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Indigenous Knowledge System And Decolonizing Methodology Interwoven Into Higher Education Experiences: Autoethnography

Franklin Sage

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INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM AND DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGY
INTERWOVEN INTO HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCES: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

by

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Bachelor of Arts, University of North Dakota, 2008
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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctoral of Educational Foundations and Research

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May
2017

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This dissertation, submitted by Franklin Sage in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.



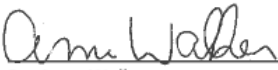
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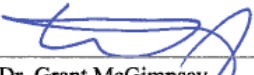


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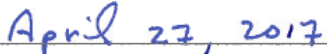


Dr. Anne Walker

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.



Dr. Grant McGimpsey,
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies



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Title Indigenous Knowledge System and Decolonizing Methodology Interwoven
 Into Higher Education Experiences: Autoethnography

Department Educational Foundations and Research

Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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Date

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To my mom, Alice Chiquito Sage, and my dad, Andy Thomas Sage,
The world's best parents!

ABSTRACT

What ways can Indigenous Knowledge and Diné Knowledge Systems be useful in autoethnography doctoral research? This dissertation uses Indigenous Research Methodology and autoethnography to make use of storytelling from the Navajo Creation Story and Navajo Circular Model to examine the educational experiences of Native Americans in higher education. A Navajo Circular Model was developed to provide a visual guide of the Indigenous Research process utilizing various Navajo traditional elements. This dissertation highlights federal policies that changed the course of Native American education. The results are in autoethnography that reveals how cultural identity, names, dislocation from home, financial barriers and racism impacted my educational journey.

PROLOGUE

This section is written to provide a guide to reading this dissertation from the Navajo perspective. It is a warning that the reader will be confused in certain sections, because the reader is coming from a different world of thinking and perspective about Navajo culture. This dissertation is not your normal dissertation that has been practiced and accepted as the standard way of conducting doctoral research.

First, in a traditional dissertation, there are five chapters in the following order, introduction, literature review, method, finding, and implication. In this dissertation, there are not call chapters but are called “Phases.” This how my thinking about this dissertation came to be. You have to set your mind to think in a circular way and that all things are interconnected. One good thing about seeing the world in a circular way is that it does not end. Birth, death, and rebirth occur to start the process again for another cycle.

In Phase One, I begin with the Navajo Creation Story. In the creation story, different beings went through four different worlds and this is a link to the development of phases. According to Navajo tradition, we are in the fifth world. Along the way through each world, different beings did not leave all life behind; but they carried different life into each world. It is important to note that all beings have different significant roles with each other as far as surviving and working together as a community. The creation story, in this dissertation, is very short compared to the original story that is told during ceremonies and story time in Navajo families. Creations stories have many different elements have details to describe

different ways of seeing the Navajo universe. The creation story is also a representation of traditional ways of educating (informal) the next generation.

Phase Two is the Historical Process of Western policies that changed the Native American ways of life and thinking. Prior to the arrival of Westerners (Europeans), the Navajo had their own education system and ways of educating the youth about certain traditional knowledge systems that worked for them. Their main transmission of knowledge was through storytelling. Western education tried to eradicate the original Native American traditional knowledge through schools. Native American Higher Education Experience is in Phase Two and Western education continues to influence Native American youth.

Phase Three is Indigenous Research Methodology has a key role in actually slowing down and stopping the colonization of the mind that has become the normal way to educate. Indigenous Research Methodology provides a voice for Indigenous people to display their own way of processing education. This methodology honors storytelling as an approach to the research process and links it to autoethnography.

Phase Four is Autoethnography. It is in this phase that I talk about my experiences with education and how I am connected to other Native American students. Autoethnography is a link back to the original storytelling and creation story.

This section's goal is to help the reader understand the circular way of Navajo traditional thinking and processing of information. I will share a model I call the Navajo Circular Model and a Google Earth geographic map to show where the four sacred mountains indicated by red dots are located to help visually orientation the reader. The model and map also demonstrate how big the Navajo universe is and how the colonization of space has downsized it to the current reservation.

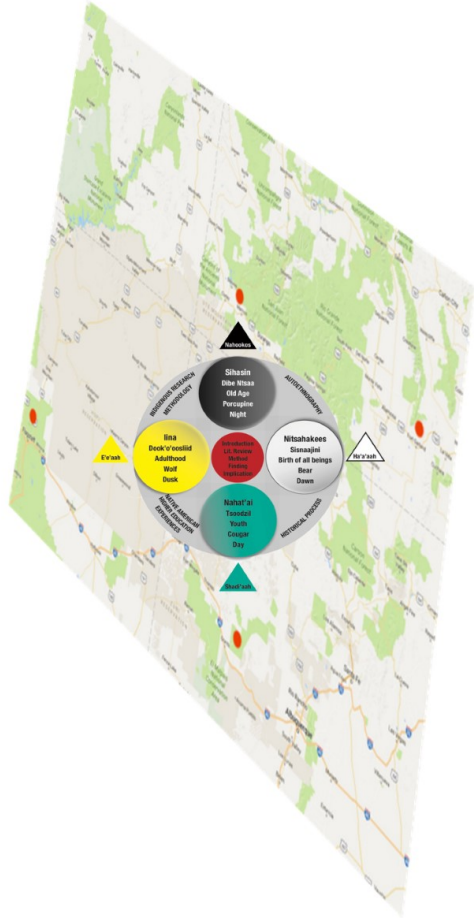


Figure 1, Navajo Circular Model and Map.

PHASE ONE

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM INTERWOVEN INTO HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCES

In the beginning, according to the Diné people, the world was dark, engulfed in mist, and a few flying little beings existed that were known as the *Nilch'i Dine'* (Air People). In this world, the Air People were asked to leave and to never return for their misconduct that upset other beings. The Air People flew high up in the air until they could not go any higher. Voices directed them to fly towards the east where a hole was located for them to fly into the second world.

In the second world, there lived the Swallow People, and the Air People were welcome to live among them. For 24 days (no significant meaning to the numbers among Diné), the two groups enjoyed each other's company by learning from each other and started to form kinships between the groups. However, one of the Air People misbehaved by sleeping with the *naat'aanii* (leader's) wife, so the group was expelled from the second world. As the Air People flew around to find a way out of the second world, *Nilch'i* (wind) called out and directed them to the south. The Air People emerged into the third world.

In the third world lived the Yellow Grasshopper People. The Air People were welcomed to live among them. For 24 days, the two groups enjoyed each other's company and started to formulate kinships between the groups. One of the Air People misbehaved by sleeping with Yellow Grasshopper *naat'aanii* wife, so the group was expelled from the third world. They flew as high as they could in search of a way out of the third world. The

voices from *Nilchi'ilichii* (wind red) led them to the west. The Air People emerged into the fourth world.

In the fourth world, four grasshoppers in the colors of white, blue, yellow, and black joined the people. This coming together resulted in four scouts being sent in four different directions to look for any other living beings and food sources; this is how the four directions of East, South, West, and North came to be. The scouts that had gone to the west and east returned with no information. The south scout came back with a report of a sighting of two different foot tracks (later to find out that these foot tracks belonged to deer and turkey). The north scout returned with information that he had seen beings that had their hair cut square in front and lived on top of houses; they were called *Kiis'aanii*. The following day, two *Kiis'aanii* arrived and invited the Air People to their village. They accepted and followed the *Kiis'aanii* to the red stream that they had to cross on four different colored (white pine, blue spruce, yellow pine, and black spruce) logs. In the village, they were fed corn and pumpkin and invited to stay and live among the *Kiis'aanii* people.

For 24 days, the two groups enjoyed each other's company and started to formulate kinships between the groups. On the twenty-fourth night, the Air Spirit People had a council meeting where all agreed to maintain and value social norms. This meeting is how insects came to be in this current world.

It did not take long for the *Haashch'eeh diné e* (Holy People) to appear and make their presence known to the newcomers. They were *Bits'lis ligaii* (white body), known to the Navajo as *Haashch'eelti'i* (Talking God); *Bits'iis dootl'izh* (blue body), known to the Navajo as *To neinili* (Water Sprinkler); *Bis'iis litsoii* (yellow body), known to the Navajo as *Hashch'eoghan* (no English word translation); *Bits'iis lizhin* (black body), known to the

Navajo as *Haashch'eeshzhini* (Black God). The *Haashch'eeh diné e* made sounds and gestures to the newcomers, but the group could not understand each other. These attempts of communication were repeated four times in four days.

On the fourth day and fourth time, *Bits'iis lizhin* stayed behind and spoke to the Air People and all insects in a language they could understand. The message was that the Holy People wanted more people who were like them. The insect did not resemble what the Holy People wanted. For the first time, the Air People and all beings that came from the underworld were instructed to cleanse themselves for 12 days.

On the 12th day, the Holy People returned with buckskins, two ears of corn (yellow and white), and two eagle feathers (white and yellow). They laid the buckskin on the ground and faced the head towards the east and the tail towards the west. The white corn was laid on a white eagle feather, the yellow corn was laid on a yellow eagle feather, and the buckskin was folded over it from the tail end. The east wind blew into the buckskin to provide air (give life), and when the buckskin was uncovered there appeared two humans (people), one male and one female. They were given the names *Altse Asdzaa* (First Woman) and *Altse Hastin* (First Man).

The two humans (*Altse Asdzaa* and *Altse Hastin*) had a family that became Diné, and again another social norm was violated that resulted in the fourth world flooding. The coyote took the Water Monster's baby, and stealing became a taboo. The humans and insects were faced with another dilemma, which was to find a way out of the fourth world.

Wooneeshch'iidi (Locust) sacrificed himself to make a hole, but it was too small, so *Nahashch'id* (badger) was asked to dig a bigger hole, which would allow the rest of the bigger bodied beings to pass through to the fifth world.

In the fifth world, the *Haashch'eeh diné e* (Holy People), *Altse Hastin* (First Man), and *Altse Asdzaa* (First Woman) created the Navajo universe and instructed all beings to live accordingly to their specific principles. One essential principle to the Diné people is the *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon*.

The *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* exemplifies the way Diné people live their lives (Lee, 2014). Rex Lee Jim (2000) stated that the term literally means, “May I walk, being the omnipresent beauty created by the one that moves beyond old age” (p. 232), and provides a breakdown of each word: “*Sa* means old age, *ah* mean beyond, *naa* means environment, *ghai* means movement, *bi* means to it, *K'eh* means according, *ho* means self and that sense of an ever-presence of something greater, *zhoon* means beauty” (p. 232). Werito (2014) expressed that *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* as part of who you are and it becomes a way of life.

For Diné people or *Ni'hookaa' Diyinn Diné e* (five-fingered Earth-surface spiritual beings) *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* is who we are: it is part of our thought processes and everyday lives. *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* is what we strive for, hope for and pray for, because we believe that its essence and meaning lie at the base of our language and cultural identity and traditional cultural knowledge and teachings (p. 26).

Altse Hastin (First Man) and *Altse Asdzaa* (First Woman) were made from male and female corn and eagle feathers; the philosophy of *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* has male and female constructs within the phrase (Benally, 1994). *Sa'ah Naaghai* has the male characteristics of “indestructible and eternal being,” and *Bik'eh Hozhoon* exhibits female characteristics of “the director and cause of all that is good” (Benally, 1994, p. 24). The principle is the Diné traditional living system that positions the Navajo within the natural

world and universe (House, 2005). *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* is a framework that puts the Diné universe in the center of our way of knowing about the world and is a natural process that established the four sacred mountains (*Sisnaajini, Tsoodzil, Dook'o'oosliid, and Dibe Ntsaa*), directions (*Ha'a'aah, shadi'aah, e'e'aah, nahookos*), and all symbolic elements.

Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon also embodies the four planning and learning approaches to life (Lee, 2014). It is a process consisting of *Nitsahakees* (thinking), *nahat'ai* (planning), *iina* (life), and *sihasin* (assurance) that are applied to the individual and community in keeping balance with the traditional way of life (Lee, 2014). The process of planning and learning is not only limited to daily routine, but it is a process (*Nitsahakees, nahat'ai, iina, and sihasin*) throughout one's life span. These approaches can be applied to the contemporary academic research process, which will be demonstrated in this dissertation.

Overview

The introduction of this dissertation demonstrates the process of how each individual being (insects, four legged animals, and humans) traveled through each world and how they came about to the modern world. It is an illustration that all living beings are significant to the Diné universe and every species has key roles. In Diné tradition, the fundamental philosophy is rooted in the creation story because it lays the groundwork for understanding the different levels of the universe. The process begins with the creation story, and this dissertation honors the process by implementing the creation story as a guideline for the project. The creation story is not just a story, but it is also, for traditional people that still reside within the four sacred mountains and for those who have moved off the reservation, their history. This dissertation recognizes Diné traditional stories, along with

autoethnography, to examine self (me) in the context of how I am connected with others (Native American students who are not all Diné) who are in graduate school.

Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon continues to be the guiding principle for Diné ways of life. However, modernization has challenged certain elements of Diné ways of life, in particular the language. But it is important to note that Diné people are resilient and adapt to the ever-changing world. One approach of adapting is implementing the traditional teaching (Diné principle way of life) into academia, such as interweaving the *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* philosophy with Western approaches. That said, the purpose of this dissertation is to tell a story from a Diné perspective with conventional methods that examine self in the context of how one is connected with others Native Americans in graduate school. The significance of the study is to utilize a method of research that gets to the root of tribal knowledge, that can be integrated into the research process and can lead to resolving some historical trauma. The guiding question is, what ways can Indigenous knowledge and Diné knowledge systems be useful in autoethnography doctoral research?

Education

One could argue that Native Americans and Alaskan Natives (Indigenous) are the most underserved populations in U.S. higher education. The total number of U. S. residents and nonresident aliens who earned associate degrees from 2009 to 2010 was 848,856 and Native Americans and Alaskan Natives earned 1.2 percent (10,101) of those. If compared to other ethnic groups, the statistics are extremely disheartening for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives: Asian/Pacific Islanders 5.3 percent (44,026), Hispanics 13.5 percent (112,403), Blacks 13.7 percent (113,867), and Whites 66.3 percent (552,376) (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The total number of U. S. residents and nonresident aliens who earned bachelor degrees from 2009 to 2010 was 1,649,919, and Native Americans and Alaskan Natives earned 0.8 percent (12,405) of those. If compared to other ethnic groups, the statistics are extremely disheartening for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives: Asian/Pacific Islanders 7.3 percent (117,391), Hispanics 8.8 percent (140,426), Blacks 10.3 percent (164,789), and Whites 72.9 percent (1,167,322).

The total number of U. S. residents who earned master's degrees from 2009 to 2010 was 611,693, and Native Americans and Alaskan Natives earned 0.6 percent (3,960) of those. If compared to other ethnic groups, the statistics are extremely disheartening for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives: Asian/Pacific Islanders 7.0 percent (42,072), Hispanics 7.1 percent (43,535), Blacks 12.5 percent (76,458), and Whites 72.8 percent (445,038) (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

The current statistics show that there is minute progress regarding higher education for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives. Multiple elements have contributed to the low rate of Native Americans in higher education. In order to understand the challenges of Native Americans and Alaskan Natives in a western educational setting, we have to revisit the federal policies that were implemented in the educational system for Indigenous children. Despite all the challenges with higher education today, in regards to obtaining Associates degrees (1.2 percent), Bachelor degrees (0.8 percent), and Masters degrees (0.6 percent) have exceeded the historical practice of just doing enough to graduate from high school. However, every person's experience with education is personal - different - and this dissertation will focus on the Navajo experience that connects to a commonality among Native American students who overcame mountains of challenges.

Storytelling is an alternative to the traditional five chapter dissertation. This dissertation is divided into four phases of reflection that mirror chapters in line with the aforementioned four cardinal directions and sacred mountains. The Navajo Circular Model is the overarching conceptual model that is used and manifests in the process from one phase to the next.

Phase one consists of the introduction with the creation story; explanation and clarification of the Navajo Circular Model, illustrating two of the three layers; highlights of several historical federal policies; a general summary of Native American higher education experiences; a presentation of the Indigenous Research Method; an introduction to autoethnography; second layer and a concluding third layer that illustrates how all elements of the Navajo Circular Model are interconnected, without separation. Phase two explores Native American students' experiences with higher education. Phase three presents the Indigenous Research Methodology - a process that values the Indigenous knowledge system and Navajo knowledge system alike, which is interwoven with Native American experiences within higher education. Phase four is the analysis of autoethnography, with the inclusion of my experiences in higher education, as well as discussion, implications, and concluding statement.

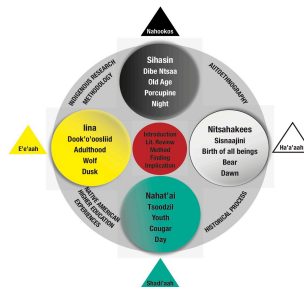


Figure 2. Navajo Circular Model.

The Navajo Circular Model

The Navajo Circular Model (Figure 2) is described as moving in a circular motion that begins in the east (white triangle) and precedes clockwise as each element is interconnected and built upon the next. The triangles represent four sacred colors and mountains labeled with Navajo words to identify the four cardinal directions. *Ha'a'ah* is east; *Shadi'ah* is south; *E'e'ah* is west; and *Nahookos* is north. The four medium sized circles within the bigger circle are color coded to identify their association with the triangles and the four sacred colors assigned to particular mountains. The model elements move in a circular cycle, and once a cycle is completed, a new cycle starts with different elements. The new elements will be explained in Figures 3, 4, and 5. Figure 2 illustrates a complete model when all the elements are in place.

The Navajo Circular Model also represents a hogan, a traditional Navajo home, in which the door always faces to the east. The first cycle is an illustration of Navajo epistemology that continues to be a traditional educational tool to preserve the culture, language, and learning principles that are associated with the sacred mountains. The model will be explained in three elements, and the first element (Figure 3) begins with the four medium sized circles.

First Element

The beginning of the white cycle of life within the Navajo universe starts in the east (*Ha'a'ah*), with the white medium circle. The sacred White Shell Mountain, *Sisnaajini* (Blanco Peak, Colorado), is located on the east side of the Navajo land. The east represents dawn, birth of all beings, and the season of spring is the host. The protector of the east universe is the bear. The knowledge of thinking, *Nitsahakees*, is one of the principles in the

Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon paradigm.

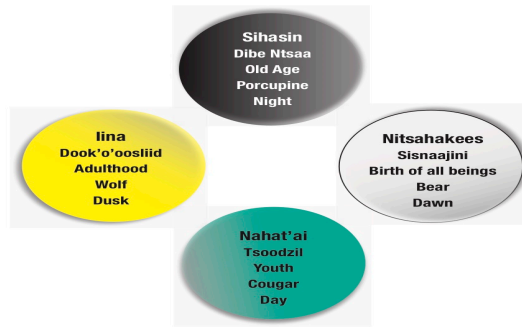


Figure 3. First Element of Navajo Circular Model.

South (*shadi'aah*) is the second turquoise circle of the Navajo cycle of life. Sacred Blue Bead Turquoise Mountain, *Tsoodzil* (Mount Taylor, New Mexico,) is in the south. This direction represents youth, day, and the cougar is the protector. *Nahat'ai* is the principle of planning and providing meaning for the implementation and carrying out of the plan. The phrase *Taani anit'eego* is the guiding principle that assists with the implementation of planning one's life.

West (*e'e'aah*) is the third yellow circle of the Navajo cycle of life. Sacred Abalone Shell Mountain, *Dook'o'oosliid* (San Francisco Peak, Arizona), is on the west side of the Navajo land. This direction represents adulthood, dusk, and the wolf is the protector of the west. *Iina* is the principle of bringing to life, providing sustenance, realizing, and making visible the outcomes of thinking and planning that emerged from the south.

North (*nahookos*) is the fourth black circle of the Navajo cycle of life. Sacred Obsidian Mountain, *Dibe Ntsaa* (Hesperus Peak or La Plata Mountain, Colorado), is on the north side of the Navajo land. This direction represents old age, night, and the porcupine is the protector of the north. *Sihasin* is the principle to make beings strong and stable, secure, to develop confidence, and to have a clear path in regards to the life cycle.

Second Element



Figure 4. Second Element of Navajo Circular Model.

Second Element of Navajo Circular Model

The second element of the model (Figure 4) is the largest circle encompassing the other circles. In this area Western institutions started to evolve, together with the development of historical federal policies that have been used to forcibly, in the early days, formally educate Native Americans including Diné. The four components in this layer are as follows: (1) Historical processes - the federal policies that impacted Native American tribes through loss of land, relocations, assimilations, and a forced education path that created a

generation of historical trauma. The first component represents the movement from initial contact between the Diné and Western colonizers and resulting educational outcomes. (2) Native American higher education experiences - the educating of Native Americans suggested by the founders of three Ivy League Institutions (Dartmouth College, Harvard College, and William and Mary College). The experiences of limitations and barriers associated with higher education academics led to high drop out rates and extremely low graduation rates. (3) Indigenous research methodology - an alternative approach emphasizing the Indigenous way of life and providing a space for Indigenous traditional knowledge systems in research processes. (4) Autoethnography - a qualitative research method establishing an individual's life experiences in a narrative format. Each of these components are presented in more detail in the following section.

1. Component: Historical Process

The historical process began with the Civilization Fund Act (1819), which was designed to provide schools for Indians to receive formal instruction about agriculture, reading, writing, and arithmetic (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2002). The Indian Removal Act (1830) removed tribes from their original homeland to isolated geographic lands away from home and the general population (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2002). The General Allotment Act (Dawes Act of 1887) authorized the allotment of reservation lands to individual tribal members to dismantle the reservation lands into private land (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2002). Tribal members were not familiar with tax responsibilities, and as a result, most of the land allotted to Indians was lost (again) to Caucasian settlers.

Richard Pratt established Carlisle Indian Boarding School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, which is often referred to as initiating the boarding school era that utilized an extreme model

of education, “Kill the Indian and Save the Man,” to assimilate Native Americans into American society (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2002). The numerous historical federal policies that resulted have negatively impacted Native American culture and tribal milieu to the point of near devastation. The generation following these early federal policies inherited educational policies that initially only promoted a basic education focused on agricultural trades for males and domestic education for females.

2. Component: Native American Higher Education Experiences

The first concepts and plans for Native Americans to pursue higher education were proposed in the earlier stages of American Colonial period through the establishment of Harvard College, Dartmouth College, and William and Mary College (Carney, 2007). These three institutions declared in their mission statements that their central purpose was to educate Indigenous (Native American) populations and to provide them access to higher education (Carney, 2007). Yet the students that attended, or attempted to attend these colleges, experienced lack of funding, unpreparedness for rigorous higher education academic work, and homesickness. These major detractors contributed to withdrawal prior to degree completion (Calloway, 2010; Carney, 2007).

Limitations and barriers. Today, some of the limitations and barriers experienced by early students are still pervasive among Native American students in higher education. Earlier policies, regarding educating and assimilating Native American youth, were perceived with mistrust and caused lasting extreme trauma, loss of traditional cultures, and negative harmful coping responses and experiences that impacted entire tribal communities. Academic preparedness was not sufficient to meet certain introductory course work in higher education. Another significant barrier is a lack of funding for a school for Native American

students attending higher education away from their reservation. Large populations of Native Americans in higher education have families with children and are searching for ways to supplement scholarships. What strategies are Native Americans and Alaskan Natives to utilize to overcome these resulting and ongoing challenges? What services are available on campuses to provide assistance to students regarding tutoring, counseling, and access to culturally empowering and relevant venues? What resources are available to supplement family income for childcare, and rent? These questions often come up when talking with other Native American educators and those who work with Native American student populations.

Tribal colleges. Tribal colleges were established with the main purpose and mission to provide tribal community members with readily accessible higher education opportunities while preserving traditional tribal culture (Warner & Gipp, 2009). These colleges, most of which initially offered two-years associate's degrees, planned to transfer students' progress and credits earned to predominately white institutions (PWI), with the expectation that these graduates would do better than freshmen who go directly to PWI. Does the tribal college alternative route for Native American students help to increase the graduation rate from PWI? How do tribal colleges and communities work together to improve education for tribal members?

Success in higher education. In thinking about what we can learn from Native Americans and Alaskan Natives who were successful in earning their higher education degrees (Bachelor, Masters, and Ph. D), this dissertation sought answers to the following questions: What were the helpful approaches that Native Americans and Alaskan Natives have taken to be successful in academia? How does the role of traditional cultural identity

for Native Americana and Alaskan Native students support academics? Can Native American/Alaska Native students access or have a space or resources to practice their traditional belief system and spirituality through the use of sweat lodges, smudging with sage and sweet grass, and other ceremonial rituals?

3. Component: Indigenous Research Methodology

The Indigenous Research Methodology is an alternative approach to conducting research that emphasizes the Indigenous way of life that is interconnected with all living beings in the universe (Steinhauer, 2002). This research process flows from a sense of place that provides a protocol (a framework) to build respect and relationship with the community that is being researched (Lambert, 2014). The data are acquired through observations, dreams, life experiences, storytelling (each tribe having different rituals and traditions of telling stories), and traditional rituals. The researcher becomes part of the study, because the data that is collected includes some of the researcher's most personal experiences, and the work created from the research is used to help the community. When relationships are established with an Indigenous community and the researcher acquires certain tribal knowledge he or she is seeking, it is crucial that the researcher is held accountable by advocating for the community.

An Indigenous knowledge system. The Indigenous Knowledge System is a formal traditional system and a method for research to help organize traditional knowledge for Indigenous people to be used in research. This system is tribal traditional knowledge, or ways of knowing, that is based upon life-long learning of tribal culture, language, values, and ways of life. For example, traditional knowledge is acquired through hearing creation stories, participating in ceremony rituals, and joining daily family activities.

Navajo knowledge system. The Navajo Traditional Knowledge System is incorporated into the Navajo way of life, which focuses on a balance, a harmony, of the Navajo people with the natural world and the universe. Some of this knowledge is associated with traditional norms and social values that are passed on through storytelling, ceremonies, and oral traditions. The Navajo language is central to the knowledge system.

4. Component: Autoethnography

Autoethnography is defined as an individual world experience that encourages a deeper reflection to self (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). To complete the circle, I add my personal journey of how the historical policies, Native American higher education experiences, and Indigenous Research Methodologies have all shaped and influenced me to pursue and obtain a doctoral degree. My mom had no formal education, and my dad had limited formal education. I was not aware of their limited education until I began school, but they always encouraged me to get an education. The journey began from the day I came into this world, and continued through my compulsory attendance of government boarding schools (the only schools available, because of my isolated geographic location) on the Navajo Reservation. Attending higher education in predominately white institutions, and, most of the time, entirely all alone (without other Diné), I was able to maintain my traditional culture and language. Knowing my native language has helped me approach certain academic concepts from the language and familiar social elements to gain a better understanding of what is being taught in classrooms and books, which are dominated by English text.

Figure 2, illustrates the four cardinal directions that continue evolving into the next day or experience in life. It is the fundamental first learning or education I encountered as a young Navajo boy. Figure 3, demonstrates what I encountered when I entered school.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

When I first heard the word *autoethnography*, it vibrated through my ears and into my brain. I repeated the word in my mind while my academic advisor discussed different research methods. We were trying to figure out which one made the most sense to me. During this early stage of a doctoral student and his advisor beginning to narrow down options for determining the dissertation research method, my advisor asked me, “What do you want to write about as your dissertation study? What are you passionate about to be swimming in for the remainder of your doctoral program?” I kept thinking that there has to be a method that honors storytelling and experiences. As a Navajo graduate student, I wanted to honor all the stories that have come before me through the generations. I sensed that my advisor’s mind was exploring her pool of knowledge about various methods as more rolled off her tongue and echoed into my ears. I made up my mind and said, “I want to try autoethnography.” After our meeting, she sent me on my way with homework. I think it was more of a task to explore the new method of autoethnography. She also mentioned someone in the Educational Foundations and Research Department who was familiar with the method.

I first went to the library and typed in “Autoethnography” on the computer, which took seven minutes to boot up. While I was waiting, I formulated how I could tell the story and life journey of my educational experiences. I discovered that autoethnography is not new; it has been around and in academic practice for a couple of decades. People have debated how to word the practice and who was the first person to talk about it. I checked out a couple of books and made copies of articles on autoethnography.

As it turned out, Karl Heider (1995) became the pioneer of autoethnography when he wrote an article in the *Journal of Anthropological Research* (1975) titled “What Do People

Do? Dani Auto-Ethnography.” Heider (1995) studied the Dani tribe and what they did in the village during the day. He asked 66 Dani (Ndani) children, “What do people do (akhuni nena hakakhalek- Dani language)” (p. 4)? The majority of the responses from children were gardening and food preparation related. Heider eventually defined autoethnography: “Dani auto-ethnography: ‘auto’ for autochthonous, since it the Dani’s own account of ‘what people do’; and ‘auto’ for automatic, since it is the simplest routine-eliciting technique imaginable” (p. 3). Autochthonous means aboriginal or indigenous origins. Four years later, David Hayano produced a paper titled “Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems, and Prospects” in *Human Organization* (1979). In the article, Hayano (1979) defined “‘auto-ethnography’ as a set of issues relating to studies by anthropologists of their ‘own people’” (p. 99).

