

A newly trained teacher named Mary went to teach at a Navajo Indian reservation. Every day, she would ask five of the young Navajo students to go to the chalkboard and complete a simple math problem from their homework. They would stand there, silently, unwilling to complete the task. Mary couldn't figure it out. Nothing she had studied in her educational curriculum helped, and she certainly hadn't seen anything like it in her student-teaching days back in Phoenix.

*What am I doing wrong? Could I have chosen five students who can't do the problem?* Mary would wonder. *No, it couldn't be that.* Finally she asked the students what was wrong. And in their answer, she learned a surprising lesson from her young Indian pupils about self-image and a sense of self-worth.

It seemed that the students respected each other's individuality and knew that not all of them were capable of doing the problems. Even at their early age, they understood the senselessness of the win-lose approach in the classroom. They believed no one would win if any students were shown up or embarrassed at the chalkboard.

So they refused to compete with each other in public.

Once she understood, Mary changed the system so that she could check each child's math problem individually, but not at any child's expense in front of his classmates. They all wanted to learn—but not at someone else's expense.