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Native American Education between assimilation and self-determination – Schooling in tribal communities in the state of Arizona

The paper explores the situation of education of Native American students in Arizona, USA. This entails an attention to some historical and to current developments. Focusing on certain school types in tribal communities and on the understanding of education from a native perspective, the aim is to show the dichotomy between self-determination and assimilation in educational processes and the challenge for the tribes to find own forms of schooling to prepare the young generations for future developments that benefit them and their tribes.

The four school types, which are presented in the following text, I investigated on the Hopi and the Navajo reservation and in a Tohono O'odham community in Arizona in 2006. The intention of the field study was to capture a range of current schooling possibilities. Therefore schools were chosen that present the common types of today's native institutions as well as their use by different tribal communities. In addition to half-standardized interviews with teachers of the schools the method of open observation in classrooms and in community events as well as print media analysis were used. The latter offered besides information about tribally relevant events also interesting statements of Native Americans. Those statements are marked with the name of the print medium from which they are taken. However, the majority of the interview quotations in the text are taken from the interviews, which I conducted with the teachers of the schools that I visited. The decision to talk to these teachers was based on their role as experts for culturally relevant subjects like native language and culture or for subjects, in which the tribal perspective plays a crucial role like history. I want to thank especially these teachers, but also all the people who supported me in conducting this – because of a lack of time unfortunately – much too short study for their kind support and openness and true experts, as the tribal members themselves, may forgive me if the content of this paper is much too concise to cover the situation sufficiently. Those supporters are the members of the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology at the University of Arizona (esp. Emory Sekaquaptewa and Richard Stoffle), Prof. Klaus Frantz of the Department of Geography at the University of Innsbruck, Austria and the people who kindly offered me a place to stay in Arizona (esp. Gladys and her family).

Education as the handmaid of political forces: Total adjustment as the ultimate goal

Of all the U.S. American states Arizona has the highest share of Native American territory. There is a rich cultural landscape to be found that is shaped by its native heritage as well as by immigration of Europeans. The arrival of European settlers on the continent tremendously changed the lifestyle of the tribes all over North America. The expansion of white settlements forced them onto territory that represents only a fragment of the traditional tribal land. This territory was established as reservations, which were put under the control of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Well-established economic and political structures were destroyed and in the following years, rights that were assured in treaties were violated. The remaining land was again reduced in size through the General Allotment Act set by the federal government in 1887. In spite of the collectivistic structure of tribal lifestyle, reservation land was divided between families and individuals as private ownership and the remaining land was given to white settlers. After a short liberal period beginning with the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934, in which the formation of self-government – based on the model of the U.S. government – was offered, the tribes lost their autonomous rights again: The Termination Act in 1953 attempted to turn Natives into "real Americans" by giving them the same services and policies as anyone else, but also by denying the special status as Native Americans and encouraging them to move to urban areas (cf. Frantz 1999, p. 10 – 36). Along with the loss of rights, land, and resources such as water came the loss of economic and cultural stability. Alcoholism, diseases like diabetes and poverty spread. All those aspects are critical issues until today.

After Native Americans expressed their protest with a variety of successful means in the 1960's and 70's and the government realized that they do not assimilate into the American melting pot, the government eventually declared self-determination in 1975. Through self-determination, tribal life can be more and more preserved and self-government can be enhanced through own departments, commissions, and legislatively created boards. The BIA changed its function from a controlling agency of the federal government to an agency that supports tribal concerns within self-determination (cf. Frantz 1999, p. 36 – 38). Since then a process of recollection of native identity and of regaining rights like water rights characterize native life.

The policy of negotiating treaties between the U.S. government and the tribes as sovereign nations, which was pursued only in the first period of expansion, was replaced by an assimilation policy to deprive them from their cultural autonomy. Native American education was the center of assimilation forces. Mission activities contained the education of boys and girls in the Christian religion and European based customs. For that, children were taken from their homes and placed into non-native families or boarding schools, which intended to transform the beliefs and behaviors of the tribes into American mainstream culture, since native knowledge was considered as gross and savage superstition and was supposed to be replaced by the Western Christian and Greek knowledge systems. The children were only allowed to speak English and were taught that their familiar believes are wrong.

A teacher of a contract school on the Navajo reservation describes her feelings when she looks back to her school time as follows:

“I was in a boarding school, I was told not to talk my language. We were set away from home; we didn't see our parents, only at Christmas time. We were just completely into English. Sometimes we still have that Flashback. When I go to Flagstaff and I hear the sound of the Pine tree, that sound ...I get just all – I don't wanna hear it. It makes me kind of lonely, depressed; I get depressed by just hearing that sound, because it was a place where I didn't want to be, away from my parents and til this day I still see that – hear that loneliness when I hear that sound.”

The boarding school history caused dysfunctionalities in homes and institutions through the loss of emotional, cultural, and social stability. The schools were closed in the 1980's and the boarding schools one finds today host students that come voluntarily, for example because of long distances between a school and their homes (cf. Frantz 1999, p. 130 – 134).

Tribal independence and education

The Native American people have experienced everything that can be brought about to force a group into a shape defined by another group. But until today the majority does not comfortably fit into dominant American institutions. After all the attempts of the federal government to destroy their way of life, history demanded for a concession of self-determination and the present situation represents a process of gaining back strength and building up independence. This process is characterized by overcoming the experienced loss, which caused dysfunctionalities in Native American homes, communities and institutions.

