Teachers of Dine Language and Culture Building Enduring Systems of Support

Louise Lockard, Velma Hale
Lecturer, Educational Specialties, Northern Arizona University
USA

Abstract

In response to the question, "How do we build enduring systems of support for our children within our classrooms and communities?" we examined the learning logs of Dine teachers in a graduate course: Foundations of Bilingual Multicultural Education. We asked, "Who are you now? How will you continue to grow and develop professionally? How does your understanding of history, research and current practice in the field of Navajo education inform and improve your own teaching and learning?" We attempted to gain a sense of the whole from this rich data source which focuses on concrete events in the stories of the participants, listening for the unique stories of how teachers learned to value their language and why they continue to teach it, exploring the institutions of literacy and power in which teachers work and live. Each teacher understands the history of language teaching in a different way; each teacher passes this understanding on to her students in a different way. The texts of the reading logs challenged and moved our thinking as researchers beyond our understanding when this process began.

The deeper meaning behind my teaching and philosophy is to ensure that we do not lose our beautiful culture in the midst of western culture. With my knowledge, I want to continue on the teachings of our ancestors and their way of life and language. These are the teachings that made our people strong, passionate, humble, and resilient. (Revaline Nez, Navajo Language and Culture teacher STAR School, 2018)

Prior decades of U.S. government policy to suppress NA/AN language use in schools had devastating results for NA/AN students and continuing negative effects on parent and community engagement. (US Department of Education, 2018)

We acknowledge the history of language suppression based on federal language policy in Navajo communities. (Reyhner 1992, US Department of Education, 2018). From this historical and social perspective, we ask, "How do we build enduring systems of support for our children within our classrooms and communities?" We know that American Indian students learn best when they see their culture, language and experience reflected in the curriculum. (Balter & Grossman, 2009; Barnhardt, 2014; Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2008; Kana'iaupuni, Ledward & Jensen, 2010; Reyhner & Hurtado, 2008; Styres & Zinga, 2013, Brayboy and Castagno 2009). Native American children who learn their heritage language in the classroom in strong language revitalization programs learn English at about the same rate as their

peers who are not enrolled in an indigenous language immersion program. (Reyhner, 2006; Rosier & Holm, 1980; Wilson & Kamana, 2011; Holm, 2006; May, Hill & Tiakiwai, 2004, McCarty, 2003, 2013; Tedlick, Christian & Fortune, 2011)

Johnson and Wilson (2005) describe lessons learned from their work with the Window Rock Immersion program and describe what makes a difference; the use of the Dine language as a medium of instruction, consistent integration of Dine culture in instruction. August, Goldenberg and Rueda (2006) discuss the need for systems that are "intensive, elaborate and enduring" to accomplish teacher change. McCarty (1995, 2013) discusses her research in Navajo dual language classrooms. She writes, "School power relations must be democratized such that bilingual teachers control their own pedagogy. The latter carries a heightened significance in American Indian and other minority communities, as it entails a basic reversal of historic role relations…. for it is only when teachers feel and are validated in their work that they can create the same conditions for their students."

Parents can and should be active partners in school improvement, and can build local tribal community ownership of the schools. Research suggests that educators who involve families in their children's education can strengthen their own instructional effectiveness with English learners. Chen, Kyle and McIntyre (2008) document the success of their work with teachers to support building background strategies and to recognize the rich funds of knowledge of the family and the community (Moll and Gonzalez, 2004). Parent workshops were developed for "We R Family" a 21st Century Community Learning Center Program by Valencia Edgewater who extended this model to weekend Diné language classes for parents and community members in the Hard Rocks Chapter (Landry, 2015). In her book, *Bringing our languages home; Language revitalization for families*, Leanne Hinton (2013 p. xiv) reminds us, "Those who dream of language revitalization ultimately desire the natural transmission of the language from parent to child and use it in daily life."

This inquiry is undertaken through narrative inquiry. (Clandinin & Connelly 2000) We examined the learning logs of Dine teachers in BME 530 Foundations of Bilingual Multicultural Education. We asked participants to describe their personal philosophy of education: Your personal philosophy of education should reflect your core beliefs, values and views. It should display the ideals that you want to promote as an educator of children from many linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Your personal philosophy of education should provide a focus for your teaching. It should be based on and spring from your own deeply felt principles as well as from your theoretical knowledge base. It should include your vision of yourself as a life-long teacher and learner. Who are you now? How will you function in the classroom and how will you continue to grow and develop professionally? How does your understanding of history, research and current practice in the field of ESL inform and improve your own teaching and learning? How does the structure of an ESL program affect teaching and learning within the program? We marked the learning logs for passages which we found interesting or important. We attempted to gain a sense of the whole from this rich data source which focuses on concrete events in the stories of the participants, listening for the unique stories of how teachers learned to value their language and why they continue to teach it, exploring the institutions of literacy and power in which Dine teachers work and live. Each teacher understands the

history of language teaching in a different way; each teacher passes this understanding on to her students in a different way. The texts of the reading logs challenged and moved our thinking as researchers beyond our understanding when this process began.

