.’”

The handout is titled, “Warrior with Words: Toward a Post-Columbine Curriculum” by G. Lynn Nelson (2000). The article is a call for writing teachers to understand that all students have stories to tell and that the power of stories are not only in the telling, but also in having someone to tell them to—having someone to listen to their stories and give back to their stories. This, to me, is the essential foundation of *story-ing* (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2013)—the act of creating and telling a story, a narrative, either orally, written, drawn or any other source of communication. Housed within the story is the culmination of one’s experiences, conversations, and teachings at the time of the telling; what we are willing and able to comprehend and share in that moment (dependent upon who we are speaking to and for what purposes). Of course, as we change and learn to adapt to our surroundings, our stories change, modify, adapt, and build upon our prior understandings. Thus, story-ing allows for growth. Moen (2006) adds “Storytelling is a natural way of recounting experience, a practical solution to a fundamental problem in life, creating reasonable order out of experience (p.2). Thus, “people without narratives do not exist” (Polkinghorne, 1998 cited in Moen, 2006, p. 2). We all have a story. How that story is told can have consequences, however.

Ms. Bee reads a section from Nelson’s article that says, “...our stories sit in us, waiting to be told, to be acknowledged. Untold and unacknowledged, they will eventually translate themselves into other languages—languages of abuse and addiction, of suicide and violence. In such a society and in such schools we are literally dying to tell our stories (Nelson, 2000, p. 14). This article is in reference to the Columbine High School shootings and how that story was told through mass killings of students.

She stops reading, puts the paper down, and says to the class, “When I first read this part of the article, I was shaking because at the time I read this, I was publishing my stories. I was cutting myself. And I’m not talking as a teenager. I am talking as a 30-year-old because my stories had sat in me, and nobody said that my story was important enough to listen to and so I took out the violence on myself. I took out my anger on myself, and I cut myself for several years and I realized, ‘why am I hurting myself for something that was not my responsibility?’ So if you know somebody or if you are a cutter or abuser, it’s okay to tell your stories in other ways, and if you need someone to talk to, I will be here to listen to you. Not to judge but to listen because sometimes we need to know that our stories matter. So I’m going to ask you to get personal with me but only to the level that you’re comfortable with because I’ve been there, and I understand what it’s like and yet I still survived, and I’m here today.”

As she told this story, many students looked to someone across the room, caught their eye, then looked back to Ms. Bee or down at their desks. I notice that Nisha and Eileen looked at one another during this story.

(Later, as I am transcribing notes in the library during lunch, Nisha and Eileen join me. I ask them about the glance they exchanged during Ms. Bee’s story.)

Nisha says, “I don’t know. It surprised me. I’d never heard a teacher say so much about their personal life. She knows the pain and what we go through and how our life has been, and it seems like she can compare her life to us and how it’s been.”

“Does she do that a lot? Does she make connections between what you guys are going through and what she’s gone through?” I ask.

“Yeah,” they both say in unison and with emphasis.



“When she said that she used to cut and I went through that experience,” Nisha says, and Eileen adds, “So did I.”

Nisha continues: “I realized that I lost family members left and right and that’s when I turned to cutting and when she told her story, I could compare mine to hers and actually felt good because I could tell my story.”

“So by knowing what she had gone through, how did that impact you in the classroom having her as a teacher?” I ask.

Eileen answers, “I think, for me, it impacted me because I knew that I could be closer to her and not just see her as a teacher because like she said, she learns more from us than she does teaching us and not many teachers are like that” (See Klug & Whitfield, 2003).

“When she relates to you on a certain level with the stories that she shares, how does that impact how you view her as a teacher?” I ask.

Nisha answers, “I just feel like I have a connection with her. To be honest, I just like her as a teacher. I feel like she’s a hero to me because to even have this class I am able to understand where I come from and what’s happened to all the other Native Americans and the difficulties that they went through. (Personal communication, Oct. 5, 2011).

Later, within Nelson’s article, he states that “Story is a ‘second look at personal history’ that can transform a person from one who is ‘trapped in [their] past’ to one who is ‘freed by it.’ But, he notes, the telling is not all. ‘Along the way, on [their] pilgrimage, each [person] must have a chance to tell [their] tale, there must be someone there to listen’” (Kopp, 1973, cited in Nelson, 2000, p. 15). Further, Hill (2009), in constructing a

classroom based on Hip Hop Literature discovered with his students that the act of speaking and listening enacted what he referred to as *Wounded Healing*, which is “the process by which members ... were able to find varying levels of insight, relief, support, empathy, and critique within the ... community for their personal and ideological wounds” (p. 74).

Nisha and Eileen explained how important Ms. Bee’s words were to them and gave them the courage to share their own stories knowing that Ms. Bee was there to listen and reciprocate their feelings: “I could compare mine to hers and actually felt good because I could tell my story,” Nisha says (See Hill, 2009, Ch. 4: Wounded Healers).

### **Constructing Safe Space: The *Dialogic Spiral* and the *Between Space***

This interaction between Nisha, Eileen and other students in relations to Ms. Bee reminds me of Bakhtin’s (1981) emphasis upon words. Bakhtin states that our words—when they are divorced from an audience, from someone to listen and give back to our words—“they essentially die as discourse, for the signifying word lives beyond itself, that is, it lives by means of directing its purposiveness outward (1981, p. 353-4). In other words, when we speak, we hope that those we are speaking to—our audience—will listen and reciprocate our words by answering them genuinely and sincerely. In this way, we are attempting to complete what I have come to understand (with the help of my participant Edgar, and Dr. Kinloch) as the *dialogic spiral* (see Appendix 1): The *dialogic spiral*<sup>11</sup> is the construction of a conversation between two or more people whereby the dialogic process of listening and speaking co-creates an area of trust between speakers—the space between. In this *between space*, the speaker’s discourse reveals vulnerabilities

and feelings. The conversation moves back and forth when the speaker becomes the listener and the listener becomes the speaker. In order for the conversation to continue, we must see and/or hear that the other is listening to what we are saying. We can see and hear this in a number of ways: by seeing them nod their head, by hearing verbal callbacks like “mmm-hmm” and “exactly,” and by hearing the other person extend our ideas by adding their own thoughts based on their understandings and experiences. This feedback can occur on paper as well, in the form of making personal connections via notes in margins of other’s writing or underlining words that connect with our own understandings (as Ms. Bee does in responding back to students’ reflection writing. See *Constructing Safe Space: Written Reflections*).

If constructive, this dialogic spiral moves back and forth, while it also advances forward/upward by expanding prior understandings of listening and speaking. Ms. Bee, by telling a personal story, allowed students like Eileen and Nisha to share their own. In a sense, they were giving back to Ms. Bee’s words by sharing their own stories on paper and, at times, in conversation both in small- and whole-group discussions (See chapter 6).

In doing so, Ms. Bee applied the advice from Nelson’s article, which says: “Personal story leads to authentic communication, speaking from our hearts, for our wholeness. But authentic communication demands a listener. So story asks of us another change from the orthodox writing class. It asks us to value listening over grading. . . . And, as each person tells his tale, there must be another there to listen. To listen. Not: To grade. Not: To Psychoanalyze. Not: To solve. Just: To listen.”

## **Constructing Safe Space: Creating a Self Logo/Symbol**

After they have collectively read Nelson’s article, Ms. Bee explains to them their first assignment titled: *Create a logo and write about it*. She asks students, “If you had a logo that represents who you are, what would it be?”

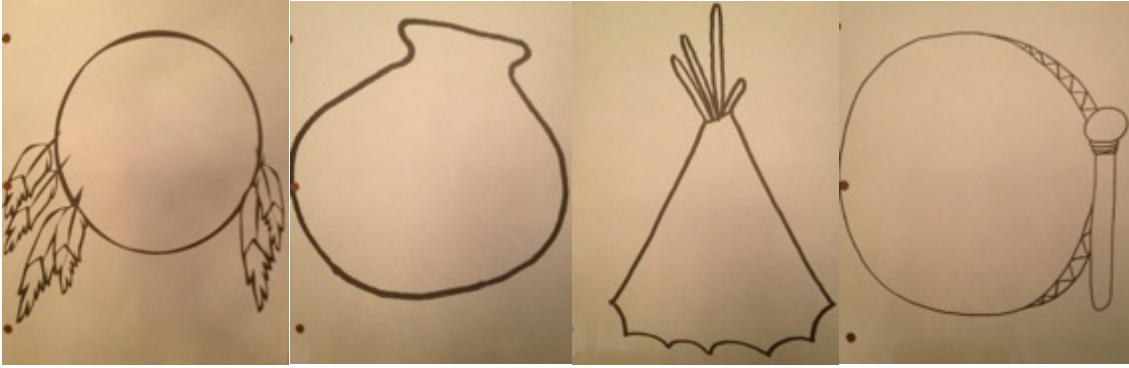
“That’s a good question. No one’s ever asked me that before,” Damon says.

She holds up the outlines of four symbols she felt were important in many Native American communities—shield, drum, tipi, and pottery—and explains what they mean.<sup>12</sup>

She asks students to choose one that best represents them. Within the symbol, students are asked to create a logo that represents them or their family or their community. She asks them to think about their family, friends, culture, tribe, celebrations and sorrows that, together, makes them who they are today: “How would you put all that is in your heart and head and soul into a picture?”

The second part of the assignment is to take something that emerges out of their logo and put it in the form of a story, i.e. whatever and however their stories need to be told: “Will it be an essay? A poem? A song? Find the story behind your logo and put it down on paper. Use your best words. We will then share our rough drafts in writing groups, rewrite them, and share our final drafts in a feather circle,” Ms. Bee explains.

She gives them the rest of the period to work on their drafts and asks that they have something written about their logos to share during the writing groups.



*Figure 13. Four symbols to construct Self Logo. Ms. Bee handed these four symbols to students within which they drew pictures, scenes, objects that reflected who they are*

“I am so excited to read what you had to read yesterday. Thank you, thank you, thank you for your honesty. Some of you wrote two pages, some of you wrote one sentence. Some of you guys said, ‘Ms. Bee, this is me; this is what I’ve done; these are some of the sorrows in my heart. Some of you guys are like, ‘ya know, I’m okay for now.’ And you guys come at this however you are comfortable with it. I’m not going to force you guys to share; I’m not going to ask you guys to do something you’re not ready to do, so for some of us it takes awhile to earn that trust and I totally, totally respect that.”

She then has students come up and grab their stories. She has written notes back to them in the margins and underlined certain lines and phrases. After students are handed their papers back, they sit down at their desk and quietly read what was said back to them and what lines connected with Ms. Bee enough for her to underline them. By writing back to them her words and thoughts that were inspired by their words and thoughts, she has continued the dialogic spiral by adding her story to theirs. She’s shown that she has listened. She has heard them (I will discuss this in more detail in the written reflections section later) (see Nelson, 2000).

## **Constructing Safe Space: Exposing Vulnerabilities through Story-ing**

Ms. Bee thanks them for sharing and helping one another revise their statements and then hands them her own symbol and accompanying poem. She asks them to underline anything they like or agree with as well as write in the margins any comments or questions they might want to ask her later. She begins reading her poem titled:

### ***My Publishing***

*by Ms. Bee*

*“Our stories get published, one way or another.” –Lynn Nelson*

*My once-crimson scar/has finally turned into a gentle, flesh-colored reminder/  
of my stories that needed/to be published/My right wrist tells the story/of a survivor/of my  
anger against myself/A story within a story within a story.../They never end/My past  
started at age 6/I was abused in the darkness/of an abandoned cave/deep in the heart of  
North Carolina/3months of silent torture/swept into the cobwebs of innocence/My past  
continued at age 10/ I was abused in the darkness/of my own room/ deep in the heart of  
an ignorant house/12 months of unacknowledged torture/swept into the cobwebs of  
unwanted memories/My past haunted me at age 30/I picked up my rusty, blue-handled  
scissors/and began carving my stories/into myself/smearing my blood/along the  
bathroom mirrors/and looking at my reflection/through red-tinted satisfaction/I was a  
newlywed/with an old soul/I could either save myself/or save my marriage/but not  
both/My first marriage/never even stood a chance/But the hawk of my heart refused/to let  
me die/Even today, she perches vigilantly above me/my animal spirit/my*

*protector/myself/She lets me tell my stories/out of infinite pain/while she gives me the strength/to find tomorrow's stories/under the shadow of her wings/I am healed.*

Ms. Bee concludes the reading and walks behind her podium. Students applaud and snap their fingers.

“Damn, that was good,” Vince says.

“I’m not going to ask you to do anything that I’m not willing to do,” Ms. Bee says.

I think back to the dialogic spiral and what must happen in the space between us for our conversations and stories to continue, to thrive, to grow. Here, Ms. Bee has shown the most vulnerable side of her self. She has revealed to them the pain of learning to become who she is and her growth in the process. She has modeled that all stories are okay in this classroom, even painful ones, ones that reveal the pain, and the hope. Ones that allow us to reflect on how stories and events have impacted us and made us who we are. Such stories and events reminds me of Valerie Kinloch’s (2010) book *Harlem on our Minds* as she shares stories through video about two participants’ identities (Khaleeq and Phillip) and about who they are in Harlem. At the crux of their own reflection of Harlem, of place, is a critique of the institutional and social inequities at play in their neighborhoods. Ms. Bee enacts many of the same stories, revealing her position and place and connections with her students.

### **Constructing Safe Space: Feather Circles**

Ms. Bee then asks students to form three groups of ten as she makes nine copies of their writing, so everyone has a copy. As she is out of the room, there is some

confusion and hesitancy in creating these groups. There are multiple pods of three or four students forming—most of which were the same small groups just formed earlier with friends—instead of the three groups of ten she had asked for. Upon returning with the copies, Ms. Bee helps move students around to make three equal groups of ten. She hands one person in each group a feather that has leather-attached beads and explains that whoever is in possession of this feather, they have the opportunity to share their story and their symbol, essentially, it represents who is speaking and who is listening in the group.

The feather is passed to Nisha. There is much hesitancy before she begins speaking, but after five seconds, she holds up her symbol and explains what she told her small group just a bit ago: She talks about the large crack that separates the circle. On one side of the circle is the border of one of her reservations, Zuni, and on the other is her other reservation, Jicarilla Apache. She says the crack represents the split her family has had to endure and how this splitting has severed her to worlds. Her eyes look only to the back of the paper; they don't try to find anyone else's.





*Figure 14. Nisha's Symbol/Logo. Nisha reveals a split in identity and family in this illustration as well as her pride in two different tribal affiliations*

She passes the feather to Beatriz on her right. Beatriz shares her story of her family living in two countries, Mexico and the United States, and the divide that a border has created for her, especially most recently. Students ask her to slow down and to speak more clearly as they can't fully hear her story through her nervous giggles and quickened speech. She makes it through, and passes the feather.

Abby receives the feather and holds up her symbol of a tiger and a dove: The tiger is her angry side, while the dove is her compassionate side. She says that she lost a great friend because of her inability to adapt to her friend's needs. She explains: "I strongly believe there is not a lot of hope for me to ever change, but I will strive to for the rest of my life. I know I shouldn't change myself, that I should be true to who I really am, but I don't ever want to lose another important person" (Document read, 8/18/12).

Abby passes the feather to Neena, who just a bit ago explained they symbolism of the three chicks walking in front of the mother duck, leading her. Although she shared in

the smaller group, this time Neena holds the feather for a moment, looks at her symbol, and then, without a word, passes the feather on to the next student. Students ask her to share, but she says she doesn't want to. They don't press her any further.

In following the navigation from the smaller writers group of three to four into the larger feather circle of 10 students, I notice something. The smaller group presentation was a sort of practicing of discourse, of story. It was a way for them to test what it is they are going to say, and revise what they say depending on the reactions or actions of others. For Nisha, her story remained nearly the same. For Neena, her story was not shared at all in the feather circle.<sup>13</sup> This sort of migration of identity from one context to the next reminded me of an idea Bakhtin posed. He stated that we react to the situations, the people, and the feelings that surrounds us at any given moment, and we decide who to be in each of these situations:

...[every person] intonates every particular and every trait of his [character], every event of his life, every action he performs, all his thoughts and feelings, just as in life, too, we react valuationally to every self-manifestation on the part of those around us. These reactions in life, however have a scattered character, that is, they are reactions to isolated self-manifestations of a human being and not to the whole that he is, not to *all* of him (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 4).

This movement that Neena, Nisha, and Abby show from small to large group trace how the levels of comfort and trust with those around them. Some students revise their stories very little, while others revise their stories slightly, while others remove their stories all together. They each told a portion of their story that they felt comfortable sharing and held back what they did not feel comfortable sharing with a new, larger group that had students in it they did not have trust with yet.

In the telling of story, we engage in a level of vulnerability, which may or may not be worth sharing depending on the trust that these students have or don't have with

one another. For Nisha, the impact was felt in a large way: [When in the feather circle] we were able to hear people's stories ... [and] it felt like, in a way, we were connected because certain things some of us would go through or certain things would represent a person and most people don't understand that, but to have people who have been there, it's really cool" (Interview, Oct. 5, 2012). She was seeing the connections in other's stories with her own. She was making the connections in emotions, in feelings, in their realities and identities, which allowed her to see the commonalities of their collective lived experiences. In seeing this, she was willing to share her story: "I have trust in people. If people share with me and cry with me and if I know I can help them, then I can share my story with them."

However, for Neena, she did not share her story and in a later interview, I asked her why she made that decision. She said that it was because she felt that her story was "too emotional, and I didn't wanna talk about it. I was like 'nah, I must be getting weak.' Being weak's like a real big thing for me. I don't like seeming weak at all. I don't wanna seem like that. Even for myself like when I'm at home if I'm going through something, I try not to share it with others. It's a sign of weakness" (Interview, Oct. 6, 2011). For Neena, strength lies in her ability to not show weakness, despite certain pain in the stories that she keeps to herself like with her father. Strength is in hiding story, in internalizing the emotions, in revealing only the joy of life.

I asked Neena a follow up question: "You don't like to show it, but did you see other students kinda showing emotion during that..." She said that Stacy, a Latina student, shared much of her story: "That was crazy [when Stacy shared her story]. I was like 'oh, that's—that was really good.' After I heard her talk, I was like 'hmm, maybe I

should share,' but then I was like 'no 'cause my story's too hardcore for it" (Interview, Oct. 6, 2011). Here, Stacy's willingness to reveal a painful moment in her life made Neena think, for a moment, that perhaps she could share her own. In the end, Neena did not tell her story, but hearing the power in Stacy's story<sup>14</sup> made her second guess that decision making Neena's story closer to being told.

### **Constructing Safe Space: Validating the Words of Others**

After everyone has had the option of sharing or not sharing their stories, Ms. Bee hands them orange folded notecards. She asks them to write at least two "Thank you" cards to someone in the group whose story they appreciated.

Neena asks, "What if we want to write more than two?"

Ms. Bee responds, "Write as many as you'd like."

"I'm gonna write one for everyone," Nisha says.

As Ms. Bee passes them out, she skips me, and I ask if I could have a few cards as well. She smiles, says, "of course." I end up writing six thank you's to the students. I thank them for sharing their stories and listening to others. I notice that the students who were the most vulnerable, who revealed the most of their stories, were the ones who received the most thank you cards. Stacy's desk was covered in orange cards and she read each one carefully. The bell rings, and I hear audible, "Awwws," as does Ms. Bee who says that she'll give them time on Monday to finish writing these cards or gives them the option to write them at home and give them during the next class period.

As has become customary for me, I go directly from this classroom to the library to transcribe my fieldnotes and audio recordings from class. On my way in to the library today, I see Stacy at a computer in the library where she is taking an online history class.

“I really liked your story today,” I tell her. She turns from her computer.

“Thanks. I felt stupid because no one else took it seriously; they just told what their symbols meant. I really put a lot of effort into it and felt stupid for sharing,” she says.

“I understand that feeling, but you shouldn’t feel that way. I think a lot of students really appreciated your story. I definitely did,” I said.

“Thanks for saying so,” she said.

I wish I could have told her at that time how impactful her story was for Neesha. How her story nearly inspired Neesha to reveal her own. How the emotions were deeply felt by many of the students. But it wasn’t until later, in the interviews, that I heard how impactful Stacy’s story was.

Upon reflecting on this situation, I began seeing lessons forming: If we are to enter into this space of sharing, we need to do so mutually, with a willingness to put our stories out there, which include the pain, the heartache, the joy, the celebration, and the fear. If not, there’s a feeling of “stupidity” that Stacy felt and a “weakness” that Neena felt.

Here, the space between the speaker (with the feather in this case) and the listener (the nine other students in the circle), could be considered the storied space, or what I have previously referred to as the *between space*. In order to construct a meaningful conversation, a *dialogic spiral*, I mentioned earlier that the speaker must reveal

vulnerabilities, emotions, and feelings. In order for the conversation to grow, these vulnerabilities, emotions, and feelings must be reciprocated, given back to through stories of their own. Words are formed in the space between, the mutual understanding of one another. If one side does not reciprocate, a breakdown can occur.

In this situation, Stacy felt that she revealed too much in the feather circle, while those around her did not reveal enough. This led to feelings of inadequacy. She felt "stupid" for revealing so much about herself. Neena felt "weak" for revealing her story. Perhaps this shows that if we are to take chances, if we are to open up, if we are to enter into vulnerable positions, we need others to do the same.

### **Constructing Safe Space: Embryonic Beginnings**

*"We are constantly and intently on the watch for reflections of our own life on the plane of other people's consciousness, and, moreover, not just reflections of particular moments of our life, but even reflections of the whole of it."*

~Bakhtin, 1990, p. 16

Neena and Stacy were looking for others to reflect their stories back to them. Stacy was able to do this for Neena, but Neena, although closer to revealing her story, was not able to do the same for Stacy. The result was that Stacy felt inadequate when reflecting on what she just said in the feather circle. Bakhtin (1990) says that we need others to reflect back to us who we are. In this way, our identities are a collection of how others see us, believe in us, know us.

He goes on to say that it is impossible for us to make sense of ourselves in isolation; we need others to answer us genuinely and sincerely. In this way, by hearing someone's words and answering them, we are giving them pieces of who they are, and when they answer back to us, they give us pieces of who we are. In this way, our

identities are a construction of conversations not by what we say or by what we hear, but in that space between what is heard and what is told: “When such an influence is deep and productive, there is no external imitation, no simple act of reproduction, but rather a further creative development of another’s discourse in a new context and under new conditions ... the fact that in such forms there can always be found the embryonic beginnings” (1981, p. 347). These “embryonic beginnings” validate who we are in that moment to that particular person. By engaging in a meaningful conversation, we give birth to new ideas, new thoughts between us that help clarify and strengthen (or in some cases, confuse and weaken) our identities to each other. Of course, we can never complete someone else’s identity simply by answering; however, we can complete the dialogic circle by answering with our lives, with our understandings within a conversation.

Stacy answered by revealing her lived experience, which inspired Neena to nearly do the same. Stacy’s story legitimized Neena’s. Her bravery and vulnerability inspired her to second guess her decision not to tell about the three chicks leading the mother duck. But, for Neena, the appearance of strength is tied to a deeply socio-historical rooting of not showing weakness in her family, and perhaps, her community. For Stacy to even allow Neena to second guess her decision was, in my mind, monumental. I wonder: If Stacy took such a huge step in revealing her story this time, might this allow other students who were hesitant in this moment, to reveal more of themselves later on? More simply: Does the telling of stories invite other stories that have, over time, been silenced?

In no way am I attempting to answer these questions with this quote; I just find it fitting: "...only through communication can human life hold meaning" (Freire, 1970,

p.58). However, I do offer a portion of a conversation I had with Nisha and Eileen in the library to offer a glimpse into this answer:

**Tim:**

When you were in that space hearing other people's stories, what were you feeling when you were there?

**Eileen:**

It felt like in a way, we were connected because certain things some of us would go through or certain things would represent a person and most people don't understand that, but to have people who have been there, it's really cool.

**Tim:**

What is happening in Ms. Bee's class that is helping you out?

**Nisha:**

I guess being able to know the fact that I am Native and that I do come from somewhere and that I do have people who love me and respect me in that class and in my family.

**Tim:**

So by learning things about your tribe and other tribes, it's helping somehow?

**Nisha:**

Mmm-hmmm. Because you can understand their problems too. I mean the things they did. It's like we're all connected under one roof, under one chain, that we're all linked into each other that no matter how hard our life is going to be that that chain is still going to be strong with each other.

**Tim:**

Are you thinking about sharing your story in other classrooms?

**Nisha:**

No. Not at all.

**Tim:**

So what has been built in this classroom that has allowed you to even think about it?

**Nisha:**

Trust.

**Tim:**

How was trust built?



**Nisha:**

For me, I lost all my trust for people. There's only certain people that I've trusted, but they've always broken it. After that, I could say that I hardly trusted anybody. Nobody I can trust. Only my sister. I mean my sister is the closest one to me. I mean me and her have been through a lot. ... I can relate my stories to hers.

**Tim:**

Are you developing a trust with people in this classroom?

**Nisha:**

Not really. I mean it's still there. I want to trust them, but at the same time I don't. It's just trust for me hasn't been there in a while. Yeah. I feel like they have a lot of trust in the classroom. Right now, I'm in the middle as to whether I want to join that circle. I mean, I want to and everything, but ever since I was five, I just felt, I just lost trust in people.

**Tim:**

So what was it like when you shared your story and your picture with other people?

**Nisha:**

I only shared page one of my story.

**Tim:**

So you shared.

**Nisha:**

I did, but I didn't want to. My mom asked why I shared that story.

**Tim:**

What'd you say to her?

**Nisha:**

I just said it was how I felt. She said, 'You shouldn't have shared it. You shouldn't have shared something that isn't supposed to be brought up like that.' She said I could have chosen something else to write about, but I didn't. I mean I was only five. I was in a custody battle between both of them. My dad wanted me. My mom wanted me. I ran away once from both of them because of that custody battle. I didn't want to have anything to do with it. And I didn't run away far.

**Tim:**

When you shared your story, Ms. Bee asked you all to write two thank you notes to everybody and you said, 'I want to write thank you cards to everybody.' Why did you want to do that?

**Nisha:**

Because their stories were interesting to me. I mean I liked Stacy's... I could see what she was going through when she was with that guy. I mean I can relate to her story. I've been through that stage once. I just liked her story. I told her too. I said, 'I've been through that before too.' I shared it with her in the Thank you note. (Interview Oct. 5, 2011)

Nisha explains her hesitancy to reveal portions of her story, and yet, she was able to share “page one” of that story. Stacy’s reading, her story-ing, allowed Nisha to relate to her, to see that they are all “connected under one roof, under one chain, that we’re all linked into each other that no matter how hard our life is going to be that that chain is still going to be strong with each other.” Seeing this link, gaining this trust, engaging in conversations that draw links to similar feelings and emotions provides a safe space for Nisha to start to tell her story. Delgado says "Storytelling emboldens the hearer, who may have had the same thoughts and experiences the storyteller describes, but hesitated to give them voice. Having heard another express them, he or she realizes, I am not alone" (1989, p. 239). Brayboy (2005) states that storytelling can be very impactful in school settings if and when students see and hear and know that their stories are being heard. Despite the power of storytelling that Delgado and Brayboy explains, and Nisha’s knowing that her experiences are not in isolation, there is still a socio-historical element tied to her decision to tell or not tell her story.

Nisha’s sharing had consequences when she told her mother. Her mother did not approve of revealing her family’s truth in a classroom space. It is here—navigating the space between home and school—that Nisha has to decide what she should and should not reveal. Perhaps Nisha’s mother is sharing what Neena discussed earlier: Strength is shown in the hiding of weakness, painful moments, and heartache. Strength, then, is tied to silence. Perhaps, in their respective communities, the revelations and stories shared in

this classroom have historically been suppressed, frowned upon, and silenced in dominant academic spaces, so much so that when rare opportunities *to* share make themselves available in a safe space, there is still a high level of hesitancy present that has been accumulated over generations (Grijalva, 1997; Reyhner, 1986; McCarty, 2002). For some of these students, this distrust goes all the way back to grandparents, and great grandparents and beyond who were forced to experience boarding schools.<sup>15</sup> Education, or the socialization produced by education, thus may be very closely connected to generations of hurt, invalidation, and distrust among marginalized peoples.

The process of story-ing may be the first of many steps to break this long chain of distrust. Ms. Bee understands the need to reveal our stories, but in a timeline and fashion that is appropriate for all her students. She's not demanding stories; she's offering a space to tell them and, if and when they do, they will know that others share similar pains, joys, fears, and frustrations. When they do engage in story-ing, there will be peers, Ms. Bee, and myself to listen—not judge, not grade, not counter—just listen in a way that students know they have been heard, thus continuing the dialogic spiral forming in the space between speaker and multiple listeners.

In this moment of sharing, there is a large level of vulnerability that some students engage or don't engage in. It is at this moment where the family environment is shared in this setting as they hear common stories from students they didn't think they shared common things with. They see how their upbringing and the situations they find themselves in overlap in meaningful and powerful ways.

### **Constructing Safe Space: Continuing the Conversation on paper**

As shown in Stacy, Nisha, and Neena's experiences earlier in this chapter, when it comes to sharing personal stories with other students, many were reserved, less willing to share, perhaps scared of others' reactions to their stories, or a fear of showing weakness that may carry with it elements of socio-historical interactions between students and the education system they, their families, and communities experienced (Foley, 1996). And even when students did share, like Stacy, there was a feeling of embarrassment for doing so. Even though this hesitancy to share information about themselves occurred in the beginning of the semester, many students were very willing to share who they were in writing to Ms. Bee.<sup>16</sup>

After students practiced their discourse and writing in small groups and then in feather circles, Ms. Bee had students turn in their logo/symbol along with the writing portion that accompanied it. She took these home, read them, and did something that most students had not been used to in their education: She wrote all over their papers—but not to correct grammar, spelling, etc.—she commented back to them, connected with their words, acknowledged their positions, identities, and understandings at this point in their lives.

The next day, she hands these logos/symbols/writing back to them. Vince raises his hand and says, "Miss, you underlined a whole lot on my paper."

Ms. Bee has a slight smile on her face and says, "Anything that's underlined and has squiggles, it's my way of saying 'fabulous.' And even when I have sad faces, it's not that I'm mad at you, it's just that what you're saying makes me sad."

I hear one student announce, “I’ve got squiggles all over the place!” (Squiggles are lines under words or phrases that are jagged, like the red line under misspelled words in word documents).

After she has handed out all the papers, there is silence for four minutes (apart from pages turning) as students read her comments and re-read the lines they’ve written that made Ms. Bee underline or place squiggles under. As students begin to place their papers down after reading her comments, Ms. Bee points to the far wall—a long corkboard covered in a decorative sheet—and introduces students to, what she refers to as “the Wall of Fabulosity,” which is simply a wall devoted to displaying students’ papers. She does not decide whose papers are up there. She simply asks the class that if they feel their papers were fabulous and worth sharing with others, she would hang them.

