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RETHINKING THE BASIC WRITING FRONTIER: NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS' CHALLENGE TO OUR HISTORIES

ABSTRACT: The authors contend that Native American students have too often been marginalized in Basic Writing research. Asking why this may have been the case, they call attention to the discipline's unwitting allegiance to images of "territory," "mapping," and "Western frontierism." They also note that since much early research on Basic Writing has emanated from East Coast institutions, Basic Writers of the Southwestern United States have perhaps understandably received far too little attention. Contending that this lack of research may potentially result in a further "othering" of Native American students, they note that we must work against 1) a somewhat narrow, even racist conception of who Basic Writers might be, 2) the continued invisibility of Native American students as well as our collective lack of knowledge about how the cultural functions of tribal life impact writing skills, and 3) the unspoken mythology in our scholarship that the Basic Writer is largely an urban phenomenon – the student who can be heroically rescued from violence, crime, and poverty rather than the student who risks losing tribal and cultural affiliations by coming from the reservation and assimilating to the university environment. In response, each of the authors speaks of her own experiences working with Native American Basic Writing students from Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico, making assertions about what can be learned from these experiences. The article concludes with tentative suggestions for future research concerning Native American students and Basic Writing.

This project is born of a shared interest and passion—working with Native American students who have, correctly or not, been institutionally classified as "Basic Writers." As our stories will disclose, we

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come to this work with different histories, approaches, and backgrounds. Originally we met in a graduate course Laura taught titled "Basic Writing Theory and Practice" – a class that seeks to investigate the major historical shifts that have occurred within Basic Writing Studies. As we have surveyed the research in Basic Writing together, we have been disturbed to discover that the available scholarship has not been speaking clearly to the matters many of our students face. Laura first started to trace this absence while directing a Summer Bridge Program that involves many Native American students from various tribes across Arizona and New Mexico. How could she create a curriculum that helped to foster, preserve, and give voice to these students' cultural ties while also teaching them basic skills in reading and writing? Loyola noticed this lack when she started to study Basic Writing literature while simultaneously writing her own literacy autobiography. Loyola looked for glimmers of her own experiences as a Native American student studying English on the Jicarilla Apache reservation as well as within the Southwestern university system, finding none. Judith came upon this troubling phenomenon as an English tutor for Navajo (Diné) students who live in boarding schools within the Flagstaff, Arizona, community, schools far away from their families on the reservation. Judith could locate no research that investigated how we might bridge the gaps between Navajo students' grammar school, high school, and college writing experiences. This paper is our collaborative attempt to speak through this silence in Basic Writing scholarship, to join together our many conversations as well as our separate projects, ones that continue to converge with and overlap each other.

Together we weave our partial stories, stories still being written, ones even formed in the telling. We hope to convey concerns that have not been a central part of Basic Writing Studies and to advocate their importance. In so doing we do not propose to answer all of the questions associated with the concerns raised. However, we do wish to generate critical awareness that Basic Writers of the Southwest, particularly Native American students, remain the "silenced others" of our research. Briefly tracing some of the metaphoric allegiances that form the foundation of Basic Writing scholarship, we ponder why this may be the case. We propose a few possible responses and we put forward narratives that we hope may illuminate matters relevant to teaching and research about Native American Basic Writers.

THE LANGUAGE OF BASIC WRITING: UNDERSTANDING OUR INVESTMENTS

Of Territory, Mapping, and Otherness

Basic Writing scholarship's historical and rhetorical investments may play some part in the lack of research concerning Native Americans and Basic Writing. First, we will observe some of the metaphoric allegiances of Basic Writing Studies, a discipline that has frequently employed descriptions of the frontier, unmapped territory, and the pedagogical West. Second, we will expose what we perceive could be partially an East Coast bias within the history of Basic Writing scholarship. This may be in some measure due to the fact that much initial Basic Writing research emerged from the Eastern United States as well as the fact that such issues related to Western populations have not been spoken about regularly enough. No matter the reasons, as a result, Native American students have heretofore not been considered among Basic Writing's "visible subjects."

Mina Shaughnessy's efforts to aid Basic Writers in the 1970s were critical, decisive, and politically compelling. Despite this, her metaphoric allegiances have perhaps contributed to the absence of Native American students in our scholarship. As many have contended for years, the articulation of the Basic Writer and Basic Writing as a new sub-discipline depended somewhat on an adherence to this work as part of a "new territory" (Adler-Kassner and Harrington; Fox "Basic"; Gay; Gunner; Harris; Horner; Horner and Lu; Hourigan; Laurence et al.; Lu; Mutnick; Stygall "Resisting"). We recall that Mina Shaughnessy's 1977 *Errors and Expectations* commences with this oft-quoted passage, one rife with specific images of landscape. A number of scholars have maintained that this text echoes and even supports the values inherent in American expansionism:

> Despite such advances, the *territory* I am calling basic writing (and that others might call remedial, or developmental writing) is still very much of a *frontier, unmapped,* except for a scattering of impressionistic articles and a few blazed trails that individual teachers propose through their texts. And like the settlers of other frontiers, the teachers who by choice or assignment are heading out to this *pedagogical West* are certain to be carrying many things they will not be needing, that will clog their journey as they get further on. So too will they discover the need of other things that they do not have and will need to fabricate by mother wit out of whatever is at hand. This book is intended to be a guide for that kind of teacher,

> and it is certain to have the shortcomings of other *frontier maps*, with doubtless a few rivers in the wrong place and some trails that end nowhere. (5 our italics)

While we would not contend that Shaughnessy's impulses were inherently colonizing, we do believe that Shaughnessy's particular terminological investment has inevitably played some part in Basic Writing Studies' legacy. In *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier* and *The Fatal Environment*, critic Richard Slotkin indicates that the representation of the "frontier" and "free land" has largely been responsible for a distinctly American identity—one connected to individuality, autonomy, rugged masculinity, the principles of democracy (the economic parity that "free land" was thought to promise), and capitalism. Embodied in the archetype of the lone frontiersman, frequently dubbed an "Indian hunter," the myth of the frontier has been utilized to rationalize the excesses of American territorial expansion, the stealing of lands, as well as the forced re-education, assimilation, and murder of Native peoples (see H. Smith and Turner for elaboration). In order to support its excesses, frontier logic constructs a version of nature—or other forces (be they natural, social, or political)—as either blissfully pastoral or deeply threatening. As such, nature might "destroy a people's capacity for civilized sentiment and social forms" or "kill man's better nature" (Slotkin *Regeneration* 269). Native Americans came to stand in for this natural world in the myth of frontierism. This occurred most acutely in the captivity narrative's structure, with the notion that through interaction with the "Indians," the white man might "go native," becoming corrupt and uncivilized. According to Slotkin, the response to this fear and our linguistic allegiances to frontierism have led to all sorts of atrocities throughout history, key among these the segregation of Native peoples on reservation lands that creates enforced reliances upon colonizing cultures.

To contend that Shaughnessy herself was engaged in colonizing her students is far too simplistic, failing to account for the significant political viability of her efforts. All the same, we witness the disconcerting linguistic allegiance invoked in her language choices. Of course, Shaughnessy is not alone in her use of such terms. Rather these are very often among the few metaphors one might call upon while engaging in new research, undertaking new areas of study. As rhetorician Kenneth Burke proposes, however, all language use embodies a perspective rooted in history through which some dimensions of a situation are exposed while others are elided. As Burke maintains, "Even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (45). Burke terms this phenomenon a "terministic screen," a set of word choices, made for any num-

ber of purposes, that strategically directs the attention to one set of ideas and concepts rather than another (50).

Shaughnessy's text has presented a specific terministic screen for Basic Writing Studies. The image of the Old West—complete with descriptions of pioneer teachers heading out to tame the academic wilderness while instilling the American values of individualism, autonomy, democracy, and capitalism—remains with us. We will point to a few rather random examples. This allegiance to metaphors that evoke issues of territory, mapping, inside/outside, and borders has been maintained even as our research has become infused by new theories in feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism, and postcoloniality—theoretical approaches aimed at greater inclusion of historically marginalized student groups. While our adherence to frontier imagery is perhaps more subtle, it may still impact the language choices we feel are available to us. Tom Fox echoes and calls to mind Shaughnessy's metaphors in his excellent piece "Standards and Access." Fox writes:

> I will begin with three quotations concerning "standards" in higher education. These points of view represent the cultural ground, the territory on which I will be trespassing. . . . Many of these authors gained their property rights to this discourse by virtue of their association with the last two presidential administrations. We'll start with the lay of the land. . . . (37)

While Fox in no way elicits a connection between the Old West in need of mapping and the students in need of taming, his language is important to note. Images of "ground," "territory," "trespassing," and "lay of the land" have a powerful history in American colonization even while often detached from a direct correspondence to their original meanings. While such word choices are doubtlessly made largely for reasons of cadence, impact, and style, they additionally call to mind a disconcerting history. When such linguistic preferences are read within the context of Native American Basic Writers' absence from our literature, the potential implications become yet more troubling.

