CHAPTER THREE: THE BIRTH OF TRIBAL COLLEGES

Rising Voices

Bilingual and bicultural.
Will it work? Is it working?
Maybe...and maybe not.
But we people are giving it a try.
Trying to learn both ways,
Trying to be in harmony with both ways

Carla Willetto, Navajo, 1966

Indian Education

Prior History

At the end of World War II, the cry, "set the American Indians free" (Reyhner, 1992, p. 52) resounded throughout the halls of Congress. The argument of a forced collectivist system that continuously reminded tribes of their inferior status spurred the creation of the Indian Reorganization Act. The Indian Reorganization Act was designed to terminate reservations.

The overall goal was to strip American Indian Tribes of their Sovereign Nation status. Under termination status, the tribes would lose their ability to govern their internal affairs; Tribal Governments would no longer exist. There were two underlying philosophies for this sudden drive to emancipate Indians from federal control. The first rationale stemmed from the post World War II belief that all Americans needed to come together as a people and that could not be achieved if American Indians were treated differently. The second reason was based upon the fact that reformers saw Tribal Governments as fostering "communal" ownership and values, perhaps too closely reflecting "communism."

The 1950's Termination Act was deemed a failure and by the late 1950's/early 1960's, Congress halted the process of termination. Thereafter, as part of the original Termination Act, the states would be responsible for the education of all Indian children within the existing public school systems. Federal funding was provided through the Johnson-O'Malley Act to ensure the enrollment of American Indians in public schools.

> "Public Laws (P.L.) 874 and 815 authorized funds for public schools with students who lived on tax-exempt federal land, such as military bases. These laws were amended to include Indians living or working on reservations or other federal trust land. P.L. 874 provides a large portion of the operating expenses of many reservation public schools today while many reservation schools were built using 815 funds" (Reyhner, 1992, p.53-54).

The 1960's brought a change to the status quo of American Indian Education. Up until this point the federal provision of educational services to American Indians was initiated through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The BIA focus revolved around academic and vocational proficiency at the elementary and secondary levels. During the late 1960's the BIA would decide that American Indians needed postsecondary education opportunities.

The BIA established three postsecondary institutions: Haskell Indian Junior College (Haskell Indian Nations University) in Kansas, and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute and the Institute of American Indian Arts, both located in New Mexico. The primary purpose of these three higher educational institutions was to provide vocational direction to American Indians. The vocational direction was to promote job training that would lead to job opportunities. Currently these three institutions continue to provide postsecondary educational opportunities for American Indians.

"Reflecting the spirit of the civil rights movement, overall federal policy of American Indians in the 1960's began to move away from paternalism and assimilation and towards American Indian self-determination" (Merisotis & O'Brien, 1998, p. 26). Tribes began to require that the federal government permit them to administer their own public services, including education. This transition would allow tribes to pass on their language and culture to future generations because it was recognized that when language is at risk, so is the culture of the people. Tribal leadership advanced the core principle of self-determination. "Indian people through their own tribal governments determine their own destiny" (Rehyner, 1992, p. 54).

In 1966 the Navajos pushed the envelope even further. In an attempt to have a school they could call their own, the Navajo Nation opened an experimental school in Rough Rock, Arizona. The school was funded through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Office of Economic Opportunity and, as a result, eleven additional contract schools were started.

In 1969 a Special Senate Subcommittee produced a summary report *"Indian Education: A National Tragedy, a National Challenge."* Senator Edward Kennedy (this study would later be known as the "Kennedy Report") wrote in the introduction, "Indian dropout rates were twice the national average, Indian students lagged two to three years behind white students in school achievement, only one percent had Indian teachers, one fourth of the teachers of Indian students preferred not to teach them," and that "Indian children more than any other minority group believed themselves to be 'below average' in intelligence." The "Kennedy Report" would ultimately lead to passage of the Indian

Education Act, Title IV of P.L. 92-318" (Reyhner, 1992, p. 55). The Indian Education Act would authorize funding for American Indian children living on reservations and for urban Indian students.

