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DINÉ EPISTEMOLOGY: SAAH NAAGHÁI BIK'EH HÓZHÓÓN TEACHINGS

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**DINÉ EPISTEMOLOGY: SA'AH NAAGHAI BIK'EH
HOZHON TEACHINGS**

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

For my ancestors and Diyin Dine'é, Ahe'hee for awakening me and bringing me home.

For my late mother, Ida Louise Begay, A mother's love is forever.

For my late paternal grandparents, Mary Blackhorse Nez & Bit'ahnii Nez, Ahe'hee for raising me and planting the seeds.

For my late father, David Charlie Nez, I wish we had more time.

For my siblings (family), Calvin M. Nez, Darlene M. Nez-Smith, & David C. Nez.

For my other family: Paulene F. Beach & the late Frederic A. Beach, Lisa Mann, Michael Beach, Daniel Beach, & Crystal Dunn, Honeyville & Berwick will always be home.

For all my nieces, nephews, & grandchildren, learn the teachings.

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For the Diné people.

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ABSTRACT

Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón (SNBH) is *Diné* epistemology, a complex system of knowledge encompassing two paradigms: Beauty Way (*Hózhóójii*-female) and Protection Way (*Naayée' k'egho*-male), with *hózhó* at its core. The study examines personal narratives of SNBH through lived experiences toward *hózhó*. The literature review looks at *Diné* worldview from the perspective of published *Diné* scholars on SNBH for *Diné* youth. This qualitative case study approach, using Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous research methodology framework, allowed for intensive descriptions and analysis of SNBH. The interviews explored participants' lived experiences using narrative inquiry to understand SNBH. The findings suggest that there is a significant relationship between SNBH—when interpreted through storytelling—and transformative awakening that could lead to new understanding of responsibility and purpose in the lives of *Diné* youth. The author concludes that more research is needed on *Diné* epistemology to develop *Diné* -centered educational frameworks on transformative pedagogical practices for mindfulness using principles of *hózhó*.

(Key words: *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH), *hózhó* (harmony), *K'é* (kinship), *Dinetáh*, *Diné* (the People), Narrative Inquiry, Mindfulness, and Storytelling).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The paper is formatted in the following: Chapter 1: Introduction: (1) Background: Personal Narrative, (2) Purpose and Significance of the Study, (3) Research Questions, (4) Definitions of Key Terms, and (5) Limitations, Delimitations of the Study.

When I began this study, I was interested in *Diné* language and culture teachers and how they use *Diné* epistemology as an educational tool. As I pursued this topic, the term *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón (SNBH)* kept emerging, and I began to ask, “What is SNBH?” I did not know what it was. I did not even know how to pronounce the component words of SNBH. I had heard SNBH in prayers, in chants, in stories, and in ceremonies, and this soon became the focal point of my study. A *Diné* elder talked about SNBH at a gathering and that ignited my thought process.

My personal and spiritual journey toward understanding SNBH is deeply rooted in spirituality as expressed in mindfulness and transformation. My academic journey began when I decided to conduct this study eight years ago, but the process of understanding SNBH took me more than 20 years. This experience forms my personal narrative and perspective as a *Diné* woman. Transformation happens to everyone all the time. It is a natural part of life. As we change, our mind and body reconfigure to learn new things. However, spiritual transformation provides the most impact. The journey to transformation involves applying these new skills to address the need to change, deal with troublesome emotions, and work towards the deep healing needed to live a harmonious life.

As we recite the chants and prayers of SNBH, one listens carefully to the words, and these words transcend one's self to a higher consciousness. When you practice these

prayers and chants away from the ceremonies, you will still feel the transformation. It is like planting seeds—when a new season comes, the seed blooms and your awareness and knowledge grow. Transformation begins to unlock obstacles to a higher consciousness.

When transformation occurs, you cannot see it—only the person experiencing the transformation will know what is happening. This research will attempt to create a pathway to SNBH. Towards that end, I have chosen *Diné* scholars to provide background stories of SNBH that support my investigation of how to apply Diné epistemology to storytelling. I also referenced other Indigenous scholars to aid me in structuring an Indigenous research methodology in which I could analyze the findings. These authors provided critical examples that accelerated my own understanding of SNBH knowledge and wisdom. Bagele Chilisa (2012), in her book *Indigenous Research Methodologies (IRM)*, looked at transformative paradigm research for Indigenous knowledge systems and how Indigenous researchers make meaningful sense using Indigenous knowledge. Chilisa elucidates the challenges of research in culturally complex settings. The four research paradigms she mentions are: (1) Positivist/Post-Positivist, (2) Interpretive/Constructivist, (3) Transformative, and (4) Pragmatic. She adds that “Indigenous Storytelling” must be heard and added as a fifth paradigm to IRM as a decolonizing and indigenizing approach. For this research, I am using Storytelling as a fifth paradigm.

Chilisa’s work illuminated the fact that, while undertaking Indigenous research using Indigenous epistemology and the Indigenous research model is not easy, it is still possible. We, Indigenous peoples, must no longer accept non-Indigenous researchers telling us that our Indigenous youth continue to fail at meeting core standards while they

are losing their culture and language. We, as Indigenous peoples, must no longer ignore the sacred ancient epistemology, axiology, paradigms, and methodology that give us our livelihood, identity, and connection to the spirits, the Holy People, and the universe. *Diné* epistemology is the embodiment of our sacred ancient knowledge system. There are other Indigenous scholars who discuss their Indigenous epistemology and share their knowledge system. For example, Manulani Aluli Meyer (2016), a world scholar-practitioner of Hawaiian and Indigenous epistemology, says, “Epistemology is a key idea. It is a way to look at knowledge and think about knowledge. The Hawaiian people have knowledge systems that are old and ancient and these ideas” (Keyele, 2010). Navajo epistemology, therefore, is important to use for this research to explain SNBH and interpret its meaning. The participants will add their personal narratives as well.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss more under ‘Indigenous Epistemology and Indigenous Research Methodology’ of Aluli Meyer’s concept of Hawaiian epistemology and Bagele Chilisa’s IRM that were so critical in helping formulate my understanding of *Diné* epistemology and SNBH.

SNBH is a complex system of oral stories and teachings that has several dimensions and multiple layers. While some people say *Diné* epistemology is a religion, I don't consider it as such. *Diné* ancestors had a strong connection to their spirituality and maintained an awareness that connected them consciously to their surroundings, to nature, and the cosmology. SNBH teachings are not written or recorded anywhere. It is through storytelling that knowledge is transferred from generation to generation and oral history preserved. I included my story to demonstrate a lived experience of my path

toward SNBH, what Diné epistemology is, and how it made me begin to see the world differently.

Background: Personal Narrative

Ya'at'eeh. Let me introduce my clans—where I come from—and describe the journey of how I arrived at SNBH from my lived experience and perspective. I will explain the transformation I went through to learn and understand SNBH, and how it changed my thought process and life philosophy. Let me introduce my clans: *Shi ei Tachiinii nishli*, *Ta'neezahnii ei bashishchiin*, *Naakai Dine'é ei dashicheii* (maternal grandparents), *Bit'ahnii ei dashinali* (paternal grandparents). This is how I identify myself to all my relations and to the Holy People. I come from a small town in northwestern New Mexico on the Navajo Nation. I was born in the month of the Big Wind (December). I had parents who gave me life and grandparents who raised me. I am a sister, aunt, mother, grandmother, student, educator, and researcher. I want to give thanks to all that have come in my path to make this research happen.

My personal narrative—the story of how I came to learn about SNBH, and how it has affected my life and my education—is an introduction to this study. The importance of using *Diné* epistemology as a theoretical framework and research methodology is to bring clarity, understanding, and new knowledge of ancient teachings and their impact on the development of Indigenous mind, body, and spirit. SNBH is a part of a greater knowledge system. It is new to me; I am still learning; I will never know all of it. But I wanted to begin sharing why the process and practice is important for *Diné* youth to move toward mindfulness, awareness, understanding, and transformation.

My journey is both humble and powerful. When a person is introduced to a new philosophy at any age, there may be some resistance and backlash at first. But if they are open-minded, they can receive it. SNBH is sacred; the knowledge was gifted to me, and I have a responsibility to share what I have learned for the next generation. Dr. Larry Emerson was a member of my dissertation comprehensive examination and dissertation committee. He passed away on August 19, 2017. I first met Dr. Emerson at a lecture he gave at Diné College. He was a kind intellectual who persuaded me to include my story. He told me, “*Diné* youth will never know your story if you do not include it. This is important to help Diné youth who are searching for the meaning of life so that they may also take the first step toward SNBH.” I hope the next generation will read or hear my story and be inspired.

My upbringing was difficult. I vaguely remember my parents and my relatives when I was a child. My mother died when I was four years old. After she died, my mother’s relatives took us away, but within a year or two, my paternal grandparents collected us and raised us on my father’s side and clan. I grew up in my paternal grandparents’ traditional *Diné* home with my three siblings— “traditional” meaning that my grandparents did not speak English (nor did they go to school). *Diné* was our primary language. We lived in a two-room home without electricity, running water, or modern facilities. One room, I shared with my siblings, and the other was occupied by my grandparents, the kitchen, and eating area. My paternal grandfather was a community leader, a medicine man, and a rancher. My paternal grandmother raised sheep and wove beautiful Two-Grey-Hill style rugs. She was the foundation of the family. She never drank alcohol and had an unconditional love for everyone.

We each have a story, and every story has its purpose. Sometimes our lives hold tragic memories. For me, I lost both parents early through the death of my mother and the incarceration and abandonment of my father. These two events altered my life pattern and my sense of self. Often in the *Diné* culture, the loss of a loved one is a rushed process, as the family must bury the individual within four days. They are often told not to cry or speak about the individual afterwards. Because of this tradition, I never had a chance to grieve the loss of my mother, nor was I allowed to talk about her until I was older. Her death was a life changing experience, one I did not know how to process, even as a teenager or adult.

As soon as I turned seven, I was placed in a local Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) boarding school. The boarding school experience was a disconnection from my family and community. This was a period in which we were not punished for speaking *Diné* at school, but neither were we taught about *Diné* culture or the history of the American Indians. We were introduced to Christianity at boarding school and everyone was encouraged to join a church. My siblings, my grandparents, and I converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS or Mormons). I was baptized at nine years old at the Toadlena LDS Chapel. At age 14, my siblings and I enrolled in the LDS Indian Placement Program to live with a Mormon family in Utah. This experience meant longer separation from my family and homeland. I was placed with a family, newly converted to the church, in the rural town of Honeyville, Utah. There I went to high school, graduating at age 16. I was happy, but deep in my heart, I still felt disconnected. I remained in Utah and never moved back to *Dinéétah*.