One might also argue that these allegiances to metaphoric investments in territory, mapping, westward expansion, as well as colonization have been carried out in the continued references within Basic Writing Studies to "insiders" and "outsiders." There are many examples of this to which we might point. In her essay "Linguistic Cultural Capital and Basic Writers," Charlotte Brammer, herself drawing upon such a terminology, reveals how Basic Writing teachers are led to create "the other." In answer to the question "Who are linguistic outsiders?" she responds, "many basic writing students are, to use Burke's term, not consubstantial with us. They speak and write a language that is different from ours" (17). Determining an "inside" and an "outside," an "us"

and a "them," we necessarily risk continually remapping the "territory" – one composed of "margins" and "centers," a landscape of those who "have" and those who "have not."

In his important essay entitled "On Not Listening in Order to Hear: Collaborative Learning and the Rewards of Classroom Research" Kenneth A. Bruffee unwittingly reinforces this terminology. This leads him to describe Basic Writers, not as emerging academics, but in terms of a landscape that has been left as a byproduct of the frontier – as inner city dwellers, who live in crowded landscapes and who necessarily know only their own kind. Bruffee writes that – "our students have been acculturated to talk to and deal effectively only with people in their own crowd, their own neighborhood" (99). Likewise, while Mike Rose's groundbreaking *Lives on the Boundary* does not in any way advocate a frontier myth ideology, his title, like many of ours including ones that authors of this piece have invoked in the past, draws upon this terminology, implying that certain spaces are firmly within acceptable borders, identities secured, and others stand at the edges of known territories, marking the "abandoned underclass" (237).

The model of Basic Writing as land, as territory, as frontier – understood as the place where pioneers or crusaders contact "foreign beings and strange landscapes" – is something we all want to believe we have left behind. In many ways we have; our sensitivity to the specific identities and needs of Basic Writers has become ever greater. Yet the terminology we use that draws from this history remains a prevalent theme in Basic Writing, sustaining metaphors that still may depict Basic Writers as savages and aliens in a besieged land. This becomes doubly disconcerting when the language of Western frontierism in Basic Writing research fails to account for Native American Basic Writers, not unlike the ways in which white settlers on American frontiers failed to account for the cultural heritages, needs, and experiences of Native Americans.

Mining Metaphors

With so many metaphors of frontierism in Basic Writing it seems odd, and potentially quite problematic, that there is so little discussion of Native American peoples within Basic Writing scholarship. Fortunately, however, Rhetoric and Composition Studies, Education, and History contain critical work relevant to our discussion – research advanced by Thurman Lee Hester, Dell H. Hymes, M. Annette Jaimes, Winona LaDuke, Sidner J. Larson, Russell Means, Deborah Deutsch Smith, Margaret Connell Szasz, Gerald Vizenor, and Robert Warrior, among others. Likewise, Jessica Enoch's November 2002 *College English* piece "Resisting the Script of Indian Education: Zitkala Sa and the Carlisle Indian School" furnishes a critical addition, revealing some of

the specific ways in which Native Americans have been historically written out of the larger discipline of Rhetoric and Composition Studies. Enoch calls for further scholarship that details the history of Native American pedagogies of resistance against assimilation programs and American schooling—a disruption of murder and ethnic cleansing that otherwise prevailed. Malea Powell's February 2002 "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians *Use* Writing" also offers a significant counterpoint to traditional histories of rhetoric, urging us not only to reimagine the "possibilities for existence and ironic identity within native communities" but also to reunderstand "a scholarly relationship to writings by Indian peoples, one that hears the multiplicities in those writings and in the stories told about them" (401).

Perhaps the most sustained, crucial examination of Native American students in Rhetoric and Composition Studies, however, has been undertaken by Scott Lyons, whose tribal affiliation is Anishinaabe. In his dissertation project, "Rhetorical Sovereignty: American Indian Writing as Self-Determination," his article in *College Composition and Communication* entitled "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?," his chapter "A Captivity Narrative: Indians, Mixedbloods, and "'White' Academe," and his forthcoming essay "The Left Side of the Circle: American Indians and Progressive Politics," Lyons has shifted the discussion about Native American students and writing in critical directions never before investigated in Rhetoric and Composition Studies. His focus, though, has not been on Native American Basic Writers specifically. Instead, this crucial work still remains the "unsaid" of Basic Writing Studies. As Lyons puts it, "Our [Native American] histories, philosophies, political struggles and cultures are too often obscured to such an extent that it doesn't even make sense to call them 'marginalized'" (138).

Basic Writing scholarship often depicts its students as people of color—African American or, perhaps less frequently, Latino—and habitually also characterizes them as urban, Eastern, and poor. While these groups may certainly be part of a profile for some Basic Writers at some institutions, this representation strikes us as problematic for a number of reasons. First, the absence of research on Basic Writing and Native American peoples depends upon a potentially racist polarization of black/white as well as a fundamentally racist conception of who Basic Writers might be. Keith Gilyard makes this phenomenon clear when he describes how time and again he witnessed colleagues walk past basketball courts in urban settings and comment upon the number of Basic Writing students there (see Foreword to Gray-Rosendale *Rethinking*).

Certainly, it is not race alone that designates one as a Basic Writer. In the case of Gilyard's colleagues, however, race and physicality were linked together. As such, our images of the Basic Writer as possessing

physical prowess over and against intellectual might give dangerous ammunition to those who would write off Basic Writers as "other." Even in an important text such as "Politics and Proof in Basic Writing," Gail Stygall is led to describe Basic Writers as "boxers who are bleeding and winded but not yet ready to quit" (28). Once again the image of the Basic Writer is unwittingly linked to physicality, echoing the subtle notion of the Basic Writer as more primitive, less civilized, unschooled.

Second, the absence of Basic Writing research concerning Native American students may depend to a degree upon the relative invisibility of Native American students living in the West to many of the Easterners who produce Basic Writing research. When we speak about "defending access," as Tom Fox (*Defending*) calls upon us to do, time and again Native American students are not considered to be even part of the "margins" that ought to be brought toward the "center." Not only do our metaphors ignore the presence of Native American people living in that Western landscape, our scholarship rarely speaks of such students, a scant article or two representing the unusual exception. This indicates that perhaps Native American students as well as the landscapes that many of them inhabit can be mined for the metaphors they offer but yet not frequently allowed to function as part of our crucial conversations about Basic Writing teaching and scholarship.

Even within our most significant contemporary scholarship, Basic Writers are imagined as deculturated and properly reculturated, echoing the historical notion of Basic Writers as savages in need of civilizing. In an article entitled "Competing Epistemologies and Female Basic Writers," authors Paul Hunter, Nadine Pearce, Sue Lee, Shirley Goldsmith, Patricia Feldman, and Holly Weaver write, "the basic writers in our study appear to perceive, at some level, that they are being asked to abandon a familiar way of knowing . . . in favor of an alien way of knowing" (74). In such cases, Basic Writing students are being asked to at least partially give up their Native voices—what in Diné culture is referred to as "bizaad"—in order to assimilate to academic standards.

Third, our metaphoric investments have left Native American Basic Writers outside of the discussion, preserving yet another myth. The identity of the Basic Writer is not only articulated in terms of people of color, usually residing in the Eastern United States, but also as a largely urban phenomenon—evoking the images of crowded housing and gang violence. Such an impression of the Basic Writer has upheld the notion that the movement of Basic Writers into the academy might be proper philanthropic work or even politically radical work, in either case a vaguely heroic act. Basic Writers, so the narrative goes, are rescued from the deadly streets and brought into safer, more encour-

aging spaces. And, in some cases, the myth may hold a grain of truth. This same narrative of philanthropy or politicization, however, is not as easy to maintain with many Native American Basic Writers. We are not rescuing them from the perils of the urban jungle. Instead, we might tell ourselves, we are taking them away from a lack of resources, both academic and economic. However, on the flip side, we are clearly taking them away from their entire cultures, traditions, rituals, and family structures—oftentimes moving them from more rural to more urban locations. Likewise, we might comfort ourselves with the notion that by teaching Native American Basic Writers standard academic discourse we are aiding their enculturation and politicizing them. But, in such cases, it is abundantly clear that we could be imposing our own cultural politics upon them—the move to instill radicalism in the student being little more than a new form of colonialism. So, what of the United States Basic Writers who live in rural settings, have no access to phones, haul their own water,[1] and the like? What of the Basic Writers who are constantly trying to negotiate clan and tribal responsibilities with their sense that they would like lives that allow them to move outside the reservations (oftentimes with the plan to return and aid their tribes)? These are perhaps the less racy images of the Basic Writer, the ones we do not see in our mainstream media or our scholarship. They do not lend themselves as easily to the rescue narratives and representations of the Basic Writing teacher as hero that we habitually keep in play.

