

American Indian Oral History Collection
Transcript Record

Tribe:

Clan:

Tape Number: 500 side 2 March 16, 1970

Narrator or Event: Edward Marinsek - South Area Superintendent
Albuquerque Public Schools

Second Narrator:

Interviewer: Bertrude Adams

Locale:

Subjects: ~~Personal Childhood Experience w/ Indians in Gallup~~

Education

~~Indian Education in the 1930s~~

Issues in
Indian

~~Navajo Realization of Importance of Education~~

~~Personal Reflections on Current Indian Problems~~

Education

~~Isolation of Indian Students in integrated schools~~

as student, teacher

~~limited school participation~~

+ school administrator

Comments:

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AMERICAN INDIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

University of New Mexico

Tape Number:

#500

Tribe:

Informant: Mr. Edward Marusek, South Area Supt. A.P.S.

Informant's home address: 429 General Somervell NE
Albuquerque, NM

Band or Clan:

Date and location of interview: ^{3/14/70} South Area Supt's Office - A.P.S.

Field Worker: Trudy Adams.

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Contents: Indian Education.

Discussion of Mr. Marusek's experiences with Indians and Indian students (he refers to Navajos and Pueblos - primarily Navajos) as a student himself, teacher, and school administrator.

Evaluation of Interview:

valuable

Future Prospects:

Mr. Marinsek's childhood experience with Indians in Gallup.

Indian education in the 1930's.

Navajo realization on the importance of education.

Mr. Marinsek reflects on the cultural problems confronting the Indians. (Based on his experience as a teacher)

The isolation of Indian students in integrated schools.

Limited school participation. (Lack of identification)

Needed educational programs in aiding acculturation.

Language barrier.

Edward Marinsek
South Area Superintendent - Albuquerque Public Schools
Interviewer - Gertrude Adams
March 16, 1970
Tape #500 side 2

- Q. Let's first discuss some of your experiences when you were growing up in Gallup. I believe when you were attending school there that some of the Indian children were in your classes. And we would be interested in knowing your impressions from that period.
- A. Basically Gallup lies in the heart of the Navajo country and the most part just a hand full of the students who were in the Gallup Public School were of Indian background at that time. A few Zuni and a few Navajo, for the most part the education of the Navajo was carried on the reservation or in boarding schools by the government. The mass movement to the public schools had not started until much later..... Generally speaking the students found in the public school background, came from family that lived along the road accultration some distance, actually they were very few, just a handful of those kind of families who might have moved in-to town and gone to the public school. There actually was no government program, such as the Border Town Program to bring students in from the reservation.
- Q. In other words, their parents probably came in for jobs and brought them in?
- A. And most of these jobs that are held by Indians at that time were with the Interior Department, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and governmental jobs of that kind.
- Q. Then these were definitely higher education level as far as their parents were concerned?
- A. Right.
- Q. And the students themselves would be expected to be more acculturated than the ones that you would say would be coming in today from the border towns. Their parents are still living on the reservation, the shepherds....
- A. Distinctly different, right.....

