Contents

I. Introduction....2

II. Native American Education....4

1. History of Native American Education....4

2. Native American Education Legislation....14

3. Educational Institutions for Native Americans....17

III. Navajo Education....22

1. Cultural Context....22

2. History of Navajo Education....26

3. Navajo School System....29

IV. Conclusion....34

Works Cited....35

I. Introduction

In the past it often occurred that the cultural and historical uniqueness of Native Americans was not appreciated and the importance of the maintenance of close bonds with native culture, customs, habits and a specific perspective of the existence and functioning of the earth from religious and philosophical view was often neglected and even suppressed. This paper contains a historical overview of Native American education. It shows a brief summary of the system and structure of state support in educational programs is shown. Furthermore, the paper includes an outline of the structure, level and definition of specific educational programs. This part is divided according to the type and level of educational institutions from the point of view of the standard state educational system and deals with the questions of basic and high schools, lifelong education and special individual programs for Native Americans. Since the size of this paper and the specialization of the author do not make it possible to treat all the subjects of Native American education, an example is demonstrated on the largest native tribe of the United States of America – the Navajos. To understand more easily the basis of the lifestyle and spatial and temporal orientation of the Navajos, the paper also looks at their lifestyle in the past and present.

One of the concerns of this paper is an explanation of the importance of the revival and preservation of the cultural heritage of the Navajo tribe. The paper contains a description of traditions, customs, religion, mythology, ceremonies and philosophical understanding of the existence of this world and the origin of people, animals, plants and inanimate objects which, from the view of the Navajos, appear in this world. Since we cannot define the exact boundary between the spiritual and material world in the way that the Navajos understand them, there are connections between religion, mythology, social

culture, culture, medicine and legislation of the Navajo community. For this reason, an extensive part of the text deals with these questions. At the same time, it should be supported not only by material but also social and spiritual investment of other cultures, nations, political systems and their institutions. One of the primary objectives of the US government of the United States of America is to support both directly and indirectly the formation of educational programs for Native Americans. The goal of these programs is to help with integration and coexistence of minority groups in such manner that they do not lose their traditional cultural identity.

II. Native American education

In order to offer a complex view of Native American education, this chapter begins with a description of the history of educational processes. The first attempts to educate Native Americans cannot be related to the current attitude of the mainstream society to the educational needs of Native Americans and the recent commitment to maintaining their lifestyle and cultural heritage of their communities. The first historical efforts were not motivated by the effort to integrate the unique cultural groups. The main concern seems to have been the discontinuation of Native American bonds with their original cultures and religions. These were also reasons why the European American ways of educating Native Americans were not always accepted. Historical data are dealt with in the following overview.

1. History of Native American Education

In the second half of the nineteenth century the first attempts to organize the education of Native Americans were recorded. These efforts were, however, connected with a forced taking of Native American children away from their families. The objective of the European American population at that time was to create an education with an artificially imposed social structure. Its task was to re-educate the Native Americans to an acceptable level for the dominant population. These efforts were influenced by Christianity which was not compatible with the religions practiced by Native Americans. The education was based on the model of boarding schools. These boarding schools tried to re-educate Native Americans in an effective way; firstly by forced Christianization and secondly by the conception of the rigid social structure in these institutions.

As Hyde observes, the children at the boarding schools were forced to cut their hair,

kept away from their families, sometimes were told their families were dead or did not want them anymore and were often abused both mentally and physically. It is obvious from the quotation that the instruments used by the boarding school teachers for the forced persuasion of Native Americans provoke strong emotions even after many years. Mary Crow Dog criticizes the effect of the educational system as such: "The schools were sterile, with cold atmosphere, an unfamiliar routine, language problems, and above all the maza-skan-skan, that damn clock - white man's time as opposed to Indian time, which is natural time" (qtd. in Hyde). Moreover, Mary Crow Dog points out the medical drawbacks of the system – both physical and mental:

> Many times, Indian children died at these schools – from diseases they had no natural immunity to, from homesickness and other factors. The children who survived the training were no better off than those who escaped the forced schooling. They often found themselves unwelcome in white society in spite of their painful acculterization process, and sometimes returned to their tribes to find they were no longer accepted there either (qtd. in Hyde).

Hyde argues that all the effort of the mainstream society only had a negative impact.

The system of forced schooling remained in place until the nineteenth century. However, the impact of separating Native American children from their tribes was partially compensated by the tribal leaders' ability to influence some ways of teaching and the content of subjects. Some schools, for example the Red Cloud Indian School on the Sioux reservation, were built and maintained by tribal initiative and funding and the tribal leaders worked intimately with the heads of the schools to insure the children were taken care of and taught useful skills as well as American language and history. Among the reasons for maintaining boarding schools were the distances. Students at boarding schools were

expected to study hard and learn well so they could, in turn, teach others. Many graduates of these tribal schools became teachers themselves and opened day schools near their homes (Hyde).

The Civil War broke out in 1861 and one of its consequences was the discontinuance of the educational process until the beginning of the twentieth century. The Civil War and lack of funding forced the closure of many of the tribal schools forever. Certainly it did not mean the end to Native American institutionalized education but the level and quantity of educational activities were limited to such an extent that we cannot speak of any assets to Native American education at that time. On the other hand, the War as such changed the political and economic distribution of power in the United States and these changes definitely led to a shift forward of the educational policy of Native Americans (Hyde).

A documentary film *White Man's Way* offers different views on Indian education. It is narrated by the writer N. Scott Nomaday. It depicts the historical tragedy of the first attempts to re-educate Native Americans. Some Native Americans perceived their integration into the dominant society as the only way out of the situation when the majority society gained control over the American continent. The following quotation is an example of a Native American person who wanted his children to be educated in boarding schools. "My father told us after evening meals: 'I want you to be able to learn the white man's way because they're coming down just like a flood. You're going to get along with them if you stay in school and learn their ways.'" This commentary shows that to Native Americans education has become a synonym for assimilation and the opportunity to survive due to the efforts of the mainstream society.