As more scholars started writing through the lens of autoethnography, it gained momentum as a method among conventional social science. Scholars formulate a working definition as it pertains to their studies and experiences with autoethnography. Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang (2010) identify it as, “a qualitative research method that utilizes data about self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context” (p. 2). Heider’s (1975) title, “Dani Auto-Ethnography,” can be applied to this dissertation; “In Diné Auto-Ethnography,” I can ask, “what do Diné people do in a contemporary world?” The responses more likely would be related to education, service, and occupation, leading to the connection of the personal to the cultural.

Autoethnography is a self-narrative method that examines self (me) in the context of how I am connected with others (Native American students although not all Diné) who are in graduate school, which is the focus of the dissertation. Chang (2008) worded autoethnography as, “a research method that utilizes the researchers’ autobiographical data to

analyze and interpret their cultural assumptions” (p. 9). This research is prudent to the literature of higher education data of real life experiences that is greatly limited in the studies of Native American students in graduate schools in PWI. Elis and Bochner (2003) said, “It is autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 209). This connection is what I seek, and that is why autoethnography is a relevant choice for me. As a way of doing research, autoethnography is a qualitative way of descriptive writing about awareness of and making a connection to the body of academic knowledge from me (Franklin Sage) including ritual aspects of my Navajo culture. Boylorn and Orbe (2014) described this method “as cultural analysis through personal narrative” (p. 17). The elements and desired outcomes of higher education are examined through my experiences with education as a Navajo graduate student.

Data Collection

The process of data collection for autoethnography is unique, because it is based upon the recollection of significant life experiences that an individual strives to expose and explain and then weaves those components into scholarly inquiry. Chang (2008) stated, “Personal memory is a building block of autoethnography because the past gives a context to the present self and memory opens a door to the richness of the past” (p. 71). A reflection of the past filters good and bad emotions that have and continue to shape the individual self to the present day. Chang’s *Autoethnography As Method* (2008) suggest that data collection is a comprehensive approach regarding ways to obtain a rich memory that is not limited to merely the collection of data, but in addition provides analysis and clarifies validity. I used Chang’s method for collecting and analyzing the (self) data, explaining the process of

collection and analysis below. I did not use all the methods in the collection of my data and the analysis in this dissertation. I will provide a summary of each method I used and will also describe my thought process in planning and thinking about each element of Chang's method.

Chang (2008) began with chronicling the past with memories. The basic premise is to collect memories and then compile data before filtering it to get to the inquiry of one's research. The task is enormous and can be complex due to multilayers of macro-memories. Chang (2008) suggested "breaking it down to manageable steps" (p. 72) and then putting them into a chronological order of sequence in small portions on a timeline.

Timeline. An autobiography timeline is a "list of events or experiences from one's life organized in chronological order" (Chang, 2008, p. 73). The timeline may also be narrowed down to annual, seasonal, weekly, or daily routines of people and then include personal perspective on how one connected to society through various routines (Chang, 2008). The writer/storyteller of a life in education is painting a life history that includes major significant events of his or her entire life in increments of certain time periods (Chang, 2008) prior to and throughout higher education. The thematically focused timeline for this study will be as follows: It will start from the first time I remember going to a formal school. Then the experiences will be organized in categories of elementary, secondary, and post secondary experiences with education, accomplishments (passing on to the next grade and graduations), failures that impacted my education, and memories about cultural identity that affected the outcome of my education.

This is how I created my timeline. First, I went through my photo albums that have my pictures from earlier childhood to graduate school. I separated the photos according to grade

level. After organizing them into a grade level, I looked at each photo and associated it with the school I attended. I wrote down the memories and experiences related to the pictures and school. Next, I went through my school yearbooks. I reexamined the yearbooks several times to recollect my memories about school and certain significant events. School pictures were one of my primary sources to recapturing my memories.

Inventory Self

In the process of the research, large volumes of information bits (Chang's word for memory collection) were compiled, with some portions being useful and others not being relevant to the specific study. At this point, research inquiry is used as a guide to filter information bits that provide categories or themes (Chang, 2008). The inventory not only provides the researcher with a collection of memory bits, but assists "also in evaluating and organizing data" in order of sequences, which may also lead to "preliminary analysis and interpretation" of one's selection (p. 76).

Chang discussed five thematic categories for inventory of self: (1) proverbs, using memorable sayings that impacted one's experiences; (2) ritual and celebration; (3) participation in significant events regarding birth, death, graduation, holidays, and traditions (I have included Native American ceremonies sweat lodge, cleansing, and healing); (4) mentor advisor guiding student through the process of academics, which could refer to an older to younger (advisor to student or elder to youth) apprenticeship in regards to teaching or passing on skills and knowledge; or (5) cultural artifacts, which are any materials that can connect the research to the significant self.

For example, one of Chang's thematic categories is using proverbs that bring a memorable saying to demonstrate the impact upon my experience. A Diné proverb, *t'aa*

ho'ajit'eego, is often used or expressed when adults are talking to youth. The proverb means, “it is up to you” to live a life in harmony with *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* philosophy. I heard it from my parents and community leaders to empower youth. The way my parents described the phrase was in the following way: it is up to you if you want to achieve a goal, acquire material things in life, and maintain the balance of Diné tradition and western society. Simply, no one can do it for you, because the individual is the only one who can understand the journey and experience, as well as know, what that urgency means. If an individual wants an education, then that person has to do the work. Some planning, commitment, and discipline is involved along with sacrificing time away from family. The proverb, *t'aa ho'ajit'eego*, is one example. I also returned to my photos and picked out the graduation pictures from high school and in higher education. This process helped interweave the formal and informal education that impacted my experience during the course of my life. While doing the memory list of each photo, I became aware that the majority of the people in the photos have passed on. The realization that with each relative's passing, the knowledge they know is gone with them became evident to me.

Visualizing Self

However, a visual image can convey a powerful story that is filled with multiple layers of communication to the world. In some cases, a description with words can only provide certain details. Chang (2008) mentioned two visual strategies, the kinship diagram and the free drawing, that illustrate the proverb “one picture is worth a thousand words” (p. 81). These techniques can illuminate a visual representation of one's memories organized into a structure of diagrams, charts, and drawings (Chang, 2008).

Kinship diagram. The maker of the diagram reveals how the social network within a family is structured. When details are added into the description, the reader will start to understand family dynamics. This diagram will help other diverse graduate students provide visual images of why their study is important in telling the stories about their educational experiences in higher education.

This is how I created the kinship diagram. I wrote down my four clans in the middle of the paper and circled it. Then I drew a line in the middle to make separate categories (formal and informal education). I listed all relatives who had some formal education into one side of the line. On the other side I listed relatives who had no formal education and that list had more names than the formal educated relatives. My parents and uncle were the only people I had the most contact with and learned about Navajo custom, ceremony, and traditional knowledge. After revisiting the diagram, I saw the words, mom and dad, and memories of talking with them came back to my heart. I became so emotional, realizing that I could no longer ask them questions about certain traditional practices or proverbs. It was those moments of thinking of my parents that I felt a calling to writing my dissertation on the Navajo knowledge system.

Free drawing. The technique of free drawing is utilized to stimulate and document experiences from one's memory. Chang (2008) said, "Memory is a vehicle to connect the present to the past" (p. 85). I have included the drawing of the Navajo Circular Model memories of the Navajo culture, educational experiences, and how each element is vital to my overall success (Figure 1). The process of sketching out the model took me on many different paths. I am very visual personal in my learning process. If I am having a hard time on my writing, I revert to drawing. I drew four basic circles on a sketch pad and asked

myself, “why these circles?” I just kept drawing more circles and then tried to draw out different shapes like octagon, square, and triangle. I keep coming back to circles. I kept coming back to the sketches but it was all created in one setting. After drawing the four circles, I did not revisit the sketch until months later.

I needed to find a way to include Navajo creation story, the four sacred mountains, and storytelling. One way to think of a life is in a circle way, the world is round (circle), a hogan is in a circle, and even the way each poles is place are in a circular pattern, and circle also represent that things are connected as a circle keep rotating. Even in the life of all beings, there is birth, journey through certain amount of time for a life to exist, and then you have death, but then rebirth begins another cycle.

In the middle of the circle is the traditional process of the dissertation and often students write in that order. Placing it in the middle is honoring that practice because they are interconnected with every approach in research. All the knowledge, data, and sources relate to the five areas of Western traditional research.

Self-Observational Data

Chang (2008) stated, “Self-observational data records your actual behaviors, thoughts, and emotions as they occur in their natural contexts” (p. 90). One of the approaches to gaining a better understanding of self is through observation that unveils your daily and weekly activities (p. 90). For example, when I am in the company of my family, my social role is different than when I am in the company of my friends, classmates, and professors. The conversations among family involve relatives, family ceremonies, past stories, and current observations that bring the reality of the changing world onto the reservation. My behaviors are limited to the social roles within the specific cultural etiquette

of being the youngest brother in the family. However, the isolation produced when my classmates and professors influence my behavior (respectful, joking, and small talk), thoughts (academic context and interweaving cultural elements into the process), and emotions (staying calm and not becoming the angry Navajo in the room) are a simple comparison. Chang (2008) mentions both systematic and self-interactive self-observation. Interactive self-observation is an approach that focuses on group interviews of the shared experience of the research topic. The data collection is taking place and the perspective of the individual researcher is implemented during data analysis by comparing one's experience with the group (Chang, 2008). I will be using systematic self-observation.

Systematic self-observation. The study of self in the context of how I am connected with others (Native American students) who are in graduate school becomes the primary vehicle for this approach because the “planning what to observe and how to observe shapes systematic self-observations. What to observe is determined by the research purpose. How to observe and record needs to be carefully planned out in your research design” (Chang, 2008, p. 91). Recording observations is in the format of a narrative to provide a free description. I used a matrix sheet that provides details in intervals (time periods organized into daily, weekly, and monthly increments).

On a matrix Excel spreadsheet, I recorded my behavior, thoughts, and emotions on monthly accounts of people I interacted with during graduate school. For the row elements, I used the following labels: date, personnel, activity, and reaction. During my deployment with the military to the Middle East, I kept a journal or tried to keep a journal. When I started graduate school, I also started a journal but I stop journaling after my first year. I

realized there are huge gaps and I just felt it wasn't necessary to journal because I got detracted to other social activities such as being in student organizations and traveling.

Topic: People I interacted with on monthly activity.

Date	Personnel	Activity	Reaction
Aug. 2012	advisor	class schedule	excited
Oct. 2012	professor	question class	clarify assignments
Dec. 2012	Graduate Office	forms	frustrated with the process

I wrote the data in a narrative format. For example, on August 2012, I started my doctoral program and met with my assigned academic advisor about the class schedule. The reaction I was feeling was excited about the new adventure in reaching my educational goals. The courses seemed to be intense, but I needed to figure out what I was going to study and how I could format my classes accordingly to help me achieve the goal of graduating.

Self-Reflective Data

According to Chang (2008), “Self-reflective data result from introspection, self-analysis, and self-evaluation of who you are and what you are. Self-reflection sometimes accompanies self-observation” (p. 95). She elaborated on that by keeping a field journal, one highlighting the self-reflective data and continuing to gather self-observational data.

Field journal. Ethnographers keep field journals to record their observations, private and personal thoughts, and feelings pertaining to their research processes (Chang, 2008). The field journal is kept separate from the data collection to ensure “objective” facts from “subjective” feelings, but in reality, it is difficult since they blend in with each other and cross boundaries (Chang, 2008). Chang (2008) asserted that keeping a field journal would benefit autoethnography through the recording research process and reflecting on the “self,” leading to self-absorption. Field journaling is a note taking process done while in the field

regarding a particular observation of the subject. It is a way to keep track of certain cultural behaviors at that particular time and moment.

Since I started working with an online group called the Student Storytellers Indigenizing the Academy (SSITA), I have been keeping a small journal to record some of my reactions and emotions I have felt during and after our online meetings. The reactions pertained primarily to the process of going to graduate school at a PWI and how I used some Diné cultural elements in my academic work. For example, during conferences that highlighted Indigenous languages and studies, I often wrote my reactions to some of the speakers.

Cultural identity and cultural membership. A culture-gram or a web-like chart is used to help people visualize their social selves (Chang, 2008). This approach is developed to “present self from multiple perspectives, in terms of social roles you play, people groups you belong to, diversity criteria by which you judge yourself, and primary cultural identities that you give to yourself” (p. 97). Other mentioned approaches to self-reflective data are personal values and preference as well as discovering self through other self-narrators.

How would I do this? Cultural identity and membership web has eight primary groups on the outer side of the web that goes inward toward the middle to the primary identity. The primary groups are nationality, personal interest, race, class, gender, profession, language, and social group. I picked these primary groups because most Americans can identify within these cultural groups. Underneath the primary groups, a direct line goes to the middle circle with a list of “how I identify myself to the group”:

- Nationality: United States, Navajo
- Personal Interests: golfing, running, weight training, and enjoying the outdoors
- Race: Native American, Navajo

- Class: Low socio economic, reservation, educated
- Gender: Male, brother, and husband
- Profession: Military, graduate student, Certified Nurse Aid
- Language: Navajo, English
- Social Groups: SSITA (Student Storytellers Indigenizing the Academy), Indian Studies Association, Northstar Council, BRIDGES (student activist organization), and CCHR (Campus Community Human Rights).

In the middle of the web are the three primary identities; Navajo, graduate student, and advocate. The identity web demonstrates my experiences with society and has shaped my identity beyond my race. My identity as a Navajo male encompasses the language I speak and, being from a reservation, I am of low socio economic status, and I am an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation Tribe (official documents). Graduate student is my second identity, because I have been a full-time graduate student for the past six years while pursuing my Masters Degree and am currently in the doctoral program. Advocate is my third identity, because all the organizations I have participated in are advocacy groups. The military is a way of contributing to society by protecting the Constitution that protects citizens and allows them to express their voices in public.

Collecting External Data

Chang (2008) said, “Data from external sources - other individuals, visual artifacts, documents, and literature - provide additional perspectives and contextual information to help you investigate and examine your subjectivity” (p. 103). External sources help to capture lived experiences to inspire and reclaim some memories.

Textual artifacts. “The textual artifacts include officially produced documents and personal, whether formal or informal, texts written by you or about you or your cultural contexts” (Chang, 2008, p. 107). Textual artifacts provides some bridging of the gap in your data where you may need significant validation with official documents that include court

documents, official letters, certifications, and many others (Chang, 2008). Other textual artifacts can be newspaper articles, programs, and any publications that an individual author wrote (Chang, 2008). Personally produced texts are priceless with rich data, because the thoughts and emotions were authentic and not driven by a research process (Chang, 2008). Some of the old letters my dad sent me during my first few years at University of North Dakota could be used, and the content would be valuable because he is no longer alive. Another example is the local newspaper (*Farmington Daily Times*, Farmington, NM) that interviewed my family about our father's military Code Talker experience. During the same time frame as that article's preparation, I was getting deployed with the U. S. Army and had to leave the university to serve. Emotions and thoughts resurfaced while I was trying to maintain some normal activity to get through a semester of school. These are examples of artifacts I have collected for analysis.

Other artifacts. There are other artifacts that are valuable data such as “photographs, trinkets in your memory box, memorabilia, family heirlooms, souvenirs, video tapes, CD collections, and innumerable other objects” that are the physical representations of your life (Chang, 2008, p. 109). Photographs and video images have advanced, even to the point that most researchers have their data readily available on their cell phones.

Literature. “Literature serves you as an important source of data that enables you to contextualize your personal story within the public history” (Chang, 2008, 110). A literature review can provide an identity in social science research, joining the subjective (inner world) and the objective (outer world) (Chang, 2008). I previously described the literature review I undertook as I moved through the second layer of the model (Figure 3, page 12). This

literature review served as an additional lens to my analysis by providing an outer world (“objective”) framework by which to analyze my inner world (subjective) identity.

External data collection reclaims some memories with textual artifacts, photographs, souvenirs, and electronic video that were recorded. All of the data has been compiled for data analysis that focuses on cultural understanding.

Data Analysis

The data collection analysis and interpretation has been consistent with the research inquiry “In what ways can Indigenous knowledge and Navajo knowledge systems be useful in autoethnography doctoral research?” Data analysis is never a finished product, because it continues to provide information that evolves into other questions that again leads to more research and interpretation. Chang (2008) stated,

You need to keep in mind one important point: what makes autoethnography ethnographic is its intent of gaining a cultural understanding. Since self is considered a carrier of culture, intimately connected to others in society, the self’s behaviors- verbal and nonverbal- should be interpreted in their cultural context (p. 125).

The shifting between self and others, the personal and the social context, becomes a routine in the process of analyzing and interpreting autoethnography data (Chang, 2008).

Ethnographers organize their data collection by looking for cultural themes to draw out meaning and sensible text (Chang, 2008). The analysis process requires examining memory bits and connecting those pieces into cultural tents and how “self” links to society (Chang, 2008). This approach of cultural data analysis and interpretation of autoethnography

that focuses on storytelling helps define the separation between autoethnography and other self-narrative literatures (Chang, 2008).

The process of analysis and interpretation is rigorous and cannot be rushed, because in order to get to the story, you have to filter the meaning out of the data before the story starts to emerge. Some raw data may be in the final writing, but it must support the argument and cannot stand alone for a story (Chang, 2008). The data analysis process is a phase that involves looking for cultural meaning in a field of raw data. Basically, you are looking for the needle and thread to sew the outfit you are going to wear for graduation. The cloth that is going to be the gown is a representative of a particular society that has earned a degree. The thread is your personal story that holds your cloth together with your own unique designs.

During the analysis phase, the focus is searching for “how things work” and attempting to answer that question from an objective standpoint. The subsequent questions become “why a system is not working or how it might be made to work better” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 12). The interpretation phase involves making meaning and sense out of your data (Chang, 2008) by asking, “‘What does it all mean’ and ‘What is to be made of it’” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 12)? The researcher has to draw meaning from the raw data. In Hodder’s (2003) words, “Meaning does not reside in a text but in the writing and reading of it” (p. 156).

How do you find a balance between analysis and interpretation? The simplest distinction is to think of analysis in terms of fracturing and zooming in. Fracturing is the qualitative analysis of categorizing in which you are coding and organizing accordingly to your research inquiry (Maxwell, 2005). However, interpretation is connecting and zooming

out. The researcher is making a connection between the data and social context (Maxwell, 2005). How are you connected to the rest of society or particular part of that society?

Analysis and Interpretation Strategies

For the dissertation, the following analytic techniques were used:

Search for recurring topic. The basic task is to identify recurring themes, topics, and patterns from your memory bit (pieces of information from your memory) of the entire data (Chang, 2008). The photographs, yearbooks, revisiting schools, various papers from school project during my youth, sketches from my model, and revisiting my sense of place (home) all helped me remember certain significant events in my life. The recurring themes that kept coming up during my collection of data were: education, home, traditional culture and identity, being away from school, financial barriers, and service to the community.

Look for cultural themes. According to McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy (2005), looking for cultural themes is “an important final step in the ethnographic process” (p. 79). They further define cultural themes as “a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating, activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society” (McCurdy et al., 2005, p. 78). The cultural themes related to my process are cultural identity, who am I in today’s world, and encountering racism.

Identify exceptional occurrence. Recurring patterns provide some details of one’s life (Chang, 2008). Some exceptional life events can change the course of our life and impact us personally (p. 133), making us unique. People experience new things, such as living in another country and having a language limitation, that may lead to personal perspective change. My enlistment with the U.S. Army gave me opportunities to travel,

living in Germany, and unveiled to me that the world is not an English speaking world that most teachers told me it was.

Analyze inclusion and omission. “Omission in data reveals an autoethnographer’s unfamiliarity, ignorance, dislike, disfavor, dissociation, or devaluation of certain phenomena in life” (Chang, 2008, p. 134). The omission can be intentional or non-intentional due to missing data, and it could also just be absent from data. To check for omission, “ask questions about omission for each inclusion” (p. 133). One approach in checking for the omission is rechecking my photos and memory bits more than a few times. I looked for what was missing from the pictures that other people could see. I kept revisiting my guiding question of this dissertation and sought out those memories that would help me tell my story.

Connect the present with the past. The history, conscious strategy, explores present thoughts and behaviors that extend from past events (Chang, 2008). Most importantly, cause-effect is the gray area in this strategy, because you cannot exactly connect the past to the present, but you can revert to logical reasoning, imagination, and intuition to explain past and present connection (p. 134).

Analyze relationship between self and others. This strategy is fundamental to the interpretation of autoethnographic data (Chang, 2008). The term “others of similarity” refers to “those who belong to the same community of practice, share common identities, and/or identify with each other” (p. 134), which is followed by “others of difference,” which refers to “representation of a community of practices, set of values, and identities different from yours or unfamiliar to you” (p. 134). Researchers discover more about themselves by seeing how they relate to the similarities and differences of others and how that impacts their experiences and even unveils some omissions.

The approach to analyze my data was making posters and putting my photography in the middle of each poster, then listing on the side of the pictures all the memories in a few words with color marks. I revisited these posters a few time or when I remembered certain events that linked me to that photo, I wrote them on the poster. Not all posters were filled with notes.. There is a picture of my family and me during my high school graduation. In that picture I had a sibling who passed away not long after that picture was taken. That poster only had graduation on top with a happy face and the rest of the poster was blank. The picture is a happy moment and significant event in my life, but I just felt I could not over shadow a lost sibling with my research writing on him.

Validity

A conversation between Carolyn Ellis and Sylvia Smith in *Heartful Autoethnography* (1999) delineated the validity concerns. Smith asked, “But how can that be valid?” Ellis answered,

It depends on your definition of validity. I start from the position that language is not transparent, and there’s no single standard of truth. To me, validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. You might also judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or even your own (1999, p. 674).

In terms of definition and standard of validity, this dissertation is based on the idea of “lifelike, believable, and possible” that pertains to one’s experience with higher education in PWI.

Third Element of Navajo Circular Model

The third element of the model (Figure 5) is the smallest circle located in the middle of Figure 2 and consists of the standard five (Introduction, Literature Review, Method, Findings, and Implications) areas of a dissertation. In higher education, the expectations of students are to achieve certain standards and learn the process of research and writing a dissertation. The third element honors the process that is traditionally followed. It is located in the middle of the circle to symbolize the way the Western academic dissertation process connects to the rest of the elements. The third element, traditional dissertation process, is placed in the middle of the Navajo Circular Model to symbolize that the Navajo Knowledge System was the original knowledge system prior to Western academics.



Figure 5. Third Element of Navajo Circular Model.

The Navajo Circular Model is a visual diagram that indicates that the traditional Navajo knowledge system can be interwoven into modern education. The model is also a

representation of a hogan. All life begins in the east and is the reason why hogan doors face to the east. When the sun rises, it awakens the people to begin a new thinking process.

A hogan is more than a shelter for the Navajo people. It has a symbolic meaning that was given to the people from the Holy People during the creation of the Navajo universe. When a hogan is built, it starts with the main pole being placed on the east side, the second pole to the south, the third pole to the west, and the fourth pole to the north. A hogan is also a place for ceremonies to be held, in particular the Blessing Way and Place of Harmony. This dissertation honors the process of research just like the hogan honors all the ceremonies it hosts, so the people can be balanced with the universe. Each of the four foundational poles contributes to not only holding the full structure in place, but also to symbolize the holistic approach. This dissertation symbolizes that the Indigenous knowledge system can be interwoven into higher education.

PHASE TWO

As an undergraduate Native American student, I experienced many hardships that negatively impacted my ability to persist and achieve academic success. A primary hardship was the severe lack of financial resources that numerous Native students struggle with while pursuing higher education. This forced me to “step-out” so I could take care of paying the university and my student loans. “Step-out” means a student leaves school for certain reasons and then returns later (Huffman, 2008). I made the choice to rejoin the U. S. military to help pay off my student loans so I could eventually return to the University and complete my degrees.

I also experienced the same struggle and frustrations of countless American Indian students who felt they were not adequately prepared for or to achieve academic success in college. I went to boarding school on a reservation and earned decent grades, but found I was not fully prepared for introduction courses in higher education. I took remedial courses at a community college before I advanced to upper level classes. One approach I took was to start asking questions about content I did not understand and took full advantage of tutoring centers for extra help. English is not my primary language so it made some courses extra challenging.

In graduate school, the first semester was the most difficult and I thought about withdrawing because I did not understand the thought process that was required. It was then that I began using my traditional ceremonies to get me through graduate school. I reverted

to the Navajo knowledge system that has always been a part of who I am as a Diné. One approach to understanding sociology for me was to utilize the traditional teachings of Holy People (gods in the Diné tradition) to understand various phenomena, curriculum, and the academic culture.

My experience with Western education from boarding school to graduate school has been primarily about colonization. The Western education system is a colonization of the mind that is based on the assimilation model aimed to eradicate tribal language, culture, and knowledge, to replace with dominant culture, which is the American (primarily English based) education system.

This short narrative (introductory to Phase Two) provides an overview of my educational experiences to expose challenges with financial resources and the detrimental lack of preparation for higher education experienced by numerous Native American college students. In the following phase, Historical Colonization of Education, I will provide evidence that federal policies were and are utilized as a legal way to colonize Native American tribes.

HISTORICAL COLONIZATION OF EDUCATION

This phase provides an overview of Native American historical processes and higher education experiences. The historical process focuses on traditional tribal education, first contact with Spaniards that established literacy as a way to educate (establishment of missions), and federal policies (Civilization Act, Indian Removal Act, General Allotment Act, and Boarding Schools, to name a few) that impacted and devastated Native American tribes due to the loss of lives, land, culture, and language. Academic research on Native American experiences with higher education has focused on barriers, success in higher

education, self-determination, and tribal colleges. This research, and particularly this phase, will provide a historical lens to assist in revealing and understanding Native American students' experience in regard to the powerful impacts of colonization and assimilation throughout their pursuit of college via the Western education system. These impacts resulted in unresolved historical and generational trauma that still affects contemporary Native American students. However, my goal is to demonstrate that trauma is not merely the result of historical issues and actions, in fact, by forcing Native American students to adhere to the Western education systems that clashes with their traditional teachings and cultures, this kind of trauma continues to actually occur and negatively impact Native American students today.

Terminology

There are two terms (colonization and assimilation) throughout this phase that need to be defined in the context of Native American. This dissertation will draw from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars to define each term utilizing a holistic approach to enhance understanding.

Colonization is “the displacement and undermining of societies, including their values, cultures, beliefs, and ways of life by outside people- typically includes clashes whereby the colonized people are encouraged and/or forced to take on the values and beliefs of the colonizers” (Weaver, 2009, p. 1552). Native American lifeway has been tied to the land that provided them with food (wild berries, plants, herbs, and animals), shelter (forest), and resources (water and air). When the Europeans and Spaniards arrived, the Native American lifeway started to disappear under colonization. Alex Alvarez's (2014) definition is based on the history of the United States as, “settler colonialism is about erasing the past in order to create a new vision of the futures, one based not on indigenous peoples and

traditions, but upon the colonists' home country" (p. 56). Colonization has been the driving force to subjugate Native Americans under the U. S. Government. George E. Tinker (2004) stated, "to legitimate an ever-increasing occupancy of the land by whites, the U.S. and Canada were compelled to reduce the native population to a state of subjugation so complete that they might 'willingly' concede the whole of their territorial entitlement to the settler society" (p. xiv). Federal policies are methods of colonization used to force the American way of life, values, culture, religion, and education upon Native Americans.

Assimilation, a process of changing one's culture and replacing it with the dominant culture, nearly eradicated Native American knowledge systems, beliefs, and ways of life. It was the system of the colonizer that forced Native Americans' cultures to be not incorporated in the U. S. historical or modern education system. The school system was the primary vehicle for the assimilation process that Native American children forcibly endured. Assimilation was a process that established a "network of Indian boarding schools that removed Native children from their homes with the aim of civilizing them" (Eckstrom & Jacobs, 2015, p. 267). Native American children were stripped of their culture and forced to take on the White (American) culture. Education is a practice of both a visible (reading and writing) and invisible (hidden curriculum) approach to eradicating traditional Native American knowledge systems. In the Dawes Act of 1887 (General Allotment Act), the third reform in the act states, "Indians must be taught the knowledge, values, mores, and habits of Christian civilization" (Adams, 1995, p. 18) and children seemed easier on which to force such policy than older Indians. Assimilation is a kinder word for "colonization of the mind" in which a mental approach is used to establish the colonizer's knowledge, and erase tribal customs of thinking and ways of knowing.

What Do the Statistics Say?