Growing up, I remember a few spiritual influences. My grandmother taught my siblings and me to pray with white and yellow cornmeal at dawn and dusk to greet and thank the Holy People. There were also the Native American Church (NAC) ceremonies that I attended for my education. I listened to the chants, heard people pray, and witnessed the beauty of the medicine's teachings and the difficulty of walking the *Red Road* as well. My understanding of NAC ceremony is that it came from other tribes and bears Christian influence. My grandfather, uncles, and my father learned of these rituals and practiced this faith; however, it was always too difficult to sit in the sacred circle with relatives because when they walked out the next day, they merely reverted to their bad behavior.

I believe the difficulties I experienced in my youth only drew me closer to the traditional *Diné* ceremony as I sought to restore my mind, body, and spirit as an adult. At one traditional healing ceremony, I witnessed my sister being healed. I was told that you do not interfere with natural occurrences nor think bad thoughts about anything. It was always uttered that we should be cautious, but we were never told why. My grandmother said that it was sometimes difficult to be *Diné*. The Holy People wanted us to live a good life because, if we make a mistake, who would fix us? And so, we were constantly reminded to walk in beauty, and respect all that is around us.

As a child, I primarily feared the medicine people. Many times, the significance of the ceremonies was not explained, which made them more disturbing. My baptism in the Mormon faith led to further confusion, but one thing I never forgot was to say my prayers at dawn and at dusk, and to pray for my people, our homeland, the water, air, and all living creatures.

While at school on the Indian Placement Program, I did not ask what tribe I was, but I knew I was *Diné*. I did not know what it meant to be *Diné*. I often took things with a grain of salt, meaning, that it was okay to believe what I was told to believe, so long as I had a good life and would be saved. In high school, I went to seminary and learned more about the LDS faith. On weekdays, I was fully involved with church activities, and every Sunday I attended church. I did not question anything; I just went.

After high school, at age 18, I dropped my full-ride scholarship to a private institution and left the LDS faith to pursue “my truth.” What truth? I no longer wanted to attend the LDS church because I felt that I was destined to do something more with my life. I bounced around trying to find something to believe in, without church or ceremonies, throughout my 20s and into my 30s. In my early 30s, I was introduced to the Kanzeon Zen Center and learned to meditate. Learning about meditation enabled me to recognize my dysfunctional mind, body, and spirit. The teachings did not say I was a bad person, but that I had been stuck in an unhealthy thought process for too long. I wanted to learn how to come out of it. Throughout my life, I had yearned for something to comfort me, to give me love, and a sense of belonging. These longings led to moments of despair when I felt no one cared about me or loved me. I felt abandoned by my parents, unhealed, and incomplete. I had an empty space that needed to be filled.

I read *Motherless Daughters* by Hope Edelman (1994) that I began to see the lessons of losing a parent. Edelman says, “Early loss is a maturing experience, forcing a daughter to age faster than her peers at both cognitive and behavior levels” (p. xxv). She goes on to say that the daughter then has to cultivate self-confidence and self-esteem elsewhere:

“Without a mother or mother-figure to guide her, a daughter also has to piece together a female self-image on her own.” (p. xxv).

Mother loss was a significantly difficult memory and experience for me. This separation in retrospect also became my mother's legacy to me, in that she transformed me into who I am today. I believe sometimes we go through life not knowing that there is a better, more optimal way to function.

In 1991, at age 29, I was invited to a pilgrimage retreat in New Mexico with the late spiritual leader, Leon Secatero, of the Canoncito Band of Navajos of Tohajiilee (40 miles west of Albuquerque). At the retreat, I learned about the Holy People and the emergence of the *Diné*. The act of offering cornmeal (white or yellow) and corn pollen, sometimes tobacco (mountain tobacco) and water, was explained to me as an act of acknowledging the deities. By calling their names, they appear one-by-one, and bless you with love, joy, happiness, compassion, and safety. If you ask for their help, they heal, and instill mindfulness and conscious awareness for a lifelong journey through good and bad times. These ancestral teachings embodied perspectives of reality for me. It reminded me of my grandparents saying that if we listened and watched the teacher's mouth, we would learn and remember what was being said. They told us not to sleep too late because things will pass us by and that the Holy People will not stop to give us their blessings.

The stories I heard at the retreat embodied *Diné* cultural values and conveyed life lessons for avoiding foolishness and things that could harm the mind, body, and spirit. Thus, I began to question my identity as a *Diné* woman. One thing that I learned about myself was that, as a *Diné* woman, I did not have a *Kinaaldá*. What is *Kinaaldá*? A friend explained to me what a *Kinaaldá* signifies to a *Diné* woman:

“*Kinaaldá* is only for women— you have a *Kinaaldá* (puberty rites of passage into womanhood) ceremony after your first, and sometimes the second, menstrual cycle begins. In the ceremony, a medicine person explains the role of becoming a woman, a mother, a wife, a relative, and the roles in a marriage, of having children, relations with others in the community, and your relationship with the Holy Ones. Songs for the home, for wealth, for health, for children, knowledge, journey (mountain songs), weaving, are sung.” (Betty Blake, personal communication, October 1999)

When I learned about the significance of SNBH teachings, and my deprivation of the *Kinaaldá* ceremony, I was hurt. I did not have the *Kinaaldá*, nor did I have any type of ceremony to restore harmony and beauty after my mother’s death. I felt a terrible engulfing loneliness in my spirit because these teachings were not shared with me.

I do not know why this was not shared with me when I was a child. It seemed that important teachings were withheld. The *Kinaaldá* ceremony molds a girl into womanhood, allowing her to receive teachings and blessings from White Shell Woman or Changing Woman. This ritual ensures a rich life filled with blessings and confidence when the transformation occurs. Because I was sent to boarding school at a young age, I could not have my *Kinaaldá*. Like so many other Indigenous persons' experience of boarding school, I was not taught about my cultural identity and greatly missed out on my rites of passage. I was denied the core values and teachings from the Beauty Way and Protection Way ceremonies, which form the umbilical cord to the Holy Ones. Instead I suffered emptiness, anguish and sadness. I grew up speaking *Diné* and I thought I

understood some of the traditions, but I did not know anything about *Diné* epistemology or SNBH teachings.

At the retreat, I learned about my culture and language from a *Diné* elder. It was the first instance that someone took the time to explain things to me. At times it was overwhelming, but I listened and asked questions. Because I did not receive SNBH teachings in a *Kinaaldá* ceremony, I often felt that I did not possess a solid foundation, and that my worth was not valued. I felt anger that left me empty and without purpose. Maybe there was a reason I did not have the ceremony. I always thought it was because I was a burden to my grandparents who raised me. Maybe these are some of the reasons why so many lives of children like me, who suffered from abuse and neglect, and felt unloved and unwanted, end in violence or suicide.

A major shift occurred in my life after attending a Native American Church ceremony in 1999. Afterwards, I drove back into Utah Valley and felt different. It was time to leave Utah. I did not know where I was going, but I wanted to visit the sacred mountains in *Dinétaah*. Instead of going clockwise, I went counter-clockwise and started in the north, traveling west, south, and east to complete my journey back to *Dinétaah*. The purpose of clockwise circling, in both Buddhist and *Diné* philosophies, is to center and purify oneself. I went in this order because that was what I was instructed to do. To find healing and interpret what the spirits were telling me, I had to make some hard decisions during this time in my life. I think I went to the north first because my mother died in Colorado. I found refuge near Mount Hesperus (*Dibé Nitsaa*). I wanted to heal myself and practice grounding meditation.

While in Colorado, I was close to home. I was invited to my first *Kinaaldá* ceremony in the Monument Valley area. I stayed up all night, observing and listening to the elderly medicine man chant songs of beauty and *hózhó* and the prayers that this girl would blossom into a fine woman with a long life of joy and happiness. I admired the beautiful songs and prayers. This ceremony healed me; finally, I understood why Changing Woman and White Shell Woman bring the teachings of becoming a woman, to strengthen one's mind, body, and spirit. The purpose of the ceremony and teachings are to bring a person back into harmony and balance. As the ceremony is administered, you are part of the process and enter a meditative state. When the songs are sung, and the prayers are recited, it creates a continuous motion that acknowledges each part of the body from the feet to the top of the head. This was the beginning of my transformation to embody SNBH teachings and to spiritually connect with the deities. I was afraid at the beginning, but I remembered back to the retreat: Leon had told us not to fear the Holy People that they will guide us and teach us.

Through mindfulness, I was able to learn to listen without judgment. The ceremonies demonstrated awareness-training strategies, such as meditation, that strengthened emotional stability and created positive moods for myself. Meditation cultivates a mindful awareness and expands consciousness. Learning about meditation through Buddhist teachings helped me reflect on *Diné* culture. In *Diné* and Mahayana systems, the goal is one's personal liberation of self from suffering. I learned that in SNBH teachings, one goes through transformation of the mind, body, and spirit by freeing the self from the pain one has held onto, which causes sickness to all aspects of being. I felt my own rebirth experience through a ceremony in which I walked on a line

of corn meal/pollen, and then sat on a sand painting that symbolized a path constructed by the Holy Ones, to a place where I felt welcomed and restored.

I went to the west mountain, San Francisco Peak. I moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, and I sought refuge there. I met someone special during this time who came from a family of healers in the traditional ceremonies and NAC. I went to many NAC ceremonies with him and helped in numerous prayer sessions for people who wanted healing for their mind, body, and spirit. I was taught by his mother and other *Diné* women to be a *Diné* woman. I was taught to help, to have patience, and sit upright in the ceremonies. I was taught how to dress, wear my hair, and conduct myself. I practiced my meditation skills during the ceremonies, but I was instructed to be present and assist where I was needed. This was a very important lesson I learned, because two years ago, I was asked to tie a young girl's hair with a deerskin strip for her *Kinaaldá*.

I went to the south mountain, Mount Taylor, and sought refuge. I came to Albuquerque in 2001 and met Leon again in 2006. He did not remember me. I told him that I witnessed dreamlike events at the retreat and that it had haunted me for many years. I shared that I came back to the Four Corners to reconnect with what the spirits showed me at that retreat. I explained to him that sitting up all night listening to stories and offering tobacco to the Holy People at dawn was the beginning of my journey to reconnect with the ancient teachings. This was a time of awakening in my being and connecting with the spirits—the mystic supernatural that I had forgotten was with me. Returning to this region helped me with further healing. It was also a time of personal doubt, as I felt unsure about making a life with someone.

