

7-1-2016

# Indigenous Language Educator's Experiences: Addressing Issues on the New Mexico Indian Education Act of 2003 and Strengthening the New Mexico Indigenous Language Programs in Public Schools

Geneva Becenti

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This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

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NOTE: DUE TO CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND LOCAL INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE WAS USED IN THIS DISSERTATION; AUTHOR WILL PROVIDE PUBLICATION.

*Indigenous Language Educator's Experiences: Addressing Issues on the New Mexico Indian Education Act of 2003 and Strengthening the New Mexico Indigenous Language Programs in Public Schools*

**By**

**GENEVA BECENTI**

B.A. Southwest Studies, Fort Lewis College, 1998  
B.A. Sociology, Fort Lewis College, 1999  
M.A. Education Leadership Policy Studies,  
University of Washington, 2004

DISSERTATION

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**July 2016**

## DEDICATION

To all the Indigenous Language educators from elders, to teachers, to administrators to parents and youth.

I remember my late mother who told me: “be a caretaker of our language and one day it would feed you and your children.” *Ahéhee shímá* for providing me the gift of our language, *diné bizáád*. Now, I understand what you have trained me to do. *Dóó shízhei ahéhee* for teaching and providing me your unconditional love and support. Your thought, stories and methods are embedded throughout this dissertation endlessly.

## **Ahéhee**

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

At the forefront, I would like to acknowledge the Diné Holy Ones, who have put me on this path to learn, and understand our mother heritage language.

#### **Assistantships and Funding Agencies**

I would like to say many thanks to the following agencies and organizations for their support: American Indian Language Policies and Native American Teacher Training Center; Center for Education Policy; Native American Studies; College of Education; The Listening Project with Dr. Kersti Tyson; American Indian Pedagogy project with Dr. Vincent Werito; Digital Initiative Scholarly Communications; and Hillerman Fellowship. No words are enough to thank the New Mexico Higher Education Commission, Navajo Nation Scholarship Agency, American Indian Graduate Center, and Cobell Native American scholarship for all of their financial support.

#### **Dissertation Committee Chair and Members**

Many thanks for sharing your knowledge and guidance to my dissertation chair, advisor and former supervisor Dr. Gregory Cajete. Many thanks for their support and guidance to my dissertation committee members: *shi'zeedi* Dr. Vincent Werito, *shinali* Dr. Tiffany Lee and *shinaii* Dr. Lloyd Lee. Extended support of committee members was shared by *shisadii* Dr. Glenbah Martinez, *shichei* Dr. Larry Emerson, and Dr. Robert Yazzie. Also, thanks to Dr. Christine Sims for being my advisor early on. Your guidance led me through my course work.

#### **Mentors and UNM Graduate Resource Center**

I would like to acknowledge my mentors and Native nerd group: Dr. Tiffany Lee, Dr. Lloyd Lee, Dr. Leola Tsinnajinnie, and Dr. Natalie Martinez. My gratitude extends to the Graduate Resource Center, Dr. Lawrence Roybal and your team.

#### **Family and Friends in Many Places**

Thanks to my family from Coyote Canyon to Chilchiltah. Your unconditional love and support has put me through every challenge and allowed me to gain positive thoughts. Also, thanks to my friends from local New Mexico, to Colorado, Washington, Oklahoma, Arizona, District of Columbia, Canada and New Zealand. You know who you are, your abundant support and love has been a part of my work, as well.

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation is a qualitative case study focused on Native American language and culture teachers' views on the New Mexico Indian Education Act of 2003 (NMIEA). The study was a two-part research project with data being collected through: 1.) surveys and 2.) interviews. In the first phase of the study, approximately 49 surveys provided an overall evaluation from parents, community members, teachers and administrators on the NMIEA. The survey explored whether or not the act is serving its purpose. Some of the respondents provided comments as well as recommendations. In the second-part of the study, 18 participants were interviewed. The teachers described their challenges and provided recommendations to the language policies, including curriculum development. The structure of the study is based on data analysis of the following themes: support, alignment and development. There are multiple layers to this case study. The teachers provided recommendations related to how curriculum and policies should be shaped and what professional development means to them.