

The Effects of the No Child Left Behind Act on Language and Culture Education in Navajo Public Schools

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This article examines the impact that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the largest federal education policy, is having on Navajo education and Navajo language and culture in general. In particular, this article investigates how Navajo language educators are interpreting NCLB and how the policy impacts Navajo teachers' ability to implement culturally and linguistically relevant instruction, specifically Native language instruction. Our findings are nuanced. While the teachers we interviewed generally supported NCLB's efforts to focus needed attention on students, they also generally agreed the policy forces them to abandon pedagogical practices that they believe to be crucial in educating their children and sustaining their culture. In the case of Navajo students, the restriction of such practices may result in more than academic failure of individual students. Because Navajo language and culture are facing extinction, such a curricular shift may be culturally catastrophic.

The opening paragraph of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) defines the purpose of the most recent federal venture into educational policy in the following terms:

The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. (NCLB, 2002, Sec. 1001)

Who could debate a federal commitment to such lofty and universal goals for educational improvement? Indeed, NCLB calls national attention to the existence of systemic inequity and directs federal support toward remedying this problem. NCLB is the federal government's most comprehensive and ambitious endeavor into public education. Since it was signed into law in 2002, the law has propagated a national discourse of educational standardization, accountability, and increased achievement for *all* groups of students.

At the center of NCLB's objectives is the guarantee that the nation's most vulnerable (marginalized) students will receive access to equal educational opportunities. However, because of the nation's system of localized education, the law has different consequences across states, districts, and schools. As Congress debates NCLB's reauthorization, it is important for lawmakers to understand the effects that this policy is having on local communities to ensure it is not harming the very students it is intended to help.

In this paper, we examine the impact of NCLB on the specific context of public schools on the Navajo reservation. With a history of forced assimilation and cultural genocide that have threatened to make both their language and culture obsolete, Navajo students, and American Indian¹ students in general, are among the most marginalized within the American educational system. American Indian/Alaska Native students are over twice as likely to drop out of school as students of European descent (KewalRamani, Gilbertson & Fox, 2007a), and American Indian/Alaska Native students consistently score lower than students of European descent on standardized measures of achievement (KewalRamani, Gilbertson & Fox, 2007b). There is an added layer of complexity to this marginalization when we consider that the vast majority of Native North American languages are experiencing what linguists refer to as "language shift." A language shift occurs when intergenerational transition of Native languages breaks down and people stop speaking their native tongue because it is no longer socially or economically as viable as the language of wider communication (e.g., English in the United States; Spanish or Portuguese in Latin America (Fishman, 1991; Krauss, 1992). Over the past 30 years, Navajo has undergone a pronounced shift, making it an endangered and rapidly vanishing language. In 1970 about 90% of Navajo four and five year-olds entering Head Start programs were monolingual Navajo speakers (Spolsky, 2002). By the 1990s monolingual Navajo preschoolers had dropped to 17.7%, with approximately 54% speaking only English (Platero, 1998). This context is important to consider when examining the impact that NCLB, the largest federal education policy, is having on Navajo education and Navajo language and culture in general. In particular, our research investigates how Navajo language educators are interpreting NCLB and how the policy impacts Navajo teachers' ability to implement culturally and linguistically relevant instruction, specifically Native language instruction.

Our findings are nuanced. While the teachers we interviewed generally supported the policy's efforts to focus needed attention on students, they also emphasized that NCLB forces them to abandon pedagogical practices that they believe to be crucial in educating their children and sustaining their culture. In the case of Navajo students, the restriction of such practices may result in more than academic failure of individual students. Because Navajo language and culture are facing extinction, such a curricular shift may be culturally catastrophic.

In this paper, we first outline the provision of NCLB and explore the debate about its implementation in Indian Country. Next, we situate our findings in a theoretical framework by discussing the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy

(CRP). In particular, we focus on scholarship that examines the benefits of CRP for Navajo students' academic achievement and for language revitalization. Then we present our findings on the effects of NCLB on Navajo language and culture. Specifically, we analyze Navajo educators' perceptions of the law, the impact it is having on the content and structure of their language and culture classes and their ability to teach their students as they see fit, and its influence on community priorities and attitudes about Native language and culture.

No Child Left Behind

Passed with wide bipartisan support, the No Child Left Behind Act is the federal government's largest intervention into public education. The law marks the eighth reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1965 (ESEA) and is founded on four overarching principles: stronger accountability for teachers and schools, increased flexibility for states and communities, implementation of "scientifically based" teaching methods, and expanded choices for parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Although its goals seem indisputable in theory, the law's implementation has been surrounded by controversy.

NCLB places accountability at the center of school reform by requiring that schools administer reading and math assessments every year between third and eighth grade, and once between 10th and 12th. Students must also be tested in science at least once during grades 3-5; 6-9; and 10-12. In 2002-2003, schools began reporting their test results two different ways—comprehensively as well as disaggregated by gender, racial and ethnic group, English proficiency, migrant status, disability status, and low-income background (NCLB, 2002, Sec. 1111(b)). These results must prove that schools, and each of their constituent subgroups, are making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward universal proficiency by 2013-2014. Schools that do not make AYP face sanctions including the loss of federal funding and ultimately restructuring or closure.

The Debate Regarding NCLB

Proponents of NCLB argue that for the first time, all stakeholders are focusing their attention on high universal standards for all students (West & Peterson, 2003). The theory underlying such arguments suggests that schools largely possess the capacity to educate every student, but need clearer goals, higher expectations, and stronger incentives to ensure that they fulfill this capacity (Sirotnik, 2004). Moreover, proponents maintain that by insisting that *all* schools bring their students to universal proficiency, and by holding schools accountable for the performance of disadvantaged subgroups, NCLB aggressively confronts America's longstanding inequity in educational attainment (Education Trust, 2003).

Critics of the act argue that by mandating high-stakes, standardized assessments, NCLB narrows teaching and learning to those subjects that will be tested at the expense of others that may be equally important. Menken (2008) contends that this narrowing effect includes language instruction: "NCLB pushes English at the expense of minority language education, as English is the language

that ‘counts’ on the high-stakes tests associated with the current federal education legislation” (p. 13). Opponents also claim that because the schools under the most pressure to improve test scores are those serving poor and minority students, sanctions for failing to meet AYP disproportionately harm schools and students that are already at a disadvantage (McNeil, 2000), and create incentives for schools to ignore or even push out those students most at risk of failing (Clarke, Haney & Madaus, 2000). This debate contextualizes the conditions under which Navajo language and culture teachers must educate their students and lays the foundation for our study.

The discussion regarding NCLB’s implementation in Indian Country largely mirrors the debate on the policy in schools across the country (see Beaulieu, Sparks & Alonzo, 2005; Taylor, 2004). The law’s call for increased educational transparency has created a new forum for meaningful discourse about the role of education in American Indian communities (Cavanaugh, 2004). Indeed, educators and policy makers have certainly begun paying closer attention to the learning processes and achievement levels of American Indian students as they attempt to understand the meaning of NCLB in Indian Country (Taylor, 2004). However, discussions regarding the consequences of NCLB in Indian Country take on a unique dimension when we situate the conversation in the historical context of cultural genocide and forced assimilation that has defined reservation schooling for over a century.

