

Whitney White

ED 290

Focus Paper

May 8, 2008

Native American Studies

To learn more information about how to teach in my domain, Native American Studies, I talked to Carolyn Anderson. She is an anthropologist with an emphasis on Native American people. I talked to her about what her dominant organizing principle was for teaching this topic, and how she is able to hold it together. Native American history is not very common among education unless at the college level, boarding school or an immersion program. So you could find difficulty in trying to teach such a rarely taught topic. So I looked to Carolyn for some insight.

Her dominant organizing principle is balancing Native and non-Native points of view, so that both are adequately represented because most students have never heard the Indian point of view. Since most of the time the dominant point of view, which is the Euro-American view is seen as objective and the Indian point of view is considered bias. A good example of this is the writings and views of a native scholar by the name of Winona La Duke. Winona's point of view is considered bias and sometimes even radical. "For society to be more just, with a point of view from justice, we especially the white people need to hear those other points of view" (Carolyn).

Carolyn focuses on using interdisciplinary resources for her curriculum. She draws from disciplines such as history, culture, art, religion, literature, reading, examples, and the media. She chooses interdisciplinary sources because it involves other points of view. Her choice to be

interdisciplinary ties along with what the domain of social studies does. Since social studies seeks to promote civic competence to help students make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. This can be accomplished by drawing from numerous disciplines (Santrock, 394). Her tactics for teaching in this field helps to identify what the field of social studies tries to accomplish in promoting civic competence.

When white people represent Indians, it's more in an imagined way compared to what it's actually like to be Indian she says. Plus, the representations of Indians are really about white people and what America is. Indians are actually invisible to white people; the stereotypes take the place of real Indian people and their experiences. The current central idea in American Indian Studies is decolonization. We need to quit thinking in a colonial way. It involves Indian people to be critical of us she says. You see it that way, but it's really this way—Indian view point of the things that have happened. A prime example of this, which shows Indians as invisible is the events that took place in 1862. The events are seen to some as the Dakota Uprising, which is more of the dominant objective view, but to Indian people it might be seen as the Dakota Conflict. Today Indian people are still struggling to get what happened in 1862 recognized as genocide because that's what it was; they were imprisoned at Fort Snelling, and forced to march out of the state of Minnesota. There is usually a double bind—Indian people couldn't win, and they knew that so they felt it was honorable to fight. Plus, most Indian people were starving due to late annuity payments and the food was usually rotten by the time it reached them. There were plenty of other factors at play instead of the stereotype that Indians were just savages. She says that the whole point of U.S. policy since the beginning was attempts to get rid of Indians period through various ways.

When Carolyn searches for sources for her classes she looks for an Indian perspective. A perspective that is critical to the dominant views. A great example is in her Contemporary Native American Issues she assigned a book called *Blood Politics* which showed us how colonialism and oppression works, and how it's internalized. It is an ethical decision because it deals with injustices and it also helps student's see those injustices in a complex way. She wants students to see more than what happened to Indian people as bad and not forget. To really see how bad it was, and know something about the complexity of the different sides of the story. After this has been established she feels it will also give students at least some idea of how to talk to Indian people and understand their side of things. Having the communication skills to speak with Indian people allows you to converse on sensitive subjects, such as treaty rights.

When asked what informs her decisions she said "I feel that I have been privileged to know and talk with Indian people. I think as a result I have gained the responsibility to teach at least some of the students to really understand things like sovereignty, treaty rights, and American Indian policy. In showing the history of an extremely non-noble history of American Indian oppression/injustice therefore it may create an interest to continue learning about it. She attempts to encourage other people to learn more about these issues of oppression/injustice" (Carolyn). Since it's so sad that few people know about Indian's and they might even be neighbors is of great concern to her. An example of people's ignorance is that many people don't know that Manitou Heights was given to the wife of a faculty member who read the Song of Hiawatha, which was written by Longfellow. The song has a mixture of Dakota and Ojibwe words for places. Yet, people are surrounded by names for streets, building, camps, etc. and see those are Indian names for things. The most common place that uses Indian names is camps. Is that an attempt to connect with the land?