We built on the theoretical foundation of critical indigenous pedagogy; theory grounded in the social-historical conditions of the community (Trinidad 2011, 2012). Critical indigenous pedagogy CIP is grounded in the positionality of the indigenous researcher as a member the community. CIP reaches back to deconstruct the Eurocentric models of the past to regain the critical consciousness of the cultural, historical and linguistic roots of indigenous peoples. This research process seeks to gain a critical consciousness through the teachings, stories and actions of indigenous peoples in their schools and in their communities. The transformative knowledge gained from this fresh view of the curriculum supports quality education for native communities. "Through CIP, indigenization makes the concept of empowerment specific to a cultural group and its historic experiences and, most importantly, makes it ecologically valid and credible to a community knowledge base." (Trinidad, 2011)

CIP research provides a fresh view of the process of knowledge construction. One example of this circular perspective is the Diné education philosophy. (Benally, 1994) The Diné education philosophy is a transformative knowledge contraction process. The first stage is thinking Nitsáhakees. At this stage the researcher begins with an awareness of the process of critical investigation. The direction of this stage is the East. The direction of the next stage in research is the south: Nahat'á (Tr: planning). At this stage the researcher identifies resources and sources for investigation. The third stage is the west: Iíná (Tr: life). At this stage the researcher applies ideas and gains new information. The fourth stage is the north: Siihasin (Tr: stability). At this stage the researcher evaluates and assesses her satisfaction with the research and prepares to formulate new research questions. This framework is used in research to connect personal and cultural knowledge, stories, experiences, and social interactions. The researcher views the community from a fresh vantage point; from the perspective of those who hold knowledge. The researcher describes how this knowledge is transmitted in learning communities which include schools, families, recreational organizations, agricultural units, or religious institutions.

We begin with the reflections of the Dine teachers:

A fifth-grade teacher describes how she balances the Dine framework with common core standards.

I plan to be an advocate for my students in different capacities. I plan to push for the creation of a culturally relevant curriculum in my school system. I have already created different culturally relevant material concerning the common core standards. I plan to continue to develop and use the more culturally relevant content in my classroom. I am in the process of searching for different interactive technology that is Navajo language based so that my students will be exposed to their language daily. I genuinely believe in the duality of the Navajo and Western way of life. I firmly believe that students that have a strong sense of identity and cultural awareness will be successful inside and outside the classroom.

A Dine language and culture teacher explores her role as teacher and learner:

I believe that learning about our own culture and others can teach respect. I think all students will benefit from such teachings because it allows for one to be a life long learner. Johnson and Legatz (2006) briefly describe this in their article: "This provides for relevant education to become successful in a multicultural society as our mission states and to carry on the vision of Dine values of life-long learning" (Johnson & Legatz, 2006, p. 27). For me to effectively carry out and live my philosophical views I need to learn continuously. There are three main places of my knowledge source, which stems from students, professional, and personal experiences. My children and students are my most excellent teachers, and I am always learning something new from them every day. My next source is learning from my personal experiences. Finally, I can continue to grow my knowledge by attending conferences and completing my academic studies. Conferences and attending classes are where I can also continue to learn from research, articles, books, oral histories, and listening to other educators and Diné traditional practitioners. There is still a lot for me to learn and to transfer down to the next generation. The deeper meaning behind my teaching and philosophy is to ensure that we do not lose our beautiful culture in the mist of western culture. With my knowledge, I want to continue on the teachings of our ancestors and their way of life and language. These are the teachings that made our people strong, passionate, humble, and resilient.

A Dine language teacher shares a story of arrival in the community where she lives and teaches:

I am very fortunate to have been raised by my grandmother. Her teachings and her beliefs are what I picked up when I was growing up. My grandmother was one of four siblings who were of the Ta'neeszahnii clan that settled down in Rock Point over a hundred years ago. The history of our clan began long after the Navajo Long Walk. The history starts with my great, great grandfather whose name was Tsin Sikaadnii Tsoh. He was captured and taken to Fort Sumner where he spent all four years working at a trading post. The conditions were harsh for the people that were imprisoned there. They were exposed to harsh winters, heat, hunger, and foreign foods. He found that the only way to survive was to work alongside other workers. One day, he saw a necklace made of red coral beads, and he vowed to work for it, and it took him four years to obtain the necklace. He knew that the necklace would serve as payment for his future wife.

