

Teaching Learning Disabled Children Using American Indian Educational Principles

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Part 1 of 2 – Creating The Foundation

American Indian educational principles, regardless of the tribal source, are consistently holistic, respectful, and embrace the differences that each individual brings to the learning journey (Cajete, 1994). The fundamental purpose of this paper is to explore how to apply American Indian educational principles to the teaching of learning disabled children in a Western educational setting and then to establish the efficacy of this approach. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze current educational practices for the learning disabled in Western education. An exploration of current practices could easily encompass a paper in and of itself. Such an exploration might provide questions for further research. This paper focuses on looking forward to what an educational framework for learning disabled children might look like if it were founded on American Indian educational principles. Although looking back is not the focus of this paper, it should be noted that if Western educational paradigms were not the norm, this conversation might not be needed. “Even a cursory examination of the numerous problems facing modern technological societies and the failure of modern education systems to find solutions to these problems, which are essentially moral and ethical in character, suggests something is fundamentally amiss in the dominant education systems of the United States” (Wildcat, 2001). Senge (2000) when talking about what we are up against when attempting to alter the industrial age system of education explains:

The assumption of smart and dumb kids is so deeply ingrained in our society that it is hard

to imagine an alternative. But the alternative is right before us: All human beings are born with unique gifts. The healthy functioning of any community depends on its capacity to develop each gift. When we hold a newborn we do not see a smart or a dumb kid. We see the miracle of life creating itself. The loss of that awareness is the greatest toll exacted by our prevailing system of education, in and out of school (p. 42).

We have the opportunity to develop children who are healthy, engaged, and who act to heal our world. Not just those children who our Western educational system sees as bright, but all of the children in the system, especially the learning disabled children. Since learning disabled children already have the gift of seeing the world differently, they are less likely to be locked into a frame of mind where there is but one right way of knowing. With help they could be developed into ambassadors of global transformation that embrace multiple ways of knowing and understanding our world. We face a global crisis, and we need these children to be engaged and confident in their ability to contribute as whole people in this world. Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2004) provide this insight into what we need, one that aligns with American Indian educational principles:

John said the problem we face is fundamentally because of lack of relationship, not just with each other but with all of nature. We are out of relationship with all of nature because we've moved into a reductive kind of awareness that is based on alienation and separation. We have to change that relationship to one of cocreation. The fate of the human species is still very much in our hands (p. 66).

The author grew up learning disabled and personally experienced the negative feelings of

self-worth associated with the stigma of being different and it is this experience that has provided the motivation to research this topic. There is a need to look at how our learning disabled children are approached. Black (1974) suggests in reference to research current to that time, “There is general agreement that underachievers as a group tend to have a less adequate self-concept than do normal achievers” (p. 1137). For children who do not read well, not only is their self-worth in question, in our Western culture literacy is the key to being accepted into the club and these children feel marginalized, different, and have no sense of place with others who are 'normal'. This was not so in American Indian cultures that embraced a variety of ways of knowing and honored each child as special and important regardless of how she learned. Western children grow up in a culture founded on literacy. Burden (2008) describes the situation for children growing up in a culture based on literacy as follows:

In a society such as ours, where literacy is a highly valued skill or commodity, a perceived inability to acquire that skill is highly likely to have a negative effect upon any individual's conception of themselves as competent. As a young person develops physically and intellectually, their feelings of competence and well-being will be shaped by the comparisons they make between themselves and others and by the ways in which they interpret others' perceptions of them (p. 189).

Although indigenous children did not have to develop literacy, in our modern culture it is a necessary skill. If we are going to weave oral traditions into Western educational settings for learning disabled children, we need to understand how important these oral traditions are to creating literacy in our culture. We draw off of American Indian educational strategies to

integrate oral traditions such as storytelling into the classroom so that those children who learn differently use these strategies to learn to read as do children in traditional indigenous cultures.

“...it is essential to use oral tradition as an element in literacy work, since oral tradition is of the essence of cultures which do not have a written language...” (Faundez in Freire and Faundez, 1989, p. 76).

Our Western educational approach to those we label as learning disabled has been based on medical and educational approaches to individuals (Macdonald, 2009). Learning disabled children are viewed as broken, do not fit the norm, and they need fixing. New research by Macdonald approaches learning disabilities as a social problem, not an individual problem which is similar to learning in an American Indian setting. According to Macdonald, there is a strong research foundation that looks at physical disabilities from a social model perspective. He is using this foundation to approach learning disabilities in the same manner. This new field is called the social model of disability. Macdonald explains:

This is where disability is not the result of a biological impairment that restricts social participation, but rather institutionalized (which is constructed socially) discrimination that restricts education, employment and life opportunities. These forms of institutionalized discriminations are referred to in sociology as disabling barriers. Hence, a rejection of individualism is fundamental to a social model analysis (348).

To eliminate the structural inequality inherent in our current educational paradigms, a new educational approach based on de-emphasizing individualism is necessary. De-emphasizing individualism is not easy in American society. Bohm (2008) explains “It's the same sort of thing –

that close connection, that fellowship, that mutual participation. I think people find this lacking in our society, which glorifies the separate individual” (p. 37). American Indian educational traditions embrace close connection, fellowship, and mutual participation. The art in this exploration is to somehow integrate Western educational systems and American Indian educational principles. It is not practical nor is it preferable to try to replace existing educational paradigms in a Western culture. There is no way to turn back the clock to try to go back to the old ways, in fact no one really knows exactly what the old ways were since colonization started over 500 years ago in the America's (Allen, 1992 & 1998; Deloria, 2001). An interest in integrating American Indian and Western educational practices creates an opportunity for a hybrid educational practice that has the possibility of creating a new and exciting outcome that directly benefits our learning disabled children. The hybridity in educational practices created by boundary crossing is the norm in our time and we need to embrace it rather than be frightened by it. Pieterse (2009) explains “Hybridity is a terminology and sensibility of our time in that boundary and border crossing mark our times” (p. 120).

A clear understanding of the principles that frame American Indian education is provided by (Cajete, 1994) and it is these principles that are explored in this paper. As to specific ways of knowing, the educational practices that are defined provide a container for exploring multiple ways of knowing rather than try to teach specific ways of knowing. In other words, the context created helps students of all backgrounds and abilities explore and be proud of their unique ways of knowing so that they build their self-esteem and sense of self.

The scope of this paper has been narrowed to educating learning disabled children in a

Western educational setting. The author has chosen to do so based on his experience growing up learning disabled and experiencing the despair and stigma of being 'broken' in a Western culture that sees those who learn differently as in need of fixing. A passion for helping learning disabled children grow up feeling whole and an interest in creating a learning process that creates this outcome have led to the fundamental question to be answered within the context of this paper, What would an educational process for learning disabled children look like if it were founded on the educational principles of traditional American Indian education?

The educational processes that are explored in this paper are drawn from *Look to the Mountain* (Cajete, 1994). There are an array of theorists and epistemologies provided in section 2 of this paper that contribute to and validate the principles outlined in *Look to the Mountain*. Throughout the exploration of American Indian educational principles in this paper, these theorists and epistemologies are drawn on to provide support for the elements of American Indian education. A mind map of these foundational resources are found at the end of the paper. There are also several American Indian themes woven into the development of this educational paradigm. The first theme is a concentric circle model found in a graphic at the end of the paper with three different American Indian educational themes. Concentric circles form a consistent model for much of American Indian thought. The second is the theme of The hunter of good heart. The hunter of good heart is someone that is on a journey to become whole. Both of these themes frame the development of the educational approach outlined in the following pages.

