

Beyond Assimilation: Tribal Colleges, Basic Writing, and the Exigencies of Settler Colonialism

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses basic writing pedagogy at a two-year tribal college, an institution type that has not been visible in the basic writing literature to date. In many tribal college contexts, socioeconomic challenges, under-resourced K-12 schools, and linguistic diversity all contribute to high student placement rates into “developmental” writing courses. Operating from the understanding that tribal college writing curricula are assertions of rhetorical sovereignty, I present a narrative of the pedagogical reasoning that led me to structure my basic writing course around the exigencies of U.S. settler colonialism—that is, the settler state’s ongoing political, social, and economic project of controlling Indigenous peoples, lands, and resources. This approach encourages Native American students to develop critical language awareness and invites them to consider the importance of writing for furthering the interests of their communities and nations while meeting the tribal college’s self-determined learning outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Native American, tribal college, settler colonialism, language diversity, basic writing

In the early days of August 2012, I spent a lot of time in the parking lot outside my apartment in Ann Arbor, Michigan, trying to figure out how I was going to fit everything I needed for four months on the Navajo Nation into my tiny Ford hatchback. I was a graduate student—a white woman just past my thirtieth birthday—and I would be spending the fall semester conducting ethnographic research with writing faculty at Diné College, the oldest and largest tribally controlled college in North America. I grew up in a military family, which should have made me better at packing and may have left me a little too comfortable skittering across the country without a clear sense of what my living situation would be. Despite many phone calls and emails, I had no solid plan for housing when I got to the Southwest, so I was carrying camping gear in addition to clothing for three high desert seasons, plus dozens of books on Diné¹ history and culture, Indigenous

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rhetorics, and composition theory. In the end, I stuffed my car to the roof and started driving, relying on my side mirrors and trusting that I would figure out where to sleep once I arrived.

Even as I was preparing to research writing pedagogy with Diné College faculty, I was also scrambling to pull together my own syllabus for English 100B, the basic writing course I would be teaching that fall at one of the college's branch campuses. Teaching this course was partly a matter of principle: informed by my readings in feminist and Indigenous methodologies (Cushman; Powell and Takayoshi; Smith; Wilson), I strove to make reciprocity an integral part of my research design. The Navajo Nation is very rural, and the college has difficulty attracting qualified part-time faculty for its more remote campuses. I was a credentialed English instructor, so it made sense to everyone involved that I would help fill this need while I was around. Furthermore, I believed teaching the course would make important contributions to my study: if I hoped to understand the local context in which Diné College faculty taught writing, there was no substitute for rolling up my sleeves and experiencing the work firsthand. Finally, as a practical matter, my research funding fell well short of the actual cost of conducting fieldwork, and my Diné College adjunct pay would just about cover gasoline and oatmeal for the semester.

As I was loading up my car that August, I was pretty clear on why I was teaching English 100B, but I still needed to make some key decisions about *how*. I had taught basic writing before, at a community college in suburban Oregon, but I was persuaded by the arguments of scholars like Lynn Troyka, Patricia Bizzell ("Basic Writing"), and George Otte and Rebecca Mlynarczyk that local context is a defining consideration in basic writing pedagogy. This seemed particularly important at Diné College, which was founded to serve a student population that has historically struggled at off-reservation institutions (Stein, *Tribally Controlled*; Tierney; Clark). I was, by that point, well versed in the (small) body of composition literature on working with Native American students. This literature often echoes the field of basic writing's longstanding concern with disjunctures between students' home cultures and that of postsecondary education (e.g. Bizzell, "What Happens"; Lu, "From Silence to Words"; "Conflict"; Fox), emphasizing potential conflicts between the languages, rhetorical practices, and interpersonal norms in Native communities and those of the "dominant culture" (Ruoff; Barwell; Glau; Grijalva; Gray-Rosendale, Bird, and Bullock; Zolbrod, "Teaching"; "Reading and Writing"). While this literature demonstrates a laudable respect for Native students and their communities, by the summer of 2012

I was coming to find its near-exclusive focus on cultural difference increasingly unsatisfying.

In the year and a half leading up to my fieldwork, I had made several weeklong visits to Diné College. I sat in on classes, chatted with faculty and staff, and worked with many students individually on their writing assignments and other coursework. These experiences gave me a deep appreciation for the college's mission to support Diné nation-building—that is, efforts to foster the social, economic, and political self-determination of the Navajo Nation—while “sustaining/revitalizing” Diné language and heritage knowledge (McCarty and Lee 103). However, my visits also fueled a growing unease with the discourses of Native cultural difference that pervade much of the composition scholarship. The Diné students I met were remarkably diverse—linguistically, spiritually, and academically—and not nearly as “other” as the literature seemed to suggest. The discourses of cultural difference, I came to believe, function to obscure what Native rhetorics scholar Scott Lyons calls “the irreducible modernity and diversity that inheres in every Native community and has for some time” (“Actually Existing” 297, emphasis in the original). While there are certainly *differences* on the Navajo Nation, differences that many would describe as cultural, they are neither monolithic nor static; Bizzell made a similar point about basic writing students more than a decade ago (“Basic Writing”).

By August 2012, I had come to agree with Lyons that “developing [tribal college] literacy pedagogy...requires paying close attention not so much to ‘cultural difference’ as to *politics*” (“Fencing” 86, emphasis in the original)—specifically, to the structures of ongoing U.S. settler colonialism, the settler state's project of controlling Indigenous peoples, lands, and resources. These structures give rise to many of the challenges Native students and their communities face and present major exigencies for Native writing. As I designed my English 100B course, I wanted to move beyond the well-worn framework of *culturally* responsive pedagogy (Gay; Ginsberg and Wlodkowski) and instead develop what historiographer of rhetorical education David Gold calls *locally* responsive pedagogy, which he defines as teaching approaches that “take into account the needs and desires of diverse communities” (153). I had an urgent sense that this locale is profoundly shaped by settler colonialism, and that the rhetorical exigencies settler colonialism presents cut across the diversity of twenty-first century Diné society, constituting a pressing rationale for acquiring academic literacies.

These were the theoretical issues I was contemplating that summer as I thought about English 100B. Ultimately, however, I had to approach my

course planning the same way I did my housing situation: by packing for all imaginable eventualities and then hitting the road, paying careful attention to my mirrors and being prepared to adjust course as needed. Thanks to help from friends and the kindness of strangers, I found a place to stay within a week of arriving at Diné College. I also devised an approach to English 100B that, while far from perfect, might offer useful insight to faculty teaching basic writing at other tribal colleges and off-reservation institutions with large Native student populations. Rather than a fully articulated curriculum or the findings of an empirical study, what this essay offers is a narrative of pedagogical reasoning. First, I provide some background on tribal colleges—an institution type that has not previously been visible in the basic writing literature—and examine the construction of basic writers at Diné College. Then, I lay out the theoretical basis for the course I designed, followed by a discussion of some of the more promising teaching practices I attempted. I argue that the rhetorical exigencies of settler colonialism can offer an inclusive and politically engaged frame for basic writing instruction at tribal colleges. This frame fosters a *critical* locally responsive pedagogy that extends the longstanding commitment to social justice in basic writing studies and invites students to grapple with Lyons’ important question, “What do American Indians want from writing?” (“Rhetorical Sovereignty” 447).

