

# Experiencing Literacy In and Out of School:

## Case Studies of Two American Indian Youths

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*This case-study research focused on the role of multiple literacies in the lives of Lakota and Dakota (Sioux) young adolescents who lived and attended school in a predominately White, rural community in the upper Midwest. In addition to examining the participants' uses of reading and writing, this study explored the ways in which the participants constructed meaning through music, dance, and art. Also studied was the influence of multiple cultures – American Indian culture, school culture, and mainstream popular culture – on the adolescents' transactions with literacy. Data were collected both in and out of school over a period of 7 months. Primary collection techniques included participant observation and fieldnotes; interviews with the participants and their parents, peers, teachers, and administrators; and examination of artifacts. The findings of this study indicate that literacy supported important personal and social needs in the lives of the adolescents. Specifically, through literacy, they explored and expressed their sense of identity and examined critical issues related to prejudice, racism, and discrimination.*

*Numerous questions remain as to the different ways persons experience literacy and illiteracy. How often is literacy defined in relation to illiteracy? How often does it actually signify academic literacy? How do diverse individuals become literate in an inequitable world? – Maxine Greene (1991, p. 129)*

**P**UBLIC PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE LITERACY of American Indian youth are often based on reports of low standardized test scores and high dropout rates. It has been reported, for example, that American Indian students score an average of 57 points lower than White American students on the verbal section of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (see Reyhner, 1992), and that only 66% of American Indian students graduate from high school nationwide (US Department of Commerce, 1992). Figures such as these can be misleading. They offer little understanding of the actual literacy experiences of American Indian students. In fact, they raise a number of questions, such as, in what other ways might Indian students be achieving and using literacy that these figures do not reflect? And, how do such figures shape our views about what constitutes literacy and who possesses it? As Goodman and Wilde (1992) noted in a study of Tohono O'odham children's writing development:

Communities of parallel culture groups that are different from the mainstream and that represent ethnic and economic diversity often find that their children are viewed and defined by sets of numbers rather than by the experiences and activities of their daily lives. (p. xiii)

Historically, schools have served to promote mainstream cultural values and expectations and have disregarded the experiences, languages, and cultural understandings of American Indians and other underrepresented groups. Early Indian schools were established to suppress native languages in favor of English (Lazarus, 1991; McCarty, 1994) and "to 'civilize' and assimilate Indians into the mainstream of the dominant culture" (Reyhner, 1992, p. 35). Although these policies are no longer carried out through abusive practices, their underlying Eurocentric orientation continues to be reflected in the schooling of Indian students, who thus experience a sense of cultural incongruence (Deyhle, 1995; Lipka & Ilutsik, 1995; Mohatt & Erickson, 1981; Wax, Wax, & Dumont, 1989). Students' cultural and linguistic differences frequently are perceived as deficiencies, a finding illustrated in Philips's (1972, 1983) studies on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, for example. Philips found that cultural differences in the structures for verbal participation resulted in miscommunication between Indian children and non-Indian teachers. As she noted, "It is primarily by virtue of the teacher's position and authority that the students and not the teacher come to be defined as the ones who do not understand" (Philips, 1983, p. 129).

Similarly, based on research in a Tohono O'odham classroom, McCarty and Schaffer (1992) contended that, rather than recognizing Indian students' background knowledge and dual-language capabilities, schools frequently re-

spond to cultural and linguistic differences by prescribing low-level remediation. They argued the importance of understanding and building on students' oral and written language competence and of providing meaningful literacy experiences that involve parents and reflect community knowledge.

Such efforts to support Indian students' language learning by drawing on the knowledge of the local community have been the focus of a substantial body of research in recent years (e.g., Leap, 1991; Lipka, 1994; McCarty, 1994; McLaughlin, 1992, 1995; Watahomigie & McCarty, 1994). In particular, research conducted at the Rough Rock Demonstration School with Navajo students (McCarty, 1994) revealed the importance of using locally developed instructional materials for supporting students' native language use as well as their overall academic achievement. Test scores of students' oral English use and reading ability also were found to improve significantly when locally developed materials were used (Begay, Dick, Estell, Estell, & McCarty, 1995).

As a former teacher of Lakota and Dakota (both also known as Sioux) young adolescents, I became interested in learning more about the role of literacy in the lives of Indian youth, both inside and outside of school. Like all adolescents, my students experienced tremendous change, and they struggled to make sense of the world and to establish their place in it. For my Indian students, who balanced their lives between two worlds, Indian and White, this struggle was sometimes especially difficult. At an age when acceptance by peers is often particularly important, they were becoming more keenly aware of differences between their native culture and the mainstream White culture.

In my teaching, I discovered the power of literature and writing to help my students generate understandings about the personal and social issues that were important to them. Yet, I also realized that these school experiences represented just one part of my students' total literacy experiences. After leaving classroom teaching, I wondered: In what other contexts did the students use oral and written language and in what ways was it important to them? How did their uses of literacy support constrain and define their sense of who they were? Through case-study research (Noll, 1995a), I explored these overarching questions to understand the factors that influence Indian adolescents' literacy experiences and the sense they make of those experiences. In addition, I was interested in knowing how others – teachers, parents, and peers – interpret the adolescents' literacy experiences. Finally, I was curious about the influence of multiple cultures – American Indian culture, school culture, and mainstream popular culture as well as variations within each of these cultures – on the adolescents' transactions with literacy. In this article, I present the findings of my research through the case studies of Daniel, a 13-year-old Dakota boy, and Zonnie, a 14-year-old Lakota girl.<sup>1</sup>

1. Daniel and Zonnie chose to have their actual names used. Names of all other participants are pseudonyms.

## Method

### *Research Context*

Qualitative case study, observed Merriam (1988), allows one “to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved” (p. xi). As such, it offers a valuable means for learning from the experiences and personal understandings of those whose voices are not normally heard in the research literature. The case-study research presented in this article depicts the literacy experiences of Lakota and Dakota young adolescents living in a predominantly White, rural community in the upper Midwest. The adolescents were in grades 7 and 8 at their local public middle school where they were representative of 15% (34 students) of the otherwise White student body. These 34 Indian students and their families, who comprised about 5% of the total population in this community, represent some of the vast majority (78%) of all American Indians nationwide who live off of reservations and trust lands (us Department of Commerce, 1992). Few of the Indian adolescents in the community, including Zonnie and Daniel, spoke Lakota or Dakota but most were knowledgeable about and participated in traditional Indian customs.

