

TITLE Special Session for Students and Elders To Address the Task Force and NACIE. INAR/NACIE Joint Issues Sessions. National Indian Education Association (NIEA) Annual Conference (22nd, San Diego, California, October 16, 1990).

INSTITUTION Department of Education, Washington, DC. Indian Nations At Risk Task Force.; National Advisory Council on Indian Education, Washington, D.C.

PUB DATE 16 Oct 90

NOTE 13p.; In: The Indian Nations At Risk Task Force and the National Advisory Council on Indian Education Joint Issues Sessions Proceedings. See RC 018 538.

PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS \*American Indian Education; American Indians; \*College Preparation; \*Educational Experience; Elementary Secondary Education; Hearings; Higher Education; Minimum Competency Testing; Primary Sources; Student Needs; \*Teacher Education

IDENTIFIERS \*Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools; Native Americans; \*Pre Professional Skills Tests Native Americans

## ABSTRACT

This report summarizes a joint session held by the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force and the National Advisory Council on Indian Education to hear testimony about the concerns of the parents of Native American students. Issues and problems were in the areas of: (1) the decline of Native enrollment in teacher education programs; (2) the Pre-Professional Skills Test as a barrier to Native teacher education and how teacher candidates have dealt with this; (3) inadequate preparation for college in secondary schools, particularly Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools; (4) test bias; (5) the need for Native students to develop test-taking skills; (6) the need for greater career guidance in secondary schools; (7) the need for greater parental involvement in educational decision making related to their own children; (8) the need for better facilities and higher employee standards at BIA boarding schools; (9) tribal advocacy for high risk students in the public schools; and (10) difficulties related to the recent BIA reorganization. The report also describes a woman's lifetime educational experiences in BIA elementary and secondary schools and in college, and her long struggle to become a teacher. (SV)

\*\*\*\*\*  
 \* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made \*  
 \* from the original document. \*  
 \*\*\*\*\*

*INAR/NACIE Joint Issues Sessions  
NIEA 22nd Annual Conference - San Diego, California  
October 16, 1990*

ED341541

**"Special Session for Students and Elders to  
Address the Task Force and NACIE"**

0185

ERIC  
Full Text Provided by ERIC

2  
**BEST COPY AVAILABLE**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Research and Improvement  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as  
received from the person or organization  
originating it

Minor changes have been made to improve  
reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-  
ment do not necessarily represent official  
OERI position or policy

**INAR/NACIE - Joint Issues Sessions**  
**NIEA 22nd Annual Conference - San Diego, California**  
**October 16, 1990**

**Summary: "Special Session for Students and Elders to Address  
the Task Force and NACIE"**

The special session for Students and Elders to Address the Task Force and NACIE was co-hosted by INAR Task Force member Terrel Bell and NACIE Council member Bob Chiago. The following issues, recommendations, and exemplary programs were discussed:

**I. Defining Student Issues**

- Students' concerns depend on their educational level. At the college level, some of the concerns are scholarships and finding the right schools to go to. Some of the concerns at the high school level are related to choosing careers. I know a number of students who are not sure what they want to do--whether they want to go to college or whether they even want to graduate from high school.
- About 64 percent of Native Americans are in college now (approximately 90,000). I think educators have been making a lot of progress, and they ought to be--all those who are members of this organization ought to be proud of how far they've come. Of course, we've got a long way to go yet, and one is never totally satisfied.
- I work as the director of a tribal education department, the Salt River Pima Maricopa Community, and I've been there for two years. We've found there is still about a 75 percent dropout rate. I think of the report that came out back in the late 1960s, early 1970s that gave rise to the Indian Education Act and some of those same statistics, such as the 75 percent dropout rate, are ones we still have today.
- Nationwide, including all students, the dropout rate is around 30 percent. We have about three and a half million students across the country on each grade level and a million, fifty thousand of them don't finish school. In the big cities the dropout rate is really, really high.
- One of the things we've found in Salt River is that there seems to be negative peer pressure in some cases among Indian students. For example, when some students do well, some of the other students seem to give them negative treatment, saying, "You shouldn't be doing well because the rest of us are not."