The retrospective view of the developing approach to Native American education can bee seen as well in their integration into the social structures of the majority society. As Nomaday puts it, "After Indian wars were over, a national experiment was designed by U.S. government to transform Indian children. A military uniform was only the beginning. These children were expected to change on the inside too, to forget being Indian and to become like their white teachers." One of the former boarding school teachers describes the problems in the idea of educating Native Americans based on an enforced change to 'white' thinking and white behavior: "Everything was so different for the children, they were very home-sick. They tried to take all their native culture from them and it was a hard thing to do. They felt that was an education." It is obvious that the employees themselves were aware of the fact that the consequence of this education was a disharmony in Native Americans' lives, a destruction of their social structures, and sometimes even health problems and deaths.

The feelings of the Native Americans who were included in this project are expressed in the documentary by former students of the schools, eyewitnesses who were still alive at the time of the shooting in 1986. One of them, a student of the U.S. Indian School in Genoa, Nebraska, speaks about the language problems he had to face: "We didn't know English, maybe a word or two. They used to punish us if we talked in Indian at a school. They wanted to take the Indian away from us. We were convinced that there was nothing of value in the Indian culture." Nomaday illustrates some of the methods and practices of the boarding schools:

> In the classroom they learned the ways and values of American society. For half a day they practiced vocational skills to prepare them for jobs and to help maintain the school. Every hour of every day was accounted for. Bells

> rang at regular intervals, nothing remained of the natural rhythms of the Indian world. The theme of these schools was separation from home, from tradition and from life in the natural world (White Man's Way).

This commentary gives a realistic picture of the principles which were the basis of the Genoa school.

As it follows from the text, rather than educational this institution was forcibly assimilating. The effects of this often harmed not only the mind and the established cultural and social bonds of the students, but in thousands of cases the consequences were deaths. The film makers and eyewitnesses, both former teachers and students, describe the events at these schools in the following ways: "In the early days, hundreds of children died at the boarding schools. Epidemics of tuberculosis and influenza swept through schools affecting those who lacked immunity to white diseases. Some children missed their home so profoundly, they became sick and died. Others tried running away and even those who adjusted had their times of sadness." Since the effects of this environment were disastrous, the organizers of the Native American education were forced to allow at least an occasional meeting of Native American students with their family members. It also unintentionally proved the need to sustain the indigenous Native American cultural and social bonds if the society wanted to prevent the dying out of Native Americans as such.

To ease the students' loneliness, parents were sometimes allowed to visit their children and this closeness inevitably strengthened the native ways. The following narration told by one of the former students of the Genoa school implies a strong relation to the faith in the philosophy of natural medicine. It helps to cure because the harmony of a healthy body deserves primarily a healthy mind too. "I remember one time I was so sick I even dreamed about Jesus. I supposed I was going to die. My mother brought some Indian

medicine and they went out in the woods and they cooked it up and she brought it back to me. When I was in a hospital, they gave pills to me and I never took them and I used to hide them but when she brought me the Indian medicine, that's what I took." The story has a very emotional content. However, the basis of the story is in what primarily caused illnesses of the Native American children. It was not hunger but, above all, the separation from their accustomed way of life.

On the other hand, it would not be objective if some positive statements of the former Native American students concerning the life at boarding schools were not mentioned here. Nevertheless it is sad to observe that the positive things were assessed first and foremost in connection with the need to educate Native American children so that they would be able to survive in the conditions created by the majority society. For many Native Americans the only opportunity to escape from the critical situation on the reservations was to attend boarding schools. Such situation aroused mainly from the shortage of food, clothes and other items of everyday life which serve to satisfy the primary needs. In comparison to these problems, some of the things connected with boarding schools were positive. The proceeding commentaries show the perceived benefits of the educational system. "I guess we all enjoyed having a good meal at Genoa. We had pork, we had beef, once in a while we had chicken, so the food was all right to me. I always had enough to eat. Then we got pies on Sundays. We got a lot of gravy there." Another former student regrets the abolition of boarding schools: "I'm sorry that those schools closed because I think our children, by sending them off, they were better educated, well disciplined and all that. I think it's hard on the reservation. The times are so different now". This quotation also shows the shift of education not to the level of personality development but to the level of

survival. The first one to take advantage of such situation, originally probably with a good intention, was Captain Pratt.

One of the founders of the first Indian industrial school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania (founded in 1879), Captain Richard Pratt used a propaganda campaign to carry out his ideas. Its task was to give distorted information to the politicians and the public.

> Captain Richard Pratt wanted to establish enough Indian schools so that all native children would be enrolled in them and would in a relatively short period of time simply disappear as groups and would become individuals within the larger society. Pratt used an ingenious method to sell his idea. To persuade Congress and the public that his experiment was working, he commissioned a series of 'before' and 'after' photographs of Carlisle students. The 'before' photographs show students soon after arriving from the reservation. Later, the same group is shown transformed, a new image implying a new state of mind (White Man's Way).

Pratt created a system where the students were motivated to be awarded a medal or a diploma. The sticking point, however, was the fact that this was not done to teach something to Native children but rather it was used as a certain brainwashing with the aim to "kill the Native American from the inside and to make them white-thinking" (Pratt) The rewards in the form of medals were chosen very appropriately as the traditional mentality of Native Americans honors values that are presented by the ownership of some appreciation. A daughter of one former Genoa student who was awarded a medal remembers: "My mother was very proud of this medal and she received it at the end of her stay in Genoa. It was for excellence in conduct, order and attention." The students were given a chance to get different awards which had the notion of importance thanks to the

constant promotion. Despite all the efforts of the organizers of this system, it did not hold out.

