A Special Mountain Place and Sunrise Ceremony for Apache Students

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ABSTRACT

In this case study I document several visits to the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona, but describe/interpret in detail one special class when we asked the children to draw and share their "Special Mountain Home." I analyzed their artwork according to the emerging categories of subject matter, themes, scenes, and symbols that I discovered in my previous study of Apache children (Stokrocki & Buckpitt, 2002). Dominant findings in this new study were that participants' drawings included their sacred mountain, animals, and the Sunrise Ceremony that included traditional dancers, dwellings, female regalia, and part of a young maiden's "coming of age" ritual. Apache girls tend to draw feminine content of social experiences, care and concern, and domestic life. Boys depict male thunder god dancers for protection, and fishing and hunting scenes. No symbols of violence were noted. Apache cultural symbols seem to be slowly changing, indicated by the inclusion of graffiti in the community, a school painting of Jesus dressed as a Mescalero Apache, and a pickup truck, drawn by a female.

Introduction

In this study, the researcher aims to inquire about what it might be like to live on the Apache Reservation from the perspective of a child. I spent a day with the children at the St. Charles Mission School in Arizona and they drew their "special mountain place" and wrote rich descriptions of their drawings. Drawing results included their gorgeous mountain setting and Sunrise Ceremony. Their teachers further elaborated on the meaning of the children's drawings. So what specifically did they want to share? What can art education teachers and researchers learn from such experiences about the culture and the children's artworks and ideas? Finally, what can visitors learn about cultural mergence?

I have been doing research with several of the Native tribes in Arizona, especially the Navajo (Stokrocki, 1995). My work with the

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Apache began in 2000. One of my former published articles involved teaching computer animation daily for three weeks to the neighboring White Mountain Apache (Stokrocki & Buckpitt, 2002). I met art teacher Marcia Buckpitt at our state art education meeting and she invited me to do research with her. Later, through the Catholic Church outreach program, the nuns at the St. Charles Mission School invited me to teach an art lesson with the San Carlos children.[2] In this article, I present the understandings I gleaned from several visits to the San Carlos Reservation but describe and interpret in detail one special class in which we asked the children to draw and share their "Special Mountain Home."

Methodology

This case study is a systematic recording of daily events over time. It implies that the researcher is learning from people and not just studying them (Stokrocki, 1991, 1997). Such research can embody a major power struggle between the indigenous people observed and the researcher's biases (Smith, 2012; Staikidis, 2014). In this article I asked the children to tell me more about their life and traditions. I analyzed their artwork according to the categories of subject matter (objects), themes, scenes, and symbols. These categories emerged from my former research with White Mountain Apache children and computer animation (Stokrocki & Buckpitt. 2002). My biases and the teachers' interpretations limit the study findings because a visitor cannot really know the experience of living with Indigenous people in this mountain place[3] (Staikidis, 2014).

Contexts

The Physical Context

The two and a half hour drive east of Phoenix, Arizona, to the San Carlos Reservation, 1.8 million acres of rolling high desert that is larger than the state of Delaware, is quite picturesque. The road winds around the mountains through the mining towns of Superior and Globe and arrives in the upland area called the Mogollan Rim. To the north are great pine forests and to the south are scrub forests of pinion, mesquite and cacti, agave and yucca plants that grow along valley streams. Several Apache groups, including the Cibecue, San Carlos, and White Mountain people, live in this Arizona region (San Carlos Apache Culture Center, 2013). This article, however, is focused on drawings made by children of the San Carlos Apache.

As I approach the reservation, I see the Apache Gold Casino, now run by the Apache tribe. Further down the road is an abandoned lumber mill, at which we turn left and travel several miles into town. Some of the men have started working for the copper mines that recently reopened. The business district consists of buildings such as the police station, the tribal headquarters, Teen Center wall murals, some graffiti, and a supermarket. Homes are simple frame structures or ramshackle trailers sitting on sand or clay arroyos. People shop or run errands and women watch young children playing in their front yards. Down the street I parked in front of St. Charles Catholic Church.

