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Peace-Building in Indian Country: "Indian Education for All"

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- This article examines Montana's effort to implement
- legislation "Indian Education for All," which is intended
- to help all Montanans learn about the historical and
- contemporary contributions and achievements of Montana's
- Native people, in light of peace-building. It describes three
- community projects developed by the Montana Writing
- Project to contribute to implementation efforts and peace
- activism in these matters. Examined are relevant theories of
- peace education: "Indian Education for All" legislation, the
- Montana Writing Project as a site of the National Writing
- Project involved in Project Outreach efforts, and difficulties
- encountered in engaging this work. Participant writing
- and photographs are included as illustrations of work
- accomplished.

Our nation was born in genocide when it embraced the doctrine that the original American, the Indian, was an inferior race. Even before there were large numbers of Negroes on our shores, the scar of racial hatred had already disfigured colonial society. From the sixteenth century forward, blood flowed in battles over racial superiority. We are perhaps the only nation which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe out its indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a national crusade. Indeed, even today we have not permitted ourselves to reject or to feel remorse for this shameful episode. Our literature, our films, our drama, our folklore all exalt it.... It is this tangled web of prejudice from which many



Americans now seek to liberate themselves, without realizing how deeply it has been woven into their consciousness. — Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (110)

We are the great-grandchildren of Sand Creek and Wounded Knee.

We are the veterans of the Indian wars. We are the sons and daughters of the walking dead. We have lost everyone.

What do we indigenous people want from our country?

We stand over mass graves. Our collective grief makes us numb.

We are waiting for the construction of our museum.

— Sherman Alexie, from "Inside Dachau" *The Summer of the Black Widows* (120)

True peace is not merely the absence of tension. It is the presence of justice.

— Martin Luther King, Jr. from a 1956 sermon given shortly before he went to trial in the midst of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (Mason)

Introduction

The land we live on once supported millions of Native American people. As Martin Luther King, Jr. indicates in the first epigraph above, those who came to be called "Indians"¹ were forcibly removed, starved to death, killed by the scores in order that Euro-Americans and consequent others could move in and enjoy American abundance. Although we, or our families and relatives, may not directly have participated in Native American genocide and ongoing acts of racist oppression toward Indian peoples, all non-Native Americans have benefited and continue to benefit from a legacy of Indian removal and holocaust, about which Spokane/Coeur d'Alene author Sherman Alexie reminds readers. The fact that land was "opened to discovery" by multiple acts of violence is an inheritance from which every non-Native American resident profits in some way. Peace-building in Indian Country (and everywhere in America is Indian Country) requires that we try to understand our violent tendencies as a nation, "own up" to the ugly facts of American history and contemporary Indian policy, which



continues to hinder Indian sovereignty, and work for reconciliation with Indian peoples. As privileged benefactors, Americans have a responsibility to work for justice and equity, which King claims is prerequisite for peace, in solidarity with indigenous people who are everywhere among us.²

Indian Education for All

In 1972, Montana—the state in which I live, teach and direct the Montana Writing Project (MWP), an affiliate of the National Writing Project (NWP)—ratified what is considered to be one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. It explicitly advocates human rights and environmental protections, and instantiates an ethics of peace-making and peace-building (Montana Code and Constitution). In it, the State pledged to recognize “the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians” and committed itself in its “educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity.” With twelve distinct Indian nations, seven reservations, over eight percent of the population, it would seem that the Native presence in our state would be hard to ignore. Yet, for many years, despite constitutional assurances, Montana’s American Indians and their contributions have been largely invisible in our schools and universities, including those located on, next to, or near reservations.

This has had unfortunate repercussions for both Indian and non-Indian students at every level. Because their cultural backgrounds receive little consideration—in either classroom content or pedagogies—Indian students often feel alien, unwelcome, and powerless in the classroom. Approximately 10% of Montana’s high-school enrollment is American Indian students, yet American Indians represent 24% of high-school dropouts. Between 2001- 2004, Montana’s American Indian students completed high school at an average rate of 62.9%, while their white counterparts’ average completion rate was 87.1%.³ Concomitantly, non-Indian students have small chance to learn about important aspects



of Montana’s identity. Continued ignorance of Indian issues and influences perpetuates harmful prejudices.

Unfortunately, lack of instructional regard for Native American students and curricula is not exceptional to Montana (Starnes). Although the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), for example, passed a resolution on Native American literature in 1978 stating “that programs in teacher preparation be encouraged to include resources, materials, and methods of presenting Native American literature and culture,” little attention has been paid nationally to teaching Native American literatures, both oral and written, or cultures until quite recently.⁴ In Montana, it was not until 2004 with a lawsuit brought against the State that our Supreme Court ruled that the constitutional guarantee of “a basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools” must include programs to implement the provision that recognized Indians’ cultural heritage and committed the State to making their cultural preservation a goal of Montana’s education system. An outcome of the lawsuit was a new definition of quality education that includes what has become known as “Indian Education for All” (IEFA) and a 2005 legislative appropriation to help school districts meet this definition of quality. “The twin hopes of Montana’s constitutional obligation—‘Indian Education for All,’” writes Denise Juneau, Director of Indian Education in Montana’s Office of Public Instruction, are that “Indian students will feel themselves welcomed when they see themselves reflected in their school hallways” and curricula, and that “negative stereotypes will be replaced by an accurate understanding of Indian history and the federal government’s trust duty” (3). IEFA is the first educational policy of its kind in the country. Although efforts to improve education for and about American Indian peoples are underway in other states, Montana is the first state that is engaged in such a comprehensive curriculum revision for all public school students.



One projected outcome of IEFA will be to help alleviate the disparate American Indian dropout rate in Montana. Janet Robideau, a member of the Northern Cheyenne Nation and director of Indian People's Action (IPA) in Helena, MT writes that "Inadequate education, a comparative absence of Indian teachers, harassment and discrimination leave American Indian students poorly supported in our schools and more likely to drop out." A long-term hope for IEFA is that as more American Indian students graduate, these students will return to the public school system as teachers (Applied Research Center par. 4).