The four years allowed for a peace treaty between the Navajo people and the government in 1868. The Navajos were allowed to go back to their lands, and some knew where to go. Others just settled down where they could. My great, great grandfather kept walking and walking until he was close to his home. As he got closer and closer to Round Rock, he saw two women sitting under a tree. He stopped to chat with the women and found out that they had been alone for months. He then asked the mother to be his wife and offered the red coral necklace as an offering. The other woman was the mother's daughter. They then moved and settled down in Rock Point.

The mother had four children of which are my direct descendants. The daughter also had children for my great, great grandfather. Between the two women, two groups of Ta'neeszahnii families populated

Rock Point. Many of our elders have left us but we continue to carry on our clans. We cannot do without learning about our past because it helps us understand what is important. Our values and beliefs come from the environment that we grew up in.

A third grade teacher reflects on the values of the family and the school
I remember my grandparent's teachings. They woke up very early to start their daily chores. I can still recall my maternal grandma telling me "wake up and don't let poverty overtake you. Get to work!" (in Navajo). My paternal grandma was a woman of prayer. I recall waking up as she called to Diyin God for strength, help, and wisdom in her daily task as she prayed in Navajo in the early dawn hours. My dad was machinist by trade, but he worked with the Navajo Nation Head Start program as an Agency Fleet Coordinator for over 30 years. His job focused on the safety and maintenance of the Head Start school buses in the Shiprock agency. He also assisted with basic maintenance at the agency preschool buildings. My mom has been employed with Central Consolidated School District for 26 years. She has worked as a para-professional for 25 years with Newcomb Elementary, and she has worked as a 1st grade teacher at Nataani Nez Elementary for one year. She also drove the school bus when they needed a substitute driver.

An art teacher invites parents to create community art projects:

At Pinon Middle School, I promoted parental involvement. I invited parents to come and create with their children at our after school art activities. I needed their support to educate their children. The grades I worked with was 6th thru 8th. The purpose is to promote cultural values in their creations of artwork. Most of the images were of their heritage. I believe that arts integrate teaching is culturally responsive and creates learning that is relevant in student's lives. We learned the art techniques and the use of materials in drawing and sculpting. We provided art materials and some snacks. Parental involvement was a success and we created a lot of art and installed a big sculpture at the Pinon Health Center. The sculpture is an image of a Navajo women standing holding a child in a cradleboard. We called it "Mother and Child".

A teacher returns to the theme of balance in her work in the first grade classroom
I am filled with joy that I am given the opportunity to teach and enhance the knowledge of 23 first graders at Tsaile Public School. Being that I was privileged in acquiring early on the important concepts of Dine language/culture, I feel that it is my duty to serve my students in the same fashion. I have already begun teaching basic concepts of language and culture in my classroom. I truly believe that a harmonious balance of learning a Dine based alongside a Western based education will support my future work with Dine language and culture by shaping and motivating further steps to take to successfully and appropriately implement curriculums centered on language and culture revitalization. Moreover, it is vital that indigenous research and theory recognize the virtues of teaching and learning through a balanced Dine way of thinking and living.

In our work as teacher educators, we call for teachers to examine the relations of power and the ideologies which define their roles as teachers of Diné language and culture and to apply the insights gained from this

process to their work. We see an opportunity to positively impact the current focus on "student achievement" and "school improvement" by expanding schools' thinking about how they can focus their efforts to enhance Navajo student learning and expanding conventional ideas of what effective, integrated, meaningful teaching and learning can look like in schools with Navajo learners. We encourage the kinds of dynamic school and community structures that create the conditions for indigenous learners and the types of dynamic professional training that helps teachers to incorporate the strategies that make a difference for Navajo student success. We envision a school that could fully involve the family in an immersive school experience that is rooted in Navajo philosophy and deeply aligned with the cultural significance of the four directions Like a *hogan* with its door facing East, every part of the school experience and curriculum would be built on the foundation of an indigenous world view, and embedded in the places, practices, language, and activities of the Diné. In this way, the family could be involved authentically, bringing all dimensions of the sophisticated indigenous knowledge system to bear on the learning experience, and rooting out the remnants of false hierarchies that suggest the Western knowledge system is better or more highly developed. Knowledge of seasons, constellations, ceremonial healing, plant and animal life, agriculture, ecological resource management, cosmology, etc. would form the curriculum of such a school. The purpose of the school would be for students to learn who they are, and to master the ways of life that are organized around the daily movement of the sun. In this model, "family involvement" is indeed a best practice, interpreted around the relationships of *k'é*, the kinship among clans and among all five-fingered people who live upon the earth's surface. With this vision as teacher educators we seek to establish systems that are intensive, elaborative and enduring for future generations of Dine teachers and students.