But assimilative forces of the American government are still evident. Despite the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, passed in 1978, the concept of religion applied to institutional and other contexts is grounded on the very general idea of a set of beliefs; regardless how and where people live (cf. Wildcat 2001, p. 48). Native Americans sometimes still have to fight in court for their religious rights. An example is the current dispute about the San Francisco Peaks, which is a sacred mountain for several tribes in Arizona. After the U.S. Forest Services decided to allow artificial snowmaking for a ski resort on the mountain using reclaimed wastewater, 13 tribes officially expressed their concerns that resources for traditional practices would be destroyed. For example the Hualapai use a certain spring for ceremonies and if water from artificial snow was to end up in the spring, the tribe would commit spiritual malpractice. For the Hopi the San Francisco Peaks are central to their belief system and the use of artificial snow would destroy the natural balance. The case was brought to court in order to defend the religious rights of the tribes (cf. The Winslow Mail 2006, p. 4). The words of the Navajo Nation president show that although one can find Christian communities, churches, missions and mission schools on

reservations (cf. Navajo-Hopi Observer 2006, p. 2), tribal religious practices have survived and the natural resources of the mountain are still important for the people's way of life:

"I also want to express my appreciation to all of the medicine people who are also represented here sending up prayers as we go before the courts of the United States of America defending our way of life and our herbs and our mountain and our medicine people," (Navajo-Hopi Observer 2006, p. 1)

A dichotomy between self-determination and assimilation can also be found in the educational context. Despite the past assimilative education in boarding schools native cultures did not vanish. Especially on the reservations many aspects of native life remain strong in homes and communities. But even if the direct and open assimilation force of boarding schools stopped in the 1980's, the influences of the past as well as of the American mainstream society – today transported by economic mechanisms and media – on the communities is constantly given. That the survival of tribal identity is continuously threatened today can be seen in the statements of two Navajo teachers about the importance to pass on cultural knowledge:

"I think identification, to identify yourself, to keep ... our language, ... our culture and just to keep it as long as possible, you know to keep that degree of blood in you as long as you can, I think that's the importance of it."

"We do cultural teaching, a lot of the things that should be taught at home, but it's not and they are losing a lot of it."

This leads to the actual situation, in which the people have to find a balance between the two distinct value systems and worldviews. The school, as one finds it in native communities today, is a clear example. Even when communities now have self-determination with respect to their schools, it is unavoidably an institution that originally emerged out of Western paradigms. To a certain degree this is necessary, because the following generations must be prepared for a life within the mainstream society, since its influence does not stop at the edges of the reservations. To achieve this goal, tribal school districts may even partner with outside school districts to implement technologies in reservation schools and enhance the technological skills of students and teachers (cf. Navajo-Hopi Observer 2006, p. 3).

The present economic situation of many reservations often demands leaving the reservation to find a job and schools see this as a goal of the education, like a Navajo teacher states:

"Preference for the kids is to get a good job, wherever it could be. If it is here, it's good, but most of the time, to get a better job is to go off the reservation. Like my son, he is off going to Flagstaff and that's where he is working."

But a great part of the knowledge passed on in schools that grounds on European-Christian approaches is often far away from the life of the people instead of being a crucial part of it, thus an assimilative effect still remains at hand (cf. Deloria 2001, p. 42). Especially the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) puts a lot of pressure on the schools. The achievements of students of any cultural group are measured with the same fixed standard and school content has to be aligned with the AIMS content in order to achieve good results. Thereby AIMS represents indirectly an assimilative tool and this can possibly be one reason why many native schools perform at the lower end of the scale, since tribal identity and content play a relevant role in many schools, as the following examples show. But schools that succeed very well in the tests understandably stand as a positive example for other schools to follow and good results of students increase their chance for good employment (cf. Navajo-Hopi Observer 2006, p. 5).

Native community schools in Arizona

In spite of the Western orientation in education, the school is in many cases the place where teachers care for the continuation of tribal values and knowledge that have survived by acting as role models and by teaching content, which has been emerging from centuries of native life. It is here where strategies are developed to deal with the gap between both knowledge systems. Many reservation and community schools are thereby a place where, in spite of the "Westernness" of the institution itself, the students can live and learn within their familiar cultural context.

The words of a Navajo teacher summarize the present state of schooling in native country coming out of the conflicting situation:

"it just like there was no choice, that choice was already made for us. But we gotta survive, either way. Some of us grew up respecting and that's why a lot of us are here as educators."

An example is a school for students from the Hopi people in Arizona, who probably managed to keep a great part of their tribal culture, more than some other native communities, and the school is the place that puts effort in its strengthening and vitalizing. They have always been living on the land of today's reservation and the community attaches importance to its independence and to the maintenance of a very own lifestyle. They are able to do so regardless of the inclusion of Western material and ideational components into their everyday life.

The day school, located on the Hopi reservation, is for students from Kindergarten to the 8th grade. It opened in 1962 as a Bureau of Indian Affairs school and is nowadays a grant school, which means that it is mainly funded by private sponsors who have a special interest in an own Hopi school (cf. Hopi Tutuveni 2006, p. 3). All subjects are taught in English but the tribal language is imparted from Kindergarten grade on. It is here where the students first learn it even if the elders are literate in Hopi. Only in cases where students live with their grandparents they are mostly able to speak it when they start school. Like all North American tribal languages, the Hopi language is originally an oral language and was put down in writing because of the need that arose through the influence of the larger society. At the Department of Anthropology of the University of Arizona a Hopi-English dictionary was developed by a member of the community, which was based on English phonetics and on earlier work of linguists. It provides a basis for the Hopi language teaching in schools.