Contemporary Context of Apache Culture and Art

Historically, art about Apaches made by non-Apaches contained realistically depicted warriors. For example, Frederic Remington became famous for his Apache ambush oil paintings. Yet paintings created by Apache Native Americans usually told a story of their Indian experience. For example, around 1900, Naiche (Chiricahua Apache) painted buckskin hide depicting the Apache girl's puberty ceremony (Wikipedia, 2015). They adorned clothes in spiritual designs to protect the wearer from enemies and to bring good luck (Native American Art, n.d.).

Apache art today is often concerned with maintaining cultural traditions and some elders have shared their current lived experiences, including the arts surrounding their Sunrise Dance (Reid & Henle,

2 None of the nuns were Apache.

3 Since the visit was in the winter/spring the weather was mild. As the summer is very hot, dry, and uncomfortable, many San Carlos people migrate to a cooler area. Poor folks seek shaded sites in the mountain area.

2012).[4] "I want these kids to know where they come from . . . .It keeps the tribe united . . . that's why these dances are important. It's an event that requires the help of each and every relative," according to Alexis Jada Pike's Grandma Reid, 2012, n.p.).

San Carlos Mission School

To the right side of St. Charles Catholic Church was the St. Charles Apache Mission School, a small brick building with a low hanging roof (see Figure 1).

Fig. 1 St. Charles Catholic Church is on the left and gray Mission School is to the right and mountains, hidden here, are in the back.

Unlike his predecessors, Father Gino Piccoli, the Franciscan pastor of the St. Charles Church, is committed to helping restore and nurture the Apache culture by incorporating it into the fabric of parish life. Father Piccoli explained:

> We meant well, but we goofed, and we said, "Leave your—leave your Apache culture and spirituality and become like us European Catholics or American Catholics." And so I said, "I'm not going to do that. I'm going to do everything I can to see what is beautiful about your spirituality and your culture, and whatever is beautiful is of God." (Eight/KAET Arizona State University, n.d., n.p.).

In addition to efforts within the church, the parish school is also very much involved in keeping the Apache traditions alive in San Carlos. This is in sharp contrast to the government practice a century earlier of sending Native American children away from home to boarding schools to be educated in the ways of White society.

The St. Charles School mission is to combine parts of Apache ceremonies with Catholic rituals (Triscinda Miller, personal correspondence, Feb. 18, 2015). Evidence of this new attitude was a painted figure of Jesus dressed in Mescalero Apache clothes that greeted us on the front bulletin board as we entered the school. Dressed as an Apache warrior, he had long black hair, a headband, weathered skin, buckskin shirt, boots, and a breechcloth (Garza, 2011). The basket at his feet held an eagle feather, a grass brush, a bag of tobacco, and cattail pollen –items used in the changing woman ceremony (see Figure 2). Jesus is holding a sacred rattle to the left and a painted sun symbol on his hand to the right. The mergence symbolic meanings reflect tolerance for cultural and religious differences.

Fig. 2 The inscription in the painting of Jesus dressed in Mescalero Apache clothes reads, "Giver of Life." These images reveal a merging of cultural icons.

4 To learn more about the ceremony, view a YouTube video, Apache Sunrise Ceremony September 2012 Kisha Harvey, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16G4j6suwxo.

An initial interview with Principal Sister Georgia revealed that the small school had several classrooms, a computer lab with 20 computers, and 150 children in attendance. For lunch, children walked over to the neighboring unified district public school building. The Catholic school is poor and receives various private and public subsidies (St. Charles Apache Mission School, 2015). The sixth grade teacher added, "This year was the most stable for having both parents in the home. There is little work on the reservation, so parents must travel to jobs in nearby cities. The school cannot afford an art teacher, so the Sisters teach art and music" (Personal interview with Sister Anne, January 3, 2003). The Apache families primarily teach about their culture. The school has an Apache culture teacher now and the teachers reinforce Apache cultural instruction. The teachers also incorporate Apache culture and language in their teaching, since English is the students' dominant language now, according to Juanita Kenton (Eight/KAET Arizona State University, n.d.).

