

## **Keynote from NJOMA Conference**

11.2.2007

Uniting for the Children of Indian Country  
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National Johnson O'Malley Association Conference  
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### **Conference Purpose:**

1. Increase Professional Knowledge and Skills
2. Promote High Educational Expectations
3. Share Program Strategies

The history of American Indian higher education is one of compulsory Western methods of learning, recurring attempts to eradicate tribal culture, and high dropout rates for American Indian students at mainstream institutions (HeavyRunner, Murray, & Shanley, 2003). As late as 1969, a congressional report titled, "Indian Education: A National Tragedy-A National Challenge," concluded that despite federal efforts, children from Indian families continued to rank at or near the bottom of every educational and economic indicator (National Indian Education Association, 2004). Regardless of the centuries-long collision with European civilization (Bordewich, 1996), American Indians were discovering ways to preserve their traditional way of life, while learning to survive in two worlds.

Since, 1994, the National JOM Board of Directors, under the leadership of the renowned Virginia Thomas (Muscogee), invested their time to preserve our traditional ways of life and taught children to live in two worlds. The JOM programs have been the frontrunners in designing student-centered services, mastering engagement of parents, and offering community based approaches that work! Other tribal programs have benefited tremendously from the genius of the JOM Program Coordinators from across Indian Country. (PrettyPaint, I. (2007) Unpublished Dissertation Excerpt) Not for Duplication w/o permission of author.

### **JOM Goals:**

Student, Parent, and Community Planning (Cooperative Planning)

1. Attain Academic Success - what is success for native children?
2. Provide Academic Enrichment Services -
3. "One of our most important retention factors is our grandmothers. They have a lot of power and influence over their grandchildren."

"We always look to our family first. If they are not there for us, we look to our friends. Students who are academically successful have at least one person in their life they can depend on."

### **Outcomes:**

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1. Increased Graduation Rates
2. Provide Experiential Opportunities
3. Meet Student Cultural Needs - History, Language ("special, unique needs")

Our world view is the cultural lens through which we understand where we came from, where we are today, and where we are going. Our cultural identity is our source of strength. In historical times the cultures and world views of tribal peoples were regarded by non-Indians as impediments to the speedy assimilation of the young. Regrettably, remnants of such viewpoints continue to be held by some professionals who impact the lives of contemporary Indian youth. It is critical that researchers, educators, and social service providers recognize the valid and positive role culture plays in supporting Indian youth and tapping their resilience.

Spirituality is a fundamental, continuous part of our lives. In traditional times, spirituality was integral to one's daily life. Embodied in Native spirituality is the concept of interconnectedness. The spiritual nature of all living things was recognized and respected. The mystical aspects of life were openly discussed. A strong ceremonial practice was interwoven into the cycle of seasons. Ceremonies marked important times in our people's lives, such as children's naming ceremonies or puberty rites.

We believe that spirituality is at the core of our survival. Many Native educators agree that our spirituality has been the cornerstone of our survival through generations of adversity and oppression. Most traditional people approach Indian spirituality with tremendous care and respect. It is very important that educators and other service providers recognize its value while also respecting the private nature of our spiritual beliefs and practices.

<http://cehd.umn.edu/CAREI/Reports/Rpractice/Spring97/traditional.html>

### Concerns:

1. FUNDING - 24 Million - 16 Million - 12 Million - 14 Million ❖
2. Duplication of Services??
3. Delayed Disbursement
4. Distractions

Historically, the goals of the colonial education of American Indians have been to transform Indian people and their societies and to eradicate Indian self-government, self-determination and self-education (Lomawaima, 1999). In fact, we have just begun to recognize the oppressive role colonization theory has had on the social, political and economic hardships faced by Indigenous peoples (Yellowbird & Chenault, 1999; Smith, 2004). Yet, even the most severely eroded Indian community today still has a substantial fragment of the old ways left, and these ways are found in the Indian family. Even the badly shattered families preserve enough elements of kinship so that whatever the experiences of the young, there is a sense that life has some unifying principles that can be discerned through experience and that guide behavior (Deloria, 2001). A supportive family often accompanies student success. Equally, a student's

family in crisis can be deeply disturbing and distracting (HeavyRunner, Murray & 2003).