What do the current statistics reveal about Native American trends in education? According to the National Center for Education Statistics report on Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2016, “the number of American school age children between 5 to 17 years old has increased by 8.4 million from 45.4 million (1990) to 53.7 million (2013)” (Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang, & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2016, p. 9). As the overall number of school age children is separated by race, Whites decreased from 62 percent (1990) to 53 percent (2013), Blacks also decreased from 15 percent (1990) to 14 percent (2013), Hispanics had the greatest increase from 14 percent (1990) to 24 percent (2013), Asians increased by 2 percent from 3 percent (1990) to 5 percent (2013), and children with two or more races also increased by 2 percent from 2 percent (1990) to 4 percent (2013). American Indian and Alaska Native school age children were not mentioned among this demographic breakdown by race, because of their small population at less than one percent. The statistics are an example of Native American and Alaska children being invisible in education, even in studies focused on race and ethnic groups in America. When a group is not mentioned in the results, they become insignificant for further discussion or study, and this is colonization in practice that leaves Native American and Alaska Native children of school age completely out of such critical data based on race.

In the same report, the authors reported that the limitation of the data regarding “small sizes of the American Indians/Alaska Natives and Pacific Islanders population posed many measurement difficulties when conducting statistical analysis... Researchers studying data on these two populations often face small sample sizes that reduce the reliability of

results” (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016, p. 4). In most cases, American Indians/Alaska Natives are not reported, because of small sample sizes or they are put in the “other” category. When 562 federally recognized tribes are lumped into one unmeasured group for the benefit of statistics, this brings up the question; does this really help us to understand the challenges of American Indian/Alaska Native students when we cannot even obtain reliable data? The final report of the National Center for Education Statistics documents that their samples were drawn from various national sources. And yet even with the various national sources, researchers stated that they could not draw enough Native Americans/Alaska Natives for statistical purposes.

The National Center for Education Statistics did show that American Indians/Alaska Natives have the highest drop out rate for 16 to 24 year-olds with 13 percent, Hispanics with 12 percent, Blacks with 9 percent, White, Pacific Islanders and two or more races with 5 percent, and Asians having a 2 percent dropout rate (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). On one hand, the report cannot find enough students to do a statistical analysis on impacts and issues important to understanding the experiences of school age American Indians/Alaska Natives, but for the category of drop-out rates, there are plenty of samples available. This indicates to me that researchers have not been focusing on creating improvements, but rather they settle for reporting the “bad” statistics, such as the high rates of Native American/Alaska Natives who drop out of school.

In contrast to the high drop-out rates, Native Americans are attending college at higher rates from previous years. From 2003 to 2013, the total college enrollment rate for Hispanic 18- to 24-year-olds increased from 23 to 34 percent (increase of 11 percent). In the same years and age range group, American Indians/Alaska Natives attending college

increased from 18 to 32 percent (increase of 14 percent), while Whites, Blacks, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and the two or more races category had no measurable difference from 2003 to 2013 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). During this 10-year period, American Indians/Alaska Natives showed a greater increase in college enrollment compared with other races.

Statistics are a way for me to understand American Indians/Alaskan Native trends when analyzing general statistics among other races. In general, American Indian/Alaska Native populations have been reduced by numerous federal policy sanctions legislated by the US government. Quantitative data illustrates a terrible picture, yet a somewhat incomplete picture, that can be better understood through a holistic historical context that helps us interpret data points. In this phase (chapter), examining American Indian experiences with the western education system will help researchers understand why statistics regarding our American Indians/Alaskan Native populations in education are so dismal.

Holistic Pre-Contact Traditional Tribal Education

Like all cultures, Native American people had their own traditional educational system prior to contact with Europeans and Spaniards. Historically, Native American traditional education emphasized how an individual can contribute to the larger community in maintaining cultural and life-sustaining processes (Cajete, 2005). It is essential for individual members to learn the traditional ways of their particular tribes, given they have a responsibility to acquire and pass on ceremonial songs, stories, values, and tribal customs to the next generation. When an individual does not learn their traditional cultural education, he or she will face some challenges in regards to contributing to their tribal community. For example, child rearing based upon Native American culture and values is extremely

important to the future of the tribal identity, preservation of language, ceremonial practices, and way of life (Szasz, 1988). While elders of the tribe are the individuals who carry the responsibility of tribal knowledge and preserve traditional cultural practices (Poupart, Martinez, Red Horse, & Scharnberg, 2000), many other members of the family, clans, and community are just as important as elders in contributing to child rearing (Szasz, 1988). Children are supported and guided by adults in the family to learn certain skills until they become of age. They are exposed to traditional ceremonies and family rituals to gain the understanding of patience, listening, and observing (Poupart et al., 2000). Education, in this way, is rooted in observation that requires listening and an emphasis on patience and the wellness of the tribe as a whole. In contrast, Western society and education emphasizes individuality, wealth, accomplishment, grades, knowledge, etc.

In accordance with Native American tradition, the skill of observation is essential and emphasized at an early age. Adults or elders do a task, such as hunting, and the youth follow and replicate their actions (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). For example, when talking with Native American parents, they explained to me that Native American children impersonate adults. When White children use a toy oven or cars, they are often doing this on their own. When Native American children imitate adults, they usually do a smaller version of the real thing, and the parents provide feedback. Native American parents encourage children to observe what they do and say. Most children often mimic adults through play in regards to hunting, battling, ceremony rituals, gender roles, and tribal values. The skill of observing and imitating an adult's action or behavior is in relation to the social setting, and they are taught the importance and interconnectedness of people to nature and the environment. At an early age, youth learn survival skills and to have "proper attitudes towards the earth and all

animate and inanimate life living on it” (Szasz, 1988, p. 12). Youth start to build relationships with the natural world that provide an experience with a place that encompasses the aspects of environment, social, and spirituality (Cajete, 2005). Observation is fundamental in Native American education. Listening to adults and acting out observed behaviors demonstrate this. Children actually imitate the adult stories in the form of a play so when the time comes to listen to the culture stories, they will be able to learn, and tell the stories when they become adults.

Observation and mimicking are a ritual part of child rearing Native American youth, and traditionally, lessons and values were embedded in the minds of children through storytelling based on transmitting oral traditions. Some tribes practice storytelling during the winter months, as summer, spring, and fall involve outside labor. Storytelling taught, entertained, and passed the time indoors.

Storytelling is one form of teaching or passing on tribal knowledge to the next generation (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Native American traditional oral stories provide a cultural history that has been passed down from generations to the next in a form of oral transmission. Szasz (1988) stated, “cultures without a written language depended totally on oral tradition” (p. 12). Native American tribes have relied on oral tradition in preserving language, culture customs, and knowledge system for generations. The Navajo Creation Story that started this dissertation in Phase One is an example of oral tradition that is fundamental to Navajo people. Today, oral tradition is still prevalent in Navajo communities in regards to learning the creation stories, coyote winter stories, clan systems, and ceremonial songs for healing and prayer. This dissertation implements some of these stories to demonstrate that oral tradition is just as important as academic written tradition. The

traditional oral stories are repeated many times so the audience (usually family members or community) can get accurate content. Nearly all stories provide some form of tribal values, history, cosmology, wisdom, spirituality teachings, and often humor that involves a trickster (Poupart et al., 2000). In Navajo coyote stories, the character, a coyote is the trickster, teacher, and philosopher, because he (coyote) wonders about things and how they (universe) really work. Too often, he forgets his place in the world, his relation to place, and the simple things in life that keep us (humans) grounded to our fundamental values (Burkhart, 2004). Often coyote makes a fool of himself or acts terribly inappropriate. These stories provide messages to youth on how to be and how not to be.

The traditional education and storytelling are essential to Native American cultural history. Winona LaDuke (1999) explains the connection between Native American traditional education and storytelling by stating:

Native American teachings describe the relations all around – animals, fish, trees, and rocks – as our brothers, sisters, uncles, and grandpa. Our relations to each other, our prayers whispered across generations to our relatives, are what bind our cultures together. The protection, teaching, and gift of our relatives have for generations preserved our families. These relations are honored in ceremony, song, story, and life that keep relations close – to buffalo, sturgeon, salmon, turtles, bears, wolves, and panthers... (p. 2).

Native American traditional education has survived for generations through storytelling and it continues to withstand the imposition of colonization. It is the early informal cultural education such as smudging with sage, sweet grass, cedar, and maintaining prayers that provides coping skills that Native American students can rely on for the future. Elders are

regarded as essential members of Native American communities due to their wisdom of tribal knowledge regarding the history of creation stories, languages, ceremonial practices, and for teaching the significance of the tribal way of life. Some Native American students who did not have the traditional education and pursue higher education may experience less cultural shock and need to transition; they would not have the traditional coping skills to rely on to help them persist through challenges. Another factor closely tied to higher education retention for traditional Native students is their desire to contribute to their Native American community. These factors can make or break a Native American college students' ability to persist through to graduation. In other words, the power of believing one had to earn their degree to help back home is valuable to college persistence (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). Another example of coping skills that can assist with persistence is the spiritual strength Native American students who are raised traditionally can rely upon. Ceremonies and smudging bring peace and strength to persist through crises and challenges. Smudging is using herbs of sweet grass, sage, or cedar smoke to fly away negative energy, cleanse, and heal the individual.

Native American traditional teaching and learning existed in high-context social environments (Cajete, 1999). It is the holistic traditional education that consists of observing and listening to the social environment on a daily basis. Youth observations are not only comprised of studying adults and elders, but also the natural environment that surrounds them via the high-context social environment of which they are a part (Cajete, 1999). Being attentive of their relationship to plants, animals, and nature helps youth establish the essential coping skills needed by individuals to be ready to explore on their own. A change in plants, animals, and behaviors of the external environment provides meaning to human survival.

For example, part of the assimilation process forced upon Native American was designed to result in dependence. Traditionally, Native Americans learned how to survive without modern conveniences. By observing what animals ate in the wild, Native Americans learned how to survive on their own. When the government eliminated hunting sources (bison) and mobility essential to harvesting and collecting nourishing and valuable plants, they created generations of Native Americans who had no choice but to depend upon government rations. Further, the inactive lifestyles created by assimilation and the unhealthy commodity foods created sickness and disease.

The traditional Native American educational system is rooted in oral tradition by observation, listening, and storytelling that have survived colonization. For that reason, Native American tribes were able to endure the atrocity of colonization from Spanish and Europeans.

Colonization

In the following section, the term colonization is used to provide a realistic event that was aimed toward Indigenous people of the “New Found Land,” which today is known as the United States of America. In this section of the phase, colonization is defined as when one group (Spanish and European) takes complete control over another group (Indigenous people of the new found land). The process to colonize Native American by foreign governments was carried out with extreme force using violence, enslavement, extermination for some Indigenous tribes, and control over the land.

Earlier colonization impacted the Natives in two different ways. One, Spanish explorers took land and enslaved Natives in search of wealth. In the south, which is now known as the Gulf of Mexico the Spanish government established forced labor and converted

Indians into Catholicism after 1492 (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). During this time, the Spanish Encomienda System seized land and all of the local Indians that lived on that land (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The system would give all of the rights to whoever claimed the land, the ownership of everything including Indigenous people.

When Columbus first arrived, he stated he wanted to build a relationship with the Natives, but quickly realized he could take advantage of them. In 1492, under the Law of Discovery, Columbus claimed the new land on the eastern coast now known as part of the United States of America (Carney, 2007). Columbus did capture Natives and enslave them like the Spaniards did on the Gulf of Mexico. Columbus wrote in a log “we saw naked people” and he named them “Indios” (Carney, 2007, p. 14). He further wrote in his log,

In hope of friendly relationships because he felt “they are a people who can be made free and converted to our Holy Faith more by love than by force, I think they can easily be made Christians...they ought to make good and skilled servants, for they repeat very quickly whatever we say to them” (Carney, 2007, p. 14).

Columbus’s description of the Indigenous people and his belief that they would make good servants is proposing that colonization would not be difficult to initiate. Columbus painted a picture to his fellow country men that Natives are childlike, have bestial behavior, are cannibalistic, and eat on the floor (Carney, 2007). Again, Columbus was establishing superiority and control over Indigenous People. The colonization of Native Americans led to loss of lands that provided them with resources regarding food, shelter, and homes. The enslavement of Native Americans changed their way of life and social structure. Once the Spaniards and Europeans gained control of the Indigenous people, the next step was to

educate the Natives into an institution of colonized knowledge that eradicated the traditional tribal knowledge.

By 1512, the Law of Burgos stated that “all Spaniards owning more than fifty Indians were required to provide for ‘the salvation of their souls... and the conservations of their lives’” (Reyhner & Eder, 2004, p. 16). This law intended for Spanish landowners to civilize and Christianize the Indians they seized (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Instead, the Spaniards took advantage of this opportunity to work the Indians to death in mines in hopes of finding gold and returning to Spain (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The Law of Burgos is a legal act that granted control over the Indigenous people in the form of ownership and provided some education for them to become “civilized” according to Spanish values.

In 1542, Charles V of Spain assigned the Catholic friars to take over educating the Indians, because the landowners failed to provide education for them (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The Law of Burgos (1512) was also supposed to assist with some form of education and convert the Indians into Christianity. The first school was established in Havana, Florida, for Indian youth in 1568 and several more missions were built in New Mexico, Arizona, and California (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The Spanish colonization brought Catholic religion into the South and Southwest Region of the current United States.

In the eastern part of the newfound land (now the east coast of the United States), the new immigrants found themselves providing schooling to children in their homes because there was no established school building (Gordon & Gordon, 2003). This early education was designed to Christianize the Indians so they could be converted to the colonized religion. The goal was for the Indians to adopt a new religion (Christianity) in place of their tribal spirituality by governing them away from ceremonies, rituals, beliefs, and practices.

The Spaniard and European contact led to colonization that impacted the Indigenous way of life due to a plethora of government laws and policies, and the influx of new immigrants that took away Native American resources by force. Colonization resulted in massive losses of Indigenous peoples' freedom, resources, and lands, which led to mistrust towards the government and education. Establishing an institution system that provides literacy is the initial process of Western education. Native American traditional education was transmission by oral tradition through observation, listening, patience, and storytelling prior to colonial education. Literacy is more than just learning how to read text, particularly the Bible. Traditional Native American perspectives on literacy education came to mean the same thing as forced assimilation, involving learning the colonial language, religion, and colonizing the mind by replacing traditional knowledge and epistemology with Western knowledge.

Colonization of the Mind through Literacy Practice.

Colonization, "subjugation of one group by another" (Young, 2001), is a process that resulted in Native Americans losing their land, resources for food, and governing tribal customs, and being enslaved. The "European Americans wanted to use education as a means of replacing traditional Native American religions and customs with Christianity, the values of the Protestant ethic, and an idealized form of the European American family" (Spring, 2001, p.36). Native American experiences with various way of being colonized created a trauma about loss of resources and children being educated in colonized language and culture. It is this process of literacy that Native Americans are schooled in the Western way of reading and acquire the colonized knowledge. Ngungi wa Thiong'o (1986) term for this process of obtaining the colonizer's knowledge is "colonization of the mind". The mind is

being redirected to a different way of thinking when reading colonized words.

Literacy practice was a colonial practice and still is a literacy practice. What do I mean by “is” a literacy practice? First, the educator is teaching the student (Navajo) how to read in English with the English alphabet and pronunciation. Not only is the instructor teaching the student how to read but learning how to pronounce words in a language that is not original to the student. Second, Navajo translated words, and sounds are also in the English alphabet. For example, *Yá’át’ééh! Shik’éi dóó shidine’é*. Every letter of the quote is in English letters. Third, most books in the school are in English. The students are reading books about stories that are not in their real daily life. If a Navajo student is reading about swimming and if he or she had not seen a lake or a massive body of water, how are they going to relate? In my experience with literacy in school reading books was about things outside my world.

Literacy practice as colonization still happens in the current education system.

Literacy education by the Europeans and Spaniards was used to assimilate, a process of changing one’s culture and replacing it with the dominant culture. Literacy practice is colonization of the mind utilizing both visible (reading and writing) and invisible (hidden curriculum) access to eradicate traditional Native American way of life. This approach was connected to a strategy to convert the Indians into Christians instead of exterminating them. It was never considered that the dominate culture could coexist with - even learn from - the Indigenous populations with their traditions intact. Literacy was the vehicle that first drove assimilation in the earlier colonial period (Gordon & Gordon, 2003). There were three English missionaries, John Eliot, Thomas Mayhew, and Eleazar Wheelock, who made efforts to reach out to Indians with an “emphasis on providing a basic literacy education to purge the ‘natural’ child and instill the teaching of Christianity through rigorous discipline training”

(Gordon & Gordon, 2003, p. 195). One might say that assimilation through literacy education fueled the extermination of Indian culture by having them learn how to read the English Bible. These assimilation tactics were widely successful, but it soon became evident that the traditions and ties to one's home tribal community were powerful as well, which led to an era of removal and boarding schools.

Before Richard Pratt's Boarding School assimilation, the approach of taking Native American away from their communities, was practiced during the colonial period. Reverend Mr. Wheelock's model of education was to remove children from their homes to attend Moor Indian Charity School (Calloway, 2010; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). During colonial time, children were also taught a similar education regarding Bible literacy, language acquisition, courtship rules, and knowledge for being citizens. The difference between the earlier efforts and the new method is that Native American children were forcibly removed from their homes to learn literacy within the colonizer's culture. This method was truly destructive, frightening, and harmful for Indian children. The boys received basic and religious education with husbandry (a patriarchal system where the male had authority over the female), and some Greek, and it was thought that the Latin language would be of importance in future missionary work (Calloway, 2010; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The girls attended school once a week to be taught gender roles such as wife and mother, and often spent the rest of the week working as servants for local white people (Calloway, 2010; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Time away from Native American culture and teaching is example of colonization of the mind. The boys and girls learned English gender roles instead of traditional cultural customs, which led to trauma because when they returned to the village, they would not contribute to the community. By being physically removed from their homes,

families, communities, and culture-these children had not learned, witnessed, or practiced tribal values such as contributing to their tribal communities. A meeting between the Government of Virginia and Six Nations, Benjamin Franklin wrote to the chiefs of Six Nations that they send half a dozen of their sons to Williamsburg College. In his letter, he told the leaders that there were funds available to take care of them and receive the same instruction as all the white people learn (Reimer, 1971, p. 59). An Indian spokesman replied that several of the young people had been instructed at the college in the northern provinces,

but, they came back to us, they were bad runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods, unable to bear either cold or hunger, know neither how to build a cabin, take a deer, nor kill an enemy, spoke our language imperfectly, were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors, nor counselors; they were totally good for nothing (Reimer, 1971, p. 60).

The leaders of the Six Nations found that European education was not suitable for their future generation who could not do the tribal duties required to survive and support a family in their community. This is an example of how Benjamin Franklin's letter is a mental persuasion that English way of life, knowledge, and language are civilized and superior.

The earlier stages of the literacy program did not make a significant impact on the assimilation process, but did manage to convert a few Indians. Some of the missionary approaches explained Christianity to the Indians in their own language (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). John Eliot, Thomas Mayhew, and Eleazar Wheelock either learned the local tribe's language or used local interpreters to help them further their missionary work. A few individual tribal members did embrace literacy and became prominent missionaries to do Christian missionary work (Gordon & Gordon, 2003). The work of John Sassamon

(Wampanog Indian) and Cockenoe (Montauk Indian) along with John Eliot (missionary) produced the first Indian Bible in Massachusetts in the dialect of Algonquian language to convert more Indians (Gordon & Gordon, 2003). Samson Occom (Mohegan Indian) attended Wheelock's school and became a congregational minister in 1759 (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Occom taught at Long Island for 12 years. His method of teaching was through gluing pieces of paper with alphabet letters on them to cedar bark and have the students identify the letters and their sounds, to make learning the alphabet faster (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Occom's method was different from the colonial approach of teaching the alphabet because he used what the child was familiar with (cedar trees and the natural environment) that assisted learning efforts. These methods of incorporating the familiar, along with missionaries efforts to teach using tribal language, were in stark contrast to the harsh method of forcibly removing children from their homes and culture.

During the same time frame when missionaries were attempting to provide literacy education to the Indians, the rest of the colonies were trying to establish as a country. The colonies were squeezing Indians from their land and depleting food resources, resulting in war between the Indians and colonies for territories. Treaties were made that were not clearly understood by Native Americans, due to language barriers, including inaccurate interpreters. And all too often, these treaties were broken by colonies due to their own greed for more land. The Indians' occupation was in the way for rapid development of towns for the new influx of immigrants. The Homestead Act of 1862 brought in waves of immigrants for "free land" (Clark, 2011).

Hostilities between settlers and Native Americans were increasing, which is not altogether surprising considering that two and often several different cultures were colliding,

and neither side was assisted or prepared in understanding the other. For some, Native American schooling was a solution for the European conquest (Spring, 2001). “Literacy, they hoped, would help them to function in the world of European Americans while preserving traditional Native American religions, customs, and values” (Spring, 2001, p. 36). Education and “literacy was their best tool for initiating American Indians to the ways of ‘civilization’ before introducing them to Christianity” (Gordon & Gordon, 2003, p. 193). Literacy practice was traumatic to Native American children because they were told that Indian ways of thinking, talking, life, and spirituality were not valid. Literacy education was the initial process of colonization of the mind resulting in generations of trauma that proposed Native American culture was barbaric (Indian way of life was not like English), and that the English culture was pure and civilized. Often students were punished for not picking up the lesson quickly and this type of behavior from missionary schools led to physical abuse for Native American children learning English (Adams, 1995).

Today, numerous Native American college students still feel that their culture, language, and ways of knowing are not welcome or even considered within the Western education system, and they feel the effect (Venable, Sato, Duca, & Sage, 2016). The attitude towards European education is negative and resistant (Guillory, 2009) and considered to be learning the colonized ways of thinking, talking, and existing. This education system initiated the colonization of the mind through the forced practice of literacy to get Native Americans to read the bible and accept Christianity as their religion, replacing Native spirituality. Literacy is a visible and yet hidden approach to transform traditional Native American ways of life into a colonized lifestyle. Trauma is the result of imperialism and colonization because of the massive losses of land, language, culture, and food sources. Trauma continues

and literacy practice of English only further abolishes tribal knowledge systems that included oral traditions.

Kill the Culture

The following acts are examples of how killing the culture and creating subjects of colonization have resulted in historical trauma for Native American people. Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, and Altschul (2011) define “historical trauma as “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations” (p.283). The experiences of loss of land, languages, and cultural practices affect psychological stress (Hartmann & Gone, 2014). Enforcing federal policy was extremely bloody force to further subjugate Native American people. It was either comply with the federal policies or be killed, and millions of Native Americans died defending their land and culture.

Historical Trauma

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines trauma as, an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea (Rowell & Thomley, 2013, para. 1).

The Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs is one of many groups working “to raise public awareness concerning the impact of historical trauma and acculturation stress on the mental health of American Indian and Alaska Native populations” (Rowell & Thomley, 2013, para. 1), documenting the increased rates of suicide and substance abuse among populations that have experienced clinical levels of trauma for multiple generations.

Traumatic events included loss of homes and lands, loss of children who were literally stolen away and taken far from their families for years, forced slave labor of children and adults, military and civilian attack that resulted in injury and death as well as mutilation and rape, outlawing religious practices and cultural traditions, and forced education that punished children for speaking their own language or expressing any aspects of their own culture. Any of these acts results in trauma for a single individual, but when the trauma accumulates as such events happen repeatedly to parents and then children and grandchildren, and even to a fourth and fifth generation, - results in historical trauma.

In 1819, the Civilization Fund Act was established to provide schools for Indians to instruct them in agriculture and to teach children the basic education of reading, writing, and arithmetic (Lomawaima, 1994; Prucha, 2000). In 1830, the Indian Removal Act, significant legislation, was passed by Congress to further remove Indians to the west of the Mississippi River to make room for the influx of immigrants (Prucha, 2000). The Civilization Fund Act (1819) and Indian Removal Act (1830) were policies that violently mandated Indians assimilate into American society through forced education and training, with an emphasis on agricultural affairs, to disconnect Indians from communal connection with the land to become more independent. Independence equals European perception of the land.

In 1887, the General Allotment Act (Dawes Act) authorized the allotment of reservation land to individual tribal members (Adams, 1995; Prucha, 2000). By passing the Dawes Act, Congress' intention was to dismantle reservation land and assign it as private land to be owned by and taxed on American Indians (Bosworth, 2011). American Indians were not included in the 'Homestead Act of 1862' for immigrants to have free land (Clark, 2011). This act initially resulted in widespread losses of land parcels due to American

Indians' lack of knowledge and compliance with U. S. tax laws and required payments. Concurrently, the act provided an educational policy to teach American Indian children "knowledge, values, mores, and habits of Christian civilization" (Adams, 1995, p. 18). The provision of the act was to assimilate American Indians by teaching them practical skills and trades (Adams, 1995; Horne & McBeth, 1998; Lomawaima, 1994). The civilization programs failed to fully assimilate Indians into civilized Americans, because the approach taken by missionaries and day schools were not effective (Adams, 1995). Missionaries lived among the Indians near the reservations that provided a safe space for the Indians from the settlers. Children received lessons from the missionaries, but when the lessons were completed, children did not practice what they had learned, in part because most often adults and elders disapproved of the civilization programs (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). A more aggressive approach was seen as necessary in order to integrate Indians into American society.

Richard Pratt, a military officer, proposed the removal of American Indian children to isolated areas to cut off any tribal influences from adults and to immerse them into American society (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Prior to Pratt's proposal, he conducted a social experiment with a group of Indian prisoners that he was in charge of in St. Augustine, Florida (Adams, 1995; Bosworth, 2011; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Pratt and his assistants assimilated the prisoners into speaking English and learning some trades skill (Adams, 1995). This prompted Pratt to lobby Congress to have his own school to educate Indians and he was authorized to recruit 125 students from reservations to unused military barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The Carlisle Indian School officially opened on November 1, 1879 (Adams, 1995).

Boarding schools were designed primarily to eradicate American Indians' identity, language, and culture (Adams, 1995; Horne & McBeth, 1998; Lomawaima, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The Carlisle Indian School's military method provided a speedy assimilation that encouraged individualism of young Indian children (Adams, 1995; Horne & McBeth, 1998; Lomawaima, 1994; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Pratt associated the long hair of Indians as a symbol of savage and the solution to end this symbol was that every child have the traumatic experience of getting their traditional long hair cut off.

Zitkala – Sa (2003) described the meaning associated with hair being cut short for Dakota people, "our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!" (p. 55). She further wrote in her biography about her experience getting her hair cut at boarding school,

...I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair. I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me (p. 55-56).

Zitkala's account of her hair being cut off along with all children entering boarding school was a traumatic experience for them. As a Dakota girl, Zitkala knew the significance of

having long hair and the symbolic meaning of have short hair. The boarding school had made her an unskilled warrior and she had to wear the short hair to mourn for her culture.

Traditional clothing was replaced with school uniforms, and all Native languages were forbidden on school grounds (Adams, 1995; Horne & McBeth, 1998; Lomawaima, 1995). Native American traditional clothing generally consisted of tanned animal hides to cover the body. The geographic location of the tribe usually determined and what kind of animal skin was used. They were decorated with either shells, bones, or some form of paint for designs. Clothing is a visual reflection of one's culture. When children arrived at boarding schools with their traditional clothing that their family had made for them with love, their traditional clothing was taken away. Zitkala – Sa (2003) described seeing the Indian girls clothing from the White culture,

We were placed in a line of girls who were marching into the dining room.

These were Indian girls, in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses. The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair. As I walked noiseless in my soft moccasins, I felt like sinking to the floor, for my blanket had been stripped from my shoulders. I looked hard at the Indian girls, who seemed not to care that they were even more immodestly dressed than I, in their tightly fitting clothes (p. 52 -53).

Boarding school was designed to eradicate Native American culture. This killing of culture starts with stripping children of their traditional clothing and hair. Most often the older students were tasked with carrying out such acts on younger children.

The U. S. Government expropriated American Indian land by producing the Civilization Fund Act, Indian Removal Act, and General Allotment Act (Dawes Act)

(Adams, 1995; Prucha, 2000). Land is the fundamental basis of cultural identity among American Indian tribes, because elements like spirituality, ceremonies, and languages are rooted in Mother Earth (House, 2002). Depriving American Indians of property was one form of defrauding them from their land. Government boarding schools served as a way to eradicate their cultural identity, ceremonies, family ties, and tribal languages of American Indian children (Adams, 1995; Horne & McBeth, 1998; Lomawaima, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The English Only Policy at boarding schools replaced American Indian languages by forcing children to speak English (Adams, 1995; Horne & McBeth, 1998; Lomawaima, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Education in the English-American context is an indoctrinated form of teaching, because of its disregard for diverse culture and contributions. It still exists today because of the way it privileges Western knowledge of education (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

Missionary schools, day schools, and government boarding schools had a common goal to assimilate young American Indians into American society and to produce manual laborers. The federal policy of assimilation was implemented on those at the low socioeconomic level (Carney, 2007) and aspirations for higher education were not part of any policy. Policies gave value to western knowledge and strived to erase the Indigenous knowledge system (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005).

