

Becoming 'mitanksi'

Service Learning Reflection Analysis Paper

Human Relations in a Multicultural Society

College of Education

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Introduction

The United States is composed of different cultures that are all mixed up like a bowl of vegetable salad, but each culture can maintain its essential components. In Mankato, the annual Mahkato PowWow is an opportunity to explore the original cultures of the North American plains. [Note: Mahkato is the original Dakota spelling for the city of Mankato.] Native Americans gather at PowWows to make new friendships, share their cultures, and host dance competition. The Mahkato PowWow is held the third weekend of September in Land of Memories Park just outside Mankato. Native people from throughout North America attend this event. And non-Native people attend to learn and to celebrate the Native cultures.

For more than 40 years, Native leaders and Mankato community members have come together at the Mahkato PowWow. One goal is to educate everyone (Native and non-Native alike) about indigenous people's history and cultures. The second is to build reconciliation between the Native community and the non-Native people. For the Native participants, perhaps the most important is to honor the 38 Dakota warriors who were killed in Mankato in the largest mass execution in US history.

To fulfill several course requirements, students from MSU, Mankato participate for a minimum of 18 hours of Academic Service-Learning (ASL). ASL is a teaching and learning methodology that was integrated into the course, Human Relations in a Multicultural Society. In the case of the Mahkato PowWow, MSU students assisted at Education Day, supervised the children's playground, made fry break, directed parking, danced, raised the tipis, etc. These were service activities. Students also received orientation to Native culture in campus classroom meetings, observed Native traditions, interviewed vendors and elders, listened to Native stories,

etc. These were learning activities. Later, students reflected, discussed, wrote papers, and made presentations about their experiences. The entire experience became academic service learning.

Historical Setting

To understand the goals of the Mahkato PowWow, it is important to understand the region's Native and non-Native people. What is the people's history and culture? Why is reconciliation necessary? Why were the 38 Dakota warriors executed?

The area surrounding the Land of Memories Park was the original homeland of an indigenous people now known as the Dakota. On July 23, 1851, the Dakota and the US government signed a treaty at the site known as Traverse des Sioux, near St. Peter, Minnesota. The treaty limited the area on which the Dakota could live and hunt. The assigned areas (known as 'reservations' to the non-Natives and as 'concentration camps' to the Natives) were quickly stripped of wild game. The US government made promises to the Dakota that included provision of foods and materials, etc. However, the government needed resources for the Civil War and did not fulfill promises to the Dakota. Dakota people, including women and children, were starving and freezing (Mahkato Mdewakanton Association. 2014).

During 1862, fighting broke out between Dakota warriors, non-Native homesteaders, and the US military. This war itself lasted for only 6 weeks, but the impact has lasted for generations. A five-man military commission was appointed to try the Dakota who participated in the outbreak. The commission settled up to 40 cases in a single day. Some were heard in as little as five minutes. In all, the commission tried 392 men, sentenced 307 to death and gave 16 prison terms. Many historians today feel the trial was a travesty of justice, and some are pressing for full pardons on behalf of those who were sentenced.

Authority for the final order of execution was passed to President Lincoln. Politicians, military leaders, the press and public pressured him for immediate execution of the 303 still on the condemned list. Lincoln approved death sentences for only 39 of the 303 prisoners. One of the 39 was later reprieved. At 10 a.m. on December 26, 1862, in Mankato, the group of 38 warriors were hanged. To this day, this was the largest mass execution in U.S history (Mahkato Mdewakanton Association. 2014). Because of the impact of the war of 1862, Dakota people were scattered throughout the upper Midwest of the United States and Canada.

In the early 1970s, Amos Owen and Bud Lawrence started a friendship that resulted in the Mahkato PowWow. Non-Native leaders such as Bud Lawrence encouraged participants to get involved in the activities to bridge the gaps in Native-non-Native relationships (Mahkato Mdewakanton Association. 2014).

Mahkato PowWow

Events surrounding the Mahkato PowWow are organized into four days. Day 1 (Thursday) is when people come to establish the setting in Land of Memories Park. On Day 2 (Friday), students in Grade Three come from area schools for Education Day. The actual PowWow events, such as dancing, moccasin games, and vendors, are held on Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday.

On Thursday, MSU students arrived at the Park to assist Dave Brave Heart and Charlie Stately to raise 4 teepees in the meadow. These teepees were used as learning centers during Day 2 Education Day and as housing for people who wanted to live in teepees during the weekend. Students also assisted with moving picnic tables into position for more learning centers (See Sandell, 2011).

