

Educational Policy and Practice: A Bureau of Indian Affairs School

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The Navajo Tribal Council approved an Education Policy that requires instruction in the Navajo language and culture at all grade levels for all Navajo students (Navajo Tribal Education Policies, 1984). Yet to date, many schools are not prepared to fully implement this policy by establishing a curriculum, acquiring materials, or funding the training of teachers. Many teachers in such schools seem to be waiting for the schools to require and fund bilingual education before they make a commitment to teaching Navajo language and culture. However, some teachers are teaching Navajo language and culture on their own initiative without regard to the lack of local funding or an aggressive

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policy (Howard, 1985).

To describe the context in which the teachers at this school operate, this study uses a model described by Spolksy, Green, and Read (1974) as modified by Tang (1983). Factors discussed include the external factors of history, demography, geography, socioeconomics and politics, and the personal factors in teacher implementation of psychology, linguistics, and culture and religion (See Figure 1). These themes are not developed in this short article but are mentioned as vital types of information before drawing conclusions in any educational environment.

In the early years of this study, some of the teachers followed the precepts of the policy on their own in spite of minimal support from the administration or other teachers. Later the administration began encouraging the teaching of Navajo language, and many more teachers began following the policy. The conclusion proposes a modified version of the assumptions that the Navajo Division of Education (NDOE) has made about what needs to be done before schools will be teaching Navajo language and culture (See Figure 2). The four factors identified by the NDOE include teacher training, material resource centers, standardized curriculum, and parent training. The new model presented includes three areas: teacher training, program administration, and the teaching support team of parents, teachers, administrators, and students. To describe the teachers' implementation of bilingual education at this school, the study uses the criteria specified by the Navajo Tribal Education Policies (1984) for teaching language and culture. In conclusion the article summarizes the factors of teacher motivation and the teacher methods observed and offers recommendations for implementing the Navajo language and culture policy in bordertown Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools and suggests implications for bilingual teacher education.

The bilingual nature of the community examined in this study suggests a reason why the Navajo language may be of interest to the teachers and the students. The English oriented economy is given as a possible reason why little emphasis is given to the study of the Navajo language. The historically uneven implementation of bilingual methods and the slowness of innovations to capture the interest of teachers are suggested as possible reasons why some teachers are not comfortable teaching the Navajo language. The teachers' own training and life experiences are presented as possible explanations for the initiatives that they do take. The meagerness of the bilingual education plan and support system are presented to suggest possible reasons why the teachers create their own materials and curriculum or do not teach Navajo language and culture at all. Follow-up observations at the school show how minor changes in leadership can result in major adjustments in practice.

Figure 1. Teacher Motivation to Comply with Policy.