In selecting the focal participants for this study, I considered students whose backgrounds, interests, and transactions with literacy differed and yet whose combined “stories” would provide a rich understanding of the common experiences of American Indian students from this rural setting. Determining participants on this basis, called purposeful sampling (Patton, 1980), assumes “that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (Merriam, 1988, p. 48). My choice of the focal participants was also based on practical considerations, such as their interest in participating and their parents’ consent as well as the likelihood that they would remain in the community for the duration of the study.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection took place both in school and out of school over a period of 7 months during the 1994–1995 school year. Primary collection techniques were ethnographic in nature and included participant observation, interviews, and examination of artifacts (e.g., students’ schoolwork, personal journals, and artwork). The observations were conducted approximately three times a week from August to February, and each lasted from 1 to 3 hours. They took place in multiple settings, such as students’ classrooms, the school cafeteria, an after-school literary club, school and public libraries, powwows, and parent meetings.

Interviewing techniques consisted of in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 1991) with the focal participants, semi-structured interviews

with teachers, parents, and peers, and informal interviews with school administrators, staff, and Indian adults from the local community. All of the interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. Following Seidman's model of phenomenological interviewing, I interviewed each of the focal participants three times. The first of these focused on the participants' life histories related to literacy. The second interview concentrated on their current literacy experiences, and the third explored the meanings that the participants' make of their literacy experiences. (I later conducted a fourth interview, which served as a member check [Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1988] to verify and/or disconfirm my initial interpretations.)

Semi-structured interviews with the participants' teachers, parents, and peers helped me understand how others interpreted the adolescents' experiences with literacy. The goal of the teacher interviews was twofold: to augment data gathered through classroom observations and to discover the teachers' perceptions of the adolescents as literacy learners. These interviews also provided an opportunity to collect written documents of the students' school work.

The parent interviews, which took place in homes and the local public library, focused on the history of each adolescent's literacy experiences in the home and community. In addition, parents spoke about their children's achievements and schooling experiences and shared their hopes for their children's future. Following my interviews with the parents and teachers, I sought respondent validation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983) by giving each a copy of the transcribed interview to verify the accuracy and make additional comments.

I also interviewed Daniel's and Zonnie's peers (Indian and White) to obtain yet another perspective. These interviews focused on the participants' literacy uses and social interactions in and out of school. The data provided both contrast to and corroboration of the data collected in the teacher and parent interviews.

Finally, I had many informal interviews with school administrators and staff and Indians from the local community. The data collected from administrators, including the principal, assistant principal, and Title v director, and from support staff provided understanding about school policy and curriculum as well as information about the schooling experiences of Indian students. (Other than the Title v director, all administrators, teachers, and staff at the school were White.) My interviews with Indians from the community provided a fuller understanding of the ways in which nonfamily members support Native children in and out of school.

### *Data Analysis*

In qualitative research, "the process of data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic" (Merriam, 1988, p. 123). Analysis begins with the first data collected

and continues – in fact, intensifies – after the data collection is completed. Throughout the period of my data collection, I read and reread the accumulating data to identify sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954), which provided direction for further data gathering. I also wrote reflective notes about my observations, which helped me to understand how the data related to broader issues. This writing pushed me to step back and question my assumptions about traditional definitions of literacy, a process that proved to be especially significant in this study. As the data collection and analysis progressed, I searched for links between concepts, using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a strategy that leads to discovery of categories in the data. From these categories emerged patterns which indicated that literacy supports the participants' exploration of important personal and social issues. From the full body of analyzed data, I developed case studies and a cross-case analysis of the focal participants.

### *Access and Representation*

Issues of access and representation are especially significant to this study and warrant special attention. As a White researcher seeking to understand how American Indian adolescents experience literacy, I assumed a responsibility to accurately understand and represent the experiences and perspectives of my participants and their families. Obtaining official permission from the school-district superintendent and middle-school principal (two White males) and the Title v director (a Lakota woman) to conduct my study was not difficult; I had been a teacher in the district for many years and was well-known in this small community. However, I also knew that for my research to be successful, gaining the cooperation and trust of the adolescents and their parents was essential. In the words of Cleary (1991), I needed “to gain entry into the conceptual world of [my] participants, to capture the meaning that they confer on what they [do] and on the way other people react to what they [do]” (p. 23).

With this in mind, I proposed an after-school club where students could engage in multiple literacy activities. I viewed this club as an opportunity for me to give something back to the participants. I presented my ideas for the “Literacy Club” to the American Indian Education Parent Association, a local parent advisory committee that advises the Title v/JOE (Johnson-O'Malley Act) Program in the schools. (This federal program, instituted in 1934, provides funding to public school districts educating Indian children.) For me, the name Literacy Club, borrowed from Frank Smith's (1988) *Joining the Literacy Club*, had very positive connotations. Smith contended that literacy learning should be built on meaningful, social, and collaborative engagements with reading and writing. To my surprise, some of the parents expressed concern about the term *literacy*, which they regarded almost as a euphemism for illiteracy. That is, they had often

witnessed literacy and illiteracy being used hand-in-hand by public media to describe American Indians. Based on their experience, these parents wondered if my purpose for the club was to remediate their children's supposed deficiencies in reading and writing. Despite my assurances to the contrary, they still worried about negative assumptions others in the school and community might make about the club and, by association, their children. As one member explained, their cautiousness was reinforced by past experiences with researchers, mostly White, whose studies had produced conclusions they considered inaccurate and damaging. After much discussion, the parents supported the club but asked that, instead of Literacy Club, it be called the Literary Club,<sup>2</sup> which they regarded as more academic.

The reaction of members of the Indian parent association to the term "literacy" revealed to me that, however positively I might regard the term, their experiences resulted in a far different understanding. This incident helped me realize how assumptions can influence research and highlighted the challenge and importance of ensuring accurate representation. LeCompte (1993) observed that researchers often go into the field with certain assumptions about the accounts they will hear. As a result, she noted, they "may fail to listen adequately to ... stories which contradict their definitions. Consequently, they may silence participants who are desperately trying to 'talk back,' contesting what researchers say or believe" (p. 13).

In a less direct but ultimately even more significant way, the American Indian adolescents themselves challenged my understandings about literacy. I set out in this study to understand how they use reading and writing – the basis of my definition of literacy – to construct meaning in their lives. However, as I listened to them and asked questions, observed them in multiple contexts, and examined samples of their work, it became increasingly clear that the ways in which they construct meaning extend beyond their interactions with written and oral language. Through demonstration and explanation, the young adolescents also revealed the influence of music, dance, and art in helping them make sense of their worlds.