Three other themes are woven into this paper. The first is a “sense of place” (That place that Indians talk about). Critical to American Indian education is a sense of place, a bonding to the

home, the village, the region, and the mountain. Place is central to understanding who we are and what our place is in this world and can be developed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike regardless of the setting, be it urban or rural. Jeannette Armstrong in her essay *Keepers of the Earth* explains this (Armstrong, 1995):

As Okanagans, our most essential responsibility is to learn to bond our whole individual selves and our communal selves to the land....We join with the larger self, outward to the land, and rejoice in all that we are. We are this one part of the Earth. Without this self we are not human: we yearn; we are incomplete; we are wild, needing to learn our place as land pieces. We cannot find joy because we need place in this sense to nurture and protect our family/community/self. The thing Okanagans fear worst of all is to be removed from the land that is their life and their spirit (p. 323).

The next theme is a “connection with and respect for all persons, human and non-human”. In American Indian mythology all persons are to be respected and protected whether they are alive or not. This is not a Western philosophy of stewardship over as a ecological concept but understanding that all persons are related, are family (all persons, human and non-human). This indigenous ecology is one of love and respect of family. And lastly but connected to ecology is 'spiritual ecology', a deep understanding that all that we do starts and ends with spirit. The spiritual is not something outside of us, it is not the worship of an entity, but it provides purpose for everything we do. Whether making tools, art, or learning, it is for the community not for self indulgence (Cajete, 1994).

A Brief Note on Western vs. American Indian Traditions

Western will be used to describe the Cartesian foundation for our Western culture throughout this paper. Rather than continuously label Western traditions in education or culture as positivist, dualistic, based on scientific method, or objectivist, it should be understood that the use of the term Western explicitly means the above (Capra, 1996; Macy, 1991; Senge, 1990; Skyttner, 2008; Wheatley, 1999). All of the positive and negative consequences that come from this Cartesian foundation of our Western world are contained within the word Western. As well, when talking about American Indian principles, culture, or education, it should be understood that the use of the term American Indian explicitly means traditional although it includes some post-colonized American Indian hybrid traditions as well (Cajete, 1994).

In American Indian culture, 'people' are not just humans. As noted above, the term person includes both human and non-human persons. In American Indian traditions, it is believed that all persons are our brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, mothers and fathers, and are part of our family and our clan. All creation included in 'People' is a critical distinction of American Indian thought and is integral to understanding American Indian education principles provided throughout this paper.

A Holistic View of the Learner and Her Environment

One of the striking aspects of Western culture is its dualistic approach to the world. Humans are separate and unconnected, simply inhabitants on this earth. The physical world is something to be observed and used but we as humans are not part of this world (Capra, 1996; Macy, 1991; Senge, 1990; Skyttner, 2008; Wheatley, 1999). As aspects of American Indian traditions regarding education are explored, the foundation of the American Indian approach

reveals that it is holistic and spiritually connected. Cajete (2006) explains “Deep understanding of relationships and the significance of participation in all aspects of life are key to American Indian American Indian education. 'Mitakuye Oyasin' (we are all related), a Lakota phrase, means that our lives are truly and profoundly connected to other people and the physical world” (p. 56). A basic assumption of this paper is that starting a learning disabled child out on her educational journey feeling fully connected to the world reduces the anxiety and feeling of separation felt by being different. In fact, if the child is started out with a paradigm of being fully connected to others and the world, she may never develop the deep sense of feeling different than all of the other children. The underlying problem that the author experienced with the Western approach is that within that approach we manufacture things. Unfortunately our education system is set up to manufacture educated children. Here in lies the source of the problem.

Our children like other biological systems are living systems (Capra, 1996 & 2002; Senge, 2000; Macy, 1991; Wheatley, 1999) and do not thrive in a mechanistic approach to becoming a whole and healthy human. In a mechanistic system educators try to drive variability out of the system to create children who all have the same knowledge. Everything must be manufactured the same. Our children simply cannot achieve this level of consistency and this author suggests that we should not have this as a goal. When we see our children as unique living systems we open up the opportunity to help them develop the confidence to think completely and make wise choices, speak with responsibility and act decisively for the good of the world. Others who grow up learning disabled as this author did are relegated to the broken pile to be re-manufactured to meet specifications. American Indian education principles provide another way to create learning.

Senge (2000) summarizes his thoughts about restructuring education around a living systems model:

Learning is nature's expression of the search for development. It can be diverted or blocked, but it can't be prevented from occurring. The core educational task in our time is to evolve the institutions and practices that assist, not replace, that natural learning process (p. 57).

When growing up learning disabled in our Western culture, a child feels like she is different, doesn't belong, and she does not have a strong sense of place. The 'normal' children are the right kind of children, and she is not; she feels broken and in need of fixing. She feels this way because that is the way she is treated. Her different way of learning, knowing, and seeing the world is not honored, instead the education system attempts to help her conform to the norm. These feelings of being separate from others can be eliminated if her education is approached in a different manner. The lessons and curriculum designed for our children do not need to be abandoned, they only need to be modified by adding connections to our world. A holistic approach is based on the context created and the conversations in which we engage. Cajete (2006) paints a picture of education based on American Indian education principles explaining that it is "...designed to encompass important ancestral traditions; emphasize respect for individual uniqueness in diverse spiritual expressions; facilitate understanding of history and culture; develop a strong sense of place and service to community; and forge a commitment to educational and social transformation" (p. 56). This holistic approach to our learners situated within a social setting will be kept in mind while looking at what education might look like based on these

principles is explored.

Being mindful of how to use these principles in a Western setting is critical. The best intentions often fail if a wholesale replacement of current education frameworks is attempted. Outcomes Based Education (OBE) is one such framework that has suffered this fate. The author is trained in OBE and uses OBE in his work. However understanding why OBE has failed to achieve the results envisioned is important so that infusing American Indian educational principles into our existing educational structures does not suffer the same fate. A study by Berlach and McNaught (2007) outline OBE failures in Australia. Given these insights, recommendations on how to proceed will be conservative. They explain:

Spady is not particularly concerned with extant militating factors such as the highly bureaucratized nature of schools; the fact that schools are organised around structures that facilitate chronological progression; that strict timetabling is required for the management of large numbers of students; and that the mind-set of teachers is imbedded in curriculum exposition rather than curriculum generation. Such disregard of cultural imperatives, together with an absence of guidance regarding practical matters is evident in most of Spady's work.

How we communicate to our children makes a substantial impact on changing their worldview and helping them feel fully connected to our world. The language we have constructed in approaching learning disabled children is one of the barriers that Macdonald (2009) spoke of that needs to be addressed. Western culture has a long history of constructing language from a mechanistic point of view. Mechanistic language simply is not part of the American Indian

learning paradigm and creating a shift in language to honor a holistic approach to learning may not be easy. A change of language is however a recommendation in this paper. Gordon (2007) in quoting Gordon (2006) provides a picture of how difficult it is to move in this direction:

Infrequently in our mainstream Western journals and texts do we see work in the area of spiritual communication, or communication with nature. The fact that our underlying models and discourse for thinking about and describing communication originally came from the engineering sciences and pertained to machine-to-machine and person-to-machine communication has historically made it difficult to move outside our mechanistic discourse and construe larger organic possibilities (p. 98).