“So, who would like to have their papers displayed on this wall?” she asks.

Three hands go up immediately, and she collects their papers. A minute later, another two hands go up, and she collects them as well. Below are two examples of the writing portion of the Self Logo/Symbol assignment from Stacy and Beatriz and Ms. Bee’s responses to their writing and logos/symbols (in some of them, my jottings/coding/highlightings are included)<sup>17</sup>.

LEO AND ROOSTER

Leo and rooster

Predator and prey

Fire and water

Night and day

Laws are guidelines

I do it my way :)

I sit and listen

Here what all have to say - and then do what's right for you!

yp.. (Yes, I have scars

Who doesn't?

I leave them be

And they stay dormant

I rather heal others :)

Help them cope

Give opinion

Give them hope

I give advice

I don't give judgment ) HUGE DIFFERENCE!

Leo and rooster

Predator and prey

Fire and water

Night and day

A contradiction they say

Sad one night

Happy the next day

One second I'm awkward / I can relate...

Next second divine

One night storm ) yes!

Next day sunshine

No matter what happens / amen.

It will all be fine

Leo and rooster

Predator and prey

Fire and water

Night and day

I know I am strange ) :j preach it, sista!

I have my own style

I know I'm bizarre

I'm not in denial

I search for understanding / me, too

Through language

Through writing

haba

Laws Discussed

HUGE DIFFERENCE!

I can relate...

yes!

amen.

:j preach it, sista!

me, too

Searching for understanding through language through writing

Beatriz' Writing (continued):

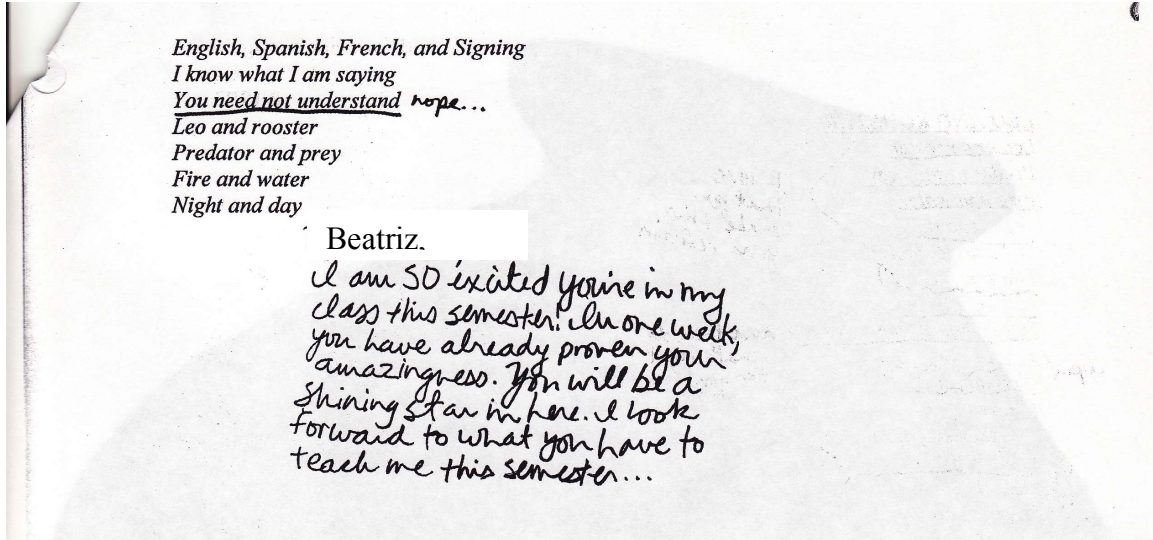


Figure 15. Beatriz' Logo/Symbol writing. Beatriz constructed a poem to that discusses who she is

With Beatriz' paper, Ms. Bee underlines 19 lines of the poem, while also creating five squiggly underlines (My blue writing finds its way onto Beatriz' paper as well during my initial coding with jottings. In this way, I engage in the conversation by adding my own thoughts, words, and connections I am making). Her first comment includes a poetry writing technique, "I love that you make this your refrain," while other comments add to Beatriz' thinking. For example, when Beatriz writes "I sit and listen/Here what all have to say," Ms. Bee replies, "-and then do what's right for you!" Instead of potentially correcting "here" to what was likely intended as "hear," Ms. Bee moves beyond proper spelling, grammar, etc. and instead gives back to this line by offering some advice.

In this way, the conversation unfolding on paper is not impeded by stopping to correct spelling and grammatical mistakes; rather, Ms. Bee comments back to the emotions of the intended words, whether they are spelled correctly or not. In the next line, Ms. Bee places squiggly underlines under "yes, I have scars/Who doesn't?" and to the left adds the simple word, "yup..." Here, Ms. Bee has already shared her story of

having scarred herself for pain in her own past to the class; she is connecting her own told story with Beatriz' by way of a simple word and an ellipses, highlighting the connection between Beatriz poem and Ms. Bee's life. With the lines, "I give advice/I don't give judgment," Ms. Bee writes in all caps: "HUGE DIFFERENCE!" thus acknowledging the power of this statement and the technique used to create it. The remaining comments are quick give-and-takes, much like an engaged discussion between two people who are deep into conversation, building off of one another's energy—both non-verbal and verbal. In writing, Ms. Bee has only the written word, but includes emotion through smiley faces and exclamation marks.

I ask Ms. Bee, "I noticed that on their papers, you underline and comment back and do a lot of that? Why do you take the time to do that?"

Because I know that when I was in school that's what made me want to continue. Even when I was in Lynn Nelson's class, he would just put a yes next to something I wrote; it validated that he's reading my words and when I was taking a graduate level class it was like an online class, and I would type my heart and soul out for a paper, and I got nothing back except for a score, and I was like, why do I even bother with it and again it just lets students know that they matter and if they are going to take the time to write something, I'm going to take the time to read it and give back. To me, it's just a natural dialogue, and I don't know how else to grade. I have to have the pen in my hand when I grade, and it's just a natural response for me to let them know that I'm hearing them.

**Tim:**

So when you're reading is it almost like you're engaged in some sort of conversation?

**Ms. Bee:**

Oh, absolutely. It's like they're there with me and every single student has their own words and their own style and their own pains... (Interview, Oct. 16, 2011).

This conversational nature of written feedback makes me wonder how this conversation on paper might look like in dialogue, in conversation. If written in dialogue, here is their conversation:



“One second I’m awkward, the next second divine,” Beatriz says.

“I can relate...” Ms. Bee replies.

“One night storm; next day sunshine,” Beatriz continues.

“Yes!” Ms. Bee says.

“No mater what happens, it will all be fine.”

“Amen.”

“I know I am strange; I have my own style.”

“Preach it, sista,” Ms. Bee says smiling.

“I search for understanding, through language, through writing.”

“Me, too.”

“You need not understand,” Beatriz says.

“Nope...” Ms. Bee says allowing the words of Beatriz to settle into her own life.

“Leo and rooster, predator and prey, fire and water, night and day,” Beatriz concludes.

“I am SO excited you’re in my class this semester. In one week, you have already proven your amazingness. You will be a shining star in here. I look forward to what you have to teach me this semester,” Ms. Bee says.

In giving back to the conversation, Ms. Bee has shown Beatriz that she’s heard her and connected with her words in deep and powerful ways. I wonder how Ms. Bee’s engagement in the dialogic spiral on paper impacts Beatriz, her motivation, her engagement, her willingness and want to write in future assignments.

I ask Beatriz in a later interview, “What does she do on your papers that you hand in?”

**Beatriz:**

On the reflections, she pretty much says how does this make—how did it make you feel? I write stories where I've felt similarly. It's kinda strange to have my own opinion be heard because in most classes, that teacher's opinion is final. It's like that's what it is, and in this class, you just write whatever you want about the subject. Okay. At first it kinda caught me off guard, and then I just started writing. Now I'm two pages in [*laughter*]. It was just—I just like it better.

**Tim:**

Another thing about Ms. Bee is that she—like in your reflections, in anything that you turn in—she tends to write on them?

**Beatriz:**

It just proves that she's reading it, and it just makes me want to write more and make things more specific 'cause I know for a fact that she's gonna read it.

**Tim:**

Especially in your reflection she wrote more back to you. Do you remember what she said in the reflection back to you? Specific comments or anything like that that stuck with you?

**Beatriz:**

In my poem, it was funny 'cause it was just right on. Usually [you] just hear 'right on' and 'it's funny,' but she wrote 'Right on, sister' 'cause I put it doesn't matter if you have to—you don't have to understand me. I understand what I'm saying 'cause that's what I put in my poem. And she's like "Right on, preach it sister." And it's just—again, it just proves that she's reading it. (Interview, Oct. 17, 2011)

Here, Beatriz remembers the “preach it, sista” comment that Ms. Bee wrote. In making that connection with Beatriz, Ms. Bee completes the spiral of listener and speaker; she allows Beatriz to see—via her written word—that there is a connection being made—a connection that makes sense to Beatriz, but when it makes sense to someone else, it has an impact on her. The lesson that Ms. Bee learned as a student in her own schooling—the frustration of working hard for simply a grade versus the validity of having someone read her words and give back to her words—made its way into her teaching practice. Beatriz is also learning this lesson. Rather than placing emphasis on a grade, Beatriz and Ms. Bee realize that constructing one’s identity through the written

word and having someone else make meaning from our realities is crucial to having the confidence, motivation, and engagement to further that construction of identity on paper in the future. Ms. Bee says:

If I'm going to open up and tell my story, I need to know that it's going to be heard and respected, so I want the students to feel the same, so that's why we start small. You know, let's start with small groups, let's start with written work. You know, 'write your opinion down and then I'll write back,' and that lets you know that I'm not just going to check it off and that this is just an assignment, but that we're connecting one on one and then from there we can build off that, so I try and start off as non-risk as possible, and I know that I have to gain their trust. I even let them know that I understand that it's going to take awhile for them to trust me, but I will continue to prove myself to them, and that's the best I can do is be open with the communication and allow them to come to me when they are ready and come to each other when they are ready. I can't take it personal if they don't want to open up to me. (Interview, Oct. 4, 2012)

Stacy's writing (with Ms. Bee's comments):

POI 1012  
8/18/11

My story

What is love without strength?  
 strength without love? one thing I  
 know for sure is that together  
 they can help you overcome anything.

I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade like any teenage  
 girl I felt in love. I fell in love but  
 with the wrong guy. Rather than being  
 in a happy stable relationship, it  
 seemed that love was what hurt  
 me the most. I was weak. I admit  
 I was wrapped. I couldn't even step  
 up. I would only let my heart out.  
 My mind told me to leave him but  
 my heart could never do it. Until  
 one day I gained strength. I  
 finally told myself I had enough  
 of him. Yes it was hard, very. Up  
 until this day I still have mixed  
 emotions. But thanks to my strength,  
 I am happy. Happier than I ever  
 been before. I feel free. Unstoppable,  
 ready to overcome anything and anyone  
 that gets in my way. That's why thanks  
 to love, I am stronger, thanks to love  
 I think differently. I want to share this  
 story because I know I am not the only person

been  
here.  
Done  
that.  
Countless  
times!

I  
so  
admire  
you.

yes!

**Stacy's writing (continued):**

11/8/18

out there whether a girl or a guy  
that has been through what I  
been through!

Stacy,

I am in awe of your strength  
and character. Good for you for  
doing what you knew you had to  
do because it was the right thing  
to do. I am so glad you're in my  
class this semester. You have so  
many stories to share with us. Find  
your voice in here. We'll listen.

Figure 16. Nisha's Logo writing and Ms. Bee's reaction

**Tim:**

So by giving back, do you think that there's something that happens with them?

**Ms. Bee:**

It's a connection. And I just can't say it strongly enough that it's just letting them know that they matter and when I constantly meet with the students, we have, what do they say, they say, "We have hurt too, we have pain too. All the other teachers are looking at our grammar; they're not looking at our words. They write, 'it feels good to know that you're actually reading my heart and not critiquing our errors.'" And I write back, "that's the only way I know how to teach, and it's not did you dot your I and cross your T, it's are you getting ideas across and supporting yourself in those ideas. That's where I come from.

**Constructing Safe Space: Written Reflections (instead of tests)**

Ms. Bee, instead of multiple choice or fill in the blank tests, uses what she refers to as reflections as unit final tests<sup>18</sup> to comment back to students. She spends quite a bit of

time underlining certain words and phrases and also adds comments on their papers directly. In doing so, students read her comments that she had while engaging in their reading. This continues the critical conversations that are happening on their papers from their own thoughts. Friere (1970) offers the term *critical meta-awareness*. Souto-Manning explains that critical meta-awareness "...allows individuals to engage in social action to solve problems and address issues they identify in their own narratives" (Souto-Manning, 2013, p. 214). Ms. Bee provides a writing space whereby their connections to the issues presented to them fuel further discussion. Their engagement with the conversations, topics, issues fuels the learning. By giving back to the conversation, Ms. Bee is challenging, listening, and encouraging students to continue to engage in thoughts about their individual understandings. Chapter 6 will further analyze this process and the impacts upon students negotiating their identity, understanding, and confusion within this classroom.

### **Constructing Safe Space: Conclusion**

Within this complicated, confusing, and sometimes terrifying space of story-ing, students negotiate their pedagogy—what they say, how they say it, and with what intentions. Crucial in this negotiation is the construction of a safe space that allows students' stories to be shared, felt, and built upon. Petrone (2010) says that student negotiated pedagogy is very much tied to the "the socio-political nature of learning (e.g. power relations and disparities)..." In this way, "classroom practices are made visible and explicit" (p. 126). Finders (1997) says, "Rather than viewing a class as a safe haven, perhaps it would be more productive to openly articulate the obstacles, barriers, and risks

that accompany literacy learning. Students need assistance in this struggle” (p. 26). The assistance offered in the construction of this safe space is having opportunities to give thanks to those who shared; assistance is offered by placing value in the sharing with others. Perhaps other assistance lies in providing a space where students have designated roles of speaker and of listener, so that stories can be shared.

In this classroom, Ms. Bee understands that, for some students, there is a real hesitancy to share their stories:

Some of you guys said, ‘Ms. Bee, this is me; this is what I’ve done; these are some of the sorrows in my heart. Some of you guys are like, ‘ya know, I’m okay for now.’ And you guys come at this however you are comfortable with it. I’m not going to force you guys to share; I’m not going to ask you guys to do something you’re not ready to do, so for some of us it takes awhile to earn that trust and I totally, totally respect that. (Classroom Discussion, Aug. 16, 2011)

She does not pressure them to share, but she does provide spaces in which the sharing is made available. Ms. Bee is attempting to show them that their voices are important, their stories are valid, and their experiences are crucial to the construction of this shared space within the Native American literature classroom: “Recognizing conflicts as potentially useful learning opportunities may help illuminate for teachers the integral nature of learning skills and content with identity formation” (Petroni, 2010, p. 126). Ms. Bee recognizes that a major conflict for her students is in the trusting of others with their stories—especially in an academic space that, for many of the participants in this study, has been untrustworthy not only for them, but for their families that traces back to the earliest contact with dominant White/European American educational practices.

Ms. Bee has recognized that there may be much hesitancy to share. She knows how much she is asking of them and has taken the first step of being very vulnerable herself by revealing a painful moment in her past. She does so because she is asking them to do the same, and has mentioned that she will not ask them to do anything that she wouldn't be willing to do. Literacy Education scholar Robert Petrone (2010) says, "In this way, conflicts and the ideological, social, and symbolic tensions undergirding them can help educators become aware of who they are asking their students to become and how their students are responding to this invitation" (p. 126). Ms. Bee, by story-ing, showed her students what she is asking them—to make sense of their lives, their identities and realities on paper and in conversation with her and the other students.

For students like Neena and Nisha, the decision to remain silent becomes more difficult as they are responding to the invitation to share and hear others' stories and see how those stories are validated by Ms. Bee (on paper) and other students (in person) and perhaps me (in interviews and personal communication) in this newly constructed storied space. Stacy, by sharing a very vulnerable story with others, made Neena question her decision to remove her story from the feather circle. It also validated Nisha's decision to share "page one" of her story and, perhaps, have the confidence to turn to page two of that story with others.

The sharing of stories allowed students to see this not as a class, but as a family: A family that shares in the hurt, that shares in the joy, that shares in the confusing and contradictory process of understanding who we are and how we fit into the spaces that surround us.<sup>19</sup>



**This is the way it has to be**

By Nisha

*I asked my teacher last year,  
“Why is it that there’s only one section of Native  
Americans out of this whole entire history book?”*

*She said,  
“Well, that’s the way  
this book  
was created.”*

*I said,  
“Well, that’s just stupid.  
I mean this book is only based on  
white European history.  
Nothing discusses Native  
American history in there.”*

*She said,  
“I don’t know what to tell you;  
this is the way it has to be.”*

*I said,  
“Is it?”*

## Chapter 5

### FROM MACRO TO MICRO: APPLYING THE SAFETY ZONE THEORY

In chapter 1, I discussed Lomawaima and McCarty's (2006) book *To Remain an Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*, and that the issue underlying the creation of laws such as HB 2281 was understood by looking at it through the safe/dangerous paradigm or the "Safety Zone Theory," which "traces the 'swings' of Indian policy—including educational policy—to an ongoing struggle over cultural difference and its perceived threat, or benefit, to a sense of shared American identity" (p. 6). More simply, the Safety Zone Theory says that there are cultural beliefs and practices that our nation has accepted or denied over time based on the shift in what is worthy of being included into the collective whole. At certain points in Arizona's history, for example, bilingual education programs were once embraced, being taught in two or more languages was viewed positively. However, today, English-only legislation has removed many opportunities to include bilingual education programs into public schools despite the rich multilingual nature of many communities in the state.

More directly to this study, classes that teach histories, literacies, and perspectives different from the dominant, standardized curricula are now in violation of HB2281, the non-white Ethnic Studies Ban, and are, essentially, banned from public schools; it is not hard to see that the safety zone here has shrunk, thus denying the exploration of cultural differences. In states like Arizona, the language and culture of Latina/o communities are at the margin of this shifting Safety Zone. Right now, I would argue, they are very much outside of the collective whole, the safety zone, of this state. In this case, as McCarty discussed with me, that because of the smaller numbers of Native Americans and because

they do not represent a single speech community, they are not perceived as dangerous or threatening to dominant interests such as those that constructed this bill (McCarty, Personal communication, 2011).

Conversely, the Latino/a community—because of their large numbers in the state and because they are recognized as speaking a common language and are perceived as constructing a single homogeneous community—are being targeted by Arizona lawmakers, whereas at earlier points in American history, this effort was concentrated on Native Americans (and it may be that way again depending on the swings) (McCarty, Personal communication, 2011). Despite this, Native American communities as with many marginalized populations have been living on the edge. By this I mean that whether non-dominant populations are inside or outside of the safety zone, they are constantly on the edge of what is accepted and what is denied. Using two participants' storied experiences, I will offer a micro-level analysis and application of this theory, i.e. how Abby and Eileen's identity and understandings interact with the classrooms and settings surrounding them. This chapter focuses on what learning and engagement looks like for two students who are coming into this classroom with two very different set of beliefs and experiences.

Vygotsky (1978) says that every person's identity is the culmination of their experiences and the social situations they find themselves in; we all bring with us a different set of beliefs to any situation, to any conversation, to any classroom. We are fortunate, according to Vygotsky (1978), because we have the opportunity and ability to learn and adapt to the changing contexts; we are not fixed entities. We are constantly changing and developing from this instant to the next. Yet, while Dewey (1938) and

Vygotsky (1978) both believed that learning happens best when there was discomfort, there was a point at which too much discomfort and confusion led to mis-educative or non-educative experiences. From what I have heard from many of the students in this classroom, they are forced to adapt and change and learn something that doesn't sit well with them. This forceful learning of dominant curricula has placed them in situations that silence them and place them at the margin of the learning community, sometimes leading to their withdrawal, either physical or mental, from the classroom discussions and teachings. Aside from this Native American literature classroom, they are rarely, if ever, exposed to different perspectives on history that validate and honor those stories, those truths, that are taught outside of school. For many of them, they are having to make large shifts in their learning to adapt to what is taught in school. Some resist these teachings in a wide range of ways from self-defeating resistances to transformative resistances (Solorzan & Bernal, 2001). In many of their classrooms, the authoritative word was from a Eurocentric perspective on history and literature. The authoritative word, according to Bakhtin (1981), is the accepted academic knowledge, that which has been deemed worthy to be taught in schools as *the* truth (with disregard to other truths, other perspectives, that these students bring with them).

What makes this research setting unique is that the authoritative word—that which has passed the many stages to be accepted into the teaching curriculum (for one class anyway)—is centered on an Indigenous perspective on history and literature. And being taught the authoritative word from two very different positions—Indigenous and Eurocentric—has caused confusion for two participants, Abby and Eileen, as they see the many contradictions this invokes. In listening to Abby and Eileen's stories, they are

trying to make sense of a dramatically shifting context and how their identities are changing as well. Within this chapter, I follow their storied journey from this Native American literature class to other spaces—in their community, in other classrooms, in online spaces.

To do so, I rely on first-hand accounts of seeing them in the Native American literature classroom; however, I also rely on their storied experiences in other settings. In this way, I am able to travel with them into other contexts listed above. I do so with the knowledge that stories are theory and have truth to them in the telling (Brayboy, 2006) and with the positioning that “Narrative research is ... focused on how individuals assign meaning to their experiences through the stories they tell... (and as those individuals) experience through participation in all sorts of social events in their infinite varieties, they also learn to tell stories about them” (Moen, 2006, p. 5). For Eileen, her stories were practiced with me in the library in impromptu conversations. For Abby, her stories were practiced with Ms. Bee through written reflections. For both of them, I tried to help co-construct a shared space during our two interviews where their stories could be constructed and shared and validated. I offer the following stories with the hopes you see it as the construction of reality and identity for Eileen, Abby, and me.

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As has become custom for me, I am sitting in the back of the Desert View High School library typing fieldnotes for the Native American literature classroom I just observed. With my headphones plugged into my digital recorder, I am transcribing the verbatim conversations of interest that have just transpired in this unique classroom. While my consciousness is lost in the transcription and initial memo writing, students

pass by, books are re-shelved, and as observant as I tried to be an hour ago in class, I don't hear or see any of this happening around me. Then, as if breaking the transfer of thought from my mind to keypad, a hand waves between my eyes and my computer screen. I peer up, and sitting across from me is Eileen, who I just saw about an hour ago in this class. Her broad smile accompanies her friendly wave of hello. Eileen, who is half Native American, half African American, is big into the dance team, not pom-poms, but modern dance art. She says that most of her family lives on her home reservation, about four hours from the valley. She has a disdain, a hatred, for history courses.

As has become the custom for Eileen, she has decided to spend a few of her lunches in the library talking with me. This time, she is telling me a story about her American history class. See, Eileen is in a unique position this semester because last year she made an "oath" to herself not to pay attention and learn as little as possible in her American history class. This led to her failing, which subsequently led to her having to retake it again in order to graduate this school year. Among the 35 students in this Native American literature classroom, she is the only one who goes from her second period Senior English elective Native American literature class to her third period American history class primarily filled with juniors, and this navigation from one perspective to another has created an uneasiness in Eileen that she shares with me today. She says about her American history class: "I don't want to be there. I just sit quiet. I just don't want to be there."

Eileen's statement about sitting quietly and not wanting to be in her American history class made me think of Abby, a Caucasian female student, and her conversations with me and Ms. Bee, the classroom teacher, in the Native American literature classroom.

Abby is taller than most of the boys in the class. Her brown hair sometimes has flares of other colors, reds or purples, but just a hue. She comes from a family of, what she refers to, “military brats,” and has travelled to and lived in many states.

On the second day of attending the Native American literature class, Abby realized something. She says, “It got a little awkward when I got in here cause I’m the only white person,” which made her think that, “half the students were just gonna generalize us as something bad, and they wouldn’t understand” (Interview, Nov. 5, 2011). This positioning has created an uneasiness in her to the point where she has had to be much more reflective (Pewewardy, 2002) about what she would say if she were to verbalize her thoughts at all. As such, she says she has become much more quiet in this particular class than in her other classes: “It gets frustrating. I don’t wanna speak up a lot” (Interview, Nov. 5, 2011).

Abby’s movement from classrooms and spaces that enact dominant positions on knowledge into this Native American literature classroom—which attempts to problematize and counter the dominant knowledge—challenges research that discusses Native American students as being silent in the classroom because of cultural upbringing, and because of social norms in Native American communities:

In a literature review about the different learning styles that Native American and Alaska Natives students have, Pewewardy (2002) discussed the difference between “reflectivity versus impulsivity” (p. 15) in his article entitled “Culturally Responsive Teaching for American Indian Students.” Pewewardy says that while students of the white dominant society are taught to be impulsive with their thoughts and voice—meaning they are taught to respond immediately, without regard to whether they feel that

what they are saying is right or wrong, so long as they are attempting to make sense of the situation verbally — Native American students “tend to be reflective” (2002, p. 15). On the other hand, reflective students have a tendency to ponder thoughts, ideas, and discussions before they give their response, which gives them the confidence that when they say something, it has a greater chance of being correct in their minds. Because of this, “Some students’ conversations may have a longer ‘wait time’ between responses” since the student delays “decision making until all the evidence is collected ... acting in response to a situation” (Pewewardy, 2002, p. 16). With the utmost respect to the thinking and research of Pewewardy, the definitions and justifications for enacting reflectivity or impulsivity within classroom discourse seem to be based on generalized notions of race and ethnicity—white students enacting impulsivity and Native American students enacting reflexivity. However, in the stories that Abby and Eileen share with me, this binary seems to be much more complicated and complex and include socio-historic issues of power, perspective, position, in/validation, and identity, not just ethnicity.

Abby and Eileen’s voices reminds me of Hill’s (2009) study that focused on Hip Hop Literature and the ways in which students negotiated “authentic blackness” as well as the impact significant shift in authoritative curriculum from dominant to marginalized can have upon the inclusion and exclusion of students voices within a multicultural setting. Hill says “For some students, the classroom became an exclusionary space that pushed them (further) toward the social margins of the classroom. For others, it became a site of possibility for renegotiating their classroom identities in a variety of complex ways” (2009, p. 58).



To show this complexity, I juxtapose Abby’s voice when discussing the Native American Literature class—“It gets frustrating. I don’t wanna speak up a lot”—with Eileen’s voice when discussing her American history class—“I just sit quiet. I just don’t want to be there.” Both are explaining what I have come to understand as a *silencing experience* or those experiences we have in classrooms and/or communities where, based on the conversations surrounding us and how our identity interacts with our surroundings, we may be forced into choosing silence. The classroom contexts are very different for Abby and Eileen, yes, but the emotions, the feelings about silence, invalidation, and reflexivity are very similar. This takes us back to my essential question: In what way or ways is the Native American literature curriculum in this Southwest Urban High School denying, affirming, or challenging the identities of students taking this course? In addition, new questions form:

- How is knowledge being transferred from this Native American literature classroom to spaces outside of the classroom walls?
- How does dominant thinking such as Abby’s interact in a space that challenges that perspective?
- And: How does this significant shift in the curriculum—from Eurocentric toward Indigenous perspective—complicate generalized notions of culture, identity, and discourse that have historically perpetuated injustices for marginalized students?

To offer answers to these questions, I return to the conversation emerging between Eileen and me in the back of the library; she’s explaining her dislike for history in general and her third period American history course, specifically.

**Eileen:**

The whole concept of learning about how these so-called presidents were amazing and how they tried, or supposedly helped Native Americans when they really didn’t and it’s like, all they did was kill them off and steal their land because they were greedy. And pretty much, they all sucked because they didn’t know what peace was and they kept getting themselves into trouble. It’s like every little thing leads to a conflict. They tricked us into writing down an X on a piece of paper and

then they break their agreement and then they do something else and I just don't like it (Personal Communication, 8/21/11).

In the past two years of pilot research for the current study, many of the stories that participants told me in interviews, personal writings, and classroom interactions reflected Eileen's story. Collectively, they were weaving together a narrative of other settings— particularly their American History courses—which, they began to realize from the conversations and lessons from the Native American literature classroom, were centered on a particular perspective of history that, as many students said, did not tell the “whole story.”

In listening and interacting with Native American students in prior semesters of this class, and now to Eileen's story, I begin to realize that they were constructing stories that ran counter to the dominant perspective on education; in other words, they were developing and practicing their discourse with me to create and share counter-stories— stories that show how oppressive factors in dominant society have affected non-dominant people personally (Brayboy 2006; Kaomea 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso 2002).

Perhaps these students—by being exposed to Native American histories, knowledges, and stories—were making sense of the history of education in relation to Native American populations, one that has placed knowledge in a hierarchy where Indigenous Knowledges are viewed by many as deficient, unimportant, not worth the time to learn in public schools, and less than dominant teachings in schools, as mentioned in chapter 2 (Adams, 1988; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002, 2006). These ideas come predominantly from a group that Banks (1993) refers to as Western traditionalists, who “believe that Western history, literature, and culture are

endangered in the school ... curriculum because of the push by ... ethnic minority scholars ... for curriculum reform and transformation” (p. 4) and from liberal assimilationist notions of citizenship that “assume that individuals from different groups have to give up their home and community cultures and languages to attain inclusion and to participate effectively in the national civic culture” (2008, p. 129).

Perhaps these students are beginning to see how they fit into an ongoing battle for academic knowledge (and thus identity), especially in places like Arizona where the passage of the ethnic studies ban has become a reality. I want to share with them that “Knowledge is not what some possess and others do not; it is a resourceful capacity of being that creates the context and texture of life. Thus, knowledge is not a commodity that can be possessed or controlled by educational institutions, but is a living process to be absorbed and understood” (Battiste, 2002, p. 15), but I have not yet developed my own discourse to share this understanding with them.

I do tell them, however, that this valley is void of classes that focus solely on the peoples who originally inhabited this land and who still make up a large portion of the state’s population: More than 295,000 Native Americans live in the state and more than a quarter of the state’s land is reservation and tribal community land (U.S. Census, 2010).