## II. Postsecondary Education

### Teacher Training and Competency Exams

Northern Arizona University used to produce a lot of Native American teachers, but it has fallen off. There was a program called the Teacher Corps that was instituted on the Navajo and Hopi Reservations. We had a large cadre of teachers who went through the program, and they are now teaching. But now we need to replace those people because within the next five years, they are going to be retiring from the educational system. I see teacher preparation programs throughout the country, and I like to look at them to see what their programs are about. Of course, Northern Arizona University is accredited by NK. NK states that you must provide at least one class or some information in the area of working with diversity of cultures that exist in the country today. If you look at our educational system you will find no courses under the required areas include this. We're more like a baby sitting service where we try to integrate these courses--or these contents or these issues and topics into the curriculum, and that is not going to work. I realize that students have to take so many hours in order to graduate, but I feel personally one more class in teaching Native Americans or teaching cultures from different areas would make a world of difference to those who are going into the field of education. Our institutions paint this picture that everything is just so out there, and if you're placed in a student teaching environment, then if it goes well--that's the way it's going to be. But we paint a very negative concept of what teacher education is all about. When student teachers go out to a reservation and don't know how to speak the Native language or aren't culturally sensitive, then a lot of blame is put on them.

I'm a senior in the teacher education program at Northern Arizona University. I'm a mature student, as you can see. But, when I first started college, I found that I was not prepared in some areas. My background is mostly from Bureau schools and I went to Indian schools most of my life. This seems to be a problem with a lot of Indian students. Five years ago, there were approximately 177 Indian students at Northern Arizona in teacher education. Yet, at the beginning of the 1990 fall session, there were only 35 students. To me, this is a really sad situation. I find it very disappointing that there aren't more teacher candidates.

I think the decrease has a lot to do with the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) instituted in Arizona about five years ago. Since then, the enrollment in teacher education seems to have really dropped. The competency test is composed of reading, writing, and math. Currently at Northern Arizona University and other Arizona schools, you have to pass the competency test before you are admitted into the teacher training program. You are not allowed to take teacher education classes unless you pass that test. What happens is that a lot of Native American students who can't pass the test drop out or go into other fields. The reason they cannot pass the test is that they were not properly prepared at the elementary and secondary level. I find that a lot of Native American students have to take courses to help them prepare for these tests, and I think that we should have already had that preparation, during high school.

I graduated from high school more than 20 years ago, and it seems to me that the younger students should have had a better education than I did. However, based on just the results

of the competency and college admissions tests, this doesn't seem to be the case. It really concerns me, especially because my own children are in school.

I will hopefully teach third grade next year. My emphasis is on bilingual education. I'm a Hopi and a pretty fluent speaker of the language. I hope I will be able to teach Hopi children and that I will use our language and culture in my teaching. From the methods courses I have taken in bilingual education I have learned that just because you speak fluently doesn't mean that you can write or think equally well. So there is that difference. It seems to me, from my educational background in the Bureau system, they taught us how to read and write, but they weren't really strong on helping us develop our cognitive skills.

I have heard about the competency exam in almost every hearing, whether it's a hearing like this or one on academic standards or one on special education. It keeps coming up. So it seems to me that something has to be done about it. Many critics of the school system say, "Well, you give students a diploma when they can't read and they can't write and they can't handle mathematics." That's been said so much that many state legislatures have passed a law requiring an examination. The problem is that some people are good test takers and others aren't. Some are quite intelligent, but they just sort of freeze up when they confront an examination. And if this is causing us to lose people who would otherwise be good teachers, and if it's keeping some from getting further education, then we should do something about it. I don't know what should be done. I believe it's important that we have standards so that when students graduate from school--whether they get a high school diploma or a college degree--they are well educated. Sometimes you are well educated, but you can't put it down on paper in an examination.