At times Native American students are those for whom leaving the tribe to gain a college education can feel like a tremendous betrayal of one's culture and may be talked about as such by other members of one's clan. Who are we saving, and from what? In their cases, is the journey from "margin" to the "center" such a valuable journey after all? Despite their obvious lack of representation in our research, these students exist. We know them. We work with them. And, as Loyola points out poignantly later in this piece, sometimes we are them.

LAURA'S STORY: TEACHING NATIVE AMERICAN BASIC WRITERS IN A SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAM

For many years I have directed a Summer Bridge Program at Northern Arizona University with the Multicultural Student Center. This program aims to provide extra liberal studies credit and writing experience to students from Arizona and New Mexico. There are 150 students in this program and I train eight graduate assistants to teach them and tutor them every year. The students in this program are either first generation college, racial or ethnic minorities, and/or in eco-

nomic need – with many falling into all three categories. Some, though certainly not all, of these students are classifiable as Basic Writers. They are placed in tutorial sessions alongside our entry composition classes or forced to take lower level classes at Coconino Community College. Some come to us with tribal scholarships, others with state funding, and still others with monetary support from Northern Arizona University – and all of the students elect to be a part of the program. As a result, many of the students for whom I have been designing programs are in part Native American or Chicana/o. And many students are mixed-race, identifying themselves by pointing to three or more racial, ethnic, or tribal groups as well as three or more linguistic groups.

As I began working with these students a few things became very clear to me. While Native American students are often treated in terms of ESL issues, many of the students who come to the program do not speak or write their Native languages fluently, having been raised in a culture that values English over other languages. In the case of some Native American languages such as Navajo it is important to recognize that the language has been written down only recently.[2] Not until college do many of these students come to learn their Native languages more fluently, after they are away from home and feel the pressing need to integrate their multiple selves. While certainly some Native American students struggle with ESL issues in their writing, we cannot ignore the fact that many universities, including my own, track students into these programs based upon tribal affiliation, whether they necessarily might benefit from being there or not. For some students this is an incredibly useful experience. They may gain critical skills while working in a supportive community composed of many other Native American students. For other students the classes are perhaps not challenging enough, and these students may understandably ask themselves why they are there. Why are such students often tracked into non-credit tutorial sessions and Basic Writing courses? It occurs in large part because of funding issues and because university studies show that in order to retain Native American students they need to feel as if they are part of a cohort, a community, as well as to have additional help. A Summer Bridge Program becomes one critical space in which this may be able to occur. But it can also become a place where Native American students come to feel that they do not have sufficient writing skills to succeed in college.

As I continue to design curricula for these students and teach in the program, I continue to be a student to these teachers, my students. The majority of the Native American students are Diné or Navajo since a great deal of the money supporting the program comes directly from various tribal scholarships. In this work I have noticed a number of things about Native American students that Basic Writing scholars and teachers need to take seriously and about which we all need to learn a

good deal more. This past summer I taught a class in which the Native American students were the majority, with one African-American student and two Chicana students. The rest were Diné, some from the reservation, some from the Flagstaff community, and some from the suburbs of Phoenix. In the class I have designed, "Rhetoric in the Media," students learn how to perform rhetorical analyses and argumentation by reading advertisements, films, television shows, music videos, and websites critically. And, despite the fact that some students have no access to running water in their homes, they all have ready access to mainstream cultural images—in magazines, in newspapers, and in movies. They also often have access to televisual representations. This speaks to the pervasiveness of American popular culture and the ways it impacts even those cultural groups who might seek strategically to exclude it.

There were several key moments or snapshots of this class and other related experiences that I will recount here, moments during which I learned a great deal from my Native American students. I do not see these experiences as somehow wholly symbolic of Native American students in particular, let alone Diné students, though many of the students referred to their cultural positions as Native Americans impacting their choices, their thoughts, and their feelings. More importantly, I think, they reveal critical cultural differences about which administrators as well as Basic Writing instructors need to be aware as we begin teaching Native American students who have been designated as Basic Writers as well as conducting research about Basic Writing and Native American students.

Snapshot One: We have built a strong community as a class. Ribbing, joking, and banter have become part of the fabric of the classroom environment. Bright laughing eyes surround me. We are working on a section in the class that focuses on communities, neighborhoods, and our definitions of home. We have just finished reading John Barlow's "Cyberhood Versus Neighborhood." The essay poses the question, Does the virtual world, the on-line world, offer the same possibilities of "home" for us as do our physical homes? In order to get at our own thoughts about this question, I ask us all to present our definitions of "home." I imagine it an easy question, a question with which many students will identify. But I know so little about the kind of identification this question fosters, enables. Each student details her/his experiences of home. One after the other cries softly as they speak painfully about leaving grandparents, siblings, and parents to come to this university far away from anything familiar, anything that feels remotely safe. Early on I try to intervene, to say no one need feel as if they have to answer the question. One after the other mentions how

she or he wants to speak about home, how important it is, how even though we began the course with literacy autobiography assignments, there has been no place until now to do this as fully as they wanted to, needed to.

When people talk about what they most like to do—what home is-- one student remarks that home was climbing up on the roof of his family's house at night on the reservation. He would look out at the stars against the outlines and shapes of the shadowed desert. Another Dine student, one who lives in Phoenix and has never been back to the reservation, responds, "I do that too. That's home for me, too." Another student says that home is being able to walk between each of his family member's homes, to sit and laugh and cook together. It is simply about being there with his family community. When he cannot be there, home is far away and he feels strangely disconnected from himself, from everything he has known himself to be. Still other students talk about the silence, the peace of home. Home is not loud or crowded or angry. Home is about what really matters—home is what takes people away from things like frustration, anger, competition. Home is in part safety.

When I ask if some students do not consider their house to be their home, a few pipe up immediately. Some students speak out with other kinds of stories, stories that bring more tears from both those talking and those listening. Home is a place they have never been, or have rarely been. The house is where abuse occurs, drunken brawls, and yelling. But home can only be found on the mesa, in the woods, out in the mountains. Home is not the house. One student recalls her brother's alcoholism, how she does not know him anymore, how he nearly died in a car accident. These particular students understand how a virtual community might be a better, safer home than the house within which they live. Some of them already consider cyberspace a better home than their physical homes. But, they wonder about the landscapes that would be missing since many of them associate outdoor space, the environment—cacti, hoodoos, coyotes, rocks, red soil, and painted desert—with community and home.

Part of the Diné creation story indicates that First Woman designated the four mountains and four rivers to show the Diné where they should live—Diné Bikeyah or Navajo Country. Contemporary poet Laura Tohe writes in her poem "Within Dinétah, the People Remain Strong": "Carson tried to wrench us from the land. What was our crime? We wanted only to live within our sacred mountains. The land holds the memories of our people's whispers, cries, and blood." She adds, "We vowed we would never again be separated from the land."[3] Identity, at every level, is at least partially linked to land. As Scott Lyons reminds us, teachers and researchers concerned with Native American issues should begin by "locating their work not on the 'frontier'

but on *Indian land*, not as 'pioneers' but as *settlers*" ("Left" 126).

How could one create or at least simulate outdoor spaces in cyberspace, they wondered? Could you ever be some place other than there when you were there? Could you use cyberspace to connect to the land? What kind of environments were possible exactly? Would the links and networks such as those on www.ienearth.org, the Indigenous Environmental Network, be enough?

