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Navajo Weaver as a Teacher of Traditional Textile Arts

Pearl Sunrise

Navajo weaving has evolved from historical utilitarian functions to contemporary fine art today. My presentation on Navajo weaving will include topics of history, economics, function; new materials affecting style and structural and esthetic textile changes, and the purpose of instruction. My role in this presentation is to disseminate information about Navajo weaving and facilitate discussion through the important question-answer sessions to achieve interaction with the TSA members.

To the Din³/₄/Navajo people, there is no word in the language to describe the word *art*. Weaving is both process and experience, and it involves activity toward a balance and harmony of self in the concept of HæZHæ, incorporating elements of physical, psychological and spiritual qualities.

Many positive and negative factors contribute to the teaching of traditional art forms. Economic and social aspects differ as well as race, age groups and learning styles. However, the mission and objectives in teaching traditional arts is the same for all, to promote understanding between cultures, among Natives and non-Native groups using the textile art form as the medium for discussion. It includes trying to give the students a total human experience by experiencing the concept of HæZHæ through the Din³/₄ philosophy of self and creativity.

Teaching Navajo weaving promotes preservation and perpetuation of the cultural arts. In order to preserve traditional arts, seeds have to be planted very early in life. For those searching for identity, they will gain identity and learn about themselves while they develop greater esteem. The Native people will gain empowerment through an enriched understanding of the value of their heritage which leads to stronger self esteem and pride for the people. For the non-native, learning Navajo weaving enables them to respect other cultures, enrich their lives, and better communicate and understand skills of diverse groups.

Pearl Sunrise has taught Navajo weaving to numerous children, adolescence, adults, senior citizens, Natives and non-Natives in a large variety of established institutions, kindergartens, elementary schools, mid schools, high schools, college level and senior citizens programs. These programs include Canoncito Navajo School, (kindergarten-High School); Cuba Consolidated Schools (elementary-High School); McCurdy School (Española, NM); "A School for Me" Navajo Handicapped School (Tohatchi, NM); Albuquerque Public Schools (Indian Education-Navajo Textiles); Chapter Houses, Navajo Reservation; Santa Fe Indian School (mid and High School); Santa Fe School for the Deaf and Blind; United World College (Las Vegas, NM); Native Arts and Crafts, (University of New Mexico Art Dept.); Institute of American Indian Arts (Santa Fe, NM); Taos Institute of Arts (Taos, NM); FRIDA Program (Lesotho, South Africa); Artist-in-Residence (Toronto, Canada); and Fulbright Scholarship (New Zealand).