References:

Arviso, M., & Holm, W. (2001). Tseʹhootsooıʹdi Oʹ lta'gi Dineʹ bizaad bıʹhoo'aah: A Navajo immersion program at Fort Defiance, Arizona. In L. Hinton & K. Hale (Eds.), The Green book of language revitalization in practice (pp. 203–215). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Balter, A. & Grossman, F. (2009) The effects of the No Child Left Behind Act on language and culture education in Navajo public schools, Journal of American Indian Education, 48(3),19-46.

Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, O. (2005). Indigenous knowledge systems and Alaska Native ways of knowing. Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 36 (1), 8-23.

Barnhardt, R. (2014) Creating a place for Indigenous knowledge in education. In D. Gruenwald & G. Smith (Eds.) Place-based education in the global age. Local diversity (pp 113-134). New York: Psychology Press.

Battiste, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education; A literature

review with recommendations. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

Begay, S., Dick, G.S., Estell, D., Estell, J., McCarty, T.L., & Sells, A. (1995) Change from the inside out: A story of transformation in a Navajo community school. The Bilingual Research Journal(19),1,120-139.

Benally, H. (1994). Navajo Philosophy of Learning and Pedagogy, Journal of Navajo Education, XII (1), 23-31.

Brayboy, Bryan McKinley Jones, and Angela E. Castagno. 2009. "Self-Determination through Self-Education: Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Students in the USA." *Teaching Education* 20(1): 31–53.

Chen, C. & Kyle, D.W. and McIntyre, M. (2008) Helping teachers work effectively with English language learners and their families. The School Community Journal, (18) 1, 7-20.

Clandinin, D., & Connelly, F. (2000). Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

M. E. Romero-Little, S. J. Ortiz, & T. L. McCarty (Eds.), Indigenous Languages across the generations—strengthening families and communities. Tempe: Arizona State University Center for Indian Education.

Haig-Brown, C. & Dannenmann, K. (2008). The land is the first teacher: The Indigenous knowledge instructors' program. In Z. Bekerman & E. Kopelowitz (Eds.) Cultural Education-Cultural Sustainability: Minority Diaspora, Indigenous, and Ethno-religious Groups in Multicultural Societies (pp. 245-266) New York, NY: Routledge.

Hinton, L. (Ed.) (2013) Bringing our languages home: Language revitalization for families. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books.

Holm, A., & Holm, W. (1995). Navajo language education: Retrospect and prospects. Bilingual Research Journal, 19(1), 141–167.

Holm, W., Silentman, I. (Eds.) (1997) Situational Navajo: The Specific language used in recurring situations by Navajo Head Start teachers and children. Window Rock, AZ: Navajo Nation Language Project Navajo Tribe, Division of Diné Education.

Holm, W. (2006) The "goodness" of bilingual education for Native American children. In T.L.

McCarty and O. Zepeda (Eds.), One voice, many voices; Recreating Indigenous language communities (pp. 1-46). Tempe: Arizona State University Center for Indian Education.

Huffman, T. (2018) Tribal Strengths & Native Education Voices from the Reservation Classrooms Amherst and Boston University of Massachusetts Press.

Johnson, F. T. & Legatz J. (2006).Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'ólta'. Journal of American Indian Education, 45(2), 26–33.

Kana'iaupuni, S., Ledward, B., & Jensen, U. (2010) Culture-based education and its relationship to student outcomes. Honolulu, HI: Kamehameha Schools Research and Evaluation.

Kelchtermans, G. & Ballet, K. (2002) Micropolitical literacy: reconstructing a neglected dimension in teacher development International Journal of Teacher Research 37 (8)755-767.

May, S., Hill, R., & Tiakiwai, S. (2004). Bilingual/immersion education: Indicators of good practice. Final report to the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education. Retrieved from http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/5079

McCarty, T.L. (1989) School as Community: The Rough Rock Demonstration Harvard educational review, 59 (4) 484-503.

McCarty, T.L. (1998) Schooling, resistance, and American Indian languages. International Journal of the Sociology of Language (132) pp. 27-41.

McCarty, T.L. (1993) Language, literacy, and the image of the child in American Indian classrooms. Language Arts, 70(3), 182-192.

McCarty, T.L. (2003) Revitalizing Indigenous languages in homogenizing times. Comparative Education, 39, 147-163.

