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Cross-cultural communication: Perceptions on an educational institution by urban and traditional Indians

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CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION: PERCEPTIONS ON AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

BY

URBAN AND TRADITIONAL INDIANS

BY

Grace Marie Boyne

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For a number of reasons, this was a difficult thesis to write. First, the majority of material used comes from personal experiences. As a Navajo (with a traditional Navajo upbringing), I have been fortunate enough to live in both a traditional and urban setting, so it is possible for me to bring both perspectives to this paper. I must admit, however, that it is difficult for me to describe a non-traditional Indian who lives in an urban environment, since my own upbringing was so different. But through my observations and my teachings I have gained an understanding to some degree, at least, why an urbanized Native American has the perspective that he/she does.

Secondly, in Western society nearly all research in the social sciences and humanities depends in one way or another on careful reading of the written materials; therefore, the tendency is to negate any work that is based on written materials. Much of the data for this project has been gathered in the community. There is little background literature to consult. The area of cross-cultural communication, specifically, in the Indian environment is almost non-existent. Because this area has been neglected, it is very difficult to make any comparative analysis. This neglect is based on several factors, one of which is the subject of this paper. The exchange of information is non-existent due to the belief in the superiority of Western culture. Anything that is non-Western is invalid. The references at the end are very brief due to the fact that there is a lack of material. Since traditional societies are oral in nature, few if any of the works in Indian philosophy, stories, etc. are available except in their own communities. This is an original work simply because the work in communication is limited to Western society.

There is the additional problem of working in an Indian community. Because Indian communities have been subjected to excessive study by the anthropologists, Indians have become increasingly distrustful of studies. Indian communities by their nature have closed boundaries; therefore, individuals who are not part of the community are viewed with suspicion. The problem of finding informant(s) who is both knowledgeable and willing to talk about these issues is also difficult to find.
I was fortunate enough to overcome these boundaries. Therefore, I would like to express my appreciation to all those Indian parents who were willing to talk to me. I hope that we can all learn by my observations.
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Cross cultural communication is difficult because of the different cultural parameters. The cultural experiences define your perspective. Behavior in culture, moreover, is dependent on many such factors as historical, sociological and psychological experiences. These experiences further define your worldview and determine your reactions.
INTRODUCTION

One of the underlying causes of unemployment and underemployment among urban Indians is a lack of education. Indeed, a poor education makes it difficult to find employment or relegates individuals to lower level jobs and lower paying jobs. In addition, the American Indian Health Care Association noted that lack of education may cause other problems as well: "people at an educational disadvantage tend not to take advantage of preventive health care, and this only adds to their overall health problems."

The Tucson SMSA (Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area) has the lowest educational achievement for American Indians of all comparably sized urban areas in the United States; just 45 percent of the Indian population graduate from high school. More appropriately, however, Tucson urban Indians graduate at a rate of 57%. In 1980, the general population, which includes all minority groups, had a high school graduation rate of 73 percent (70 percent of Phoenix's urban Indians and 76 percent of Flagstaff's urban Indians graduated from high school). Furthermore, non-Indians were twice as likely to have a college education as were Indians (19 percent versus 9 percent). The census data clearly indicates that a lack of education affects Indian youth at an early age and puts them at a distinct disadvantage -- both educationally and

The statement found in the Report to Metropolitan Tucson Commission on Urban Native American Affairs emphasizes a known fact: education is important. Yet, we find that Indians are still experiencing difficulties in the educational arena; they are finding that education is meaningless. They are leaving the school system in large numbers. Yet the educational institutions aren't making any improvements; they haven't made any meaningful inroads in combatting this problem. Statements such as "we are making progress. We are aware of the problem but it will take time" create the impression that the institutions are making progress. There has been too much rhetoric with no specific solutions; too much time has been spent defining problems and not enough time finding solutions. But this has been an on-going problem for the last five hundred years.

One such school district in Tucson is the Sunnyside School District. The school district is located in the southern portion of Tucson; it is located near the San Xavier District of the Tohono O'odham Nation. On March 29, 1954, 34 square miles of the San Xavier Indian Reservation was annexed to the Sunnyside School District. Like other school districts in the Tucson area, the district has been faced with a growing
Indian student population. The fluctuation and increasing number of Indians in the cities have contributed to the increase in the student population. Additionally, students from the nearby reservation are bussed to the District to attend the schools. The parents of these students come from both traditional and non-traditional Indian community. The school district has an Indian Education Parent Committee composed predominantly of members of the San Xavier District of the Tohono O'odham Nation together with a number of parents from other Indian nations such as the Yaqui, Navajos and etc.

I had the opportunity to speak with parents of the school district; some of these parents are also members of the Indian Education Parent Committee. Additionally, I spoke with the school administrator and Indian staff member of the District's Bilingual Education Project to discuss the parental concerns. In the course of the discussion the parents expressed several. They felt these issues were important and they wanted the school administrators to address them. The school administrators, on the other hand, either felt these were unimportant or irrelevant. The statistics of the high dropout rate, for example, demanded that some type of action take place, but different ideas and incompatible perspectives resulted in a lack of activity. And this failure to communicate is what this thesis attempts to address. Individuals from dissimilar communities had varied
perspectives and, therefore, different ways of dealing with the situation. This paper does not attempt to discuss the issue of school dropouts; there are a number of studies which already attempt to do so. This thesis attempts, instead, to address such parameters outside the school environment as viewpoint and perspective, both contributing factors to inaction on the part of both the administrators and parents, thus prolonging the issues. The parameters of cross-cultural communication have multiple and direct effects on the individuals involved. Communication is a difficult area. We as individuals feel that we are communicating, but we discover this not to be so. It is further complicated when we are dealing with individuals from different cultures. But before we get into the discussion, some background will contextualize the problem.

In an academic setting, whether one is a Native American or not, there are numerous rules that one must abide by, and one of them is that everything has to be prepared according to Western methodology. If you deviate from that practice, you must be prepared to discuss at length why you did so.

Research typically involves collecting enough data to support a theory. But numbers can be manipulated to support a theory. The ideas and methodology are debated endlessly in academic journals. Meanwhile, the needs of the people studied usually remain unaddressed.
In this project, I consider it especially inappropriate to use typical Western research methods because this study concerns an Indian community. In the words of one individual, members of such communities already feel they have been "studied to death." This attitude is fairly common in Indian communities, the members of which are very distrustful of anyone who is attempting to do a study -- and with good reason. Typically, a "professional" comes into a given community to examine some problem. Usually, the community will approve his or her making the study, thinking that it may help them resolve some problem. The individual will then go through the community asking questions. Afterwards, he/she will simply disappear, never to be seen again. The community, meanwhile, has no ideas what happened with the study; it gets no feedback whatsoever. No one knows what will be done with the information collected or what conclusions were reached. The community never benefits from that information. It is small wonder, then, that Indian communities are typically distrustful of such studies.

As an Indian who is experienced in both cultures, I feel I can offer some insights to those who attempt to study Indian culture. There is a proverb about a blind man trying to describe the elephant. This story serves aptly to illustrate our inability to describe that which is beyond our realm of experience. Due to the unique perspective I enjoy as one
perched between two cultures, I feel I have some of the tools necessary to describe that proverbial elephant. I enjoy a distinct advantage over most Anglo researchers. I am more likely to be trusted by other Indians because of my own ethnicity. The individuals who take me into their confidence know that I have to live in the community; I have to abide by the rules. They know I believe in reciprocity, that I will share my findings with them.

As a participant in both the traditional and urban Indian communities, I am also sensitive to differences in culture. Identical behavior can have opposite meanings, depending on the context in which it takes place. This leads to cultural misunderstandings, which can, in turn, have devastating results. For example, the article, "Blunders Abroad" (Nations' Business, March 1989), discusses some incidents of Americans' insensitivity toward other cultures. This article relates many of the common mistakes Americans make when doing business in countries overseas. For example, in one scenario,

An American went to Malaysia to close a substantial contract. There in a splashy ceremony, he was introduced to someone he thought was named 'Roger.' Throughout the negotiations, he called the man 'Rog', not realizing that his potential client was a "rajah", which is a title of nobility, not a person's name. This well-meaning American did not know that, in Malaysia, while many of the states are controlled by sultans, one state is headed by rajahs. (51)
This incident, while amusing in retrospect, was far from funny at the time. Though the businessman in question may have had good intentions, he likely so insulted his hosts that he lost the opportunity to do business with them.

One way to minimize multicultural faux pas is to learn all that you can about a given culture, and to learn it from that culture's perspectives, not a Western one. If you want to be successful in a community, you have to take time to get to know it thoroughly, always bearing in mind that each community has its own unique characteristics. Knowing the culture you are going into can help curb inadvertently insulting behavior. For example,

"An oil company was about to sign a contract with a Middle Eastern nation. An hour before the signing ceremony was to begin, the American executive and the responsible government official met for tea. Relaxing, the American propped his feet on a table, with his soles facing his Arab host. At once, the official became angry and left the room -- to the surprise and dismay of the American. The U.S. executive did not know that exposing the soles of one's shoe to an Arab is a grave insult." (Nations' Business, 56)

The same article also related how three U.S. executives went to Japan to sell tractors. The Americans, who had never been in Japan before, thought their presentation has gone well. The Japanese, however, did not immediately respond to their sales pitch. Since the executives observed no reaction, they thought that perhaps their prices were too high. So,
they lowered them. And they kept lowering them. They did not know that the Japanese were simply thinking it over, not rejecting the offer outright.

One of the more common complaints that I have heard in Indian communities is that most outsiders are impatient. They go into a place and expect immediate results; they arrive with the presumption that the whole world does business in the American fashion. In many Indian communities, however, the process is slow, and one has to be very patient. One must understand that such things as the concept of time and the pace of business vary according to cultural context. I was at one school board meeting, for instance, in which the Bilingual Education Director presented a letter which had to be signed by the School Board members. Despite the fact that she emphasized that it had to be done that evening, the school board members politely avoided signing it by passing it around from one person to the next. I could sense the administrator's impatience. Failure to recognize cultural differences can lead to frustration, such as that expressed by many Anglos when they complain about how those Indians are always operating on "Indian time."

Divergent attitudes toward time can manifest themselves in other ways. For example, Indian communities stress developing long-term relationships. Most Americans, on the other hand, focus on short-term gains. This is fine if you
intend to spend only a short time in the community, but if you intend to return, your next request for assistance will be passed off from one member of the community to the next, just like the above-mentioned letter. Since I have been a part of the Tucson Indian community since 1983, my informants trust me. They know that I will further the goals of the Indian community. I will not take advantage of them. This is a cultural trait we share in common.

Another cultural trait that can have a bearing on time is worldview. Worldview is how one views his/her relationship to his/her surroundings. Children are taught in subtle ways how to orient themselves in terms of space and time. In the industrial economy, the young ones learn to do so according to straight line and grid patterns. Therefore, children in Western society tend to think in a linear mode. Dr. Barre Toelken, author of *Dynamics of Folklore*, writes that children are socialized very early on in this way.