Once a year an Indian day takes place in the school and for one week the students and teachers practice tribal songs and dances every day. Not only the students but also the parents are involved in the practicing - the fathers and grandfathers by singing and the mothers by preparing the dresses. Thereby the school is a community-meeting place and the Indian day is an event where the smallest children already get used to the ceremonial dances and learn them more and more.

But all Western components of knowledge and skills are also included in the curriculum from Western biology, mathematics and science to basketball. This curriculum is not mandatory since the school is no public state or federal school, but the goal is to prepare the students for the challenges of the outside world. Nevertheless tribal perspectives are included where possible. History contains native history including visits to sacred places - where a story can be told to learn about the creation of the Hopi - as well as mainstream American content. Social studies are taught with drawing parallels to the mainstream paradigm from native worldviews. The Hopi beliefs are presented as the community's traditional beliefs and are put within a context of other beliefs of different peoples. The teacher puts an emphasis on the clans to which the students belong by reading about clan animals such as deer, bear or wolf. In the tribal worldview there is a sisterhood and brotherhood within clans, which goes beyond the blood relationship but determines kinship. "Like all kinship relations certain obligations and rights are assumed with membership in a clan. The customs, habits, obligations and rights that correspond with clan and special societies in our tribes served to constantly remind us of the complex community that shapes our identity and ensures our continued existence." (Wildcat 2001, p. 94) The culture of belonging to a clan is still alive not only in school but also in homes where the clan animal can be seen in different ways and in ceremonies to reinforce the awareness of the relatedness to those living beings.

The teaching of social studies is also used to talk about Hopi ideas of living - presented in the native way of telling a story about Pan-Indianism, the sharing of common values and goals of the one native family, split in different groups - or about the importance to keep the languages alive. Knowledge about other tribes and their values is discussed as well, for example in research papers about Indian people of the United States. For the teaching of the own curriculum the textbooks of *The Council for Indian Education Series* and materials of other publishers, which include native contents, are used. But the school is as modern as any other school and one can find computers and different technological means. The students are supposed to enhance their abilities and, at the same time, remember who they are and where they come from. A member of the school board who was recently elected as 'Elder of the Year' says: "You can live comfortably in two worlds, not forgetting who you are and where you came from but learning someone else's ways for a meaningful career." (Hopi Tutuveni 2006, p. 3)

The school - like the whole community - goes its own 'Hopi way'. The staff is Hopi and only a few non-Natives, who work there to contribute to the community's way, totally integrate themselves.

Schools in other native communities in Arizona also intend to bridge the gap between past and present, Western influences and tribal culture, although in these communities the survival of the latter is often more threatened by those influences than in the Hopi community. Regarding the type of school, they each realize this process to a different degree.

An example is a boarding school for students from Kindergarten to the 12th grade of high school on the Navajo reservation. The students are bussed in from distant places of the reservation when they chose to attend the school. Resulting from the endeavor of the ethnic focused activists in the 1970's and the Self-Determination Act, the Navajo took a great part of their educational system into their own hands. They have been able to build schools that consider cultural norms and include the use of the Navajo language as well as the employment of native teachers. The boarding school has control over those aspects through its establishment as a contract school with the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). It belongs to the tribally controlled school board, which consists of members of the community. The funding comes from the BIA as well as from the Navajo tribe itself.

The school has full control over the curriculum, which means the teachers are required to develop the curriculum themselves. This to date has been completed for reading, math, music, art and physical education and is in progress for science. The teachers use the Arizona state curriculum standard that is set up for all public schools in Arizona as the guideline. This can be attributed to the past and present influence of the mainstream American society as well as to little financial freedom. The school program also contains home of the braves (sports), computer, and student council as well as after school tutoring, where tutors are available to assist students in the development of academic success and achievement. But a crucial aspect is the development of the Navajo language curriculum by the school itself. Like the Hopi language, Navajo is put down in writing by now. The teachers use a curriculum standard that the Navajo nation has set up for the Navajo language teaching – an important part of the schooling.

A teacher describes the current situation of the language use in the families, which represents one reason why all the subjects in the school are taught in English:

"It is their home language, their grandparents are really – maybe about 100% are still Navajo speakers, their grandparents. But with the parents themselves I would say there are about maybe 50%, the younger parents. And so we are just – we receive them, they already understand the language. The only thing is that their speech is not really developed and that's hard for the pronunciation."

Her employment as a teacher for Navajo language and culture benefits from her professional education that involved learning aspects of the tribal language.

"I did a survey under University of Arizona, I got my masters from there and researched also about how we can revitalize our language. And like we said every little thing, every little language we speak in Navajo is important to that kids to hear it. My results were – I had three groupings. The younger, 5-years-olds and the next ones, 9-years-olds and then the 11 and 12-year-olds. And my research was whether – which group would pick up the language faster within 9 weeks intense Navajo language instruction. And so I did that with the three groupings and my result was that 11 and 12 year olds were the ones that came out really strong in picking up the language. And that showed that whatever age to pick up a second language was very important – was a strong evidence that it is not too late for anyone to pick up a language."

The school also includes cultural teachings about the Navajo way of life, the four basic clans, and the culture of the "four cardinal directions".

