Joseph Henry Suina: Cochiti, N. Mexico

In 2004, the Spencer Foundation in Chicago gave NDSG funds to start up an oral history collection to be housed in its archive at the University of North Dakota's Chester Fritz Library. Made up at this point of taped interviews with fellow conferees in the NDSG circle past and present, the collection is an ongoing effort, first of all to help us recall and honor the various pasts that unite us as a democratic

It is not so much the old village or the backstreet that is significant. It is the perception and the affirmation of a world in which one is not necessarily a stranger and an agent, but can be a member, a discoverer, in a shared source of life. [1]

Let's start with the summer of 1964. The Educational Development Center in Cambridge,

community, and secondly to serve the need every democratic community has for its members to utter their stories--not so as to convey some particular messages but primarily and simply to speak and be heard. For a good 25 years now there has been a depression in the ability of American society, as our colleague, the late Lillian Weber, once so aptly put it, to help school teachers visualize possibility: *We have a depression in our visualization of possibility right now and I'm saying that it's both the task and the challenge to keep alive the visions that do exist, even if you can't use them right away.* By locating our members' actual experiences in a textured historical 'telling,' we are trying here to bring forward and share a ratifying sense of movement, process, and direction that Weber's remarks alluded to. The democratic argument here is that, through practices acquired over the push and pull of the last 40 years, understandings gleaned from multi-cultural and multi-generational experiences, and values that have been generated thereby--coaxed into being, nourished, and held--we have more to work with than is ordinarily acknowledged.

MA was about two years into field-testing its Elementary Science Study, one of the earliest attempts in that period of modernizing to rethink schooling at the elementary level. The civil rights movement was converging on Mississippi, registering voters and starting freedom schools. Where were you at that point, physically, psychologically, culturally, etc? That was 40 years ago. I was 20 years old then. I was two years out of high school. I was in the military: the Marine Corps. In 1964, I was in Vietnam, on my first tour of duty. I was with the 1st Marine Division, in a special unit, sent in ostensibly to advise South Vietnamese troops on organizational matters. But actually we were there fully armed to assist with security, laying in communication systems that were going to be needed in the months ahead. I had no idea then that I would be going into education in any way, shape, or form. All I knew was that I wanted to leave my home village and see the larger world and the military was the only way out for most minorities at that time.

Where was your village? Cochiti Pueblo, an Indian reservation where I still have my home. Fifty miles north of Albuquerque, about 30 miles southwest of Santa Fe, along the banks of the Rio Grande. At that time, in 1964, it was a dusty little community, with maybe 500 people. Growing up there, I went to the U.S. (Bureau of Indian Affairs) school in the village. Then for two years, up to the first year of high school, I went to a BIA boarding school, 30 miles away. Then, at that point, a policy reversal at BIA, mostly to save money, brought my peers and me back home the remaining two years of high school. This was so that we could attend an 'integrated' school, in Bernalillo, a hispanic community near Albuquerque. I guess it would be like for the first blacks to come to a white school: we experienced racism like never before. We were bussed in on a daily commute, 30 miles there and 30 miles back, a trip that took well over two hours each day with all the stops involved.

At the time, our Native traditions were still very intact in my village. Modern technology hadn’t

touched us yet. I think we were just getting electricity and indoor plumbing; and gas lines soon followed. Television, at that time, was just on the outer edge of our culture. Life was still very much like in my dad's generation.

Transportation was still by horse and wagon. The Native language was rich. The traditional ways, our ceremonies and all of that, was what I grew up in. When public schooling came along, it was a very strange, hateful experience at first: very different even from our government school in the village, where we were all Indian. From that point on, my life clearly had two very different aspects.

There was the modern, more fast-paced life that schools brought, and the old ways, the traditional, more spiritual ways, which defined me. When I went into the military, the split became even more strange. That was the first time I ever moved away from home, except for boarding school. I was joined with other very different individuals from across the country. They had strange ideas and ways about them. To grapple with those things all at once—a strange place in the context of very rough individuals—was very challenging.

Many people think that the Marines are the roughest and the most challenging branch of the armed services. It may be so, but we--my comrades and I--used to kid with one another, saying that we Marines were the most needy, the most in need of being reaffirmed in some way, the ones with the poorest self-confidence. This probably was truer than we cared to admit.

Your boot camp must have felt a bit like undergoing immigrant Americanization. Yes, most certainly. Another important dimension of learning about the 'outside' world that was confusing yet fascinating.

After boot camp and more advanced combat training, my unit became part of a "floating battalion" in the Pacific. That meant being out at sea aboard a helicopter carrier in the first phase, flying in supplies to different places--but also pulling into

ports in parts of the world that I had only heard about (Hong Kong, Okinawa, Taipei) and even some places I hadn't heard about. In the Philippines we trained for jungle warfare. And when we were deemed "ready," we were deployed to an airstrip in Da Nang, South Vietnam, to provide security for communication systems that were being set up.

Then, in a third phase, we were sent into the jungle in the highlands of northern Vietnam, right near the DMZ, where again we were providing security for communication systems that were also being set up for what everybody knew was coming, except us. It wasn't long before we got into the mix of the fighting, which was quite an experience. To know that the game your opponents were playing with you was for real, for keeps--life and death--made you grow up pretty fast. It was probably also the most enlightening of all the experiences I'd had, particularly with outsiders. In a combat situation, it was made clear, very early on, who was who and who did what. That was a learning experience for life. Certainly not a bright spot in my life, but it happened that way.

I was there nearly three months when I got wounded. Nothing really too serious, but I was taken out of there. I came back to the United States and was here for seven months when I was recalled. In fact, I was in Cochiti on leave when the call-up came.

There had been a major change in the fighting situation there. It was the beginning of the Tet offensive. Troops were needed, quick. Even those of us who had served there had to go back, and never mind if you didn't want to, you had to do it. So very soon, I was there again, in the middle of it. And this time, the fighting was much more severe.

This time I didn't go over in a neat little three-phase set-up, where I could count on finishing this, and then that, and the other, and out. This time, I didn't know for how long or for what. I was just a regular, on foot: a "grunt." A foot soldier in Vietnam, doing what we called "search and destroy" missions deep into enemy territory.

Normally, we would have a 27-day stretch on a mission, and then relief for rest and recuperation, and that usually was a 10-day R & R period out of the country, to a place of our choice, and then back again. I managed to get through that cycle once. That is, I did my 27 days on missions, and then came out. I went out of the country for R&R in Taiwan and then came back. When I returned, I went right back into the jungle. This time, I lasted maybe eight days and got wounded again, and this time it was a lot more serious.

I took hits in the leg and in the chest. The leg injury was the more serious--bones and other parts shattered. It took months to heal.

Another important learning experience. For sure... Probably the most important thing I learned from that experience was how, on our side, it was mostly minorities on the ground, doing the fighting: ethnic minorities and poor whites. And the people who were piloting the helicopters, and serving as officers, were all college educated and almost all were white. It was like night and day. Who was doing what was determined by ethnicity and I think education. Probably more ethnicity and race than education. I hadn't been conscious of that going in until I saw it myself. I was a product of that early phase of education before much attention was paid to minority issues or looking into special approaches to help equalize educational opportunities and results.

When I came back home, I had no idea about entering college. I got out of the military in the fall, and for two months – November and December of that year– I was without a job. I probably wasn't in any shape to take on new responsibilities anyway. But by early January, I was starting to get restless. Still a college career wasn't even in my thinking.

Then a good friend of my mom's and dad's, this man from Santa Fe, an Anglo, made me a job offer, part of which required enrolling myself in classes at the College of Santa Fe, where he was the groundskeeper. He sort of tricked me into it. "Oh, by the way," he told me, "you have to enroll in some

classes at the college to take the job... But don't worry; I'll help you. We'll get you the easy courses!" Before I realized what was going on, I found myself in a college work-study situation and into a new phase of my life.

You probably were ready for it. I didn't realize that learning could be such a joy. Especially when you had the freedom to do it, as opposed to being locked into an eight to four situation, or being shot at out of the clear blue. I got into a sociology class, I recall, a history class, PE, and something else. By the end of the semester, I had three Cs and a B, and I was hooked. The next year I transferred to a college in Colorado, which had tuition waivers for Indian students. It seems that the school had unwittingly been built on Indian land, and to make restitution it was decided to give Indians tuition waivers at the college, never thinking that there could be a lot of Indians using this opportunity in the future. And I didn't even have to work this time, other than doing the classroom stuff. I worked in the library; I did my studies, and I did very well. I took on a whole other life. I was probably one of a few Indians in college at the time.

In the United States? At this particular college. But I know, too, that in the U.S. at that time, there weren't many Indian students in colleges.