She attempts to show her students how Indian people recognize humility. Starting with the belief that the Creator is going to know everything, and you're never going to accomplish that goal. You need to ask for help—be pitiful. Indian people recognize the dependence of the rest of the universe to help. We are people and not God's favorites and in result we don't have the right to destroy everything. She makes an effort to awaken student's minds to the idea of there being other points of view because she can't give that view since she's not Indian. Therefore she attempts to awaken it. She agrees that there is a great need for educated Indian people to teach and give that new view point (s).

When asked if she thought knowledge was local, she agreed in some sense that everyone's knowledge is directly related to their position in society. How you see the world depends on where you come from and where you've been. She feels that there is abstract knowledge in classrooms since people are talk about people thousands of miles away, and don't even know what's going on here. Abstract knowledge is a result of the power of writing and literacy, to keep us from thinking about what's going on right next door, and keep us interested in things that aren't local. She, herself is more interested in local things—a commonality among Indian people is oral tradition, and she has tremendous respect for oral tradition, which is local and alive in Indian culture. She recognizes the importance of experimental learning—reinventing what learning really is. Learning was experimental to Indian people. Indian men didn't learn to hunt by reading it from a book, but rather experienced hunting with their fathers; older men taught by experience.

The concept of local tells us we're not local. There is a deep connection to places and land for Indian people. If knowledge isn't experimental/lived experiences, what is it? Is it intellectual—the intellectual experience to land. She feels it's possible to have an intellectual

experience to the land, but that's why we're so screwed up about land she says. In terms of being screwed up, she means disconnected—we live in a disconnected imaginary world. Indian people have a connection because Indian people lived here. White ancestors came from many places so they feel a disconnection. Connection to land ties in with Indian worldview, that all things are living. So you get a glimpse of how important it is to address things in a different way. It is deeply important to think what it would be like to see and experience the world in a different way.

In terms of race, experience is important—actions count rather than abstract learning. The relationship counts, it's highly important. A good example to follow is—actions speak louder than words. What she means is that by some she may be seen as a “wannabe” by both Indian and/or white people, when in reality she sees how important that relationship is to Indian people. Her actions as a professor for this domain are showing her efforts to spread awareness of issues relating to Indian people, and I thank her for that. It would enrich people's lives to get to know Indian people, and she wishes everyone knew that as well as getting to know each other.

In terms of middle and high schools, courses may be interdisciplinary for the content area of social studies, and also very helpful in defining the basis for my own teaching. In looking at the content area of social studies I understand the importance for students needs to understand their historical roots and locate themselves in time (Santrock, 394). I see the importance of guiding students analyzing and reflecting about historical events, and encouraging students to think about possible alternative meanings of events and how they might be interpreted in different ways. A good example of this is the different theories people have for how Indian people came here. A good activity would be to show students the various theories and have the students come to a conclusion of how they think Indian people got here. By showing students

the various geographic locations of Indian people (i.e. plains, Southeast, etc.) it will help develop spatial and geographic perspectives of the differences of Indian people overall. It will be resourceful and allow students to make informed and competent decisions about the relationship of humans to their environment—living conditions, food substance used by different Indian people depending on their geographic location. A good example is how the Northeast tribes ate a lot of seafood while the plains ate buffalo and more game.

The theme of *Individuals, groups, and institutions* is important for my domain because it allows students to see just how important a role the government, churches, local individuals along with local governments played a role in the injustices against Indian people then and now. Also another important theme is *Power, authority, and governance* because understanding the development of power, authority, and governance in the United States and other parts of the world is essential for developing civic competence (Santrock, 395).

Global connections increases interdependence among nations requires understanding nations and cultures around the world. This theme would be necessary if during class we did an activity about comparing Indian people of the United States to other Indigenous people around the world. The theme *Culture* would benefit my class because the study of cultures prepares students to ask and answer questions, such as How are cultures similar and different? What is the best way to interact with people who are from cultures that are different from your own? The theme of culture is essential for teaching in my domain because it offers students the option to present a different culture than their own. Like the theme said, it allows them to gain the tools necessary to communicate with other cultures. For my domain that would be Indian people, and by what Carolyn informed me about her dominant organizing principle it fits well. After taking one of her classes a student ended up on a reservation in Wisconsin, and was able to carry a

conversation about treaty rights with some tribal members. She was proud when the student told her the next year. It is important to have the skills of communication because you never know when you'll run into an Indian person.