I remember an examination I took once. I had some squares I filled in on an answer sheet. When I was almost through, I found out I didn't have the answer sheet lined up correctly. Then it was too late. It wasn't a serious exam, but if it had been, it would have been terrible. It seems to me to have somebody's future determined by one examination is not very good. Sometimes you may not be feeling well the day you take the exam. Now, these aren't excuses. These are circumstances that happen often. I don't know what should be done about that, but I've heard it so much during these meetings yesterday and today that I've become convinced it isn't just an isolated problem. It's a problem that many people face and worry about. Education should help people get ahead, have a better life, and be happier. So I'm concerned about that. Maybe the Task Force can come up with some recommendations in this area.

I don't know if we can really come up with an answer to the problem, but I think a lot of these tests are culturally biased, and that is part of the problem. We need to set high expectations for educating our Indian students from the beginning so that they have these goals to look forward to. I think in everything you have to have some sort of test you must pass for admission or to get a job. I think schools should teach their students how to take tests successfully.

I don't know how useful instruction in test-taking skills would be. Maybe that needs to be part of educating Indian students--how to take tests so they'll be successful like other kids.

I know that some parents hire tutors to prepare their children for these examinations. This puts those children whose parents don't do that or those who come out of a different culture at a further disadvantage.

I serve on the board of directors of the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey. They publish the SAT, a lot of the college entrance exam tests, and the advanced placement test where you can take a course and take an examination and you'll get college credit for it while you're still in high school. As we've studied our testing practices in that company, using computers and computer analysis--some of the things that we're learning are surprising. For instance, the SAT is apparently biased against women. It's supposed to predict how well you'll do in college. And generally first year freshmen women do better in college than their male counterparts, but they tend to score lower than males on the SAT.

I say all that to emphasize that I think we need to be very careful about tests and how we use them, especially when we make decisions that affect people's lives, and I'd urge all of you to speak up on behalf of the Indian students. I wonder if they're not being hurt unfairly by these tests. Native Americans get hurt enough without being hurt by that. So I just express my concern and worry about it.

I'm an assistant professor at Northern University, and these are two of my students who are here as part of a classroom requirement. I just want to say one thing when we're talking about the PPST exam and all other exams--for example GREs and so forth--being culturally biased. Number one is that I grew up on a reservation. I attended the BIA schools. I was physically and psychologically ridiculed for speaking my Native language. Although my background includes growing up in both rural and urban areas, I think I've adapted very well.

Maybe I have been Americanized too much. I am an assistant professor at NAU in the area of teacher preparation programs. I see a lot of my students coming through the educational system, either sophomores or juniors, and again they're facing the PPST examination. There are other ways and other avenues for getting around that exam, although I don't really encourage my students to do that. I've gone back and looked at some of the figures, and it's just astonishing to see the numbers of Native American people not going into education today because of this exam. I tell people if this exam is giving you problems, then there are other institutions that don't require the PPST exam and they can seek their education from a different school. I attended NAU and graduated from NAU--I received undergraduate and master's degrees there--and I went through the same educational system.

It is very difficult for me to see my students come through the system, take this test, and all of a sudden they are stopped and told that they cannot continue their education. They are juniors now and they only have one more semester left--and they can't start taking any of these educational courses because of this barrier facing them.

When we talk about teacher training and teacher preparation programs, we need more minority students coming into education. Our institutions do an excellent job of recruiting minority students into varying types of educational programs; however, they do a very poor job of retaining our Native American students. If you'll look at the entrance rates compared to the graduation rates, there is no comparison. You will find that the students are being

neglected, both academically and socially, along the way because there is no real academic support.

I am a teacher, and after my 12 years of higher education I am at the point now where I'm able to help my people and accomplish the goals they set for themselves. So it's very difficult for me to try to encourage my students by saying, "Come on. You can do it. You can do it," but also to see that there is a barrier here. So what do you tell the students? I can only do so much because there's only one of me; however, I hope throughout the country, my colleagues and I can perhaps get together and brainstorm this issue about preparing more Native American teachers.

