

Title

Four Corners Media Project

Abstract

The Four Corners Media Project will combine storytelling, web-based story collection, and filmmaking to reconnect Navajo Adolescents with Navajo Elders for the dual purpose of validating the wisdom of the Elders and capturing it for future generations, and inspiring and empowering the young people as they approach adulthood. While the project will engage both female and male Adolescents, its focus is primarily ecofeminist, in that Native American wisdom has always emphasized connection to the Earth, consideration for all life, and self-empowerment through communication with Nature.

This project may also provide a template for similar intergenerational reconnection projects whose purpose is conserving indigenous cultural wisdom, not only throughout the Southwest and other areas populated by Native Americans, but in many cultural settings.

Project Rationale (Need Statement)

Native American youth currently represent the highest statistical rate of teen suicides in the US. Native American Elders, especially among such groups as the Navajo and Sioux Nations, suffer from inadequate nutrition as well as the many other trials of aging, not the least of which is feeling devalued by their own communities. In addition, a growing number of Native American adults are stricken at an early age by crippling diseases, most notably alcoholism, diabetes, and heart disease. Recent research shows that the underlying causes of these conditions stem from a loss of native lifeways, forced upon these people as Western culture has appropriated their land and crowded out their spiritual and cultural practices. As do all youth, Navajo Adolescents tend to disregard the wisdom of their Elders, thereby extending the loss of cultural knowledge and its resulting damage into future generations. The current Native American interest in gambling casinos, while it has brought more money to some Native Americans, has also brought attendant vices—addiction to gambling, alcoholism, drug abuse, and prostitution among them. The Four Corners Media Project is intended to stem the flow of disinformation that has alienated young Navajo from their cultural roots and the wisdom of their Elders, to reconnect them with the source of their spiritual power and wellbeing, and to give them tools to use to support themselves while helping to heal their communities.

Project Description (Anticipated Outcomes)

This project has five focal points. Its successful completion will:

1. Divert Adolescents from self-destructive behavior patterns and encourage self-affirming and productive, community-supportive activity,

2. Increase Elders' sense of self-worth and validate their wisdom in order to reconnect the young people with their spiritual source for the good of both Navajo and global communities,
3. Create a visual and verbal record of Elders' wisdom teachings, to be used as a model for similar tribal projects and to preserve these teachings for future generations,
4. Create a vehicle for teaching Adolescents useful life skills (filmmaking and web page design), and
5. Provide a template for future use in reinvigorating marginalized communities through mutually supportive intergenerational interaction.

Implementation Plan

The project, as it is currently developing, will consist of three phases:

Phase I, scheduled to extend from July 7 through July 25, 2008, will consist of *Preparation/Education, Story-telling, and Filmmaking*. It was anticipated that the initial phase of this project would require approximately a month (since participating Adolescents will need to be taught the necessary skills of filmmaking): one week in Santa Fe at the Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) where they will learn the basics of filmmaking, one week on the Navajo Reservation in Shiprock, NM, where they will film the Elders, and one week at SFCC where they will begin post production work on the film.

Phase II will consist of *Film Editing, Web Page Design, and Documentation*. The second phase of this project will extend well into 2009 and possibly even 2010, while the Adolescents perfect their film editing skills, design a web page to host the film, and participate in interviews with the research team for the purpose of evaluation and documentation of the project results.

Phase III will consist of *Dissemination* of the project results. These results, the "product" of this project, will include a high quality documentary film that may be used as a teaching tool in Indigenous Studies programs and shown on PBS or in various film festivals; publication of articles in professional journals and/or popular magazines; and publication of a book or a chapter in an anthology.

Preparation/Education

Adolescents will receive the necessary instruction for photography, audiotaping, filmmaking, and web design from appropriate professionals (see Qualifications of Administrative Staff). This has been scheduled to take place during a period of three weeks, from July 7-July 25, 2008.

Story-telling

Navajo Elders will share their stories (personal, historical, or teaching stories) with Navajo Adolescents. This is expected to take place during the week of July 14-19, 2008, while the Adolescents document the process through audio tape, film, and still photography.

Filmmaking

Navajo Adolescents will return to SFCC for the week of July 21-25, 2008, to apply what they learned in the first week of the course and to begin to learn the basics of post production (film editing). Post production will continue at Northwestern High School in Shiprock under the guidance of Shiprock Associated Schools Inc. (SASI) media teachers Anne McGinley and Chris Schramm. The Adolescents will continue to interact from time to time with members of the Research Team in this phase of the project.

Web Design

Navajo Adolescents, under the guidance of McGinley and Schramm, will create a website to host the Elders' stories, transferring photographs and video footage to the website. This will take place during the school year 2008-2009.

Documentation

The Principle Investigator and Research Team members will record both the Elders' story-telling and the Adolescents' attempts to capture the stories on film and on the website through audio and video tape and field notes. Working with partner organizations well-versed in filmmaking (see Qualifications of Administrative Staff re: SFCC), the Team will help the Adolescents create a final documentary film. This documentary will relate not only the process of story-telling and creation of the website, but much of the interaction of Elders and Adolescents and the experience of all participants as well. In a sense, the documentary will be a story about indigenous story-telling and lifeways, and how vital the oral tradition is to Native American youth seeking to reconnect with their cultural roots. This phase of the project will begin during the 3 weeks on location and will continue until the project has been fully documented, evaluated, and determined ready for dissemination, which will take at least a year to complete.