The boarding schools were criticized a lot because of their high costs, low effectivity and the large demands on the maintenance of these institutions. Simultaneously with these economic reasons, public opinion started to grow stronger. The public did not approve of boarding schools because it saw in them mainly the intention to forced assimilation of Native Americans. The projects were discontinued under the pressure of the public and because of economical reasons. The Genoa school closed in 1934 and by the end of the 1930s Pratt's experiment was over. One historian explains the end of boarding schools: "There had always been critics of assimilation and discrimination. This criticism was mounting by the thirties. The schools were expensive to maintain and the ideas of assimilating the Indian into white society was pretty much a failure." The outcomes of this educational system and the reasons for its ending are suggested by the narrator in his concluding commentary.

The narrator poses several rhetorical questions. They should lead to more than a contemplation of the consequences of forced segregation and later re-education of Native Americans. As Nomaday says: "Indian values did survive, their culture did survive in spite of our attempts to suppress it but it was not without a cost. There was a great deal of personal pain and suffering. We'll never know the extent of that. Life on any Indian reservation is far from ideal. But was the white man's way a solution to Indian problems or did it create them in the first place?" The documentary shows that the main question that should be asked by each person who tries to educate Native Americans is, what is the purpose of this education? As long as their education is considered only a way of changing Native Americans, it will not be successful. The purpose of education is to provide equal

conditions for all people and to maintain cultural and social bonds that are characteristic for them. The examples of Captain Pratt's experiment and other boarding schools projects clearly show that Native American education for the purpose of their transformation was not effective.

What cannot be denied to Captain Pratt are his zealousness and probably even a real belief in meaningfulness and usefulness of his vision. His thoughts and enthusiasm for this educational system are clearly shown in the *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* from 1892. The title of his speech is "The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites". As the title suggests, Captain Pratt saw the only way of assimilation of the Native Americans in their transformation to 'white-thinking' people. When he connected this idea with military drill and strong sense of loyalty to the U.S., the result was a system of re-education, not dissimilar to the system of re-education of non-German children in Aryan families during the World War II. Captain Pratt in his speech asserts:

> The school at Carlisle has always planted treason to the tribe and loyalty to the nation at large. It has preached against colonizing Indians, and in favor of individualizing them. It has demanded for them the same multiplicity of chances which all others in the country enjoy. Carlisle fills young Indians with the spirit of loyalty to the stars and stripes, and then moves them out into our communities to show by their conduct and ability that the Indian is no different from the white or the colored, that he has the inalienable right to liberty and opportunity that the white and the negro have.

This passage from Captain Pratt's speech insinuates his orientation towards loyalty, discipline and nationalistic tendencies in this thinking. In the following part of the speech,

Captain Pratt points out the fact that boarding schools for Native Americans are only a certain fore-step for the preparation of Native American children for a real life as it was perceived by the majority society. Pratt states:

> Indian schools must, of necessity, be for a time, because the Indian cannot speak the language, and he knows nothing of the habits and forces he has to contend with; but the highest purpose of all Indian schools ought to be only to prepare the young Indian to enter the public and other schools of the country. And immediately he is so prepared, for his own good and the good of the country, he should be forwarded into these other schools, there to temper, test, and stimulate his brain and muscle into the capacity he needs for his struggle for life, in competition with us.

This passage shows the contradiction between the ideas stated and the reality of Native American education. The boarding schools abided by Pratt's motto "Kill the Indian, Save the Man". Thus not teach the Indian and help him but change him into a white person and only then help him. Pratt's principal ideas though have had a logical content. Only the instruments that implemented the ideas were not effectively chosen.

It is clear from the previous excerpts that Captain Pratt's views and policies cannot be judged only in black and white. It remains only a speculation whether the failure of the boarding schools was caused by the way it was realized or by the insufficient knowledge of the general relation of the indigenous people to education and their integration into the majority society's culture and social structures.

2. Native American Education Legislation

There have been a number of legislative actions which have restructured the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) since the Snyder Act of 1921. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 introduced the teaching of Native American history and culture into BIA schools. Although it still was not an ideally conducted system, the Indian Reorganization Act was one of the important steps towards the advancement of Native American education. This remained, although in a limited form, in the curricula of these educational institutions until the 1970s. The 1972 Indian Education Act established a comprehensive approach to meeting the unique needs of Native American students. It established the Office of Indian Education (OIE) and the National Advisory Council on Indian Education. The Act authorized several competitive grant programs for Native American children and adults. This Act dealt with the question of financing Native American education. In 1974 a directed system of teacher training was introduced in Native American schools. The purpose of this program has been preparation of teachers for teaching Native American children so that the teaching could fulfill not only the requirements of American society but also the maintaining of Native American culture and knowledge. The program of the directed system reacted to the need of further advancement of Native American teachers. Since the American society discovered that the system of Native American education can become at least partially independent from the influence of standardized state control, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Act of 1975 was passed. The Indian Self-Determination and Education Act gave authority to the tribes to contract with the BIA in the operation of schools and to determine the education programs for Native American children. Furthermore, Native American educational institutions were given rights to deal with some of the financial matters. This issue was treated in the Education Amendments

Act of 1978. It gave power to Indian school boards for local hiring of teachers and staff, and the direct funding of schools. Ten years later, when the system of grant financing of gifted and talented students at standard American educational institutions had been working for a long time, a similar Act was passed for students of Native American schools. This Act was issued in 1988. Since 1988 Native American schools have been able to apply for grants in education. Apart from the schools, grants could be awarded to gifted and talented students, as it is in all other standard educational institutions in the USA. In 2001 Native American education was re-authorized in No Child Left Behind Act. This Act applies to the whole educational system in the USA including Native American education. An equal approach is guaranteed in Title VII Part A of the No Child Left Behind Act which is especially dedicated to the rights and duties in Native American education. The including of the Native American rights for education into the legislative system was not only a social and ethic act but at the same time a clear notice of indisputable claim of Native American community (OIE).