- We have mentioned culturally biased tests; I think we would eliminate a lot of those problems by implementing bilingual education in elementary education at an early age.
- Do you think that if examinations were oral--if you didn't write them but they were taken across the table from an examiner--they would be less intimidating to a child?
- I guess it depends on who was sitting on this side of the table. It might be intimidating if the person were Anglo.
- The PPST is a state requirement. Regarding NAU's sensitivity to the problems posed by this exam, it has been noted that there have been some problems and we've tried to go through some recommendations about the PPST exam. For example, there are cut-off scores for reading, writing, and math. They range from 171 to 173 for the State of Arizona. In my few years at NAU, I've never once been asked by the administration to take a serious look at this and come up with some recommendations on what we can do. Although we do have a Native American Indian Education Association on campus, at one point in time we addressed our administration and said, "Look. We have students who may be within so many points of these scores. What can we do for these students?" We came up with an idea we call the window approach, and that is if you're within three points of the passing score of any of these exams, you are admitted provided you take a course that will substitute for the actual course itself or the exam portion of it. This is how we've gotten a lot of Native Americans through the system. And you know, the PPST exam only measures how well you take tests, it doesn't measure your teaching ability.

I just want to make two final comments about NAU. Number one is that our president at the university is very supportive of Native Americans on campus and also doing as much as he possibly could for the people here. He's very supportive because of some of the programs that he's implemented such as the New Momentum Project. In addition, he has signed agreements and partnerships with some of the Native American tribes in Arizona. The president is doing as much as he can. He's very sensitive to the needs of the students on campus.

One more important thing is that NAU used to be a teacher preparation college. At one point in time, it was called Arizona State College. I personally feel that NAU should be the mass producer of Native American teachers because we are located near one of the largest Native American tribes on this continent today. Yet, we fall perhaps fourth in the country in

Native American enrollments. I've gone public with this statement, and I strongly feel that perhaps we need to take a look at it one more time.

### Career Guidance

- My child who is a senior has been talking about a lot of goals. He wants to be an engineer technician, but he doesn't know what kind of an engineer specifically. I think the colleges need to give more information about what type of career goals they're going to be offering. Now, he's thinking about becoming a civil engineer.

## III. Elementary and Secondary Education

### Parental Involvement

- My personal experience is that my son was tested with the CTBS test administered through the Bureau, and he scored real low. They told him he had to be retained. He was in the sixth grade and couldn't go on to seventh grade. As a parent, they wanted me to sign off on this. Usually the teachers and administrators call parents in to discuss a problem and ask the parent to sign off on a decision without giving the parent an option. Well, I said I didn't want to sign it. I said, "I know my child is better than that." And I said, "The test determines he can't read or write, but I know his potential." And so he therefore went on ahead. I promoted him myself. The next year he was an honor student. He had real good grades all year, and I was glad I hadn't signed sign those papers to have him retained. He is going to be graduating this year and is thinking of going to college. So with my personal experience, I think parents should be really involved in their children's education. Also I want to emphasize that a lot of teachers intimidate parents when they come into the classroom. I think teacher candidates need to have a course in parental involvement so that they'll know how to involve parents.
- I would like to see parents more involved in determining what their children are learning, because I think if they have a direct involvement in deciding what is included in the curriculum, they will be more interested in helping their children. So I think that might be one answer. Educators tend to say, "Well, those Indian parents aren't educated, you know, so how can we expect them to learn?" But those parents, even though they may not have a formal education, are just as intelligent as others. They have common sense and a desire to learn about what their children are learning, and from that base they will begin to help their children become educated and better prepared.
- I'm really glad that we're finally beginning to do away with the Indian school concept because I went to a boarding school and felt that it deprived me of a lot--especially contact with my parents. Education doesn't begin when you step into a classroom. It begins from the moment you're born. I think that parents should be involved in their children's education--as long as they're able to participate. It seems that in our schools, parent involvement is limited to things like fund-raising. To me, there is more to parent involvement than fund-raising. A parent needs to be involved in decisions about what their children should be learning, how they should be learning, and how education is relevant to their future. I think that is really missing in our educational process. It seems to me that

educators in our local schools tend to make a mystery of what education is all about, so that parents are intimidated about participating in their child's education. Somehow we create a professional-client relationship where they are worlds apart. I think this is part of the reason why our children aren't doing well in school. So we need to be more concerned about involving our parents in what their children learn.