Education Day was held for third grade students to learn about the Native American culture from many volunteer presenters. MSU students assisted in several roles. Some students greeted the school buses and led students to their places in the gathering circle. Other students helped presenters set up their materials in the learning centers. Some students then assisted presenters, such as leading games or making dream-catchers. Students also ensured that presenters had water and refreshments available.

MSU students who attended the PowWow on Saturday and Sunday participated in many learning and service activities. Interestingly, usually any single activity actually was a combination of learning and of service. And usually every activity was accompanied by a story that taught Dakota values.

Comparisons and Meanings of Cultural Dimensions

Naming Traditions

My colleague, David Larsen, has taught me about the naming traditions of Dakota people. Traditionally without family names, the Dakota have a complicated naming system with several classes of names: (1) gender and birth order, (2) behavior and significant events, (3) nicknames, (4) honor and respect, (5) secret and spirit names. New names may be assigned at adolescence and throughout adulthood based on life experiences. In other words, names change as the individual changes.

A child's first given name was based on the child's gender and birth order. For example, Caske (pronounced chass-keh') means first-born son, and Winona (pronounced wee-noh'-nah) means first-born daughter. Later, individuals would receive names that described their behavior and deeds. For example, Sarah Brave Heart told us that her family's name was the result of her grandfather's boldness when he participated in the Sun Dance, even though the US government

declared such dance was illegal. Among Dakota, nicknames may be awarded based on affection or special activities. For example, it is said that Chief Sitting Bull was called “Jumping Badger” as a boy. Later, he was known as “Slow,” because he took extra time to do things.

Today, David told me, it is common practice to use kinship terms, such as uncle or grandfather, to show honor and respect for people who are not related. Native Americans also have secret names or spirit names that only the individual and the spiritual leader know. Sometimes, the name symbolizes events in a dream or a vision.

In my Northern European culture, we have traditions for naming, but our traditions are different than those of the Dakota. Often, a child’s given name memorializes ancestors or suggests parents’ dreams for the child’s future. For example, I was named “Elizabeth,” in part because several ancestors were named “Eliza.” My brother, on the other hand, was given our father’s first name as his middle name. Randall Wayne was the son of Wayne Harry. And our father had been given his father’s first name as his middle name: Wayne Harry was the son of Harry. This continued our German traditions.

We also have names that describe our behavior and deeds, such as “Hoppy” for a long-distance runner. In my culture, when couples get married, women change their family name to that of their husband. Such terms provide understanding about how other people think of the person. Nicknames also serve as time markers. For example, we have shortened names that are used affectionately for children, such as “Beth” for “Elizabeth” and “Denny” for “Dennis.” When I entered high school in a new town, I decided that I wanted my teachers and friends to call me by my middle name, “Jill.” I think that I have grown into my given name, “Elizabeth.” As an adult, I have used this more formal name as a professional name. I can tell who and where many of my friendships started by the name they call me.

In my family, significant adults are sometimes given names that symbolize respected roles of honor. For example, when my mother was born (on the kitchen table), an elderly female helped with the delivery. This woman was known as “Aunt Mide,” although she was not directly related to members of the household. Today, my own family has become very connected to two international graduate students who studied at MSU, Mankato. We are so close that these young women call me “Mom.”

Similar to the Dakota, my Christian traditions have spiritual names. Christian adolescents may choose the name of an admired saint to become their spiritual name at confirmation. My parents named me Elizabeth, thought by many to mean “consecrated to God.” These names and their meanings are not considered secret, as with the Dakota, but whether this is a spiritual name or a cultural name or both depends on the individual's personal beliefs.

Prior to the Mahkato PowWow, I had not realized that many Native Americans keep their sacred names hidden. Waugaman (2011) has suggested that perhaps Native Americans have grasped an important spiritual and psychological reality. “If an individual suffers trauma or degradation but retains a secret core identity, their secret core identity has not been defiled. Instead, the core identity can be used to help the individual recover and heal. This concept could be of great help to individuals suffering from trauma” (Waugaman, 2011). We can be strengthened by the realization that every person has a sacred spiritual center.

Because of our work together since 2007, David Larsen has gifted me with a Dakota name. David Larsen calls me "mitanksi" in Dakota (pronounced meh-tahnk'-shee). It means little sister when spoken by a male. (If a female were speaking, the word would have a different ending.) Even though David and I are not related, I think this kinship term was given to show

respect. I am deeply touched that David gave me this name. The name itself speaks to a relationship: little sister of a brother.

The Dakota naming tradition can inspire an individual to continue to change and grow throughout life, to overcome the negative and to reach for the positive. Our identity can be enhanced by how we are seen or judged by others... by what we give to the community and how we behave, rather than what we take.