- Q. Now do these children blend in well with the group, or was there a feeling of segregation. We are all hearing about segregation today. How was it?
- A. Generally speaking coming from a community like Gallup, where you had an immigrant community virtually, with every kind of European, particularly European groups in the city, the problem of cultural difference was not pronounced and it was acceptable. Although, let me say again, there was a deep seeded feeling about Navajos and Indians in Gallup, by virtue of the fact, that the community was surrounded basically by the reservation. And most people's opinions of the Indians was one of basically one of Indians coming into town at that time, prior to the time that they were allowed to legally, to buy liquor. And coming into town and buying wine from the numerous bootleggers that lived, particularly on the north side of town and seeing them generally speaking in an intoxicated state. So you can imagine the kind of prejudices that were built up over a period of time about the Navajo people.
- Q. How did they live long in Gallup, you must have visited the reservation a great deal. And I am wondering if you can recall experiences talking with parents and their attitudes toward their children attending public school? Or if they seemed to prefer having their children go to the BIA Reservation School?
- A. Actually during the time that I grew up in Gallup the idea that Navajos or other Indians would be gathered at a particular point in an urban community and educated in a public school wasn't even an idea that people talked about. Most of the education took place on the reservation and in the BIA schools and much of the education was handled in also boarding schools run by various religious denominations. For instance, we played basketball against teams that were comprised of Indians that went to these boarding schools. Holbrook Mission, St. Michaels, Tohatchi, the various places like that. And these were schools run by the various religious denominations. The attitude at least in the 30's and probably up until World War I, was that the traditional Navajo had very little, use for formal education as we know it. There was no great value placed on it by parents or by the tribal leaders. And of course all of you have read stories about the fact that the BIA school people actually had to go on the reservation and virtually catch the kids in order to bring them in. Then you had many cases in which they ran away from the schools, the boarding schools. And they made it back to their hogans and had to be picked up again, this was kind of a constant thing that happened.
- Q. More recently I believe you went out to the reservation and was talking with parents. Several of parents had children in your school at Washington. Did you find that their attitudes had changed significantly?

- A. There had been a real change I think on the part of the average Navajo parent, on the reservation. There are two reasons for that. First of all the tribal leadership has taken a very strong stand in terms of the importance for formal education for all Navajo. And this has been discussed at various Chapter houses over the reservation and there is a real earnest and sincere feeling that education is extremely important for kids. So you have that type of tribal leadership coming into play, kind of form an opinion. Secondly, from the time that I knew the Navajo tribe, in the early 30's and to present time there has been a remarkable population explosion among the Navajos. The economic structure makes it practically impossible for these people to continue in the tradition economy and be able to seek out a living so people by simple common sense know that a job is going to be found off the reservation. This requires for the most part, some kind of an education, at least some knowledge of the English language, at minimal level. So that there is now, with the reduced herd of sheep and other kinds of problems that simply I think not a need for a large family, at home, in fact there is not a need for that kind of family, with the breakdown of the traditional economic structure, but actually the real burden placed on the home, on reservation for say, a family who has 5, 6, 7, or 8, who live on a small flock of sheep and whatever weaving and other kind of income that could sustain a family. There is a real economic advantage to the kids to be boarded out and at some school and cared for in terms of their material needs as well as their educational needs. So this certainly is an important factor. It should be given full consideration.
- Q. Now Mr. Marinsek, I believe you taught some of these children, that you had some them in the classroom? Can you tell us some of your experiences with the Navajos or Pueblo Indians in your classroom situation?
- A. Generally speaking most Navajos, in terms of whole pattern of acculturation, in terms with their acquisition with the English language and others way, by the ways by which we measure them, fall to some degree on the lower end of the continuum when you continue to judge them to place them on the same continuum with the pueblo Indian students or Spanish speaking students. And so my experiences has been upon bringing them together in schools so that you will have many learning difficulties imposed on them because of the factors of cultural difference, practically every Navajo student was reared pretty much in the early years of personality formation in the traditional Navajo culture. There is indeed a real cultural difference, difference of development from the very beginning. And of course, the language in almost every case was the Navajo and the acquisition of the English language was usually rather meager and it presented a real problem in terms of the child's ability to compete well academically in school.

And of course other concomitant problems too. There is a problem of isolation, being away from a family, away from kin folk, away from the known indigenous culture to a virtually foreign country. So there is a whole feeling of isolation in that develops. And generally speaking, if students manage to stay in the Border Town Programs a couple of 2 or 3, 4 years and he begins to adjust to the urban public school situation and seen happy with it. Our friends with children just off the reservation and directly to the border program was the one with much unhappiness on the part of the student. Complete isolation from activities in school and unhappiness at the dormitories also. A group of girls and boys who came to us from Ramah a year before last and when that school was closed and they actually had the practical problem of keeping those kids in town. Keeping them from running away and going back home. So there are many difficulties in this whole process.

