

Identity, Meaning, and Engagement with School: A Native American Student's Composition of a Life Map in a Senior English Class

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This case study of a Native American high school senior focuses on one of the final assignments he completed before dropping out of school early in the school year. The task was to draw a life map — a nonverbal text that identified 10 key life events on his journey to that point — as part of a larger unit on identity for his senior English class. The protocol analysis identified the possible topics he considered for inclusion in his life map, along with the cultural dimensions of the task that we infer kept him engaged enough to complete it at home while simultaneously producing the think-aloud protocol for the research. The article concludes with a consideration of the potential of assignments that enable nonverbal composing based on life and cultural experiences for engaging Indigenous students who are otherwise disengaged from school.

The experience of attending public schools can produce feelings of estrangement for those who fall outside the Western mainstream. As Belgarde, LoRé, and Meyer (2009) note,

From the moment that many Indigenous children enter school, they face stories, uses of language, world views, and ways of knowing that differ vastly from their home settings. The ways of the home and community are often ignored, marginalized, or actively devalued in the school setting, imparting to the children the idea that school is more valuable, important, and relevant than home. (p. 415)

The sense of alienation that follows from this cultural ostracism may distance Native American youth from school to the point where they leave altogether, as often as 117 percent more than their White counterparts (National Caucus of Native American State Legislators, 2008). If reducing dropout rates is a sincere goal among educators, then understanding the relation between mainstream school practices and the cultural practices of Indigenous peoples seems critical.

This understanding is especially important if, as Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argue, school as commonly conducted is irrelevant to the developmental and educational needs of Native American youth.

In this article we report a case study of a Native American student we call Peta, a pseudonym adapted from the name of Quahadi Comanche chief Peta Nocona (the student's given name was that of another chief of the Comanche tribe). We studied Peta during his process of producing a graphic text for his high school English class as part of a unit on identity that took place at the beginning of his senior year. His teacher assigned the text, a "life map," as a way to get students to trace important life events that would enable them to reflect on the experiences that had contributed to the formation of their identity at that point in their lives. Peta, who found school in general to be irrelevant, spent several hours on this task at home, suggesting an engagement with the project that was largely missing from his response to school assignments, given that halfway through the first semester of school, he dropped out to do work of greater personal urgency to him. To understand his volitional completion of his life map on his own time in the midst of a general disaffection with school, we inquire into the following research question: In what ways did the life map activity enable Peta to make connections to school that were often absent in conventional school tasks and that enabled him to draw on the cultural funds of knowledge from his community practices?

Coauthors' Positionality

The tale of the fish can never truly be told if the fisherman tells it. (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000, p. 168)

Given the history of exploitation, genocide, predation toward, and cultural desecration of Native American people by those of European descent, Indigenous scholars have argued that researchers from outside tribal communities ought to approach Native American research participants with respect and take pains to conduct studies for the benefit of participants and those they represent rather than for their personal career advancement (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). Some argue that research should only proceed under the advisement of tribal elders so as to respect tribal sovereignty (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Lomawaima, 2000). Our case study of Peta, while taking care to respect his cultural positioning, is complicated by some factors that compromise our ability to follow all precautions outlined by these scholars.

First, Oklahoma, the site of the research, has a limited history of reservation segregation, the site of greatest sensitivity in research on tribal populations (Lomawaima, 2000). Rather, Indigenous people coexist with other populations within the flow of everyday life while maintaining cultural traditions, with "Native America" serving as the state's official tourism slogan (albeit, some believe, in an exploitative manner) and over 60 tribal headquarters located within its borders. Inter marriage is common across racial lines, even if the history of the

region is characterized by broken treaties, the seizure of tribal lands, the forced march of Southeastern tribes to the Oklahoma territory over resistance from the Aboriginal prairie tribes, the marginalization of tribal governments and institution of federal and state governing entities, and other acts of exploitation, degradation, and oppression (see, e.g., Ehle, 1997; Jackson, 1995[1881]). The possibility of working with tribal elders was thus not available during the data collection, and efforts to locate Peta following his departure from school for a member check have proven futile: Internet searches did not locate him, and his high school alumni association had no address for him.

Second, as an 18-year old, Peta provided his own informed consent to participate in the research, which satisfied us at the time of the data collection that we could proceed with the investigation without tribal consultation and approval. In spite of our efforts to conduct this research in an ethical manner, we therefore undoubtedly fall short of the most stringent expectations for conducting this research, and are working with the *JAIE* as part of the vetting process for the conduct of a study based on what is undoubtedly a complex and highly sensitive matter of cultural representation.

We next provide an account of the positionality of the three coauthors of the study to provide a sense of our relationship with one another and to Peta as a Native American student in a primarily White educational setting. The first author is of mixed ethnic heritage, including Jewish grandparents who escaped Byelorussia (now Belarus) during the genocidal pogroms of early 20th century Eastern Europe and emigrated to New York City; Irish Catholic ancestors who emigrated to the U.S. (also New York) during the potato famine of the mid-1800s (like the pogroms, the famine is considered by current historians to be an episode of Catholic genocide and removal due to the increase in food exports by Protestants throughout the potato blight; see Woodham-Smith, 1992); and German ancestors who immigrated to the U.S. (New York) in the mid-1800s to escape poverty. He lived in Oklahoma for most of the 1990s, which was his first engagement with large Indigenous populations. His research has employed a Vygotskian perspective for two decades to understand the cultural underpinnings of human development, particularly in educational settings. This study represents the third article that includes attention to Peta (see also Smagorinsky, Zoss, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2005; Zoss, Smagorinsky, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2007). Prior studies in this line of inquiry have included other Native participants (Smagorinsky, 1997a, 1999; Smagorinsky & Coppock, 1995). In each case, the author has made every effort to understand the participant's worldview with a focus on such issues as an Indigenous teacher's discrepant notion of time management in a regimented school setting, an Indigenous student's use of dance as a vehicle for interpreting literature, and Peta's use of art to represent his cultural identity in the third author's English class.