NCLB and American Indian/Alaska Native Education

NCLB recognizes the federal government’s unique role in American Indian/Alaska Native education by devoting an entire section (Title VII) to the implementation of the law in reservation schools. Title VII calls for the federal government to “continue” working with “local educational agencies, Indian tribes and organizations, postsecondary institutions,” to create high quality academic programs for American Indian/Alaska Native students that address *all* of their academic needs, including unique cultural and linguistic priorities (NCLB, Title VII, Section 7101). This commitment to attend to the cultural and linguistic needs of American Indian/Alaska Native students and communities was further reiterated by President Bush in Executive Order 13336, which addressed the federal government’s commitment to assisting tribes in complying with the mandates of Title VII “in a manner that is consistent with tribal traditions, languages, and cultures” (Bush, 2004). Title VII and Executive Order 13336 both recognize the importance of implementing NCLB in a manner that is congruent with American Indian/Alaska Native cultural and linguistic practices. Initial research, however, raises questions about whether this commitment is being upheld in practice (Aguilera & LeCompte, 2007; Beaulieu, 2006; Beaulieu, 2008; Beaulieu, et al., 2005; McCarty, 2008a, 2008b; Patrick, 2008; Starnes, 2006; Winstead, Lawrence, Brantmeier & Frey, 2008). Some stakeholders argue that even though Title VII and E.O. 13336 represent the federal government’s commitment to improving overall educational quality through culturally relevant

solutions, this has been little more than a promise on paper (Beaulieu, 2008; Beaulieu, et al., 2005; McCarty, 2008; Patrick, 2008; Starnes, 2006; Winstead et al., 2008). Based on a comprehensive review of the literature on culturally responsive schooling for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argue, “The increased emphasis on standardization and high-stakes accountability under NCLB seems to have resulted in less, rather than more, culturally responsive educational efforts and more, rather than no, Indigenous children left behind in our school system” (p. 942).

The most extensive study examining the cultural implications of NCLB in American Indian schools is the 2005 report issued by the National Indian Education Association (NIEA).² The report written by Beaulieu, Sparks, and Alonzo is based on 11 regional hearings that examined the intended and unintended consequences of the law in American Indian communities (Beaulieu et al., 2005, p. 1). These hearings include the voices of authorities and renowned Indian educators as well as classroom teachers from across Indian Country and echo both aforementioned sides of the debate. Overwhelmingly, however, witnesses at the NIEA hearings were fearful that a push toward standardized curriculum and annual standardized testing would be especially dangerous for their students. Educators described what they believed to be the deleterious effect NCLB was having on “culturally based education including the use of culturally appropriate pedagogy and curriculum” (Beaulieu, et al., 2005, p. 65). By ignoring the social and cultural roles that schools play in communities through an exclusive focus on student achievement, NCLB may in fact push Native language and culture out of the only institutions working to maintain them. In the next section, we contextualize these claims by reviewing the literature about the role of culturally relevant pedagogy in Native education.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Indian Education

We use the phrase culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to refer to both culturally and linguistically relevant instructional approaches. While there is rich literature on the implication of CRP across racial and ethnic groups, we focus our examination on the literature that specifically relates to Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native, and in particular American Indian communities. This research documents the benefits of CRP approaches for both the academic achievement of Native students and the survival of Native languages and cultures.

Defining Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Scholars define culturally relevant pedagogy in various ways. Ismat (1994) provides a broad description of the term as it could apply to any cultural group, contending that CRP incorporates students’ cultural backgrounds in a way that is child-centered and relevant to their real-life experiences. It utilizes cooperative learning and whole language activities, which encourage critical thinking. Finally, it is pervasive and interdisciplinary and, therefore, must be supported by all staff

members. These components, Ismat writes, create a learning community that is positive for all students.

Demmert and Towner (2003) share this same vision of a pervasive and inclusive pedagogy, but they further discuss CRP as it pertains specifically to American Indian students. They write that CRP in American Indian schools should incorporate Native languages and traditional cultural components. Demmert and Towner (2003) contend that teaching strategies should demonstrate an awareness of and a sensitivity to “cultural ways of knowing and learning” (p. 16) while fostering a curriculum based on traditional culture and tribal spirituality as well as the social norms and values of the community. Lastly, they argue for the inclusion of parents and elders in the creation of community-wide education.

Although we agree with both of these definitions, we offer a broader definition that allows for the inclusion of *all* American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities. Some tribes, for instance, are predominantly Christian and prefer to omit Native spirituality from the curriculum while other tribal Christian communities acknowledge it as a significant piece of their heritage. To avoid conflicts like these and to defer to communities’ self-definitions, we define CRP as the infusion of local epistemologies into classroom activities (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Hermes, 2005, 2007; Lipka, Mohatt & Ciulistet Group, 1998). In this way, CRP is a pedagogy in which teaching strategies value the experiences and backgrounds of the students and engage their cultural, linguistic, social, political, and economic contexts in processes of learning.

Like other scholars we contend that American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students’ home languages and cultures must be viewed as the building blocks students use to make meaning in their lives and, therefore, as rich sources of curricular material (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Deyhle, 1995; Hermes, 2005, 2007; Lipka et al., 1998; Lipka, Sharp, Adams & Sharp 2007; Lipka, Webster & Yanez, 2005; Swisher & Deyhle, 1989; Starnes, 2006; Wildcat, 2001; Williams & Rearden, 2006; Wilson, Kamanä & Rawlins, 2006). We also share this literature’s caution against the superficial utilization of language and culture in schooling. In studying Ojibwe tribal schools in Wisconsin and Minnesota for nearly a decade, Hermes (2005) found that in school sites where Ojibwe language and culture were merely “added on” to existing curriculum, culture was narrowed to fit into existing school frameworks (p. 52). Hermes argues that, in such cases, important aspects of the Ojibwe culture were lost.

Incorporating local epistemologies, however, does not mean simply bringing traditional elements of students’ languages and cultures into the classroom; rather, it requires teachers to understand how students are actively constructing culture in the present day by drawing from these traditions and from their everyday lived experience (including popular media, news, technologies, and other cultures with which they interact) (see Gay, 2000; González, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Hermes, 2005, 2007; Lipka et al., 1998; Mol, Amanti, Neff &

González, 1992). Castagno and Brayboy (2008) contend that, “educators must come to know that multiple epistemologies exist and that their students may come to school with a very different worldview than they themselves have grown up with” (p. 952). These authors contend that “multiple epistemologies can and must coexist within school settings” (pp. 952-953).