WHAT DO TRIBAL COLLEGES WANT FROM WRITING?

In order to grasp the reasoning behind the English 100B course I designed, it is important to understand the origins and distinctive mission of the thirty-seven tribally controlled colleges and universities across the United States today. When the tribal college movement began in the late 1960s, Native American students were the most underrepresented minority group in postsecondary education (Wright and Tierney). Among those who did enroll in college during this period, academic success rates were low: in 1970, researchers estimated that the overall attrition rate for Native students in any kind of postsecondary education was around 75% (Boyer). During this period, many tribal nations were seeking increased political and economic self-determination, and these efforts were sometimes hampered by a lack of tribal members with sufficient education to take over reservation functions and services. The Native self-determination and burgeoning community college movements came together with the establishment of the first tribal colleges. Navajo Community College (later renamed Diné College) was founded in 1968, and over the subsequent decades, tribal nations from Arizona to Alaska

to Michigan found the combination of vocational, “developmental,” and academic curricula offered by the community college model well suited to the needs of their communities (Stein, *Tribally Controlled*). While some tribal colleges now offer four-year degrees in select fields, most remain primarily associates-granting institutions that prepare a significant number of their students to transfer to off-reservation universities (*AIHEC Fact Book*).

Most tribal colleges share the comprehensive, open-access missions of community colleges while maintaining their own unique cultural and community development missions. Nearly all offer courses in tribal history, heritage culture, and language(s). Many also integrate tribally-specific content and pedagogical approaches across the curriculum—the Diné Educational Philosophy, a four-step cyclical model for learning derived from traditional Diné epistemological frameworks, is one such example (Willeto; Toth). In addition to serving the important goal of sustaining and revitalizing tribal languages, knowledges, and values, these curricula are intended to strengthen students’ identities and foster their academic success, both at the tribal college and, for those who transfer, at off-reservation institutions where they will often be minoritized. Many graduates will bring their expertise and professional credentials back to their reservation communities, assuming leadership positions and contributing to local economic development. In the broadest sense, then, the purpose of tribal colleges is to further their nations’ political, economic, and cultural self-determination and, ultimately, to protect and extend their sovereignty.

As Lyons observes, the term *sovereignty* is complex and contested in Native intellectual circles, and its meanings have shifted over time (“Rhetorical Sovereignty”). However, this concept is essential for understanding why writing pedagogies at tribal colleges are not simply a matter of culture. Rather, such pedagogies contribute to the multigenerational project of asserting tribal nations’ distinctive political status as nations and working with other Indigenous peoples to build the legal structures for global recognition. Lyons writes:

Our claims to sovereignty entail much more than arguments for tax exempt status or the right to build and operate casinos; they are nothing less than our attempt to survive and flourish as a people. Sovereignty is the guiding story of our pursuit of self-determination, the general strategy by which we aim to best recover our losses from the ravages of colonization: our lands, our languages, our cultures, our self-respect. For indigenous people everywhere, sovereignty is an ideal principle,

the beacon by which we seek the paths to agency and power and community renewal. (“Rhetorical Sovereignty” 449)

Tribal colleges are both manifestations and vehicles of educational self-determination: they assert tribal sovereignty. Through their curricula and programs, these colleges prepare Native students to participate in the social, political, and economic project of nation-building. Because academic literacies are essential for succeeding in postsecondary education, both before and after transfer, tribal college writing courses have an important role to play in this project.

CONSTRUCTING “BASIC WRITERS” AT DINÉ COLLEGE

Even as tribal colleges pursue these broad social and political goals, issues of student academic preparation remain a persistent challenge. The nature of this challenge reflects major themes in the basic writing literature: students’ socioeconomic status, their language diversity and prior literacy experiences, and the ideological dimensions of writing placement. In 2007, 57% of first-time entering tribal college students enrolled in developmental writing courses (*AIHEC Fact Book*), and at Diné College, these rates are even higher. The college assesses incoming students using ACCUPLACER®, a computer-based test employed by more than 60% of community colleges nationwide (Scott-Clayton) that includes multiple-choice questions about reading comprehension and grammar and usage, as well as an impromptu machine-scored writing task. Readers of *JBW* are likely familiar with disciplinary critiques of both multiple-choice tests and machine-scoring for writing placement, so I will not rehearse those arguments here (for recent overviews, see Perelman; Condon). According to one Diné College instructor I spoke with, more than 90% of incoming Diné College students place into developmental reading and/or writing, figures that are consistent with those reported by Kay Thurston in the late 1990s.

The reasons for these placement rates are complex. As at many open-access institutions, some Diné College students have little experience with computerized testing formats, poor or out-of-practice test-taking skills, or a lack of understanding of the stakes of the placement exam (Hughes and Scott-Clayton; Scott-Clayton). Likewise, some students are entering college with a GED, are returning after long breaks in their schooling, or received inadequate academic preparation in their K-12 schools, whether on- or off-reservation. During my dissertation research, I conducted longitudinal

interviews with sixteen Diné College students, all of whom self-identified as Diné (two also identified as Zuni and/or Hopi, and one as African American). Seven of these students described major disruptions or relocations during their K-12 schooling, nearly all related to socioeconomic challenges. Almost a third of Navajo Nation households have incomes of less than \$15,000 a year: 38% of reservation residents and 44% of children are considered to be living in poverty (*Demographic Analysis*). Poverty-related experiences during childhood—a function of the structures of settler colonialism—likely affect the academic preparation of many Diné College students.

Settler colonialism has also resulted in an ongoing process of “language shift” on the Navajo Nation (House), creating complex patterns of linguistic diversity among Diné College students that affect writing placement. There are over 300,000 enrolled members of the Navajo Nation, roughly 174,000 of whom live within reservation borders: around two-thirds of these residents are fluent speakers of Diné bizaad. Although Diné bizaad is considered the healthiest Indigenous language in North America, intergenerational transmission has declined dramatically since the 1960s; fewer than 25% of Diné children now speak the language fluently (Schaengold; McCarty, Romero-Little, and Zepeda). Some Diné College students—particularly those who are older—grew up speaking Diné bizaad as their primary home language, learning English through schooling, popular media, and time spent off-reservation. In their day-to-day lives, many of these bilingual students “shuttle” (Canagarajah, “Place” 593) between English, Diné bizaad, and Navlish—a contact variety of Diné bizaad that integrates English words and phrases as well as some syntactical structures—depending on the age, language proficiencies, and ethnic background of the person with whom they are speaking (Schaengold; Webster, “On Intimate Grammars”). The four students in my dissertation study who fit this linguistic profile were all over the age of thirty. However, the majority of younger Diné College students have been raised in bilingual or monolingual English-speaking households, and their proficiency in Diné bizaad varies. In their research with Diné youth, Teresa McCarty, Mary Romero-Little, and Tiffany Lee found that many students understand the language, even if they cannot speak it fluently. This was the case for ten of the sixteen students in my study, all of whom were in their late teens and twenties. Only two students reported not understanding Diné bizaad at all.