"Culture has a lot to do with the clanship. The clanship is where you identify yourself as a Navajo maternal clan, that's your mother's clan. You have both; maternal and paternal that identifies you as a Navajo, as a Diné. And from there it goes on to your extended family ... and why we have that circle and it broadens into the dress and the clothing and then the – just having the respect and the harmony, the balance of harmony in your life. The Navajo culture is based on four directions. That's the east, that's the birth. And then you have the south, which would be the adolescence. And then you have the west, which is young adulthood, parenthood and towards the north is the old age, the elderly. So there is a cycle, in each direction. There is a teaching philosophy in all direction and that's part of the culture."

In Navajo culture things are communicated in a positive way. The Navajo nation curriculum standard is the guideline for teaching the tribal culture and it includes aspects of a positive oriented personal development:

“in the Navajo culture – what is on the standard, it says you have to follow certain taboos and the standard talks about the thinking of the Navajo way. All ... (*the teacher*)... can do is tell the students that talking about death means you are putting that on yourself. Tell them that when you are fascinated with black, fascinated with the dark side, that you are inviting that to take place in your life.”

A different school type is a public school on the Navajo reservation, which is for students from the 1st to the 8th grade. Here the funding comes from the state of Arizona. The teachers follow the standard that is put out by the state department for education for all public schools and the curriculum guidelines within the public school district. That means that the school does not develop curriculum itself although the teachers have a certain degree of freedom in creating their teachings as well. They make up own units and include Navajo orientated aspects.

Unlike the contract school, the staff here is to a large extent non-native. However, in subjects taught by them, the Navajo way is respected by letting Navajo teachers go into the classrooms to help teachers out and sometimes one of the non-native teachers even learns the language. Subjects are taught in English, but the tribal language is used by a Navajo teacher while helping out during classes. Six years ago the school started off with this Navajo emergent program and brought in Navajo instructors. The assistant teacher sees great value in teaching the tribal language and using it as a support in the regular lessons like science:

“It is very important. What we are finding now is, the kids are hearing the native language, but they are not responding in Navajo, they don’t respond back, but for some reason when you talk to them in Navajo they understand more, so we are almost translating and interpreting what is done in English to them in their own language. But they only speak English, so it’s kind of weird”

The language lessons are the place where the tribal lifestyle – clanship, ceremonies, traditional housing, and child caring - is imparted. This is a part of the school education even if the homes do not keep up a lot of the cultural components anymore.

The 4th example is an urban charter high school for students from the Tohono O’odham community. Unlike the public school, which was created by the government, or the boarding school, which was established through a contract with the federal BIA, charter schools can be established by groups of people who want to go a different way than the schools that already exist. Their establishment originally started in the 1990’s within certain communities as institutions inside distinct neighborhoods with the goal to ensure schooling separately from other groups. But later the idea of chartering an own school spread and schools focusing on arts, math or sciences as well as other specialized institutions opened. The circumstance that a development resulting from ethnic focused activists in the 1970’s - in which, for example, the Navajo took their educational system into own hands - has not happened to that extent on the Tohono O’odham reservations makes the chartering of a high school for Tohono O’odham students to consider their needs important. The majority of the students come here from the reservations for the cultural component and only a few live in town.

The school offers the same courses as any other school – like history, math, and English - but within that framework it has more flexibility than a regular school district would have. There are no textbooks prescribed and units can be self-developed. Used material is for example *A Papago Grammar* from the University of Arizona press for learning the tribal language. The author Ofelia Zepeda is a member of the community and taught at the University of Arizona.

A lot of the staff members are Tohono O’odham. Classes are taught in the tribal language, in traditional singing, in basket weaving and in gardening for the native use of plants. A special subject is ethnobotny, which is usually only offered at universities within Anthropology or Cultural Studies. Here the use of plants by different cultures as well as their impact on their way of life is taught. But importance is also attached to the use of modern technology like laptops as well as to academic support classes, where the students come in to work individually on academically oriented subjects and get tutorial help. History

includes tribal past as well as the consideration of the tribe's involvement in the wider American context for example, by discussing: Who would you pick to be president of the United States?

One of the teachers sees the importance of the school in the consideration of the tribal perspectives:

"If you go to public school, even at charter school, especially the ones that are with a certain focus – you gonna learn about history from the perspective of somebody else rather than your own. So here they learn history from the native perspective. Even math has some elements of – ok, how did the native people use math, so they talk about baskets and patterns, you know. If they go to P. High – like some of the kids go to P., which is on the south side – they wouldn't get any of that stuff. There might be one class or something for it or like a Native American club, but that's not the same like every class having some elements of a Native American culture. Even the science guy, he is trying to – he is reading a couple of books right now, cause he is new, that has to do with the native use of nature."

The consideration of the tribal perspectives within the general education of the students leads to a positive consciousness about the origin:

"I think that the purpose of the school was to get them to be really proud of their culture, just show them how special it is, cause if you have a person that is not even – like me, I am not a Tohono O'odham, but I can say words for plants in their language. If somebody else is learning words in your own language for plants then they kind of 'Wow' - then they must think it's cool."

The history teacher of the school is not from the community as well and tries to present a holistic view of past developments in which ethnic differences are considered:

"we do use examples from local culture and when we get to that point in history when people started moving here and building cultures and civilizations I will study that more and more. Also I am teaching kind of from a tribal perspective, that's kind of my plan for this year in terms of empire versus indigenous people as it has happened all over the world. You know, this was not the first time that indigenous people were oppressed by some foreign empire. And that's not really that well understood."

