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ABSTRACT

Indiana University's American Indian Reservation Project places student teachers in 16-week teaching assignments in schools across the Navajo Nation, emphasizing cultural and community involvement. Prior to student teaching, participants undergo extensive preparation to enhance their cultural values, beliefs, lifestyles, and education practices. A group of 30 student teachers reflected on their experiences and resultant learning and insights from both classroom and community settings. In the 10th week on-site, students described which two activities or events involving American Indians held the most significance for them during the past 2 weeks. In the final week, they described the three most important learnings or insights gained from the student teaching experience. Student teachers identified 99 distinct professional insights as a result of their experiences, organized around the themes of: the art of teaching, classroom discipline, personal-professional characteristics, school pupils, curriculum, relationship building, and school culture. The most commonly noted insights were related to the art of teaching and classroom discipline. Students reflected on 75 cultural experiences and insights gained, grouped around: the relationship between modernity and tradition, contemporary Navajo society, cross-cultural communication, cultural competence, challenges in Navajo education, pupils' living conditions, and historical understanding. (SM)

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Student Teachers Reflect on Professional and Cultural Learning in Reservation Schools and Communities

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Lessons Learned in Navajoland:

Student Teachers Reflect on Professional and Cultural Learning in Reservation Schools and Communities

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Student teaching represents the capstone requirement of most teacher preparation programs across the United States, yet the experience often focuses solely on the classroom setting, lacking attention to important school and community contexts. Zeichner (1996) warned that because of this narrow focus, most preservice field experiences, including student teaching, "often fail to prepare student teachers for the full scope of the teacher's role" (p. 216). Similarly, Blair and Jones (1998) observed,

> It is common for education majors to focus on classroom management, information giving, school routine, and daily survival to the exclusion of fresh and careful reflection on the daily life, values, history, and aspirations of the school community. Yet, today's teachers must be students of human behavior, social events and their causes, and the characteristics of the citizens they serve. (p. 77)

Brown and Kysilka (2002) echoed this assertion, adding that the study of and involvement in the local placement community is a must. For preservice educators, they noted, community participation "provides valuable community background information not available through the typical classroom field experiences" (p. 184). The cultural and professional insights gained when the interplay of classroom, school, and community factors is explored, can contribute significantly to the achievement of academic excellence at many levels.

Through a special student teaching program designed to foster cultural immersion and community involvement in settings on the Navajo Indian Reservation, participants are required to explore both classroom and community dynamics, issues, and trends, resulting in new learning and related insights that often move well beyond those traditionally reported in conventional student teaching placements, and thus significantly enhancing the preparation of these novice educators for the multiple perspectives that characterize today's elementary and secondary classrooms. These student teachers, prepared for and placed in non-mainstream schools and communities, must delve below the surface of the "cultural iceberg" to examine "the much larger and less tangible aspects such as beliefs, values, assumptions, and attitudes" (Brown & Kysilka, 2002, p. 69). Having grown up in a society that largely places American Indians "in history and in museums" (Sleeter & Grant, 2003, p. 133), the student teachers find themselves now working with, living with, and learning from, an enduring people whose lessons are far-reaching and life-transforming. The data presented in this paper suggest that a focus on *both* professional and cultural topics and issues during student teaching, wherever the placements may be, enhances beginning teachers' understanding of the multiple realities that characterize many classroom and community settings and strengthens their ability to respond effectively to people whose worldview may differ from their own.

The American Indian Reservation Project

The American Indian Reservation Project at Indiana University-Bloomington was started in the early 1970s as an optional alternative to conventional student teaching. Through the Reservation Project, student teachers are prepared and placed for sixteen-week teaching assignments in Bureau of Indian Affairs, contract/grant, and public schools across the Navajo Nation (Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah). Cultural and community involvement are cornerstone components throughout the immersion experience.