These federal policies resulted in historical trauma that continues to exist today. For example, the Navajo people had the Long Walk of 1864 (Johnson, 1973). During this time, the Navajo people were rounded up like cattle to a particular location in Fort Wingate, New Mexico. They marched to Fort Sumner was close to 500 miles across the desert of New Mexico. The Navajo that could not keep up with the pace of the groups were either killed or

left behind by the military escorts. The Navajo were kept in captivity at Bosque Redondo, New Mexico for four years (Johnson, 1973). The impact has led to unresolved trauma for generations of Navajo students. This trauma endures due to the continued generational disempowerment of Navajo people, traditional Navajo knowledge, and the severance of valued bond attachments. The earlier policies emphasized taking resources and freedom away from Native American tribes; while for the missionaries, their tasks were to educate Indians to read the Bible and transform to the European way of life.

Earlier Higher Education for Indians

Colonial missionaries working with literacy education faced challenges from Native Americans elders about their children reading Bible verses instead of learning how to be Indians. Missionaries presided over Native American children being educated according to the colonial way. This thought lead to continuing the education of Indians into college and obtaining degrees. The idea of having Indians more educated than local English people was an uncomfortable proposition among those that wanted them exterminated. Further, during this timeframe, only the wealthy had access to higher education. Even so, in 1617, the idea of college for Indians sparked a discussion that led to the English setting aside one thousand acres for the construction of a “college for children of the infidels” in Henrico, Virginia (Wright & Tierney, 1991). As it turns out the Virginia Company was collecting money to help educate the Indian, but in reality the funds the company received were used to pay for other expenditures within the Virginia Company (Spring, 2001). The idea, however, was short lived when the Powhatan relationship with the British turned into war by 1622 and the college was never constructed (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012). Surprisingly, Indian resistance and war did not stop the efforts to establish several colleges for Indians.

Three prestige universities (Harvard, William and Mary, and Dartmouth) were started during the colonial period to educate the Indians. Their institutional charters specifically mentioned educating Native Americans. And yet, the resistance of Native Americans toward White educational institutions of education coupled with the lack of adequate funding left Native Americans largely on the outskirts of higher education. Centuries later, these factors still contribute to low numbers of Native Americans pursuing degrees from mainstream higher education institutions. What follows is a brief overview of the first colleges established to serve Native American students.

Harvard College. In 1636, Harvard University was established; 18 years later, building to house 30 American Indian students was built by the university officials (Brayboy et al., 2012). It was not until 1660 that Harvard housed the first Indian students and over a time span of 24 years, only four Indian students were housed in a building that was supposed to house Indians free rent (Carney, 2007). The university charter stated,

Whereas, through the good hand of God... and revenues for the advancement of all good literature, arts, and sciences in Harvard College... and all other necessary provisions, that may conduce to the education of the English and Indian youth of this country, in knowledge and godliness...(Governor Thomas Dudley, 1650, para 1).

Harvard College did not fulfill its original mission to truly educate Indians because they only had a few attend. Prior to the American Revolution, only six Indian students attended (John Sassamon, John Wompowess, Joel Lacomis, Caleb Cheeshahteumuck, Eleazar (no last name), and Benjamin Larnell) (Carney, 2007). In 1665, Caleb Cheeshahteumuck graduated and was fluent in four languages (Latin, Greek, English, and Algonquian) (Carney, 2007).

Obviously, Cheeshahteaumuck was widely touted as an outstanding success of the school, but one might categorize this “success” as one in a million-literally.

William and Mary College. William and Mary College’s original proposal in 1693 had no mention of educating Indians, but the possibility of gaining some financial funds through Boyle Funding to support Indian education changed that proposal. The late Governor Robert Boyle left his estate to be used for “pious purpose” and for the profit to be used to support Indian students in college (Carney, 2007). The 1693 College charter read,

William and Mary College has among its purposes that the Church of Virginia may be furnished with a seminary of ministers of the Gospel, and that the youth may be piously educated in good Letters and Manners, and that the Christian faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians, to the Glory of Almighty God (Carney, 2007, p. 1).

Boyle Funding provided 14 pounds per year for Indian students and a grant to build an Indian school. The Brafferton building was not constructed until 1723 and did not house a single Indian student until 1743, 40 years later. The building was used for storage. William and Mary College had a unique set up of a school within a school for Indian students named Brafferton Indian College and Indian Grammar School (two other names used for the Indian Grammar School were Fort Christiana School and Boyle School). The Grammar School was used to help Indian students prepare for Brafferton Indian College.

The schools had a very unusual way of “recruiting” Indian students during the colonial period. According to a letter by then Governor Spotswood in 1711, “it was a custom of the college administration to purchase Indian children captured in warfare to ensure that William and Mary College might continue to benefit from the Boyle Fund” (as

quoted in Carney, 2007, p. 29). The practice of negotiations with Indians regarding treaties had a stipulation that tribal leaders send their children to William and Mary College as hostages to protect the treaty (Carney, 2007). The tribes resisted the treaty demands and were not in favor of sending their children away to school. The Brafferton Indian Grammar School had the highest attendance of Indians, but only 16 students went to William and Mary College and none obtained a degree (Carney, 2007).

Dartmouth. Eleazar Wheelock had a vision of expanding Charity School into a liberal college for Indians to be educated in missionary and teacher work, and then return to their communities to carry out what they had learned (Calloway, 2010; Carney, 2007). While trying to raise funds to start the college, he solicited local residents and encountered resistance and bigotry. Wheelock turned to Samson Occum (Mohican) to help him secure funding from England (Carney, 2007). Occum was Wheelock's protege from 1743 to 1748 and he studied various subjects including English, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew (Gordon & Gordon, 2003). Occum accompanied by Reverend Nathaniel Whitaker, toured England and Scotland to raise funds and they managed to secure over 11,000 pounds for Wheelock's College for Indians (Calloway, 2010; Carney, 2007; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). The approach was to have Samson Occum do the sermon at various churches to demonstrate Indians can be converted to Christianity and therefore a school could convert more of the Indians (Calloway, 2010; Carney, 2007).

Governor John Wentworth signed the charter on December 13, 1769 for Dartmouth College (Calloway, 2010). The charter read,

KNOW YE, THEREFORE that We, considering the premises and being willing to encourage the laudable and charitable design of spreading Christian

knowledge among the savages of our American wilderness, and also that the best means of education be established in our province of New Hampshire, ... for the education and instruction of youth of the Indian tribes in this land in reading, writing, and all parts of learning which shall appear necessary and expedient for civilizing and Christianizing children of pagans, as well as in all liberal arts and science and also of English youth and any others... (Calloway, 2010, p. 22).

The charter emphasized that Indians needed to have Christian knowledge and be trained according to “civilized” society.

Indian enrollment at Dartmouth College did not flourish as Wheelock envisioned. Indian students attended the Charity School, but continuation on to Dartmouth College showed limited enrollment. Wheelock mismanaged the funds raised by Occum by manipulating reports and channeling funds through Charity School (Carney, 2007). Wheelock’s original proposal to educate Indians was short lived but it did transform into educating Europeans to do missionary work (Carney, 2007). White student enrollment increased filling slots designated for Indians. A young Indian boy named Symons (Simms, Simmon) was turned away because Dartmouth was full. Occum complained to Wheelock that the college’s purpose to educate Indians had been taken over by White students. Symons eventually was admitted and became the first Indian Dartmouth College graduate (Carney, 2007).

Prior to 1800, Dartmouth College had a total enrollment of 25 Indian students, with three graduating. They are as follows: Daniel Simms (Sima, Narragansett Indian) in 1777, Peter Pohquonnoppect (Stockbridge Indian) in 1780, and Lewis Vincent (no tribe mentioned)

in 1781 (Carney, 2007). Between 1769 and 1973, 187 Indian students attended and 25 graduated from Dartmouth College (Carney, 2007).

Harvard College, William and Mary College, and Dartmouth College secured funding for the purpose of Indian education, but mismanagement of funds led to unfulfilled intentions (Carney, 2007). Their intent was to educate Indians for missionary work and then return them to their villages to convert the rest of the Indian population (Carney, 2007). The Indians that trickled through college were frequently used for interpreters between the tribe and colonies (DeJong, 1992). Prior to the Revolutionary War, college was very elite; only the children of the wealthiest attended college (Carney, 2007) and Indians were not among the wealthy. It is also important to realize that there was very little trust between Native Americans and the European's education institutions. And further, as is still an issue, the education offered did not include any cultural relevance to the Native Students- only the Western dominate society's methods, perspectives, and expectations.

For Indians, the pursuit of an education was limited further, because of lack of funding for individual tribal members meant that they generally could not afford to pay for school at White institutions (Carney, 2007). The funding issue was a challenge during this time frame and it remains a barrier today. The earlier form of higher education (Dartmouth, William and Mary, and Harvard) showed signs of funding not being available to the institution charters that were supposedly established to educate Indians. Limited scholarships to support Indian students that attended universities (Dartmouth, William and Mary, and Harvard) were exhausted for administrative operations and to provided limited financial aid. Indian students not properly prepared academically for higher education resulted in academic failure, and this issue remains relevant today. Assimilation and conversion of Indians were

the priorities of earlier education. Adequate academic preparation of students in higher education was absent given that basic Indian education focused instead on agricultural and trade training suitable for farming, industrial, and domestic work.

Current Awarded Postsecondary Degrees

Throughout that time and well into the next century, little advancement or success was realized in Native American education at all levels. White teachers who knew nothing of Native American culture were teaching Native American children. Change did not begin until a time when the entire United States was awakened to Civil Rights issues.

Over the past decade, educational success for Native Americans at the higher education level has improved, but still remains low. The tables below illustrate. Native American school age children between five to 17 years old were left out of the statistics in a study because they were too small a population to include for statistical analysis. A study administered by the National Center for Education Statics (2016), examined degrees earn by race/ethnicity in 2002 – 03 and 2012 – 13 in the following tables listing each degree earned (Bachelor, Master, and Doctor) with race. These tables indicate that Native American students are graduating from higher education.

Table 1. Bachelor Degrees Conferred

Race	Percent		Total	
	2012-13	(2002-03)	2012-13	(2002-03)
White	69	(76)	1,223,576	(994,616)
Blacks	11	(10)	191,180	(124,253)
Hispanics	11	(7)	86,650	(89,029)
Asian/Pacific Islanders	7	(7)	130,144	(87,964)
American Indian/ Alaska Natives	1	(1)	11,445	(9,875)
Two or more races	2	(-)	34,338	(-)
Total	101	(101)	1,677,333	(1,305,737)

The American Indian/Alaska Native students conferred bachelor degrees (Table 1)

increased by 1,570 between 2002-03 to 2012-13 academic years. The result is a small increase, but does indicate that more American Indian/Alaska Native students are obtaining degrees.

Table 2. Master Degrees Conferred

Race	Percent		Total	
	2012-13	(2002-03)	2012-13	(2002-03)
White	69	(77)	455,892	(346,003)
Blacks	13	(10)	87,988	(45,150)
Hispanics	11	(8)	52,990	(25,200)
Asian/Pacific Islanders	7	(7)	44,912	(27,492)
American Indian/ Alaska Natives	1	(1)	3,697	(2,886)
Two or more races	2	(-)	11,839	(-)
Total	103	(103)	657,318	(446,731)

There was not a significant increase in percentages in the 10-year time frame regarding Master degrees (Table 2) distributed by postsecondary institutions among race/ethnicities.

The American Indian/Alaska Native students in graduate programs obtained 811 more Master's degrees in 2012-13 (3,697) compared to 2002-03 (2,886).

Table 3. Doctoral Degrees Conferred

Race	Percent		Total	
	2012-13	(2002-03)	2012-13	(2002-03)
White	72	(76)	110,775	(82,549)
Blacks	8	(7)	12,084	(7,537)
Hispanics	7	(5)	10,107	(5,503)
Asian/Pacific Islanders	12	(11)	18,408	(12,008)
American Indian/ Alaska Natives	1	(1)	9,000	(759)
Two or more races	2	(-)	2,438	(-)
Total	102	(103)	162,812	(108,356)

Again, there was not a significant increase in the percentages during the 10-year time frame regarding Doctor degrees (Table 3) distributed by postsecondary institutions among race/ethnicity. The American Indian/Alaska Native students in graduate programs obtained

141 more Doctoral degrees in 2012-13 (9000 in total) than compared to 2002-03 (759).

The total degrees (Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral) earned by American Indian/Alaska Native students in 2002-03 were 13,520 and in 2012-13, there were 2,522 (16,042) more degrees earned than 2002-03. The numbers are small compared to other race/ethnicities, but it is a steady increase and the most in higher education degree earned in the history of the American Indian/Alaska Native population since the beginning of formal Western education. Unfortunately, significant barriers to Native American/Alaska Natives higher education success still exist.

Exclusion Education: Current Higher Education

Colonialized literacy practices were the vehicle used to assimilate Indian youth. Traditional tribal teaching was eradicated and replaced with the colonization of the mind approach of teaching and learning. The education system focused on literacy by publishing bilingual Bibles to further convert tribal communities to Christianity. Higher education was established to further educate Indians by having them obtain teaching and missionary training. There were numerous barriers that emerged with colonization and earlier higher education regarding limitations and challenges that did not hold to the charters of Harvard, William and Mary, and Dartmouth were financial support and proper academic preparation. Today, these two barriers (financial and academic) are still prevalent among American Indian students in higher education.

Current Barriers

Financial. There is a widespread myth that Native American students go to school for free in higher education. The earlier establishment of college has shown the myth is untrue and it continues to be a myth. Colonial time frame demonstrated that higher education

was only for elite White people with financial resources (Carney, 2007), and the missionary efforts to establish a pipeline for Indians to earn the same education was not well received (DeJong, 1992). Access to higher education historically required a great amount of financial resources from families and remains a current limitation. Native American students reside predominately below the poverty level or, in and require financial aid to attend distant higher education institutions (Cunningham, McSwain, & Keselman, 2007). The majority of Native American students attending universities utilize some type of scholarship from their tribe or aid based upon financial need (Thomason, 1999). This is due to Native American students and families generally coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Larimore & McClellan, 2005). Limited financial resources traditionally limited the attainment of an education for Native American students (Thomason, 1999). A student echoed Thomason by stating,

I think money is one the biggest issues in the education system because if you don't have it, or if you've lost your scholarship and you don't have the drive or the willingness to work yourself and pay for it yourself, you're not gonna go back to school (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 78).

Falk and Aitken (1984) report that the most frequently cited factors hindering retention for Minnesota Chippewa Tribes (composed of six reservations in Northern Minnesota) was the lack of adequate financial support. When a student does not have funding to pay for tuition, housing, transportation, and food, the student will be more likely to leave school to pay bills. A two year Army veteran stated, "...But right now, I don't know what. Most of my schoolwork has gone pretty much down the drain. So I need to take care of bills. Right now most of my problems are financial" (Huffman, 2008, p. 89). Leonida Garland and Allen

Wright were part of the first group of the Choctaw Nation to go to college under the “forty for twenty years” education provision, but they left Delaware College due to money problems (Crum, 2007). Historically, financial resources are foreign to most Native American people and things that would help them gain some financial stability were stolen with empty treaties and government promises. Currently, Native American students that do attend higher education institutions most often face financial barriers because they come from poverty-stricken communities, and often have families to support as well.

American Indians have consistently experienced frustration in accessing college. Native Americans who attended an institution of higher education quickly recognized that to be part of this population, one who has earned a higher education degree, they must obtain some type of financial resources. Navajo students express that money is the barrier in achieving their goal to attend a university of their choice. One student (participant) stated, “I want to attend Harvard or Stanford, that’s what I really want to do. But thinking realistically, I don’t think my family could afford it” (Hoffmann, Jackson, & Smith, 2005, p. 37). Financial aid from institutions may be able to fund individual students, but additional family members (student’s dependents) become the responsibility of the student. Native American students are eligible to receive loans to help meet extra costs, but a student stated, “there’s the fear too, can I pay it back when I’m done?” (Flynn, Duncan, & Jorgensen, 2012, p. 443). Native American students are commonly non-traditional students with families. The extra cost of supporting a family is not included in scholarships. One of the barriers for Native Americans who are single-parent students, is a greater challenge regarding obtaining adequate financial resources. A single mother stated, “I applied for more scholarships hoping that it would make it easier, but once I got those scholarships, they just took away the

loans. I think as a single parent that they just don't allow you to get enough" (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 78). Single parent students who attend college have extra responsibilities and difficulties regarding day care costs, time management of school and parenting, and lack of financial resources contributing to the multitude of obstacles Native American students face (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

Despite financial barriers some students remained optimistic about receiving some kind of financial aid to decrease the financial burden of paying for college (Hoffmann et al., 2005). In an interview, a Navajo student was asked, "And what obstacle does that (financial barriers) help you overcome?" A student answered, "Probably the financial one because if I get good grades then there'll be a lot of grants or money for me... scholarships" (Hoffmann et al., 2005, p. 39). Financial aid has always been a barrier for American Indians from the start of colonial education and for those few students that tried to attend higher education during the colonial period. The financial aspect of higher education is one barrier, but academic preparation and unfamiliarity with the rigorous academic culture and expectations add to the multitude of obstacles regarding Native American higher education success.

Academic. Native American students entering higher education typically face academic challenges when pursuing professional degrees (Nursing, Medical School, Business, Law, Education, and science relate degrees). They frequently cannot continue academically because of inadequate preparation from previous institutions (grade school, elementary, high school, and tribal colleges). An element that could impact inadequate preparation is the lack of funding to support those students that need extra preparation. Earning a degree that is needed back home is most commonly the primary motivation (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). A very common challenge shared among Native American

students going to a predominately White institution (PWI) is the lack of academic preparation. PWI is an acronym that is used to describe the institution that represents predominate White populations. (Shotton et al., 2013). Flynn et al. (2012) conducted a study regarding American Indian post secondary transition and retention; 12 of 21 American Indians interviewed stated that academic unpreparedness before college was a factor in the post secondary transition. Two American Indian students in the study of Flynn et al, described their academic experiences by saying, “I think the hardest thing about coming to college is making the adjustment for the academic part and being able to make the grades and stuff” (Flynn et al., 2012, p, 443). A second student followed up by saying, “the transition to a work load, like you actually have to study as opposed to high school where you just could look it over for a few hours and go in and just take it” (Flynn et al., 2012, p, 443). The core issue is that students do not feel ready for the rigorous academic work that is required for higher education. Historically, Native Americans were colonized with extreme force that resulted in trauma for generations. The mistrust of White teachers that represent the American society continue to teach from the colonizing the mind curriculum that leave the Native American culture elements out and continues to be a factor.

Brown (1993) provided evidence that showed quality preparations in secondary education has a strong association with higher education achievement. Guillory and Wolverson (2008) interviewed state board members from Washington State University, University of Idaho, and Montana State University, and found that the lack of academic preparation in K – 12 affects poor performance in higher education. Students from reservation schools deal with extra barriers because of inadequate, underfunded schools. These students were typically raised in tribally impoverished reservation communities, where

poverty affects every level of life- from health care to the quality of education. There is an awareness of the lack of academic preparation for American Indian students among administrators, educators, even students themselves knowing that “lack of” proper training in academics is a barrier. A student stated, “The way my high school was set up didn’t prepare me for college and scared me out” (Flynn et al., 2012, p, 443). Encountering academic challenges is the turning point for some Native American students and a continuation of the historical impact of colonization through education. The initial idea of assimilation through education by providing American Indians basic education with the literacy practice of killing the traditional culture resulted in the education system focused on colonization of the mind and conversion to Christianity. A strong and diverse academic program was not considered part of colonized education due to the colonization assimilation practices of the time, which continues to this day. English only policies is a colonization practice.

A president of a university extended a recommendation to American Indian students facing challenges. He stated, “I think some individual attention, some tailoring of programs and advising (and meeting) special cultural needs, strengthen a Native American student’s commitment to persist on through to graduation” (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 71). The statement by the president provides some hope in resolving or working toward the lack of academic preparation barriers. Today, tailored programs helping close some of the gaps between American Indian students and academics are emerging. These programs provide academic support to American Indian students and disadvantaged populations. TRIO Programs (Ronald E. McNair Program, Educational Opportunity Center, Talent Search, Upward Bound, and Veteran Upward Bound), “are federal outreach programs and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from

disadvantaged backgrounds” (U. S. Department of Education). TRIO Programs, federally funded by the Department of Education, are for first generation and low-income students who often are underprepared for college and need extra assistance and encouragement to be successful.

The Department of Education provides the following descriptions for each program: Talent Search - identifies and serves potential students to be successful in higher education; Upward Bound - prepares and provides opportunities for students to be college ready; Educational Opportunity Center - provides information to adults entering higher education on academics, financial aid, admission, and the application process; Ronald E. McNair Program - encourages and prepares students for doctoral studies with research participation and various academic activities; Veteran Upward Bound - assists military veterans with student support services to be successful in higher education (Department of Education). TRIO Programs help address the issue of minority students’ low graduation rates and lack of academic preparation for higher education as being a historical phenomenon that originated in colonized education.

The barriers for American Indian students in higher education continue to be limitations in obtaining higher education degrees. The higher education system is aware of the extremely low graduation and retention rates of American Indians in higher education. Some tribal governments have taken the initiative in resolving these barriers by taking ownership of education on reservations, in particular, developing tribal colleges. Tribal Nations exercising self-determination were granted the authority to approach education in a more holistic way that includes cultures and languages in higher education for tribal members. Self-determination provides tribes the rights to reclaim some of their losses

through tradition ways of thinking and building academic support for the younger generations to be successful at PWI's by obtaining initial degrees that will benefit communities on the reservations.

Self-Determination

The relationship between parent and child is comparable to the relationship between American Indian Tribes and the U. S. Government. The government still maintains control on federal American Indians Affairs, but they want the tribes to be able to self-govern the local affairs on the reservation. Self-determination provides the ability for tribes to handle some of the local level administration. This relationship is intentional on the part of the U. S. Government, and the language is still often used today in documents pertaining to American Indians. On a certain level of the relationship there is security, but often avoidance by both parties. American Indian leaders view self-determination as handling all their affairs, not just the operation of administration. Conflict due to resources or imitated support and chaos in the organization regarding who really has authority sometimes exists. Self-determination for American Indian Tribes under the guidance of the U. S. Government is the real meaning. The critique of self-determination is highlighted in statements of documents and the practice of those policies. Self-determination policies give tribes the right to contract with other governmental funding sources. Federal and state government jurisdictions are symbolic agents that reinforce historical generational trauma among tribal members.

Self-determination and tribal colleges are the forces acting to preserve Native American culture in response to the parent-child model. The primary purposes of the Dawes Act (1887), Indian Removal Act, and the Assimilation Policy were to eradicate the Indigenous knowledge system, languages, culture, and land. President Johnson gave a

special message to Congress on March 6, 1968, about Indian self-determination. He stated,

We must affirm the right of the first Americans to remain Indians while exercising their rights as Americans. We must affirm their right to freedom of choice and self-determination. We must seek new ways to provide Federal assistance to Indians—with new emphasis on Indian self-help and with respect for Indian culture (Prucha, 2000, p. 250).

The U. S. Government had been trying to find ways to decrease funding Tribal Operation of Affairs (education, health care, and social services). The freedom of choice to self-govern tribal government and self-determination had stipulations that caused tribes to see themselves as wards of the federal government. Self-determination policy was not purely to have tribes manage their own affairs, but to get at their natural resources and to allow corporations to use tribal members as cheap laborers (Senese, 1991). Some legislators, due to giving ownership to tribes marked did not take the self-determination policy of Indians tribes lightly. Indian tribes interpreted President Johnson's message as retaking self-government within their administration. The U. S. Government failed to define the real meaning and goal of self-determination.

Two years earlier, Wendell Chino, Chairman of Mescalero Apache Tribe, sent a letter to President Johnson on June 23, 1966 requesting an Indian Treaty Rights Conference to “discuss his (Apache Tribe) treaty rights and agreements providing for free and undisturbed use of his land” (Robbins, 1990, p. 28). The response from Joseph Califano (Special Assistant to President Johnson) was that a conference regarding “treaty rights guaranteeing free and undisturbed use of land would be limited and level out many tribes (who do not have treaties) in whom the President has an interest” (Robbins, 1990, p. 28). This correspondence

led to the organizing of a task force made up of non-Indians to meet secretly and draw up a plan to improve Indian Affairs. Chairman Chino's letter regarding the Treaty Rights Conference alarmed the legislator that the Indians wanted their land back that had been taken from them. The Secretary of Interior, Stewart Udall, at that time representing government, responded by stating, "...It is my considered opinion that any national conference on Indian affairs called by the White House should be related to some specific matter, such as economic development, which would be my first preference..." (Robbins, 1990, p. 28). Udall did not want to talk about land, but instead considered economic development more important.

During the same time, Udall (Secretary of the Interior) went to different tribal leaders to gain support for the Omnibus Bill and the Indian Resources Development Act of 1967, but was strongly opposed (Castile, 1998). The bill was a way for the federal government to cut support to the tribes regarding economics, health, education, and social affairs (Castile, 1998) with a heavy emphasis being on economic development (Senese, 1991). The intention was to get the tribes to be able to operate their own affairs while the federal government supervised, the way a parent supervises a child. One of the recommendations included education as follows:

Establish a National Advisory Council for Indian Education. Have tribes consider whether to assume responsibility for operating their own school systems. Establish an Advisory School Board for all Bureau Indian Affairs (BIA) schools. Commit resources needed to make BIA schools into a model system and reverse the trend to transfer as much Indian education as possible to public schools. And direct Office of Education to make a special effort to

improve education for Indian children in public schools (Robbins, 1990, p. 29).

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (1824) is an arm of the U.S. government that supervises tribal affairs (Prucha, 1975). The BIA was created under the Department of War on March 11, 1824, to oversee administration of funds for the civilization of the Indians (p. 38). The agency has been in place to supervise and manage the school systems on reservations. The educational elements were to have tribal members receive industrial trade training off the reservation and return to industrial jobs that were made available by corporations.

On June 23, 1972, the Indian Education Act was signed into law (Castile, 1998). The act was not followed in good faith regards to where Indian tribes had total control over the distribution of funds to schools (tribal contract schools and reservation schools). Six months earlier, the Navajo Community College Act was passed to ensure similar funding as Haskell Indian Junior College received through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (Castile, 1998). Under this act, the tribal nation could provide higher education services to tribal members.

Tribal Colleges

Likeminded people of American Indian education and non-American Indians established a higher education community college model that not only challenged the U.S. Government on denying American Indians their language and culture, but sought to regain control of education for American Indian communities (Warner & Gipp, 2009). Educators and the Navajo Nation established the first tribal Navajo Community College (the college name changed from Navajo Community College to Diné Community College) at Tsaile, Arizona, in 1968 (<http://www.dinecollege.edu>). This college not only made higher education for Navajo people more accessible, but the philosophy of education was based upon

traditional Navajo culture (<http://www.dinecollege.edu>). In the early 60s, several councilmen, educators, and the Navajo Nation Chairman designed a plan to take control of education on the reservation due to a 90% attrition rate of Navajo students attending off-reservation colleges (Warner & Gipp, 2009). The opening of the Navajo Community College paved the way resulting in 35 tribal colleges in the United States (Clement, 2009).

One of the central roles of tribal colleges is to help local tribal communities preserve their traditional culture and values (Littlebear, 2009). This may be accomplished by incorporating Native ways of knowing as a template for tribal stories, traditional knowledge system, traditional belief systems and ceremonies to contribute toward American Indian students' lifelong learning process (Warner & Tijerina, 2009). In American Indian traditional communities, knowledge of elders is regarded with high esteem because they are the language keepers and spiritual guides (Martin & Thunder, 2013). Reinforcing Native ways of knowing provides a safe space for American Indian students on campus (Ecklund & Terrance, 2013).

Tribal colleges are located in reservation communities providing a geographical physical space and place. The location of tribal colleges becomes the host of the Indigenous knowledge system. Not only is the tribal college location creating a space, but the very land it is on is a fundamental basis of cultural identity intertwined with spirituality, ceremonies, and languages. The first tribal college (Dine' College) in America exemplifies the value of the Indigenous knowledge system in higher education. Dine' College's (Navajo Community College) educational philosophy is "*SA' AH NAAGHAI BIK'EH HOZHOON*" translated to "past old age, the one that walks there in ultimate balance and harmony or on the balanced path" (House, 2005, pp. 92-93). The four key elements are *Nitsahakees* (thinking), *Nahal'a*

(planning), *Iina* (living), and *Sihasin* (Assuring) (www.dinecollege.edu). The Dine' (Navajo) language is prudent in understanding the philosophy and classes are offered with different tracks (non-speaker, speaker, and advanced speaker) (www.dinecollege.edu).

The core value of the knowledge system has survived with American Indians (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005) and tribal colleges are valuing it in academics for the students and people. American Indian students are recognizing that the traditional knowledge system has a place in higher education that will help them in pursuing degrees at tribal colleges. Some Predominate White Institutions (PWI's) have recently become aware that incorporating the Indigenous knowledge system and providing culturally appropriate services and guidance assists in improving retention rates among American Indian students.