As part of this endeavor, MWP has developed partnerships and programs designed to implement the promise of reconciliation, justice and peace inherent in Montana's IEFA law. In professional development programs for writing teachers and in school- and community-based writing projects, MWP has practically engaged Mary Rose O'Reilley's pressing question: "Is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing [and hurting] each other?"⁵ by examining writing and teaching strategies that might motivate rhetorical efficacy toward peace rather than continued systemic and individual violence against Indian peoples. Participation, commitment, and "rhetorical listening" (Ratcliffe) across the cultural divides have been our primary tools to bridge the gulf between Native and non-Native lifeways. While the roads have not been easily traveled, we have made forward progress in our efforts. In the remainder of this article, I overview theories of peace education that motivate the work, describe MWP's local translations of NWP goals and the partnerships we have developed to accomplish peace-building necessary to implement IEFA, offer words and images of participants that tell the story, discuss the challenges we have faced, and offer some tentative conclusions about peace-building, writing and teaching in Indian Country.

Theoretical Rationale

Strategies gleaned from theories of peace education have been critical in MWP attempts at peace work in Indian Country. Peace educators



have outlined possibilities for rhetorically approaching problems of violence through three efforts: peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace-building (Harris & Morrison 11), which I discuss as they apply to community writing projects and rhetorical education. Specifics are outlined below and illustrated in later sections.

Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping aspires to "negative peace," or the absence of conflict and violence (Galtung), and mirrors peace-through-strength policies followed widely where governments of nation-states and the United Nations invest billions of dollars in defense, military personnel and prisons to provide so-called "security" for citizens by threat of force to deter violence (Harris & Morrison). In academic settings, peacekeeping pedagogies involve conflict and violence prevention strategies intended to create safe, predictable and orderly learning environments. Generally, we know these as preemptive policies outlined on course syllabi such as criteria for student conduct codes; attendance and grading expectations; requisite number of pages and drafts in assignment descriptions; font size specifications and spacing requirements; and articulated expectations for conferences and peer response groups.

Peacemaking

Peacemaking is effort toward conflict resolution. Peacemaking pedagogies teach conflict resolution techniques so individuals learn to manage their own clashes constructively. In writing/rhetoric education, an example is development of "conflict resolution and mediation" essay assignments such as those described by Nancy Chick. Chick advocates blending alternative stances to emphasize conflict resolution, mediation, dialogue, search for common ground among what may seem like polar opposites to find outcomes with which opposing sides might agree (par. 2). Drawing on Costanzo, Chick develops writing guidelines that advocate a peacemaking stance. These include: 1) examining ways in which language represents conflict; 2) learning strategies for focused,



attentive listening and problem solving; 3) seeking to understand positions of conflicting sides; 4) clarifying foundational partisan⁶ interests; and 5) appreciating situated concerns, both immediate and long-range. Writers invent new options that note complexities represented in conflicting positions and offer solutions that attempt to discover common ground, a central point that might bridge extreme distances in a debate, as alternative to the status quo of taking opposing sides on argumentative questions-at-issue (Costanzo 8-9).

Peacemaking stances centrally involve the art of rhetorical listening necessary to mediation and conflict resolution. Described by Ratcliffe, rhetorical listening strategizes interpretive invention to engage spoken and written texts by supplementing reading, writing, speaking, and silence as rhetorical art and code for cross-cultural conduct ("Rhetorical Listening" 198). Ratcliffe discusses eavesdropping, listening metonymically, and listening pedagogically as approaches, and presents these in terms of cultural logics, stances, and dominant interpretive tropes (Rhetorical Listening). Rhetorical listening as peacemaking occurs when listeners invoke both their capacity and their willingness (1) to promote an understanding of self and other that informs our culture's politics and ethics, (2) to proceed from within an accountability logic, not from within a defensive guilt/blame sense of responsibility, (3) to locate identification in discursive spaces of both commonalities and differences, and (4) to analyze claims that accentuate commonalities and differences and the cultural logics within which they function ("Rhetorical Listening" 204; Rhetorical Listening 26). Rhetorical listening mobilizes peacemaking as it motivates rhetors toward understanding and empathy and gives us effective means to make peace when competing claims arise among individuals, groups, cultures, and nations.

Peace-Building

Peace-building, virtually absent from professional education discussions, involves building capacity for peace—constructing



desire to learn how nonviolence can provide a foundation for a just and sustainable future (Galtung, Jacobsen & Brand-Jacobsen)—what Galtung calls "positive peace" to mean peace plus justice (2). Peace-building promotes standards of human rights and social justice, living in balance with nature and providing meaningful participation to citizens in their government. Peace-building is proactive, seeks to avoid violence and conflict as solutions to problems, and diverges from peacekeeping and peacemaking, which respond to violent situations to try to stop them (Harris & Morrison 8-12). Peace-building begins with rhetorical action—with identification and critique of structures and conditions that sustain social inequities, injustices, violence and war, and seeks discursive alternatives that foster real-world resolutions to violence and injustice. Peace-building entails "any exchange of ideas intended to diminish conflict among persons in interpersonal or public relationships" (Troester & Mester 422).

Critical rhetorical analyses of peace-building are studied by communications scholar Ellen Gorsevski who "explores the interstices of rhetoric and non-violence as they play out in global political conflicts" and "demonstrates the ways that nonviolent theory can complement rhetorical theory, expanding it to serve as a mode of political interaction and intervention" (12). Gorsevski acknowledges that rhetoric mimics peace-building "when it exists in the spirit and context of promoting justice and human rights" (179).

Drawing on principles of Bondurantian "propaganda," Gorsevski demonstrates the peace-building capacity of persuasion by "reading" Martin Luther King, Jr's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" to illustrate how King promotes principles of love, peace and nonviolence. Gorsevski shows how King addresses misconceptions and misgivings his adversaries hold; educates them and the public about strategies of nonviolent action; clearly states his objective; reveals nonviolent tactics to inform detractors; draws up ethical, moral, and legal arguments on the side of nonviolence; invokes the democratic ideal of "human



rights”; reveals injustices of those who oppose nonviolence; educates the audience in how to read anew events of recent history; remains free from any pejorative connotations; exudes compassion—even for one’s adversary; demonstrates a fervent desire for mutual understanding; and focuses on and appeals to justice and human rights (180-81). Such approaches make spaces for marginalized voices of other sides both to speak and to be heard, and open possibilities for peace-building under conditions of angry, perhaps violent disruptions.