The Native American education legislation is unique in four ways. These four points specify in a relatively simple and unambiguous way which distinguishes the Native American educational system not only from standardized educational activities in the USA. They also suggest the separation of Native American education from other programs that support Native American culture. The first point emphasizes the necessity of different approach to Native American education from the perspective of language needs and from the complex perspective of the Native American cultural diversity. “1. It recognizes that American Indians have unique, educational and culturally related academic needs and distinct language and cultural needs” (OIE). The complexity of this institution’s field of activity can be observed in the next point. “2. It is the only comprehensive Federal Indian

Education legislation that deals with American Indian education from pre-school to graduate-level education and reflects the diversity of government involvement in Indian education" (OIE). The third point illustrates the will of the American federal government to support the Native American education. This support includes not only the support of the education itself but also shows the awareness of the difference between the standard educational system and the Native American educational system. "3. It focuses national attention on the educational needs of American Indian learners, reaffirming the Federal government's special responsibility related to the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives" (OIE). The aim of Bureau of Indian Affairs is to support Native Americans and their institutions in matters such as social politics, economic support and legal needs. It provides Native Americans with legal assistance in arguments between Native Americans and the current majority population of the USA. Since the activity of the Bureau is rather broad, the question of Native education has been extracted so that the system of Native American education could function more flexibly and effectively. BIA employs not only Native Americans while in the Office of Indian Education it is precisely the Native Americans who have the ultimate word in the autonomous tasks of this institution. "4. It provides services to American Indians and Alaska Natives that are not provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs" (OIE).

Among the primary functions of the Office of Indian Education is the grants management which means the design and overseeing of the system for administering all types of Indian education grants and national evaluations of programs. The educational system is divided into several parts. The first and basic part is the organizational division of educational programs according to different levels of educational activities and the level of students from the view of their age, interests and preferences (OIE). The division of the

organizational system is described in more detail in the following section.

The educational processes are described on the model of the organizational system. The standard education is based on a certain hierarchy within the educational institutions The Native educational system is divided in a parallel way. What follows is an overview of the educational institutions for Native Americans that come under the competence of the Office of Indian Education. The statistical data taken from the web site of the Office of Indian Education are also included.

3. Educational Institutions for Native Americans

Pre-Kindergarten – Grade 12

There are 185 schools for Native Americans. Of the 185 schools and dormitories, the BIA directly operates sixty-three of these programs. The majority of these education programs are operated by tribes through local school boards through grants or contracts with the BIA. All schools are empowered through the BIA's policy of local control and the federal government's policy of Native American self-determination. The schools are small, most of them enroll 250 or fewer students. 130 of the 185 schools are elementary schools only and forty-five of the schools have grades ranges of Kindergarten only to Kindergarten through Grade 6. Some schools offer a Family and Child Education (FACE) program. Most of the students continue their education at a public high school. There are only fourty-five schools providing a secondary education program in the school system (OIE).

Approximately 11,500 students reside in dormitory programs while they attend school away from home. 56 schools provide residential programs. There are fourteen peripheral dormitories where students live and attend nearby public schools. The peripheral dormitories provide "home-living" programs that offer activities to enhance student

learning. There are seven off-reservation boarding schools located in the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Oklahoma, California, and Oregon. Two of them provide elementary programs only, four of them provide secondary programs only and one school provides both elementary and secondary programs. These schools serve an inter-tribal student population. The graduation at a secondary school can be a starting point for university education. This model has proved useful with Native American education despite the difference in their education (OIE). The following text describes the system of university education.

Tribal Colleges and Universities

Since this paper focuses mainly on university education, this part about tribal colleges and universities is dealt with in more detail than primary and secondary educational institutions in the previous text. The information about the primary and secondary education is included for better understanding of the sequence of lower educational institutions and Native American colleges and universities. The information is also taken from The Office of Indian Education web site (OIE).

There are thirty-four federally recognized Tribal Colleges and Universities in the United States. The colleges, schools and dormitories are located on sixty-three reservations in twenty-three states across the United States serving approximately 60,000 students representing 238 different tribes. Located mainly in the Midwest and Southwest, Tribal Colleges and Universities service both full- and part-time students, eighty-five percent of whom live at or below the poverty level. The schools are located mostly on economically depressed, isolated Native American reservations. Thanks in part to grants from the American Indian College Fund, the tribal colleges are slowly renovating and modernizing

their campuses. They offer two-year associate degrees in over 200 disciplines with some providing a bachelor's and master's degree. They also offer 200 vocational certificate programs (OIE).

Tribal Colleges and Universities are both integral and essential to their communities. They are often the only postsecondary institutions within some of the USA's poorest rural areas. Tribal Colleges and Universities serve a variety of people, from young adults to senior citizens, Native Americans to non-Native Americans. They also provide crucial services and add hope to communities that suffer high rates of poverty and unemployment (OIE).

The majority of the schools are located in Arizona and New Mexico, with most of these schools located on the Navajo Reservation, but also including the Pueblos and Apache of New Mexico and the Pima, TohonoO'odham, Hopi and Apache of Arizona. The area with the second greatest number of schools encompasses the states of North Dakota and South Dakota on the reservations of Sioux, Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara and Ojibwe. The area with the third greatest number of schools is located in the northwest region of the USA. The remaining schools are scattered on reservations throughout the USA. Mostly two-year institutions, tribal colleges provide the knowledge and skills which students need to transfer to four-year colleges and universities and to become successfully employed (OIE).

