

# Integrating Storytelling into the Mindset of Prospective Teachers of American Indian Students

## A Grounded Theory

Gary W. Cheeseman & Susan C. Gapp

### Introduction

This study is part of a larger project that explored the use of storytelling as a learning tool in schools in the United States. Here we examine storytelling as a pedagogical tool for prospective teachers of American Indian children to enhance classroom learning.

The specific intention is to illuminate the pedagogical methodology of storytelling as an authentic educational communication mechanism for giving voice to American Indian students. We address some academic concerns of American Indian students to assist discovery of culturally meaningful, proficient educational and social solutions to problems within American schools. Additionally, the use of storytelling as a natural instructional design component for widening the perspectives of all prospective teachers is highlighted.

For the past 15 years, the first author has been involved in the advancement, promotion, and implementation of culturally authentic pedagogical development for American Indian educators and students. Over time, it became apparent that the best efforts of Anglo educators were deficient in addressing the educational needs of American Indian children.

Pewewardy (2005) and Morgan (2010) have argued that the educational failure of American Indian people is rooted in an ethnocentric educational paradigm that migrated from Europe to North America. Determining factors that have instigated high levels of educational failure throughout Indian country has resulted in an increased focus on storytelling as pedagogical theory. Thus, researchers

(Deyhle & Swisher, 1997, Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003) have sought to create a new pedagogical theory grounded in the world's oldest lesson plan.

### Academics and American Indians

The literature is clear. Historically, racially diverse student populations have not fared well in the public school system and American Indians are no exception, as evidenced by high dropout rates and low levels of academic success (Pewewardy, 2008). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2009), American Indian ACT scores in 2009 were a full three points below those who declared themselves White, and American Indian and Alaska Native students' dropout rate was 15% and trending upward compared to the national average of nine percent.

Research (Chiago, 1981; Morgan, 2010; Nieto, 2000; Payley, 1989; Pewewardy, 2005; Wilson, 1996) has indicated that traditional classroom environments often conflict with the ways in which American Indian children learn. Naturally, to understand how American Indians learn educators must know the history of Indian education in the United States.

### Boarding Schools

Perhaps the most devastating educational effect on American Indians was American Indian boarding schools. Founded in the late nineteenth century in support of Assimilationist policy, their objective was "coercive assimilation," i.e., forcing Native people to resemble White Christians while restricting or removing their traditional ways of life (Harvey, Harjo, & Welborn, 1995).

During his presidency, Ulysses S. Grant conceived a program entitled "Grant's Peace Policy of 1869 & 1870" (Sim, 2008), which called for a formal transition of Indian boarding schools to various Christian denominations. These

Christianized schools were ruthless in their methodology. Children were punished by whippings, being jailed, food deprivation, psychological burdens and demands, death threats, unhealthy and unsanitary living conditions, and sexual abuse for practicing their cultural ways. These punishments were intended to assimilate them into White culture, to them a totally foreign way of life (Trafzer, Keller, & Sisquoc, 2006).

After returning home, these children faced a multitude of problems, including ridicule from their own people (Szasz, 1999). The effects of Indian boarding schools may never be fully measured; their students were so deeply traumatized that scars were left on their ascendancy, as not only were these schools' successful in destroying their students' identity, they also robbed future generations of their traditions.

### American Education

If we want to successfully educate American Indian students, we must ask the question that American Indian education scholars have been asking for decades, "How do mainstream public school teachers teach American Indian children?" (A. Koch, personal communication, October 6, 1992). Rains and Swisher (1999), Szasz (1999), and Chiago (1981) have laboriously studied variations of this question for decades.

Morgan (2010) stated that American schools are often rightfully criticized for alienating diverse students by not portraying their cultural contributions accurately in the classroom. Brady (1995) noted that most teachers of American Indian students are non-Native and many of these educators know little about diverse cultures.

The literature clearly reveals that if diverse students, particularly American Indians, are to succeed in the American educational system, teachers must provide a culturally responsible educational environment that includes diverse pedagogical perspectives (Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, Nieto, Schofield, Ward, &

Gary W. Cheeseman and Susan C. Gapp  
are assistant professors  
in the Division of Curriculum and Instruction  
of the School of Education  
at the University of South Dakota,  
Vermillion, South Dakota.

Walter, 2001; Freire, 1970; Morgan, 2010; Swisher, 1996; Swisher & Deyhle, 1989). It is vital that American Indian students be able to recognize their culture within their education (Love, Benefiel, & Harer, 2001). Storytelling, a culturally appropriate practice having universal appeal, could play a significant role in resolving cultural conflicts within the current educational system.