I finally went to the east mountain, Blanco Peak, and made offering at the base of the eastern gateway. I had seen this place before. I remembered the mountain when I was a small child. This was near the place my mother died. I was asked to help a family in Aguilar, Colorado. The children's mother had died, and the father was incarcerated. The grandmother was granted custody of the children and needed assistance. Before I arrived at the ceremony, I visited the sacred mountain and asked for strength and healing for myself and for the little children. This experience was full-circle for me. I saw myself in the children, and what it must have been like when our mother died. This family was asking for a ceremony for the children, so that they could grieve and let go of their sorrows and live a happy life with their grandparents, with the additional prayer that someday their father would come back to them. I remember talking about my own past. People shed tears because we did not have a ceremony for healing when our mother died. How astounding is this that I would come full-circle to a place where I could bring love, healing, and compassion to four little children!

All the tears I had cried, and all my heartache, slowly subsided. After this ceremony, I reflected on my journey. Up to this point, I had met many kind people in the ceremonies (and some not-so-kind). The compassionate ones had taken me under their wings and taught me patiently about being a *Diné* woman. I know in my heart that I was loved by these people, some of whom have now left this world. I know that my grandparents loved me and did their best to give me a home and support for me. I know now that my mother was a good mother who died trying to protect us and made sure we were left in a strong woman's care. I met my father off and on through the years, but the last ten years of his life, I spent more time with him, traveled with him, and attended

some NAC ceremonies with him. Those were good times. I know that he loved me too. I will always miss these key figures in my life and I honor them now. SNBH brought healing to my being. I never doubted the Holy People again.

With the start of a new journey, Leon invited me to a retreat scheduled for October 2008. I was preparing for the retreat when I learned of his passing on September 28, 2008. I will never forget Leon Secatero. I lost a teacher that day. Yet, I believe that he had done his work with me and that it was up to me to pursue my own path and live it.

Steve McFadden wrote in eulogy:

Grandfather Leon Secatero, 65, Headman, Canoncito Band of Diné, widely respected native elder, a founder of Spiritual Elders of Mother Earth died on Sunday, September 28, 2008. Services were held each day, concluding Thursday, October 2, 2008 at Tohajiilee (Canoncito), NM. (October 1, 2008, Chiron Communications)

I was planning to go to law school; instead I went into education and earned a Master of Arts degree in educational psychology from UNM. After graduation in 2007, I took a few months off to live in Tasmania, Australia. While there, at Bruny Island, I climbed the stairs to The Neck and saw a memorial about an Aborigine woman called Truganini, who was indigenous to Bruny Island before the Europeans invaded. I read about how Truganini, witnessed the brutal murders of her people and was later taken to Flinders Island to a settlement or a prison (Ryan & Smith, 1976). This was a profound moment for me, as this memorial reminded me of my people's history. It was time to go home.

I returned to New Mexico and decided to pursue a PhD at UNM in language revitalization. I wanted to bring our heritage language back to the children and somehow return to the sacred teachings.

Indigenous epistemology is a cosmovision of the connectedness of time and space, when the first light appeared. SNBH is my foundation, the star path for self-actualization, self-help, self-identity, and self-awareness. The truth I was seeking for so long was all within. Manulani Aluli Meyer (2010) states that we are “nothing but awake, we just thought we were asleep” (p. 224), meaning that when we ask the universe, it will show us the way to these ancient teachings, the epistemology of our people, and, eventually, to sacred paradigms such as SNBH. I knew this was what I wanted to explore for my dissertation.

I experienced pain and loss at an early age, but I survived. I gained knowledge, an awakening, a transformation, through SNBH. I feel we are at a crucial period in research today, where we must recognize the value of processing new knowledge and understanding from Indigenous perspectives and allow the Indigenous children to become fluent in their native language, as I did. SNBH helped me speak *Diné* again. SNBH gave me confidence, self-love, and a life foundation. SNBH is whole, real, and alive. My story here is meant as a segue, an introductory background, that folds into the greater purpose and significance of this study.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how to illuminate or share knowledge of *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) paradigm with *Diné* youth, so that they may enjoy a balanced mind, body, and spirit. Today, many *Diné* young people face significant

challenges because they do not know their culture or how to speak their language. Many *Diné* youth know nothing about *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) teachings. This study describes the complex *Diné* belief system that everything has a place in the universe, and that all living things have duality in the form of female and male life, as expressed in Beauty Way and Protection Way teachings. When SNBH is explained, it allows for an individual to further recognize that, within these sacred ancient teachings, “You” are a Holy Earth Surface Being living in beauty and harmony. When these teachings are nurtured and practiced, the self is transformed.

This study demonstrates how *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) paradigm is significant to the lives of *Diné* youth. SNBH is the female version of the *Hózhóóji* teachings (Beauty Way). The other, and opposite, is the male version, referred to as *Naayée'k'egho Na'nitin* (Protection Way). The Beauty Way and Protection Way go together, paired as duality of female and male. The *Hózhóóji* and *Naayée'k'egho Na'nitin* teachings explain “how the two paradigms are tied and connected to the natural world and how they guide individuals to recognize life’s obstacles, ensure awareness of the self, and instill security, inner strength, and a firm foundation in life” (House, 2000, p. 93). SNBH is “at the core principle, to live in beauty and harmony” for many *Diné* people (Witherspoon & Peterson, 1995, p. 7). SNBH is beneficial in understanding the “study of knowledge nature” (Wilson, 2008, p. 33). Epistemological beliefs encompass both the idea of knowledge, and how knowledge is acquired. As Battiste (2002) writes, the context of awareness is thought to be “found in theories, philosophies, stories, ceremonies, and as ways of knowing” (p. 18). Furthermore, the implications of epistemological beliefs affect

educators and anyone working with Indigenous people, as they play a part in how an individual learns and experiences the world around them.

My personal narrative is intended to offer meaning, knowledge, and moral support to the choices one faces as a *Diné* youth. This way of learning is determined by the individual even when guided by elders. The stories create a curiosity, and a journey begins. The creation stories are passed on from generation to generation with meaning derived at certain times of the year according to the ceremony of the season. If an individual wants to learn, they sometimes must wait until the appropriate season.

Diné College, built in 1966 in Tsaile, Arizona, established SNBH as an educational philosophy. This was a momentous shift for *Diné* education. When I was a student at Chuska Boarding School in the 1970s, I heard nothing about SNBH or the term *Diné educational philosophy*.

To future researchers, this study has the potential to show why Indigenous knowledge is significant, and why it is so important to pass on to our youth. The traditional stories are baseline information for an understanding of Indigenous epistemology, but when we show the impact on individual experience, and how to apply it in real life, that is when the philosophy becomes more powerful.

Research Questions

The research questions were inspired from the term, *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH). I wondered: What does SNBH mean and how significant is SNBH paradigm for *Diné* identity, language, and culture? Where did SNBH come from, and why is it used in *Diné* ceremonies? Why did I not hear it when I was a young child in my

grandparent's household? And finally: How does one acquire an understanding of SNBH teachings, and how would someone apply SNBH knowledge in everyday living?

In qualitative research, the developed questions are stepping stones to learn about something unknown. They are the central element to both qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research allows you to seek to learn *how* or *why*, rather than *how often* something occurs and how widespread it is. The research questions I developed are designed to gain an in-depth understanding of SNBH from *Diné* educators and examine how different perspectives of SNBH teachings from *Diné* women and men might impact *Diné* youth. The following questions are based on my own understanding of SNBH teaching and practice. Some of them may overlap, but all must be considered to gain a fuller range of perspectives from *Diné* women and men who have experienced SNBH—how and why they use it in their profession, in their daily life, and why it is significant for *Diné* youth. There are six research questions:

1. What is *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) for the individual?
2. Why is SNBH significant?
3. How does one acquire or come to understand SNBH?
4. What is its purpose and what constitutes valid knowledge?
5. How does one transfer SNBH knowledge and apply and utilize in everyday life?
6. How does one experience transformation of self once he/she has acquired SNBH?

Definition of Key Terms

1. *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón*, or SNBH, is translated as *the philosophy of life*.
A way of life for the *Diné* people drawn from the Beauty Way ceremonial teachings of their epistemology.

2. *Diné*, the name of my people or tribe in its own language, translates to *The People*. *Diné* is used to refer to a singular person, a man, or plural for a group of people. For this study, *Diné* is used, and *Diné* is only used when the term is required. We are also federally recognized by the US Government as Navajo.
3. *Diné'tah* is the ancestral land of the *Diné* people. It is used to designate the land within the sacred mountains boundary.
4. *Epistemology* is the theory of knowledge, especially concerning its methods, validity, and scope. Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion. Shawn Wilson (2008) describes epistemology as the study of the nature of thinking or knowing. It involves the theory of how we come to have knowledge, or how we know that we know something (p 33).
5. *Indigenous* is used throughout this paper to refer to the people and peoples who identify their ancestry with the original inhabitants of Australia, Canada, and the United States. Indigenous is also as an adjective to describe things that belong to these peoples (like knowledge) (Wilson, 2008, p. 33).
6. *Paradigms* are broad principles that provide a framework for research. As paradigms deal with beliefs and assumptions about reality, they are based upon theory and are thus intrinsically value laden (Wilson, 2008, p. 33).
7. *Mindfulness (mindful)* is cultivating awareness, with the aim of helping people live each moment of their lives—even the painful ones—as fully as possible (Kabatt-Zinn, 1993, p. 260).

Limitations, Delimitations of the Study

The literature review discussed some examples of how narrative storytelling is used from other Indigenous scholars but geared toward a certain Indigenous population. The study focuses on how *Diné* individuals acquired SNBH knowledge, why it is significant to them, and how they use SNBH for everyday living. The reason for choosing to do the study was to empower *Diné* youth as they gain an understanding and knowledge of SNBH. However, it is up to the individual to accept these teachings. Limitations virtually affect all research projects, as well as most things in life. Delimitations clarify the boundaries (aspects of the problem, time and location of the study, sample selected, etc.) of your study, and limitations of the study expose the conditions that may weaken the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The study was conducted in New Mexico with *Diné* participants.

Limitations include the following:

1. The participants may not have been representative of the *Diné* language or culture.
2. SNBH may not have been interpreted the same way for everyone when asked about how much they know.
3. SNBH is very sacred and participants may not have shared all that they know.
4. The participant may not have accurately conveyed how they share their knowledge and skills of SNBH.

Delimitations include the following:

1. The location of the interview may not be representative of the Navajo Nation.
2. The time arranged for the interviews may not have been an appropriate time, due to scheduling conflict or researcher availability to conduct the interview.

