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Cultural and Linguistic Perspectives on My Experience Teaching Navajo Students

Abstract:

Even though Webster (2015) wrote that young Navajos have not learned the Navajo at a rate to maintain the continuity of the Navajo language (p. 15), I saw my students still possessed the Navajo culture in many ways when they used English. Webster (2015) also emphasized the negative experiences of the boarding school that impacted how Navajo resisted the English language and connected strongly to the Navajo language (Webster, 2015, p. 23). I have been teaching at a two-year institution near the Navajo reservation in the American Southwest for almost 9 years. The majority of my students consists of Navajo, an American Indian tribe with 332,129 enrolled members according to the 2010 U.S. census on Navajo (Navajo Tourism Department, 2018). As their instructor, I found characteristics of Navajo language and culture influenced my Navajo students' usage of English and interaction with other students including other Navajos. Navajo grammar has 4th person which English grammar does not possess. The important concepts of control/non-control (Webster, 2015) in Navajo language and Navajo culture/worldview, Saah Naaghaii Bikeh Hozho (House, 2002; Witherspoon, 1977), are taking into consideration. Navajo rhetoric/discourse (Philipsen; 1972) and oral tradition/storytelling (Kroeber, 2004) are also essential parts of Navajo culture. Moreover, the relationships between Navajo culture and learning style (Boognl, 2006; Little Soldier, 1989; Rhodes, 1990, 1994) are analyzed in order to find the most suitable teaching pedagogy including classroom activities for the Navajo students. This paper aims to provide my personal journey and reflection from the cultural and linguistic perspectives of teaching the Navajo students.

References:


