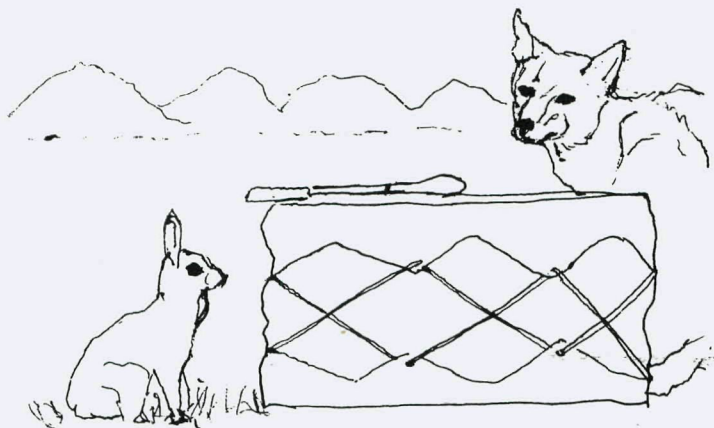


COYOTE AND RABBIT BRING BACK THE CHILDREN'S DRUM

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This modern parable tells a story about Title IX programming for American Indian children. What began as an outstanding program became mired in politics and came close to being closed down by a school district. The story shows how alliances can help provide learning environments for American Indian children.



There was a place where a small group of Indian people did not care properly for the children's program, and all the other Indian families went away because of them. The children's program was supposed to be about helping children to learn in schools.

Instead, the group wanted to be the ones that had the most expensive beads and the biggest pow wow. They had also taken the children's drum, the life spirit. Coyote knew he had to change things and he went to find Rabbit. Rabbit had been tucked in a tree all winter and did not want to be bothered.

Rabbit: "Let me alone; I'm sleeping."

Coyote knew that if he could nudge Rabbit out of the tree he could get Rabbit to help. Coyote is persistent and is sneaky in getting his way sometimes. He finally got Rabbit's neighbor

to help convince her to come out.

Coyote: "Oh, neighbor, you must help; they are ignoring the children."

Neighbor: "I don't want to. They will pick on me and they are rude too!"

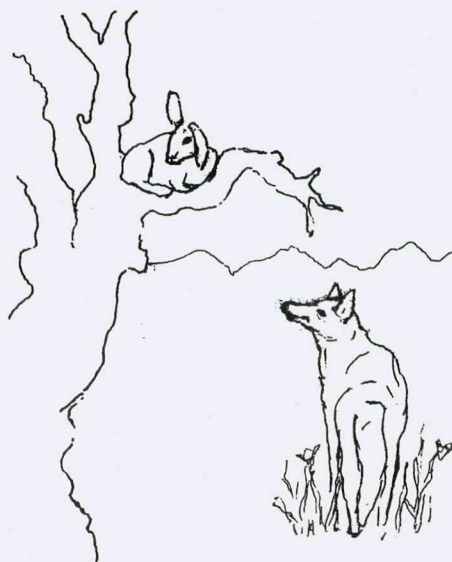
Coyote: "Oh but you must! We need someone to do it."

Neighbor: "Rabbit, wake up; you must help Coyote and Tall Whitebear now."

Coyote: "Rabbit, you must do this or all our children lose this opportunity."

Rabbit: "Oh why? You won't stop until I do this, will you? But I need my rest."

Coyote (innocently): "You can rest later."



And that was the beginning of how Coyote, Rabbit, and Tall Whitebear brought back the children's drum.

Littleview, Somewhere, is an urban city with a mix of Indian people. They are from the North, the South, the East, and the West. The urban Indian population of Littleview is a little over 3,000 according to census data taken in 1994. The Littleview School District applied for a Title IX grant to provide services for American Indian children in the Littleview School District. Until recently, the Littleview American Indian Program (LAIP) was in jeopardy of being phased out of the school district, which was growing weary of LAIP because for many years the program posed several problems for the school district.

One of the main problems was that for several years the American Indian parent committee was made up of the same individuals, some of whom had no children in the district schools. The LAIP ran according to the ways and desires of the small group of committee members in charge. These members were responsible for making decisions for over 500 American Indian families, who would try to join the group and often left in tears. Many times there were fights over North and South. Families were concerned that the cultural part of the program would be from a different direction than theirs. For example, in many instances a person from the North did not want to learn about the South.