Unfortunately, numerous teachers are ill equipped or poorly trained to work with cultures different from their own, while others have developed preconceived notions about cultural diversity (Freire, 1970). Additionally, as Irvine and York (1995) stated, "some teachers believe that diverse pedagogy is meant to serve only diverse students" (p. 57). If such problems remain unaddressed, they lead to unproductive pedagogical procedures (Giroux, 1988).

### American Indian Stories

Traditionally, American Indian stories are organic and alive. They represent truth and wisdom and are part of the sacred circle that connects all things. As Stillday (personal communication, 2006) states, "The talkers say stories that help us remember what we are not supposed to forget." Thus such stories represent the prolongation of tribal intellect through the notion of cultural enlightenment.

#### Types of American Indian Stories

The "Straight Story," one of two types in Native cultures, is a fundamental narrative that concentrates on a particular occurrence (MacDonald, 1993; Sawyer, 1962). It is usually entertaining and meant to stimulate some realm of emotion (A. Koch, personal communication, April 5, 1993). American Indian stories are cyclical—they meander, digress, and deviate, but eventually the story becomes meaningful and makes sense (Lenox, 2000, p. 97).

The second story form is the "Sacred Story," in which storytellers tell certain tales. Sacred stories are told by sacred people and come to people in sacred ways, such as dreams and visions (Inglebret, Jones, & Pavel, 2008). Traditional American Indian medicine-people understand that sacred stories are "complex, deep, and powerful and considered a form of medicine that connects all things—the pragmatic, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual" (Bruchac, 2003).

#### Power of American Indian Stories

For the American Indian, the living

power of words gives the process of speaking a sacred dimension. American Indian traditionalists understand that words are living, breathing, beings—both potent and powerful. Likewise, Arthur Koch (personal communication, March 16, 1994) states, "Be careful of what you say because you are going to be heard."

#### Storytellers

A storyteller is not merely a presenter, conversationalist, entertainer, educator, or a person that simply tells stories—they are "custodians of the narrative," healers with an extensive spiritual and social convention (Copely, 2007, p. 288). Many people harbor the ability to be an instinctive storyteller and everyone has a story to tell (Powers, 2006). The storyteller in all of us lives in our heart and surfaces when we need it (Meyer & Bogdan, 2001).

#### Setting the Stage

Many American Indian communities are making an effort to fulfill their obligation and take responsibility for the education of their people, desirous of new educational approaches explicitly established to serve their unique cultural needs.

To understand the education problem in American Indian communities, educators must grasp the relationships and variations between American and Traditional American Indian education. Generally, traditional forms of American Indian education prior to the concept of formal schooling focused upon the relationship of the student within the context of their community (Fixico, 2003) and the need to educate oneself to avoid failure. Furthermore, the community emphasizes and even celebrates the natural process of failure because to fail is to stay in balance; one cannot succeed without failing (Thomas Stillday, personal communication, April 8, 2006).

It has been our experience that much of education's pedagogical literature features a theoretical basis but lacks critical inquiry into the integration of culturally appropriate pedagogical principles. Many American Indian education scholars have suggested the integration of culturally appropriate pedagogy into the classroom environment. There have been numerous studies proposing excellent ideas, but few educational systems have initiated them (Brady, 1991; Chiago, 1981).

To date, there is little research examining how educators feel about including storytelling pedagogical techniques within their teaching. This study's primary re-

search question was: After taking an American Indian education course that featured storytelling techniques, would prospective teachers be willing to infuse storytelling pedagogical practices and procedures into their own teaching methodology?"

To examine this question a grounded theory was utilized. Grounded theory methodology begins with understanding participants' subjective experiences, and then extracts theoretical statements through an inductive process of recognizing the interplay among those subjective experiences.

#### Methodology

The first author has been exposed to many stories throughout his lifetime; thankfully, many were told within a meaningful cultural context that allowed for identification of self, future goals, and relevance of the stories. Upon entering the field of education decades ago, the educational deficits that existed within this culture were quickly recognized. Exploration into the realm of American Indian/Indigenous intellectualism has led to the belief that people learn differently, and when individuals are taught in ways conducive to their learning styles, they tend to retain more and are better able to contextualize the curriculum.

Likewise, scholars such as Piaget and Inhelder (1973) have also theorized about these concepts, especially including new ways of presenting and internalizing information by its incorporation into the existing classroom paradigm or perception. MacKenzie (2007) wrote, "Storytelling is needed as a rich soil for cultivating imagination" (p. 32).