First of all, for physical surroundings, most babies in America find themselves lying alone in a room made up primarily of straight lines. The child may be placed up or face down during sleeping, but is almost invariably placed face up during waking hours. Above the child the ceiling provides a large flat surface with corners. Around the child, more close at hand, are the vertical and horizontal slates and corners of the crib. How early the child notes the presence of these straight lines is not possible to determine. (227-228)
An individual socialized in a Navajo setting instead sees the world more in terms of circular patterns. This is because a Navajo hogan traditionally is round. Its ceiling is circular; its roof, domed. "In short, nearly every patterned experience coming to the young Navajo child, whether featuring round or straight lines, is described in essentially circular rather than linear terms." (237)

He further states that individuality is the guiding principle of the Western socialization process, that straight lines and grid pattern constitute a sense of order. The whole sense of socialization is based on these orderly patterns; one only has to look at the streets of any city to understand this - or any classroom, for that matter. "Jagged edges, disparate measurements, asymmetry and incompleteness are considered intolerable." (229) Almost every activity is based on this linear mode. The idea of wasting and saving time, moreover, is an indication that life experiences are perceived as existing along some abstract line. Unfortunately, many members of Western society fail to recognize that not everyone share this form of reality.

Do Blacks, Hispanics and other minorities experience the same difficulties as Indians? The answer is a resounding
"NO!" They are different at their core. Barre Toelken establishes why this is so.

Worldview [he says] is a general way of referring to the manner in which a culture sees and expresses its relation to the world around it. While earlier students of culture were certain that similar conditions would impress any human eye and soul in similar ways in widely separated circumstances, there is now evidence to the contrary; that is, objective reality actually varies widely according to the viewer's means of perceiving it. (225)

He says these means are affected by cultural and linguistic factors so ingrained in a subject that the way he or she thinks is affected. He further cites data obtained from a UCLA research team working on the Hopi reservation. They found that Hopi children use the right hemisphere of the brain for speaking and hearing their native tongue and use the left hemisphere for English. This led to the conclusion that people speaking different languages may perceive things in vastly different ways.

According to a recent census, there are almost a million and a quarter Indians in the United States, many of whom reside in urban areas. Despite the social and cultural pressures to become assimilated, most have retained their cultural identity. The Metropolitan Tucson Commission on Urban Native American Affair's publication, Native American in Tucson: Our Home -- Your City indicates that numerous Tucson
urban Indians still practice their traditional religion, speak their native language and transmit their culture to their children. Dr. Joe's publication, *Traditional Indian Alliance: Delivery of Health Care Services to American Indians in Tucson* concluded "Indian cultures continue to play a significant role in the lives of urban Indians despite their long-term residence in Tucson." This study found that a majority of urban Indians are

still fluent in their native tongue and...maintain some of their tribal customs and traditions.... Thus despite prolonged urbanization, many still see their residence in the city as a mere extension of their traditional homeland.

This study further indicated that 79 percent valued their traditional Indian ways even though they have adopted urban lifestyles, "signifying that a majority of urban Indians in Tucson adhere to or engage in some tribal activities or a cultural traditions."

Erikson in "Childhood and Society" discusses the tenacity with which Indian children retain customs and attitudes formed at home despite the well-intentioned efforts of both teachers and parents to change them. *Search* magazine also discusses research done on cross-cultural responses to supposedly objective scientific data. It was found that different cultural views of nature and knowledge and different cultural organizations of evidence affected the learning process of
students forced to think, perform and compete academically in a system not their own.

Indian communities, then, are unlike their Chicano, Asian-American, and Afro-American counterparts. Their historical and legal status further confers their uniqueness from other ethnic groups. The fundamental constitutional basis of Indians is outlined in the opinions of Justice John Marshall in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*. He established that Indian tribes have a right to a political and social existence and that this right is not derived from the Constitution of the United States. He traced it to natural law and international law. Further, their political status and their relationship to the United States, is, then, the foundation which confers this uniqueness. Therefore, tribal governments negotiate directly with the Federal Government, whereas members of other minority groups are more fully integrated into governmental supervision in all aspects of their lives.

How much of the culture of these island nations is going to survive? To what extent are Indians being absorbed into the general society? The late Cherokee anthropologist, Robert K. Thomas, notes that

when confronted with the need to extract a livelihood from nature, Indians will select those cultural objects that are efficient and then after, refine, and improve them to increase productivity. Adaptation to the natural environment involves modifying culture in response to
material needs and objective necessities. Some cultural objects decay and others flourish, but the process of selection being contemplated occurs among the objects that belong to the culture. This selection process is, consequently, a form of internal or autochthonous development. ("The People and the Stranger" Robert K. Thomas, unpublished manuscript, 4:3)

Indian people may then borrow from other cultures, an activity that is especially widespread in a city the size of Tucson. Usually, a subordinated people borrow from the dominant society. This process, called acculturation, has been more or less enforced, either overtly through the educational process or covertly through the gradual encroachment of urban areas onto Indian settlements. But borrowing from the dominant society need not necessarily be viewed as a capitulation to the surrounding culture.

Material goods and institutions have social significance. To illustrate, a Mercedes automobile, which affords transportation, also conveys prestige upon its owner. As a rule, however, Indians show almost no regard for the appearance of their cars and treat them as utilitarian objects, not as symbols of the owner's social rank....Borrowing objects but not meanings, as with Indian cars, extends to institutions. (Ibid, 4:5)

Acculturation, then, is not to be confused with absorption, the process by which a distinct people ceases to regard themselves as such and fully take on the identity others have imposed on them, such as what happens when a Navajo comes to
see him/herself as an Indian. Acculturation, then, can in both form and substance in the end produce two co-existing societies that, on the surface, are virtually indistinguishable from one another. What often happens in an Indian community is that people may borrow foreign objects but reject foreign meanings.

In this study, I try to determine what are the views and values of the Indian community. Their whole way of life has always been measured against Western standards. Therein lies the problem. Analysis by non-Indians when dealing with Indian issues has not been especially helpful to the Indian communities. Western solutions cannot be simply superimposed over Indian communities. The last 500 years are living evidence of this. Now is the time to develop standards of our own.

METHODS & RESEARCH BACKGROUND

My research began when I was asked by one of the parents at Elvira Elementary School (Sunnyside School District) to give a talk there on September 29, 1990. After my presentation, which dealt with culture in Indian communities, I was asked to attend a discussion in which parents would be voicing some of their concerns in regards to their lack of involvement in their children's affairs, the high dropout rate
among Indian students, and cultural insensitivity on the part of school administrators.

Discussion centered on how to confront these problems. Different issues were raised; the discussion was both very lively and candid. Since I wasn't a parent in the school district, my contribution was minimal. My opinions were unsolicited anyhow, and my upbringing indicated that I keep silent until I was invited to participate. So I just sat back and listened.

A couple of weeks later I had a research paper due for an Indian education class. I had originally intended to research the issue of Indian school boards in general, but since culture was my forte, I decided to integrate that into the paper. Here was a situation that needed review in our own city. Such a review might prove helpful to both Indian parents and school administrators in gaining new insights into an "old" problem.

I attended the first meeting on November 15, 1990 and requested that I be given some time on the agenda. I discussed the nature of the research I proposed doing and told them what I expected to get out of my work. I indicated that no solution would like be easy, assuming that one was even
feasible. Permission to conduct research was favorably received, and names and phone numbers were forwarded to me.

I formulated a number of questions for the parents. Since the parent population was fairly small, I attempted to contact as many of them as possible. Keeping this in mind, I contacted the first set of parents shortly after the meeting and interviewed a number of them. When the interviews were completed, I asked if there were other parents I should talk to. Usually, I was given additional names and phone numbers.

The warmth with which interviewees responded to my questions confirmed my conviction that Indians tend to be responsive to other Indians about Indian matters. This was the case whether we were discussing health, education, or other socio-economic factors. Additionally, all Indians share some common historical experiences as well as cultural worldviews. These provide them with a framework within which to function, a set of references by which to understand cause and effect in their lives. This gives them the tools they need to address the ordinary problems of living. Having experienced these, I felt I could possibly compile a much more comprehensive view than could an Anglo researcher.

The demographics of this study involves parents who have children attending the Sunnyside School District. I interviewed 25 of them with children attending the elementary, middle and highs schools in the districts. A majority of the
parents were Tohono O’odham and Yaqui, but some Navajos and other tribal groups were represented as well. Tohono O’odham parents primarily reside within the school district or live in San Xavier; I interviewed 11 Tohono O’odham and 8 Yaqui parents. The other six parents were from the Navajo, Apache and other tribal groups.

The questions were very simple. They dealt with background issues such as gender, marital status, occupation, economic status, tribal affiliation, and employment history. They also pertained to who was considered the "head" of the household, how many children were in the family, and who is the guardian of the child. Other questions dealt with such family and background issues as whether someone was socialized on the reservation (or which Yaqui village), or not, whether that person speaks his/her tribal language, whether or not his/her children do, and, if so, whether or not they speak it fluently, whether they or their children are more comfortable with English or their native tongue, and whether or not they and their family members participate in any traditional Indian activities, whether or not their children are enrolled in a tribe, and, if so, which one. Other issues addressed were as follows: What was the highest grade they completed? What type of school did they attend? If their children were still in school, how well did they think they were doing? Had any of their children dropped out? If so, why? What did they
think about the school that their child(ren) attended? What did they think were problems commonly experienced in this school? Finally, what did they think contributed to these problems?

After analyzing the responses, I wanted next to discuss some of my impressions with the school administrators. So, I contacted the Director of Bilingual Education. It was necessary to do this, as Indian Education is a component of the Bilingual Education. I shared my findings with her and requested her response to these issues. The other purpose in sharing these concerns was that the school administrators would gain a better understanding as to why the parents were dissatisfied with the program.

The meeting was held in her office on December 7, 1990; the interview was taped. After the interview was completed, I transcribed the tape and shared the information with the parents and allowed them the opportunity to analyze it. Since I do not have permission to use the materials, it was not included as part of this study. I listened to the parents' analyses and compared their responses to mine.

Although the appointment was scheduled with the Director, another staff member was present, an individual from the Apache Nation. When I first scheduled an appointment, I indicated that I would appreciate it if I could look at the documents which listed the Indian dropout rate for the past
ten years and financial information for Title VI and Johnson O'Malley funding. At that time she assured me that the documents would be available when I came for the interview. The interview lasted an hour and a half. To assure correctness in my report, it was taped. The parental concerns are listed as follows, not necessarily in the order of priority.

THE VIEWS AND CONCERNS OF THE PARENTS WERE CONSISTENT WITH THOSE EXPRESSED AT ELVIRA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. THE HIGH DROPOUT RATES AMONG INDIAN STUDENTS, THE LACK OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND THE INSENSITIVITY OF ADMINISTRATORS WERE THE CONCERNS EXPRESSED BY THE PARENTS. Each of these items will be discussed individually. But how Indians are perceived by administrators and by themselves plays a significant role in the interaction between the two groups. These perceptions are primarily responsible for the lack of insight on the part of the administrator and for the opinions by the Parent Committee that the school is not making meaningful inroads into what they view as primary obstacles.