- I was raised by a single parent and grew up in a family of nine children. I was third from the bottom in a family of nine, and my father was killed when I was eight years old. But I didn't know there was a great disadvantage there because I had such a good mother. She knew how to be tough and to love you at the same time. That's what you need in a parent. Parents make a big difference, and I think we are hearing that very clearly. We need to get them more involved in education. I think maybe the schools need to do more to make the parents feel welcome and comfortable at school and in meeting with the teachers. I often think they don't feel that.

#### The Boarding Schools

- We need to really update or make the boarding schools a little more comfortable than they are. The children don't want to go there in the first place. But you have to send them there and it's hard to leave home. And you're freezing and you don't have enough blankets. They use the old military blankets which makes you itch all night long and it's very uncomfortable. My child complains about it every day when he calls.

I would like to know why they are doing this since education is very important. My son who is in school now at Sherman Indian School, calls home and tells me that there's no hot water and it's cold over there, and he's got a cold. I think that this is part of the facilities management problem.

- I just want to comment on a few things mentioned earlier about dormitory life. I grew up in a dormitory. It was a home for me away from my own home, and at that time it was okay for me. But now, when I go back and look at the dorms and look at what they're doing, it seems like a lot of the students have left the dorm life and have gone into public schools. They don't want to stay in the dorm, and I guess the parents themselves think that they're not getting the education they should be getting in the BIA school system. I believe it's that way because the BIA employees--the teachers and the dorm maids--need to upgrade their standards. I believe that's the main thing--the parents don't want to send their kids there because of that. I myself am a parent and I have kids whom I wouldn't send to the dorm because of those reasons. So I propose that the standards set for BIA employees should be upgraded.

#### Tribal Efforts with Public Schools

- Our tribe in Arizona was able to reduce the dropout rate and triple the graduation rate this past year. Almost 100 percent of the students from our tribe attend a public school adjacent to the reservation. The reservation is located right next to the boundary lines of the city of Scottsdale on the west side, and on the south side next to the city of Mesa. All the students from our district go to school in the Mesa Public School District, with the exception of those few who go to the BIA operated school on the reservation.

One of the things that we wanted to do at the beginning of last year was to find out how we could reduce the dropout rate. So we had to try, to the extent possible, to get as much information about the students as possible, keep track of them, and establish some communication between the various schools our students were attending and our office--so that we could try to provide supplemental services to students who were having difficulty in school. Primarily through coordination, I think we were able to have some success this past year.

There are a lot of difficulties out there. There are students that we've identified, as a result of our communication with the district, who have special needs that have not been addressed. We are beginning to identify a lot of students from the community with fetal alcohol syndrome. We are trying to find some resources for our children who have that special problem. Other students don't have role models, at least at home. They may be second or third generation welfare recipients, and they think, "Well, why should I go to school? I can just stay at home and collect welfare after I reach a certain age."

Part of our effort is to try to do things to make school important to them, possibly through activities--maybe not necessarily associated with strict academics, but maybe even sports. So we've been trying to conduct activities similar to a music program in which students who want to learn to play musical instruments are asked to maintain a certain attendance and grade point average. We are trying to establish some incentives other than just the education itself to try to keep our kids in school.

#### The BIA Reorganization

I am a member of the Coropah Tribe and have been on the tribal council since July. We are a newly recognized tribe located south of Yuma, right near the Quechan Reservation. Next week, we're meeting with the Quechan Tribe to discuss education issues, and that is why they sent me here--to see where education is. We have a tribal member who is the director of education in Phoenix. He's out of a job now. We're concerned because we have a lot of problems with educating Indians, and I'm just looking for answers to see if anybody knows what is really going on. My main concern is why the BIA chose to realign its system. I don't understand this. I just got on the tribal council, and the Bureau just pulled this one on us, and it affects education.