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Eileen and Abby are both navigating this sometimes contradicting and confusing line between what knowledge is accepted and what knowledge is denied as they move from class to class, from school to community. For Abby, she finds herself in compromising positions within the Native American literature classroom, positions in which she is confronted with an Indigenous history that sheds light on the interactions the

U.S. government and military had with Native American communities: “Well, I wanna support my race no matter what and see some good in it. Then, when I watch a video in here, I feel bad for the Native Americans. I just don’t know if I should really side, or I should be neutral” (Interview, Nov. 5, 2012). She is being exposed to new stories of U.S. history, ones that have not been acknowledge in dominant curricula, which has resulted in her having to ask new questions, and have new thoughts that make her feel as though she is going against her race, despite her wanting to “support (her) race no matter what.” Her ideas and identity are coming up against a new authoritative discourse from an Indigenous perspective within this sole class. However, when Abby walks outside of this classroom, her positions, her knowledge, her perspectives are, for the most part, once again validated in courses that teach a dominant, Euro-centered curriculum.

On the other hand, for Eileen, she says that the only classroom in which her ideas are validated and her history is discussed in meaningful ways is within this Native American literature classroom. When she walks outside of these classroom doors, once again, she is faced with courses and positions that place her knowledge, again, at the periphery of the conversation. When she navigates from this second period Native American literature class to her third period American history class, she is living, seeing, and directly experiencing these swings of knowledge from these two classes in a period of two hours. She is living the contradictions in knowledge from one hour to the next. Simply, the context is changing...for both of them. Smagorinsky (2001) says that “Context is viewed as a relationship among people or artifacts and their environment, which typically include multiple sets of overlapping goals, values, discourse, tools and

other residue of social life” (pp. 135-6). Their contexts, their movement between different classrooms and spaces is shifting and changing in some pretty big ways for them.

Both Eileen and Abby are beginning to make sense of these contradictions through *story-ing*, which Kinloch and I (2013) have come to understand as those conversations in which our narratives, our identities, our stories have the opportunity to be voiced, shared, and validated with another. For Eileen, the multiple impromptu conversations in the library with me have allowed her to voice her emerging story. Abby, on the other hand, has used the reflection writing in class to voice her emerging story with Ms. Bee. It is important to note that neither story is shared explicitly within the classroom discussions; instead, their stories are revealed through other means—conversations outside of class and written communication on paper. This sharing outside of oral classroom discourse shows the importance of having multiple avenues and spaces from which students can engage in story-ing to construct their identities. As Eileen and Abby share their stories, I continue to think about the Safety Zone Theory and how it might relate to their experiences within and outside of this Native American Literature classroom.

In the back of the library, Eileen is story-ing the scene of the classroom and the day’s interactions, and I peer up at her every once in awhile, providing responses to her story that help her know that I am actively listening, engaged, and eager to hear what she has to say in order to help co-construct the storied space we are occupying by enacting the *dialogic spiral* (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2013)—or the process of co-creating conversations based on mutual trust and validation. She tells of her American history teacher, Mr. Richard, who gave the class a handout that had a series of questions that they

were to answer truthfully. By the end of filling out this handout, Mr. Richard said that he could tell whether or not they were Democrats or Republicans. The handout had questions like ‘Are you male or female? Are you religious? How old are you? Are you Caucasian-American? Are you a part of the other ethnicities like African American, Native American, or Hispanic American?’:

**Eileen:**

I was looking at the questions like, ‘what the heck is up with this,’ so I just took out my highlighter and I highlighted the word, “Native American” and then I wrote in big letters “PROUDLY” on top of it and then I circled it and put a smiley face on it. Then I handed it back to him and he just looked at me and he [asked], ‘why did you have to do all that?’ I was like ‘because I’m a proud Native American.’

**Tim:**

Really. What did he say?

**Eileen:**

He was like ‘oh, okay, that’s cool.’ I was like, ‘yeah.’ And then he said we could tell him the name of any famous people and he could tell us whether they were Democratic or Republican. And the first thing that came into my mind was Chief Sitting Bull. I don’t know why but it just popped into my head and then I asked him and he didn’t know who he was. And I was just sitting there, and I said, ‘you’re an American history teacher and you don’t know who he is. CHIEF SITTING BULL’ and then he said, ‘Sitting Bull? As in Cheech and Chong?’ I was like ‘no, are you kidding me.’ I was just so shocked. The class laughed and I was sitting there with this really disgusted look on my face because they were being disrespectful, and I was really pissed. I was like ‘how the hell does this American history teacher not know who he is?’ If you had asked me last year, I couldn’t tell you who he was either until I learned about him in this Native American literature class, but like when I asked him that, it took him about a good seven minutes to catch on to who he was, and I was so shocked by that whole concept of it (personal communication, October 5, 2011).

What catches my attention at this point is that she said, “If you had asked me last year, I couldn’t tell you who [Chief Sitting Bull] was either.” I wonder: What if she had not taken the Native American literature course? What if she had never learned who Chief Sitting Bull was? Would this situation she is now telling me about never have

happened? I know—by being a part of the classroom—that just last week Ms. Bee discussed who Chief Sitting Bull was. Now, he “just popped into [her] head.” The transfer of knowledge from one classroom to another happens all the time, but what happens when those knowledges conflict and contradict one another? Eileen was finding out, and she was sitting in her desk, quietly screaming at what was happening around her, a silencing experience.

### **Abby’s Writing and Ms. Bee’s Response**

This silencing experience that Eileen was feeling in her American history class is something that Abby can directly relate to in this Native American Literature class even though as I stated earlier these two young women are positioned very differently within dominant society. I noticed that Abby does talk during small-group discussions, but seems hesitant to speak when the conversation shifts to the whole class. I explain this observation to her in an interview, and she says:

“Sometimes I’m sitting there for ten minutes wondering if I should say (what’s on my mind) or not.”

**Tim:**

Oh, really. What’s happening in those ten minutes? What are you feeling? What’s going on in your head?

**Abby:**

I’m just thinking of other people’s reactions and who’s gonna try to start an argument over it and seeing if I just want to start it up again or just stay quiet. (Interview, Nov. 5, 2012)

Here, Abby is becoming very reflective in this classroom, calculating other’s reactions, playing them out in her head before speaking. In doing so, the context surrounding her has created a silencing experience in which her thoughts are not voiced

for fear of reactions from students around her. For her, this movement toward being reflexive does not seem to be due solely to her ethnicity; rather, the result seems to be how her knowledge and understandings happening *within* her are interacting with the knowledge being taught and conversations happening *around* her. Her identity has been shaped by her racialized experiences over time that provide greater access to centralized positions in dominant, Euro-centric courses. When she comes in contact with a differing and conflicting position of the authoritative curriculum, it is then that the silencing experience occurs. Despite her viewpoints matching more closely to dominant thinking—which Pewewardy (2001) says is tied to impulsivity—she is not impulsive in this setting, but reflective. She has adapted according to her environment. She is, as Hollins (1999) explains, pondering thoughts, ideas, and how others will react to her thinking.

Perhaps this interaction between self and environment that Abby and Eileen are discussing may be better understood by applying the Safety Zone Theory on a micro-level. Whereas Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) referred to the macro-level of this theory as viewing cultural differences as either a threat (unsafe) or a benefit (safe) to the United States shared sense of identity, the micro-level might include a safety zone *within* each of us, an *Internal Safety Zone* (InternalSZ) and *around* each of us, an *Environmental Safety Zone* (EnvironmentalSZ). The InternalSZ is what we are thinking and feeling and becoming in our mind. In other words, it is our cumulative identity up to the present point, which, according to a sociocultural perspective, has been formed by our gendered, raced, classed, and language experiences. The EnvironmentalSZ includes that which surrounds us, the contexts and situations we find ourselves—within schools, at home, in the community, etc.



Vygotsky (1978) referred to these terms as intERmental and intRAmental abilities. The intERmental ability referred to the social plane happening all around us (or the EnvironmentalSZ):

*IntERmental Ability=Social Environment=Environmental Safety Zone*

The intRAmental ability referred to the inner psychological plane (or the InternalSZ):

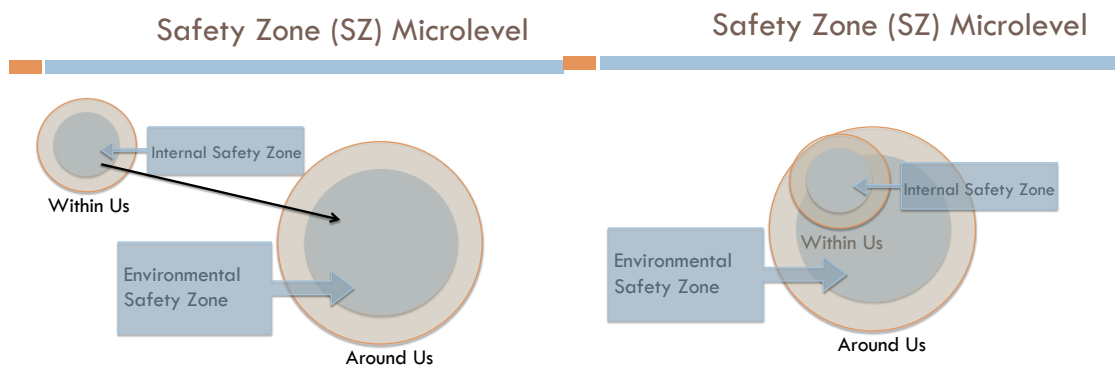
*IntRAmental Ability=Internal Psychological Plane=Internal Safety Zone*

Vygotsky states that “An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one. Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice:…on the social level, and…on the individual level; first, *between* people (*interpsychological*) and then *inside* the child (*intrapsychological*)” (1978, p. 57). This process of transformation from the social environment (EnvironmentalSZ) to the internal psychological plane (InternalSZ) is learning to become who we are. This process helps to further understanding our identity; it allows us to construct our realities and our positions on that reality.

I couple Vygotsky’s abilities with Lomawaima and McCarty’s (2006) safety zone theory to pair how our individual identities and realities come into contact and interact with notions of power, oppression, and socio-historical and socio-cultural elements in academic, community and other social settings. So, whereas I am envisioning the InternalSZ to be that construction of identity within a person, the EnvironmentalSZ becomes those spaces that surround us—that validate and support our InternalSZ. Conversely, there may also be moments where our surroundings invalidate and attempt to deconstruct our InternalSZ. What this theoretical base does not address is how students can make the movement from one social situation to another that may differ greatly causing contradictions and confusion in their reality. How can teachers, family members,

counselors, administrators, friends, help teach (and be taught by) others how to critically move from one space to another, while helping to be true to their emerging identity?

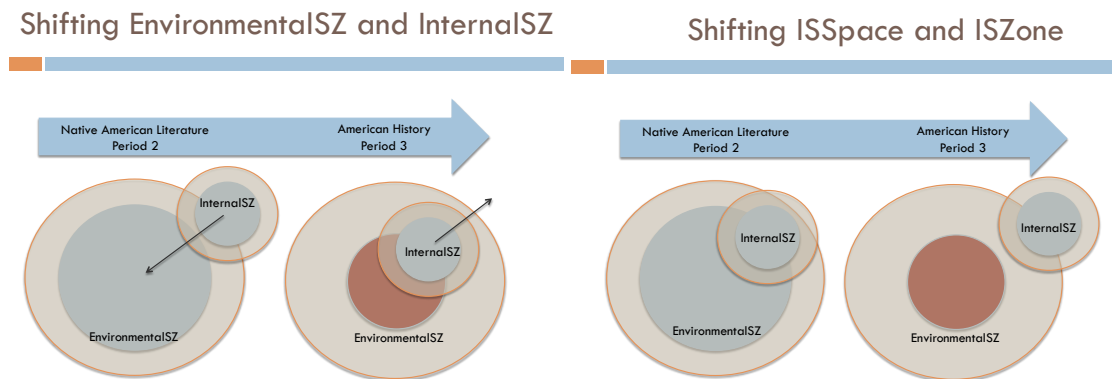
Paris (2012) addressed this question with the use of culturally sustaining pedagogy (stated in chapter 2). Culturally sustaining pedagogy “requires pedagogies (to) be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people—it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). How this can be done in the classroom and in the community is still emerging i.e. Projects in Humanization? (See Kinloch & San Pedro, 2012). Eileen and Abby offer narrations of this confusing movement from sustaining their very different cultural competency, while, at the same time, being taught how to interact within the larger dominant society.



*Figure 17. Internal and Environmental Safety Zones. This illustration shows how our Internal Safety Zone and Environmental Safety Zone shift and change and interact constantly with the other to develop our identities.*

Focusing on Eileen’s story for a moment: What if Eileen has her own InternalSZ *within* her thoughts, *within* her mind? And what if those thoughts are validated by the knowledges, histories, and stories that are happening *around* her—the

EnvironmentalSZ—in the Native American literature class? As Eileen passes from her Native American literature classroom to her American history class, within ten minutes, she goes from an expansive EnvironmentalSZ that validates her InternalSZ in the Native American Literature class to a contracting EnvironmentalSZ in her American history class that shrinks and invalidates her InternalSZ because the Euro-centric knowledges, histories, and stories do not validate her cumulative identity. What might this navigation feel like?: “I was sitting there with this really disgusted look on my face because they were being disrespectful.” Conversely for Abby, her InternalSZ—her cumulative identity—has been called into question in the Native American classroom, thus, creating perhaps a shrinking EnvironmentalSZ for her, which has placed her ideas at the periphery of the classroom as it did for Eileen in her American history class where her anger created a silencing experience for her. When I see Abby in the hallways, she seems very eager to talk and engaged in conversations, but something happens when she enters the Native American literature classroom.



*Figure 18. Shrinking Environmental Safety Zone. This illustration shows how the Environmental Safety Zone in the Native American Literature course is more expansive than in the American history course for Eileen. In addition, it shows how Eileen’s Internal Safety Zone is pushed to the margin in the American history course.*

The same goes for Eileen: Seeing her in the Native American literature class—where she is talkative, engages in whole-class and small-group conversations and is quick to laugh—it is hard for me to picture her as the silent, passive, and enraged student in her American history course. A term that comes close to matching what Abby and Eileen are experience might be *code-switching* (Li & Milroy, 1992) or our ability to act differently in different situations. In this situation, perhaps the term *knowledge switching* would be more accurate, in that Abby and Eileen are having to enact different language and racialized roles due to the shift in authoritative knowledge from Indigenous to dominant. Both are having to make such a drastic knowledge shift while moving between periods, between classes, between environments.

For Eileen and Abby, perhaps this now becomes the navigation of how the InternalSZ that we are constantly constructing interacts with the EnvironmentalSZ that surround us. Much like policy in relation to populations marginalized by systemic inequalities has moments of expansion and contraction in our nation's history, so too are there moments of expansion and contraction within and around the self. But whereas the macro-level scale of the Safety Zone Theory happens over a longer period of time (years, generations, election cycles) the interaction between the InternalSZ and the EnvironmentalSZ seems to have the ability to expand and contract in a matter of minutes in Eileen and Abby's cases. And even though Eileen knows that the American history course does not validate her perspectives and her emerging understandings of the construction of history, she, nonetheless, still has to enter into those spaces because it is a requirement for her to graduate.

For Abby, she has the ability to remove herself from this Native American literature without consequence, something she thought about doing at the beginning of the year: "...this seems overwhelming. I really can't say I will stay in this class..." (Written document, Aug. 10, 2011). If she had removed herself, she would have simply been placed in a different English-elective class. When Eileen chose to make an "oath" to not learn anything from her American history course last year, her mental removal, her active non-learning as resistance, resulted in her having to retake the course. She had no other choice but to take it again if she wanted to graduate. The consequences of their possible choices of removing themselves from classes that invalidate them are very different—one has a choice without consequence, the other still has a choice, but with huge academic consequences.

Eileen cannot remove herself physically from her American history classroom without penalty of failure and dropout. What she can do and has done; however, is remove her voice, her willingness to learn, her internal self from this space, which was her way of resisting last year. This type of resistance that Eileen displayed was a type of *self-defeating* resistance whereby "students' behavior implicates them even further in their own domination" (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 316). In other words, her "oath" to herself to resist learning led to her failing the American history class and having to retake it again the next year.

This conversation in her American history class created a shrunken EnvironmentalSZ and, last year, led to her failing the class because of her self-defeating resistance. Hearing the pain in her voice, I wonder: if by being exposed to a new perspective on history and literature in the Native American literature class that are rarely

ever deemed as worthy in schools, is Ms. Bee creating painful situations in other spaces that Eileen may not be able to understand and cope with yet? In other words, can an EnvironmentalSZ create a greater critical consciousness that may, in turn, create shrinking EnvironmentalSZs? Before I allow this question to fully form in my mind, I am reminded of something that Eileen said to me last week:

**Tim:**

In our conversation in the library you said that you had to do a research paper on one of the “discoverers” and “conquerors” who came to the new world. You said that you might discuss another perspective of that person you had to research. Did you end up doing that?

**Eileen:**

Yeah, I did. I don't remember who it was. It was one of the French guys. I don't remember his name, but the students handed in the bibliography of all the good things that they did, and I was the only one who turned in a paper with the negative side and everybody was really interested and curious to know if it was true or false. I said, ‘this is what he did to my people; he wasn't that great of a person. He killed them. He didn't care. And all he wanted was gold and land and he never understood that they didn't have any of it. He was just a bad person.’

**Tim:**

And students were interested in what you had to say?

**Eileen:**

Yeah, they were interested in what I had to say because they thought it wasn't true. Because if you give them a topic that we learn about in Native American literature class, they'll just look at you like you're crazy or clueless.

**Tim:**

Do you get mad in a situation like this because students don't know?

**Eileen:**

Not really. I don't blame them because I was in that place too. I didn't know who [Chief Sitting Bull] was. I already knew these people weren't good, but to know they were even worse than they claim to be...I didn't blame them for not knowing that.

**Tim:**

Did you get some feedback on your paper from the teacher?

**Eileen:**

He never said anything. I got a good grade though because it was the truth.

**Tim:**

So now that you are taking it again, how are you doing this semester?

**Eileen:**

I'm passing.... I don't see a purpose in [American history] though.

**Tim:**

What if it was Native American history?

**Eileen:**

I've always had a plan that if I get older and start my own family, I want to teach my kids about who they are and that they don't need to be afraid of who they are and where they came from or they don't need to take discouragement from other people and saying that their ideas are not true. I always want them to know both sides of the story so that they're not always having to be disappointed when they get older, like me being young and thinking that they're great people and then growing up and finding out that they're really not.

**Tim:**

Having this Native American class before your American history class does that do anything for being in the history class at all?

**Eileen:**

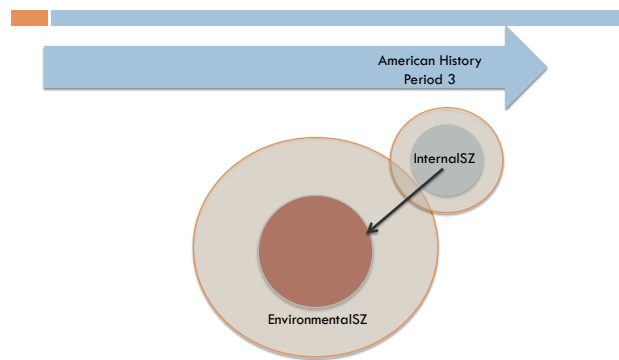
I think it gives me more opinions to say sometimes in the American history class since they are back to back. So like it's interesting to see what Ms. Bee will say and then go into American history and see what Mr. Richard will say and I always say that it's completely different, but it's a little interesting. It's really the only thing I pay attention.... I just sit there. (interview, October 5, 2011).

A pause, a silence, falls between us. I take a moment to think back on my prior question that was beginning to form: By being exposed to new perspectives on history and literature that are rarely ever deemed as worthy in schools, is Ms. Bee creating painful situations that Eileen may not be able to understand and cope with yet? Last year, at this time, Eileen said that she “purposely made a little oath to myself and made a promise to not do any work for the entire semester” in her American history class. Fast forward to this semester in which she has a Native American literature class that presents new information and a new perspectives to Eileen that she has, in turn, used in her

American history class to construct a research paper that never came to be last year. This research paper is fueled by a new understanding about the men who are often viewed as heroes, adventurers, noble conquerors in American history classes, something that never fully fit into her InternalSZ perhaps. For Eileen, she knew that—to her—these teachings were lies that she refused to learn from. Instead, she was engaged and motivated to write a research paper that did help to construct her InternalSZ, that did help to validate her emerging identity, and when the American history teacher could not disprove her ideas, she became validated in a contracting EnvironmentalSZ that also creates situations where she finds herself being laughed at for knowing whom Chief Sitting Bull is. In this instance where Eileen’s InternalSZ did not match up with the American History authoritative teachings, she was able to find her voice by creating a counter-narrative to the mainstream knowledge construction. In doing so, she was enacting a different form of resistance—transformational—in that she displayed a “level of awareness and critique of her ... oppressive conditions and structures of domination ... [and was] motivated by a sense of social justice” (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 319). She was motivated to take a stand and teach others her truth of these murders, conquerors, and propellers of genocide. In so doing, her InternalSZ moved closer to the center of her American history class’s EnvironmentalSZ



## Validated in a contracting EnvironmentalSZ



*Figure 19. Validated within a contracting Environmental Safety Zone. This illustration shows who Eileen's Internal Safety Zone is validated and thus moves closer to the center of a contracted Environmental Safety Zone*

I pause here to reflect on how Eileen's story overlaps with Abby's. I wonder: What if Abby also has her own InternalSZ whereby her dominant thinking does not match with the Native American literature class, thus complicating her identity? For Abby, does the Native American literature class' EnvironmentalSZ also shrink and contract? If Eileen was able to find validation by taking part in one classroom that discussed knowledge from Indigenous perspectives, how might Abby find validation outside of this classroom to validate her InternalSZ? I asked her:

Are there other ways that you share your opinion? What I'm thinking is like if you don't have an outlet to where you can share your ideas in the classroom fully yet, then...

**Abby:**

Well, if I can't share it here, I'll go home and most of the time just rant about it with people on the internet.

**Tim:**

On the internet? Who do you talk to on the internet?

**Abby:**

Maybe just like three people I think that I've known for a few years.

**Tim:**

Where are they from?

**Abby:**

Texas, California, Canada. I think there's five, Oklahoma and Kansas.

**Tim:**

Okay. You talk to them about the subjects that are in here?

**Abby:**

Sometimes, yeah.

**Tim:**

Yeah. Do you feel like they're giving you good feedback or no?

**Abby:**

They're just listening.

**Tim:**

Oh, really. That helps?

**Abby:**

As long as someone's listening, I'm good. (Interview, Nov. 5, 2011)

Abby has found an outlet—online conversations—to make sense of what was happening in her Native American literature classroom. She was gathering feedback from others who share her dominant position in relation to this class. By simply having someone listen to her and give back to her feelings, she has found an EnvironmentalSZ via discussion forums online, which helped construct, or perhaps, maintain her InternalSZ despite the teachings within her Native American literature classroom<sup>20</sup>.

However, even as these online discussions continued, Abby's confusion continued to show itself over the course of the semester. She may have been entering into what Bakhtin (1981) refers to as the zone of contact—or those moments when our identity, our beliefs, our realities, come into contact with teachings, understandings, and knowledges that may not completely match our own. Within this zone of contact, there arises a struggle where ideas do not match, do not agree: "It is those moments of struggle

that we develop our own ideologies” (Ball and Freedman, 2004, p. 7). As mentioned earlier, what makes this situation unique is that the authoritative word—the accepted academic knowledge—is from a marginalized position. Bakhtin (1981) says that the “authoritative discourse”—or that discourse which is acknowledged truth—“demands ... that we make it our own” (p. 342). However, in this process of learning the authoritative word (i.e. the accepted and taught curriculum), a conflict may arise with the authoritative discourse: “although some people take authoritarian words as authoritative [truths], ... some may resist” (Ball & Freedman, 2004, p. 8). Those that take the authoritarian words as truth without question have a better matching of their InternalSZ with their EnvironmentalSZ; however, those that resist this authoritative “truth” may have a greater mismatch between their Internal and EnvironmentalSZ, thus leading to shrunken EnvironmentalSZs whereby emotions like confusion, frustration, and silence ensue.

Whereas the authoritative word in most every other academic space (and even on the internet) has validated Abby’s InternalSZ, this Native American literature classroom has exposed her to ideas and teachings that contradict and challenge her own. For Abby, these moments have created an uneasiness within her, a confusion that she is trying to make sense of: “I just I don’t know who to pick sides with. Cause if I say one thing, then everyone’s gonna get mad. If I say the other thing, I’m just completely canceling out my other side just so everybody else would be happy” (Interview, Nov. 5, 2011). She finds herself in this liminal state where, whichever choice she makes, it is a difficult one. If she agrees with the authoritative knowledge from the Native American literature classroom, she feels like she is “canceling out my other side.” If she goes against the teachings of the classroom, she feels as though “everyone’s gonna get mad.” Here, the choice or choices

she is making within this classroom, impacts her identity, impacts what she believes and who she is. If she accepts some of the teachings within this classroom, she must, at the same time, in part or in full denounce her dominant ideas, her identity, the teachings from her family, her community, and her school (outside of this Native American literature classroom). Something she said that she struggled with throughout the semester. The implications of Abby's tension reminded me of Hill's (2009) analysis when discussing white students in a Hip-Hop Literature class. He said,

Rather than merely spotlighting the ways in which hip-hop-based (and I would substitute Native American knowledge based) education forges new cultural connections to previously marginalized groups, we must also keep track of the ways in which such interventions produce new cultural margins and, thus, new forms of marginalization. (p. 64)

As Abby's voice and struggle plays out in my mind in relation to new forms of marginalization, I focus in on Eileen's emerging story and wonder how Eileen interacts in the American history classroom that, much like Abby in the Native American Literature classroom, confuses her, challenges her knowledge, her identity. I ask Eileen: "So you said that you have more opinions in the American history class by having the Native American class. Do you actually voice those opinions in class?"

**Eileen:**

No. I'll write them down on paper, and I'll keep them as notes to myself, so like just in case I might use them for a certain topic that comes up then I'll voice my opinion, but since we never talk about it then nothing ever gets acknowledged so I keep it to myself until something kinda relates to it.

**Tim:**

So you're taking notes about the subject American history, but with your opinions and thoughts?

**Eileen:**

Yeah.

**Tim:**

Do you think that helps you at all in the class somehow?

**Eileen:**

No.

**Tim:**

Do you think you'd be doing as well if you didn't have the Native American class?

**Eileen:**

Probably. I mean it's just the thought of doing it and trying to understand why it happened is something that always throws me off, so I'm like...I don't think that if the Native American literature class was there that I wouldn't have the opportunity to still do good in American history but I guess just having it back to back helps me a little bit to have a better understanding. (interview, October 5, 2011).

Eileen explained that really the only thing she pays attention to in her American history class is the contradictions that occur between Ms. Bee's teachings and Mr. Richard's teachings. These two teachers are providing readings and information that have been deemed as valuable enough by the school district to teach to students. Both are in positions to enact the "authoritative discourse." (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342).

And just as Abby dealt with confusion, frustration, and silence in the Native American Literature classroom that did not match her InternalSZ, so too does Eileen have to deal with the same emotions in her American history class. It is at these moments of resistance, disagreement, and frustration that Eileen and Abby enter into the "zone of contact" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). Again, within this zone, there arises a struggle where ideas do not match, do not agree: "what we think as an individual is not the same as some aspect of the official doctrine of our larger world. It is those moments of struggle that we develop our own ideologies" (Ball & Freedman, 2004, p. 7) or our own InternalSZ. When we disagree, a tension and struggle happens, and we begin to form our own ideologies, which may be positioned closely to the authoritative discourse or far from it. For Eileen,

her InternalSZ is positioned far from the authoritative word in her American history course and close to it in her Native American literature course. Without the Native American literature course, this zone of contact would not have been created by Eileen because “If you had asked [Eileen] last year, [she] couldn’t tell you who [Chief Sitting Bull] was either,” thus this moment of struggle (this zone of contact) would not have helped her develop and continue to construct and strengthen her ideologies, her InternalSZ.

While Eileen is finding the confidence to create her own correction to history, thus being validated in what was contracting EnvironmentalSZ (the American history class), over time, Abby has allowed the authoritative discourse from the Native American literature class to find its way into her own understandings, thus allowing her to be validated in what too was a contracting EnvironmentalSZ. For Abby, the multiple zones of contact have shaped her and changed her InternalSZ over the course of the semester. I will take you through Abby’s reflections from the beginning of the semester to the end of the semester to track how the zones of contact altered her InternalSZ:

**Written Reflection #1 from Aug. 10, 2011:**

(The contact between the US government and Native American tribes) was just all a big fight. It’s like one person has to end up on top. They can’t be equal.

**Written reflection #2 from Sept. 12, 2011:**

I think I’ve learned that government and everything, they did their wrong, but the Native Americans, they weren’t completely innocent. That in any conflict, it’s each other’s problems ‘cause they both fought fire with fire. Not many people just wanna listen or understand if it’s something that’s not part of their belief.

**Written reflection #3 from Nov. 2, 2011:**

(The U.S. military) just came in and they charge, and they really had—they didn’t have any morals. Where I think Native Americans did.

**Final Reflection from Dec. 2, 2011:**

We have been lied to through everything previous.... You can't believe everything you hear, because everyone has their own way of telling the story. I think that the stuffed animal description played into this very well. We only truly saw what was in our view. You can look at things in only one way, and not even notice the real truth about what was there. But that's not our fault, because that's how previous teachers taught us. We were taught to only look at the good side from what we did to others, not the bad. I'll be honest that in unit 1, I was still very unsure about this class, and I didn't know if I'd fit in. Everyone is very accepting though, which I really didn't expect.

The community development and family creation assignments, conversations, activities, and written reflections from chapter 4 needed to occur in order for Abby's understanding to be impacted. In addition, Abby needed to know that her emerging understanding was valued, that she was not pressured to think a certain way in this class. In order to do that, the written reflections (above) were always validated by Ms. Bee. In this, I mean that Ms. Bee always underlined, highlighted, and wrote in the margins of all her students' papers, giving credit to wherever their thinking was at that time and perhaps pushing them a little further. Ms. Bee had continued the conversation with Abby; she had continued the construction of the dialogic spiral...on paper. I asked Ms. Bee of this teaching technique: "So when you're reading is it almost like you're engaged in some sort of conversation?"

**Ms. Bee:**

Oh, absolutely. It's like they're there with me and every single student has their own words and their own style and their own pains like Abby, she's always writing about how scared she is in class and how she wants people to know that not all white people are bad, but she's honest with me, and I think that she's starting to open up more, not just on paper, but with other people in the class that she can say, 'ya know, hey not all whites are bad,' but I think that she needed to find her voice first on paper and hear me validate that and then I think that kind of gave her some courage to go out and say what she feels needs to be said.

(Interview, Oct. 16, 2011)

In a sense, Ms. Bee became that sounding board that Abby needed in the beginning of the year when she resorted to using online chat rooms for validation from

friends in states across the U.S. Ms. Bee did not criticize Abby's positions. She listened and in listening, in seeing, and in giving back to Abby's conversations, Ms. Bee helped to expand her classroom's EnvironmentalSZ—one that validates, honors, and acknowledges who Abby is, where Abby comes from, and Abby's emerging identities and understandings. In turn, Abby was willing to allow a new perspective to enter into her thinking<sup>21</sup>.