During the academic year prior to student teaching, Project participants are required to

undergo extensive preparation (including seminars, readings, abstracts and papers, workshops, sessions with Navajo consultants) for the cultural values, beliefs, lifestyles, and education practices in the placement sites for which they have applied. One preparatory assignment engages each Project participant in a structured "interview exam" over Fedullo's (1992) *Light of the Feather*. With a Reservation Project coordinator, the student examines Fedullo's journey into "contemporary Indian America" through a discussion of issues surrounding culture shock, stereotypes, verbal and nonverbal communication patterns, assimilation and acculturation, educational practices, and American Indian values. Taken together, these requirements not only familiarize the student teachers with the schools and culture in which they will be expected to operate, but they also serve as an effective self-screening device in that applicants whose primary motivation may be to "see the Southwest" are discouraged by the intensive preparatory work. The preparatory phase receives ongoing review and evaluation by the Project director and staff, and feedback from Project participants is utilized in revising assignments to better fit the students' preparatory needs.

While at their Reservation sites, Project participants are expected to engage fully in all teacher-related functions of the schools in which they are placed, including classroom instruction, pupil supervision, committee participation, meeting attendance, and extracurricular involvement. Participants live in the placement school's dormitory and provide after-school academic tutoring, companionship, role modeling, and "life enhancement" activities for the young Navajo dorm residents. They also assist in the preparation and serving of breakfast and dinner in the adjacent cafeteria. Such dormitory and cafeteria experiences enable the student teachers to interact closely with people at the grassroots level in a wide range of activities – from the ordinary tasks of daily life to special events and traditional ceremonies – and thus learn first-hand about the people and communities in which their school pupils live.

Contact is maintained with the Reservation Project office throughout the on-site

experience by telephone and through correspondence. Staff members write detailed feedback letters to participants upon receiving their assignments and reports, and calls are placed when concerns arise or points require clarification. The Project director visits each participant on-site at the beginning of the semester, and midway through a staff member returns to "troubleshoot" with those student teachers who need the extra support and to conduct a daylong seminar for the entire group at a centrally located school. All Reservation Project participants know that the office is a phone call away should questions or problems arise, and with few exceptions, e-mail enables the student teachers to maintain contact with Project staff as often as needed and receive feedback on their academic assignments within a few days of submitting them electronically.

The Reservation Project is designed to emphasize *both* classroom teaching and community involvement experiences. Project participants cannot "just student teach" but also must immerse themselves into the lives and culture of the people with whom they live and work. Consequently, members of the placement community, along with educators and supervisors in the placement school, become (on many levels) vital contributors to the learning of student teachers. Some of these learning outcomes and their sources are examined in Stachowski and Mahan (1998).

The Current Study and Its Findings

A total of thirty (30) student teachers from recent semesters, placed in elementary and secondary schools on the Navajo Indian Reservation, were required to reflect upon their experiences and resultant learning and insights in both classroom and community settings. Although various report questions throughout the semester addressed a number of topics and issues related to the student teachers' experiences in these arenas, two questions in particular served to direct the student teachers' identification of specific, major professional and cultural learning outcomes.

In roughly the tenth week on-site, the student teachers responded to the following question included in their biweekly reports titled, "My Learning Through Cultural Immersion: Identifying, Reflecting, Synthesizing":

> What two activities or events involving American Indians held the most significance for you during the past two weeks of this reporting period? In vivid paragraphs, describe each of the activities or events, and identify the people involved and what happened. Then, clearly identify the personal insights (new learning) you gained from the experience. These insights should pertain primarily to the American Indian culture and/or local community in which you are immersed.

In the final week of the experience, participants completed a survey report titled, "Final Assessment of Student Teaching: Bringing Closure to the Experience," which included the following prompt:

> Please fully describe the three most important learnings or insights you gained during your student teaching experience. These learnings and/or insights may pertain to any aspect of your student teaching experience, such as instructional strategies, curriculum, discipline, classroom management, pupils, professional relationships, etc.

Taken together, these questions generated many dozens of short essays from which important professional and cultural learning outcomes could be extracted. The student teachers' responses were content analyzed for distinct ideas and examples, which were then grouped within general categories or themes. The themes, along with specific examples, are described in the following sections.