This concept has been held by Native elders throughout the world. Storytelling is the means by which all we need to know is carried through time (Sobal, 1999). Ojibwe elder, medicine-man, and teacher Tommy Stillday (2005) of Northern Minnesota's Red Lake Indian Reservation has said, "You are your story and as your story unfolds you need to speak about it and have others speak about their story too," especially the children. Clearly, storytelling must be part of the educational process (Meyer, 1995).

#### Objective

Our objective was to introduce prospective teachers to storytelling while qualitatively exploring their perceptions of storytelling and its use as a form of pedagogical methodology.

The assumption was that prospective teachers would find storytelling an effective teaching and learning tool, and consider using it as an instructional method within their future classrooms.

### **Theoretical Approach**

Rooted Grounded Theory, a qualitative approach, was chosen to extract individual and collective meaning from participants. This approach addresses complex circumstances without preconceived limitations, and its storytelling nature supports this article's pedagogical subject matter.

Qualitative methodology also allows for unrestricted investigation in which participants do not feel compelled to specific content, with grounded theory methodology enabling participants to easily understand and articulate the fusion of storytelling into their pedagogical framework.

### **Study Demographics**

This study was conducted in a lightly populated, rural mid-western state. According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), 24.6% of the state's population is under age eighteen, 86% is White, and 9% is American Indian. High school graduates comprise 89% over age 25, while 24% over age 25 have a Bachelors degree or higher. Home ownership is 68%, with a median household income of \$45,000.

The university involved is a public, Carnegie-classified, medium-sized four-year institution with between 5,000-9,999 students. The institution is categorized as an intensive Doctoral/Research University offering doctoral degrees and distance learning opportunities. According to university statistics, 87% of the University's population is classified as White, 2% Native American, 1% Black, Asian, and Hispanic, respectively, and 6% other.

### **Study Design**

In order to inquire if prospective teachers find storytelling to be an effective teaching and learning tool, and if they would consider using it in addition to mainstream instructional methods when they begin teaching, we as researchers used storytelling pedagogical techniques as a form of instruction in a research laboratory (course/classroom) to provide study participants with practical and theoretical perspectives about storytelling. Our assumption was that the prospective teachers would recognize the value of storytelling and implement storytelling into future teaching practices.

We developed and used a classroom laboratory where participants were introduced to storytelling's context and pedagogical use. The content and topics of an Indian Education course were presented through and by storytelling, with explanations of story elements and effective delivery of story interwoven within course content.

The second author is a literacy specialist, and she spent a significant amount of time teaching the participants the essential story components. The story setting was emphasized, as it is one of the key components to telling successful stories.

Stories and the concept of storytelling as pedagogy were presented to participants in two ways; first, to supplement the more mainstream forms of pedagogy, such as lecture and classroom discussion; and secondly, as the main form of pedagogical delivery using lecture and classroom discussion as supplemental tools.

### **Participants**

The University requires all education students to complete a course in Indian Studies. For this research, 22 students volunteered to participate in a storytelling research section of this course rather than the usual version. Participants included eight juniors, seven sophomores, seven seniors, two graduate students, and one freshman. Nineteen participants self identified as White, one as African American, one as Latino, and one chose not to answer, with none identifying as American Indian.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative data were collected through open-ended questions presented to the entire class approximately every other week throughout the course. There were five data collection interviews and focus groups during the class, with written data accumulated and analyzed by both researchers.

Throughout the semester, five data collection sessions/interviews were conducted, followed by classroom focus groups the following week. Numerous questions were asked throughout the process, with all directly related to the primary research question. Session transcripts were analyzed for themes to compose the grounded theory.

### **Coding**

We employed three primary forms of coding: open coding or developing categories from data, axial coding or connecting the themes from the data, and selective coding to build theory from the data (Corbin

& Strauss, 1990). The coding process was used to interpret and fashion theory from participants' answers and was not used to prove an existing theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Many qualitative authors, including Creswell (2007), emphasize layers of analysis to ensure reliability.

Data were deconstructed and examined by the first author and then re-examined and critiqued by the second author. We grouped the examined data into categories and subcategories. Categories were defined as detailed measures and overarching concepts holding considerable meaning to the participant.

Methods of extracting concepts were designed to identify both details and major ideas. The first author utilized open coding throughout the study, both during and after each session/interview and follow-up focus groups, as this identified the participants' collective experiences with larger emerging relational concepts presenting themselves. The same open coding process was used after each session/interview.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), axial coding is the renewal of data fragmented during the open coding process, and in this study axial coding was used to tie subcategories to the larger categories. The concept that began to emerge through the coding process was how the participants responded to the phenomena of their incorporation of storytelling into their pedagogy.