The University of Arizona, a PWI, for example, implemented a Living-Learning Community Model that incorporates Native American concepts (Shotton et al., 2013). The First-Year Scholar Program designed a retention plan for University of Arizona freshmen. The students live on one wing of a campus dormitory called O'odham Ki Wing (people house in O'odham language). The program has a mandatory study hall in the evening, two mentors serve as role models for the freshmen, and there is a professional team that consists of representatives from financial aid, counseling, housing, advising, and admissions. Family is invited during the family weekend along with the rest of the university. The retention rate among Native American students improved, but the program was short-lived because of funding.

Success in Higher Education

Individual students did find success in higher education attributed it to cultural elements of identity and heritage. A study by Huffman (2008) found that secondary

preparation and performance do not necessarily contribute to academic success among Native American students, but cultural identity was a significant factor for success among the Native student sample. Native American students who can draw strength from their cultural identity to navigate through academic life succeed in higher education (Larimore & McClellan, 2005). A Choctaw student described how prayer helped motivate and strengthen her,

I have prayed like with the research paper and stuff like that. I don't pray to pass a test. I pray for help for me to hang in there, you know? And just to get it done, I don't pray to get an A or anything like that. No. I pray to give me strength and motivation (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010, p. 13).

It was also shown that students who practice and have a strong cultural connection perform well academically (HeavyRunner & Morris, 1997). The tribal belief system, in regards to the ways plants, animals, nature, and humans are interrelated, is often misunderstood by non-Native Americans (Locust, 1988). Huffman, Still, & Brokenleg (1986) investigated college achievement among Dakota/Lakota/Nakota students and the results showed cultural identity related to success in college for Sioux students.

The realization that success in higher education is linked to traditional cultural identity and heritage (Huffman, 2008) is fairly new, as is the possibility of comparison with mainstream scholars and educators of higher education. How many of the Native American students that have a strong connection to their cultural identity and heritage are included in the National Center for Education Statics (NCES)? Research is needed to provide the answer. According to the NCES, the number of bachelor degrees earned among Native Americans and Alaskan Natives from 1999-2000 was 8,719 (0.7%) and within 10 years the

number increased by 3,480 (0.1%). These 12,199 Native American graduates during 2009-2010 persevered in the face of financial and academic barriers to succeed in higher education. But we do not know the role of cultural identity and heritage in their success because that is not included in the NCES statistics.

Native American students in higher education face financial and academic barriers from the earlier establishment of higher education and it has continued into modern times. Access to higher education has improved with tribal colleges being geographically located on reservations so students do not have to relocate and overcome culture shocks, transition away from their tribal culture and support systems to obtain degrees.

Conclusion

Native Americans are the most underserved and underrepresented ethnic/racial population in higher education (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). The short narrative at the beginning of this phase provided an overview of my educational experiences to expose challenges with financial resources and under-preparation for higher education. This phase provided a historical colonization background that explored the roots of the literacy practices that completely disregarded Native Americans culture. Earlier higher educations for Indians emphasized that there were barriers (Financial and Academic) from the beginning of colonial higher education that are still a limitation to Native American educational success today. Traditional education that is fundamental to oral tradition has survived all of the atrocities of colonization, literacy practice, and federal policies that completely disregard the traditional tribal cultures. Native American students attribute success in higher education to traditional education that emphasizes cultural practice of smudging and praying that is important to their identity and heritage. Self-determination empowers Native Americans through the

exercising of their rights of citizenship to take ownership of certain government services. Tribal colleges provide access to higher education for the people by the people and also established the Indigenous knowledge system in academics on tribal land.

Next, Phase Three will provide details of Indigenous Research Methodology along with how colonization, literacy practice, federal policies, and boarding schools were the forces behind diminishing the culture that attempt to eradicate Native American knowledge system. It is these practices that colonized the mind of the younger generation that went through the trauma of government boarding schools. Indigenous Research Methodology creates a space for oral traditional stories so people can reconnect with their traditional cultural stories that have nearly been eradicated by the colonizers. Indigenous Research Methodology also provides a platform to decolonize the colonized minds through an Indigenous world lens. In Phase three, the Navajo Knowledge System will be explained using an Indigenous paradigm.

PHASE THREE

In Phase Three, the following topics will be covered in order. First, Indigenous research is not an alternative to western research, but an Indigenous (Native, Indians, and Tribal) way of doing research based on tribal ways of gaining information that tells us about the world. Second, the Indigenous Research Paradigm may be understood by way of four western research terminologies: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. Each of the four elements (ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology) will be included and summarized in the Indigenous Research Paradigm starting with ontology, and Indigenous Knowledge will be particularly explored as part of epistemology. Third, in Research as Ceremony, all the elements of the Indigenous Research Paradigm will be used to exemplify the Navajo way of gaining knowledge, thinking, and keeping balance in a world that is seen differently from the contemporary world of western society. It is important to note that Navajos and other Indigenous (Tribes, Nation, Native, and Aboriginal) people do not separate themselves from the natural world. Their universe is circular and everything is interconnected. The Indigenous Research Methodology is in line with decolonizing Western academics by responding to the guiding question, what ways can Indigenous Knowledge and the Navajo knowledge system be useful and valuable in academics, particularly regarding the academic culture at the college/university level.

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

Indigenous research is based on Indigenous ways of thinking and fits within the

traditional cultural universe. Indigenous scholars and graduate students are taking on the responsibility to preserve ancestral tribal knowledge, stories, ceremonies, and philosophies in academia. Kovach (2009) stated, “Indigenous researchers are finding ways to apply their own tribal epistemology into their research work” (p. 25). This dissertation uses approaches that differ from the conventional research process and which provide a richer understanding of Indigenous research and further, explains how knowledge systems of particular tribes and the Navajo knowledge system originated from ancestral traditional cultural teachings. An Indigenous Research process will provide an understanding of Indigenous and the Navajo knowledge system that can be used to answer the question in what ways can Indigenous knowledge and the Navajo knowledge system be useful to assist Native American students and others with academics?

Indigenous research can benefit the people and community for future generations in preserving and strengthening their tribal identity, knowledge, stories, and sense of place. “Indigenous graduate students are in a unique position to utilize cultural knowledge in the academy to create a platform for future graduate students” (Venable et al., 2016, p. 8). Indigenous researchers and graduate students have a responsibility to assist communities in the preservation of tribal customs by documenting them for future generations. This dissertation is striving to ensure that Diné stories (Creation Story) and ways of traditional teaching of cultural elements about the four directions, life cycle of learning (thinking, planning, bring it to life, and putting it into practice) are a part of higher education research process. At the same time, researchers need to be cognizant of tribal customs and protocol in Indigenous communities regarding protocol and research. For example, one way of validating respect toward a community protocol is offering tobacco to the tribal elder or the

knowledge keeper (the individual who knows tribal knowledge). The protocol of offering tobacco is a symbolic agreement between the individual and the community that certain tribal customs maybe revealed to the public. I have not shared a thing that is not for outsiders. Certain cultural knowledge, customs, and practice that I did share are necessary information that I learned growing up, or my parents told me. I have undergone a consistent internal and spiritual battle about what I can share and not share.

This dissertation will describe the Indigenous Research Methodology to obtain information about the Indigenous knowledge system that focuses on tribal knowledge, ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. This dissertation is introducing and validating Indigenous Research Methodology, because most Western academics do not recognize or incorporate such important knowledge and ways of thinking. The boarding school system and earlier education system that was forced upon Native American people attempted to eradicate the Indigenous Knowledge system, and certainly omitted it from the academic process. Indigenous Research and this dissertation is making a point to implement Indigenous Research Methodology at the higher education level of research projects. The significance of the study is to utilize a method of research that gets to the root of tribal knowledge (creation story and storytelling) that can be integrated into the research process, benefit in the retention of Native American students in higher education, and can lead to resolving some historical and generational trauma.

Further, the impact of such historical trauma was heightened by assimilation policies that largely guided Western education, and strived to destroy the cultural, spiritual, and community traditions that previously rendered Native people more resilient to traumatic events. Countering assimilation by reaffirming traditional culture begins to address and heal

historical trauma. This dissertation is making a point that Diné language is important by naming certain geographic locations and specific names in the creation stories, Navajo culture still exists in the contemporary world, and our ways are still important. Further, they provide strength and guidance for Native American students to persist in higher education. Diné ways of thinking and seeing the universe are valuable knowledges that deserve to have a place in academics.

There are Tribal Review Boards that are in place to protect the tribal members and all tribal studies from any harm. These review boards are similar to Institutional Review Boards (IRB) that protect any unethical harm to students. In 1996, The Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board (NNHRRB) establish an independent Tribal IRB that exercises the right to regulate, monitor and control all research within the Navajo Nation boundaries (Becenti-Pigman, 2005). Indigenous Research recognizes the need and necessary for Tribal IRB to protect tribal customs and tribal members.

Indigenous Research Paradigm

Shawn Wilson's (Cree) Indigenous Research Paradigm will be used to shape this research and establish a guideline in providing the fundamental principles of the Navajo Knowledge system. Wilson (2001) stated, a "research paradigm is a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that go together to guide your actions as to how you're going to go about doing your research" (p. 175). This dissertation utilizes the Navajo belief system that was introduced in Phase One regarding the creation story about how the animals, First Man, and First Woman, traveled through different worlds, and how the *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* principle was given by the Holy People for the Diné to live by. This creation story is utilized as a guide for the dissertation. The creation story puts the

dissertation in the Navajo universe and is also a natural process that established the Navajo Circular Model (Figure 2) that is the basis for this dissertation's structure. The Diné Creation Story is at the center of our way of knowing about the world, and therefore, how I continue to gain knowledge about the world.

Wilson argued for the fundamental belief “that knowledge is relational” in the Indigenous paradigm (p. 176). Knowledge is not only for humans, but is also shared with all beings such as animals, plants, and the environment. The Diné belief system on knowledge, learning, and living are sacred and interwoven into the relationship with the universe (Benally, 1994). These relationships are sacred with other beings (animals, plants, air, natural environment, and land), because the Diné belief system honors, acknowledges, and respects that humans are not the only beings with great knowledge in the universe. Benally's statement describes how Navajo people see a paradigm in ways of connections. The essential element in the Navajo belief system establishes these universal connections between humans and other beings. It is these relationships that help one to understand Navajo beliefs, and it can only be understood when this context is present. This dissertation provides a current Navajo graduate student's experiences in higher education through the sharing of traditional stories that have been passed down through countless generations.

In Navajo and other Indigenous cultures, a proper way to build a relationship within a community is to identify yourself by saying your name, clan, and origin or sense of place. This is a way of connecting one's identity in relation to the community and universe of all beings, which is a fundamental protocol that is considered mandatory. I will reintroduce myself using an example of a Navajo proper introduction. English letters are used to assist with the pronunciation of words,

Yá'át'ééh (It is good; welcome; hello)! *Shik'éeí dóó shidine'é* (my relatives and my people, friends). *Shi'éeí* Frank Sage *yinishyé* (I am called Frank Sage). *Tódich'í'ni nishlǫ́* (I am Bitter Water clan), *Bit'ahnii bashishchiin* (born for Folded Arms People), *Dzil tl'ahnii dashicheii* (maternal grandfather clan is Mountain Cove Clan), and *'Áshijhi dashinali* (paternal grandfather clan is Salt People). *Ákót'éego diné nishlǫ́* (In this way, I am a Navajo male).

The four clans identify by who they are as a Navajo person and also make themselves known to the Holy People. The clans identify one's relatives outside their immediate family circle. The Navajo Clan System is an example of knowledge being relational; if you do not know your clan then how are you going to know who your relatives are? Family and family ties are maintained, valued, and recognized far more so in Indigenous cultures than in non-Native American society.

Indigenous Research involved conducting research from the perspective of one's original place. There are scholars who perceived Indigenous Research as postcolonial due to the omission of it throughout the colonization of Indigenous people around the world. Primarily Indigenous scholars are introducing indigenous Research into Western academics. Globally, Indigenous people experienced colonization in different forms and at different times throughout history.

Bagele Chilisa (2012), born in the country of Botswana in Southern Africa, describes the Indigenous Research Paradigm as a postcolonial Indigenous research paradigm that is, “a framework of belief systems that emanate from the lived experiences, values, and history of those belittled and marginalized by the Euro-Western research paradigms” (p. 19). Lived experiences are imperative to this dissertation that focuses on Navajo traditional teachings as

the fundamental initial education that has been used to gain Navajo traditional knowledge and in helping understand how the Navajo world works. The Navajo Circular Model is established based on this lived experience. The new wave of Indigenous researchers is challenging the Western paradigm in recreating a paradigm that fits tribal ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. This dissertation described in Phase One that a tribal paradigm can be integrated into higher education research. Phase Three asks the question: in what ways can Indigenous knowledge and the Navajo knowledge system be useful and utilized in higher education academic research?

The Indigenous paradigm utilizes four entities consisting of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. These entities are terms used by the Western paradigm and share a commonality that knowledge is based upon an individual (Wilson, 2008). The Indigenous paradigm uses the same terms, but knowledge is based upon a universal relationship (Wilson, 2008). The paradigm is circular in that these entities are blended and inseparable (Wilson, 2008). What Wilson is referring to is that the Indigenous Paradigm is in a circular format such that ontology is connected to epistemology and methodology and axiology and back to ontology. It is like a dream catcher or a spider web in that there is a connection between each part. Another way of understanding this connection in a circular way is a vehicle wheel. The wheel is made up of a hard rubber, a metal rim, a valve to keep the air in the wheel, and air to keep the wheel inflated. Everything in a wheel has some significant role and it cannot be separated. If it is separated, then one will end up with a flat, useless wheel. The whole tire helps the vehicle move to a specific destination with the guidance of a driver. In the following sections of this dissertation, each of the entities will be introduced and discussed to provide greater understanding. Phase Three will conclude with

the section “Research as Ceremony” which is an example of a specific tribal paradigm of the Navajo way of knowing.

Ontology

The first step in the Indigenous Research Paradigm is ontology. The dissertation will explain and describe the different elements that make up the Indigenous Paradigm as a guide for a better understanding of Indigenous way of thinking. This dissertation is being presented as a way to decolonize the mind from the academic paradigm and the standard research processes that have been practiced. The education system that was mentioned in Phase Two has colonized the mind of Indigenous people through colonization, literacy practice, and boarding schools. Decolonization of the mind involves unlearning colonized knowledge and relearning, reclaiming, and utilizing valuable Indigenous knowledge.

In Wilson’s (2008) words, “ontology is the theory of the nature of existence, or the nature of reality” (p. 33). The Indigenous perspective of the earth (Mother Earth) is seen as a form of life with *interdependent* various components (animals, plants, and humans) and it provides for balance and survival (Cordova, 2007). Indigenous ontology (the theory of the nature of existence/reality) supports that the nature of existence/reality is relational and interdependent. Western people know that earth is real and it exists, because people walk, run, and build things on it. The details were learned/provided on what earth is, what it looks like, and what it does.

Wilson (2008) illustrated Indigenous ontology as the reality of a relationship one has with the truth. Instead of the truth being external or out there like an object, it is the idea of a relationship to it (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous ontology pertains to building a relationship with reality (tribal knowledge system) and it is this relationship based upon Indigenous

knowledge that makes it a reality. Individuals can acquire knowledge to gain information, but it does not become true knowledge until the true relationship is formed.

In the Indigenous world, earth is referred to as *Mother Earth*, because it is the earth that provides us with water, air, and food. It is real to Indigenous people because water is visible and there to provide our human body with liquid hydration. The mountains and hills are real, because we live on those surfaces. Plants are real because we as Indigenous people use them for food and medicine to help us heal. The mountains and water as parts of our bodies, as living entities, that connect and provide spirituality, language, and identity. The physical bodies are made of physical earth that our languages, spiritual ways, stories and ALL of it come from and are part of the earth the same way. It is this way that *Mother Earth* is ontology, which is an assumption about relationships as part of existence. It is this way that *Mother Earth* is ontologically real. *Mother Earth* is a natural world for Indigenous people, one that provides spirituality, language, and identity.

It is this shared spiritual experience between humans and Mother Earth (land) that defines the fundamental basis of cultural identity (tribes). Indigenous people communicate to the land and the natural world through prayer during ceremonies in communicating with the Holy People through natural world. The traditional languages of Indigenous tribes are important to the heritage of traditional ceremonies. The languages preserve the ceremonial songs and prayers that are offered to the land (*Keyah*) and the Holy People (Navajo Gods). In the Navajo creation story, humans are made from earth by the Holy People and the wind gave them life (Sage, 2012, p. 18).

For Navajo people, it is real to have a unique relationship with the natural world that nourishes them and provides them spirituality, language, and identity. To maintain a balance between *Mother Earth* and Navajos, certain ceremonies have to be practiced and songs sung in the language gifted to them by the Holy People.

Chilisa (2012) further described relational ontology this way: “the social reality that is investigated can be understood in relation to the connections that human beings have with the living and the nonliving” (p. 20). Those connections are with land, plants, animals, and other beings (Chilisa, 2012). For example, visualize a tree. The roots of a tree hold the soil in place from erosion; while in reverse, the soil provides natural nutrients such as water and many organic elements for growth. A tree also provides shade and shelter for flying beings. Humans and breathing beings get air (oxygen) from a tree and our responsibility is to take care of trees from threats such as deforestation. When a tree is cut down, it does not provide natural resources.

Indigenous ontology is a relationship about a belief or way of knowing in terms of reality. It is not asking the question, what is real? Instead, the belief is based on relationships between living and nonliving regarding reality. Next, the dissertation will explain epistemology, how we gain knowledge about what is true and real.

Epistemology

The second step in the Indigenous Paradigm is epistemology. Indigenous scholars perceive epistemology in different ways that are relevant to their Indigenous culture. Epistemology inquires into the nature of knowledge and truth (Chilisa, 2012, p. 21). The ultimate rationale of Indigenous philosophy is, “one seeks knowledge, because one is prepared to use it” (Garrouette, 2003, p. 114). The web of tribal knowledge is accessed by

strict adherence to protocols, has agency, is useful and practical, is appropriate for the community, requires protection, can preserve (ancestral knowledge) and can also create relevant modern knowledge. Knowledge emerged with tribal creation into the universe. Today, that knowledge is considered sacred ancestral knowledge that exists within certain practices such as ceremonies, storytelling, and languages. The people (humans) do not seek knowledge; it comes to them through a dream, vision, other natural occurrence, or sharing. Once the knowledge is acquired and shared within the community, each community member has the responsibility of preserving traditional knowledge through various tribal resources that will transcend individual lifetimes to the next generations. This dissertation documents the Indigenous knowledge system as an alternative approach to thinking and knowing, one that has been absent from academic discourse and omitted from Western education at every level. Contemporary Indigenous scholars and Indigenous graduate students argue that traditional tribal knowledge guides tribal people in ways of knowing. The practice of responsibility and preservation of knowledge is learned through teaching about communal, natural ways of knowing. It is from this standpoint that Indigenous knowledge and the Navajo knowledge system can be practical in academics.

Lambert (2014) stated, "epistemology is knowledge" (p. 61). The Navajo creation story involves the journey through worlds, creation of humans, and how they acquired knowledge that is highly valuable in the four sacred mountains. After the first frost of each year, Navajos and other tribes use the animal, Coyote, as means to share knowledge within the community. The Coyote is inquisitive, because he wonders about things and how they (things) really work. Too often, Coyote forgets his place in the world, his relation to place, and he tests social order that helps to keep us grounded to our earthly fundamental values as

Navajo people. In the contemporary world, Coyote reminds us (Indigenous scholars, graduate students, and community members) that the Navajo knowledge system does have a space in academics.

The questions we ask in our research process are like the Coyote's questions. It is the questions that guide us, as researchers on a journey, that lead us to understand and experience the process that shapes our knowledge to acquire what we are seeking or comes to us in our dreams.

Coyote's behavior often provides examples of how not to go about doing things or act toward one another. Our relationship to our environment, animals, and relatives must always be respectful. For adults, it is a good reminder about how the universe is interconnected and the importance of maintaining formal social order within our tribal system and universe. For children, it is a way to help guide them through the life cycle and to appreciate values that have been passed down from generation to generation. Indigenous Knowledge systems that are rooted in our ways of thinking and knowing are explored in Phase Three.

For example, many of the important things I learned came from listening to stories from my parents and relatives. My parents used to say, "Listen and learn something and then apply it to your own thinking." At a young age, I learned the art of observation and discipline by being quiet and not moving until the adults were done talking. Thinking about how the world works at a young age led to more questions than answers, but listening and learning are traditional education. The issues adults talked about were how we're related to land, livestock, ceremonies, and how to best preserve the family legacy of the medicine bundle.

Native philosophy concerns itself with lived knowledge that is experienced through various journeys in the universe. Knowledge is not gained through conventional Western approaches. Native philosophy is primarily rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing that are acquired by making connections while walking in beauty to understand the knowledge. The Navajo words “walking in beauty” means to walk in harmony while being cognizant of your environment. Land, animals, air, planets, and spirituality are part of this walk and it is through these different elements that people experience living knowledge in the universe. As Kovach (2012) described, “epistemology means a system of knowledge that references within it the social relations of knowledge production” (p. 21) and “challenges the very core of knowledge production and purpose” (p. 29).

Indigenous cultures recognize that we are like an ear of corn, because we are part of the whole corn from the roots, stalk, corn silk, cornhusk, leaf, and tassel. Corn would not grow without the seed being planted and the soil cultivated. In the Navajo culture, traditional people pray with corn pollen that comes from the tassel. Before any prayer, corn pollen is placed on top of the head to signify to the Holy People that you are Dine’ (Navajo). It is then sprinkled onto the ground in a forward motion to make a path for the person into the world. The corn pollen is also a reminder that Navajos are part of the earth. We as “ears of corn” is a perspective that speaks about people being part of the environment.

Albert Marshall, Mi’kmaq an elder, expressed, “knowledge is not a tool, but rather it is a spirit. It transforms the holder, it also reminds us that we have responsibilities to the spirit of that knowledge” (Lambert, 2009, p. 67). Indigenous knowledge is not separated into different categories or themes to draw conclusions or findings like the conventional processing of data. For example, the Navajo’s four sacred mountains are located according

to the Navajo traditional sense of direction. It is within these mountains that Navajo's host individual ceremonial songs, healing herbs. The cycle of life and belief that are all connected to maintain that spiritual balance for the Navajo are part of the four sacred mountains. In a Blessing Way Ceremony, there is a section in the prayer that states, "In beauty I walk. With beauty before me, I walk. With beauty behind me, I walk. With beauty above me, I walk. With beauty around me, I walk. It has become beauty again. It has become beauty again. It has become beauty again."

This prayer is getting the individual back in balance with the universe and all beings including the land. Alvord (2000), the first Navajo woman surgeon, stated, "Navajo believe in hozho or hozhoni – 'Walking in Beauty' a worldview in which everything in life is connected and influences everything else (p. 14). She further said, "Navajos make every effort to live in harmony and balance with everyone and everything else" (p. 14). Instead, the data (acquired through various knowledge systems) are the synthesis of the lived knowledge shaped through the experienced journey. All of the data are useful when trying to understand what is really going on in Indigenous communities. Each individual piece of data formulates this sphere of general knowledge that has been collected. This sphere is not seen as a slice of pie, but more as a connection or a huge web that continues to evolve into other spheres. Once the researcher finds what he or she is looking for, the process does not stop when an answer is revealed. In the following paragraph, Coyote represents a researcher to describing how he goes about the process of researching, collecting data, and finding knowledge that he is seeking on his journey.

All of the data would resemble a picture of Coyote in the distance wandering across the high desert of the Southwest mesas. He would appear small compared to the large mesas

surrounding his presence. The sky would overlook the rest of the universe within the four sacred mountains of the Navajo universe and desert sage brush would be in his way of walking a straight path. Coyote, the philosopher and researcher, would be guided by his question, “How do I fit into this world?” In his mind, he is confident that by the end of the day he will find his answer. He is surrounded by all of his answers, but he has not realized that if he acts and respects other animals’ ways of life, he can find his answer by just observing and being patient. As we all know, Coyote’s patience is limited and it will only lead him into misbehaving. His nose is always low to the ground sniffing for clues. Other animals, looking out for their territory, always spot him. He is a willing participant but is always warned that certain rituals are not meant for him. He tries anyway to get this rich data to paint the picture of Indigenous research. At times, he does wander into things that benefit all beings. He is persistent in gathering his data through his many activities and the way he goes about doing it. Not only is he being careless, but he is also testing certain cultural boundaries or social phenomena. Most of all, Coyote is making connections with data from the Indigenous knowledge that is all around him.

Indigenous Knowledge. What is Indigenous Knowledge? Louise Greiner (1998) alluded to the idea that Indigenous Knowledge applies to the “unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men Indigenous to a particular geographic area” (p. 6). Navajos have a knowledge system that connects them to wind, corn, animals, and eagles that established their relationship to the land. This local knowledge forms a spiritual relationship with *sense of place* in the universe. The following story is an example of traditional Navajo Knowledge. It is part of the creation story in how Navajo man and woman come to existence. The story is oral history that has

been written down for non-Navajos and for Navajos to get a sense of what Indigenous Knowledge is.

On the 12th day, the *Haashch'eed dine'e* (Holy People) returned with buckskins, two ears of corn (yellow and white), and two eagle feathers (white and yellow). They laid the buckskin on the ground and faced the head towards the east and the tail towards the west. The white corn was laid on a white eagle feather, the yellow corn was laid on a yellow eagle feather, and the buckskin was folded over it from the tail end. The east wind blew into the buckskin to provide air (give life) and when the buckskin was uncovered there appeared two humans, one male and one female. They were given the names *Altse hastin* (First Man) and *Altse asdzaa* (First Woman) (Navajo Oral History Story).

The story above will not be used or seen in modern textbooks or history classes because only certain knowledge is valuable in the Western context. If Navajo people know their history of the creation story, where they heard it, and connect it to themselves as a human being, that is a spiritual connection to place. Also if a Navajo hears a Creation Story for the first time and wants to learn more about it, it then gives that Navajo a spiritual connection to place. That is the initial step in decolonizing the mind with Navajo Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge. Decolonizing the mind is unlearning what has been taught by the Western education system about Indigenous culture and relearning the tribal culture in regards to creation stories and tribal knowledge. Literacy practices and government boarding schools tried to kill the culture of Indigenous people by omitting it from the education process, which impacted generations of Indigenous people and knowledge.

The essential process in decolonizing the mind is gaining insight into the principles that pertain to specific teaching guides from tribal knowledge. This dissertation provides certain Navajo principles to help provide insight into the Navajo universe. It was in the fifth world that the *Haashch'eeh dine'e* (Holy People), *Altse hastin* (First Man), and *Altse asdzaa* (First Woman) created the Navajo universe and the original instruction that all beings live accordingly to specific principles of *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon*. This perspective places the Navajo universe in the center of the way of knowing about the world. It also serves as a natural process of learning the established *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* elements in regard to the four sacred mountains, directions, and all symbolic elements. The use of the Navajo Knowledge System in the dissertation is a way of decolonizing, through the use of ancestral knowledge and implementing the Navajo Circular Model, that brings *Haashch'eeh dine'e*, *Altse hastin*, and *Altse asdzaa* into contemporary research. The Navajo way of thinking, in regards to knowledge system, is a form of decolonization of the mind in contemporary Navajo researchers and higher education students. The Navajo Circular Model discussed in this dissertation is a representation of decolonizing the mind from the traditional and modern Western way of thinking about research, and the process of gaining knowledge.

Indigenous Knowledge is a global term used to describe the origin and values of the original people of a particular land. Tribal Knowledge is referred to in general terms to describe cultural aspects and beliefs from over 500 tribes in United States of America. Traditional Knowledge is referred to that knowledge that can only be used in ceremonies, and traditional is a term used to describe the people that live the old way (without modernization of running water, electricity, and western influence). Traditional Knowledge is a respectful representation of a worldview consisting of a balance among the freedom of

cultures, languages, and social lived experiences of Indigenous people that perceive all elements of nature are connected (Brayboy et al., 2012). A hogan is a form of traditional shelter for Navajo people. It has symbolic meaning that was given to the people from *Haashch'eeh dine'e* during the creation of the Navajo universe. The initial building begins with the main pole being placed on the east side, the second pole to the south, the third pole to the west, and the fourth pole to the north. A hogan is also a place for ceremonies to be held, in particular, the *Blessing Way* and *Place of Harmony*. A hogan is symbolic of *sense of place*. For example, after a new birth, the umbilical cord that linked the baby and mother for nine months is buried on the east side of the Hogan once the cord stump is dried and falls off the baby, to establish *sense of place*. This is a cultural practice that builds a relationship between the earth and humans. The burial of the umbilical cord is a lived experience in regard to freedom to practice our own cultures. This dissertation honors the process of research, just like the hogan honors all the ceremonies it hosts, so people can be balanced with the universe and tied to a *sense of place*.