The group was responsible for deciding how the grant money was spent. They got a huge amount, \$100,000. Many people were hired and paid, but they worked with only a small number of children and produced a newsletter and a pow wow. The

children, who were invited to the pow wow, had fun, but their grades did not improve. There were fights over what drum to get for their expensive pow wow. The children's drum was the focal point of a major falling out among several members of the group. They could not agree in the parent meetings at which there was name-calling and negativity, threatened violence and disrespect. Serious divisions in the group led to people staying away. Many families no longer participated in events; many people left the program.

The Big Redman in charge left the group shortly after this occurred. LAIP also lost most of its grant money. Someone new became director, Big Redman², and the parents followed the same pattern. Sure, they had culture classes that turned into culture clashes, due to the North and South infighting and assorted issues. They also had a newsletter and a pow wow. The tutors worked on the newsletter and occasionally saw students, but not nearly enough tutoring was done to help educate young Indian children, according to the records kept.

Many of the group members were used to making money at the pow wow. It was business for them. But, when it came to focusing on children's education, they said they wanted things to be better, but they never initiated any action. After the last director left, LAIP was standing alone.

Coyote, Rabbit, and Tall Whitebear walked in the door. The first meeting was quiet enough but after a few more meetings, the committee started to bellow. They wanted a pow wow. They wanted culture classes. Tall Whitebear offered, they accepted, and culture classes in story telling, mime, and music by Somewhere tribal artists

were provided. This was a neutral stand to avoid the North and South conflicts.

But, of course, the parents felt that these events were decided only by Coyote, Rabbit and Tall Whitebear, although they had agreed to the events. They wanted their old familiar people back to present an event. The cost was phenomenal (more than ten times what Somewhere Indian artists were paid) but Tall Whitebear, who was in charge, said to let them have this one last event. Against Rabbit's judgement they had the event. A handful of people showed up and Rabbit was the only one to make or think about giving the high school graduates an honoring certificate. The only thing talked about in the parents' meetings was which drum they wanted and who would provide the fry bread. They never discussed how this event would honor graduating students.

When tutoring was mentioned by Rabbit or Tall Whitebear, no one in the committee seemed to care much. Rabbit simply kept sending more and more tutors to schools throughout the district. They tried to get Rabbit to quit a few times by yelling. They took turns going after Coyote, Rabbit, and Tall Whitebear, one by one, in their meetings. Rabbit and Coyote would leave every time they did this and not return to that meeting. Tall Whitebear stayed but he stopped bringing his children so that they would not hear him or others being verbally abused.

Coyote became too weary of the strife and its toll. Coyote continued to help Rabbit and Tall Whitebear but started skipping the meetings. Rabbit and Tall Whitebear were persistent. They refused to give in to those whose motives seemed self-centered as

opposed to children-centered.

Things did change.

The group changed over the past year and now there are rules about not getting out of control or being impolite or abusive in meetings. So far, the parents, mostly new, have not started the verbal abuse. It will no longer be tolerated.

In the past 15 months, Rabbit has made sure that more children have been tutored than in the past 20 years, as far as record keeping reveals. Coyote and Rabbit assume that the 'white tape' of record keeping was too much for those in charge to bother with before. Many children were probably helped during those twenty years, but the records don't indicate much of anything that was done. Unfortunately it is the records that the District and the Title IX people review.

Rabbit pulled one out of her hat this time. There are records to show that families are receiving tutoring; tutors are getting paid; culture classes, computer classes, and support groups are being offered. This has been done with a budget that is less than \$40,000 (the budget 10 years ago was about \$100,000).

Improvements in standardized test scores (which 'white tape' funding sources like but children generally don't) and grades are measures of trends in the right directions. The parents' group has changed in its culture and is still changing into a more productive group. The group has become more focused on the importance of education and is aware that we must all make efforts to be progressive. Educationally based culture classes are offered as well as a new 'Talking Circle' for teens.

Coyote, Rabbit, and Tall Whitebear need to note here that the changes that are occurring are due to very dedicated people who have volunteered their time to make change happen. Sometimes, as Rabbit described above, you have to overcome a lot of 'red tape' for children!

Education is important to American Indian families. The children's drum, the life spirit of LAIP, is safe, so learning continues. Life, living, and learning go on. □



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