We concentrated on the relationship between the categories and allowed the data to guide the process. Axial coding was conducted during and following each session/interview, with selective coding used to form a larger theoretical outline. Selective coding is the practice of conjoining, cultivating, and formulating categories around a fundamental concept to create a core category for the phenomena of study that begins to explain the research (Creswell, 1998). In this study, selective coding ultimately exposed that the conceptual relationships gathered from the data collection process were exhausted.

### **Validity**

Qualitative validity is a relative term and is viewed as a goal, not a result (Creswell, 2007). To ensure validity, the first author utilized a secondary researcher to re-examine all data. Additionally, participants were asked to turn in written answers to all questions asked, and clarification during the focus groups was sought from participants if the researchers discovered any ambiguity within answers.

The second author served as the secondary researcher, reexamining the results of the primary researcher's data analysis and collaborated with the primary to clarify discrepancies.

Participants were asked to turn in written responses to session/interview questions. Written answers ensured accuracy and provided researchers with text that could be clearly analyzed.

**Five Sessions**

Participants engaged in five sessions related to this research study, spread across one semester (see Table 1 for additional information on the structure of the research program). An initial session/interview lasted approximately 55 minutes during which the prospective teachers were asked:

1. Have you ever studied storytelling in an academic setting? (Explain)
2. Are you aware of what the term "storytelling" means? (Explain)
3. Do you consider yourself a storyteller, why or why not? (Explain)
4. Do you enjoy listening to stories, why or why not? (Explain)
5. Do you enjoy telling stories, why or why not? (Explain)

After the participants' answered the questions, researchers examined, categorized, and coded the questions. During the following class, participants were allowed to elaborate in a focus group. After interpreting the initial answers, both researchers met to verify the accuracy of the initial interpretations.

In a second session, participants engaged in another interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. This time participants

were asked to answer questions specific to content discussions from the previous class period pertaining to their knowledge of stories:

1. Do you know the definition of "setting" as it pertains to a story? (Explain)
2. Explain why you think a story's setting is an important element to the story? (Explain)

During the classes that followed these first two sessions, researchers asked participants to discuss any elements pertaining to the formal construction of stories for which they had questions. The researchers reiterated the questions and furthered the discussion of formal story construction, believing it important to attend to any alterations made by participants to support the findings' credibility.

The third session/interviews followed the same procedures described in the first and second sessions/interviews. Because researchers recognized there were components of the emerging theory needing additional enriching, the following questions were asked in the third session/interviews:

1. In general, are stories easy for you to understand? (Explain)
2. What do you find interesting about story characters? (Explain)
3. Do you enjoy hearing stories? (Explain)
4. Do you like hearing about complex characters when listening to stories? (Explain)
5. What would your perception of an American Indian story character look like? (Explain)

The next week these questions were

followed by focus group discussion in order to obtain and further define meanings referenced in the session/interviews by participants. As was completed after the first two sessions/interviews, the researchers examined, categorized, and coded the questions.

The fourth session/interviews followed the same procedures described in the first, second, and third sessions/interviews; however, researchers asked the participants to respond more reflectively than in previous sessions/interviews. The following questions were asked:

1. Do you feel as if storytelling is an effective teaching tool? (Explain)
2. Are you interested in using storytelling in your classroom setting? (Explain)
3. Do you plan to use stories as part of pedagogical practice when you teach? (Explain)
4. Do you believe that children can learn from stories? (Explain)

The next week these questions were the subject of a focus group discussion in order to obtain and further define participants' meaning as referenced in the session/interview. Researchers again examined, categorized, and coded the questions.

The fifth and final session/interview followed the same procedures as the previous four. Prior to the participants engaging in the final session/interview, researchers informed them this would be the final session/interview and to answer the questions as thoroughly as possible. The following questions were asked in the fifth session/interviews:

1. How can using storytelling methodologies influence the way you teach? (Explain)

**Table 1**  
**Structure of the Research Semester**

<i>First quarter of semester</i>	<i>Second quarter of semester</i>	<i>Third quarter of semester</i>	<i>Fourth quarter of semester</i>
Introduction	Intellectualism	Social issues	Pedagogy
• Introductions	History	• Oppression	Storytelling
• Definition of Terms	Empathy	1. Subject stories	Curriculum
• Resistance	• Black Elk readings	• History of inequality	• Teaching styles
1. Subject stories	1. Subject stories	2. Subject stories	1. Subject stories
• Assignments	• Harvey readings	• Boarding schools	• Learning styles
• Lectures of story	2. Subject stories	3. Story of Lila	2. Subject stories
2. Subject stories	• Stories of empathy	• Education and social justice	• American Indian literature
• Spirituality	3. Subject stories	4. Subject stories	3. Read
3. Subject stories	• Lectures emotion		• Inter-disciplinary
	4. Subject stories		• Pedagogy
	• Developing story lectures		4. Subject stories
			• Presentations of story-books

2. Do you believe that students can learn more when the content is presented in story form? (Explain)

During the week 12 class, follow-up questions from the fifth session were reviewed, and participants had the opportunity to expound on their learning experiences in a focus group. The researchers were able to further define the meanings referenced by participants in the previous session/interview, and they again examined, categorized, and coded the questions from the final session/interview. At class completion, we again examined responses given throughout the entire course.

### Data Analysis

We took extensive notes which were transcribed throughout the data gathering process, and participants were asked to turn in their written answers at the conclusion of each session/interview. All collected data were reviewed and answers clarified during the focus group session held the following class period. Data were reviewed and re-reviewed during the categorization and coding process.

### Results

It is imperative to stress the considerable difficulty involved in presenting research outcomes in a way that does not appear too linear or inferential. Results include the consummation of the participants' collective procedures as they circumnavigated storytelling into their pedagogical practices. These research results intend to convey a theory that does justice to the complex process of the study's phenomena.

### Intensifying Cognizance

The participants understood that the infusion of storytelling into their pedagogical process meant becoming cognizant of their personal motivating influences, especially upon reflection of their own value systems, personal occurrences, and attitudes.

In session/interview one, participants were asked, "Have you ever studied storytelling in an academic setting?" Only three had studied storytelling; two spoke about "telling stories in a creative writing course" and the third mentioned "explaining things in show and tell." Most participants indicated they had never studied storytelling, but several had some experiences with storytelling in various courses.

Participants were asked "Do you know what the term storytelling means?" All par-

ticipants indicated knowledge of the term, with most knowing storytelling was a form of "oral communication used to illustrate a particular point or teach a lesson."

In response to "Do you consider yourself a storyteller?," all but five indicated yes; most stated they "love to tell stories and that they talk about things that happen in their lives on a daily basis." Participants seemed eager to inform fellow participants of their storytelling prowess.

When participants were asked, "Do you enjoy listening to stories?," all answered affirmatively. One indicated that "Stories are candy for the imagination." Another said, "Stories feed the imagination and the soul." Most of the participants indicated that stories are "interesting, entertaining, and fun." Five implied "stories teach a person about their self." One added, "I was adopted and when I met my mother for the first time she shared her story and I was part of it."

One of the course objectives was to motivate students emotionally by using relationships embedded in their lives. Each participant became increasingly more cognizant of the need to infuse culturally relevant pedagogical techniques into the teaching process by personalizing, contrasting, and comparing their educational experiences with those of American Indian students. One participant illustrated her experience in the focus group following session/interview one:

I never really thought that people learned differently. I mean, living where I do I think I should have known better or at least thought about it more. My mother is a teacher, and I never heard her say anything about learning styles or teaching styles; she taught Native Americans too. However, when you talked about how learning is connected with values and about how we need to open our eyes it dawned on me; I learned some things slower than others and some things I learned faster. Thinking back, I think it was because they were taught in different ways. I remember the Natives in my class in grade school; well they mostly seemed to learn slower. Maybe if they heard stories they could have learned more.

Another participant shared her experience:

When I did my para, I was in a classroom where there were lots of Native students. When the teacher began telling stories it seemed like the Indian kids perked up and got excited about the period. I remember stories being told when I was in first grade too. I think I paid more attention. There is just something about hearing a story.

Another participant added:

I wish I would have heard more stories when I was a kid, it makes me sad that I didn't.

Overall, the participants quickly recognized that they needed to become more mindful that incorporating storytelling into the pedagogical process meant, at least in part, looking within one-self. The participants' value systems, personal occurrences, and attitudes helped them understand the importance of finding ways to infuse storytelling's pedagogical processes into their teaching. The students began to think holistically about instituting a pedagogical process that represented conceptual change.

### Enabling Conceptual Change

The participants shared some of their ideas about how they could enable conceptual change; maintaining this focus was imperative for them to reflect on student development, address student questions, and understand what they are teaching to become better teachers. The concept involved was that if a participant understood story elements and could share a story successfully, they could use storytelling as a pedagogical tool.