Tribal colleges and universities also serve as community centers, libraries and tribal archive career centers, economic development centers, public meeting places, child-care centers and caretakers of tribal languages and cultures. Tribal college faculty and administrators serve as mentors and community role models. They are different from mainstream community colleges. The curricula are designed from a Native American

perspective. The colleges offer courses in tribal languages that might otherwise disappear, as well as other traditional subjects. Not only the tribal languages play an important role but also the timing of teaching some subjects. "For example, Bay Mills Community College offers a traditional tribal literature class—only in the winter term because the stories are supposed to be told when snow is on the ground" (OIE). Many of the colleges offer programs for Native American elementary and secondary school teachers, with teacher preparation programs of their own or collaborative programs with a state college or university (OIE).

In addition to their uniquely designed education of Native American students, Tribal Colleges play a vital role in the communities they serve. They offer adult basic education, remedial, or high school equivalency programs. American Indian Graduate Center has awarded more than 9000 fellowships to qualified Native American and Alaska Native students to pursue graduate degrees in all fields. The number of students applying is increasing. It provides additional educational opportunities to encourage the students to work with Native American communities, tribal leaders and organizations.

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) is another Native American organization. It was founded in 1972 by the presidents of the nation's first six Tribal Colleges, as an informal collaboration among member colleges. Today, AIHEC has grown to represent 34 colleges in the United States and one Canadian institution. AIHEC's mission is to support the work of these colleges and the national movement for tribal self-determination. Its objectives are to maintain the standards of quality in Native American education, support the development of new tribally controlled colleges and encourage greater participation by Native Americans in the development of higher education policy (AIHEC).

Native American students can be awarded fellowships to study in graduate and professional programs at institutions of higher education. The fellowships can last up to four academic years and lead toward a post baccalaureate degree in medicine, clinical psychology, psychology, law, education, or a related field; or to an undergraduate or graduate degree in engineering, business administration, natural resources, or a related field. Grants for training of teachers of Native American children shall be given preferably to Native American applicants. Grants can also be given to tribal educational organizations and institutions to support programs for improving employment and educational opportunities for adult Native Americans, programs that offer opportunities for non-literate adults and for adults who want to qualify for a secondary school diploma. The Adult Education program is designed to improve educational opportunities for Native American adults who lack the level of literacy skills for productive employment. The Adult Education program also expands and improves existing programs for delivering adult education services, including delivery of these services to educationally disadvantaged Native American adults (AIGC).

III. Navajo Education

1. Cultural Context

The Navajo Nation which has a population of approximately 250,000 and the Navajo reservation (64.750 square kms) are the largest in the United States. The Navajo reservation is in the Great Basin Desert region on the Colorado Plateau. It occupies most of the northeastern portion of Arizona and it extends into northwest New Mexico and a southern strip of Utah. The name, Navajo, comes from the Tewa people of the pueblos and means people of the cultivated field. Diné, as they call themselves, entered the Monument Valley region about 500 years ago. The Navajos were fierce warriors who fought both the Spanish and the immigrants from the United States who came into their territory. Navajo life became difficult after their contacts with Anglo-American people. They wanted the Navajos to stop raising sheep because of soil erosion. With the loss of their sheep, many Navajos left the government reservation to seek wage labor (Rieupeyrout). The Navajos today try to create a promising future for themselves. They want to preserve their way of life and language through their education systems and government, which was first formally organized in 1923. Schools within the Navajo Nation teach bilingually, including the written equivalent of the Navajo language (Locke).

For better understanding of Navajo culture, it is necessary to have at least a general overview of their mythology. Navajos, as one of the native tribes of the USA, see the origin and the signification of things that surround them in natural relations. The precise border between mythology and the real history, between religion and philosophy, between sacred ceremonies and everyday work cannot be set. These aspects penetrate into one another. It also has to be taken into consideration in the education of Native Americans.

Myths and legends played and still play a very important role in the life of native people of the Southwest. Native Americans believe that myths are a reflection of their culture and that they represent a system of values in their past and present lives. Making paintings in the sand, which the Navajos are famous for, has no ritual meaning if it is not accompanied by recitation of a relevant myth. Myths about the creation of the world are most sacred and most strictly restricted. Children are told only a general story and the true one is revealed only to the mature ones. The Navajos oppose recording the stories. The Navajos believe that myths have a supernatural power: by telling them they can cure ill people and unite them with nature (Gold).

According to the traditional Navajo religion there are several worlds. "They believe that the universe goes through the cycle of origin and end. At the end of each world, a new world is formed from the ruins of the old one. Each world was created as an unsullied and pure one but ended by deterioration due to discord or wars among the Navajo ancestors" (Gold 54, my translation). This world is the fifth one. The first world was created by the Holy People. After setting the mountains down where they should be, Holy People put the sun and the moon into the sky and carefully placed the stars there as well. The Holy People continued to make the necessities of life, like clouds, trees and rain. Worlds are mounted like plates, which float one above the other, and people are born to this world by climbing from one world to another. The previous worlds were either too small or destroyed by floods or they were destroyed by vicious magic. People are usually forced to leave for another world (Gold).

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a clear division between religion and everyday life of Navajos does not exist. As an example of the penetration, several parts of the cultural heritage of the Navajos are commented on. The following part

deals with the different kinds of Navajo cultural expression. It describes the arts and crafts developed for centuries. The first of these crafts is pottery.