To further complicate the linguistic picture, most Diné College students, whether bilingual or not, speak some version of Navajo English. As linguistic anthropologist Anthony Webster describes, Navajo English

“differs on phonological, morphological, syntactic, discourse, and lexical grounds” from the “ideologically-privileged abstraction called Standard English” (“Still” 79), as well as from the written abstraction I will call Edited American English (EAE). Students’ familiarity with conventions of Standard English and EAE varies depending on their geographical experiences, prior schooling, and the nature of their media consumption and literacy practices. Compared to African American Vernacular English and other well-established English language varieties, however, Diné society expresses relatively little overt pride in Navajo English, perhaps because identification with Diné bizaad remains so strong (Schaengold). In the midst of all of this linguistic complexity, one thing is clear: Diné College students bring a unique range of locally-specific language experiences to the writing classroom. Many have spent their lives in communities where “translanguaging”—“the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (Canagarajah, “Codemeshing” 401)—is the norm.

Although translanguaging theory enables us to understand Diné College students’ multilingualism as a resource (Canagarajah, “Codemeshing”; Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur; Horner), features of Navajo English often appear in students’ academic writing in ways that their instructors find problematic (Thurston). Some attribute students’ difficulties with EAE to living in an “oral culture” (Zolbrod, “Reading and Writing”; “On the Reservation”), an assertion that reproduces binaristic theories of literacy and orality that have long been critiqued in composition studies (see Daniell, “Against the Great Leap”; “Narratives of Literacy”). My own interviews with Diné College students suggest that they engage in a wide range of literacy practices, and most have done so since they were small children (see below). However, the majority of tribal college students are among the first generation in their families to attend college (Stein, “Tribal Colleges”) and may not have spent as much time in the kinds of language, literacy, and learning environments that, as Mike Rose has shown many times over, foster the academic achievement of middle-class students. All of these factors likely influence Diné College students’ performance on the ACCUPLACER, which assigns a high value to “sentence structure” and “mechanical conventions” (“ACCUPLACER”)—in other words, to EAE. These factors also contribute to a general perception among Diné College faculty, both Diné and non-Diné, that many of their students are underprepared for college-level writing and benefit from the extra time and instruction provided by developmental writing courses (Thurston; Toth).

WHAT DOES DINÉ COLLEGE WANT FROM WRITING?

The self-determined learning goals for tribal college writing courses might be understood as enactments of what Lyons calls *rhetorical sovereignty*, which he defines as “the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires...to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (“Rhetorical Sovereignty” 449–50). As I was planning my basic writing course, I was eager to respect the rhetorical sovereignty of the Navajo Nation, so the question at the forefront of my mind was, “What does Diné College want from English 100B?” To answer this question, I turned first to the course catalog, which describes English 100B as follows: “This course advances students’ abilities to write well-crafted and grammatical essays, with appropriate and effective word choice. Elements of expository prose are emphasized. Advanced grammar and other discrete skills are taught as necessary” (“2012-2013 Catalog” 87). The description prioritizes two key learning objectives: the ability to compose in a genre described as an “expository” essay, and the ability to produce “grammatical” writing, which I understand to mean making effective use of the conventions of EAE. When I asked my supervisor for additional direction, his only requirements were to a) use the inexpensive *Grammar to Go* textbook preferred by the lead English instructor at the branch campus; b) format my syllabus according to the common template used throughout the college, and c) integrate the four-step Diné Educational Philosophy into the course. Beyond that, the design of my English 100B section was up to me.

Looking for more guidance, I turned to the Diné College mission statement. In addition to reiterating the Diné Educational Philosophy, the 2012 statement expresses a commitment “to advance quality student learning” in three areas:

- In study of Diné language, history and culture.
- In preparation for further studies and employment in a multi-cultural and technological world.
- In fostering social responsibility, community service and scholarly research that contribute to the social, economic and cultural well being of the Navajo Nation. (“2011-2012 Catalog” 8)

Elsewhere, I discuss how I and the Diné College faculty in my dissertation study have used the Diné Educational Philosophy to teach writing as a process (Toth). In this essay, I focus on how I endeavored to meet the other

three objectives expressed in this mission statement: to provide students with opportunities to learn about Diné language, history, and culture; to equip them with the transferable abilities they will need to succeed in multicultural academic and work settings; and to prepare them to further the well-being of the Navajo Nation. As I discuss below, placing the exigencies of settler colonialism at the center of the course enabled me to address all of these objectives while honoring the college's self-determined goals for English 100B.

The college's objectives were, however, only part of the equation. As Patrick Sullivan observes, motivation plays a key role in students' persistence and the quality of their learning, particularly in basic writing courses. In order to achieve the college's goals for the course, I needed to tap into students' intrinsic motivation. I needed to consider what *they* wanted from writing. This was no simple question. Native people have a complex historical relationship with the "heretofore compromised technology of writing" (Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty" 447):

[T]he duplicitous interrelationships between writing, violence, and colonization developed during the nineteenth century—not only in the boarding schools but at the signings of hundreds of treaties, most of which were dishonored by whites—would set into motion a persistent distrust of the written word in English, one that resonates in homes and schools and courts of law still today. If our respect for the Word remains resolute, our faith in the written word is compromised at best. (Lyons, "Rhetorical Sovereignty" 449)

As veteran Diné College writing faculty Kay Thurston and Paul Zolbrod ("Reading and Writing") have described, this "persistent distrust of the written word in English" has particular force on the Navajo Nation, where much of the middle-aged population learned English in schools, often Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools that they entered as young children separated from their families. The emotions surrounding memories of these experiences—and the social changes they have fueled—can be conflicted and intense (Spolsky; House).

In my own experience, Diné College students' attitudes toward literacy vary. While fourteen of the sixteen students I interviewed for my dissertation had placed into basic writing, nearly all described participating in a range of out-of-school literacy practices. Two students expressed outright dislike for reading and writing, but five regularly read books for their own enjoyment

or interest; four were avid writers of fiction, screenplays, or poetry; two kept personal journals; two often wrote in their places of employment; and one regularly composed bilingual sermons for his independent Christian church. All were engaged in various forms of digital reading and writing, from web design and blogging to text-messaging and Facebook (Toth). Despite these rich extracurricular literacy practices, however, the perceived role of English-medium instruction in the process of language shift—and the prevalence of drill-and-grill grammar instruction in many Diné people’s K-12 educational experiences—have contributed to an “ambivalence” about school-based literacies among some segments of Diné society (Thurston 35). In short, teaching basic writing at Diné College means reckoning with students’ complex and variable relationships to a technology that has been compromised by its association with the settler state.