In session/interview two, participants were asked, "Do you understand the definition of setting as it pertains to a story?" All indicated term understanding. The overwhelming response was, "Setting is the location of the story" or "where the action takes place."

Participants were asked, "Explain why you think a story's setting is an important element of the story?" Most participants stated the setting is important because it "sets the scene of the story by putting a visual in the readers or listener's mind."

In the focus group held during the following class one participant articulated how important it is to understand what one is teaching;

I can't tell you how happy I am right now; it's like a light bulb just went off in my head. What (author) is teaching us goes beyond the classroom. We learned about story and how important it is to know the parts of a story. It is important for our assignment, and we need to know story to teach story by telling stories; but what is more important about knowing the setting of story is that it tells the reader who the characters are. I now understand what (author) is saying about telling our own story, it tells the world who we are. The setting is your culture; by not knowing the setting of the story you don't know the character or

yourself or people from other cultures. We need to know the story of Indian people to understand who the people are.

A second student continued the conversation:

This makes sense to me now. As teachers we need to tell the story of all people and we need to learn what the setting is; you said it was the culture. To answer student questions we need to understand the setting; otherwise we are lying to the students. When this discussion started I have to confess, I didn't know what the term meant, now I do; it is about the big picture isn't it?

### **Evolution of Knowledge**

As the research project entered midpoint, the researchers' plan was to enrich the study and collect data that may reveal whether the participants' levels of understanding had evolved. Participants were eager to speak about how their evolving perception of storytelling had changed.

In session/interview three, participants were asked, "In general, to this point in the course, are stories easier for you to understand than before the course started?" What was being asked was whether stories were, as an overall concept, easier for the participants to understand. With the exception of one, all answered affirmatively. Most participants answering "yes" spoke about how hearing "stories" assisted in the "learning process." Some mentioned that they now have a "different perspective" on learning and feel as if stories are a much more "important part of the learning process than realized."

Participants were also asked, "How do you feel about hearing stories at the halfway point in the course?" One articulated on what eight others' shared, "Stories provide opportunities to learn about a variety of different subjects." Another said, "Stories help her learn" because they allow her to "use her imagination." Several said that "stories are enjoyable and fun and they keep their interest."

While in the focus group, held during the following class period, one participant spoke of how the course information "woke him up" to ideas that he had not thought of before. The discussion then moved to what they had missed in school.

When I started the course, before this project started, I honestly never thought about storytelling; as the course went on, I began to question my own education. I mean, I wonder if storytelling would have made me a better student. The more I have learned the more convinced I am that we

should, as teachers, make storytelling a big part of our teaching. I wish that my K-8 teachers would have known a little more about storytelling because it just makes sense.

This participant looked at us and asked, "Why don't teachers learn the art of storytelling? It seems to me that it should be part of methods programs in all the education departments."

A second participant quickly raised her hand and added:

I know what he is saying; I have been thinking the same thing. When I started this course I wasn't sure what to expect, but I think I understand now. It's like, I know I have been surrounded by stories my whole life and I never realized that I was learning something about something just by listening. I understand how important it is. I understand the reasons for telling stories.

One of the graduate student participants commented on storytelling's place in education.

When I went through my education program, I did most of it at (name of university), and I felt satisfied with the program, but now I don't. It makes me wonder what else I don't know; I guess that's the way it is—new research, the evolution of knowledge, and new techniques.

Another of the participants said that she was "saddened because she feels as if she "should have been studying stories long before this research project," and another vocalized the need to keep communicating by using stories.

It is weird because storytelling is the oldest way of teaching. We learned that in this class; but we aren't really taught much about it. I think we teachers need to be communicating and teaching students how to communicate, especially in a world that seems to be becoming more and more distant. Hmmm, I guess what I am trying to say is that we need to communicate because we seem to be hiding behind emails, and twitter, and stuff like that.

### **Pedagogical Techniques**

As the research project reached week nine, the topics of pedagogy and pedagogical technique began emerging. The researchers were particularly interested in the pedagogical questions because of its burgeoning pedagogical theory.

In session/interview four, participants were asked, "Do you feel as if storytelling is an effective teaching tool?" All answered affirmatively, with one declaring,

Everything I learned about storytelling in this course, for this project has been amazing; I never realized how affective stories could be and I certainly never thought about stories as a pedagogical tool.

Another indicated,

I feel that stories are a great teaching tool but the listener should be willing; so part of our job is to help the students understand the elements of storytelling.