The American Indian epistemologies that form the foundation of the recommended educational paradigm explored in the following pages uses a more holistic and inclusive language. Although “there is no word for epistemology in any American Indian language” (Cajete, 2005), there are understandings that inform how to talk about American Indian educational concepts. The first is the holistic approach to education. Cajete explains “American Indian education historically occurred in a holistic social context that developed a sense of the importance of each individual as a contributing member of the social group” (p. 69). The work from here out demonstrates how to create this sense of connection and wholeness for learning disabled children integrating American Indian education principles into our Western educational systems.

The holistic framework of American Indian education is in alignment with modern system theory. Long before Bogdanov (1980) created his systems theory of Tektology in the 1920's and long before Von Bertalanffy (1969) first outlined General Systems Theory in the 1940's, American

Indians had been living deep spiritual systems practices for thousands of years. Where we are now discovering systems thinking, systems thinking was a foundation of American Indian living and is the foundation of American Indian education. “The environment was not something separate from their lives, but was the context, the set of relationships, that connected everything” (Cajete, 1994). Luhmann (1995) translates systems thinking into a social systems framework based on conversations and relationships with those in the community and this understanding is critical to creating learning cultures for our learning disabled children, cultures that view these children as whole contributing persons in our complex world. “To overcome our Cartesian anxiety, we need to think systemically, shifting our conceptual focus from objects to relationships” (Capra, 1996, p. 295). Understanding complexity is important in helping these children realize that there is not a right way and a wrong way of being and to understand that paradox is part of living in a complex world.

Unlike in Western paradigms, in American Indian traditions there are multiple truths, not just one scientific truth. It is necessary for our Western education system to understand that relying on a single objectivist model is not an accurate reflection of reality if we are going to connect with children who see the world differently. “...it is one thing to impose a single objectivist model in some restricted situations and to function in terms of that model – perhaps successfully; it is another to conclude that the model is an accurate reflection of reality” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 221). As learning disabled children have a different way of knowing the world, providing them with the space to have different ways of knowing is an important component of their education. “By relaxing the conscious mind's hold on reality, a person

becomes aware of circles, learns to tolerate paradoxes, and realized that no one way need exclude others in order to be true” (Nelson, 1993, p. 16).

With a focus on embracing a holistic world view, our learning disabled children can become powerful advocates for the healing of our world. “To build a sustainable society for our children and future generations, we need to fundamentally redesign many of our technologies and social institutions so as to bridge the wide gap between human design and the ecologically sustainable systems of nature” (Capra, 2002, p. 99). American Indian educational principles provide this framework. Structuring an educational paradigm with a holistic approach based on conversations and relationships with all persons that engages children who are labeled as learning disabled helps these children feel part of this extraordinary world. These children need to feel that they are apart of the world and know that their unique way of knowing is valid and important. As Meadows (2008, p. 172) states “Remember, always, that everything you know, and everything everyone knows, is only a model” and embracing multiple models helps our learning disabled children feel whole on their journey to becoming contributing human beings in our world.

American Indian Foundation for Learning

The foundation of American Indian learning is a deep connection with the universe. There is not a dualistic view of humans being separate. There is however a sense that we are all related and family, regardless of whether we are human people or non-human people (Cajete, 1994). Those who want to emulate the sense of ecology found in American Indian traditions but do so from a Western perspective, are unable to understand the American Indian connection with place. It is not ownership of or stewardship over our land, world, and universe, it is a connection with

and love of family that forms the American Indian sense of ecology. A learning relationship with the whole integrates several inner and outer realities of learners and teachers. Cajete (2005) introduces us to these realities:

Hah oh is a Tewa phrase sometimes used to connote the process of learning. Its literal translation is to breath in. *Hah oh* is an Indian metaphor that describes the perception of traditional tribal education – a process of breathing in – that each tribe creatively and ingeniously applied. As a whole, traditional tribal education revolved around experiential learning (learning by doing or seeing), storytelling (learning by listening and imagination), ritual or ceremony (learning through initiation), dreaming (learning through unconscious imagery), the tutor (learning through apprenticeship), and artistic creation (learning through creative synthesis) (p. 72).

Cajete (1994 & 2005) provides the above framework for understanding the full ecology of American Indian education based on the seven direction model upon which most American Indian traditions are founded. The seven foundations of American Indian education that provide the framework for our conversation honor the seven direction model. Cajete (1994) explains “The majority of American Indian tribes recognize seven sacred or elemental directions. These directions include East, West, North, South, Zenith, Nadir, and the Center. Through deep understanding and expression of the metaphoric meaning of these orientations, American Indians have intimately defined their place in the universe” (p. 37). The seven American Indian Educational foundations based on these elements include environmental, mythic, visionary, artistic, affective, and communal. Seventh and central to all of these is spiritual ecology. The

theorists and epistemologies that are outlined in mind map at the end of the paper support these aspects of American Indian education and it is through these elements that an educational framework that transforms the learning experience for learning disabled children can be defined. The outcome of this approach is defined by Cajete (2005):

A primary orientation of indigenous education was that each person was in reality his or her own teacher and that learning was connected to each individual's life process. One looked for meaning in everything, especially in the workings of the natural world. All things of Nature were teachers of humankind; what was required was a cultivated and practiced openness to the lessons that the world had to teach. Ritual, mythology, and the art of storytelling combined with the cultivation of relationship to one's inner self; individuals used the family, the community, and the natural environment to help realize their potential for learning and a complete life. Individuals were enabled to reach completeness by being encouraged to learn how to trust their natural instincts, to listen, to look, to create, to reflect and see things deeply, to understand and apply their intuitive intelligence, and to recognize and honor the spirit within themselves and the natural world. This is the educational legacy of indigenous peoples. It is imperative that we revitalize its message and its way of educating for life's sake at this time of ecological crisis (p. 77).

Spiritual ecology.

American Indian education is holistic and does not have the positivist and dualistic history upon which Western education is framed. But holistic does not quite capture the spiritual nature of learning. In our Western paradigm we learn to improve ourselves, spirituality has little or no

place in our quest for knowledge if we even are on a quest. Cajete (1994) explains:

For Indian people, traditional learning begins and ends with the spirit. It is an old maxim that puts in context what Indigenous people view as education. The perspective incorporates the metaphors of Pathway, orientation, hunting, and seeking life and completeness into a system and a symbolic language for education (p. 69).

One can imagine some peoples reaction to a conversation about including spiritual ecology at the center of an educational framework in a Western culture. It is important to understand the foundation of these feelings. In a Western culture we are separate from our world and our universe and certainly separate from those aspects of the universe that cannot be objectively defined and observed. The dualism is at the center of why we have children who feel disconnected, different, and lack a sense of place and purpose in our world. The conversation about spirituality however is not about religion. In American Indian beliefs, there wasn't a concept for religion. Allen (1998) explains "For tribal peoples, spirituality and mysticism are communitarian realities. The community and every individual within it must ever be mindful of the human obligation to spirit, balance, and the relationship (on kinship) that exists among all beings, so that all might prosper" (p. 47).