Finally, we contend that CRP calls for the involvement of parents, relatives, elders, and community members as important resources in the *creation of knowledge*, especially in many American Indian Alaska Native communities where community and extended family are at the core of children’s growth and development (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Demmert and Towner, 2003; Lipka et al., 1998). The work of Lipka et al. (1998) provides a vivid example of the powerful change that can occur when Native teachers work with community members and elders. Lipka and colleagues document that in the work of the Ciulistet group. The Ciulistet group is an organization of Yup’ik teachers that worked collaboratively with elders to create “Culturally responsive education that fundamentally change[d] the role and relationship between teachers and schooling—and between the community and schooling (Lipka et al., 1998, p. 3). To do this, the Ciulistet group invited elders to “participate in the reinterpreted knowledge designed for school” (p. 177). This provided the elders with the opportunity to influence the creation of curriculum and pedagogy. This process made the “link between elders’ knowledge and schooling direct” and contributed to the creation of CRP that was grounded in the experience of elders (Lipka et al., 1998, p. 177).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the Context of American Indian/Alaska Native Student Achievement

Through extensive ethnographic research conducted in the Navajo Nation, Deyhle (1995) has explored the identity formation and classroom performance of Navajo adolescents. She argues that Navajo school failure is typically driven by Anglo notions of individualized success and the “racial warfare” that characterizes Anglo-Navajo relations. Deyhle (1995) concludes that those Navajo students who are more “culturally intact” have more positive school experiences (p. 4). In other words, students who have stronger familial connections to traditional Navajo values—for example, the communal nature of success and the primacy of the family—or have been exposed to these cultural values in a classroom context often have higher self-esteem and perform better in school overall because they are less likely to view school as a site of discrimination.³

While Deyhle’s notion of school success is rather broad (a positive response to schooling is a mix of higher self-esteem, better grades, and graduation), other researchers have looked to quantifiable outcomes such as standardized test scores to justify culturally and linguistically relevant instruction (Bacon, Kidd & Seaburg, 1982; Brenner, 1998; Demmert & Towner 2003; Holm & Holm, 1995; Lipka et al., 2007; Lipka et al., 2005; Rosier & Holm, 1980; Vadas, 1995). Though standardized tests can be biased and representative of the mainstream

culture in which they were written, using these studies enables us to justify the use of CRP within the framework of the standards movement.

Vadas (1995) surveyed 185 Navajo students in grades seven and eleven to assess the relationship between their connection with traditional Navajo culture and their performance on standardized tests. The results suggested that students who identified more strongly with Navajo language and culture had higher scores on standardized achievement tests. Additionally, research examining the use of CRP and mathematics instruction for Native Alaskan and Native Hawaiian students finds that the use of curriculum based in local epistemologies leads to increased student achievement on standardized math exams *and* improves students' understanding of their community and heritage (Brenner, 1998; Lipka, 2002; Lipka et al., 2007; Lipka et al., 2005). These results and Vadas' findings indicate that students' connection to their culture in the home environment is indicative of school success, and they also imply that making an effort to bring this home culture into school and provide students with more affirmation of their cultural identity will help improve test performance.

Additionally, studies conducted on bilingual Navajo immersion programs support the claim that literacy skills learned in the Native language are transferable to second language literacy. In 1980, Rosier and Holm published their findings from a longitudinal study of Navajo students at two schools, one of which was the Rock Point Community School.⁴ The study analyzed two groups of Navajo students in grades two through six who entered school as monolingual Navajo speakers; the group from Rock Point was taught only in Navajo until mid-second grade, while the group from the other school was taught only in English in an ESL program. The researchers compared students by measuring their performance on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) and the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT). Their findings conclude that for grades four and higher, Rock Point students who did not begin reading English until mid-second grade scored significantly higher than the other group on both tests.

Holm and Holm (1995) report on a similar study conducted on the Navajo immersion program at the Ft. Defiance Elementary School.⁵ They found that Navajo immersion students did as well as or better than monolingual English students on most standardized test tasks, including assessments of English writing and math. These studies conducted at Ft. Defiance and Rock Point demonstrate that Navajo students can acquire their Native language at no cost to English proficiency, and, in fact, that being bilingual and/or having exposure to their home culture may actually improve students' overall performance on the mainstream instruments most schools use to measure achievement. These conclusions have been replicated in later studies of Fort Defiance⁶ (Aguilera & LeCompte, 2007) as well as among Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian students (Aguilera & LeCompte, 2007), Cherokee students (Bacon, Kidd & Seaburg, 1982), and other linguistic minority groups (Demmert & Towner, 2003).

The implication of these studies on teaching and curriculum planning should be clear: early Native language instruction (by which we mean

meaningful, literacy-oriented bilingual instruction rather than transitional ESL models) and culturally-based curricula may be important tools in improving the academic performance of Navajo, other American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students. Even those students who may enter school with little to no fluency in their heritage language (which is the more likely case among the Navajo today) may benefit from learning their ancestral tongue. Not only is it culturally relevant and identity affirming in the way that Deyhle (1995) contends, but as Crawford (1995) tells us, bilingualism in general has been proven to “enhance cognitive flexibility” and academic performance (p. 135). Thus, evidence suggests that CRP may be an important step in closing the achievement gap between American Indian/Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and students of European descent.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the Context of Language Shift

As discussed above, students’ native or heritage language is a crucial element of the cultural capital they bring to the classroom. However, the argument for including native language instruction in the education of American Indian/Alaska Native students becomes even more complex when we consider the fact that many of these languages are near extinction (Harrison, 2007; Hermes, 2005; Krauss, 1992). Bilingual education and CRP take on an entirely different meaning in the context of language shift and attempts at revitalization. McCarty (2003), for example, characterizes the language-culture connection when she says that not only are “local languages...irreplaceable intellectual, social and cultural resources to their speakers and to humankind,” (p. 149) but “language loss and revitalization are human rights issues. Through our mother tongue, we come to know, represent, name, and act upon the world” (p. 148). Here McCarty touches upon two important themes—the unique cultural knowledge embedded in language (which is one of the driving factors behind linguists’ involvement in language revitalization projects) and the notion of linguistic human rights. CRP, in the linguistic sense, is no longer just an issue of individual student interest; it enters the realm of the collective community’s interests as well.⁷ As Navajo and other American Indian/Alaska Native languages die out, their loss is accompanied by tremendous personal, cultural, and academic ramifications.

Not only should teachers respect and value the home languages their children bring into the classroom, but they should see them as strengths. This model can apply even in a community that has already undergone extreme language shift. In this case, heritage language programs—where students learn their ancestral language for the first time—demonstrate respect for students’ home culture, utilize an aspect of the community’s cultural identity as a means of implementing second-language instruction, and acknowledge that students have a right to learn their ancestors’ language. This perspective is key, considering that one of the main reasons some Navajo parents “choose” not to pass on their Native language is because they were not taught these languages themselves, and, more importantly, they were taught to devalue these languages in the boarding schools

they were forced to attend (Yazzie, 1995). Community and institutional attitudes toward the Native language are inherently intertwined. Projects that aim to bring the language into higher-status domains like education and government will fail without community commitment to intergenerational transmission (Fishman, 1993), but institutionalized revitalization efforts in schools have the power to revive community morale about an endangered language and give it more prestige (Spolsky, 2002). Clearly, the linguistic aspects of CRP have important individual and community implications for Navajo and other American Indian/Alaska Native students, especially in the context of language revitalization. Forcing English-only, dominant culture instruction will contribute to the distancing of the students from their home culture and hasten the disappearance of their already fading language. Because of the importance of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy for both improving the academic achievement of American Indian/Alaska Native students and revitalizing the Navajo language, our research examines how the implementation of NCLB impacts teachers' ability to implement CRP.