Because this is a research project as well as a means of providing community support, and because the results of the project will be published in both printed and visual format, Adolescents must have their parents' or guardians' consent to participate in the project. All participants—Elders as well as Adolescents—will be asked to sign an Informed Consent to be audiotaped, videotaped, photographed, and published. Particular care will be given to respect the wishes and lifeways of Elders, Adolescents and their parents, and the Navajo community in relation to these requirements. Finally, Elders and Adolescents will be interviewed to learn how they felt about their experience of participating in the project.

Evaluation Plan

This project will employ a blended qualitative research method, combining elements of Organic Inquiry, Feminist Research, and Participatory Research. The blended method produces an account that is both accurate and intimate, preserving the personal reflections of participants as it reveals the core themes of the project, and inspires the audience to find its own ways to address challenging cultural issues.

Data will consist of excerpts from journal entries and field notes, participants' comments and reflections, transcriptions of audio-taped comments made during interviews and group work, video footage, and still photos. All audio-taped material will be transcribed by a qualified Research Assistant, and all video footage will be edited under the guidance of highly qualified professional filmmakers. A statement of how this data will be gathered is included in all Informed Consent forms.

One of the most effective ways to determine the project's success will be through interviews with participants (Elders, Adolescents, Cultural Consultants, and the Tribal Council) who will consider its potential for applicability in this particular community as well as for duplication in other Native American communities. This method of evaluation is best suited to such a project, because of the oral and consensual traditions of many Native American people.

Public reception of the resulting film as a PBS documentary and/or an independent film, and the willingness of funding organizations to support future similar efforts, will be further determinants of the project's success.

Dissemination Plan

The results of this project will be disseminated through professional journals and popular magazines, a book or chapter in an anthology, press releases in both New Mexico and California newspapers, the documentary film (which could be viewed on PBS or shown at various film festivals), McKay-Riddell's conference presentations, and the Navajo Adolescents' website. Nor should one underestimate the efficacy of word of mouth—a reliable source of information among Native Americans. Such a range of options for dissemination insures that the project will be well documented across a broad swath of the general population—including those who are underserved as well as those who may be inspired to reach out to the underserved.

Impact/Outreach

Post-project interviews with participants (both Elders and Adolescents), as well as professionals involved in the project, will help to determine its success. Furthermore, the project will be judged by the Tribal Council and if considered worthy, its results will be presented to other Native American communities for their use in cultural conservancy and community reclamation.

Such a project can be implemented in a very small, inner-city community as well as in a community as large and all-encompassing as the Navajo Reservation. Furthermore, it can be applied to any cultural group, provided one can find Elders who are willing to participate. In Northern California, for example, we have mini-communities of South Asians (including Tongan and other Pacific Island groups), Asians (including Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Thai), African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Middle Easterners (including recent and earlier immigrants from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran). It is possible, therefore, that this project may serve as a template for similarly funded projects around the country.

Qualifications of the Project Director

Valentine McKay-Riddell, Ph.D., Founding and Executive Director of Orenda Healing International (OHI) and Adjunct Faculty member of the Global Ph.D. program at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP) will serve as Project Director.

Through projects implemented as Director of Orenda Healing International (OHI), a 501.c.3. nonprofit organization founded in Santa Fe, NM, in 1993 (currently based in Berkeley, CA), her clinical training in the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology's (ITP) Residential Masters program, her doctoral work with female elders serving as mentors to Adolescents at a "last chance" school in the San Francisco Bay Area (*Coming home to Gaia: Mentored Earth-based rites of passage with adolescent girls*. McKay-Riddell, 2006), and her post-doctoral work with female Adolescents at the same school (the Gaia's Girls project), she has gained considerable experience in working with both Adolescents and adults in a multicultural environment (Native American, Latino, Pacific Islander, African American, and Anglo). She has also taught shamanic healing and expressive arts therapy to incarcerated Adolescents in New Mexico, and to seniors, developmentally disabled adults, AIDS and cancer patients, and women in transition in Northern California, Oregon, and New Mexico. This experience, along with her own Native American heritage and the fact that she has assembled a strong research team that includes reliable Native American consultants, promises successful results with such a research project.

Qualifications of Administrative Staff Members

Kate Wolf-Pizor, MA, MFT, Chair of the Residential Master's project at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, will serve as Clinical Advisor. She has taught at the Institute since 1997 and served as Chair since 2001. She has also taught at Santa Clara University and National University. She has been a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in California for 19 years and has worked with families in California for the past 30 years. She is past president of the California State Division of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and maintains a private practice in Mountain View, California.