Spiritual ecology provides the center, the place of stability, and the place from which the other six foundations emerge. Spiritual ecology is the center of concentric circles radiating out into wholeness. "What seems to have been intact in all these settings were the concentric circles of interconnection – the campfire, the extended family, the larger society, humanity, nature, and the mystery of Spirit" (Baldwin, 1998, p. 27). Without spiritual ecology, one would simply implement

disparate strategies without a tight interconnection and purpose to the greater good of humanity, the earth, and the universe. If we are to develop children who are stewards in our world, having a deep sense of spiritual connection is critical. In American Indian terms this is living a good life. Cajete in Arrows, Cajete, and Lee (2010) tells us “The Indigenous ideal of living a good life in Indian traditions is sometimes referred to as striving to 'always think the highest thoughts.' This metaphor refers to the framework of a sophisticated epistemology of community based ecological education” (p. 140). Children with this foundation are in-tune with their world and are able to unleash their creative selves to help us solve the pressing problems we face. These children are not rigidly stuck in a dualistic paradigm but agile in a dynamic world bringing with them a keen ability to think clearly and fluently to help their near and far family. Staying focused on spiritual ecology helps our learning disabled children live a good life and fulfill their journey to becoming whole contributing persons.

Spiritual ecology does not conflict with the religious traditions that a child may bring to the classroom as spiritual ecology is not religion and does not inhibit the practice of ones personal faith (Cajete, 1994). What spiritual ecology does is provide a context for personal faith to manifest for the good of humanity, the world, and the universe. Having a strong and stable center from which to learn and grow has a profound impact on a learning disabled child's ability to learn, grow, and experience wholeness on her journey to becoming a complete human in our world. Spiritual ecology is the center of concentric rings radiating out into the world. Black Elk speaks through Neihardt (1988) telling us the importance of the circle when he says:

Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have

heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves (p. 194).

In part 2 of this paper, details of the other 6 elements of American Indian education will be explored in full.

Teaching Learning Disabled Children Using American Indian Educational Principles

Part 2 – American Indian Educational Theory

The foundation to understanding why to use American Indian educational principles in teaching learning disabled children was introduced in part 1 of this paper. The seven American Indian educational elements based on this foundation include environmental, mythic, visionary, artistic, affective, and communal. Seventh and central to all of these is spiritual ecology which we addressed in part 1. In part 2, the theorists and epistemologies that support the other 6 elements of American Indian education provides an educational framework that can transform the learning experience for learning disabled children.

Experiential learning and the communal foundation.

Humans learn best when in an experiential setting (Kolb, 1984). In the Western paradigm, one would sit back and observe or be given objective knowledge to be added to the mental database (Capra, 1996; Macy, 1991; Senge, 1990; Skyttner, 2008; Wheatley, 1999). Many of us have experienced the lecture format of education. The expert, that person in front of the uneducated students, imparts her knowledge and wisdom to those who do not know. There is objective knowledge to be learned and someone has to teach it. In an experiential learning setting, it is not that the teacher does not have knowledge or wisdom to offer, but she becomes a part of the learning community rather than separate from it. “Indian community is the primary context for traditional education. Community is the context in which the affective dimension of education unfolds” (Cajete, 1994). Dialogue is the foundation for creating a sense of community. Bohm (2008) when talking about the role of dialogue in creating shared meaning in a community says

“It's something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all. It's something creative. And this shared meaning is the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds people and societies together” (p. 7). It is within the context of dialogue in a community that children also learn how to relate to the people and the world around them. Lyle (2000) in relating to what Mead in his description of symbolic interaction said:

He suggested that children bring into the world powerful social tendencies that impel them to participate in a community: it is through social activity and exchanges that children are able to take on roles, put themselves in the place of another person and make inferences concerning the others experiences (p. 51).

When children and teachers in a community come together in dialogue to learn together, they do so in collaboration. Collaborative learning strategies are designed to engage the learner with the teacher and other learners in the learning community so that they all learn together. In a learning community, it is understood that everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner. In his ground breaking work in education, (Freire and Faundez, 1989; Freire, 2009) Freire provided a framework for reducing the power differentials normally found in educational settings. The role of the teacher is not to only teach, but to create containers for collaboration and dialogue and to foster learning conversations. Later work on conversation as experiential learning by Baker, Jensen, and Kolb (2002) provides a strong case for conversation as an experiential approach to learning. Conversational learning supports American Indian communal learning and provides a theoretical foundation to the experiential communal learning models found in American Indian education. Rogers (1995) also supports learning as experience when he explains:

If we accept Dewey's definition of education as the reconstruction of experience, what better way can a person learn than by becoming involved with his whole self, his very person, his root drives, emotions, attitudes and values? No series of facts or arguments, no matter how logically or brilliantly arranged, can even faintly compare with that sort of thing (p. 306).

It takes courage for a teacher to give up the power of being the expert. It is much easier to simply remain at the head of the class and impart wisdom and knowledge to the containers in the room, the students. Freire (2009) calls this the banking approach to education and this banking approach to education is another example of how Western education sees the child as separate from the world. "Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is a spectator, not re-creator" (p. 75). But for those teachers who step out of this framework, embrace dialogue as a framework for learning, and are willing to give up the expert power position as the sole educational approach to teaching, the return is great. They are given a gift that cannot be replicated, the gift of children who are whole, engaged, confident, and contributing members of our world. This is particularly important for children who are labeled as learning disabled in our Western culture. When we create a learning community that honors every child's contribution, wisdom, and ways of knowing, no child is singled out to be different. Each child's unique gifts are recognized and embraced. Freire in Freire and Macedo (1995) explains the personal importance of dialogue from his perspective of a teacher as follows:

I engage in dialogue not necessarily because I like the other person. I engage in dialogue

because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing (p. 379).

When Hillary Clinton said “It takes a village to raise a child” many in our Western culture were upset (Clinton, 1996). One could hear the collective How dare you insinuate that it is not the sole role of the parents to raise a child. Yet it has always been the community's responsibility to take care and raise our children. The statement that Hillary chose comes from an ancient African proverb and is as basic to humans as being human. In an American Indian educational setting, every person in the tribe is that child's teacher. It is all of our responsibilities to insure our children are raised in a nurturing and caring manner. Most if not all of the Western practices that cause our learning disabled children to feel isolated, different, and inferior came to our nation with the colonizers. The practices were not part of American Indian education (Allen, 1992 & 1998; Cajete, 1994; Deloria, 2001). If a child was different, this was embraced by the tribe as the child obviously had a special talent. The child was not told that she was not normal, not the same, not a value to the tribe. Each child was able to learn at her own pace and embrace her special talents. Each child grew into healthy and contributing members of the tribe. It should be our goal to help our learning disabled children feel the same sense of belonging.