Peace Education: Project Outreach Work of the Montana Writing Project

The mission of the NWP is “to improve the teaching of writing and improve learning in the nation’s schools” (NWP “About NWP”). Writing Project sites establish partnerships between postsecondary institutions and local area school districts to offer high-quality professional development programs for educators. MWP also belongs to a multi-year NWP initiative known as “Project Outreach,” which promotes efforts “to increase access to its programs, insure relevance of those programs, and increase the diversity of its leadership” for teachers of students living in poverty (Fox). Project Outreach: developed out of concern that writing projects, like many organizations, grow through social networks that are economically and culturally accented.... Project Outreach supports inquiry into writing projects’ patterns of invitation, publicity, subject matter of programming, leadership identification and support, as well as the informal conversations, meetings, and locations of its work [to identify and alter] socially sedimented practices [which] may lead to a homogeneous organization that reproduces itself (Fox).

Project Outreach is a direct effort to make and build peace as local writing project sites investigate discursive and material means to alter organizational practices that support social inequities and injustices.



Through sustained inquiry, MWP examined how our local practices unwittingly affected “access, relevance, and diversity” in ways that negatively impacted our efficacy in implementing IEFA through writing professional development and programs. MWP discovered that access to and relevance of our programs in light of Indian issues of concern were a key barrier to increasing diversity in our leadership, to implementing IEFA, and to fostering MWP’s peacemaking and peace-building efforts. For example, MWP’s service area is geographically one of the largest in the NWP network as we serve the entire state—the fourth largest in the country. Montana’s twelve Indian nations are located on seven reservations—Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Blackfeet, Flathead (consolidated Salish, Pend d’oreille and Kootenai tribes), Fort Peck (Assiniboiné and Sioux), Fort Belknap (Assiniboiné or Nakoda and Gros Ventres), and Rocky Boy’s (Chippewa-Cree)⁸ in fairly remote areas far distant from Missoula where MWP is headquartered at the University of Montana (U.M.). For teachers who work with Native students, traveling to U.M. for teacher professional development creates undue hardship, financial expense, and, for Native teachers, the likelihood of humiliation due to rampant anti-Indian bias and harassment in off-reservation locales—all which create obstructions to access. In order to enact peace-motivated work we had to lower barriers to access. In the next section, I describe how this occurred.

MWP School-Community Partnership with Blackfeet Community Tribal College, Browning, MT: A Case Study

When I interviewed in 2000 for the position I now hold as Director of Montana Writing Project, my soon-to-be colleague Debra Magpie Earling (Salish/German), the only Native American professor in the English Department, asked me what my plan was for helping Native students to succeed in teacher education. At the time, I didn’t have a plan. However, I listened intently to her heart-wrenching stories about Native students who had deep desire to earn a teaching certificate so they might go back to their reservations to teach, but who had been thwarted in their attempts because they struggled to pass the



standardized “Praxis” test required at that time for entrance into the School of Education. Even without a plan, however, as a critical feminist theorist and peace activist, I understood the ways in which cultural identities accent academic success. When I was hired, I committed to do what I might to create more successful opportunities for Native students interested in teacher education. My determination went for naught in early years because the only Native student I encountered was a brilliant young man who did not need any help to pass tests. From a family of means, he had completed his undergraduate degree at Columbia and then played tennis professionally. When we met, he had recently ridden horseback solo from Canada to Mexico, a “personally life-altering trip,” and had decided “to give something back” to his community; he wanted to teach. He was a brilliant writer, a gifted teacher, but after a few certification courses, he determined that his desire to teach would best be served by pursuing a career as a professional singer/songwriter because unlike the students he encountered in public schools, “The audience actually listens to what I have to say.”

A few things dawned on me after working with this accomplished young man. First was the realization that a field-of-dreams “Build it and they will come” approach was not by itself going to increase diversity in my classes. Next was that Native students weren’t registering for my classes because their academic pursuits were likely being derailed somewhere earlier. I would need to intervene far sooner in their educational endeavors if they were to land eventually in any of my university classes. Finally, I learned that the university can be an alien place for many Indians. In talking with Native students on campus, I realized that their experiences often ring similarly to those bell hooks describes in “Learning in the Shadow of Race and Class,” a memoir about her undergraduate years at a predominantly white woman’s college and at Stanford University. hooks comes to understand that poor students of color are welcome at institutions of higher learning only if they are willing to surrender memory, to forget the past, where



they come from, their families and homes, and claim the assimilated experience offered at the university as the only worthwhile and meaningful reality. For most Indian students, that price is far too high, family and home place far too important. It occurred to me that if MWP wanted to be an agent for peace and justice, we would need to travel outside of our university comfort zone and meet Indian people in their communities where the risk of discomfort was ours, not theirs, to bear. With that realization began MWP collaborations with the Blackfeet Nation’s tribal college, Blackfeet Community College (BCC), in Browning, MT, approximately a 4-hour drive north of Missoula.

With the aid of MWP teacher-consultant Laurie Smith Small-Waisted Bear (Lakota), who then taught at Heart Butte School on the Blackfeet reservation and who acted as our cultural guide by making primary contacts at the tribal college, MWP began to offer professional development in writing and teacher education in Browning. Our first program served pre-service teachers who were taking general education classes at BCC with a plan to transfer to UM for professional classes once they passed “Praxis” and had been admitted to the School of Education. Their primary goal for taking that class was to learn academic writing well enough to pass the “Praxis”—a goal we never achieved because of divergent understandings between our views of academic writing and those with whom we collaborated at the tribal college. We did learn much about the specificities required of peace education in this community context through that class, however; a summary of this learning follows:

- Peacekeeping strategies support effective learning. e.g., clearly analyze features of genres of academic writing with students to demonstrate expectations; practice “reading like writers.” (Bomer; Ray; Ray with Cleaveland; Ray with Laminack). Distributing models while expecting extrapolation is insufficient.



- Peacemaking requires revision of typical expectations about who sits at the table during class. Often spouses/partners, siblings, children, and extended family members (and even the occasional dog⁹ or horse) came to class with the registered student. Graciously include in all activities everyone who arrives; do not treat guests as spectators.

- Peacemaking requires flexibility and adjustment to peacekeeping strategies outlined in course syllabi. Activities often take far longer than scheduled. (Without instantiating stereotypes about so-called “Indian time,” we had to learn the significance of non-linear, event-based temporality and the significance of extended storytelling in Indian Country to be successful.)