My working hypothesis is that if the individuals involved had a better understanding of each other and their roles, their relationship could be more harmonious. This study examines the relationship between a school district (which has Indian student) and the Parent Committee. If a school district receives federal dollars to educate Indian students,
the school is required to follow certain rules and regulations as to how these dollars are expended. According to one of these recommendations of the Parent Committee, which has a role in deciding what will be spent and how it will be spent, must be given due consideration. The basis of the conflict between the school and this committee, I feel is one of perception, that is, how individuals or groups perceive each other and how these perceptions color their reactions.

Communication is built on an exchange of information. Schramm's "Unique Perspective of Communication: A Retrospective View" (15) describes communication as a relationship built around the exchange of information. It further states that this exchange is not limited to only two individuals but can involve groups such as a football team or the family. The relationship between the members is built on discourse. In order to communicate, an exchange of information must take place in some sort of comprehensible fashion. How this exchange takes place depends on the parameter of individual cultures. In a traditional society, for example, it is done in a very informal and intimate setting. You are unaware that this process is occurring. On the contrary, the Western educational process is very formal, to some, very threatening. In a classroom, the teacher sits behind a desk and students sit in desks placed in rows. This scenario defines boundaries and defines roles. The person who
sits behind a large desk is in charge, and the students are not.

Edward Sapir in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* discussed what role culture plays in communication. He says it is the exchange of information which binds a society together.

While we often speak of society as though it were a static structure defined by tradition, it is, in the more intimate sense, nothing of the kind, but a highly intricate network of partial or complete understandings between the members of organizational units of every degree of size and complexity, ranging from a pair of lovers or a family to a league of nations or that ever-increasing portion of humanity which can be reached by the press through all its transnational ramifications. It is only particular acts of communicative nature which obtain among people participating in it. Thus, the Republican Party cannot be said to exist as such, but only to the extent that its tradition is being constantly added to and upheld by simple acts as that Joe Doe votes the Republican ticket, thereby communicating a certain kind of message. Or that a half dozen officials meet at a certain place, formally or informally in order to communicate ideas to one another and eventually to decided what points of national interest, real or supposed, are to be allowed. (56)

Communication in its basic form is necessary for any enduring relationship. All groups, institutions, organizations and nations exist by virtue of communication. Once you fail to communicate, you cease to exist as part of a unit. Therefore,
communication is basic to history, behavior, thought, art, and the survival of existing institutions.

In a traditional society there are other multiple panes of communication that bind the group together. These are based on the shared beliefs or assumptions between tribal members. There has to be some common ground for the way the world exists. For example, when one communicates in Navajo, the communication varies depending on whether one is a Navajo speaker (that is, Navajo is the primary language) or one who learned Navajo. In a simple phrase such as "the road to my mother's house is muddy," individuals who are unfamiliar with the Navajo culture usually translate it with all the details that are necessary for the sentence to make sense in English: "the road to my mother's house is muddy." In Navajo much is left out as already understood: "To my mother's it's muddy." If you are going to your mother's, there is probably a road or path. You also need not mention a house, simply because, if there is a road, at the end of the road or path, there is probably some type of a dwelling. In the Navajo language, the word "to" presumes movement; the emphasis is more on the processes rather than achievement. In English, "to" indicates goals or the achievement of objectives. It is such deep structures as these that form perspective, a perspective that, subsequently, determine how individuals react. In order to gain a perspective on the Indian tribes here in the Southwest,
it is necessary to gain an understanding of their history and the cultural assumptions they share.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The primary function of history is to awaken a consciousness of the unity of the past with the present; to develop a conception of society as an organism and of the life of society as an evolution and not as disconnected succession of events or episodes. It would be a mistake to assume that history has no other function than to furnish facts, although the importance of a careful and painstaking gathering of the facts should be emphasized. Organization and interpretation are essential if history is to perform its true function, which is to trace development. Events and conditions should, therefore, be regarded not as being isolated or unrelated or even of equal importance, but as related to both preceding and later developments. That is to say, they are important in so far as they help to explain some course of development.

History gives us a knowledge of how human society came to be what it is. It shows us not only the steps but the kinds of development. It shows us what progress has been made in the economic, political, social, technological, intellectual, religious, aesthetic and moral phases of his development. It helps us understand that our most highly valued social
possessions are deeply rooted in the past and to view the world as undergoing a continuous process of readjustment and change. The importance of this knowledge can hardly be overestimated. The growing acceptance of this fact has had a profound influence on thinking in all lives of scientific endeavor in our time.

A knowledge of history enables us to place ourselves in proper relation to our time -- its forces, struggles and tendencies. It helps us not only to understand the place of our own age among ages. But it gives us a clearer vision of the direction in which mankind has been headed so that we may better grasp the movements and tendencies of the present.

It is history alone, if we care to listen, that can make us conscious of movement and a sense of direction. It is history that tells us what and where we have traveled, how far and along what road. It is history that can tell us whether the guides who offer to conduct us further are trustworthy or not.

Southwestern tribes have been subjected to three colonizers: the Spanish, the Mexicans and the Anglo-Americans. Although those conquerors mainly focussed on civilizing the native population, they set out to accomplish this goal in three very different fashions according to their unique perspectives. This, in turn, colored their perspective when viewing the Indians.
For example, the first colonizers, the Spanish who came to the New World in the 1500's, came with the intention of "relieving" the New World of its mineral resources; they never came with the intention of remaining in this part of the world. Those who came were mostly men; there were very few females. When the Spanish established colonies, they also established sexual relationship with native women. The priests condemned this as "unholy". They decided that the men should marry the women so the children from these unions could be legitimate; thus a new race was born.

The indigenous population was less prepared than the Spanish for their first encounter, despite the fact that their sacred histories indicated they would have encounters with foreigners. The Singing Tree of the Yoeme (Yaqui) speaks of the fact that encounters with these brown-robed individuals were going to affect their lives. The Hopi of northern Arizona speak of their white brother, "Bahana" who was going to return to the people one day so that he could help the Hopi save their culture. This would be a white person with light-colored or blonde hair. The various creation stories of the tribes indicate that there would be encounters with these individuals, different from themselves.

The Spanish, on the other hand, had existing categories in terms of which they were prepared from the start to think about and deal with the Indians. They knew before they even
encountered the Indians that they could expect barbarism. Initially, they had expected to find people with great wealth and cities, but they quickly changed their minds after each expedition visited the villages of the American Southwest (after all, they did find gold in Mexico). By the time the missionary work had begun, it was generally accepted that throughout the region, Spaniards would be dealing with savages and with a culture below their own.

The Spanish had no trouble deeming other civilizations as inferior to their own, and they believed they had a moral obligation to "civilize" the savages. This sense of obligation was strong at all levels of the civil and church hierarchies. It was encoded in the laws and regulations set forth to govern relations with Indians. This was especially the case in church hierarchy, but this sense of duty was equally strong in the secular realm. Both civil and church officials agreed from the start on what the Indians should be made to accept as the fundamental elements of civilization -- that is, the Spanish elements of civilization.

What were these elements of civilization? According to Edward H. Spicer, *Cycles of Conquest*

...prevailing Spanish opinion, especially among officials at a dance from the Indians was that the barbarians lacked law and real authority, that they had either no religion at all or a species of worship which was called idolatry and was wholly evil (usually being regarded as
worship of the Devil), that their settlements were not organized communities, that their sexual lives were unregulated, that their forms of body covering was not clothing properly so called, and that they lacked houses worthy of human beings. (82)

So the Spanish view in respect to the process of civilizing was not that they were replacing existing functional institutions and cultural traits, but rather that they were giving the Indian things which the latter did not have. Lacking government, religion and civilized tendencies, the Indians were being given the opportunity to know these things and should be grateful for them.

The Spanish culture which was brought to the New World consisted of a number of elements which were thought to represent the civilizing process. They were what the Spanish regarded as necessary for civilization; members of the conquered native group had no input in this. Spicer says,

the high policy conferences in which Spanish program was conceived, of course, remained unknown to and unparticipated in by the Indians. No Indians ever reached the king for discussion of policy matters and only a few from the northeast (these being Yaquis and Yumans) in the whole colonial period ever reached the viceroy in Mexico City. Many came into contact with captains-generals or governors in the frontier capitals, but at this level policy could not be fundamentally influenced. The framework of Indian-Spanish relations was determined unilaterally by the Spaniards. That it might or should have been determined in any other way did not occur to any
Spaniard, so far as the historical records go. Thus, although the plan of conquest and civilization with which the Spaniards started was modified in some ways in response to Spanish experience, it cannot be said that Indian experience was ever conceived as having any policy value. The Spanish program was an a priori, unilaterally conceived plan for improving, that is, "civilizing" the barbarian Indians, who were not regarded as capable of participating in the formulation of any program for themselves. (285)

They modified many aspects of Indian life; there was constant pressure from the missionaries to alter certain features of daily life. According to Spicer,

They preached against plural wives and sexual relations outside of marriage; they preached the necessity of formal marriage ceremonies. They preached against drunkenness. They tried to introduce the confession and they carried out moral lectures whenever the opportunity offered. They also denounced forms of native ceremony which they regarded as in conflict with Christian belief and practice. (297)

They affected Indian communities in different ways and fashions. For tribes that lived closer to the mission or town system, the assimilation rate was much higher than for those who did not. Spicer says,

the missionary program might be summed up as an attempt to incorporate Indians into Spanish society, through a gradual modification of Indian communities, through continuous teaching, demonstration, and instruction, through the acceptance of the missionary as a fatherly guide in the process, and
through forcible imposition, when necessary, of church attendance and work routines. In contrast, the civil authorities urged incorporation of Indians by organizing them into formal political units of Spain, by forcing them to conform to European work habits in the mines and agricultural establishments run by Spaniards, and to pay tributes, by redistributing tribal land to individual Indians, and by fusing Spaniards and Indians through intermarriage and living together in the same communities." (Cycles of Conquest, p. 309)

It is not possible to provide a representative sample of the attitudes and viewpoints of the Spanish; there was considerable variation in behavior and attitudes among these civilizers, but there was uniformity in their teaching of Christian ideals to all Indians. "Their primary focus was conversion of Indians, on getting them to accept new ideas and behave in conformity with the new ideas." Never once did the Spanish make any attempt to understand the Indians, whose "puzzling or stubborn behavior was not viewed as part of another moral system which could be understood and through understanding eliminated as a major obstacle in accepting the Jesuit moral system." (Cycles of Conquest, p. 309) The missionaries had no understanding of the Indian world; there was no search or attempt to find common ground.