This finding caused me to question and reconsider my conception of literacy and eventually to broaden my definition. I came to view literacy as the construction of meaning through language and other forms of expression or, as Eisner (1994) wrote, as "the ability to encode or decode meaning in any of the forms of representation used in the culture to convey or express meaning" (p. x). Although my original focus on reading and writing remained central to the investigation, adopting a wider lens enabled me to develop a fuller understanding of the ways in which the adolescents "read the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987) in a variety of contexts.

2. The Literary Club is not addressed in this article because of space limitations. See Noll (1995b, in press) for a description of the club.

## Results

In this section, I present the case studies of Daniel, a seventh grader, and Zonnie, an eighth grader. Their case studies portray each one's particular uses of literacy as well as certain functions, or roles, that literacy serves them both. Beginning with descriptions of the young adolescents and their families, the case studies go on to examine literacy experiences outside of school and finally literacy experiences inside school.

### *Daniel*

Daniel was an outwardly cheerful 13-year-old boy who has a husky build and thick, dark brown hair worn in a long ponytail. A buffalo nickel or eagle-feather earring usually dangled from his ear, and he wore a maroon cap with lettering that named a powwow he and his family had attended the previous summer. Recently, Daniel also started wearing an American Indian Movement (AIM) badge, symbolizing Indian power, on the sleeve of his coat.

Daniel proudly described his father, Parnell, as a full-blooded Yankton Dakota Sioux. He lived with his father and his mother, Grace, who was White, and his younger sister and brother. Their home was "on the Bottom," a neighborhood located on an old flood plain of the Missouri River and separated from the rest of town by a bluff that runs along the southern edge.

When Grace and Parnell spoke about Daniel, it was with warmth and pride. Their family was close, and they took time to talk and laugh together every day. Parnell commented, "I think communication in the home is important. We have family meetings, like, 'Okay, anybody can talk.' ... And we laugh and joke.... The Indian people, we have jokes." Understanding and living "the Indian way" was important to Parnell, and he was raising his children to have knowledge about and pride in their culture. He explained:

Every year we go out and walk in the woods. I tell them about different trees and what it's used for. Berries and wild tea. You know, you find that down by the river.... And these trainings that I teach them, I say, "I hope you remember these because you could teach other children that want to learn."

Parnell also taught his children the traditional way to make buffalo jerky and Indian drums. As he shared these Indian traditions, Parnell taught his children – often through story – underlying historical, cultural, and spiritual knowledge.

Daniel had been dancing at powwows since he was 3 years old. For the past several years, his participation in powwows had been as a member of the Ihanktonwan Dakota Singers, a drum group of young people organized by Parnell. Daniel's active involvement in the traditions of his culture had earned him the respect of other Indian families, who regarded him as a role model for

younger children. However, his expression of Indian identity, symbolized in part by his long hair, subjected him to verbal and physical abuse from White peers. As a younger child, he was taunted, called racist names, punched, and dragged across the playground. After unsuccessfully attempting to resolve the problems by talking with school officials, the parents of the White peers, and finally a lawyer, Parnell reluctantly told his son to fight back: “I told him, ‘You know, Daniel, I didn’t want for this to happen, but starting tomorrow, you tell ‘em four times to leave you alone. If [they don’t], you know what to do.’”

Daniel followed his father’s advice and on two different occasions put to use lessons he learned in a tae kwon do class. He maintained that he had had very few problems in the past year. But it was clear in talking with Daniel that he continued to struggle internally with issues of racism and with his identity as a young Indian male navigating between cultures. His uses of literacy played a significant role in this struggle, as the next two sections reveal.

### *Literacy at Home and in the Community*

Daniel’s experiences with books began at an early age with his parents reading aloud to him. He recalled his mother reading fairy tales and alphabet books to him at bedtime; his father told of sitting with Daniel on his lap and teaching him to read. As Daniel grew older and began to read on his own, he checked out books from the public library and brought them home. His choices covered a wide range of genres – horror, fantasy, science fiction, and biography – yet he did not describe himself as having been an enthusiastic reader. Indeed, reading was still not especially high on Daniel’s list of priorities, although he did enjoy reading the weekly newspaper, *Indian Country Today*, which his family regularly purchased at the supermarket newsstand. Daniel especially liked the comics in this newspaper and readily named his favorite ones: *Around the Rez*, *The Wannabee*, *On the Ridge*, and *The Redskins*.

The kinds of writing Daniel did at home included writing to communicate information to his family (e.g., taking down phone messages and leaving notes for his parents when he went out) and writing for school assignments. Homework, he explained, was done before or after supper “at a table in the washroom where it’s quiet.” He also used the desktop computer, which Parnell and Grace bought for their three children, to compose and revise writing assignments. According to Parnell, Daniel enjoyed sharing rough drafts with his parents, who were a highly appreciative audience. They regarded Daniel as a good writer of stories and a capable student.

Even more than the sharing of writing, making music was an important and regular shared event in Daniel’s family. He was teaching himself to play traditional music on the Indian flute, and he also practiced and performed regularly with his Indian drum group. This drum group represented an affirmation of Daniel’s identity as an American Indian. He said, “It teaches me my culture

and [about] respecting the elders.” Daniel knew the historical and cultural significance of the songs he sung, which, he explained, are expressed through an integration of “the lyrics, the melody, and the drumbeat.” The drumbeat, besides keeping time for the singers and dancers, carries special meaning in certain songs. In veteran songs, for example, there are “honor beats [which] imitate gunshots [or] are like a lightning bolt coming to strike the ground.” The songs he sung were in Dakota, and the melody varied according to the meaning and purpose of the song. Singing the songs, Daniel said, was “like telling a story about something. Like a war, happy times, a family.”

### *Literacy at School*

Daniel remembered that his first writing in school consisted of “words that nobody understood. I used to put sentences together, you know, sentences that didn’t make sense.” Then he learned “the basics – alphabet, easy words. Two-letter words: *as, if*. Sometimes *fat, cat, hat, rat, bat*.” Reading in kindergarten and first grade “was kind of hard at first. But I sort of got used to it. I just started flipping through the pages, looking at the pictures. I’d try to read some of the words ... describing the picture.” As he progressed in school, Daniel gradually moved from reading picture books to chapter books. Sometimes his class read a novel together or listened as the teacher read aloud. He recalled that the reading was often followed by a lesson, such as determining the main idea.