Methods

The findings reported in this article are part of a larger project that analyzed the ways that NCLB, as a broad federal policy, plays out in a unique, localized context (Balter, 2006).⁸ When we started this project, we were familiar with issues surrounding American Indian/Alaska Native education and Navajo education in particular, and NCLB's effects on urban teachers. Co-researcher Balter had conducted prior research on bilingual/intercultural education in indigenous communities in the United States as well as in South America, and she had interviewed an educator from the Rough Rock Community School.⁹ Co-researcher Grossman had extensive research experience examining urban teachers' (non-Navajo) responses to the imposition of large-scale assessment policies. We began our inquiry with the outline of our research design and the goal of examining NCLB's implementation in the Navajo community. While we had an understanding of how NCLB played out in urban settings, we were curious about how the policy may be having different or similar effects in this unique context, which has its own set of cultural, linguistic, historical, and political concerns. It was only after initial participant observations (and subsequent to both authors' reviewing the field notes and collected documents), however, that we narrowed our research questions and formalized our methods.

The primary goal of the research presented in this article is to examine: 1) How NCLB is being interpreted by Navajo language educators; and 2) How the implementation of NCLB is affecting teachers' ability to utilize CRP, specifically Native language education in a setting where that language is disappearing. Because our questions seek to understand the nuanced ways in which educators are interpreting the provisions of NCLB and how the policy is affecting Navajo teachers' attitudes, we intentionally employed ethnographic methods, including participant observation, formal and informal interviews, and

document analysis. Locally-framed analysis is an important but rarely taken approach to policy research and can provide decision makers with an in-depth understanding of the consequences of policies in specific cultural contexts (Merriam, 1998).

Participant Observation

Each summer the Navajo Language Academy (NLA), a non-profit organization working toward the maintenance and revitalization of the Navajo language, holds its annual linguistics and language-teaching workshop for Navajo and non-Indian linguistic scholars and Navajo language teachers. The goal of the workshop is two-fold: 1) to provide a space where linguists and native Navajo speakers can do research *on* Navajo and *in* Navajo in order to document their incredibly complex language and prevent it from becoming extinct; and 2) to train and collaborate with Navajo K-12 school teachers on creating pedagogical strategies for effectively passing on the language to students in their classrooms.

During the summer of 2005, co-researcher Balter worked as a proposal writer for NLA and attended the workshop in Flagstaff, Arizona. Approximately 25 teachers (K-12) attended, representing reservation districts from all three states (Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado). Each day during the three-week workshop participants attended four classes—three distinct linguistics classes (taught primarily by Anglo linguists) and one entitled “Navajo Language Teaching,” which was co-taught by two respected Navajo educators. During the workshops participants lived together in dormitories and ate meals together in dining halls.

Co-researcher Balter participated in all aspects of the workshop. For the most part, she was another student in the class, learning and inquiring alongside the teachers. She informed all participants that in addition to taking part in the workshop, she was collecting data for a research project. On weekends, she would sometimes drive into the reservation with workshop participants. These ventures gave her opportunities to meet friends and family members, ask informal questions, and get a sense of a community perspective on Navajo education. Additionally, participation in the workshop and extra-workshop activities allowed her to establish the respect and trust of the Navajo teachers and gain a deeper understanding of the teachers’ cultural and pedagogical priorities.

During the workshop, co-researcher Balter took extensive field notes, documenting what went on inside and outside of classes. She also collected documents handed out in presentations and classes, including artifacts from teacher practice shared during the workshop. She communicated with other participants as well as instructors and guest speakers regarding her position as a participant/observer, informing them of the possibility that she would write about her experiences and laying the groundwork for individual follow-up.

The workshops provided co-researcher Balter with an opportunity to have extensive conversations with Navajo language teachers from reservation public schools and learn about the state of education and Native language status on the reservation. Through discussions in classes and informal conversations with the

Navajo language teachers, we began to learn about the importance that these teachers placed on implementing curriculum grounded in local epistemologies. We also learned about the challenges Navajo language teachers faced with regard to maintaining their language and culture and giving their students what they would consider a valuable education. One of the obstacles that continued to come up in teachers' conversations was NCLB. At the same time, some educators described the positive effects of the policy on their classrooms. These seemingly contradictory messages intrigued us and became the foundation of our research. To gain a more thorough understanding of how Navajo language teachers were interpreting NCLB and how the policy was affecting the teachers' ability to implement CRP, we conducted follow-up interviews with workshop participants.

Interviews

Several months after the workshop, we sent out a collective e-mail to the group of teachers. In this e-mail, we explained our research and asked for participants. We offered to call the educators or conduct the interview via e-mail. All of the respondents indicated that e-mail would be the easiest way to conduct the interview because of their busy schedules or, in some cases, limited phone access. Therefore, we sent our questions via e-mail to those who had responded. After a few months, we received e-mail responses from seven Navajo educators.¹⁰ We maintained an e-mail correspondence with most of our interviewees in order to ask for clarification or follow-up on particular questions. The educators represent three school districts and two states (Arizona and Utah). Five of the interviewees teach Navajo language and culture classes at various grade levels ranging from K-12, one is the Bilingual Director of a reservation district, and one is a former consultant for the Division of Diné (Navajo) Education. All are Navajo themselves and native Navajo speakers.

Data Analysis

We analyzed and interpreted data at different stages during the research process. Reflection on co-researcher Balter's field notes from the NLA workshop, for instance, helped shape the questions we included in the interview protocol. We did not begin formal data analysis, however, until after we had received all interview responses. Once we began reading through our interview transcripts and field notes, we followed Strauss and Corbin's (1990) three levels of coding qualitative data for analysis: *open coding*, *axial coding*, and *selective coding*.

We started by reading through interview transcripts, documents collected during the workshop, and field notes (we transcribed relevant portions of the field notes as we encountered them). From these data, we began the process of *open coding*, or compiling a list of initial trends that emerged from the data. As we read through these data, we kept a list of common ideas and themes that continually emerged. We wrote down themes such as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Language Attitudes, NCLB and Teachers, NCLB and Curriculum, Positive and Negative Attitudes Toward NCLB, among others. We revised and refined this

list as we progressed through our analysis, a process that Strauss and Corbin refer to as *axial coding*, or reconfiguring broad concepts into specific categories. Multiple forms of data collection and sources of evidence yielded several measures of the same phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). This triangulation allowed us to verify the accuracy of our data and to gain a more complete understanding of how Navajo language teachers are interpreting the provision of NCLB and how the policy is affecting the teachers' ability to utilize CRP. Our final set of categories included sections on: Background Information About the Schools and Communities, Specifics of the Navajo Language Shift, Justifications for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Language Attitudes in the Schools and the Community Before and After NCLB, Teachers' General Interpretations of NCLB and its Effects on Education, NCLB's Effects on Students and Classrooms, NCLB's Effects on Teachers, and NCLB's Effects on Navajo Language and Culture Programs. We entered these categories in to a Microsoft Word document and began cutting and pasting excerpts from interviews, field notes, and documents under the categories to which we believed they most pertained.