In 1970, following the Kennedy and Fusch and Havighurst studies, President Nixon sent a message to Congress;

> ...the story of the Indian in America is something more than the record of the white man's frequent aggression, broken agreements, intermittent remorse and prolonged failure. It is a record also of endurance, of survival, of adaptation and creativity in the face of overwhelming obstacles. It is a record of enormous contributions to this country – to its art and culture, to its strength and spirit, to its sense of history and its sense of purposes (Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Briefing Booklet, 1999).

The attention directed towards the shortcomings of Indian Education and the pressure from tribes led to the passage of the Indian Education Act. This act provided funding for Indian children in reservation schools and in urban settings.

The movement of congressional support encouraged Indian educators to initiate the National Indian Education Association and push Congress further. The Indian Education Act was a small step, but not significantly practical in improving Indian involvement in school districts or enhancing culturally appropriate curriculum.

The crowning landmark shift in federal policy would be reflected in the Self-Determination and Indian Assistance Act of 1975. "What this means to the Indian community," said Senator Henry Jackson (the bill's sponsor), "is that the heavy hand of paternalism which has dominated the lives and affairs of Indian people for so many years can now be broken" (Congressional Quarterly, 1977, p. 810). The Self-Determination Act would "promote maximum Indian participation in the government and education of Indian people and supported the right of Indians to control their own educational activities" (Reyhner, 1992, p. 56).

As a direct response to the Self-Determination Act, the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) provided research and demonstration grants to the first established community college on a reservation, the Navajo Community College (now called Dine College). OEO evaluated and deemed the Navajo Community College as a success that promoted the "Navajo Community College Act. "One of the legislators of the Act noted that, the Navajo Community College is an example of self-determination at its very best" (Merisotis & O'Brien, 1998, p. 26).

In 1978 the Tribally Controlled Community Colleges Assistance Act provided "authorized grants of $4,000 to all tribally controlled community colleges for each full-time equivalent American Indian student for general operating support" (Merisotis & O'Brien, 1998, p. 27). Prior to the 1978 legislation, a handful of Tribal Colleges existed; within a decade over twenty colleges existed through the assistance of the Self-Determination Act and federal support.

Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander Folk School, said, "stretching people's minds is part of educating, but always in terms of a democratic goal. That means you have to trust people's ability to develop their capacity for working collectively to solve their own problems" (Horton, M. with Kohl, H. & Kohl, J., 1998, p. 132). Horton's reference relates to the Highlander School's Experiences during the civil rights movement; the ability and drive that motivated people from the work fields to endure the physical abuse associated with voter registration. He believed that if opportunities were available to help people grow and learn, they would take advantage of these learning opportunities. Tribal communities reflect a similar philosophy through the social renewal and independent democracy of tribally controlled colleges.

Similar to Horton's Highlander School, Tribal Colleges would not be the mainstream educational system. In the early days of the Highlander School, Myles Horton made a conscious decision to work "with poor, oppressed people. I had to take into consideration that they'd never been allowed to value their own experience; that they'd been told it was dirt and that only teachers and experts knew what was good for them," stated Horton (Horton, M. with Kohl, H. & Kohl, J., 1998, p. 57). As with Myles Horton, in 1997 Paul Boyer, at the request of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, found through his research analogous factors that would impel American Indian communities to found Tribal Colleges. Boyer concluded there were four important characteristics of Tribal Colleges. "(1) Tribal Colleges provide a learning environment that supports students who have come to view failure as the norm. (2) Tribal Colleges celebrate and help sustain American Indian traditions. (3) Tribal Colleges provide essential services that enrich the surrounding community area; and
(4) the colleges have become centers for research and scholarship" (Boyer, 1997, p.4-5). Tribal Colleges did not want to look and act like their counterparts, the "mainstream" community colleges. "Their first loyalty was to the members and culture of their Tribal Nation, making them institutions of opportunity not assimilation" (Boyer, 1997, p. 25). This tribal philosophy has allowed the colleges to become uniquely Indian institutions of higher learning.