Several participants stated "yes, stories put information into a context that nearly everyone can understand," with most including in their response, "Stories are more affective" and are a better way of learning than "lecture, book, or other assignments." Several indicated, "All teachers should take this course" and "learn how to tell stories" as well as how to implement storytelling into the process.

Participants were also asked; "Do you believe that children can learn from stories?" All participants answered yes, with one participant adding,

We need to, as teachers, explore all we can about the teaching process; I mean, it's like we are obligated to teach all students, and we should be doing just that; I believe that all children can learn from storytelling, I did.

When participants were asked, "Are you interested in using storytelling in your classroom setting?," all responded yes, overwhelmingly stating, "storytelling will help children learn." Additionally, most added, "It helps teach those that don't learn the same way that the majority does."

While in the focus group, held during the following class period, one participant summarized what many others were disclosing:

I think that we need to rethink what education is, how we look at education; our profession and how we (me) teach our kids [sic]. We need to rethink how our kids are being taught. It isn't that teachers are teaching bad things; they have the most important most complex job there is. They teach our kids who they are; they are going to run our country. The way we appear to be moving isn't the right way, blaming teachers and everything, gosh; we used to be the best and we are falling through the floor now and the more we pursue this path the more we seem to be failing. It seems like we need to revalue our teachers and teaching. Doing something like storytelling to address the needs of all students appears to be the way we need to think. We need to think about the details to correct the big picture yah; it is tied together.

A second added:

We probably ought to be thinking about assisting our teachers in becoming great teachers rather than diminishing the worth of teachers; learning how to diversify and differentiate our teaching by learning the art of storytelling ought to be part of the process.

Yet another participant stated:

We as teachers need to know all we can about teaching and learning. Teachers in teacher education programs need to be learning about concepts like differentiation and other diversity issues in education.

A further comment was:

I did my internship in a small school here in (state name), and I witnessed the affect of storytelling first hand; I mean, I saw the second grade students react to storytelling. It was like they were all over the place for the first two hours of the day, but when it came time for the storytelling session about the book they were reading, the kids were like quiet and they were paying attention and sat nicely. I believe in storytelling because I saw it first hand; I can't wait to use it in my classes.

### Overcoming Challenges

The participants circumnavigated many challenges during this study, both internal and external. Many struggled from within trying to weigh class expectations, their personal time and energy, and their experience with storytelling. Most participants also dealt with external constraints such as time, lack of resources, and fulfilling other course requirements. The participants succeeded in working through these issues as they learned about Indian education, story, storytelling, and storytelling pedagogy.

The larger question for the participants was, "How are participants (future teachers) going to overcome the obstacles that will keep them from using storytelling as pedagogy?" Several students also struggled with questions such as, "How will I utilize storytelling pedagogically knowing little or nothing about storytelling?" and others worried about "content" and how to use storytelling properly.

In session/interview five, participants were asked, "How can using storytelling methodologies influence the way you teach? One answered, "I think we need to learn as much as we can about how to tell a story, I am cool with us having learned how to configure a story; I think it will really help." This was almost unanimous. Some participants were worried about

having the skill set to properly tell effective stories.

Many participants echoed this student's response, "I think I will allow my natural storytelling instinct guide my content delivery; I think we need to look at the other methodologies and decide what would be best suited for storytelling." Another added, "Like the author did here, make content the pedagogy and the pedagogy the content."

Almost all participants answered with some variation of this student comment, "I don't know about finding research on the pedagogy of storytelling; it doesn't seem like there is much research out there."

The participants were also asked, "Do you believe that students can learn more when the content is presented in story form?" The majority, 15 of 22, indicated that they thought, "Students can learn more." One communicated what many others suggested, "We, us, the people in this course learned more by hearing the stories that were told this semester." Other participants indicated that "some" students might learn from storytelling. One student conveyed, "some may and some may not, every student is different."

The final focus group was left open-ended; participants could expand on topics or speak about anything that they felt needed additional conversation. While in the focus group held during the following class period, one of the participants summarized what many others were thinking:

I feel incredibly lucky to have had the opportunity to take this course and to learn about storytelling and how to use it as a teacher; I have some concerns though. I guess I hope that we will have the academic freedom to design our own methodology. I think I have heard that some schools are pretty strict with how and what is taught. I will need to understand the in's and out's of assessment to be able to justify the storytelling; I am not sure I understand that well. I guess I will never stop learning. There is possibility.