As we coded our data in this way, we began to notice a story emerging. This process of reconstructing our data categories into a particular story is what Strauss and Corbin refer to as *selective coding*. We started keeping track of which subjects expressed consistently positive or negative views of NCLB and how these views may have reflected their experience. We saw patterns in teachers' goals for their students and for the classes they teach, and we realized that these goals were based on two specific concerns: validating cultural identity and combating Native language shift. We started to see consistency in the emphasis each teacher placed on the connection between language and culture in Navajo communities and how this perspective shaped their interpretations of and experiences with NCLB. Also, we started to understand the role of NCLB and other policies in shaping language attitudes in the schools and on the reservation and how these attitudes are crucial (possibly the most important) factors to consider in assessing the implications of language shift.

Limitations

By no means do we claim that our results present a complete portrait of the impact of NCLB on Navajo language and culture education. We do, however, maintain that what we present is a crucial start to qualitative research that must be continued and expanded in order to conduct a comprehensive assessment of how NCLB affects Navajo and American Indian/Alaska Native education. One limitation of our study is that it did not include classroom observations or interviews with parents or students. A more complete analysis of this policy's implementation should include these dimensions.

While e-mail interviews are not often standard ethnographic practice, e-mail proved to be the only way that we could communicate with many of these educators after the workshop—partially because some had limited time for phone conversations and partially because some had limited phone access. As a result,

our sample of educators was self-selecting and limited to those who have Internet access, which may have shaped the nature of responses in some way. Although we have no way to know this for sure, it is possible that the teachers with regular Internet access may have more resources in their schools in general, which could consequently affect their overall experiences with NCLB.

Finally, our sample of teachers was limited to those who were in attendance at the NLA workshop (except for the one teacher who was referred to me by a teacher in attendance, although she has a profile that is similar to the rest of our interviewees). The kinds of teachers who would come to a workshop on language maintenance are clearly those who have a strong belief and stake in language and culture education and those who have access to ongoing professional development. Thus, their emphasis on CRP may be stronger than a randomly selected group of Navajo language teachers or Navajo teachers in general. A wider survey of more teachers without affiliations to the NLA would be necessary in order to gain a more complete understanding of the educational priorities across the reservation.

Findings

The combination of the opinions the educators expressed in interviews and the issues that arose during fieldwork weave an important story about how NCLB is affecting Navajo language and culture classes and the wider educational goals these teachers have for their Navajo students. Throughout their narratives, these educators emphasized the personal importance they place in their classrooms on CRP and articulated, in one way or another, the fact that in Navajo communities, the concepts of language and culture are inherently intertwined. Furthermore, the educators described in detail how NCLB is having a “narrowing effect” on their ability to teach Navajo language and culture. The educators explained how NCLB has: 1) forced them to arrange class time in a way that is geared toward test preparation; 2) restricted their ability to develop and implement community-based curriculum; 3) disempowered them by failing to recognize their pedagogical expertise; 4) changed administrator and community attitudes about the importance of CRP—particularly language instruction. This final finding regarding community attitudes raises particular concerns given the historical marginalization of Navajo culture and today’s conditions of language shift. In a community where the Native language and culture are already teetering precariously on the verge of extinction, these educators share a collective concern that NCLB’s unintended consequences have the potential to facilitate the disappearance of their language by altering community attitudes and priorities.

Educators’ General Perceptions of NCLB

The educators’ had fairly optimistic initial perceptions of NCLB’s goals. Educators focused on the aim to improve teacher qualifications, educational accountability and transparency, and the increased awareness of the needs of certain groups of students. One teacher in our sample, a secondary Navajo

language and culture teacher, expressed consistently positive feelings toward NCLB:

NCLB has greatly brought changes for everyone—parents, students, teachers, administrators, and schools. It is about time there is more awareness for Limited English Proficient students. These students are getting more attention than they have been before. Everyone is made aware and responsible for these kids to get them to a certain reading level before they go to the next grade level. (personal communication, January 18, 2006)

Even educators who had a more critical perspective of NCLB shared this optimistic view of its broad goals. For example, a teacher wrote:

A great change has taken place. Because of the accountability and high standards, our school district must ensure that all students, including disadvantaged students, meet high academic standards. The annual reading and math assessments are used as diagnostic tools for schools to continuously improve. (personal communication, December 16, 2005)

These teachers' responses are representative of the extent to which the educators in our sample internalized the theory of action of NCLB. In general, they perceived the law as an ambitious attempt to increase educational quality and access throughout the nation.

The one administrator in our sample also conveyed a generally positive view of NCLB. During one of the NLA classes he taught, for instance, he referred to NCLB as potentially "up in the sky" because "it might finally help us create a system that works" (NLA fieldnotes, July 7, 2005). He contended that as a result of the law, teachers and students are being forced to work harder in order to make some of these changes, but he believed these requirements are ultimately for the better. However, as we will show, his perspective on NCLB is often at odds with that of the classroom teachers.

One teacher in our sample consistently articulated a negative opinion of the law. In his words, there has been "only [one] highlight" of NCLB: increased parental access to their children's education. Otherwise, NCLB, according to him, "has been nothing but another broken promise" (personal communication, November 28, 2005). His use of the term "another broken promise" hearkens back to the years of broken treaties that the U.S. government made with the Navajo and other American Indian/Alaska Native tribes. This teacher complained about the cultural biases in standardized achievement testing, which, he argued, put the Navajo student at a disadvantage. While this teacher continually described the effects of NCLB as harmful, most of the educators (to some degree) agreed with the overall rationale of the law. The teachers we interviewed were concerned, however, about the policy's consequences for their ability to utilize CRP and, more broadly, for community attitudes toward teaching Navajo language and culture.

The Effects of NCLB on Teachers and Their Ability to Utilize CRP

As we have shown, when asked to comment on their general perception of NCLB and its goals, most teachers viewed the law in a positive light. However, in

reflecting on their experience with implementing the policy, all five-classroom teachers discussed how the law has forced them to change the structure and content of their classes by placing more test-oriented demands on their time, thus limiting their ability to develop and implement CRP to the extent they would like. Four of the five teachers also discussed how the stresses associated with the implementation of NCLB have created an educational climate that devalues their expertise causing the teachers to feel disempowered.

We asked the educators explicitly whether they thought NCLB has had any tangible effects on their schools' language and culture programs. From her standpoint as someone who has surveyed language and culture programs throughout the reservation, a former consultant to the Diné Division of Education commented:

Yes, NCLB has certainly had a great impact on Native programs. These programs are left behind since there is no funding for such, or so small if there is any. Yes, English reading and math have taken away from these programs. (personal communication, April 7, 2006)

All five of the teachers in our sample echoed this educator's sentiment that NCLB has brought about noticeable changes to their Navajo programs by requiring increased focus on English and math instruction, and four of the five teachers explained how these changes interfered with their efforts to teach Native language and culture and ultimately maintain the Navajo language.