In a communal experiential setting, there is not a drive to move everyone at the same pace. It is not necessary to insure that every child gets exactly the same objective knowledge at the exact same time. Each child helps the other and learning from each other and at their own pace reduces the stigma of not being the same. An educator can deliberately create this type of

experiential setting, a learning community where everyone is learning together. One of the ingredients to the author's ability to survive through the 5th grade while not being able to read was with the help of his friends. Children can be wonderful and nurturing if that is the culture created in the classroom. And finally as Hillary Clinton said learning is not relegated to the school only, it is the responsibility of the community. As Cajete (2005) says, "For American Indian tribal education, the community was and continues to be the schoolhouse!" (p. 76). The question is How do we bring the community to our education?

Storytelling and the mythic foundation .

We humans learn through stories. "Students of literature...are so conscious of narrative that some have argued it is storytelling which makes us human" (Landau, 1984, p. 262). And Cajete (1994) says "Humans are storytelling animals. Story is a primary structure through which humans think, relate, and communicate. We make stories, tell stories, and live stories because it is such an integral part of being human" (p. 116). And Egan (1991) states "We are a storying animal; we make sense of things commonly in story forms; ours is a largely story-shaped world" (pp. 96-97). In the Western world we have focused education on the transmission method of communication, students are to listen and receive the objective truth from the teacher (Lyle, 2000). In American Indian education, storytelling is at the core of learning and the use of storytelling is consistent with our roots as humans. We learn best from stories and the use of stories in the classroom is becoming better understood as more and more research is done into the efficacy of this approach (Lyle). "...only recently have some Western scholars of myth begun to cultivate an appreciation for these keepers, and reverence for the *power* of myths in shaping

human learning and experience” (Cajete, p. 115).

Storytelling and myth are important contributors to helping a child become fully integrated into her community (Cajete, 1994). The child does not grow up in this paradigm being asked to memorize disparate objective facts, instead knowledge is in the context of her family, community, region, and the world. She is fully connected and what she learns is designed to help her integrate fully into her world. As Pearce (2007) states, “Both the story told and the manner of its telling are part of the creation of the social worlds in which we all live” (p. 217). The power of myth as story is that it connects the child to the world around her. No longer does she feel different nor disconnected to the world. Instead she feels fully connected and a part of our world. Cajete explains the power of myth in learning as follows:

Living through myth means using the primal images that myth presents in a creative process of learning and teaching that connects our past, present, and future. Living through myth also means learning to live a life of relationships to ourselves, other people, and the world based on appreciation, understanding, and guidance from our inner spirit and our wealth of ancestral and cultural traditions (p.116).

We need teachers who are willing to step out of the transmission mode of teaching and creatively draw children into a fully connected world where we are all related. There is no place in such a world for humans to be separated from and apart from the wonders of our world. For learning disabled children, developing a deep connection with their world removes the deep separation that they feel in the Western education system as being different and in need of fixing. Mythology does this for our children. What mythology especially does is to help our children hear

the world around them with all of their senses. Stories help them become better observers of our world and help them gain a sense of how they are a part of that world. At a deep level they feel connected and a part of a world that is fully connected.

In talking about myth it is important to step out of the American view of myth as a lie (Allen, 2002, p. 102) and understand the pivotal role myth plays in helping us become fully connected humans in our world. Thomas Mann (1960) as quoted by Allen states “The myth is the legitimization of life; only through and in it does life find self-awareness, sanction, consecration” (p. 104). Children love and connect to mythic stories. Such stories are a powerful way to connect to children and connect children to their world. Often comics play this role for our children but the comic mythic storyline is not often brought into the classroom. These heroic stories from some of these comics engage children in ways that the assimilation of objective knowledge does not. In American Indian learning, heroic figures in myth are regularly integrated into the child's learning. Allen further explains:

An American Indian myth is a story that relies preeminently on symbol for its articulation.

It generally relates a series of events and uses supernatural, heroic figures as the agents of both the events and the symbols. As a story, it demands the immediate, direct participation of the listener (p. 104).

Lyle (2000) in exploring how to integrate narrative into the classroom has found a strong foundation in Western research supporting this direction. Of particular interest for the integration of American Indian storytelling approaches into the classroom is the research of Egan. Lyle notes that in Egan (1992) that children's imaginations are stimulated by emotions (p. 56). Egan states

“The tool we have for dealing with knowledge and emotions together is the story” (p.71). To integrate myth and storytelling into education, it is not necessary or desirable to eliminate the Western perspective, only to keep it in balance with alternate ways of knowing. As Nelson (1993) explains “The task is not to abandon science or analytic thought, but to have it take its proper place in relationship to other realities” (p. 5). Nelson further explains “It is not a matter of teaching people the one other reality; it is rather a matter of teaching people to experience multiple realities” (p. 11). The learning disabled child without this balance of ways of knowing, feels disconnected and broken in a Western world. It is our job as educators to bring balance to these children by fully integrating myth and storytelling into their learning experience.

Ritual or ceremony and the affective.

Our lives as humans are filled with rituals. The way we get up in the morning and get ready for the day is a ritual. Our educational structures for our children are rituals. How we eat meals together if we do are rituals. Sporting events and religious ceremonies are rituals. It is easy for us to embrace a ritual even though many rituals are automatic and we do not seem to notice them. Rituals help children feel like they belong and are part of something greater. Rituals connect children with the community and create an emotional bond to the community. As Cajete (2005) states when describing the affective, “This is the foundation in which we establish rapport with what we are learning and why we are learning it” (p. 75). This foundation creates the context for what is learned. There is a reason for learning what is presented. Children are not simply containers into which we shovel information, they are intimately part of the community and they need to know how they fit and how what they are learning helps them become an integral part of

the community.

Rituals are special types of stories. Rituals as episodes of communication are designed to let the child participate in the story. But unlike an unstructured story, some rituals are fully planned. As Pearce (2007) states when describing a church service, “There are no hard choices or moments of uncertainty” (p. 151). Yet games and sporting events are also rituals and these although structured, do have flexibility on how they roll out. Regardless, rituals are critical for our children to not only become connected with our community but to help them transform into a contributing and integrated member of that community. Allen (1992) explains that “Ritual can be defined as a procedure whose purpose is to transform someone or something from one condition or state to another” (p. 80). The transformative nature of ritual goes beyond the Western view of ritual. In American Indian thought, ritual helps the child become spiritually connected with the rest of the world. Adding ritual to education is not a plea to introduce religion into the classroom. Quite the contrary, this spirituality is a connection with the unknown forces of the universe. If a child has a religious tradition, there is no reason that her spiritual framework would not lend to this connection with the world. Yet the important distinction is that in connecting a child with the world, she needs to feel that she belongs to something and is integral to the world, not just placed onto the world without any sense of place.

Allen (1992) explains that “Ritual-based cultures are founded on the primary assumption that the universe is alive and that it is supernaturally ordered” (p.80). Using ritual to connect a child with the universe is a challenging addition for Western educators who have been told for years that anything religious must be left out of the classroom. Making a spiritual connection with

our world may be a difficult message to formulate. Yet to insure that a child feels connected to our world so that she does not view our world as nothing but a resource to exploit is a critical foundation to helping her on her journey to become a whole person. Cajete (1994) says “Society, rituals, healing ceremonies, sports, pilgrimages, vision quests, and other rites provided the communal context in which individuals might attain one of the Indigenous education's highest goals, that of completing one's self” (p. 179). “But I think it's important to notice that the ritual isn't sacred, it just opens the door to the experience. It isn't only the place that is sacred, we are” (Wheatley, 2002, p. 132). Educators help our children become complete through connecting them with their community and the world through the rituals that we create. Wheatley gives us a glimpse of why a child needs to be able to feel that she is sacred. When a child feels sacred, she can fulfill her journey to become a whole and contributing human in our world:

When we don't know that sacred is available in our day-to-day lives, when we have to wait for somebody else to give us the experience, it is very difficult to know ourselves as sacred. In the absence of that knowledge, we more easily accept domination and the loss of our freedom. When sacred becomes a special rather than common experience, it becomes difficult to feel fully alive and full human (p. 132).