In thinking about how Ms. Bee created an EnvironmentalSZ for Abby to discover her positions and ideas in a classroom that confused and challenged her, I think about the conversation that is happening in the back of the library with Eileen and me. Perhaps we are creating our own EnvironmentalSZ where we are practicing the construction of our stories, which are the telling of our InternalSZ through conversation, through listening, through the construction of the dialogic spiral. Within this positioning, Eileen is using the conversations that are emerging between us to strengthen where she fits, how she fits, and if she fits in different spaces. For Abby, this emergence of identity was happening with Ms. Bee through written reflections and the validation that ensued from Ms. Bee's written comments and underlining. In my interviews and interactions with Abby, I hope that I, too, was able to create such an environment built on trust, on validation, on being human to one another.

Eileen's willingness to spend her lunches talking about important matters in her schooling experience with me makes me wonder: Does she see me as a resource that can carry her stories, her struggles, her ideological becoming to audiences larger than just the two of us? Does she view me as an ally, as someone who will make the words on her



paper that, before our conversation, only she saw, something available for many other students, or teachers, or administrators to see and make sense of? Perhaps.

Or perhaps Eileen is enacting another type of resistance: Resilient. Resilient resistance is the act of “surviving and/or succeeding through the educational pipeline as a strategic response to visual microaggressions” (Yosso cited in Solorzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 320), which seems closely tied to the term “survivance,” which Brayboy (2006) discusses as the combination of survival and resistance. This combination is strategic and necessary in order to adapt to different spaces in a constructive way that develops to personal growth. In her American history class, Eileen writes notes that she keeps to herself about the contradictions in authoritative discourse between the two classes: “It’s really the only thing I pay attention to.” These notes keep her engaged as she thinks about corrections to the information she is hearing.

At times, she has shown her resistance by teaching other students her correction to history, but most of the time, she says, she sits quiet, writing notes to construct counter-narratives to herself. In doing so, she may be enacting an internal transformational resistance, which “appears to conform to institutional or cultural norms and expectations, however individuals are consciously engaged in a critique of oppressions. Students maintain both criteria of transformational resistance, yet their behavior is subtle or even silent and might go unnamed as transformational resistance,” (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 324). However, within this chapter, the different stages of resistance that Solorzano & Bernal (2001) have put forth may not be linear or progressional (i.e. one resistance leading to the next as a series of steps that ultimately lead to the all encompassing transformational resistances); instead, students like Eileen and Abby may move from one

type of resistance to another depending on the environment they find themselves in. In such a case, our ability to code switch or enact and verbalize that which we are thinking and feeling in our InternalSZ may be dependent upon our environment. As such, our resistances may be much more dynamic based on time, place, and how we chose to act or resist. We may enact many different forms of resistance from one moment to the next.

Instead of actively not learning like she did last year that led to her failing, she is actively listening to the contradictions in knowledge and keeping track of these on paper. Eileen is engaged in the conversation and motivated by the contradictions in authoritative knowledge. So, too, is Abby keeping track of these contradictions and voicing them online and in written reflections to Ms. Bee. When Eileen visits with me, those notes come to life through conversation, through story-ing. When Abby writes reflections to Ms. Bee, perhaps a story is emerging as well. Perhaps part of our survival—rather, our survivance—is practicing the construction of our own InternalSZ with others, putting voice to the classroom silence in new spaces like the back of the library that has now become an EnvironmentalSZ that we have co-constructed or the jottings of ideas on a written reflection. Bakhtin (1981) says that our understandings cannot happen in isolation; rather, they must happen in the spaces between listening and speaking, the between space (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2013). Story-ing is part of this between space, the co-construction of identity, reality, and understandings. How can we provide more opportunities of identity construction to happen with our students, with our participants, with our communities and schools that we work with?

Without the Native American literature classroom that provided an authoritative discourse from a new perspective that includes Indigenous Knowledges (which was seen

as an EnvironmentalSZ for Eileen), Eileen's counter-story may never have been constructed. Without Ms. Bee's willingness to give back to the conversation by responding to Abby's reflection, Abby's emerging understanding may never have been constructed. Further, by voicing what they are feeling, processing, and story-ing with me in the back of the library or on paper in the classroom, Eileen and Abby are constructing their InternalSZ in newly formed EnvironmentalSZ. They are allowing the notes they created of the many contradictions of knowledge between the two classes, between two very different spaces, to escape into the world via the construction of a conversation that puts voice to the silencing experiences they had in spaces that they felt once invalidated them, silenced them, discredited them. Through listening and story-ing, both Eileen and myself, Abby and Ms. Bee, have further constructed our InternalSZ that is ever-evolving and changing as we all find ourselves in moments of conflict, contradiction, and confusion. It is at those times—those zones of contact—that we are continuing to understand who we are and how we fit into the fabric of our surroundings. It is at these times—in classrooms, in communities, and in the back of libraries—when we are learning and teaching and becoming all at the same time. It is during those moments when we are collectively changing toward more inclusive and equitable identities that are more accepting of those visions of the past, present, and future that embrace pluralism rather than inequality and monoculturalism.

## **“This ain’t done, mother fucker”:** Story-ing the pain

*As I make my way through the halls, I notice an advertisement hanging on the men’s bathroom door. It reads:*

*Once a Native American Fighter,  
always a Native American Fighter...  
Want to be The Native American Fighter?  
Come to Native American fighter tryouts to see if you have what it takes to be a Native  
American Fighter Mascot at all of the Varsity football games.  
Any questions?  
Ask a Varsity Cheerleader!*

*I place my hand on the announcement and rip it down out of frustration, only to walk another 10 paces to see another announcement, and then another.<sup>22</sup> Shaking my head, I walk into Ms. Bee’s classroom and hand the advertisement to her.*

*We exchange a brief look; she says, “I saw this, too.”*

*Ms. Bee asks for the class’s attention: “Okay, I’m going to turn this into a teachable moment. What do you guys think about the mascot tryouts? Are any of you going to try out for it?”*

*“Who would want to be a mascot?” one student asks.*

*“Do you think that whoever they choose to be the mascot should also be educated about what being a Native American fighter is about?” she asks.*

*Vince, a Native American student from the bordering reservation, raises his hand and says, “Miss, um, isn’t the purpose of a mascot supposed to represent the school altogether? I don’t think that being a mascot has anything to do with learning whatever the mascot is. I’m just saying cuz the purpose of having a mascot is to rally up the crowd and get everybody excited and it’s not, ‘oh, I’m gonna teach you guys about what the mascot is.’ I mean if a badger was the mascot, the person in the costume isn’t gonna learn about badgers and teach the crowd their knowledge of badgers.”*

*“Nisha, what do you think?” Ms. Bee asks.*

*“Personally, when I went to football games, it was always someone white as the mascot and it’s kinda like a disrespect toward Native Americans because ... I mean, personally, I’m fine with it, but to some people it could be disrespectful to their own people, but they should be aware that they can disrespect some people,” Nisha says.*

*“Should we not be sensitive to the 10-15 percent who are Native American at Desert View?” Ms. Bee asks.*

*“When you go to the game, do you go there to watch football or sit next to the mascot to ask him questions about what tribes are where? No, you go to the game to watch the game. You’re not there to learn the history of Native Americans.”*

*Keene has a wrinkle above his forehead as he asks, “Wait. Are you for having a Native American as our mascot or against it?”*

*At this, the class laughs.*

*“I’m just saying: it’s a game. Chill out,” Vince says above the laughter.*

*“What does our mascot look like?” Ms. Bee asks continuing the conversation.*

*“He’s wearing a costume,” Neena says.*

*“Why did you say costume? Is it truly Native American traditional clothing?” Ms. Bee asks.*

*“No, it’s like polyester. Like cheep cloth,” Neena says. The class laughs again.*

*“Does our mascot have a headdress?” Ms. Bee asks.*

*“No,” the class responds.*

*“Should he have a headdress?”*

*“No, because that would be a little much,” Vince answers, drawing a line between what is and is not acceptable for a Native American mascot.*

*“We used to have a headdress. It was a made by the [local] tribe,” she says.*

*“Awhile ago, the student who was the mascot didn’t want the headdress to get dirty, so he put the headdress on the ground,” Ms. Bee explains.*

*“And what happened to it?” Vince asks.*

*“It got taken away. Why?” Ms. Bee asks rhetorically. “If you’re going to be representing a culture, don’t you think that you should know the basics of the culture and you should know what is respectful and what is disrespectful? Placing the headdress on the ground was a sign of disrespect. That same year that the mascot put the headdress on the ground, we had a student who was European American, and he was talking on Myspace about all the Native Americans here at Desert View. He was saying things like ‘dude, Native Americans here suck. They’re so stupid. Native Americans deserve to lose their land; they didn’t fight hard enough.’”*

*“Who is this? Let’s go find him,” Keene says chuckling.*

*“I mean it was page after page of this stuff,” she says.*

*“Why was he even coming here then?” one student asks.*

*“So the Native Americans were going back and forth with this kid that they got so upset with him that they printed out all of his Myspace pages and handed them out to all the Native American students at Desert View.”*

*At this, the class oo’ed, awed, and laughed at the action of printing and distributing these hurtful words.*

*Ms. Bee continues her story, her voice elevating in pitch when quoting the female Native American students: “I’m in the middle of teaching, and I hear bloody murder screaming right outside my door. He was getting a beat down by six very pissed off Native Americans—six very pissed off Native American females.”*

*More oo’s and awes and laughter.*

*“It took 15 teachers to drag these girls off. And the girls were all riled up saying stuff like, ‘this ain’t done, mother fucker.’ His little glasses were knocked off and someone came up and stomped on them. Oh, this poor child. Eventually, he got suspended and then kicked out of school. The girls, unfortunately, also got suspended and kicked out of school. Should they have been kicked out of school?”*

*The class says a mixture of yeses and nos.*

*Noticing the varied responses, Ms. Bee asks: “Okay, why?”*

*“Well, cuz they used violence,” Keene says.*

*“Okay, if you’re suppressing a lot of anger, and you see this about your culture, your religion, your beliefs, is that gonna piss you off?” Ms. Bee asks.*

*“Yes,” the class responds.*

*“Okay, it hit a level; it hit a nerve and so there was a whole lot of negotiating between Desert View and the local tribe like ‘oh my gosh we’re so sorry, but unfortunately we are going to have to ask that your kids don’t come to Desert View anymore. The school said, ‘We understand your anger, but we can’t promote violence*

*and that's when the local tribe took the headdress back. Should we get the headdress back?"*

*Class: no.*

*"You should prove your respect," one student says.*

*"Okay, but how do we do that? By having a real Native be the mascot and not be all fancy or anything," Ms. Bee offers.*

*Ten seconds of silence falls on the class. Keene breaks the silence, saying: "Certain Native American cultures fought because they had to. They got the whole model of what being a Native American fighter is by the movies that depicted us back in the early 1900s. I mean there shouldn't be a mascot at all that represents a Native because we're not really fighters. We were trying to protect something that we loved and that we weren't going to give up on."*

*Ms. Bee offers another solution: "If we're a fighter, then can't we be a Trojan fighter?"*

*Vince interjects: "So I was watching Deadliest Warriors on television... (In reference to show that has historical and modern fighters that fight one another to see who had the best weapons at the time).*

*"DUDE!" Keene yells. The class laughs.*

*"No, no, no, just listen," Vince says, reclaiming the attention of the class. "One of them was an Apache Indian versus the Gladiator. He got it good. He got down, he like ..."*

*"But the Apaches were fighting for their land..." Keene says.*

*"Okay, but dude," Vince says. "Like I want you to go home and watch it. I would want to have that Native American guy on my football team."*

*Again, the class laughs.*

*"Did you notice that the actor that represented the Apache was white? You could tell that he was wearing makeup," Keene says.*

*"Yeah, of course he'd be white," Nisha says.*

*"Dude. I didn't pause it and analyze who was the actor and test his hair or whatever," Vince says. "I was just trying to watch Deadliest Warriors."*

*"Should we have two mascots then? One, a gladiator that does it for entertainment and a warrior who does it for survival?" Ms. Bee offers.*

*Keene touches his hand to his forehead and shakes his head. He is visibly frustrated and does not participate in the remainder of the discussion.*

*"Have you seen our statue?" Vince asks Ms. Bee. "He's buff. He's got a six pack and huge pecks."*

*"Okay, thank you for participating in this discussion. We'll come back to this again later in the semester," Ms. Bee says and continues with the lesson that she had planned for today originally. (Fieldnotes/audio recording, Aug. 17, 2011)*

## ***Voicing the Hurt: Lessons in Becoming Conscious***

*There have been many moments in my life when I was critical of certain events and decisions my friends and family made around me. Sometimes, I voiced my hurt, I voiced my concern, my reality. Other times, I resigned to the fact that my voice will not and cannot be heard, even though my lips are moving and coherent sounds and arguments are being made, so why even begin the discussion, which will, no doubt, turn into a heated argument with hurt feelings?*

*For example, as I wrote this section in the spring of 2013, I was asked to participate in a fun race in downtown Phoenix where a group of people participated in a parade of sorts for a fundraiser, but instead of a car pulling a float, people decorate themed shopping carts and push them along for a few miles. A friend of mine said that their shopping cart theme was: Immigrants from Mexico. It would come complete with a huge sombrero, and they would have rakes and other lawn care tools and go around mockingly trying to care for lawns along the rout. I hesitantly wrote a brief email message that said their theme was offensive and that, if they changed it, I would be more than happy to partake in the festivities as I had heard how much fun this had been in the past.*

*I got an email a week after I voiced my concern saying that they had changed the theme to simply wearing colorful dresses, red bandanas, sombreros and hand out Mexican food and drinks to people along the rout. This change, my friend thought, was enough for me to be okay with partaking in the festivities. I tried to explain to him that he missed my point: that enacting stereotypes, dangerous ones at that, about a group of people that you don't fully know, that you don't understand, whose language you don't know, is enacting a privileged and dominant position that continues to perpetuate the unjust social structures of our society today. In addition, I sent him an article about a college fraternity party where they dressed up as stereotypical Asians, and another one about dressing up as stereotypical Mexicans and the reactions of people hurt by those actions.*

*(I understand where he is coming from: When I was a freshman in undergraduate school, I was much less critical of my world. I did not see the world as I do today: During Halloween that year, I dressed in stereotypical Asian garb, a red robe with dragons weaved into the fabric. I wore a conical hat. I taped my eyes to appear even more slanted than they already were. I look back at my actions, and it pains me to my core to think that I was capable of being that insensitive and disrespectful. This was extremely problematic as I am Filipino-American, enacting dominant stereotypes of Asians. I wonder: If I were able to go back and have this same conversation with myself that I'm having with my friend here, would I be able to listen, to change, to learn from who I have become today? How did I come to this point of becoming aware and conscious of this new reality? It was not overnight, so who and what allowed me to make this switch?)*

*My friend replied to my email saying his hope is that he does not offend anyone and that his intentions are to create a light-hearted, fun-themed event. He concluded saying, "I also think the planet needs to lighten up a bit."*

*Knowing that by continuing this discussion would only create a rip, a tear, between us that may not be reconcilable, I told him that I have many friends who share his position and many that don't. I live with my reality everyday and as tempting as it is*

*to see the world as he does, it is simply an impossibility; I can't go back. I wrote one final email saying that I sincerely hoped that he enjoyed the festivities (I meant that). He did. Meanwhile I reflected on this exchange for quite some time wondering how my voice, my rhetorical strategies, my eagerness to help teach others how I see, might be heard and felt and altered in some small or large way. What processes need to happen in order for others to develop a critical consciousness about race, ethnicity, language, and educational equity with me? What might those conversations look like?*

*I share this personal story with you because I experienced this frustration, this anger, this eventual silence that I have experienced in Keene. When his frustration mounts after speaking his truth and being refuted by others, I reflect on stories in my life when the emotions were very parallel. I also see my earlier self in Vince and the ways in which he uses humor and laughter to deflect certain realities that he isn't able to fully comprehend at this moment in his life. To me, as the exchanges between Keene and Vince continued to occur throughout the semester, I began to see it as how my identity today would interact with my identity when I was younger. In other words, what are the processes of conscientization, of becoming conscious and critical of our world's fetish with power, with colonization, with oppression? If we all start at different points, bring to each setting our own realities that have been an accumulation of past lessons at home, in the community (city and reservation), and at school, how can we engage in conversations, in teachings, that embrace our different realities within the same discussion? And, as we include these lived experiences, funds of knowledge and communities of practice into our classrooms, how can we (as facilitators and problem posers) highlight and embrace some realities, views, and positionalities that ask for compassion, collective understanding, and critical consciousness, while, at the same time, attempt to deconstruct the hurt, pain, and destruction that racist, classist, sexist—in all, dehumanizing—perspectives can have upon our collective society?*



## Chapter 6

### ENGAGING DISCOURSE IN THE ZONE OF CONTACT

There is no way to unpack everything revealed within the above classroom conversation; I do not intend to, nor do I have the ability to at the present moment. As with all the italicized stories that lie between chapters and within chapters, I rely on the power of the story itself—the narrative telling and my subsequent re-telling—to allow the reader to highlight, to focus in on, to say “oh, that’s interesting” before I enter my thinking and analysis into the conversation. In so doing, the story, the dialogue, the emotions and feelings and words of the students connect (or don’t) with the reader based on your lived realities, understandings, and emerging identity. These connections may be completely different than my own; thus, there may be moments “missed” in my analysis. I acknowledge this.

Instead, I explain what I *will* focus on in this chapter that this classroom conversation and the realities<sup>23</sup> of the students herein revealed to me. Using a social constructivist view upon language, learning, and the processes of socialization, I seek ways in which conversations (the construction or destruction of the *dialogic spiral*)—in small and large group and in individual writing—impacts students’ willingness (as well as their hesitancy) to learn from and with one another. I attempt to track the process of becoming critically conscience, or what Smith (2003) and Freire (1970) refer to as *conscientization*, within a classroom whose teacher, Ms. Bee, attempts to foster respect for difference and cultural identity within a multi-ethnic and multi-tribal setting. To make sense of this process, I focus on the voiced interactions between two male Native American participants, Vince and Keene, and how their words, their actions, their

discourse and position in relation to the topic of a Native American fighter as the school's mascot impacts one another's thinking. I focus on how their heated discussions provided a space for other students to engage in critical listening strategies—allowing both sides of the story (Keene on one side, Vince on the other) to enter into their consciousness and then making the final determination of who's truth they eventually accept, deny, or a combination of both. I focus on how Keene's mounting frustration and Vince's revelation of not knowing certain events in history leads to moments of drawback, of silence, of removing their voice from the conversation as a result of heckling. I focus on how Vince allows Keene's teachings, lessons, and wisdom to enter into his own consciousness and understanding.

To do so, I continue to rely on the theoretical understandings of Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) and my extended definitions—Internal and Environmental Safety Zones—and Bakhtin's (1981) zone of contact. In addition, I include sociocultural theory to investigate how the participants' actions in this study are related to the contexts in which they navigate and understand—in this case, a classroom that centers its curriculum (authoritative discourse) on Native knowledges using sociocultural responsive pedagogies (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2011). Using a social constructivist approach like critical sociocultural theory provides a setting for the messiness of identity in construction as well as how environments surrounding us impacts that development, that growth. Moen (2006) says that sociocultural theory sees individuals as having the ability to “learn and develop through participation in social activities and the world. Sociocultural theory... connects the entities mind and world” (p. 2). In relation to this study, I am critically listening to this interplay between the mind and world for

participants in this classroom. I have come to understand this difference between the mind and world by separating the Safety Zone Theory into the Internal (i.e. mind) and Environmental (i.e. world) Safe Zones that these students share with me.<sup>24</sup> To further investigate how the interplay between EnvironmentalSZ and InternalSZ and the ways in which listening—critical listening—impacts both safety zones, I rely on Herbart’s (1913)<sup>25</sup> definition of a listener and English’s (2011) expanded analysis of our *inner censor*. The *inner censor* is our inner voice that disrupts the conversations, lessons, and interactions constantly surrounding us and asks whether or not to accept or deny that which we are exposed to.

Critical sociocultural theory, in addition, addresses power relations, resistances, and conflicts as avenues in which learning occurs and where Bakhtin’s Zone of Contact comes into play: “It is those moments of struggle that we develop our own ideologies” (Ball and Freedman, 2004, p. 7). In other words, when we come into contact with teachings, understandings, and knowledges that challenge or do not fully fit our own, we have decisions to make: Do I accept this new knowledge? Do I refuse this new knowledge? Do I accept some parts and deny others? Viewing learning as a choice of what is accepted and what resisted and denied allows for agency, or “the strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools and resources, and histories, as embedded within relations of power” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 8). Duff (2002) extends this notion of agency in education by questioning how students make the decision to

...want to display their identities and personal knowledge in class or to conform to dominant, normative local sociolinguistic behaviors—that is, whether they consider those behaviors and disclosures as signs of competence or incompetence, of strength or weakness—a community standard and ideology toward which they

*choose* to become socialized, or rather something they just endure, resist, or circumvent by demonstrating their capabilities in other ways. (p. 313)

Graham Smith (2003), in relation to Indigenous communities, extends this notion of agency in discussing *transformation*. Transformation is the “proactive and positive” actions that allow us to “focus on what it is that we want, what it is that we are about, and to ‘imagine’ our future” (p. 2). And, I would add, refuse that which we do not want, are not about, and can’t imagine in our future. Lyons (2000) refers to this as “rhetorical sovereignty,” which is the “inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (pp. 449-50). Collectively, the pursuit of agency, of sovereignty, of identity is learning (both in the acceptance and refusal of knowledge).

Whatever the decision—the act of acceptance, of refusal (or combination of both)—is where learning and identity construction<sup>26</sup> lies: “...learning is a social process. ...learning is resistance to and/or reconceptualization of skills and knowledge. ... And the acts of taking up, disrupting and transforming discourses have implications for how one conceptualizes the constructs of identity and agency” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 6). Learning, then, is the process of negotiating—resisting or accepting—that which is presented to us within whatever context we find ourselves and as we “acquire, appropriate, resist, or reconceptualize skills and knowledge within and across discourse communities, [we] continue to be formed as acting subjects” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 10). That said, Dewey (1938) warns that some learning can be a mis-educative experience, meaning that certain lessons have the potential to stop and/or distort growth for learning in the future. In relation to this study, students in American History courses

may be learning damaging and untrue perspectives upon history about Native Americans. Students in the American History course are learning; however, it is not aiding in the construction of critical consciousness for students who are being misinformed about certain peoples, events, and perspectives.

For some of the participants herein, most of their academic lives have consisted of resisting a dominant Eurocentric authoritative paradigm. And while resistance is a part of learning, it is also laden with consequences that can place dispossessed students at the margins of the conversation or silence their voice (which can be seen as an active resistance i.e. actively not learning as in Eileen’s case in chapter 5). It has created silencing experiences in which students are forced to sit with quiet rage so loud that they cannot hear—rather, refuse to hear—the dominant lessons taught before them. However, this Native American literature classroom, through Ms. Bee’s careful construction of an EnvironmentalSZ in which to accept or deny the teachings using dialogue at the core and in which diverse perspectives are sought and listened to, many students are engaged in the conversation because they have an avenue to share—oral, writing, and critical listening—their thoughts. They have a space in which their identities, subjectivities, and understandings are not just heard, but supported as valid and in process. The *dialogic spiral*—whereby conversations are constructed together based on trust, reciprocation, and shared respect—offers ways in which to make the EnvironmentalSZ more expansive, inclusive, and forward looking toward equity and conscientization (see chapter 4).

To better contextualize this negotiation, Lave and Wenger (1991) offer the term *Communities of Practice* to mean “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice”

(p. 98). All students come to the classroom with their own communities of practice complete with certain positions, understandings, and perspectives that have made sense to them up to the present moment through processes of acceptance and rejection—their InternalSZ. In what ways can teachers (and researchers and members of our pluralistic society) acknowledge students’ present truth, while also offering new voices and new perspectives to push their thinking and their reality respectfully and honorably? The process of how students come to make sense of their realities, to me, is key to understanding how learning occurs.

### **Ms. Bee: Problem-Posing Education**

*Once the announcements conclude,  
Ms. Bee says:  
“Okay, I’m going to turn this into a teachable moment.  
What do you guys think about the mascot tryouts?  
Are any of you going to try out for it?”*

It was not rare for Ms. Bee to pause the lesson she had planned for the day in order to address something that students or she felt was pressing in their school, in their community, in their world. Almost all the participants mentioned that this made the class more real, authentic, organic. Nearly every day, Ms. Bee had written on her white board a critical thinking question that she either had them answer in small groups to begin the day’s discussion directly, or used it to reference indirectly the lessons and ideas generated for that day’s class. Questions led to conversations (most of the time), conversations led to arguments or understandings, in any case, students were talking and she was listening. In this way, Ms. Bee enacts many of the main tenets of Socio-culturally Responsive Education in that she

incorporates students' lived experiences, home-based knowledge and local environment to inform curriculum design and content as well as how relationships are formed with students. ...educators are validating students' home based knowledge and experiences and allowing students to actively participate in constructing what counts as knowledge in their classrooms and schools. (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2011, p. 200)

From the very beginning, Ms. Bee made it clear that her knowledge of Native Americans in the United States was still emerging and that there are those in class that know much more than she does; she is as much a learner (if not more) as she is a teacher. Instead of seeing this as a deficit to her teaching and thinking, she used it to her advantage:

I'm still new at teaching this Native American Literature course, and I don't want to upset anybody through ignorance or just stupidity. I tell them up front that I'm going to be the learner more than the teacher and I tell them, 'let me know if I am giving any inaccurate information,' and I hope that I have established that relationship early so that they can be open with me, cuz you know, I look like a white girl and so I want to establish that I do have Native American blood in my bloodline and to know that I am truly trying to do what's best not only for the Native American students but for all the students to come to a proper understanding of Native Americans, their history and their literature (Interview, April 25, 2011).

As Ms. Bee navigates her identity through the teaching of this course, she also resists what Freire (1970) refers to as the banking concept in education. Such banking resists dialogue for it is solely the teacher who has the wisdom and knowledge; the students are passive and empty receptors needing to be filled with such knowledge (like a deposit of money into a bank, thus banking). Instead of employing this type of educational process, Ms. Bee is enacting a "problem posing education," which sets itself the task of demythologizing. ... [And] regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 64). Vince breaks down Ms. Bee's teaching style:

Ms. Bee lets us talk. She has us argue around. Most classes it'll be like 'what do you think?' One person will say something and then the teacher will leave it at

that, but Ms. Bee let's us kinda like go back and forth and talk about what we want to say. We can talk how we want to talk and not worry about something being mispronounced, you know what I mean? Or the teacher will be like, 'that's an interesting point' and then go off on a subject and that'll be it. Ms. Bee is pretty good at picking something and then staying at it. She'll let us all talk and let us hear each other out. (Interview, Jan. 9, 2012)

For Vince, he can communicate without fear of ridicule or correction. His thoughts are of most importance, not the proper dominant structure of his language. Ms. Bee's decision to focus on the thoughts and stories instead of the so called "proper" dominant sentence structure, tenses, and grammar, highlight the link between the EnvironmentalSZ and the dialogic spiral: A dialogue in which people can build off of one another's statements, challenge or complicate those statements respectfully continues the scaffolding of discourse, continues the construction of the safety zone.

Keene agrees as he makes sense of this by comparing this class with others he has taken:

I guess it's just kind of like, the other classes are more structured, organized, always set in stone. This [NALit] class, this one feels kind of, not like it can go anywhere in topic, but it lets you explore the boundaries and certain aspects of the topic instead of having to learn this lesson and getting it done by a certain point. (Interview, Oct. 25, 2011)

Time, according to Keene, is not of precedence in this classroom, rich conversation is.

And Ms. Bee allowed the conversation to continue so long as students were participating in the discussion.

She is giving them ample opportunities to see how and where their communities of practice overlap or don't and ways in which other students' realities might enter into their own, or not. Ms. Bee says,

I listen to all of their conversation when they don't think I'm listening to them and, without butting in, I try and embrace what they are talking about or somehow subtly bring it up like either in a class discussion or on a one-on-one discussion



where they happen to ask something that they've been talking about. I just really want to validate things that I hear them say and their known heritage and again their own struggles. Just let them know that their stories matter, that's what's important to me. (Interview, Oct. 16, 2011)

Ms. Bee's emphasis on story-ing—on facilitating conversations to fuel knowledge construction—has provided students with opportunities to further make sense of the questions they pose on their own. In addition, Ms. Bee pushes them to ask why their Indigenous Knowledges are being discussed and shared with them for the first time in an academic setting. Often Ms. Bee emphasized this point, deconstructing the educational process as a political act, which highlights certain histories and literacies (dominant European), while downplaying or outright ignoring other marginalized histories and literacies: "Why have you not been taught this history before?" (Fieldnotes/Audio Recording, Aug 15, 2011). As students become conscious and critical of the educational process that selects whose knowledge is shared and whose is not, "Dialogue is of paramount importance as participants try to break the seemingly monological narration of events" (Souto-Manning, 2013, p. 219). Souto-Manning used Freire's (1970) concept of culture circles in an elementary setting to make sense of consciencization, or the act of becoming aware and critical of the social processes surrounding us, impacting our decisions and how and why we are exposed to certain perspectives of our world and denied access to others. Souto-Manning (2013) says "In culture circles, participants seek to recognize the infiltration of institutional discourse into personal narrative, and challenge its absolute voice. They come to view institutional discourse as one understanding of an issue..." (p. 219).

Ms. Bee often highlighted conflict to fuel conversations. Dyson (2003) observed a teacher who "did not resolve conflicts; she brought them out into the open where the

range of opinions undergirding them could be made audible and this process of naming and discussing diffused power struggles and promoted social and intellectual discussions of text types and preferences” (p. 103). As seen in the story that begins this chapter, Ms. Bee rarely answered the questions posed by students; rather, she continued the conversation by posing new questions that students could answer through dialogue themselves. In doing so, she defused the banking concept of education (of having the definitive and final word) by allowing students to construct answers to their own questions.

Students who were not participating orally, as I will reveal later in this chapter, were still engaged in the discussion, picking and choosing whose ideas fit their own ideologies and rejecting those that didn't. This process of becoming critically conscious through the negotiation of knowledge construction “Allows individuals to engage in social action to solve problems and address issues they identify in their own narratives” (Souto Manning, 2013, p. 214). While engaging students in such problem posing education that calls into question certain processes of education and asks for meaningful dialogue to help make sense of their lived realities together, certain questions begin to emerge: What happens when students identify with different elements, different levels of understanding/conscientization at the same time? How are they making sense of their reality as elements of power, colonization, oppression are included in discussions? What emotions are they feeling as their realities are questioned, challenged, and deconstructed? To help answer these and other questions, I share with you the stories of Vince and Keene.