What kind of place was it? It was a very conservative place. Mainly students from well-off families, who came there from around the country, so that they could ski and do those kinds of pleasurable things that they were privileged to do. Then there were a few of us oddballs, myself and a handful of other Indians, mostly Navajo, who also were in the school primarily because it had tuition waivers. But we fitted in okay. I don't think we were discriminated against overtly. On the other hand I don't think we ran with the crowd, either. We were just sort of an oddity, marginal on campus. Occasionally we met in the lunchroom and other parts of the campus. We shared identity and pride even though we were from different tribes, but we never really hung out together. Besides I got married during that time, and a couple of kids came along

pretty fast. So I wasn't the usual college student there, out all night and that sort of stuff.

I was on a trimester system so I could finish in less than four years, going to classes year-round. I worked hard; I was very motivated. And by the time I completed my degree work, I was clearly of a different mind-set as a result of a college education. I could now frame my earlier experiences in school and the military, and could ground them in a larger U.S. historical context. Before college, I was just immersed in the real life of living racism as an Indian from a reservation, in school, and then in war. But when I went to college, I finally could see the larger context of this problem. I understood why the civil rights movement. I understood better where my tribe and I personally fitted in. I could also better understand the larger issues of war in Southeast Asia and the role of minorities in combat.

You were in the education program. I went into an education program not out of a burning desire to do so, but primarily because I saw it as an opportunity to get a job close to home. Schools were then the biggest employer on the reservation, as they still are today. And if I could work close to home, I'd be able to continue to practice my traditional life, which was important to me, as it still is.

But once I got into education – initially I was a straight humanities major, but once I added an elementary education minor to my program and began to student-teach in the elementary schools, I realized how near that was to what I most wanted to do with my life.. I didn't have to justify teaching by saying it was "for the sake of a job," or anything else.

On the reservation, there was an expectation that the oldest child in the family would care for the kids pretty much while mom and dad were busy making a living or doing their other chores. Not care for an infant necessarily, but the toddlers and on up. And being impoverished, like everyone else in Cochiti during my youth, my folks were kept very busy making ends meet, my dad in farming and silver work, and my mother in bead work and some

pottery, and a few things like that, to sell to tourists. So as the oldest in a family of six children, I did a lot of babysitting and a lot of kid-watching.

And when I did go off the reservation to go to boarding school, or later to go into the service, what I missed most were my brothers and sisters. Later, when I went into education, I realized that I had a lot of kid-skills. I knew how to take care of them; I knew child development actually quite well--more than my peers who were in classes with me did. I had that practical experience and responsibility, plus, of course, I had been in Vietnam and I was, I'm sure, older than most people my age, at least emotionally. More mature.

All of this as I said, came together for me when I started to student teach. I found that my career choice was not that far off from what I would have chosen even if my choices had been unlimited. I was quite pleased about getting a degree in elementary education and, in addition, to coming home to work with the tribes. My first teaching job was as a 4th grade teacher.

At another pueblo? Yes, at Laguna Pueblo Elementary School. It is west of Albuquerque, about 90 miles away from my home.

What year was that? That was 1970. August 1970. I stayed in that job for a couple of years.

What was happening in the world around you at that point? 1970? Of course, the Vietnam war was still going on. It was moving toward its final stages...The civil rights movement... The whole waive of ethnic pride... Achievement and rewards in school and in our society in general were clear issues that were at the forefront. The Johnson Administration with its move towards...what did they call it?

The Great Society? Right. The Affluent Society.

Affluent, you're saying? The Affluent Society, as it was referred to, was what was spoken about, and even acted upon nationally. On the reservation, we

received funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to set up Upward Bound and Head Start programs. The year before a national study of Indian education, entitled: A National Tragedy, a National Shame, revealed that awful things were happening to our youth at the BIA and other schools. It was not just the low achievement scores or high dropout rates that people were complaining about, but other concerns. Practices of cruelty in the boarding schools, even sexual molestation by teachers and dorm staff were reported. It was a horrid report, and alerted the BIA, as well as the public schools, where more and more Indian students were going, that some major changes had to be made. With the 1964 Civil Rights Act and other social advancements, attention to issues on the reservations started to result in new opportunities.

Before that, the official government policy was termination of Indian tribes, meaning to just do away with Indian governments, get Indians off their reservations and assimilated into the larger society. Tribes resisted because it was all about financial expenditures and this money was rightfully theirs because of treaties and other promises to them.

Termination of self-government. Right, the traditional government and the rights that Indians have as sovereign nations were to be abolished. We were to eventually assimilate into Santa Fe or Albuquerque, and places like that, so that there wouldn't be any reservation boundaries; or tribal authority, or Indian culture for the U.S. government to have to deal with.

No tribal community. Yeah. In essence, they would be doing away completely with whatever we Indians had. Which really wasn't a new idea. This was attempted in the late 1800s with Indian boarding schools and the removal of children to distant places. But the new termination initiative in the late '50s into the '60s was meant to relocate Indian families. Young Indian families as opposed to just Indian students were removed from their communities. Intact Indian families uprooted and sent off to places like Dallas or Chicago for welding

school, or barbering school, or cooking school, whatever--the idea being to educate them in a trade, find them jobs in the cities, and then integrate them into the larger society--at the level of knowing how to manage a bank account and all of that. There was a huge initiative in that direction. And of course, the intent was to leave the old and the very young back on the reservation, so that eventually the reservations would dry up and die.

But the resurgence of pride in culture and race brought on by the civil rights movement fired up Indian tribes as well. The American Indian Movement (AIM) and other organizations that formed were often quite militant, and carrying the banner for Indian self-determination, meaning that tribes had the right to control their own destinies. By the early ’70s, the pressure on BIA produced almost a complete turnaround in policy: from termination to self-determination. The irony is that this happened during a Republican (Nixon's) administration, which you normally wouldn't expect. It was also in this time that the Taos Pueblo got back some substantial amounts of land, which Nixon signed off on.

What’s the background to that story? Well, the land that was returned had been illegally taken by the U.S. government. And it was returned when the Taos people were able to prove their claim, which they supported by documentation from the Spanish government from years before. What Taos Pueblo got back increased its land holdings considerably. But more importantly, the pueblo got back its sacred land and the lake that they talk about in their stories and songs.

So those things in our favor were starting to happen. In 1975 Congress enacted the Indian Self-Determination Act and Indian communities were being given opportunities that they never had before. We were even recipients of an initiative by HUD (Housing and Urban Development) to build housing on the reservation. What we didn't realize then is that a home, an individual home, although it had all the nice things that American homes have, would bite at the core of our culture because what HUD

built wasn't in any way culturally congruent with what we had.

They built on individual lots, and in pueblo life that's not the way we live. We live as a collective group together around the plaza. Having an individual home with a yard, a fence, and so forth around it, with individual rooms, children with their own TV, really led our people towards becoming more individualistic. I think a lot of things that happened then, like the erosion of fluency in Native language, and the undermining of some of the authority vested in the traditional government, can be traced back to HUD's initiative. It started to undermine the integrity of the whole idea of community: living as a group, working together for the benefit of the group, and taking care of each other.

What exactly would happen? People would withdraw from community life? When I was growing up, we still had community clean-ups. Each year we refurbished community houses and kivas (ceremonial houses) as a community. We cleaned the ditches as a community. We did everything together as a community. Then stucco became available, so we didn't have to plaster our adobe houses anymore, which was a group job. Concrete lining for irrigation ditches came on the market, so we didn't have to do ditches together. People would not join in the dances as they used to, or attend other community affairs. What seemed to be a better way of life was eroding the traditions of self-government that we knew.

On the other hand, under the provisions of the Indian Self-Determination Act, Indian tribes could now contract with the government for greater tribal control of hospitals, for example, or of schools, institutions that previously were administered from Washington, if tribes were willing and able to take over the job of hiring, firing, and policy making working within the context of federal guidelines. Before, these services had a cookie-cutter approach to working with the tribes. It didn't matter whether you were Navajo, Havasuppi, Pueblo, or Apache. It was all the same to the bureaucrats. Contracting

made it possible to reshape the program, whether it was a health program, or an educational program, to what would be best for that group.

But it wasn't something that Indian tribes jumped at. I guess having a long history of broken promises and treaties with the U.S. government made the tribes leery. This was a totally new direction and not one to be trusted. Many of our tribal leaders didn't know what to make of it. Everyone thought that this was another way for the U.S. to relieve itself of its responsibility. The fear was that once you contracted for a school, and assumed responsibility, the government would cut off your funding source; or would do it gradually, less and less each year until you ended up with nothing. It's only been in the last 15 years that I've seen this idea start to mature, and people are now taking hold of that mechanism.

Let me back you up. You took this job at Laguna. I worked there for two years: school year '70-'71 at that small school, and then at another nearby for the school year '71-'72. I was there as a 4th grade teacher.