We see similar attitudes exhibited two hundred years later by the employees of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

These Indians are by nature and disposition a sly and crafty folk from whom sincerity is not to be expected.
They are accomplished hypocrites, and, as a rule the ones who seem the most virtuous should be considered the most wicked of all. They say one thing to their people when in the presence of the missionaries and later in secret they say another directly contrary.....in fact, I cannot deny that with these stony-hearted people the result does not repay the hard labor of the valuable seed. The seed of the gospel does not sprout, of it if it sprouts, it is spoiled by the thorn of carnal desire....For this reason we find little eagerness among our new converts who prepare for baptism. Indeed, some only pretend to believe, showing no inclination for spiritual things, such as prayers, divine services and Christian doctrine. They show no aversion to sin, no anxiety about their eternal happiness, no eagerness to persuade their relatives to be baptized. They show rather a lax indifference to everything good, unlimited sensual desire, an irresistible habit of getting drunk, and stubborn silence in regard to hidden pagans, and so we cannot find them and bring them into the fold of Christ. (Cycles of Conquest, 311)

The quotation indicates that there was no common meeting ground possible between the indigenous and European cultures, even two hundred years later. Given their powerlessness, Indians had no choice but to hide their real feelings about their difficulties with the program. The Indians knew the missionaries didn't understand their way of life.Rather than complicate the situation, the Indians would perform their ceremonies elsewhere. As a result, missionaries considered Indians to be insincere. But the Indians thought they were being polite.
The Spanish, at least, were consistent. Their goal was simple: to "civilize" the native population. But it was deemed the responsibility of the church to carry the program through, and as a part of their strategy, they became actively involved in implementing educational policy. The indigenous belief system, traditions and ceremonial cycles were viewed as pagan; it was deemed necessary to proselytize and educate the native people in the ways of Christianity. The Spanish built schools and forced all the children to attend schools. The traditional language and culture were replaced by those of Spain.

After Mexico won its independence from Spain, the government was only interested in maintaining its stability. The role of Indians in the new state -- if they even had one -- became a dominant theme; Indians became a serious threat to the very existence of the nation in that in various regions of Mexico, civil wars had broken out between the indigenous groups and the Federal Government. In Yucatan, caste war had broken out between the Maya Indians and the Yucatecans. In the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Zapotec Indians had to be put down by Benito Juarez. In the northeast, Huaxtec and other Indians constituted a threat to the national unity and in the west, the Indians of the Sierra Madre Mountains in Nayarit were at odds with the federal government. In the northwest, the Apaches, Yaquis and Mayos were discontented. The Mexican
government tried to resolve the Indian problem by adopting measures which would integrate them politically into the Mexican government. The first measure consisted of granting full citizenship; the Indians were to be treated precisely as other citizens of the new republic. Indians were not recognized as distinct from any other Mexican. The government was no longer able to use the word "Indian." If it became necessary to use the term Indian, only the term "indigene" was used. All individuals born in Mexico were to be citizens, and all citizens were guaranteed equal participation in the political arena. Indians no longer existed politically.

The next step in this campaign of nationalization was to integrate citizens politically. All Indian groups were required to set up municipal governments with a roster of local officials whose duties were clearly set forth. Their authority was to derive from elections by all adult males of their communities. The traditional political structure was no longer recognized. The intent was to do away with all facets of it.

The third aspect of the program carried "the concept of quality and individual responsibility into the realm of economic life." It consisted in the equitable distribution of land in parcels for the support of individual families. Landholders were to have title to their lots, and thus, full freedom to use and dispose of their land in their own best
interest. The new laws required that this individual distribution take place as soon as possible, so that excesses of land beyond individual needs could be handled in the best interest of the state and the nation as a whole. Land belonging to inactive missions was to become state property and was to be made available for distribution to indigenes, if needed. Community lands were to be managed by local governments, but were also to be distributed in part where conditions required. In this way the states could lay a foundation which would permit the expansion of population into areas where large mission holdings and Indian communities with large traditionally defined areas had constituted an obstacle to settlement. At the same time no one would suffer, for the basis would be the initial assignment of land in accordance with the need of each family. The distribution of land and the granting of deeds would also promote individual responsibility and initiative, which, in turn, would make it possible to develop a system of taxation for the local support of schools and the expenses of the state.

These measures were intended to homogenize the people, thus erasing the friction between the castes, fostered by Spanish distinction of race and birth. Similarly, integration into the mainstream would erase the economic barriers and, thus again, eliminate classes. These policies were advertised as liberation from the oppressive Spanish rule and as an
opportunity to abandon unenlightened "primitive" customs such as the common ownership of property. However, such reforms viewed by the Indian community as a new form of oppression and a threat of a well-established way of life. There was resistance to varying degrees. The Indians either resisted by fleeing or by armed revolt.

The Tarahumara opted for withdrawal. It is not difficult to understand why they chose that alternative, given the abuses of the past two hundred years. The Indian resistance to these "enlightened" policies was seen in a different light by the Mexican government. It "proved" the barbarism of the Indians. Rather than modify their laws, the Mexicans tried to enforce them. The Mexican government already viewed the Indians as pro-royalists and so saw their resistance as subversive.

The existence of Indian communities based in the colonial system constituted a threat to the nation. They must be broken up at all costs, so that individual initiative and modern forms of representative government could prevail. (Cycles of Conquest, 338)

No one attempted to understand the viewpoints of Indians. For example, in the case of the Yaqui Nation,

local government was managed by Indians themselves, and the communal administration of land had hardly been altered in their essential features during the Jesuit regime... town government, although now employing many new formal features of Spanish
organization, had by 1800 crystallized into very definite patterns of political autonomy and corporate land control. The two features on which the Mexicans focused as necessary to bring the Indians into the nation -- individual land holding and political hierarchy -- flew in the face of the previous two centuries of development. Political equality with Mexicans was meaningless in the limited context of the autonomous Yaqui River communities. It was not in any sense regarded by the Yaquis as a desirable privilege, particularly since the growth of tribal feeling anti-Spanish attitudes after the revolt of 1740. The Spanish contacts had stimulated a vigorous Yaqui separation based on the colonial mission type of nearly autonomous communities. (Cycles of Conquest, 337)

The Indians were primarily interested in forming their own nations and were not interested in becoming either part of neither the Spanish nor Mexican empires. The Mexican government, unfortunately, viewed this tribal tendencies toward separatism and corporate autonomy, as a species of barbarism which had to be destroyed. Indian communities were a threat to Mexican nationalism. If this separatism was allowed, it would be hard to convince others to become part of a nationalistic group.

Another civilizing method employed was education, one that had first been tried by the Spanish. Regarded as fundamentally important, schools were established in all Indian towns. Attending them became compulsory. This did not work for a number of reasons. First, the education was done
by strangers. Secondly, the subject matter in the educational process was irrelevant to local needs. Indians who have never been exposed to Shakespeare can't understand why it is taught in school. But all this was to change when Anglo-Americans came into the area.

When the Anglo-Americans came into contact with the Indians of the Southwest in the 1840's they had already two hundred years of experience with indigenous people elsewhere on the continent. The eastern portion of United States was settled by the British in the 1600's by Protestants who believed in the teachings of the Bible, love of God and a sense of duty. The United States was founded on those principles. The area was settled to establish viable and permanent colonies, self-sustaining units of the British empire. The settlers came with their families; thus any sexual relationship with native people was considered sinful. Color became important in the United States as a result of British Protestant ethics. Maintain an ostensibly Christian code of morality got tricky. Christians had to justify their genocide of Indians by stating that Indians weren't quite human; they were a rung down on the ladder. These individuals were mentally deficient and biologically as well as morally inferior because they didn't behave according to European standards. Although the colonizing pattern was different in the Southwest, a racial caste system became important; the
system was also based almost entirely on color and appearance. The lighter you were, the more upwardly mobile you were.

This particular heritage shaped the colonizers' attitudes and objectives. Their previous encounters had been with Indians who were primarily hunters and gatherers. These individuals were used to following the land for resources. It was assumed, then, that Indians were more or less addicted to wandering and warfare. They expected similar behavior from Indians in the Southwest. They came to regard the Pueblos as civilized Indians, however, because they were farmers. In their eyes, all the nomadic tribes remained barbarians opposed to settlements. The Anglos, unlike the Spaniards, had no intentions of civilizing the Indians; they were more interested in pushing the Indians out of the way and keeping them isolated. In general, Anglos thought in terms of extinction or forced isolation rather than Christian conversion. (Spicer, 344). They did not desire to integrate Indians into the Anglo-American society, since they had no established policy for civilizing Indians. England, and later, the United States, thought of Indians as a separate political entity (a view affirmed by the Marshall ruling) and so there was no campaign to convert them to anything bust dust. England and the United States followed a policy of acquiring land by either treaty or outright purchase or, as a last resort, simply by conquest. Early in 1800, it finally became apparent
to the Anglo-American colonizers that they had to deal with the Indian problem; they weren't just going to disappear, as had been erroneously assumed for the last two hundred years. The first of many changing Indian policies became a reality when the concept of "dependent domestic nation" was introduced by Chief Justice Marshall in the case of Cherokee Nation v. United States; the tribes were "regarded as having legal right to land which they occupied, but they were not political units formally integrated within United States....the laws of the United States did not apply within their territory." (Spicer, 34-35) In 1832 it was proposed to set aside an Indian territory west of the Mississippi River; there, the tribes were assured, they could continue to live in the "old ways." Many tribes were relocated to this new area. The concept underlying this approach to problems of Indian affairs was that the solution to land conflicts and a way of life lay in isolating the Indians as completely as possible from whites and letting them go their own way. Incorporating Indians into American society seems to have been an idea quite foreign to Whites. It was this viewpoint which led to the reservation system.

Treaties were negotiated with as many tribes as possible; these were intended to insure peace for Anglo expansion and to set territorial limits within which Indians were to remain. (Spicer, 345) Treaties at this time were nothing more than
promises to maintain the peace. It wasn't until after 1849 that the idea of civilizing the Indians began to take shape. The U.S. Government began to resettle the different tribes; the tribes agreed to cooperate if the U.S. Government were willing to provide protection from encroachment by settlers and certain cash payments or payments in food, clothing and other necessities. The expenses for supporting the tribes became so great that the U.S. Government began to want tribes to become self-sufficient. This meant that officials of the Department of the Interior had to undertake measures for economic and educational development to insure the integration of tribes into the nation; the Department of the Interior began to develop a program of assimilation. Isolation soon became an impossibility. The appearance of the Ghost Dance and the increasing raids by the Apache of the late 1880's indicated a need for some type of civilizing program.