## **Vince and Keene: An Introduction**

Vince<sup>27</sup> has lived with his grandma on the reservation that borders the school district of Desert View High school nearly all his life. His father is in prison, and he never knew his mother. He says he's 75 percent Native American and 25 percent Mexican, which has been an issue for him in the past when students told him he looks Mexican. Even in the Native American class, a friend of his said while laughing, "Vince is Mexican and Pima, but he looks Mexican." He says he's heard the jokes all his life, but has gotten over it. His dad's girlfriend, who also is the mother to many of his brother's and sisters, is an alcoholic and has, according to Vince, been known to blow all her "per cap"<sup>28</sup> money, her children's per cap money, and his dad's per cap money at the casino in one night. Vince fully purchased his own house with his per cap money when he turned 18 and allowed his siblings to stay there after seeing them walk down the street alone without shoes on. Unfortunately, he says, his dad's girlfriend made her way into his house and has stayed there, not paying for a thing for months. A little while ago, he moved out of his house and stayed with his girlfriend in the city because of this living situation. Since then, he paid for an apartment for his dad's girlfriend and her children (his siblings) for the first two months, so he could get his house back, but when the third month came, she didn't pay for it. His grandmother and other family members have, in the past, given her money and now, Vince says, they say it's his turn to take care of her.

Keene says even though he is a mixture of four different tribes, he identifies with his "Hopi side, I guess, because we take part in the ceremonies and stuff, more than the Navajo for some reason. I don't really know why we did that, but yeah." His sister, Amy, took this class the first year it was offered and was a participant in my pilot research.

Keene says he would often look at the materials, readings, and writings she brought home from this class two years ago and had many conversations at home with her about what they were talking about in the Native American literature class. He's already rented and seen almost every movie shown in the class because of Amy's recommendation. Now, while he's taking this class, Amy will ask him about the class and engage in discussions centering on the lessons and conversations in there. When Amy and Keene were younger, they would travel up to their Hopi reservation every few weeks, but recently, because of financial reasons, they don't make it up as much: "Probably like...once every few months." He says when he's up there, "The air is a lot cleaner ...[and] it's more quiet than the city. It's kind of peaceful, I'd have to say." Often, he and his sister participate in ceremonies because of the "spiritualness" of it. Something, he says, that is void in the city. When on his reservation, "there's a difference ... because ...being around people that you know or your family and you know about your culture and they know about it too. It's just that they understand ...the cultural aspect of it." Despite all that, he's happy to be in the city because of the different types of people and different friends he interacts with. He's just used to the city now, he says. <sup>29</sup>

### **Urban vs. Traditional Native: Spectrum of Indigenous Identity**

"American Indian intellectuals must be careful, in their own assertions of what constitutes American Indian-ness, to avoid reenacting the divisive logic of colonialist domination—one that not only pits Indian against non-Indian, but also Indian against Indian and tribe against tribe" ~Sandy Grande, 2004, p. 106

Memo: The Keene and Vince dynamic continues. This week, Keene calls out Vince's lack of knowledge. Vince calls out Keene's willingness to speak his truth. This back and forth, I fear, is damaging of both of their voices in the classroom. Instead of viewing and accepting where the other has come from, which has led to their thinking today, they are verbally battling one another over their knowledge. This is disheartening. (Aug. 29, 2011)

The notion of Indian-ness was pervasive in this classroom: Who was more Native or less Native than someone else<sup>30</sup>? Whose ideas were honorable to their elders and whose were not? In Hilary N. Weaver's (2001) article titled "Indigenous Identity: What Is It, and Who *Really* Has It?," she discusses identity in relation to Native peoples. Weaver (2001) defines identity as the "recognition of a common origin or shared characteristics with another person, group, or ideal leading to solidarity and allegiance ... [and is] an ongoing process that is never complete. ... Identity is shaped, in part, by recognition, absence of recognition, or misrecognition by others" (p. 242). She focuses on three facets of identity—self-identification, community identification, and external identification as well as how "internalized oppression/colonization is related to identity" (p. 240). Self identification is self perception, how we view ourselves and perhaps could be tied to our Internal Safety Zone. It may be influenced by the advantages and disadvantages certain identities have in different contexts. For example, while discrimination can lead to rejection of identity, climates where Native identity is seen as fashionable, financially profitable, and beneficial to survival and resistance leads to assertions of that identity (Weaver, 2001). Thus, the environment around us impacts how we see ourselves: "identity can only be confirmed by others who share that identity" (p. 245). Lee and Quijada Cerecer (2011) add that Native youth, in addition to being impacted by Native culture, are also greatly impacted by social media, tribal economic development, family occupations and income, off reservation residency, and peer influences (adding how conversations, teachings, and differing and contemporary environments impact the individual, thus the interplay between the Environmental Safety Zone and the Internal Safety Zone).

Indian-ness, for many participants, was separated into two categories: Traditional Native and Urban Native. For example, Charlotte breaks down how she sees others in the classroom:

“Tina, she’s more of an urban native and Tosha, she’s really shy so doing group projects she won’t talk much and then Ari, she knows quite a bit. Tina, she’s more into the city life, I guess you could say, I don’t know what that means, but me, I’m more traditional. I think Ari is too. I kindof got that vibe from her.”

**Tim:**

“So there’s, you kindof made the difference between um traditional and urban Indian. Can you talk a little bit more about that? What’s the difference?”

**Charlotte:**

“Well, the urban ones are, you can’t really relate to them. They’re like, no offense, but a white person in this culture because I guess they establish too much to the way things are and they probably don’t go back to the reservation as much anymore and they don’t know their ways and maybe not interested, ya know, they’re just one of those normal kids you see, but when you meet a Native-native, they’re just like family to you because everything’s almost the same and you can laugh almost every second, so there’s a big difference” (Interview, March 24, 2010).

For Charlotte, there is a major disconnect between Traditional and Urban Native. Urban Natives are much more connected to dominant “white” culture and are disconnected from their reservation ceremonies and conversations. On the other hand, Traditional Natives still participate in ceremonies and spend more time on their reservations. In addition, Charlotte considers herself Traditional Native, which means that there are shared understandings (communities of practice) that allow her to share in laughter based on shared contexts, histories, and stories.

It is tempting to continue forming this binary of who is more traditional and who has been urbanized; however, I see the harm such binaries have had on my own community on the Flathead Indian Reservation as well as the one that has developed within this classroom: “Rather than determining where someone fits on a continuum

between two cultural identities or worlds, it may be more accurate to say that indigenous people live in one complex, conflicting world” (Weaver, 2001, p. 249). Weaver’s article discusses Indigenous identity specifically, and I would think that in a broader context, she would include all peoples into this conversation as living in “...one complex, conflicting world” (Weaver, 2001, p. 249). Rather than focusing on this binary, I focus on individual’s stories to complicate and contradict this harmful other-ing that can occur in our communities and in classrooms.

Keene’s story includes the teachings and learning that have come from interactions with his sister. He has already been exposed to many of the teachings within this classroom through the conversations and lessons that his older sister, Amy, taught him as she took this course previously, which has helped him construct a critical awareness of the lessons and conversations being taught in here.

**Keene:**

Just like, kind of, stuff that was kind of—wasn’t brought to the light in textbooks, how information was kept from—like the real truth of information of history was kind of kept from the textbooks of when we were younger. We didn’t learn the whole side of the story of certain events.

**Tim:**

Who taught you the ‘whole side of the story’?

**Keene:**

Like my sister, she did projects and stuff, so she was learning more about what was happening and stuff, like what happened to our people in the past. I guess that information kind of stuck with me.

**Tim:**

She was bringing that information home and you were—

**Keene:**

Yeah, when she worked on it, she would mention the information to me. Even though if I didn’t look like I paid attention, I guess it must have stuck with me.

**Tim:**

Do you talk about this class with her?

**Keene:**

Yeah, most days, if there's something, if the conversation was really interesting or had a part in it, I might mention it to her. If she asks how's the class going or how was it today, stuff like that.

**Tim:**

What do you tell her?

**Keene:**

I say it went all right sometimes, depending on what the information was. If it was interesting today, I'm going to tell her what we're going to do tomorrow, but kind of set up for it. (Interview, Oct. 25, 2011)

For Keene, the lessons in this classroom are continuing to be discussed at home with his sister. He's been engaged in the teachings prior and is now making more sense of them as he is taking this class. His positions are being discussed at home and strengthened at home, and he brings that critical awareness with him in this classroom, something that is not always appreciated by other students.

### **Moments of Silence and Removal of Voice: Heckling**

*I focus on how Keene's mounting frustration and Vince's revelation of not knowing certain events in history leads to moments of drawback, of silence, of removing their voice from the conversation as a result of heckling.*

There were numerous times when Keene volunteered his answer in class, where he voiced his beliefs, and shared his knowledge, which some times was beyond what Ms. Bee knew. When Ms. Bee had students watch the movie "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,"<sup>31</sup> Keene was very critical of the movie saying to another student, "'It's not focusing on them (the Native Americans); it's focusing on the white people."

After which, Vince says to him, "Can't you just enjoy the movie, Keene?"



“I can’t enjoy this movie,” Keene replies.

“But this is a five star movie,” another Native American male, Grant, says to him.

Keene removes his voice. (Fieldnotes/class audio recording, Aug. 21, 2011)

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Ms. Bee asked the whole class, "Does anyone know about the ghost dance?"

"Keene knows," Vince says.

"Keene, do you know what the ghost dance is?" Ms. Bee asks at Vince’s prompting.

"No," Keene says and then places his hands on his forehead and shakes his head.

"I don’t know; I’m just really tired right now."

Keene removes his voice.<sup>32</sup> (Fieldnotes/class audio recording, Aug. 22, 2011)

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To make sense of Keene’s silencing experience, Petrone (2010) offers the term “heckling,” which is a “practice in which [people] verbally condemn, ridicule, and/or tease other [people]. ... Heckling illustrates how conflicts function to teach and learn social and ideological normativity” (p. 120, 123). As Keene feels compelled more and more to speak in this class because the questions posed are similar to the ones he asks himself outside of school, his voice has been challenged through heckling because of it. He says, “I notice this is the class where I talk a lot, more of like a serious kind of tone. I guess the questions being asked are just personal questions I ask myself too. It’s the kind of things I think about anyway.” At the same time he feels compelled to share his knowledge, to answer the questions that fuel the discussions, he is being heckled for being critical and for speaking on other students’ behalf<sup>33</sup>.

This critical awareness—his exposure to a greater breadth of materials that are discussed in this class—has caused Keene frustration and silence when he does not see other students verbally and non-verbally agreeing or attempting to learn from his reality (the destruction of the dialogic spiral). And while I challenge the binary of Traditional vs. Urban Native American, I do think Keene’s knowledge construction at home and having been engaged in lessons concerning this classroom impacts his willingness to speak critically of what’s being discussed, while also creating moments of confusion which lead him to cease talking during certain conversations. In other words, the heckling from other students impacted his voice from time to time.

However, at the same time Keene was the recipient of such heckling, he dishes it out as well, particularly in relation to Vince’s lack of knowledge about certain subjects. Keene’s shock at Vince’s lack of knowledge leads to hurtful exchanges in which Vince, much like Keene, falls silent:

Keene explains to the class, "It’s just like in the northeast and how everybody talks about the Cherokee and yet they forget about all the other tribes."

Vince says, "This is the first time I’ve heard of the Cherokee."

Keene turns to Vince and says, "Really? Oh my goodness."

Vince’ voice falls silent. (Fieldnotes/class audio recording, Aug. 29, 2011)

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Ms. Bee is modeling a presentation about Australian Aborigines. In a couple of weeks, groups of students will be presenting on local tribes of their choosing. Today, Ms. Bee says, “Now some sad history about the Aborigines is that they have what is called the stolen generation, and again, this is going to sound very familiar. The Aboriginal

children were forcibly removed from their families by federal, by state law, and by Christian missionaries. They were sent to mission schools."

Vince says, "They can really do that?"

Keene laughs while saying, "Yeah! They did it to us too."

"Oh...nevermind," Vince says, removing his voice from the conversation.

(Fieldnotes/class audio recording, Oct. 26, 2011)

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Keene's shock that Vince does not know about certain tribes and histories has caused Vince to fall silent. For Vince, he enters the classroom with a different set of beliefs, different funds of knowledge. He says that he has not been exposed to many issues about Native Americans in the past, which has impacted his views about certain subjects in this class such as the Native American mascot in his school. And while his knowledge is, at times, heckled by Keene within this classroom, Vince says the lessons he's learned in NALit through conversations, through readings and writings have made their way into settings outside of the classroom. Much like Keene shares his knowledge outside of this class with his sister, Vince is using the information in this classroom in other settings, helping others make sense of his reality as it is emerging through conversations in there. For example, Vince says that he "brags" about the new knowledge he's learned in this classroom with friend who are not in that classroom: "To my friend Allen, he has multicultural lit and he doesn't have Native Lit, so he asks about what we do and then me, John, Grant and me, we brag about what we learned to other people" (Interview, Jan. 9, 2012). Vince reveals that he's proud of the new knowledge he's learned about Native American peoples and sees the sharing of this information as

bragging. In addition, like Eileen, he's used the knowledge gained in the NALit class in other classrooms in a way that's benefited him:

Like in government (class), I know that second hour (NALit) got me a lot of extra credit in government because they were talking about how they were establishing all this stuff, and I talked about how (my bordering reservation) has it's own little government and all the rules we have apply to only us, and I brought it up, and I was able to talk about it to the class and to the teacher, and it brought my grade up a lot because of that. I was able talk about it and nobody argued, and the teacher knew a bit about it, so that helped me out there. (Interview, Jan. 9, 2012)

Here and in other settings, Vince is teaching others what he's learned, and while, as seen in the story that began this chapter, his thinking in relation to one subject—the mascot—is in contrast to Keene's, Vince is still learning and teaching lessons within and outside of this classroom. The spectrum of identity: who is Traditional Native American, who is Urban Native American, who has more knowledge of Indigenous events and histories does not matter as both Keene and Vince are taking their own lessons learned in this classroom and sharing them in their own ways with others outside of the classroom that aides in the construction of their emerging identities, their InternalSZ. By engaging in the Zone of Contact, they are building, strengthening, and practicing their discourse and rhetoric to be shared in other settings.

In discussing this with Ms. Bee, she sees the advantage of allowing conflict and tension to enter into conversations. She says:

I think with Vince, just who he is, is pushing the other kids to find out where they feel about certain issues. I mean, 'cuz he and Keene always go round. ... The fact that they're debating about something, I think is brilliant. I think that they're starting to pull each other's own natural leadership and opinions out just by the discussions and just by being who they are.

**Tim:**

It seems like when they are doing that, you don't interject or anything?

**Ms. Bee:**

No. That's the key.

**Tim:**  
Why?

**Ms. Bee:**

Because again, I think that they need to have a safe place, even if it's completely volatile and controversial, they still know that they are in a safe place. I think that they trust me enough to know that if I don't like where it's going that I will stop it. I want them to feel like they have that voice to argue and debate about something that matters to them, and do so in a safe environment, and allow their voices and their opinions to be heard, especially students that might not have that opportunity in other classes. (Interview, Oct. 16, 2011)

While the conversations are heated and may lead to moments of silence, Ms. Bee sees the brilliance of this setting and allows it to occur. She provides a space to engage in the struggle (the zone of contact), a place to practice their discourse with those who disagree with their beliefs. It's important to note that much had to be built at the beginning of the semester—the creation of a feeling of family through vulnerabilities, through seeing commonalities of experiences, and gaining trust and admiration (as illustrated in chapter 4)—in order for these heated conversations to take place. In addition, Ms. Bee shapes and shifts the conversations through problem posing questions that asks for equity and critical consciousness: “They trust me enough to know that if I don't like where it's going that I will stop it.”

For Keene, Vince, Eileen, and Abby engaging in this struggle allowed them to construct and strengthen their InternalSZ despite silencing experiences. They all shared stories of how they were impacting those around them through lessons taught at home, in the community, in other classrooms—other EnvironmentalSZs. The topics, conversations, and issues that are connecting with them may be different, but they are all enacting their rhetorical sovereignty (with Ms. Bee's careful facilitation), using their

words as actions to teach others their truth in a way that has not happened in the past in spite of those moments of heckling in the classroom. They are thriving as they resist or accept the teachings in the NALit EnvironmentalSZ that relies on Indigenous histories, peoples, and perspectives. In the process, their InternalSZs are expanding. The lessons they are learning through readings, conversations, and writings are broadening their understandings, their identities in a way that gives them confidence to share their reality in new spaces outside of this classroom.

And while these conversations herein are contained within a small classroom setting, the words of Vince and Keene provide a complex picture of the frustration and joy that can ensue when topics concentrating on Native perspectives, understandings, and knowledges are discussed with competing Indigenous ideologies. In continuing the thinking about how changing contexts for Eileen and Abby in chapter 5 led to different actions on their part in the last chapter, I continue this navigation of safety zones with Vince and Keene and how their Environmental and InternalSZs are not separate from one another; they very much impact the other (and in so doing, they learn from one another and gain respect for the other). I focus on identity and how the recognition or mis-recognition by other students constructed often-heated exchanges in whole class conversations that pitted one perspective of Indian-ness with another (Keene vs. Vince) and how conversations led to learning opportunities.

### **Voiced Interactions: Breakdown in Communication**

*I focus on the voiced interactions between Vince and Keene and how their words, their actions, their discourse and position in relation to the topic of a Native American fighter as the school's mascot impacts one another's thinking.*

In chapter 4, I briefly mentioned Bakhtin's (1981) use of the "Embryonic beginnings" (p. 347) to explain how our identities are constantly in a state of construction through impactful conversations and lived experiences. When the influence of another is "deep and productive, there is no external imitation, no simple act of reproduction, but rather a further creative development of another's discourse in a new context and under new conditions ... the fact that in such forms there can always be found the embryonic beginnings" (1981, p. 347). Here, I navigate how our realities, when faced with those that are very different from our own (zones of contact), impacts moments of such identity construction. As stated earlier, by engaging in a meaningful conversation, we give birth to new ideas, new thoughts between us that help clarify and strengthen (or in some cases, confuse and weaken) our identities to and with each other.

Vince and Keene, in the following story (and subsequent interviews where I replay this story with them) gives access to such embryonic beginnings as Vince and Keene's InternalSZ impacts their EnvironmentalSZ and vice versa as they interact within a zone of contact.

### ***We're letting down our ancestors***

*Ms. Bee is beginning a new unit that discusses Native Americans as mascots, something that she had students discuss earlier in the semester. As she does with all her new units, before students have been exposed to readings, conversations, videos, and other media that might impact their thinking, she asks a direct question to see where their*

*thinking is at the present moment: "How many think that the mascot should not be a Native American Warrior?"*

*Keene's hand goes up. Ms. Bee asks Keene why.*

*"It's just stupid. It's just a waste of time and half the time, if it's supposed to be a Native Fighter then why is there a white person going out there?" Keene answers.*

*"It's a black guy," Vince corrects him.*

*"Or even a black guy," Keene says.*

*"This conversation really hits home for some of us, so we need to listen to each other," Ms. Bee says. She calls on Vince who is raising his hand.*

*"I'm going to comment on Keene's comment: Have you ever been to a football game?" Vince says while turning to look at Keene.*

*"I have," Keene says.*

*"Then you know they need a mascot to make them play better," Vince says.*

*"Why do you need a mascot to feel better about themselves?" Keene asks.*

*"Okay, so the alligator population is going down, you don't see everybody crying over the population declining," Vince says. The class laughs at his reasoning.*

*Keene looks up from his paper and says, "You're comparing us to animals now?"*

*"But have you seen them? They do flips; it's awesome. They did. It was awesome. Just go to the game. That's all I'm saying," Vince says.*

*"Why is he so into watching dudes jump around?" Keene asks and receives laughter from the class.*

*After the laughter subsides, Keene says: "It's just that it's gotten to a certain point in our culture where, what Vince was saying, Natives don't care anymore because*



*it's been so naturalized. As a kid, I didn't know I was Native American, but when I played with my toys, I didn't want the Natives to win. What the hell is wrong with that? They've gotten to a point where they've de-generalized culture to the point where they showed movies, old movies like from the 1930s, 40s, 50s, that Natives are just like ravagers of the land like the war songs like Da-da-da-did-da-da (the Atlanta Braves chant/song), I hate that song because that's a stereotypical song that they used to play when Natives would come around in movies to fight. It's a disgrace. If we are allowing them to call us redskins... it's just bullcrap that everything our ancestors fought for us to live and preserve the culture (is being lost). We're just letting them down."*

*"See, you're overthinking this, Keene. Can I just invite Keene to a football game?" Vince says.*

*"You're a JACKASS, Vince," Keene says, his voice elevating in pitch and volume.*

*"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Ms. Bee says.*

*"I'm having a bad day," Keene says. The conversation continues, but Keene removes his voice from the conversation. His gaze does not leave his desk. Ten minutes later, Keene turns to Vince and says, "I apologize for the comment, Vince."*

*"Alls I'm saying is you guys need to go watch a football game," Vince says not acknowledging the apology.*

I've noticed (as discussed earlier with heckling) that when Keene is being critical of something or shares his Indigenous Knowledge with the class, he's made fun of by Vince and others. Sometimes Keene backs up what he says, but there are other times that he makes a point, is challenged, and then removes his voice from the conversation by

saying: "I'm just tired today" or "I'm having a bad day"<sup>34</sup>." While Eileen and Abby's story (in chapter 5) offered ways in which changing contexts from one classroom to another space in school or in the community impacted their motivation, their voice, the ways in which they participated or did not in conversations, Vince and Keene's interactions here show that even with the careful construction of an EnvironmentalSZ, in an instant, that zone can shrink: "You're a JACKASS." In a matter of moments, the EnvironmentalSZ of this classroom shrunk considerably after being challenged by other students: Vince was asked why he was so into watching male mascots, to which the class laughed. Keene's thinking was challenged by Vince to the point of an outburst, after which, Keene removed his voice from the discussion. Vince and Keene's InternalSZ (which are the compilation of their funds of knowledge and their communities of practice) in relation to the subject of Native American mascots are worlds apart. As such, they are both staunch in their defense of their beliefs, refusing the other's voice to enter into their thinking.

Here, Ms. Bee takes control of the conversation saying, "Whoa, whoa, whoa," alerting both Vince and Keene that the discourse has reached a dangerous level. In this way, Ms. Bee can be seen as a guide, protecting students at times as in this situation, but also allowing the conversation to unfold whereby two or more very different positions are at odds against each other. Her questions keep the conversation moving forward and when the discussion is happening between students, she steps back and allows them to practice their ideas, their thoughts, their rhetoric and only interjects when she feels the conversation is dwindling or when it has become unsafe for her students: "I want them to feel like they have that voice to argue and debate about something that matters to them, and do so in a safe environment, and allow their voices and their opinions to be heard,

especially students that might not have that opportunity in other classes” (Interview, Oct. 16, 2011). English (2011) says “it is only through educative distance that the teacher can understand how the child is influenced by the immediately observed world, with all of its limits, and thereby recognizing where the child’s thought and interactions with the world need expansion or modification” (p. 180). Rather than simply telling if one position is right or wrong, Ms. Bee allows both positions to unfold in voiced interactions and is reflective on which direction she should move in subsequent classes, adding sources and readings as the conversations move forward. By not supporting a certain point or position that she may agree with, she validates both Keene and Vince’s InternalSZ, their lived experiences and beliefs up to the present point (their historical beings), what makes sense to them right now. Her role as facilitator and problem poser, then, is very much a reflexive one: She is contemplating on what articles and readings her students need to strengthen their positions and identities, while attempting to not take sides in the whole class conversations. English (2011) says that “teachers must understand both *where the learner is starting from* in his or her learning process, and *where the learner still needs growth*” (p. 180). English calls these types of teaching methods: “*Listening to know where the learner is*” and “*listening to know in which direction to expand the learners thought*” (2011, p. 181). Ms. Bee, in reflecting back to students on their written reflection with underlines, squiggles, and comments, was able to understand where they stood on certain issues, while pushing and challenging them on certain issues and thoughts that were more equitable and critical. For example, Nisha writes in her first reflection, “Certain events are never talked about in history classes” (Written, Sept. 12, 2011). Ms. Bee underlined this section and asked in the margin, “Why is that?” Here, Ms. Bee is

prompting students at certain junctures in their own thoughts to push their thinking a little further toward conscientization. In Keene's second reflection, he writes: "I do not think I am a warrior, for I have not faced all the trials in my life yet," (written, Nov. 2, 2011) to which Ms. Bee responds, "Isn't coming to school every day proving yourself as a warrior?" Here, Ms. Bee is attempting to show Keene how strong his resilient resistance is in finding worth and value in an educational structure that does not support nor validate his Indigenous knowledge, history, and truth. It is crucial, then, that teachers create an EnvironmentalSZ to support the struggle, to support students' resistances, their battles of inner thought as well as the battles in whole-class conversations to develop their InternalSZ. But what does this struggle look like? How are Vince and Keene making sense of these conversations in which their lived experiences are being challenged by the other?

To better understand this specific classroom situation, I used an ethnographic method developed by Martinez (2010) and Rampton (2003) called *Participant Retrospection*, which asks participants to look back at data excerpts and comment on them. I replayed this classroom scene to them to better understand what was going through their minds during this exchange. Unfortunately, when I interviewed Vince a month-and-a-half after this exchange happened, he said that he did not recollect it (perhaps he did not wish to reveal his thinking with me about this). As such, I could not continue that part of the conversation; however, I arranged to interview Keene directly after this exchange happened, so it was fresh in his mind. I asked:

Were you surprised at all about how the discussion happened today?

**Keene:**

A little bit, yeah, just how some Natives say that they don't really care.

**Tim:**

Do you ever think why they're thinking that way?

**Keene:**

Maybe it's because the absence, I guess, of a true, how would you say, like a true role model in the media and stuff. I guess it's just like everything we see in the media about Native Americans is always the stereotypes or just sort of showing the old ways, that we don't really see the modern Native today.

**Tim:**

Does that bother you?

**Keene:**

Yeah, I mean, me and my sister, we kind of complain about it. We say it's funny how Natives are always left out if they're putting the majority of ethnic races in a group or something, naming them off, Native Americans are left out.

**Tim:**

Why is that?

**Keene:**

I guess some people probably think that we don't exist anymore, Natives. I don't know, I'm just wondering if people are just forgetting, like they don't really care basically.

**Tim:**

All people including Natives, or—

**Keene:**

Some people, maybe some Natives are just kind of drifting away towards more public media way, I guess. I'm not saying they're not traditional, but they kind of forget a little bit of it.

**Tim:**

Do you see that happening in here with some of the conversations we've had?

**Keene:**

Kind of. It feels like the way some students are, they know a little bit about their culture, it's just that they don't really look deep into it or they're missing the key aspects of it. Do they realize or think, did their ancestors, the way they fought for their people and their land, do they want to be remembered as just basically symbols of just fighting and just the noble Natives or something like that? Is that how they want to be remembered, or did they want to be remembered that they fought for their culture to try to keep it alive as long as they could? (Interview, Oct. 25, 2011).

Keene reveals that his frustration is not in Vince (he never mentioned Vince, specifically); rather, his frustration lies in how dominant media and urban communities have impacted the thinking of Native Americans in this classroom. He denies the binary, “I’m not saying they’re not traditional,” but he accepts that a transformation has happened in the forgetting of traditions. He is very aware of the power structures at play in education, in Indigenous identity, in the colonization of the mind, and he is not seeing that others share his thinking, which has led him into moments of overwhelming frustration where he has short verbal outburst, or shuts his voice off from the discussion altogether.

In these moments where his knowledge is at odds with others’ realities (zones of contact) and he does not see that others are impacted by his reality, he becomes silent out of frustration. This, too, could be seen as a *silencing experience*; however, in this situation, it is not an educator’s authoritative discourse that pushes Keene to this point, but a peer, a Native American peer, someone he’s known for a long time. Someone like Vince is enacting an Indigenous Identity that Keene thinks is disrespecting the honor of their ancestors. For Keene, his InternalSZ is making little impact upon the EnvironmentalSZ, as such, he does not waste any more of his time and energy in voicing his truth for others are not receiving it...so he thinks.

However, when speaking to other students about the dynamic and often heated exchanges between Vince and Keene, students are learning through critically listening to both sides of the discussion. When discussing the dialogic spiral in chapter 4, I mentioned that in order for a conversation to continue, we need to see and hear that others are making sense of our reality. If we can’t see or hear that some exchange of ideas is

happening, a breakdown occurs: "...words grow sickly, lose semantic depth and flexibility, the capacity to expand and renew their meanings in new living contexts—they essentially die as discourse" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 353-4). For Keene, this breakdown in discourse results in his silence, his disconnection from the conversation. A conversation within a setting in which there are many listeners and few speakers, my definition of the dialogic spiral becomes complicated since students, despite their showing their connections verbally or visibly, are still very much connected to the points being made as Vince and Keene exchange realities within a zone of contact.

### **Heated Discussions in the Zone of Contact: Critical Listening as Learning**

*I focus on how their heated discussions provided a space for other students to engage in critical listening strategies—allowing both sides of the story to enter into their consciousness and then making the final determination of who's truth they eventually accept, deny, or a combination of both.*

By interrupting the learner's taken-for-granted modes of being in the world, the teacher opens up the possibility for the learner to experience the *self* differently, to come into conflict with the self, *to feel uncertain* about what to do, to hear the voice of the censor.

Ultimately, the learner must begin to feel and see [themselves] choosing actions that recognize the other. (English, 2011, p. 184).

As Vince and Keene entered into this zone of contact—revealing their reality, denying the other's—other students seemed to stay out of the argument. I wondered: How were those that were not speaking out loud experiencing this exchange? Were they completely disconnected by the discussion? Or were they (like I was at the time) interested in the points that were being made by both of them? Lave and Wenger (1991) say that "Learners move from Legitimate Peripheral Participation to expertise or central participation as they learn, and that in most communities of practice, learning is

constituted by this movement” (p. 3). While Vince and Keene have often volunteered their opinions in whole-class discussions, taking vocal leadership positions in the whole class discourse, others have not: “I speak a little bit more to the small groups, but when it’s the big class, just like—I get kind of nervous a little bit.” (Shila, Interview, Nov. 2, 2011). This whole class and small group discourse may be reifying some tribal gendered norms in which men take the vocal leadership roles. Most of the other students are on the periphery of the conversation: listening, reflecting, accepting, and denying. In talking with Eileen and Nisha in the library, they discussed how “Vince and Keene are always going at it” (Personal communication, Oct. 5, 2011).

