

The Diné Dual Language Professional Development Project

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The Diné Dual Language Teachers Professional Development Project works with a consortium of public and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools to prepare teachers with a proficiency in Navajo language and culture to teach in dual language programs. These schools were identified as seeking to implement the Diné language and culture teaching perspective; a perspective based on the premise that education is best when it reflects a sense of place, education should be based on the philosophy and values of those being educated, and the preparation of teachers should reflect the Diné perspective on education. We recognize that a culturally responsive teacher education program works to empower teachers to make instructional choices that honor their professionalism and language background.

Navajo language teachers work within state and federal language policies and laws that constrict the opportunities of their students to learn, some of which date back to the introduction of formal education for Navajos with the signing of the educational provisions of their 1868 treaty with the United States. For teachers of Navajo language and culture today, these policies take the form of current legislation that imposes standards-based curriculum on schools and limits the language of instruction for English language learners. The culturally responsive Diné Dual Language Teachers Professional Development Project at Northern Arizona University (NAU) works to empower teachers to make instructional choices that honor their professionalism and students' Navajo heritage. The curriculum is contextualized to the knowledge, skills and experiences students bring to class. Studies by Deyhle (1992), Rosier & Holm (1980), Holm (2006), and others document the success of culturally contextualized curriculum and instruction.

Recent research (see e.g., Hanson & Moir, 2008) in professional learning communities demonstrates that social interactions, interpersonal relations, classroom communications, and technology support the success of classroom teachers. Other research (see e.g., Carnegie, 1986, Wise & Darling Hammond, 1987) documents that effective preparation of good teachers includes practical experience under carefully supervised conditions in collaboration with experienced teachers. We believe that an effective way to prepare teachers is through site-based partnerships between colleges of education and K-12 schools that allow students to immediately apply what they are learning in their college classes by working with K-12 students under the supervision of mentor teachers. The project was initiated as an Annenberg Rural Challenge Grant from 1998-2001. We believe: 1) Education is best when it reflects a sense of place 2) Education should be based on the philosophy and values of those being educated 3) Preparation of teachers

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should reflect the Diné perspective of education. In her evaluation of this project in *Engaged Institutions; Impacting the Lives of Vulnerable Youth through Place-Based Education*, Sandra Wilson reflects on the need for place-based learning to overcome cultural and historical biases on the Navajo Nation. She writes, “Proponents of place-based learning recognize that community ownership is an essential component of a successful Navajo school” (2003, p. 41). The new project described in this chapter is based on the success of the Rural Systemic Initiative that supports teacher leadership, promotes community engagement and makes place based learning the foundation of the curriculum. Efforts to prepare teachers of the Navajo language are based on an understanding of the history of formal education in as well as an understanding of efforts by teachers, parents and community members to gain autonomy in the education of their children. This history has not been included in traditional teacher preparation programs. Teachers need information about successful program models, teaching strategies and materials. They need to discuss the funds of knowledge in their communities which motivate parents to transmit their language and culture to their children, and they need to establish settings in the community where children are immersed in their home language.

The Native American Languages Act of 1990 recognizes that “there is convincing evidence that student achievement and performance, community and school pride, and educational opportunity is clearly and directly tied to respect for, and support of, the first language of the child or student.” The Esther Martinez bill passed by Congress in 2006 is an amendment of the Native American Languages Act of 1990 that authorizes competitive grants to establish language nests and language immersion programs for children birth to seven years old and their parents. The passage of this bill following 14 years of deliberation in the Congress serves as an invitation to discuss the history and the current situation of indigenous languages our schools and to reflect on systemic change in schools to support this model.