Our knowledge or our ways of knowing are consolidated through people exercising their connection to the land (Martin & Thunder, 2013) and at the core is the Indigenous way of knowing that everything is interrelated (Wilson, 2008). Nature, a fundamental tribal teacher and guide, helps people to learn the web of local knowledge that has been shared through generations. In this dissertation, the Navajo Circular Model demonstrates the various elements of teaching and learning that extend from the four sacred mountains with each direction and each mountain symbolize a specific way of thinking. Indigenous and Navajo Knowledge were nearly abolished by the knowledge paradigm of Western culture,

but it did not completely vanish, because *sense of place* to landmarks preserved the ancestral knowledge.

Indigenous Research Methodology

The third step in the Indigenous Paradigm is Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM). This methodology explains how we gain knowledge, epistemologically, in the Indigenous Knowledge System.

It is drawn from Indigenous or tribal paradigms that encompass ontology (nature of reality), epistemology (nature of thinking or thought), methodology (how knowledge is gained), and axiology (ethics and morals) that guide the research process (Wilson, 2008). It is from this *place* that is the host of traditional teaching, learning, and cultural education elements, that our Indigenous Research Methods come. The honoring of ancestors through oral histories based upon their specific tribes maintains validity of their stories in the contemporary world.

Learning from *place*, familiar geographical areas, helps Indigenous people and students to understand their identity in the context of who they are in the universe in which they exist. When oral history is included in a research project, it is important to start from the beginning with the oral traditional creation story or emerging stories. They provide a deeper understanding of why and how those places are sacred and are assigned specific symbols to help us (humans) to remember our stories. For example, the Navajo people have four sacred mountains that are geographically located around the reservation. The mountain located to the east is called *Sisnaajini* (Mt. Taylor, NM), because it symbolizes the birth of all beings and *Nitsahakees* (thinking of learning principles), the protector animal is a bear, and dawn is the beginning of the day. In a clockwise fashion, the mountains located in the

following directions are as follows: south is *Tsoodzil*, west is *Dook'o'oosliid*, and north is *Dibe Ntsaa*.

Wilson talked about Indigenous people having relationships with our environment as an extension of gaining knowledge with other beings and rendering it shared knowledge.

An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation. It is not just interpersonal relationship, not just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge (Wilson, 2008, pp. 176-177).

A unique relationship among a story as place, as relationships, and as methodology, that stresses concepts of how knowledge is organized culturally (ontology, axiology, and epistemologically) is not inconsistent with an understanding of how we can come to understand knowledge from our traditional, cultural viewpoints (methodology). It is from this *place* that the author finds passion in his story to share it with the rest of the community of Indigenous Nations and beyond.

A story within research can benefit those students that are having a hard time finding their place and/or maintaining their tribal identity. In the educational system, it is getting more difficult for any cultural elements or Indigenous languages to be included in public school curriculum because of federal policies that are driven by standardized testing and a political agenda. This kind of federal education system and omission drives a lot of Indigenous youth away from their identity, culture, and language, and places them at a

disadvantage when it comes to needed scores for college entrance. For example, how would a non-Native American Student respond to “what is the purpose of a sweat?” or “what is the spiritual significance of the four directions?” They are less resilient to historical and contemporary trauma. If students see more Indigenous books, articles, and teachers (professors) in the school system, it may lead them to know more about themselves. In the same process, students will be able to gain self-empowerment, connections to, and pride for education.

The education system is dominated by Western knowledge and research process. IRM challenges the Western way of thinking and producing knowledge by examining Indigenous people and their way of life through the lens of oral history and *place*. Lambert (2014) states, IRM “are an alternative way of thinking about the research process and they are different from the Western approach since they flow from tribal knowledge... involves tribal epistemology, meaning that information is gained through a relationship with Indigenous people in a specific community” (p.2). It is the Indigenous epistemology that builds relationships between the researcher and research, community, and place. Traditional stories provide in-depth data that reveal certain phenomenon that cannot be explained through the lens of other research processes. The umbilical cord stump that is buried by a hogan is a connection to *place*, a link to the Navajo culture, and a traditional way to maintain a passion for learning. In this way, IRM’s connect the student to the research.

In higher education, Indigenous graduate students often find it challenging to implement a part of their cultural identity into a thesis or dissertation (Venable et al., 2016). Kovach (2012) mentioned the value of having a support system of non-Indigenous faculty members who understand the importance of the Indigenous Knowledge System. We

(Indigenous graduate students) cannot forget to share IRM with non-Indigenous faculty. IRM involves building relationships with our academic programs and our committee members by sharing experiences of where we (Indigenous) come from and how we navigate in the modern world while using Two Eyes Seeing (using Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspective to research) (Marshall, 2004). This dissertation calls it walking in two worlds (Navajo and Western) to maintain balance with academics that implements every part of my Navajo culture into this dissertation.

IRM provides a space for Indigenous researchers and people to gain power and control over their own culture. Chilisa (2012) calls it decolonizing methodologies and the “techniques include a process of decolonizing the conventional interview technique, using Indigenous interview methods such as talking circles and invoking Indigenous knowledge to inform alternative research methods compatible with the worldviews of the colonized” (p. 23). The resistance came through waves of rewriting our (Indigenous) own ways of doing research that we had always done prior to Euro-Westerners. Giving voices to the elders and knowledge keepers in academics, establishing ownership of our stories that have survived colonialization, and reconnecting to our sense of being who we are as Indigenous people are examples of decolonizing methods.

IRM honors the ancestry knowledge to provide a space in our academic research. We (Indigenous researchers) can live out their dreams and establish an alternative approach to research that reconstructs the practice of research processes from the colonizers with the ancestral knowledge system. “Indigenous ways of thinking, understanding and approaching knowledge have long been dismissed by the academic world because they have been considered not to belong to any existing theory” (Cook-Lynn, 1997, p. 21). We express and

practice our self-determination about how we (Indigenous people) want to authorize and institute our way of conducting research with rational accountability, respectful representation, reciprocal appropriation, and rights and regulations. Decolonizing methodology research also incorporates social justice for the people and the community we (Indigenous researchers and graduate students) associate with while conducting research. It provides a voice for our research and produces a voice for the people in the community who can benefit from our findings. This dissertation utilizes the IRM approach regarding a Navajo graduate student's experiences in higher education.

Kovach (2012) stated, IRMs “are guided by tribal epistemologies, and tribal knowledge is not Western knowledge... Indigenous methodologies and qualitative research at best form an insider/outsider relationship... the tension of the insider/outsider dynamic will persist until Indigenous research frameworks have methodological space within academic research dialogue, policy, and practice” (p. 30-31). Indigenous people of this world have always existed alongside living and nonliving beings. Euro-Westerners did not only colonize the Indigenous people by changing their way of life, but they also colonized their mind through research paradigm. Colonization extremely affected Indigenous people through the loss of land (territories), political processes, economics, and social systems, to name a few. The fundamental knowledge system, beliefs, and behaviors of Indigenous people were nearly abolished by scientific colonialism (Chilisa, 2012). It is this machine, colonization, that nearly exterminated the Indigenous knowledge system and placed value only in the Euro-Western knowledge and research process. The colonized outsider endured until the reality of the Indigenous awakening materialized into Indigenous scholars which sparked a resistance to scientific colonialism.

Axiology

The fourth step in Indigenous Paradigm is axiology. Once Indigenous knowledge is acquired and a relationship is built between the researcher and research (as a process), researcher and researched (the thing being learned about), and researcher and knowledge (what is learned), what kinds of ethical conduct guidelines are needed by the researcher to maintain accountability? Knowing and understanding the significant traditional protocols in acquiring Indigenous knowledge will help the researcher. For example, tobacco was used to initiate the journey into the ancestral world of spiritual beings and this means there is extreme responsibility to protect that relationship. The offering of tobacco builds relationships with people and acknowledges trust. This dissertation honors and takes responsibility in assuring that the knowledge shared is authentic according to Navajo original instructions.

My mother used to say to me, "why you asking about those? What you going to do with it?" My questions were about certain cultural practices or presented to acquire other general knowledge. Her obligation to protect ceremonial or ways of thinking often led me to ask my dad questions. His responses would be that "knowledge does not belong to you, because you are either too young or you have not had that ceremony yet." Wilson's (2008) statement, "What is it ethical to do in order to gain this knowledge, and what will this knowledge be used for?" (p. 34), resonates with and supports my parents' responses to me. When I got more mature, I was rewarded with responses to my questions. My parents, during those times, were turning to their Navajo ethics and protocols to protect the Navajo knowledge system and me.

Axiology refers to ethics and a value system within the philosophy (Chilisa, 2012).

Indigenous knowledge is a web of multiple pieces that are connected to make up the tribal universe. Within the Navajo universe, this dissertation seeks knowledge in a respectful way by sharing generations of traditional knowledge, just as the knowledge is needed and ready to be used in higher education. Given the understanding of accountability safeguards, all of the elements of this dissertation are contributions to higher education, Indigenous communities, and mostly for the benefit of the ensuing (younger) Navajo generations.

A choice about right or wrong behavior involves ethics that established accountability in safeguarding the data relationship with cultural ways, ceremonies, and languages (Lambert, 2009). The confidence to use Navajo knowledge within this dissertation actually came from the fact that it is establishing foundations in sharing knowledge for Navajo and Indigenous students in higher education. It is done in participation with an online Indigenous graduate students' support group called Student Storytellers Indigenizing the Academy (SSITA), which helped identify the limitations and challenges to locating Indigenous research resources regarding tribal knowledge. This dissertation honors the ancestral knowledge of the Navajo Holy People, Dine' bizaad (Navajo language), and ceremonies by preserving basic teachings for future generations of researchers.

Research as Ceremony

When Indigenous scholars talk about ceremonies, they are coming from a perspective that is familiar to them in regards to one's pursuits and spiritually. Wilson (2008) stated,

For Indigenous people, research is ceremony. In our cultures an integral part of any ceremony is setting the stage properly. When ceremonies take place, everyone who is participating needs to be ready to step beyond the everyday and to accept a raised state of consciousness. You could say that the specific

rituals that make up the ceremony are designed to get the participants into a state of mind that will allow for the extraordinary to take place (p. 69).

Ceremony is a process for healing, but also a way of thinking and coming to know about ancestral knowledge. Wilson (2008) described research as a communal ceremony among Indigenous people where a web of relationships is interwoven with ontology (nature of reality), epistemology (nature of thinking or thought), methodology (how knowledge is gained), and axiology (worth of knowledge). Ceremonies have different meanings and experiences for people that participate. A research process is comprised of certain methods and ways of conducting research including picking the topic of research, literature, method, findings, and implications. In a Ceremony, certain protocol needs to be followed from gathering certain herbs or medicine for the ceremony, seeking a *hatáli* (singer) to do the ceremony, and establishing a place to host the ceremony. During the ceremony, the *hatáli* connects the participant to the Holy People and the consciousness of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology becomes a reality of the participants' experiences.

In the Navajo universe, four is a sacred number because of the four sacred mountains and four directions, which make this section Ceremonial, based upon the four entities of Indigenous paradigm. Research is Ceremony because in Navajo culture it is in a Ceremony that *hatáli* shares certain knowledge. I will describe the four entities that make up an Indigenous paradigm from the Navajo way of understanding these important concepts of research. Up to this point of the dissertation, the focus has been on background and preparation to experience the steps beyond the normal research process. The goal is to understand ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology from the Navajo way of knowing. This dissertation use Ceremony by traditional protocol by asking permission from

my family who are knowledge keepers. It is through the strong network of kinship and *hatáli* that I was granted authorization to talk about creation story and certain principles such as *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon*. The Navajo Circular Model is a visual diagram that represents my Ceremonial process with this dissertation. When I was sketching out the model before my original writing, I recalled a traditional ceremony call, *likaah* (they enter) often referred as sand painting by non-Navajos. In this Ceremony it brings the individual back to balance with the Navajo universe. This dissertation is a ceremony by sharing Navajo cultural creation story and the significance of the four sacred mountains. This dissertation is also a decolonization of the mind by understanding the Navajo view of the research process.

The Navajo ontology is a perspective that is the fundamental reality of a whole Navajo universe, not just a part of the universe. It is about maintaining a relationship with the whole natural world and how the individual fits into this universe. Within the natural world, the knowledge system connects the Navajo to the other beings (plants, animals, and land). The relationship with all beings within the universe is what constitutes ontology among Navajos. The Navajos live within the four sacred mountains that established their place to the land; *Sisnaajini* (Blanco Peak, Colorado), *Tsoodzil* (Mount Taylor, New Mexico), *Dook'o'oosliid* (San Francisco Peak, Arizona), and *Dibe Ntsaa* (Hesperus Peak, Colorado). The mountains are not there just as earthly objects, but are hosts, providers, and boundaries for sense of place in the Navajo tradition. The mountains are symbolic reminders to the Navajos that the traditional knowledge system does exist within this world. As long as the mountains are there, the language is breathing (language being maintained) and *hataalii* (Navajo Singer/healers) are singing the ceremonial songs. The relationship is built on spirituality and experiences with the natural world. The ways of knowing the universe within

the context of traditional Navajo, *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon*, embraces land, animals, plants, and spiritual ways. The knowledge that extends into the relationship with all elements of life in the Navajo universe is a specific tribal ontology.

This dissertation situated in Navajo ontology, combined with the creation story, provides the fundamental ways of knowing about the world and how knowledge is gained about Navajo traditional ways. The Navajo Circular Model provides healing of historical trauma through traditional teaching and learning. In the process of designing the model, some significant events were revisited in my academic training as graduate students are supposed to acquire knowledge from the Western research process. The Navajo traditional culture, language, thinking, and learning evolved as each circle was formed in the diagram. The reconnection to the Navajo Knowledge System initiated ceremonial healing with familiar songs that were sung and everything was done in a circular motion starting in the east.

This dissertation utilizes the Navajo knowledge system that the Holy People gifted to First Man and Woman along with *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon*. In the fifth world of the creation story the *Haashch'eeh dine'e* (Holy People) instructed *Altse hastin* (First Man) and *Altse asdzaa* (First Woman) to live according to the fundamental principles of *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon*. The principle “old age I follow in the path of beauty” is what every traditional Navajo aspires to achieve. Living a long life to reach *Sa* (old age) is a very respectable milestone to a traditional Navajo. This principle is included in the majority of ceremonial songs and it cannot be fully described to the public. It has male and female constructs like all living beings. More details will be provided later in this section. In honor of the Holy People, this dissertation respectfully implements the principles of *Sa'ah Naaghai*

Bik'eh Hozhoon. The principle is the source of knowledge that models the foundation of the Navajo way of knowing. It also provides a circular way of thinking, knowing, and learning that is metaphysical. The Navajo Circular Model is an example of how the Navajo way of thinking, learning, and teaching can impact scholars.

This dissertation approaches the Navajo epistemology as the knowledge that extends from the Holy People who instructed the First Man and Woman about *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon*. A Navajo Circular Model uses the knowledge system that pertains to Navajo traditional norms and social values guided by the four principles of *Nitsahakees*, *Nahat'ai*, *Ina*, and *Sihasin*. The Navajo axiology pertains to staying true to the *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* and being accountable to the Navajo traditional practice of walking in beauty in health, mentality, and spirituality. Being accountable about traditional knowledge is presented in a respectful way.

The Navajo paradigm is a fundamental belief in the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* literally meaning “past old age, the one that walks there in ultimate balance and harmony or on the balanced path” (House, 2005, p. 93). According to Herbert Benally (1994), the philosophy of *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* has male and female constructs within the phrase. *Sa'ah Naaghai* has the male characteristics of “indestructible and eternal being” and *Bik'eh Hozhoon* exhibits the female characteristic of “the director and cause of all that is good” (p. 24). Benally (1994) described the Navajo traditional belief that all Navajos have male (protective and aggressive) and female (nourishing and gentle) characteristics. For example, in the body of a male, the left side is a shield to protect and the right side is nourishing. For the female body, the left side is nourishing and right side protects. The Holy People ascribed these lateral characteristics for protection when a male

and female stand side by side and pray to the east. Their protective sides are on the outside and their nourishing sides are side by side.

It is the Navajo traditional living system that positions the Navajo within the natural world and universe (House, 2005). *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* is a framework that acknowledges the Navajo universe into a paradigm and is a natural process that established the Navajo knowledge system that encompasses mind, body (physical), mental (emotions), and space (human on earth). Balance within the knowledge system is essential to the health of an individual. There are four ways to keep the knowledge system in balance. First, the traditional belief is that the individual Navajo needs to properly develop the mind. This dissertation is part of a life-long journey that requires proper mind development (learning Creation story, participating and experiencing ceremonies, talking with traditional knowledge keepers) to share experiences in the education system. Second, skills for survival traditionally include physical body survival. The third skill is building relationships (knowing my clan and who are my relatives, revisiting people, places, and offering prayers) in a good way with people, animals, and the universe. The fourth is being cognizant of the environment and nature.

Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon has four principles of knowledge and learning that circulate with the four sacred mountains and directions. East is the beginning of the cycle of life within the Navajo universe. The sacred White Shell Mountain, *Sisnaajini* (Blanco Peak, Colorado) is located on the east side of the Navajo land. The east represents birth of all beings. The knowledge of thinking, *Nitsahakees*, is one of the principles in *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* Navajo Paradigm. The life of this dissertation originated in the east when I was thinking about how the experiences of earlier education influenced my journey into

higher education. A specific recollection involved the morning after my mom returned back to earth (buried), the air was crispy and cool with November weather covered in fog at an altitude over 9,000 feet. I had just passed Blanco Peak, Colorado, the sacred mountain in the east for the Navajo people, and was entering into the summit of La Veta Pass. It was at this moment that I realized that with my mother passing into the spirit world and all she knew about our way of life, as traditional Dine' (Navajo), had also passed on. How can we, as family, preserve and maintain all the knowledge that extended from her? At that moment, I came to the realization that I needed to do something and the process of this dissertation came into focus. This was a calling that cannot be turned down or revisited later in life.

South is the second element of the Navajo cycle of life. Sacred Blue Bead or Turquoise Mountain, *Tsoodzil* (Mount Taylor, NM) is in the south. *Nahat'ai*, the principle of planning, implementing, providing meaning for implementation, and carrying out the plan is associated with the south. The phrase, *Taani anit'eego*, meaning it is up to you, is the guiding principle that assists with the implementation of planning one's life. The dissertation process involved planning, identifying committee members, selecting a methodology and method, and designing the Navajo Circular Model. *Nahat'ai* also involves talking or conversing with people. During this process, the model utilized in this dissertation came into my thinking and vision about how the Navajo universe is all about relationships to different beings. This orbit of circles is comprised of elements (living and nonliving) that bounce off of each other in a circular motion. Indigenous methodology is different from conventional methodology in the sense that the researcher is part of the research. It is also Navajo tradition that nothing is separate from living and non-living beings.

West is the third element of the Navajo cycle of life. Sacred Abalone Shell Mountain, *Dook'oo'osliid* (San Francisco Peak, AZ) is on the west side of the Navajo land. *Iina* is the principle of bringing to life, providing sustenance, realizing and making visible the outcome of thought and planning emerged from the south. The dissertation evolved into life by placing the planning into action. *Iina* is life and part of life is Navajo knowledge, ceremony, and language. Traditional Navajos have a fundamental belief that everything in the universe provides some form of life and the honoring interdependence among elements in life is what constitutes "walking in beauty." *Hozho* is beauty and harmony that is a holistic view of spirituality, physical, and mental that helps with the progression of life.

North is the fourth element of the Navajo cycle of life. Sacred Obsidian Mountain, *Dibe Ntsaa* (Hesperus Peak or La Plata Mountain, CO) is on the north side of the Navajo land. *Sihasin* is the principle to make strong and stable, to secure, to develop confidence, and to have a clear path in regards to the life cycle. The dissertation process of thinking, planning, and evolving into life is brought together by the fourth element. The Navajo Circular Model has implemented the fourth (north) circle of the planning and learning process. It is also in the geographic north direction of the Navajo Nation that the writing of this dissertation takes place. I live off of the reservation, but it is the ancestral knowledge that keeps me connected to the natural world of the Navajo way of knowing. The circle of learning does not end once it reaches north, but academically continues onto the next cycle of life. This dissertation will not end once the requirement is achieved but will evolve into a new life outside of and beyond the dissertation.

The methodology of gaining knowledge through the Navajo *Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoon* provides the belief system of the Navajo knowledge that has been practiced for

generations. The methodology is in line with decolonizing Western academia by responding to the guiding question, what ways can the Indigenous Knowledge and the Navajo Knowledge Systems be useful and seen as valuable in academics? This dissertation gets to the heart of Indigenous Knowledge by using Navajo tribal customs that are significant to place, space, and environment.

Conclusion

This phase used the guiding question, what ways can Indigenous Knowledge and the Navajo Knowledge System be useful in autoethnography doctoral research? Conducting Indigenous research utilizes an approach that differs from the conventional research process in the sense that it focuses on Indigenous ways of thinking within traditional culture. The Indigenous Research Paradigm has four entities (ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology) that were described in separate sections to provide an understanding of what they mean from the Indigenous way of thinking. The Indigenous Research Paradigm is an interconnection to the natural world of the Indigenous universe. The Indigenous Knowledge System is ancestral tribal knowledge that represents a worldview of relationships to the natural world of living and non-living beings. The IRM draws from the Indigenous Research Paradigm and Indigenous Knowledge System to guide the Indigenous research process. Research as Ceremony is an example of a specific tribal way of thinking, learning, and how knowledge is interconnected to people and place.

In the next phase, Autoethnography, the study of self and the story of the Navajo author's life experiences with formal and informal education that preceded this dissertation will be discussed. This will differ from Western research in that I am interconnected or a part of this dissertation. This perspective requires some content to be presented from my

personal, actual views and experiences. In other words, traditional qualitative Western dissertations do typically use words such as, “I” or “my” (experiences), and quantitative research does not; however the Navajo Circular Model based on the Navajo Knowledge System requires the inclusion and interconnection of the author.

PHASE FOUR

This dissertation started off the with Navajo Creation Story that connects storytelling with the process of how each being (insects, different animals, and humans) traveled through each of the four worlds to get to the current fifth world. It is the Holy People that created First Woman and First Man out of buckskin, corn, and an eagle feather as the wind gave them life. The Holy People provided instruction about the four sacred mountains with their significant colors (East is white, South is turquoise, West is yellow, and North is black). They also assigned which animal (East is the bear, South is cougar, West is the wolf, and North is the porcupine) is the protector for each direction. The life cycles are as follows: East is a birth of all beings, South is youth, West is adulthood, and North is old age. The Navajo teaching and learning processes were also assigned with each direction, *Nitsahakees* (thinking) in the East, *Nahat'ai* (planning) in the South, *Iina* (thinking and planning coming to life) in the West, and *Sihasin* in the north (make beings strong and stable). To honor the Holy People's traditional teachings and intellect this dissertation develops and presents a Navajo Circular Model to provide a visual image of the higher education resource process that includes a traditional and a significant Navajo way of processing storytelling.

During my education, I also went through the cycle of traditional teachings at home from my parents, acquiring the formal Western education for credentials (high school and higher education) and society, serving in the military for 12 years, and advocating for Native American rights regarding land, the First Amendment protections, and cultural identity. This

dissertation was guided by the question, what ways can Indigenous Knowledge and Navajo Knowledge System be useful in autoethnography doctoral research? I have completed another full circle once again by telling a story and the development of a higher education model based on my personal experiences and perspectives regarding the education process. It is within this process of Indigenous Research, through the lens of a Navajo perspective, that a question crossed my path on this journey. That question was what is the value of Western education? When one acquires special type of knowledge from school, the individual is rewarded with credentials and has hope to gain a suitable income to support a family. Western schooling is highly valued in modern society. The informal education is just as important as formal education, but the system of power only allows Western knowledge to be included. It silences a lot of stories that are rooted in Native American traditional culture. The root and ways of teaching do not only take place in Western structure. In a philosophy of education class, the professor told the class "education is happening all the time around us. We just do not notice it until it is pointed out to us" (S. Rocha, personal communication, Spring 2014). It is this connection that education is happening everywhere, every day, outside the systematic structure of "education" that some themes emerged from telling my story. I would like to refer to these themes as *pieces of rocks* because they are all separate experiences that made up the whole story and came from one huge rock that once was a part of the larger form of rock. Further, the using of this metaphor incorporates Traditional Navajo Knowledge System that connects humans to the earth beings.

The coyote character featured in oral traditions is known to be the trickster, but often he is not recognized as the philosopher or the teacher for all beings. Through the Navajo

traditional teachings, there is a bit of coyote characteristic in all people. I will honor the coyote by asking what is the value of Western education? It is while I was revisiting my formal education experience that a few *pieces of rocks* (metaphor) arrived on the journey within the story. Those *rocks* included cultural identity, names, dislocation from home, financial barriers, and racism. The *pieces of rocks* provide a bigger picture on how these stones connect to the larger community of *rocks*. In other words, how does each theme (*rock*) relate to the Native American students who have experienced Western education? My story is only one story, and how many other Native American students had similar experiences? The goal of this work is that one-day when students pick up one of my *rocks*, it would empower them to shape their own journey through higher education.

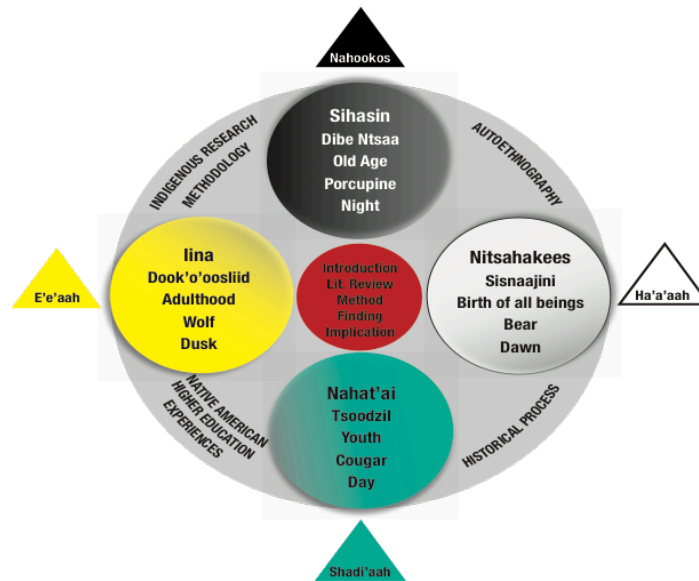


Figure 6. Navajo Circular Model.

The Navajo Circular Model has been the visual guide to this dissertation and it will continue to serve as a visual model to illustrate that all experiences in my lifetime are connected to every part of who I am and what I have become. Upon revisiting my life experience with education, the general question of, “what is the value of education?” kept surfacing. This is a very interesting question because it connected me to a world beyond the Navajo universe that helped me find a way to use my traditional teachings and culture. I came into this world as Navajo and have been taught by my parents with deep-rooted ancestral ways of knowing about the Navajo universe. Navajo language is my first language and I have been fortunate enough to maintain my traditional Indigenous language with a fluent oral speaking ability. This brings to question, am I still a traditional Navajo who has endured the assimilation process twice with boarding school and the military? Education has forced me to face challenges and come to terms with identity, barriers, racism, and a different, rather foreign society, with starkly differing values.

Identity

At the beginning of the creation story, it was a dark world, just as I was in my mom's womb. When I was born and after the umbilical cord that connected me to my mother was cut off, my creation story began. The Navajo traditional way of life was my universe. On the day my umbilical cord stub dried off, my parents buried it underneath the Hogan door that faces the *Ha'a'aah* (east). This ritual creates a sense of place for a baby and links the human to a sacred place of *Sisnaajini* (Blanco Peak, Colorado), the White Shell Mountain. *Ha'a'aah* is a representation of the birth of all beings, and the process of *Nitsahakees* (thinking) starts to take place for the newborn. The burial of the dry umbilical cord stub into

the earth is another way to establish the identity of the baby to the Holy People demonstrating that she or he is a Navajo with four clans.

My clans include the following: *Tódich'í'nii nishlǫ́* (I am Bitter Water clan), *Bit'ahnii bashishchiin* (born for Folded Arms People), *Dzil tl'ahnii dashicheii* (maternal grandfather clan is Mountain Cove Clan), and *'Áshijhi dashinalí* (paternal grandfather clan is Salt People). Navajo culture is a traditionally matriarchal society, and it is the mother's clan (*Tódich'í'nii nishlǫ́*) that is passed on to the next generation. The first clan (mother's clan) becomes the identity of the individual baby in a Navajo traditional custom. The *Bit'ahnii*, father's clan (patriarchal), is secondary and recognized through my grandmother on my dad's side of the family who is *Bit'ahnii*. The grandfather's clan identifies the great grandmother's clan. These four clans are my *identity* as a Navajo person, and I always introduce myself with the four clans to establish a place in the universe among the people.