**Tim:**

What do you guys think about that whole battle back and forth?

**Nisha:**

Well, some of the things that Vince brings up, it’s not necessarily pointless. He has funny arguments and positions that I listen to. But Keene like [his points] are really worth talking about, but Vince, the mascot thing was kinda stupid.

**Tim:**

But you guys respect what Keene has to say?

**Eileen:**

I’m more respectful of what Keene has to say because when Vince says something, it’s more like a joke. He’s not serious.

**Tim:**

Do you think he’s serious about his position with the mascots though?

**Eileen:**

I think so. I mean he doesn’t shut up about it so. Sometimes I think he’s just trying to get a laugh out of people.

**Tim:**

It seems like people don’t step into the conversation between them. Why?

**Nisha:**

I want to, but I put my words in bad tones and ... yeah.



**Eileen:**

I just like to listen to what they have to say.

**Tim:**

Are you afraid or hesitant to speak because...

**Nisha:**

I'm not afraid or hesitant. It's just like...I used to get into these conversations, and it's like sometimes they would just go on and on and on like the whole class period. And sometimes I don't have the language to get out.

**Tim:**

By certain type of language do you mean cuss words and things like that?

**Nisha:**

(Nodds her head yes).

**Tim:**

So you just refrain from doing that all together?

**Nisha:**

(nods her head yes.) But I'm still listening like I'll hear what Keene has to say and then what Vince has to say, and I see things I agree with in both of them.

**Eileen:**

Me too. I sit right between them so I get both sides.

**Tim:**

What's going through your head when they're having those arguments?

**Eileen:**

I don't know. I just listen to both of them and it helps me figure out where my opinions are.

For Nisha, the conversation has created such an emotional connection that she doesn't "have the language to get out;" she is worried that what she will say will come out negatively and get her in trouble as it has in the past. Instead, she engages in the conversation in her mind, as does Eileen. Although they weren't participating verbally in the discussion, they were very much receptive to the positions and points that were being made by both Vince and Keene. English (2011) explains that "...listening is not a one-

sided, passive aspect of learning. Rather it implies an interrelation between two people, in which each is open to the other. Listening keeps us open to the other—to the other’s needs, wishes, ideas, questions, and judgments” (p. 172). So, *critical listening* then is the silent interplay between what is heard and experienced around us and how we are making sense of those lessons and ideas in our minds. In other words, critical listening requires that we answer with our lives—our experiences and understandings; however, not with verbal words, but with silent inner thoughts that construct a dialogue with the conversations surrounding us. Herbart (1913) says that “ideas are a later production of mind; they serve to define more clearly the ends for which we work, at the same time giving us insight into the best means for attaining them” (p. 63). English (2011) expands Herbart’s theory on learning and education through listening with the terms *inner censor* (which is also referred to as *inner voice*) and *inner struggle*. Whereas our *inner censor/voice* are our ideas and thoughts within our minds as we are engaged in a learning environment, the *inner struggle* are those moments when our current understandings, identities, and positions come into contact with new ideas, understandings, and positions that do not fully conform and fit into what we have known. To engage in an inner struggle and practice their discourse with those who are in opposition to them, students need opportunities to critically listen and speak within the zone of contact.

As such a struggle ensues within such a zone of contact that asks us to accept or refuse (or a combination of the both) a new idea into our own thinking and being: “When we experience inner struggle, it is due to the fact that our past decisions come into conflict with the demands of the present situation” (English, 2011, p. 175). This conflict that results in an inner struggle is what Ms. Bee sought in her teaching. She wanted

students to engage in the battle of positions. But for Keene and Vince, it was sometimes difficult to do so because of heckling and because they could not see other students accepting and agreeing with their positions. However, Nisha and Eileen have shown us that they are engaged in critical listening practices whereby the conflicting points of Vince and Keene are creating an inner struggle within them, and, ultimately, they decide whose points to accept and whose to deny. Although they may appear to be passive listeners, their inner censors/voices are constructing their own identity based on the voiced interactions between Vince and Keene within the zone of contact. As such, they are constructing their InternalSZ in an environment that engages in the struggle. Thus, the EnvironmentalSZ approaches and moves back and forth from the borders and boundaries of what is safe and what is dangerous: “She has us argue around” (Vince, Interview, Jan. 9, 2012), which “...lets you explore the boundaries and certain aspects of the topic” (Keene, Interview, Oct. 25, 2011).

Although Nisha and Eileen are not able to voice their opinions for fear of the words they may use and the emotions that may overcome them (which has gotten Nisha in trouble in the past), they are still very much a part of the discussion. Unfortunately, Keene cannot see this directly, which results in a breakdown of the dialogic spiral and he ceases, at times, to continue to participate in the discussion.

This acceptance and refusal of positions could best be seen in the movement from small-group discourse to individual writing via their unit reflection essay tests. The following story tracks this movement:

*An Illusion to Freedom*

*Today, Ms. Bee tells them that they are going to be preparing for their second unit reflection that they will be writing tomorrow. To prepare for the test, she asks them to get into groups of six. As students rearrange their desks, she hands out a list of quotes from Chief Joseph, John Trudell, Anna Lee Walters and subsequent questions that students have brought up over the course of the unit. (In addition, issues and questions centering on the Warrior Mascot and the Incident at Oglala are listed as well). She reads the first part of the handout (See Appendix 6 in chapter 4): “Today, you will be engaging in a Socratic Discussion! For each statement or quote, each student must discuss his or her opinion, adding additional support or quotes from the literature we have read and/or video we watched over the past three weeks.”*

*One group is composed of four participants (Keene, Abby, Shila, and Neena) and two students who are not participants in my study. Neena waves for me to come over and join their group. I gladly accept. A few minutes into the discussion, they come upon a question that asks (using a quote from Chief Joseph): “Do you think Native Americans are ‘free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and talk and act for myself...’?”*

*Keene begins the discussion saying: “It’s kind of like an illusion to freedom. Remember when Edgar came in here? He mentioned how his friends were fighting with the Navajos and Hopis to preserve the San Francisco peaks<sup>35</sup>. It’s like they’ve given us the rights of Native Americans to follow our own cultural aspects; they call it religion, but they wouldn’t let them protect sacred lands for them, to keep their sacred lands sacred. It’d be like going to Jerusalem and saying, ‘oh, we’re going to build a highway*

*through here. I mean, it's holy land so it's like they'll respect you, but they won't respect the ideas of your people. They are only going to allow certain things that they think is not a threat to them. It's just like what Abby said, they're more secretive now because it seems like the government doesn't put the actual events of our history in history books and they try to glorify certain events and not even discuss others. I guess you could say that Native Americans are free to a certain extent to what the government allows them to do and what not to do. (Here, Keene is discovering and making sense of Lomawaima and McCarty's Safety Zone Theory without ever being exposed to it directly).*

*Neena says, "I think everybody's free now to do what they want to do. Like mentally, do you think you're free?"*

*"Not to go all Matrix<sup>36</sup> on you guys, but in order to be free, you have to break the borders that they suppress onto you, you have to break the stereotypes and don't believe in stuff that's not true about you. We need to prove that our culture is something that we cherish for our people, that they're still here and will still be here because we've survived," Keene says.*

*There is a short silence and then they move on to the next question, and then the next, until the bell rings. Ms. Bee thanks them for their participation. She tells them to bring all the materials, assignments, and notes that they have accumulated over the past three weeks in to class tomorrow; they can use those resources to construct their essay tests.*

*The next day, students are preparing for the test, taking a look at their papers, eager for the questions they will answer. She hands out the questions, and gives me a copy as well. To my amazement, the test and yesterday's questions for the Socratic*

*discussion are nearly identical (See Appendix 5). I look up to see reactions from the students, and it appears that they are having similar reactions to this discovery. They are asked to choose five quotes or concepts (out of the 22 quotes/concepts) and answer them.*

*Shila chooses the question and quote from Chief Joseph that was discussed in her group yesterday. She writes:*

*2d. We, Native Americans, have the right to go as we please, but when we have a say in what we believe in, it somehow bites us in the butt, and we have to pay for what we did like when Edgar came in and told us about his friends protesting the San Francisco peeks. We can choose our teachers to teach us about our trash, but we do not have a say in the place we go to school at. And we do follow our own religion, but outsiders don't understand what we do. They think it's bad, but it's our way as a healing process. It's like what Keene said about our religion, outsiders don't know anything about it. When I got on the badminton team here at Desert View, I missed about a week because I had to help out in my uncle's ceremony. For that, I got kicked off the team. The coach didn't understand, not sure if she was racist or just didn't want to take the time to listen. I'm not too worried about it because it was 2 years ago."*

Although Shila was not a very vocal part of the Socratic discussion yesterday, she was very much engaged in critical listening. She was listening to the points that Keene was making and even cited him within her written reflection. In addition, she used the same point that Keene used about the San Francisco peeks—which he cited from the words of Edgar—and the appearance of freedom of religion and speech. (In addition, Keene cited Abby's position in his discourse: "It's just like what Abby said about..."). Keene's

critical position—which were constructed with the help of Edgar and Abby’s discourse—were impacting Nisha, Eileen, and Shila as they were engaged in an inner struggle whereby conflicting perspectives and ideologies were voiced, and they were critically listening. They were deciding whose position(s) to accept and whose to deny. And in this choosing, they were further constructing their own (and ever-changing) InternalSZ, their beliefs and identity up to the present point. Ms. Bee, in addition to giving them opportunities to engage in the zone of contact, asks them to take an individual stand on the issues and questions being addressed in class. She is asking them to construct their InternalSZ in writing; however, they are still given ample opportunities to cite others as it is an open note essay test. Bakhtin (1981) says that when we speak, we are constantly citing the words of others that have impacted us to the point where we have made their words our own. He refers to this action as *citatoriality*. This movement from group- and whole-class discussion to individual thought (by way of reflection writing) is seen in the story above. Shila further discusses this saying:

I like the discussion group. . . . you can hear about other students’ opinions and everything, what they think about it.

**Tim:**

Did their ideas and opinions get into your paper at all?

**Shila:**

Yeah, some of them did, actually.

**Tim:**

Were you thinking about that as you were writing it?

**Shila:**

Yeah, just like trying to think back to what they said and everything, yeah.  
(Interview, Nov. 2, 2011)

Citatoriality was not a rare instance and many students often cited Keene even though, when in whole class discussions, they would not verbally affirm his positions. Keene's discourse was still making an impact on them. For Harmon, an African American male, Keene's points were impacting his thinking. Keene's points (during the mascot discussion in which Keene stopped voicing his understandings in class because of heckling) were heard and even cited by Harmon. In the second reflection essay he wrote:

...the white man would say one thing to the Indians and have other things written on the paper and told them to touch ink with the pen, not knowing they were signing off their land. And Indians accepted the white man and showed them how to survive in the wild. White men gave them guns and liquor. Like when Keene said, 'When I was little, I used to make my cowboys kill the Indians because in school I was taught they were bad.' Every Native is not a howling, running, tomahawk-throwing savage. But most people think of them that way. (Writing, Nov. 2, 2011)

By allowing students to engage in the struggle, to tune into their inner censor/voice and engage in their inner struggle—pitting the environmental discourse with their internal discourse—Ms. Bee has created a fertile environment within which students have the opportunity to voice their identities in a variety of ways: whole-class discussion, critically listening and reflecting, and individual reflection essay writing. In doing so, students have had opportunities to be impacted by multiple perspectives about Indigenous Identity; they have engaged in an inner dialogue in which they accept and/or deny that which is presented to them; they have co-constructed a space in which their environment is safe enough to engage in dangerous discourse that, without a careful facilitator, can lead to aggression and anger without resolve. They have done so without ridicule or judgment from Ms. Bee, for she has accepted that each student enters her classroom with a different set of lived experiences and beliefs, each as unique and true to that individual as the next.



## **‘We’re pretty cool’: Respectful Exchanges Despite Differences**

It is important to note that in order for Vince and Keene to partake in the conversation, they had to have cared about it in the first place. Both of them say that this NALit class is different for them. They feel comfortable enough and engaged enough to participate in the battle in the first place. They care, so they share their realities with others. Keene says, “I don’t really talk at all” (Interview, Oct. 25, 2011) in other classes. Vince says, “Like the teaching in other classrooms, I’ll talk to the teacher, but when it comes to everyone, like as a class, not really” (Interview, Jan. 9, 2012). Having a classroom that engages in questions that they ponder outside of class, gives them voice in spaces that historically have silenced them. Their voices give rise to others’, and on and on.

And despite Keene and Vince engaging in verbal arguments that lead to outbursts and silencing, they value the other’s positions and are learning from and with the other.

Vince says that Keene:

just gets me by surprise like you don’t expect anyone to say anything and then he says stuff out of no where, and I’m just like, “what? you serious?” Like he’ll say it, and I’ll just be like, “whatever” and then Ms. Bee will be like “that’s right.” And I’ll be like, “What? How did that happen?” And then I’ll look around and ... everyone will be like, “Man, how does he know this stuff?”

### **Tim:**

So what’s going on there when he says stuff or when you guys argue. What are you thinking in your mind?

### **Vince:**

Well, a lot of the stuff he talks about, it’s like—okay, this is where it gets difficult because you can tell when someone’s being a suck up basically or you can see when someone’s preaching to the choir, but like when you know that person and you know what he’s about and sometimes he just summarizes the lesson for us and a couple times he’s done that and that’s when I start an argument because actually, one time I didn’t think it through and he dominated me and I was just

like, damn. It stayed with me for two weeks. I was just like, ‘remember when Keene got me?’

**Tim:**

Is there anything going on between you two like arguments and stuff.

Vince: No. We’re pretty cool. When I see him outside of class I’ll always say, ‘hey, what’s up Keene?’ (Interview, Jan. 9, 2012)

Vince is shocked at times at the knowledge that Keene possesses. He’s having difficulty understanding why Keene shares so much—if it’s to suck up or to preach to the choir.

Vince is realizing that Keene is helping to teach the class his truth and laughs at how Keene “dominated” him in an argument that he wasn’t prepared for. There is respect given in Vince’s words about Keene and despite the heated exchanges, they are “pretty cool” outside of class.

**Conclusion:**

To answer my questions that began this section: Many students such as Shila, Eileen, Nisha, and Harmon, although not vocal in the whole-class discussions, were very much engaged in the act of critical listening—allowing multiple voices and perspectives to enter into the minds and construct an inner dialogue in which they accept or refuse the ideas of others. In chapter 3, I asked: “If a word is spoken and there is no one there to listen to it, to expand it, to try to make sense of it, does it exist? I argue alongside Bakhtin that it does not, and the effects of this invalidation and ignoring has been felt personally and seen through prior participants’ voices while discussing an assimilationist education they have been exposed to.” Rather than revising this statement to hide my process of becoming, I reveal it again here so as to answer it with the knowledge that these participants have helped me understand.

I ask again: If a word is spoken and there is no one there to listen to it, expand upon it, to try and make sense of it, does it exist? Yes, it does! Even when our words don't appear to be received by others, they may very well be having an enormous impact on them. When confronting situations, spaces, and communities that may not be reciprocating and appear to be uncomfortable or cold to our message, it is crucial that we continue to engage in the struggle, for other's may be impacted by our discourse, our counter-stories, our lives. The appearance of reciprocation most definitely helps us have the confidence to continue our thoughts via spoken word in the dialogic spiral, but it is not essential. Words, once left from our voices, can grow heartily and thrive in the minds and hearts of others. However, how can we—as teachers, parents, councilors, community members, siblings, etc.—aide in the construction of confidence needed to voice their lives when confronted with a world and society that does not fully understand and see with the critical lens that marginalized populations have had to look from? How can we aide in the development of conscientization when many of the environments surrounding us continue to enact dominant ideas, discourses, realities? (I attempt to answer this in chapter 7, but could use your help).

In citing others' positions and points, they have allowed others' realities to become their own. Ms. Bee's willingness to facilitate a discussion that asked students to struggle with the topic, to enter into the zone of contact, provided an avenue for students on the periphery to engage in the discussion by way of an inner dialogue. This construction of the EnvironmentalSZ in which students led the discussion allowed others to make sense of their InternalSZ. Although Keene was not able to see that others were accepting and/or supporting his position, many students were very much connecting to

his reality. His and Vince's verbal battle helped students see multiple perspectives to one issue, and subsequently took a stand on an issue for themselves. Keene and Vince, by revealing their realities, helped others make sense of their own. In other words, by enacting their rhetorical sovereignty, they allowed others to practice and construct their own.

### ***“You Should Look Into It”***

*Harmon, a 6 foot 2, African American male, former offensive lineman for the football team before an injury sidelined him, towers over the rest of the class. His staunch stature is intimidating until he speaks, until he reaches out his hand to shake yours or bring you into an embrace. Today, Damon, a Native American classmate asks him: “Hey Harmon, you Native American?”*

*Students in his vicinity turn to look at him as he answers:*

*“I think I am, but I’m not sure,” Harmon responds. His eyes finding no one.*

*John pauses. Students look to him.*

*Then says, “You should look into it.”*

*Harmon’s eyes find John.*

*“Yeah. I should.”*

***“I found my tribe!”***

*Beatriz, a Latina student, is helping her group conduct research about the Apache tribe for a presentation later in the week. She is in the one small section of Desert View’s library where books about Native Americans are shelved. In the distance, I hear some sort of loud squeak, and then I see Beatriz running over to Ms. Bee with a huge smile on her face.*

*“I found my tribe!” she says to Ms. Bee, barely able to contain herself in the quiet library. The bell rings, and I walk with Beatriz to her next class asking her what she’s so excited about. She shows me an old book with the words “Tarahumara Indians” on the front.*

*“My family was once a part of this tribe. I tried to talk about it with my mom, but she was too young to remember anything before moving to the U.S. I’ve tried to look them up ever since Google was invented, but I never knew the correct spelling of the word. Now I know! I’m probably going to be smiling all day,” she says excitedly. “I’m going to read it tonight!”*

*She departs to her next class.*

*The next day, as she enters class, I ask her how the book is coming along. She has a disappointed look on her face.*

*“I’m disappointed. It’s pretty much about a white guy talking about how his family vacation. It’s pretty much his vacation journal and doesn’t say much about the tribe at all,” she says. “But at least I know the correct spelling of the tribe’s name, so I can continue to research.”*

## ***Indigenous Identity Construction***

*Harmon and Beatriz' stories were not unique within this classroom. Many students who identified as another ethnicity often knew that their families had some sort of ties to one or multiple Native American tribes. Within this classroom, however, those stories were able to be shared. Students were able to discover pieces about themselves with others and many of the students who did identify themselves as Native American encouraged others to engage in conversations about Native identity. Harmon and Beatriz both discussed how, at home, they had conversations with their parents about their family's roots. While Beatriz spent much of her time on the internet looking for more information about her tribe, Harmon began calling members of his family:*

*I talked with my mom. Well, actually, my mom called her sisters and then everybody started calling everybody.*

***Tim:***

*When you found out that you were Cherokee and Seminole, what were you thinking?*

***Harmon:***

*Man it was just cool.*

***Tim:***

*Do you feel like you have a connection in class now because of that?*

***Harmon:***

*Yeah, even more so now.*

***Tim:***

*So, when you tell other kids in class, what have they said?*

***Harmon:***

*They say, 'you should look into it more.' I was like, 'yeah, that's what I'm doing.' Keene, he told me a bit more about it. He knows a lot. He was like, 'basically they're in Florida and all down south.' I was like, 'yeah I know that much.' And then he's like, 'they're a peaceful people pretty much like the Hopis.' I was like, 'oh, that's cool.'*

*For Harmon, he has been encouraged by both his family and his classmates in the NALit class to continue to discover where he comes from, his past. Many Native American students like Keene and Damon over the course of the semester, encouraged students who did not claim Native American as their identity to find out more about themselves.*

*Having a class like Native American literature provided a space for Harmon and Beatriz to conduct this very important identity work. It opened up conversations at home and in class. The shift in authoritative curriculum from Eurocentric to Native American emphasized other identities, other understandings, other knowledges to enter into students' thinking. For Beatriz and Harmon, it was transformational.*



## CHAPTER 7

### ENDING AS BEGINNING

"Indigenous peoples represent the unfinished business of decolonization"  
-Franke Wilmer (1993, p. 5).

In constructing this final chapter<sup>37</sup>, I re-read the stories that were shared with me by the students of this Native American Literature classroom. I felt their impact, their emotion, their power. I hope that the stories—if you took my analysis away—can stand on their own as told and felt and experienced by the students who helped write this dissertation. That said, I also acknowledge the many stories that deeply impacted me over the three years that were not directly included in this writing. I say, “not directly,” because all the stories, emotions, struggles, and situations that participants shared with me and allowed me to see are in this writing; they helped me discover new ways of seeing and being and for that, I am grateful.

I begin the ending of this writing by engaging and revealing the struggle and the hope and possibility of a classroom like Native American literature with a teacher like Ms. Bee in a school like Desert View with students like Eileen and Abby, Vince and Keene, Shila and Harmon, you and me. I continue with questions I cannot fully answer (but hope you'll join me in exploring further): Why are classrooms like this—that attempt to acknowledge literacies, knowledges, and perspectives too often marginalized in schools—considered dangerous? Why are they a threat to our society? What is the purpose of education in a pluralistic society if it is not to help students honor, explore, problematize, and extend their lived realities, their communities, their cultures? What type of students are we creating (or denying) when one dominant monolingual and monocultural curriculum based largely on white norms is pushed upon us all? What is

lost when we do not help students engage in critical conversations, in critical dialogue that discusses real issues that impact them directly? How can we help them in becoming better listeners, speakers, thinkers, and writers in an environment that helps them engage in the struggle within the zone of contact?

In revisiting the prior chapters, perhaps I've glimpsed a few of these answers: In chapter 1, I discussed the power of story-ing and the importance of including emotion into the classroom and into our ways of knowing and seeing others' positions and perspectives with trust and respect. Cindy LaMarr stated that Native American students should receive "a high quality education that not only prepares them for the demands of contemporary society, but also thoroughly grounds them in their own history, culture and language" (p. 1). I asked and attempted to answer: What might LaMarr's vision look like for Native American students in an urban setting where multiple tribes are represented in one classroom? How might students engage in a classroom that attempts to prepare them for contemporary society while also grounding them in their history and culture? What partnerships, collaborations, and meeting of the minds needs to happen in order to construct a classroom from the ground up that engages the authoritative discourse from a marginalized perspective?

In chapter 2, I revealed how the accumulation of readings and voices in the field of education have impacted my thoughts and realities. Lomawaima and McCarty's (2006) safety zone theory, for example, was featured throughout my writing and gave me a path from which to see, to question, and to have the confidence to explore and push that theory with the help of Bakhtin's (1981) zone of contact and authoritative discourse and Althusser's (1971) differentiation between the Ideological State Apparatus and

Repressive State Apparatus. I tracked the dangerous path that educational theory and practices have been as well as the direction and hope in new ways of learning, and being, and becoming.

In chapter 3, I hoped to reveal a little about who I am and how my subjectivities are very much impacting the way I write, the way I see, and the limitations and advancements of my identity. In doing so, I wanted to highlight my confusion in living in a liminal position: I am not Native American; I am Filipino-American by ethnicity and grew up on the Flathead Indian Reservation where Native American families and friends included me in their rituals, ceremonies, and cultural traditions. In addition, I discussed how my identity impacted my ability to build and maintain dialogic relationships with my participants. And, while not perfect, I reveal the methodological tools I employed as I engaged in the research in this setting (case study, ethnography, grounded theory, participatory action).

In chapter 4, Ms. Bee's curriculum and her emphasis on creating a safe space was the focus as well as the decisions, reasoning, and implications of using conversations and stories to fuel this classroom knowledge construction. Students like Stacy showed us how taking a chance by being vulnerable and revealing emotions of pain, heartache, and growth provide spaces for others to do the same as they engage in the dialogic spiral.

Chapter 5, Eileen's and Abby's navigation within and outside of this Native American literature classroom provided a lens to view the safety zone theory on a micro-scale with the inclusion of Internal Safety Zone and Environmental Safety Zone and how each impacts the other as Eileen moves from this classroom that (for the first time) validated her thinking to her American history class (that silenced, angered, and ignored

her thinking), and as Abby moves from this classroom space that has placed her at the margin to an online space that helped her build discourse to battle the teachings in the Native American Literature course. Through their stories, I was able to see how their confusion—their acceptance and denial of knowledge—impacted their identity construction.

Vince and Keene's heated exchanges in chapter 6 showed how their voices impacted those who were engaged in critical listening practices around them within the zone of contact. The written reflections of students showed how they were citing the words of one another, allowing other's perspectives and reality to impact and become their own. Vince and Keene allow us to see the danger and possibility of engaging in the zone of contact, while reflecting back on what was needed in order to construct a safe enough zone to, in the end, still have respect and admiration for one another after heated discussion in which their positions, culture, and identities were challenged.

All this was written so as to answer the question that fueled this discovery: *In what ways is the Native American literature curriculum in this Southwest Urban High School denying, affirming, or challenging the identities of students taking this course?* From this question, spurred other questions, other confusions, other contradictions that, with the help of participants' stories, I struggled through. Now, I take this opportunity, not to attempt to neatly wrap up this writing, put a bow on top, and wipe my hands clean of it; I take this opportunity to complicate what has been written before. I do so because endings, from what I've been taught about story-ing in my community, should also be beginnings—beginnings for other discoveries, other opportunities, other ways of seeing

and being. If I ruffle and fray the ending, I hope that it will give more opportunities for future writing, whether my own or yours, to continue the conversation.

And like I began this dissertation, I will close with a story:

***Do you have a second to talk?***

*It is about 8 o'clock at night and my cell phone is ringing. The caller ID says the incoming call is from Michael, a participant in the pilot research I had done about four months ago. I pick up. His voice cracks as it makes its way through cell towers and static air into my cell phone. He asks me, "Do you have a second to talk?"*

*A short pause,*

*"Of course," I replied. "What's going on?"*

*Michael is about a month away from graduating high school. He is making plans for his big graduation day that would honor where he comes from, who he is, and the accomplishments he's made (as well as the sacrifices he's had to make). To do this, he asked Vice Principal Davis to grant him permission to wear traditional Native American clothing during the ceremony. He said he researched it and discovered that Vice Principal Davis has the power to make exceptions to this rule he is fighting; however, he was quickly denied and given an alternative: "They told me, 'You can wear that [traditional Native American clothing], you can wear whatever you want; it just has to be underneath [the graduation cap and gown].'"*

*As he says this, I think of the deep metaphor taking place here: You can be anything you want to be underneath this black cloth, this black graduation robe that covers the uniqueness from which we come. You can be anything you want to be, so long*

*as you comply with how the dominant society wants you to look, and act, and become. He continues: “That wasn’t enough for me. I owe my parents and my grandparents because there was only so much I could learn culturally from them, so to me everything goes in a cycle. For me, this is something leading to the end. Something like this to happen, it just doesn’t make sense to me. The more I got into it, the more confusing I got.”*

*“So what was their reasoning for denying you your request?” I ask, trying to conceal the furious rage that was within me as Michael shared his story.*

*“Ya know, this is where she went off on a tangent. She said, ‘Oh, it’s just policy,’ you know? That’s how they handle things. That’s how they always handle things. They’ll let me walk [for graduation], but it’s still going to be a policy next year and the fact that I know kids that are juniors who want to do this—ya know, I don’t really expect anyone to look up to me. But I have to think in that realm of, ‘all right, I have to deal with this because someone not as strong as me might not know how to deal with this later.’ Ya know, things in this world just aren’t right. It’s only shown in this little event, but collectively, to do something, everyone needs to get involved. Like the fact that I want to graduate is evidence that I really like their school, ya know, and I got all these opportunities to take like Native American literature and stuff like that, ya know. It’s good that the school got me into that, but the fact that it has me at this juncture is kinda hypocritical. It’s like, ya know, they want you to have this discovery, and I have. A lot of kids there don’t have that and that’s the problem with the world, ya know, and, ya know, the fact that I’ve had it, and it’s working against me just proves, in my mind that when I try to do something good, everything works against me and I know what’s good, and I know what’s right, in my mind.”*

*As he is story-ing, he is asking for feedback: 'ya know?' And I give it as best I can over a phone line by giving "mmm-hmms" each time he asks, 'ya know?' because within his voice is a struggle; his struggle is my struggle: I see his hurt, his pain, his want to create change. I see it when I think back to my friends' battle back home. I see it in my Alaska Native students with the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. I feel his confusion as I plod along on a parallel path of discovery. I provide him space to be heard, and, in doing so, I am attempting to enact elements of critical listening: "This is important work that you're doing," I say honestly, then give him space to make sense of his situation by talking and being heard as he continues his discovery by struggling through the oppressive structure he is fighting.*

*"I respect that you understand that. It's like the minute I say this to my mom she just immediately just goes to what God says. That in and of itself is another conflict. I'm not going to get through to her and that's the way the world is so these are just smaller incidents of the bigger thing and this to me is just how I'm going to go about it, how I will do it. I'd like to see where it could go. To have people believe in me, I feel honored and privileged. I don't know, it's just a lot of little things like that, and it just makes..."*

*He pauses. I wait for him to find the words that he needs to share.*

*He continues: "Everything is just starting to come together for me, but at the same time it's falling apart. I guess when you do confront something like this I'm already going to have problems with my own identity because who's to say that to some extent I'm already assimilated myself and that's something that I accept."*

*Hearing Michael reveal so much of himself and his situation to me, I take a leap. I reveal who I am in relation to Michael and his emerging story by telling him my truth:*

*“That’s something that we all have to try to question is what are the colonial aspects that are within our mind frame already and how can we combat that and how can we move beyond that, and it’s not an easy thing to do because we’ve been living in this system for a long, long time, and the things that we are doing may be hidden, and it’s a process of awakening, of realization, of what you’re going through right now, and I share the path you’re on right now, Michael. I’m going through it right now myself, so you’re not alone and knowing that you’re not alone helps,” I say amazed that so much came pouring out of me.*

*After sharing my connection, a fear sets in momentarily: Perhaps I crossed some sort of ethical boundary that discredits my entire work here. I question my humanity, who I have become as a person as though there is some line between who I am as a researcher and who I am as everything else. His voice quiets my inner struggle as he continues my thought:*

*“That’s the thing that I told my other friends, it’s like what the hell am I? I’m not Jesus. I’m just some other kid and people are like amazed by what I’m doing and I’m like, ‘No, everybody has this. You just have to bring it out.’ I don’t want to have people go through what I have to go through, there’s an easier way.”*

*“What you’re gonna be doing will help someone behind you do what they want to do in this sense and then you can move beyond that. There’s no limit to what you can do,” I say.*

*Another silence falls between us, and we don’t fear it.*



*“It’s good though, Michael,” I say hoping to pack my sheer amazement at his social activism and ability to see the power structures and oppressive factors into four little words.*

*“Yeah I know man, it’s just so...ugh...whew,” he says. I can hear him wipe away tears and clear his nose and voice. As he does so, I continue to share my amazement in his action.*

*“What you’re feeling right now is a good thing; you’re waking up man,” I say.*

*“Yeah and that confusion is just me like my other part of my mind just wanting to stick to what’s already, what’s the norm, besides every other problem that’s outside of my head, it’s just that’s what it is and something that I have to work out myself,” he says.*

*I tell him that this isn’t something that should be worked out in isolation, and that I’m always here to listen, to help, to further his cause. We exchange goodbyes. He thanks me for listening. I thank him for sharing his struggle with me.*

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*Within weeks of graduation, Michael made the choice to leave Desert View High School. His work to change the school and district’s policies toward allowing Native American students to wear traditional clothing during graduation drained him of his energy, he said. He lost confidence in a school that was enacting a glaring contradiction, one that he could no longer tolerate as he was revealed new perspectives on history and education from a Native American literature classroom. The contradiction: Desert View was proud to have a Native American fighter as a mascot, but when a real-life contemporary Native American fought for his right to show his cultural pride at*

*graduation, he was denounced, silenced, turned away. Michael lived this contradiction. He bravely made a choice.*<sup>38</sup>

**“Everything-is-just-starting-to-come-together-for-me,  
but at the same time—  
it’s fal-  
ling a-  
part”**

*“When their efforts to act responsibly are frustrated, when they find themselves unable to use their faculties, people suffer,” Paulo Freire, 1970, p. 59.*

Michael’s story is one of many stories that reveals a shortcoming of this classroom: When students are exposed to a new reality, one that reveals power structures, unequal treatment of human beings in education and society, and histories/stories that have been hidden and/or denied from existing in dominant authoritative spaces, how can we—as teachers, researchers, community members, fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers—work with others to create the change they seek? To be more succinct: If we are to ask students to reflect on a reality from a new perspective, we must also help them to discover ways in which they can put their thoughts to actions in positive and transformative ways.

