

Summary of Responses to NIEA “Building Partnerships” Workshop

35th Annual Meeting of the National Indian Education Association
Phoenix, Arizona
October 28-31

Facilitated by Penn State’s

American Indian Leadership Program
and
The Center on Rural Education and Communities

I. Background

At the 35th Annual *National Indian Education Association Meetings* held in Phoenix, Arizona, October 28-31, 2004, Penn’s State’s *American Indian Leadership Program* (AILP) and the *Center on Rural Education and Communities* (CREC) joined together to lead a workshop entitled, “Building Partnerships for Rural Indian Education.”

John Tippeconnic (director, AILP and Professor of Education) served as the lead presenter, and was joined by co-presenters, **Susan Faircloth** (Assistant Professor of Education), **Katherine Heeren** (graduate student, Educational Leadership Program) and **Kai Schafft** (Assistant Professor of Education, and CREC co-director).

The purpose of the workshop was to lead a focused conversation with Indian educators about the barriers to providing a quality education within Indian schools and communities, and how a research and outreach agenda might be developed to better understand and begin to address these barriers.

The session had nearly 30 people in attendance and was marked by lively discussion. The following are notes taken from the dialogue, as well as written comments provided by workshop participants:

II. Workshop Notes

What are the most pressing needs and concerns affecting your community?

- We have a lack of parent involvement in schools and education.
- There is a need for more native teachers and administrators.
- We are encouraging students to go on to higher education, but when they do this they can’t go back to the reservation. It’s like an “involuntary brain drain.” There’s no incentive for them to return.

- Non-native teachers work so hard to “native” themselves. It creates a distance between them and their students. There are trust issues. These teachers are well meaning, but they can’t overcome the (cultural) distance. Non-natives struggle. They ask themselves “how can I gain the trust and respect of my students?” A lot of non-natives are teaching Indian culture and language and it’s just not right. It doesn’t work.
- We have a need for grants and fellowships and resources of that sort. There ought to be dollars available to put theories and struggles into action. It’s very difficult to effect change because for instance BIA policies are so rigid and now we have things like No Child Left Behind to contend with.
- There is a need for *good* native teachers, not just native teachers.
- Youth behavior is a community problem. Young parents lack parenting skills. This translates into school problems. Parents think that school involvement starts at the school. They think “from 8 to 3 this child is not my responsibility.” It has to start from home. Hardly any student knows how to speak Navajo. Parents aren’t held accountable. Our language is fading. A lot of times parents think “schools will do the parenting for me.” But there is a phrase from the elders: *It has to be you*. Dependence is a disease.
- There is no heart in the education policies we work with. No Child Left Behind is written with dollar signs behind it. There’s nothing from the heart.
- Tribal schools are included into bigger districts. They are often seen as an add-on. Is there a possibility of getting tribal schools into their own districts? In my experience, people went to BIA school for elementary, tribal school for middle school and public school for high school.
- (For outsiders) to fix an indigenous problem, it’s like learning Chinese to function.
- Funding is a big issue. A lot of us are treaty tribes. We’re struggling at the bottom of the can, struggling for the same grants. We need to validate our culture and our values. Funding issues should be automatic. Government funding should support education absolutely.

How might the Rural Center and the American Indian Leadership Program at Penn State help address some of these issues?

- We all have a lot of questions. A Penn State partnership might just be an open dialogue. Networking and sharing. Possibly having answers that are backed up by research.
- Provide an awareness of institutional culture. The idea that we are products of a system has some validity. Lakota persons would go into schools and “Lakotize” the schools. Community people went into schools and shifted gears and became “institutionalized.” There is a certain momentum to institutional culture. Who really controls what? When there are “community controlled schools” who really is controlling the shots? Institutions structure power.
- We could use an educational handbook for the parents of students. We need to increase the positive involvement with the school setting. State and national

standards do not reflect native peoples. Children fail because they do not see (test) items that are meaningful to them.

III. Summary of Feedback Forms

Although the workshop had over 25 attendees, we received only 20 feedback form responses. Those responding identified themselves in the following ways (see below, more than one response was allowed). Of those identifying themselves as “other,” responses included: consultant; researcher; federal programs; AISES board member; program coordinator, and; tribal education consultant.

School Administrator:	40%
Other:	30%
Community Member:	25%
Parent:	25%
Teacher:	20%
University Educator:	20%
Student:	10%
School Board Member:	0%

What are your community's primary needs?