- Peace-building requires acknowledgement of white privilege and strategies that marginalized-others deploy to resist oppressive power. For instance, we found ourselves the brunt of jokes told in Blackfeet and English, which we either didn’t understand or didn’t find funny (e.g., “dumb blonde” jokes in particular were used to tease); we learned that humor is key, a test of an outsider’s sincerity. We learned not to take ourselves too seriously, to laugh along, and ask what is meant later.

- Peace-building requires compassionate understanding and innovative ways of seeing, behaving. Absenteeism and tardiness—family emergencies, children requiring safe passage, death and funerals, delays caused by Indian Health Service—are common facts of Blackfeet life. Teachers of Indian students might need to adjust peacekeeping policies to promote peacemaking resolution of conflict while determining differences between behaviors that are self-destructive to learning and while holding students accountable to the high standards required for ultimate success.

Our next Blackfeet collaboration partnered MWP faculty with BCC writing teacher, Woody Kipp (Blackfeet); BCC professional development directors in math and science education, Calvin



Weatherwax and Helen Augare (both Blackfeet), who work under the aegis of the Rural Systemic Initiative (RSI)—a federally funded program, which supports science, technology and math professional development for teachers in rural areas; and 15 Browning School District teachers and administrators in an academic-year continuing-education course entitled “writing extensions in science, math and traditional knowledge.” This class was a success primarily because courses that carry university credit for recertification are hard to come by in Browning and the teachers/administrators who enrolled had a long-term dedicated commitment to RSI. As a result, participants were willing to trust MWP on the basis of our collaboration with Woody, Calvin and Helen, for whom they held utmost respect. Additionally, I sat second chair to Laurie Smith Small-Waisted Bear (Lakota), so our teaching team was predominantly Native.

The successes of this class hinged on integrating Blackfeet cultural ways of knowing with traditional approaches to teaching science and math, and coupling field trips to cultural sites and landscapes with writing marathons. Writing marathons are place-based writing excursions in which small groups of writers engage in writing/reading over extended periods of time (Louth). Natalie Goldberg offers this advice about writing during a marathon in *Writing Down the Bones*:

Everyone in the group agrees to commit himself or herself for the full time. Then we make up a schedule. For example, a ten-minute writing session, another ten-minute writing session, a fifteen-minute session, two twenty-minute sessions, and then we finish with a half-hour round of writing. So for the first session, we all write for ten minutes and then go around the room and read what we’ve written with no comments by anyone.... A pause naturally happens after each reader, but ...[t]here is no good or bad, no praise or criticism. We read what we have written and go on to the next person. ... What usually happens is you stop thinking: you write; you become less and less self-conscious. Everyone



is in the same boat, and because no comments are made, you feel freer and freer to write anything you want. (150)

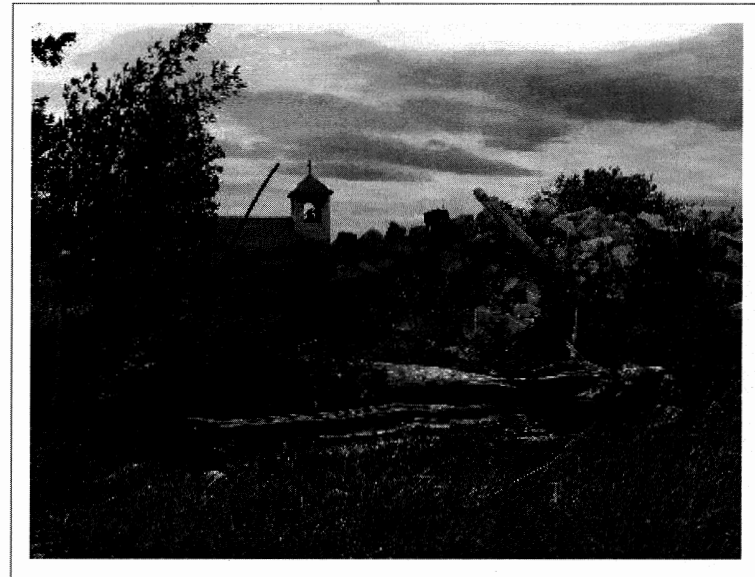
Toward efforts at conflict resolution among disparate ways of knowing, we added to our marathon experiences the awareness that in Indian Country traditional knowledge of place is essential. We began this class with a cultural knowledge-based writing marathon in Browning on one Friday night in October. Groups that night wrote in the stadium at the high-school football game, in the waiting room at the Indian Health Service hospital, from the aisles at the Town Pump (a gas station and convenience store that is the hub of activity in Browning), and in the empty faculty lounge at the local Catholic school. When we all came back together as a group about 9:30 that night, a community had been unmistakably formed. The spirit of this evening lasted throughout the semester even though we got together only once a month (Friday evenings and Saturdays). We marathoned each class meeting—traveling to Glacier National Park, which is directly adjacent to the reservation on former Blackfeet homelands, to learn traditional Pikuni (Blackfeet) names for landmarks, medicinal uses for flora, and counternarratives to “official” Montana and U.S. history; to sites of buffalo jumps that Pikuni people relied upon during the pre-reservation era of buffalo hunts; and to the ruins of the Holy Family Catholic mission boarding school, where Pikuni children were sent “to kill the Indian, save the man” (Captain Richard Pratt, founder of Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, qtd. in Juneau 3).

Participants’ words and images tell the story:

My name is Kevin Crawford and I live on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. I was born and raised on the Res. When I was growing up my grandmother was very strict and disciplined. She lived the “boarding dorm syndrome”: she was sent to Carlisle Indian School when she was very young. She never talked about her experiences there. When we would ask her about it she would just smile and would



not answer. She also spoke broken English and whenever she spoke Blackfeet she would not share with us what was said.... My brothers and I were sitting in her living room one day watching television when she told my dad that she didn’t want us to learn our mother tongue because of what she and her generation went through at the boarding schools throughout the United States.... My grandfather had [similar experiences], but encouraged us to learn our culture and still get a good education. ... I’m not a fluent speaker, but I do know a lot about my Blackfeet heritage. —Kevin Crawford (Blackfeet)





Mission Boarding School

Kevin tells of his relatives
Who are buried here
Boarding school children
Killed by disease
Killed for being Pikuni

His grandfather,
As a third grader,
Ran for his life
Escaping the brutal punishments
And humiliation
Of this place.

Here
We are forced
To stare these stories
In the eye

Our hearts
Struggling
To find words
In a place
Where words
Will never be enough.