The second author is a doctoral student at The University of Georgia as well as a full-time English teacher at Rockdale Career Academy, a charter high school outside Atlanta. Her lineage includes Choctaw on her maternal

grandfather's side (undocumented) and ethnicities from the British Isles (obscured by family instability), along with indeterminate origins following from the early departure in her life of her biological father. She has lived her whole life in five southern states outside any connection with Indigenous communities.

The third author was Peta's teacher during his junior and senior years of high school. She has Choctaw heritage on her father's side significant enough to qualify for a roll number in the Choctaw tribe, although his family chose not to register; her great grandfather was Irish Catholic and immigrated to the U.S. during the potato famine. She is a Native of Oklahoma who lived in the state for 31 years, including attendance at the University of Oklahoma for her undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees, all in English education. The Native American population in the school district she attended as a student has remained fairly stable at 31 percent since her high school graduation, and the high schools where she taught language arts averaged slightly over 10 percent. She entered doctoral studies following the year of data collection and now teaches at Colorado State University.

Theoretical Framework

We frame our study of Peta's composing process in terms of semiotics, issues that should inform Native American education, and the notion of educational "third spaces" that provide room for hybrid cultural practices in classrooms.

Semiotics

The field of semiotics provides an appropriate framework for considering Peta's drawing of his life map. From a semiotic perspective, meaning is communicated through culturally-appropriate signs, with a sign comprised of any material medium through which one can inscribe meaning, including ephemeral vehicles such as speech. In Western societies, language has long been privileged as the sign system with the greatest status that accords it an inherent superiority to other vehicles for making, representing, and communicating meaning. To the Soviet psychologists Luria and Vygotsky, for instance, speech served as the "tool of tools" (Cole, 1996, p. 108). In his work on multiple intelligences, Gardner (1983) argued that linguistic and mathematical/logical intelligence, while emphasized in U.S. schools, are but two of many ways of thinking available to people as they navigate their worlds. The consensus from work in the field of cultural semiotics is that speech-based communication, including writing, accrues its privilege on the basis of cultural preferences and traditions, rather than intrinsic qualities (Smagorinsky, 1995; Suhor, 1984; The New London Group, 1996; Wertsch, 1991; Witte, 1992).

From a semiotic perspective, any configuration of signs produces a text (Smagorinsky, 2001) and so is subject to a "reading," even in the absence of words. Art, for instance, presents spatial arrangements of signs orchestrated for beholders to perceive and attribute meaning to. In this conception *any sign system* has the potential for offering a meaningful configuration for creators to suggest

and perceivers to interpret. Wertsch (1991) argues that the potential of particular psychological tools or “mediational means” for enabling learners to construct meaning is *situational*. According to Wertsch’s view of the relative value of psychological tools, some are “viewed as being more appropriate or efficacious than others in a particular sociocultural setting” because they “strike their users as being appropriate or even . . . the only possible alternative, when others are, in principle, imaginable” (p. 124).

Wertsch (1991) argues that people employ a “tool kit” of mediators for constructing meaning, rather than a limited set of linguistic tools. (See Castagno and Brayboy [2008] for the potential of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), with which Wertsch and related scholars affiliate themselves, to inform culturally responsive schooling through its attention to the role of cultural norms in students’ acclimation to school expectations for academic work.) For schools to limit access to just a few of these tools ignores the complexity of human behavior and the diversity of approaches people have to solving problems.

Extending the metaphor, Smagorinsky & Coppock (1994) argue that people cannot simply carry the tool kit about and use the tools therein indiscriminately; rather, the value of the psychological tools comes through the way in which they are culturally sanctioned in particular situations. So while a compositional tool such as sculpture is legitimately employed to depict written texts in such settings as the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris — known as the “sermon in stone” because it provided a “readable” interpretation of the Bible for the illiterate masses of the early centuries of the second millennium C.E. — the same sort of interpretive text might be regarded as inappropriate as an interpretive medium in a school setting (Smagorinsky, 2009).

A semiotic perspective, however, suggests that if a tool enables the development of psychological growth in a learner—that is, if sculpting effectively “interprets” a story and leads to the construction of a meaningful interpretive text — it only has lesser value than speech in school because educational traditions grounded in Western values prevail in that setting (Smagorinsky, 2001). The hierarchical system that follows positions different sign systems above one another, privileging writing above all other meaning-making tools in core academic classes and minimizing the role and importance of other vehicles of expression and representation.

Native American Education Issues

Belgarde et al. (2009) argue that conventional Western schooling often excludes aspects of Indigenous students’ culture that could potentially help them engage with school learning. Instead of fostering these connections, however, schools impose the linear, detached, and mechanistic values of the European Enlightenment on all students, thus producing chasms between many students—including those from Indigenous cultures — and the school curriculum. As a consequence, these students are constructed in school settings as disaffected, indifferent, and apathetic, leading them to disengage with and often drop out of

school. We next review aspects of this problem that are especially germane to our study of Peta's life map drawing.