When the participants shared during the final focus group an interesting theme began to emerge; the theme of "possibility." One participant stated:

I agree with everyone else, I am sorry I am a little emotional; I think that this is all possible. I have been to the reservations and seen the problems in education. It seems as if there are a lot of suggestions but never any answers. The other thing I want to say is that storytelling is something that belongs to them; I mean storytelling belongs to all of us, but it is special to the Native Americans in this country. I

feel like there is a possibility here rather than another failed program.

Another participant added,

Yah this is systemic, not like, well it is not paternalistic. It is like she said; it seems real.

### Summary

The grounded theory integrating storytelling into the Pre-K-12 pedagogical process was best represented by the concepts of intensifying cognizance, enabling a conceptual change, evolution of knowledge, using pedagogical techniques, and overcoming challenges. This theoretical method was cyclical in nature, as participants moved through the process; they made their way through an American Indian education course heavily emphasizing story, storytelling, and using storytelling in the pedagogical process.

Specifically, throughout the procedure of interviewing participants, a commitment to intensifying cognizance was made by teaching the concepts of story, storytelling, and how storytelling could be included pedagogically. During the final focus group, participants collectively shared their encounters with "possibility."

As students' knowledge base grew throughout the course, they began to understand how to facilitate conceptual change. Enabling this change directly influenced the evolution of knowledge, especially how participants created stories and storytelling pedagogy.

Consequently, much of the classroom discussion encouraged further receptivity to story, storytelling, and storytelling pedagogical concepts while concurrently addressing student development and lowering levels of resistance. Further, participants also needed to meet the challenges of being a university student.

### Implications

A considerable amount of the storytelling literature in the field of education has been based in theory and lacks critical analysis or empirical results. This study provides critical analysis and empirical results that can benefit the education field, with its findings at least partially alleviating the dearth of knowledge about storytelling's pedagogical construct.

Stories are told every day, everywhere in the world, and are examined in a multitude of academic settings at all levels within the education system. Stories are the subject and serve as a content tool in a

variety of reading, literature, and language arts courses. To use storytelling across the curriculum as a pedagogical mechanism in the formal education setting is, to some extent, difficult.

Many participants discussed the challenge of locating educational pedagogical research, and it is our hope that this lack of research will inspire others to conduct additional studies that assist in the use of storytelling in formal education.

As the participants reflected on what they learned about storytelling and its pedagogical processes, they were faced with the challenge of how to evaluate themselves in terms of personal capabilities and knowledge. Because there are limited storytelling resources available, participants had difficulty measuring their capabilities and knowledge levels against others' experiences.

### Limitations

While the researchers blended methods to safeguard the credibility of their research findings, there are limitations present in the current study. These include participant selection (only participants from one university were allowed to contribute), the interview method, and the course content. In reporting on the study we have described how these methodological choices were limiting.

The participants included in this study were students enrolled in the particular university described in this investigation, which has a unique student demographic and adheres to a theoretical practice that differs from other universities around the country. It is unknown how emergent theory may have been affected or what distinctiveness could have materialized if voice was given to participants from other post-secondary institutions.

Storytelling curriculum was presented throughout the semester as indicated in the following brief map of the participants' course curriculum. All content was presented pedagogically in story form. The interview methodology consisted of interview sessions and follow-up focus groups occurring the following week. Interview responses were discussed, written, submitted, and then analyzed by the researchers. The open-ended focus groups allowed participants to discuss the subject matter with which they were concerned with minimal guidance.

There are a variety of alternative ways in which content and curriculum could have been delivered in the course,

any number of which could have altered the outcomes of the results.

### Recommendations for Future Research

To add further credibility to these findings, future research should explore a variety of studies. One such study could be constructed to encompass the concepts from this study: intensifying cognizance, enabling a conceptual change, evolution of knowledge, using pedagogical techniques, and overcoming challenges. If researchers were to construct a study about overcoming challenges, they might include such statements as "I experienced internal and external challenges as I incorporated storytelling pedagogy into my pedagogical processes," or "What challenges does the institution present in the implementation of a storytelling pedagogical process?"

Some of the participants in our study discussed the challenges of student openness to storytelling; thus a study addressing how educators navigate challenges experienced while incorporating storytelling into the pedagogical process would be helpful. Furthering this line of research could assist others in finding successful strategies for implementing storytelling into the pedagogical process.

The theory that emerged from this study provided valuable knowledge that addressed literature voids regarding the experiences and processes of teachers as they attempt to incorporate storytelling within classrooms. Thus we suggest that these research recommendations are critical for teachers committed to implementing storytelling pedagogical processes in their teaching methodologies.

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