As I planned my English 100B course, I knew I also needed to consider my own identity and positionality at Diné College. I was, after all, the latest in a long line of bilagáana (white/Anglo) English teachers that many of my students would have encountered over the course of their schooling. I had to ask myself what *I* wanted with tribal college writing instruction. Why did I think teaching writing was important and worthwhile in this setting, despite the uncomfortable specter of assimilationism? The answer to these questions, I came to believe, is the essential role that writing plays in contending with the structures of U.S. settler colonialism.

BASIC WRITING, MEET SETTLER COLONIAL STUDIES

Over the last two decades, postcolonial theory, with its powerful concepts of borderlands, contact zones, and hybridity, has had a major influence on basic writing studies. However, most postcolonial theory derives from critical examinations of exploitation colonialism—for example, the British colonial presence in South Asia—which is a distinct historical formation from the ongoing settler colonialism that has led to independent settler states like Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Without denying the important insights of postcolonial theory, I believe the scenes and purposes of tribal college basic writing are better understood through settler colonial theory, which addresses the actual power structures in which Native students live, learn, and write. Indeed, any writing pedagogy which aims to develop students’ critical awareness of local, national, and global structures of inequality stands to benefit from an understanding of settler colonialism.

Historian Lorenzo Veracini offers a helpful articulation of the distinctions between settler and exploitation colonialism. First, while exploitation colonialism requires the physical presence of nonindigenous colonial administrators, these individuals generally consider themselves to be temporary residents: they are citizens of the imperial nation-state and will eventually return to their home country. Settler colonialism, however, involves the permanent settlement of nonindigenous people on Indigenous lands, which results in the formation of an independent settler state. Thus, in settler colonial contexts, “invasion is a structure, not an event” (Wolfe 388). Second, exploitation colonialism aims to control the labor, extractive resources, and markets of the colony. As Veracini memorably puts it, exploitation colonialism says to the colonized, “you, work for me” (1). Settler colonialism, however, is motivated primarily by a drive to acquire *land* and therefore seeks to dispossess and eliminate the Indigenous peoples who have prior claims to that land. It says to the colonized, “you, go away” (Veracini 1), although the mechanisms by which it attempts this vary across time and place. The United States, for example, used a combination of treaty-making, forced removal, land allotment policies, and outright warfare and genocidal violence to acquire Native land throughout the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The “domestic dependent nation” status of the 566 tribal nations currently recognized by the federal government—a legal status that distinguishes many (although not all) Native peoples from other minoritized racial and ethnic groups in the United States—is the result of this particular settler colonial history.

Veracini argues that a defining feature of settler colonialism is an ongoing effort to erase the state’s history and current status as a settler state by obscuring the continued existence of Indigenous peoples and/or denying their prospects for long-term survival. Settler culture may be eager to appropriate images of Indigenous people as a means of asserting local or national identities (sports mascots being one highly visible example). However, such representations typically consign Indigeneity to the past or present Native people as endangered and in the process of disappearing (see *The Last of the Mohicans*, for example, or the ubiquitous *End of the Trail* sculpture of the slumped, defeated Indian riding away from the vanquished frontier). Because settler colonialism wants Indigenous people to go away, their very survival is a form of resistance: continued Indigenous presence calls attention to the settler state as a *settler* state by revealing that the project of settlement is incomplete. It undermines the narratives of Native vanishment, perhaps tragic but always inevitable, that have long justified the settler colonial project.

As Veracini is careful to note, however, resisting settler colonialism does not mean undoing settler colonialism. While it may be possible to expel the colonizers in the context of exploitation colonialism, the realities of settler demographics and political independence render the physical decolonization of settler states unlikely. Rather, because the logic of settler colonialism is to “extinguish the settler colonial relation”—that is, to negate treaty agreements and the legal structures of tribal sovereignty—“the struggle against settler colonialism must aim to keep the settler-indigenous relationship intact” (Veracini 7). In short, resisting settler colonialism means maintaining Native political alterity, rejecting both “the melting pot” and uncritical forms of multiculturalism that celebrate Native cultural heritage but fail to acknowledge tribal nations’ distinctive legal status.

Settler colonial theory offers a helpful lens through which to consider Lyons’ question, “What do American Indians want from writing?” Writing has clearly played an important role in the machinations of settler colonialism—print is the medium that has codified U.S. legal structures that sanction dispossession. Writing has also been a means of producing and reproducing representations of Native people that either consign them to a frontier past, cast them as incapable of self-governance in the present, or invoke narratives of tragedy, “fragility” (Veracini 4), and cultural loss that deny the possibility of positive Native futures. On the other hand, writing is also a means by which Native people have resisted settler colonialism. Tribal nations have used—and often repurposed—written documents like treaties and legislation to hold on to tribal lands, reassert land-use rights, and resist environmental exploitation on and near their landbases.

Likewise, written Native self-representations can assert what author and literary critic Gerald Vizenor calls “Native presence”: that is, an insistence on the continued existence of Native communities and nations and a refusal to allow contemporary Native lives to be characterized by notions of “victimry” (vii). These Native self-representations counter settler colonial narratives of tragedy and vanishment that deny the role of Indigenous people in the settler state’s future. As Malea Powell demonstrates, Native people have long “used” writing to “refigure ‘the Indian’” (400), ‘the Indian’ being a settler colonial construction rather than an accurate depiction of existing Native people or communities. Thus, “compromised” though it may be, writing is an important technology for confronting settler ideologies with tribally specific representations that assert Native presence and futurity. As long as there is Indigenous land to be taken or exploited, sovereignties to be undermined or disregarded, or Native presence to be obscured, the

ever-evolving structures of U.S. settler colonialism will present important exigencies for Native writing.

Settler colonial theory also offers a useful reframing of the conversation about Native American students in basic writing studies. More than a decade ago, in the *JBW* article “Rethinking the Basic Writing Frontier,” Laura Gray-Rosendale, Loyola Bird, and Judith Bullock made the important observation that Native students have been rendered invisible by the frontier metaphors, regional biases, racialized preconceptions, and urban focus of basic writing scholarship. Since that article was published, settler colonial studies has emerged as a distinctive field, one that provides a theoretical apparatus and critical vocabulary that helps explain the scholarly oversights that Gray-Rosendale and her colleagues identify. For example, we might understand the absence of Native students in basic writing scholarship—and the uncritical use of frontier discourses to describe teaching and knowledge-making—as a function of settler colonial ideologies that deny the continued presence of Native communities and their ongoing claims to the land.