What kind of 4th grade teacher were you? A rotten one. Probably the worst.

Too formal? Yeah. I came out of a teacher preparation that emphasized rows and columns, basal readers, strict discipline and all of that, and I went into a BIA school, which encouraged just that.

You were the source of control and power. It was very teacher-centered at the time. That was what I had learned.

You had a method... Yes.

...but not much of your own philosophy? Not much, although I knew from when I grew up that there was a whole other way of teaching and learning, and that it was much more efficient, exploring and learning in that way, in the context of real life as opposed to being removed from it, behind four walls, working with very abstract words. I knew that, but just didn't question the

teacher-centered classroom. This was the school I went through, too. So did many of my predecessors. I just assumed that this was the way you did things.

Then IGE came in. I don't know if you recall this wave of IGE: Individually Guided Education? It was a system that was starting to take hold.

Came in from where? From the outside, into the Bureau, and onto the reservation. It was supposed to be a new, individualized approach to working with each child, at the child's pace, and on the child's needs. In some sense, it was a weak takeoff on what Lillian Weber had been doing in New York starting in the late '60s. At least many of the concepts of open education that she espoused were embedded in IGE, although with certain distortions. You worked in teams, under what they called a "unit leader." The walls between classrooms were broken down. You shared kids, materials and responsibility.

Literally break down walls? Yeah, literally. Rooms were opened up. And of course, it led to a lot of confusion, a lot of unhappy people. Many teachers, particularly in the BIA, were not well enough prepared to do that. They came out of isolated kinds of environments--the old locked-into-classroom setups--to all of a sudden sharing kids and sharing authority and so forth.

At the end of my second year at Laguna (1972), I got recruited by the BIA school in Acoma Pueblo, which was even further away from my home and away from Laguna, to be one of the IGE unit leaders. That summer I went to training sessions in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, to learn more about IGE. I did work there for a couple of summers thereafter. But during that year teaching at Acoma, my mother passed away.

Suddenly? Yeah, suddenly. She was only 47 at the time. And I had a younger brother and sister still at home, one of whom was four, and the other, I think, seven. Lorraine, my wife, and I felt that we had to come home for them. It just so happened that there was a teacher at another BIA school at San Felipe Pueblo, which isn't far from Cochiti, who wanted to

move out west in the Acoma area. So she and I exchanged positions. I stayed at San Felipe for three years, continuing to work in an IGE program. Twice (in different years) we lost our principal in the middle of the school year. I assumed the role of principal for long periods of time and still carried my own classroom responsibilities.

You took over without any special training? Yeah. I had no training in administration. But, of course, part of that job was working with the tribe and the tribal council, where I had an advantage coming from a sister pueblo. I was knowledgeable about San Felipe traditions, and spoke the same Keres (Native) language. At that time – in the early to mid ’70s – a lot of older people in those villages still didn’t speak English fluently, and many of them were councilmen. When I went in to the council meeting to give a school report, I did it all in Keres, and that impressed the elders and gave me an edge in that area of work.

Were you being influenced by any of what was going on in the larger world of educational reform at that time? I was starting to open my eyes. I started to break out of the old-fashioned teacher-centered approach. I was reading about some different approaches elsewhere in the country. Exploring on my own, I got very interested in teaching through the Native language, a language that my students and I shared. The Bilingual Education Act was passed in 1974 and money was being made available to schools that had students whose language was other than English to help them develop and implement bilingual programs. I went around observing classes at some of the programs around Albuquerque, although they were all for Spanish speakers. Then in 1976 after it had become apparent that the movement for bilingual-bicultural education lacked people knowledgeable about the language and the culture of the children who the law was meant to serve, particularly those who were Native American, UNM put together a summer bilingual education program for teachers, all expenses paid, and I got recruited. I took it thinking I'd be going back to San Felipe in the fall in my role

as teacher. But then I received the offer of a full-time scholarship--tuition plus stipend--encouraging me to stay on in the fall for my master's degree. I was given the option of getting completely out of BIA teaching upon completion, or going back to my position at San Felipe, if I wanted.

Had you yourself thought about going on? I had thought about it, but not seriously.

You didn't see yourself as a scholar. No, I didn't see myself in that way at all. I came from a very traditional Native family. Both sides of my family had produced important figures in the pueblo, either medicine men or head men of their moieties. I could never get away from our traditions, nor did I want to. The most I aspired to become was a teacher on the reservation. Maybe I'd take on other roles to help my tribe with the many issues pressing in upon them from the outside world. But I didn't think I would go out in the larger world and do scholarly work. It was my curiosity--the joy of learning all I could--which got the better of me in that respect.

I went from the summer program into a master's program, and by the summer of 1977, after three semesters, I'd completed the degree. At that point I was already breaking through my own personal glass ceiling. My mentor at UNM encouraged me to go into a doctoral program, but I wasn't so sure I wanted it. Ambivalence reigned. I registered for a couple of non-degree courses. But needing to earn a living, I also took a job with the Albuquerque Indian School that meshed with something growing in me.

Albuquerque Indian School was a boarding school, in operation since 1881. It had started out as a Presbyterian church school, and then became a BIA school. The school had been going downhill for a long time, and the tribes, all the 19 pueblos, had gotten together and contracted it from the BIA, assuming responsibility for it under the provisions of the Indian Self-Determination Act. I came in as part of the planning team, whose job included going from village to village to communicate what the takeover would mean; what it would allow us to do.

What the government did was allow the old BIA school to continue functioning, while it funded another staff to look into building the new school--I don't mean the walls and foundation, but the ideas. The goal was that, after a year, the old guard would depart, except for those we wanted to have stay on, and this new group of people who were there, planning and thinking, redeveloping the curriculum and so forth, would slide into key positions. Go from planning to practice, but in the old shell.

We did a lot of visiting with tribes, here and there, and hosted a lot of gatherings of parents, students and tribal leaders to determine what their needs were.

You were becoming a public figure, a public intellectual, in a sense, operating on an inter-tribal level. I would say I was becoming more of an educator, on a broader scale, and of course, a learner as well. I learned about other tribes and the larger federal education picture. Before that, I knew about other tribes, but from a distance: except for those I taught. I knew about other tribes through their children in school, either as my boarding school mates or as my students, but now I had to go into council meetings with people some of who didn't speak my Native language. There are five different languages among the 19 pueblos. That gave me a nice extension from where I was, working in little BIA schools on three different reservations. That helped me to extend my work into the 19 pueblos, as well as in Navajo and Apache communities, with yet another different language, because they all had kids in the school. Not in huge numbers; it was a school of some 600-plus students. And the experience really broadened my horizon. I never before had worked where I had input into the reshaping of a school. I was there, working for that group, to the point where we actually started the school.

In the old shell. An old coat, with patches on it, really was what it amounted to. Interestingly we had the power to make policy and personnel decisions, but in the beginning the problem was that the pipes were too rusty, the boiler room was a disaster, the school was literally falling apart. So the initial

question for us was how could we save the school at its physical level?

What ideas did this new school embody that made it different from its predecessor? Well, the idea, first of all, was for the tribes to control the school, which was a whole new idea in Indian education. We never before, as Pueblo Indian tribes, had control of our schools, except with token advisory committees.

Your own public school. Yeah, in this case, not public, it was a federal Indian school, but it was under the control of the tribes. That was a major, major departure. The other idea, of course, was to infuse the curriculum with Native American content, and other more tribally compatible elements. I don't think we dealt, at that time, with the pedagogy or the learning styles. That's why I say it was an old shell with the beginnings of new ideas in it. The shell was the building, the structures, but also some important stuff of teaching and learning, which maybe we didn't know about, or maybe we weren't ready for. We really took some old ideas and simply re-framed them. We tinkered with it, is what happened. It took a long time to do more.

Albuquerque Indian School no longer exists. The pueblos, which eventually became the sole contractors – somehow the Navajo and Apache groups got pushed out--the pueblos moved its operation back up to the Santa Fe Indian School, which had become an art school a few years earlier That was the school I went to many years before. The pueblo governors exerted their power and got the federal school out of there. The art school was relocated at the college of Santa Fe, and we got the SFIS buildings back in Santa Fe. Although Santa Fe Indian School was almost as old as Albuquerque Indian School, it was in a lot better shape. After the school re-opened with its new format I stayed for another year, and then I decided to work on my doctorate full-time.

Back to UNM. Well, I was at UNM all along, taking classes part-time, while I was working with the tribes. But what happened was that, in the

summer of '79, I was invited to teach a course at UNM, which was my debut teaching at the college level, and I got hooked. I like all my other teaching experiences I had had up to that point, but this was somehow different.