The Separation of Humans from Nature. Native cultures are, at their heart, oriented to the natural environment in ways that are absent from societies that derive their values from the European Enlightenment (Belgarde et al., 2009; Cajete, 1994; LoRé, 1998). Jacobs and Jacobs-Spencer (2001), for instance, distinguish their version of character education from that of mainstream character educators by stressing the learner's relationship with nature. They argue that schools

do not have policies that see human relationships with nature as dependent and morally reciprocal. More inclined toward individualism and mechanistic structures than community or holistic processes, the dominant worldview emphasizes economic utility and consumption rather than diversity and conservation. With such a priority, moral education is not about a commitment to life and its interconnections, but is merely another vehicle for enforcing conformity on behalf of economic outcomes. (p. vii; cf. Jacobs, 1998)

Belgarde et al. (2009) find that these different emphases are at the core of the dissonance that Native students often experience in U.S. schools. Native epistemologies hold that learning follows from observing the natural environment, that learning is often a spiritual experience, and that humility is a virtue. As such, the Western concept of education, which privileges linear thinking and a focus on competition, is contradictory to many Native students' self-image and belief systems (Beaulieu, Sparks, & Alonzao, 2005; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).

Jacobs and Jacobs-Spencer (2001) invoke the Lakota expression, *Mitakuye oyasin* (We are all related) as among the great awarenesses needed for effective character education. Like Jacobs and Jacobs-Spencer, Cajete (1994) sees a direct relation between the natural world and learning, one from which people and all worldly elements — the whole of the biota — are interconnected and interdependent (Allen, 1986). Christian societies that embrace Enlightenment values, however, tend to see people and nature as separate. As reported in Genesis 1:28 of the Old Testament, God instructed people to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." The difference between Indigenous and Western perspectives is clearly illustrated by 20th century French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's (1942) view that "A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral." Given the spirit life accorded to all earthly objects in many Indigenous worldviews, this belief reveals a separation of people from their natural surroundings and the subservience of nature to humans, suggesting the deep chasm between the orientations of European Americans and Native Americans in their conceptions of the natural world.

Schools' separation of humans from nature is one of many compartmentalizations that such institutions impose. The curriculum is separated

into discrete subject areas, teachers have areas of specialization, sentences are parsed into their component parts, eras are distinguished historically, and so on. LoRé (1998), in contrast, argues that Native American cultures emphasize interdependence, harmony, and synthesis. He notes that “The cultivation of all of one’s senses through learning how to listen, observe, and experience holistically through creative exploration is a highly valued philosophical approach to Native American education” (p. 199).

Emphasis on Linear, Written Thinking and Composing. Many Indigenous students find Western schools isolating due to the shift away from a holistic, intuitive, and community-centered thinking process with which they have been raised and are familiar (Belgarde et al., 2009). Schools that focus more on linear thinking and the written expression of knowledge devalue the type of meaning-making and expression Native students are often taught at home. As such, they feel distanced from the learning process and from the material they are studying. While some students eventually learn to “survive in two very different worlds” (Belgarde et al., 2009, p. 418), many do not and choose their Native identity over the one privileged in Western schools. (See Henze and Vanett [1993] and McCarty and Wyman [2009] for perspectives that question this strict bifurcation of identity.)

What is missing in scriptocentric schools is attention to other communication genres and media that are central to Native American cultures. In particular, notes Cajete (1994), a focus on linear writing overlooks art, oral storytelling, dance, music, and other diurnal and ceremonial ways through which Indigenous people express their thoughts, often in nonlinear ways. Some scholars even maintain that the imposition of writing on Native American students is an act of hegemony, at least as an exclusive medium of representation. Belgarde et al. (2009) argue that “Written language is viewed as the creation of the White society, one that has historically rejected them and used literacy against them in the form of treaties and other documents that cost them dearly” (p. 418), a perspective that potentially alienates students when writing provides the only medium available to them for expressive purposes in school assessment. LoRé (1998), arguing against writing as the solitary representative vehicle for students in school, asserts that “the ability to use language through storytelling, oratory and song” as opposed to strictly written uses of language “is highly regarded by most tribes as a primary tool for teaching and learning” (p. 199; cf. Hulan & Warley, 1999). (See collections of Native American authors that belie this perspective regarding the oppressive potential of writing, e.g., Allen [1989, 1996].)

Culturally responsive schooling would make learning through multiple sign systems more available to students by constructing “a visual learning environment within the classroom. Scholars suggest that teachers integrate the visual arts across the curriculum, design learning activities that allow students to observe, and use tools such as paper, markers, videos, and chalk” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 962). Simply allowing this medium, however, is insufficient unless instruction

explicitly makes connections to students' everyday lives so as to allow for "more authentic and real-life application of learning" (p. 962), particularly that which is anchored in community life and viewed from the perspective of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination without obscuring the role of racism in North American history. Doing so, argue the authors, will enable Indigenous perspectives to achieve appreciation on a level with other epistemologies and help to eradicate, or at least challenge, deficit views of cultural difference.

The Minoritization of Native American Students in School. McCarty (2002) argues that schools *minoritize* students by denying their cultural practices and constructing instruction and assessment in ways that diminish Indigenous students and their ways. As Moll (2000) and others have argued, schools impose White middle-class values on all students and overlook the ways of knowing that are available to students outside school, particularly those from non-White cultures that operate from different value systems. To Stuckey (1991), the marginalization of students' cultural practices — the minoritization of which McCarty (2002) speaks — constitutes an act of violence against adolescent Indigenous youth. Schools thus contribute to the reproduction of power relationships that govern society at large so as to diminish the kinds of cultural capital available to, and critical to, Native American youth in their lives outside school.