We've had education problems in my tribe as far back as I can remember. I'm different. I was eight before I started to learn English. I entered school when I was seven. Up until that time I mostly spoke my language. I don't know the system in boarding schools because my tribe was just federally recognized in 1971. I wasn't recognized as a tribal member or an Indian until then, so I wasn't privileged to go to these boarding schools. I was in public schools most of my life, and now the rolls have been opened to my tribe, so there are kids who have started going to boarding schools.

The majority of our kids go to public schools. My tribe is still primitive and people don't go to the public schools because schools have been prejudiced. I also had to face prejudice as I was growing up in the school system. Raised by Elders, I didn't know one word of English when I went to school and Head Start wasn't around then. We have now included Head Start and all the other educational programs available to us, and now we find out that

they're taking that education away from us. The tribes can carry education on without relying on BIA. But to top things off, they're taking that education program away from us. I don't know how it affects all Arizona tribes. But I just know that we're being affected by it.

The tribe is considering going with the office in Sacramento and I guess that's our reason for meeting with the Quechan Tribe. They're in California right across the river from us. Our regional office is being closed; the superintendent claims that they were not informed of the actions area office took in closing out the education programs.

I am somewhat familiar with this. I work with an Arizona tribe as the director of education for the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community. About 20 years ago, I was the director of education for the Navajo Nation. So I've been somewhat involved with the Bureau education programs. We do have a BIA school on our reservation--even though it's adjacent to Scottsdale and Mesa--that serves students in grades K through 6. One of the things we all know is that the Bureau has been unsuccessful in providing a good education for Indian children, at least in general. There are exceptions to that--there are some good BIA schools. I believe part of the reason there are some good BIA schools is because of the local leadership in those schools--the principal and the people who work in those schools. But very often, probably in most cases, we find bad schools.

Back in 1972, in testimony presented concerning the Jackson Bill, I myself recommended some reorganization of the Bureau and, in fact, recommended a Bureau of Indian Education as well as a Bureau of other types of activities. It appears that someone may have read my testimony and come up with some new recommendations but not necessarily the same that had been recommended back then. Right now, with the Bureau schools, the authority to run the schools goes from the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Education down through the agency superintendents of education down to the principals. Then there is a separate authority from the Assistant Secretary down to the area directors and then down to the agency superintendents. Some people have responsibility for certain aspects of what happens in the schools, while others have different authority. I think part of the realignment, from what I understand, is to put some of the authority with the responsibility; in other words, mesh the two together.

Right now, for instance, at our school in Salt River, facilities management is not under the principal or under the education people within the chain of command. Facilities management is with the agency superintendent. Procurement goes through the agency superintendent. There's a problem in terms of authority between things such as that. Part of my understanding about realignment is that it will put authority with responsibility. I understand that there are approximately 108 BIA-operated schools within the country. There are maybe 60 or 70 contract schools that are BIA funded, in addition to the 108 BIA operated schools which contract with the tribe or the community.

There are 33 field offices to operate 108 BIA schools. In the district I work with, there is one district, and the field office is very similar in function to a district--at least that's the theory. In the Mesa Public School District that our students attend, there are about 40 or 50 schools that are operated only by one district. I think the Bureau's intention is to try to do some reorganization and maybe try to provide a better education. But the Bureau, as usual,

probably does a partial rather than a full job. They also don't explain too well the purposes of what they are doing. Although they have consultation hearings, it has been a bit confusing. For example, at one of the hearings, they were trying to duplicate a huge package of papers explaining their reorganization plans. They should have gotten these out to the tribes before they held the hearings so that the tribes might have had an opportunity to respond to and at least review what they were planning to do. But instead, they came in and then they found that they didn't have copies for everyone, so they tried to make copies at the same time they were having hearings. Then they had other hearings and they've been having hearings and more hearings. The latest we've heard is that our area education office is going to be abolished and the functions provided by that office are going to be taken over by some of the more local agencies. So there's a lot of confusion, and I think that is causing some difficulties.