Furthermore, settler colonial theory provides insight into why Gray-Rosendale and her co-authors experience success with the pedagogical approaches they have developed for working with Native students. For instance, Gray-Rosendale describes inviting her students to analyze popular representations of Native people and “critique how mainstream American culture constructs us all”—to “challenge the American government” and “a United States that constructs Native Americans as ‘others’” (84). From the perspective of settler colonial studies, I understand her to be giving students the opportunity to grapple with how settler culture circulates anachronistic and homogenizing stereotypes that deny twenty-first century Native presence in order to obscure the reality that the American government presides over a settler state.

However, settler colonial theory also reveals a persistent discursive tension in “Rethinking the Basic Writing Frontier.” Although the authors acknowledge that Native students’ “lives and experiences var[y] greatly from one another” (95), they repeatedly cite the risk of “assimilation” in basic writing courses: of “taking [students] away from their entire cultures, traditions, rituals, and family structures” (79). While the authors’ respect for Native students’ heritage and values is admirable, they seem to unwittingly reproduce discourses of Native cultural difference that elide the “modernity and diversity of...actually existing Indian nation[s]” (Lyons, “Actually Existing” 297). Such elisions have political implications. For instance, the

authors invoke the commonplace of Native students “mov[ing] between two worlds” (88), which, as educational ethnographer Donna Deyhle argues, functions to obscure the racialized socioeconomic structures that actually undermine Native students’ academic success. By employing these discourses, Gray-Rosendale and her colleagues may inadvertently play into what Maureen Konkle calls the “inordinate focus on Native difference and cultural identity” that abets colonialism by distracting from the political dimensions of Native people’s experiences (7).

Lyons asserts that “the discourses of assimilation and authenticity... have always been language games designed for Indians to lose” (“Actually Existing” 303). And indeed, Gray-Rosendale, Bird, and Bullock’s focus on the perils of assimilation lead them to overlook the fact that Native students—and the tribal nations that often subsidize those students’ education through scholarships—might seek out academic literacies for the purpose of furthering tribal self-determination. Moreover, the “language games” of assimilation situate academic literacies on the non-Native side of a dangerous binary, ignoring the reality that a great deal of basic writing instruction for Native students takes place in tribally controlled colleges. If tribal college writing curricula are assertions of rhetorical sovereignty, a means of resisting settler colonialism by maintaining Native political alterity, then tribal college writing instruction is, by definition, the *opposite* of assimilation. In its most productive iterations, settler colonial theory refocuses attention on Native sovereignty, dispossession, and continued claims to the land, offering a politically engaged way out of the pedagogical double-bind created by the discourses of assimilation, authenticity, and monolithic Native cultural difference. I am fortunate to have the benefit of these theoretical developments as I respond to Gray-Rosendale, Bird, and Bullock’s important and (alas) largely unheeded call for more attention to Native American students in basic writing studies.

A brief methodological note before I turn to what I actually did in English 100B. Writing retrospectively, it is easy to present this narrative of pedagogical reasoning as though I had the entire trip mapped out from the beginning, and to imply that I traveled alone, with nothing but a Ford full of theory for company. On the contrary, the practices I describe in the remainder of this essay emerged from an ongoing and often frantic interweaving of my own disciplinary frameworks with what I was learning through interviews and classroom observations over the course of my ethnographic research. Likewise, my teaching functioned as a kind of preliminary analysis of these data, laying the groundwork for the theorization of locally responsive com-

position pedagogy at Diné College that I developed in my dissertation. The research and the teaching were thus inextricably bound up in one another. This essay presents my experiences of the teaching side of the journey, and I take sole responsibility for any questionable detours. However, my English 100B course would not have been what it was without the local knowledge generously shared by my Diné College colleagues and their students.

ENGAGING WITH SETTLER COLONIALISM IN ENGLISH 100B

The eleven students in my English 100B course were, in many ways, a microcosm of the diversity and complexity of contemporary Diné society. While all self-identified as Diné, several also described themselves as having Pueblo, Mexican, and/or Anglo ancestry. Three students were bilingual, and several of the others understood spoken Diné bizaad to varying degrees, but others said they had little or no understanding of the language. Likewise, students' spiritual identities were diverse and overlapping. Over the course of the semester, they mentioned participating in traditional Diné spiritual practices, the Native American Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and other Christian denominations. Furthermore, like the students who participated in my dissertation study, the students in 100B held a wide variety of personal interests and were engaged in an array of extracurricular literacy practices.

They ranged in age from eighteen to their late twenties. Some had young children of their own, and several others had major child- or eldercare responsibilities within their families. About half of the students had lived their entire lives on the Navajo Nation; others had moved on and off reservation repeatedly throughout their childhood and early adulthood. All of the students lived with immediate or extended family. While several students resided within five miles of the branch campus, others were commuting from as far as fifty miles away, and maintaining reliable transportation to campus was sometimes challenging. For nearly all of the students in the class, personal or family finances were a constant pressure.

The students' academic backgrounds were also diverse. Several had graduated from high school that spring, a few were continuing Diné College students who had been enrolled in English 100A the previous semester, and some were newly enrolled at Diné College but had previously attended other postsecondary institutions, either on- or off-reservation. The rest were entering college for the first time after breaks in their schooling that ranged from a year to a decade. While most of the students had at least some experience

using computers for schoolwork, a few struggled with relatively basic skills like creating and saving Word documents or attaching email files. Nearly all of the students were among the first generation in their family to attend college. While many were still figuring out their long-term academic and career goals, most expressed a desire for greater financial security for themselves and their families, and several also sought careers that would enable them to contribute to improving conditions in their communities.

Many of the challenges these students faced in pursuing postsecondary education were bound up in the structures of settler colonialism. These structures have fostered reservation socioeconomic conditions in which unemployment is high, the quality of K-12 education is inconsistent, and poverty-related logistical difficulties and social problems can disrupt students' schooling at every stage. In this section, I discuss three of the more successful ways in which I sought to foreground the rhetorical exigencies of settler colonialism in English 100B while meeting Diné College's self-determined learning goals for the course. First, we contextualized EAE in relation to settler colonialism. Then, we examined how Diné people have historically used writing to resist settler colonialism. Finally, we discussed how Native activists have employed writing as part of broader "transnational indigenous movement[s]" (Huhndorf 366)—both within and beyond the United States—that push back against settler colonialism on a global scale. I conclude with a discussion of students' final course portfolios, which suggest the pedagogical value of these approaches.

Contextualizing Edited American English

I came into English 100B with some anxiety about how to approach the issue of "correctness" in Diné College students' writing. I was, of course, familiar with longstanding debates in basic writing studies about the effectiveness of direct grammar instruction, and I was also aware that many of the students in my class had a long and stultifying history with writing instruction that focused almost exclusively on sentence-level concerns. Likewise, I had been following recent conversations in the field about translanguaging (Canagarajah, "Codemeshing"; Horner et al.; Horner), and I was eager to acknowledge and respect the unique linguistic resources in this setting, including the English language variety that most Diné College students now speak as their primary language.