What course was that? It was a course entitled "Education Across Cultures," one of a few courses that dealt with issues of tribal culture in education. I liked doing that; I enjoyed the students. I liked the level of interest they brought to the work we did. It was based a lot on what I had learned over the years working with minorities in schools. This course encouraged me to push ahead on the doctorate.

In the fall, I went full time, full load. I still had the GI Bill, and also, I found a benefactor, or rather she found me--a wealthy woman in Florida looking to underwrite an Indian who was a serious student, and I was the Indian person she found. She made it possible for me to go full-time and raise a family. By then, Lorraine and I had five kids.

Had you started meeting with the North Dakota Study Group yet? Actually no. That wasn't until 1981, the year before I defended my doctoral thesis.

Which was on what subject? On the use of native language in the schools, and the responses that it elicited in Indian students as compared to English. I went back to San Felipe, where I had taught earlier, to gather the data. And that whole experience--of looking into the issues of language closely tied to culture--I think pulled me into the linguistics area, as well as into looking at culturally compatible settings and practices, and so forth.

And that broadening, in turn, drew me more and more into developing my own philosophy and frame of working with others, particularly those that are traditionally left behind in schooling.

It was in the context of just completing my course work that spring, and about to start my final dissertation year, that Catherine Laughlin introduced me to the NDSG. She was a professor of mine at UNM when I first starting doing course work, and

then when I was a doctoral candidate, she became a member of my dissertation committee. The first meeting I went to was at Wingspread, in Racine, this beautiful setting, and full of people whose work I had been reading: Ted Chittenden and Ann Bussis, Courtney Cazden, Eleanor Duckworth, Vito Perrone, Debbie Meier, Ann Cook, and on and on, ad infinitum.

I'd been reading about the new ideas in education, about equity in education, about open education, and so on. So I was a little bit in awe of where I was and whom I was with. And I think I was a very quiet participant because I wasn't sure of myself. It was the first time I had really branched out, as a professional educator, beyond New Mexico.

Sitting in awe like a young boy watching his first professional baseball game. Yeah, and seeing all the players there, you know.

You were listening, I would imagine, taking it in. Yes. And also meeting people who are my friends still today, like Stan Chu, Lynn Strieb, Wilma Heckler, Sherrin Hersch. I wanted to say Hubert Dyasi, but he wasn't there at the time. He didn't come into the picture until about...

A couple of years later. That was when Lillian [Weber] was starting to move out of the picture, and he was starting to move in.

What was your sense of Lillian? Oh, she was a strong person, for sure, which wasn't my typical experience with women out here. She was very strong, but at the same time I knew that the things that she spoke about, she spoke with passion and love.

What probably surprised me about NDSG more than anything, to be honest with you, was that here were a group of white people--I didn't make any distinctions between the individual members of the group-- I just saw them as white people from back East--who were truly sincere in doing something about the inequities in testing and other areas of

concern for those students who were not doing well or who were typically left out in the cold.

Seeing that helped me become more comfortable about relating to people on the basis of our respective ideas, that it wasn't just me with a chip on my shoulder. I began to realize that it wasn't just a minority issue, or a minority scholar's issue--that it was bigger than that.

In my earlier grounding with local minorities, we acted more out of emotion, more out of anger, although there was plenty of literature to reinforce why people might be angry. But at that first meeting, as well as at subsequent meetings of the group, I saw another side of American thinking, one I hadn't experienced before. People were acting out of a body of informing literature, people who were well-educated, and certainly not in need financially, and who could hold their own anywhere, in academia or any place else. That was new for me.

One such figure who became immediately invaluable to me was Clara Pederson--who some would say was Vito's right-hand man in keeping the NSDG afloat in its early days, helping him manage the logistics of the annual meetings. Clara was part of Vito's faculty at the Center for Teaching & Learning at the University of North Dakota. She was actually working in Zuni, Arizona, with Mavis Martin, another early NDSG member, helping to develop UND's Head Start and Follow Through models there, which I had known nothing about, even though I was teaching a graduate class on-site there.

Even though I was still only a doctoral student, I had started to teach regularly in a teacher training program not only at Zuni, but also in schools on the Navaho reservation--places like Crown Point, Ship Rock, and Tajagilli-- where I'd had my first experiences with supervision of students in classrooms. Clara's support for what I was doing at Zuni reaffirmed me personally and reaffirmed the importance of the work I was doing.

Your students were essentially a first generation of Zuni teachers. First generation of Zuni teachers, first to go to college in their families. In fact, many of them are retiring right now, because most of them were about my age and many even older when we started.

The center of your life, I take it, was still in Cochiti? All the while that I was working and going to school, I was able to live in Cochiti, as I still do, and hang on to my language, to my culture, to my ceremonies, and to all that went with it. And, in fact, during that time, I was entrusted to be a junior tribal officer four times (each appointment for a year in duration). When you were designated a "junior officer," it meant you were being groomed to take on more responsibility at some future date; possibly even to become a leader of the village.

Politically how does it work at the village level? There are two kivas in the village, two moieties, of which one of them you are born into, and they're the hubs of our government. The moieties, which are religious in nature, take turns providing the leaders for the village. The leaders are in place for one year, and then at the end of the year, they switch kivas furnishing the leaders.

And every year that the leaders are in place, they have a layer of another six to 12 junior officers underneath them--drawn from the opposite kiva. The junior officers do the dog work, if you will, but that's how you learn. What's happening in that process, of course, is that, as a junior officer, you're privy to council meetings and to ceremonies in the kiva that are only for tribal leaders. So that while you're doing your piddly stuff – sweeping floors, or getting the message out to the people and those kinds of things – you're also learning the way of life and laying the groundwork for governing in the future.

In other words, while I was going to school and working, expanding my horizons, I was also, in my own way, internally growing in my culture.

Deepening your self-understanding. Yeah. This, of course, wasn't all that easy to pull off. It's a wonderful idea in principle, to be of two cultures, but it's also very demanding. At times, you have to forsake one thing for the other because of demands that happen to conflict, and that's not a good feeling.

How, in general, was the weekly work routine at UNM organized? The funding for our work, first of all, was generous enough so that when we taught a course on-site, we'd actually charter a small plane in Albuquerque and fly out. What would have taken five, six hours by car roundtrip, we could do in 40 minutes flying. I would take a flight out to Gallup two days a week and then pick up a rental car and go to places like Tohatchi and Clear Lake. Different places up and down in the Four Corners area (where Arizona, New Mexico, Utah and Colorado meet). I often went into Arizona and Utah where the Navajos are located as well. From Window Rock, Arizona, I went to the various schools like Rock Point and Rough Rock, and other places. Or, I'd fly to Ship Rock and then do the upper Four Corners area in and around Mexican Hat in Utah. Or out to Zuni, where there was this other network of schools. Sometimes, I'd do visits to two or three schools in one afternoon and be back home by 7 p.m. It was that kind of extension. The distances are substantial here. New Mexico alone would probably take in all of New England.

Were there other people like you doing this? Yeah. There were two or three professors from our regular faculty.

Were they Indians? No. I think I was the only one. Except for another student who was Navajo and he eventually dropped out, Herbert Lee. He came to the North Dakota Study Group one year, as a matter of fact, and the NDSG folks really enjoyed him. He was a good speaker, he had some wonderful ideas, and he had a good sense of humor. He's now working at Gallup. He's doing teacher training there.

You were sort of growing yourself as a teacher. Yeah, very much so. Mavis Martin and Catherine Laughlin's's work made me very conscious of the

classroom environment. I was very fortunate to have Catherine pull me into the publication of her book, The Learning Environment: An Instructional Strategy (Teachers College Press, 1982). I was able to really learn about the finer points of classroom management, as well as classroom environments, which I was able to combine more closely with my work in classroom supervision.

By finer points, you mean strategies like pacing?
Yeah, right. Wait time, and other kinds of human interactions, which are important in conjunction with how the environment might support a literacy setting, or how the environment might support other important goals that we have in the classroom. That helped get me excited about teaching even more. It gave me a bag of tools that I could count on, and I was always adding to it, trying things that were different, combining ideas, and so forth. I began to grow in that way. I wasn't a lonely one-room schoolteacher any more. I was moving into another dimension of teaching.

After I defended my dissertation in 1982, UNM hired me as a teacher trainer with the American Indian Bilingual Education Center (AIBEC), which was set up at the college with Title VII monies. At the height of our numbers, we were a team of four, serving a seven-state area, which included New Mexico, Arizona, Oklahoma, Utah, Wyoming, and the Dakotas. Within that area we reached out to Indian tribes that were trying to establish bilingual programs in their schools and needed different sorts of training. Each trainer had different strengths and took on assignments accordingly. I knew about classroom environments and strategies for working with Indian children and their parents, and so forth. It was great work, but hard on my home life. It meant even more traveling than before. I'd be in one state for three days, and then catch a plane over to another one, and spend another couple of days there. By the time I got home, it would be a week or so later. I saw a lot of hotels; I did a lot of eating out. Then, about six months into the program, we lost our director, and I took over and did that for the next year and a half, I think. It was at that point UNM

invited me onto the faculty as a lecturer. At the time, UNM had only one Indian faculty member in the College of Education.