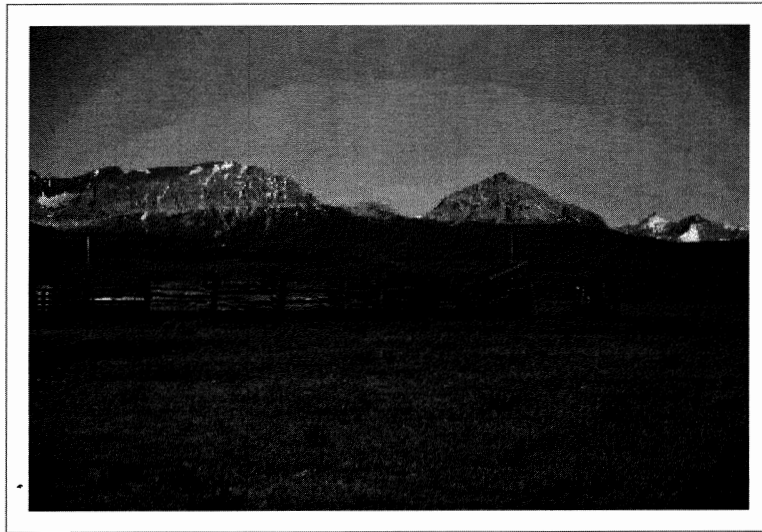
—Wendy Z. Warren



Indian Education

The rubble of stones is all that is left.
A reminder of lives remaining in a rubble of physical and
emotional pain.
Overcast day, ominous feeling, leaving a stain on the
descendents,
Remnants of the past.
Tattered souls,
We survive.
Emerging in a new way, but an old way.
The way of the universe is the circle.
Rounded pipe bowl
Rounded teepee
Rounded earth
Rounded sun
Rounded hoop
Rounded drum
Round dance — a healing beat, buh bum, buh bum
Let the circle help us teach
Let the circle help us survive.

—Kathy A. C. Kipp (Blackfeet)



In 2005, NWP began to provide MWP with additional funds to run satellite summer institutes in collaboration with BCC and Browning Public Schools. NWP summer institutes intend to develop teacher leaders in writing, and include three primary features: 1) Participants study scholarship about teaching writing; 2) Participants develop a model inquiry demonstration lesson in response to a question they have about teaching writing; and 3) Participants write. In the BCC satellite, we also incorporate Blackfeet cultural knowledge and address issues related to implementing IEFA. Wendy Z. Warren, MWP teacher-consultant and a middle-school writing teacher from Columbia Falls, about a 90-minute drive from Browning, co-directs the satellite summer institute with Woody Kipp and Browning Public Schools MWP teacher-consultant Kathy Kipp, an elementary teacher.¹⁰ BCC summer-institute participants have included an even mix of Indian and non-Indian teachers from the Browning area. Although these institutes have been small, the richness of discussions is enhanced by the diversity and size of the group. A sense of community is established quickly with writing marathons; the power inherent in sharing stories of each others' lives is evident. Peace-building is enhanced by establishing a close sense of



community, where people feel comfortable asking those “dumb cultural questions” that seem to raise ire in many public conversations.

Project Outreach goals also play a central role in framing inquiry questions that ground development of model demonstration lessons and construct a peace-building ethic. In particular, a “Writing into the Day”¹¹ activity led by Kathy Kipp posed this question: “Niitsitapi (the Blackfeet name we use for our institute) means Real People. But many of our children no longer feel like real people. How can we help our children feel like real people again?” Following writing, a discussion ensued about teaching methods currently mandated in Browning, specifically, “Success for All” (SFA), a “scripted” elementary-school reading program. Browning schools, like all reservation schools in the state, are labeled “failing” by federal “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) measures. As a result, schools must show specific steps being taken to remedy “failure.” SFA implementation in Browning is so carefully monitored that SFA reading lessons are locked up, handed out to teachers one week at a time, and then recollected at the end of the week. In recoiling horror, Warren remarked that her school, just on the other side of the mountains from Browning, was labeled “failing” the first year of NCLB” but made “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) the following year simply because of a change in the formula used to make determinations. Teachers at her (mostly white) school are *never* required to use a standardized program for reading or any other subject, and they continue to have a great deal of autonomy in their classrooms. This seemed new information to many Browning teachers.

At first, a few Browning teachers defended SFA, saying it really did help to improve reading scores; however, when ensuing discussion considered issues of test bias, student lack of motivation, and absolute inability to incorporate any culturally relevant material in nationally standardized, scripted curricula, the tone changed radically. Participants began to consider that SFA was another kind of “boarding school” educational experience for Indian students, a thought that made



everyone shiver. One participant, a second-grade teacher, had come to the institute looking for specific answers, perhaps a “scripted” approach to teaching writing. “Can’t you just tell me what to do? I really want a sequenced program that will work.” As discussion evolved, and as he talked through his frustrations with both Kathy Kipp and Warren, this participant came to accept that there are “many right answers” to the question of how to teach writing, and he became motivated by the possibility of using writing instruction as a way to bring cultural relevance into his classroom,¹² something he had done very little of, despite his extensive cultural knowledge. The institute planted the seed for teachers to think about peacemaking ways to solve conflicts posed by discriminatory pedagogical mandates by considering subversive alternatives for teaching writing without mind-numbing, Blackfeet-bereft scripts.

A Day in the Life, BCC Summer Institute: In the Sweat Lodge, Just After

Crucial to transformation in thinking, teaching and writing, which motivates peace-building through MWP’s Blackfeet partnership, is a three-day tipi encampment that culminates with a ceremonial sweat. The purpose of the sweat is multifold: 1) to acquaint participants firsthand with a traditional Blackfeet ceremonial ritual, which is modified to accommodate outsiders; 2) to bring together in peace both Indian and non-Indian teachers on behalf of the educational success of Blackfeet children; and 3) to bless the peace work of teacher participants and the writing project. These encampments frequently draw crowds of additional participants into our summer institutes—spouses/partners, children, extended family members, siblings, friends—who all come to listen, participate and write. MWP clearly benefits from having learned early on to be flexible and inclusive of all who attend. Although participants decide individually whether or not to join the sweat, the “blessing” aspect of the experience has created tensions that must be addressed through peacemaking and conflict resolution. Through listening rhetorically (Ratcliffe) to diverse



perspectives, participants honor everyone’s beliefs and concerns. Peace-building requires adjustment of “norms” and acceptance of discursive alternatives that enhance capacity for peace.