These school examples show that tribal components are a relevant part in native education today and can be included in specialized schools. But then again, the European-Christian based contents as well as the mainstream culture that has emerged alongside the development of this contents are nowadays more and more represented in an overwhelming media offer, which has its own strong educating influence on today's generation of students. A teacher of the school for Tohono O'odham students and a Navajo teacher talk about their experiences:

"I don't think they learn the language at home anymore, I am not sure why. You definitely see a sharp change between one generation and another. I think it has a lot to do with television."

"We get lots of graffities, we already got some on our module. Especially at the high school - I am also a high school teacher – by giving them a magazine, maybe they can cut out something, something really nice and cheerful, but they will always go directly to something that's black and dark and vicious and violent. You see a lot of that. That's why I shy away from giving them a magazine to cut out. Whereas the little kids they are still into – still cheerful and still have that sunshine in their life, you know, they don't think about things like that ... We don't think about life as a trash. The whole society goes with TV and the CD's that are coming now, emphasizing glory in death and darkness and black and everything that has to do with that. That's the opposite of our Navajo way. Because our Navajo way, we were taught – we don't talk about death, we don't talk about – we don't even look at a dead person ... There are different believes also, there is always a conflict with that believes. A lot of Navajos are still traditional and they try to keep their kids into that, using that teaching philosophy, but most of the time it's the kids that are fascinated with the outside world. That's more dominant. And when the parents talk to them about 'this should be the way that you should live' that just doesn't really sink in, they don't mind the traditional ways. They think of it like it is just a made up believe. And it is no longer relevant for them to live with."

The schools are in a process of finding out how to match the overwhelming medial information as well as the Western paradigms – taught in subjects as math, biology and physics – with the components of tribal culture and knowledge, which play a role in native life. The statement of a Navajo teacher gives an example:

"Our approach was to learn it through the book, literature based and then expands using an activity, maybe going out and bringing in an elderly to talk about certain topics or either to go on a fieldtrip ... on the computer and we

can just click on to the story and they have a person reading to them in Navajo that they can hear and then we are developing the comprehension, too ... In music I follow a standard also, an Arizona standard, basically the notation, the theory, the music history ... But we do activities on the site, like with the Native American music. For example this coming week is Native American week and I am having them listen to the rhythm of the beat of the Native American music.”

That a distinct native culture has not only survived within the generation of elders becomes clear if one looks at certain experiences of the teachers. They indicate that elements of the tribal culture still play a crucial role for young people and thereby must be considered to guarantee an educational success. First of all, it is the native language as a reflector of the tribal knowledge that supports a way of learning, which the students are used to from the familiar context:

“We see the kids are more aware of what’s going on when we talk to them in Navajo. When we even go into a classroom, the kids settle down more than when they are in with their regular teacher. I think we need to have more schools like this on the reservation and maybe even some high schools and challenge them in that way, that might work.”

Secondly, it is the need for the personal connection with the broader context – with the people involved in the whole educational process, with the things they learn about and the reasons they learn for, as the teachers for the Tohono O’odham students put it:

“I think they really need to have a sense of participation in the environment, that it’s not just being put upon them, but that they have some ownership of it. I think one on one attention and encouragement is very important. I think to be successful they need to have a personal relationship with their instructors more so than a typical - whatever - Anglo-youth would need.”

“I think a lot of the kids actually like going to smaller schools, cause it feels more intimate, you get to know your teachers better, you get to know your – you know everybody more rather than if you are in a big school, you are kind of like just lost.”

That in spite of the losing of tribal beliefs in families and among students a distinct native culture has survived becomes also clear when Native American students are out of their familiar communities in order to attend schools of the mainstream American system. In those institutions they are confronted with a huge amount of content, which is not placed into the context of their familiar knowledge and culture system. Moreover, it is likely to happen that a feeling of inferiority is imparted by representing an objectivity of the content and by degrading any other (cf. Deloria 2001, p. 3). Many students struggle in these institutions:

“When they get into town and they are not in a building where the majority of the students are Navajo – it’s a slap across the face when they get into town, they are like – you know. Kind of scared, they don’t speak up ... I think it is just a change in culture as they hit the high schools, it scares them I think. Getting there a lot of them just academically start falling behind.”

Besides high schooling off the reservation, it is also the professional education in colleges and universities, which causes difficulties for Native Americans, since postsecondary education is even to a much lesser degree in the hands of the tribes. The statement of a native student gives an informative insight:

“My biggest dream ever was to go to Northern Arizona University (NAU) to become a nurse. However, when I went to NAU to pursue that dream it didn’t work out the way I thought it would. It wasn’t as fun and as comfortable as I thought it would be. With my motivation going down and challenges rising up, I had given up and failed a class, which I thought I would never do in my life. I felt ashamed and out of place, so I finished two semesters and dropped out ... I found it hard to pass Biology: The study of Science. I failed it twice” (Navajo-Hopi Observer 2006, p. 5)

For a comfortable learning situation, she prefers the conditions that the teachers mentioned in the statements above:

“That was when a friend told me about College America, a 15-month program that will help you get through class faster and easier because of smaller classes and more personal attention ... There were only about 10 students in

the class. I think community college classes are even bigger than that. I felt relieved, because I felt more comfortable with a small class" (Navajo-Hopi Observer 2006, p. 5)

The understanding of education from a native perspective

Deloria gives an explanation for the difficulties that the student describes. Native American students that come from an environment where tribal culture is lived face a science in mainstream institutions, which includes explanations for phenomena that are already explained differently by tribal knowledge but which is stated in mainstream institutions as the valid concept. It is at this point that students come into conflict and – of course – fall academically behind, since the content taught in educational institutions is directly connected with the basic idea of how the world functions and has to function. Western science is the basis for the technological world of today. Its reality is described differently than it is by a native worldview.