Family Reunions

The Mahkato PowWow illustrated many qualities of a family reunion. These characteristics included regular meetings, extended family connections, meals, story-telling, recreation activities, historical memorabilia, honorary recognition of elders, and shared spiritual events.

The Mahkato PowWow is held the third weekend of each September. The regular schedule means that the community anticipates many of the traditional components, as well as new aspects that are added each year. This makes the PowWow a lively event that grows with time. This gathering built connections among many members of the Dakota extended family, including aunts and uncles, grandparents, great-grandparents, etc. Because of its design for education and for reconciliation, this particular PowWow included many people who were considered “cousins,” a term used by David Larsen to describe everyone gathered at the event. Old relationships were renewed and new friendships were created. Intergenerational relationships were fostered. This emphasizes the Native view that all people and things are connected.

Meals were cooked and shared around campfires or purchased from vendors who made traditional foods such as fry bread. At all meals, elders were served first personally by younger

people. While gathered for meals, many elders repeated Dakota tales that shared significant events and communicated morals and values. Other recreational activities, such as the moccasin game, badminton, soccer, craft-making, and lacrosse games fostered cultural unity and understanding of Dakota / Native American culture.

In all components of the PowWow, there was celebration of Native elders and of Native chiefs, business leaders, educators, and those who served in the military. These persons were highly respected by the community. Elders and military personnel were given seats of honor in the dance arena and at other meetings during the PowWow. Various elements of the PowWow, as well as the entire PowWow itself, were included for spiritual observances. Traditional spiritual activities, such as smudging, drumming, singing, dancing, prayers, and sweat lodges are now a significant part of the gathering.

One of my personal favorite family events is a family reunion. In my experience, family reunions help establish healthy family relationships and provide a way to share family history stories. A family reunion also makes more memories for everyone involved. At one reunion, some relatives provided reenactments that highlighted pivotal points in the family's history, like immigration from Northern Europe and participation in the American Revolutionary War. We learned about family customs and social, economic and technological developments through the years. At a reunion in Pennsylvania and another in Yorkshire, UK, planners provided tours of important genealogical spots including the family homesteads, towns, employers, machinery, markets, and streets (even one named after the family).

Cognitive Dissonance

The Mahkato PowWow was established specifically to educate people about the history of indigenous people and to build reconciliation between Whites and Native Americans. At the

Mahkato PowWow, I learned that the US government established and broke treaties and promises with indigenous people throughout history and throughout North America. The results of these broken promises caused the US – Dakota War in the middle 1800s and the largest mass execution in US history.

This knowledge made me uncomfortable; it caused cognitive dissonance. My previously-held beliefs did not match the reality shared at the PowWow. So, I started asking questions and examining the resources available from various PowWow vendors. Soon, I realized that my family's historical and current advantages gained in Iowa had been intimately related with the historical and current situations of the indigenous people in central North America. I learned that, for hundreds of years, Native people groups had hunted, fought, and resettled through North America. The Sauk/Sac and Musquaquee/Fox tribes migrated from the eastern regions of the continent and displaced the Illini and Iowa tribes from what became the Iowa territory, where my Northern European ancestors settled.

For their part, European nations followed the principle that possession of land constitutes title to the land. Land in central North America was claimed by the Spaniards, occupied by the French, given back to Spain and returned again to France. Then the land was purchased by the US. For hundreds of years, none of these rulers seemed to acknowledge that the land was possessed and occupied by indigenous people who would have, according to the European principle, had title to the land. The US negotiated treaties to buy land from the Native people that the US had already "bought" from France. These treaties were not accepted by some Native people, led by Chief Black Hawk, and war broke out in eastern Iowa and western Illinois.

Around 1830, the war known as the Black Hawk War with the Sauk/Sac and Musquaquee/Fox Indians ended. In 1830, my great-great-great-grandfather Heinrich Fellner was

born in Scott County. In 1832, General Winfield Scott presided over the signing of a treaty by which the US gained about one-third of the land in the present state of Iowa. Settlement increased in what became Scott County and in Muscatine County. By 1837, the Scott County and Muscatine County areas had been completely surveyed. Iowa became a state in 1846. In 1846, my great-great-great-grandmother Ann Stuart Longstreth arrived in Muscatine County with her children from Pennsylvania.