The importance of pottery is both in its function and in its cultural value. According to myths, pottery-making was one of the crafts given by the Holy People even before the Diné emerged into the present world. Its special significance is preserved in ceremonial texts and songs. The principles of pottery-making have been handed down from one generation of potters to another for several centuries. The Navajos often attribute greater significance to the thoughts and processes involved in making an object than they do to the object itself. Although the shapes and designs of pottery depend on the use of the product, they also relate to group identity. Much of the pottery made today, still maintains the tradition of an unpainted product, often decorated only with a clay band around the neck. Pottery products serve as jars, bowls, dippers, and canteens for the storage and preparation of food. The second use for pottery by the Navajos was in a ceremonial context. A number of Navajo ceremonies require the use of Navajo-made pottery for certain ritual functions (Hartman).

Another traditional craft is the silversmithing. The Navajos make jewelry of silver and they put smaller or bigger pieces of turquoise in it. “It is not only a fantasy which is reflected in the jewels. It is an Indian subconsciousness hidden in the symbols” (Holzbachová 33, my translation). In the past only Navajo men were silversmiths but in recent times a few women have begun to participate in that art (Locke).

Paintings in the sand are perhaps the most famous art produced by the Navajos. Paintings were made for ritual purposes and they showed not only mythical beings but they described natural phenomena, for example lightning, sunbeams, mountains, animals, plants and rainbow. The paintings in the sand are seen as a type of a sacred altar. This altar always

faces the east. They even used to be several tens of centimeters long. “This is the sacred arena where Holy People enter and there they meet other participants of the ceremony” (Gold 179, my translation). Many ceremonies are connected with curing because the Navajos believe that the cause of illness is the disharmony in the world. The illness interrupts the harmony between a person and his or her surroundings. During the gathering of sacred plants and their consequent sprinkling, the medicine man prays and defines the exact cause of the patient’s illness. The medicine man also sets the song, which is called the “chant” or the “way” to the success of the curing. The Navajos know the texts of these chants by hard. The songs contain strange sounds and sacred words. Therefore it is forbidden to record them. There can be as many as one thousand patterns of different colors at one painting. The painting in the sand is sprinkled by the sacred pollen or the maize flour so that the curing power will be secured. During the curing process the cured person is seated on the sandpainting and the sand is sprinkled over his or her body (Locke).

Another craft which the Navajos are famous for is weaving. For a long time, it was forbidden to weave the paintings shown in the sand. It was because they sometimes showed the gods. While the Pueblo and Mexican men are excellent weavers, Navajo men seldom weave. Formerly almost all Navajo girls were taught to weave. Navajo women weavers are among the best in the world. It is said that there are several hundreds of sacred patterns of sandpaintings which are woven and each of them is accompanied by its song. The cloths sold commercially are made with intentional mistakes not to make the gods insulted (Locke).

The strong orientation of the Navajos towards religion and reliance on natural relations can be observed in their continuing orientation towards natural medicine. Unlike the medicine practiced by the majority society, Navajos’ system of curing takes for granted

that you cannot treat a person's "body" without treating their "mind", and vice versa. "In this respect the Navajos are many generations ahead of white Americans, who are only now beginning to realize that it is the patient, not the disease, which must be treated" (Kluckhohn 228). Native Americans have had enormous knowledge of making use of natural sources. Throughout the world, people use many different substances to create special psychological states. Many such substances are used in various magical contexts. The Navajos have so called Peyote cult. Using of these substances cannot be regarded as a sort of drug addiction. Navajos used these substances only for the purpose of bringing people into special conditions during their religious ceremonies (Aberle).

It has been shown on several examples that the Navajo culture deserves not only comparison with other native cultures and with the culture of the majority society but there is also, without any doubt, moral duty to defend this culture, to preserve it and, in the first place, pass it on to future generations. This is closely connected to the issue of the education of Native Americans and the Navajos.

2. History of Navajo Education

Rather than presenting some general foundations based on historical and contemporary needs of education, it is better to describe a few specific facts on the example of one Native American school. Rough Rock Community School on the Navajo Nation territory in Arizona proves the assumptions and hypothesis about Native American educational problems dealt with in the preceding chapter. This Navajo Community School, as it is illustrated in the following text, was established in order to clearly differentiate the Navajo education from the education at standard schools of the majority population (Honoring Nations).

From the sources of The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, it is clear that Navajos in Rough Rock started to strongly apprehend the necessity to distinguish the education of their children from the mainstream educational system as early as in the 1960s. The reasons for this division were: little support of the Navajo culture, the dying out of the relations between the Navajo nation and its history, the decreasing knowledge of the native language, the excessive assimilation of the Navajos into the majority group, the fading out of the Navajo traditions and habits, and the generally deficient possibilities of the Navajos to interfere in and to influence the school system. The Navajos explained these negative aspects by the large proportion of the Anglo-American educational system which did not maintain and cultivate native traditions and cultures but rather taught Navajo students about these as historical facts (Honoring Nations).

In spite of the great effort of the Navajos, they were not given the chance to apply their view of education until 1966. In this year, the Rough Rock Community School was for the first time run by the Navajo Community. Although the time since the establishing the first Native American boarding school by Captain Pratt in the nineteenth century presents more than eighty years, Native Americans, specifically the Navajos, managed to preserve their culture in a state that made it possible to transfer it into an educational system. The Navajo management of the school was soon able to optimally connect its needs with the needs and relations of the educational system in the USA. Through their efforts, the high school soon offered a unique pedagogy, one that combined western educational models with Navajo traditions (Honoring Nations).

However, until 1984 the instruction at this school as in other Native American schools proceeded only in English. The management of the Rough Rock Community School started to find the need of even more intensive support of the Navajo culture. For

that reason, the Navajo Studies Department was created. It teaches the culture, traditions and history of the Navajos in their native language. Thanks to this change the students have begun to understand the context of the Navajo culture from a different perspective because using the original and thus the most precise possible terms entailed an easier comprehension of the curriculum. "Through the Department's efforts, the School now offers twenty-three Navajo Studies courses, teaching topics as diverse as conversational Navajo, Navajo philosophy, and contemporary issues facing the Navajo Nation" (Honoring Nations). The Department is also developing a comprehensive Navajo Studies curriculum to be used by other reservation schools. It is alarming that eighty percent of Navajo children who come to the Head Start programs are not able to speak Navajo. The school's task is then to substitute the original role of the family in teaching children their mother tongue. The Rough Rock Community School can be rightfully ascribed one of the greatest merits in saving the native culture because owing to this school the native culture has not remained only a history. The immense potential can be seen at the same time in the opportunity to not merely keep alive but to develop the existing native culture.