The Dawes Act of 1887 was the first of many such programs. A major component of the Act was the land issue; it was decided that the land should be allotted to individual Indians. Spicer says,

It was thought that Indians needed to be civilized and that the basis of civilization consisted in knowing how to handle individual property. Out of such experience, it was reasoned, would come responsibility and awareness of the obligations of citizenship. Hence, if
the land which had been assigned as reservations to each tribe were now reassigned on an individual basis, there would appear stimulus to economic improvement. On such a basis would grow industriousness and desire to be like the Anglo-Americans. The tribal ties which were believed to be counter-productive to the lack of industry and the lack of individual responsibility would melt away and the Indians would become participants in the American nation. (Cycles of Conquest, 349)

Additionally, it was believed that citizenship was conditional on the proven ability to manage a piece of land. There was no provision to integrate the tribes politically. The Anglos also instituted administrative control over the reservations, making all decisions regarding the tribes without any input whatsoever from the tribes themselves. They instituted programs which also proved to be counter-productive to the tribes. Robert K. Thomas, for instance, record in his papers the following incident:

a friend of mine who is a tribal councilman from San Xavier told me several years ago the Bureau of Indian Affairs agricultural expert came to San Xavier and told them that in order to increase the fertility level of their farming, that they would have to remove the first six inches of soil from their fields. My friend said that San Xavier people were a little taken back by this advice but labored very hard and at some significant expense, managed to remove the first six inches of soil from their fields. Now my friend said an agricultural expert came to us and tells that we will have a hard time farming since it appears we have no top soil in
our fields. He told of his incident with some annoyance in his voice. (Process and Identity, 27)

Education was another factor in the civilizing process. It was believed that if Indian children were removed from the environment and required to be educated in Anglo schools, their barbaric heritages could be broken more quickly, an idea rooted in the early Spanish policies of colonization.

Another tactic was to suppress all religious ceremonies, especially those "offensive" to the missionary groups. Furthermore, the Federal Government established mission schools on the reservations to weed out these strange and heathen practices. The attempt to replace the Indian spiritual beliefs with those of Christianity proved an impossible task. Instead of dying, most of the ceremonies went underground.

But there were other factors which brought about change; the government program after the late 1800s and early 1900s was changing. One such change was the Indian Reorganization Act. This stopped the land allotment process and provided for on-reservation schools. It also provided for political integration, modeled after Mexican colonizers. It required that all tribes draw up constitutions and that each constitution be written with special reference to each tribe's social structure. The tribal political structure was now formally embodied with certain powers, such as the power to
tax and the ability to manage tribal resources. The traditional political structure began to change as the Bureau of Indian Affairs began to appoint Indians to act as legal spokespersons and sign legal documents on behalf of tribes.

The intent of this program was to culturally assimilate Indians, to disorganize their communities and, lastly, to influence Indian culture. They were hoping to replace Indian culture with Anglo culture. This assisted in the transition of dependent and domestic nations to enclaves of dependent nations with a lack of ability to make decisions.

This summary of Indian policies illustrates the difficulties to which Indians have been subjected to. North America was populated by a number of indigenous peoples long before Columbus arrived in this part of the world. But the systems forced on Indians were those of Europeans. Being recent arrivals to the area, Anglos should logically have adapted to the existing framework of Indian culture, the product of an ancient legacy, an enduring record of events and happenings. This history molds perceptions in turn. It is a record of man living in relation to the world. History gives us knowledge of how man came to be. This chronicle should have been a guide, a manual to judge the previous encounters and to learn from this. But Western society has refused to learn from indigenous forms of what took place in the Southwest history tragically illustrates this very well. We
have not learned anything from the last 500 years of contact; Western society continues to make the same mistakes in all phases of Indian life.

Indians have always known who they are. This accounts for the viability of the culture which has remained intact despite the five hundred years of contact. There are Indians who are still Indians, people who still speak their native language, people who still practice their traditional ways. In spite of their ample opportunity to learn from available cultures, Westerners still can't recognize their indigenous population. I know. I teach a class at a community college in Anthropology, a class entitled "Indians of the Southwest." At the beginning of the class, I give a simple test. It consists of the following questions: "define an Indian; name all the tribes in Arizona; name all the tribes in Tucson; and list ten stereotypes you know about Indians." Typically, the student define Indians according to their costume and physical characteristics; this response illustrates that a typical Westerner has difficulty defining what an Indian is. If you can't define an Indian, how you can you even explain them? It is, therefore, necessary to define Indians from both Native American and Western perspectives.
PERCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY

Firstly, how do Indians define themselves? For traditional people, that is, those individuals who live most of their lives on the reservation and close to their kinfolks, they define themselves as belonging to a particular group of people. They do not define themselves as Indians. I remember entering a classroom and heard somebody say, "an Indian." I had never seen an Indian. I had always been surrounded by my kinfolks and had never seen a white person until I entered school. Through various media I had come to associate "Indianness" with a huge warbonnets and riding a horse. I was very interested in seeing an Indian; I had never seen one up close. I was thoroughly surprised to discover that I was the Indian, especially since I had always introduced myself first as a Dine ("Person") then, if one did not know what that meant, as a Navajo," as a Navajo and finally, since a majority of people in Western society are unaware of what a Navajo is, an "Indian." But I certainly did not think of myself as Indian.

There are several parameters which further define tribal identity in a traditional setting. One such parameter is kinship. Individuals in an Indian community interact with each other on a daily basis; they never see stranger, only kinsmen. They know all the people in their community.
Everybody is familiar. It is a community based on a network of personal and unique relationships, both holistic and given. You never have to worry about who you are. You are complete; you are whole. You are not becoming anything, you just are. In this society, there are no terms for nuclear family, and there are distinct kin classificatory terms. It is not a community built on a structure of status and roles. In a role, a person performs and watches the self act; it is unique.

Such individuals also live in a sacred and traditional society. They have a unique world view, in that the members know that they exist in a universe that is alive. Everything is alive and has a spiritual significance. There are no internal guides or controls. Everything just is. The society is closed and bounded. It does not accept any definitions imposed by outsiders. It also does not look to other national groups to understand the meaning of an event. The parameters of the environment are defined within the system.

The tribe is both responsive to and a product of its natural environment. It evolves over time and becomes more and more adaptive to its environment. This accumulation of knowledge has become part of the ritual and religion; religion is defined as the attention to the sacred here and now. It defines the group or person. The problem with the educational system is that foreign values supersede the traditional ones.
The tribe also realizes that the environment is sacred and traditional. Traditions are the only authority; tradition is the accumulation of sacred knowledge. The integrity of the individual is inviolate; therefore, no individual has authority over another individual. Leaders have rank and prestige but no authority over the individual.

There is no definition within tribal societies for the word "Indian." This is an erroneous label imposed externally by Europeans. It was a term applied by Columbus who mistakenly thought he had arrived in the Indies.

Columbus called the people he saw as *los indios*, a term apparently used at the time to refer to all peoples east of the Indus River. It comes to us in English as 'the Indians.' (Gill, 4)

Most Indian people define themselves as members of a particular Indian nation. That is, they define themselves first as Navajos, Seminoles, or Tohono O'odham, then Indians and, lastly, as Americans. In Western society, individuals usually invert this order, defining themselves as Americans first, then by their ethnicity, such as Irish, Italians, etc.

Other errors in the word come from cultural differences between the indigenous people and the Europeans. Deeply embedded in the cultural makeup of a man of European descent background is the accumulated experience of the Judeo-Christian spiritual tradition, the heritages of the ancient civilization of the Near East, Greece and Rome, and the
various political, social and economic systems of Western Europe; the Indian culture was obviously and profoundly different from that of Europeans. Thus the cross-cultural encounters inevitably led to a series of mutual misconceptions. Beginning with Columbus, these colonizers observed and judged natives from a Eurocentric point of view, failing consistently to grasp the realities and truths of Indians themselves and their backgrounds and cultures. In the early years of the 16th century, educated Whites steeped in the theological teachings of Europe argued about whether or not Indians were humans with souls; whether they, too, were derived from Adam and Eve (and therefore, like the rest of mankind) or whether they were a previously unknown subhuman species. Other Europeans spent long years puzzling over the origin of the Indians and developing evidence that they were Egyptians, Chinese or descendants of one of the Lost Tribes of Israel (a view espoused by Mormons), Welshman or even the survivors of a civilization that had once flourished on a lost continent in the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans.

There were no Indians before Columbus, before the Europeans came to America, that is, no people who called themselves "Indians". They were called by various names, Navajos, Tohono O'odham, Cherokee or Yaquis, etc. (Even these names were often categories created by Europeans.) The numerous groups scattered throughout United States do,
however, share some commonalities, but they are also separate people, each with their own languages, cultures and names. Every reservation has a story about an incredulous White coming in and staring at an individual. "Are you a real Indian? You don't look like a real Indian." Since Indians come from different nations, their physical features, body structure, and skin color vary a great deal. Stereotypes abound when Europeans discuss Indians. A questionnaire I distribute on the first day of class asks the students to identify the physical characteristics of Indians. Respondents include such things as "dark-skinned or red-skinned, black and long hair, overweight, etc."

A study of Indians is actually more a study of European views about the native peoples of America. The Indians and the ancestors of the Europeans have had five hundred years of contact; neither has learned much in these five hundred years. Instead, these stereotypes and preconceptions are reinforced through the educational system and perpetuated through the media. The Anglo society probably knows less about Indians today than it did five hundred years ago. The current situation at the Tucson schools is a good example of this misunderstanding.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs of the Department of Interior, whose function is to act on behalf of Indians, defines Indians as a person who must have Indian blood. To
have this is to have Indian ancestors living in American before the arrival of the Europeans. It means that a parent/grandparent/ great-grandparent was clearly identified as an Indian. Indian tribes have varying blood requirements for enrollment. Many tribes require at least 1/4 Indian blood and some a lower percentage, but Federal requirements usually require at least 1/4 (so some individuals can't be Indians even though they may be members of many different tribal groups). Traditionals would prefer to determine membership by participation and belief in the culture. This definition is of Western origin and probably instituted to determine eligibility for the tribal resources. The two definitions indicate a dichotomy on the views of what constitutes an Indian. This further adds to the confusion.

There have been significant changes in American Indian life; we know there has been significant acculturation which has, in turn, had a significant impact on perspectives. The Indian tribes, after almost 500 years of contact, are still being bombarded by Western culture. Robert K. Thomas in "Process and Identity," remarks

there has been a great many changes in North America even before 1650. I see three dynamics of change before 1605. First, any tribal group as it lives in a stable natural environment learns more about that environment and, as it learns, it changes to better adapt to that environment....Every time I visit my friends in their camp I can see small and
subtle changes in life there; changes in social organization, division of labor, socialization of the young, leadership roles and so forth. Life there is certainly not static. And this small band of hunters is becoming more and more efficient in that environment. They are not simply responding to the demands of the natural environment. They are learning more about how to live well in such a natural milieu and refining their social and cultural forms accordingly.