Snapshot Two: Many students talk about how it feels to move from high school into college classes. I imagine what the difficult transitions might be—unfamiliarity with the campus, lack of knowledge about which classes to take and how to register, homesickness. But, again, I do not know enough. Some speak about their English classes on the reservation, how they felt as if their teachers did not care about their welfare, taught classes as if they were asleep. "I never wrote a paper in high school" is something that students repeat over and over again to me, like a mantra. What I am asking them to do is entirely new—how do they even begin to approach such a process? Other students remark that they had wonderful teachers on the reservation, but that these people were not paid well, and that the best ones could not stay for long. Other teachers, some mention, are Navajo and were raised in the boarding school system themselves. Sometimes they perpetrate what they have learned in boarding schools upon their students, they tell me. My students all talk about how they never had to make claims of their own, state ideas of their own. It feels strange to do this. It does not seem in line with the position of humility they have adopted in other areas of their lives. Why would they want to call attention to themselves? When I ask the students to tell me about themselves *as writers*, many say they do not see themselves as writers. "Why would I call myself a writer? I am so terrible at it." Students have very low confidence. Even if they are not fluent in Navajo, they have heard stories about their own inabilities to learn English sufficiently well because they know Navajo or maybe because they *are* Navajo. Knowing Navajo, they come to think, is a liability. I hear it so many times I begin to wonder how my students manage to write anything—"I know I am a bad writer. I have heard people say that Natives are not good writers."

I think about the higher level administrators to whom I speak on a regular basis. I make cases for the viability of the program, for the students, to make sure we can keep doing this as any budgets deemed "extraneous" get slashed. I listen to the hand-wringing over Native American student retention. "Why do we lose them?" the low voice in the suit asks me, staring at me from behind the desk. Windows can be

seen behind the suit, windows that look out onto the campus, pine trees bending in the wind. I smile as I watch two Native American students pass by. Here is a conversation about them in which they are given no part. No one asks them what they think. The suit sits behind a desk surrounded by shelves lined neatly with books. What answer do I give? The answer that is expected of me, the Professor, the Director of a Program? Or do I give the answer that I think is most accurate? I try out the latter to see how it will fly. "Maybe we lose them because they have real lives elsewhere. Maybe we lose them because they have to work three jobs to stay here and send money home to their families. Maybe we lose them because they do not feel at home here and we do not make them feel at home. Maybe we lose them because too often we tell them who they are without listening to them tell us about themselves." And the answer comes much as I expected it. The eyes look at me with suspicion. Not the easy answer. Not the instant cure. The suit wants the numbers to add up, the calculations to yield the solution. "Hmmm," as a finger traces a line down a page in a thick binder. Various figures are rattled off—how many students drop out when, how much money this costs the institution. And yet serving surrounding tribes is a critical part of the university's stated mission. What are we to do?

The writing difficulties with which we struggle include things that some people say typify Basic Writing—lack of complete sentences and problems with subject/verb agreement, logical progression of ideas, diction and tone, and word choice. At the same time, these students' writings contain many things that are not usually associated with Basic Writing—complex critiques of the operations of American culture, the American media, and the privileged discourses in mainstream American society. Reading our work aloud to each other and talking about grammar and style rules in the context of each others' papers seem to be very helpful as students gain some confidence. Still, what this course asks the students to do is embrace the idea that we should critique how mainstream American culture constructs us all. We can challenge the American government. We can challenge a United States that constructs Native Americans as "others." I watch them watching me out of the corners of their eyes. Can it be true that this woman, this woman who looks "white," is for real?

One Diné student comes to my office, making idle chit-chat. She jokes with me easily. She talks, saying she loves the class and pauses as she sits in the chair in my office and looks at my doctoral diploma.

"Rosendale?" she smiles at me sideways and laughs, "You are Chicana, right?" I laugh. "No," I say, knowing that now that I have faced the question head-on I may be perceived as just a stupid white chick, and perhaps rightly. I could mention the rural, impoverished town of 500 people in southern New Hampshire in which I grew up,

the dusty dirt road that passed by our house and then the cemetery, the one room schoolhouse I went to as a kid, my Jewish blood. I don't. "Oh," she says. I look at her and smile. She fumbles for a moment and then says what she has been wanting to say. "I asked because, well, you just seem to understand us." And, I realize what a compliment this is. And, yet, I think to myself. No, I could not, would not claim to understand you, but I am learning more about you. You are teaching me. And, thank you for this. I learn from what you tell me, what you show me. I learn from you, but I do not claim to know you. And I have so much more to learn.

Snapshot Three: Other administrators and teachers in other university programs targeting Native American students tell me that their Navajo students are having trouble writing. Writing what? Writing how? Writing in rows. A straight line—trace an idea to its logical conclusion. The arguments spin, circular. Opened but never closed. "The Circle, correctly described by conventional wisdom as philosophically foundational to many if not all indigenous peoples across the globe, represents holism, regeneration, reaping what one sows, and the importance of listening to the past—which is, on this model, also the present, also the future: the Circle always comes around," Lyons reminds me ("Left" 135).

"Sure," I hear them say. "These students can give amazing speeches about political issues relevant to the reservation. But, there is no translation into the writing." The moans. The sighs. The furrowed brows. And now I see the rows.

"Why is it that they do not just make claims and support them?" come the frustrated voices.""Have they never been asked to do this before?" "No," I say. "Maybe they have not. And maybe it feels hard, counter-intuitive, even wrong to do this." Again, the suspicious looks. And I feel for a moment that I have crossed over some invisible line, moved from proper admin-speak to something altogether different. I do not stop. "After all," I pause, "they raise the critical question for us every day. We need to listen. They say 'Why do we have to do this?' Do we really always know how to answer that question? I know that I do not." Again the Hmmm. . . . And we move on our ways.

I read my Diné students' papers and I realize that the demand for adherence to standard academic discourse (whatever that is) is a simplistic way of viewing the problem. The complex ideas about American culture and politics, the media and representation, offered by my students defy such an easy interpretation of their work. Some might say that my students are circular arguers. Too easy to try to push a circle into straight lines without tracing the circle first. The circle comes full circle—if you learn how to read it. And the key becomes that Native American students, all students, should have the chance to learn

many modes of writing, many kinds of argumentative strategies—not just one, not just some amorphous standard.

One Diné woman, Marlenda Luther, describes herself in her Writer's Profile: "When people first see me they think 'She looks like the tough type.' You know the kind of person who is not so attached to their family. Well that's because they don't know me very well. That really bugs me because I am the family, homey person."

She decides that representations of female Native Americans in the mainstream media really bother her. She begins to ask herself why the media tells her who she should be, how she should look, what she should think, and what life as a Native American is like. "But, it's all mixed up," she says. She focuses on one cultural text in particular, the animated Disney film *Pocahontas.* Pocahontas was twelve or younger at the time, not the voluptuous woman presented in the film. John Smith is portrayed as dashing when he is known to have been a small man with a beard. Various historical characters disappear, others are rewritten, and still others fictionalized. "In this paper I will prove that Walt Disney's Pocahontas is derived from legends and stereotypes rather than anything like historical accuracy. The film does not portray Native Americans well, using derogatory terms and changing the images of the real character to better fit society's myths about Native Americans," she writes. She examines how stereotypes about femininity and race are intricately connected in this visual text. The lead woman, whiter and wearing more colorful garb. The women not in the lead role, darker treated in the film as backdrop for the "real action," more "other." She talks about how the film places Native Americans hiding in trees "like monkeys," Pocahontas watching John Smith from behind bushes—suggesting that Native Americans are—"uncivilized" and that they "do not know how to communicate with others."

The language used to describe Native Americans in the song lyrics for the film employs words such as "savages," "filthy little heathens," and "Injuns," Marlenda tells us. "It is as if Native Americans are depicted as having no sense of education, and no moral behavior. I mean, we, Native Americans weren't that stupid back then. We did have a good education, but other people did not see it because the language barrier made things different," she states. She talks about how it has to be that way for the film to be marketable to mainstream white America. Making money in a capitalist culture depends upon racist depictions of Native Americans, she says. The white man could not be seen to want the darker woman—it would undermine all that American mainstream culture depends upon, white as privileged. She makes note of the lack of historical accuracy in the film, discusses Pocahontas' age, and the way in which the film plays up her romance with Smith when historical fact suggests that perhaps no such romance really existed. She shows where and how the film makers inappropri-

ately mix various Native American traditions without making any distinctions between very different, sometimes feuding, cultures. To her mind, "they mess with Native Americans' ancestry" by depicting false images and histories.

"Is it okay that I want to write about this?" she asks me after class is over. She has a full draft in her hand. She has a worried look on her face. "I mean, I do not have good things to say about this film." I smile. "You do not have to say good things. You need to say what you think." The fear seems to leave her face, at least for the moment. "Really?" "Really. You should say what you think and back it up by referring to the text," I say. "I can do that," she laughs with excitement. We say good-bye. The Native American students in my class already recognize that there are few to no representations of Native Americans in the mainstream media, that the ones that exist often depend upon myths of them as savages, as exotic squaws—the construction of an "other." In many cases they need not be taught the lenses of cultural studies and postcoloniality to understand such issues palpably. Having the feeling that they are authorized to speak about the effects dominant culture has had on them, however, can be substantially tougher. How might such speech be used against them? Can they trust the listener if the listener is not part of their community?