Dreaming and the visionary foundation.

In American Indian education, dreaming and connecting with the non-concrete world is an important part of the journey to become a whole person. In Western education in controlled settings we embrace connection with the non-concrete world. Creative writing might be one of those settings. Art might be one of those settings. However these settings are not integral to the

education process, they are tacked onto the curriculum and depending on how they are taught, may or may not tap into a visionary foundation for the child. Western education is so grounded in objective reality that there is little room for dreaming. Yet as a culture we are seeking people who are creative and see out of the box. These non-linear people have the ability to tap into dreams and visions of realities that do not conform to the objective reality that we believe exists.

“Through facilitating the understanding of their dreams and conditioning them for the creative process of visioning, we allow students an avenue for learning that capitalizes on one of the most basic and ancient context for developing self-knowledge (Cajete 1994, p. 147).

Do educators feel that if a child creates a 'fantasy land' in her mind, she will not develop into a rational and grounded member of our society? What is the road block? Vision and dreaming are integral to storytelling and help us make sense out of our world. As humans, we learn from stories and creating educational contexts that encourage children to dream and envision new realities help them grasp educational content that must be learned. There is certainly no reason why we cannot add strategies to our classrooms that help children dream and vision. Reflection exercises, journaling, telling stories, art, dance, song, experience with nature, unstructured time, and creative writing integrated throughout the educational experience helps build dreaming and visioning into a child's journey to become a complete and contributing person in our world. Other aspects of visioning include a holistic framework and a give-and-take complementary relationships with others. By combining these attributes of vision we help children feel connected and develop a sense of purpose and place. As Cajete (1994) says “Living through vision engenders living for a purpose and, as such, significantly enhances the meaning and quality we find in living” (p. 145).

As our world becomes more complex, we are looking to our children to bring creative solutions to the world and help us out of the global crisis that we have created. It is critical that we help our children break out of the artificial boundaries that we have created and tap into their deep center of creativity, the world of dreams and visions. From a positivist framework, this is nonsense as we need to focus our children's attention on objective reality. The highly creative people in the world who are transforming the way we interact with the world are doing everything but adhering to objective reality. The outcome of opening up the minds of our children is important for them and our world. Ending a chapter on dialogue with the universe, Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2004) summarize what is happening to create such profound levels of connectivity and creativity:

Through genuine engagement within teams or groups, as in Bache's classroom, we discover Sacred Mind 'hidden' in plain sight...alive within our everyday collective experience....And when we do, we discover as Rosch said, that 'action becomes action that supports the whole, that includes everything and does everything that's needed.' But of course, the action is not just 'our action.' It is the by-product of participating more consciously, in dialogue with an unfolding universe (p. 166).

The tutor and the environmental foundation.

One of the legacies of Western thought is the belief that humans are separate from the environment within which we live. We can trace many of our abuses of environment, children, women, and other cultures to this frame of mind (Allen, 1992; Cajete, 1994; Roszak, Gomes, and Kanner, 1995). If there is one principle from American Indian education that can be adopted

which has the potential to change the world, it is the belief that we are not separate from the world within which we live. Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur, and Schley (2008) reference Buckminster Fuller when they describe the need to tend to the whole world saying “Buckminster Fuller once likened our planet to a spaceship hurtling through the universe. Noting that no instruction book came with 'Spaceship Earth,' he cautioned that if we intend to survive, we need to learn how to look at the planet as one system, as a whole, and steward all its resources accordingly” (p. 179).

The world does not exist for humans and the disconnect between being human and being in the world poses a challenge for children who grow up learning disabled in a Western world. A child who is provided with a learning context of connection versus separateness, does not grow up feeling like an outsider. She learns that we all have a purpose in this world and learns to respect the rest of the world of which we are a part. “Within an indigenous ethical system, nature exists on its own terms, and individual non-humans have their own reasons for existence, independent of human interpretation” (Wildcat and Pierotti, 2000, p. 66). Learning disabled children can be leaders in our journey to heal the world if we help them draw off of ancient Indigenous ecological wisdom. Cajete in Arrows, Cajete, and Lee (2010) says “If Indigenous wisdom can tell us that it is not just about a more pleasurable experience but something much greater, maybe this deeper ensoulment can help us understand life energy in the world so we can maintain our right relationship to it” (p. 103).

An environmental educational foundation should provide the context for the knowledge that children acquire through our educational system. One of the reasons to take an ecological

perspective is to learn from our world, not just from ourselves. All knowledge is not generated by humans. The world around us becomes our tutor and provides us with lessons that human generated knowledge cannot do. “The Environmental foundation forms a context through which the tribe observed and integrated those understandings, bodies of knowledge, and practices resulting from direct interaction with the natural world” (Cajete 2005, p. 74). The environmental foundation has its origin in living systems theory. In living systems of all kinds, a relationship between the organism and its environment is crucial to learning. Maturana and Varela (1998, p. 172) tell us “Everything we have said points to learning as an expression of structural coupling, which always maintains compatibility between the operation of the organism and its environment.”

The sense of separation and a feeling of lack of place is not only experienced by children with learning disabilities. There is a growing body of work in ecopsychology (Roszak, Gomes, and Kanner, 1995) that explains how this separation from the natural world is causing the same phenomenon in adults. In the Western world we have made an arbitrary cut between ourselves and nature, one that clearly states we are separate. “Since the cut between self and natural world is arbitrary, we can make it at the skin or we can take it as far out as you like – to the deep oceans and distant stars. But the cut is far less important than the recognition of uncertainty about making the cut at all” (Hillman, 1995, p. xix). For those children that have different ways of knowing, learning, and experiencing the world, providing them with a sense of connection and a bond to the natural world may provide a foundation for their journey to become whole and healthy humans. Certainly in looking at the history of American Indian education the connection with the natural world is seen. In speaking about the ecopsychology of development, Barrows (1995)

explains:

Frances Tustin, the British child analyst, sees the 'awareness of bodily separateness' as the tragedy underlying human existence. But bodily separateness, we might argue, is an illusion; my skin is not separate from the air around it, my eyes are not separate from what they see. I would alter Tustin's statement to say that it is indeed the illusion of bodily separateness that is the genuine sorrow, that accounts for our loneliness, that isolates us and leads us to exploit and violate one another, the world we live in, and ultimately, ourselves (p.109).