The Indian Appropriations Act of 1851 sent Indians to reservations farther to the West. The lands that the Natives were forced to occupy were often too small to raise animals or hunt and were not suitable for farming, if the Natives were inclined to agriculture. In 1857, my great-great-great-grandparents Carl A. and Eliza Beuthien Priester moved to Scott County from Prussia/Germany. In 1871, Federal legislation was passed to abolish the reservation system and to stop acknowledging the tribes as nations separate from the US. The 1871 Dawes Act stated that “hereafter no Indian nation or tribe within the territory of the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation, tribe, or power with whom the United States may contract by treaty.” The new policy was to integrate Indians into American society rather than separate them into isolated reservations. The 1887 Dawes Severalty Act was a Homestead Act directed at breaking up Indian reservation holdings as well as tribes themselves. My ancestors continued to farm their property in eastern Iowa. I realized that I was given a head start by my European American ancestors. People like my ancestors wrote the history books in their own favor. And I know one result was that I have experienced more power and privilege in my life.

Use of Influence and Changing Behavior

As a member of the dominant culture in Southern Minnesota, I unconsciously assume the privileges of that dominant culture. I expect to be able to set schedules and agendas and to take

the initiative. My communication and work styles are task-oriented with a swift pace (Rose, 2014). I am focused on direct action and results. I want to get things done and save time. My preferred style is to communicate directly, with few thoughtful silences. I look people in the eyes and expect them to be able to have fast and clear conversations with me. To show my involvement in a conversation, I frequently complete the sentences of my conversation partners.

At the Mahkato PowWow, I learned about the traditions, customs, rules, and norms of behavior among the Native people. I realized that my European American values could be in direct opposition to the values of Native people and possibly very offensive to them. The Dakota value people and the group, rather than individuals and things. They want to share and find honor in giving to others, rather than acquiring status through wealth and possessions. Dakota values call for working together and helping each other, instead of competing and trying to be the best. For the Native people, time is here today and we should be patient and enjoy life, instead of watching the clock and preparing for the future.

I was concerned that my natural style would get in the way of establishing relationships and of participating in the Dakota culture. Instead of walking past people because I was afraid of an awkward conversation, I used my communication style to initiate conversations with the Native people at the PowWow. Sometimes I would start questions with “can you tell me more about...?” or “can you help me understand about ...?” I listened to each speaker carefully, so I could learn more about his or her group and individual cultures.

I also tried to incorporate Native cultural values into my communication methods when I interacted with speakers, elders, vendors, and others. I spoke in a softer voice, said only what was necessary, and looked downward without eye contact, as a sign of respect. I allowed longer pauses for thought, and I avoided finishing sentences of other people. At the conclusion of a

conversation or presentation, I shook hands. The result of my behavior changes is that I learned many things about beliefs and traditions and practices. I think the pauses, especially, provided space for others to expand on their thoughts and share even more with me.

Applications to Life in the Future

As a result of my experience at the Mahkato PowWow, I have set several goals.

- (1) Incorporate the Mahkato PowWow as an experience to support cultural competency among students in classes that I teach at MSU, Mankato.
- (2) Create a Native Dakota “persona doll” to use in my classroom to develop an understanding of the cultural group by giving the doll her own identity including family structure, cultural background, skin color, abilities and even likes and dislikes.
- (3) Write a journal article about the changes in cultural competency among MSU students who participate in service learning at the PowWow.
- (4) Encourage students in my classes to develop their own stories of their family histories and cultures.
- (5) Increase my leadership at MSU, Mankato around diversity and inclusion efforts through College of Education and department committees.

Conclusion

Evidently, many people in the Native American community, specifically those in attendances at the PowWow, really want others to know about their lives, history, traditions and the Dakota 38. Participating in the Mahkato PowWow has helped me learn about indigenous people’s history and cultures. And planners of the PowWow seek to build reconciliation between the Native community and the non-Native people.

David Larsen calls me "mitanksi" in Dakota (pronounced meh-tahnk'-shee). I will be reflecting on the meaning of that name for a long time. The name, mitanski, reminds me first of "us" instead of "me." And it also reminds me that I have the role of a younger relative... expected to learn from my elders. I hope that I will grow into my Dakota name, "mitanksi." I hope my presence at the PowWow and my interactions with other Native people will continue to foster that reconciliation and goodwill.

Resources

Mahkato Mdewakanton Association. 2014. *Mahkato Wacipi Minnesota*. Accessed on June 14, 2014 from <http://www.mahkatowacipi.org/>.

Sandell, E. J. 2011. [video] *Raising the Tipi*. Accessed on June 14, 2014 from http://youtu.be/9A_0pIqt9VU.

Waugaman, E. 2011. *Names and identity: The Native American naming tradition*. In What's in a name? Psychology Today blog. Accessed on June 24, 2014 from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/whats-in-name/201107/names-and-identity-the-native-american-naming-tradition>

Information about First Nations followed by a quiz: <http://firstpeoplesvoices.com/morality.htm>