James Perry, a Navajo residing in Shiprock, NM. will serve as Regional Contact Person (Tribal Liaison) and Cultural Consultant. He has been involved with the community within the surrounding area for the past 8 plus years. Prior to moving back to the

reservation, he lived in the San Francisco Bay Area. Being Navajo, he can relate to bridging classroom work, on and off site training, and integrating the Navajo culture as one of the corner-stones in offering a professional customer relationship in current and future business development on the Navajo Nation Reservation. He is also able to bridge the generational gap existing between youth and elders, which will facilitate the elders' telling of their personal history/stories and the ability of local young interested talent to faithfully record them.

Nicole Margiasso, MA, will serve as Research Assistant to Dr. McKay-Riddell. Nicole holds a Masters in Philosophy and Religion with a Concentration in Women's Spirituality. She is currently a group leader for Gaia's Girls, a project designed to cultivate self-empowerment and inner peace for adolescent girls from underserved communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. Nicole has done cross-cultural research in Women's Mysteries. She has conducted anthropological fieldwork in Mexico, documenting the practices of Mayan midwives. Nicole is also currently writing a book on the Irish goddess Brigit and her sacred places, based on her recent extensive travels in Ireland. Nicole will be presenting her research at the National Women's Studies Association's Annual Conference in June of 2008.

Additional staff support members may be needed. These include two Technical Assistants: one who is knowledgeable in web page design and one with experience in filmmaking. These Assistants may be students from the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Santa Fe Community College, or the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe.

Jill Spitzmiller and Hank Rogerson, internationally acclaimed filmmakers and faculty members in the Santa Fe Community College Film Technicians Training Department (Film Center) will provide training for the Adolescents and will supervise film production and editing. Examples of their work may be found on the Web at www.circleofstories.com.

Please visit www.sfcc.edu for information about SFCC's Film Technicians Training Department (Film Center). Please see "Santa Fe Community College Training Center Corporation" as follows:

During the spring of 2005, under the New Mexico Nonprofit Corporation and New Mexico University Research Park Acts, a new corporation (the Santa Fe Community College Training Center Corporation) was created by the Santa Fe Community College in order to conduct activities related to two initial training projects and to support the development of other training projects in the future.

The first of two such projects is:

Film Center - the college will plan, design, construct, equip and furnish both a mobile film production and transmission capability and a film scene design, construction and training facility. The Film Center will be operated in cooperation with the New Mexico Film Office www.nmfilm.com.

Articles of Incorporation were registered by the New Mexico Public Regulatory Commission on April 16, 2005.

Organizational Capacity

Orenda Healing International (OHI) www.orenda-arts.org was founded in 1993 to umbrella a program teaching Healing Art © to HIV and cancer patients with Open Hands in Santa Fe, NM. During the following 4 years, OHI extended its program to include classes for developmentally disabled adults, challenged youth, and other interested groups and individuals in New Mexico and Northern California. During eight months spent developing a community internet system in Nevada City, CA, OHI encountered many Adolescents who were living on the street. The needs of these young people, and our wish to help them, inspired the YouthSpace Project, which we designed and helped to manage-- collaborating with Nevada County Community Network, Silver Springs High School, the 3-R School, and other organizations in Nevada City, during the spring, summer and fall of 1996. YouthSpace was intended to provide a forum and online meeting ground for homeless Adolescents and concerned adults in Nevada County.

Subsequent projects with incarcerated Adolescents at the Santa Fe Detention Center and other challenged youth were funded by federal grants between 1998 and 2000. These projects consisted of providing an umbrella for writers and musicians to teach at the Detention Center and at Big Brothers Big Sisters in Santa Fe.

During this same period, the McCune Charitable Foundation in Santa Fe funded OHI's program, YouthSpace Santa Fe, which included providing training in media arts, computer programming and web page design at Warehouse 21, permaculture gardening at the Life Center for Youth and Adults, team-building outdoor activities, boys' and girls' support groups, and a weekly public radio talk show for teens at the Santa Fe Community College media center.

Recently completed projects include two after school programs for adolescent girls at the San Francisco 49ers Academy for challenged youth in the San Francisco Bay Area, funded by the Center for the Divine Feminine at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, and preliminary work on the Four Corners Media Project in Shiprock, NM, for which this grant is requested.

This record demonstrates the ability of Orenda Healing International, under the guidance of Founding and Executive Director Dr. Valentine McKay-Riddell, to organize, direct, and successfully complete the Four Corners Media Project.

Project Budget

Estimated total cost of this project is between \$100,000 and \$150,000. Items to be included in the budget are:

Salaries and Stipends for Research Team, Cultural Liaison(s), Web Trainer(s), & Film Producer(s)
Travel and Accommodations for Research Team, Web Trainer(s), Film Producer(s)
Training Expenses for Adolescents
Accommodations for Adolescents
Local Internet Access (site & computers donated)
Documentation (audiotape, videotape/digital film, written report)
Equipment (digital cameras & edit stations, Mac computers & Final Cut Express)
Film Production and Editing
Publishing Expenses

A Phase I seed grant has been provided by the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. Additional funding for Phase I, and Phase II funding, is being requested from the McCune Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation, and other local and national organizations. These funds will cover the costs of web design, film production and post-production. Phase III funding for dissemination of project results will be sought from PBS and other related sources when we have completed a trailer for presentation.

Contact Information

For additional information please contact the Project Director:

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