The clan system *identifies* who you are and who is your family, extended clan relatives, community, and the rest of the larger Navajo community (reservation) within the four sacred mountains. Other cultural elements shape identity as a Navajo person as well. One of those elements is *Dine' Bizaad* (Navajo voice, words, or language) that is prudent to understanding ceremonial songs and all traditional customs. Among the traditional Navajo people, the belief is that the Holy People offered the language as a gift to the people so they could carry on the ceremonies, traditional knowledge, and cultural practices that the First Man and First Woman instructed (Beck, Walters, & Francisco, 1996). As the Navajo people encountered Europeans, the Navajo way of life and language slowly dissipated with modernization. I was one of the fortunate Navajo who went to school speaking only Navajo. It is not the case for a lot of Navajo children across the Navajo Nation. Paul Platero (1992)

examined 39 preschoolers regarding Navajo and English usage in the classroom across the Navajo Reservation. The results indicated that 17.7 percent could only speak Navajo; 54.3 percent could only speak English; and 27.9 percent were bilingual in Navajo and English. This statistic extends from generations of Navajo people going through the government boarding school system to be assimilated into American society. This is precisely how colonization through the education system aimed to eradicate Native American traditional culture, language, and tribal identity for American society (Adams, 1995; Carney, 2007; Reyhner & Eder, 2004). An education system of colonization of the mind (Thiong'o, 1986), sadly, replaced a lot of Native American traditional teachings and knowledge.

The Navajo way of life was my universe until I turned school age to attend formal school. On my first day of school, I discovered another identity that was significant with the outside world of the Navajo universe. The *identity* of having an American name, Franklin Sage, along with birth certificates, and social security numbers, will forever place me in a larger society. At the tribal agencies, it is tribal enrollment census numbers that have six digits. Esther Belin (2014) is *Tlogi* clan born *Todich'iinii* and her grandfather's clan is *Kinlichiiinii*. When she is filling out tribal forms, her Dine' identity, which is her clan, is never asked. Instead she is asked about her Western identity as an American that includes, name, date of birth, place of birth, social security number, and birth certificate. I certainly have had similar experiences when going to the tribal offices to fill out paperwork for various businesses. The American identity is about showing proof that you are who you say you are when dealing with official agencies and documents.

What is my name?

One morning my parents woke me up and told me the bus was coming to take me to school. I was starting kindergarten at a school located seven miles away from my home. I was excited to go to school like most kids around the world. My mom helped me wash my hair and put on my best clothes. As the small yellow bus arrived in the front of the house, I shyly entered and found it was nearly full of young Navajo children starting school. It seemed like a long ride to school through various turns picking up other kindergarteners. Finally, the bus parked and we followed the bus driver into a building.

We sat on small chairs and tables that were our size. Looking around the room, there were many pictures of things I had never seen before. The teacher, Mrs. Smith (all characters not in my family are given pseudonyms), started calling out names, like Walter Antencio, Ann Benally, Ben Chiquito. As she went down the list, the children raised their hands when their names were called. I was mesmerized by all of the posters on the wall and different things like a trash can full of red balls in the corner of the room. When she called out, Franklin Sage, I continued to look around the room fascinated with various equipment in the room.. Then, she called out again for the second time, “is Franklin Sage here?” The bus driver answered, “Yes! He is sitting in front of you.” The teacher’s aid tapped me on the shoulder and softly said, “That is you.” With surprise, I raised my hand not knowing what it really meant, but I did it anyway like the rest of the children.

I did not know my full name, because at home my parents never used my English name. Traditional Navajo families refer to each other by kinship such as *my brother*, *my sister*, *my mom*, and *my dad*. Siblings refer to each other as either *my older brother/sister* or *my younger brother/sister*. Relatives are also referred to as kinship, *my uncle*, and first

cousins are associated with brother or sister. Aunties are regarded as *mother* or *my aunt*. To call a relative by an English name is disrespectful, as if the individual does not know the relationship.

I really did not notice my last name was different from the rest of the common last names among my peers such as Herrea, Thomas, Yazzie, Begay, Martinez, Benally, Antencio, Tsosies, and other Navajo last names. I did not learn about how my dad got his last name until I got older. The story goes that my dad's original name was Andy Thomas. It was during the time he attended Ignacio Indian Boarding School, Ignacio, Colorado. The school would provide transportation to students during holiday breaks to return home and back to school. The bus would drop off students at different locations where parents would pick them up. My dad would often wait for his grandpa, father, or a relative to pick him up on horseback.

One of those holiday breaks while my dad was waiting to be picked up at the trading post, the owner of the Sage Trading Post store asked him what his name was and he said, Andy Thomas. The store owner repeated it a couple of times and went back to doing his task. Dad kept sitting on the bench outside the store. In a few minutes, the store owner returned and repeated my dad's name again, "Andy Thomas." Then he said, "Andy T. Sage, what you think of that?" The storeowner asked my dad if he wanted to take his last name, adding that he would ask my dad's dad or grandpa for permission. My dad said, "I guess it was ok with my dad and everybody about taking the *bilagaana* last name." When he returned to school, he started using Andy T. Sage as his official name.

The story about how my dad got his last name does not fit the stereotypical way of Native Americans getting their names. He did not get "Sage" at the boarding school or tribal

agency; instead it was at the trading post. In the Eastern part of the Navajo Reservation, the sagebrush is our forest and medicine for a common cold. One significant geographic location near Sage Trading Post is a place call *Dine'Tah*. According to the Creation Story, *Dine'Tah* is where all beings emerged out of underworld to the current world. I often wonder if that is the reason why the storeowner wanted my dad to carry his name. A spiritual link existed between my dad, *Dine'Tah*, and the name. It could be Mr. Sage (the storeowner) did not have any children who would carry on the name. As far as the details of the reason why my grandparents agreed to take the name for my dad has never been told to me. I dared not disrespect my parents by asking such questions, but even today I still wonder about it. In the *bilagaana* way, it means wise person. I have come to terms that the Holy People made the connection with my dad to the name because he would one day do great thing for the people and a country. Native Americans usually got their American names at either boarding schools (children) or tribal agency (adults) offices for official documents, and also to take away the tribal identity of having Indians names (Adams, 1995).

Dislocation From Home

On the *Shadi'aah* (South) is the *Tsoodzil* (Mt. Taylor, New Mexico) sacred mountain; turquoise is the color associated with this area; and the cougar is the protector animal. The life cycle of the *Shadi'aah* is youth. As my journey in education is heading toward *Tsoodzil*, a small *piece of rock* appeared in my path that had been dislocated from home (*dislocated rock*). At that moment memories of being at boarding school when I was five years old came back to me like it happened yesterday. I suddenly felt this tingling of nervousness inside my body. My chest starts to get tight, and full of emotion, I hold back the tears that began to formulate in my eyes. I have no more tears left for the assimilation process and the system

that separated my parents and me at age five. Dislocating Native American children is and was part of the system of education for assimilation on reservations (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Pratt's approach, the fastest process in assimilating the younger generation was through forced boarding school attendance at distant locations (Adams, 1995). All the students that attended boarding school were dislocated from their parents and not only on the Navajo Reservations, but all across the country. The school I attended was not run like the Carlisle Indian School (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2004), but the model was a similar one regarding the dormitory, moving in single file (usually line up in a single line from small in height to the tallest) to the dining room and school buildings. Classroom instruction was conducted in English only.

The *dislocated rock* remained present throughout my educational experience from attending primarily boarding school that was far from my home. There was only one school year that I got to experience public school, but I had to ride the bus at least 80 miles round trip and get dropped off on the side of the dirt road. In the rural area of the Navajo Reservation, access to school is rarely close to home and families have to send their children to distance schools. In more densely populated areas like Crownpoint, Window Rock, Chinle, Kayenta, Tuba City, and Shiprock, there are public schools and children can either walk to school or take buses to pick up students. It is also in these reservation towns is where the Navajo Tribal Agency office was located. Historically, boarding school was set up near tribal agencies for the convenience of the company office to manage the school and any tribal affairs such as distributing rations for the tribal members (Adams, 1995).

The more I have carried the *dislocated rock* around with me; it has become normal to leave home and go off in the distance for school. When I left for military basic training, I felt

comfortable just as when I left for higher education. The assimilation process of being away from home had begun to take effect on the *dislocated rock* of mine. The longer I was away from my sense of place where my umbilical cord stub was buried on the east side of the Hogan, I started to adopt the lifestyle of the American society because I was immersed in it. I began to speak less Navajo because there was no one to speak it to and the only time I spoke it was when I would call collect (when the receiver accepted the call that she or he would pay for) to one of my brothers or sisters. The English language became the primary source of communication outside the family and my community. I was detached from my community and more independent; I needed to be self-sufficient to survive the American society (Shotton et al., 2013). The *dislocated rock* was shaping more and more like an American.

Boarding School

I was only five years old, I remember being in a green GMC pick-up truck heading south on BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs) 46, a dirt road that connects the community of Counselor and Pueblo Pintado, left a trail of dust visible for the shepherders on the eastern checkerboard area of the Navajo Reservation. In the truck my mom rode on the passenger side, my uncle drove, my brother bounced in the pick-up bed, and I (Franklin) squeezed between my mom and uncle. My parents did not own a vehicle so we relied on my uncle and relatives for any long distance transportation. As the truck went down the hill, I could see white buildings. I was excited, but it quickly faded. Once we entered the BIA government boarding school campus, my stomach tightened and I moved closer to my mom for comfort. As we passed the government housing, we drove onto the parking lot in front of a white and red building. A long concrete stairs lead up to the front of the building before it separated

into two directions. Following my mom and brother, we entered the building and there was a smell unfamiliar to me. We entered a very large room with lines of tables and people that were sitting who greeted my mom. I noticed a huge television in the corner of the room. As I looked around, everything appeared big to me.

I was instructed to follow one of the older boys to put my clothes away. In a room, I put my suitcase alongside other suitcases and then I was asked to sit in the hallway. I tried to go back to the big room to look for my mom, but I could not. The adults had to distract me long enough so my mom could walk out and leave with my uncle to go back home. My mom left without saying goodbye or giving me hug. These experiences affected me to the point that I would not greet, say farewell, and give hugs until later in my life. I started to cry. After a while, my brother came and got me to play outside. I was not sure if he was sad too, but he was quiet for a while as I continued to cry. He told me, “Don’t cry. They will get mad at you.” As we sat on the swing, he wiped off tears and rubbed my head while I was sobbing from crying so hard. At that moment, I knew I would not see my parents for a while.

That same evening, all of the children were in the big room with the huge TV in the corner (later I learned that room is called a *living room*). I stood by myself and looked out the window as the daylight turned to night. I wanted to go home to be with my mom and dad. At that moment, one of the dorm aides, a heavy built older Navajo man with a flat top haircut, dressed in Wrangler pants, leather belt with a huge belt buckle, western shirt, and cowboy boots, yelled out, “little boys come with me.” We followed him down the long hallway into another big room (little boys wing) that had rows of bunk beds. He assigned us a bed and on each bed was a towel, washcloth, toothbrush, and a pair of pajamas (top and bottom) nicely folded. The dorm aide instructed us to take our clothes off, including

underwear, and put on the pajamas. We struggled buttoning up our pajama shirt as the dorm aide went down the row to make sure everybody had their shirt buttoned and not wearing underwear. We took off our underwear so when we wet our pants in our sleep, it would only wet the pajamas and the bedding. We were only allowed to bring three pair of pants and shirts, five underwear and socks, and one set of clothes to save for Sunday church (we changed our clothes after church into our clothes that we wore the day before). I was assigned bunk number 14, the top bunk, and that number was also on all of my clothes.

I crawled up the ladder of the bunk bed and pulled the sheet open. I had never slept on a bed with a sheet on it. At home, I slept next to my mom on sheepskin with folded blankets. These new sheets had a different smell. I lied down to sleep, but instead I started to cry once the lights went out. As I cry softly so I could not be heard by other children whom I could hear crying and some calling out for their mom and dad. This was my very first night as a child that I was not sleeping next to my mom. A few children were crying hard into their pillow so the dorm aide would not hear them down the hallway. That night on my first day in the dormitory, I cried myself to sleep. I cried so much that day for missing my parents, and for not being able to see them since they had told me to put my clothes away.

Historically, a method to disconnect youth from their parents was to take the child to government boarding institutions by force and then isolate them from their families into a new environment. Pratt initiated the practice of taking Indian children far away from their communities and family ties (Adams, 1995; Reyhner & Eder, 2002). Once the child is away from his or her secure environment (tribal communities), they are stripped of their culture, language, and way of life at boarding schools. On my first day at the boarding school, I

believe that I did not experience the degree of extreme trauma as those Indian children did during the earlier era of government boarding schools. Zitkala (2003), *Dakota girl*, describe the account of her experience getting her long hair cut. “I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly... I cried aloud, shaking my head while I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids” (p. 55). The trauma of having their long hair shaved, and traditional clothing replaced with military uniforms for boys and the buckskin dresses for girls replaced by dresses that were similar and worn by female teachers. Wearing pajamas was new to me at boarding school and the experience introduced me to how “civilized” children slept at night. The first night was traumatic, because the bond between a child and parents was suddenly physically severed. Homesickness continued throughout the year and the crying never completely stopped. It was very difficult especially during the days I had chickenpox and was isolated in a room for sick school children. Other students or staff brought food to where I was confined to one room.

My sickness from chickenpox led to more sickness and I ended up going home for a short period. When I arrived at home I was excited to see my mom, but it took a while for me to warm up to her. I felt betrayed for being left at school, and that few months away from my parents was enough to not feel the same connection I had with them prior to attending boarding school. As a five year old, it was hard to understand a lot of things-in particular why I had to go away for school.

During the time I was at home, I had a blacking ceremony alongside my mom. It was explained to me that I should participate, because I had red dots all over my body and the ceremony would heal me. My dad got the proper materials for the ceremony and he asked

the relatives to help. He took the hogan wooden door off the hinge and replaced the door with a blanket. When the medicine man arrived, everybody gathered in the hogan to start the ceremony. In the hogan, the men sat on the south side and the women on the north side. My mom and I sat on the west side of the hogan next to the medicine man.

After the medicine man handed my mom a corn pollen pouch, she took a pinch out and placed some corn pollen on her tongue, on top of her head, also then sprinkled the rest toward the east. I copied what she did. The medicine man did the same things and began singing to start the ceremony. I sat quietly next to my mom listening to the healing song sung by the medicine man with his eyes closed. The process was very intense (because of the sacredness of the ceremony no further details will be provided or information as to when it was done). We ate with the medicine man before he went on his way. The ceremony not only healed me from sickness, but it also connected me during the singing to the natural world. It is said by the elders that during ceremonies, you are in the presence of the Holy People. After a few days, I returned to school and no longer felt the loneliness as strongly. I made friends the rest of the time I attended Pueblo Pintado Boarding School through second grade; I felt empowered to persevere because my family, the medicine man, and our traditional ceremonial ways had provided me strength and protection.

Day School

During my third grade year, I enjoyed the privilege of day school by getting up at 4:30 or 5:00 in the morning to walk to the Pipeline Road to get on the bus. The road is known as the Pipeline Road, because it was built for corporation vehicles to maintain transportation access along the pipeline. The pipeline transported natural gas and provided temporary jobs to some local Navajos, primarily while the pipeline was being constructed.

Today, it does not provide jobs to the local Navajo, but to people living in boarding towns in Trading Town, Gas Town, and Anasazi Town, the majority being non-Navajo workers.

My dad was the first one up and he would build a fire in the wooden stove that he made out of a 50-gallon metal barrel. He was a very resourceful man and he made or built everything - even the two room modern house we slept in - by hauling rocks in a wheel barrel or wagon. The house had no running water or electricity. It was plastered with dark grey cement on the outside, white trim around the edge of the green roof, and two doors that faced the east. Next to one of the outside doors was a 50-gallon barrel to collect rain water. Chopped wood was stacked next to the house. In the distance towards the northeast the woodpile was located and 50 yards from the woodpile was the hogan. The sheep corral is southwest of the house and to the south is the horse corral. Juniper trees surround the homestead along with sagebrush and that was used as medicine for several acute sicknesses. Numerous reservation homes still do not have the modern convenience of running water and electricity. There are a multitude of reasons such as the location of the homes could be too far from the main water line, living outside of county lines, politics always cutting needed funding, and the list remains today.

Working together, my parents made breakfast on the wooden stove. The smell of coffee brewing lingered while my dad cut potatoes into tiny pieces that looked like a machine had sliced them. His shirt sleeves were rolled up past his elbows while he made fresh tortillas as the kerosene lantern lit up the two-room house. He would often eat with us as my mom gave him instructions on how to wash my face and comb my hair. I really enjoyed that it was my parents cooking our traditional food and preparing me for school in the morning, instead of waking up in a boarding school bed just before eating institutional food. Then we

students had chores, such as cleaning the bathrooms, swiping and mopping the sleeping area, making sure trash cans were empty, and that all the beds were made.

During cold winter school days, my dad would walk with me to the bus stop. He would walk in front of me to plow the fresh snow with his big winter boots bundled up for warmth. Listening to the crunching sounds from the boots as his weight pushed down on the snow, I tried to keep up with him by stepping in his footprints. The bus could be seen coming down the hill. He would stand on top of the hill until I got on the bus. When I returned from school, he would, at times, take the same walk with me.

After helping my dad bring wood or tend to the sheep for the night, we would sit in the house as I played with my imaginary toys. My dad would either read his western books or listen to the University of New Mexico sports on KKOB radio station. If there were no games on, he would tell mom and me the story he had previously read from a book while he herded sheep.

Once again, another school year arrived and summer vacation was over. My parents decided to send my brother and me to another boarding school a little farther from home. This school was located near one of the sacred mesas (*Dzith-Na-O-Dith-Hle*) in traditional culture, and it is where First Woman raised the twins. The twins lived on this mesa and it is not far from where the Navajo emerged into the fifth world. This place is known to the Navajo people as *Dine' Tah*. First Woman and the Sun had twins from their affair. First Woman lived on *Dzith-Na-O-Dith-Hle* with her twins until they were old enough to start asking who their father was. One day, the twins went out to find their father and they faced many challenges along the way. Once they arrived at the Sun's house, the twins had to go through some more challenges to prove to their father they were his children. One of the

challenges was that the sun put them in a hot sweat lodge and he tried to burn them with hot rocks that produce very extreme heat. The Spider Woman was the one that helped the twins get into a small hole inside the sweat lodge. The Sun kept putting in more hot rocks and eventually he told the Twins to come out. Once we arrived at the school and entered the administration building, the smell of the boarding school quickly reminded me of the first day at Pueblo Pintado. I asked my mom, “do all schools have a funny smell?” She just looked at me with a smile. Mr. Sparks, a tall skinny White man, greeted us with a smile and said, “Ya ah teeh!” Mom “Aoo ya ah teeh!” A conversation between my mom and the principal occurred with one of my older siblings, serving as an interpreter. I sat waiting on a chair as my feet dangled, feeling comfortable but also nervous.

When the adults got done talking, the principle walked me to my classroom. I was going to be a fourth grader in Mr. Paul’s room. Mr. Sparks informed Mr. Paul that he had a new student and his name was Franklin Sage. I took a desk in the back of the room and I was “the new kid in class.” The teacher’s aide gave me a pencil and some writing materials. Mr. Paul was walking back and forth in front of the class writing on the chalkboard. The rest of the time in class that day, I basically followed my classmates on activities so as not to draw attention to myself or say anything that would get me in trouble. When school was out for the day, Mr. Paul told me to follow the boys and they would take me to the dorm. We lined up and Mr. Paul walked with us about half way back to the dorm.

This dorm had another long hall with an uneven floor, but there were two separate wings once entering the door. One, Wing A, for little boys - 1st to 3rd graders, had a longer hall and rooms without doors. Each room had two bunk beds, a dresser with four drawers, and a large mirror. The shower and bathroom were at the end of the hallway. On the other

wing, Wing B - 4th and 5th graders, had only six rooms with a similar set up. This dorm was a lot different from the previous boarding school I had attended. I was assigned to the second room on the left as one looked down Wing B. I had the bottom bunk and was told to go to the linen room to get my sheets, towels, blankets, fire blanket (a blanket used to cover up in case of a fire), and pillow. I got my bedding and returned to my room to make my bed. This was a task I learned quickly.

During my first year at Dzith-na-o-dith-hle Community School (DCS), I struggled academically in English to the point I was one of the lower functioning students in class. I went to the resource lab to get extra help during class when other students were doing fun activities. My confidence in reading, spelling, and English related subjects was very low. This led to my hating school so much that I missed 45 days that school year. I felt so embarrassed and ashamed that I resorted to not saying anything in class. When asked a question, I would start sweating and feeling a little sick. This struggle resulted in my need to repeat fourth grade the following year.

During holiday breaks, the school would bring students back home and would pick them up the day before school started again following the holidays. Depending upon the weather and the condition of the dirt road, the bus would only go on those roads if they were in good condition. The year I missed 45 school days, bad road conditions also contributed to my absences. My parents had no way to bring me back to school and I am not sure what my uncle was doing during that time. During one of those long absences from school, *my brother* and I hitchhiked back to school. A White man driving a pipeline truck picked us up on the dirt road and dropped us off at the highway near the school. We walked all the way into the dormitory.

When my parents found out about me being retained due to a lot of absences and challenges with English, I got lectured with some hard love. That summer, I worked on my reading skills by reading National Geographic magazines that were in boxes at home. I even read a book my sister had about the Navajo Long Walk. One day, When I was in the hogan digging through boxes, I came across a book about athletes. The book had a damp moist smell to it; for some reason I would smell things. In that book, I read about Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali), Ferdinand Lewis Alcindor (Kareem Adual- Jabbar), and other prominent sports figures from the 1970s. I learned that the two African American athletes had changed their names because of their Islamic Religion. Muhammad Ali was very outspoken about why he changed his “slave name.” Reading this book was the first time I heard about African slaves in America. I inquired about Blacks being slaves to one of my early teachers and I was told it happened a long time ago. That was the extent of my education about slavery at that school. When I returned to DCS to start the new school year, I was reading well and my confidence was much better than throughout the previous year. It was not long, however, before I realized that academics would continue to challenge me.

During the remainder of my schooling at DCS, my struggles with academics seemed to get worse with each passing year. One way to cope with my challenges in academics was through participation and dedication to sports. My goal became to complete all of my classes with passing grades, primarily because sports participation required it. From sixth to eighth grade, I participated in every sport I could. It was during my sixth grade English class, that I learned a lesson about taking school seriously if I wanted to continue to play sports. The English teacher had a spelling test every Friday and I dreaded those days. I did not pass spelling tests a few weeks in a row. My teacher told the coach I would not be coming to

practice, because I did not pass the spelling tests. I felt embarrassed and wanted to quit school.

Up to this point, no one mentioned college to me and I never thought of going. My focus was more on going through the motion of daily classroom worksheets, getting it done, turning it in, and hoping for a passing grade. The school curriculum did not provide or include any cultural elements and utilized unfamiliar approaches to education that I did not understand. Everything was taught in English and when I did go home for the holidays, I primarily spoke Navajo, because my mom and uncle did not speak English. My father did attend formal school in Ignacio, Colorado, and Albuquerque Indian School, Albuquerque, New Mexico, but he did not earn a high school diploma. My mom did not go to school. It was the decision that was made for her by her parents. In the eyes of some White middle class teachers, I was the product of my environment and it impacted my academics. The challenges of what was learned at school often did not transition to home, because there are two different ways of thinking and doing what is needed to survive. At school, English was the primary language vehicle for learning and talking. At home and in the community, Navajo was the language for communication, learning, and even thinking among family members.

High School

During my high school years at Santa Fe Indian School, a two-and-a-half-hour drive from where my parents lived, students had the option to go home for the weekend if their parents checked them out. Unfortunately, my brother and I only went home during the holidays on a greyhound bus to Counselor Trading Post. We had to walk 18 miles on a dirt road to get home. The majority of the time, we caught partial rides from local people

heading south. This did not deter us from coming home for the holidays or from continuing to attend that school.

During my first year of high school, English continued to be a struggle. The teacher would give a writing assignment in class and we had to read it out loud. When it came to my turn, I read but was often overcome with nervousness and embarrassment. In frustration, my participation in class again turned to silence. Having a conversation in English was not among my strengths either, and I used it only in necessary situations. My friends were Navajo and we spoke in our language. Other students also spoke their tribal languages so often we would teach each other certain greetings. I was passing English with Cs and it was good enough for me. Anything to do with English regarding spelling, writing, and talking became a dilemma for me and a barrier to enjoying education. And because of my struggle with English, I came to dislike the language.

During the winter of my junior high school year while I was home, my uncle was elected to the Navajo Nation Council as one of 88 members. The pride of having my uncle, who was without any formal education, elected into one of the highest positions in the Navajo Nation got me thinking about if I should continue with school. When the time came to go back to school and finish the spring semester of my junior year, I did not go. One rationale was that if I am struggling with English and not leaving the reservation, why do I need an education? In my mind, I was putting forth the effort in English, but it was inconsistent with the results toward obtaining a better grade. If I gave up on my education at 17 years of age, one more Navajo high school drop out would be added to the statistics.

It was January 1987, and the Navajo Nation Inauguration for the Council delegates and President of the reservation was held in Window Rock, Arizona. Early in the morning,

my mom, brother, cousins and myself, and one of our cousins drove to the tribal capital. When we arrived, the parking lot was already full and we made our way to the bleachers. The ceremony started and it was speech after speech spoken in English and Navajo expressing the importance of education. I could not get away without hearing that painful word, education. After the celebration, we returned home busy with our daily routine of chopping wood and hauling water from the well that was half a mile away. My uncle stayed for orientation and attended his Council obligation.

A few days later, my uncle returned with some groceries and a rack of mutton ribs. Mom cooked it for him while he talked to us about his experiences. While we feasted on mutton, I listened to the conversation among the family. After the feast ended and the table was clear, my uncle asked my brother to read some mail for him. He brought in a bag full of blue books that he was supposed to read. The books were the Navajo Nation Code of Laws and Ethics in multiple volumes (these books are according to Navajo traditional teaching and philosophy of life). My brother had a week to read through them and then translate it for my uncle. My uncle did not go to formal school, and he could not speak or read English. Reading documents had become a barrier for him in this new tribal government position. This was the determining factor for me to return to school and get my high school diploma. When I returned to school, the outlook on education had a different meaning. I secretly worked hard at my English classes and started to put forth full effort in my studies.

Education does not only happen within school buildings or when a teacher is present. It is happening all the time in various ways in human society. It is preserved as only a certain type of knowledge is valuable and all people should acquire certain knowledge in order to be part of certain society. Prior to starting formal schooling, everything for me was presented in

the Navajo language and way of life. Growing up, everybody around me spoke Navajo and I did not remember anybody in my family speaking English at home. The only time I heard my dad speak English was when he would interact with the trading post owner. When he returned from his Army service in World War II, he was the only member of the community who was bilingual. Relatives and community members would bring him their mail for him to read to them and he would also write their letters. I only learned about his role in the community during his funeral reception when relatives spoke of him. My father was a simple, humble man who did not boast about himself or his experience in the military and his contribution to the community as one of the only bilingual speakers at that time. My father served in the U. S. Marines during WWII as a Navajo Code Talker. In 1943, he enlisted and trained with the 297th Platoon in Camp Pendleton, California. The Navajo Code Talkers were classified until 1968 when the military unclassified the Navajo Code. The Navajo Language using the English alphabet was developed and used for communication in the battle field. Navajo Code Talkers had to memorize all the words and phrases. I did not learn about his military service as a Navajo Code Talker until I got a little older. I just waited for him to tell me about his experience on his own terms. As the relatives and community revisited some memories of my dad, I sat on the hard metal folding chair absorbing every story. Hearing stories about my dad was empowering, instilled pride, and made me examine my responsibility of taking ownership of my education.

Observing my parents provided me with an education regarding what a Navajo is supposed to know and acquire within the four sacred mountains. Knowing my clan at an early age identified who I am. I learned how to say my four clans, *Tódích'íí'níí nishlǫ́* (I am Bitter Water clan), *Bit'ahníí bashishchiin* (born for Folded Arms People), *Dzil*

tl'ahnii dashicheii (maternal grandfather clan is Mountain Cove Clan), and '*Áshijhi dashinali* (paternal grandfather clan is Salt People), and *Ákót'éego diné nishlǫ́* (In this way, I am a Navajo male). Knowing the clan system is fundamental knowledge that connects Navajo people to their relatives, community, environment, and sense of place.

Challenges

The circle of education continues toward *E'e'e aah* (East), *Dook'o'oosliid* (San Francisco Peak, Arizona) the Abalone Shell Mountain. *E'e'e aah* represents adulthood, dusk, and the wolf is the protector. *Iina* (life) is the principle of learning and teaching that have been carried on from thinking (East) and planning (South) process in the traditional Navajo cycle of education. It is in this direction of the life circle that all things that have been learned in the previous two courses come to life, as you become the adult. Once one reaches adulthood in the Navajo tradition, that is the responsibility of carrying on the entire knowledge system one has learned to this point. The adults begin to formulate their way of thinking that honors all beings. This where the third rock dropped crossed my path, a little heavier than the other two rocks, and it had a rough surface with some chips on the edges. The *rock of barriers* relates primarily to financial resources for my education and supporting myself of outside my community.