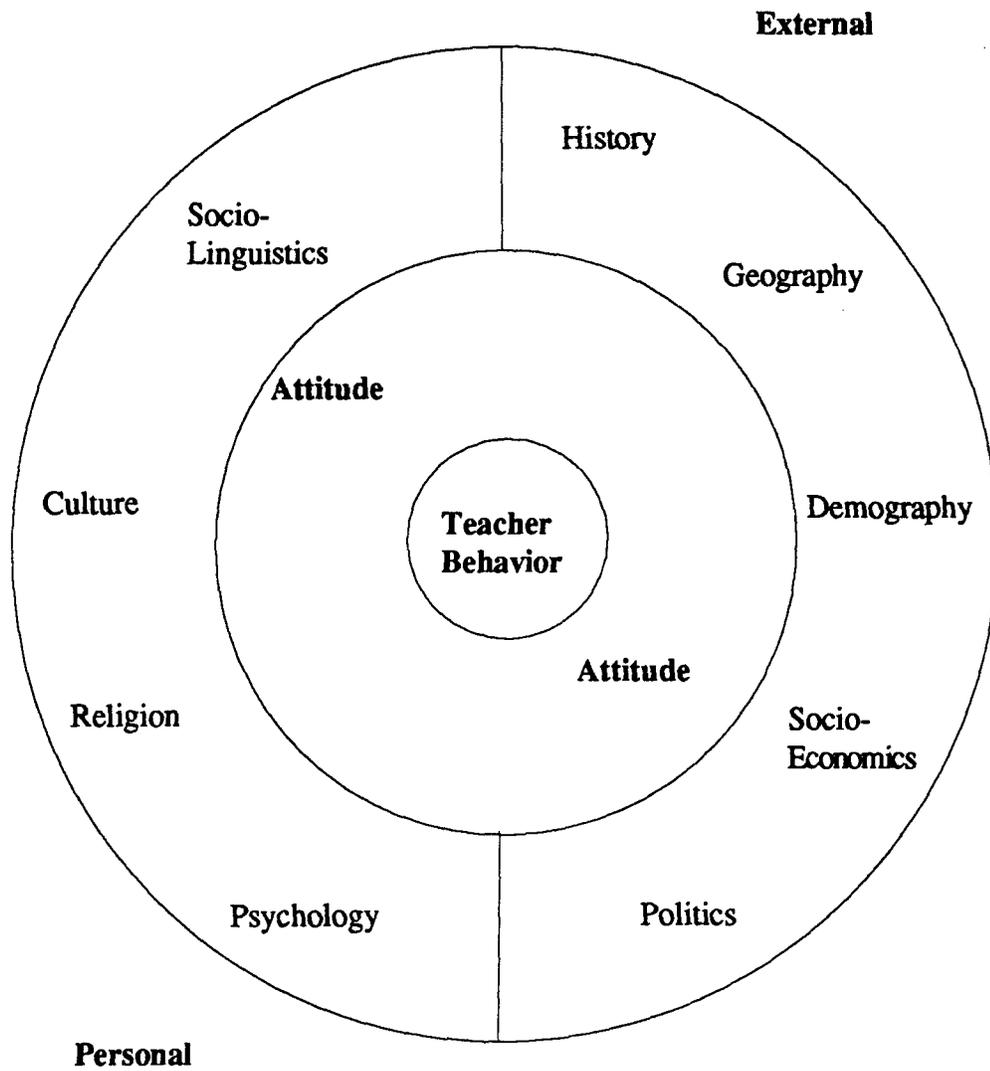


Figure 2. Factors of policy implementation.

Teacher Training	Program Administration	Teaching Support Team
Experiences Foundations Language Culture Methods	Policies Materials Curriculum Leadership Funding	Administrators Teachers Parents Community Students

Policies

The Navajo Education Policies Mission Statement, as presented in the Navajo Tribal Education Policies (1984) states:

The human resource of the Navajo Nation is its most valuable resource. The Navajo Tribe, as a sovereign nation, has a responsibility to its people to oversee their education in whatever schools or school systems they are being educated, to assure that their education provides excellence in the academic program and high, realistic expectations for all students. An appropriate education for Navajo people is one that fosters: (a) the formulation of age, grade, and/or developmentally appropriate competencies in all basic areas of academic and cognitive skills; (b) competence in English language skills and knowledge of American culture; (c) competence in Navajo language skills and knowledge of Navajo culture; (d) the development of Navajo and United States citizenship, self-discipline, and a positive self-concept; (e) preparation for lifetime responsibilities in the areas of employment, family life, recreation, and use of leisure; and (f) an attitude toward education which encourages lifetime learning. (p. 2)

By issuing this policy as a mandate the council boldly asserts the doctrine of sovereignty, that this minority group is willing to exert an influence on how and what their children are taught. The council accepts the responsibility of assuring that Navajo students are receiving quality education, even though it does not have the means to provide it to them because the Navajo children are in the hands

of the education agencies of various state governments, the Federal government, and various church and community private organizations. Such a plan obviously assumes the cooperation and support of the various agencies that do provide the education. In fact, every level of government and every type of school has issued statements and policies which support the mandate (Howard, 1985), and they continue to do so even today. The policy statement also implies that, although the tribe can provide policies and support, the implementation must come through the interest of each of the school communities.

Support for the Policy

In 1988, the Bureau of Indian Affairs reported results of a number of studies that suggested that the most effective Indian schools promote close involvement of parents and the local community in the educational process and incorporation of the community milieu into the content of the curriculum (Report, 1988). At that time the BIA proposed goals similar to those upon which the 1984 policy was based including:

Goal 13- Encourage BIA Schools to give greater emphasis in their curriculum to tribal history; relationships of tribal governments; tribal, state and federal law; cultural anthropology; heritage of indigenous Americans; and effects of world trends on reservation economies (p. 260).