Important Professional Lessons Learned in Reservation Classrooms and Schools

As Table 1 indicates, the 30 student teachers identified and described a total of 99 distinct professional insights as a result of their experiences in Navajo Reservation classrooms and schools. Although the essay prompt called for the identification of three insights, several

students actually incorporated an additional one or two insights which, although related, represented distinctly different ideas. These 99 insights were organized around the themes of The Art of Teaching, Classroom Discipline, Personal-Professional Characteristics, School Pupils, Curriculum, Relationship Building, and School Culture.

Insert Table 1 about here

It is not surprising that the kinds of learning outcomes cited most often included those typically described in the literature on student teaching – learning and insights related to The Art of Teaching and to Classroom Discipline. Together, these insights represented more than half (52) of the total 99 important lessons learned, with exactly 26 described for each of the two categories. As student teachers moved through the progression of observing, assisting with classroom instruction, team teaching, and assuming full instructional responsibility, they grappled with issues related to daily and long-term lesson planning, incorporating variety into lessons and activities, utilizing an array of instructional strategies and approaches, and developing and refining the many skills that together contribute to the art of effective classroom teaching.

Much of the professional learning these student teachers described within the theme of The Art of Teaching could have been reported by their counterparts anywhere in the United States. For example, Lucas learned, in his high school Spanish class on the Reservation, to present "a balanced mix of set routine with marked variations" to maintain his pupils' interest in instruction. He appreciated the opportunity to develop skill in the effective use of various media, such as movies, music, and flashcards, "to make the lessons more relevant to students' lives and motivate learning." Similarly, Paul found that hands-on discovery projects planned for

his kindergartners and first graders resulted in active learning and quality work, whereas "worksheets almost always failed and barely half the class turned in work."

However, some of the lessons learned within this theme were reflective of the student teachers' placements in Navajo Reservation schools. Heather reported that her elementary children responded enthusiastically to her frequent use of music and technology in her lessons – skills that were second nature for her, but in which many Navajo elementary educators had no formal training. She explained, "I taught reading through songs I wrote and used computer games and the word processor to supplement the learning of reading and writing." For Leah, also an elementary student teacher, a significant professional insight pertained to the realization that although many of her elementary pupils were bilingual, they were proficient in neither English nor Navajo. Thus, they experienced difficulty in following written and oral directions. Eventually, she discovered that the children "understood much better how to do things when it was explained to them in Navajo, even if they couldn't speak it," and consequently teamed with her supervising teacher and classroom assistant, both of whom were Navajo, to present directions and explanations in both languages.

Similarly, professional learning as it pertains to the theme of Classroom Discipline, could be reported by student teachers everywhere, as well as by many experienced classroom teachers. Several sub-themes emerged in the student teachers' reports, including the development of the abilities to know which disruptions can be ignored, to use one's voice effectively, to create the structure that pupils need to succeed, to foster a sense of community, to effectively balance punishments and rewards, and to draw the line between being friendly and being a buddy. Many of the student teachers, in retrospect, appreciated that had they been firmer in the beginning, they would have struggled less in establishing and maintaining discipline over the rest of the semester-long placement. Joshua, for example, admitted,

I am a soft-hearted person by nature, and I brought that condition into the classroom. I

was reluctant to firmly implement a discipline system . . . . Being situationally lenient, I was accused of being unfair and playing favorites. A firm and constant discipline plan would have eased discipline decisions and fostered a more reliable learning environment.

Similarly, Denise reported that with a strong discipline plan in place from "day one," the children would most likely have "tested their boundaries for the first week instead of every day." Placed in a situation where the classroom teacher's ability to discipline was weak, Eileen discovered that she needed to choose her battles in terms of the routines and dynamics that had already been established and were familiar to her elementary pupils. She reflected, "Once I found meaning from their perspective, things improved for me." In a somewhat different vein, Brandon believed that discipline problems stemmed from the teacher because "when a student is not engaged in what I am talking about or what we as a class are discussing and working on, I have failed." He reported that he had always held this perspective, but was frequently told by others that this was "an idealistic view and not very applicable to actual teaching." Although he felt that his student teaching experience indeed reinforced his beliefs, he remained at odds over how to maintain good discipline yet still empower his pupils to think critically about their world and use his Social Studies classroom as a forum for the exploration of alternative perspectives.