A story begun. A story still unfolding. I suppose that this is a story of my beginning to locate my own teaching and research within and amongst different linguistic allegiances, different practices—"not on the 'frontier' but on *Indian land*," to live and work not as a "pioneer" but as a "settler" (Lyons "Left" 126). This is not always an easy thing to do—and I do not always succeed. More and more I learn every day that there is a great deal that I do not know. I live near *Indian land*, but my students live on it. I live here on this land with some permanence, yet I have not yet *settled*. But I know that my students will teach me better how to do these things over time, if I listen. I know that the curriculum I have designed will continue to need to grow and change in very large ways because of their involvement. They will stretch me to consider other possibilities. And I am still learning.

LOYOLA'S STORY: BETWEEN WORLDS—MOVING BETWEEN NATIVE CULTURE AND THE DESIGNATION "BASIC WRITER"

My story offers an interesting addition to the stories provided by my co-authors. I write this story as a Native American student who was once designated as a "Basic Writer" myself. In referencing my own journey working "between worlds," I want to clarify one concern. The

notion that Native students, or any other marginalized student group, can successfully move between two worlds without experiencing painful alienation (i.e., psychological, emotional, and intellectual) in both is very unrealistic. One can only likely hold such a perspective from a position of relative privilege. As we work with Native American students designated as Basic Writers, we need to encourage them to have facility in both worlds, and to understand that in certain contexts one world and set of values will be privileged above the other. The idea that a "conflict" or "contact zone" model which encourages borderland residency is politically viable, let alone helpful to every minority student, should be questioned. Instead, issues of context, linguistic expectations dictated by situation, and students' needs must determine how we understand what it means to move "between worlds."

As I have read the research in Basic Writing, like Laura and Judith, I have been struck by the lack of representations of Native students. And, I have been concerned by the number of students in the Southwestern universities and colleges who are too often tracked as Basic Writers whether they necessarily belong in such classes or not. I am a full-blooded Jicarilla Apache Indian. I was born in 1963, which makes me part of the "baby-boomer" generation. I cannot speak about my own literacy experiences without describing the historical and cultural backgrounds of my family/families. My biological lineage consists of both parents being of full Jicarilla Apache descent. Both were fluent in the Jicarilla language, and learned to speak English in boarding school.[4] In the fall of 1963, I was officially invited into a new family structure which consisted of my adoptive parents—my mother, who was a full-blooded Jicarilla Apache, and my father, who is of English, Irish, and German descent. My father came to my hometown of Dulce, New Mexico, in the early 1950s, from Michigan. My parents were one of the first bi-racial couples to be married on the Jicarilla Apache Reservation. My father has lived on the reservation for over forty-five years, and considers Dulce home.

Like many Native American students who are classified as Basic Writers, I am a first generation college student (based on my biological lineage). In more recent years, two other members of my biological family have obtained Associate Degrees, with one planning to pursue a Bachelor's Degree soon. My adoptive parents' educational pursuits were varied as well. My adoptive mother attended Mesa Community College, in Grand Junction, Colorado, hoping to acquire credentials in journalism/business. She completed one year. My adoptive father completed up to the tenth grade in high school. My adoptive mother was a fluent speaker of her first language, Jicarilla. Her father spoke several languages including Jicarilla, Navajo, Spanish, and English. Her mother spoke only Jicarilla. My mother's siblings all conversed in Jicarilla while growing up. When exposed to the boarding school ex-

perience, my adoptive mother's family—just like my biological parents—were forced to speak English instead of Jicarilla. This was the beginning of their experience of acculturation into the mainstream society. Punishment for uttering any word in Jicarilla was very severe—for example, having one's mouth washed out with soap, being slapped on the hand with a wooden ruler, or being tied to a pole in the basement and whipped. These suspect moves toward "civilizing" signaled a shift away from the values and language of Jicarilla culture—an attempt to suppress and erase differences that might be threatening to white hegemonic discourses.

The historical background of my family is important in depicting my own linguistic and literacy background. Much as it pains me to write this, to this day I do not speak fluent Jicarilla. Did this contribute to my being classified as a Basic Writer in the early stages of my college career? I had not learned my native language first. I still have a chance to learn, but being discriminated against by being told that "you have an accent, and it's not Apache," continues to deter my willingness to learn. As the years go on, I still hope that I will learn my language. Learning to speak and write English as my first language was what my parents wanted. They felt that it would be the more important language to conquer, the language that would enable me to succeed in life. Caught between two worlds, the English-speaking world and the Jicarilla-speaking world, the fact that I could occupy neither space easily led many to classify me as a Basic Writer. Cultural differences, differences that were not understood by the instructors or the academic institutions in which they worked, were largely responsible for my placement there. The thinking process in the context of the Jicarilla language is entirely different from the writing process in English. Though teachers and administrators failed to consider this, many times ideas are turned around completely in the translation from one language to another. Something said in Jicarilla can mean its opposite when translated into English and vice versa. Many gatherings involve people telling jokes or stories in Jicarilla. A joke or a story would lose its meaning when translated into English. It would no longer be funny. As a result, complete fluency in both languages would require not only knowledge of both languages and their differences but the ability to feel at ease in both cultures. Though I might have struggled with not feeling completely comfortable in either context, I did not experience the even more difficult process of fully translating from fluent Jicarilla to non-fluent English. I found myself moving through both languages and cultures—even if a bit awkwardly at times.

To this day my greatest hope is that I may learn to speak and write Jicarilla fluently. I learned bits and pieces of the language from listening to conversations between my mother and grandparents. I grew up with over ninety-five percent of my peers consisting of Jicarilla

Apache students. Though non-Native Americans are often not aware of this, today many Native students living on reservations do not speak or write their Native languages fluently. In my own case, I can say that less than half of the students with whom I attended school on the reservation spoke fluent Jicarilla. As a result, during the late 1960s and early 1970s acculturation was not a difficult issue for our tribe. Most of the students from my generation considered English our primary if not our only language. We had been taught that the English way was the only way. On the flip side, I also began primary education with no worries of being disciplined for uttering any word in Jicarilla.

Learning to speak Jicarilla was something I very much wanted to do, but my mother never taught me. I recognize now that I may not have pursued learning the language in part because I was never immediately surrounded by a full-fledged circle of Jicarilla speaking peers. While the white American communities may have found my writing and speaking to have overtones of "Native culture," on the reservation I was always told that I didn't have an "Indian" accent, that I was different, not "Native" enough. Other tribal members' perceptions and images created by my having a white father on a predominantly Indian populated reservation also contributed to my failure to learn to speak Jicarilla and my feeling of having one foot in each world, though neither firmly planted.

As a result, my individual focus in the reservation schools I attended was always geared toward the English language. I always received good scores on reading and writing assignments, although teachers would often comment on report cards that "my seatwork [the way I produced my work] was sloppy." I recall that my early interests were in reading and writing. I didn't like the third "R," Arithmetic. In those days, the older generation was concerned with incorporating and keeping the "3 R's" in academic instruction, especially in primary education. I breezed through elementary English and reading classes. I moved on to junior high level English, and then high school English, achieving above average grades. I was placed in the higher academic level of English classes, and I graduated from Dulce High School, in 1981, as Salutatorian, with the goal of being the first college graduate in my family.

My college expectations were high. I applied to attend the University of Arizona, in Tucson. I had never been off the reservation or away from my family for more than two weeks in all of my eighteen years. Besides the enormous transition of leaving the "rez," my attempts to "fit in" academically would be shattered during the first semester at this university. To my surprise, I was placed into what was called a "remedial" English class, as well as a basic math class. Upon my first day walking into the classroom, I observed that the room was full of Natives. In one sense, I was happy. These were people who shared

some of my experiences. Yet I began to question why we were the ones who were there and not other students from other kinds of cultural backgrounds as well. What assumptions were being made about our writing backgrounds and our tribal affiliations? Did we really belong there, or was this a faulty assumption perpetuated by a racist academic culture?