3. The participants may not be viewed as a traditional individual to represent *Diné* cultural teachings.
4. The participant may not have grown up with SNBH knowledge.
5. The participant may not have understood or answered the research question(s) to the best of their ability.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The following are primary areas in Chapter 2: Literature Review (1) Introduction, (2) *Diné* Worldview, (3) *Diné* Scholars on SNBH, (4) Sylvia Jackson, (5) Wilson Aronilth, Jr., (6) Herbert Benally, (7) Rex Lee Jim, (8) Vincent Werito, (9) Deborah House, (10) Challenges for *Diné* Youth, and (11) Summary.

Introduction

The literature review briefly examines the *Diné* worldview and a geography of *Diné* and its cardinal points. *Diné* is a name given to the people by the Holy People which translates to “Man or People.” *Navajo* is the name given to the *Diné* by the Department of Interior of the United States of America as a federally recognized tribal nation. But for this study, *Diné* is used, and *Navajo* is only applied when needed.

The *Diné* worldview is based on the emergence of the people into the current world. The origin of the stories explains the sacred colors, mountains, and the deities who brought the teachings and gave them to the *Diné*, the people. They convey SNBH teachings and many other frameworks for different stages in one’s life, for all living things, for the home, and the universe. The teachings are often referred to as lifelong teachings because one will never learn all of it. The medicine people, healers, and traditional practitioners know part of it, specialize in one form, and have their own version of how it was passed to them. SNBH is the focus in this study, and *Diné* scholars will explain what it means and give some background history. There is a wealth of literature on *Diné* myth, but for this study, I wanted to focus on literature specifically from *Diné* scholars on SNBH and view their interpretations. Epistemological beliefs encompass both the idea of what knowledge is and how it is acquired.

The *Diné* way of life changed over the years. In 1868, after a four-year incarceration at Bosque Redondo, New Mexico, the *Diné* people signed a treaty with the U.S. government. What was “education” to the *Diné* people at the time? Education has many meanings. Through Indigenous lens, learning never ends—children are continuously given new tasks and responsibilities as they grow. SNBH paradigm is argued to be abstract, but to a *Diné* individual, it embodies everything around them. From *Diné* embodiment, “*Hózhó* conveys intricate notions of beauty, harmony, and order” (Chief, C. et al, 2016, p. i20).

Diné Worldview

The stories of *Diné* worldview are told in the winter season to respect the balance of the natural world. It is through creation myths that one can delve into *Diné* worldview. *Diné* worldview is considered “polytheistic” (Gaski, 1998), in which many deities are responsible for the creation of life. The stories are cosmogonic events told by the ancestors of their journey.

Dinétaah is the emergence place. There are various versions of *Diné* creation story recorded and written by non-*Diné*, I will use this view from an old book by Aileen O’Bryan in *The Diné: Origin Myths of the Navaho Indian* (1956) where O’Bryan recorded *Diné* storyteller Sandoval or Hastin Tlo'tsi hee (name translated by O’Bryan meaning Old Man Buffalo Grass) stories while living in Mesa Verde National Park. Sandoval tells his version:

The first world was the dark (black) world where the four *Diyin Dine’é* lived and the mist beings, Coyote, the insects, and the *Holy Wind Beings*. The myth narrates that the First Man and First Woman came into existence here. The second world

was the blue world, where blue-gray animals and birds dwelled. The third world was the yellow world, where two rivers cross and more animal people lived. A great flood occurred when coyote stole the Water Buffalo's children and they fled into the fourth world. The fourth world was the white world and monsters lived here. First Man was not content there because the great flood left the land barren and sent Locust to see about the Fifth World. Locust performed his magic and First Man and First Woman led the people to the Fifth World. Here the people were divided into two groups. Mountain Lion and Wolf were selected, and the people were told to choose one to be their leader. The people who chose Mountain Lion turned out to be the people of the earth and were instructed to plant and grow corn. The other who chose Wolf, became animals and birds, and all kinds of creatures and all went their separate ways. The sacred mountains are replications from the second world, and the animals played a significant role bringing the *Diné* people into the current world, the Fifth World. (p. 12)

All these things were spiritually created in the time before this world and before the physical aspect of humans existed. The relationship with the Holy Wind Beings changed when man was formed in this world. First Man and First Woman were given specific instructions on how to dwell alongside the animals, insects, wind, and land.

My understanding of *Dinétaah* is the place where the *Diné* dwell and where their creation begins. The original *Dinétaah* still exists, and the *Diné* still reside within their sacred boundaries, but their current land base has been reduced. The mountains, which are key cardinal points of the *Diné* sanctuary, include Mount Blanca (*Sisnajiini'* or White Shell Mountain), to the east in the San Luis Valley near Alamosa, Colorado; Mount

Taylor (*Tsodzil* or Turquoise Mountain), to the south near Grants, New Mexico; San Francisco Peaks (*Dook'osliid* or Abalone Shell Mountain), to the west near Flagstaff, Arizona; and LaPlata Mountain (*Dibé Nitsaa* or Obsidian Mountain), to the north near Mancos, Colorado. The other two sacred mountains are in the center: Huerfano Peak (*Dzil Na'oodilii*) near Huerfano, New Mexico where many *Diné* emergence stories begin; and the spiritual center of old Dinétah, Governador Knob (*Ch'oolii'i*), near the current Navajo Dam in Colorado/New Mexico where Changing Woman was found. Changing Woman is a very important figure to the *Diné*. Navajo Mountain (*Naatsis'aan*) is also another sacred mountain (rarely mentioned) in southeast Utah near Lake Powell. It is said our ancestors came from another light system or worlds before they came into this reality.

The practitioners, the medicine people and healers, and storytellers are holders of these stories and teachings that are often told during the ceremonies or during the winter months. Each practitioner has a unique calling to use from the elements gifted to them from the Holy People. They carry a variety of sacred knowledge and geographical knowledge of where these events occurred. In *Diné* narrative history, the purpose of the mountains, elements, and animals are told as instructive anecdotes, and often the practitioners say if one does not comply accordingly, a disruption in the natural world or self could ensue. SNBH paradigm is a stem of the Beauty Way teachings for lifelong journey and imparts stability in one's life journey for bringing one back to the *Diné* way of life.

Diné Scholars on Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón

Everything begins with prayer. *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* is the nature of *Diné* existence, an embodiment of *Diné* paradigm or ways of knowing. Leroy Little Bear (in Cajete, 2000) states, “Native American paradigm is comprised of and includes ideas of constant motion and flux, existence consisting of energy waves, interrelationships, all things being animate, space/place, renewal, and all things imbued with spirits” (p. ix). SNBH paradigm holds the principle to live in beauty and harmony at its core.

SNBH teachings are sacred and considered a way of life; therefore, this information must be handled with extreme care and with reverential respect, as many *Diné* today still follow the teachings and practice daily. It may not seem sacred to some individuals, but even the act of breathing is considered sacred to those who are devoted. While numerous non-*Diné* academic researchers and anthropologists have written about SNBH, I found a modest amount of research on SNBH from *Diné* perspective. Furthermore, SNBH cannot be known only by one person, or one teaching, or one way of knowing, because it has many forms of interpretation. But all are aiming for the same outcome—walking in beauty and creating harmony and compassion for all living things.

Navajo people believe SNBH focuses on healing the whole person (Roessel, 1979), on restoring peace and a sense of purpose; whereas mindfulness improves the health of the mind, body, and spirit. It takes practice to acquire the techniques and skills. It is also flexible; if one technique does not work well, you can change it to accommodate the individual.

Denetdale's book, *Reclaiming Diné History* (2007) demonstrates that writing on the Navajos is biased and not accurate from non-*Diné*. *Diné* perspective must be valued. Denetdale reveals in her writing that oral histories and narratives convey *Diné* beliefs and

values. The next section is a collection of stories from *Diné* scholars to convey how SNBH restores and balances the whole self.

When I met Sylvia Jackson, she was working for the Office of *Diné* Culture, Language, and Community Service (now called Office of Standards, Curriculum and Assessment Development). I was captivated by Sylvia's wisdom of storytelling and how she articulated her voice in *Diné*. Sylvia along with many other *Diné* storytellers collaborated on *Ama Sani doo Achei baahane* (2005). Sylvia wrote about seasons, climate, and weather which depicts the sun's pathway teachings, another form of SNBH paradigm.

Sylvia Jackson

Jackson (2004, #61, #62) states that SNBH represents a way of life in which the process of growing is reflected in following the sun's pathway for daily living. In this practice, the seasons, climate, and types of weather are depicted as part of the sun's pathway of growing throughout one cycle, a year. SNBH is the female version of the *Hózhóóji* teachings (the gentle teachings or Blessing Way). Beauty Way and Protection Way go together, paired as female and male. It is important that one understand this natural order so that it can be used as a guide to the decisions and choices one will face in life.

Jackson (2004) and Zolbrod (1995) note that SNBH came from the Holy Ones, one of whom, White Shell Woman (*Yoolgaii Asdzaa*) demonstrated that her existence can be found within the seasons. This was her purpose for coming to the earth surface as she walked round the fire hearth from the east to the south, west and north—the sunward path. The people witnessed her return to her youth, adolescence, adulthood, and old age

as she completed the circle. White Shell Woman said to the people, “You will know I will be with you as you witness the change of the four seasons from spring, summer, fall, and winter (*daango*, *shiingo*, *ák’ée’go*, and *haigo*). I will be the seasons” (Jackson, 2004, #61, #62). Each season represented certain activities as the sun journeyed from east to west, and each season represents both male and female roles throughout one’s life.

In conclusion, Jackson says, as the seasons change, ceremonies are encouraged to restore harmony through the beauty path of SNBH. For example, sweat ceremonies are summer ceremonies where rocks are heated, and water poured for steam while participants consume wild tea to obtain a clean body free of toxic elements. SNBH paradigm always leaves an opening so the individual can be flexible—they can leave *Dinétah* and come back.

I did not find many SNBH stories by *Diné* woman, but I valued Jackson’s story and the impact for *Diné* girls. In the publication, Jackson shared many traditional stories accordingly to the seasons and living in harmony with the natural world.

The next *Diné* scholar teaches Navajo philosophy at Diné College. I was not familiar with Diné College when I first went there in 2006. I had heard of the college, but I did not know about the SNBH paradigm for an educational model. I was referred to Mr. Aronilth and contacted him to learn about the classes he teaches at Diné College. He is a storyteller and has great wisdom around SNBH.

Wilson Aronilth, Jr.

Aronilth is a faculty member at Diné College in Tsaile, Arizona, where his writings are used as the curriculum for Navajo Philosophy. SNBH is the core teaching and the foundation at Diné College. Aronilth (personal communication, February 7, 2011)

stated that the main intent of SNBH is to introduce the basic *Diné* way of learning to the students. Aronilth (1992) wrote that the:

“*Diné* way of learning is necessary for each young person to feel the power of a sense of worth, not only in himself or herself, but a sense of worth in his/her beliefs, community, education, family, land and values so that an adolescent will understand his role in life” (p. 2).

