

Other Voices—

Cultural Heritage Stressed in School

Educators on the Navajo reservation have come to recognize that Navajo culture plays an important part in the education of the Navajo child. At the same time, the teachers themselves have realized that a bi-cultural background is not only desirable but a necessity in the education of Navajo children. More emphasis is being placed on language and culture all the time. A Navajo reservation school—the Rough Rock Demonstration School—has as the foundation of its program the accent of Navajo culture and language. Said Dr. Robert A. Roessel Jr., director of the school: "We want to instill in our youngsters a sense of pride in being Indian. We want to show them that they can be Indian and American at the same time, that they can take the best from each way of life and combine it into something viable."

The various institutes, workshops and orientations held in the area this summer have all stressed Navajo culture and language. In most of these workshops, Anglos are used as instructors in the Navajo language. There is a growing body of non-Navajos who are becoming proficient in the Navajo language, which makes not only better teachers out of them but gives them a true insight into Navajo culture.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is setting a trend in this field. A Navajo social studies unit is being worked up at the present time by the University of New Mexico under contract with the Navajo Area of the BIA. When completed, this unit will be incorporated in both Bureau and public schools on the reservation. This unit will stress the history, customs and legends of the Navajo people—a rich history filled with the exploits of such leaders as Barboncito, Manuelito and Black Horse.

These teaching trends are of the utmost importance. Bi-culturally, oriented teachers are of the utmost importance. This trend will result in well-adjusted students who are proud of their ancestry and history and immediate cultural background. The end result will be a higher rate of scholastic accomplishment on the part of Navajo students.

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