The Navajo education policy states, “The Navajo language is an essential element of the life, culture and identity of the Navajo people. The Navajo nation recognizes the importance of preserving and perpetuating that language for the survival of the Nation. Instruction in the Navajo language shall be made available for all grade levels in all schools serving the Navajo Nation (Navajo Tribe, 1984, 10. N.N.C. § 111). The Navajo Nation places great value on a Navajo specific education that supports the self-identity of its teachers and students (DDE, 1996, 2003). A 1991 survey of 4,073 Navajo Head Start students found that 53.3% spoke only English, 17.7% spoke only Navajo, and 27.9% spoke both Navajo and English. These statistics indicate a severe need to include instruction in Navajo language in all schools serving Navajo students as well as a need to understand the need for autonomy within these schools as a foundation for success. Bernard Spolsky (2001, p. 157), citing McCarty (1998), writes of the influence of the school in disrupting intergenerational language transmission: “Seemingly protected by their isolated geographical position and by the formal recognition of their autonomy as a nation, the Navajo people have so far been

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denied any real control of the one institution, schooling, which has the potential to play a role in a campaign to reverse language shift.”

Support for Navajo dual language programs in schools is documented in a survey of 242 schools on the Navajo Reservation in which 1,222 Navajo classroom aides and 2,474 aides of all types responded. The Diné Division of Education found that Navajo language and education is a legitimate part of the educational program (DDE, 2003). Research in Navajo communities demonstrates that dual language immersion curriculum and instruction supports students’ academic success. (Rosier & Holm , 1980, McLaughlin, 1992, Goodluck et al., 2000, DeJong, 1999) Research also demonstrates that place and community based curriculum and instruction supports students academic success (Pavel et al., 2003, Wilson, 2003).

Studies show dual language immersion is successful in many settings around the world (Baker, 2003). This chapter shares curriculum and pedagogy developed by Arizona school districts to teach Navajo language and culture and attempts to answer the question, “What are the core programmatic features (including language practices) or strategies of dual language programs that will lead to significant increases in student achievement for different groups of students in different contexts?”

We also know that many dual language programs are negatively affected by “external” educational policies that fail to take into consideration the specific nature of dual language education. Most language education policies in the US today are informed by a deficit or monolingual view of linguistic and cultural diversity. In order to change policy this frame needs to change to a multilingual, additive view of the linguistic and cultural experiences that children and their families bring to school. We need to ask, “How do dual language educators effectively resist monolingual language ideologies to promote dual language program and policies?” The exclusion of native language assessment from the No Child Left Behind Act is one example of how effective dual language programs can be undermined by these broader educational policies.

Northern Arizona University has prepared bilingual teachers for the Arizona classroom with full certification and a bilingual endorsement since 1985, working with schools and communities to ask “What kinds of preparation do teachers need in order to meet the needs of the children in dual language programs? How does our teacher education program encourage and develop cultural competence in our teachers?”

The Diné Dual Language Teachers Professional Development Project works with a consortium of public and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools in the Arizona portion of the Navajo Nation and the bordertown community of Flagstaff to prepare teachers with a proficiency in Navajo language and culture to teach in dual language programs. The consortium schools seek to implement the Diné language and culture teaching perspective based on the premise that education is best when it reflects a sense of place, should be grounded in the philosophy and values of those being educated, and teacher preparation should reflect the Diné perspective of education. We recognize that a culturally responsive teacher

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education program works to empower teachers to make instructional choices that honor their professionalism and language background. Eight schools located across or the Navajo Nation, representing the largest enrollments, are partners in this consortium.

The first year of the project served 29 teachers who enrolled in coursework leading to Master's in Bilingual Multicultural Education (BME) with a bilingual endorsement. The project expects that remaining 28 participants will complete the bilingual endorsement by August 2013 and that they will complete the Master's degree by December 2014. At NAU, students complete seven BME courses for a total of 21 semester credits of coursework for the Bilingual/ESL endorsement. They must also demonstrate proficiency in their tribal language. Candidates can complete the Masters in Bilingual Multicultural Education with three additional courses: one course from each of the two foundations areas, and the Graduate Seminar for a total of 30 semester credits of coursework.