There are representatives from BIA here at the conference, including down in the exhibit area. They might have additional information pertinent to what's going on in your specific area with the reorganization. They certainly should be able to answer some questions about it.

The director of the BIA Office of Education, Ed Parisian, does sit in on our business meetings and is involved in what's going on in the Task Force because everybody believes it is important for the BIA to coordinate with ED and the INAR Task Force.

#### IV. One Woman's Experience

I'm a full-blooded Navajo from White Cone. White Cone is located about 65 miles north of Holbrook. I attended schools at King's Canyon for seven years and then at Snowflake, and they're all BIA schools. I had a chance to go to college right out of high school, but I decided to get married and provide a home for my younger brother and sisters. Since we lost our mother when I was at the young age of 12, I made a personal commitment to keep my siblings together for as long as possible. So I married and became a housewife and a mother, and now I'm a grandmother.

My schooling at King's Canyon was quite different from the last two schools I attended. The employees there had us speak English; we were always punished for speaking our own language. The dorm maids were called matrons at the time. They used to tell us that it is impolite to speak your own language when someone who doesn't understand it is there to hear because they might think you are talking about them, and I understood that.

I went to school there with a lot of Hopis. I had started to learn a few of their expressions and words when I left. Maybe if we hadn't been restrained from using our Native languages, I could have been speaking Hopi too. I just feel that the government has really cheated us out of our own language and culture as students. If we were taught to appreciate our own language and culture at an early age, maybe a lot of my peers wouldn't be on skid row. It hurts me to see these people on skid row.

My high school years were a lot different from elementary school. In high school, we were allowed to speak our own language if we wanted to. Unfortunately, I had lost a lot of my

own language because I hadn't been allowed to speak it, though I could understand it very well. While in high school, I had to learn my language over again so I could fit in socially with my classmates. After a couple of years I learned to speak Navajo fluently again.

I was employed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as an educational aide for seventeen and a half years. Then I decided to take early retirement because of several reasons. First, I was just not getting anywhere with a dead-end position. Second, when a new teacher came in, I would have to devote most of my time to training this new teacher about how the BIA curriculum works. Mainly I felt I could teach my own people and should get the pay the teachers were getting because I was just as good as they were and sometimes even better.

I then decided to go back to school and get my bachelor's degree in elementary education so I could do what I liked best and get paid for it. In the summer of 1987, I went to Arizona State University for one semester. I didn't like it because I felt out of place. The school was too big. Then I enrolled at Gateway Community College. I took several courses there and was able to obtain my AA in general studies. Thanks to the Navajo tribal scholarship, I was able to attend summer school in 1989 at Northern Arizona University. I registered for the fall of 1989 and thought that I was going to get things going, but I had some problems. I had accumulated a lot of hours because I was going to school every summer when I was employed by the BIA. I took classes that really didn't pertain to my specific major for at least 10 semesters. I guess I just didn't know what I wanted to major in then.

In 1984, I quit going to summer school and couldn't take any more methods classes because of the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) test that we had to take as an undergraduate to get admitted to the college of Education. I was unable to pass the reading and writing part of the test, but I did pass the math part. I just couldn't afford to take another test, so I didn't take it again. The college wanted me to pass the test before I would be allowed to use the Pell Grant monies. Also, my hours exceed the 144 maximum hours allowed by the government.

Fortunately, I was a Navajo so I just relied on the Navajo tribal scholarship to finish up this semester. Then I finally decided I was getting nowhere, so I decided to just complete a general studies degree and then go back and take the Arizona Teacher Proficiency Exam. That way I would be detouring the PPST exam and I could finish the four methods courses to do my student teaching, so I will end up with a bachelor's degree in elementary education.