The Structure of Tribal Colleges

Governance

Tribal Colleges are chartered by one or more tribes and maintain a Board of Regents that promotes the autonomy of the institution. Essential to the longevity of a Tribal College is the role of its Board of Trustees or Board of Regents, which must act as buffers between the college and the local tribal governing system. To ensure the true sense of higher education, "an indigenously controlled college must be an intimate part of its local community yet remain politically and administratively separate from the local governing body" (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. 43). However, the social movement of creating a higher education configuration contains a variety of features that reflect a diversity of interests and objectives and a unity of vision and spirit.

Tribal Colleges incorporate a revitalization and reformulation of culture and tradition and articulate the rejection of Western Higher Education philosophy for educating American Indian students. Historically an objectivism has been applied to the process of Indian Education and an assumption that there is one--and only one-- methodology of education for American Indian people and it must reflect mainstream America. This mindset has eliminated and excluded past and current tribal and social contexts associated with tribal perspectives and the relational reality of Indian people. Smith (1999) states in her book "*Decolonizing Methodologies*." "While rhetorically the indigenous movement may be encapsulated within the politics of self-determination it is a much more dynamic and complex movement which incorporates many dimensions, some of which are still unfolding" (p. 110). The Tribal College movement has developed a shared discourse among tribes in the United States.

A cadre of grassroots education activists and tribal members initiated the Tribal College movement. They were also charged with establishing administrations for their own newly-formed colleges. In the early years, the skepticism of non-Indian four-year colleges and universities and their reluctance to assist Tribal Colleges was evident. Tribal Colleges were seen as competitors and their legitimacy was questioned. The concern of neighboring non-Indian institutions revolved around the unproven track records of Tribal Colleges and their accountability for providing a sound and accredited educational process was in question.

This dilemma stimulated many of the original Tribal Colleges to hire presidents who were not educators. "The best teachers of poor and working people are the people themselves. They are the experts on their own experiences and problems" (Horton, M. with Kohl, H. & Kohl, J., 1998, p. 152). However, the colleges needed a catalyst to accelerate the learning process. In response to this situation, "...a Ford Foundation grant sponsored a three-year leadership institute for presidents, vice presidents, deans, and faculty, offering seminars on the skills needed to run a college" (Boyer, 1997, p. 30). The proportion of tribal administrators has gradually changed, and "today's ratio of about 90% Natives to 10% non-Natives serve as tribal administrators" (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. 46).

Curriculum

"The struggle for the validity of indigenous knowledge may no longer be over the *recognition* that indigenous peoples have ways of viewing the world which are unique, but over proving the authenticity of, and control over, our own forms of knowledge" (Smith, 1999, p. 104). The challenge for Tribal Colleges is finding a balance between the mainstream curriculum and their own Native history and language studies. In search for a balance, the development of American Studies provides for the connection of traditional knowledge and history as it relates to American Indian students, the community, and to the college's mission. Tribal Colleges offer a wide range of non-cultural courses; however, they still reflect tribal philosophies of education.

Boyer (1997) documented that all Tribal Colleges began as two-year institutions. This was in direct response to meeting the vocational need among American Indian communities. The current movement among the Tribal Colleges is to offer not only an array of vocational curriculum (i.e., culinary, arts, early childhood, and construction trades) but also to provide four-year and even graduate degrees. The expansion to four-year degree programs happened through the strong cooperative working relationship between smaller Tribal Colleges and non-Indian institutions. The colleges also offer general education/liberal arts courses that are transferable to non-Indian institutions.

The advent of technological advancements in distance learning has opened the door for Tribal Colleges to offer courses to remote areas of their reservations or multiple reservations. More importantly, the questions of how students learn and the content of what is learned through the mechanism of technology while adapting American Indian culture within the Tribal College curriculum is a constant subject for discussion. The fact is that technology is omnipresent in the daily lives of students. Tribal colleges continuously reflect upon their internal policies that strive to enhance efficiency, access, quality, and equity.

