The Effects of Education Narratives on High School Persistence among Navajo Girls

By
Nancy Carre’, PhD
Public Policy and Administration
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Definitions

Narratives are stories

Narrative policy analysis: what motivates the policy writing process?

Education narratives:
- Why send children to school?
- What should school look like?
Purpose of the study

- To examine federal and Navajo education narratives
- To understand why many Navajo girls drop out of high school
Methodology

- **Interviews:** DODE administrators
- **Navajo girl who had dropped out of high school**
- **Documents:**
  - *A Nation at Risk* (1983)
  - NCLB 2001
  - RTT 2009
  - NNSEA 2005
Why focus on girls?

Educating girls has wide-ranging implications:

- Health (personal, family, community)
- Economic (personal, community prosperity)
- Political (self-direction, participation, setting community directions)
Poverty, family issues

Hopelessness: why bother?

Lack of engagement: no autonomy

Rigid public school policies not aligned with student needs

Cultural discontinuity and confusion
How did this girl describe her home and school environments?

**Teased at school / fights**

Parents had 2 different ideas about culture/language/ceremony.

School: You’re out, you’re forgotten

**Mother:** Traditions, ceremonies, family, language. "Who am I?"

**Father:** Get a diploma, go to college, start a career, make money. "What am I?"
What about programs to help her into a career?

• Missed the target
What do the federal government and Navajo Nation emphasize in their education policies?

Federal government
• Productive workers
• College
• Career
• Money/Success
• Accountability, STEM, standardized tests, challenging standards, English, high quality teachers, AYP

Navajo government
• Safe learning environment
• Families and community involvement
• Navajo language and culture
• Navajo government
• Challenging academics
  Teachers/Counselors familiar with Navajo culture
So.....

What is the missing element?
Meaningful education = Engagement

- Is your child excited to go to school?
- Is your child learning things that interest him or her?
- Is your child able to relate this information to their everyday life?
- Does your child have a real say in what courses they take?
- Does your child have a personal plan and a way to make it come true?
- Does the school support your child’s self-determination?
Recommendations

Federal and state:

Grant autonomy in education to indigenous peoples

- Encourage community schools (Rock Point)
Supportive structures: tutoring, day care, counseling.

Schools become agile

Community-based internships
Sanctuaries
Community mentoring for at-risk.
Questions?