However, it was clear to me from the English 100B course description, my branch campus's textbook requirement, and conversations with my su-

pervisor and other English faculty that Diné College saw advancing students' proficiency with EAE as one of the major objectives of the course. I also took seriously Lyons' "unsexy argument endorsing the value of teaching Standard English to Natives" ("Fencing" 79). Lyons views tribal college writing pedagogy as a matter of providing Native students with access to a powerful "grapholect" ("Fencing" 101). In order to succeed at off-reservation colleges and universities, most Diné College students will need to be proficient in EAE, not least because of the racist interpretations some faculty and employers have of "nonstandard" features in Native students' writing. Furthermore, in the context of settler colonialism, competency in EAE is a necessary tool for exerting tribal self-determination and extending sovereignty in legal settings. Thus, it seemed to me that the question was not *whether* to teach EAE in English 100B, but *how*. The approach I took aligns in many ways with the concept of critical language awareness advocated by scholars like Keith Gilyard, who writes, "although English itself, much less its written, academically sanctioned versions, has served slavery, colonialism, class oppression, and gender exploitation...the practical situation is that it's a major linguistic tool that we have had to and will have to employ" (38). Gilyard argues that basic writing courses can be spaces in which we help students become aware of the role language plays in both reproducing and reimagining these structures of power—to show them the "revolutionary possibilities of appropriation" (38).

My first step in building such awareness was to contextualize EAE in relation to colonialism. Early in the semester, we spent an entire week discussing the history of "Englishes" on a global scale. I emphasized the fact that English has been shaped over time by multiple invasions of the British Isles by speakers of various European languages, and that the long history of British colonialism has led to a proliferation of spoken Englishes around the world, many of which are now found in settler states and are ascribed varying statuses within systems of race- and class-based inequality (Bhatt). In order to have a concrete basis from which to discuss English language diversity, we watched video clips from *Trainspotting*—Ewan MacGregor's famous line about Scotland being "colonized by wankers" got a big laugh from the students—as well as *The Wire*, *Smoke Signals*, and the reality television show *Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo*. In our class discussion, the students readily identified defining features as well as the ascribed status of the different English varieties used in those clips.

From there, we began charting some of the distinctive features of Navajo English. While students were quick to come up with unique lexical features (for example, the common exclamation of surprise "Is *it*?"), it took more

prompting to get to some of the morphological features that distinguish Navajo English from EAE. Such features include tense markers that function as aspect markers in Navajo English, often interpreted as “verb tense confusion” by English teachers responding to Diné students’ writing, as well as different conventions for pluralizing mass nouns (see Thurston; Schaengold; Webster, “On Intimate Grammars”). Several students initially described their own English to me as “bad” or “broken”—characterizations I found downright distressing—so we devoted significant time to deconstructing “Standard English” ideologies, particularly as they function in relation to racism and classism in the settler state. To my mind, discussing, historicizing, and validating Navajo English addresses the college’s stated mission to advance student learning through “the study of Diné language[s], history, and culture.”

We then turned our attention to EAE as a written language variety: its history, its affordances, and its power, as well as whom it privileges and how it is often (and inaccurately) equated with intelligence, particularly in academic settings. The students examined several examples of writing in English varieties other than EAE, including passages from Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. We also looked at a facsimile of the first pages of Increase Mather’s 1676 *A Brief History of the Warr [sic] with the Indians in New England* in order to demonstrate how EAE was still in the process of being standardized during the early stages of North American settler colonialism. This text provided an opportunity to talk about how writing has been used to record and privilege settler narratives, an exigence that has prompted responses from Native writers like William Apess, whose “Eulogy on King Philip,” published in 1836, directly counters Mather’s history of King Philip’s War.

With this critical contextualization of EAE in place, we turned to students’ own writing-in-progress. Over the course of the semester, their major writing assignments included a literacy narrative, an interview-based essay about the role of writing in a career field they were considering, and a public letter that took a stance on a pressing issue facing students’ communities. We took each of these assignments through multiple rounds of revision based on a combination of peer and instructor feedback. When responding to students’ writing, I drew on Paul Kei Matsuda’s recommendations for helping multilingual students develop metalinguistic awareness. In advanced drafts of students’ papers—typically the second or third, after at least one round of feedback and revision addressing more global issues—I began coding patterns of grammar, usage, and punctuation that departed from the conventions of EAE. I asked students to use the metalinguistic commentary provided on a

code key to inform specific editing decisions in their drafts and to develop personalized “editing checklists”—essentially, reflective editing logs—over the course of the semester. I also discussed some of these patterns with students in individual conferences about their drafts.

The goal of this formative feedback and reflection was to give students the opportunity to become aware of their own patterns of “nonstandard” usage and approach editing with these features in mind. I encouraged students to think of editing as making rhetorical choices about usage based on purpose and audience, rather than as “correction.” I invited them to incorporate words and phrases in Diné bizaad into their writing when it suited their rhetorical purposes, and to consider their audience carefully when deciding whether and how to translate those words into English. I proceeded from the understanding that we were not “fixing” students’ “broken” English, but rather honing their ability to use a powerful written English variety, one that would, as the Diné College mission states, help prepare students for “further studies and employment in a multicultural world” and equip them to use writing to “contribute to the well-being of the Navajo Nation.”

Writing Diné Self-Determination

Once we had contextualized EAE, we began to look at the role writing has played in the history of Diné efforts to retain their lands, defend treaty rights, and assert self-determination and sovereignty in the context of U.S. settler colonialism. We began with the Treaty of 1868 (Naaltsos Sáni). The signing of this document, which is still celebrated on the Navajo Nation each June, enabled the Diné to return to their homeland after a devastating scorched-earth campaign, forced removal to an internment camp at Bosque Redondo (Hwéeldi), and four years of incarceration, all at the hands of the U.S. Army (Iverson, *Diné*). In some ways, the treaty exemplifies the double-edged role of writing in the context of settler colonialism: it was used to “contain” the Diné on designated reservation lands in order to secure broader settlement projects in the Southwest, but it also created the legal means for Diné people to reclaim their territories after years of removal. Likewise, the treaty recognized a measure of tribal sovereignty that has been a basis of modern Diné nation-building efforts over the subsequent century and a half.

In English 100B, we examined both facsimiles of the original hand-written treaty document (complete with the “X-mark” signatures of Barboncito, Manuelito, and other well-known Diné leaders during this period) as well as copies of the typed version of the treaty, which is still a living legal document.