Sister Greene elaborated on other aspects of the school's attention to teaching Apache culture:

> One of the things we're very proud of and feel we've been very successful with is our after-school program, and for the girls it means designing and actually making their own camp dress, their own jewelry, all of the things we associate with the Apache people. For the boys, it's learning their traditional sacred dances through what we call the *Ga'ans* or more commonly known as the Crown Dancers. And it's a wonderful experience. What we [sisters] have discovered through the culture clubs and the Apache Curriculum is that our children have better self-esteem. They have a better sense of themselves. (Eight/KAET Arizona State University, n.d., n.p.).

The Art Class and Drawing Project

The classroom was large with windows along one side, blackboard to the front, and bulletin boards on the opposite side. Students sat at their own desks facing the front of the room. The observed fifth and sixth grade combined class consisted of 11 girls and 8 boys.

The teachers invited me at the end of the school year because of their busy program, mandatory state standards, and cultural and remedial work with children. I asked if the students would draw "what they like to do," but Sister Anne thought that we would get mostly basketball pictures. She suggested that children draw "a special place to the Apache people." She passed out the 8" x 11" paper, colored pencils, and crayons that I brought for children to keep. I accepted the theme because I hoped to learn more about Apache perspectives through the eyes of the children. In the next few paragraphs, I will describe the children's drawings.

Mountain Scenes

Half of the drawings depicted mountains. Children started with triangle shapes for mountains. Several children called them the Triplet Mountains that are sacred and served as a lookout to see if the U.S. Calvary was coming during earlier times (see Figure 3). The mountains attract thunderstorms in the summer during the monsoon season. One student's drawing featured a dark colored sky with strokes in different directions and a brown colored mountain with a lightning bolt topping it. She called the drawing *Thunder Mountain*. Even though the drawing was too dark to duplicate, it communicated the wild wind and brilliant lightning that occurs during the late summer.

Fig. 3 The Triplet Mountain on the San Carlos Reservation in Peridot, Arizona.

Nalin,[5] a young girl, drew the three-peaked Triplet Mountain in the background with a sunrise. Behind her are two blooming saguaro cacti and several yucca plants that supply reeds to make the San Carlos Apaches' famous burden basket. The tiny metal bells featured at the end of its strings symbolize rain (see Figure 4). She called her picture *Big Mountain, and It Is Good*, explaining that the mountain spirits protect her people.

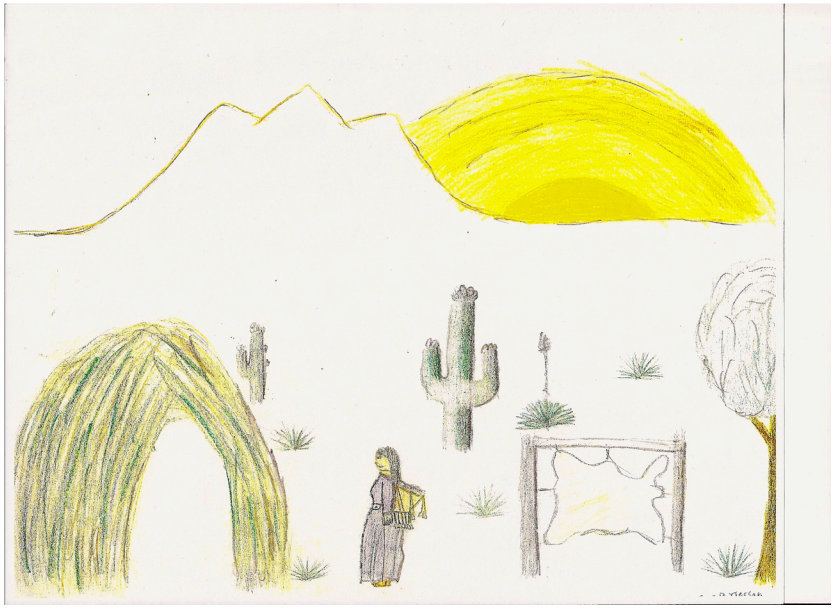

Fig. 4 A young girl, Nalin, drew the three-peaked Triplet Mountain in the background with a sunrise. In the foreground, from left to right, she depicted a wickiup (a traditional Apache shelter), a maiden carrying her burden basket on her back, a frame to support drying buckskin that she will make into a dress, and a tree as well as various desert plants in the background..