I was also disturbed by what being in a Basic Writing class meant in practical terms. The class was dull, boring, and slow moving. When I received my course textbook, it centered on grammatical structure alone. We spent our semester learning to differentiate between a noun and a pronoun, a verb and an adverb—eventually moving on to the construction of a paragraph and finally to a full-blown essay. I believe that we were given a list of choices to write about. I know one included writing about what we did during the summer. So I chose to write about my grandfather. I really enjoyed writing about my grandfather, who was a very interesting, loving man. But in another way the assignment was far too simplistic. I also recall that while working on this piece, I was required to re-draft the paper and incorporate my teacher's comments, with the assistance of my tutor. What was curious about this experience is that I conversed more with my tutor than I did with my teacher and together we struggled to decipher the meaning of the teacher's comments.

Something became palpably clear to me at that time. Perhaps this was what the "institution of higher learning" thought about me and my writing potential, that I was not fully capable of functioning in mainstream academia. The trouble is that I definitely began to feel this way as well, as I fought to maintain an interest in all of the aspects of grammar "again." I believed my high school experience had prepared me to be competitive in the university setting. I was completely wrong, and to this day, I have never forgotten the traumatizing effect of being placed in this remedial English class. I have often wondered how my peers were affected by this same placement. And I continue to wonder why so many Native American students are placed in and then stay in these classes in colleges and universities within the Southwestern United States.

In some important ways, I feel that the humiliating experience of being "lesser" in the area of English contributed to my overall decline at this university. Like many of the Native students who begin attending universities in the Southwest, I did not return the following year. Disillusioned with my academic experience, instead I chose to attend a smaller community college located closer to my home of Dulce. There I could be closer to family, find some success in my work, and rebuild my confidence. For both better and worse, I found the curriculum moved at a less demanding speed. But, most importantly, I was encouraged by my writing professor, and the fear of looking over my

shoulder and seeing the "grammar patrol" was gone. Though it seems strange to say it, this non-attention made me feel better than all of the detailed attention that I received in that Basic Writing class ever could. With time and the patience of a new set of instructors, I became increasingly confident in my writing skills.

My next educational experience took place at a liberal arts institution, and by this time, I knew I wanted to major in English. Despite the earlier setbacks in this area of study, I still had a strong desire to accomplish and succeed. At that point I was more fully able to reflect on my educational experiences. During my formative years in high school, I was a well-rounded student. I participated in sports, made the honor-roll, and engaged in many extra-curricular activities. My senior year our English teacher asked us to do a research project which she said would help us prepare for the college experience. But, I don't recall having the support I needed to compose such a paper. I don't even recall having read various classic works of literature. Since I did not have the foundation in English that I needed from high school, I spent much of my time catching up and finally reading these "classics" while at Fort Lewis College. My exposure to these readings and various authors of color opened the doors to new dreams and expectations regarding my future in English. Reading finally became a welcome addition to my life. I was not concerned with what I read, just as long as I read. And the more I read, the more I learned what areas of literature were appealing to me. At the same time, I was learning to articulate my thoughts associated with reading in a comprehensible and confident writing style.

Maturity also played a great part in my completion of a Bachelor's Degree in English as I gained the confidence I needed to perform to expected academic standards. With the years, came the intense desire to accomplish what I had started years before. Though it has taken time, I now know that I have something to offer society and particularly my tribal people, and I hope to encourage the younger generations in their pursuit of higher learning. For five years I worked for the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, as an Administrative Officer for the Jicarilla people in Dulce, New Mexico. I composed agency newsletters, and gained much satisfaction contributing to the welfare of my tribal people. Now I am completing a Master's degree in Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Writing at Northern Arizona University—where I am also gaining a certificate in Professional Writing.

Through all of these experiences I have come to enjoy writing in several genres. I must admit that there are still those times when I sense that "old feeling" of not being able to express my ideas in as articulate a manner as many of my peers, people who have never been tracked as Basic Writers. I admit I will always be conscious of my choice of words and my use of structure.

Being classified as a Basic Writer has been difficult. I came to understand this term, its history, and my own placement in such classes more fully by studying the literature in Basic Writing Studies. It is something I still feel a bit uncomfortable admitting now, even though I am completing a Master's degree and continue to consider doctoral work. It held a stigma for me as it does for many Native students who are tracked into these courses. I feel this way despite the fact that by all objective measures I have transcended the category. However, my experiences being labeled in this way still stick with me. I tell this story as one Native woman who hopes that she can help other Native American students to understand that they can resist this labeling and move beyond it. I tell this story to teachers and theorists who work with Native students in the Southwest as well as across the United States. It will become increasingly important for those who teach and do research in the field of Basic Writing to learn more about the diversity of contemporary Native peoples; to face the flaws in their own stereotypes and the metaphoric investments of Basic Writing Studies that have made it such an inhospitable place for Native students, teachers, and scholars; and to understand how to more fully support Native students designated as Basic Writers.

JUDITH'S STORY: TUTORING NATIVE BASIC WRITERS IN A DORMITORY HIGH SCHOOL

Excerpt From My Tutoring Journal, October 21, 2002

> It was almost time for my 7:00 pm English tutoring session at the Kinlani (Flagstaff) Bordertown Dormitory High School. At ten minutes after 7:00, the students filed into the cafeteria that would serve as my classroom. They sat at tables fastened to the floor, surrounded by backpacks and Doritos. One of the cafeteria ladies, a Navajo woman, finished mopping the floor, wandered over, and watched me jotting notes in the margins of my paper. She asked me in halting English what I was writing.
>
> I considered the possible tangles of language and settled on an explanation. "It's a paper on how to help Native American students succeed," I said.""Some of them seem to have a lot of trouble learning in school."
>
> She nodded, then leaned toward me conspiratorially. "We know why. But it's not something we talk about."
>
> "I think it needs to be talked about," I said.
>
> "But it's not what you think," she said. "The real reason they can't learn."

"Why can't they learn?" I asked.

"Witchcraft," she said.

"Witchcraft?"

Her face was serious. "The Witch on the reservation puts a curse on them and it makes them stupid," she said.

This was a possibility I had not considered.

I glanced around at the students nearby.

"Is this true?" I asked them. They nodded solemnly.

"Could you please explain this to me?" I asked. "Because this is something I don't know about."

A student at the next table spoke up. "The Witch doesn't want them to leave the reservation and go to school," he said. "So the Witch puts some stuff in a pipe and she blows it out the pipe and it makes like a rock that you can't see and it goes and sticks in the person's forehead and then he is stupid. They know when it happens to them. That's why they don't study. The curse makes them stupid. They know it won't do them no good."

"What can take the curse away?" I asked.

One student said, "The Medicine Man. He can do it." The other students agreed.

The dormitory school director, a Hopi woman, appeared out of nowhere. I wondered how long she had been listening.

"Well, no one can put a curse on the English tutor," she said briskly, "because *she* doesn't believe in the curse."

She looked to me for confirmation. I looked away. I wasn't sure. Actually, I was feeling a little stupid myself right at the moment, with a slight feeling of tenderness and discomfort in my forehead. And I could see that the curse, far from being a foolish superstition, was alive and well and hurting my students' chances for success. Still, I didn't come here to destroy traditional Native American beliefs. I was here to teach writing.

This excerpt from my journal reveals how oftentimes poorly understood cultural differences create barriers and misunderstandings that block our efforts to communicate effectively with our Native American students. Even our practice of taking attendance may alienate students. In Navajo culture, it is impolite and rude to directly ask a person's name. One learns a person's name by asking another nearby person, who introduces the unknown one. On many occasions I have seen Diné students respond to a teacher asking a student's name while taking attendance by blushing and turning away, or blanching and refusing to answer, or frequently by giving someone else's name.

Since the "dumbing-witch" incident, I have come to understand how deeply Navajo traditional beliefs in *adishgash*, magic, may affect our schools (see Brenner; Kluckhohn). A practitioner of *adishgash*, or witchery, is called *adilgaashii*, or "Skinwalker," a person who is able to transform into a wolf, bear, or other flesh-eating creature and cause harm. Some Navajos consider these Skinwalkers to be so dangerous that they are worthy of death. In 1864, the Navajo conducted a formal witch hunt (comparable to the Salem witch trials but on a smaller scale) near Chinle, Arizona, directed at a group of Navajos who were disturbing *hozho* (the state of harmony and order) through their excessive prosperity (see Grant for further elaboration). Forty Navajo lives were claimed by Navajo witch hunters before the United States Army stepped in to stop the slaughter. The Navajos remember this event as *Hweeldii*, the Hardship (Blue). Native American students may internalize such stories, and their message is clear: Too much success is over-reaching, immoral, suspect. Whether or not students personally believe in *adishgash*, witchcraft, there still exists the cultural value of staying in one's proper place. What a contrast to our universities and colleges that encourage students to reach for the stars and achieve all they can. In Native culture, such achievement may be seen as a threat to students' *hozho*.