Only one student in the class had ever read the treaty before, and in small group discussions of the text, students were quick to identify a number of federal promises that had not been met. We talked about how this text and a series of executive orders in the following decades created most of the current boundaries of the Navajo Nation; students were well aware of many of the political and economic implications of these boundaries, although they were less familiar with the legal history that had given rise to them. This led to ongoing discussions of topics like land allotment, termination policies, jurisdiction issues and tribal law enforcement, grazing rights, dry laws, and the racialized socioeconomics of bordertowns like Gallup and Farmington. These last points touched on heated local political issues that sometimes revealed significant differences of opinion within the class, and our debates inspired several students' choice of topics for their final public letter assignment. The Treaty of 1868 thus became the starting point for an unfolding conversation throughout the rest of the semester about the ways that writing, particularly law, continues to shape the social geographies of Diné people's lives in the context of settler colonialism.

Following our extended examination of the treaty, we went on to discuss some of the ways that Diné people used writing in the first half of the twentieth century to pursue greater self-determination and resist settler colonialism. To do this, we looked at several texts from Peter Iverson's volume of primary Diné historical documents (*For Our Navajo People*). These texts included a series of Diné-authored public letters, speeches, and petitions. One set demanded better teachers and resources for local schools. These appeals for educational resources demonstrate the value that generations of Diné people have assigned to acquiring literacies for contending with the unequal power relations of settler colonialism. They also foreshadow the long-standing desire for community control over the education of Diné children that would come to fruition during the educational self-determination movements of the 1960s (Stein, *Tribally Controlled*). These letters became an opportunity to discuss the key leadership role that Diné people have played in pan-Native movements. Some students were proud to learn that the first tribally-controlled community schools and postsecondary institutions in the United States were founded right there on the Navajo Nation.

The second set of documents we examined came from the extended campaign for full voting rights for Native people in the Southwest. This discussion was particularly timely during the waning days of the Fall 2012 election. The twentieth-century effort to secure voting rights was an important way that Diné people sought to exert greater presence and influence within the

settler state. These uses of writing signal Diné people's desire to participate in that state's future—to help shape its direction and secure greater self-determination within it—rather than fading into the past, as settler narratives demand. As in many college classrooms, students' investments in electoral politics varied widely: several were quite politically engaged at the local and Navajo Nation level, and a few were closely following the national presidential race; other students were uninvolved or cynical about the entire political process. However, many of the students had been unaware that Native Americans did not have the right to vote in New Mexico state elections until 1962. While some of the letters from Iverson's collection were more interesting to students than others, they demonstrated that Diné people have been using writing to seek greater self-determination and resist settler colonialism as far back as students' great- and great-great-grandparents' generations.

Writing Indigenous Transnationalism

During the final third of the semester, we expanded our scope beyond the Navajo Nation to look at some of the ways writing has figured in transnational Native American and Indigenous movements since the 1960s. I was initially startled to realize that most of the students in the class knew relatively little about the Red Power movement: in late October, when I brought up the fact that the American Indian Movement (AIM) activist Russell Means had recently passed away, only one student in the class knew who he was. We started our conversation about pan-Native political writing by discussing the 1969 Occupation of Alcatraz by Native American activists. We read the Alcatraz Proclamation, a public statement released by the activists that claimed the San Francisco Bay island for all Native Americans by right of discovery (Smith and Warrior) and examined how it satirizes the discourses of settler colonialism to critique settler history as well as living conditions on mid-twentieth-century reservations. Students immediately caught the humor as well as the bite of this document, expressing surprise that such a radical statement had been widely circulated by the mainstream news media. More than forty years after the Proclamation was written, students still recognized and appreciated its edge.

During this unit, we also had the opportunity to hear firsthand from a Diné activist who had been involved with pan-Native political movements since the 1960s. Jean Whitehorse, a librarian at the campus who has played a major role in efforts to expand internet access across the Navajo Nation, took part in the Occupation of Alcatraz as a young woman and went on to partic-

ipate in many AIM-related activities over the decades. After hearing about her ongoing political work from another instructor, I invited Whitehorse to visit our class as a guest speaker. She told students about the Native American political causes for which she has worked and the role that writing plays in her collaborations with activists across the country. Whitehorse discussed the importance of literacy for the well-being of the Navajo Nation, citing examples that ranged from understanding corporate coal mining leases to negotiating government land disputes to her own story of being involuntarily sterilized by Indian Health Service doctors after signing release forms she believed were for an emergency appendectomy. These examples—the environmental exploitation of Diné lands, unresolved controversies over land rights, and what Whitehorse referred to as genocidal federal power over Indigenous women’s bodies (see Lawrence)—are all dimensions of settler colonialism that she has experienced within her lifetime. The English 100B students were riveted by Whitehorse’s presentation, as well as by the realization that their librarian had been a witness to and player in the history we were discussing. As one student said on the way out of class, “I thought she was just an old lady.”

Finally, as part of a broader discussion about students’ takeaways from English 100B during the last week of class, I handed out copies of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, passed in 2007 after decades of Indigenous activism (Pulitano). As it turned out, the students knew little about the United Nations and were not familiar with the Declaration. Some, in fact, had been only vaguely aware that there *were* Indigenous people in other parts of the world who shared similar experiences of settler colonialism, past and present. While we did not have as much time as I would have liked to dig into the Declaration or to look at the role that writing is playing in global Indigenous activism, the students’ level of interest in other Indigenous experiences suggests that this would be a fruitful topic to expand in future iterations of the course, perhaps with greater attention to the possibilities of social media and other forms of digital writing for a new generation of Indigenous activists.

STUDENT REFLECTIONS

While there are certainly things I will do differently if I have the opportunity to teach this course again, the students’ performance in their end-of-semester portfolios suggests to me that framing the course around the exigencies of settler colonialism was a promising approach for achieving Diné

Beyond Assimilation

College's goals for English 100B in the context of its broader institutional mission. In these portfolios, I asked students to submit final versions of two of their three major writing projects for a letter grade (they had the option of dropping the project they felt was weakest) along with all of their draft materials, their complete editing checklist, and a reflective cover letter. For the cover letter, I asked students to address a series of questions, including:

- How have you grown as a writer this semester? In other words, what are you able to do now as a writer that you weren't able to do in August? Please provide specific examples of this growth from your writing projects.
- How are you using (and how do you plan to use) what you've learned in English 100B in your other college courses? How are you using what you've learned in your life outside of college?

In their cover letters, nearly all of the students stated that they believed their ability to use EAE had improved over the course of the semester, and the contents of their portfolios corroborated these claims. All nine² of the students who completed the course produced final drafts that demonstrated greater familiarity with the conventions of EAE. In her portfolio cover letter, Angela³ went so far as to quantify her improvement over time, writing, "In draft 1, I made 86 mistakes as compared to my second draft, which I made thirty-six mistakes and in my third draft I made only five mistakes." While Angela's use of the word "mistakes" reveals that I was not as successful as I would have liked in reframing students' understanding of patterns of "non-standard" usage, it is clear that she took pride in her language learning and seemed to appreciate that the editing checklist enabled her to track that learning in a concrete way. However, lest readers suspect that all English 100B did was turn basic writing students into error counters, I will point out that Angela went on to write the following:

I also learned about my history, which I never knew about before. I will educate my children about their history and others as well. I also learned about different Englishes. I now look at the way other people talk differently. I know because of their environment, family, and primary language it effects the way and how they speak.