Some educators believe that learning about social studies would benefit from constructivist strategies, such as using varied sources of information, student-generated questions to guide inquiry, and peer collaboration (Santrock, 397). In the constructivist view, students should form their own interpretation of evidence and submit it for review. Allowing them to do so should encourage greater reflection and deeper understanding of social issues (Santrock, 397). I truly believe this would be an effective teaching strategy because it wouldn't be just question and answer or me as the teacher controlling the lecture. It would provide students the opportunity to participate in their learning and in result maybe retain the information longer or period. I would defiantly provide varied sources of information as you seen Carolyn use and incorporate peer collaboration via groups. Groups would be assigned to go over the reading or come up with a question for the rest of the class, which are examples of working together.

A good example of students working together in the classroom is portrayed in interactive slide lecture turns teacher centered activity into a participative experience for students. Students view, touch, interpret, and act out images projected on slides. This is very useful because it helps students experience history, and in result more active participation is present. I feel it's beneficial to include students in learning instead of just presenting them with facts through a lecture. Students may be more motivated to learn and eager in result.

Constructivist approaches stress the importance of thinking critically about values. Effective teachers recognize opposing points of view, respect for well-supported positions,

sensitivity to cultural similarities and differences, and a commitment to social responsibility (Santrock, 397). This is defiantly present with the useful tips provided by Carolyn in teaching in an uncommon domain. Teachers guide students to consider ethical dimensions of topics and address controversial issues rather than directly telling students what is ethical.

Some teaching strategies designed by the Teachers Curriculum Institute (2001) in a constructivist approach are: interactive slide lecture, social studies skill builders, writing for understanding, and response groups. The social studies skill builders are where students sit in pairs and complete skill-oriented tasks. Writing for understanding challenges students to write for a purpose. The last teaching strategy is response groups, which creates rich classroom discussions for controversial topics. The response groups strategy would be important to implement in the curriculum for my domain because there are many controversial topics to discuss; one would be the different theories of how Indian people got here. All of these teaching strategies would be important to include in my curriculum in at least one way.

Learning and teaching history demands complex thinking by both teachers and students. It centers around interesting, generative, and organizing problems; critical weighing of evidence and accounts; suspension of our views to understand those of others; use of facts, concepts, and interpretations to make judgments; and later, if the evidence persuades, to changes in our views and judgments (Santrock, 398).

My domain would follow the social constructivist approach to learning. Social constructivist has an emphasis on collaboration with others to produce knowledge and understanding (Santrock, 228). A social constructivist approach emphasizes the social contexts of learning and that knowledge is mutually built and constructed (Santrock, 337). Involvement

with others creates opportunities for students to evaluate and refine their understanding as they are exposed to the thinking of others and as they participate in creating shared understanding. This is important because it provides development of students' thinking. It is good to hear other points of view, especially if you've never heard a different view from a person of a different culture than yours. According to Carolyn, a number of students throughout her years of teaching haven't heard the views from an Indigenous perspective, and that's why it's critical to provide that view for our domain. Surprisingly, some students and even people in general haven't heard that view, and only the dominant view. Moving from Piaget to Vygotsky, the conceptual shift is from the individual to collaboration, social interaction, and sociocultural activity. Vygotsky's social constructivist approach emphasizes that students construct knowledge through social interactions with others (Santrock, 337). My curriculum will be based on finding sources by as many Indian people and others who are well respected because the Indian perspective is different from those who are non-Indian, and it's important to show that difference. So in result, students will read assigned books and talk each class period about the previous assigned chapter in groups, then get together as a class and go over main ideas/concepts and questions. I see the importance in collaborating with others to produce to develop students' thinking.

Piaget emphasized that teachers should provide support for students to explore and develop understanding. While Vygotsky emphasized that teachers should create many opportunities for students to learn by co-constructing knowledge along with the teacher and with peers (Santrock, 337). Which I have demonstrated the importance in the previous paragraph. It is important that as a teacher, I serve as a facilitator and guide rather than a director and molder of students learning. As a teacher in a social constructivist approach it's important to closely monitor students' perspectives, thinking, and feelings. Also, the teacher and students are learning

and teaching. Insight can be gained as a teacher through students thinking in your field of teaching.