Several student teachers looked beyond the classroom to understand the dynamics that influenced and contributed to their pupils' classroom behavior. Stephanie, for example, who taught middle school Language Arts, suggested,

> Students who are used to being emotionally abused do not respond to yelling or threatening forms of discipline. . . . I must be patient with these children and give them positive feedback and structured activities. They need to be pulled aside and talked to, but not yelled at.

Likewise, Heather reported that her ability to manage her elementary class improved greatly

once she realized that trying to be the children's friend was not what they needed: "They needed discipline and structure, for I found that many did not come from households with these things in place."

Although fewer in number, the insights student teachers reported within the theme of Personal-Professional Characteristic (16) reflected important self-discoveries about their own emerging "teacher personalities." The student teachers learned, often the hard way, the importance of organization, flexibility, and adaptability, as well as a positive mood and personal accountability. Mary suggested, based on her observations of many teachers around her, that "complacency and lack of accountability go hand-in-hand," adding that as she enters the teaching profession, "personal accountability will be very important for me to establish so that I do not fall into a complacent, half-hearted teaching style." Joshua, too, recognized that "honesty in effort reigns king over perfunctory duty," and believed that this attitude opened many doors for him in both his placement school and community. Refreshingly, several student teachers, discovering the Navajo value of good-natured teasing, learned that taking everything too seriously removes the fun from teaching. Leah was at first "thrown for a loop" by the teachers' and children's teasing, but eventually learned to distinguish between joking and seriousness. Janet, too, maintained that "teaching is a serious job"; however, she added that she learned to keep a sense of humor and found that "most of the time, it is a more effective way to reach the students."

Within the theme of School Pupils, the ten (10) insights reported suggested important lessons had been learned about the attitudes, needs, and circumstances of the youth in the student teachers' classrooms. Insights about race surfaced for two student teachers, although in significantly different ways. Cassie, for example, described the racist comments made by some of her children as "a self-defense mechanism." She added, "Many of the children are very angry but do not know why or can't act upon it. They take it out on anyone they can." On

the other hand, Kirstin, an African-American student teacher, discovered that bringing her own history and culture into her elementary classroom inspired her children "to stand up to ignorance," as they learned firsthand about a group with whom their experience had been limited largely to what they saw on the television. Buffy's insights about her pupils followed a different vein, as she responded to their low self-esteem compounded by years of poor school performance:

> A teacher told me my first week that the students here have extremely low self-esteem academically. She expressed the importance of constantly building them and helping them experience success. I immediately made it a goal of mine and feel that I accomplished the goal in several ways: showcasing each student's work, individually affirming them, and teaching to their interests.

Somewhat surprising was that only nine (9) of the 99 total lessons learned were categorized under Curriculum, which tended to be a primary focus of the student teachers' coursework in their teacher education programs but assumed less importance in student teaching. Many of the insights offered pertained to the student teachers' struggle to balance state standards and curriculum guidelines with their pupils' actual performance levels and learning needs. For example, Stephanie posed the following dilemma:

> The Arizona standards are very high compared to the curriculum set here at our school, yet the school must be accountable for the students' achievement or lack thereof. I teach in accordance with the standards, but many of the students are one, two, or more grade levels behind – how do you follow standards that are set too high?

Her concerns are not uncommon, especially in settings – such as the Reservation – where No Child Left Behind carries far-reaching implications for schools where pupil achievement falls significantly below grade level. It is expected that student teachers will describe lessons learned in this area with greater frequency, as schools strive to comply with such mandates.