Similarly, nearly all students from the White Mountain Apache area in a former study (Stokrocki & Buckpitt, 2002) made landscapes, including mountains, trees, or cacti, with either sun or moon. In fact, one third-grader made a computer graphic of the famous Thunder Mountain. The mountains indeed are important to the Apache people who pray for rain for their crops and to placate the summer forest fires. Because it is so hot in the lowlands during the summer, most families still travel to the higher mountains for coolness. As they seasonally migrate from lowland to highland environment, they develop keen observation skills.

5 Pseudonyms are used for the children's names.

The Sunrise Ceremony and Spirit Dancers

Several drawings showed important rituals in the lives of Apache people. The annual Apache Sunrise Ceremony is hosted in the mountains nearby; the ceremony is a four-day, coming-of-age ritual for young maidens (for more information, view TheLonelyBearCub, n.d.). One female student, Jacali, portrayed an Apache maiden in traditional white buckskin dress with fringes who is carrying a ceremonial cane to insure her long life (see Figure 5).

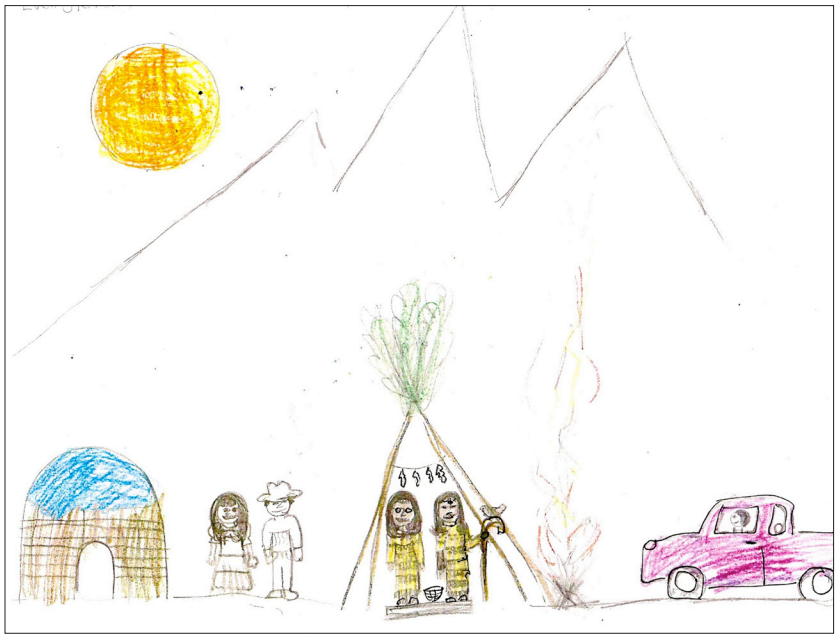

Fig. 5 Jacali drew an Apache maiden standing with her godmother for her coming-of-age ritual, known as the Sunrise Ceremony. They wait under a framed tent, representing her future home, that consists of willows with feathers suspended about her head.

The maiden wears an abalone shell tied on her forehead and an eagle feather attached to her hair in back of her head. This represents her "as a whole" (personal correspondence with Herb Stevens, Manager of the San Carlos Apache Culture Center, 7/20/2000). She waits under a framed tent that consists of willows. The maiden is portrayed here with her godmother, a virtuous woman whom the family admires and whose virtues—strength, endurance, and forbearance—they wish their daughter might emulate. Participants wish the young girl the following values: long life, health, food, and wealth (condensed from Basso, 1970).