The BIA report further asserts that the self-esteem of BIA students may be enhanced by formal recognition in school curricula of the importance of tribal history, cultural anthropology, and heritage:

These subjects will be of particular intrinsic interest to many Indian students, possibly motivating them to greater learning efforts in all areas and providing them with a greater appreciation of the world around them. In addition to new curriculum offerings, BIA education could support study of tribal culture and socioeconomic institutions in a variety of other ways. The BIA could support the development of textbook materials for Indian children, or could sponsor efforts in particular schools to develop such material for broader distribution throughout the system of BIA education. Lecturers in Indian History and culture could be encouraged to visit BIA schools. Indian elders can share insights in traditions and living successfully as an Indian in a modern changing world. Innovative satellite instruction and interactive laser videodisk technology might be used to increase student interest and overall involvement in these areas. The doctrine of Indian self-determination means that Indians themselves should have a greater voice in the degree to

which Indian education should seek to teach the work habits, intellectual interests, history and other elements of the mainstream non-Indian culture, or how much should be taught of the beliefs, history, language and culture of the Indian tribe itself. The BIA is changing to allow greater tribal individual school control over such decisions. (p. 260)

As evidence of the viability of the policy, Dilcon and Chuska schools in the Fort Defiance Agency use a whole language methodology that includes valuing of native language and culture as the students learn English (Report, 1988). The result is that whole language bilingual students do not lose enthusiasm for school after third grade (as do many students in traditional curricula) but increasingly master basic skills over time. By the 8th grade or the last year of elementary school, students are near or above national norms as measured by CTBS. Similar results with bicultural school curricula are found in Greasewood-Toyei, Arizona; Sisseton-Wahpeton, South Dakota; Tiospa Zina Tribal School, S.D.; and San Felipe Elementary, New Mexico. In contrast, BIA schools in the area of this study (with little integration of Navajo culture in the classrooms) reported that the 1986 average achievement at all grade levels on nationally standardized tests was close to the twentieth percentile (Report, 1988).

Although each of the candidates for Navajo President in the 1990 election supported the idea of fostering Navajo language, culture, and the traditional values in education (Navajo Times, Nov. 8, 1990), many teachers and community members seem to share the early 20th Century opinion of Theodore Roosevelt who said in support of a very gradual evolution toward self government:

On the one hand I very firmly believe in granting to Negroes and to all other races the largest amount of self-government which they can exercise. On the other hand, I have the impatient contempt that I suppose all practical men must have for the ridiculous theorists who decline to face facts and who wish to give even to the most utterly undeveloped races of mankind a degree of self-government which only the very highest races have been able to exercise with any advantage. (Harbaugh, 1967, p. 197)

In contrast, John Collier, the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) from 1933-1944, advocated bilingual and bicultural education for the various Native American tribes (Rusco, 1991). Collier's efforts aggressively pursued the ideal of Indian sovereignty based on his belief that Native American Cultures were superior to the culture of the modern, industrialized world. For example, he began *Indians of the Americas* (1947) with this dramatic statement: "They had what the world had lost. They have it now. What the world has lost, the world must have again, lest it die" (p. 7). However, due to changing national priorities, bilingual programs started in Navajo schools during his administration were

abandoned at the time of World War II and revived only in a very few cases in the late 1960s.

The controversy continues to exist over bilingual/bicultural programs. Some view them as preserves for traditional ritual knowledge while others see them as tools for improving students' critical capacities and academic skills. While some see them as outside the schools' domain, many regard them as a means of providing jobs and a pathway for Navajos into a system to which they previously had been denied access (McCarty, 1989). Bilingual/bicultural education is the antithesis of most local residents' formal educational experience, and it is a testimonial to the long-term disenfranchising effects of the federal role in Indian education whose experience is that the school's job is to "teach the White Man's way."

McCarty reports that one failure to implement a well-conceived bicultural program was because the school developed three separate curricula with school board approval, with no mandate for any of them and without a mechanism within the school to insure their implementation or coordination with each other. However, the involvement of community language, culture, and members in the school did increase attendance, graduation rates, and lead to increased educational levels and improved prosperity for the community.

Through the years a number of projects successfully created Navajo materials and curriculum incorporating those culturally meaningful experiences and concepts called for in policy statements. However, McCarty, Wallace, and Lynch (1989) report that in the case of the Navajo Materials Development project the effects of the use of their materials were not evaluated because funding for the project ended shortly after the materials were created.

Policies for Navajo education seem to have been based upon sound educational research, have worked well where implemented, and have the support of politicians and policies at every level. Why then do most teachers not implement the policies in their classrooms by integrating Navajo language and culture into the instruction? To address the question of the difference between policy and practice, one school was studied in depth.