The largest hurdle for technological advancement in Tribal Colleges still remains the infrastructure to support the technology. There have been some drawbacks to distance learning in rural areas that do not support the technological infrastructure. There has also been limited dialogue about the student's preference for attending a classroom setting with an actual teacher as opposed to having a virtual teacher via technology. "Tribal College administrators note that their students often prefer to complete the more challenging courses in Math, Science and English at a Tribal College where more support and encouragement are offered" (Boyer, 1997, p. 32).

Instruction

Tribal Colleges can have enormous influence and authority on the Indian educational process. However, many of the instructors at Tribal Colleges are non-Indian. In 1999 the American Indian Higher Education Consortium noted that 30 percent of full-time faculty at the colleges were American Indian/Alaska Natives, as were 79 percent of full-time staff members. However, less than 1 percent of full-time faculty and staff at all public institutions were American Indian/Alaska Natives. Tribal Colleges initially rely heavily on part-time instructors, and the growth of full-time faculty develops as the colleges mature and financial resources increase.

As part of the Tribal College faculty structure, elders and spiritual leaders represent a significant portion of the part-time staff.

> I grew up on the reservation and I've been through all of our ceremonial Rites of Passage. And then by coming here they're utilizing that knowledge. Basically I don't have a formal teaching education. Here at the College I'm the spiritual/cultural advisor, working to implement our culture into this College.
>
> (American Indian Faculty Interview, March 17, 2004)

These individuals represent the heartbeat of the community's culture and traditional philosophies, and they are an integral part in teaching the cultural and language studies offered at a Tribal College. The American Indian Studies courses and departments are the backbone in constructing the "uniqueness" found in Tribal Colleges as higher education institutions.

Student Profile

Tribal Colleges are generally located in isolated rural areas of their respective Nations. By the nature of reservation demographics, the Tribal College population is significantly smaller than the populations found at Western universities or colleges. In comparison to their counterparts, "90% of the students attending their college are first generation students" (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. 50).

Student demographics have shown statistically that "the typical Tribal College student was often described as a single mother in her early thirties. Tribal College officials explain that this population was the least served by higher education, yet was the most eager to get a degree" (Boyer, 1997, p.35). The age demographics are changing slightly, as eighteen- to early twenty-year-old individuals enroll. However, the disproportionate demographics of the male to female ratio remain constant.

2003 Tribal College Student Enrollment Demographics

Tribal College or University	Total Head Count	Indian Student Enrollment 2003					
		Male FT	Male PT	Female FT	Female PT	Total Indian Head Count	%of Indian Enrollment
Bay Mills CC	419	38	15	61	101	215	51.30%
Blackfeet CC	547	165	23	275	64	527	96.30%
Cankdeska Cikana	188	35	27	77	38	177	94.15%
Chief Dull Knife	428	32	127	55	129	343	80.14%
College of Menominee	499	44	49	120	170	383	76.75%
Crownpoint Institute	575	218	22	254	79	573	99.65%
DQ	306	17	4	21	1	43	14.05%
Dine College	1912	272	166	682	746	1866	97.59%
FDLTCC	1043	78	81	104	61	324	31.06%
Fort Belknap College	252	41	39	82	71	233	92.46%
Fort Berthold CC	262	69	16	117	43	245	93.51%
Fort Peck Com. Coll.	634	74	68	140	165	447	70.50%
HINU	918	430	28	410	50	918	100%
IAIA	153	54	13	63	12	142	92.81%
Keweenaw Bay	50	2	4	6	19	31	62%
LCOOCC	544	71	43	176	116	406	74.63%
Leech Lake	162	43	11	72	21	147	90.74%
Little Big Horn College	594	82	106	188	201	577	97.14%
Little Priest	133	18	8	51	34	111	83.46%
Nebraska Indian Coll.	189	28	19	53	54	154	81.48%
Northwest Indian Coll.	709	109	64	218	178	569	80.25%
Oglala Lakota College	1441	206	162	422	433	1223	84.87%
Red Crow	240	100	10	125	5	240	100%
Saginaw	72	3	9	12	33	57	79.17%
Salish Kootenai Coll.	1131	224	126	358	155	863	76.30%
Si Tanka Univer	729	113	12	148	44	317	43.48%
Sinte Gleska University	955	137	94	330	257	818	85.65%
Sisseton Wahpeton	287	56	26	83	75	240	83.62%
Sitting Bull College	318	64	10	153	50	277	87.11%
SIPI	915	345	40	375	155	915	100%
Stone Child College	202	43	9	94	31	177	87.62%
Tohono O'odam	165	4	31	12	113	160	96.97%
Turtle Mountain CC	926	187	104	391	207	889	96%
UTTC	508	158	8	222	10	398	78.35%
White Earth TCC	79	0	3	6	40	49	62%
Totals	**18,485**	**3,560**	**1,577**	**5,956**	**3,961**	**15,054**	**81.44%**