In fifth grade, Daniel started learning to play the saxophone and was taught to read music. Comparing the reading of music to the reading of printed text, Daniel revealed a heightened understanding of the symbiotics of literacy and music. He observed: “It’s kind of the same.... Every note is like a letter or a word. And when you talk, like I’m talking now, [the music] is just like a phrase ... like a sentence or something.” Similar to the punctuation used in written language, “there’s like, certain dynamics. Like piano, pianissimo, mezzo-forte, fortissimo. That’s when it’s really loud. Then there’s like accents that makes it like short and loud.” At home, Daniel relied less on reading sheet music and more on playing by ear. His choice of music reflected his avid interest in Elvis Presley, and he had created his own renditions of “Love Me Tender” and “Can’t Help Falling in Love.”

In school, unlike at home and Indian events, Daniel seemed to lack a sense of belonging. He was polite to his peers and teachers but kept to himself much of the time. His classmate Ian remarked that, although Daniel was “very kind and nice and loyal,” he did not have many friends. “He usually keeps his thoughts and feelings to himself,” noted Ian. Daniel’s teachers described him with a mixture of warmth and frustration. They found him pleasant but were often upset with his disorganization and his inability to complete assignments. His civics teacher observed:

He is such a talented kid. His talents don't come out here [in school] and I think that is really too bad.... I've seen him at powwows ... and he is highly competent and talented. But you don't see it in the academic area and that is too bad.... He's capable, [but] he just is totally disorganized. He leaves his books and everything in everybody's room, just spread all over the place. We try to get him to change – he has a book bag – but before class he's wandering around to see where he's left it.

Daniel rarely used his locker and only occasionally took home his books. His language arts teacher contended that he purposely left his work at school to keep his two worlds separate, adding: "It seems to me that he just likes to leave school at school.... It's like a job. You know, an 8:30 to 3:15 job. He leaves it and he's done." Daniel's grades were between C's and D's, which his language arts teacher believed was due less to disorganization and more to Daniel's busy life outside of school.

Civics was the class in which Daniel felt he had the most trouble. He attributed his low grades to incomplete current events assignments. He described the assignments as boring and a recent unit on state elections as unimportant to him. It's "just some politics," he said. "I don't think they're that important to learn. What are politics anyway?... Politics, all that stuff, doesn't really go with the Indian ways." Daniel's comment appeared to reflect the fact that most of the current events discussed in class came from mainstream news media (e.g., daily newspapers and television), which rarely reported Indian issues. He wished that *Indian Country Today*, which was available in the school library, was used in his classes. His civics teacher noted that students could bring in current events from *Indian Country Today*, but few did so.

In describing what he might find interesting to learn in school, Daniel identified Indian culture. "History might be important [to learn] ... when stuff originated, like singing and dancing and the flute. Hoop dancing, grass dancing, traditional stuff." Instead, according to Daniel, what he learned in his classes was "White man's stuff.... Some stuff [that] don't include Indians." By way of example, he referred to stories in his reading class that "tells about White men all the time ... and then, about Indians? Very little about Indians ... like Chief Crazy Horse."

Daniel's civics teacher did make some effort to encourage understanding of issues from multiple perspectives, including a Native perspective. During a study of the French and Indian War, for example, she asked her students to choose a Colonial, British, or American Indian point of view and write an imaginary letter to someone about the war. "They could present it in any format they wanted to but they.... had to tell the causes, the effects, as they saw them." Although Daniel chose to write from the Indian point of view, he later misplaced it.

In Daniel's reading and language arts classes, the teachers allowed student choice on many of the assignments. For example, one or two periods each week in reading class were set aside for reading from trade books of the students'

choice. The reading teacher noted that Daniel barely completed the minimum requirements for the class and that he read less than any other seventh grader. Daniel contended that he read considerably more than his teacher realized, but that he did not “bother to hand in the book reports” to get credit. He described with enthusiasm a book he had just finished on Chief Crazy Horse and described in detail books on Chief Red Cloud and Geronimo. Besides reading about American Indian heroes, Daniel identified horror stories as another genre he greatly enjoyed.

His interest in reading horror stories carried over to his writing for language arts assignments. In this class, besides structured lessons on grammar, mechanics, word usage, and writing techniques, the teacher set aside time for writing and often allowed her students choice in the topics and genre. According to Daniel, the only limitations for a story assigned near Halloween were “no blood, no guts, no swear words. Has to be *clean*.”

Daniel referred to himself as a “smart and intelligent” writer who “like[s] to write.” He was enthusiastic about his Halloween story and read it with enthusiasm and expression:

It was a dark, rainy Halloween night of ‘93. Kids were looking for a place to have a Halloween party with no parents or supervision of any grown-ups. The kids were between the ages of 10 and 16. They drove up to this joint of the old house of the Satan’s Sisters.

Here Daniel paused, chuckled, and said, “Whatever that is,” then continued reading. As he neared the end of this work-in-progress, it was clear from his faltering voice that he was no longer reading but telling the story he had created. He described spooky events that evolved into an all-night party. Knowing Daniel’s love of horror and imagining a gruesome ending, I asked him what would happen to the characters. He had already decided to end this story, not with horror, but in the everyday realities of adolescence. “They’ll get grounded,” he explained matter-of-factly.

The next day in class, Daniel arrived with his completed story, which was four-pages long and thick with description. It now began, “It was a night with a big old full moon that was riding in the sky with such happiness.” The student teacher collected the stories and announced she would read several aloud. Daniel sat attentively each time she scanned through the stories to choose one to read, and he slumped in his seat each time she passed over his. Later, he expressed disappointment that she did not choose to read his story: “I was like, ‘Aw, man!’ I wanted to hear how she read it.”

Daniel appeared to have little interest in writing or speaking about events related to his life outside of school, yet he did assert his Indian identity in school in other ways. His AIM badge, eagle-feather earring, and powwow cap, as well as his signature on many assignments (Figure 1) served as quiet but visible assertions of his Indianness.

Although Daniel generally chose not to write about his life outside of school,



FIGURE 1. Daniel's Signature

he did write about his experience as an Indian in a predominantly White school. In a paragraph entitled "Daniel's Time at School," he wrote (transcribed as originally written):

My days at school are a total bore. People call me names (racial), annoy me, cut in front of me during lunch and say, "All prairie niggers and niggers at the end with the charges." They do this to talk to my best friends, and leave me with a bunch of dweebs. Sometimes, I wish I can be like some of the white kids. They have short hare, girlfriends, a whole truck lode of friends, and they are all slim and good-looking. I wish they would just except me as a human being.