McCarty, T.L. et. al. (1995, 2013) Change from the inside out: A story of transformation in a Navajo community school. Bilingual Research Journal 19 (1) 121-139.

McCarty, T.L. & Nicholas, S.E. (2014) Reclaiming Indigenous Languages: A Reconsideration of the Roles and Responsibilities of Schools Review of Research in Education, 38 pp 106-136. AERA.

Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. Theory into Practice, 31(2), 132-141.

Moll, L. C., & González, N. (2004). Engaging life: A funds of knowledge approach to multicultural education. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), Handbook of research on multicultural education (2nd ed., pp. 699-715). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Navajo Nation Division of Diné Education (1984). Navajo Nation education policies 10 § NNC 111.

Navajo Tribe Division of Diné Education (July 19, 1995) Executive Order Title X.

Navajo Tribe Division of Diné Education (1996) Diné culture and language curriculum framework. Window Rock, AZ: Division of Diné Education.

Navajo Tribe Division of Diné Education. (2003a) Diné language standards. Window Rock, AZ: Division of Diné Education.

Navajo Tribe Division of Diné Education. (2003b) Diné Culture-based curriculum. Window Rock, AZ: Division of Diné Education.

Nelson-Barber, & Johnson. (2016). Acknowledging the perils of "best practices" in an indigenous community. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 47*, 44-50

Ninneman, A.M., Deaton, J. and Francis-Begay, K. (2017) National Indian Education Study 2015 (NCES 2017-161). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

Reyhner, Jon. 1992. “American Indians Out of School: A Review of School-Based Causes and Solutions.” *Journal of American Indian Education* 31(3): 37–56.

Reyhner, J. (2003). Native Language Immersion In J. Reyhner, O. Trujillo, R. Carrasco & L. Lockard (Eds.), Nurturing Native Languages (pp. 1-6). Flagstaff, AZ: Northern Arizona University.

Reyhner, J. (2006) Education and Language Restoration. Philadephia, PA: Chelsea House.
Reyhner, J., & Hurtado, D. (2008). Reading First, literacy and American Indian/Alaska Native

students. Journal of American Indian Education 47(1), 82-95.

Reyhner, J. & Johnson, F. (2015) Immersion Education in Reyhner, J. (Ed.) Teaching Indigenous Students Honoring Place, Community and Culture. University of Oklahoma Press; Norman, OK.

Siekmann, Sabine, Joan Parker Webster, Sally Angass'aq Samson, and Catherine Keggutailnguq Moses. 2017. "Teaching Our Way of Life through Our Language: Materials Development for Indigenous Immersion Education." *Cogent Education* 4(1): 1–13.

Spolsky, Bernard (2001) Prospects for the survival of the Navajo language: A reconsideration in Proceedings of the 2001 Athabaskan Language Conference University of California Los Angeles May 18-20 2001.

Styres, S. & Zinga, D. (2013) The community- first land-centered theoretical framework: Bringing a 'Good Mind' to Indigenous education research. Canadian Journal of Education 36(2), 284-313.

Solorzano, D. & Yosso, T. (2002) Critical race methodology: Counter-story-telling as an analytical framework for education research. Qualitative inquiry, 8(1), 23-44.

Tedick, D. J., Christian, D., & Fortune, T. W. (Eds.). (2011). Immersion education: Practices, policies, possibilities. Bristol, England: Multilingual Matters.

Tharp, R.G. (2006) Four hundred years of evidence: Culture, pedagogy, and Native America. Journal of American Indian Education 45(2), 6-25.

Trinidad, A. (2011). Sociopolitical development through Critical Indigenous Pedagogy of Place: Preparing Native Hawaiian young adults to become change agents. Hulili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being, 7, 185-221.

Trinidad, A. (2012). Critical Indigenous pedagogy of place: A framework to Indigenize a youth food justice movement. Journal of Indigenous Social Development, 1(1), 1-17.

U.S. Congress. (1990) Native American Language Act. 104,25 U.S.C. 2901-2906 PL 101-477

U.S. Congress, (2006) Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act PL 109-39

U.S. Department of Education. Institute for Education Science. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *Study of the Native American and Alaska Native Children in School Program: FY 2011 and FY 2013 Cohorts*, Washington, D.C., 2018.

Wilson, W.H. , & Kamana, K. (2011) Insights from indigenous language immersion in Hawai'i. In D.J. Tedick, D. Christian & T. W. Fortune (Eds.) Immersion education: Practices, policies, possibilities (pp. 36-57). Bristol, England: Multilingual Matters.

Yosso, T.J. (2005) Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. Race, Ethnicity and Education, 8(1). 69-91.