* American Indian Higher Education Consortium 2003 Enrollment Data

Student Services

The Tribal College student profile is representative of an over thirty population, female, and probably the head of household with extended family obligations. In many cases students may have encountered previous negative experiences at Western institutions of learning. Therefore, the Tribal College student may bring a combination of cultural, past educational perceptions, and personal/family characteristics that add to the complexity of attending college. The Tribal College develops a capacity to recognize and enhance these cultural and social elements within the family structure to strengthen a student's college experience.

Tribal College administration, trustees, faculty, and support staff understand that "90% of the students will be first generation students" (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. 51). Access may be the first step in the equation of achieving higher education. However, "many established tribally controlled colleges place importance on adult basic education (ABE) programs (also known as graduate equivalency degree or GED programs) because a substantial number of their students lack a high school or secondary school diploma" (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. 52).

Staff and faculty also realize that the students bring a hybrid of culture and dominant viewpoints and that the mix of classes and programs is imperative for student success. The infusion of culture and language across the spectrum of Tribal Colleges provides stability and the awakening of self-identity. Boyer (1997) found consistently that students were actively encouraged to seek proficiency in their language, culture, and traditional lifeways, as they are inherently ingrained within the community.

Due to the rural environment of Tribal Colleges, child-care, transportation, and inclement weather can represent significant barriers to student academic success. These particular stumbling blocks may directly relate to a student's increased absenteeism and lack of time to study and prepare for class. The relatively condensed geographic nature of Tribal College campuses provides staff and faculty the ability to work together in addressing the needs of students.

As the Tribal Colleges become more anchored in their communities, "the soul of native leadership is grounded on principles that reflect an inner strength, a meaning and purpose in one's life to make a difference in one's native community. This awareness is often referred to as spirituality" (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. 158). As a result, the Tribal Colleges now provide a pathway to knowledge for generations of American Indians to relearn, reclaim, and rejoice in their unique heritage, culture, values, and traditions.

Supporting Organizations of Tribal Colleges

The first six Tribal College presidents established the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) in 1972. The organizational purpose of AIHEC was to assist in the long-range planning and lobbying for Tribal Colleges. Their lobbying resulted in the "U.S. Congress's passage of the Tribally Controlled College or University Assistance Act of 1978" (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. 82). AIHEC currently has a Washington, D.C., office. AIHEC's mission is to support the work of the 34 Tribal Colleges and the national movement for tribal self-determination. "The mission statement that was adopted in 1973 identifies four objectives:

- Maintain commonly held standards of quality in American Indian education,
- support the development of new tribally controlled colleges,
- promote and assist in the development of legislation to support American Indian higher education, and
- encourage greater participation by American Indians in the development of higher education policy." (http://www.aihec.org/2004)