Creating Spaces for Indigenous Students in Mainstream Classrooms

Gutiérrez and Stone's (2000) account of the "third space" of classroom life suggests one resolution to the dilemmas facing Native American students in school. A classroom's third space provides a hybrid zone in which the first space (occupied by students and their discourse) and the second space (where the teacher's discourse dominates) meld, and conflict and difference are transformed to allow for new possibilities for learning. Belgarde et al. (2009) argue that "When there is no third space in the literacy classroom, students' funds of knowledge are marginalized or bracketed" (p. 424). To Gee (2002), success in school follows from finding a close match between students' home discourses and those privileged in school. Designing classrooms to provide for third spaces enables the likelihood that such matches become more readily available to a broader spectrum of students.

The notion of a third classroom space helps to address the problem identified by Henze and Vanett (1993) regarding the metaphor of "walking in two worlds," which they question because it glosses the complexity of cross-cultural transitions and transactions given that it "assumes that two distinct, readily identifiable worlds exist, and that the worlds are internally uniform" (p. 119). Cindy, the third author for this article and Peta's senior year English teacher, emphasized activity and the arts in ways out of step with her colleagues, who generally endorsed a Western cultural heritage approach to curriculum and instruction.

Teachers like Cindy, who provide third spaces in classrooms for students of diverse cultures, can help provide the mediation that Henze and Vanette argue

is not available to Indigenous students in many schools, especially those with monocultural emphases. A third space would expand the notion of “discourse” to include whatever resources students draw on from their community-based identities: oral storytelling, dance, nonlinear ways of thinking and representing ideas, art, and other media available in cultural practice. Our study of Peta’s life map production provides a look into the third space created by one teacher in a part of the country with a large Native American population with a history of disengagement with school.

Method

This research was funded by the National Council of Teachers of English Research Foundation to support a year’s ethnographic study of one high school English classroom in which the teacher encouraged and at times required the use of art for interpretive and expressive purposes. The study was not designed specifically to focus on Native American students at the time of conception and planning, but rather to provide an empirical basis for better understanding the role of artistic work in a curriculum formally dedicated to literature, composition, and language study. Our approach to analysis has relied on the extraction from this broad corpus of key events in which the arts played a role in student learning, although the data have proven rich enough for additional studies of writing processes (e.g., Smagorinsky, Daigle, O’Donnell-Allen, & Bynum, 2010). Our study of Peta’s life map construction is illustrative of this approach.

Researchers’ Roles during Data Collection

The class was taught by the third author and observed daily by the first author over the course of the year, allowing him to invest time in “hanging out” (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000, p. 164) and “living simultaneously in two worlds, that of participation and that of research” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1996, p. 113) so as to earn the trust of the class as a whole and the students who, like Peta, made themselves available for case studies. As a regular member of the class, he developed cordial relationships with many students. During small group activities he would often play a teaching role by assisting groups with their questions. He also taught the class whenever Cindy was absent and a substitute teacher was present, which occurred whenever Cindy or her three children got sick. His 14 years of public school teaching, along with the students’ knowledge of him as a university teacher and class member, allowed these classes to proceed according to Cindy’s plan.

Data Collection

Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) found that when as researchers who were cultural outsiders, they needed to abandon the “‘traditional’ interview format” and instead “have conversations with individuals about their ideas or ask them to recount particular experiences while a tape recorder was running” and “keep our mouths shut and listen deeply” (p. 167). Our study of Peta similarly relied on the

researcher's listening ability, rather than questioning tactics, by giving Peta a tape recorder for a think-aloud account of thought processes while carrying out the task of drawing a life map. The protocol began at school with Peta producing his life map in the company of the first author, while the third author taught the class. This session began as follows:

1st Author: Do you want to do this by yourself, or do you want me to sit with you? I will just hang out.

Peta: OK. We will give it a try and see if I'm comfortable with it.

After a brief period during which Peta drew and discussed one event he included on his map, he took his recorder home and completed his life map and protocol at home in his room. The protocol was thus situated (Smagorinsky, 1997b, 1998) rather than produced in a clinical setting.

In addition to the protocol, data came from classroom observations made by the first author. Field notes from these observations helped to provide an account of the instructional context of Peta's life map. These field notes were sent daily via email to Cindy for validation.

Data Analysis

The protocol that Peta produced while drawing his life map (totaling 4,073 words) was collaboratively analyzed by the study's first two authors. Through the collaborative coding of the protocol, we identified two major categories. The first category simply provides an inventory of the events that Peta talked about while considering what to include in his life map (see Table 1), and the second catalogues the aspects of Peta's cultural identity and social experiences revealed through his protocol (see Table 2). The tables list each subcode and the frequency with which it appeared in the protocol. We should note that the frequencies for each code are relatively low because he sifted through many experiences in order to generate his life map.

In Peta's protocol we identified three major subcategories of cultural and social experiences: references to his Native American culture, derogatory remarks about the school culture, and allusions to social experiences without a specific cultural orientation. We refer to the specific instances within these categories in our report of the findings of the study. Peta left school before providing us with a copy of his life map. We therefore only have his protocol in considering what sorts of thinking were engendered through his response to the assignment (see Table 3).