Furthermore, he states that SNBH reinforces the reality that life is not always easy, life is not always a Blessing Way, but can be harsh, and a *Diné* person needs to know how to protect themselves from this reality. Therefore, they must learn to maintain balance by giving offering, praying daily, and performing the ceremonies when needed, to return to *hózhó* . Otherwise, balance and harmony will disappear.

Aronilth said today most *Diné* people sleep too much and wake late. In a personal communication (February 7, 2011), he told a story of when he was a little boy. His grandmother would go outside when the morning star was out and pray for all of them. His grandmother would say that we must go outside and greet the Holy People and make offerings, and that we should never forget our prayers and songs. Aronilth claimed that, conversely, through laziness comes mean tempers, greed, jealousy, and moody behaviors.

Aronilth (1992) dissects the meaning of SNBH: *Sa'ah* refers to *Nilchi Diyin* , which literally translates to *holy people*. He told me to be very careful how I translate this because the *Diné* language has been studied by many non-Navajo linguists, and some have altered the way our language is written and sounds. He says *Naaghái* refers to walking in balance. *Naaghái* should reflect your characteristics, your existence, and how beautiful you are. When one walks, and lives, and learns with SNBH, they will

understand what it means to have positive energy. They do not need to question to learn (Aronilth, 1992). *Bik'eh* refers to obeying the natural laws and following the higher intelligence of the Holy People (*Nilchi Diyin*). *Hózhóón* refers to living the path of happiness and enjoyment to achieve success.

He says in SNBH, one is seeking to live the path of happiness and enjoyment, and, above all else, to achieve success. Aronilth also states that *hózhó* (happiness), great interest (*bohoneedlí*), and creative learning (*nizhonigo adahooláá*) are elements an individual is seeking to achieve success. These are the reason one wakes very early—to seek joy and happiness, to have a good, sound mind and physical fitness. This allows one to have a positive, creative, and critical mind to think, plan, set goals, make ethical decisions, and to prioritize one's purpose in life. In *Diné, T'áá hwo'ájit'ée* (self-esteem, self-interest, self-motivation, self-honesty, self-value) must be entirely self-generated to be successful.

He says that SNBH is inside you, it refers to the spirit and soul that is the real you. SNBH is rooted in your hopes and faith. SNBH is your spirit, soul, your blood flow, your mind, and body. He states that when your grandma and grandpa pray, they say, *hozhoogo, nizhonigo diyingo, Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón, naashaa dooleel* which means that your prayers are SNBH rooted in hope and faith, and you walk in beauty and harmony. Aronilth claims that when you make your prayers, you create what is in your mind. Therefore, you must keep your thoughts clear and positive to bring positive energy and stay in balance and harmony with your surroundings. SNBH means you hope to be successful, because when you lose hope, you will try to commit suicide or fall into bad habits and wander. He uses the term *digiiis* (losing your way) to capture not living

according to SNBH teachings because your thoughts have created another dimension in which negative energies encompass your mind. He continues that you should have unconditional faith to challenge the impossible, and this is where you will see and know that life is not all “rosy and sweet.” The challenges and hardships of life become surmountable through the unconditional faith and vision of SNBH. Your prayer is your vision, and your song is your mission. He reiterates that:

“SNBH is your spirit, soul, your blood flow, your mind and body, and SNBH will take care of you when you walk, live, and learn. You will have positive thoughts and you will not doubt its teaching because SNBH gives you positive energy.”
(personal communication, February 7, 2011)

In conclusion, Aronilth equates SNBH to the water you drink, the food you eat, the air you breathe; it becomes your life and your purpose. SNBH is your prayer and song, showing you why you are here, and where you and future generations are going in the next 100, even 500, years. He states that if you lose this, you will be confused. But to know SNBH is simple.

Aronilth translated the complex system of SNBH and stressed that it can self-destruct when other attachments interfere, and you become irresponsible. According to Aronilth, self-care must be achieved through discipline and interconnectedness with the Holy Ones. The recognition and realities of the stories he shares must not be lost. The “old” *Diné* language he uses is valuable as it gives a deeper meaning when he tells these stories.

The next scholar was unknown to me, but referred by the late, Dr. Larry Emerson. Benally and Emerson (2008) has been instrumental in developing the Hozhoogo Na’ada

Assessment Model. This has been a critical tool for *Diné*-centered research and *Diné* communities impacted by the environmental destruction of fracking, and has encouraged critical dialogues between *Diné* scholars and *Diné* youth.

Herbert J. Benally, PhD

Benally is a Navajo scholar at Diné College (1994) who wrote a scholarly dissertation on SNBH in 2008 entitled “*Hozhoogo Naashaa Doo: Toward a Construct of Balance in Navajo Cosmology*” and initiated the educational philosophy at Diné College. He states that

Navajos divide their sacred knowledge between the winters and summer seasons. It is taboo to discuss winter stories in the summer and that most of the sacred knowledge is only told in the winter. There is also certain ceremonial knowledge that is kept within the circle of the ceremony and cannot be shared with the public. (p. 23)

Benally (1994) states that the ancient tribal stories identify the creators of this world as SNBH, and in this concept, lies the sacred and spiritual identity of the Navajo people. SNBH represents a combination of separate male and female concepts:

The first concept is *Sa'ah Naaghái* and is defined as the indestructible and eternal being that is male and exhibits male-like qualities. *Bik'eh Hózhóón* is the second concept and is defined as the director and cause of all that is good and is female and exhibits female-like qualities. SNBH combines these two concepts that do not operate apart but complement each other in their duality. (p. 24).

According to Benally, SNBH is the very idea from which the universe is constructed. It is the power by which all things are created, organized, and governed. It is

the life force of the universe. Benally (1994) describes the Navajo people as the Holy People who have made SNBH their way as well. To learn SNBH is to internalize the principles of *hozhoogo iiná* (good life) and the way of happiness (p. 24). By embracing these teachings, we evolve into our true selves. In this view, *Diné* individuals must be taught the Navajo way of life to become a fully functioning being. This is achieved through ceremonial prayers that reaffirm the concept of happiness.

Furthermore, Benally (1994) states that the purpose of SNBH is to reach *hózhó* - a state of peace, happiness, and plenty where balance and harmony can be achieved, and to learn behavior applicable to *hózhó*. This is referred to as the “Beauty Way of Life” or the beautiful life, *hozhoogo iiná* (p. 27). He (1994) describes how “life becomes the knowledge itself because everything in life is part of the four branches of knowledge, the four stages of maturation, and the four cardinal directions” (p. 24). Benally (1994) further explains the framework of Navajo philosophy “as a process guided by the four principles of knowledge life as a whole” (p. 2).

In conclusion, Benally (1994) states that understanding metaphysical and physical realities are key to Navajo reality and purpose. Spirits have a critical role in the *Diné* worldview, for they are endowed with responsibilities within the natural order of things. SNBH protects the knowledge sources.

The next scholar, Rex Lee Jim, described himself as a poet during his book reading and signing of “Saad,” his 1995 collection of short poems (Navajo Times, April 9, 2015).

Rex Lee Jim

Lee Jim is the former Navajo Nation Vice President, an author, and an educator. Lee Jim (2000) writes in his autobiography that the medicine people have always known and talked about personal power. He states that living an honest life sometimes means you go through personal suffering, and that the truth hurts for those who do not know themselves. During life's fast-paced rhythm, some people search for the meaning of the truth they seek. He says that today, "Some of us have risen beyond ourselves, and we eagerly embrace the truth when we find it, for we constantly search for our wisdom in the everlasting intelligence" (p. 230).

Lee Jim (2000) recounts his grandfather's words to him: "My grandchild, wake up, our grandfathers, the gods, are upon us. Wake up and let us go greet them" (p. 231). As Lee Jim stood outside, his grandfather, who was also a medicine man, guided him to take a pinch of corn pollen, place a pinch on the tip of his tongue, another on his head just beyond his hairline, and another to gently make a road of corn pollen ahead of him with a single motion. Only Lee Jim knew how far into the future his thoughts went. As his right hand began to make the road, he would utter these words: *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón nishloo naashaa doo*. This utterance has a strong significance designed to empower and enlighten an individual and restore spiritual wellness for self, family, community, present, and future (Lee Jim, 2000).

Lee Jim deconstructs SNBH as follows: *Sa* means "old age;"; *ah* mean "beyond;"; *naa* means "environment;"; *ghái* means "movement;"; *bi* means "to it;"; *k'eh* means "according;"; *hó* means "self" and that sense of an ever-presence of something greater; *zhóón* means "beauty;"; *nishloo* means "I will be;"; "*naashaa doo*" means "may I walk" (p.

232). “May I walk,” invokes a sense of the omnipresent beauty created by the one that moves beyond old age. The more he analyzed SNBH, the more he believed one must do something right to reach old age. According to these teachings, reaching old age is an accomplishment, particularly 102 years old. He states that old age is not simply being old or achieving a milestone, but having a quality of ever-improving spirituality, physical growth, social flexibility, and mental processing.

In conclusion, he reminds us that SNBH is becoming, changing, and improving all the time. He states that when a *Diné* person is young, they do not listen, but at an older age, they look back and say, “If I could only live my life over again, if I only listened to my elders then. Grandma knew it all along, if they only told me this, if I only realized this when I was younger” (Lee Jim, 2000, p. 237). The formula is always there; sometimes we must go back and rekindle what our grandparents have shared with us.

The next *Diné* scholar wrote his dissertation entitled, “Racialization of Diné (Navajo) Youth in Education” at The University of New Mexico. He is a mentor, a colleague, and an educator/researcher of American Indian education issues and contributed a chapter on *Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón* in *Diné Perspectives Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought* (2014).

Vincent Werito, PhD

Werito (2014) a Navajo scholar, researcher, and educator at The University of New Mexico writes of how he stood behind his parents, and they began their prayers: “*Koodoo hózhó dooleel*” (It begins in beauty), “*nánitl’ah doo biyáhoyee’nidi hozhoogo naashaa dooleel*” (although it is hard and difficult to aspire to it we want to live our lives in beauty/harmony) (p. 25).

What does this mean for our contemporary lives as Navajo people? Werito writes about the different stages of his life while referencing *lina* and concepts in a lifelong journey to *hózhó*. Werito (2014) conveys that for

Many young people it is easier and more convenient not to think about SNBH, especially now in the contemporary context when other such as popular media and technology pervades our psyches. (p. 26)

He writes, “*Diné* peoples or *Ni’hookaa Diyiin Dine’é*—the five-fingered Earth surface spiritual being--SNBH is who we are; it is part of our thought processes and everyday life” (p. 26).