To this point, I had always been taken care of financially by my parents. My parents were self-sufficient with the livestock, a few chickens, and mom would sell her rugs at the local trading post. I am not sure how much she would sell for, but I think it was enough to get us groceries and few other items. Every spring my parents would plant a small garden so we could have some vegetables in the late summer or fall. I always looked forward to the watermelon, but for some reason, I would always get the end piece. By the time I was done

eating that end piece the rest of the watermelon would be gone! They often tell it is because I am the youngest one. I just learned to accept it and appreciate the sweet taste. Eating the fresh garden watermelon was the reward, but it was the early morning walk to the water well to get to our daily water supply and more for the garden that are alive in my memory.

I had a small bucket, and my dad would fill it up. My dad would push the wheel barrel full of five-gallon plastic containers and the rest of the family either had two buckets or two-gallon plastic milk jugs to carry. The trail was not smooth like you see in parks or national parks. It was what we called "rez trail." Half of the trail was in soft sand, and when I took a step, my feet would sink into the soft sand. Yeah! My dad would push the wheel barrel full of water jugs through that trail. By the time we got home, my tiny bucket would either be half full or a little left at the bottom. I usually spilled the water all over my leg from not carrying the bucket. As we got closer to home either mom or dad would look in my bucket and laugh and pour a little more into my small bucket. I think they did it so my siblings would not tease me, but of course, the side of my leg would be soaked with water. These are among the little things that my parents did that made me feel loved beyond words.

They were teaching me discipline, following directions, responsibility, work ethics, and teamwork. Even herding sheep required some management skills to be able to take care of the flock from any danger from the coyotes. It was the livestock that was the main source of meat, and the wool for my mom's rugs. My parents made sure as children we knew how to take care of things and appreciate what we had with limited financial resources. At the same time across the reservation, many more families lived in the same manner and condition as we did. The primary sources of employment on a rural reservations are schools, health related occupations, and chapter houses (similar to a city hall), which usually only

have limited work programs that are heavily dependent on funding from the tribal headquarters. Employment is limited in rural areas, and most people have to travel a distance for jobs. Unemployment is high, and families still survive with the traditional way of life.

One alternative was railroad employment, which required being away from home and family for months at the time. The rural reservation lack of jobs brought me to joining the military. That took me to Fort Dix, New Jersey, for basic training and then I was assigned to my duty station in Germany. During my time overseas, I was again taken care of by the military with housing, health care, and employment. I tried to save like my dad had advised, but it was the first time in my life I was getting some income coming directly to me. I did manage to get saving bonds for 100 dollars each month, and it came in handy after I left the military.

Financial barriers are one of the greatest and widespread challenges on the reservation and for people living in lower socio-economic areas. The average income on the reservation is way below the poverty level compared to the rest of the country. There are tribal scholarships available that are based on financial need, but I never had the good grades and my national test scores were too low. Native American students attending distance higher education have faced financial barriers because they are predominately from lower income families (Cunningham et al., 2007). To attend a PWI, students have to look for and gain other financial aid resources. I chose to get student loans to supplement my funding to cover the cost of tuition, housing, books, and fees.

Historically, Native American people did not have the financial resources to attend higher education. The Colonial Colleges (Harvard College, William and Mary College, and Dartmouth College) tried to secure financial resources for Native Americans students, but the

majority of funds that were raised did not provide enough funding for the students (Carney, 2007). Financial stability continued to limit Native American students in their pursuit for higher education.

Higher Education

When I returned home from my enlistment with the U. S. Army, I started summer school at San Juan Community College in Farmington, New Mexico. It was 80 miles one way from my parent's house to campus and I made that drive every day. I had an English class on Mondays and Wednesdays, and a chemistry class on Tuesdays and Thursdays. I took advantage of the tutoring center on campus and spent most of the rest of my days in the library. I often went home late at night and got up early the next day. The fear of not doing well academically in elementary and high school reemerges still when I enter a classroom. I continued this routine for one year, the drive and studying. As I progressed and earned better grades, I took more classes part-time.

Driving back and forth to attend classes began to start wearing on me financially, physically, and mentally. Housing was limited and without a steady income, the option to rent was a challenge. I was not receiving any scholarships due to my poor academic performance in high school and on college entrance exams. I did have the GI Bill, but when I researched other financial resources, I quickly learned that by going part-time, I would only get a percentage of what my service had earned. "Be all you can be to join the Army," was their slogan and yet a GI Bill only provided \$400 dollars a month stipend and it did not cover tuition, books, and fees. My decision was to leave the GI Bill for later in my education. I took out a student loan to cover tuition, books, and gas money. Student loans were readily accessible, but would take years to repay.

One winter day, I was late for class because the tire on my car went flat. I usually arrived an hour early so I could review for the quiz and class. I missed the quiz and was distracted by car trouble. Frustration led me to think of searching for another university. During the drive home, my mind started to wander about not just settling for what was available within 100 miles of my home. The frustration of trying to get an education with limited funding was nearly overwhelming. “I need to get out of here, but where should I go?” was all I could think about, and it made the trip home go by fast. I drove up to my parent’s house and the lights were out. I walked into a dark two-room house that my dad built when I was toddler. I always felt peaceful and comfortable in this location where my umbilical stub connected me to my sense of place. Slowly walking into the kitchen, I struck the match against the table to light the kerosene lantern. As the room lit up, I could see the dinner my mom cooked on the propane stove, fried potatoes with green chili, onions, small cut up mutton, and freshly made tortillas. I heated up the food and started reading the sociology chapter assignment due for the next day.

I woke up the next day early with my dad. We sipped our cowboy coffee and I mentioned to him my frustration. He just listened and let me talk. Mom walked in and poured her coffee and sat at the table. I continued to talk with them about my frustration and thinking of leaving. One of the unique qualities of my parents was listening and later on they would reveal what they were thinking. We ate breakfast and I went off to school again.

When I arrived at the school, I walked into the counseling office and talked to a counselor about transferring. While sitting in the waiting room, I started looking at various brochures that were lying on the table. A lot of them were applications to universities where I believed I would not get accept into. I came across the University of North Dakota

brochure about American Indian Programs and checked into various programs that were offered that were specifically designed for American Indian students. I was not key on one academic program in particular, but I was intrigued by 28 different Indian related programs housed on that campus. I applied and got accepted. I talked to my oldest brother and his wife about buying me a plane ticket in exchange for my car. I told my parents about a school way up north called the University of North Dakota that I planned to attend after the summer. I reassured them that I would come back when I was done with school. I packed all of my clothing and blankets into a duffle bag that I was allowed to keep from the Army. Attending boarding school at age five, and when I was 18 years old and stationed in Germany for two years for the Army, I got comfortable with being away from home at long lengths of time and distance. The assimilation process was also implemented to break that connection between families and communities. I went through the process twice with boarding school and the military, which made the decision to leave home for college somewhat more comfortable.

I arrived at the Grand Forks Airport at night, picked up my bag from baggage claim, called a taxi, and walked outside, waiting to be picked up. Flying in from the southwest desert of New Mexico, I quickly felt the difference in humidity. The campus Housing Office was closed and I did not know anybody in Grand Forks. For my first night, I stayed at a hotel. Sitting in my room, I started to have doubts about my decision to move across the country for an education. I called one of my brothers and told him I made it to Grand Forks, North Dakota. The first question he asked me, “What is it like there?” I responded, “Not sure. It is dark and very humid.” After a short conversation, I hung up the phone. I missed home and started to think back to my first day at boarding school. This time I knew it was not going to be easy to go home and that it would be a while before I would see my relatives

again. I told myself that I had spent one year and a half in Germany, so this new adventure was nothing.

The next day, I took a jog to the Housing Office and was instructed to go to McVey Hall to finish the process. After getting my room assignment, I walked back to the hotel to get my duffle bag and hiked back to my room. I put away my clothes, which were not much, and made my bed. One task I mastered in boarding school and in the military was making beds with hospital corners. Since I only came with a duffel bag, I only had one fitted sheet to cover my twin rubber dormitory bed, one sheet to spread it on top the fitted sheet, and cover it up with my white Pendleton blanket. The hall was quiet this early in the morning, as other students moved in with help from their parents throughout the day. I wished that I could have had that same experience, but the more I thought of home and my parents, I started to get homesick. To distract myself, I went for a walk to see the rest of the campus.

Academics

I (Franklin) would take two steps forward and one step backward regarding my academic progress during my first five years at the University of North Dakota. The struggle with academics continued and no matter how hard I studied, I would get one class in the failing range. Summer school became my option to retake courses and to overcome challenges. I tried different techniques for studying and taking exams. During the spring semester of 2000, I was mentally exhausted trying to figure out my academic struggles. Half way through the semester, I stopped going to class and spent my free time entertaining the bad habit of damaging my liver. The realization and acceptance that I was not cut out for higher education became my main thought. My semester grade point average (GPA) was 0.0 and 2.3 overall, which resulted in me getting dismissed from the University.

I was embarrassed about my GPA and ashamed that I could not achieve a degree. That summer, I decided to stay in Grand Forks and work. In the spring of 2000, I got a part time job at the YMCA as a fitness trainer. I basically monitored the fitness room while members did their workouts. I tried to cover my expenses earning minimum wage and lived on rice and beans. I desperately searched for a higher paying job. I applied to a nursing home as a certified nurse's aid, interviewed, and was notified that I would need to complete a two-week course to become certified. After completing the requirements to be certified, I started a full-time position. The requirements were hands-on and when I was in the military, I went through some medical training as far as first-aid, CPR, and transporting injured personnel. The most rewarding part of working at a nursing home is talking to residents and learning about their history. The responsibility included the basic care services such as bathing, grooming and feeding residents. It was intense physical and mental work. At times it required advocating for the residents' rights and those kind of issues and experiences can become intense.

Activist

The circle of education continues toward *Nahookos* (North); the *Dibe Ntsaa* (Hesperus Peak, Colorado) is Obsidian Sacred Mountain that is the color black and represents night, old age, and the porcupine is the protector animal of the *Nahookos*. The *sihasin* is the principle to make beings strong and stable, to secure, to develop confidence, and to have a clear path in regards to the life cycle. It is in this journey that the fourth *rock* appeared in my path. The rock of activist is where higher education challenged me to engage in activism. If I would have never left the secure, comfortable environment of home, I would

have never been able to advocate, learn more about, and impact social issues that Native Americans face.

One day I heard some Native American students at UND from one of the local tribes meeting to talk about the controversial UND school athletic nickname the “Fighting Sioux” and logo of a geometric symbol of an Indian head wearing a war bonnet. The meeting was on the second floor of the school’s Memorial Union. Walking up the stairs, I was nervous because I had never attended any of the student group meetings. I entered the room and was greeted with handshakes and expressions of appreciation for showing up. I felt uncomfortable, but I was there to learn from the students who had strong feelings about the nickname and logo issues. The meeting was intense for me since I was not familiar with the issues and I was hearing story after story about the history of racial incidents that occurred involving and hurting Native American students on campus. Growing up in a traditional Navajo family, I have been taught the significance of my clan, and learned the traditional ways. For me to take on a tribal identity like a Sioux would be unrealistic and disrespectful. After the meeting, I felt like I needed to not only learn more, but to be supportive of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota students. Being a Navajo student, I could understand some of the hurt and demeaning comments that were usually aimed at Native students speaking out against the school logo and nickname.

During the meeting, I recalled my first week at school at UND when I was running and a pick up truck slowed down by me, and the passenger shouted out the window, “Go Sioux!” then they sped off. I just laughed and thought, “I am Navajo, not Sioux.” It did not occur to me that it was a racial incident. After attending the meeting, I could connect the shouting from the pick up truck and the controversial school nickname.

When I “stepped-out” of school due to my academic failure, I started reading books on social justice to educate myself on various issues about the 1960’s Civil Rights Movement. I was enlightened by what African American people did to change the practices of discrimination against them. After my shift at the nursing home, I would go back to my apartment to do more reading. I started to attend meetings for the student organization called BRIDGES (Building Roads Into Diverse Group Empowering Students) that consisted of Native American and non-Native American students attending the University of North Dakota. I was not a student at the time but tried to remain low key and attend for my own educational purposes. BRIDGES originally had the name SOAR (Students Organization Against Racism) and it was formed to challenge the institution to change the school nickname and logo, the “Fighting Sioux.”

During one of the meetings, the President of BRIDGES made an announcement that he would like to have volunteers be part of a panel discussion to talk about the history, incidents, and why they find the nickname and logo offensive. I volunteered and clarified that I was not a current student, but was a prior student. We made arrangements to meet before the panel to strategically plan our presentation. During my drive back home to my apartment, I thought, what have I done? Feeling nervous, I started thinking, what are my co-workers going to think? What is my family going to say when they hear about me talking about racial issues? I don’t even speak up in class, what am I going to say? All of these questions blazed through my mind.

I parked on one of the streets, because I did not have a parking permit and I could not afford a ticket. Walking towards the union, I started to sweat, the weather was cool, and there was a little breeze. I entered the Union and made my way to the room of our panel.

The room was full of chairs but the room was empty. A few minutes later more students started to fill in the chairs, but no sign of the president. I was getting more nervous as I looked over the notes I had written down. Well, the notes were never used because I spoke from the heart and I knew that the Holy People would protect me. This was only the beginning of my activism and speaking engagements that put me in the public eye, spurred on by some racist comments directed toward me from both non-Native and Native people. Those racist and hate comments did not deter me from speaking out. It reassured me that more education needed to occur in school systems and in the public spaces.

Native American students come to the University to pursue degrees and return home to help their communities and families. At a PWI, the Native American students are often the only tribal members in the class and they were frequently targeted and asked to talk about their position on the logo/nickname controversy.

Back To School

In the fall of 2004, I enrolled in two classes to give education one more attempt. This time I was set to pursue Sociology based upon my recent involvement with the student organization. Since I was providing some educational forums through my activism, I wanted to study society. I also only took two classes, because I could manage that load better than being a full-time student. When I went to the community college part-time, I did well. I kept the full-time position at the nursing home and worked around my classes. I used part of my income to pay for classes and I moved in with friends in a one-bedroom apartment where four people lived. That semester during my free time, I studied, worked, and attended organization's educational forums talking about the school nickname. My test and quiz

scores improved a lot. I started to gain confidence in school and speaking up in class became easier.

In January of 2006, my father passed away and I was not taking classes, because I had no scholarships to pay for school. I saved up to reenter in the fall of 2006. After coming back from my father's funeral, I started to think about what I was doing and weighed the option of reenlisting in the military, active duty, for a couple of years. I talked with a recruiter and asked him about prior service tuition benefits to repay my student loans. I did not qualify for the repayment program due to my prior service and it was only for new recruits. The active duty option was not worth reenlisting, but the recruiter tried to persuade me. Instead, I talked to the North Dakota National Guard recruiter and he said two words that got my attention, "tuition wavier," and I enlisted for a one-year trial. Within a year, I would get full benefits like regular National Guard personnel and could use the tuition wavier. I did not have to go back to basic training, but had to go through job training as a Water Purification Specialist. That summer, I completed training and attended regular, once a month drills.

During fall semester of 2006, I went back to school as a full-time student using the National Guard tuition wavier benefits. I continued to work at the nursing home part-time to have a steady income as my academics had improved. One of the reasons I stayed at the nursing home was having worked there a couple of years. I noticed a difference between Native American and non-Native American regarding elders. It seem to me a nursing home was like a storage for White elders to wait to pass on. Very few families would come on a daily basis to visit their parents or grandparents. It was sad to see such a lot of good elders being alone in these situations. My student activism interest led me to various universities to

speaking about the effects of sports mascots and how the use of the Fighting Sioux nickname/logo was dehumanizing to the Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota people. In the meantime, my student loan was accumulating interest with each passing month.

One drill weekend, the company announced that the battalion was looking for 21 volunteers to be deployed to Iraq for a water purification mission. I volunteered, thinking there had to be many that did from other units. My chances of being one of the 21 volunteers were slim because I only enlisted for one year and it was expiring in March 2007. One of my reasons for volunteering was to pay off my student loans and this deployment would help. When I first enlisted in Active Duty Army in 1990, it was for economic reasons. During that time, there were hardly any jobs in the area where I lived and I had no job skills. Military service provided me with some income and an opportunity to visit a country that I would probably never visit otherwise. Reenlisting with the National Guard was to pay for my school. I volunteered to be deployed into a war so I could pay off my student loans.

I finished the semester on a high note by passing all four classes. I was feeling proud and finally performing well in academics. My fear of academics had subsided and I was thinking to myself that I had overcome my limitation. How many Native American students struggle as much as I have? Leaving family, relatives, and home to pursue a higher education away from home is such an extraordinary challenge. The reservation is our home and we feel most secure among relatives. I often would try to figure ways to implement some of my tribal traditions into my school. Instead of figuring out a way to incorporate some Navajo traditional elements into my papers, I just reverted to doing what the professors wanted and went with what was required. At this point in my academics, I really did not feel

comfortable going against the normal process of getting through to earn a degree on a National Guard tuition waiver.

During spring semester of 2007, I had taken on five classes and had the previous confidence in my studies. At the time, my normal routine was doing my reading, rewriting my notes that I had taken in class, starting my papers early so I could read them a couple of times before due dates, working part-time at the nursing home, and fulfilling my drill duties. One day that semester, I got an email from the National Guard that read the following,

SAGE, FRANKLIN N, followed by my social security number, and the unit, 0132 QM CO WTR SUP FWD (Quartermaster Company Water Support Forward). You are ordered to active duty as a member of your Reserve Component Unit for the period indicated unless sooner released or unless extended. Proceed from your current location in sufficient time to report by the date specified. You enter active duty upon reporting to unit home station. REPORT TO HOME STATION: 01 May 2007. REPORT TO MOB STATION: 04 May 2007, Ft. Hood, Texas. Period of active duty: Not to exceed 400 days. Purpose: Operation Iraqi Freedom... (Orders 106-081).

I had to read the order a few times and I felt this realization that I was going to get deployed. I was surprised that I got picked for one of the slots because I was only on a one-year enlistment. I do not remember who I called to tell them about my orders, but I did make some calls. I also had to inform my professors about the order. I tried to maintain some normal routine with my academics, but I was distracted with the order. I started drill with the people I was deploying with in Camp Grafton, Devils Lake, North Dakota. The preparation before our MOB (Main Operation Base) station report date involved long weekend hours of

paper work, medical check ups, and those long briefings that have at least 100 Power Point slides. With each slide the presenter would read it to us and it made the briefings seem extra long.

Academics were important and I tried to keep myself busy with studying, but I could not concentrate and ended up having to reread materials. I tried hard to keep up with the academics but ended up withdrawing from four classes, and finishing one class. The emotional cycle of pride, worries, and unknown factors were coming back. Would I have been willing to volunteer for a deployment if I did not have the stress of student loans or paying for school? The deployment took me away from school, but I had to start thinking what skills I would need to learn to survive the deployment. For a year, I was away in the Middle East.

Our unit returned at the end of April 2008 and I reenrolled in one class that summer. I jumped back in school to keep myself busy and refocus on my goal of getting a degree. On December 19, 2008, I walked in the University of North Dakota Winter Graduation Ceremony in my National Guard Class A uniform to receive my Bachelor of Arts. This was a goal that took years to accomplish, one that started in New Mexico, and took me across the country to North Dakota, deployment to Middle East, and back to Grand Forks. It was during my deployment that I started thinking about pursuing graduate school. On one of those long days when I still had to pull guard duty on one of the look out towers that over looked the farming fields and a small town in the distance, during our three hours duty, fellow enlistees and I talked about random things in life and education was one of the topics.

Graduate School

The conversation about education during guard duty really motivated me to continue on to graduate school. Sergeant Mountain was from a small town, he had enlisted right after high school, and at his first duty station, he was deployed. That night in the guard tower, he told me it was his third deployment and he could not wait to get out to start college. During the Iraq campaign, the GI Bill had been improved to attract more young people into enlisting and the scholarship was very attractive with monthly stipends, books allowances, and full tuition payment. This new GI Bill also made me more comfortable about paying for graduate school for the first year. I applied for Graduate School with a little bit of encouragement from my undergraduate academic advisor. On July 13, 2009, I got an email from the Sociology Graduate Program Director. I clicked on the message from the director and I read the first the following, "Congratulations! You have been admitted to the MA program in the Department of Sociology at the University of North Dakota (UND). You will receive an official letter of admission from UND Graduate College in few weeks." The news was exciting and a feeling of accomplishment in academics brought me back to all the challenges in my academic work from the first day I went to boarding school to receiving this email. My persistence in working extra hard to get a higher education degree had paid off, and now I had an opportunity to further my education that only a small percentage of Native American students in higher education receive. Being accepted into graduate school put in a pool of those small numbers of Native Americans that get an opportunity to obtain a Masters Degree. Leaving home or moving far from the reservation is a hard decision to make when a Native American chooses to get a higher education. Alvord (2000) struggled with leaving home to medical school to become the first Navajo surgeon.

I was admitted with provisional status, which meant I did not have a high GPA and I would have to prove in the first semester that I could do graduate level work. Once the semester started, I once again found I was not prepared to do all the required reading and writing. Again, I tried to read every article that was assigned and in one class, it seemed like we were reading a book a week. I had to participate in class discussions on materials I read. Sociological Inquiry class was the hardest to me that semester, and I was reading the material and rereading to try to understand it. I was starting to lose confidence in my ability to do graduate level work. One day after a drill weekend, I woke up and decided to weigh the option of withdrawing from the program. On drill weekends, I had no time to do any reading for the upcoming week. I was already three days behind on my reading and had to write up a response paper to one of the articles. The anxiety and stress got the best of me that morning.

Instead of going straight to my academic advisor and informing her of my decision that morning, I went to the park that was by the river and took some sage with me. I walked along the bike trail and soon found myself near a secluded area with trees and walked down to the bank of the Red River. I sat down on the bank and listened to the flowing river with traffic in the distance. I lit up the sage and smudged myself with the smoke. I prayed for guidance and strength. While sitting on that bank, I started to think of my mom. She never went to school and some of my relatives had dropped out of school for various reasons. I was too far away from home to seek any support from my mom and I had to figure out a way to get through the Graduate School Program. At that moment, a Navajo proverb came to mind that my parents used to tell in my youth: *t'aa ho'ajit'eego* (it is up to you). It is often used to have the individual take responsibility for what they decided to do in life, a personal

decision to achieve certain goals in life. I perceived it as self-empowerment to achieve certain things in life. For me, it was the Graduate School Program that I was having second thoughts about. It had been up to me to move away and pursue an education and apply for Graduate School.

Instead of withdrawing, I had made up my mind to keep trying. Graduate School is also about figuring things out and being creative in ways to best approach academic work. In my Sociology Inquiry class for the final paper, I wrote about the Holy People of Navajo in as an example of what phenomenon means.

This paper led me to further explore ways to implement Navajo traditional knowledge in my academics, and I wanted to do my thesis on Navajo Language. Instead, I decided to do research comparing Native Americans' and non-Native Americans' recycling behaviors with secondary data from the General Social Survey (GSS). In this survey, the Native American populations were very small and consisted of participants from four different years to make up the 590 Native American participants. The experience I gained from working with this secondary data set led me to realized that more studies needed to be conducted involving adequate Native American samplings.

In Graduate School, I had to take 3 classes outside of the Sociology Department and I picked an Education Foundations course since I had not taken any Education Department courses. In that class, we read and discussed issues about inequality in education regarding curriculum, access to higher education, and racism. I was engrossed in the topics so much that it got my attention to take additional classes from the Educational Foundations and Research (EFR) Department. The professor I took three classes from encouraged me to

apply for the Doctoral Program in the EFR, and I did not hesitate to comply with her encouragement.

Doctoral Program

While I was finishing up my Sociology Thesis in Spring of 2012, I applied for the Doctoral Program in the Educational Foundations and Research (EFR) Department. On May 9, 2012, a letter from the University of North Dakota School of Graduate Studies read the following,

Dear Franklin, Your application for admission has been evaluated by faculty of your program and the School of Graduate Studies. I am pleased to inform you that we are offering you admission to pursue a PHD Educational Foundations and Research to begin in the 2012 Fall semester...

I read it a couple times over and over to see if I was reading it right. Now I was in the company of a very few Native Americans pursuing a doctoral degree in higher education. The excitement of making it this far in my education, even with all the earlier limitation to academics seem to have dissolved. But now the thought of finishing it, and actually going through another few years of grueling academic work with reading and writing was worrisome.

Throughout the first semester of my doctoral program, I kept hearing. "what is your topic for your dissertation research?" I kept saying, it is on Navajo Language. I have always been interested in my original language and have been able to maintain the fluency of speaking it. Since the passing of my dad, I came to realize that the Navajo language is important, that it contributed significantly to the U. S. Military history and American society. As I continued to take classes, I started to collect different articles on Navajo languages. I

quickly realized non-Navajo scholars wrote the most academic journal articles or they are co-authored by Navajos. These discoveries drew me to the conclusion that I had to do my dissertation on Navajo Language. There was something putting me away from doing the research on the language. I have mention that you do not seek knowledge it seeks you. I was trying to seek out but my body, heart, and spirits were not connection to the path of doing research on the Navajo language.

The *activist rock* has reminded me that language is not really my primary passion. Yes! I can speak my language, but other people are engaging and taking on the responsibility to maintain the language. I did another full circle on my education journey. As I take a closer look at my education experience, what was missing was the incorporation of the Navajo Knowledge System that I was taught at home. From the first day of Western education, I did not learn or hear about Navajo Knowledge in school. It is in my Doctoral Program that I have gained support from my advisor that I can contribute to the larger society and to help my home tribal community. By telling my story and implementing a traditional way of seeing the world, this can be a healing process and empowering tool for Native American students to use in the next generation.

Healing

When all four *rocks* are put together in the inner circle of the Navajo Circular Model, a reflection about “what is the value of Western education?” emerges. Certain opportunities are provided to individuals based on their experiences with education. I have put myself out there in the world of academics to show that my story is one of millions of Native American students who have attended, are attending, or are going to attend schools of higher education institutions. When I decided to take the journey of telling my story and used some cultural

elements that shaped the course of my education experience, I had to admit that I was nervous and continually reassured myself that it would be a contribution to my community in the preservation of Navajo knowledge. Taking a new approach in the academic field that has been minimally practiced only in certain way can be challenging. This dissertation established that Indigenous Research and storytelling do have great benefits and value in understanding the Native American experience with education. The healing process is talking about hardships, dedication, determination, and goals can be achieved through various educational elements. This dissertation highly recommends more Native American students talk about their education experience to help heal the atrocities that have been forced upon their people and homelands in U. S. history.

The Moccasin Journey

In conclusion of this dissertation, I present a final story about a moccasin that serves as a connection to tie all of my stories and experiences together. As ancestors told the people, moccasin is the Twins footwear that is worn during their journey to Father Sun. The Holy People instructed the Twins the need to be connected to Mother Earth through the wearing of the moccasins. The sole of the shoes represented the White Shell that is the link to the foundation and stability of all the traditional knowledge they had learned. The red covers of the moccasin represented the Mother Earth and universe. The shoe is not only a shoe to worn for connection to the earth, but is made along with a sacred medicine bundle that has the traditional teaching and learning. The implementing of *Nitsahaakees* (thinking), *Nahat'a* (planning), *lina* (life), and *Silasin* (reflection) into the Navajo Circular Model is a direct link to my educational journey.

The moccasin is often made for the individual to wear during ceremonies and in modern times it is a reminder for the individual that traditional teaching starts with their connection to the earth. My moccasins have taken me to different parts of the world, and through Western education, I have come to realize that my identity as a Navajo and my accumulation of cultural knowledge is just as important.

My journey began with a creation story to illustrate that Navajo people have their own perspective on how they came to this world. It is with each journey through four different worlds just as this dissertation is presented in four different phases. The four different worlds are not separate, but connected as the beings moved from one world to the next, they carried all knowledge with them to the next world. In Phase One, the Navajo Circular Model was introduced and described each of the elements. In Phase Two, some historical events that led to colonization in education was described to point out that the policies and activities were designed to eradicate the Native American customs, languages, and identities. In Phase Three, Indigenous Research is a different perspective and method regarding conducting academic research. It is conducted according to traditional teaching and oral tradition, which has been the primary vehicle to carry on Indigenous Knowledge and Navajo Knowledge System. In Phase Four, I shared my educational experiences that shaped me into who I am today.

This dissertation has presented the history of American “Western” education from a Native American student’s perspective. The U. S. government, religious entities, and mainstream society tried to assimilate Native Americans by omitting their culture from education to “help” them be successful. How ironic that actually including and incorporating traditional tribal knowledge and culture may provide the most effective tool for educational

success among Native American students. From this point forward, I will walk in beauty and harmony toward healing and strive to carry on traditional knowledge.

Now go back and read the dissertation again.

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