

Kansas State University Libraries

New Prairie Press

Adult Education Research Conference

Assessing Colonization's Historic and Enduring Impact on Native American Food Culture from an Adult Education Perspective

Angela Kissel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc>



Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Administration Commons](#), [Community-Based Learning Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), [Food Security Commons](#), [Indigenous Studies Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Native American Studies Commons](#), [Oral History Commons](#), [Place and Environment Commons](#), [Social Justice Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#)

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Adult Education Research Conference by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Assessing Colonization's Historic and Enduring Impact on Native American Food Culture from an Adult Education Perspective

Angela Kissel¹

¹Department of Counseling, Leadership, Adult Education, and School Psychology, Texas State University, Texas, United States

Abstract

The purpose of this Research Roundtable is to connect pre- and post-colonization adult education discourse to the historic and continued preservation of Native American food culture.

Keywords: adult education, food culture, Indigenous learning, Native American, Tribal Critical Race Theory

This Research Roundtable is framed from the historical context presented in Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz's (2014) book, *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, and the geographic scope of this Research Roundtable is limited to the continental 48 states. The purpose of this Research Roundtable is to connect pre- and post-colonization adult education discourse to the historic and continued preservation of Native American food culture. This Research Roundtable includes an overview of pre-colonization Native American food culture, historic events that directly impacted Native American food culture and security, a discussion on Tribal Critical Race Theory, and Indigenous learning associated with historic and contemporary Native American food culture.

Changes to the Native American Foodscape

Before the colonization of the United States, many Native Americans had healthy, mostly vegetarian, diets based on the staples of corn, beans, and squash, which were supplemented by wild fish, fowl, and wild game (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Mann, 2006; Taylor, 2001). The Native American foodscape (i.e., "the places and spaces where food is acquired, prepared, talked about, and gathered meaning from") was a factor of geography (Mackendrick, 2014). Especially after the Revolutionary War, historic events and practices significantly disrupted the Native American foodscape, affecting Native American tribes differently. The settlers and United States government involved in these events and practices significantly reduced the food security and subsequent quality of the diets of Native Americans, making them reliant on the federal government for "staples of canned meat and fish, bread, beans, sugar, and coffee or tea" (Edwards & Patchell, 2009, p. 32). To Native Americans, "food is the conduit between people and place that ensures cultural longevity and personal physical vitality. When those food sources are disrupted, health and culture are disrupted" (Gilio-Whitaker, 2019, p. 75).

Adult Education Perspectives

Tribal Critical Race Theory

These historic events and practices that disrupted the Native American foodscape and created issues of food security resulted in oppressed individuals, communities, Nations, and psyche. One facet of Native American oppression is rooted in Tribal Critical Race Theory, which emerges from Critical Race Theory but addresses the specific needs of tribal peoples as "racialized beings and the experience of colonization" (McKinley & Brayboy, 2006, pp. 428-429). McKinley and Brayboy (2006) list nine tenets of Tribal Critical Race Theory, emphasizing the roles racism and colonization have on Indigenous peoples that are unique from other critical race theories. Tribal Critical Race Theory also rejects assimilation of Indigenous students in educational institutions; instead, maintaining "cultural

integrity” as a distinctive Indigenous identity and “source of pride” (McKinley & Brayboy, 2006, p. 437).

One significant emphasis of Critical Race Theory is the development of counter-narratives (Amah, 2012; Briggs, 2019; Ross-Gordon et al., 2017; Squire, 2019). For example, Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) denounces the US narrative as a fallacy, not a heroic conquering of savage peoples in the name of *Manifest Destiny* but rather a counter-narrative that is the truth: “the story of the new world is horror, the story of America is a crime” (p. 228).

Related to Critical Theory, Freire (2018) posits the theory of critical conscientization that manifests itself through the Native American narratives surrounding *survivance*, stories that are “renunciations of dominance, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry” that are a force behind the Native American self-determination and sovereignty movement (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 217). Furthermore, Native Americans can utilize dialogical discourse to not only unveil the injustices that have befallen them but, through the process of critical consciousness, come together in reflection and action (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Doing so could promote continuity and resurgence of the Native American learning that remains at the heart of many Native Americans to further unity and promote healing.

Indigenous Learning

Indigenous learning deconstructs Western notions of adult education that conflict its principles. The first principle of Indigenous learning that differs from Western constructs of education is that “there is an emphasis on interdependence instead of independence in learning” (Reagan, 2018, p. 85). Furthermore, interdependence is linked to the communal nature of learning in that the distinction between *teacher* and *non-teacher* is a rather foreign concept to many Indigenous peoples because teaching and learning are a community effort (Reagan, 2018). Third, there is a holistic approach to learning that includes the “spirit, mind, and physical body as a threefold being,” which is a broader focus than the cognitive Western focus of learning (Reagan, 2018, p. 86). Finally, it is critical to recognize that most learning in Indigenous cultures is informal because learning is the underpinning of “social life in general” (Reagan, 2018, p. 88).

Native Americans historically engaged in nonformal and informal narrative learning because no written Native American language existed prior to the early 1800’s, and the responsibility of community tasks was shared (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). There remain Native American food culture traditions that constitute adult learning, many through narrative and experiential learning (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020; Ross-Gordon & Kasworm, 2017).

Adult learning was, and remains, a critical facet of Native American food culture knowledge. Furthermore, through the lenses of Indigenous learning and Tribal Critical Race Theory, important distinctions can be made about Native American learning as it pertains to the continuation of Native American food culture.

Conclusion

This research reveals a history of pre- and post-colonization Native American food culture, but that context is lacking in the discourse specific to adult education. This gap warrants further exploration so that ties to adult education can be applied to historic and contemporary Native American food culture to preserve this knowledge. Dunbar-Ortiz (2014) argues that Indigenous peoples must “challenge the core of the scripted narrative of the origin story,” and one of the ways that goal can be achieved is for Native Americans to continue sharing the knowledge and history of their peoples through adult education, and when omissions and inaccuracies in the historic narrative are identified, advocate for their correction, making history not just more comprehensive but more accurate (p. 2).