Context of the Investigation

We next present the context in which Peta produced his protocol based on the first author's field notes and Cindy's planning artifacts and input. Although these notes do not include findings from the protocol analysis, we consider this account of the setting to be a critical part of this report in that it details the instruction that Lexie designed. Even though Cindy's teaching was not specifically planned to

Table 1. Events not included in Peta's life map

Category	Frequency
No Memory of Event	
Birth	1
Ordinary Events	
Bike riding	1
Car drive	1
Elementary school	1
First dance	1
Friends	3
Granny	2
Pet story	1
Summers	1
Traumatic Events	
Dad runs over car	1
House break-in	1
Obnoxious classmate	1
Pet death	1
School disaffection	1

Table 2. Events included in Peta's life map

Category	Frequency
Cultural Experiences	
Hair cut off	2
Naming ceremony	3
Adolescent Experiences	
First girlfriend	2
Four-leaf clovers	3
Move to new city	2
Playing trombone	3
Stage experience	2
Tomboy friend	3

accommodate Indigenous students, her instruction met the criteria for culturally responsive schooling (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008) in terms of casting the broadest possible net to include students of wide a range of personal and cultural makeups. This description thus helps to situate his work on his life map and account for the dedication with which he approached a school task in ways that were acharacteristic compared with his usual degree of engagement with school. This account further outlines one culturally White teacher's instruction that deeply engaged one disaffected Native American student in schoolwork.

Table 3. Cultural identity and social experiences identified in protocol analysis

Category	Frequency
Native American Culture: Cultural Tools	
Drawing	1
Narrative	3
Nonlinear thought process	5
Native American Culture: Rituals and Responsibilities	
Leadership	4
Naming ceremony	1
School Culture	
Other students mindless	1
Schedule issues: Occupies time	1

Participant

Peta was a 12th-grade male, although was well behind in credit toward graduation. His heritage included the tribes of the Cherokee, Delaware, Kiowa, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho, and the European nationalities of the English, Irish, Scottish, and French. He stated throughout the research that his primary identity was as a Native American, and his appearance suggested this orientation: His deep copper skin and long black hair, typically tied in a ponytail, signaled his affiliation with his heritage and the people in the community who shared this identity.

Peta had a problematic relationship with school, having failed a number of classes, including Cindy's the previous year, due to excessive absences. Peta's absences, he related, followed from a combination of factors. He found his classmates' lack of engagement with school and what he constructed as their insincerity to be isolating and alienating. In conjunction with a mask that he produced for a project related to the life map that we focus on in this study (see Smagorinsky, Zoss, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2005; Zoss, Smagorinsky, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2007), he produced the following poem. We present it as a prose poem because he did not like to have people read his writing, preferring to read his work aloud to provide his own inflections, because, as he said, "People can look at this [writing] and perceive it differently than what I meant it."

With all of your nice boys' and girls' faces of innocence smiling and blushing, with such a lie that is thought not to be perceived and I have lost my innocence and I will refuse to play the drama of joy and misery for I am my own and the rolling fluid vines of my words with the pouring and beating drops of my mind raise up the rage from deep inside.

This intense expression of emotion typified the powerful way in which Peta engaged with opportunities to explore and represent his sense of self through artistic and written compositions. Such occasions were rare in school and

contributed to the lack of connection he felt with school and its priorities and practices. Many of the classes he took had no relevance for the serious interest he reported that he took in his Native American community and its activities. Peta was heavily involved in local Native American community life, to the extent that school often took time away from what he believed to be important.

Finally, Peta was working two part-time jobs to help with the family's finances. His father had left the family and his mother was ill, forcing Peta into an adult role at home that stood in contrast to the adolescent role he was expected to play in school. His feeling of being older, more mature, and more involved in his adult community further alienated him from the rank-and-file teenagers in his school whom he labeled as "zombies" drifting through school without meaning or intention. Peta indicated where his real passion lay when referring to his commitments outside school. At one point he said wearily, "I've got too much stuff to do. I am supposed to be so many different things. I am supposed to be a leader and all of that. That's my problem, I stay up too late. I can't get things done. Too much stuff going on. The whole world won't stop." These responsibilities far outweighed his commitment to his school obligations, and he ultimately made the choice to dedicate his energy to his community rather than the school.

In contrast with his general view that school provided a listless and uninspiring experience, Peta spent a great amount of time on schoolwork that enabled him to explore issues of personal and cultural identity. These projects included the poem and mask to which we have alluded and the life map that he produced for this study, all of which he spent many hours outside school on. Such occasions were rare, however, and midway through the first semester of his senior year, Peta left high school for good.

The Classroom Setting and Instruction Prior to the Life Map Activity

Peta was enrolled in the senior British Literature class taught by third author Cindy in the academic year 1995-6. The class met for 84 minutes on alternating days on the school's block schedule. School began on August 21, and the research encompassed the period of time extending through September 11 when Peta provided his think-aloud protocol while producing his life map.

The instruction leading up to the life map project included a set of overlapping activities that Cindy designed in relation to a unit on identity. Although the class was technically dedicated to the study of British Literature, and although most of her senior-year colleagues taught canonical literary works in chronological order, Cindy designed her curriculum around students' personal development as individuals and so included texts from outside the conventional progression "from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf." These texts included both formal works from published authors and texts produced by students in response to Cindy's prompts.

We next provide a description of the class and its activities leading up to the life map project. Although we describe each activity separately, in actual

practice Cindy used the block periods to interweave assignments so that they built upon and reinforced one another. From the first day of class, Cindy emphasized writing and composing as central activities. Students, along with Cindy, kept writer's notebooks, i.e., formally-bound books with blank, unlined pages used for exploratory writing, sketching ideas, composing poems, responding to various prompts, and otherwise using writing as a way to generate ideas in relation to the curriculum and classroom discussions.