Jacali colored a gradating sunrise in the background along with a saguaro, a yucca, and a *wickiup*, a dome-shaped dwelling whose frame is made of light pliable poles of either willow or cottonwood and covered with brush that is tied over the frame in parts. An opening at the top of the structure allows the pit fire smoke to escape. Here the young maiden will live when she first marries; however they will later move into a trailer or modular house. The juxtaposition of the pick-up truck is also a part of Apache life. Jacali included such important necessities that are part of indigenous contemporary life in this artwork and a continuation of their Legend of Changing Woman.

In the Sunrise Ceremony, the young girl assumes the role of "Changing Woman" and reenacts a creation legend. In the legend, Changing Woman hides in an abalone shell during the great flood that destroyed the earth. She is impregnated and bares the son of the sun and the son of the water. She is blessed with corn pollen in her hair for protection and fertility. The pollen is carried in a prayer basket made of willow or yucca. She wears woven strands of multiple beads in a rope, shawl, or T-shaped necklace. The young maiden portrayed kneels and then runs around with her cane at different distances and towards the eastern sun to commemorate this ancient story (Macerale, 1984). Earlier, Apache women used seeds to denote fertility and later traded the seeds for the colorful Venetian glass beads, introduced around 1540 by the Coronado Expedition. She also inserted metal disks, mirrors, or beads in her hair.

A young male student, Tarak, mentioned that during the ceremony male dancers, called *Ga'an,* appear to bless and protect the young girl and to ward off illness and evil (San Carlos Apache Cultural Center, 2015). See Figure 6. The *Ga'an* represent the four sacred directions and colors. In Figure 6, the crowned figures wear the east color of yellow. They also wear large fan-shaped wooden headdresses painted with sacred symbols. They paint their bodies in black and white images that evoke lightning, mountain designs, and animal motifs that represent the mountain spirits. The children drew a few clan markings, such as the sun, eagle, and bear claws. On the *Ga'an*s' arms are tied parts of forest greens. The male dancers also dance early Sunday morning under and around the young maiden's willow frame that symbolically provides her stability. The fifth spirit is "the gray one or clown" who represents "the unpredictable." The *Ga'an* provide balance to a young maiden's world. During the final stage of the ceremony, the godfather paints the young girl's face with earth colors and she becomes "White Painted Lady" (Reid & Henle, 2012). The *Ga'an* escort her in a procession as she journeys around the earth. All participants gather around the bonfire's wood ashes and the young girl's problems are symbolically thrown on the ashes. She runs around the ashes to denote her passage into maturity (Goodwin, 1994).

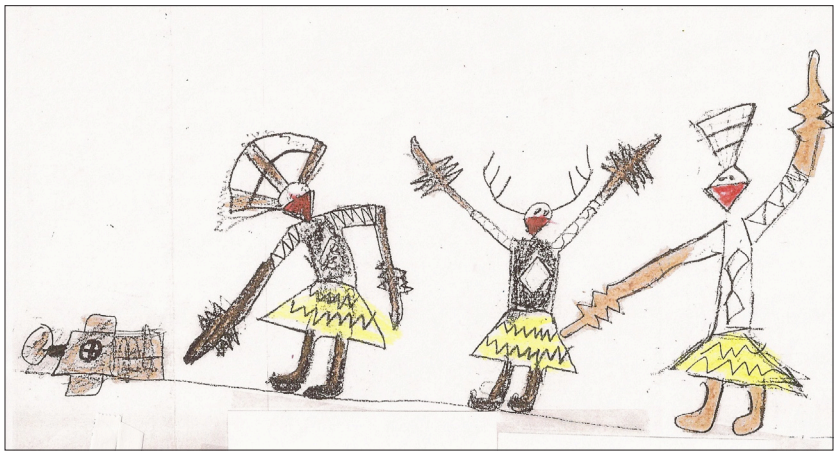

Fig. 6 Tarak drew three ceremonial crowned figures. Known as the *Ga'an* or mountain spirits, they dance with wands around a spectacular bonfire to provide strength and protection for the maiden.