Furthermore, the consistency of defining *hózhó* as a state of harmony and peace aligns with the idea of previous scholars that one must nurture their own path toward SNBH. He states that this is already a complex idea demonstrated in its invocation in traditional *Diné* ceremonies and cultural teachings to generate a harmonious outcome. Werito posits that “*Hózhó* of SNBH could be interpreted as being essential to *Diné* holistic thought and practice that encompasses a much larger *Diné* worldview” (p. 26).

In conclusion, Werito believes that *Diné* teachings brings a state of *hózhó*, conscious awareness that brings harmony and peace. And it is “entirely up to you” to manifest the principles of thinking for yourself, to live life in a delicate manner with the universe; and lastly, to come into knowing who you are. These relational principles support *Diné* epistemology and SNBH through nurturing and sustaining the balance of life with the universe, earth, and all living things.

The next and last scholar is not *Diné* but has worked at Diné College for many years and has interviewed a *Diné* medicine man on SNBH.

Deborah House, PhD

House was a nonnative who taught and conducted her research at Diné College in the 1990s. I included House because she wrote, *Language Shift Among the Navajos: Identity Politics and Cultural Continuity* (2002) and interviewed Frank Morgan who talks about *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón*. I also wanted to relate House's understanding of SNBH at Diné College. House (2000) explains: "The male version, *Sa'ah Naaghái* (SN), is the protection way or *Naayée'k'egho Na'nitin* associated with the male aspect of SNBH. The *Naayée'k'egho Na'nitin* originates in the natural world and guides us in recognizing danger and obstacles." (p. 93)

House (2000) relates Frank Morgan's interpretation of SNBH:

Sa' means "old age;" *ah* means "up to, a long way to and beyond;" *Naa* means "around; cyclical repetitive;" *ghái* means "it walks there;" *Bi* means "its" (third person singular, possessive); *K'eh* means "according to, in line with;" *Hó* means "there is, the whole place;" *zhóón* means "beauty, balance, harmony, the way, the path of balance or harmony or beauty." Morgan's free translation of SNBH is: "past old age, the one that walks there in ultimate balance and harmony or on the balanced path," sometimes referred to as "long-life happiness." SNBH refers to a life that is characterized by the balanced and harmonious inter-relationship of male *Sa'ah Naaghái* protection way and female *Bik'eh Hózhóón* blessing way aspects, which comprise everything that exists in the four directions of the natural world, with the practitioner in the center of earth and above. The center goes everywhere you go; it never changes. SN is all things in the natural world: elements, people, animals, plants, heavenly bodies, and daily phenomena. BH is

all the things around you: mountains, clouds, rains, sun, moon, lightning, dawn, yellow twilight. Together, they have male and female relationships in everything you see and provide balanced and interconnectedness in an orderly way. Frank Morgan (House, 2000) says that Navajo employ their own philosophy - *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* - to learn both Navajo and Western language and culture without demeaning either perspective. (p. 92-93)

In conclusion, House writes the root of “*Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* helps to maintain balance and harmony...and this process was designed by the Holy People to assure long life happiness...and suggests that it might play a role in reversing *Diné* language shift” (p. xxvii). We (myself and the *Diné* scholars) on *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* believe that *hózhó* provides an important framework for *Diné* peoples to live in harmony and balance or continue to create more challenges for self.

Challenges for Diné Youths

Dinétaah is the beautiful and rugged home, and ancestral land, of the *Diné* people. This section gives a brief historical background from the *Diné*'s past as a nomadic tribe, to their confinement on present-day Navajo Nation and the transitioning of their children into western education.

By the 1860s, the world the *Diné* knew was all but destroyed. United States troops, other tribes, and Spanish and Mexican settlers had all turned their attention to the destruction of *Diné* after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican American War and granted the United States Mexico's northern territories and inhabitants (Roessel, 1979). Between 1861 and 1862, the American white settlers pushed their way into the Southwest and into the lives of the *Diné*. Tensions rose to a fever pitch resulting

in the forcible removal of thousands of *Diné* from their land and homes in 1863 under the military leadership of General James H. Carleton and Col. Christopher “Kit” Carson. Lamphere (2007) summarizes the “Navajos began to surrender...and marched more than 250 miles across what is now the state of New Mexico to Fort Sumner...more than 8,500 Navajo people were incarcerated for four years. (p.21)

This ordeal came to be known as “The Long Walk.” To the *Diné* it is known as *Hweeldí* (a place of great suffering). The *Diné* suffered at the hands of other attacking tribes and at the hands of soldiers who raped their women and abducted their children. Many died from the horrific conditions. The *Diné* who were not captured remained in western *Dinétaah*, where they held ceremonies and prayed for their relatives to come home.

After *Diné* were released and returned to their homeland between the sacred mountains. Kit Carson died one week before the *Diné* signed the Treaty of 1868 at Fort Lyon, Colorado. *Diné*, unlike other tribes along the eastern seaboard, were allowed to return to their beloved homeland. Following their homecoming, *Diné* lived in closer contact with White people through traders and government employees. To achieve peace and security for their tribe, the *Diné* leaders agreed to send their children for a western education. The compulsory education for *Diné* children (Treaty of 1868: Article VI) read:

...between the ages of six and sixteen years, to attend school; and it is hereby made the duty of the agent for said Indians to see that this stipulation is strictly complied with; and the United States agrees that, for every thirty children between said ages who can be induced or compelled to attend school, a house shall be provided, and a teacher competent to teach the elementary branches of an

English education shall be furnished, who will reside among said Indians, and faithfully discharge his or her duties as a teacher. (New Mexico State University, 2008)

The signing of the treaty colonized the *Diné* and Western education is actively still imposing to destroy *Diné* language and culture. It became a fact of life. Yellow Bird (2005) asserts that “The U.S. educational system has been one of the most hostile and oppressive aspects of colonialism” (p. 16). Through U.S. colonization and land reduction, *Diné* became a trust land, or a reservation, and a boundary was established for the *Diné* (see Fig. 1 of Navajo Reservation Map).

Though *Diné* was reduced, it is still striving to sustain a viable economy for an ever-increasing population that has now surpassed 250,000 *Diné*. The colonial-based economy created a system in which the people had to rely and depend upon federal monies and assistance, and policies were enforced to control the tribe.

Hildegard Thompson served as the Director of Navajo Education from 1949 to 1952. Her book *The Navajos' Long Walk for Education: A history of Navajo Education* (1975) gives a historical background of the first boarding school built on the Navajo reservation and the development of the Navajo Special Program designed to teach vocational skills to *Diné* students so that they could survive in mainstream society. She describes public school development for the *Diné* youth as mediocre. The teachers assigned to the *Diné* children were on their own and some teachers were simply ill prepared and did not have the resources or the funds to adequately serve *Diné* students (p. 63). Thompson notes many of the native children were Christianized when they were removed from their homes and brought into the school system. The school systems

treated the children harshly, demoralizing them by taking away their cultural and lingual identity. This type of treatment led to many native children performing poorly or becoming delinquent, but some of them did excel and went on to make a living in mainstream America (Thompson, 1975).

The Meriam Report (Meriam, 1928) brought national attention to the economic and social conditions of the American Indians in the 1920's. The most fundamental need was "to remove the Indian child as far as possible from his home environment" (p. 346) and "train all Indians for American citizenship, for absorption into the general citizenship of the Nation" (p. 348). The efforts to assimilate American Indians had resulted in disaster for many tribal nations. Yellow Bird (2005) again asserts that "Education and other racist policies and tactics have caused negative, oppressive effects on the critical thinking and responding capacities of the First Nations" (p. 16).

Over the years, the development of *Diné* children was affected tremendously by western education; neutralizing their language and culture constituted a core strategy of assimilation. Crawford (1995) found, between 1980 and 1990, the number of Navajos who were monolingual English speakers dwindled to about 15% of the Navajo Nation's population. The loss of *Diné* language is closely tied to a loss of culture (Batchelder, 2000) and still felt today. Language and culture is a component of *Diné* identity. Removal of one's identity is destructive. It generally takes four generations to revive a language, and it is not simple to re-learn the traditional teachings. Nonnative scholars state tribal nations in the United States are losing their language and culture at a rapid rate.

We must understand that not all members of the Navajo Nation share the same beliefs about language and culture loss and how their children should be educated.

Language and culture loss in the younger generation has been hastened by social media, the influence of Western lifestyle, lack of parental or grandparental guidance, and conversion to Christianity.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs, now known as Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) or the federal government, still plays a role in *Diné* education, health, and living standards. In 2005, the 20th Navajo Nation Council enacted the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005 (The Office of Diné Culture, Language, and Community Service, 2005), (CYJ-37-05) to establish the Navajo Nation Board of Education and the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education (DODE) to confirm the commitment of the Navajo Nation to the education of the Navajo people of Titles 10 and 2 of the Navajo Nation Code.

Furthermore, in Section D reads:

The Navajo Nation specifically claims for its people and holds the government of the United States responsible for the education of the Navajo People, based upon the Treaty of 1868 and the trust responsibility of the federal government toward Indian tribes. (p. 2)

Over the years since I initiated my research, many new policies and initiatives have been established, but to hold the United States responsible for the education of the Navajo People is not the path to reclaiming *Diné*-centered ways of knowing. Recognizing excellence and progress, while addressing failures, are the keys to improving *Diné* education system. Without incentives for effectiveness and replacing failure with success, our system of evaluating students is meaningless. Schools that represent Native students should take the opportunity to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and build curriculum in which the students can visualize and hear lessons through their own language and culture.

Standards established must be developed to help the students establish real-world skills. Many of these skills, Native children already possess, but they go unrecognized by the western perspective. If students are given more culturally appropriate teachings, they will be more likely to meet both Common Core standards in the public schools and Navajo Standards.

Summary

Diné people offer their prayers at dawn and twilight for a purpose to the Holy People who dwell in the House of Dawn, a place not to be entered by the people of the earth. The offerings are reminders to receive blessing, stay connected, and live a life in harmony and balance with beauty. SNBH paradigm has traditionally ensured that “the principles or rules for constructing a cognitive map for life were learned well by the people,” and it is the driving force that brings stability and knowledge and spirituality for a long life (Aronilth, personal communication, February 7, 2011). It also reminds us that life is not always easy, but through these hardships, and subsequent transformation spring new responsibilities for *Diné* youths to take their education to a new level. Educators must also acquire a new direction through substantial policy change for *Diné* students to succeed.