These changes can take place either through assimilation or acculturation. Assimilation is either defined as the social and outward absorption of a group. Acculturation means that the subordinate group takes on the culture of another group. Culture usually means forms, items, practices, institutions, etc. for us. It also means perceptions, ways of being, values, philosophy, worldview, outlook -- anything that reflects the inner man. Culture also means socialization into a way of being. In "Process and Identity," Dr. Thomas paraphrases Sol Tax's definition of culture:

He said in the 1950's that culture is inseparable from the existence of the some human group. He referred particularly to human communities. In human communities, people have systematic, organized and structured relations of one to another. Moreover, this network of relations had a boundary. In laymen's terms one would say that most Indian communities are groups of kinsmen who live together in intimate circumstances and who tend not to associate, to any great extent, with people outside of that group of kinsmen. Tax says that it is human communities
that have culture. Further, central to culture are the meanings and perceptions which people 'carry' in their heads. Cultural traits and customs are simply reflective of these meanings and perceptions. Personality and values are another way to look at these meanings. Of course, these meanings are shared by members of a human community. Ergo, Tax said that as long as these human community maintains some cohesion, then these meanings will tend to change only as that total group has new experiences. If an item from another culture is simply taken over by such a human community, then it will be integrated into the already existing system of meanings of these people. There, so says, Tax, it is possible for a human community to take on a great many items from another culture and to integrate these items from into its matrix of cultural meanings without significant cultural change. So boundary has an effect on how social change takes place and what they were in, whether they would adapt or not. (20)

Tribes have experienced changes but not the normal ones. For example, more tribal members are living in the city. Since the government instituted the relocation program, a great number of tribal members have been raised and socialized in the city. This affects how the individuals will identity themselves and how they will relate to their world. One of the major effects is the loss of language which indicates

That many Indians have a new conception of themselves and see themselves as now in on the 'American act.' Of course, there are special conditions which can bring about language loss, such as a change in your notion of your place in the world. For instance, in Western Oklahoma, there is so much inter-tribal
marriage that it is almost impossible for any community there to continue using their native languages. But inter-tribal marriages are, in themselves, an indication of major change in self-conception. In the case of western Oklahoma, it is not the Indians that are becoming an Indian American ethnic group but they certainly must be, at least, creating a new type of generalized Indian community. ("Process and Identity, 28)

It is these conditions which formed the perspective of the urbanized and westernized Indians. These are usually individuals who have resided for a number of years away from a traditional setting. The relocation program of the U.S. Government was primarily responsible for this. After World War II, when Indians got the opportunity to experience Western society, they began to understand that there was life away from the reservation. Through the relocation program, they were offered the opportunity to learn a vocational skill. A large number of families were relocated to large urban centers, such as Los Angeles, Dallas and Chicago. There they remained with their children being socialized in Western ways. Another factor is marriage outside the tribe, usually involving individuals who were sent away to boarding school. With marriage between two tribal members, it is usually difficult to decide which tribe to be affiliated with. Sometimes, you have individuals whose identity rests with more than one tribe.
Sometimes, the children of these marriages are Indians in name only. They don't know their language; they have never lived on the reservation. If they have gone to a reservation, it was probably just for a short visit, probably to visit family members. Since they do not speak the language, they cannot communicate with many of their elder kin. They cannot spend any time on the reservation since they cannot communicate; therefore, they cannot be socialized in a typically traditional fashion, and they have no idea what the traditional way of life is like. They know they are Indians, but they don't know what that means. They are perplexed about who and what they are.

Identity is important since it is what guides an organism's transformation through its life cycles. Identity means that you exist. In an Indian, an individual's transformation through its life cycle is achieved through several mechanisms, one of which is religion. In "Process and Identity," Thomas states "among American Indian groups it has been primarily religion which has been focused on as symbolic of identity in these ideological or enclaved tribes. In other words, the native religion becomes the center of the culture, and not simply as expressive of a person and a lifeway but as a symbol of lifeway and a peoplehood." The identity of an individual is reflected in the way he greets his deities and the way he interacts with these sacred beings.
But this transformation never takes place in the life of urban Indians because individuals are never socialized in a traditional fashion. They don't know what you are talking about and don't understand the ramifications of going out in the early hours of the morning and greeting their deities. To such individuals, these activities only have meaning on Sunday. The rest of the week they are forgotten. They have modelled their worship on the Christian pattern. An urban Indian's socialization is Western but, unfortunately, Western society, in turn, tends to look upon them as Indians, and expects them to act as such. They know as much about traditional societies as the next White person.

There are also urbanized Indians who know they are Indians but haven't had the opportunity to be socialized in a traditional setting. They understand the importance of such a process but are socialized in a Pan-Indian setting. Pan Indianism is defined as the expression of a new identity and of the institutions and symbols which are both an expression of that new identity and a fostering of it. ("Pan Indianism," 77) This identity is usually associated with the Plains traditions, where pow-wows are now the social events. It is an attempt to form a new group with new institutions and a new ideology. This is especially prevalent in urban settings where there are Indian clubs which allow young people to meet.
These activities usually do not have much impact on traditional people but do have an impact on urban Indians. Robert K. Thomas says in "Indian Religion" that Indians have adopted much of contemporary American's material culture such as cars, television and mobile homes and Indians are increasingly involved in America's non-material culture, such as Christianity, formal education, and bureaucratic government. At the same time, there has been reassertion of distinctively Indians practices, such as the spread of pow-wows (social dances) from Oklahoma to reservations throughout North America and the increase in aboriginal Indian religious ceremonies. Some signs point towards absorption of Indians into the larger society, such as through intermarriages, language loss and weakening kin ties, whereas others point to a cultural revival, such as the attempts of city Indians to return and rejoin their original rural communities, the deliberate use of Indian languages in the home and in public affairs, and the revival of aboriginal institutions of government and religion. (Unpublished manuscript)

Significant changes have taken place in modern Indians. In "Process and Identity", Thomas points out "that the nature of the relationship between the powerful society and American Indian groups had contributed to this pattern of loss of traits but cultural continuity; that is to say, the excessive control by the federal bureaucracy or local establishments had effectively sealed off American Indian communities from contact with the rest of the world." Such a phenomenon tends
to control the type of experience that Indian tribes have had to face. Sometimes they are unprepared for these changes.

Since 1950 there have been significant changes. Because of the implementation of the government's relocation program and other governmental policy, a large number of tribal members began moving to the cities. This phenomenon resulted in a large number of Indians being raised and socialized in the city; they no longer live in the old-styled and bounded communities. Additionally, this means that large numbers of Indian children have been educated and socialized in the Western system. This experience creates reactions which are unlike those in tribal life. For example, the introduction of new institutional forms has tended to erode traditional structures and to introduce new specialization in roles. What sustained tribal members in the past is no longer utilized. "Sheep raising has become progressively less important to Navajos." More and more Indians are becoming dependent on western institutions; the care of the sick and the aged are progressively being taken over by agencies. There is still sharing among relatives. There are still formal give aways. But there is very little cooperative labor either in farming, stock raising, house building, wood cutting and so forth." ("Process and Identity, 73)

What about these changes and how are tribes responding to them? The recent contact groups are still reeling under the
impact of Western society, and it is difficult at this time to assess how these communities will integrate or respond to these changes. The second type of Indian groups are the ethnics. They may think of themselves as American Indians -- part of the larger society -- and then as part of a tribal society, and they act accordingly. This group regards itself as part of the general American society, a special and distinctive part, but still a part of American society. But it usually has no desire to assimilate.

The different groups responded to changes in a variety of ways. We see more signs of pan-Indianism such as pow-wows. For example, the Tohono O'odham have no pow-wow in their ceremonies or rituals; yet the Tohono O'odham are taking on pow-wows, as evidenced by the yearly Wa:k Powwow. It is a means of defining their identity within the urban Indian community of Tucson. Another common ceremony is the Sun Dance. We see Navajo males participating in this ritual; yet, the Sun Dance is not part of the Navajo religious cycle. Nevertheless, it is probably the most important ceremonial event of the Plains tribes.

Now that we have discussed the Indian societies in general, let us turn our attention to Western society. As Indians view it, modern American civilization is the antithesis of tribal society. It is a society based on the individual; it is the opposite of a group-based tribal
society. Individuality is downplayed in tribal society, whereas in Western society, the individual is important. In civilization, religion and traditions have a small role; there is no idea of a sacred world as there is in the Indian communities. In fact, the sacred world provides the primary emphasis in tribal society.

Modern American society is a society based on institutions; institutions are the way people in a community come together and arrange their social relations in order to do some life task for that community. The American middle class lives in a world where "things" are mere objects and activities are important in human life. Most Americans simply assume that people, perceptions and the quality of relationships are standard around the world, and therefore, look to "things" and activities to explain differences in cultures.

America is urban. Urban life is typically city life, and cities mean dense concentrations of people. Urban society is a society on a large scale, and urban areas are linked together by communication, trade and government; the city is the center of a network of relationships and activities. There is a great deal of coming and going, of interchange and exchange, and so forth. Urban populations are by no means isolated or self-contained.
An urban population is highly heterogenous culturally. There are a great deal of cultural differences, variety in ethnic background, life experiences, wealth, occupation, place of birth, and even language. There are differences in values, mentality, and outlook, and these tend to vary according to occupational roles. Life experiences are probably more critical in determining how a person comes to see the world, and surely the life experience of a policemen is rather different from that of a university professor. Historically, town life has been characterized by small neighborhoods, showing much less heterogeneity, but that is becoming less and less the case in Europe and North America.

Urban populations have no strong definition of themselves -- there is a little sense of an "US" against some other "THEM". Urban society is not a strongly bounded society. People come and go, and their allegiances come and go as well. City life is best characterized as a life among strangers. A culture is above all, a set of common understandings, common meanings; one, however, cannot find a culture in such diversity. It means the things that people agree on implicitly are not significant, to say the least. There is a commonality, perhaps based on law, for example, which allows the society to operate. But if there is more commonality than that, it is usually based on conformity rather than consensus. The same oneness one may find in a city suburb, for instance,
which may look like a community in behavioral terms, is more the product of conformity than it is of any kind of consensus among people.

Now, a life lived among strangers, among people whose ethnic and regional origins, language, occupation, differ substantially from one's own, creates conditions for typically urban behavior. There can be very few "givens" -- shared assumptions -- in urban life. There is not much social life, not much one can count on. One cannot know for sure what person one is meeting, what the social situation requires or provides; such circumstances call for an appropriate behavior. Behavior becomes conscious, rational, critical, and very self aware. It also becomes impersonal in the sense that people tend to enjoy only partial relationships with each other, usually vis-a-vis their occupations. If one goes into a gas station, one's relationship with the attendant is one of a customer-to-seller and little more. One does not need to know that the attendant had a fight with his wife that morning or whatever. In urban society, relationships are predominantly functional. More than that, you are judged a great deal by role categories, by symbols of rank. For instance. How one is dressed and so forth, one's speech, and one's general manner usually places one in some general category of roles which are ranked in society. One can tell working class people from
middle class people on the basis of their role symbols: dress, demeanor and so forth.

