

## Tribal Youth Media Project for Ojibwe Students

### **Introduction**

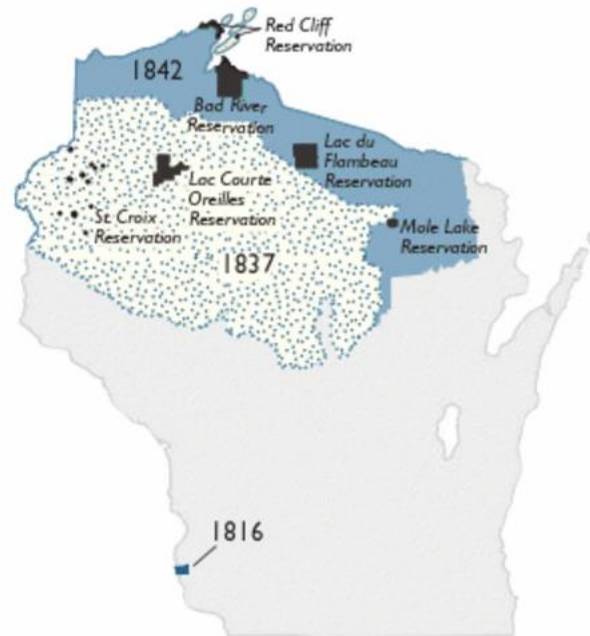
The use of social media and digital storytelling may help to close the achievement gap that is seen between Native and non-Native students (Tynan and Loew, 2010). The preservation of culture and education of Native Americans is a continuous concern as young Tribal members perpetuate their self-identity and learn their history as well as assert their sovereignty. As more and more students are learning and able to utilize media tools, they can start to explore their self-identity and their culture which can be beneficial to their learning process. Oral storytelling is central to Ojibwe culture, and the use of contemporary technologies can get the Tribal youth involved and excited to learn ways to preserve their culture and environment.

### **Background**

#### *Lake Superior Ojibwe*

The Ojibwe Nation settled in the Lake Superior area about 500 years ago. They had migrated from the East Coast of the United State because oral tradition had told them they originated from the Great Lakes area and that it was time for them to return (Loew, 2013). Because of the cold climate they live in, the Ojibwe traditionally hunt and fish. When the French arrived in the 1600's, the Tribe had embraced the people who had brought items to trade that

they had never seen before. The Ojibwe encouraged intermarriage as well as offered them their military service and later fought alongside them. The Treaties of the 1800's between Native Americans and the US Government resulted in the Ojibwe ceding most of their land and having to split up into six different reservations in Wisconsin: Bad River, Lac Courte Oreilles, Lac du Flambeau, St Croix, Mole Lake, and Red Cliff which are seen on the map below. The federally recognized Nation has a population of 27,000 (Loew, 2010).



#### Wisconsin Map of Ojibwe Reservations

Loew, Patty, Paul DeMain, and J. P. Leary. *Indian Nations of Wisconsin Histories of Endurance and Renewal, 2 Edition*. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2013. Print.

The cultural resilience of the Ojibwe was diminished in 1856 when children were forced to go to boarding school away from their homes where they were not allowed to speak their

Native language or practice their cultural traditions (Loew, 2013). As time went on, students lost their self-identity more which caused the achievement gap between Native and non-Native students to widen. This is a result of Native students feeling pressure to assimilate into the ways of the dominate culture of their classmates. Gregory Cajete, a Tewa Pueblo education scholar, had observed Native students rebel against the teachings of Western science because they “realize that if they are going to be successful they have to get with the program. But, in the process of doing that they have to subdue their own intuitive way of thinking about what they are doing, their own cultural perspectives of what they are doing” (Nic Paget-Clarke, 2015). Conventional teachings in schools focuses on teaching Western science in a way that is not conducive to learning for the Ojibwe people because it does not relate to their culture and may oppose their traditional teachings within their community. Native science holds true to Native students just as Western science holds true to Western scientists.

Historically, the Ojibwe people were not governed by one leader or chief. They instead were led by many “chiefs” who ruled by “consent of the people rather than by authority.” (Loew, 2013). This shows how important community is to the Ojibwe and that multiple opinions matter when making decisions.

#### *Research on Native Education and Identity*

According to the National Education Association, the percentage of Native Americans that don't have a diploma or General Education Development equivalent is twice the number of white students (Tynan and Loew, 2010). This issue has been observed for many years and it is imperative that it's recognized by educators to encourage success. Minority students in schools

have felt the need to “assimilate into the ways of the dominant culture” in order to succeed which does create cultural conflict in the classroom (Tynan and Loew, 2010). As people became aware of this conflict as it causes achievement gaps, interest grew in creating programs to address the problems with the learning process for Native students. Creating a comfortable atmosphere for everyone to learn in has greater outcomes of success.