Up until that point, you were like an adjunct? Up to that point, I was really … I didn't have a faculty status.

You were operating on soft money. Yeah, my salary came out of that Title VII money. As a lecturer, I went into regular money, but still not on a tenured line. I wasn't put into a tenured position until after a year or so--a trial period. Then I became a regular faculty person with all the worries of having to do the scholarly work, the teaching, and the committees. University life.

A devil's bargain. For sure.

Who were the writers of influence, or of interest to you at that point? Who were you listening to besides your colleagues at the university? I suppose some of my early influences came to me by way of people like John Goodlad and some of the work he did early on.

What work was that? Looking at education in a democratic context. Looking at more than just reading but reading between the lines. What it means to be "educated" as a democratic citizen. At the same time, I think I was expanding more into the area of multicultural education, reading people like James Banks and others who were writing and talking about issues of prejudice and poverty and the effects of those conditions on schooling. I started looking at schools with an eye out for more than just achievement. I started teaching with a greater emphasis on social justice issues, and that worked well in my bilingual education classes. Materials development became important because there was so little of it for specific minority groups. How did you, as a teacher, extend yourself to have more materials? One of the problems with materials, of course, particularly here in the Southwest, was the lack of Indian-ness in classrooms. There was not a whole lot of material even for the hispanics in the Albuquerque schools. They were using materials

developed in Dade County, Florida, for the Cuban population, which was inappropriate for our area.

By this point, you had advanced degrees, you had been taken into the realms of higher education, drawn into a national enterprise, involved in scholarly activities, and the heart of your life, your spiritual values, was still in Cochiti. Yeah, kind of like that.

How did you manage to balance it all? Not very well! (Laughter) There was a lot of going, back and forth, between community out there, and the culture in town. There were moments when I'd have to be in both places at the same time.

You mean that logistically it wasn't easy. What about psychologically? Psychologically, too, it wasn't very easy, because there are two different sets of values involved, and two different paces of life. One is very individualistic: the focus is on the individual, the person, what you do. It's for you, you know? It's me, myself, and I, whereas the other one is much more group-oriented. It's community oriented, where the people are interdependent, and the focus is on the group as opposed to the individual. So that was a very difficult psychological kind of movement back and forth.

And then of course, the pace of life was a little bit different as well. The demands to do this and that were always so much more pressing at the college, it wasn't just a matter of taking responsibility. I could do that; I could take responsibility for my own actions and my own life. But it was that you had to push yourself to the forefront. The things you publish, how students rated you in classes, the need to be reviewed every year, the need to put your best foot forward, and to make a name for yourself, and all of that – so self-centered, and that was highly unusual for me, coming from a community where you're just part of the group. That was a major psychological conflict that I was caught up in all the time. Still am today. When you grow up with a basic orientation to life that is so fixed in a particular way, as I was, when you do change, it's not easy. My guess is one never changes completely. I had a talk

about this with Vito at that time. I don't know if he'll remember, but I remember telling him that I wasn't sure if I was going to finish my doctorate. I didn't know whether I should go on or not. I was afraid that once I got my doctorate, it was going to take me out of the community completely, and that I would not find a job here at the university because the university had a policy about not hiring its own. I figured I might have to go out of state for a job if I got a degree or at least to New Mexico State, which is almost 300 miles from here. I recall Vito encouraging me and telling me not to worry about it, that it would work out. It amazes me still that I shared this otherwise private part of myself that quickly.

Vito Perrone was a moral force in your life at that point. At that point, I was very impressed with how central he was to a lot of otherwise very independent and powerful thinkers. He pulled people together in a way that respected their opinions; they could still think their own thoughts their own way.

They agreed to disagree. Right. And that's what I think I liked about the group. You could agree to disagree, and do it without having to depend on emotional force. It turned out that the group was very caring, and made up of people I learned to trust. I was very quiet for the first conference or two, not saying a whole lot, but listening intently. Eventually I found my voice in the group, although I was not very vocal, and that was okay, too.

I imagine the members of the group were, in a sense, just as in awe of your presence, as you were of theirs. I'm not sure of that. But if that were true even a little, maybe it was because I was the only one Native American in the group. I did represent a part of another group that wasn't represented. I think my presence in the group sort of reminded people that the group needed to expand and I think there was conversation about doing that. It wasn't necessarily because Joseph Suina was voicing that, or pushing that, or that that was my agenda. But I think people realized that it must be pretty lonely to be a group of one...So we started

expanding. We started to see more diversity in the next few years...

What *was* your agenda? My agenda at NDSG meetings, I think, was to connect with different people, to speak more intelligently about the issues that I knew. Some of it was gut feeling, but I also needed to broaden my own literature-base and support. I knew that you just couldn't rely on gut feelings at the university, and survive there very long. So I think there, with NDSG, I was able to make connections across people, across bodies of expertise, etc., that people were either writing or reading about. That exposure helped me to grow academically.

What impact did your publications have in Cochiti? I don't think very much, to be honest with you. I don't think a little place like Cochiti, an Indian community, is focused too much on reading and writing. Reading is a very individualistic act, you know. You have your face in the book; it's you and the words. And with the community where I came from, it's people, talking face to face, social interaction.

It wasn't frustrating to you, that that was so? That wasn't a major problem for me. I knew I was in two worlds. The part that was hard was being the individual, pushing myself forward, and doing what you had to do to survive, the group a secondary consideration.

But did you recognize, despite your willingness to be self-effacing, that besides being a member of the pueblo you had gone on and become this individual who was part of another assemblage of people who were hoping to make their voices felt nationally? By the late '80s, it was starting to get that way. And partly that's because of the nature of who I am. Because Native Americans were so rare in higher education at that point in time, I was always a minority, even among minorities. So wherever I went, I couldn't help but sort of speak for Native Americans. I never said, "Well, I won't do it; I can't." But I often said, "What I'm sharing with you is a very narrow view. There are many

other cultures of Native Americans that I cannot speak for." I would qualify my words in that way.

At the same time I felt maybe that speaking for Native Americans was the only work around for a Native American to do, and that what I had to say should be respectful and credible, but it also had to be courageous. I wasn't militant by nature, but I didn't want to have to shrink or sit back. Silence always hurt the minority not the majority. I think I knew that I couldn't speak harshly about the past and about broken treaties and stuff like that and keep people's attention, so I would try very hard to be the diplomatic representative I was expected to be: the spokesperson. I felt pushed into that position, but I also enjoyed the opportunity to take on the issues, because Native American life was an area that I was knowledgeable about, in a personal, almost visceral way. Being angry about it sometimes, I was, yes. But I always had enough sense about me that I could couch whatever I said in a reasonable diplomatic way.

You found yourself drawn into the debates of American education. Yes, you might say so.

You were looking at the issues of education, you said, in a democratic context. Two things were happening in school that was life and death for us. One was simply the business of preparing people to get into the work force, and that was attractive for the tribe, as well as for outsiders. Because outsiders could come in and say that they educated you, and you went into the work force. But the problem with that, I began to realize, is that there were a whole lot of other issues that surrounded getting people educated, particularly Native Americans and others who have been traditionally left behind in schooling. And that had to do with lack of social justice in schools: the hidden messages. I've written about this in that little article, "And then I went to school."

Spell out what you mean: 'hidden messages.' Messages which are ever so subtle, yet very powerful. The textbooks I had as a child, for example, that pictured only pitched roofs and straight walls, sidewalks and grass. My world was

quite different; it was one of adobe homes, dirt floors, the bare ground, and not a whole lot of vegetation in the yard that I was growing up in. It was a different way of life, a different lifestyle that was presented clearly as one to be valued over anything else. But because these materials were produced by very educated people, in high gloss, and in the context of being central to the curriculum, they communicated very strongly 'the ideal life.' As if to say, 'This was what you become and get when you get educated, when you finally get civilized! What you have at home now is not good enough!' And although it was not true, as a child I began to take in that message.

There was always this measuring of self and the past, and of self and the future. Even a simple thing, like this couch behind us here, was framed as something you lived to have in the future. In the meantime, the sheepskin, the Indian blankets, the things that we rolled up during the day and used as a couch, what you already had, were demeaned. It was the message hidden. Those kinds of messages were being delivered all the time in school. They were never explicitly stated, but our educators knew that their students were making these interpretations for themselves. They were planting seeds for complete assimilation in the most negative way. Whoever (in the BIA) said that learning was teacher-centered knew otherwise, because they knew we were indeed making meaning, constructing meaning for ourselves. The message was that you become, and when you reach for it well, one day you will have it... if you will only become educated and let go of the past. And for a good while, I actually had that dream in my head.