The final themes of Relationship Building and School Culture, each with six (6) lessons cited, focused on the social parameters within which the student teachers operated in their Reservation schools. In seeking to build relationships with teaching colleagues, parents, pupils, and other members of their placement communities, the student teachers have often had to step back and permit these relationships to unfold slowly, as trust and respect were fostered and earned through actions and demonstrated commitment. Joshua discovered that "being present in the community and at community functions brings the benefit of community relations, and the prized secondary benefit of a higher level of respect from teachers, parents, and students." He reported:

> After each fair or game that I attended where I saw, was seen by, or conversed with community members, I was treated and greeted as a fellow member of the community instead of an outsider. This respect was heavily realized in my classroom after I attended a basketball game and watched a few of my students play. Previously, these students tended to be disruptive in class, but afterwards the players and the rest of the students realized that I was interested in more than just their academic lives.

Other important insights within these final themes included recognition of the need for teamwork and collaboration with classroom assistants and school administrators, and of the need to avoid school gossip and stay out of school politics by keeping opinions and comments to oneself.

Important Cultural Lessons Learned in Reservation Communities

In Table 2, the thirty (30) student teachers reflected on a total of seventy-five (75) cultural experiences and insights gained outside of the classroom, generally through their work in the dormitory and school cafeteria, and volunteer activities with community organizations and local families. Like the responses on professional lessons, several students included more than one distinct lesson. The 75 responses were grouped around student teachers' understanding

of the Relationship Between Modernity and Tradition, Contemporary Navajo Society, Cross-Cultural Communication, Cultural Competence, Challenges in Navajo Education, Pupils' Living Conditions, and Historical Understanding.

Insert Table 2 about here

The large number of responses in the first two categories, Relationship Between Modernity and Tradition and Contemporary Navajo Society, highlights the difficulties of preparing students for a cultural immersion experience, but also the fundamental importance of community involvement and volunteering during the student teaching experience. Although student teachers are required to complete extensive preparatory assignments prior to their placement on the Reservation, most find that their real learning begins when they arrive on the Reservation, and start to make connections between what they have read and what they see in their communities. Jon made the connection after helping with a traditional, all-night shoe game:

> It was one of those things that you only hear about or read about, but we got to experience it for real. I learned much about the Navajo culture . . . the importance of being thankful for everything . . . of family, friendship and unity in 'the Navajo way.'

For most student teachers, these kinds of opportunities were the highlights of their student teaching experience on the Navajo Reservation not only because of their novelty, but because through these events they met parents and families of the children they taught and participated in the social life of the complex communities they served.

It should be noted that student teachers in the American Indian Reservation Project are placed in communities across the vast Navajo Reservation, and the diversity of culture, history,

and economic development on and around the Reservation makes generalizing about conditions difficult and therefore complicates the preparation process. For example, a student teacher placed near a border town might have fewer opportunities to hear Navajo spoken, while a student teacher working in the interior of the Reservation may hear English only when it is necessary for communication. This diversity reinforces the importance of immersion in the local community to gain the deepest understanding of the context in which the school experience takes place.

Twenty-six (26) of the responses focused on the student teachers' growing understanding of the relationship of modernity and tradition in their communities. Many students went beyond a simple comparison of the "traditional" Reservation with the "modern" Midwest by writing about this relationship within Navajo communities, and as well as drawing comparisons between the traditional life they experienced on the Reservation with their own hometowns. Heather wrote about a local Navajo woman's interest in the Internet: "I am seeing more and more Navajos interested in technology in order to help preserve their culture. One Navajo woman wants me to help her set up a web page so she can sell her traditional Navajo crafts." Paul drew a comparison between a Navajo ceremony and his own religious tradition when he suggested, "this event was similar to one at home where incense would be used for meditative prayer." Further, what may have seemed modern in one society may have appeared traditional in another. In one case, Mary included a short conversation which illuminated the strength of women in the matriarchal Navajo society:

> I also found a comment by Ashley interesting: 'Well, he's my Dad for right now, but he doesn't make any rules. Aunt Flee makes all the rules.' The women here are more independent that what I'm used to at home.