In the Treaty of 1868, *Diné* children were tossed into a ring of fire without any explanation of what the purpose of education entailed and today, the Navajo Nation still honors that. A new era has begun. The Navajo Nation is making slow progress to take control of their own schools and educate more *Diné* teachers. Maryboy, Begay, & Nichol (2006) state that the term “*Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón* has been used extensively by the *Diné* people.

To offer support to *Diné* youth, educators must generate a new way of thinking through SNBH that will help the youth to cultivate self-awareness. Educators must also communicate high expectations and demonstrate to Indigenous youth the importance of their cultural and traditional knowledge and the importance of their languages. They must continue to encourage their curiosity, exhibit humility, and share narrative stories of how the *Diné* people got to where they are today. They must provide the truth of why the *Diné* people have reached this critical time in history in which *Diné* ways of knowing are vulnerable to extinction. *Diné* worldview, *Diné* epistemology, and SNBH paradigm could be lost if we do not begin to provide a pathway to self-awareness for *Diné* youth. *Diné* epistemology, as I know it, is multi-dimensional and deep. Sharing *Diné* epistemology and teaching from SNBH paradigm reintroduces the *Diné* way of thinking and reintegrates these teachings into the home, school, and community. This must come down from Navajo Nation Council to the Department of Diné Education.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Chapter 3: Methods (1) Indigenous Epistemology and Indigenous Research Methodology, (2) Positionality of the Researcher, (3) Data Collection Procedures, (4) Sampling Procedures, (5) Research Site, (6) Research Design, (7) Instrumentation, (8) Interview Questions, (9) Data Sources, (10) Data Analysis, (11) Narrative Inquiry and Storytelling, and (12) Summary.

Indigenous Epistemology and Indigenous Research Methodology

In our fast-paced social world, the Internet and social media keeps everyone busy, but storytelling in qualitative research does not require technology to propel the outcome. There are tech giants to gather data and expedite conclusions, but from an Indigenous point-of-view, technology can wait. Worldviews, epistemology, knowledge, and methodologies are a set of big academic words to describe our core values, what we believe in, and our way of life. In my mind, Indigenous epistemology is storytelling. That is what comes naturally from my being and that is what I have gathered in this research—it is the way we preserve and pass on knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is shared.

Wilson (2008) notes that Indigenous research methodologies manifest Indigenous values and beliefs. Indigenous epistemology is “all about ideas developing through the formation of relationships” (Chilisa, 2012, p.148). To understand relationships, one must understand the core values and the power of the language used to describe the connections through the stories of our ancestors. There has been a misunderstanding of Indigenous philosophies, and ways of knowing for a long time—not only for the *Diné*, but for most Indigenous peoples around the world. Over the years, Indigenous philosophies have given us new building blocks in our intelligence that allow us to come

closer and closer to finding our identity. I learned during this study, that we are far from perfect, and that some of us do not receive the same message, because the mainstream Western thinking continues to exert hegemony. The true reality of the *Diné* philosophy is that everyone alive is a free, complex individual with many gifts and talents originating at conception.

As I discuss research design and their rationale and application regarding *Sa'ah Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón* teachings, SNBH hold a unique potency because they are not uttered in everyday language. SNBH is often used in prayer and storytelling at ceremonies. The Holy People gave us the name “the Five-Fingered Earth Surface Spiritual Being People” purposefully (Werito, 2014, p. 26). This phrase embodies *Diné* metaphysics and *Diné* cosmology. I thought carefully about Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous research methodology and how I would use it for this study. It is difficult to circumvent Western methodology altogether. However, Western methodology can be Indigenized so that data is gathered and analyzed through an Indigenous lens. We Indigenous peoples have learned to adapt to the Western way of life and acculturate to the dominant society, but that does not mean there is no place to utilize our own knowledge. My hope is to employ Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous research methodology to regenerate and bring back ancient principles to, our communities.

In Chapter 1, I mentioned Aluli Meyer’s conception of Hawaiian epistemology and Bagele Chilisa’s IRM scholarly work as touchstones to support this chapter. The *Diné* knowledge system is vast, and I am a beginner. To convey the concepts, I will explain more under Research Design of how I constructed a visual framework for *Diné* youth to help them understand what SNBH is and how it can be approached.

Positionality of the Researcher

The aim of this study is to benefit *Diné* youth, the whole Navajo Nation, and other Indigenous communities throughout the world. Therefore, I accept responsibility to honor and respect Indigenous epistemology and sacred ancient knowledge, and to present my positionality as a researcher. Luis Sanchez-Ayala (2012) says, “Before we consider any research, we must consider our own positionality, the ways in which the values and subjectivity of the researcher are part of the construction of the knowledge” (p. 117-118). He explains, “Positionality is the notion that personal values, views, and location in time and space influence how one understands the world.”

Consequently, knowledge is a specific reflection for each interviewer and interviewee in this study. I do not claim to know everything about SNBH. I am only sharing my knowledge and understanding. I was told by the late Leon Secatero that no one will ever know all the sacred teachings, but only portions of it will be shown to us for our mind, body, and spirit.

I enjoy some advantages as the researcher. I am an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation. I understand *Diné* and speak the *Diné* language. I am an insider to the study in that some of the participants are clan related. Kinship is the first act and a custom of *K'é*. Kinship determines your role and how you address the person you meet. From there, you build a relationship based on your role. I am also an insider in that I have attended both traditional *Diné* ceremonies and NAC ceremonies. I sat with *Diné* elders and *Diné* practitioners to ask about the meaning of SNBH, and I shared my personal narratives with them so that I could heal and walk in beauty and harmony again.

I believed the focus of the research needed to be from a *Diné* perspective to show *Diné* youth the importance of SNBH teachings. But I also see a broader group of

beneficiaries from my research. The stories herein could be beneficial to all Indigenous young people who are looking for a way to return to their culture and relearn their language. They will need to find their own elders who can teach them about their ancestral ways of knowing and go to their traditional practitioner for healing and protection to begin the new journey.

This study is not about religion, nor is it aimed at converting anyone. I want to tell *Diné* youth about their history and creation stories and give them a glimpse into some of the ceremonial teachings and their purposes. I want them to know what it means to be *Diné*. The youth need to hear this from *Diné* themselves, not from an outsider or from a book or a film. The *Diné* individuals chosen for this study are respected *Diné* individuals who have higher education degrees, speak their heritage language, know their culture, work with Indigenous and/or *Diné* youth in the community, and do not live on the Navajo Nation. I chose individuals who do not reside on Navajo Nation to show that even though an individual may be far from *Diné*taah, there is still a strong connection to their home. I believe it is critical for *Diné* to seek SNBH teachings and to explain and share what these teachings mean in real life.

Data Collection Procedures

When I began this study, I initially wanted to interview Navajo Language and Culture teachers and get their perspective on how they utilize SNBH teachings as an educational tool in the Gallup-McKinley School District and the Navajo Nation. Some of the schools were on the Navajo Nation and some schools were in Gallup, New Mexico. All the schools had Navajo Language and Culture teachers who are certified as such through the Navajo Nation's Department of Diné Education (DODE) and the New

Mexico Public Education Department. To gain access and permission to do research with the Navajo Nation, you must be approved by the school districts, the school board, Navajo Nation DODE, Navajo Nation's school board, and Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board (HRRB). It is a lengthy process. I mention this because I think that while protecting students and teachers is paramount, Indigenous nations must develop smoother procedures so that *Diné* graduate students can return to their community to do research that can benefit the Navajo Nation. I would like to see an Educational Research Review Board put in place and administrative support offered to researchers. I did not pursue my initial study because my study focus changed. I then sought permission to conduct research from my dissertation committee and the University of New Mexico's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

I passed my comprehensive examination in December 2013 and immediately started my proposal. My proposal described how I would design the study and the methodology I would use to analyze the data once I conducted the interviews. I also devised a timeline with due dates to keep me on track. I created an advertisement to recruit *Diné* participants for the study and an informed consent form to show that participation in the study is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time. The form also stated that participants' information and identities would be kept protected and confidential. I created nine interview questions to ask the participants about their knowledge and experience of SNBH. Some of the interview questions will answer the research questions for the study. Overlap in interview questions was devised to draw out more in-depth information and stories from the interviews. I developed a generic

interview guide to use as a template for the step-by-step process for the interviews from start to the end, but I used a personal approach with the participants.

Sampling Procedures

A purposeful sampling procedure was used to invite 10 *Diné* individuals for the study. In qualitative studies, the sample size is typically small. I chose a purposeful sample because I wanted to develop a deeper understanding of SNBH through this study. Gall, Gall, & Borg, (2003) adds: “In purposeful sampling the goal is to select cases that are likely to be ‘information-rich’ with respect to the purpose of the study” (p. 165).

The participants had to meet the following criteria for the study:

1. *Diné* adult.
2. *Diné* educator or have some type of interaction with *Diné* youth.
3. Have knowledge about *Diné* language and culture.
4. Enrolled member of the *Diné* tribe.
5. Reside off Navajo Nation in New Mexico (preferably Albuquerque).
6. Former or current UNM undergraduate or graduate student.

The participants are unique in that they live off the Navajo Nation (reservation) but are still connected to their homeland. They have families who live on the Navajo Nation; they follow traditions, go home to attend ceremonies and some cultural events, and practice *Diné* spirituality. The participants also provide another point of view outside the Navajo Nation.

Six individuals responded to the advertisement for the study. Another female responded via email that she did not know about SNBH and did not speak *Diné*, but still wanted to participate. I explained that it was for my dissertation study and that I had set

criteria and a strict timeline. Another male said he did not work with *Diné* youth but was currently studying to become a higher education instructor at UNM and could not participate. Three did not reply. One male had to withdraw due to conflict of interest and another male took his spot. I contacted everyone by email, and if they called, I spoke to them on my mobile phone to schedule an appointment.

To the six individuals who responded to my invitation to participate, I sent the advertisement, the informed consent form, and a brief description of the study from the IRB Protocol, which explained the procedures for interview (30 to 60 minutes interviews documented on a digital recorder). The informed consent form included the potential risks and benefits. The email also included a personal note explaining why I had selected them for the study.

If they responded that they would like to participate, I thanked them and told them that I considered them a respected *Diné* educator in New Mexico, and that I had heard good things about the work they do with *Diné* youth from the person who referred them. I also told them that they will be making a great contribution to a study that would benefit *Diné* youth. The participants were asked if they had any questions about the study or about the forms prior to the interview. They were all informed that the data they provide will be kept confidential, including their names, and an identification number would be assigned to them to ensure confidentiality.