Procedures of the Study

The study took place at an elementary school where bilingual education was not institutionalized by requirements from the administration or funding for materials. The fictitious name chosen to represent the school is "Rising Rock Elementary." The school is in the fictitious "Sheet Rock Agency," Navajo area,

of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. All the students and most of the staff are Navajo Indians. Volunteer subjects were solicited from among teachers and other staff members of the school. Comparisons among that group are made as to the methods and materials they are using and their reasons for teaching or not teaching Navajo language and culture. Teacher implementation of the policy is socially and historically bounded; therefore, a correct interpretation of the teachers' behavior with regard to the policy requires an hermeneutical approach to achieve an interpretive understanding and must be expressed in the language of the situation rather than in neutral scientific language (Smith, 1983). Such statements form a large part of the text of the study but are deleted from this brief summary.

Class sessions dealing with Navajo language instruction were observed during the months of March, April, October, November, and December, 1986, and February and March 1987. Follow up surveys were done with the teachers in 1989 and 1991. Teacher and student behaviors were logged as well as comments on materials used and posters and projects displayed. The emphasis in the observations was on methods and motivations for teaching Navajo language and culture.

The approach used for this study is in the "emic" rather than the "etic" tradition (Pike, 1966; Stake, 1978). Emic is an approach in which behavior is studied from within the system rather than without. Emic studies examine only one setting rather than comparing multiple settings. It is an approach wherein the structure is "discovered" rather than imposed by the researcher. The criteria are considered to be relevant to internal characteristics rather than considered universal. For a detailed description of the research methodology see Howard (1987). The constructs for reliability and validity in this type of research are identified by LeCompte and Goetz (1982).

Volunteer subjects were solicited from among teachers on the staff at the school. Ortiz and Engelbrecht (1986) studied eight classrooms from one school in a similar study. Osborne (1983) observed five classrooms in his ethnographic study at a Zuni Indian school. At Rising Rock Elementary, the entire school professional staff is studied as a single case. Forty eight staff members and seven school board members were interviewed, observed, or both. Three categories of representative teachers were considered sufficient for the purposes of case study descriptions in this study. Several teachers from each category were self-selected to be particularly thorough informants. Comments and observations of the others were used for purposes of comparison and internal reliability. One school only was involved in the study in order to build a case for a consistent context leading to internal validity. Multiple observations and follow-up

interviews and interviews of nonprofessional staff also increased the internal validity (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990, p. 380).

The people interviewed, observed, or both, during the study included all twenty classroom teachers, all seven special programs teachers, all seven school board members, the principal, supervisor, and counselor, and fourteen noncertified staff. Only the responses of the twenty-nine professional educators were included in the data. Each is ranked as "Doer," "Hesitator," or "Against." "Doers" include four Navajo and one other Indian. "Hesitators" include eleven Navajos, two Hispanics, and eight Anglos. "Against" include two Navajos and one Anglo. As used in this text, the term "Anglo" refers to the generally white, English speaking, dominant society.

Observations

It is normal for teachers to react with hesitation to new policies or programs if they have not been involved in the policy formation or indoctrinated in the tenets of the program. This is particularly true in Indian education where programs have historically come and gone. Reservation school teachers must contend with the struggle between the tendency of parents to want linguistic and cultural assimilation for their children and the school policy of bicultural integration. This process has advanced in the Rising Rock School area to the point that most of the children do not speak the language of their grandparents. Community social pressures may be a stronger influence in teacher behavior than published policies. The administration responded in the past to such pressures at Rising Rock with a wait-and-see attitude. Such a leadership void allows those who are personally motivated the freedom to be creative but leaves the others wondering what to do. In recent years a new principal hired a Navajo culture teacher to give presentations in the classes, to organize school-wide culture activities involving the community, and to encourage implementation of the policy. The atmosphere of the whole school quickly changed to one of support for the program. The closed door bilingual teachers began seeking certification and being openly proud of their classrooms. Even the parents seemed pleased and the children cooperative.

In 1986 only two innovative teachers demonstrated and described a belief that teaching the local language and culture was beneficial to the children cognitively and psychologically. They tended to feel that it was possible and desirable to integrate children into the mainstream biculturally. The others tended to cling (in varying degrees) to the standard they were raised with, that Indians should abandon their language and customs and assimilate into the dominant society.