To explain the need for action, Friere (1970) discusses two dimensions of the word itself: *Reflection* and *Action*. Whereas *reflection* asks us to contemplate our realities—to be critical and conscious of it— *action* attempts to change that reality. One *can* exist without the other *but* at a price:

When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter into *verbalism*, into an alienated and alientating ’blah.’ It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action. (Freire, 1970, p. 68)

More succinctly, “To exist, humanly, is [not only] to *name* the world, [but also] to change it” (Freire, 1970, p. 68). Freire says that the combination of reflection and action is *Praxis*. Garcia and Shirley (2012) add: “This process must be inclusive of a *dialectical* experience that offers opportunities for individuals and communities to engage in analyses, critiques and dialogues in order to recognize, unpack and resist notions of power and dominance” (p. 80). Smith (2003) calls this process “consciousness-raising,” “conscientization”—and later (2004) “indigenous transforming praxis”—and is a transformation that must be “...won on at least two broad fronts; a confrontation with the colonizer and a confrontation with ‘ourselves’” (2003, p. 2). Perhaps then, the transformation must be won within us, our InternalSZ, and around us, our EnvironmentalSZ, as we interact and make sense of our realities in zones of contact.

Michael and Shila, Keene and Vince, Eileen and Abby, and others whose voices have constructed this dissertation are engaged in a struggle both within their minds (InternalSZ) and surrounding them (EnvironmentalSZ). They have been given an opportunity to discover a new reality and to explore realities that have always been with them, to reflect on them, to name them; however, when they leave this classroom (that has constructed an authoritative discourse from an Indigenous perspective), they are faced with the same dominant reality that marginalizes the knowledge of their communities and the class, one that is confusing, upsetting, and, at times, overwhelming: “Yeah and that confusion is just me like my other part of my mind just wanting to stick to what’s already, what’s the norm, besides every other problem that’s outside of my head, it’s just that’s what it is and something that I have to work out myself” (Michael, Personal communication, April 21, 2011). Here, Michael is fashioning a critical reality,

one that asks him to be critical of his surroundings—to question the structures at play—is causing him confusion to the point of him almost wanting to be back to “what’s already...the norm.”

The norm. What is the norm? Perhaps it’s an education that has successfully acted as an Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 1971) that teaches students how to be within the definitions of dominant society; to accept one set of values based largely on white middle class norms of language and social interaction, while at the same time having to denounce their own (Kill the Indian, save the man); that teaches students to not question, to not be critical, to accept their position in society: “Teaching and moral education that is predicated on the learner’s blind obedience to authority works against cultivating the learner’s choice (English, 2011, p. 188). When we ask students to question this reality without more outlets or conversations to take action, what are the consequences?

In discussing with Ms. Bee after the first and second year of the study, I mentioned to her that perhaps a unit was needed to discuss contemporary Native American activists and the tools and strategies they use to take action against the injustices they see, Ms. Bee agreed; however, time was a factor she said prevented her from getting to this discussion. There were times when Ms. Bee discussed praxis that students engaged in:

***‘Graduation with nothing but traditional clothes’***

*Ms. Bee shows a picture of three students standing in traditional clothing at a past graduation. She explains, “About ten minutes after graduation, these two girls came*

*up to me, crying and said, 'we just got dress coded'<sup>39</sup> by administration. They told us that we are not in compliance of standards for what we should be wearing for graduation. They asked, 'what do we do?' They were in tears. They said, 'my grandma made this dress for me. My grandma, it took her months to make this for me'. So I said, 'you know what darling? Wear it. See what happens.' Not a dang thing happened. But is that fair for administration to say that you can't wear traditional clothing, and yet we are the Desert View Native American Fighters? We have a Native American fighter as a mascot, but God forbid you actually be Native American. Is there a huge discrepancy there? Does that make sense that you can be a Native American fighter on the field, but you can't dress traditional for your own graduation? Does that make any sense at all?"*

*"Hell no," Grant says.*

*"And those are the things that we have to think about. These are very real issues that we have had to come to terms with. If we are going to be the Desert View Native American Fighters, we better damn well follow through with respecting Native American traditions and expectations," Ms. Bee says.*

*Grant says, "Nice. I'm gonna come in to graduation with nothing but traditional clothes."*

I hear in Grant's voice the same determination that Michael had when he challenged the graduation dress code a year before, the same want to create change, to take action. I hear Ms. Bee asking students to be reflective and critical of their surroundings, of their realities, and to find ways in which to take action against the injustices they now see after being exposed to an entire semester of relations between

Native American communities and dominant ones. And while students like Eileen are taking action by teaching students in her American History class her truth (her perspective on “noble conquerers” that to her are rapers, murders, enactors of genocide), there are others who are denied their new reality and the actions they are taking to correct and to transform their reality, like Michael. Reflection without actions falls short when helping students to construct tools to become actors of change. Rather, we need to combine reflection and action into praxis as they engage in process of becoming conscious or conscientization: “...for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action” (Friere, 1970, p. 68).

I mention what I see as a shortcoming of this classroom not to be critical of the powerful work that Ms. Bee has constructed within this classroom, but to offer an extension to future teachers, researchers, community members who may be working in a similar capacity as Ms. Bee. I am not exempt from this. I, too, need to continue analyzing my future teaching as a professor, my future thinking as a researcher and the ways in which I work with students and community members to construct praxis as they engage in conscientization *with* me, for “...it is vital that educators and educational leaders engage Indigenous students in a decolonizing process of praxis, dialogue, and self-reflection to sustain and privilege Indigenous knowledge systems while simultaneously addressing contemporary goals and issues within the schooling context” (Garcia & Shirley, 2012, p. 76).

English (2011) says that teachers must enact *pedagogical tact*, which “requires that teachers judge on the basis of looking, listening to, and taking in students questions, difficulties, struggles, and frustrations in all aspects of learning, “ (p. 186). I focus on the

last part of this statement: “In all aspects of learning.” How can we include the changing learning contexts—the changing power structures that move with students from different spaces, from classroom to community, from city to reservation, from student to active member of society—into classroom discussions? How can we engage in the struggle with students (particularly, as is the case with many teachers in urban schools, when we are not fully from the communities that our students are from) as they learn to find their voice in the face of historical silence?

McCarty et al. (1991) suggests in their study that silencing experiences may not be due to Native American cultural and learning practices, but because students may not know how to begin to speak up for the injustices done to their histories and their knowledge as they have been trained over time to be silent in an academic context. How can we teach students to begin to speak up for the injustices done to their histories, communities, and knowledges? How can we help students enact their rhetorical sovereignty? How can we help them practice their thoughts, practice their stories, and engage in the struggle of reflection and action? What might be the cost of “becoming critical” in thought but not action?

Perhaps the role of the teacher as facilitator should move toward one as co-researcher and co-discoverer with students. One in which teacher and students are making sense of the realities they all face outside of the school walls, that are impactful and important to their immediate identity construction in a complicated and confusing reality. For Ms. Bee, she based future readings and discussions on what was discussed in the present moment. She researched about what was discussed and brought in new articles, new readings that might bear new light, new insight to enrich the conversation

that had just happened so that they could collectively continue to engage in the zone of contact with new resources, new voices to cite in their own thinking. In this way, while she has a curriculum in place, she constantly was adding, subtracting, substituting articles, readings, movies, important historical Native peoples for others. She is in process with students, allowing their words and worlds to enter into the classroom.

In this way, Ms. Bee is seeing herself as a constant learner, often reflecting on where her thinking is now and where she still needs growth *with* students. An extension to this growth *with* students, perhaps, should include ways in which Ms. Bee and her students (and researchers) can use their new knowledge to enact change before students are faced with situations and settings that don't make any sense to them. Petrone suggests that teachers should be "Recognizing conflicts as potentially useful learning opportunities [that] may help illuminate for teachers the integral nature of learning skills and content with identity formation" (Petrone, 2010, p. 126). In reference to Freire's (1970) use of the term praxis: teachers should not only recognize conflicts, but engage students in conversations that ask them: What would you do in a situation in which your identity, culture, and history is ignored, invalidated, and silenced? An important extension to this line of questioning is our duty—as mentors, advocates, human beings—to help students become aware of potential obstacles in their process of action. What happens when you attempt to change the dress code for graduation to include your cultural traditions and are outright denied and refused? What happens when you attempt to change the school's mascot, revealing the damage felt as a Native American, and still students and administration don't hear you? What happens when you are laughed at by students and teachers for knowing whom Chief Sitting Bull is? In general, what happens when



*reflection* leads to situations where we take *action* and are faced with realities and dominant societal structures that play by different rules, that hide behind cowardly statements such as “That’s just district policy” and “That’s just the way things are”? If we ask these questions, we engage in the struggle with students as we prepare them for situations and confrontations they might not be able to envision for themselves. We need to engage in the struggle with them so that the actions of Michael, of Keene, of Eileen are not in vein, but in process of discovering ways in which to learn to enact the change we would like seen.

To make sense of what this might look like, Kinloch and I (2013) use the term “Projects in Humanization (PiH).” PiH is a “framework for telling, retelling, and representing stories in nonlinear ways... to listen—closely and carefully—to *what* young people are saying, and *how* and *for what reasons* they are saying it” (p. 26). And while we are listening—and validating through listening within the dialogic spiral—I suggest that the next step in Projects in Humanization is for us—as teachers, researchers, community members, etc.—to engage in the process of becoming with those we mentor, advocate for, teach and learn with— not just in reflection, but also in action—so as to develop praxis with others, to become conscious with them as we, too, engage in the struggle, instead of taking a backseat observatory position in their struggle. And while I am not Native American, I share Kovach’s position: “For many Indigenous peoples in contemporary academic [contexts] in this country...merely walking though (or out of) mainstream doors, we tend to make spaces alive with a politicality that creates both tension and possibility” (2005, p. 20). If we are to continue to work with marginalized populations living in oppressive conditions as teachers and researchers, we need to walk

“through (or out of) mainstream doors” with our participants and students. As we enact our conscientization—our often times confusing and contradictory process of becoming conscious—we need to reflect and act with and not separate from those whose stories and lived realities are shared with us.

We must prepare students, especially students from marginalized populations, to engage in the struggle as has been echoed in the work done with urban and marginalized populations (Brayboy, 2005; González, 2001; Hill, 2009; Irizarry, 2011; Kinloch, 2010, 2012; Kirkland, 2008; McCarty et al., 1991; Morrell, 2004; Paris, 2011; Romero-Little, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2010; Winn, 2011). To cultivate critical, compassionate, and understanding students, we need to expose them to realities that are different than their own. To do so, we need to expose them to issues of power, to issues of colonization, to the ways in which society has failed as well as succeeded. Even in a classroom like this that centers its curriculum solely on Native American histories, literacies, issues and perspectives, students are learning what it means to be Indigenous and how that definition is different from person to person, tribe to tribe, country to country. Students from other ethnicities and cultures also engage in this struggle and see commonalities that colonization and power have upon their families, upon their communities, and realities. Even though it is centered on Native American literature, the real focus of this classroom was in making sense of the struggle. How can we continue to awaken our own critical inner voices? How can we teach others to awaken theirs? How can we help others engage in a dialogic spiral that is impactful for everyone, where learning other truths takes precedence over maintaining your own? And how can we produce Projects in Humanization that engages in praxis? How can we engage in story-ing with them?

When asking Ms. Bee about what she hopes students will leave with after spending a semester or year in her classroom with her, she helps in answering some of the prior questions:

In any class, I want them to know that their voice matters, their stories matter. It's important to tell your story, to write your story down and to hear other people's stories and to think for yourself. It's important to realize that the world is not all rainbows and people pooping out skittles, it's kind of a crappy place we live in so let's make it better. I tell them that my goal isn't to heal the world, but to heal my little pocket of the world. If I heal that pocket, they can heal other pockets. I've told them before, yes, it's important to read and write, but it's more important to know how to be a human being. It's important to know that we do affect others. We can see the world around us. We're not untouchable. What we do has repercussions on others, so live your life wisely. (Interview, Oct. 4, 2012)

It seems as though Ms. Bee has already been engaging in Projects in Humanization—rather—in *Practices in Humanization*<sup>40</sup> in her teaching and in her life. She is helping students to engage in critical conversations emotionally and respectfully, while, at the same time, encouraging stories from their communities, families, and cultures to make their way into the classroom. She is helping them realize that their actions affect those around them and that their position in this world has impact.

As we are attempting to sustain the cultures, languages, and realities that students bring with them to school each and every day, we must also engage in the political act of resisting and accepting the voices, lessons, and structures that are at play in schools and in communities (Gracia & Shirley, 2012; Paris, 2012). Finders (1997) says, “Rather than viewing a class as a safe haven, perhaps it would be more productive to openly articulate the obstacles, barriers, and risks that accompany literacy learning. Students need assistance in this struggle” (p. 26). In what ways can we be facilitators and co-participants in their development of conscientization? Perhaps we use time in our classrooms to report back findings in our realities. To use our realities as opportunities

and sites of self-research. To bring contemporary issues and ways to solve them into our classrooms.

I wonder, had Michael been given a space within the Native American literature class to update others on the obstacles, barriers, and issues he faced when he was taking action, might he have had the confidence, the support, and the direction to succeed? And if the dominant and oppressive structures did prevail, might he have had the support, the confidence, and the shared struggle to have graduated despite the structures at play, while encouraging those younger than him to continue the struggle? To complicate it even further, if we, as educators, researchers, and community members take action with others, would we be nearing an area that falls outside the safety zone and thereby negating the work that we've done? How can we continue in the face of injustices if we play on the margins of what is safe and what, to some, may be considered dangerous?

This struggle is one I have faced every day and one that Ms. Bee, and all of my participants have engaged with. At times, participants here could not make sense of the struggle and made decisions that impacted them greatly. On the Flathead Indian Reservation, I understand, now, that perhaps we were not trusted with such power to have critical-thinking minds; we were feared for having the capacity to deal with the realities surrounding us in taking action. I wonder, if my friends, who decided to leave school, if they had been exposed to a NALit course taught in a way that engaged in problem posing, that had a teacher who constructed a safe environment while dwelling in the zone of contact, would they have seen the worth in their education? Would they have dealt with the other classroom and community spaces that invalidated their histories, cultures and beliefs? What would a classroom like this have done for them?

Perhaps they would have echoed the sentiments of the participants in this study: For Abby and Eileen, they were able to make sense of their changing contexts while using knowledges from marginalized perspectives to enter into those new spaces. For Nisha and Stacy, they were able to engage in vulnerable personal experiences to see the commonalities of emotion, which allowed them to engage in the dialogic spiral learning environment. For Vince and Keene, they felt compelled to voice their frustration, their positions and realities in a heated, yet safe discourse environment, while allowing other students to engage in critical listening strategies to accept, deny, and modify the lessons exposed in such zones of contact. For Ms. Bee, her identity, curriculum, and knowledge construction was in development with her students as she allowed their voices and critical understandings to fuel the learning environment. Perhaps students and teachers in future classrooms might find the relevance and sustenance in a course such as this.

### **What are the Benefits of a Course like Native American Literature?**

I take this last moment to discuss the implications of a course like Native American literature taught by a socially conscientious teacher like Ms. Bee with students like the participants herein in the hopes that more teachers, more schools, and more students will—sad as it is to say—take a risk to construct and be taught in a setting that acknowledges the many perspectives, understandings, and knowledges that comprise this nation. In thinking back to the stories shared, the lessons taught, the bonds and friendships forged within this class, I ask: What is lost when our curriculum is comprised of one truth to history, one take on literacy, one perspective and knowledge from the dominant, white Eurocentric position? (In addition, what is gained by white policy

makers when one dominant and standardized curriculum is forced upon our teachers, students, and communities?)

While this dissertation discusses how a significant shift from Eurocentric to Indigenous perspectives on knowledge construction impacts students in this space, I believe it's more than that. It's about the many stories, histories, truths of many peoples that are hidden in our curriculum, silenced in our schools, denied in academic spaces. As I think about the possibility that a course such as this has upon all the students of our nation, I envision classroom spaces not as places to regurgitate facts and figures that we may or may not agree with, but a place to become critical thinkers, actors, and agents of social change in our communities. I envision classrooms that are fueled by conversations whereby multiple positions are voiced, heard, constructively challenged. I see opportunities for students to be proud of where they come from—the opinions and positions they've been taught at home—all while learning to allow others' truths to impact their own. I see teachers like Ms. Bee who are not afraid to be vulnerable in front of students; teachers who take chances in the face of legislation and curriculum standards that may limit their impact upon students; teachers who believe that they are learning with and not to their students; teachers who see the impact pedagogy can have when trust, respect, and mutual admiration fuel knowledge construction; teachers who have a genuine interest in the knowledge and cultural expertise that all students bring with them to school.

When places in our nation ban ethnic studies as Arizona has, I ask again: Who's ethnicities are they banning? Who's ethnicities are they forcefully emphasizing? And if they are banning certain ethnicities (apart from the ethnicities of Western Europeans,

which of course comprise the current “ethnic studies” of the literary and historical canon) what are we afraid of as a society? What is lost in the ban? Who is continuing to be silenced? And at what cost? It pains me to think of students like Eileen who have been denied their truth for years to the point where they have to make “oaths” to themselves not to learn anything in her American history class. Or Abby who may have continued to believe in one dominant history before being impacted by the stories of others in this class. Or Harmon and Beatriz who would not have had the opportunity to discover more about their family’s histories. Or Keene who would not have had the chance to reflect on why he was hoping the Indians would be defeated by the cowboys as a young boy. Or Vince who, despite staying strong in his opinion about a demeaning mascot, allowed some doubt to enter into his thinking. Or Charlotte who had an opportunity to make her ancestors proud by speaking her truth in a classroom that gave her the opportunity to. Or on and on and on.

What is lost in such a ban? Students are lost. Stories are lost. Histories are lost. Languages are lost.

What is gained when classrooms like Native American literature are valued?

### ***Genuine Learning***

*In the final reflection that Ms. Bee had students write to close out the semester, Edgar finished his essay with the following statement:*

*As we learned about our Native heritage, we were forced to examine the way we learn, the way we know, the way we see, OUR discriminations and prejudices. We learned about ourselves, but more importantly, we learned about each other. We*

*learned about how humans with all their flaws can love each other for simply being, where classmates can share their concerns and not-understandings, and teaching can truly happen. It is not just repetition and copying but genuine learning. (Written, May 24, 2010)*



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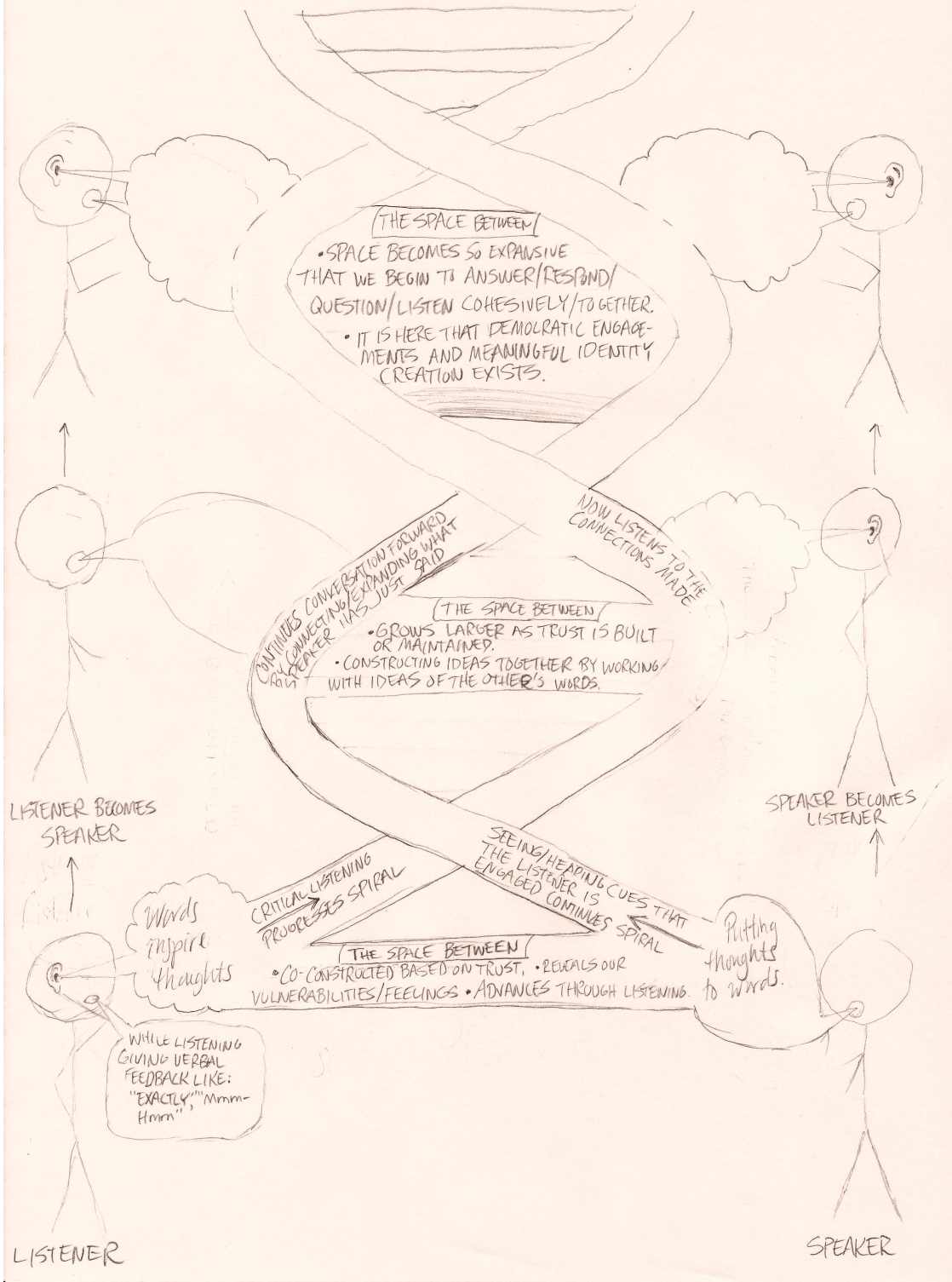


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APPENDIX 1  
THE DIALOGIC SPIRAL

# DIALOGIC SPIRAL



APPENDIX 2  
WRITING GROUP GUIDELINES

## Writing group guidelines

Please remember that for many students, this process is a bit scary the first time. So come with a non-judgmental attitude and a willingness to help your group members strengthen their writing pieces by offering gentle suggestions. You will want the same from your group when it is your time to read.

Here is the process: Each student will read his or her piece out loud *SLOWLY* while the rest of the group members read their copies in front of them. After your group member has read, it is your responsibility to help make the piece better. Please write all over the paper! Once you have done that, *VERBALLY* offer the following:

\*Praise what you liked. Be specific about lines, phrases, and images that worked for you. Underline, star, happy face these parts so your group member can see you liked it.

\*Ask for clarification. If there were parts that you did not understand or that you thought were lacking, ask questions in order for your group member to know where to fill in the holes. Did the piece answer who, what, where, when, why, how? Did the piece paint a picture in your head? Were all parts of speech in there? Specific nouns, lively verbs, adjectives, adverbs, transitions? If not, what could be changed or added? Avoid using "You should" when offering suggestions. It is not your writing piece! Use "you could" instead.

\*Help your group member with any editing of grammar, spelling, punctuation, or mechanics. Help to polish up the piece.

On the bottom of the paper, write what specifically you liked about the overall piece *AND* offer one suggestion for how to improve the piece.

After the first person has read and the *ENTIRE GROUP* offered their input, give that group member his or her copies back. Move on to the next person.

Using your writing group's suggestions, rewrite the piece until it is a *PERFECT* paper. Depending on the writing piece and time, you may go through as little as one revision or as many as three revisions before writing your final. Mrs. Box will clarify how many revisions are expected for each piece.

APPENDIX 3  
REFLECTION 1

### Reflection 1

1. Share with me what you think about this quote. "...the damaging effects of a biased history continue to impact all children and especially Native children." Agree or disagree, giving personal examples for support if possible. Again, think back to your own education over the past 18 years. Are you even GETTING a "real" comprehensive education about American history?
2. Choose two quotes from any of the handouts I gave you about historical bias and perspectives and share with me how they tie into your own belief system.
3. What did you learn about the difficulty of teaching historical events from our timeline activity? Was it hard to choose "important" events on your own? What about with a partner? How do you think historians choose curriculum for today's textbooks?
4. How did watching the video clips affect your perspective of American/ Native American history? Please use specific clips and your emotional/psychological/intellectual responses for support.
5. Which video clip had the most impact on you? Why?
6. Colonel Chivington said before the Sand Creek massacre: "Kill and scalp all, big and little; nits make lice." What does this mean? Why does he compare the Native Americans to lice? Contrast this with White Antelope, who died in front of his tipi wearing Lincoln's peace medal singing his death song, "Nothing lives long except the earth and the mountains." What does this mean? What do the quotes and actions say about these men's characters?
7. Reflect on the quote: "All true power moves in a circle." Give me examples from the video clips and/or your own life for support.
8. Choose one of the following quotes and share with me why you chose it, what it means to you, and how it relates to your own life.

"Our people still live. We live, and so we have hope."

"The only history a man knows for certain is that small part he owns for himself. You can't forget we're all part of the same wheel, the hubs and the spokes and the felloes. You break one, and you break the wheel."

"When you tell your stories, you touch your grandmothers and grandfathers and all the ancestors who walked before them."

"It's important for people to know where they came from and what others have been through."

"Now, this story belongs to you."
9. Please critique this class so far. What activities have you liked? What suggestions would you make to ensure it is interesting and relevant for next year's students? What is the biggest lesson you have learned so far in this class?



APPENDIX 4  
SOCRATIC DISCUSSIONS



**Socratic discussions!**

For each statement or quote, **each** student must discuss his or her opinion, adding additional support or quotes from the literature we have read and/or the video we watched over the past three weeks.

**\*Begin the discussion by reiterating what you told your neighbor:**

Out of everything we have discussed/read/watched over the past 3 weeks, what is the most important lesson you have learned about what it means to be a true warrior?

**1. CHIEF JOSEPH**

- "... too many misunderstandings have come up between white men and Indians."
- "I know that my race must change. We cannot hold our own with white men as we are." Do you agree or disagree? Explain, using modern and/or historical examples.
- "... we soon found that the white men were growing rich very fast and were greedy to possess everything the Indian had." Is this still true of today? Why or why not?
- Do you think Native Americans are "free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and talk and act for myself..."? Support your opinion.
- How is Chief Joseph a Warrior? Give specific examples for support.

**2. JOHN TRUDELL**

- "... does the white man oppress us, or do we oppress ourselves?" Which is it?
- "... the white people, they do not feel oppressed; they feel powerless... we do not feel powerless; we feel oppressed." What is the difference? Agree or disagree?
- "The white man is going to have to accept... that he is in the wrong."
- "I burn the American flag because it's been desecrated." Do you agree or disagree?
- Is John Trudell a warrior or an agitator? Support your opinion.

**3. WARRIOR MASCOT AND FEATHER FOR GRADUATION DEBATES**

- From the cartoon: "But I'm HONORING you, dude!" Agree or disagree?
- "If you are fighting against a perceived injustice, is the proper recourse to go out and do the very same thing?" What do you think? Support your opinion.
- "Mesa should catch up with the rest of the country and change their mascot."
- "A warrior is a person who goes to battle for standing up for what they are, where they come from, their people... How is playing football, basketball, tennis, track, etc. proving yourself? Do sports prove modern day warriors? Explain your opinion.
- "Rich Crandall... opposed making an exception to the rule for eagle feathers because it would open the door for other students wanting to display symbols of their own culture or background." Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Crandall?

**4. ANNA LEE WALTERS**

- "For beauty is why we live... We die for it, too." Do true warriors die for beauty?
- "Now that we are old and Uncle Ralph has been gone for a long time, Sister and I know that when he died, he was tired and alone. But he was a warrior."

## 5. INCIDENT AT OGLALA

- Many of the people at Pine Ridge spoke highly of AIM and wanted them there for protection, because AIM spoke for the traditional Indian people and represented a “Warrior Society.” Do you agree with AIM’s presence on Pine Ridge, or do you think their presence exacerbated already high tensions?
- AIM members said that while on Pine Ridge, they were there HELPING people understand what a warrior society is by promoting a better way of life through example, i.e. chopping wood, getting water, and advocating sobriety, because “their only courage up to that point was when they were drunk.” Are Native Americans who live on reservations today living in a “warrior society”?
- Leonard Peltier said he will not fight his unjust imprisonment because it’s “what being a warrior is all about...I still have my dignity and respect.” Agree?