Animal Subject Matter

Animals portrayed in several drawings included deer, horses, coyote, and birds. Elan, a young boy at the school, informed us that he learned to sketch from his father. He first drew the deer's outline in profile and added horns, ears, and eyes (see Figure 7). He then shaded under the deer's stomach with the side of his pencil. He depicted the deer as moving because their legs are slanted and form upside-down V-shapes. Elan seemed to emphasize the forward thrust of the front legs by outlining them again with brown color and darkening the rear legs. Later he colored the deer and trees brown and highlighted leaves in yellow-green colors. For ground foliage, he used pencil lines in haphazard X-shaped strokes and overlapped them in mustard yellow. For the Apache, the deer is an endangered animal as well as a spiritual one that represents fertility and protection and is the source of traditional buckskin Apache clothing.

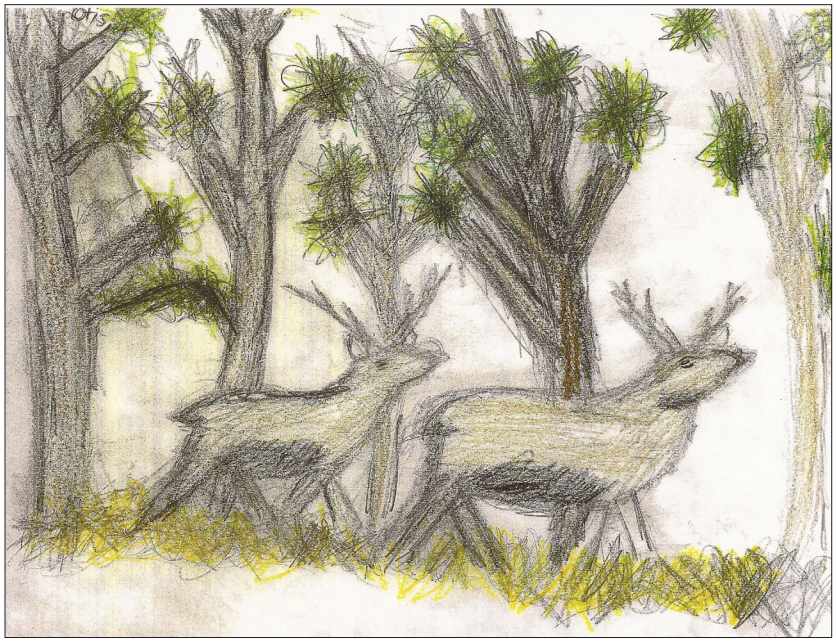

Fig. 7 One boy drew two forest deer, a fertility and protection symbol, as well as the source of the traditional buckskin Apache clothing.

The other students admired his drawing technique and realistic rendering and shading ability. In fact, most of the students formed full human figures from front or side views. Sister Georgia informed me that local Apache artists taught the children how to draw the Apache warrior and woman figure. In addition, Apache adults regularly draw some of these themes and so children have learned to imitate motifs from adult art.

Gender Differences

Apache girls tend to draw feminine content of social experience, care and concern, and domestic life similar to the drawings of mainstream Anglo children ages 7-12, as Tuman (1999) suggested. In my former study Apache girls depicted more human figures and feminine clothes in computer animation Kid Pix programs than boys did (Stokrocki & Buckpitt, 2002). An important consideration, however, is that the Apache consider such subjects and themes as important for young girls to learn as part of their rites of passage (TheLonelyBear-Cub. 2012).

In this study, the boys tended to draw thunder dancers and hunting scenes with deer, fish, rabbits, and birds, but no violent images. When watching the boys draw, I observed no evidence of mainstream masculine content such as danger, power, aggression, violence, heroism, or sports. There is little violence in community life because the Apache are basically peaceful people in spite of the negative versions of them portrayed as horse thieves and as aggressive fighters (Nicholson, 1999-2015). The boys play basketball, however, and will draw related images. Our project directions were to draw their special place, which perhaps is the main reason for a lack of these other themes. When freely drawing, Apache girls tend to draw hearts, flowers and landscapes and to include more human figures and feminine clothes than boys (Stokrocki & Buckpitt, 2002).