Angela's comments regarding her changed perspectives on language and history were echoed in other students' cover letters, which suggests that

this course accomplished Diné College's learning goals for English 100B while furthering student learning through the study of Diné language(s), history, and culture.

In their cover letters, several students also noted their appreciation that the course was not focused solely on grammar. As Rose wrote, "The class was actually fun; it did not seem like an English class...I thought we would be doing grammar nonstop and less writing at first, but the class was different. Thank you for making class not so boring it was the first English class I liked." Comments like Rose's encourage my belief that framing the course around the exigencies of settler colonialism was intellectually engaging for students and helped them begin to understand writing as something more—and more interesting—than just "grammatical correctness." Such comments also affirm that basic writing students at Diné College value being challenged with complex ideas, substantive writing assignments, and high expectations, provided they are also given the scaffolding and instructor support to succeed.

Some English 100B students were particularly galvanized by their expanded sense of how writing could help them make positive changes for Diné people. As Corey wrote, "Standard Written English⁴ is the key type of writing for our generation, because it has the power to change and make laws for our constitution." Corey's comments reflect an understanding that there are multiple varieties of English, some of which have powerful legal and political affordances. Furthermore, his comments suggest that he found those affordances motivating. In a broader sense, his observations also demonstrate that basic writing courses at tribal colleges—even those that unapologetically assume the goal of "teaching Standard English to Natives" (Lyons, "Fencing" 79)—are not a form of assimilation. On the contrary, they exist to equip students with the linguistic, rhetorical, and literate resources to improve conditions in reservation communities, further tribal self-determination and sovereignty, and resist settler colonialism by maintaining Native political alterity. By framing the course in terms of the rhetorical exigencies of settler colonialism, I believe I made those objectives more explicit to both myself and my students.

CONCLUSIONS/BEGINNINGS

The basic writing course I taught at Diné College was in many ways a test drive: I started out with what I thought I knew in August 2012, and I made frequent recalibrations as I got to know my students better and learned from

long-time Diné College writing faculty. In the year and half since I taught the course, I have spent a lot more time on the road thinking, talking, and writing about writing at Diné College. This essay reflects what I thought I was doing at the time and how I have come to view the experience through the rearview mirror. The aspects of my pedagogical approach that seemed to get some traction offer several insights to other tribal college composition faculty, to writing instructors at off-reservation institutions serving Native students, and perhaps to basic writing faculty in other two- and four-year college settings, as well.

First, this approach moves beyond the well-meaning but misguided worry that teaching academic literacies to Native students is inherently assimilationist. The ubiquity of writing courses at tribal colleges—as well as the extent to which tribal nations subsidize these courses at off-reservation institutions through scholarships (see Gray-Rosendale, Bird, and Bullock)—demonstrates that these nations value academic literacies precisely *because* they can be used to further tribal self-determination in the context of U.S. settler colonialism. The question, as I have suggested, is not whether to teach these literacies, but how. Lyons observes that there is an Ojibwe national literature stretching back to the nineteenth century, one that consists primarily of public writing, which can and should be the basis for tribal college writing instruction (“Fencing”). Much of this public writing responds to historically situated exigencies of settler colonialism. The Navajo Nation also has a literature of this sort—Iverson’s collection of primary documents is one excellent compendium—as do other tribal nations. These national literatures are as much a part of Native students’ heritage as oral traditions, and they can be productive readings for writing courses that affirm Native students’ identities and enable them to see themselves as part of a long line of Native rhetors who have used writing to advance their peoples’ interests and “refigure ‘the Indian’” (Powell 400) for national and global audiences.

My experiences in English 100B also contribute to ongoing conversations about the politics of EAE in basic writing instruction. There has, unfortunately, been relatively little scholarly discussion of the role of Native American English varieties in the writing classroom (for exceptions, see Thurston; Lyons, “Fencing”), even less examination of the aesthetic affordances of these English varieties (Webster, “Still”), and no discussion of how to help students make effective rhetorical choices using the full range of linguistic resources at their disposal. I am not wholly satisfied with the approach I took in 100B—at the time, I did not know enough about the features of Navajo English to discuss it with students as precisely or affirmingly as I would have

liked. However, Diné College students' level of interest in the colonial history of English language diversity and in deconstructing Standard English ideologies supports the idea that this is a promising way to contextualize EAE for Native students. Critically situating world Englishes in the broader history of colonialisms and economic globalization—and understanding EAE as both an instrument and a means of resisting the racialized socioeconomic inequalities that result from these histories—could be a productive approach in many basic writing classrooms.

Finally, the introduction of settler colonial theory contributes to the long tradition of critical pedagogical approaches in basic writing studies. Scholars like Ira Shor, Patricia Bizzell, Mike Rose, Min-Zhan Lu, Bruce Horner, Keith Gilyard, and Tom Fox have long advocated basic writing pedagogies that invite students to undertake rigorous intellectual work that includes critical examination of the discourses, language ideologies, and socioeconomic structures that impact their lives and perpetuate class- and race-based inequalities. For Native students, such critical pedagogies *must* include examination of their locations within the structures of U.S. settler colonialism, which shape their social geographies, political realities, and the rhetorical exigencies to which much of their writing responds. However, settler colonialism is not simply a Native issue. *All* Americans live within a settler state, and the fact that some of us can ignore that reality is itself a function of settler colonialism's ideological structures (Veracini; Wolfe). My work with Diné College students has convinced me that any critical pedagogy should acknowledge the role that settler colonialism, now deeply intertwined with global capitalism, plays in perpetuating the socioeconomic structures in which all our students live, learn, and write. Including Indigenous perspectives in the writing classroom is not simply a matter of multicultural "coverage." As the Diné rhetors in my 100B course taught me, those perspectives enable all of us to locate ourselves in new, critical ways. Since August 2012, I have loaded up my Ford and crisscrossed this country several times over, and it looks different to me now: the land and the people on it have been refigured. Now, I see Native presence, and I see my own responsibility to help foster conditions that support positive, self-determined Native futures.

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Notes

1. The Navajo Nation is the legal name for the landbase and government of the people commonly referred to as Navajo. In Diné bizaad, the Navajo language, these people call themselves “Diné,” or “the People,” which is the preferred term in many Diné College materials.
2. Two of the eleven students who enrolled in English 100B did not complete the course. In both cases, the students were struggling primarily with family and transportation issues rather than insurmountable academic difficulties.
3. The students quoted in this article granted permission to use these passages from their cover letters, and are referred to using pseudonyms of their choosing.
4. In order to align with the terminology favored by the other English instructor at the branch campus, with whom many of my students would be taking English 101 the following semester, I used the term “Standard Written English” rather than EAE in English 100B.

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