In this paragraph, Daniel's description of a painful racial incident suggests internal conflict over his identity. Although he identified himself as Indian and chose to express his Indianness by wearing his hair long, for example, he also perceived it as setting him apart from things he desired. He associated short hair with "white kids" and with having girlfriends and being popular and attractive – all of which were important to him as a young adolescent. His final sentence, "I wish they would just except [accept] me as a human being," reflects the beliefs he heard at home. In speaking about acceptance of racial differences, Parnell said, "The way I was taught, the only race I know is the human race. I don't favor none of them, you know, like the Red, Black, White.... There's good and bad [in all of them]."

In another piece of his writing, an illustrated story called *The Struggle with the New Kid*, Daniel addressed reconciliation of racial conflict. His story was based on an actual incident, which he described:

[Troy] kicked my butt last year. Just because I was telling him to quit cutting in front of me, quit cutting in front of the bus line.... [H]e start beatin' me up and I had to do some tae kwon do moves on him, knocked him down. [I said], "Don't you ever touch me again!" [He said], "Okay, okay, I got it, I got it."

In Daniel's story, Benny B., an Indian boy with an Elvis Presley hairstyle, is challenged by a group of older White boys. Like Daniel, Benny knows martial arts and puts them to use when attacked by the boys, one of whom is named Troy

(Figure 2). As the story continues, Benny agrees to go because "... he thought he was following the friends that he might have someday. As soon as they got to [the park], the boys came toward Benny with looks of anger on their faces." A fight breaks out, and the story ends when Benny "wins," just as Daniel perceived of himself in the real-life incident. In Daniel's story, however, the fight is followed by reconciliation. Benny B – who is now admired for his tae kwon do moves – is invited by the older boys to be friends, and he accepts.

Making a connection between this book and his future, Daniel predicted reading and writing and art would continue to be important in his life. He thought he might like to be an author, artist, or cartoonist, because he said, "I don't think they have very many Native American authors and artists, except for

This young fellow was a handsome looking one. He was so handsome, that all of the girls wanted to be with little Benny B. every time he was outside for recess. When some boys from Reading looked outside through the window, they saw Ben with their "Future Wives". They were also very jealous of him. They were so jealous, that they thought that they could Beat up that New Kid from Tupelo to get all of the First grade girls all to themselves for doing their "Macho Thing" to poor little helpless Benny. So after school that was just the thing that they were going to do.

But These Boys that were going to Beat up Benny didn't know this. but, He was a Black Belt in Karate before he left Tupelo. So when It was Three o'clock, They went up to Benny in line for the Bus, and asked him if he could play some foot ball with them at Pent's Park. So Benny thought about the question.



FIGURE 2. Benny B.

Oscar Howe.... [I] might write about ... things I've gone through to Native American children and some non-Indian children ... [like] prejudice in the schools." As Daniel worked through ways of handling racial conflict in his own life, he seemed to recognize the value of sharing his struggles with others. By telling the children of the future "what it was like back then when I was in school," he said he hopes to help children of *all* races live in harmony.

### *Zonnie*

Zonnie sat next to her mother on a wooden bench against the back wall of a large meeting room. Side by side with elbows nearly touching, the two listened to Joe, Zonnie's father, who was speaking from the front of the room. He was telling the audience about the hardships in his life, but he also spoke about the strength he drew from his family. This gathering of local Indian and White residents at a museum was a mid-winter celebration of Native culture. Planners for the event also hoped to draw attention to the governor's plan to close this cultural and natural history museum because of fiscal cutbacks. Daniel and his drum group were present, as was the oldest of the Indian elders in the community. After the elder offered a prayer in Dakota, everyone lined up for steaming potato and cabbage soup, fry bread, and a berry sauce called wojapi.

Zonnie and her family often participated in Indian cultural events such as this one. They attended community powwows, and Zonnie's mother, Kathy, was well-known in the area for her beautiful beadwork, which was displayed and sold in the museum gift shop. Joe, a storyteller, recently returned home after an absence of nearly 12 years, during which time he was incarcerated. Thus, Zonnie, who was 14 years old, had lived most of her life without her father at home. She and her mother and four brothers had sometimes visited Joe over the years, but because he was imprisoned in another state, it had been difficult for them to make regular trips.

Zonnie's parents were full-blooded American Indians. Joe's background was Lakota, and Kathy was Navajo. As children, they spoke their native languages – Lakota for Joe and Navajo (or Diné) for Kathy – but both were forced to learn English when they started school. "The only way we can communicate is English," explained Joe. "I can't talk Navajo, she can't talk Sioux to me." Zonnie had never learned to speak either of her parents' native languages.

Zonnie enjoyed spending time with her parents and brothers, three of whom were still living at home. Unlike her small circle of friends, comprised of both Indian and White eighth-grade girls, she remained extremely close to her family. She said:

[My friends] think I'm crazy because I like my family and I like my brothers.... I grew up a little bit different. My mom never grounded me. We always just talked.... I just like to go home [after school] because I want to be with my family and stuff. I only have 4 more years before I graduate from high school.

One of Zonnie's friends, Melanie, who was also Indian, described Zonnie as shy but added, "She's not shy with her friends. With us she is talkative about anything on her mind, [but] she hangs back and listens in social events." Zonnie's relationships with both her friends and her family influenced, at least in part, the role of writing, art, and dance in her life. These relationships impacted how she made meaning of her world and the ways in which she chose to share those personal meanings, all of which are the focus of the next two sections.

### *Literacy at Home and in the Community*

Zonnie remembered her mother reading to her from a variety of books when she was young. They took trips to the public library and also read from books the family owned. "My mom read to me, like rhymes.... *The Three [Little] Kittens [Who Lost] Their Mittens* and *Curious George*," she recalled. "She also read stories about dolls coming to life ... [and] stories by this author that wrote *Star Boy* [and] one called *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses*." Zonnie's two oldest brothers were also active in her early literacy experiences. "They would teach me about words and cursive and ... writing and reading.... They started off with, like, small books, like *The Rabbit Runs* and they would just teach me ... how to sound out and stuff"

Zonnie had a strong interest in poetry, which she traced to drawing pictures as a young child. She said, "When I was little, I guess I started drawing first and after awhile I started thinking about writing. Then I started reading other poetry books and then I got into writing poems." Zonnie's interest in poetry continued to grow, and she also turned to other books, including books about horses.

Despite his lengthy incarceration, Joe was involved in his daughter's literacy development. Over the years, the two of them had written letters to one another, and she had sent him poems she had written:

He likes them. He shows them to his inmates – prison inmates – because they hardly get anything from their families and stuff so he shows off what he gets from his family.... And they really like my poems because it reminds them of what love used to be.