### *Tribal Youth Media Project*

Patty Loew, a member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and Timothy Tynan, a UW graduate student in Life Sciences Communication, became interested in working with Native students to explore their self-identity and learn about science as it relates to their culture through the use of digital storytelling. They became part of the Tribal Youth Media project which involves media instruction for students ages 9 to 14 and is hosted at the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Community College and the Bad River Reservation (Tynan and Loew, 2010). The project involves creating a documentary of a science-related news story that is relevant to the Ojibwe community.

One of the topics is Treaty-based fishing rights which involved exploring the concept of environmental sustainability. Another topic focuses on the Chippewa flowage that occurred in the 1920's which caused massive flooding and destruction on the Ojibwe reservation. The students are able to interview scientists and the Elders of their community to better tell their story. In a video about the threat of mining to Manoomin (wild rice) and *Zizania aquatica* which cultural food for the Ojibwe, a botanist and a natural resource specialist are interviewed about how the rice grows and how the opening up a new mine will pollute their water, affecting

the rice production. In the video, the student says “if the mine goes through, we will all be sad, especially the elders as they know the old stories” (tribalyouthmedia, 2011). Not only are the students able to get a variety of perspectives on a topic, they are able to relate it back to their culture and community. When the students learn about the relevance of their topics to their community, they become more excited to create a digital story to teach others. At the end of the four-week camp, everyone in the community gathers together to watch the students showcase their documentaries.

### **Policies Affecting the Case**

The 1972 Indian Education Act is a federal policy that recognizes the unique educational needs of Native American and Alaska Native students (US Department of Education, 2005). The government has a responsibility to ensure Native students receive their diverse academic needs and have the tools to succeed. Although this policy was implemented 40 years ago, there is still an achievement gap that exists.

Act 31 is a statutory requirement that all schools in Wisconsin must teach about Native American Tribes (UW-Madison School of Education, 2017). Students should learn about the history and culture of the Nations that reside in the state as well as the inherent Tribal sovereignty that they have. Schools conventionally only teach about Native Americans’ role in US history but rarely touch on their culture in present day. Appreciation of Native culture and their presence of today will grow with education.

## **Analysis**

The Tribal Youth Media program allows the Native students to learn science in a way that's "culturally relevant and engaging" (Tynan and Loew, 2010). It also addresses the failures that Western teaching has made with indigenous students. If Native students can be taught in an environment that does not pressure them into fitting in with the majority, their ability to learn the topic is substantially better as was shown when they were learning with only other Ojibwe students (Tynan and Loew, 2010). The digital storytelling allows the students to create a self-identity as well as connect with other members of their Tribe. The better implementation of both federal and state policies in schools will also allow non-Native students to better appreciate the culture of their Native classmates which would make them feel more comfortable at school. This will also allow non-Native educators to become more aware of the culture of their students and to try to make subjects more relevant to all of the students for better learning. Native educators can empathize with their Native students because they have been through the same learning processes when they were in school. They would also be more careful when teaching their students about the history, culture, and sovereignty of Native people for better understanding.

During the Tribal Youth Media projects, the Ojibwe students interview the elders in their community who are much more willing to being videotaped by another Tribal member. The important tradition of oral storytelling can be preserved over a long period of time as new technology has arisen. This has been an important part of the Ojibwe community through time and many more stories can be heard by more people through the use of digital storytelling.

## **Lessons Learned**

The importance of having a strong self-identity and understanding of one's own culture is reflected in the ability to learn a subject as it relates to oneself and culture. The project for the Monona Park and Recreation website will be used to educate the community about the protection, stewardship, and etiquette of the mounds at the park. The lessons learned from the Tribal Youth Media case study can be applied to this project. The use of media, such as digital storytelling, can help to preserve cultural traditions and teachings. The technologies of today can be used as a tool to preserve and bring awareness of culture and making a documentary is an effective way to teach others. The use of the Monona Park website will allow everyone, Native or not, to learn about the mounds which will allow them to appreciate them and their history more.

## **Conclusion**

When Native students are able to learn subjects in the context of their own culture, they are more likely to succeed. The Tribal Youth Media is a project that allows Ojibwe students to feel comfortable within their community while learning about science. The use of media is a good way to allow students to form their self-identity and connect with other people of the same background so that they do not feel as much pressure in school to be more like the majority, which hinders their success. Media is a tool that will help preserve culture and create awareness as time goes on.

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