Before the change in focus of the school in 1989, some teachers held extreme beliefs, such as “the study of the local language might interfere with the learning of the mainstream language and prevent the children from qualifying for jobs.” Such beliefs are apparently held over from the teachers’ own school experiences of coming to school not knowing the school language and being made to feel that their language was inferior.

This attitude was being perpetuated unconsciously by most teachers in the way they used two languages. The local vernacular was (orally) still used by adults to discipline the unruly, explain to the slow, and to communicate socially with other adults, not with children. The mainstream language was used (orally and written) as the means and the topic of instruction and in every official and social capacity with the children. Most attempts at teaching the local language were superficial and explained in the mainstream language. In contrast, the motivated teachers tended to integrate local tales and lore into the regular language arts and sciences, to expect the children to understand and speak the local vernacular fluently, and to learn to read and write it with interesting story books and challenging assignments. By 1990, six teachers were doers, and twelve were more than willing and included Navajo culture as much as possible in their teaching. Only one out of 20 surveyed was now listed as a hesitator. Leadership and teacher involvement seem to have made an enormous difference in teacher attitude and implementation of the bicultural policy.

Conclusions

Factors of teacher motivation

Certainly, training in the students’ language and culture is a prerequisite to good teaching. However, some who are trained still hesitate to get involved in teaching. Bicultural teacher training should emphasize attitude development and knowledge and skills in bilingual methods and bicultural philosophy. Positive experiences in cross cultural environments and bicultural education may be essential to the development of such attitudes. Teachers are sensitive to the expectations of others. Parents, administrators, and other teachers need to be taught about what the teachers are doing and what the objectives are. Students need to be encouraged by a positive attitude of parents and teachers so they will accept the language and culture studies.

Teacher Training

This study demonstrates that simply hiring teachers who represent the majority of the student body racially does not guarantee implementation of bilingual or bicultural policies. Many minority teachers are not prepared philosophically or academically to teach the minority language or culture, and some nonminority teachers are. Teachers tend to teach the way they are taught unless certain events (that are difficult to standardize in training) occur in their lives (Kennedy, 1991).

Personal Experiences: Among their recommendations for training teachers in minority education, Gonzales and Ortiz (1977) include these competencies: be able to recognize how one's personal values, attitudes, and expectations may influence one's own behavior towards minority-speaking, culturally different children; and be able to facilitate contacts and interaction between the learner's family and school personnel; and participate in a "cross-cultural" experience during the teacher training period as a condition for teacher certification. These special cross-cultural experiences may occur at anytime in a teacher's life and may be more significant in teacher preparation than cognitive or content competencies (Furuto & Furuto, 1983).

Whatever attitudes the teachers have now may have been developed in their early experiences as they attended school and learned empathy or antipathy for certain languages or people. Positive cross-cultural experiences or positive experiences with bilingual education were reported by a number of teachers who were "willing" or "doing" language and culture instruction. These findings seem to support the recommendations of Gonzales and Ortiz and Furuto and Furuto.

Language and Culture Training: Taking courses in Navajo language and culture and in bilingual and multicultural methods does not seem to guarantee teacher implementation. However, teachers with an adequate background in Navajo language and culture will be more likely to take initiatives to use bilingual methods in their classrooms. Language and culture training is a prerequisite to teacher involvement in the program. Teachers in this area must travel long distances to attend such classes. As the demand for training increases, delivery of such training will likely become more convenient.

Philosophy of Bicultural Education: The Doers obviously believe that it is good for the children to study Navajo language and culture, but the others, although both viewpoints are expressed, do not believe in it enough to implement it. It seems that only those teachers who have a strong personal conviction about

the value of bilingual methods are enthusiastic about using them. Teacher training should emphasize the positive aspects of learning two languages. Knight (1972) shows in his study that teacher preparation programs should be concerned with attitude development of the teacher candidates as well as with content and methods. The findings of this study also support the idea that content instruction is not enough. Preservice and inservice teachers who are being prepared for service in schools with bicultural policies should participate in positive experiences designed to help them feel good about functioning successfully in varying cultural contexts.