Zonnie was a prolific poet who preferred to write alone in quiet places. "[I like to be] by myself with no one around. I just listen to music and stuff. I write [my poems] by myself." Her favorite kinds of music to listen to while writing were country and ballad rock, and her favorite musicians were Brian Adams, Mariah Carey, and Whitney Houston. "I get my ideas of writing poems from music, from other people that write music, from what I listen to, from my other poetry and other books."

The influence of music on Zonnie's poetry was marked and, as she looked to the future, she anticipated that expressing herself through both music and

poetry would continue to be important. She hoped for a career composing lyrics and singing country music. For now, she shared her interest in country music and in composing songs with her father. “He writes music and the words with it,” and Zonnie and her brothers sometimes helped him. But, unlike her father, Zonnie did not write down the music for the lyrics she created. “I just make up my own music, just sing it to myself” while composing the words.

Many of Zonnie’s poems, like the lyrics of country music, were about love and heartbreak, though unlike country music, they centered on her family. She explained that, in the following poem, “Give and Take,” she was acknowledging the pain her mother still felt from the deaths of her own mother and her mother-in-law.

*Give and Take*

You lived with love,  
 You lived with life.  
 But love can be taken away by death.  
 No one can bring back a love.  
 No one can help the feelings inside,  
 So don’t be afraid of telling hard feelings out loud.  
 Life is a pain and it could last forever  
 Until you do something about it.  
 You will have life as a gift,  
 But everyone has to die someday.  
 Though don’t take the pain so hard.  
 Their soul is still alive,  
 Because life may not give you forever,  
 But love lasts forever.

The closeness that had existed between Zonnie’s mother and grandmothers also existed between Zonnie and her mother. This bond was revealed not only in Zonnie’s poetry, but also in the gentleness of her voice as she talked about her mother and the cultural knowledge her mother taught her. Zonnie explained that her mother had learned beadwork from Joe’s mother and then later taught her how to do it:

She taught me when I was little.... She taught me everything, like buckles, earrings, key chains, and bracelets.... She’s expressing the [Lakota] culture and what she is.... And I got interested in it because it was something my friends never learned how to do. So they, like, were amazed that I learned how to do beadwork.

Zonnie also grew up knowing how to dance. “[I do] women’s traditional dance,” she said. “I wanted to learn to jingle dress, but I guess I’m just going to stick with traditional.” Her father recalled:

We used to go to powwows, and my mom used to sing her Indian songs and have her dance. So she was an Indian dancer.... That’s part of her, a part that

I'm proud of, too, you know. Keeping her heritage. And she's not going for the contests or the best dancer or nothing, but being part of it.

When her father has been away, Zonnie's oldest brother became responsible for encouraging her to continue dancing. About 4 years ago, he and his wife and young children moved back to the reservation, and Zonnie began to lose interest in dancing. She said:

I liked it but, I mean, I didn't really want to do it all my life.... because I wasn't really having any fun that way. I wasn't with my friends, and some of them don't know how to dance. And they were, like, walking around and stuff and I like to go around with them.

Next to family, friends were very important to Zonnie. In school as well as out, the ways in which Zonnie expressed herself were influenced by a variety of factors, not the least of which was her desire to socialize with friends.

### *Literacy at School*

Zonnie did not consider herself to be a reader when she entered kindergarten. In fact, she said that it was not until she was in second or third grade that she felt she could really read. She recalled that reading in school meant doing worksheets, reading aloud, and writing sentences and paragraphs.

Now an eighth grader, Zonnie still did not consider herself to be a particularly good reader. Her comments suggested that she defined a good reader as someone who liked to read broadly or "someone like my mom ... someone that reads books that are about real people." Zonnie contrasted her image of good readers with herself: "Not like what I read 'cause I don't really read appropriate stuff for, like, school. [I read] things that I don't really learn from. It's just stuff I want to know." The "stuff" Zonnie was referring to was popular magazines, such as *Vanity Fair*, *Entertainment Weekly*, and *Rolling Stone*.

Besides magazines, Zonnie primarily read horror stories, and she explained that it was the graphic description, "which gives you a picture," that appealed to her. She enjoyed Alvin Schwartz's ghost stories in the elementary grades, and though she still read these occasionally, she moved on to novels by Stephen King in sixth grade. Of King's books, *It* and *Misery* were two of her favorites. She added that she saw a similarity between King's writing and her own poetry in terms of the clear description in both. "It's what I like in my poetry," she said.

Zonnie recalled that, since fifth grade, writing poetry had become an increasingly important part of her life in school as well as at home. She wrote her poems in a colorful spiral notebook kept close at hand in her book bag. All of her poems were important to her, but some of them she considered more private than oth-

ers: “Some of the poetry that I write is private because it’s just my feelings and other poetry that I write is just for some kind of thing ... that teachers tell me I should do.”

Most of the poetry Zonnie wrote in school was not done for class assignments but rather for herself during class or in study hall. Her friends begged her to slip out of study hall to walk the halls, but Zonnie preferred to stay and write. She felt pressured to write less so that she would have more time for them. Just as her friends could not understand her closeness to her family, they thought she was too dedicated to her poetry. Zonnie’s friend, Melanie, remarked, “Poetry is part of [Zonnie]. It’s more important than getting together with friends.... Poetry is her way of expressing herself to the world. She uses poems to express her feelings about friendships, her parents, and ways she looks at the world.”

Zonnie freely shared her poetry with her parents and certain other adults, such as her reading teacher and the guidance counselor, but she hesitated to share it with her friends:

Whenever I show it to my friends, they just want to show it off and stuff and they talk out loud and ... read my poems out loud and stuff so everyone, like, looks at them.... It bothers me. I don’t like it.... They are kind of private to me. I mean, they’re just – they mean a lot to me ... and I don’t like them to read them aloud.

This year reading was Zonnie’s favorite class, and she enjoyed her reading teacher the most. She said that this had been the case for her every year in school: “The reading teachers that I ever knew were very nice to me ... If I show them my poems and stuff, they react in a good way. They like my poems. We end up being good friends.” Zonnie explained that a “bad way” of responding to her poetry would be trying to “fix problems and mix around words.”

She sometimes stayed after class to chat with her reading teacher, although with other teachers, she was generally very quiet, both by her account and theirs. The reading teacher observed, “She knows that I love to read and ... that I’m intelligent and ... receptive, and I have more time. And I’m pretty nonthreatening.” Ironically, this teacher said she had no idea what Zonnie liked to read and she described Zonnie as a “mediocre” student, based on her C average. Yet she also described Zonnie as “conscientious.... She would never, never not read an assignment. I mean, I can always depend on her.... She’s stable and assertive and a good role model.”