That was a motivating force in your life? Yeah and it made me disconnect or disassociate from myself for a while. I think after putting them together, the two worlds, I knew that I had to hold unto my heritage above everything else.

Would you put a date on that? That period of time? Certainly growing up in the community, early on, through the grades, through high school. But I

don’t think it stopped there. It continues even as we speak.

How about in the early ’80s, after you’ve gotten your doctorate, and you were participating in the debates of American education? I think that’s when I began to realize the subtleties and the messages that were embedded in schooling. The melting pot theory still had validity in some quarters. It was especially blatant I think when it came to minority people or people still with a traditional culture like mine. There was such a contradiction. The institutions all paid lip service to the principle of equality, but there were forces working, ever so subtly, to get rid of your language; to get rid of your tradition, so that you could get on with it. I think once I began to get a sense of what was happening, the lights came on in my head. Before I was just reading, and now I could read between the lines, thanks to the white man's own education.

In the early ’80s, you were reading Goodlad. You were interested in statements of his about what it means to be educated as a democratic citizen. That interested you in issues of prejudice and poverty and its effects. You began looking at schools as more than just achievement, but as sites of social justice or injustice. Injustice. I began to see it more as injustice. A place to be modified; to conform. To conform more than to find yourself. To be sort of fitted in to this American mold. I'm not sure Goodlad wanted his critique to go that far. But it was clear that the school itself was a place that sorely needed to be modified.

Who was doing work about that, writing or talking about that, in the early ’80s? Did that have a place in the discourse at the North Dakota Study Group meetings you attended? Yeah. I think that was coming through in some of Vito Perrone's work and other people who were there. Vera John-Steiner (who wasn't part of NDSG but who was a mentor of mine at UNM and who had spoken a number of times at Lillian Weber's Workshop Center in New York) was writing about some of that, along with Courtney Cazden who was

at Harvard, and others. Cazden and John-Steiner were coming from the linguistic perspective, but embedded in their work was the social context of why language was being lost; why traditions were lost, among other things.

One thing that was so glaring to me, even before going to college, as I think I mentioned earlier, was what was real in Vietnam. How minorities, people of color and the poor, were on the ground, fighting in the jungles, and the majority, mostly white and educated, flew the planes and were company commanders, and so on. Even the engineers and people in intelligence were white and held privileged jobs in war. So there was this difference...everybody could see it, very few said anything.

Tracking, but in another form. Right. That was so blatant during the Vietnam War. And as I mentioned before, it was brought graphically home to me when my unit took a severe beating in a gun battle and I saw a black man who was torn up pretty badly. I saw the flesh underneath his skin, and it seared itself on my mind, seeing him and another individual, a poor white guy in a similar condition. And flesh is flesh, you know? You don't, for that little bit of time, see skin color. Flesh is flesh. No different than yours or mine. Yet, that's how it was played out. Some 53,000 American troops died in Vietnam – 53,000 and some – and I can safely bet that a very high percentage of those who died in the jungles and high lands of Viet Nam were poor and ethnically different just like me. I was a lucky one.

And that's the other thing that came to me: the understanding of tracking. The understanding that the matter of skin color was a matter of money, that the two went hand-in-hand in American society, and that racism was still deeply entrenched even though civil rights struggles had brought about some changes. And the hardest nut to crack in that regard is what happens in the schools through standardized testing and bench marks, the end result of which is the same: casualties of the classroom. And who are they mostly? The same ones who were in Viet Nam and other wars. No matter what you talk about, what

you say about pedagogy that's more fitted to this group or that, with the literature to back you up, in the end tests and the standards, embodiments of those entrenched prejudices, still determine what teachers think and what they value in the school because too many teachers are still just interested in getting kids through the system. And they'll lower standards if they have to, and they very often do to save their hides, not the kids'.

So even though I've seen a lot of social progress on many fronts, I think it is without a doubt that there are still strong forces pulling us back to where we were before and long ago rejected.

When did that retrenchment start out here, do you suppose? During the early '80s. When Reaganomics began to kick in. It was at that point that we lost a big teacher training program in which we at UNM had prepared over 700 Navajos to be teachers. Over 700 Navajos who went back and fitted into schools on their reservation. Plus we graduated well over100 of the Pueblo people from UNM alone. Before that, we had just a handful; maybe a dozen, myself included. But when Reagan and his people came into office, you could just feel that tide shift and go directly against bilingual education and Indian education. I think that antagonism toward bilingual education tapered off after Reagan left office, but now it's coming back with renewed energy, powered this time by passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.

Why do you suppose it tapered off after Reagan left office? I think the education secretary, William Bennett, along with a number of notables in the hispanic community who were overly zealous, like [the journalist] Richard Rodriguez and others who we needed, left us in the cold. They were just too eager to make a name for themselves and to become the 'darlings' of mainstream white America. While they had some valid points, their opposition to bilingual education did nothing to help with what really matters in education.

Overly zealous about what? About going back to an English-only policy; doing the standards of

American values and so forth; the middle class values agenda. Bennett contended that bilingual education was divisive and inflammatory. That it was pulling us apart. The reality of America was English, he argued. People like the present-day governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, were very much into that, as were other highly visible people who were speaking out. But then there were some things happening within their camp that tore them apart. Some of the hispanics finally realized they were just being used. In part, that was because racism surfaced its ugly head at that point, and they lost some people, people who went their own way.

What do you mean racism surfaced? In the Department of Education? In the higher realms of government. Linda Chavez, who happened to be an hispanic from the Southwest and a powerful female appointee [director of the United States Commission on Civil Rights under President Reagan] who could have done a lot to help our cause turned the other way along with others within that camp. Do you know Richard Rodriguez's book, Hunger of Memory? I use that book often in my classes because it focuses on in particular the view against bilingual education. I think it was the publication of Hunger of Memory that started the pendulum to swing away from bilingual education and any ideas about making schooling more relevant for culturally different students.While on the one hand he was pushing for getting minorities to get ahead, he was also saying it’s those very things, the social reform tools like affirmative action and bilingual education, that were keeping minorities down. He admits to having taken scholarships for himself through minority programs, and using the system. But when it came to getting a job, that’s where he stopped taking advantage of American handouts, as he referred to them. White conservatives, both in the private and public sectors, cheered him on. They saw his story as the epitome of American success. On the other hand those who looked at him carefully--and he speaks about the fact that he can’t talk to his mother, or his father, or others in his own

world anymore – saw a pitiful and troubled individual who sold out to the American dream.

You're saying 'Hunger of Memory' had a direct impact on the work you were doing in New Mexico. With someone like Richard Rodriguez going around the country making speeches, usually before very conservative and influential elements, it was difficult to defend those programs. He was showcased as the individual who achieved success: "if he can do it, you can do it." That old "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" approach, which doesn't really want to see what is behind the scenes, or to know what it is that individuals are going through in the process.

The Reaganomic education machine had a field day supported by the likes of Mr. Rodriguez's surface appearance. When you are in office and you have the media's attention, you spread the message far and wide. And what's in the news means a lot in shaping public opinion. Here the news was that English-only was the wave of the time, and it had many high-profile people supporting it. That hurt teacher education at the core. It was difficult to stand up to that no matter how many references might be supportive of that. We saw the loss of educator interest in the programs, if they had any to begin with.

People were saying none of that had anything to do with race or any other bias of that time. But there were too many things happening that were not consistent with just purely helping people get to a better place in life. There was still this sorting going on. Those willing to play along fitted in; others were immediately out of the picture. I think that happened to them probably around the late '80s, early '90s. Then there seemed to be a little bit of a swing back into the conversations about child centeredness and so on.

Did you lose your local constituency then, too? The local people, yes.

People who themselves were concerned that their children were being properly prepared for the

American economy. That's right. These were the parents. But the teachers, who were primarily Anglos, too. It was difficult to get that message across to them in a real, kind of personal way. After all, the parents were saying, "I don't want my kid in bilingual education; I want them to have English." The parents were of course arguing their perspective out of an economic base.

Denying themselves. Denying themselves. Not realizing what they had gotten caught up in earlier in their lives. All they were realizing was that they wanted something better for their kids, and education was still the answer. But because of the wave of thinking at that particular time, it was very difficult to argue otherwise. The majority of teachers in the classrooms were non-Indian or non-hispanic. Even at UNM: to speak to them about culture and language was to be a rebel, one with a chip on the shoulder. They found it difficult to connect with where minorities were coming from. Many of the working teachers that I had in my classes, from local elementary schools, had never been to even the closest pueblo here to watch a dance or anything.