Organization and Policy

Teachers' attitudes about the availability of curriculum and materials seem to be related to their involvement in teaching the native language and culture. Although the highly motivated teachers create relevant, localized material or purchase materials at their own expense to meet their needs, it is a difficult burden. The issue is not so much a matter of availability on the market, but of school resolve. A wide variety of materials has already been collected by individual teachers, but most teachers will not become involved until the administration acts to organize a process to select and order what they need. If the library books and materials included the native subject materials required by the BIA standard, teachers would be able to better involve students in the type of education required by the standards and policies in effect at the school, including the Navajo Tribal Education Policies.

The NDOE has proposed a reservation - wide committee that would develop a standardized curriculum adaptable to every school. However, much controversy is still associated with such a plan. The fact that legislative actions and politics at every level often counter bilingual program development suggests that a subject of local interest such as Navajo language and culture may not find a place in the curriculum unless the individual teachers are motivated to include it on their own and in concert with their peers. It is commonly observed that bilingual teachers need a willingness and ability to work together cooperatively in the formulation and achievement of purposes of common concern (Henderson, 1985-86). The governments and agencies that mandate such policies are currently delegating implementation and funding to the lowest operating level. An interest by increasing numbers of individual teachers may help start the process at the school level and lead to the organization of a curriculum committee. Teachers may have more confidence in the curriculum if they

participate in decisions on appropriate content for culture instruction along with the parents and community members. For example, if teachers understand that the purpose for culture instruction is to foster student respect for major community activities, the teachers may accept the task more readily than if they feel the curriculum promotes a particular belief system. This problem of values and cultural education in the schools has always existed in America (Ebeling, 1991). Ebeling suggests that even in a homogeneous setting the role of government in establishing curriculum and educational policy is problematic. He concludes that if members of a community could participate in establishing and operating a school that would benefit everyone in the community, the resultant channels of communication would promote harmony in policy development, and presumably, practice. A reservation committee would have less impact on individual teacher implementation of policy than a school committee in which they participate.

The lack of action by the administration in early years allowed the few motivated teachers to forge ahead on their own without interference. However, many of the others began to do more when they had some definite leadership. The school board and administrators must select a style of leadership that works for them and begin communication with the parents and teachers if they expect to implement the published policies of the school regarding Navajo language and culture.

Support Team

The teachers' perception of the attitudes of parents, administrators, other teachers, students, and community members towards bilingual education may be a factor in teacher behavior. Parents of the Rising Rock students would have to learn how to encourage Navajo use at home and Navajo studies at school in order for the students to successfully acquire facility in the language. The feelings of the parents towards use of the language affects the students' acceptance of the use of the language in school and how the teachers feel about teaching it.

The school policies as they are implemented and administrative leadership styles may influence teacher behavior. Although different teachers respond to different styles of leadership, an active type of leadership that sets out to involve as many people as possible in the process of curriculum development and materials acquisition is likely to have the best results at this school.

The teachers' perception of the attitudes of the other teachers does not seem

to correlate with their own actions or attitude; however, improved communication about this issue may encourage more to try it.

The teachers' perception of the students' attitude is a clear predictor of the teachers' commitment to this method. Teachers will not push the students to accept Navajo studies. They must be willing to participate in it, or the teachers will naturally reduce their efforts. However, teachers who have pressed on beyond the initially hesitant student reaction have found increasingly favorable student attitudes.

Policy Implementation

In 1986 even the "doers" felt that they were not achieving a great deal because this was only their second year teaching these concepts, the students had not previously studied Navajo, and the school did not yet have an organized curriculum for them to follow. They did feel that their efforts were well received and worthwhile. By 1989, more teachers were openly expressing interest in Navajo language and culture as the new principal began to encourage them openly. By 1991, there were still hesitators and opponents, but those who enjoyed teaching language and culture were clearly more comfortable with that role.

Teachers are likely to display culture oriented items whether or not they also teach culture and language concepts. However, displays in the language-active classrooms were more likely to change with lessons being given and be interactive or student produced, and therefore, be more likely to enhance the attainment of policy objectives. By integrating Navajo studies into the curriculum, some teachers teach their regular subjects, stay on schedule, and still teach Navajo language and culture concepts.

This study may be a significant contribution to the now sparse literature about implementation of the new Navajo Tribal Education Policy. It is expected that studies of this type may also provide information for evaluation of multicultural teacher preparation programs and the implementation of bilingual education policy at the operating level. To understand the dynamics of policy implementation a variety of external and personal factors affecting teacher attitude must be examined. To increase the chances that teachers will follow policies, teacher training, policies, curriculum, and the teaching support team must all be favorable.

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