Navajo society places a high premium on maintaining *hozho*. As Navajo writer Andy Harvey writes, "To be out of harmony, even with one's own words, is devastating to a Navajo person's ability to be a successful learner" (5). Thus, the competitive, goal-oriented academic environment may be antithetical to more holistic Navajo ideologies. Similarly, members of other Native American tribes may find that the sometimes materialistic values of the academy oppose their own traditional philosophical ideals.

While each tribe has its own beliefs and traditions, and individuals within Native American society vary greatly, Native American students can face challenges that may stem from cultural beliefs and values that are incompatible with Western academic ideologies. When these beliefs and values collide, Native American students are often caught in the middle of two distinct and powerful traditions—their home cultures' and those of the academy. Therefore, if Native American students are to succeed, they must find harmony within these two distinct worlds. With this in mind, I believe it is our responsibility as academics to clear the way for Native American students to succeed in our colleges and universities by embracing a larger vision of diversity and imagining new practices and pedagogies that will welcome Native American students.

When I first began working with Navajo high school students, it was difficult for me to see them as individuals, whose lives and experiences varied greatly both from one another and from my own. These

students have been my teachers, made themselves vulnerable so that I could begin to see them for who they really are. Some want to preserve their indigenous languages; others study French. Some students are greatly interested in holding to their native traditions, others want only to assimilate and escape their lives of desperate rural poverty on the reservations. Still other students practice some traditional ways while pursuing other Anglo ideals. Our Navajo Basic Writing students may or may not speak English as a second language. In the high school where I tutor, 50 percent of students speak Navajo, some fluently, others poorly. For some, English is their only language. These students may be fluent or illiterate in several languages: French, Hopi, Spanish, English, and Navajo. So diverse are these students that we can make few assumptions about them. Our only option is to know them and allow them to teach us. From them we can learn that there are many ways for our students to invent themselves in the world. Their necessary crossings and re-crossings between worlds should be encouraged, even if that means letting go of our fears and embracing the lifeways of another culture alongside our own. We should also understand that such crossings are difficult, painful, and oftentimes problematic.

But while teachers ought to accommodate students who are interested in preserving their traditional cultures, I wonder sometimes whether our concern with preserving Navajo traditions may be more a reflection of our desire to imagine Navajo students as relics of a quaint past, as static members of a fixed society, while we imagine white culture, academic culture, as a sort of creative motion. If we essentialize Navajo students as human time capsules, we do them a great disservice and contribute to their continued absence from Basic Writing literature and from the academy. When we see the university only in terms of archaic or modern, as insider or outsider, we miss other privileging hierarchies that are revealing.

Since the academy is at least in part an elitist institution, it is also an exclusive institution. In *Lives on the Boundary*, Mike Rose suggests that the academy is a secret society, that the novice is taken on a journey by his mystagogue and initiated into a select clique: "The student is being spiritually transported by the teacher and by an inspiring humanities program from the margins to the center. He is being brought into and invited into the club" (8). Later, Rose elaborates, referring to his own experience as a student who had grown up in a Los Angeles ghetto: "Nothing is more exclusive than the academic club: its language is highbrow, it has fancy badges, and it worships tradition. It limits itself to a few participants who prefer to talk to each other. What Father Albertson did was bring us inside the circle" (58). The exclusive and limiting aspects of higher education are problematic. Native American students, who already feel marginalized, are reminded daily that they stand outside the circle of ideal college students; hence, they

may not possess the confidence to step over Father Albertson's line, to join those on the inside. These students, whose lives feature frequent feelings of powerlessness, may blanch at handing their locus of control to a teacher whom they may (rightly) perceive as a somewhat self-interested elite. Indeed, the whole idea that they need to be included may further serve to reiterate for Native American students what they already feel: they are outlanders. Far from being inspired, these students may be discouraged, further peripheralized, and driven out by the very system of initiation designed to assimilate them.

This willingness on the part of academics to posit an "other" may be more than an aspect of the hierarchical nature of the academy. In her essay entitled "Intellectual Development and the Place of Narrative in 'Basic' and Freshman Composition," Kathleen G. Dixon also questions this approach, suggesting that fear underlies our desire to postulate an "other":

> Why must human difference, otherness, (or "alterity" as literary critics are now fond of saying) be figured along these poles of adulation or denigration? Is the "other," as certain Lacanian psychoanalytic critics tell us, that which the dominant culture fears and represses? (7)

If college instructors are imagined to be the dominant culture in higher education, over and above students, perhaps predicating the student as "other" serves to create a safety zone for rising academics between students and themselves, positing a qualitative difference that raises professorial status and maintains the rigid institutional hierarchies on which academics are dependent and with which academics are complicit. If we are to aid Basic Writers who are Native American students, we must understand how their particular "otherness" is constructed culturally as well as by the academy.

I close with the forceful words of one of my current students who, struggling with the inadequate technological resources we encounter daily at the school, printed a copy of his college application letter for me to read. The computer room seemed strange and empty as I read his letter. I was stunned by the rhetorical power and beauty of his prose. I could not help but think once again that categorizing Native American students as Basic Writers too often fails to account for their actual experiences and lives.

> My name is Tyler Johnson, and I am a Navajo. My home is on the Navajo Reservation, in a discrete place called Tonlea. To follow my traditional customs, I am of the Many Goats clan, born for the Towering House clan, and my paternal grandfather is of the Yucca Fruit clan. This is the story of my education and life.

As a child, I have seen the hardships of life without a proper education. I have seen my parents struggle with the daily task of providing for their family. I have seen people live on the government, including my own family. I have seen my family struggle to live without it, and still see it today. I have vowed to myself that I will do everything in my power to get the education I need to survive on my own.

In the third grade I had taught myself to read, since then I have strived to be the best I could be. In the seventh grade, I was placed in Transitional Mathematics (a high school math class), and half way through my eighth grade year I was sent to Carmel, Indiana. I was sent there to further my schooling and broaden my view of the world. In my school I was the only Native American, and lived there with a white family. I had never been so far away from home, much less the reservation. I worked hard to adjust to an entirely different lifestyle and an education that exceeded my own. I received honor classes and received the best grades I could get. I returned home stronger than before, and became one of the few at the top of my class. Through the trials of life, I have accelerated above my peers, and have continued to take many challenging courses throughout high school.

Life on the reservation is not easy, life in general is not easy. I live in a Hogan (the traditional home of the Navajo) with no running water or electricity. My home is a dusty town with one gas station, no high school, and twenty miles from the nearest major town. Life for my family is hard considering my mom has to drive thirty miles to get to work and my father one hundred miles, each going in opposite directions. Money never seems to be in our hands, and we live day to day, never knowing what the sunrise brings. Every day is a challenge, which we gladly accept, never losing hope of a better day. Despite these circumstances, my family has survived and I continue my schooling.

My parents have taught me well from the experiences they have gone through, and that to get what I desire, I need an education. My mother has taught me to be a good person, and my father has taught me never to give up. They are my inspiration to do my best in everything I do, whether it is in school or in sports.

This is my story, and this is the life I live. Today I am still continually trying to advance my education, and I see that education is my key to the world.

CHALLENGING THE CONSTRUCTION OF BASIC WRITING'S OTHERS

The accounts we present here supply small glimpses into a crucial area of research for Basic Writing Studies, one that needs to begin to receive more significant attention. While we have not provided ready answers, we hope that we have exposed some of the potential metaphoric problems in the history of Basic Writing scholarship, problems that have perhaps contributed in certain ways to (if not perpetuated) the invisibility of Native American Basic Writers. We also hope to have provided some thoughts about such students, what they can teach us as well as what and how they may want us to teach them. If we do not make this research a priority in the years to come, the tracking of Native American students into Basic Writing programs across the country will continue with few questions asked. As a result, we may not begin to thoughtfully consider how best to aid these students as well as how to work with and between cultural differences. We might fail to determine whether Native American students are too often tracked as Basic Writers because of universities' lack of knowledge about such cultural differences. We might fail to understand the racist biases against Native Americans that remain too often unquestioned.

If we are to begin such scholarly work, however, we must recognize the significant hurdles that we face. And, by no means are we able to investigate them sufficiently here. If the terministic screen adopted by Basic Writing Studies has often relied upon the frontier myth and images of mapping and territorialization, particularly of Western landscapes, in the future we will need to understand and reconceive this phenomenon in radical ways. We will need to work against the negative potentials of this terminology from the inside out, to in fact throw away the maps we have used to understand the territory of Basic Writing—instead recognizing the critical presence of Native American students in this landscape. Studying the work of Native American Basic Writers in ways that allow them to speak to our research has the possibility of re-writing this history of colonization sometimes unwittingly embodied in the metaphors of our discipline. It also holds the potential to shift the troubling history in the United States of Anglo teaching that has forced Native students to assimilate and acculturate to a set of often rather arbitrary standards, frequently with little rationale offered.