In 1984 the Navajos pressed that the instruction proceeded in the Navajo language at all levels, this means that Navajo is used at schools from kindergarten to grade 12. The children thus do not perceive the original language as something which they are forced to study but as a common communicational instrument used in the Navajo community. "The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (1999) reports that there are 148,530 speakers of Navajo in a Nation of 250,000 to 275,000 people (statistics on the population of the Nation vary by source)" (Honoring Nations).

3. Navajo School System

The Navajos themselves made a relatively extensive study in the 1990s that elicited their opinion of the extent and the manner of planning, organizing, management, control and evaluation of the whole educational system. The principal questions which were posed are introduced in the following text. The study also reveals that there is not by far a homogeneous opinion of the educational requirements. These, often radical, differences create problems within the community itself. It must be admitted that each of the responses is truthful in a way. The first question's task was to define the content of educational needs as they were perceived by the Navajos. The question ran: "What aspects of Navajo culture should be included in instruction?" (Batchelder).

The Navajos themselves felt this question as a very sensitive and debatable one. They put emphasis on removing religious ceremonies from the curriculum. The Navajos consider most of the rituals and ceremonies taboo. That is why the Navajos tried to push through that the rituals were passed on within the family and they were not conveyed and taught in public. Another rather strong representation of the answer to this question can be specified as a denial of the great significance which was attributed to native culture at Navajo schools. Mainly younger respondents in their late teens and early twenties who live in larger towns or outside the reservation felt that there should be more space at the native schools given to the preparation of students for getting to colleges or preparation for their future jobs. The students should contribute to an economical growth and progress which would bring the prosperity to the whole Navajo Nation. There were also radical opinions of some of the respondents which claimed that schools were not able to teach the native culture let alone keep it. These respondents wanted the culture to be handed over as it had been in progress before. This belief was caused by their own negative experience with

schools which were not educational institutions but rather something which was grinding culture and language into students' heads in a totally preserved state. This group did not see the educational system as sufficiently motivating the students. This natural perception has been reported as fundamental. There was an equally large number of participants who believed that the study of Navajo culture has some place in schools. People living in smaller communities on the reservation and those who were not directly connected to major roads thought that "traditional stories (if taught within the proper season of the year), Navajo history, and the clan system could be included in the school curriculum" (Batchelder). These participants believed that students would learn how to properly communicate with elderly people and so preserve the traditions. For another group of respondents, it was important to teach at least the clan system at school and some basic facts from Navajo history (Batchelder).

The second question asks about the responsibility and authority in the educational system. The question was: "Who should be responsible for teaching Navajo language and culture?" (Batchelder). There was a wide range of responses. People from smaller communities believed that the best instructors for both language and culture instruction would be the Navajo elders who are community members. They asserted that people who teach about the Navajo history and traditions on the reservation should also teach children at school. Another group emphasized that the teachers of Navajo language and culture should be certified teachers and it did not matter whether they were Navajos or not. The last group of participants stated that teaching Navajo culture and language at schools would only blot out the native culture and that there should be other people responsible for passing the knowledge of the Navajos than the school teachers (Batchelder).

The third question concentrated on the fluency of the spoken Navajo. "How fluent in Navajo language should students become?" (Batchelder). The answers to this question were again divided into several groups. This time the answers depended mostly on the place where the respondents lived. Those who believed that fluency in Navajo should be the goal of a language instructional program were from smaller and more isolated communities. They implied that Navajo was important for children in everyday communication. Others felt that Navajo should be taught only in order to communicate in basic situations and to preserve at least some of it. It was essential to speak Navajo for children whose grandparents did not speak English at all. Participants living outside the reservation declared that it would be enough for students to be able to communicate only in basic Navajo, to be able to read some names of places, people or animals. The last group suggested that learning Navajo was not as important for Navajo children as learning the Anglo-American way of life which could help them later in their professional lives (Batchelder).

The last question of the study wanted to find out how much time of the curriculum should be spent on teaching the Navajo culture and language. "To what extent should the school day be devoted to Navajo?" (Batchelder). On one side there were those who wished all school subjects be taught in Navajo, on the other side were obviously those who would be contented only with an elementary level of Navajo. These people also suggested that Navajo would become a voluntary subject at high schools (Batchelder).

This questionnaire, although it consisted only of four questions, developed a heated discussion. The responses have affected the contemporary Navajo school system. The school system is trying to find a compromise which would be able to satisfy as many

differences of opinion as possible. The problems of the school Navajo system are further dealt with in the following text.

There is a large number of native children dropping out of schools. It cannot be asserted that the mistake is always on the side of the school system. Often it is rather the inclinations of native people to alcohol addiction or other addictions in underage, their inability to conform to an order which they do not consider as natural and last but not least their distaste of family planning. It is not an exception that native girls leave schools at the age when their Anglo-American peers are beginning to understand what the partnership is like. These girls often have to leave school at the age of twelve or thirteen. The partnership illustrates the reasons for Navajo students leaving schools prematurely.