Writing that responds to the experience appears below:

In the center of the sweat lodge, the rocks radiated heat they had obtained from the fire. At first, the small domed lodge was comfortably warm, the air filled with expectation. This was my first sweat, and I was anxious. My dear friend, Lorrie, a veteran of the sweat lodge, had warned me that it would be hot, and when it got too intense, to just pray harder. Pray? I hadn’t done much of that lately. Would prayer keep me from evaporating right out of the lodge with the heat?

Holy incense was tossed on to the hot rocks with the first prayers, scenting the air with its sweet smoky aroma. More prayers were said by each member in the lodge, each prayer building on to the next; prayers for healing, prayers for understanding, and prayers for peace. Our individual hopes and desires connected into one united plea. With an

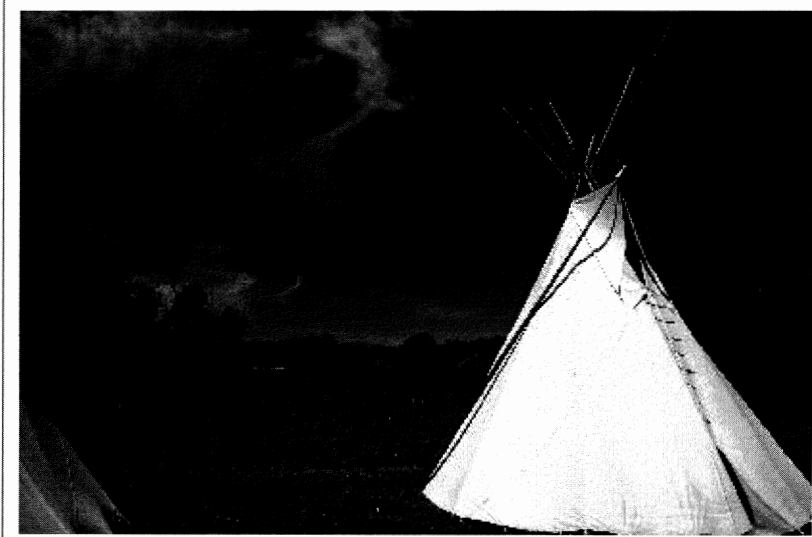


unspoken signal, the door of the lodge was closed, plunging the room into complete darkness. The air in the room seemed to thicken into inky night.

Water splashed onto the glowing rocks with a snap and a sizzle sent up a heavy blanket of hot steam that mixed with the rich incense. Sticky heat covered every inch of my body, burning my eyes, stinging my nose. Breathing became a difficult task. I pulled a towel close to my face.... to weaken the power of the steam – wondering if I would survive its suffocating effects.

My ears, and then my very being, focused on the voices – deep and resonant, soulful and sweet, to the words, spoken separately, yet together, in an orchestra of prayer. I found my voice joining the chorus as it started slow and soft, gaining strength with the heat.

Just when I thought my soul would leap right out of my sticky body, the door was flung open, releasing the rich sage-scented haze of



smoke and prayer, letting in delicious cool air and dazzling sunlight. I followed the rays of light out of the heated womb into the arms of daylight – enjoying the release, realizing that darkness, heat, and smoke typically created in me complete and utter terror. But here in this place, these elements had created a different environment. It had become, for me, a sanctuary – a place of spiritual growth, leading to a birth of understanding. —Leslie Haggar

I sit in complete darkness, except for occasional glints of light coming from the red-hot rocks in the center of the lodge, rocks that were collected earlier in the day with great care. The hot air presses outward against me, carrying scents of sage and tobacco. Having never had an experience this intense, I have doubts about how long I can endure this heat.

Each of us has our reasons for being here at this place and time, some reasons told; some hinted at, some kept private. Prayers are offered and taken, beginning with the leader and continuing around the circle. When my turn comes, my prayer is for my first- graders who are out of my care. My thoughts now are silent personal prayers that I didn't know I had, that special people in my life find peace.

The heat and darkness and sound clarify the moment so that I am completely alone with myself but connected to each person in this lodge. The air is made even hotter with each whack of the eagle wing against the ceiling, each hornful of water hissing on the rocks, and made even thicker with singing, and chanting and whistling. I am relieved when the order is given to open the door, and I make my way to the creek where I sit down in the cool water.

The second round is short and I am surprised when it is over. During the third and fourth rounds, my mind feels clarified. I am no longer uncomfortable but welcome the heat and steam, the sound. Everything is peeled away and I feel a connection to the spiritual world. I feel tired,



peaceful, and joyful when we come out of the sweat lodge for the last time. —Donna Sommerfield

“This is not a silent movie. Our voices will save our lives.” writes Sherman Alexie in one of his early poems. During the long, lonesome, highway hours traveling from Missoula to Browning, I contemplate both the rise of “the backbone of the world”—the Pikuni name for the front range of the Rocky Mountains that is their home—and for the value of prayer. I am driving north to join the MWP satellite at BCC. In my role as Director, I have been asked to participate in a ceremonial sweat to bless the writing project work in Browning. I will join other BCC summer institute writing project fellows, honored members of the Blackfeet community, elder Pikuni religious leaders, local community members, students, teachers, and their guests who gather to honor our work and bless its continuance and growth in the community. This is not a job my education or experience has prepared me to do. Yet, I drive on.

I will be asked to pray—in my own way—to honor the work of those gathered on behalf of the educational success of Blackfeet students—most in NCLB-labeled “failing” schools, working with mandated, scripted curricula that allow no room either for writing nor for culturally relevant impulses.

I don’t pray anymore. Troubled these days by the politics of prayer sold to the highest bidder, I’ve abandoned the Christianity by which I was raised; but have not abandoned what I learned as a Christian—to reach out to those in need, to pray for them that hate you, to love those that despise you and persecute you, to bless them that curse you, to forgive their transgressions, to turn the other cheek.

So in the hot dark intensity of the sweat lodge, breathing deeply the smoke of sage and tobacco offered to the Creator for blessing, I pray for our project. I pray that the work that we do will go forth and



accomplish the peace-building we intend—that it will give teachers the power to speak up on behalf of children silenced by curricula never intended to help them succeed, just intended to help some fat white cats back east get rich. I pray for the power to forgive them for they know not what they do.

