



**FIFTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON FAIRNESS & EQUITY  
ISSUES IN CHILD WELFARE TRAINING AND EDUCATION**

***Regional Panel Presentation***  
**Building an ICWA Regional Collaborative**  
Central California Training Academy

Summary of Presentation  
April 12, 2007

**Soledad Caldera-Gammage** (Curriculum and Evaluation Specialist, Central California Training Academy)

Soledad Caldera-Gammage introduced the panel presentation by briefly summarizing her involvement with planning a collaborative summit of diverse groups, intended to create a common dialogue about issues related to ICWA. The objective of this presentation was to describe the process of organizing the summit and offer insights as to the factors that led to a successful collaboration.

Though the initial planning stages involved a small group of committee members, the planning group steadily grew to include members from other interested parties, including community members, persons from academia and professionals in the field. It was important to remain open to allowing as many interested members to join as possible. An overall objective of the group was to ensure that targeted needs were being met for the community as a whole, and not just for the university or the tribe.

Once a cohesive group was formed to plan the summit, it was discovered that not only was everyone interested in working together, but everyone sought the same objective: collaboration among multiple parties. The planning process allowed this to happen, but not without a lot of hard work, passion, and commitment from everyone involved.

**Corinne Florez** (Coordinator, Title IV-E Child Welfare program, California State University, Fresno)

Corinne Florez discussed the history of the facilitation process that allowed the collaboration to evolve and achieve success. The process did not happen quickly; it took approximately two or three years to gel.

The group began their conversation by discussing the problems they knew existed. They defined the current situation, and then proceeded to set the tone for the rest of the work process. Borrowing from concepts of cultural competence, particularly “*dynamics of*

*difference,*” the group decided from the beginning that they would be committed to respecting and appreciating one another’s differences. This was also the guiding theme of the rules for the group: honesty with one another, regularly checking in with each other, accepting that people are going to have different opinions and allowing all diverse opinions to be expressed.

The group also looked at current frameworks, or what they called explanatory models. They reviewed historical influences and oppressive practices that had occurred in the past. They also examined educational issues, and what was being offered at school and in the classroom. They posed several questions to one another:

- What are the realities of current practices?
- What was/is happening within public child welfare practice in regards to race and disparity?
- What was/is happening within American Indian communities?
- Are the values, traditions and perspectives of the American Indian community being acknowledged and incorporated into school curricula?

Above all, consistent emphasis was placed on cultural competency and respect for one another. The group is now considering next steps, examining feedback from the summit and developing a plan for the future.

**Thomas Phillips** (American Indian Graduate Outreach & Recruitment Coordinator, California State University, Stanislaus / CalSWEC Title IV-E Child Welfare Project)

Thomas Phillips began by stating, “*The greatest enemy to social justice, equity and fairness is apathy.*” In contrast, the objective of the summit was to take action against injustice, inequity and unfairness. Part of this action was to create a *collective* (rather than a *selective*) community, a common ground where all are included, and not separated or excluded.

The summit was a significant accomplishment, since university and American Indian communities have historically been at odds. The American Indian community has been reluctant to trust universities, and there is a disproportionate under-representation of American Indian students enrolled in colleges and universities. This may be due to the American Indian population being historically excluded in the development of academia, except as subjects of research. Also, school curricula oftentimes exclude mention of relevant American Indian issues.

Mr. Phillips then described the importance of visibility and presence, and how this is necessary before any action can occur. Being visible – joining groups and attending events – allows one to get to know community members who may be critical to the change process. Being present also allows one to become more culturally competent about the people with whom one is working.

**Matthew West** (Director, Santa Rosa Rancheria ICWA Department, Lemoore, California)

Matthew West expressed his gratitude for being at the symposium and for all the efforts put forth by those involved. He reiterated that the solution to fixing and mending the problems that exist is for everyone to work together. It is important to realize the differences that people bring with them, but there is always a way to work through them and push ahead. He reminded the audience that there are walls and barriers within the systems in which they work, but cautioned them not to let those barriers deter their efforts.

**Audience question:**

The Federal Review now requires tribes to participate in the process as stakeholders. Are there any recommendations for achieving successful outcomes for everyone?

**Panel response:**

Begin by going to the gatekeepers of the tribes, the elders of their communities, and invite them to participate. If they are not able to take part, ask them to keep you in their prayers during your work. Also keep elected tribal people informed of your efforts.

Allow tribal and community members time to talk about their concerns when they do come to the table. It is disrespectful to invite them only to accomplish what you want, without considering their needs and concerns.

Develop a strategic plan, keep people accountable, put community members' responses into action and act collectively.