Students also included selected pieces of writing in portfolios as a way to showcase what they considered to be their best work. The writing from which they selected their portfolio exhibits was stored in writing folders. As a preface to the emphasis on questions of identity, Cindy had the students spend the first day of class illustrating their folders with images and words that represented things that the students liked (front) and disliked (back), using magazines she had brought in to cut up for images when their own artistic abilities were insufficient.

Students had two opportunities to introduce themselves to Cindy. In a "Who Are You?" activity, students composed a letter, formal essay, video, or other text explaining who they were. They were also given the option to have a parent or other significant adult write a letter or prepare a video introducing the student to Cindy. She had students engage in an "I remember" activity in which they composed a cluster of childhood experiences using a web-like graphic organizer in their writers' notebooks. Then the students contributed one of their personal memories to a class cluster. The students next did a free-write about one of the details in their personal cluster. From this free-write they chose a "vivid line" that Cindy then composed into a class poem based on the students' memories that she collated and displayed on the wall.

In response to the reading selections, students kept a reading log and participated in response-based discussions about literary excerpts. Reading logs were kept as double-column journals in which students were encouraged to record affective responses, generate questions about the text, or compose constructive responses to the reading. Students discussed these entries in small groups and generated a topic and a discussion question for the whole class. These topics and questions then shaped large group discussions that followed.

Cindy's emphasis on issues of identity was manifested in continual attention to the students' childhood, which she attributed to the fact that she was the mother of three and the daughter of a kindergarten teacher. Cindy often referred to her own children during class as a reference point for her own life experiences and encouraged her students to recall events from their past as a way of considering who they were and where they were headed. She continually prompted them to consider the importance of the past in shaping a person's identity, such as when she had the students bring in baby pictures as the basis of discussions prior to their production of their life maps.

The literature leading into the life map project revolved around the motif of identity that Cindy had focused on with the writing folders and introductory activity. All of the literature discussed by the students reinforced her goal of

having the students reflect on their identities. She began each class with a “thought for the day” designed to promote self-reflection through journal writing and discussion. She also showed an excerpt from Thornton Wilder’s play *Our Town* (1938) to help them consider the influence of the past on the present and followed their discussion with reading log entries and subsequent small group discussions and presentations of a given set of poems and literary excerpts. These selections were by authors alienated as a consequence of their heritages in their cultural milieus (e.g., Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl* [1947/1991] Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* [1952]) and centered on issues of personal growth and identity. Cindy’s role was to provide prompts and rely on the students to generate discussions that followed from the intersection of their reading and personal experiences. She wanted them to find meaning at the nexus of their life experiences, their reading, and the compositions they produced.

The Life Map Activity

The life map activity required students to draw a life pathway and illustrate it with pictures representing significant events from their lives. Lexie provided a model from a student from a previous year and explained the symbolism of each element the student included. She stressed that the items might not be something “that would make the nightly news” but that were important to the student. In doing so she revealed her belief in the importance of the ordinary and everyday, a theme that recurred in her teaching. Lexie then described a life map she’d done for herself and talked about some of the images, recommending that the students use their writer’s notebook to list events they might draw about and use on their maps.

Findings of the Protocol Analysis

We present our findings by first reviewing the events that Peta considered in his life map, then outlining the areas of his Native American culture that he reflected on as part of his process of composing his text, and finally considering the emotional experiences afforded to him by some aspects of the task.

Inventory of Events

Peta’s thought process for producing his map involved what we called *sifting through experience* in order to identify appropriate events for inclusion. The following unedited series illustrates this process. (All names or people and places are pseudonyms.)

Thought process goes bouncing around. I am thinking about my granny, and stuff. I love my granny. What I said, everything goes right on by. And I can’t really say everything I think because it goes too fast. My friend, Tracy. She was cool. I can remember playing swords with her ballet bars on the back. They had those little knobs on the end for joints and stuff. And I was swinging real hard and I missed, and the knob went flying off. And it crashed her mom’s window. We couldn’t play swords with them anymore, but I really didn’t get in trouble for breaking the glass, which was pretty cool. We used to play “Clue” together all the time. She was really the one I really liked

playing with more often. I had a friend named Ned Tang who lived up the street. He was a jerk. He broke my toys and stole from me and stuff. He was a loudmouth. He was my greatest butt in the world. 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8 [counts items included in his life map]. I guess I won't put my caps on there [the life map]. That wouldn't make any sense. But I will leave Tracy up there. The stuff I have about Tracy, that is when I was living on Lahoma. Lahoma Street. (Yawn). I spent a lot of time with my granny. The only thing that really stands out is her throwing up her pants after she had sown them, and one leg was longer than the other, and she had sewed some of the pants. Held them up, looked at them, looked at me, went "whoop!" She threw them up in the air and started laughing, and I was cracking up rolling on the ground. She spent so much time on them. She was funny, so light hearted. I was too serious.

This sifting process produced an inventory of notable events from his life, including those he considered traumatic and did not include in his drawing. Table 1 lists 14 events that he chose not to incorporate into his drawing. One, his birth, "is not a memory" because he lacked sufficient consciousness to recall it, and so was rejected. He further decided not to include what we categorized as "ordinary events": occasions that had little special significance to him such as riding his bicycle, mundane experiences, summer vacation, and so on.

Finally, Peta chose not to include disturbing events from the past. Early in his protocol, for instance, Peta said of an incident when his father mistakenly backed his van over his toy car, "I didn't put that on my sketch because I didn't want to put down traumatic experiences." He also referred to a series of pets that died, including a cat that his father had accidentally let slip into the clothes drier before he dried a set of jeans. Peta suggested through other reflections that appeared in his protocol that his reticence in including difficult events from his life indicated his lack of comfort with his classmates and the possibility that he wished to present a positive image to his teacher and classmates through his work on this assignment.