In 1986 Tribal College students founded the AIHEC Student Congress. The goal of this association was to address the academic and cultural needs of Tribal College students. AIHEC's Student Congress founders wanted to ensure a mechanism for the development of a national leadership organization. The guiding mission of AIHEC's Student Congress encompasses the following:

> We, the students, with the divine guidance of our Creator, The Great Spirit, as acknowledged by our North American and Alaska native people, do hereby establish a student organizational structure under the sanction of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). Furthermore, it is our mission to provide leadership opportunities to our students; to create a sense of community between student leaders of all tribes and nations; to promote a sense of understanding and acceptance between all people; to work for tolerance, peace, prosperity, and love across the globe; [and] to ensure longevity of native tradition, language, and culture while working together to build healthy communities (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. 87).

Sustainability is always an issue when establishing an educational institution, which the newly-established Tribal Colleges realized quickly. Therefore, "The American Indian College Fund (AICF) was a formal charter of AIHEC, but it did not begin staffing and operations until late 1989" (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. 85). The organization was structured as a philanthropic entity. Fundraising efforts target private and corporate foundations and these efforts directly benefit Tribal Colleges and their students.

As the increase of Tribal Colleges continues and student enrollment increases the limited number f Tribal Colleges across the nation may not meet the needs of the population. There are high numbers f American Indian students attending mainstream universities and colleges. In 1992 the American ıdian program at Stanford University and the Native American program at Dartmouth College ɔnvened a dialogue with national student-service professionals. The group pursued the idea of creating ı organization that improved support services for American Indian students attending college and niversities across the country. The results of this discourse was the following mission statement: Members of the National Institute for Native Leadership in Higher Education are committed to sharing ersonal and professional experiences that cultivate Native communities through the promotion of viable ıd culturally appropriate support systems in higher education" (Benham & Stein, 2003, p. 88).

The National Institute for Native Leadership in Higher Education (NINLHE) is a national ɔnsortium that includes Native American Program Directors of both Tribal Colleges and non-Tribal vo- and four-year institutions. Currently the NINLHE Institute for Professional Development provides ːarning opportunities for student retention strategies, organizational skills, and peer-to-peer networking.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS and PROCEDURES

A Trail Not Yet Finished

Be proud and respected as a
person, be proud in what you
are and what you may
become in the future.
Priscilla Badonie, Navajo, 1983

Introduction

I have lived the Kindergarten-graduate school educational ritual. I feel that the dramatization that contributes cohesion and stability in an institution created by Western thinking alone alienates those of us who are from ethnic cultures. Acknowledged, but rarely spoken, this presupposed direct and explicit Westernized discourse often invaded my psyche. Most days I prayed feverishly that I would not be noticed. I suppose that might have been difficult as there were only three minority students attending the college.

So here I was in college--but did I really belong? Brookfield (1995) summarizes it best: "we wear an external mask of control, but beneath it we know that we really are frail figures, struggling to make it through to the end of each day" the "imposter syndrome." My case study site presented me with a different picture of students and their environment within a Tribal College setting. Students were enthusiastic and seemed thrilled to be in college. They were enjoying the experience…incredible!

This section presents an overview of the research methods used in the "Looping Linear: A Tribal College Perspective Case Study." It describes the type of study, site of the study, selection of subjects, methods of data collection, biases and confidentiality issues, case study background, data encoding, and theoretical frames of analysis. My intent was to gain and formulate a better understanding of the Tribal Colleges' intricacies and to raise the curtain of mystification not only for myself but also for others.

Type of Study

This research study was constructed in a qualitative case study format. My case study strategy was based in terms of the who, what, where, how, and why of a Tribal College (Yin, 2003, p. 21). "A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning of those involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). This particular case study methodology has incorporated three common characteristics of qualitative research. The methodology is guided by (1) phenomenology; (2) it is a case study involving one bounded system, or a single unit—i.e., a Tribal College; and