In this class, students read assigned selections from an anthology, completed vocabulary lessons, and occasionally engaged in choral reading. Most of the writing was “less creative writing than response to reading,” said the teacher. “Because the text has no comprehension check, I make my own questions out and we use those to make sure everyone reads, to make sure that everyone understands, and then for some thought.”

In Zonnie’s language arts class, many of the writing assignments centered on skills the teacher, a White male, taught. She explained that after teaching about

cause and effect in literature, for example, “[the teacher] would just have us make up our own cause-and-effect story or think of one that we had [experienced].” Zonnie found these assignments unappealing, though it was unclear whether she objected to what she perceived as a contrived basis for writing or to her difficulty in “making up” a story. For her, making up a story meant telling about something unconnected to her life, and she preferred writing about her own real experiences and feelings. For this assignment, Zonnie said, “I wrote about my dad and how he got in prison. Like cause and effect of what happened.”

Although she did not normally read poetry other than her own unless it was assigned, Zonnie admired the work of Langston Hughes. In January, her language arts teacher planned a 2-week unit in which the students read and listened to a variety of poems then wrote their own. Among the selections this teacher shared were poems by Mary Tallmountain, Gary Soto, and Langston Hughes from the book *Braided Lives: An Anthology of Multicultural American Writing* (Minnesota Council of Teachers of English, 1991), which generated discussion about prejudice and racism in class. According to the teacher, Zonnie was “typically reserved” in class during these discussions, though she later expressed herself in her journal (Figure 3). Writing in this journal was less prescriptive than other assignments, which were graded on a number of specific criteria. As Figure 4 also reveals, Zonnie used the journal to write about personal feelings and experiences.

Jan. 12, 1995

~~Discrimination~~

I have been talked against because of my color. Hurt because I did things different from what they do. The language that was used it can compare to nothing meaner in this world. Life being Native American (Indian) is hard. Every person white may never feel bad in this way unless they were "in my shoes".

FIGURE 3. Zonnie's Journal Entry

1st ♥

1st Love

I felt in love w/ a boy. While walking around in the mall. He was or looked my age. I tried to ask him out, but didn't have the courage to. Then after being as dumb as I am. I almost started spying on him. But then he noticed me. So, I acted like I was going in a store. So I did. While walking, I didn't know he was behind me. Then all of a sudden I turned around. And nearly screamed. He was laughing. And then he asked me out. And then I said "no" As dumb as I am.

FIGURE 4. "1st Love"

Zonnie observed that her language arts teacher rarely read or responded to her journal entries, which rather ironically may have encouraged her to write more freely. According to Zonnie, they rarely engaged in conversation in or out of class. He acknowledged that he did not "really know her like I know other students who are more vocal. Zonnie is just kind of there."

For the most part, Zonnie was not highly enthusiastic about doing school-work – describing it as "okay" but "boring" – yet she accepted it as a job she had to do. She seemed content with her grades – generally B's and C's – as were her parents. Zonnie's comments about school indicated that she found her classes

predictable and fairly easy. She regarded the primary purpose of school work to be preparation for the following year, and she thought school would be better if classes were only 15-minutes long. This would allow more time after school “to write poems and stuff. Or [to] just go around with friends ... go to movies or walk around and just have some fun.” As it was now, she continued, “after school, usually you have to do your homework and then you have supper, and then you have to get ready for bed and go to bed. You don’t have that much time to do what you want to do.”

Zonnie’s parents placed a high value on her education, and they supported her aspirations for the future. “I want my children to have the best education that they can have,” said Joe. “We missed out. What we wished to have, but didn’t have – we’re trying to express our feeling [to] help [our children] attain their goal ... setting a goal for themselves to reach.” Kathy wanted Zonnie to be “whatever she wants [to] be. A career of her own. If she wants to be a writer, she can be a writer. If *she* wants to do that.”

As mentioned earlier, Zonnie thought she would like to be a composer and singer: “I like music and I like writing and [I could] put the two together ... and see what I can come up with. I like computers, [and] in music they have computers where you can write your own music.” Looking ahead even further, Zonnie said she intended to support her own children’s forms of expression and to pass along her cultural understandings to the next generation:

[I will] encourage them like my mom does to me to continue writing and do whatever they do. Like music comes into the family, like my grandmother used to really be into music and stuff. [I’ll] Probably encourage them in that.... If you don’t pass it down, maybe the next children that they have won’t know about it and they won’t pass it down to their kids and have that knowledge of the past.... The past could get lost ... [and] your future children couldn’t have what you had.

## Discussion

The case studies of Daniel and Zonnie reveal their literacy experiences both in and out of school and the meanings these experiences hold for them. Their experiences with written and oral language are influenced by art, dance, and music and are reflective of the cultures in which these young adolescents participate: American Indian culture, mainstream popular culture, and school culture. The case studies, in demonstrating the ways in which these two students use literacy, also reveal certain functions, or roles, of literacy. Specifically, through literacy, Daniel and Zonnie explore and express their sense of identity and they also examine critical issues related to prejudice, racism, and discrimination. Each of these roles is looked at below, followed by a brief discussion of the ways in which the adolescents’ multiple literacies are supported at home and by other Indians the community. Finally, the implications of this research are addressed.

*Identity*

For Daniel and Zonnie, who live in a predominantly White community, issues related to self-identity tend to be complex. These adolescents must work hard to define for themselves what it means to be American Indian while participating in certain environments, such as the local community and the school, that do not reflect or affirm their native culture. At the same time, because Daniel and Zonnie are members of the community and school and because they are influenced daily by popular media, part of who they are is reflective of mainstream and popular cultural values and understandings. Thus, establishing a sense of identity is especially challenging. As Hirschfelder and Singer (1992) noted:

Indian teenagers struggle with the same who-am-I questions and suffer the same turmoil as all young people. They, too, must find their personal identity, but their search is more complicated than that of their non-Indian peers. Indians must learn to operate in a world that constantly rejects and attacks their native cultures. (p. 3)

In school and out, Zonnie and Daniel construct personal understandings of themselves and their worlds through reading, writing, dance, and music. In a variety of settings and contexts, each of these forms of expression serves to confirm, constrain, and/or broaden their sense of who they are. Zonnie knows herself to be a poet, an identity that is affirmed by her family and friends. She uses language capably and eloquently to express her ideas and feelings. Her poetry is not only a reflection of her transactions with language, however. The meanings she creates are influenced by country music as she composes melodies in her mind while writing the words to her own poems. She is influenced by both the syntactic conventions of musical expression (e.g., rhythm and beat) and her particular choice of music. Themes common to country music are reflected in Zonnie's poems, which describe herself, her relationships with others, and her view of the world.