Sixteen (16) responses reflected the student teachers' growing understanding of contemporary Navajo society, and several student teachers commented on the relationship

between Navajo culture and their own. Janet, for example, made the following observation of an aspect of the Anglo-Navajo relationship in her community after the dormitory heating system was still not repaired by winter:

> The importance was placed on the superficial look [a landscaping project] of the school as opposed to the dorm. When someone from outside the community comes to power at the school, their priorities may be skewed. In this situation, [an] Anglo man who has been here for only two months is making decisions that override many of the of the community members who have lived in the community all their lives.

Joshua visited a small craft market near a tourist site on the Reservation and wrote that "many [Navajo] artists utilize American Indian images that feed into the romanticized visions and ideas held by non-Indian cultures. Understandably, the Navajo artisans are trying to make money and be self-sufficient, but unfortunately perpetuating misunderstanding and misconceptions."

Unlike the tourists who often leave the Reservation with their outdated stereotypes reinforced by casual interactions with Navajo people at the craft markets and in other limited contexts, the student teachers dealt with the day-to-day reality of Navajo society, and they were often surprised by what they discovered. Leah recalled a conversation where a fellow teacher casually mentioned that her husband is an alcoholic, and remarked that the teacher's "nonchalant expression really shocked me. In my culture, alcoholism has a very negative stigma attached to it. People tend to be hush-hush about the issue. She acted as if it were just part of life."

Twelve (12) of the responses were grouped as lessons learned about cross-cultural communication and understanding, in which students described the processes of interaction and the formation of friendships in their community, despite linguistic and cultural differences. Amy's passage about a day she spent helping a local elderly woman proved that communication can take place across seemingly insurmountable barriers:

> We gathered wood and went to Kayenta to pick up flour, oranges and 7-UP as a gift for her [Ramona's] kindness. Ramona didn't speak English so we had to get by on hand gestures and expressions. She made fry bread for us . . . she appeared very grateful, and that felt amazing.

Amy's experience revealed how the student teachers' interactions within the community not only benefitted community members, but also helped the student teachers to understand the lives of people they were less likely to meet inside of school. People like Ramona who do not speak English often have very important roles as community and religious leaders, but may not be involved in the community school, where English is a necessity. Cassie's reflection on cross-cultural communication and understanding underscored the similarities some students found with Navajo people in their communities:

> We [Chas and I] share a lot of the same beliefs and have managed to come to many of the same conclusions about life. I never knew that you could develop such a strong friendship in such a short period of time.

One of the biggest concerns for student teachers preparing to go to the Reservation is, "How will I be accepted?" Ten (10) Reservation Project participants reflected on their own cultural competence in the Navajo context, as they adapted to the different expectations, priorities, and challenges in Navajo life. Halfway through her sixteen-week student teaching experience, Sarah realized, during a conversation between a Navajo pupil and a visitor to the Reservation,

> . . . how much about the culture I had learned since I arrived. I found myself sharing knowing looks with this [Navajo] student as she wove her way through the rapid fire of personal questions. I ended up diverting the conversation to another topic.

Although some situations, like Sarah's, illustrated an almost invisible adaptation to Navajo cultural values, some situations are not so easy to navigate. Many student teachers

found it difficult to accept behavior that is considered rude or inappropriate in their home communities. Eileen resolved one of those conflicts at the end of a day-long visit by university students from California, who had come to paint and repair school buildings at her placement site. The community held an ice-cream social to express their gratitude to the visitors, and in that environment, Eileen "experienced gratitude from my host community, a rare experience for me." She realized that during the visit by the California students, she had been "introducing [Navajo] cultural beliefs to strangers, as opposed to me being a student in their community." She began to understand that "people do appreciate me here, but do not express it because I am a fixture in their community. They express gratitude differently than I am accustomed to back home." Like Sarah, Eileen was able to appreciate and deepen her own cultural competence by watching Navajo people interact with visitors to the community, which illuminated the student teachers' own knowledge of and acceptance in their communities.

