

Lakota Identity and Virtues - Stephanie Charging Eagle - OSEU #2

Most importantly, we have to acknowledge that there is a system in place that was... I guess you could say... forced upon us... to acknowledge who we are, you know...in that way. And that is with the blood quantum... and that is the reality. So, we have to work with that. But we... what we want our students of South Dakota... who use this curriculum... is that we consider ourselves people of the Oceti Sakowin... because we come from that land... we come from that lineage of people... who fought for that...who lived that life... who acknowledge spiritually who Wakan Tanka is... who Tunkasila is. If we were to... this is just my personal... I guess this is personal for me... if I were asked to pick people in my community who would be the people that would be acknowledged as Lakota... because of criteria, certain criteria...I would have to say first that they live the life of a Lakota person... which is a male or female... and to live that life as a Lakota person would. And that is, you know, all the teachings we've gotten as a Lakota woman...what I was taught were certain responsibilities... certain roles that I had to know and to be able to do as a woman... and that was my role in the circle... and the male is the same. So I wouldn't be like a male and the male wouldn't be like a female.

The... our roles and responsibilities. So I would have to look at the individual and say, "They are... I would say they are Lakota because every day they live that life. They're generous in the way that we as Lakota people are generous. They are spiritual in the way that our Lakota people are spiritual." And so it's all these very abstract virtues or characteristics. And then language... to be able to speak the language... not just surface language...but to be able to understand when we say, "tiospaye," what does that mean? We know that means "extended family," but what does that word really mean? And to have the language in that sense would be another very important criteria. The other thing is... to understand the spiritual part of who we are...to understand that we are one in a circle...but that to be the best we are in that circle individually is what makes us whole... strong as a whole. We are never an individual for ourselves, but that we do our best to be who we are. And that's what I believe... when we talk about variety and resilience, that is the key there... for me to be the best educator... not because I'm going to get lots of money. I never...I'll never be rich, you know...but to be the best educator...to be the best woman... to be the best in what I do because I'm doing it within the circle to make the circle stronger.

And that I believe is the variety and the resilience of our people. And that's what we would like our students of South Dakota to see and understand.