Similarly, Daniel's sense of self is inextricably tied to his role as an Indian drummer and singer. Both the meanings behind the songs he and his drum group sing and the act of performing for others inform and reinforce Daniel's understandings about his culture and his membership in it. The lyrics as well as the drumbeats have certain cultural and historical significance which Daniel re-creates each time he performs. This sense of connectedness to culture traditions is significant in terms of Deyhle's (1992) findings with Navajo students that suggest a positive correlation between students' cultural identity and their academic success. Daniel also is influenced by the music of Elvis Presley, which he has taught himself to play on the saxophone, and he dreams of his Indian drum group becoming as popular as his favorite singer. His identification with Elvis shows up as well in his story about Benny B., a character who is from Elvis's hometown of Tupelo, Mississippi and who sports an Elvis hairstyle. Like Zonnie, Daniel identifies himself as a writer, though in his case, the writing is usually prose rather than poetry. Both adolescents envision possible careers in which

literacy plays a primary role – for Zonnie as a songwriter and singer and for Daniel as a children’s author and illustrator.

### *Prejudice, Racism, and Discrimination*

Just as exploring self-identity is central to adolescence, so too is a growing awareness of broader social issues. For Zonnie and Daniel, the issues of prejudice, racism, and discrimination are not merely abstract concepts. Rather, they deal with these issues daily, often through personal and painful experiences in their own lives. As the two case studies reveal, literacy helps Zonnie and Daniel examine and make sense of these experiences.

Zonnie wrote about discrimination in her journal (see Figure 3) and referred to prejudice in an essay about her father’s arrest and eventual incarceration. In another journal entry, she described an incident in which several White girls passed her and a friend on the street then turned around and plugged their noses while laughing. Events such as this are not uncommon, according to both Daniel and Zonnie. Daniel wrote about being called a “prairie nigger” in the piece “Daniel’s Time at School.” In his story about Benny B., he built upon an actual incident in which he felt discriminated against. As the author and illustrator, he had the opportunity to re-create this event and to achieve a different, more peaceful resolution that is in keeping with his desire for reconciliation and harmony. Given the research that suggests a link between Indian students’ experiences with racism, discrimination, and prejudice in school and their lack of academic success (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Wax et al., 1989), the potential of literacy as a means for dealing with racism becomes especially significant.

### *The Influence of Home and Community*

The case studies of Zonnie and Daniel provide understandings about the role of literacy in American Indian homes that challenge commonly held beliefs. Both Zonnie’s and Daniel’s families were actively involved in their children’s earliest literacy experiences. They read aloud to them, took them to the library and encouraged their early attempts to make sense of print and visual texts. They continue to be supportive of their literacy engagements, providing enthusiastic audiences for their children’s poems, stories, music, dance, and art. Furthermore, Zonnie’s and Daniel’s parents care deeply about their children’s achievement in school and hope they will go on to college. These attitudes and aspirations are not unique to them and are held by other American Indian families in this rural community as well.

Daniel and Zonnie are also supported by other Indian adults outside of their families who share their knowledge and expertise in a variety of ways. For example, one mother teaches fancy dancing to Zonnie and other Indian youth.

Daniel's father established the Ihanktonwan Dakota Singers drum group for young people, and he freely shares his knowledge about drum making. Another Indian adult, a storyteller and fluent speaker of Lakota, is teaching the language to Daniel and his father. These funds of knowledge (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) support Zonnie and Daniel and members of other Indian households as well as engender a sense of cohesiveness among Indians in this predominately White community. Through such funds of knowledge, Zonnie and Daniel gain a wealth of traditional knowledge and develop a sense of belonging from their interactions with others.

### *Implications*

The case studies of Daniel and Zonnie, in portraying the role of literacy in their lives, can help us gain insight into the literacy learning and schooling experiences of American Indian youth in general. Especially significant to this investigation are the disparate in-school and out-of-school pictures of the participants which evolve. With few exceptions, the adolescents' literacy strengths, cultural knowledge, and richness of expression outside of school are not fully recognized or tapped in school. Their teachers are, for the most part, unaware of the multiple literacies that are so central to the students' out-of-school lives. These students tend to be judged by monocultural, Eurocentric, and verbocentric ways of knowing (Eco, 1976), which provide only a partial and, thus, a distorted view of their capabilities.

Understanding and building on Indian students' background knowledge and experiences require that teachers learn about the native culture of their students. It is also important, contended Fuchs and Havighurst (1972), that teachers become familiar with the goals of the local Indian community. Through such measures, assumptions about the culture and about Indian parents' attitudes toward their children's education can be reassessed and new knowledge can be brought to bear on the teaching of Indian students. As Wax et al. (1989) and Wolcott (1984) have shown, what appears to be apathy toward education, for example, might in fact be rejection of assimilationist perspectives and practices in the schools. Or, as Zonnie's father notes, a seeming disinterest in education could be a reflection of parents' discomfort resulting from their own negative school experiences. Thus, it is important for teachers to develop "a thorough, deep local knowledge ... that also includes an understanding of the sociohistorical experiences of the local population with formal schooling" (McCarty, Wallace, Lynch, & Benally, 1991, p. 54).

Learning about the funds of knowledge (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) and traditions within local Indian communities (when appropriate) can provide teachers with valuable understandings about their students and information for developing a culturally responsive curriculum. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) described community-based contexts of learning as "flexible, adaptive,

and active" (p. 133) and contrasted them with school learning, which is "encapsulated, if not isolated, from the social worlds and resources of the community" (p. 134). They argued that the gap between school and home communities needs to be bridged and that having teachers draw on the community knowledge is one viable way of accomplishing this. As Deyhle and Swisher (1997) noted:

If educators are equipped with this culturally specific information on how Indian students have come to view and learn of their world, test results, classroom behavior, and the communication and interaction patterns educators confront in classrooms will be more meaningful.... this understanding can lead to educational practices that are more sympathetic and effective with American Indian students. (p. 139)

Although, as Swisher and Deyhle (1997) also contended, a culturally relevant curriculum in and of itself will not solve larger institutional and societal issues that work against Indian students, it can serve to make visible their cultural knowledge and perspectives. It also may serve to "depoliticize cultural differences in the classroom ... [thereby] prevent[ing] the emergence of student resistance to school" (Erickson, 1984, p. 543). Finally, as the case studies of Daniel and Zonnie suggest, by validating expression of cultural knowledge, perspectives, and personal experiences through language, art, dance, and music, the literacy strengths that exist in the lives of Indian youth outside of school might be more clearly revealed within school.

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