Furthermore, life in such a society is fragmented. One goes from situation to situation, from work to home for example, and there is little carry-over from one to the other. One participates in several social groups, each associated with a special purpose but few relationships carry over from one group to the other. Life is specialized and it is secular. It is secular because it is an object world. Objects are not alive as a living being is alive; objects do not contain the possibility of emergent, personal meaning which might be a definitive one. The term "objective" as it is used today implies that no emotive meaning is elicited from the observer, and the relationship is devoid of mutual involvement. When one relates to another person impersonally, as in a reciprocal role, this is defined as an object relationship. And what most people do in urban society is live in this secular object world and thread their way through it. They have to be selective about where they are going and what to respond to, and they have to be reflective. There is so much stimuli just on the urban street corners that one would be overwhelmed unless one selected out what one wanted to attend to in terms of one's own purpose. Of course, if behavior is rational, conscious, critical, and personal and, if moreover, the world is fragmented and secular, these are
perfect conditions to give rise to that kind of thought which we call scientific, which looks at the world objectively and proceeds to figure out what causes what. What science does to a large degree is what we as urban people do every day; science is just a more systematized way of doing things.

Urban society is held together by large institutions, which urban people create for specific purposes. We make them up in our heads and put them on paper and bring them into being for a certain job. This is a world where literacy is tremendously important. Literature is the communication of strangers. It is impersonal communication. The writer need not interact with his audience on a face-to-face basis. One does not depend on the emotive context to supply meaning as one does when one interacts personally with someone. Urban society could not operate without words on paper.

These large institutions, created abstractly and then put to work by agreement, are the cement of such a society. That's what holds it together. And into these institutions urban men fit themselves into arranged in hierarchies of specialized role functions. There are many kinds of institutions -- educational, economic, governmental -- all made of people in specialized role functions.

Current urban society is not really a society. It is a mass of individuals maximizing themselves and bound together only by laws and institutions. The society bounded by
institution is sanctioned by law. These laws are agreed-on systems for strangers to live comfortably with one another. It is a society which must experiment perpetually in order to find ways for strangers to live comfortably together. Take, for example, strangers in an elevator. Now, one knows he shouldn't strike up a conversation with others. Additionally, he is supposed to look at the number of the floors. People generally never talk on elevators.

This is a society which makes one conscious of himself and his constantly changing environment. There are few relationships that one can count on. These relationships are usually based on money. For example, "when one enters a restaurant for a meal, one does not get fed because one is a kinsman, a member of the community, one gets fed because one has the necessary resources, money." (Process and Identity, 17)

Urban society puts the onus on the individual to decide who he is. The individual is responsible for his own identity. In urban life, persons make themselves and even make their world around them. They control and work on themselves as objects. The individual picks out a role and puts himself into it. Important terms in modern American civilization are discipline, control, responsibility and freedom, and all of these terms relate to the process of creating oneself. In modern times, this self-creation takes
place in the context of roles, occupational ones. The individual creates himself and validates the chosen role by his activities.

CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES

We have discussed three groups, participants in Western society in general, urban Indians and traditional Indians, each of whom, we will find, have divergent views on educational philosophy. Experiences have shaped the perspectives of the three groups. Three issues -- Indian dropout rate, cultural insensitivity on the part of the administrators, and the lack of parental involvement -- were all considered extremely important by the parent group and will be analyzed individually. The first issue is the significant impact of the high dropout rate on Indian students. There has been a significant amount of literature on this issue; I would like to include a section of a paper done by a student here.

Statistically speaking, the dropout rate for Indians was 35.5% in 1988. This is 13% higher than that for either Afro-American or Hispanic students. Since only 3.1% of all students are American Indians, this figure is extremely high. Of the students enrolled in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, 37% are classified as having some kind of learning handicap.
Special education programs often have a disproportionate minority enrollment. When you compare that with Afro-American students, you find that their handicap rate is only 9% while that of Hispanics is only 7%. This statistical information indicates that Indian cultures and the special needs of Indians are being overlooked, misinterpreted and/or devalued. (Harvey, 1991) Apparently, this is of great concern to the parents; they understand the need for education. What they don't understand is why the administration is failing to address the issue.

The parents were concerned about the high rate of Indian dropout. They felt that topics covered in school weren't relevant; therefore, the Indian students had no commitment to the school system. Despite this, they feel that education is important; all you have to do is review speeches given by tribal leaders. They almost always mention the importance of education. What they don't understand is why the educational institutions aren't doing more to educate their children. Considering the history and the emphasis that colonizers have placed on education, they do not understand why more isn't being done. Traditional parents are beginning to understand that their children have to function in both the traditional and non-traditional societies; they want their children to be well prepared. Traditional parents usually place more emphasis on doing well academically. Even if they aren't able
to assist their children with homework, at least, they still emphasize getting it done. They are more likely to confront the problem of academic deficiencies but in a traditional setting -- by putting a child through a ceremony or ritual. The indirect function of these ceremonies is to bolster the confidence and self-esteem of the students who know, in turn, that precious resources are being expended to assist them in meeting their educational goals. The expectations and support of the parents and the community forces the children to succeed. But the important factor is that the parents and community all are involved in ensuring their children's success and they all take pride in the accomplishment of the students.

This support system is rarely intact for urbanized Indian students. In most situations, the family is some distance from their kin and they really have no one to look to for support. They, consequently, do not have access to ceremonies. Additionally, these ceremonies have no meaning for the individual, so the intent of the ceremony is lost.

The administrators, on the other hand, do not deal with the problem; they skirt the issue. For example, the administrator I interviewed felt there was alot of incorrect information about the dropout rates. She felt that the misinformation was damaging to the school, to the students, to the Indian community, and to the parents. She had read that
there was 33% dropout rate, but she felt that this information was misleading. She acknowledged that there is a dropout problem, but felt that the 33% was exaggerated, "we recognize [the problem] and we are dealing with it and seeing results. The statistics is changing." The five-year-old statistics that she cites is that the dropout rate was 25% in 1988 and in 1989, 18%. But she admits that 18% is still high.

Their immediate concern was that the dropout rate was high; their public image was damaged by the high rate. In their minds, the statistical information was more important than remedies. For example, they don't deal specifically with remedies. They do have specific activities or places where students are encouraged to feel like they belong. They instituted a cultural center at Desert View; they are going to try something similar at other schools. The District has hired Indian staff that the students can identify with. They have also been doing attitudinal surveys for the last five years which try to determine whether students like school or not. Not included in the survey was the question as to why the students like or disliked school. They are trying to get more personnel with a caring attitude. And lastly, they are making tutoring available, and available sooner, before a student's academic problems reach a crisis situation.

The attitude that students feel that they belong is important. The fact that the school administrators bring up
this point indicates that the educational atmosphere isn't conducive to a sense of belonging as well as learning. How can students feel comfortable in an environment where they are made to feel unwelcome? Whether this is intentional or not, the attitude is still there. The fact that the student perceive this to be so indicates the validity of their feelings. Instituting a cultural center isn't going to make a difference if the students don't feel they're part of the system. Attitudes have to be adjusted. Cultural relevance of educational material is important. Why study Shakespeare if a majority of the students have never heard of Shakespeare? If you don't know anything about Indian culture, how can you make meaningful decisions about what is culturally relevant. This attitude needs to be recognized and adjusted.

She believes the District's philosophy that "all students can and will succeed" demonstrates convincingly the District's commitment to the students. She believes that changes will take time; she has already seen some improvements, but she still maintains that it is demoralizing to her staff to hear that 33% of the students are dropping out. Unless there is good data to support her position, it will not help the students. She believes that incorrect information reinforces the pessimism about the prospects of success.

Without statistical information, it is difficult to discern whether the District has made any progress in their
dropout rate; the lack thereof is counterproductive. The statistics is available, since the assurance was made that this formation would be available in time for the meeting. Additionally, other members of the Indian Studies class made several attempts to obtain this information and were given the "runaround." One can only speculate why the data has not been made available, and one can only assume that such information must be damaging in nature.

If the District is concerned about being misrepresented by the media, at least where the dropout rate is concerned, then the best way to counter the damage is to keep correct and up-to-date information. Why doesn't the District so do? The administration indicated that they did have the information but it was so rough that it wouldn't make sense to anyone. "We are doing it," she says, "but it is done by hand. We have to do so many other reports, it didn't seemed that significant... Schools aren't required to do that. They are required to keep other data.... This wasn't a priority. We now have a computer system where we can do that." The administrator reiterated the improvement the District has made. I asked her what the District dropout rate was five years ago. It was 25% five years ago but last year it was 18%, District-wide. If this is statistically accurate, then the school does seem to be making some progress. On the other hand, if the District only keeps rough data, how sure can she
be in her pronouncements that the school is making improvements. I again requested the data when it becomes available. The response was non-committal; the data would be available at some future date.

There seems to be a question as to how a "dropout" is defined. The state, according to one of the officials I interviewed, had re-defined "dropout", a move that would make the statistics more meaningful. The District, I was told, has two types of dropouts: "hardcore" and "seasonal". The hardcore are those who leave the school system totally. Seasonal dropouts, on the other hand, are those individuals who don't do well during the first nine-weeks, drop out and then return later. These individuals have to deal with their teachers reinforcing their lack of success by telling them that they aren't doing well, that they are going to get an "F" no matter what they do. So they drop out. They make another attempt in January and the cycle is repeated. A contradiction between policy and practice exists. Despite the District's philosophy that "all students can and will succeed," you have a teacher who is denying that likelihood. The District needs to address this issue.

The school does not address the issue of dropout or the remedies; they skirt the issue by defining dropouts as "hardcore" or "seasonal". A dropout is a dropout regardless of how you define it. They can manipulate the data. Their
dropout rate is made to be smaller than what everyone seems to think. Their emphasis is centered on statistics and definitions. They don't look beyond this so they have no idea why Indian students drop out; therefore, there are no solutions.

Society views dropouts as individuals who leave the academic environment simply because of overwhelming academic and social frustrations. They view themselves as misfits; they mask their feelings of insecurity, inadequacy and loneliness by withdrawing from basic social learning. School administrators like to consider the home as a primary cause of this phenomena, but it is unproductive to blame the parents. The school administrators indicated that another contributing factor to a student dropping out was a negative home environment. Home environment was not explained, so I am presuming it means the home environment in the Western sense, a family composed of a mother, father and immediate siblings with a father who is the family's primary wage earner. Their contention is that unless a student has a good home environment, students lack the support mechanisms -- academic and otherwise -- to complete high school.

We live in a fast-tempoed, every-changing and very demanding society characterized by a high success-value orientation that is an antithesis to traditional Indian cultures. The emphasis is on how to acquire these values.
One of the speeches I heard was "When a youngster quits school before formal completion, he is in effect, removing himself from a potential lifetime income officially estimated at $165,000 for a high school graduate." Now individuals in this age bracket cannot comprehend the enormity of such a decision; he may not possess the maturity to fully understand his situation. Such an individual usually needs guidance and counseling. The dropout may be a person with serious personality and environmental conflicts rather than an immature person who simply decides to walk away from his responsibilities. On the other hand, it may be individuals who are behaving according to cultural expectations. The student is frustrated with the educational system. The Western education system is based on an accumulation of knowledge in one discipline. Education, in a traditional Indian community, is personal and informal. It involves a learning process which encompasses many disciplines.