- Q. Would you say that the pueblo Indian students were able to adjust better than the Navajo Indian students, possibly because of their situation in the community where they lived more intimately with the other members of the community as opposed to the Navajo who is spread out over a vast area of the reservation. Is this significant?
- A. It really is significant in that in the pueblos you can establish a school even at the pueblo, you gather all the kids together and there is a community. And there is the feeling of identification and you have an educational process there. It doesn't have as many hurdles to overcome, but certainly there are many. And then you also have the situation of having a number of them pueblos close to Santa Fe and Albuquerque where you have an urban influence. And you find that there is high degree of sophistication on the part of many of the families. Even though they live on the reservation, quite often, more often than not, both parents are working in town and you find an improved economic situation and also kind of a sophistication that comes from being in touch and living next to the middle-class Anglo culture.
- Q. While you were principal and also recalling your experiences as a teacher in the classroom, what was the attitude of the Indian student to the situation of being in the public schools and also toward their peers in the school?
- A. First of all I would never say that I saw very many Indian students, particularly the Navajo students who were absolutely at home among the students in the school. That is to say, very few students found a point of friendship and strong friendship in identification with the group outside their very own. Basically the border town students. It is very necessary that they had this feeling of togetherness, a kind of necessary building of a shell around themselves, and it is very difficult to get relationships outside of this circle.

Of course the longer the students stayed in the program here the most of the other outside contacts and friendships were developed. And actually if we had a child in the program over a number of years by the time that they managed to make it up to the high school, that they were able to sustain themselves throughout the program then there was the reverse feeling, quite often of not being able to go back on the reservation and adjust satisfactorily there. We had a number of students who went to schools, did not want to go back during the summer time. And you would find these people kind of in a limbo-status between the two cultures, where they were no longer truly comfortable in their own culture and yet they did not have all of the values system incorporated in this sophistication to really handle their ability to live in ours.

- Q. Were the students generally able to establish a rapport with the teachers or did they stay as remote with the teachers and the staff at their schools? And stay as remote as they did from the other students?
- A. I think that generally speaking, teachers do not understand the Navajo children or the other Indian children. We made many attempts to provide background information to build up some understanding on the part of teachers. But for the most part, there is very little understanding of the value systems and the language, the culture and as a result there isn't the kind of communication that should take place, that you would hope to take place in the classroom. More often than not the Indian students work quietly, unobtrusive in the classroom, rarely will speak out in class even if a direct question was directed to an Indian student, and chances are that you might not even get a response in that kind of a context.
- Q. They were not discipline problems in other words?
- A. For the most part, no. They weren't discipline problems. There was some abrasion, let's say between some of the Navajo students and some of the Spanish-speaking students that would result in some blows being struck occasionally. Basically because the remarks were made about the Indian students and the Indian students would retaliate. And this wasn't something that happened frequently, but occasionally this would happen.
- Q. And this was my next question, the attitude of other students toward Indians? Is there more that can be said about that, you just touched on it briefly.
- A. I would say that they would pretty much leave the group alone. Occasionally a boy would go for sports and there was some identification with, but this was just a handful of students of an identification outside the Indian group content. And many of them, probably at Washington, there was a band director there and almost all of them were in the music program and this was some sort of pride among them. The, I think the point at which other students

appreciated the Navajo students at Washington was during our Spring Festival when the Boarder Town students had a part in the big public program that was presented. And the Navajo students themselves worked out some traditional dances for the public and there was some real sense of pride on their part when this happened and it was appreciated on the part of other kids. Or as something that culturally differed.

Q. Did any great number of Indian students participate in sports, boys in basketball or baseball, football? The girls in various inter-mural activities as cheerleading and this sort of thing?

A. Very little, a few boys out for basketball and track. We made some attempt to organize the Indian students with a faculty sponsor and had some success with this, we organized an Indian Club a couple of years ago, it was fairly successful. Incidentally, there were some very excellent faculty contacts. As you referred to earlier where..... we had a real special understanding on the part of several faculty members working with students. And they formed some real friendship with Indian kids, actually visited the kids on the reservation and more often than not, the students would turn to these two or three persons on the faculty for help and advisement that was necessary.