Teachers who were studying with you? Yes. Some of them, I'm sorry to say.

They never came near the reservation? It wasn't true for all of them, but I would say it was the case for more than half. And usually, they were the more articulate in class, and the most outspoken.

Speaking out against what you were professing? Speaking up, maybe not in a direct way, but in that round-about way, so that it was very difficult to drive home the points of why it was important for them to have that experience and to learn about the lives of children they would be working with. I was just starting to spread my own wings, and I wasn't quite sure of myself yet. Their opposition was sometimes very intimidating. It was during this period of time that I found allies at the NDSG meetings and discovered it wasn't just me or my kind who were barking up the tree. Here were other people also of the mind that there was something better that could be done in the schools, and that was

very, very useful to me in my growth because it was easy at that time, and I think it still is easy, to sort of create an "us and them" situation based on economics or color.

Because of the NDSG I think the issue of color grew somewhat blurred for me at that time. It wasn't so pronounced any more.

What do you mean, "not so pronounced?" "The issue was blurred?" I meant the support was broader than I realized. I think by meeting with the group, which happened to be very progressive in their thinking, and very child-centered in their work, it helped me to see that what I was thinking was shared by a broader group. I saw it wasn't just a Southwest kind of thing, or an Indian-White thing. The needs of the poor and culturally different were just as critical in L.A., Miami and New York as on the reservation.

What else were you looking at during that time that had impact like that? What kind of reading were you doing? You started to say in our previous conversation, but we got sidetracked. I was reading some of Dewey's old stuff, his work on experience, and so forth. And then some of the education classics, like "Looking into Classrooms," by Phillip Jackson, republished in the early 1970s, which describes the little things that happen in the classroom that either supports the teacher or totally pulls the teacher off course.

I was into both what was happening in education on the national scene as well reexamining things at the molecular level of teaching practices, like the matter of 'Wait Time.' How long do you wait to get a response from a child, and what kind of impact does that waiting have?

And how, as a classroom teacher, did you distribute your conversation among 24 students? Who are you talking to and about what and how? And whom do you reinforce, and so forth?

Those issues were beyond mere awareness, but I actually was doing my best to put them into practice

in my own classes. More importantly, it was coming from a larger context in our educational field of study. I realized that so much of what was happening was based on which student is the most vocal and articulate and likable from the teacher's perspective. In other words, who makes us feel like we're effective teachers?

And almost always it wasn't the poor child; it wasn't the one who didn't have the language of the classroom. I began to see that there was an equation here between the larger world, even war, and the microcosm of society, which is the classroom.

I went to about six or seven NDSG meetings through the eighties and nineties and grew more and more in sync with the kinds of ideas that were emanating out of that circle. Not that I agreed with everything I heard. But then I don't think anyone was supposed to do that.

Lisa Delpit spoke at one of those meetings about how sometimes we have ideas that work for white middle kids, they're child-centered ideas, but these ideas don't necessarily work for all children. She used as an example the matter of showing anger and disappointment at kids at times when they mess up. She said that you've got to demonstrate disappointment with some kids (black kids); you've got to raise your voice, and make it known. In 'progressive education,' there are defined ways to be child-centered. But being child-centered in the white world doesn't always work for being child-centered in the Indian world either. That was an area of contradiction for me in regard to what seemed an engrained value of NDSG. One size does not fit all, no matter how much sense it might make to one group.

For example, Indian kids are used to being talked to. They don't always have to be tinkering with stuff and doing inquiry. In our culture, it's perfectly okay to spend a certain amount of time being talked to and to just listen. To spend time developing listening skills, developing respect, and finding your place in the world of children, parents, and grandparents.

But as a pedagogical approach, you aren't questioning the value of doing inquiry? No, not at all. All kids need to do that, but there is a time and a place. In fact, one summer (as a direct benefit of my membership in NDSG) Lorraine and I did an inquiry-based science course at the CCNY Workshop Center in Harlem working with Hubert Dyasi and his colleagues. We came away fascinated and with wonderful memories.

It was all about finding your own agenda, your own research project, and the resources you needed to go out and interact with it, whether 'it' was plants or ants or whatever. It was an education that came from the individual students themselves and I liked that. I see the value of that for Indian children and that is a part of their education. It is the extreme of that education that sometimes bothered me because we come from a group-centered world and the skills needed are somewhat different but just as important.

In the extreme of the progressive program, there wasn't really a place for kids to be lectured to, which I think is too bad. I think there is something to be said for somebody who has knowledge and who dishes it out. Of course, if you overdo your lecturing, it’s not good for anybody. But I felt that there was a place for it, as well as a place for respecting authority, a place to be scolded, and maybe even a place to be spanked.

Which is why, in its pure sense, I didn’t always agree with the inquiry-only approach, of it totally evolving out of the child. It was evolving out of the white child maybe – but I'm not convinced that that is the best for them either. And it was people like Lisa Delpit and a couple of others whose strong speech validated what I was feeling: 'Stop! There are some things that you’re forgetting here.' Which was okay, you know? It didn’t mean that kids were miseducated; it was just a different process.

I'm all for being progressive, but I'm uncomfortable thinking positively about pronouncements that are not necessarily progressive for those who are different, which go against the fundamentals of how children grew up.

That's an interesting blend. My background, I think--where I came from and who I am--allowed me to broaden that span. Because I knew in my heart that the education we received in the traditional community never hurt anybody. Nobody was labeled; nobody failed, they all found their place eventually. Certainly some were clearly better at certain things that others were not, but there wasn't this "labeling;" there wasn't this tracking; there wasn't any of that.

It sounds like you resolved the conflicts you had early on, when you were still a doctoral student, about fitting in to academic life, on the one hand, and whether on the other hand academic life would somehow undermine your place in Pueblo life. One of the things people have told me is that when you go back to your own university to take on a professional role, which is what I did in essence, it takes quite an adjustment. Catherine Laughlin, who was my mentor and someone I looked up to, all of a sudden became my peer. So did three or four other people I took classes from. So it took me a little while within the university to sort of find myself. Today, I don't think I have any problem with that, partly because those people that I had as instructors have almost all retired. But when they were all there, they were so encouraging and wanting me to succeed.

You're the elder now. Yeah, I'm the old man now. In fact, in 1992 as a kind of recognition of eldership (even though I wasn't formally in that company yet) --and I think this is an interesting story--I was invited to Spain to participate in observing the 500th anniversary of Columbus' so-called discovery of America. They couldn't very well have had that celebration without a delegation of the vanquished. Or should I say the near-vanquished?

Anyway, I went there with tribal leaders and Indian scholars from throughout the Southwest. We didn't go as a political unit, but as a culturally plural Native delegation. The Navajos had a representative, the Hopi in Arizona had one, the Zuni, the Apache, and so on. The All Indian Pueblo Council had their chairman, and I went with him as a scholar. Each

leader of their Indian nation took along a scholar, and the scholars were asked to present at a series of talks over two days at the Escorial, a major architectural complex just outside of Madrid. They also, at the last minute, invited some women. Initially they had invited only the men. Too macho, someone high up said, and they reconsidered. So I got Lorraine an invitation, too. We ended up with a delegation of about 25 men, and three women.

It was, of course, a very well secured place. Lots of security people there because of the Queen's presence, sitting with us, up on the stage; facing the audience out front. It wasn't a huge space, but it was quite full. It looked like an audience of mostly students and professors. The program itself was all tightly scripted to emphasize the positive aspects of the occasion. But on the very first day, the ghost of history escaped from the script and took center stage, sort of.

We had the first morning's presentations, and I was on the agenda early on. The Hopi scholar presented, and I think I followed. Just a piece of history and about traditions still still being practiced today; how we live and so forth, and what the impact of Spain had been on us. The good things, mainly. Like the contributions each culture made to the other. It was meant to be a well-cleansed conversation. No boat-rocking. Were it possible, I would have sank all three of their boats 500 years ago.

But what happened was, we had a break. I think we had gone on for an hour and half or so. Two talks and all the time simultaneous translation into Spanish. We could speak in English, but we had this person who was right behind us translating into Spanish. And there was this medicine man in our group. I think he was from the old Pima Reservation. And when we had our break, and went off into this elegant room outside of the hall, this Pima medicine man asked the Queen if he could bless her on the stage as a part of a ceremony he wanted to perform, which wasn't on the program. Of course, she was thrilled to do it. For one thing, it was great publicity. There were lots of cameras out there to record it all.

The problem was no one told her security people that this was going down. It was all just spur of the moment. Some of us in the room didn't even know that this was going to happen. It was apparently decided mainly between the Queen, the medicine man, and the program chairman.