One of the primary reasons for incorporating community participation in the Reservation Project is to enhance the student teachers' understanding of their pupils' home circumstances, and thus serve them better in the classroom setting. For many non-Indian teachers, the cultural differences, material poverty, and unique social expectations for Navajo children are difficult to accept or even understand. Eight (8) reflections noted lessons about cultural differences and social challenges which can directly affect education on the Reservation. For example, following a pizza party with several local teenage girls, Robin remarked:

> The most amazing thing I learned was that every one of those girls had lost a family member. Two of the girls lost their fathers, and two had lost siblings to illness or accidents. Those experiences are nearly unfathomable to me. The fact that each girl experienced such great loss at such a young age is mind-boggling.

For many young Navajos, family responsibilities occasionally conflict with the schools' expectations. Pupil absenteeism is high in Reservation schools, partly because of ceremonial

responsibilities, and many youth are forced to choose between school attendance and participation in important, although lengthy, cultural events and activities. Lucas recalled attending "the first night of a five-way blessing-way ceremony" and remembered family members "coming and going" throughout the night. Despite the distance, he "learned that families come from all over [the area], but that they still returned for the ceremony." Although pupils often attend ceremonies after school, if the ceremony is being held for the pupil, he or she will often miss a week or two of school. Just as regular attendance is critical for school success, regular participation in the ceremonies is vital for traditional Navajos to learn about their culture.

Five of the student teachers' responses focused specifically on their pupils' living conditions. Student teachers are strongly encouraged to ride the bus home with their pupils at least once to see where they live, how far they must travel to get to and from school, and what their homes look like. After one of these trips, Sarah wrote:

> As the bus violently bounced around, I felt as though I might be sick. This really made me stop and think about how this was something these kids had to go through twice a day. It made me think about what a large effort [it] was to leave their homes. I never really pictured people in the United States living this way, but I also realized that modern advancements are really not necessary to survive.

During a trip with a Navajo friend to help extract "one of the buses stuck in the mud," Sarah also commented on how she was "amazed by the muddy conditions. It really helped me to gain better insight to the living conditions of many students."

Two responses reflected the student teachers' deeper understanding of Navajo history and its influences on present-day perspectives. During the preparatory phase of the Reservation Project, student teachers study two central events in Navajo history, the Long Walk and the Livestock Reduction. Once on-site, student teachers often have the opportunity to

learn about these events in greater detail from witnesses or descendants who know the stories well. Janet wrote about a difficult experience when history was used at a writing conference to "create fire and passion in the Navajo writers." At one session,

> . . . the woman leader read her poem about how she wasn't sorry about the September 11th events, and she made a parallel between Whites and Columbus with the Taliban and Osama bin Laden . . . . The new personal insight was that there is still a lot of anger from some Native Americans towards Whites.

Sarah wrote about a story drawn from the Long Walk period (1863-1868) she had been told by her friend, Mr. T– , describing "a lady who had been left behind while everyone was on the 'Long Walk.' It made me think about the Long Walk in a new way." These experiences and interactions in the community helped the student teachers understand the depth and complexity of Navajo and American Indian history, and how it is still very much alive in the hearts and minds of their Navajo neighbors.

Summary

The 30 student teachers whose lessons are shared here, met the challenges of the American Indian Reservation Project with varying degrees of success. Some have remained on the Reservation, taking teaching positions in or near the schools where they student taught, while others have relocated to other parts of our nation, and even overseas, where they are employed in both educational and non-educational settings. Still others have returned to their home communities, very often small towns and suburbs in the Midwest, to teach in schools much like those they attended as children. All of these student teachers have taken with them important lessons – lessons about teaching, about schooling, about culture, about community – that continue to shape the kinds of educators, as well as the kinds of *people* they are today. While many of these lessons were learned through trial and error, and oftentimes with tears and frustration, the insights these individuals have gained are far-reaching, going well beyond the

borders of Navajoland to influence and inform the students teachers' lives, as well as those with whom they work and live.