Events Included in the Life Map

Table 2 indicates that Peta included two types of events in his life map: key, if not uniquely cultural, events such as moving to a new city and having significant relationships and experiences; and cultural experiences, in particular his Native American naming ceremony and the ritual of having his long hair cut. We focus on his Native American orientation for the remainder of our analysis, organizing our findings according to the rites and rituals that initiated him into his Indigenous community and the cultural tools that he employed for the life map and other projects he referred to during his protocol.

Native American Cultural Issues

In considering what to include in his life map, Peta said, "I guess school kind of makes me upset. Mainly, I realize how many people there are just so mindless. . . . I was a student zombie at school." We understand this last remark to be Peta's

voicing of a typical student's school demeanor, and possibly his own disaffection in his classmates' company. School, he felt, took time away from what he believed to be important. Early in the protocol, he expressed fatigue and frustration with having "to be in a school all day and going to work, [I] barely have time to do anything." What he felt he ought to be doing instead concerned his active life in his Native American community, which he pursued with such deep engagement that he decided that school was irrelevant to what he found meaningful in life. We next illustrate how the life map enabled Peta to use Native American cultural tools as part of his composing process, and helped him draw on his cultural knowledge derived from his experiences with rituals and responsibilities central to his tribal life.

Cultural Tools. To produce his life map, Peta drew on the cultural tools of drawing, narrative storytelling, and nonlinear thinking in conjunction with one another. Peta explained this process as follows during his protocol:

I guess most of the stuff I think about is anything I hear, I say it over in my mind in a voice. I don't know if this is what you want or anything [addressed to the researcher]. Basically it is what is going on. I am telling you a story as I write or draw. I guess I could tell stories, and it does make sense. Stories are always told with drawings more — at least to me they are. That is how the entire Indian history was — were all is with stories. Sit there and tell stories, and I guess you would have little drawings on pieces of leather and stuff. I guess drawings are more suited to storytelling than actual thought processes. I guess thought process is storytelling — who knows. I know if I was writing, my thinking wouldn't really be much as to what I am writing, but much more broad, and then I would sort of figure out words that just kind of fit in. And go with the flow. . . . Expression is a way to enlightenment or something. You learn more from expression than just sitting there thinking.

Peta's emphasis on the nonlinear aspects of thinking was further expressed when he briefly complained about the requirement that the life map be sequential: "I don't like the idea of this life map being linear either. It doesn't make sense. No way in life is linear." His approach to the task illustrates Zepeda's (1995) views on the benefits of students bringing themselves and their worlds into their school expression in what she calls a "continuum of literacy [in which] the young writer reaches deep into a past, a past he or she shares with a community — a past thousands of years old" (p. 11) with which to infuse school-based expression. Although he found the linear notion of a life path to be limiting, the task nonetheless enabled him to draw on both his personal life and tribal ways of knowing to produce his map.

Rituals and Responsibilities. Peta described two aspects of his life in his Native American community: his naming ceremony and his responsibilities as a "leader," as he said, in tribal activities. Early in the protocol he said,

I can kind of remember, but I would be about a year old, and my dad, he is real into the Indian religion, and there was this naming ceremony. It is not my given name, but my given name is [Peta Bacha] which is on my birth

certificate, and the Indian given name is [inaudible]. You have got this tepee, and you have several members of your clan and sometimes friends and relatives, and they take you into the tepee, and they have songs going on and prayer. And periodically you would go out — you would leave and walk around the tepee and just sort of experience what is going on such as — you would notice things such as any wildlife that is around, the weather, anything that happens to be going on. . . . [On the life map] I do a little sketch of that. My dad holding me with a whole bunch of people inside there. When they came out, and then they came back in, they gave me a name which is [inaudible]. I can't remember the exact translation, but it had something to do with running water [because] there was a river nearby. Something that was going on at the river, I guess, something that caught their attention.

Based on the fact that Peta dropped out of school shortly after completing this assignment, and the fact that he not only completed it for his teacher but also produced a protocol for the first author, we infer that the opportunity to incorporate his cultural experiences into his schoolwork was both rare and welcome, if remote from his present experiences. The purpose of the life map, however, was to delve deeply into childhood in order to explore the range of experiences that contributed to a personal sense of identity, and so we read a certain significance of this event in Peta's construction of himself as having a tribal identity signified by the rituals of his naming ceremony and its grounding of his perspective in the natural world in the third space afforded by Cindy's classroom.

Emotional Mediation

A final area that we review in our analysis of Peta's life map production is the role of what we call *emotional mediation*, a phenomenon that we have observed in Cindy's students from both this year's ethnography and studies from other years in her classroom (e.g., Smagorinsky, 1997b). Emotional mediation occurs when a composing process enables a learner to consider, regulate, and express emotions that are central to their emerging senses of self. During the protocol Peta said,