### **JOM Activities: Family Education Model**

1. Tutoring 1. Evaluation Component
2. Educational Materials 2. Networking Component
3. Computers 3. Family/Cultural Activities
4. Physical Education 4. Counseling
5. Summer School 5. Mentoring
6. College Prep Classes 6. Life Skills
7. Counseling
8. Testing Fees
9. Writing Competitions
10. Remedial
11. Caps & Gowns

Student retention is one of the most challenging issues facing higher education today. Educational literature indicates that when students fail to complete educational programs serious adverse conditions plague the individuals, their families, and their communities. To mitigate this deteriorative affect, Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) must strengthen their understanding of the factors that affect student departure, as well as the factors that contribute to students' educational persistence. A close examination of the retention factors for Indian students reveals that replicating the extended family structure within the college culture enhances the student's sense of belonging and leads to higher retention rates. This article provides first a backdrop to understand the social context of the American Indian student and then explains the Family Education Model (FEM) and how it addresses the need for family-based education in post-secondary education.<http://jaie.asu.edu/v41/V41I2A4.pdf>

The Family Education Model (FEM) shifts the emphasis from dropouts to persisters who persevere using a family-centered approach. Based upon research with students on a daily basis, the model builds retention interventions focused on student's strengths. The components of the model are 1) culturally specific family activities that invite the families of student on campus, 2) counseling strategies that take into consideration family issues, 3) formal and informal mentoring, 4) seminars and workshops on family life skills, 5) networking, and 6) evaluation.

### **What are the Important Cultural Values in Evaluating JOM Programs?**

1. Tribal Sovereignty - Trust Obligation
2. We must be evaluated within the context of our culture and community.
3. The centrality of our families and communities must be taken into consideration when designing evaluation approaches.
4. Evaluators must recognize our gifts (personal sovereignty).

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Sovereignty - The power of a governing body to exercise both legal and physical control over the people, land, and resources found within a defined territory.

Under the American legal system, Indian tribes have sovereign powers, separate and independent from federal and state governments. However, the extent and breadth of tribal sovereignty is not the same for each tribe.

### **Closing Comments:**

A significant challenge accompanying this perspective is the growing number of American Indians becoming educated and being heard (Boyer, 1989). They are challenging the notions of oppression, assimilation and cultural bias by acknowledging the complexity of colonization and self-determination, by tolerating the contradictions of power and privilege, and by providing a critical appraisal of empirical evidence and Indigenous ways of knowing (Gilbert & Terrell, 1998; Van Soest & Garcia, 2001; Cajete, 2001). For these reasons, Indian educators and the general higher education community need to find answers to fundamental questions concerning under-representation, achievement and retention of American Indian students in higher education.

Cultural resilience is a relatively new term, but it is a concept that predates the so called "discovery" of our people. The elders teach us that our children are gifts from the Creator and it is the family, community, school, and tribe's responsibility to nurture, protect, and guide them. We have long recognized how important it is for children to have people in their lives that nurture their spirit, stand by them, encourage and support them. This traditional process is what contemporary researchers, educators, and social service providers are now calling fostering resilience. Thus, resilience is not new to our people; it is a concept that has been taught for centuries. The word is new; the meaning is old.

<http://cehd.umn.edu/CAREI/Reports/Rpractice/Spring97/traditional.html>

Being a tribally sovereign student (living in two worlds) is a complicated, challenging endeavor and acquiring proficiency requires years of careful study and discipline. To make significant improvements for Indian students, we need to possess - or cultivate - the following attributes:

1. Confidence - we need to believe that our efforts to improve education will make a difference and that the precious time and energy we invest will pay off in ways that are observable and significant.
2. Commitment and Determination - we need to really want to improve. We need to recognize that nobody can teach you how to be educators, but with the right guidance and the right materials, we can teach ourselves a great deal. Students need to commit the necessary time and to protect that time from competing demands.
3. Practice/Follow-through - we need to teach our students to practice newly learned skills to keep from losing or forgetting them. We need to teach students how to drill themselves, to return to each lesson, to work with each technique until it becomes second nature to them. Students need to think long term rather than short term.

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HeavyRunner and Morris (1997) explain that, traditionally, resilience has been cultivated by focusing on four developmental areas:

1. spirituality-living according to the belief in the interrelatedness of all things.
2. mental well-being-having clear thoughts.
3. emotional well-being-balancing all emotions.
4. Physical well-being-attending to the physical self (Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990) described Native ways of building self-esteem as fostering resilience in young people.

In traditional cultures, there were four bases of self-esteem:

1. Belonging. From the time they were born, children were looked after by caring adults. Everyone in the community treated others as related, so children developed a sense of respect and concern for others and experienced a minimum of friction. All of this fostered good will.
2. Mastery. American Indian and Alaska Native families told stories, provided nurture, and acted as role models to foster balance in spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical competence.
3. Independence. Many traditional Native cultures placed a high value on individual freedom, and young people were given training in self-management. Young people were never offered rewards for doing well. Practicing appropriate self-management was seen as the reward in itself.
4. Generosity. Giving to others and giving back to the community were fundamental core values in many Native cultures, where adults stressed generosity and unselfishness to young people. <http://www.ael.org/digests/edorc02-11.pdf>