However, in order for this to come about, we increasingly need to generate situations and research possibilities that allow our Native American students to talk back and through to the discipline, to challenge it from within. Likewise, we must encourage teachers of Basic Writing to learn from their Native American students—to study their lives, their homes, and their cultures. We must learn about the assumptions Native American students may have about college and univer-

sity environments. Perhaps the new efforts of Basic Writing Studies might best be described as a kind of de-territorialization and de-colonization, encouraging Native students to rewrite the metaphors that have heretofore structured the very operations of this discipline. This will take Basic Writing Studies in crucial new directions, perhaps exposing trails that have always been there on the land, but ones we have overlooked in the past in favor of the frontier myth. The frontier myth has too long played a part in the language of Basic Writing Studies. Increasingly teachers of Basic Writing need to become settlers on Indian lands, much as Lyons encourages all Rhetoric and Composition scholars to do—challenging and disrupting the once comforting images of ourselves as pioneers.

Authors' Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the reviewers of this essay for their very thoughtful feedback and suggestions, which we have tried to consider here. One reviewer encouraged us to extend our research for a book chapter or even an entire volume. Since we are all continuing independent research in this vein to some degree, bringing together our various voices in a larger project is certainly something we will consider. We thank the reviewer for this suggestion.

Notes

1. Too often in Western culture "hauling water" has flavors of the unsanitary and suggests a deficit model. When we talk about "hauling water" we invoke images of menial chores and hardship, perhaps influenced by White frontier people who had wells and bucketed their own water. But this suggestion hides the richness of Native culture. For instance, Northern California's Wintu community includes a thousand-year-old ceremony held at a sacred spring in the meadow. Wintu religion focuses on healing through the use of natural resources, including the spring and the mountain there. Many springs, wells, and waterfalls are sacred places and the carrying of water from these places to the home is a sacred act. Also, it is important to note that desert dwelling people do not need as much water as some cultures, as they use water carefully and sparingly. Water is sacred, springs or other water holes are the sacred dwelling places of the ancestors (which is why many Navajo do not eat fish), and water is not freely wasted on lawns, daily showers of the whole body, the way Anglos waste this precious resource. Also, the preciousness of water can be seen in the tribal clan names of Navajo people, for instance. The word "Havasupai" means "People of the Blue Green Water." There are the other Navajo

clans to whom water is especially sacred: "Near the Water Clan," "Deer Spring Clan," "Two Who Came to the Water Clan," "Big Water Clan," "Reed People," "Red Running into the Water Clan," and the "Light Water People," just to name some. We should be careful not to essentialize or minimize a huge part of Native culture since "doing without" may be a sacred act.

2. For the purposes of both Laura's and Judith's stories, it is important to offer a brief history of Navajo as a written language. In 1849 the first Navajo word list was created by Lt. James H. Simpson, part of a journal of military reconnaissance, appearing in *Navaho Expedition.* In 1852 the first Navajo vocabulary, *Vocabulary of the Language of the Navaho,* was published by J. H. Eaton. In 1887 Washington Matthews began publishing information about Navajo ceremonies. In 1912 the first major dictionary, *A Vocabulary of the Navaho Language,* was published by the Franciscan Fathers. In 1926 the first grammar, *A Manual of Navaho Grammar* by Fr. Berard Haile, appeared. In 1939 the Harrington-LaFarge alphabet for the Navajo language was created. This was the alphabet used in *ADAHOONHILIGHII,* or Current Events, developed by educators as a tool for teaching Navajo language reading skills. It was a monthly newsletter distributed to reservations and posted on bulletin boards. It covered both local and national events. The first issue was published on August 2, 1943. In the late 1930s, author Oliver LaFarge and anthropologist John P. Harrington of the Smithsonian Institution devised a Navajo alphabet that was usable on an English typewriter. Until that time, a written language had not existed. In 1941 the first bilingual primer, *Diné Yazhi Ba'alchini,* was published by James Byron Enochs. By 1941 the first compilation of place names emerged in the book *Diné Bikeyah* by Richard F. Van Valkenburgh. However, the first modern dictionary, *The Navaho Language,* by Robert W. Young and William Morgan did not appear until 1943. In 1956 the Navajo translation of the New Testament was completed, becoming one of the central ways in which the Navajo people first saw their language in written form. In 1967 the first modern Navajo textbook, *Navajo Made Easier,* by Irvy W. Goossen, was published. It was not until 1985 that the Navajo translation of the Old Testament was completed. Since then, various references for modern Navajo have appeared, and in the mid-to-late 1990s, Navajo fonts became available on computer programs.

3. See Laura Tohe, "Within Dinétah, the People Remain Strong," presented at the Navajo Treaty Day Commemorative Program by the Friends of the Navajo Treaty Project at the Cline Library at Northern Arizona University, June 1, 1999. Other compelling texts that take up related concerns from an historical perspective include Sam Bingham and Janet Bingham, eds., *Between Sacred Mountains: Navajo Stories and*

Lessons from the Land; Peter Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos*; Klara Bonsack Kelley and Harris Francis, *Navajo Sacred Places*; Laurence D. Linford, *Navajo Places: History, Legend, Landscape*; and Robert S. McPherson, *Sacred Land, Sacred View: Navajo Perceptions of the Four Corners Region.*

4. Here we refer to the practice of forcibly removing Native American children from their homes, or what the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania, founded by Henry Pratt during the 1880s, referred to as the "kill the Indian, save the child" philosophy of education. For a useful overview of the schooling practices of Natives from the 1880s through the 1920s, see Carolynn Marr's work "Assimilation Through Education: Indian Boarding Schools in the Pacific Northwest." While she speaks to issues relevant within that geographical location, as she notes, her overviews of the structure of Indian Boarding Schools cut across such differences. Since all such schools were federally legislated, the set up of the schools, the subjects taught, the large focus on vocational training and knowledge of United States laws, and the school schedule were virtually identical across the nation. For several recent publications that examine the boarding school experience and its impacts upon Native American students today, see Margaret L. Archuleta, Brenda J. Child, and K. Tsianina Lomawaima's edited book *Away From Home: American Indian Boarding School Experiences, 1879-2000* and John Bloom's *To Show What an Indian Can Do: Sports at Native American Boarding Schools.* For a comprehensive bibliographic overview of texts that take up this subject, see http://www.asu.edu/lib/archives/boardingschools.htm and http://www.asu.edu/lib/archives/labriola.htm.

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News and Announcements

Conference on Basic Writing Invites Nominations for Innovation Award. The Conference on Basic Writing requests applications for its 2004-2005 Award for Innovation. This award recognizes basic writing programs for innovations that improve educational processes through creative approaches. Only innovations that have been implemented will be considered for the award. The winner will be presented with a plaque at the 2004 CCCC meeting in San Antonio, Texas. CBW wants to recognize those programs that are implementing new or unique ways to improve the success of their basic writing students. Is your program doing something especially useful and effective in terms of assessment, placement, pedagogy, curriculum, community outreach, etc.? If so, please nominate your program for the 2004-2005 CBW Award for Innovation. For complete application information, see <http://www.asu.edu/clas/english/composition/cbw/Inny_1.html>, or contact Greg Glau (gglau@asu.edu).

Call for papers: *The Journal of Teaching Academic Survival Skills* (*JTASS*) is seeking articles for its next issue. *JTASS* is a multi-disciplinary, refereed journal that publishes articles focusing on the teaching of "at-risk" students—those who might fall between the cracks in colleges and universities without some intervention on our part. We seek critical work in areas such as instructional strategies, political considerations, incidents with students, promising practices, student services, program development, and more. We value studies that are pertinent to specialists yet accessible to non-specialists. We are pleased to consider articles that extend our definition of the at-risk population or that focus on how the condition of being "at-risk" undergoes variation and transformation in light of particular environments, class-based markers, or learning situations. To submit a manuscript or learn more about our journal, please contact: John Paul Tissoni, Editor, Journal of Teaching Academic Survival Skills, Department of English, Miami University Middletown, Middletown, OH 45042. Manuscripts should follow APA format. Please submit both in hard copy and disk form. Contributors can also submit electronically to tassonjp@muohio.edu.