

<sup>1</sup>**Iskotew Kahmahch Opikik:** “fire that is beginning to stand”

Recognizing that historical trauma is a very real concept that has impacted American Indian people for generations, Stone Child College with support from the American Indian Higher Education’s NARCH Project, has developed a curriculum to address Historical Trauma as an integral component of the process of healing. A three-course series has been developed to provide the fundamental knowledge necessary to define and understand the concept of historical trauma, assist students with the healing process and provide basic research skills to begin examining this concept within their tribal community.

History at its best helps the present make sense of the past. History at its best tells the nation’s story through the voices of all the people. These voices enlighten the past and provide wise counsel for the present, creating healthy and creative communities. History at its worst not only ignores the different voices but eliminates them altogether. The resulting silence lives on and is seen and heard in the painful, dehumanizing community stories etched out daily on Indian Reservations today. Yes, history at its worst is the narrative lived and experienced for the past 500 years by the Native Peoples in the United States.

This aftermath of the near extinction of the Native Peoples is still felt today and has given rise to the theory of historical trauma (HT). With healing as the main focus Stone Child College (SCC) on the Rocky Boy Reservation in Montana has developed a comprehensive curriculum on the topic of historical trauma. This article is an explanation of the rationale, content, and instructional strategies used in the curriculum design.

## **FIRE THAT IS BEGINNING TO STAND**

Beginning in 2013, SCC engaged in a three-year process of designing and developing a comprehensive curriculum on Historical Trauma with the ultimate goal of individual and community healing. The title “iskotew kahmahch opikik” in Cree and “biskanewin ishkode” in

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<sup>1</sup> Biskanewin Ishkode in Chippewa

Chippewa is a metaphor for Native Peoples to begin re-claiming themselves as a people. They have to fan the “fires” of rebirth, to begin standing as a people, as a community with a sense of knowing how to connect to the trauma of the past in order to heal. They need to be the “fire” that burns ....healthy and resilient, integrating the past and the present as a proud people.

## **HISTORICAL TRAUMA**

The adverse effect of this history carried down from generation to generation is known as historical trauma. **Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart**, widely regarded as the “mother of historical trauma” by Native Americans, describes **historical trauma** as “...*the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over one’s lifetime and from generation to generation following loss of lives, land and vital aspects of culture.*” (Braveheart et al., 1998)

This historical trauma is manifested in multiple ways and becomes more pronounced for each succeeding generation. Listed below is a synopsis of the major points contained in the Little Book of Trauma Healing by Carolyn Yoder. (Yoder, 2005)

- The effects are cumulative and are seen in individual and group attitudes and behaviors in succeeding generations. The transgenerational transmission of these traumas can occur even when the next generation is not told the trauma story, or knows it only in broad outline. A “conspiracy of silence” surrounds events for which grieving and mourning have never taken place.
- Cultural traumas are created when attempts are made to eradicate part or all of a culture or people. Unaddressed traumas affect not only those directly traumatized, but their families and future generations. Not releasing the trauma causes “freezing” trapping it in the nervous system.

- Brain researchers tell us that neurons that fire together wire together. The more intense the experience is, the tighter they wire together neurologically, making it difficult to release past memories/behaviors.
- Reenactment behaviors—those that turn unhealed trauma energy against the self (acting in) or out on others (acting out)—are signs of distress and unhealed trauma. Paradoxically, reenactments represent attempts to **resolve the effects of trauma**. Reenactment behaviors are a major public **health issue** and indicate that people and groups need **psychosocial and spiritual help**.

## PHILOSOPHY:

SCC began with these philosophical and educational tenets in mind:

### We Believe...

- Education is an effective way to heal from our historical trauma of loss of land, loss of people, and loss of family and culture.
- Each person must take responsibility for self-healing.
- As a communal culture healing takes place within the context of community.