The native worldview contains the holistic principle that everything is related to each other. One thing (an object, entity, living being or phenomenon) cannot be understood when it is examined separately from the entities, phenomena etc. to which it has a relation. Therefore, the concept of *place* is a crucial element in native views on things, because knowing the relatedness of everything involves knowing the proper place of things. This is only possible if one does not take things out – mentally or practically – of their naturally emerged context in order to examine or treat them isolated. Furthermore, the concept of *place* as a guiding philosophical element in life is only important for those persons who have learned to acknowledge the relatedness of things as the basic principle of the world. "Our traditional indigenous cultures are literally grounded in the geographies and natural environments to which we are historically connected. In fact, history itself, and our worldviews, philosophy and material culture, were and in varying degrees still are shaped by a sense of place." (Wildcat 2001, p. 77) Belonging to the concept of place is the crucial concept of *power*, since every thing in its place – object, living being or phenomenon – possesses a life force, which is considered as a spiritual power. Thereby every place provides a certain experience for persons (cf. Deloria 2001, p. 2). Within this view any object, any thing in this world – including animals, plants and geographic features – is understood more as a person, an entity with a *personality*, because it possesses a special kind of power, which is able to provide a certain experience.

The conflict in mainstream educational institutions for Native American students who come from an environment where tribal knowledge plays a crucial role is obvious: Scientific explanations from a native perspective, which students have learned as one of more but as *their native* knowledge, are based on the mentioned principles. That means, having the place of things in the natural world and their related things in mind, one is not interested in finding abstract concepts like in Western mathematics for example, since that process grounds on taking phenomena out of their natural context. The learning of abstract concepts is also the opposite of the native experiential learning, as Deloria states: "The Indian mind was considerably more interested in learning the psychological characteristics of things than in describing their morphological structure." (Deloria 2001, p. 3) Compared to the Western idea of knowledge content, it is not the thing itself that is the focus of imparting, but the individual experience with it. Learning by experience is the hallmark of native education. That requires subjectivity and that maintains the personal involvement. This is not provided in the Western learning framework of abstract and isolated concepts within which the individual perspective has no place in order to maintain an assumed objectivity (cf. Deloria 2001, p. 6). Furthermore, power and place produce a personality of things and that requires an ethical relationship to them. The Western scientific process of using natural elements for the exclusive goal of creating a product for progress and human support can be problematic for Native American students who are imparted with tribal understandings of the natural world. This circumstance can explain the need to have a sense of participation in the environment and that it is not just put upon them, an aspect which was mentioned by the history teacher of the high school for Tohono O'odham students. Learning of abstract and objective knowledge that is separated from the actual life of the student creates difficulties, which he or she would not have with a subjectively relevant education, including a personal relationship with the instructors. A Navajo teacher describes the tribal concept of education that emerged within centuries of native life, as follows:

“It starts from the beginning when the sun rises, when you greet the sun in the morning, that’s where education begins. When you are up even before the sun comes up you run towards the east, that’s part of your exercise to live longer that used to be the routine of all Navajos. And when the sun goes towards the south you begin to be focused on what you are gonna do for today ... And a lot of philosophy of teaching of what is the best, even just in maintaining your hair – when you put your hair in a bundle that was a sign of being steady and being focused. If your hair is all (...) then your mind is like that ... And every little thing had its place; there was a teaching in every little thing. The Navajo perception of the world is circled whereas the Anglos’ philosophy or their perception of life is like a square. So that’s the conflict right there, too. It’s really interesting ... there is a corner, that little square has a corner and you can be isolated in that corner, but if there is a circle, a complete circle, there are no corners. Navajos are more – they have to show wholeness of themselves and not by parts, here there and here there. In the white world it is the other way; they see themselves as a little part of something. They are all different. They don’t think of themselves as a whole and they don’t mingle as a whole.”

Characteristic was always the respect for the things that are a part of the learning process: “For instance, certain stories about the stars could not be told when the constellations in question were overhead. Some other kinds of stories involving animals, plants and spirits could not be told at a particular time of year or in a specific place.” (Deloria 2001, p. 21) The following statement of a teacher in a school on the Navajo reservation shows that the school actually cares for this view on learning:

“They say a lot of the animals are in hibernation; you don’t talk about them when they are out and a lot of stories have to do with them. That’s the reason why we tell our stories only in the wintertime ... That’s a lot of information that we have, oral, a lot of oral story telling, that’s what it is. I guess we are bringing that from within, you know, our own upbringing.”

One can state that the difference between the native perspectives regarding worldview and educational philosophies and the Western perspective does not allow for a degrading of the native knowledge system. Even from a cultural universalistic point of view, one can argue that Native Americans often come to the same conclusions through a different metaphysics, without the necessity to take the self and the own life out of the process (cf. Deloria 2001, p. 5), like a teacher describes:

“One is like a more spiritual approach and the other one is more like quantitative, you know the Western view ... it’s the same thing when you go down to the root. Knowing like plants and how to use them that’s what is based on observation, it’s not based on writing numbers, but it is still the same thing, you know how it is used. There are some of the plants that are used by Natives that are a big thing in Western culture like Echinacea and Black Cohoche and Blue Cohoche.”