In 2011 the first cohort of 28 Master's students enrolled in BME 530: Foundations of Bilingual Multicultural Education and BME 637: The Cultural Component of Bilingual and ESL Instruction. These courses were taught online. During the summer, they enrolled in BME 531: Bilingual and Second Language Methodology. BME 599: Introduction to Linguistics is offered as an optional course. In Fall 2013 they enroll in BME 631: Structured English Immersion and Sheltered English Content Instruction and BME 634: Testing and Evaluation of Language Minority Students. They enroll in EPS 596 Multicultural Perspectives of Human Diversity and EDR 610: Introduction to Research during Spring 2013. They return to the Flagstaff campus for Summer Session II 2013 to enroll in BME 538: Linguistics in Educational Contexts. This completes coursework for the Bilingual/ESL endorsement. In Fall 2014 Cohort I students enroll in the capstone course BME 698 and BME 608 Fieldwork Experience. They will graduate with a Masters' in Bilingual Multicultural Education with a content emphasis in bilingual education in December 2013. A new cohort of 20 students will begin in year three of the project. Cohort II will graduate in December 2015.

Two mentor teachers at each site provide support with classroom problems and other issues related to technology and academics. Mentors serve as cheerleaders, tutors, and staff developers. Their role is complex and consists of being an advocate, catalyst, collaborator, data collector, demonstrator, facilitator, instructor, leader, learner, problem-solver, resource provider, and trusted listener. The literature on mentoring strongly supports its value in helping new teachers and preventing them from leaving the profession owing to what has been called "praxis shock."

The project is developing Navajo dual language mentor teachers who 1) employ a variety of formative assessment tools and strategies, 2) accelerate Project Teachers' practice as defined by the Arizona Professional Teacher Standards, 3) build Project Teachers' capacity to analyze student work to improve student achievement, 4) assist Project Teachers to demonstrate ongoing self-assessment and reflection, 5) develop a professional learning community among Project Teachers and Mentors, and 6) increase the teacher retention rate.

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The mentor teacher seeks to increase student achievement by developing a community of professional educators that utilize formative assessment to accelerate practice. Project teachers receive mentoring and are encouraged to reflect on their teaching practices. The Research Agenda Working Group for American Indian and Alaska Native Education Federal Interagency Task force found that “According to much of the literature, the central issue underlying the educational disparity [between American Indians and Alaska Natives and “Mainstream” Americans] is the poor fit of culturally derived behaviors and expectations between Native American students and school systems. This pervades many aspects of education, and can include culturally biased curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment” (Pavel et al., 2003). Research in schools within rural reservation communities documents the success of culturally contextualized curriculum and pedagogy as measured on standardized assessments of student academic performance in English (Deyhle, 1992; Rosier & Holm, 1980).

Each year of the project students participate in three Diné Dual Language Math and Science Workshops that provide students and classroom teachers at participating sites opportunities to strengthen the community of learners. The workshops conducted by the Mentor teachers who are Diné dual language teachers and provide lesson plans, materials and science and mathematics teaching strategies. The Diné Division of Education participates in these workshops. Lesson plans and online resources are being added to the online database of materials on the project web page. Mentor teachers guide project teachers and classroom teachers as they a) align curriculum/assessment/instruction to state and national academic standards, b) study achievement data and classroom indicators to identify achievement gaps, c) research curriculum, instruction and assessment resources that target these needs, and d) participate in professional development focused on content instruction in the dual language classroom, reflect on improved teaching and learning in these content areas and share findings with colleagues.

The Diné Dual Language Teachers Professional Development Project is increasing the capacity of the Navajo Nation schools to provide dual language education to Diné students and to provide continual support to new teachers and for NAU to provide teacher education programs on site will be strengthened during the five years of the project. This project serves as a model of long-term collaboration between a university, a tribal education department, public, and tribal schools to serve language minority students in dual language classrooms. Project teachers reflect on the teaching of Navajo language and culture from the perspective of their daily work. Rhonda Thompson, a first grade teacher at Chinle Elementary School writes, “We are the experts. We have a caring staff at our school who know that offering the best education is up to us.”

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