Q. Now I was wondering also if there should be a greater concentration of the students into fewer classroom and fewer schools being involved in the Border Town Program?

A. I personally feel there should be more concentration for two or three reasons. First of all, I think we can focus our efforts in fewer schools so that we can do the proper training of teachers and do something which I think is very important, which is, provide a special kind of language program for the students. Remember you are teaching Indians a second language. We cannot provide this program if we just have 4,5,6 students. I think it will be well to concentrate into fewer schools. Children in Border Towns and then along with that, bring along the, earmark some funds to do something in terms of programing, that would be.....

Q. And cultural enrichment. This could be brought about through Title I. Another question that I had in mind was whether you thought, or how you feel about the Border Town Program as it is involving students living at the Indian School and attending Public Schools versus the Indian Schools, at which students live and go to school on the campus. Do you feel that there are benefits to have the children come out and go to the public School?

A. I think that there really are, providing that the public schools have some real program and have some people who are specifically impressed with the responsibility of working with the kids. I

think over the past two or three years there has been some real focus of attention on the Border Town kids. Not merely enough to earmarking the money to do some specific kind of things, but at least give the attention and the awareness of the problem has been made. I really think that there is really no, probably no advantage to bringing them into some central urban point into a boarding school situation and simply creating a school on campus and not having the kind of mixing and exposure to the culture that is taught in the public school. I think that this is exceedingly important. There is a real problem, of course, we are all aware of right now at the Border Town dormitories in Albuquerque now, we simply need to, we need a program in which we can separate the Border Town kids from the regular Indian students here. Because that's been probably the singly biggest problem for the last two years.

- Q. They are living in the same dorms with each other and I believe the competition is quite strenuous between them.
- A. In fact a point of constant irritation concerns the kids of both groups are upset most of the time, so we definitely need some new dormitory facilities, where it can be done.
- Q. What is your feeling on the age at which children should be brought into a public school Border Town situation? Do you feel that it should begin in the elementary school or could it be deferred until junior high?
- A. Well I have always believed that in the case of the Navajo where there are really no communities on the reservations of any size, well you must gather kids up and bring them together at a central location at taking children that are relatively young. I would say from the 3rd grad or 4th grade on up, has its advantages..... Where we can create schools on reservations and get enough students together, then I believe education and the early years probably should begin on reservations. With certain special ingredients involved. For instance I think that instruction should begin in Navajo, in the Navajo language, and then later English should be taught as a second language. I think this is the single biggest hurdle that we have to overcome at this point. We don't have the bilingual Navajo teachers, we don't have outside of some experimental programs even the desire on the part of educators and probably on the part of many of the Navajo leaders to go into this kind of program. I think that essentially we must begin with the Navajo language and with the culture and background the kid has been reared in and then proceed from that point.
- Q. Are there any other comments that you can give us about your experiences with the Indian children?

A. For two years I was director of a College Orientation Program on campus at the University of New Mexico. This was in the late 50's in which we brought in graduates of the various public and parochial, and BIA schools, the high school graduates for a six week orientation to get them ready for college. And these were probably the most acculturated, sophisticated in terms of their knowledge of the middle-class Anglo culture. Kids coming from Navajo background, most of those kids at that time, even a handful of select students simply were not ready to handle the traditional college curriculum of life. Both summers that we directed this program, for instance we only had one student each summer who able to score high enough to pass the English Proficiency Exam. Most of the others, despite all of the years of instruction failed way down in the lower percentile. To just give you an example of what a difficult time even today to prepare professional people, you know from the tribe. They have got to be a general improvement in the economic situation, education situation, something that we are not going to solve in the schools basically. It is a much bigger problem than that. But I think the tribe itself is, has its basic rationale, the idea that students will learn the English language, will get the education that is necessary to hold jobs off the reservation and virtually in other words adopt the value system of the dominant culture and really end up non-Indian as a last resort. I think that maybe the time will come up very soon that he won't take a second look at that, like other groups have done. But at least that seems to be the attitude right now.

Q. Well thank you very much, I appreciate you talking with us.

END OF TAPE