Present challenges for future developments

One can conclude that it is truly a need of the communities to have institutions that are designed for the distinct tribe, in order to meet the needs of the students. But the descriptions also showed that the current situation often requires leaving the reservation to get a job or further education. A present side-effect of the separate schooling can be an inability of young people to cope with processes in the mainstream society when they have been schooled on the reservations, even when the knowledge passed on in the school grounded relatively little on tribal metaphysics. So how can separate education and integration into the larger American society go together?

An answer can be found in Wildcat’s thought that the challenge in native education today is to take self-determination as the central principle to create an own educational system, which can include native needs, goals and methods and thereby build a framework wherefrom again action for economic and cultural self-determination can grow. The quoted experiences of teachers who deal with students on a daily basis, confirm the assumption that the inclusion of those needs and methods is actually crucial for an effective learning process. The high drop-out rates from mainstream institutions can be reduced if more high schools, colleges and also universities come into being in native hands in order to facilitate the students to stay within the community and thereby again strengthen it socially, culturally and economically with their skills. The creation of a truly *own* educational system can be achieved by “building an educational practice on a foundation of American Indian metaphysics that is a unified worldview acknowledging a complex totality in the world both physical and spiritual.” (Wildcat 2001, p. 7-9)

To take self-determination as a guideline in education also includes a consideration of the circumstance that the American - and thus global - mainstream process demands for self-determination, in which the people face the developments and results of the process, in order to achieve independence. For it, education must produce the necessary skills to deal with technologies that can support the tribal lifestyle and economic stability, since it is not technology itself that is the problem, but an irresponsible application and use of resources for producing. A learning based on tribal views should not be misunderstood as an absolute and dogmatic concept that condemns Western technology itself, because native education always had the focus on meaning and ethics and not on "non"- development. The use of technology in a native context would contain a connection between technology and the community (including plants, animals and geographic features) and a provision with a sense of place and meaning. Computers and the worldwide web are especially useful tools. Their application is to date little understood in terms of environmental and cultural contexts and for indigenous people they can for example serve as methods to build a global network (cf. Wildcat 2001, p. 30).

This notion can to some extent already be noticed in the school motto of the Navajo boarding school 'Building the future, keeping the past':

"That means in the future there is supposed to be a person with all the technology, that's what the world is into. They can take math, they can take all this and they can be a driving force to their career, but at the same time to remember who they are when they go off the reservation, that they still have their clans, they still - their root is still here in their own country, in their own land. And one of the Navajo saying is that when you are born and you're (...) core, that little piece that drops off, that is very on the Navajo land. So wherever you are, it drives you back to that place where you were born."

Self-determination in terms of education ideally requires this "indigenization" of education as the active answer to the historical developments instead of the only reactive process of "decolonization" (cf. Wildcat 2001, p. 31). "You see and hear things by being in a forest, on a river or at an ocean coastline; you gain real experiential knowledge that you cannot see by looking at the beings that live in those environments under a microscope or in a laboratory experiment. You experience places and learn, if attentive about processes and relationships in those places." (Wildcat 2001, p. 36) This way of learning also leads to personal growth, which is in American indigenous cultures the number one goal of education before professionalization and it is hard to realize within any westernized institution. Elders also play an important role in native education since their experience and wisdom are a resource of knowledge and they ideally are involved in the education setting. But formal American education, especially such that is taught in post-secondary institutions, can help to build up a professional knowledge that people need in today's society. Native American education as a catalyst for self-determined communities should include both tribal education and formal Western education, but teachers and students should be aware of the difference between the two roles in life, which both ways create. To confuse or exchange them, leads to the loss of meaning and deeper understanding of life. Indigenization education through and for self-determination means to bring the missing component of meaning as well as personal - and thereby tribal - growth into the formal schooling process (cf. Deloria 2001, p. 46).

This is not only a dream that emerges far away from real educational conditions but is also a wish of experienced teachers. In the Navajo and Hopi communities the idea of a tribal school emerged, which would strongly emphasize the tribal culture and history in early years and which would include Western knowledge later. A young Hopi teacher sees great potential in tribal knowledge and education:

"Hopi math is a base of 20 - we were multiplying by 20s to get large numbers ... We know science. We know our historical roots. We know place based learning. We know all of our shrines since the time of emergence ... my long-term goal is to see and create a real Hopi school that is about teaching what being Hopi really means. It's hard to do that in a school, so I don't envision a typical school with classrooms and desks. I see a real family oriented school." (Hopi Tutuveni 2006, p. 3).

Within the concept of indigenization, integration can be understood as being a part of the society as an independent group that defines its way of life on its own and that can ensure this way by own means through equal exchange with the larger society. Thereby schools would also come out of the above described dilemma that occurs within the mandate to educate students in the tribal way but also to prepare them for the present need to find a job off the reservation. Furthermore, the results of the

current state instrument to measure the standards of student achievement might no longer stand for the real quality of the education and the schools do not have to reach for standards defined by someone else.

Deloria states that as much as this can only be the responsibility of the tribes themselves, as big are at the same time the obstacles to assume the responsibility since a lot of people have lost the connection to the tribal knowledge (cf. Deloria 2001, p. 86). But if this obstacle is overcome, self-determination can appear.

Higher education as a pivot for self-determination

Therefore it is especially the issue of higher education that needs to be dealt with. Mainstream institutions cannot provide native students sufficiently with education, because their way of schooling as well as the professional knowledge imparted there are not free of culture and applicable to every way of life. Only a few colleges are in the hands of native people and even there the programs and degrees in most cases did not emerge out of own tribal developments but out of cooperation with state universities and colleges (cf. Wildcat 2001, p. 114f.).