The other day I was driving and, or I wasn't driving, I was actually in the car. My mom was driving and I was riding. And I just stared to the, I don't know, the scenery, farmlands going by, and I just had this really, really cool ideas just flowing, popping in and out, just going on. Too many distractions, pretty much, to work on it. I came up with a goal that I was wanting to do was start writing, I guess, a poetry book or something that is based on the emotions or something, and having maybe either an intro and ending pertaining to basic emotions in general. Talking about the primordial aspects of it and stuff. Last year, I pretty much, I did a pretty good job of it. Just expressing emotion in poem and that did take me about two or three weeks or so to write 2-1/2 pages or so. I figuring, you know, maybe each basic emotion could be about two pages. And have like a poem for each subject expressing that kind of emotion through that poem, be very general, and I would kind of like to keep it general, not make it too broad or anything, or too specific. Anyway, I had told you that I was real lazy. You know the

thoughts that I was having and how, it was one of the first actually I thought about my thoughts, actually thinking, usually thinking and just let it flow and all that stuff. You are not really thinking about what you are thinking, kind of. You know just thinking, if that makes sense at all. And I realize that since I have been, at least up to now as far as, I guess I have been doing this [working on the mask and protocol] for about over an hour so, around an hour. Haven't been too much track of time. When I am actually having to talk about what I am thinking, I start thinking more about what I am talking about rather than just thinking as to where, you know, letting my thoughts go to wherever. Although they do still kind of wherever. They just jump into my conversation every once in a while. But nearly as much as is going on in my head. I guess when I am thinking about what I am thinking, then I realize what I am thinking and when I am talking about what I am thinking I start thinking about what I am talking about and things become more, they depend on each other. When I was working on my free write earlier today, actually it was yesterday, consider it as one. That's my problem, I stay up too late. I can't get things done. Anyway, writing about what was going on in my childhood and stuff, bringing back old emotions and stuff. I was getting angry and I was getting defensive and if somebody would have come up to me while I was writing and try and say something about me, I probably would have popped or something. There are things coming back.

This portion of the protocol reveals Peta reflecting on the metacognitive facets of thinking aloud while composing, sifting through experience, reconsidering and reformulating plans, expressing frustrations, considering the quality of his thought processes, and engaging himself with the role of emotions in his life. Goodlad (1984) has characterized schools as having a "flat" affect for both students and teachers (p. 108), and Castagno and Brayboy (2008) review a number of studies that emphasize the importance in Culturally Responsive Schooling for caring relationships between teachers and students. Attention to the affective experiences of Indigenous students in schools, however, appears limited to pathological characterizations such as attention to "mental disorders" (see, e.g., Beiser & Attneave, 1982). We see tasks such as the life map as potentially helping students increase their emotional engagement with schoolwork through the affordances of activities that enable them to draw on critical life experiences under the guidance of a caring teacher and semiotic curriculum to make meaning through their engagement with materials centered on questions of personal and cultural identity rooted in deeper investments in significant cultural practices.

Discussion

It has been the convention of most schools to treat the arts of narrative — song, drama, fiction, theater, whatever — as more "decoration" than necessity. . . . Despite that, we frame the accounts of our cultural origins and our most cherished beliefs in story form, and it is not just the "content" of these stories that grips us, but their narrative artifice. (Bruner, 1996, p. 40)

Bruner's (1996) work on narrative inquiry was not developed specifically with Native American communities in mind, but characterizes Peta's orientation to

the world well. Bruner contends that schools emphasize paradigmatic, or analytic, thinking at the expense of the narrative mode. Given that Peta completed the life map activity at home, layering the think-aloud protocol on top of it, while ignoring most other school work, we can infer that it served as a key means of expression and meaning-making for him. This sort of engagement was absent in most of his schooling to the point where he dropped out soon after completing this assignment.

The life map, even with a linear form that he rejected, enabled Peta to explore his experiences for the purposes of personal growth, embody his ideas artistically, and think narratively and without the constraints of linear requirements. These opportunities were rarely available to him in a school where many classes emphasized the learning of Western culture and its facts, even though the fields of literature, history, science, and others are often built around stories. Peta's protocol reveals the manner in which the life map assignment created a third space that both met Cindy's requirements for engaging thematically with the literature curriculum and enabled him to sift through significant life experiences that, while reduced to symbols on the life map, involved his recall and reconstruction of his life narrative — one that he explicitly tied to his Indigenous culture's rituals, history, and means of embodying and expressing experience — in a school task. Along with the identity mask — itself infused with cultural symbols and narratives — that he produced in conjunction with his life map, the identity unit embedded in the British Literature curriculum enabled Peta to engage in one of the relatively few meaningful academic experiences that he reported from his life in school.

Cindy's decision to teach the class thematically, and with the narratives of students' lives as central texts in explorations of their identity, appeared to provide Peta with an opening into English studies, although not sufficiently to keep him from leaving school as a consequence of his overwhelming feelings of alienation from the curriculum and his classmates' lack of urgency in their school lives. We see Peta's think-aloud as suggesting some possibilities for Culturally Responsive Schooling designed and implemented by White teachers in third spaces that allow for Indigenous perspectives to inform Native students' textual expressions and help use their cultural traditions as the basis for their engagement with conventional school curricula.

This study contributes to the body of work on culturally responsive schooling, detailing one teacher's practice in relation to one disaffected student and demonstrating the potential of a semiotic curriculum that is linked to students' home and community ways of knowing and producing representational texts. Although it was not designed as a study of instruction specifically suited to Indigenous ways of knowing and acting, it suggests that mainstream teachers whose praxis falls outside the linear, competitive, mimetic norm may provide educational opportunities that continue to evade them in the routine conduct of school. Along with other practices we have documented from Cindy's class that enable composing across sign systems (e.g., Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen,

1998; Smagorinsky, Cameron, & O'Donnell-Allen, 2007; and other research referenced in this article), this study provides an illustration of how instruction was designed and orchestrated and how Peta found opportunities for meaningful engagement with tasks that allowed him to draw on his own cultural resources. Such teaching has potential for contributing one exemplar to the growing body of work on teaching that provides new spaces for classroom participation in which students representing a wide range cultures and dispositions may fruitfully find themselves in meaningful acts of academic composition.

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