APPENDIX 5  
REFLECTION 2

## Reflection 2

Please choose FIVE quotes or concepts to write about. Everyone must answer question 1, so you have FOUR more to choose. Write the number and letter for each answer. Please thoroughly share your opinions, adding additional support from the literature and/or video. I look forward to reading your answers. .

\*1. Out of everything we have discussed/read/watched over the past 3 weeks, what is the most important lesson you have learned about what it means to be a true warrior? Do you think that YOU are a warrior? Why or why not? Use examples for support.

### 2. CHIEF JOSEPH

- a. "...too many misunderstandings have come up between white men and Indians."
- b. "I know that my race must change. We cannot hold our own with white men as we are." Do you agree or disagree? Explain, using modern and/or historical examples.
- c. "...we soon found that the white men were growing rich very fast and were greedy to possess everything the Indian had." Is this still true of today? Why or why not?
- d. Do you think Native Americans are "free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and talk and act for myself..."? Support your opinion.
- e. How is Chief Joseph a Warrior? Give specific examples for support.

### 3. JOHN TRUDELL

- a. "...does the white man oppress us, or do we oppress ourselves?" Which is it?
- b. "...the white people, they do not feel oppressed; they feel powerless... we do not feel powerless; we feel oppressed." What is the difference? Agree or disagree?
- c. "The white man is going to have to accept...that he is in the wrong."
- d. "I burn the American flag because it's been desecrated." Do you agree or disagree?
- e. Is John Trudell a warrior or an agitator? Support your opinion.

### 4. WARRIOR MASCOT AND FEATHER FOR GRADUATION DEBATES

- a. From the cartoon: "But I'm HONORING you, dude!" Agree or disagree?
- b. "If you are fighting against a perceived injustice, is the proper recourse to go out and do the very same thing?" What do you think? Support your opinion.

- c. "Mesa should catch up with the rest of the country and change their mascot."
- d. "A warrior is a person who goes to battle for standing up for what they are, where they come from, their people... How is playing football, basketball, tennis, track, etc. proving yourself? Do sports prove modern day warriors? Explain your opinion.
- e. "Rich Crandall... opposed making an exception to the rule for eagle feathers because it would open the door for other students wanting to display symbols of their own culture or background." Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Crandall?

#### 5. ANNA LEE WALTERS

- a. "For beauty is why we live... We die for it, too." Do true warriors die for beauty?
- b. "Now that we are old and Uncle Ralph has been gone for a long time, Sister and I know that when he died, he was tired and alone. But he was a warrior." Agree?

#### 6. INCIDENT AT OGLALA

- a. Many of the people at Pine Ridge spoke highly of AIM and wanted them there for protection, because AIM spoke for the traditional Indian people and represented a "Warrior Society." Do you agree with AIM's presence on Pine Ridge, or do you think their presence exacerbated already high tensions?
- b. AIM members said that while on Pine Ridge, they were there HELPING people understand what a warrior society is by promoting a better way of life through example, i.e. chopping wood, getting water, and advocating sobriety, because "their only courage up to that point was when they were drunk." Are Native Americans who live on reservations today living in a "warrior society"?
- c. Leonard Peltier said he will not fight his unjust imprisonment because it's "what being a warrior is all about... I still have my dignity and respect." Agree?

*Is Leonard Peltier a warrior? Use a quote from something we read from him to support your opinion.*

APPENDIX 6  
REFLECTION 3

### Reflection 3

*Share with me what you have learned about mission schools and American education versus Native American education based on what we read, watched, discussed, and experienced over the past week. You must choose 5 questions. Everyone must answer question 6. Please be as thorough as possible, and use citations from the handouts for support. I look forward to reading your answers.*

- 1. On the first day of this unit, I wanted you to experience on a miniscule scale what it might have been like to be in a mission school. What were your impressions of this activity? What do you think you would have had the hardest time with if you were in a mission school?*
- 2. What did you learn from Code Talker? What was the most powerful part for you? Why?*
- 3. What was the most powerful drawing from the mural? What was the artist trying to say?*
- 4. From the clip Into the West, what part about the mission schools had the most impact on you? Why? Was there a specific quote or scene that made you angry or that you disagreed with? Share it with me. What do you think about General Pratt and Mr. Wheeler?*
- 5. What do you think are some overall concerns with Native American parents and students regarding "American Education"? What are YOUR concerns about American Education?*
- 6. Critique this unit. What did you like? What would you suggest to take out, add, or improve?*



APPENDIX 7  
FINAL REFLECTION

## Native American Literature Class Final Reflection

For your final reflection, I would like you to choose **THREE** units to critique/reflect on. Additionally, everyone must answer questions 8 and 9, so you will answer a total of **FIVE** questions. I would like for you to share what you learned during the unit, as well as what you would suggest to keep, take out, or add. Please be honest, as you are an integral piece of the overall puzzle that will continue to shape this class so that we can ensure that this amazing class will remain in Mesa Public School's curriculum. I look forward to reading everyone's reflection. Take a deep breath, and begin.

### **Unit 1: Finding Our Stories**

Reflect on the first activity we did as a class where you created a visual logo and connected it with a personal story, which you then shared in our feather circle. How did it feel sharing your story? How did you feel your story was received by classmates? What did you like about the activity? How can I improve this unit?

### **Unit 2: Finding Our Lost History**

Reflect on your feelings about the movie *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, as well as the clips from *Into the West*, including the Sand Creek Massacre. Reflect on the perspective activity, where you had to describe a stuffed animal from your limited perspective. How did that relate to how you have learned history the past 18 years? Reflect on the timeline activity, where you learned 13 pages worth of Native American history and then created a timeline to teach the rest of the school what they have not been taught. What did you like from this unit? How can it be better?

### **Unit 3: Finding Our Tribes**

Reflect on the map activities, where you learned about some of the tribes throughout the United States, including the 21 tribes in Arizona. Reflect on the group activity where you had the opportunity to research a tribe and teach others about that tribe. What did you like about the unit? How can I improve it?

### **Unit 4: Finding Our Neighbors**

Reflect on learning about specific tribes in Arizona, including the Salt River Pima Maricopa, O'odham and Navajo tribes. What did you learn about their basketry, pottery, history, and sacred symbols? What was the most powerful section of the mural we analyzed that depicted the Navajo tribe? What did you learn from the book *Goat in the Rug*? What did you learn about your classmates and yourself as you shared your how-to books in your feather circle? Suggestions of improvement?

### **Unit 5: Finding Our Warriors:**

Reflect on what you learned about warriors Chief Joseph and John Trudell. What did you learn about being a warrior from Anna Lee Walter's short story "The Warriors?" What do you think about sports teams that use Native American warriors as mascots, including Westwood's own warrior? Reflect on what you learned from Leonard Peltier. Is he a warrior? Explain your opinion.

#### Unit 6: Finding Our Inner Poetry

Reflect on the poetry we read during this unit. What was your favorite poem we read and why? Were you proud of the poems you wrote during this unit? What poem that you wrote was your favorite and why? What main lesson did you learn from this unit?

#### Unit 7: Finding Our True Education

What did you learn about mission schools from the book Code Talker? What did you learn from the video clip we watched and the mural we analyzed about mission schools? Should this information be taught to all students? Why or why not? How do you think you would have acted if you were forced to attend a mission school? Do you have any family members who were educated this way? Please share with me.

#### Unit 8: Finding Our Future:

What did you learn about the human spirit from Sherman Alexie, his interview, short stories and poems? Write down your favorite quote from *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and why you chose it, including any connection you made with the quote. Is the book appropriate as part of a school curriculum? Explain.

#### Unit 9: FINDING YOURSELF ☺

I thank each of you for your participation in this class over the past 5 months. Thank you for your RESPECT and OPEN-MINDEDNESS each of you brought every day to class. Now I would like for you to share with me what you are going to take from this class out into the “real world.” Have you been inspired to become an activist for a cause you believe in? If so, what? How are you going to educate others about issues we discussed in class? How are YOU going to “Walk in beauty”? Please know that each of you has taught me more about myself and how blessed I am to have such amazing students as you. I love you all for who you are and who you are becoming.

APPENDIX 8  
IRB ORIGINAL APPROVAL

To: Django Paris

From: Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh Full Board

Date: 12/28/2009

Committee Action: Approval

IRB Action Date: 12/28/2009

Approval Date: 12/18/2009

IRB Protocol #: 0909004387

Study Title: Reading, Writing, and Culture Among Native American High School Students

Expiration Date: 12/17/2010

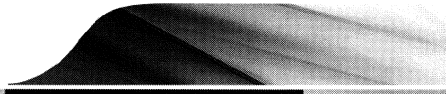
The above-referenced protocol has been APPROVED following Full Board Review by the Institutional Review Board.

This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date noted above. Please allow sufficient time for continued approval. Research activity of any sort may not continue beyond the expiration date without committee approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol on the expiration date. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study termination.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh Full Board immediately. If necessary a member of the Committee will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh Full Board. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

APPENDIX 9  
IRB CONTINUATION #1



**To:** Django Paris

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair   
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 12/17/2010

**Committee Action:** Renewal

**Renewal Date:** 12/17/2010

**Review Type:** Expedited F9

**IRB Protocol #:** 0909004387

**Study Title:** Reading, Writing, and Culture Among Native American High School Students

**Expiration Date:** 12/16/2011

The above-referenced protocol was given renewed approval following Expedited Review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval of ongoing research before the expiration noted above. Please allow sufficient time for reapproval. Research activity of any sort may not continue beyond the expiration date without committee approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol on the expiration date. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study termination.


This approval by the Soc Beh IRB does not replace or supersede any departmental or oversight committee review that may be required by institutional policy.

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.



APPENDIX 10  
CONTINUATION #2





Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

**To:** James Blasingame  
LL

**From:**  Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB 

**Date:** 12/09/2011

**Committee Action:** **Renewal**

**Renewal Date:** 12/09/2011

**Review Type:** Expedited F9

**IRB Protocol #:** 0909004387

**Study Title:** Reading, Writing, and Culture Among Native American High School Students

**Expiration Date:** 12/15/2012

The above-referenced protocol was given renewed approval following Expedited Review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval of ongoing research before the expiration noted above. Please allow sufficient time for reapproval. Research activity of any sort may not continue beyond the expiration date without committee approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol on the expiration date. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study termination.

This approval by the Soc Beh IRB does not replace or supersede any departmental or oversight committee review that may be required by institutional policy.

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

APPENDIX 11  
IRB MODIFICATION





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Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

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**To:** James Blasingame  
LL

**From:**  Mark Roosa, Chair   
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 03/02/2012

**Committee Action:** **Amendment to Approved Protocol**

**Approval Date:** 03/02/2012

**Review Type:** Expedited F12

**IRB Protocol #:** 0909004387

**Study Title:** Reading, Writing, and Culture Among Native American High School Students

**Expiration Date:** 12/15/2012

The amendment to the above-referenced protocol has been APPROVED following Expedited Review by the Institutional Review Board. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals that may be required. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval of ongoing research before the expiration noted above. Please allow sufficient time for reapproval. Research activity of any sort may not continue beyond the expiration date without committee approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol on the expiration date. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study termination.

This approval by the Soc Beh IRB does not replace or supersede any departmental or oversight committee review that may be required by institutional policy.

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

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<sup>1</sup> All student names, schools, and locations are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

<sup>2</sup> The stories James tells me here are from an interview on March 9, 2010. So as not to

<sup>2</sup> The stories James tells me here are from an interview on March 9, 2010. So as not to disturb the flow of his story, I use this endnote to cite when James told this story to me.

<sup>3</sup> By “dominant”, I am referring to what White-Kaulaity refers to as the “voices of power”: those voices that have written and created the narratives, the stories, the teachings in public schooling that reveals only the western white male perspective. For example: A dominant perspective taught in schools is that America was discovered by Columbus when, in fact, indigenous peoples had been living in America for thousands of years before this “discovery”.

<sup>4</sup> Two articles that discuss the root cause and issue of this legislation can be found at:

<http://articles.latimes.com/2010/may/08/nation/la-na-ethnic-studies-20100508>

<http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2010/05/ethnic-studies-banned-arizona>

<sup>5</sup> While some of my Native American friends did transfer or choose not to graduate from high school, others have gone on to earn bachelors, masters, and law degrees. Two of my closest friends graduated from Dartmouth College. One of them, Casey Lozar, went on to earn a masters degree at Harvard, was VP of Resource Development at the American Indian College Fund and is currently the Chief Marketing and Development Officer for the Notah Begay III Foundation. Another close friend, Josh Morigeau, earned his law degree from the University of Montana and now works as a civil and criminal defense lawyer in Polson, MT.

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the data collected in this Native American discussion group was not included in this dissertation. Students from Ms. Bee’s class in the first, second, and third year were all invited and members from each class often attended these discussions (anywhere from four to twelve students participated). We met afterschool nine times over the course of the spring 2012 semester. Edgar and I shared in buying pizza and bringing them to a park that lay at the border of the reservation and city. This park no longer exists as it was purchased by a baseball team for spring training. Although, I recorded and transcribed all nine meetings, there was not enough room to give tribute to the discussions there. In time, they will be shared, just not now.

<sup>7</sup> (See Okakok, 1989; Meyer, 2001; Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999; Kleinfeld, 1970 for further reading that justify many of the practices with Native American students that Ms. Bee includes within this class statement).

<sup>8</sup> Ladson-Billings (1995) notes the importance of teacher’s dispositions (tolerance, flexibility, temperament) toward their students in creating successful learning environments, particularly teachers of students of color. Ms. Bee is emphasizing her willingness to engage in such tolerant dispositions.

<sup>9</sup> In class, students would often refer to people of the Cherokee tribe as “wanna-be Indians.” For example, Erin from the second pilot study said in a conversation about Native American identity: “I think [being Native American] is based on blood. You can’t be something you’re not. But then you look at the Cherokee’s and they’re Native American, but they get stereotyped as not being Native American.”

When I asked why that is she said, “I feel that people who are white say that they are Cherokee. They just look that way. It’s just kindof a stereotype within Native Americans about Cherokees” (Oct. 27, 2010).

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Erin may be referring to how the federal government defines Native Americans. During the years 1899-1906, the governments asked Native Americans to sign their names to the Dawes Rolls. Having signed this roll meant that they were designated full-blood Native American. From these rolls, the federal government could then track what blood quantum subsequent generations were. The problem with this system was that when the government asked Native Americans to sign these sheets, there was much distrust and many did not sign them, thus they were given no federal recognition. On the reverse side, many people who had no tribal connection did sign the rolls and were defined as Indian: "...in Oklahoma, it was not uncommon for individuals with no Indian ancestry, but with active homesteading ambitions...to seek to acquire places on the rolls through dishonest means" (Garrouette, 2001, p. 233). Because many such homesteaders were successful, there is skepticism of who is and is not of Cherokee descent.

<sup>10</sup> Multiple times, Ms. Bee did, in fact, alter her syllabus to include impromptu stories, authors, and ideas that students brought to her attention. She is very open to having students bring in materials that they feel are important to the teaching in the class. Being open, not rigid or stuck on a standards driven curriculum, opens up opportunities for students to share what they know thus providing more incentive and motivation for them to pay attention to what's being taught and presented. Student centered curriculum is crucial here. She has stated openly that she does not know everything and that she is very eager and open to learn what they know.

For example, during Unit 4: Finding Our Warriors, Ms. Bee says to the class: "Edgar, who was visiting yesterday, in one of his final reflections to me that made me cry, he said that he loved this class because it was organic. He said that you guys basically created the class and that's true. Because of one student in here now, I am changing what my plans were for next week. As soon as the suggestion to learn about Leonard Peltier came up, I was like 'he is a warrior.' It makes sense that he should be in this unit. I did not know that he wrote his own book, so as soon as school got out, I went straight to the bookstore, and I got his book and fell asleep with his book on my face. I could not put this down. It is the most amazing writing. It is called *Prison Writing: My Life is My Sun Band*. So what we are going to do next week is be learning about Leonard Peltier and then we're going to be watching *Incident at Oglala* so that we can continue to learn about warriors and their struggles. So again you guys are the ones that are creating this curriculum, so if you have something that you want to learn about in here, I'm willing to throw everything out so that this is a meaningful class for you."

Keene raises his hand and asks, "You can find that at any bookstore right?"

"Actually, this was hard to come by. I had to go all the way to the (faraway) mall to find it because it's a good book. I think I got the last copy," she says.

"We should take a class field trip and break him out," Keene suggests.

That night, I ordered two copies of this book, and lent them to students who wanted to read a portion or all of it. Keene was the first to read it. As he entered the classroom while having the book in his possession, I asked him to give me an update on what was happening in the book.

<sup>11</sup> These ideas were constructed using the elements of the dialogic spiral while co-authoring a chapter with Dr. Valerie Kinloch in *Humanizing Research*. While constructing the chapter, Kinloch and I would skype our conversations. When she spoke,

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I would write notes on the ideas she was stating that impacted my reality. When I spoke, she did the same thing. In this way, our individual ideas became our collective realities captured within the chapter. We gave back to the conversation by seeing non-verbal queues online and by recording each other's words to move the conversation upward in a spiral fashion.

<sup>12</sup> In the first year, Ms. Bee only gave them one option, the shield. In the second year, she gave them four options. In her latest class (spring 2013), she opened it up to any symbol of their choosing. Here were her descriptions of each symbol: 1. Shields: Depending on the tribe, males at various times of their lives went on what were called vision quests. There were many reasons for these quests, but the most common reasons were for the warrior to obtain his spiritual name, to seek out his spirit guide, or both. When the quest came to an end, the warrior told his tribe's Holy Man his visions, which the Holy Man interpreted, and these images were then transferred to the warrior's shield, as well as symbolized on the inside and outside of his tipi. The shield was important to the warrior because of obvious physical protection as well as spiritual protection. Because of the latter reason, shields will never disappear from the cultural identity of the Native American, for it also provides linkage and/or constant identity of the bearer.

2. Tipis: Although tipis are mistakenly thought to be the type of dwelling all Native Americans live in, it is only the Great Plains Indians who lived in these dwellings. Tipis were perfect for these nomadic tribes because they were durable, mobile, and they provided safety and refuge from outside elements. Painted tipis were typically painted in accordance with traditional tribal designs, geometric shapes, or animal designs. As already mentioned, they depicted vision quests and personal experiences.

3. Drums: For hundreds of years, drums have been integral part of the Native American lifestyle. They help guide warrior through their religious ceremonies as well as social gathering and pow wows. Drums also help the drummer to communicate with a higher power known as the Great Spirit. Therefore, drums are more than musical instruments or decorations. They are the voice for the drummer. The drum is made circular to represent the constancy of life and the earth. The beating drum is compared to the beating human heart as well as the heartbeat of the earth. Some tribes use spiritual animals to decorate their drums, while other tribes use geometric shapes. The drums are usually painted with natural earth colors taken from nature to connect the drummer with the heart beat of the earth.

4. Baskets and Pottery: Basket-weaving is one of the oldest known Native American crafts, identified by archaeologists as nearly 8000 years old. Likewise, pottery can be dated back 2000 years. Both baskets and pottery are highly practical as well as beautiful. Designs on the pots and baskets range from basic geometric shapes to images found in nature. Both baskets and pots are also considered sacred products given by Mother Earth, and their designs are part of that sacredness.

<sup>13</sup> Ms. Bee, when discussing the feather circle in a later interview, said that it was not rare for students to skip class during a feather circle class. She could not answer why this was.

<sup>14</sup> Stacy's story:

*What is love without strength? Strength without love? One thing I know for sure isthat together they can help you overcome anything. I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, like any teenage girl, I fell in love. I fell in love, but with the wrong guy. Rather than being in a happy,*

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*stable relationship, it seemed that love was what hurt me the most, I was weak. I admit, I was whooped. I couldn't even step up. I would only cry my heart out. My mind told me to leave him, but my heart could never do it until one day I found the strength. I finally told myself I had enough of him. Yes, it was hard, very. Up to this day, I still have mixed emotions. But thanks to my strength, I am happy. Happier than I have ever been before. I feel free. Unstoppable. Reading to overcome anything and anyone that gets in my way. That's why, thanks to love, I am stronger. Thanks to love, I think differently & I want to share this story because I know I am not the only person out there whether a girl or guy that has been through what I been through. (Written document, Aug. 18, 2011)*

<sup>15</sup> Boarding schools were “arguably the most minutely surveilled and controlled federal institutions created to transform the lives of any group of Americans. The schools controlled a physical *safety zone* in their classrooms and playgrounds that could symbolically neutralize the Native languages, religions, economies, politics, family structures, emotions, and lives that seem to threaten American uniformity and national identity” (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, pp. 2-3).

<sup>16</sup> There are certain stories and writings that are intentionally absent from this dissertation. When, after conducting member reflections, it was decided upon with participants that certain personal stories did not need to be revealed to larger audiences. Many of the stories that Ms. Bee had asked students to write—based on who they are and where they came from—are intentionally not included. They are between Ms. Bee, the participant and sometimes me. These stories are sacred to them; I respect their decision by excluding them.

<sup>17</sup> The amount of underlining, commenting in the margins, and note at the end from Ms. Bee were consistent with all the students' papers for this assignment.

<sup>18</sup> In Ms. Bee's multicultural courses and other writing courses, she refers to these tests as “Celebrations of Knowledge,” but, because of the nature of the course, she felt the word “Celebration” was inappropriate for the context of the classroom, thus “Reflections.”

<sup>19</sup> Methodological note: I reflect on my shortcomings, my hesitancy to engage in the conversations happening in this classroom: I missed wonderful opportunities to share my own story, to engage in the healing process of story-ing. My silence, perhaps, was rooted in the historical processes of engaging in research, in the removal of ourselves from the conversation in order to gain “objective” data. Perhaps my hesitancy to do so is also rooted in my own marginalized positions in academic spaces, relying on silence to get by and fit in. If I am to engage in the construction of safety in this classroom, I must also engage in conversations with my life. How can this be done?

<sup>20</sup> I do not have record of these online discussions; however, I do understand that online discussions and comment boards often include the reification of white supremacy and/or racialized ideologies.

<sup>21</sup> Abby's reflections might be seen as attempting to please the teacher, however, given my multiple data sources and observations of Abby, her learning and shift in knowledge was indeed, at least or in part, genuine.

<sup>22</sup> I realize that I was enacting my own resistance as I interacted in this school environment that, at times, was infuriating, disrespectful, and, in my opinion, socially unjust. This was one of the few times that I allowed my frustration to show, even though no one saw this action, I knew that I was crossing a boundary of activism within my

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research setting. There were other times when this boundary was breached; however, my resistance was resilient in that my appearance remained calm, collected, and strictly observatory. In no way could others see the rage that was quietly mounting with the setting of this school. It was the critical conversations within the Native American classroom that gave me solace, and smothered the rage within me as many students were battling the same rage and enacting their own forms of resistance. By being a member of this transformation, I was able to “deal” with the other contexts and situations outside of this classroom. In this way, I was experiencing many similar emotions, enacting similar resistances with these students and in impromptu conversations, texts, facebook messages, we were able to discuss how we were experiencing different contexts and our new knowledge together. Kovach (2005) says that when enacting Indigenous Methodologies, resistance is very much a part of the research process.

<sup>23</sup> I realize that the term reality is a loaded word without any real grounding; however, I use it in conjunction with the terms positionalities, understandings, and perspectives. Realities to me, is the accumulation of the three terms just listed; it is our cumulative identity up to the present point and how that identity allows us to see and not see the lessons, stories, conversations, and events happening around us.

<sup>24</sup> To understand the Internal (i.e. mind) Safety Zone, I employ methods of dialogic interviews, member reflections, analysis of written works, and one on one impromptu conversations with participants. To understand the Environmental (i.e. world) Safety Zone, I employ methods of ethnographic fieldnotes, audio recordings of classroom—both whole group and small group—conversations.

<sup>25</sup> While Herbart’s viewpoints seem to be directed at the ways in which educators can assimilate the mind, bring it into the fold of what dominant culture views should be important for students, his terms and theoretical positions do provide much guidance into the processes in which we learn and how listening impacts that which we accept and deny. In this way, I am using Herbart’s terms as a way to enact Paris’ Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies, i.e. how can we as educators sustain students’ languages, cultures, perspectives, and community/tribal beliefs, while also including thoughts and teachings that expand their cumulative InternalSZ up to the present point.

<sup>26</sup> I view learning and identity construction as one in the same.

<sup>27</sup> In introducing Vince, I acknowledge that I am revealing damage, heartache, and pain from his reality. I do so not as a way to show the hopelessness, not to show the deficit; rather, I do so to show the strength in Vince’s choices as well as how percap money impacts Vince’s life and the ways in which community is still at the root of his decisions with money. I offer context, not damage, in introducing Vince.

<sup>28</sup> Per cap is the term used by students to refer to per capita payments, which are payments that tribal members receive upon the sale of tribal assets, casino revenues, claims settlements, as well as revenues generated from tribally owned enterprises (mines, dams, companies, etc.). Because this classroom is multi-tribal, students realize the difference in per capita payments among their tribes. For example, the local tribe that borders this reservation receives large amounts of funding while students who are from reservations further away have very little, if any, per capita payments, which has lead to heated discussions.



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<sup>29</sup> Apart from using this introduction as an opportunity to humanize these participants (i.e. show the reader that Keene and Vince are real people with real life situations and consequences), I do so to include the differing communities and contexts that they bring with them into the classroom. This navigation from one community into another is an important consideration moving forward. Participants have attempted to reshape their own communities because of the conversations and knowledges shared within this classroom. Understanding where they come from plays a role in how they are interacting within this class, for “the process of people navigating across discourse communities also has the potential to change the discourse communities themselves” (Moje & Lewis, 2007, p. 10).

<sup>30</sup> Marc Lamont Hill (2009) discusses an authentic black space while teaching a Hip Hop Literature class. The stories of his students about who is black, who has black-ness, and who is pretending to be black, echo some of the conversations and interactions in this classroom. Borrowing his words, there is an authentic Indigenous space that is developing; however, I choose not to follow this as I see the damage in such labels can have on communities.

<sup>31</sup> There is much drawback among Native American communities concerning this film. To combat that, Ms. Bee gave students two printouts: One was a compilation of positive reviews of the movie, another was a compilation of negative reviews. She says, “We don’t just watch movies in here, we need to know what we’re watching.”

<sup>32</sup> Other instances where this occurred:

The bell rings and Ms. Bee stops the movie. Students are gathering their belongings and walking out of class. As this is happening, Keene includes his voice as he is telling some students about the main differences between the movie and the book, which he read previously at home.

John, a Native American male, interrupts Keene saying, “Why don’t you teach this course Keene?”

“Sh-ah, right,” Keene says then removes his voice. (Fieldnotes/class audio recording, Aug. 23, 2011)

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Ms. Bee asks the class concerning a packet of readings she is asking them to read for a unit: “Are these doable?”

Keene immediately responds, “Yes.”

Manny points out: “Since Keene is the only one who said ‘yes,’ I guess that means we all agree.”

Keene removes his voice. (Fieldnotes/class audio recording, Sept. 15, 2011)

<sup>33</sup> Upon completing a draft of this writing, I asked Keene and Amy if they would like to read it. They ecstatically said yes and over their spring break, they read the dissertation and gave me important feedback, particularly on this section. Keene mentioned that his silence was, in part, because he noticed that other students were not speaking, and he wanted to give them an opportunity to contribute to the conversation. As such, he removed his voice, at times, to allow others an opportunity to voice their own understandings (personal communication, March 26, 2013). Keene did not deny that others’ words impacted him in the scenarios above.

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<sup>34</sup> When Keene and his sister read this section, they mentioned the Keene really was having a bad day. I asked Keene if he would still have been frustrated in such a setting. he said he would have been. He added that his anxiety and frustration in other parts of his life (“I’m having a bad day”) led to his verbal outburst. Normally, he said, he would have been able to contain his frustration in a situation like this (personal communication, March 26, 2013). Keene and Amy’s member reflection in this note and in the prior one, do not change my analysis; rather, it deepens it, nuances it. I am so thankful that they took the time to read and reflect with me a year after they were involved in the study.

<sup>35</sup> Edgar, a past student of Ms. Bee’s in the first year of this class, and also a participant in my first pilot research study, asked if he could visit the current NALit class. I asked Ms. Bee if this would be okay, and she said of course. Ms. Bee asked Edgar if he would like to say anything at the end of the day’s discussion, and Edgar accepted. He stood in front of the class and told a story about his friends who travelled to Flagstaff, AZ to protest the fact that the ski mountain was using recycled waste water to create fake snow on this mountain. This act has infuriated many Native Americans who view these mountains as sacred places. Edgar told of how his friends ... (look the specifics up). Here, Keene is citing Edgar’s story, his lesson.

<sup>36</sup> Keene is referring to the film called “The Matrix,” released in 1999 starring Keonu Reeves. In it, the protagonist, Neo (played by Reeves) is given a choice between a red and blue pill. The red pill will awaken him to the real world and all it’s horrors and challenges. The blue pill will allow him to continue living his current dreamed and digitized reality. He chooses the red pill and is thrust into a world where intelligent machines have been harnessing human bodies for electricity for quite some time, keeping them in check by hacking into their minds and playing a false reality for them until the humans perish.

<sup>37</sup> I must apologize before proceeding. I apologize because I realize that I am speaking out of turn. There are many who have come before me that deserve this opportunity to speak their truth, to teach me and others what our schools need. However, I have been given a rare opportunity to be heard, and so, I must take advantage of it. I take this last opportunity to speak candidly, to set a benchmark as to where my thoughts are today so that I can come back years later, re-read them and realize how naïve or wise I was at the time. Right now, this is what I think I know. This is who I am at this moment.

<sup>38</sup> Michael and I are still in touch. We share a lunchtime conversation from time to time. Since this exchange, he told me that he went back to school to finish his credits at a school on his reservation. He is attending a community college at the time of this writing. I include this in the footnote and not in the body of the story because I want to highlight the damage that dominant discourse (such as statements like “It’s district policy” or “That’s the way it has to be”) reveal denied identities, stories, and perspectives is very much a real problem in schools and one that, as Michael reveals, relates to our dropout rates. His self-determination to succeed in spite of Desert View is a true testament to survivance.

<sup>39</sup> Dress coded means that students did not comply to the dress code of the school and are suspect to disciplinary measures by administration.

<sup>40</sup> I move from *Projects* in Humanization to *Practices* in Humanization so that it attributes the everyday practices that people engage with already, rather than projects,

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which carries the connotation of something needing to be taught, given, and learned from an outside source. It is there already; we are all learning ways in which to harness the power of what it means to be human *with* one another (Freire, 1970).