I have always been troubled by prayer as supplication—the “ask and ye shall receive” part of prayer. In postmodern times, that has devolved into requests for material benefits. What does creation, all powerful, good, loving and true, care for that?

Around the campfire after the sweat, Kathy Kipps’ teenage daughter Moriah, “Mo,” sings Patsy Cline and “Rock of Ages” in a deep bluesy alto. Someone remarks that she sings like Janis Joplin and wonders about that song, “Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz.” Without hesitation, I use my choir-trained voice, rusty with disuse, to sing every stanza a’capella: “Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a color T.V? Dialing for Dollars is trying to find me. I wait for delivery each day until 3:00. Oh Lord, won’t you buy me a color T.V?”

How ironic in this place at this moment.

In the sweat lodge earlier, I had acknowledged my wholeness with creation, the brilliant all of it, the loving tenderness with which we might treat others, and ourselves, the goodness of the effort of writing project. I believed again in the possibility of peace, of mutual congregation toward common good.

I thought of my teaching in more possible terms—that I could do what was needed to find a useful path to forgiveness, to outreach, to access, and for the blessings that come from an idea unfolding in dignity and collaboration. I felt a peace beyond frustration and realized as I sang Janis Joplin that the goals of state schools are at odds with the cultural ideals so necessary to success in Indian Country. I wondered what it might take for curriculum to be relevant, to speak to the lives



of Blackfeet students in ways that bring them to succeed in both the modern and the Blackfeet ways.

Just before I sang about asking the Lord for a Mercedes Benz, we viewed the space shuttle and the space station circling in orbit in the night sky above us—a thumbnail crescent moon, Mercury, Mars, Venus, Saturn in alignment. A Hopi prophecy, we learn from Woody, says that “When you see a house in the sky, we are at the edge of the precipice.” I am certain that we are teetering toward the abyss and wonder what it will take to pull us back toward each other in ways that refuse the path to failure, that have the potential to build peace.

I am certain that it’s not going to be accomplished through scripted curricula intended to be both teacher-proof and child-numb.

“This is not a silent movie. Our voices will save our lives,” I hear Alexie echo, and I pray. Writing is the way to bring our voices to the fore, to live lives that can be heard, to travel a path together with our minds turned toward the spirit, fully intact.

Prayer in schools is verboten, and I don’t do it there or anywhere, but here in this place, I have been moved to pray.

I think if you’re doing a good thing, you don’t need to be afraid.¹³

—Heather E. Bruce

Resistance to Peace-building in Indian Country

Many Montana teachers and pre-service students, most of whom are non-Indian, resent being asked to consider the need for understanding, reconciliation, and taking responsibility for Native American issues of concern. Anti-Indian racism is a huge problem in our state, and MWP participants’ writing samples reminiscent of the sweat experience miss the antagonism we often face during peace-building work. We are not unaccustomed to hearing angry, hate-filled comments while doing anti-racist work as part of our implementation of IEFA. Opposition



manifests in statements such as, “I never killed an Indian. I have no responsibility in this.”





One of my writing methods students recently wrote:

In my limited experience with curriculum in existing English classrooms, the “Indian Education for All” requirement is a feared and neglected element of education in Montana’s schools. Teachers seem to pay the law notice by including [Jim Welch’s] *Fools Crow* and sprinkling some Native American poetry into the year’s lesson planning.... As a high school student in Whitefish, I remember broaching the topic of Native American history as it related to our state. I remember feeling like history pointed a finger at me and my ancestors for the ills that Native Americans suffered at the hands of settlers from overseas. I felt as though my teachers were asking me to answer for these injustices without giving me any course of action for remediating what happened so long ago.

Peace-building in the face of colonialist politics, rampant racism, negative tribalism and pernicious violence is fraught with the difficulties engendered by ignorance, blame/shame, fear and hatred.

To illustrate just one dumbfounding example, Kathy Kipp and her daughter Moriah, a Browning High School honors student, visited a Missoula-based summer institute to present to the wholly white group of teacher-participants there. I had been struggling with a vocal majority in this institute who were incredibly resistant to and critical of the social justice goals outlined in shared readings and discussions. Kathy had agreed to lead this group in a writing exercise and discussion about the effects the legacy of boarding-school experiences has had on Indian students today in an attempt to build these teachers’ capacity for empathy through storytelling. She asked participants to read an excerpt on boarding schools from *Rethinking our Classrooms: Teaching for Equity and Justice* Vol. 2 (Bigelow) as a text. Moriah read a response she had written to the “How can we help our Indian children feel like Real People again?” activity her mother had led in Browning. Kathy asked Missoula teacher-participants to write in response and discuss questions and issues that arose for them during their reading. Several



refused to partake. They neither wrote when Kathy prompted nor spoke when questioned. One participant even turned her back, crossed her arms and refused to look at either Kathy or Moriah the entire time of their visit. When Moriah, a high-school student, read what she had written and asked for questions or comments, no one responded. Icy glares punctuated the silence. These are people who teach the children of Montana.

In peace-building work with the implementation of IEFA, we must try to work past resistance, toward conflict resolution which has the potential to silence hatred, shame and fear—the root causes of violence (Gilligan), and to work for reconciliation toward Indian peoples. We must take responsibility—we must own up to the facts of American history. By taking responsibility, we might acknowledge the benefits that non-Indians receive as a result of a genocidal legacy: land ownership, freedom to come and go as one pleases on a vast continent, access to higher-quality education and jobs are just a few examples. Non-Indians might indeed realize that although we may have worked hard to earn what we have, we, as the privileged inheritors of a legacy that continues to oppress Indian peoples, have a responsibility to work for justice and equity by noticing injustice and inequity and working to undo it where we are able. Taking responsibility means owning up, responding in whatever arenas of influence our privilege allows us to enjoy—through work in schools, churches, synagogues, community organizations—to notice anti-Indian racism, to do our homework and find out the facts, to correct the perpetual repetition of myths and stereotypes, and to offer a corrective. To speak the truth to power with love wherever and whenever we are able. This is what it means to take responsibility and work for peace.