All five of the teachers we interviewed discussed how NCLB's requirements have forced them to arrange their Navajo language and culture classes in a particular way that is geared toward test preparation. As the teacher who was the most supportive of NCLB described, these arrangements do not explicitly forbid teachers to incorporate CRP and language instruction, but do place additional demands on the class time of Navajo language and culture teachers:

Like I mentioned, all certified teachers are to teach a reading skill. When reading test prep is done, everyone will be expected to teach test taking skills for math and also writing. For SSR [sustained silent reading], students are grouped by their reading level. We will be receiving math groups according to their grade level also. No one has said, "do not speak Navajo during SSR or anytime." (personal communication, January 18, 2006)

It is true that there is no mandate that students may not use Navajo. However, all of the other teachers in our sample were far more critical about how the implementation of NCLB had forced them to make alterations in the organization of their instructional time that negatively affected their language and culture programs. One teacher described explicitly how the move to a test-driven focus has taken away from the Navajo language and culture program at her school:

It has tremendously affected the Navajo Language and Culture class in [our school]. I think the administration and board members are afraid to lose the federal funding if we fail to meet our performance objectives and not demonstrate results in academic achievement. I am being advised to teach

SRA reading [English reading curriculum] and teach summarization to the English language arts standards and objectives. (personal communication, December 16, 2005)

This comment is representative of three of the four other teachers who expressed a particular concern that NCLB caused them to modify their class time in a way that inhibited their ability to fully implement the Navajo immersion environment that underlies their theory of instruction.

All of the educators in our sample (including those supportive of NCLB) discussed the importance of an immersion approach, where the teacher speaks only Navajo in the classroom and expects students to learn how to converse. According to the former Diné Division of Education consultant, an immersion approach is crucial because of the complexity of the Navajo verb. Teachers must use verbs regularly and be very conscious of keeping particular verb forms limited and consistent rather than defaulting to teaching lists of nouns, days of the week, or colors. This is the only way, she believes, students will become conversational enough in Navajo to pass on the language (NLA fieldnotes, July 2005).

All of the educators in our sample shared the belief that immersion was the best pedagogical approach to maintain the Navajo language; however, four teachers talked directly about how the implementation of NCLB has demanded that they restructure their Navajo language and culture classes in a manner that precludes attention to a consistent approach to language and cultural instruction. One teacher described the considerable negative impact NCLB had on her school's immersion program:

Our immersion program has become a pull-out program. Now, Navajo language is only being taught 45 minutes a day for 5th-8th grade. Thirty minutes for kindergarten to 4th grade. With a limited amount of time, we are now only focusing on language usage. It's getting difficult to teach the Foreign Language Standards because the students with limited Navajo or no Navajo do not understand what is being asked of them. (personal communication, January 16, 2006)

By reducing the immersion program to a pull-out program, this teacher was not able to give her students the exposure to the language she deemed necessary. This teacher's experience represents the most dramatic consequence that NCLB has had on how the teachers organize their Navajo language and culture classes. However, a common theme across our interviews was that NCLB forced teachers to alter the structure of their courses to create space for preparing their students for standardized exams.

All of the educators' we interviewed described how the focus on testing and accountability as a result of the implementation of NCLB restricted their ability to develop *and* implement community-based curriculum that builds on their students' lives and interests. According to a middle school teacher:

The testing mandated by the federal government ties the hands of highly qualified teachers to follow their local curriculum. Test preparation has made

it difficult to create a curriculum that is fun, engaging, and educational.
(personal communication, December 16, 2005)

Like this teacher, three other teachers reported that because they were compelled to prepare students for standardized exams, they not only had to devote Navajo class time to teaching English reading skills, but they also had less time to create a Navajo curriculum that was engaging to their students.

All of the teachers we interviewed (and many in the NLA workshop) described how the increased focus on accountability brought on by NCLB led to a school climate where increasing students' test scores and test preparation were prioritized and developing and implementing CRP were devalued. In interviews and at the NLA workshops, teachers talked about the types of curriculum that they had to scale back as a result of NCLB. In one example, an elementary teacher described the Navajo curriculum she uses with her students, which utilizes traditional Navajo mythology (Winter Stories and Coyote Stories) to illustrate what she refers to as important "cultural morals" and highlight Navajo vocabulary (personal communication, January 16, 2006). In another example, a high school teacher explained how she and her colleagues augment Navajo vocabulary by having students "introduce themselves by stating their four clans, residence, and parents'/grandparents' names in Navajo." These teachers simultaneously try to expose students to historical and traditional elements of their heritage while making it immediately relevant to their lives today by integrating technology into instruction. While some lessons call for students to learn about weaving by talking with a community grandparent, others require them to create Power Point presentations using the Navajo language (personal communication, January 18, 2006). It is assignments like these, grounded in the lives and culture of their students, that the teachers contend that they have been forced to eliminate in an attempt to raise student tests scores and create space for the additional demands associated with the implementation of NCLB.

Additionally, the teachers in our sample discussed how the emphasis on test-based accountability created pressure that extended beyond restructuring class time or limiting instruction to consistent feelings of disempowerment. Two teachers, for example, spoke explicitly of feeling as if they were under constant threat and scrutiny to succeed according to the law's rigid standards:

We are being threatened that the state will take over if our school does not improve. Teachers are being written up for not making the yearly progress.
(personal communication, December 16, 2005)

Most children are not meeting the assessments code/level of learning so the schools are being labeled [...] The teachers are the ones being judged.
(personal communication, January 16, 2006)

These comments represent the voices of *all* of the teachers in our study. Each described how the implementation of NCLB has created an environment in which they feel a tremendous amount of pressure to raise students' test scores by any means necessary, including narrowing instruction and limiting CRP.

In reflecting on how NCLB has necessitated that she diminish the use of CRP, one teacher articulated more explicitly that the law creates a policy context in which the experience she and her colleagues have is neither consulted nor valued in the codification of what her students must learn. In her words: “I thought the Navajo Nation is a sovereign¹¹ nation, and we should have a say in teaching our Navajo children what they need to know, be proud of the fact that they are a Proud Navajo people with a rich history, culture, language, and certainly contemporary Navajo affairs and issues facing the Navajo Nation” (personal communication, January 10, 2006). Similar to three other respondents (and other educators at NLA), this teacher expressed frustration regarding the limiting effect NCLB has on her ability to utilize local epistemology in her instruction. Although NCLB’s aim is to increase student performance, we find that in the context of Navajo education, the policy disempowers the teachers by failing to respect them as pedagogical experts for their students. This diminishes the likelihood that Navajo students will succeed academically (given previous research demonstrating that the utilization of CRP has the potential to improve Navajo students’ academic achievement). The teachers we interviewed were personally invested in giving their students everything they need in order to succeed and felt increasingly devalued the less they were able to do so.