There were several factors mentioned by the school dropouts. It was a problematic relationship between a student and a teacher, the content of the instruction, the insufficient support of parents, reading problems, the financial need to work instead of going to school, and also a feeling that children were unwanted at schools for both native and non-native children. The students complained of a number of things. It was for example the lack of the teacher's help. Many children who had reading difficulties and required extra help from their teachers complained of overcrowded classrooms where teachers had little time to help individual students in need. Another factor which contributed to high drop-out rate was the way in which Anglo-American students perceived the Navajos. "Many Anglos expressed their perceptions of Indians as lazy, unmotivated, undependable workers who had drinking problems and who were irresponsible and uncaring parents" (Dehyle). This opinion reflected on the Navajo children who were also perceived as dumb and having many more learning difficulties than their Anglo-American classmates because they were relaxed, quiet and did not participate in the lessons (Dehyle).

Approximately two thirds of Navajo school leavers said that academic requirements also presented a problem for them. They mentioned that the tasks done at school were difficult for them, the subjects were uninteresting and they were often bored. The reading problems can be attributed to the fact that Navajo children did not read at home because they simply had no time for reading. Navajo children complained of the way they were treated by their teachers: "The teachers didn't expect anything of you because you were an Indian. They put you in general education, basic classes, and vocation. They didn't encourage college bound classes" (Dehyle). It can be clearly seen that the teachers underestimated Navajo children. They were seen as incapable of competing for professional jobs and unable to acquire higher education. There were prejudices that these children were capable of gaining only semi-skilled jobs. The reality of limited job opportunities which the children faced on the reservation did not contribute to finishing their high school grades either.

Half of the Navajo school leavers said that lack of parent encouragement was a factor for them. "Although a majority of parents were described as wanting their children to attend school, they were at the same time described as not giving enough encouragement" (Dehyle). Parents often wanted their children to help them at home, with herding or taking care of their younger brothers or sisters. The last factor for leaving school was pregnancy. A young woman in the school age who became pregnant was rarely encouraged to return later to school (Dehyle).

IV. Conclusion

There are still many obstacles which prevent the revival and the advancement of the native culture in spite of the immense endeavor of many Native Americans. It must be acknowledged that at the time when the Europeans came to the American continent and started to forcibly colonize it, there was a substantial population of the native nations living there. They functioned according to their cultural and social bonds which were developing in a different way from Europe. The native culture cannot be therefore considered as something inferior. The native culture is simply different. Nevertheless it would be inappropriate to excuse all the mistakes of Native Americans by the forced invasion and colonization of the American continent. At the time when Native Americans are given the opportunity to decide almost autonomously in the questions of their self-determination, they take few advantages of these possibilities. The reasons put forth by Native Americans as well as the official governmental sources are more than questionable. The Native Americans should first of all become conscious of their own amount of responsibility for the current state. The basis, of course, must be consist in cooperation.

The introduction to the whole paper defined that it would deal with different perspectives of Native American education, its history, structure and specific educational programs. The content itself showed the system of organization and structure of Native American education on the concrete example of Navajo community which is the largest Native American community in the USA. For a meaningful future it is important to specify not only the authority but also the responsibility of individual components of the educational system as such.

Works Cited

Aberle, D. F. *The Peyote Religion Among The Navajo*. New York: Wenner-Bren Foundation. 1966.

American Indian Graduate Center (AIGC). 21 June 2004 <www.aigc.com>.

American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). 21 June 2004 <www.aihec.com>.

Batchelder, Ann. "Teaching Diné Language and Culture in Navajo Schools: Voices from the Community". *Learn in Beauty: Indigenous Education for a New Century*. Chapter 1 (1-8). Northern Arizona University, 2000. 21 June 2004 <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/LIB/LIB1.html>.

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). 21 June 2004 <www.doi.gov/bureau-indian-affairs.html>.

Dehyle, Donna. "Constructing Failure and Maintaining Cultural Identity: Navajo and Ute School Leavers". *Journal of American Indian Education*. Vol. 31 N. 2, 1992. 21 June 2004 <http://jaie.asu.edu/v31/V31S2con.html>.

Gold, P. *Posvátná tajemství Navahů a Tibeťanů*. Praha. Pragma. 2000.

Hartman, R. P. *Navajo Pottery – Traditions And Innovations*. Flagstaff: Northland Publishing. 1987.

Holzbachová, M. *Amerika země Indiánů*. Praha. Mladá Fronta 1973.

Honoring Nations 1999 >> Navajo Studies Department. 21 June 2004 <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/hpaied/hn/hn_1999_studies.htm>.

Hyde, Kathye. *The Education of Native Americans,* 1997. 21 June 2004

<http://members.aol.com/tawodi/carlisle/intro.html>.

Kluckhohn, C. and D. Leighton. *The Navajo.* Harvard: Harvard University Press. 1947.

Locke, R. F. *The Book of the Navajo.* Los Angeles: Mankind Publishing Company. 1989.

Navajo Nation Department of Head Start (NNDOHS) . 21 June 2004
<www.nnheadstart.org>.

Office of Indian Education (OIE). 21 June 2004
<www.oiep.bia.edu>.

Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance(ONNSFA). 21 June 2004
<www.onnsfa.org>.

Pratt, Richard. "Kill the Indian, Save the Man". *Official Report of the Ninteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (1892), 46-59. Reprinted in Richard H. Pratt, "The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites," *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the "Friends of the Indian" 1880-190*0 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260-271. 21 June 2004
<http://socrates.bmcc.cuny.edu/bfriedheim/pratt.htm>.

Ration, Tom. "The Life Story". *South Corner of Time, 1977.* 21 June 2004
<http://dizzy.library.arizona.edu/southcorner>.

Rieupeyrout, Jean-Louis. *Dějiny Navahů: Indiánská sága 1540 – 1990.* Trans. Helena Beguivinová. Praha: Argo, 2000.

White Man's Way. Videorecording. Prod. Nebraska Committee For The Humanities And Nebraska For Public Television. 1987. 30 mins.