Another concern expressed by the parents was the lack of parental involvement. There was mutual agreement that parents needed to get involved in the educational process, but there was disagreement as to how this could be accomplished. There were many reasons for the non-involvement. Parents, for instance, felt uncomfortable with the bureaucratic processes, since they did not understand them. This compounded the problem of feeling isolated from the process. There were
other reasons, but the basic one was that the parents felt uncomfortable; they did not feel welcome. The attitude that most Indians encounter in Western society is one of superiority. This attitude was present at the first encounter and it hasn't changed in the last five hundred years. This superior attitude, although it may be unconscious, made the parents feel their opinions weren't important.

The behavior of the administrators confirmed this perception. They set the agenda and took administrative control of the meetings; the Parent Committee felt like a "rubber stamp." Furthermore, the behavior confirms this attitude. For example, at a meeting that I attended, the administrator had prepared a proposal which needed review by the parent group. She did not allow them sufficient time to review the material; she wanted the committee to approve the proposal immediately. The Parent Committee, according to one school administrator, is viewed as an advisory group. "When I first came into this position, I relied heavily on the technical services provided by Johnson O'Malley and Title V....I feel ....based on their guidelines, their definition of the role is that it is an advisory role." The Parent Committee feels their input is ignored. The administrators do whatever they want. The group felt that they were not given enough information to make an informed decision. They also felt that while some information was made available, it often
came at the most inconvenient time -- when proposals and grants had to be submitted, always with the statement that it is due tomorrow. So the parents had no choice but to approve it. Otherwise, they would lose the funding. Yet, the school maintains that their recommendations are very much taken into consideration. 95% of the time their recommendations are taken very seriously, if not followed.

The schools indicated all the students were served by Indian counselors but also had parent liaisons between the parents and the schools. Although everyone agreed that parents should be more involved with their child's education, the degree of involvement was refined. The administrators felt the involvement should be more education-oriented rather than administrative. It was suggested that a workshop be instituted so parents could help their children with math. This is a very unrealistic viewpoint, as many parents probably don't have the mathematical skills to tutor their children, and I am talking about parents in general, not just Indian parents.

School officials felt that middle school children don't even like to see their parents involved since they are trying to cut the apron strings. This resistance seems to intensify at the high school level where children don't want to see even the slightest hint of parental involvement. She indicated that there seems to a lack of concern among Indian parents.
The Indian staff person confirms this: "I did get one parent who said, 'I don't have enough time in a day to get really involved with my child's education.' He didn't really get involved." He asked two Indian parents to get involved in September. They came once and after that....He has asked other parents to get involved in different components of education, such as the Indian Parent Group or even the curriculum committee or superintendent committee, etc. It is difficult for individuals to understand when a choice has to be made between eating and volunteering. For those parents who are fortunate enough to be employed, it is difficult to work and then to have to volunteer.

Both administrators pointed out that the social functions seem to draw the most parental support. This seems to indicate parents are aware that school is important. The other factor to consider is that social functions are less threatening and less intimidating.

As for making a more comfortable environment, she feels the district is making every effort to make the parents comfortable and she, herself, is making every effort to accommodate the parents' wishes. For example, when the parents wanted to move the meeting place to the District's boardroom, she did so. She feels that every effort was made by the District to make the parents feel welcomed.
The lack of parental involvement can perhaps also be attributed to a negative home environment. Indian school officials says, "children argue with their parents and they move out; their base of support is gone, so they drop out. The home environment, no doubt, contributes to the lack of educational progress. But placing the entire blame on the home environment is counterproductive. The administrator's perception of what constitutes an ideal home environment is very different; an Indian's perception of what constitutes an ideal home environment is also very different. To reconcile the varying viewpoints, one must have a better understanding of the Indian culture. In Western society, an ideal home environment usually means a father, mother and siblings. The father is the primary wage earner. In Indian societies, an ideal home environment has different meanings, depending on the tribal culture. In a matrilineal family, if an Indian family is lacking a father, it is usually the mother's brother that the family looks to for male leadership. Since this is an atypical family situation, this would not fit the description of an ideal home environment.

To attribute the problems of a negative home environment to the lack of student's progress is counterproductive. Just because you have no control over it doesn't mean you should ignore it. The institution's responsibility is to educate the child. Although negative home environments may be a problem,
some students succeed nonetheless. There are reasons why these students succeed. One reason may be expectations; parent and teacher's expectations alike affect student achievement. The fact that they are going to be penalized if they do not complete their assignment is a factor. Self-esteem was acknowledged as relevant, that is, the child believing that he or she develop academically. Parental involvement determines whether or not the child completes his or her homework but equally important is whether or not the teacher gets involved in the process. The key is expectations. Your particular culturally-based philosophy or goals may not have universal applications but if one's expectations are minimal, then he or she obtains minimal returns.

The last topic of concern was cultural insensitivity on the part of the administrators. The parent group felt the administrators did not recognize the cultural diversity of the tribes. The Director acknowledges that she doesn't know enough about Indian culture but says it shouldn't be a problem. When she was hired as the Director, she didn't know she had to deal with Indian education. She has had no experience whatsoever in this area; her experience is in bilingual education. What she knows of Indian education she's learned since her tenure with Indian education. She's had no opportunity to be close to the Indian community. She relies
on her Indian staff's expertise and she meets with them regularly. The District buys books on Indian culture and she reads quite a bit. Her expertise, however, lies in bilingual education; she's been in that field for twenty years. She maintains that as a member of a minority group she knows what it is like to be a minority.

Historically, other minorities' perceptions of Indians is comparable to that of Western society as they obtain the information from the same source. They, too, perceive Indians as members of a generically defined group, as people who pillage, plunder and wear war bonnets. The last five hundred years of contact has not corrected this viewpoint. One only has to read a history book to discover this and history continually perpetuates this view.

The administrator also holds the generic views of Indians. "Have you gone to any cultural events?" I asked her. She didn't feel it was necessary. After all she has her staff for expertise and additionally, she consults books, books written from a Western perspective. Unfortunately, her staff members are also urbanized Indians. They have no sense of tribal identity and would be hard pressed to define what an Indian is.

Identity is extremely important in determining your Indianness, and it is this intangible quality which determines responses to your environment. In a traditional setting, the
concept of Indianness is emphasized at an early age. Usually one is required to learn the tribal language first, and then one is forced to learn English. But the tribal language is strongly emphasized, "you are never going to be white. Your eyes aren't going to turn blue, so you better learn your language". This emphasis on language allows you to communicate with every member of your family, especially those who do not speak English.

The educational process is very personal; it is usually the responsibility of your family members. It is expected that everyone will contribute. For example, when one herds sheep, one is exposed to the environment, you can learn about plants and its medicinal uses. You are taught sacred history, philosophy and other discipline during appropriate time of the seasons. Participation in rituals and ceremonies are encouraged and expected. All of these activities play a role in defining your identity. You know who you are.

Western education, on the other hand, is very traumatic. Your first exposure to the educational process is a stranger who's only interest is that you sit in a desk and be quiet. You are still standing up and don't know what to do because you can't understand this strange language that is coming out of her mouth. She is getting exasperated with you because it is your fault that you can't understand her. In a very short time you become frustrated so you refuse to participate and
you are labeled as stupid. You are embarrassed to go to class and so you skip out. After a while, you get behind in your class work and you never catch up. It is a vicious cycle that can have a demoralizing effect on Indian students.

On the other hand, if the expectations are high and the teacher refused to accept anything less, the student will succeed. There are a number of reservation private schools who will attest to the success they've had.

Let's take a typical scenario of two students who fail, one an urbanized Indian and the other, a traditional Indian. The degree to which one values oneself varies between the two. For example, if a student fails in the traditional community, the student is not blamed; he is not made to feel that he is less than a person. The family views the failure as forces beyond the student's control. The family will then take other steps, such as putting a child through a ritual, one that plays an important role in reinforcing the support of the family and, additionally, the self-esteem of the individual involved. The student has his/her family about him/her and he/she trusts that he/she can't fail the next time. the ritual reinforces that the support is always present. What else can he/she do except succeed.

The support of the family is extremely important. It indicates to the individual that he is important to the community regardless of his failure; failure is not emphasized.
Familial support will always be there. The family makes tremendous sacrifices to ensure that the student completes the schooling. The caring and nurturing which part of the socialization and educational process is built into the society which places great emphasis on the kinship. A traditional family with few resources will encourage the student with an overabundant supply of emotional support. The sacrifices made by the family demand, in turn, that the student succeed.

An urbanized student, with only his immediately family present, does not have this built in support. Parents lacking the guidance of the elders respond in a typically Western fashion. They castigate the student and discuss his shortcomings. The student, already defensive, feels hurt and confused. The situation is compounded by the inability of the parents to deal with the situation effectively. The student, feeling tremendous pressure, can't deal with the situation. So they do the next best thing. They drop out. It is difficult for him/her to get the built-in support. In a traditional society, if you can't talk to your parents, you can always talk to other members of your family.
The following quote was taken from the December 17th issue of *Arizona Daily Star*.

Nearly one in every four people in this nation is a person of color. By the end of the next generation, people of color will account for 55 percent of the U.S. population. People of color will also constitute the majority of work force in the year 2000 and beyond. Such a projection forecasts the tremendous social and economic changes in the way this nation will do business. In both the public and private sectors, policies and programs are being developed that directly affect diversity.

It has become necessary for many employers to offer training in cultural and ethnic awareness and sensitivity. That's because despite 214 years as a democracy, we still have not learned how to live together and respect the rights of people who are perceived as different.

Our schools, churches, homes and media have not fostered enough of an atmosphere of understanding, trust, communication or sharing. Polarization and hostility remain the watchwords for many reas where people of varying races and backgrounds are forced to interact.

This article aptly describes the environment, not only at Sunnyside School District but elsewhere. In spite of the rhetoric that everything possible is being done, we still have not learned to appreciate diversity and take advantage of it. In fact, "polarization and hostility remain the watchword." Unless administrators recognize this diversity, accept it, and
become comfortable with it, then discrimination will remain, an obstacle to real change. Because discrimination was, at one time, so prevalent, it has become institutionalized and exists even now, despite the arguments that bias is a thing of the past.

Until we recognize and accept diversity, the situation at Sunnyside will continue. Recognition of diversity involves admitting that you lack knowledge about a specific tribal or ethnic group. This can contribute to cultural misunderstanding as I stated in the introduction. The district's administrator assumed that all tribal groups are same; she recognized no differences. In fact there are 22 reservations in Arizona with three major linguistic families. Yes, there are common historical experiences; all tribal groups had to deal with the three colonizers. But not all tribes fared the same in their encounters.

Unless Western society is willing to admit that their educational techniques have not been effective, the school dropout will continue to climb; it affects both our human and financial resources.
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