The underlying source of the teachers’ feelings of disempowerment is the tension created from teachers’ and policymakers’ different conceptions of what students must do in order to be “successful.” While NCLB demands proficiency in broad, state-defined standards of English language, reading, mathematics, and science as demonstrated by high performance on standardized exams, the teachers we interviewed argued that these demands do not reflect what they really want their Navajo children to be able to do in their lives. In the words of one middle school Navajo language and culture teacher, “It is stressful always being dictated to about passing the AIMS [Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards], and yet we fail to consider what we really want them [the students] to be” (personal communication, January 10, 2006). What the teachers want the students to be, according to this teacher, are individuals who can pass these tests and succeed in the mainstream culture while maintaining pride in their Navajo heritage and knowing what it means to be successful adults in their Navajo communities:

I feel there is too much emphasis on the NCLB Act, and we need to focus and build strong individuals who can achieve in both worlds [Anglo and Navajo]. With the NCLB Act, it is only geared to one side. It needs to be balanced. (personal communication, January 10, 2006)

This teacher went on to say that she wants her students “to know who they are wherever they go in the world.” She invokes the metaphor of navigating between two worlds and stresses the importance of giving Navajo students access to both worlds. Unfortunately, in her opinion, NCLB values one of these worlds to the exclusion of the other. Another teacher described how schools are now “putting stress on [their Navajo] students with strict memorization of facts and procedures”

(personal communication, December 16, 2005) that are not, in any way, affirming their Navajo identities. Scholars argue that one of the most important tasks teachers can take on is providing students from non-dominant cultures (in this case Navajo students) with the skills necessary to be successful in both the dominant (mainstream) culture and the students' heritage culture (see Carter, 2005; Delpit, 1995; Deyhle, 1995). We find that the focus on improving students' test scores and the resulting test preparation and curricular changes brought about by the implementation of NCLB have devalued both CRP and local educators' expertise. These changes have hampered teachers' abilities to help students navigate *both* worlds they must be prepared to enter.

The Role of NCLB in Changing Administrator and Community Language Attitudes

In addition to a change in the content and structure of Navajo language and culture classes, the teachers in our study reported a change in community attitudes toward CRP—particularly language instruction—since the implementation of NCLB. We contend that these changing views are a residual effect of NCLB that is unique to the Navajo community and significant in the context of the language shift that is already taking place. The teachers we interviewed believed that the alteration in attitudes is more detrimental than the modification in the actual structure of the classes because it permeates the entire community and affects the priority that these programs receive. The teachers asserted that NCLB deems Navajo language programs unnecessary or secondary to other school programs. As a result, they contended, the policy will facilitate language shift, in part, by communicating to community members that Navajo is no longer socially or economically as viable as English. For instance, in response to whether she believed Navajo language programs have been affected (either positively or negatively) by NCLB, a middle school teacher responded:

Our Navajo language and culture are affected in a negative way due to the administration, board members, parents, and community not fully supporting the program. The only time the administration mentioned that the district is integrating Navajo language and culture is when they are asked to do a presentation at workshops. (personal communication, December 16, 2005)

This teacher's response indicates that since the implementation of NCLB, her school's Navajo language and culture programs have become something that is more for show rather than authentic culturally relevant pedagogy. More importantly, her answer reflects her belief that NCLB diminishes both parents' and school administrators' support for Navajo language and culture programs. Five of the seven educators we interviewed shared this belief.

Four of the five Navajo language and culture teachers, in particular, expressed concerns that the programs in which they teach are tenuous because their administration no longer prioritizes their work. For example, a teacher describing the status of the programs since the implementation of NCLB explained:

We tried to align our state standard to all areas of the content areas, [but] our administrators are not fully aware of the importance of teaching the Navajo language and culture. Not unless you are raised traditional, then you can see the foreign [Navajo] language is [benefiting] the students. I feel we are shortchanging the student. I feel our administrators are more concerned in being in compliance with state standards. That's the driving force. (personal communication, January 10, 2006)

As this response demonstrates, a disconnect between administrators and their language and culture teachers seems to have grown in the wake of NCLB. Because they are directly responsible for implementing NCLB, the administrators are compelled to prepare their students to succeed according to the law's requirements, which means doing everything in their power to improve achievement on English language standardized tests. As the teacher's statement above illustrates (and the other teachers corroborate), however, sometimes prioritizing these mandates can diminish the importance placed on other aspects of education. Administrators may believe they should channel more support into the core, tested subjects rather than backing something that does not ultimately affect the federal support that they receive and greatly need. On the other hand, the teachers we interviewed were *all* adamant about the importance of continuing language and culture education for the success of their students and the vitality of their community *despite* the changes in administrative attitudes.

Along with changes in administrative attitudes toward Navajo language and culture, our interviewees also noticed changes in community attitudes toward CRP. A majority of the educators claimed that rather than supporting CRP for the purpose of maintaining and valuing the home culture of the students, some parents have internalized the rhetoric of NCLB and started to view time spent on Navajo language instruction as subtractive from English learning and preparation for the tests, which their children must pass in order to be "successful." Like the administrators, the teachers pointed out, some parents believe that with already limited resources, schools should prioritize the tested subjects and teach their children what they need in order to be successful and competitive when measured against the rest of the nation's students. The teachers contended that parents do not seem to support instruction that is not aligned with the current policy environment, which values student scores on standardized exams. Parent attitudes and administrative attitudes are mutually reinforcing. If parents do not support a program, administrators will have less leverage or reason to maintain it. A school will not put resources into a program that the community as a whole does not want. Conversely, if parents see that administrators do not value language and culture instruction, they may defer to the administration as experts and come to value it less themselves. One teacher described how this phenomenon has played out in her school:

There has been a dramatic change in our language program due to the No Child Left Behind Act. Some parents are stating that Navajo language should not be taught in the classroom because it's holding back the children's

English learning. Younger generation parents are telling their child/children that Navajo language and culture is not important anymore. A lot more students are coming to school with limited Navajo or no Navajo language usage. (personal communication, January 16, 2006)

This teacher observes that the language attitudes in her community have shifted from supporting heritage/Native language instruction as a crucial tool in cultural maintenance and student success to dismissing it as secondary in order to comply with NCLB and help students achieve on the English language tests. We contend that this change in priorities, which leads to cuts in important Navajo language and culture programs, is partially responsible for perpetuating language shift by curtailing important Navajo programs. This shift may have grave consequences, ultimately facilitating the extinction of the Navajo language and culture.

The potential of NCLB to change language attitudes among Navajo people may prove to be more dangerous than the ways in which it has encouraged schools to alter their curriculum. By privileging English and devaluing other languages, the policy has the power to change community attitudes about their Native language. Our findings demonstrate the hegemonic rhetorical power of NCLB, the effect of which undermines efforts to support local knowledge and mirrors historic attempts to marginalize and eradicate Navajo culture. This may be the most insidious effect of the policy because it hastens language shift and makes it look like a voluntary process on the part of the community.