A student teaching program like the Reservation Project lends itself well to a marriage of professional practice with cultural and community involvement, and requiring that participants actually record their learning in structured assignments encourages them to process their many new experiences, develop and prioritize emerging new ideas, and apply the related insights to subsequent challenges and events. However, such learning need not be limited to those individuals who journey far from home, to decidedly different settings, for their student teaching assignments. Not only these adventurers, but also student teachers in our own campus communities and those who return to schools in their hometowns, can be required to explore beyond the walls of their classrooms and school buildings, by making the communities a place of participation and learning. The result, we hope, will be educators entering our profession who appreciate the power of cultural immersion as a way of better understanding the children and families they serve.

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Table 1: Important Lessons Learned by Student Teachers in Navajo Reservation Classrooms and Schools*

Lessons Pertaining to...	# of Times Cited	Examples
The Art of Teaching	26	▪ incorporating variety into lessons & activities ▪ making subjects concrete & tangible ▪ acquiring skill & confidence with ESL instructional strategies
Classroom Discipline	26	▪ striking a balance between punishments & rewards ▪ developing a firm, consistent, & fair approach to managing behavior ▪ fostering a sense of classroom community
Personal-Professional Characteristics	16	▪ keeping a sense of humor & using it as an effective way to reach pupils ▪ putting an honest effort into everything, even mundane tasks ▪ being organized, flexible, & adaptable
School Pupils	10	▪ recognizing the influence of outside factors on school performance ▪ seeking ways to maximize pupils' self-esteem & motivate them ▪ appreciating the similarity of children everywhere
Curriculum	9	▪ developing long-term plans ▪ creating interdisciplinary units with assessment using state standards ▪ finding a balance between curriculum guidelines & pupils' actual needs
Relationship Building	6	▪ accepting that friendship and trust develop slowly in Reservation settings ▪ being present at community functions to gain respect of people, parents, & teachers ▪ working as a team with classroom assistants & school administrators
School Culture	6	▪ avoiding school politics & gossip ▪ keeping opinions & comments to oneself ▪ recognizing the battles you can & can't win

* 30 student teachers in elementary and secondary classrooms on the Navajo Reservation identified 99 important lessons learned.

Table 2: Important Lessons Cultural Lessons Learned by Student Teachers in Reservation Communities*

Lessons Pertaining to...	# of Times Cited	Examples
Relationship between Tradition and Modernity	22	▪ Helps teach community members how to use the world wide web to sell traditional crafts ▪ Understanding that modern conveniences are not always necessary to survive ▪ Watching a family adapt to off-reservation norms during a weekend trip to Phoenix
Navajo Society	16	▪ Adapting new institutions to fit cultural norms ▪ Understanding the important role of women, elderly ▪ Understanding values on family, land, not on "nice" possessions
Cross-Cultural Communication and Understanding	12	▪ Learning about Navajo family life, common family problems ▪ Understanding relationship of economic need and cultural preservation ▪ Understanding the complexity of "Native American" and the resilience of strong tribal identity
Cultural Competence	10	▪ Hosting non-Navajo guests illustrates how ST is treated more like a community member and not as a guest ▪ Understanding differences between how gratitude is expressed by and among Navajos ▪ Understanding that "friendship takes time"
Challenges in Navajo Education	8	▪ Understanding problems of basic literacy ▪ Lack of resources/utilities in home environment ▪ Experiencing transportation problems many Navajo children face daily
Pupils' Living Conditions	5	▪ Helping extract bus from muddy road highlights transportation problems on reservation ▪ Recognizing absence of indoor plumbing, electricity for many rural residents ▪ Learning about effects of broken homes on Navajo students
Historical Understanding	2	▪ Navajo shares stories about local connection to Long Walk period ▪ Complexity of integrating Navajo historical experience into adult writing workshop

* 30 student teachers in elementary and secondary classrooms on the Navajo Reservation identified 75 important lessons learned.

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