Earlier that morning, I had noticed this old guy in the first row. He seemed very jittery. Just an older guy who I was sure was a professor--at least he was wearing these half glasses that made him look professorial—and who kept looking around, taking notes, which I took to be expressive of an intellectual interest. I couldn't have been more wrong. We almost had an international incident, is what I'm leading up to.

We had all just taken our places on the stage again when, without a word of introduction, the Pima medicine man got up from where he was seated and walked up to the Queen. He was carrying a folded blanket over his shoulder, as a Native elder would, underneath of which was a quiver of eagle feathers that he was going to use to bless her with. And when he reached her and made to draw out a feather from his quiver, the old guy who was sitting there with his little glasses suddenly sprung up onto his feet and pulled out a revolver.

A delayed echo of something that happened 500 years ago! Five hundred years later, judgment day had arrived! On both sides, certainly, the mistrust was still there. It is a wonder that the Pima medicine man didn't get shot. I think the Queen raised her hand or did something just in time to avoid a tragedy.

Did the ceremony continue? The ceremony then went on. The person who was attending the Queen stepped forward and explained the situation in Spanish. Anyway, that was quite a heart-stopping incident.

A confrontation with the monster of Native American history! Right. It wasn't over, the treatment of 500 years ago, by a long shot. We could have all been disposed of, ever so quickly, had that

truly been an incident of one of ours killing the Queen. It was very intense for a bit. I think hearts were beating fast. It was hard to trust again. We had had a tiny, bitter taste of what our ancestors had to swallow. But we made the best out of the situation. We stumbled through.

The thing that got me though was that nowhere the next day did we see anything about it in the paper, or on TV; nothing was ever said in spite of all the media there in the room with us, including TV cameras. It was isolated and cast off as an honest human error. Just for that moment it made me realize and think, "My God! Here we are, playing like everything's okay, but we could have all been killed because of a lack of communication! On the other hand, it would have been quite a coup to kill a Queen 500 years later!

That was some trip. What did you do for an encore? In the '90s I became increasingly involved with tribal affairs. I was given my first major responsibility of a post within the tribe in 1995. I became lieutenant governor, and that sort of changed my whole relationship to the tribe. Before you're an elder, you can be fairly lax about attendance at events. You can offer an excuse when you miss something, and so forth. But as an elder, which I became, you've got to be there for things; that's expected of you. If you expect the youth to be there, then you better be there first. I had to drop out of university teaching for that period of time in office.

For a year? Yes. Plus, since 1995, I've been councilman as well, which is like a tenured seat at the university. Then in 1998 I became the governor of Cochiti Pueblo, which was still another kind of extension for me, in a direction I could never have imagined when I was 20. During that time President Clinton had instituted a more welcoming protocol governing Washington's relations with American Indian tribes, called "Government to Government." It extended to tribal leaders who came to Washington to take up matters of state the same degree of access to the president as visiting heads of states. I had an opportunity to meet with Bill Clinton

twice in that year, as well as with Janet Reno and others in high office.

About what? With Clinton, it was about Indian needs in general. We met once in Washington and another time here, in Albuquerque, when he met privately with governors from the local tribes. Then we met with Attorney General Reno about jurisdictional issues, on matters of security, as well as funding for tribal police. Newt Gingrich also came out here to meet with us during that year looking for Republican support. At the time, the issues were pretty heavy around casinos and gambling, which didn't concern my particular pueblo. I think Gingrich hoped that he, being a Republican (and New Mexico being heavily Democratic) would have a special impact. At the time, he was quite prominent in his role as the spokesperson for his party.

Of course, Pete Dominici, who's Republican, is from New Mexico, and the two, Gingrich and Dominici, hand-in-hand, couldn't do more than what the Democrats had been doing with the compacts for gambling. About the only Republican we supported in reelection was John McCain.

Anyway for me this was new, other than the times, in 1995, when I was lieutenant governor and went with delegations to Washington to lobby for financial aid for an irrigation project, for a problem with seepage from the dam on our land, and for the construction costs for an elderly center and other projects. Being governor was another level of education for me, which clearly involved my pueblo but not so much on the traditional end. It was more about assisting with the tribe's intersect with the big world, where we dealt with highways, hospitals, social services, schools and much more.

Did taking on those responsibilities change your thinking in any sense? I think I was actually somewhat prepared when I came to that point. Some people say that they were totally unprepared; they didn't know anything. But I was prepared in the sense that I wasn't afraid to speak in front of people. As an academic, I did that all of the time. But also I

was fairly well-grounded in the issues and ills of society, primarily from the education perspective. I also knew about other things that were happening. I won't say I was very good at it, but I wasn't totally blown away by it either. It was again another extension of self, where you deal with real people and their issues in life.

Part of being governor also required me to preside over our court as judge. When things happened that infringed on tribal law, I convened the court and presided over it, and that was still another area of experience that I'd never had before.

How complicated was that? Most cases were minor, like driving while intoxicated. 0thers were a bit more serious. Some things I didn't even know were happening in the tribe. Somebody was beating his wife, for example. One of the stalwarts in the community at that. Things like that all of a sudden came to the surface for me, because so much of that stuff was hidden. Yes, I was a changed person after that term.

You had to be a wise man. Yeah, being wise was part of it. I don't know how good I was at that. Trying to pass judgment in a way that was just and firm. You also had to have some backbone to do it, some courage.

So where has education, American education, educating a public for democracy, come since you left college in Colorado? How would you characterize the existing discourse? Speaking strictly from the perspective of Indian education, what we are seeing today is very dangerous. This business of "No Child Left Behind," and the intense focus on testing, putting schools on probation, and eventually putting them on corrective action, and so forth, has been more dangerous than anything I've seen in a long time.

In the state of New Mexico at one point, 68 percent of all the schools that were on either probation or in corrective action were schools with large numbers of Indian students. When you're at that stage, what happens within those schools is that the teachers and

the administration are frantic to turn it around. They've gotten much more test-focused. Enrichment literacy, for example, has all but gone out the window. They bring in people from the outside who have a magic bullet, usually a canned package of some type, and force that on the kids whether it fits or not. We had an incident at one of the schools where a child was actually told, very forcefully, to stop using her Indian language. It was like a step back in time, all in the interest of test scores.

Now we're focused on the mechanics of reading, as opposed to the pleasure of it. It's taking us far away from the focus of the child and far away from looking at the total child in the context of his or her community.

There are programs that we have, that used to have a permanent place in our school day--not on a pedestal necessarily-- Native language programs and other cultural programs, that are treated like second-class citizens now because tests do not render judgments on that kind of knowledge.

One of the big problems has always been the lowering of standards for the minority student and certainly that is true for Indian kids. But now so much is focused on testing, the standards, and benchmarks that people are forgetting the child; they're looking right past the child. They're looking at the benchmark. We have those marks so that we can work towards a better thing, but they're just marks, and how we reach those marks to many is still through the outdated practices of the past.

The one good thing that has come out of all of this--and if schools would only use it well--is the money that has come to the schools that have been targeted. Already the flow of this money into the state has resulted in a lot more attention being given to education in the political realm. In 2003, the state legislature voted to elevate the state department of education to a cabinet position. And along with that, the Office of Indian Education is now one of the sub units within the cabinet position. At the same time UNM was awarded a substantial grant to help with the newly established Institute of American Indian

Education, for which I was named director. And I've now had a chance to talk to some of the administrators of those targeted schools about combining some of the money they've been given for training with some of the money we've been given to actually free up some Native teaching assistants to pursue their undergraduate degrees and to have them work toward their teaching licenses. We have 54 on scholarships to do just that right now.

There are those kinds of possibilities. The two key people I've been working with are the NM Secretary of Education, who is a female hispanic, and the Assistant Secretary of Education, who is a woman from the Santo Domingo Pueblo. The two are very aware of the importance of including culture and language in the education of Native students. So far, I've had nothing but the best that I could expect out of them in terms of cooperation and commitment.

And then of course today there are a lot more educated Indian people in the world than when I got my doctorate. I don't have to be the only Indian carrying the load.

Is that a community that you can call on, that community of educated young people? Yeah, in fact, I work with seven other Native American faculty members and they've been very supportive. The grant was given to us to keep this conversation alive, and to do it with energy and enough of a mass, which is crucial, because people get complacent. We also provide a lot in-service work to schools and tribes as well.

Do you have a plan for the next 10 years? Not to fall asleep, maybe...although in getting close to retirement the idea of just sliding out of the whole thing is very enticing. I'd like more time to write, to put on paper some of what I've been privileged to witness--if I could word it in some way and share it.

A different kind of writing than what you've done already. I think so. Something different.

1. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City,* 1975.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED, CONDENSED AND EDITED BY ARTHUR TOBIER

This interview with Joseph Suina was conducted in 2004. Suina retired from the UNM faculty in 2006. He now devotes himself entirely to farming, family and the Cochiti tribal council.