Conclusion

The current policymaking landscape indicates that standards and accountability will remain a core component of school reform. A key element of the Obama Administration's main education reform, the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top grant program, rewards states and districts that adopt internationally benchmarked standards and assessments. Moreover, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has called for both the continued alignment of standards to "strong assessments" and the development of a system of national standards. It is likely, therefore, that as Congress and the President move forward with the reauthorization of NCLB, accountability will remain a critical element in the federal government's efforts to guarantee that the nation's most vulnerable students receive access to equal educational opportunities.

While we commend the federal government's continued investment in high standards and expectations for *all* students, we believe that for scholars and policymakers to fully understand the effects that NCLB is having on American Indian/Alaska Native education, future research needs to look inside Navajo language and culture classrooms and listen to the voices of parents and teachers to explore the myriad ways the policy is affecting teacher practice and community beliefs. The opinions of the teachers in our study are complex. Many expressed some appreciation of NCLB because they believe it has the potential to improve the educational opportunities provided to all students. At the same time, the educators discussed how NCLB constrains them in ways that they see

as detrimental to their students and communities. All of the educators (including those most supportive of NCLB) emphasized the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy for improving student achievement and maintaining Navajo language and culture. However, because of the pressure that the implementation of NCLB places on teachers for their students to be proficient in core subjects, the teachers reported that they have less freedom and time to implement curriculum that is relevant to the goals they have expressed for their students. These teachers voiced concern that NCLB renders CRP obsolete, forcing them to shift their practice in ways that undermine the very goals that NCLB is meant to achieve. Our findings demonstrate that as policymakers work to revise NCLB, they must listen to the perspectives of *teachers* to ensure that sound instructional practices guide the shaping of the policy so that all students have the opportunity to achieve.

In addition to the constraints NCLB places on their language and culture classes, the teachers indicated that they have noticed a shift in community and administrative attitudes toward language and culture instruction. Because of NCLB's requirements, some parents and community members are beginning to see CRP as less relevant than (and even detracting from) English and math instruction that will help their children succeed on the tests. NCLB's requirements are altering community priorities by narrowing the definition of academic success to one that leaves no room for traditional language and culture. While NCLB may narrow the definition of academic success in other environments as well, in the context of language shift these consequences can be devastating for the survival of Navajo language and culture. Our findings illustrate how in this specific context, NCLB may exacerbate the extinction of Native language and culture, which can be detrimental to individual students and to their community as a whole. We encourage policymakers to adopt a new version of the law that allows more flexibility at the local level to make room for community defined approaches to culturally relevant pedagogy.

Finally, we find that as a broad federal policy, NCLB has failed to take into account the unique cultural, linguistic, historical, and socioeconomic needs and priorities of the Navajo community. This is particularly problematic considering the marginalization of the Navajo community in larger American society, and more particularly of Navajo students within the American educational system. As our interviewees conveyed, NCLB institutionalizes a dominant, mainstream vision of education that renders grassroots knowledge and educational priorities impractical through the urgent frenzy to raise students' scores on standardized tests. Even though it was almost certainly not the lawmakers' intention when they wrote the law, NCLB and the larger movement toward educational and linguistic standardization can be viewed as assimilationist and, consequently, educationally detrimental when situated in the historical trajectory of Indian education policy and the Navajo cultural context. As Congress debates the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, we urge lawmakers to listen to community voices so that they can better understand how the policy undermines teachers' ability to

implement instruction that meets the needs of Navajo students and may ultimately lead to the extinction of the Navajo language.

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Endnotes

¹In this paper, we use the term "American Indian" rather than "Native American." The Navajo educators we worked with did not seem to have a preference between the terms, however, the trend in current literature and politics is to favor "American Indian." We use "Native" as an adjective used to describe something specifically of Navajo or American Indian, Native Hawaiian, or Alaska Native origin and "native" as a more generic adjective referring to something that belongs to someone by birth.

²Another study of note is Part II of the National Indian Education Study written by Moran and Rampey (2008). This report provides a comprehensive examination of the current integration of American Indian and Alaska Native languages and culture in schooling. While the study does not specifically address the effects of NCLB on American Indian education, it does offer insight into how educators are presently incorporating language and culture in Native students' schooling.

³Research by Agbo (2004) and Cleary and Peacock (1998) support the conclusion that the CRP is beneficial for enhancing Native students' self-esteem. Additionally, see St. Charles & Costantino (2000) for a review of the literature on CRP and reading instruction. See Reyhner and Hurtado (2008) for an analysis of CRP in the context of NCLB's provisions for the use of Reading First.

⁴The Rock Point Community School is a Navajo reservation school located in Northeast Arizona. It began teaching ESL in 1960 and implemented full bilingual instruction in 1967. In 1972, the community elected a local school board that contracted with the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) in order to have more local control in establishing a Navajo-centric school environment. Rock Point continues to operate today as a BIA (K-12) school (see Reyhner, 1990 for a full history and description of the school).

⁵The Fort Defiance Elementary School is a Navajo immersion program that was established in 1986 (see Nave, 1996 for a complete discussion of the program).

⁶In 2004, the Fort Defiance Elementary school became part of the larger Dine' Language-Immersion School. Aguilera and LeCompte's study examine the entire Dine' Immersion School.

⁷In making this argument for linguistically relevant pedagogy, we are assuming that the community has already made language revitalization a priority and has some of the resources needed to begin the project. In the field of anthropological linguistics, there is an ongoing debate over who can and should initiate revitalization efforts (linguists or communities themselves) and in what stage of language endangerment a language must be in order to have realistic goals for a revitalization project. We believe that the community itself must spearhead revitalization efforts and that linguists can offer invaluable support.

⁸Subsequent to the completion of our data collection we received approval for our study from the Navajo Nation Research Review Board. In retrospect, we would have gained approval prior to data collection.

⁹The Navajo created the Rough Rock Demonstration School in 1966 (which later changed its name to Rough Rock Community School in the 1980s), and it was the first experiment in tribally controlled bilingual/bicultural community schools. In 1967, the residents of the Gila River Reservation (largely Pima) created the Blackwater Community School (see Brown & Havighurst (1970) and Drake & Mangini (1981) for a description of the Blackwater Community School). The creation of the Rough Rock and Blackwater schools is representative of the larger movement for American Indian self-determination.

¹⁰One of the teachers from the NLA with whom we had initially contacted said she did not feel qualified to respond to the questions herself, but she forwarded them to another Navajo language and culture teacher in the same district who had agreed to answer them. While this teacher had been unable to attend the NLA workshop, her profile is very similar to the other teachers in attendance, so we do not think her absence significantly affects our findings.

¹¹This teacher's critique also raises questions of Navajo sovereignty. Another teacher brought up questions concerning the legality of NCLB in light of tribal sovereignty. There is an extensive body of scholarship that examines the authority of NCLB on Navajo schools (see Beaulieu, 2008; Beaulieu, et al., 2005; McCarty, 2008a; Spolsky, 2002; Winstead et al., 2008). An analysis of the intersection between NCLB and tribal sovereignty is outside the scope of this paper.

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