

When I reflect on my own conception of teaching and learning I look to my culture for the answers. Teaching in Indigenous communities can be different and similar to teaching in non-Indigenous communities. But in order to stay true to who I am as a Lummi woman I will start with a form of teaching and learning in our culture. War Canoe Racing is a cultural sport. Crews of 6 and 11 men, women, 16 and under and 13 and under youth, use traditional cedar dug out canoes and travel throughout our territory to race other tribal communities. I will speak from the perspective that I know personally, the women's crew. This crew is comprised on 10 women and 1 skipper. The women are all expected to train together everyday starting in February or March. These crews run together and train out on the water together every day. The first race is in May and the last is the last week of August. From May to August crews train every day and race every weekend. Each weekend the race is in another location. At the races, the crews all sit together on the beaches, eat together, camp together, and race together. There are different roles for each person in the canoe. The bowman sets the tone for everyone. In order to be in this role the bowman has to know each person on their crew and their abilities. The bowman has to understand at a deep level what every individual on her crew is capable of. If the bowman paddles too fast some might not be capable of keeping time and we loose. The second person works very closely with the bowman. If the second cannot work with the bowman, we loose. The first two are also in charge of steering the canoe from the bow. On turns, these large canoes need to be steered from the bow and stern. The skipper sits in seat 11. The skipper makes all decisions within the crew. The skipper provides each crewmember with guidance and advice. The skipper ensures each member of the crew has the same paddling technique and if they don't, he corrects them.

Success depends on each member of the crew paddling in one cohesive stroke and this only comes with practice and experience. War canoe racing is an extremely difficult sport and people have to be committed 100%. The skipper cannot keep a crew together unless each person wants to be a part of the crew. Before and after races the skipper provides the crew with constructive feedback but also encouragement. It is from this cultural knowledge that I will develop my philosophy for teaching and learning.

Very much like the skipper, the teacher has the role of guiding and motivating their students. The skipper also sets boundaries and standards for the crew to be successful. Therefore, developing a well-rounded teaching strategy is very important in the beginning. According to Fink, teachers must self-assess their own abilities while developing a strategy. “It is also wise to honestly assess your current level of teaching skills that is, how developed are your interaction skills with students, your course management skills, your course design skills, and so on?” (Fink, 2013) This self-assessment will help an instructor align their course design with their abilities. Teacher presence in online learning environments is very important. According to Baker, teaching presence in online learning is new to the literature but it is important to view students as people even though the main form of communication is through technology. (Baker, 2010) Teacher presence is needed reassure students they are working with humans and not computers, and to set course boundaries and standards. “The importance of establishing course rules and policies in an online course cannot be overemphasized, but rules and policies on their own may be perceived by the student as rather dehumanizing and isolating if not accompanied by a ‘human side’ to the instructor that issues them.” (Stewart, 2008) According to Stewart, online instructors should give students timely and

constructive feedback that promotes deeper levels of understanding. But also build an online learning community where students don't feel isolated. (Stewart, 2008) Like the canoe, working with Indigenous students is all about relationship building. If students don't feel a connection to the material and instructor they will most likely disengage. Developing strategies to deliberately keep the humanness intact with online learning is so important for distance education at Northwest Indian College.

Our skipper learned very young by his father that you cant make people pull canoe, but you can make them want to. That is the philosophy that he goes by today. He cannot make us go to practice every day but he can make us want to go to practice every day. This teaching can be applied to education as well. As an instructor I want to ensure I am motivating my students. One way to motivate is to ensure the knowledge presented can somehow allow for self-reflection. Self-reflection is the basis for the Constructivist Theory described by Ally. "Constructivist theorists claim that learners interpret the information and the world according to their personal reality, that they learn by observation, processing, and interpretation, and then personalize the information into personal knowledge. (Ally, 2008) And according to this theory students are more successful when they can draw from the material a personal meaning they can apply to their surroundings. Swan also states the importance of the connections students make between content and their life. "Dewey (1959) believed that an educational experience must fuse the interests of the individual and society, that individual development was dependent upon community." (Swan, 2009) Another way to motivate students is through interaction. "Interaction is at the heart of the learning experience and is widely cited as a defining characteristic of successful learning in both traditional and online learning

environments.” (Baker, 2010) Interaction also leads to students feeling less isolated and this contributes to online learning communities.

A successful war canoe crew works together in a cohesive manner. Much of the weight of success is dependent on teamwork. In order to build this team, the skipper has to develop relationships with each of the members. He has to understand individual strengths and weaknesses. This is dependent on constant interactions between the skipper and crewmembers. This constant relationship building and interaction applies to education. Student and teacher relationships are very important to successful learning. Baker describes this importance through the transactional distance theory. “Moore’s transactional distance theory (Moore, 1973; Moore & Kearsley, 1996) provides an explanation for why the use of electronic communication tools may encourage interactions among learners and the instructor in an online environment.” (Baker, 2010) This theory describes the quality of learning is dependent on this interaction and less on geographical location. Baker also states that separation is not dependent on geographical location either. Increasing dialog between student and teacher can decrease this perceived distance.

I would also like to ensure that my own personal teaching and learning philosophy is aligned with the Northwest Indian College Teaching and Learning philosophy. As an instructor at Northwest Indian College it is important to ensure my work is leading to mission fulfillment and that includes ensuring alignment with college-wide initiatives. “In order to support the education of our students, the faculty actively participates in this effort by developing their own self-knowledge, modeling wellness, taking advantage of faculty development opportunities, and participating in action-based,

learning focused research and curriculum development.” (NWIC Teaching and Learning Committee, 2011) I do each of these personal development strategies throughout the school year. In order to teach inherent rights in the Native Studies courses, a faculty has to know what that means for them. Self-knowledge comes from studying our family lineage and learning our oral histories. Modeling wellness is participating in war canoe racing. Our women’s crew includes representatives from all levels of Northwest Indian College, from student to administrator. I am also constantly conducting research and developing curriculum for my courses. I was able to participate in curriculum development for successful completion of this course.

Works Cited:

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