Teachers who have worked in reservation schools or schools in border towns report impossible working conditions, violence, institutional racism, and the ongoing legacy of the boarding-school experience where children taken from families never learned to nurture. Ongoing



impoverishment and familial devastation can be directly linked to land allotments, the result of the Dawes Act of 1887, which authorized the U.S. President to survey Native American tribal lands and divide them into plots for individual Native American families in total contradiction of an Indian ethics of intentional community and disavowal of private rights to land ownership. Native students in urban areas report untenable acts of harassment, bullying, disrespect from fellow non-Indian students and teachers. In light of this demeaning legacy, it is important to see ways to teach Indian children how to be Real People again, how to care for one another, to respect heritage and traditions, to become resilient, to understand spirituality, to forgive, to become resilient, to become resilient. It is also important to help non-Indians to take responsibility. Taking responsibility means seeing different ways of looking at the world, living with compassion and understanding, reaching out in the face of violence. Resilience, spirituality, forgiveness, reconciliation: this is the work of Indian Education for All. Dare to resist the status quo. Dare to work for peace.

Traveler, there is no road. The road is made as one walks.¹⁴



Endnotes

¹ A note about terminology: diverse terminology is currently in use to refer to “Native Americans.” I use the terms Native American, indigenous, American Indian, and Indian interchangeably. The term American Indian most accurately refers specifically to tribal peoples in the United States who hold treaty rights and sovereign status (see Grande 8). Although many writers today prefer the term “Native American” in an attempt to correct historical wrongs done to Indian peoples and to demonstrate respect, most of the Native people with whom I work refer to themselves in English as “Indian.” My colleague Debra Magpie Earling (Salish/German) exhorts: “Native people, having survived five hundred years of genocide, alienation, and discrimination, have given dignity to the term “Indian.” (qtd. in Susag 9).

² There are more than 500 federally recognized American Indian nations. In the 2000 census, 4.1 million people reported themselves as American Indian or Alaskan Native alone or in combination with one or more other races. Over 60% of Indians live today in urban or suburban, rather than reservation, contexts (Porter 40, 60).

³ Montana Office of Public Instruction, American Indian Education Data Fact Sheet, 2005.

⁴ Since the 1978 resolution, NCTE has published three books about teaching Native American literature: *Roots and Branches: A Resource of Native American Literature—Themes, Lessons and Bibliographies* by Dorothea Susag (1998), *Reading Native American Literature: A Teacher’s Guide* by Bruce Goebel (2004) and *Sherman Alexie in the Classroom “This is not a silent movie. Our voices will save our lives.”* by Heather E. Bruce, Anna Baldwin & Christabel Umphrey (2008).

⁵ Mary Rose O’Reilly, author of *The Peaceable Classroom* (Boynton/Cook 1993), attributes this question to Ihab Hassan, who in 1967 beginning his tenure as a distinguished professor at the University of



Wisconsin-Milwaukee asked in a colloquium for college composition teaching assistants, "Is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?" Hassan's question arose in response to considerations of the violence of grading policies as life-or-death propositions, because in 1967 failure in college frequently meant a draft ticket to the front lines in Vietnam (O'Reilly 8-9).

⁶ The editors of the *Rethinking Schools* publication *Rethinking Globalization* explain the distinct difference between "bias" and "partisanship." Biased curriculum ignores multiple perspectives and does not allow interrogation of its own assumptions and propositions. Partisan teaching "invites diversity of opinion but does not lose sight of the aim of the curriculum: to alert students to global injustice, to seek explanations and to encourage activism" (5).

⁷ Joan Bondurant claims that propaganda—"propagation of desired objectives"—is an integral part of peace-building as a form of persuasion that supports "education of the opponent, the public, and participants" (38 qtd. in Gorsevki 180) distinct from commonplace understandings of propaganda as abusive and manipulative rhetorical art (Bernays; Ellul).

⁸ The Little Shell Band of Chippewa, headquartered in Great Falls, is a state-recognized tribe without a designated federal reservation. Numerous other tribes are represented as well by the population of Montana and not all Montana's Indian people live on reservations.

⁹ We tell a story about a dog who played a key role in a class dramatization of Sherman Alexie's poem "Powwow Polaroid," in Bruce with Baldwin & Umphrey.

¹⁰ Kipp is a common Blackfeet surname; however, Kathy is married to Woody's nephew.



¹¹ "Writing into the Day" is another NWP phenomenon. These activities are participant-designed and led. In MWP summer institutes, approximately 60 minutes each morning is set aside for "Writing into the Day." These generally constitute freewriting in response to a foundational text—poem, quote, story excerpt, picture, music, film clip, question, or some such "inspiration," and provide time for writers who wish to read out loud what they've written to the group.

¹² During the discussion of cultural relevance, participants shared that SFA had offered to pay willing teachers a small sum to take traditional Blackfeet stories and use them to develop "SFA style" lessons—so that SFA would have lessons to market to other reservation schools. MWP wonders if the developers of SFA know that each one of the 500+ tribes have different cultures with different stories.

¹³ I thank Wendy Warren for this insight.

¹⁴ This is a very loose translation of "se hace camino al andar," written by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado. See Antonio Machado, *Selected Poems*, trans. Alan S. Trueblood (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982), 143.

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The Words to Speak: The American Indian Caucus at CCCC

Joyce Rain Anderson, Bridgewater State College

- Every day is a reenactment of the creation story. We emerge from dense unspeakable stuff, through the shimmering power of dreaming stuff.—Joy Harjo "A Postcolonial Tale"

This is a story. Or it is a story among the many stories. At the 2000 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Minneapolis, George Googleye, a tribal elder from Leech Lake, opened our caucus with a pipe ceremony, and specific prayers were offered for the members. Often we begin our caucuses with words from our elders, a talking circle or poem or just words spoken from the heart. Chairs always form the circle. In the past, Malea read from Joy Harjo's book *Map to the Next World*, or we have asked our Indian poets to offer one of their poems. Cynde Yahola-Hill, Dawn Karima Pettigrew, and Qwo-Li Driskill have all read their poems to begin our talk. While listed on the program as business meetings, the American Indian Caucus always begins with the business of being Indian. That way, we and our allies are reminded always that "there is work to be done" (Driskill).

As I read Heather Bruce's "Peace-Building in Indian Country: "Indian Education for All," I am struck by the efforts of the Montana Writing Project (MWP) to help implement "Indian Education for All" (IEFA) and not surprised by the resistance. The director of the Montana writing project who has authored that paper says she realized the need for MWP "to travel outside of our university comfort zone and meet