Given the seriousness of the separateness that our children might feel and in particular those children labeled learning disabled, the need to help them become connected and feel apart of the greater world is critical. These children should have the same opportunity to feel connected that American Indian children taught in a traditional setting have. Connecting with the natural world gives children a sense of place in history and the world. "Indigenous peoples look around them to get a sense of their place in history, and they depend upon the animals and the plants of their local environments for companionship, as well as for food, clothing, and shelter" (Wildcat and Pierotti, 2000, p. 62). American Indian's are often held up as an example of ecological thought and action and how to connect with the world and it is time to help our children learn from an early age this connection with our mother earth (Allen, 1992; Cajete, 1994, Deloria, 2001). Roszak (1995) explains ecopsychology and this deep sense of connection with our world as follows:

Like all forms of psychology, ecopsychology concerns itself with the foundations of

human nature and behavior. Unlike other mainstream schools of psychology that limit themselves to the intrapsychic mechanisms or to a narrow social range that may not look beyond the family, ecopsychology proceeds from the assumption that at its deepest level the psyche remains sympathetically bonded to the Earth that mothered us into existence (p. 5).

Infusing an ecological foundation into the learning of our children goes beyond helping our children gain a sense of place and connection with our world, it provides them with psychological health that sustains them through their life's journey. Our world is complex and simple solutions to global crisis's are not going to help us create a sustainable world. We need to be raising children who inherently understand the connectedness of our world. They are our future and learning disabled children who already have different ways of knowing, can lead the way. Simply creating awareness early in a child's education helps her see intuitively what many adults fail to grasp. The gap in understanding of the connectedness of our world is clearly explained by Senge, Smith, Kruschwitz, Laur, and Sara (2008):

But what many of us are unaware of are the invisible costs that come with this. The products we choose to buy affect people in distant places not only through direct economic ties but through their side effects, such as CO₂ emissions and the depletion of natural resources. Our current methods of shipping and distributing food and other products over great distances consume massive amounts of increasingly valuable fuel and create another source of greenhouse gases. One glass of orange juice, for example, contains the equivalent of two glasses of oil, if you include transportation costs. Global

distribution systems generate almost 10 percent of today's annual CO₂ emissions (p. 42).

In a American Indian educational framework, ignoring the consequences of human actions as is seen in the above quote is not part of the view of the world. Wildcat and Pierotti, (2000) explain "...our traditional indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems shun the naive dichotomies of Western thought, e.g., material versus spiritual, science versus humanities, and quite predictably the most invidious of Western distinctions – nature versus culture" (p. 63). The ecological views of American Indians are not primitive and quaint relics of the past, but are based on thousands of years of accumulated experience and knowledge interacting with our world. "The approaches developed by Indigenous people around the world tax the imagination. Indigenous knowledge bases evolved over thousands of years and hundreds of generations" (Cajete, 1994, p. 79). Bringing this level of understanding and connectedness to our children helps them be fully connected and gives them the understanding that they need to help heal our world.

Artistic creation and the artistic foundation.

Artistic creation is closely aligned with visioning and dreaming and one of the strategies to help children connect with internal sources of creativity and help them feel like whole people. "The Artistic foundation contains the practices, mediums, and forms through which we usually express the meanings and understandings we have come to see" (Cajete 2005, p. 74). Cajete further states that "Art itself becomes a primary source of teaching because it both integrates and documents a profound process of learning" (p. 75). It is interesting that art, music, and other creative learning are the first to be cut when we have a budget crisis in the United States (Smith, 1988). "When there are budget pressures, the arts and electives budgets are often the first to be

cut” (Senge, 2000, p. 42). It may be because these creative learning strategies are not considered central to a child's education. We learn from American Indian education that these strategies are anything but optional. Smith says “For many learning-disabled children, academic content – mathematical functions, grammar, syntax, spelling – can be taught and made to stick through the arts” (p. 14). Art as an American Indian education strategy helps the child understand and become one with the world within which she is growing up and helps her integrate the academic lessons into her learning in a way that is not available to her in Western education settings. In Arrows, Cajete, and Lee (2010), *Four Arrows* explains the role of art to American Indian culture:

In Indigenous ways of thinking, to speak a word, to sing, to paint, to dance, etc., is to initiate a process of vibrational energy that enters into relationships that ultimately connect us back to Nature....Art, and I am including music when I say art, to Indigenous cultures in not a form of entertainment, amusement or escape as it often is in dominate cultures. Art represents creations that define place and lead to transformations (p. 88).

“The creation of art is an alchemy of process in which the artist becomes more himself through each act of true creation” (Cajete, 1994, p 149). As learning disabled children have a different way of knowing and seeing the world, participating in art provides an avenue to learn about themselves and connect to the world (Smith, 1988). In American Indian education, art is not simply individual expression which is an individualistic point of view, it is an expression of the spiritual and is for the health of the community. Cajete explains “The making of art in Indigenous societies provided a pathway to wholeness for both the artist and those who utilized the artist's creations” (p. 158). As learning disabled children are confronted with the world, their brains are

not ready to discern between the myriad of inputs that are typical in a Western educational setting. They need to learn how to organize and prioritize inputs and art is an outstanding method to do this (Smith, 1988). In explaining how these children react to the input rich environment around them, Smith says “The immature child cannot integrate several processes at once. He needs to do one thing at a time. He pays attention to everything going on. It looks like he is not paying attention to anything, but, in fact, the child is attending to every stimulus around him (p. 12). Smith further explains how art helps a child learn to organize the complex input that she is confronted with:

Through all the art forms, a child can be helped to sort out one color, one shape, one form, one sound from another; discriminating through the hands, the body, the eyes, the ears, and all the senses is part of artistic experience. Learning to look, learning to listen, remembering what is seen, remembering what is heard – problem areas for the learning disabled – are emphasized in the arts. These skills help organize experience. They help make sense of the world, make sense of the messages coming in through the senses. That's what perception is all about: making sense of the environment, organizing it to have meaning (p. 12).

What Smith discovered and implemented at The Lab School in Washington D.C. is inherent in American Indian education, art is an integral part of helping a child become a whole human being in our complex world. Art should not be an add on to be added or removed based on budget, it should be a core educational component woven throughout the child's educational experience (Smith, 1988). The need for art to be integrated into the educational experience is

especially true of learning disabled children. Educators must be willing to invest in each child as an individual and adapt their approach to the specific needs of each child. This may take a bit more work but for the teacher that cares, it is a small investment. Teachers will find that “Learning-disabled children can learn very sophisticated material as long as the teacher thoroughly understands it and breaks it down into simple parts to teach it step by step” (p. 14). Smith further explains that “The arts can ignite the whole learning process. To have this effect they need to be central to education, not peripheral” (p. 11). What teacher would not want this as an outcome for her students? Taking the steps to integrate art into the curriculum even though as a course it may have been removed is a powerful strategy to enhance the learning experience of not only the learning disabled children, but all of the children in the classroom.

As a strategy to help learning disabled children learn, art helps these children connect with the world around them and construct meaning around the rich inputs that confront them. Art helps create concrete connections with the hopes and dreams of the child and connects her with the materials that she must learn. “Whereas myth is reflective of inner psychology and cultural concepts through imagery and symbol, art gives a concrete and tangible expressive form to these dimensions” (Cajete, 1994, p. 153). As learning disabled children often have difficulty with words, art helps these children feel that they too can communicate. The ability to represent the world artistically is inherent in us as we grow up and we as educators need to tap into this inherent way of knowing the world to insure our children excel on their life learning journey. As Smith (1988) says “All art carries symbolic meaning, understood without words. Little children know this. They understand gesture, rhythm, tone, and movement before they understand words” (p. 11).