- Education regarding collaboration of all stakeholders.
- Needs related to poverty issues.
- Lack of parent involvement. (More) native teachers and administrators. Development of ST leadership. Opportunities within the community and nurturing.
- Factionalism, poverty, disconnect for many with traditional culture, values, language.
- Place for students to be while not in school.
- Economic development, spiritual ‘enlivenment’, political, social mobilization.
- (Speaking from an urban area) community/city needs awareness for non-native about natives in area. Parents want native language to be taught I schools when there are several tribes present (parent involvement)
- Our nation covered the whole nation gathering concerns/issues and mid-Nov. we’ll be having a summit to discuss the outcomes of the needs assessment.
- Partnerships in/with AISES
- Parent involvement, native teachers, expand teacher opportunities but nothing for them when they return, compete with drugs and alcohol, keeping them in school, connections between home/school/tribe.
- An “educational handbook”: Parents will learn what questions to ask at PTC’s. Sp. Ed. Questions to ask on services. Homework how-to’s, positive involvement with “our” child’s educational endeavor.

- Goals for Native American students. Data. Best practices. Native Teachers.
- Language revitalization, land rights, teacher recruitment/retention (acculturation), Principal development.
- Native American teachers/administrators, professional development, parent involvement.
- Economic development, more education, parent involvement, Native American teachers and administrators, 60% unemployment, better parent skills.
- Language/culture preservation, Higher education programs delivered onsite to people who will stay in community (grant cycle syndrome).
- Teen catch up activities, parenting skills, regeneration of culture and language

What are your school's primary needs?

- Parent involvement, professional development.
- Native American role models in schools, exposure to possibilities, loss of culture language.
- Attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers, more parent interest/involvement in child's ed., less struggle for funding.
- Parent involvement, native teachers and administrators, discrimination, jobs.
- Clear direction, belief and insistence that students (can) do well (better)!
- Staff needs awareness/knowledge of non-traditional native learners. Need for in service training for non-native teachers. We have a need for cultural sensitive curriculum in school (inter-tribal for urban areas).
- To work collaboratively w/the Nation to address our childrens' educational needs.
- More naïve teachers, cultural integration in curriculum, change in assessment models, support for naïve teachers.
- Teacher retention: funding.
- Working with parents, how to work with students for success, Indian learning styles.
- Funding.
- Higher achievement from a larger percentage of students. Continue on in education to a higher level of education. More parent involvement. More hands-on connected curriculum. Differentiated instruction that formulates constructivism for learners.
- AYP issue.
- Improvement of attendance rates. Cultural orientation/sensitivity training for non-Native staff.

How can Penn State best partner with Indian educators, schools and communities to address these needs, especially through applied research and/or other assistance?

- Ensure that the Penn State program teaches relevant material. Establish pilot program in a few communities. Create a local community research agenda that can be replicated in other communities.
- List serve – rural Indian education/public school.
- Sharing ideas, writing grants, awareness of grants, institutional culture.
- Provide some (facilitate) forums within the communities.
- Since we can't make non-native teachers native, we need to educate teachers of customs, traditions and culture.
- Whatever is possible!
- Provide best practices information to Indian educators and administrators. Detail how Indian educators can work within constrictions and/or constructs of NCLB (or whatever follows) to meet assessment needs, culture integration across the curriculum.
- True cultural curriculum development and assessment. Indigenous “natural” assessment.
- Provide models for Native American student success within a public education system.
- Coordinate graduate students/researchers at various universities working on these issues. Develop a national network. Distinguish it from the Rural School and Community Trust and the ERIC Rural Clearinghouse.
- Webbing between (Penn State) and schools in the Nations.
- Research in all of these areas to help create change. To help promote accomplishments of young people coming back to the reservation to help make a difference
- Facilitate communication on issues – perhaps a journal? An interactive online journal? I.e. I post a paper and others respond.
- Best practices that work with Indian children. How to give Indian parents the skills they need to be good parents, community members, etc.

What education-related issue would you like to see improved or changed in your community to better address quality education for he children you work with?

- Support the school. Parents understanding the school system.
- A tribal education system that can respond better to school needs.
- Open sharing of information between outside ed. Programs and local school districts. I am interested in developing a forum to more completely discuss issues.
- Parent education, GED classes, language and culture classes.
- A very specific beef! BIA dictating choices and holding back to fund its own salaries at higher rates than grant schools can pay with their allocations.

- Have top notch schools, with top notch educators.
- Culture integration across curriculum. Use of performance-based assessments within requirements of testing. I'm interested in dialogue re: SPED and over-representation of A.I. students.
- Get our leaders to be positively responsive to and supportive of education.
- Teacher recruitment/retention, native primarily, support for non-native teachers.
- Native historic knowledge (and others), native language, economic-related funds.
- More adult education, systemic change that is good. With NCLB there is change going on throughout the nation. We are operating in a capitalistic enterprise economy, a democracy and an age where we as educators need to know how to access information not memorize. True knowledge helps provide an environment for creativity and expansion of thinking out of the so-called norm. Keep the dialogue going. Preserve and go forward at the same time is a hard act to follow. Cultural diversity???
- Curriculum which puts culture, history, language at center – the dominant theme.
- Parental involvement