But professional education is a crucial component in the further development of self-determination and therefore has to focus on native perspectives; otherwise tribes will stay dependent on professional advice from outside engineers and bureaucrats who are not able to place their knowledge within the tribal views and needs. Own institutions could align culture and professionalism. "Basic research, technology transfer, reliable information, bioremediation (ecology-based as opposed to genetics oriented) technologies, and ultimately community service – all of these can be accomplished by creating an institution that prepares and provides indigenized professional education: practices supportive of cultural diversity emergent out of the diverse geographies and ecologies of the places we call home." (Wildcat 2001, p. 117)

The role of scientific research

As much as self-determination in education can only be the responsibility of the tribes themselves, as big are at the same time the obstacles to assume the responsibility, since a lot of people have lost the connection to the tribal knowledge. Therefore a crucial goal must be its regaining. This is already the intention of Traditional Use Studies. They are undertaken in order to map aspects of history and culture. The data collection can include mapping and recording of traditional uses including sites and activities, historical research and interviews with custodians of knowledge: "there is a concern that the current generation of Elders is growing older, and that it is very important to capture their knowledge while there is still time to do so." (Honda-McNeill/Parsons (Eds.) 2003, p. 9) Key concerns are also the stabilization of the community by strengthening the tribal identity with a continuation of the oral history tradition, preserving a way of life to pass on to the younger generation and preserving environmental knowledge as well as the expansion of resource development, which is destroying the land. In order to respond to the latter concern, studies can help to inform industry and other users of the land about the dependence of native people on the land and its resources (cf. Honda-McNeill/Parsons (Eds.) 2003, p. 9). Students of the Hopi community conducted such a study on the reservation. The video research project recorded historical information about the establishment of Hopi villages and the relation to archeological sites. The students asked their elders about what they could remember about the establishment of villages as well as about mistreatment of the people by the federal government in those former times including forced educational compliance (cf. Hopi Tutuveni 2006, p. 1).

In educational respects, the studying and vitalizing of practices from former stable times of the tribes can give back some of that stability to the tribe and to the educators of its following generations (cf. Deloria 2001, p. 43). Research can be helpful to create schools that intend to meet the needs of a special cultural group. A positive example of scientific research is to see already in the urban charter high school described above, as the statement of a teacher shows:

"This school is based on research about the type of environment that native youth need to be successful in high school ... Academic research. And when this school was designed it was designed based on research available at that time done on Native American education."

The function of scientific research is changing more and more from the investigation *over* the people to investigation *with* and *for* them. At the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology of the University of Arizona, projects serve the benefit of Native American tribes. Within consultation programs, research has the role of data collection with the intent to achieve a positive effect for the life of tribes, namely in cases where land, which was once under their control and is still used for traditional activities, is going to be used by federal activities. Consultation is here defined as "a process by which American Indians peoples with aboriginal or historic ties to public lands are identified and brought into discussions about cultural resources in those lands. Consultation involves a fundamental decision on the part of a government agency to share some decision making with American Indians ... Indian people are asked to share in four critical decisions: (1) to identify resources needing protection; (2) to prioritize which cultural resources will be protected first; (3) to select from among a variety of management practices those that most appropriately protect the cultural resources in the context of other resource uses; and (4) to participate in long-range planning and monitoring of the lands and resources" (Stoffle 2001, p. 23) For that purpose research contains conducting key cultural expert interviews with tribal members, searching literature and archives and analyzing existing data and field data (cf. Halmo 2001, p. 11 f.).

It is unfortunate that tribal members are still forced to explain and document their traditions to protect or sometimes eventually regain their tribal ways. But Deloria also sees a value in cooperation between non-Natives and Natives in drawing attention to native knowledge, since on the basis of the present state of things, circumstances for Native Americans still can gain through the support of "the voices of respected white scholars ... in order to plead our own case." (Deloria 2001, p. 5) Every article and every scientific paper can be based on the equal exchange of knowledge if both understand it as a call to offer Native American knowledge to the benefit of everyone instead of non-native guidance.

But it is not necessary to place main responsibilities regarding the undertaking of scientific research only in the hands of non-native people. Moreover, it appears to be important that Native Americans represent not only the investigated but also the investigating part, as the dispute about the sacred San Francisco Peaks shows: In the primary stages of the current court case an Environmental Impact Study was conducted in consultation with the tribes. It acknowledged that the mountains have a cultural and spiritual relevance for the involved tribes but nonetheless recommended that the snowmaking plan can be realized. "The forest service doesn't really believe there is anything up on the mountain. They say: 'We're just going to use a little piece.' But you can't divide spiritual things into little pieces. You have to consider the whole. I don't think the Forest Service is really listening." (Hopi Tutuveni 2006, p. 1)

Tribal members hold a perspective that is relevant for ensuring credibility and applicability of scientific knowledge in the native context. "we must use what we learn about the scientific understanding of the world to ask questions of our people about how our ancestors understood the world, remembering that the tribe exists over many generations and possesses a cumulative knowledge that transcends any particular generation." (Deloria 2001, p. 86)

It applies also to research done in the educational field. Scientific work done by community members of the Hopi, Navajo and Tohono O'odham tribes, who work in cooperation with the University of Arizona or studied there, has already brought about insights and knowledge for the schools: A Hopi dictionary was developed as well as a grammar for the Tohono O'odham language and the teacher of the boarding school on the Navajo reservation studied aspects of Navajo language learning during her master qualification.

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