Conclusion.

When this paper was framed, the question was asked What would an educational process for learning disabled children look like if it were founded on the educational principles of American Indian education? In the prior pages a case has been made to answer this question using the seven American Indian educational principles of spiritual ecology, experiential learning, storytelling, ritual or ceremony, dreaming, the tutor, and artistic creation. In each section a theoretical and epistemological foundation to the educational principle highlighted has been provided and the holistic view of education that is pivotal to American Indian education has been framed. Given that American Indian education is founded on a holistic view of learning, it would be a mistake to simply cherry pick certain elements of this educational approach and implement only those elements. The recommendation of this paper is to explore how to fully integrate into existing educational paradigms the principles in this paper or create charter or independent schools based on the full implementation of these principles. The author believes that by doing so, learning disabled children and all children for that matter will have a far brighter future as whole and contributing humans in this complex world.

The outcome of this effort will be children who are no longer set aside as different but who are fully accepted for their unique gifts. These children will develop their own wisdom as they listen to the world around them, observe how they fit in, gain insights into how they can integrate into their lives what they observe and gain a solid feeling of connection to our world. When we provide learning disabled children with the framework to excel in life and learning, they will give us back gifts that we have not imagined. We will gain the gift of children who are

creative and agile in this complex work and think clearly about the challenges we face. We will gain the gift of children who make wise choices and speak responsibly and in the end act decisively to provide to our world something useful and spirit based. What more could we ask?

There were several observations posed within the context of this paper that deserve consideration. The first is that creating a shift in language to honor a holistic approach to learning is not going to be easy. Programs will need to be developed using different language and then curriculum adjusted to add the needed language. It is understood that this is no small feat. It is because of this understanding that the research by Berlach and McNaught (2007) outlining OBE failures in Australia is so important. One cannot simply state that this is the way it should be and walk away. It will indeed take quite a bit of work to understand how to systematize these educational principles. It would be the hope of this author that there might be teams willing to take this next step in the development of this program. Part of this effort will be to explore how to bring the community as a whole into this educational model. As creating a learning community is important to American Indian principles, understanding how to do this will be integral to the design of a successful program.

The work from here out will be to demonstrate how to create this sense of connection and wholeness for learning disabled children integrating American Indian education principles into our Western educational systems. The health of our world depends on our ability to do this. As education is the process of following tracks and opening minds to possibilities (Cajete, 1994), it only makes sense that following the tracks of this educational approach will open up possibilities that are unseen at this time.

In this turbulent time, we crave connection; we long for peace; we want the means to walk through the chaos intact. We are seeking things that are only available through an experience of sacred. Yet sometimes in pursuit of these goals we flee from people and withdraw into an environment we think we can control. Or we blot out our longings with mind-numbing experiences or substances. But we cannot find connection, community, and peace by withdrawing from others or going unconscious. The peace we seek is found in experiencing ourselves as part of something bigger and wiser than our little, crazed self. The community we belong to is all of life. The turbulence cannot be controlled, but when we stop struggling and accept it as part of life, it feels different (Wheatley, 2002, p. 135).

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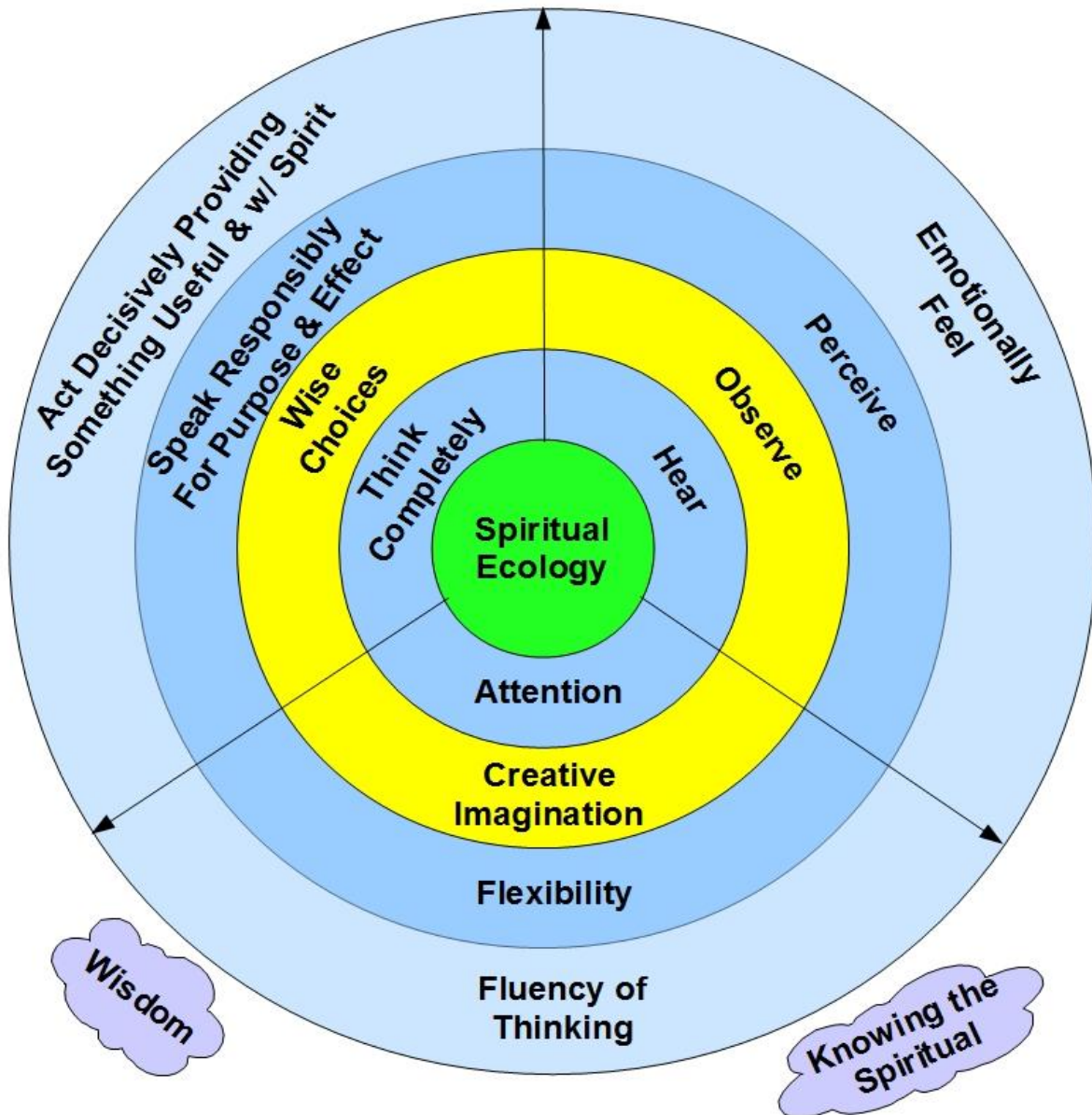
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Learning Begins and Ends With Spirit



**Education is the process of following tracks
and opening minds to possibilities**

TEACHING LEARNING DISABLED CHILDREN