While Apache gender roles are changing somewhat because more women are working outside of the home, the Apache still value their traditional symbolic rites and symbols. This is in contrast to Tuman's (1999) study, in which she argues the need for young people (not specifically of Native American backgrounds) to "break out of the

gendered stereotypes that currently inform their drawings" (p. 57). Such an approach would discard the valued traditions of the Apache. I believe that the emphasis should be on extending expressive images and themes in teaching Native American children, not on discarding them. My college students at Arizona State particularly enjoyed the "purple pickup truck," drawn by a young girl (see Figure 5), indicating that the Apache are extending their traditional ceremonies and roles with modern conveniences.

The Apache still mostly celebrate the Sunrise Ceremony. "In the last twenty years, the Sunrise Ceremony has been elaborated, with expensive gift exchanges" (AAANativeArts.com, 1999-2008). Invited guests often attend certain portions of a Sunrise Ceremony and the Apache perform ceremonial parts for the public each year at the Hon Dah Casino in the White Mountains of Arizona. The Sunrise Ceremony is expensive to host and preparations take months. Other parts of the ceremony and preparations are sacred and secret. The persistence of such themes in the children's drawings suggests a continuance of Apache cultural beliefs and a living relationship with Mother Earth (Schlessinger, 1993). "The Apache will fight to maintain their land, especially the mountains, which they believe are sacred," according to Herb Stevens, Manager of San Carlos Cultural Center (personal communication, December 29, 2014).

Reflections

The research question guiding this study was, what is it like living on the Apache Reservation looking through the eyes of the children? The children revealed cultural connections between their home, community, and school environment. Noteworthy were their drawings of mountains, clothing, houses, and animals, and the children's descriptions of the meanings of each. The importance of male thunder dancing and the young girl's puberty rites were described in particular.

A second area of focus in this study was, what can art educators and researchers learn from such experiences about the culture and the children's artworks and ideas? Since the school has few guests and no art teacher, I assumed that the children valued my visit and the art materials that I left with them. As an outsider and a professor, the nuns may have limited what the children shared. They may have highlighted realistic drawing, such as the deer, because Euro-American culture values this kind of depiction. Yet I was surprised that the children seriously interpreted their land and I wasn't expecting the elaborate drawings of the Sunrise Ceremony because sharing this sacred tradition might not be allowed. In a former visit with members of a non-Native local township's art council, children only drew their favorite commercial place, such as a visit to Wal-Mart or a hamburger joint. I visited St. Charles Mission School again in March of 2015 and motivated the combined fifth and sixth grade Apache students to share their "Favorite Place".[6] All students drew the same mountains and similar animals. Two girls drew the same traditional buckskin regalia, and one boy depicted the outdoor basketball court.

I am pleased that I asked for so much elaboration because I learned much about the details of the children's lives, as I encouraged them to teach me. In some ways, encouraging the children to talk about their drawings was a form of storytelling. In Apache tradition, translating meaning and gaining trust takes time (Basso, 1970). From their history of negative experiences with white people, Native people are hesitant to share their ideas (Schlessinger, 1993). Therefore, this study became a researcher's learning experience over several years with Apache students and it was not just a show and tell event.

What can visitors learn about cultural mergence? They gain a deeper understanding of Apache life beyond the "heroes and holidays" type of multiculturalism (Eldridge, in press). They can relate to the symbolic richness of the Apache "coming of age" ceremony as it relates to the mountains and weather. Finally, they can gain an understanding of the importance of humans maintaining respect for nature and the merging of cultural symbols and meanings that reflect tolerance for cultural and religious differences.

6 I work with The Gold Canyon Arts Council, who motivate students each year to appreciate the arts by hosting musical concerts, speakers, and art exhibits. With two other retired art teacher colleagues, we continue to visit the children in San Carlos every year.

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