As for contributing to students learning I would use scaffolding—a technique of changing the level of support over the course of a teaching session; a more-skilled person (teacher or more advanced peer of the child) adjusts the amount of guidance to fit the student's current performance (Santrock, 339). Scaffolding would be instrumental during the beginning of the year, preferably with the start of the first book or article assigned. I would offer direct instruction about the book and go over main ideas/concepts with the students in an attempt to prepare them for their first paper. Throughout the year I would provide less guidance, and by the middle of the semester or year I could assign a peer who shows high competence to go over main ideas/concepts, and rotate among peers throughout the year. For those who are not as high as others I would wait until the end of the year when they have had a chance to get the hang of things. Yet, I would still offer guidance, assistance and monitor their efforts.

Cooperative learning would be a base for learning in my classroom. Cooperative learning occurs when students work in small groups to help each other learn (Santrock, 345). This strategy is instrumental because when students teach something to others, they tend to learn it more deeply. Cooperative learning would be significant in assigning research topics for students to explore themselves. I would list topics for students to research and limit each topic evenly so every topic gets covered, but I would let the students decide for themselves which topic they would like to pursue. I would give them the decision to decide in an effort to increase their appeal, and motivate them. Once a topic is chosen, the students would choose a direction to follow, kind of a sub-topic of their overall main topic. An example is a topic could be treaty rights but the sub-topic might be how it affected the Dakota and a different group like the

Cherokee for example. Once that has been established the groups would work together to make their sub-topic flow and then present their topic to the class. Of course I would offer individual grades, student evaluations for students to evaluate their peers according to their topic, and grade accordingly. This may be a good example of group investigation.

Positive peer interaction and positive feelings about making their own decisions were motivating factors behind students' choice to participate in the cooperative groups. So it's important as a teacher that I'm monitoring the discussion between groups and to make sure every group member is contributing equally. Cooperative learning also promotes increased interdependence and connection with other students which is something positive (Santrock, 345). However I do need to maintain monitoring students' progress in an attempt to drive off social loafing which can be associated with cooperative learning.

In looking at composing the small groups it would be useful to assign heterogeneous groups with diversity in ability, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and gender. The reasoning behind heterogeneous grouping is that it maximizes opportunities for peer tutoring and support, improves cross-gender and cross-ethnic relations, and ensures that each group has at least one student who can do the work (Santrock, 349). Another reason heterogeneous grouping could be useful is that it allows students the chance to hear other students perspectives on the issue we're looking at. It allows diversity because people aren't all the same, have the same thoughts and it really ties into how you've grown up, and where you've been and what you've seen.

Through teaching I would be offering students my view point as an Indian person, but not the overall view point of Indian people. I can only speak for myself and not all Indian people.

So I would have the ability to provide my family's history and the events that took place throughout their lives in an attempt to show a different view point out there, and there are many. I can also provide things that have happened to me throughout my life, along with obstacles I've faced and have been able to overcome due to extended family kin networks, which are prevalent in Indian country. Students can also access the different view points through various Indian newspapers like Indian Country and The Circle. It's an attempt to expand their horizon. I find that by offering the other point of view of Indian people students will see that it's not bias, but it's important that people know and recognize the atrocities that have happened to Indian people in order to move on. I as an Indian woman don't have vengeance on my mind or anything, but more than anything I just think us Indian people want past wrong doings recognized, or at least I do. I have no vengeance because a Dakota perspective is that we are all related—everybody is like siblings. Or as a Dakota man might say “we are all brothers”.

For the first couple of weeks I might spend time asking students what they know about Indian people just to get a sense of what local knowledge they have. Secondly, I might offer insight into how life is different from the average American. When I mean different, I'm referring to the different worldviews especially the Dakota and possibly the Ho-chunk since I am from those nations. So students can get a sense of what life is actually like and not the stereotypes of the media and others. I want them to see something else than Dancing with Wolves for example. After offering some insight into Indian people's lives I would move forward in my content area. I would move on by following the tips offered by the social studies content areas provided in Santrock's text, and by using the themes presented in the content. Also by using the teaching strategies provided by the social constructivist approach to learning, and by

using the social constructivist approach for teaching and learning because it fits perfectly with my domain I feel.

Works Citedⁱ

Anderson, Carolyn. Interview. 23 April 2008.

Santrock, John. Educational Psychology. New York: McGraw Hill, 2008.

ⁱ I just wanted to remind you that you said it was okay to only use these sources.