



Navajo Medicine Men: *An Instructional Game*¹

Ted Ward

This letter is the subject matter for the simulation that follows.

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(From a review of ongoing research, development, and training projects:
United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare)

This is a three-year project to train 12 Navajos to become Medicine Men. Since no ceremonies can be taught in June or July, the ten-month training cycle will begin in August. Vacancies from any cause will be filled then. (For example, the first year, 1969-70, four trainees each learned one full ceremony and, therefore, are now qualified to practice as Medicine Men in these specialties. One or more may elect to again become a trainee to learn another ceremony.) The training is based on 40 hours per week for the 10 months each year. The length of time is due to the sheer volume of rote memorization involved in each ceremony to be learned. There are some 50 ceremonies. The average medicine man knows 2 or 3, rarely more than 5. The training is accomplished by long hours of practice under the direct supervision of the Navajo doctor in charge. The practice under the direct supervision of the Navajo doctor in charge. The trainees are taught in the instructing medicine man's own Hogan, usually at night. The objective in each case is for the trainee to learn the particular ceremony perfectly prior to performing it with a patient. Emphasis is on restoration of emotional well-being so that the patient can function normally. The program provides a means of perpetuating a tradition of proved positive value for Navajo Mental Health. The Navajos are desirous of having a trained group of practitioners to replace the older men. They work closely with Public Health Service (PHS) doctors providing psychiatric counseling where it is of value and referring medical cases to PHS physicians. This program provides mental health relevant personnel for a proportion of the Navajo Nation still non-English speaking and unable to benefit from Anglo forms of therapy.

¹ Ted Ward. Navaho Medicine Men: An Instructional Game, Human Factors in National Development Workshop: The Role of the Church in Development. Summer Course, Wheaton College, July 1981

The project began in August of 1969. Six Medicine Men were hired and to each were assigned two trainees. Except for one, the trainees have been under thirty and one was only sixteen years of age. These young people already had some knowledge about the Navajo chants and ceremonies.

The program has been working in cooperation with the PHS. In addition to staff consultation, the psychiatric consultant of the Navajo Indian Health Area as well as other PHS physicians have conducted and participated in eight mental health and medical group discussions with the trainees, instructors, and staff of the program throughout the year. These discussions involved the correlation of the two systems of mental knowledge, giving the trainees a greater understanding of the problems of their patients, and increasing their sensitivities to the interpersonal issues at stake in their professional work. Some specific topics included "Bacteria and How It Effects the Body," "The Circulatory System," and "The Structure of the Body and How It Works."

In addition to working with the Public Health Service, the program staff has been working industriously towards the goal of all the trainees becoming Medicine Men. By the end of the first year, four of the trainees have become Medicine Men. Three others have learned the ceremonies and when patients ask them to, will become Medicine Men after performance of the ceremonies with patients. The last five trainees have learned much but still need further training.

The project also has been gradually building up an image for itself in the eyes of the community and the public. The director of the program has been invited to speak at numerous conferences sponsored by anthropological and educational organizations. These trips involved travel to many parts of the United States, including Washington, DC, San Francisco, and Minneapolis.

Several field trips have also been made by the trainees and staff. One of the trips was made to the Gallup Indian Hospital where the instructors and trainees observed the operating room as part of an all-day program. All in all, this has been a successful year for the Mental Health Program.

Navajo Medicine Men: Facilitator's Guide

Ted Ward

An instructional game for training in cross-cultural sensitivity (for groups with background in ethnocentrism). The experience will require 60-90 minutes.

1. Give each person a copy of the letter from John Dick and a 3X5 card.
2. Use one side of 3X5 card to note your reactions to the letter. Jot down notes about how you feel about it while or after reading it.
3. On the other side of the card; write your responses: (Project these questions on overhead, expose one by one.)
 - 1) Assuming that the letter is real, is it good or bad for the US to spend tax money this way?
 - 2) Assuming that it is real, will the tribe be helped?
 - 3) Is science advanced or hindered by this plan?
 - 4) What would you do to improve on the plan?
5. Form groups of four people to share and discuss these five questions. After sharing, try to reach a consensus of conclusions. (Announce the 5-minute period to reach consensus after 10 minutes of sharing.)
6. Debriefing I: Share the points of consensus your group has been able to reach.
7. In small groups again, critique your own group's stance: What evidence of acceptance did you display? What evidence of ethnocentrism did you display? What premature judgments did you make? (These three questions can be projected on overhead to stand as reminders during the small group discussion.)
8. Debriefing II: Share important observations about your groups approach to the "cross-cultural encounter" that was involved in this experience with the Navajo. (Yes, it is a real document, not a hoax!)