### Healing...

- **Coming with Gratitude:** *Becoming more present to the wonder of being alive in this amazing world.*
- **Honoring Our Pain:** *Dedicating time and attention to honoring our pain ensures space for grief, outrage, and sorrow. This caring derives from our interconnectedness with all of life (a core Native belief).*

- **Seeing with Native Eyes:** *Envisioning what is possible with a new understanding of our power to make a difference.*
- **Going Forth:** *Clarifying our vision of how we can act for healing of our world, identifying practical steps that move our vision forward.*

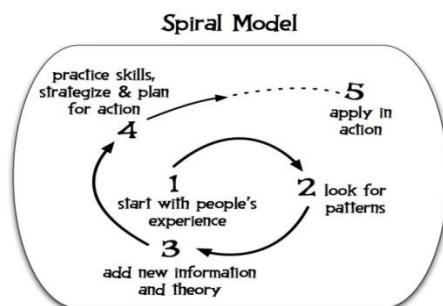
### Teaching ...

- **Experiential:** *Bridging theory with the “real world” practice.*
- **High Context:** *The use of multi-media formats with a variety of visuals so students can observe and listen.*
- **Interactive:** *Processing in small and large group formats helps internalize the concepts and course content.*

### THE CURRICULUM:

**Spiral Model:** (See Figure 1) When organizing the course content, it became apparent that there were core concepts that needed to be revisited over the three courses. The depth and expanse of the coverage would vary from course to course. Using the spiral model provided the opportunity for in-depth and repeated explorations of the key concepts of HT from different perspectives, always with a focus on PRACTICE, APPLICATION, and ACTION.

Figure 1



**The curriculum** (*See Figure 2*) consists of three courses (3 credits each) with each course organized into three units. These nine credits are designed to cover the topic of historical trauma in 135 hours of instruction. The three courses also serve as core requirements in several of SCC Associate of Science degrees.

- **Course 1** begins with an overview of the theory of HT from **CONFRONTATION** of the past, **UNDERSTANDING** the past, **RELEASING** the past to healing and **TRANSFORMATION**. Sherman Alexie's book on the *Absolutely True Diary* served as the real-world connection of how HT plays out in the main character's life (Arnold). This novel was also used to illustrate the various phases of the Hero's Journey according to Joseph Campbell (2008).
- **Course 2** re-visits HT but this time analyzes it in the life of the Maori (indigenous people of New Zealand). Students experience vicariously how it feels and what it looks like. They then step back to analyze the **STUCK-ON/ACTING OUT** behaviors (anger, rage, bullying, hypervigilance, nightmares, flashbacks, loss of capacity in working memory) and the **STUCK OFF/ACTING IN** behaviors (depression, numbness, feeling weak or drained, difficulty concentrating or making decisions, feeling spaced out, unable to act, avoiding others).
- **Course 3** addresses HT by taking a hard look at HT within the community, using the qualitative research methodology of **PHENOMENOLOGY** to better understand how the phenomenon of HT is evident in the community, always looking at the solutions as much as the problems. Face-to face interviews serve as the primary vehicle for gathering data to be analyzed in order to better understand how essential

aspects of the phenomenon of historical trauma are manifested today within the community.

(Figure 2)



## THE DESIGN

**Stage One** (see excerpt below in Figure 3 entitled *Desired Results*) in the instructional design begins with the big ideas/outcomes and essential questions that serve as the foundation for the unit/course and set the tone and provide the core concepts for the Unit.

In **Stage Two** (see excerpt below in Figure 3 entitled *Assessment Evidence*) the Assessments are authentic (linking assessments to real-world experiences) and varied in order to appeal to the learning styles of the students, ranging from writing/reading assignments to projects, small and large group presentations, role playing, etc.

**Stage Three** (see excerpt below in Figure 3 entitled *Learning Plan*) include readings, novels, short stories, dramatizations, discussions, video links, projects, and so on. The emphasis

is always on engaging and challenging the students to understand the content and demonstrate their understanding in their real-world contexts. Each unit within the three courses has 12-15 lessons with options for adapting to fit the students' needs.

*Figure 3: Excerpt of Unit Plan containing the Three Design Stages*

<b>STAGE 1-DESIRED RESULTS</b>
<p><b>Course 2: Unit Two: Ethnic Identity: Who am I as a Native Person?</b></p> <p><b>Unit Summary:</b> This unit explores the complexity of being Native in today's society. A loss of identity has been one of the after effects of generations of trauma and living out the "Cycle of Trauma and Addiction" which has led to what can be described as "soul wound". American Indian youth today are undergoing stress and committing suicide as the ultimate escape from "soul wound". The unit begins with a reading that explores the connection between suicide and the need for re-creating a positive view of self. <i>Suicide and Soul Wound: Stress, Coping and Culture in the American Indian and Alaska Native Youth Context</i>, underscores that identity development is one of the key aspects of healing the "soul wound".</p> <p>In his book, <i>Ten Little Indians</i>, Sherman Alexie irreverently and humorously depicts characters who wrestle with issues of self-identity. There is no single answer; there is no one solution to this poignant loss of self. There is no formula that outlines the steps one must take in order to begin the search and, eventually, come to terms with a blurred image rather than a simple, clear picture. Each of his characters comes to terms with his or her sense of self in creative and unique ways. The search for a sense of identity is a painful journey but Sherman manages to balance the pain with laughter, making the invisibility and loss of identity easier to recognize.</p> <p>Through reflection and analyses of Sherman's short stories, various articles, and the film—<i>Lesser Blessed</i>, a sense of self begins to emerge through determination and commitment. Circuitously, we begin to understand, in a visceral way, how intergenerational trauma can be balanced even though the journey is scary and chaotic—much like most heroic undertakings.</p> <p><b>Materials Needed:</b> <i>(All are included with this Unit except for Ten Little Indians book.)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Suicide and Soul Wound: Stress, Coping, and Culture in the American Indian and Alaska Native Youth Context</i> by Eleni Malka Zimiles (2013).</li> <li>• <i>Ten Little Indians</i> by Sherman Alexie (2004)</li> <li>• Lesser Blessed 2012 Film (<a href="#">YouTube link</a>)</li> <li>• PPT: Who am I as a Native Person?</li> <li>• Sorensen Self-Esteem Test</li> <li>• TED TALK: Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are by Amy Cuddy (<a href="#">link</a>)</li> <li>• Transcript of Amy Cuddy's TED Talk</li> <li>• Power Play Poses Worksheet to accompany Amy Cuddy's Talk</li> <li>• Conceptualizing Native Identity Worksheet</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethnic Identity Graphic—Handout</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Understandings: Students will understand that....</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-identity is critical to the healing process.</li> <li>Self-identity is a means of re-claiming past wisdom.</li> <li>The process of defining oneself is scary and chaotic—much like most heroic undertakings.</li> <li>Sherman Alexie characters are as complex as the Native People one would meet in real life.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Essential Questions:</b></p> <p>Who am I as a Native person?</p> <p>What social and cultural traits characterize a Native person?</p> <p>How do I go about “finding” myself?</p>
<p><b>Students will know that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is no one clear “recipe” for self-discovery.</li> <li>Inheriting a traumatic past has repercussions for the present and the future but it is possible to change the cycle to one of a strong sense of identity and purpose.</li> <li>Studying hard and completing assigned readings are part of learning to change the cycle of trauma and addiction.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Students will be able to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read selected readings with understanding.</li> <li>Commit to completing this course of study and following through on this commitment.</li> <li>Identify the different aspects of the journey to uncovering ones identity.</li> <li>Describe how the different characters in literary selections grapple with the same issues most people encounter.</li> <li>Write and express their thoughts in discussion and class interactions.</li> <li>Demonstrate what they’ve learned by completing all of the assignments.</li> <li>Participate in a research study as part of the Biskanewin Ishkode collection of courses on Historical Trauma.</li> </ul>
<p><b>STAGE 2: ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE</b></p>	
<p><b>Performance Tasks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Book Charting Activity of Soul Wound 10%</li> <li>Sorensen’s Self Esteem Test 10%</li> <li>Worksheet on Cultural Identity Factors 20%</li> <li>FINAL PROJECT: PPT on one of the Essential Questions 40%</li> </ul>	<p><b>Other Evidence:</b></p> <p>Participation and attendance 20%</p>
<p><b>Key Criteria:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work is turned in on time.</li> <li>Thoughtful and creative responses are expected.</li> <li>Responses are complete with specific examples given to respond to the questions.</li> <li>The content of the response shows that close reading was done and that student was present at the class discussions.</li> </ol>	



5. Papers use Standard English with very few grammatical errors.
6. If absent during a key discussion, student will confer with the instructor on make-up assignments.

93-100=A    92-86=B    74-85=C    73-60=D    60 and below =Not Pass

### STAGE 3—LEARNING PLAN

<p><b>Instructional Strategies</b></p> <p><b>Discussion</b> in order to personalize the content of the article they will be reading.</p> <p>It is recommended that the instructor identify any vocabulary words that need to be explained. Discuss these terms prior to the assigned reading of the article.</p> <p><b>Book-Charting Strategy.</b></p>	<p><b>Summary of Learning Activities:</b></p> <p>In Unit 1 the focus was on the cycle of trauma and addiction and how this cycle was the result of trauma experienced by past generations. Unit 2 begins with the grim reality of how many Native youth are committing suicide as the ultimate way out of the cycle of trauma and addiction. Self-identity is seen as a key component in the healing of “soul wound”. Self-concept, self-esteem, social self and self-knowledge are different aspects of looking at oneself in order to forge an identity. Self-identity will be discussed at length during this unit. Students will have opportunities to evaluate the characters and their sense of Native identity in three stories from Sherman Alexie’s book, <b>Ten Little Indians</b> and in the film: <b>Lesser Blessing</b>.</p> <p><b>LESSONS ONE/TWO:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Suicide is viewed as the overall American Indian experience. Introduce the Indigenist stress process model framework so that the students have a clear understanding of these stressors: These stressors include:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Marginalization of AIs.</li> <li>b. Psychological strains of historical trauma</li> <li>c. environmental stressors</li> <li>d. quotidian (everyday stuff) stressors</li> <li>e. personal adversities from relationships (meaning who am I and what is my role in this community?).</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Have the students discuss and elaborate on the stressors that they experience in their everyday lives. For example, not having enough gas to get to class, tensions in a relationship, etc. Review “stuck-on” and “stuck-off” behaviors. Integrate these concepts into the discussion.</li> <li>3. Distribute copies of <a href="#">Zimiles.-Suicide-and-soul-wound-Stress-coping-and-culture-in-the-American-Indian-and-Alaska-Native-youth-context.docx</a> by Eleni Malka Zimiles they will be reading in small groups. They will be using a modified version of the <b>Book Charting Strategy</b>. Divide the students into groups of 3-4 and give each group a marker or markers and large Post-Its. The reading is conveniently divided into</li> </ol>
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	short segments followed by a question. Each group will choose or be assigned a section (there are 10 sections).
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## RESEARCH:

The HT Curriculum content is tailored to address and frankly discuss real-world struggles, highlighting physiological, psychological and socio-cultural behaviors. (Rice-Brown, 2015)

Initially, the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) test was going to be used as a pre and post-test for Course 1 (2015 Summer Term). However, it was realized that giving a post-test immediately after Summer Term was impractical because it didn't allow enough time to make meaningful changes in such a short time-frame. In place of the ACE post-test each student wrote a journal entry stating what this course meant personally. The following themes emerged from these journals:

- The story of Rocky Boy entitled, "NOWHERE LEFT TO GO" made a lasting impression on them. They felt a new appreciation for their "place".
- They enjoyed the "Talking Circle" sessions at the end of the day. They felt they were heard.
- They felt better about themselves in general and more hopeful overall.
- They recognized that their lives were connected to the historical trauma of the past and they were convinced that this knowledge would be helpful in their personal healing.

**Phenomenological Research:** When studying a phenomenon such as Historical Trauma, the goal is to look at the experiences of historical trauma from multiple points of view in order to eventually come to a sense of the "essence" of these experiences. For example: How is HT manifested today within the Rocky Boy community? What do these manifestations signify for

the participants and the community? Additionally, when considering the conscious aspects of a traumatic event, the researcher has to be aware and empathetic to the request of asking the participant to re-live an experience or set of experiences that may be extremely painful.

(Creswell, 2007)

Phenomenological research began in earnest in Course 3 (2016 Summer Term) when the students conducted twenty face-to-face interviews gathering information from a cross-section of community members, ranging from young adult to elder. It was interesting to observe the students' reactions when they began word-for-word transcriptions of these personal interviews along with an analysis of these data, noting the different themes that emerged. Suddenly, HT became more real for them. In the near future, SCC is planning to publish these findings for educational and community planning purposes.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Stone Child College has now taught the entire curriculum during two summer terms and continues to teach it as an integral component of its overall academic curriculum. They are hopeful that this information is helpful in moving toward the healing process for each person participating in the program and will provide inspiration for the community at large, creating new stories that are alive with hope and determination reflective of a rich past, not entirely lost.

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