During the interviews, I took on a position of respectful curiosity and prompting of open sharing, so that I did not over-structure and guide the conversation, but instead allowed the participants to tell their stories in their own unique ways. The initial introduction of my clans, and where I originally came from, set the stage. Three

participants told me that they were related to me—one was a male cousin and one was my mother (she initiated that relation). The other participants did not claim any relation, but we introduced our clans and they shared who their parents and grandparents were and the place they call home. The *Diné* clan system has four clans that coincide, and each *Diné* person belongs to a clan. One of the participant initiated her status by mentioning the same clan I belong to. I am not familiar with distinguishing how relations are formed, so I did not initiate the greeting when each of the participants expressed how they wanted to greet me in kinship. Once that relation is established, the next time you see this person again, that is how you will greet each other. In some areas, the women usually greet non-related young men as their sons and an older gentleman as a grandfather; and an older woman sometimes takes on the role of a grandmother. The degree of how traditional people are with *K'é* varies.

After I made the arrangements to meet the participants for the interview, I offered them a token (gift) of appreciation. The gifts included a mini cedar smudge wand, mini white sage wand, small herb bag, abalone shell, pencil, snacks, bandanas, and a necklace for the last participant. The gifts were purchased from New Mexico Bead & Fetish in Old Town in Albuquerque. I personally selected these gifts because I have used some of the earth's medicine, such as the cedar and white sage, at home and in ceremonies for cleansing and purification of space and energy. The intention behind the gifts was to convey deep respect and to thank the participants for their work with Indigenous youth. The gifts represented an acknowledgment of the individual and respect for their stories. Prayers were offered prior to the interviews. Kathryn Manuelito (2009), a Navajo scholar, says of her research at Navajo Ramah:

The Navajo protocol was observed by: always introducing myself through my four clans, observing the indirect method of addressing a topic utilizing an advocate from the community for each initial visit to the elderly, giving a small gift of baskets of fruit, or pollen and prepared deerskin as requested, honoring the *sacredness* of spoken words with participants in their own environment. (p.17)

Most Indigenous people respect the elders and traditional practitioners, for they are the knowledge keepers. The elders (some of them) have a significant role in their families and communities. They provide guidance, teachings, healing, and mentorship. They are invited to pray at special events and, nowadays, are even invited to classrooms and conferences to share their knowledge. To establish a protocol for working with *Diné* scholars and educators, I developed some guidelines. I was consistent in conveying what I wanted from them, how we would achieve this process, and the rewards for those we want to impact, particularly *Diné* youth. In some tribes, tobacco is offered as currency, but usually only if it is for an honorarium. The exchange or gifting of tobacco is like a contract between two parties indicating that the person you are gifting and offering (the participant), is agreeing to what you are asking, and the person that is offering (myself), is making a commitment to respect the process and protect their wellbeing (Ferlin Clark, personal communication, February 2014).

The data was all digitally recorded, and the participants' information was kept confidential and saved on my computer at my office at UNM, my personal laptop, on a flash-drive, and on a backup system at my residence. The participants were told that their stories will be used in the dissertation and their quotes in presentations, but pseudonyms will be used to protect their identity. In the beginning, the participants were assigned a

“P” for Participants and a number in the order they were interviewed (1 through 7); however, to create a personable storyline, I assigned pseudo *Diné* names. Note: I still use P1-P7 in Table 1 to illustrate the order the interviews were conducted. After the stories from the participants, I ended each theme (topic) with the findings for that particular theme.

Again, Table 1 illustrates the participant’s demographic information in the study. The table shows the identification number (ID# P1, P2, and the pseudo name); gender; home state (Navajo Nation is a tri-state reservation trust land in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah); UNM status (if they are alumni or a current student); profession; and language. P4 (no name assigned) is the only participant who withdrew due to a conflict of interest. He was replaced with P7 - “Yazzie.” After I collected all the data and transcribed the data, I removed two participants P5 (female) and P6 (male) (neither were assigned pseudonyms). P5’s (female) interview was not recorded from the beginning, and when the transcription was sent to add more, she did not give additional information. P6’s (male) data was not used because I wanted to keep the data equal between females and males (two each). Both P5’s and P6’s data were transcribed but were not analyzed or used in the study. I included language to show whether *Diné* was their first language. If not, participants had learned to speak *Diné* from their grandparents. I asked only a couple of participants what their primary language was at home. One told me in an interview that they speak mostly English at home. The table was created mainly to provide a visual background of information for the participants. I did not want to show where they obtained their degrees, to protect their identity, but included the states where they obtained their degrees. The table has seven columns from left to right (horizontal) to

show the ID number (P1 to P7). The first column (vertical) shows gender, state, UNM status, profession, and language. Note: P4's, P5's, and P6's data was not used.

Table 1. Background Demographic Information of Participants in Study.

Id#: Pseudo Names	Gender	UNM Status	Profession	Home State	Language Status
P1: Nizhoni	Female	BA: AZ MA: UNM MA: UNM Current	Navajo Language & Culture Teacher	AZ	<i>Diné</i> (1 st) English
P2: Hoskie	Male	BA: UNM MA: NM	Navajo Language & Culture Teacher	NM	<i>Diné</i> (1 st) English
P3: Nanibah	Female	BA: UNM MA: UNM PhD: UNM Current	Instructor at univ. Certified Navajo Language & Culture Teacher	AZ	<i>Diné</i> (1 st) English
P7: Yazzie	Male	BA: NM BA: AZ MA: UNM	Works at school in NM	AZ	<i>Diné</i> (1 st) English

The *gender* column shows four participants, two females (Nizhoni, Nanibah) and two males (Hoskie, Yazzie). The *state* column shows where the participants said they are originally from on the Navajo Nation. Three participants (Nizhoni, Nanibah, Yazzie) are from Arizona (AZ), and one participant (Hoskie) from New Mexico (NM). Two females (Nizhoni, Nanibah) and one male (Yazzie) are from Arizona, and one male (Hoskie) is from New Mexico. The *UNM status* column shows two females who are both UNM

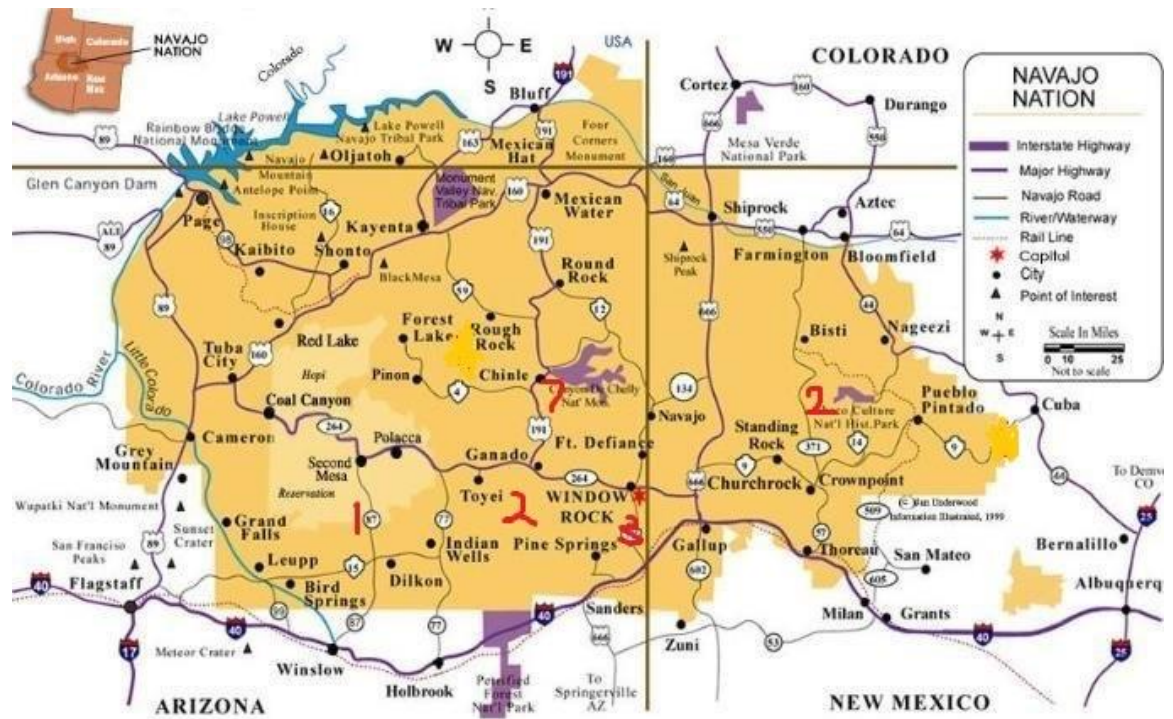
alumni (Nizhoni has a master's degree, and Nanibah has a bachelor's degree), currently studying at UNM. One female (Nizhoni) is currently in a master program and the other female (Nanibah) is a current PhD student. Both males Hoskie and Yazzie are UNM alumni—Hoskie received his bachelor's degree at UNM and is currently in a master's program at another university in New Mexico, and Yazzie received his master's degree from UNM. The *profession* column shows both females (Nizhoni, Nanibah) and one male (Hoskie) are certified Navajo Language and Culture teachers, but only Nizhoni and Hoskie are currently teaching. One male (Hoskie) works at a university in New Mexico. I did not include their clans in the table; however, it is under the “Identity” section of the paper.

The geographic findings add a diversity to the participants' home locations. The participants also indicated where their parents and relatives live and said that these areas have meaning to them. The Navajo Reservation Map (see Figure 1) shows the areas the participants are originally from in *Dinétaah*. The map also indicates where SNBH teachings originated for the participants when they state where their parents and grandparents are from. All the participants resided in Albuquerque at the time of the study. Hoskie has two locations on the map to show where his parents originally come from: his father from Arizona and his mother from New Mexico. Nizhoni, Nanibah, and Yazzie all stated they come from Arizona (same vicinity) and did not indicate where their father's clan came from, only their mother's side of the clan (maternal grandparents). They gave information about where their parents worked off the reservation, but I did not use that information on the map. All participants, though they live away from Navajo Nation, are still very much connected to their communities and call it home. In the

interviews, the participants gave the Navajo place names for where they're from, which were then translated into English and located on the map. This information will be kept confidential.

The participants identify with their home in *Dinétaah*. Some are in remote areas and some near townships, but the participants all have a strong connection to their homeland and cultural ties to SNBH.

Figure 1. Navajo Reservation Map (Coyote Gulch Blog, 2016)



Research Site

The criteria for the study is that all the participants reside in New Mexico and are tribal members of the Navajo Nation but live off the Navajo Nation. UNM IRB granted me permission to collect data from the participants as stated in the protocol. All four (4)

participants live in Albuquerque. The following is to show where I interviewed the participants:

Nizhoni is a female participant. She asked if I could come to her house on the west side of the Rio Grande River. There were no interruptions and we took our time. She told some beautiful stories. Just as we completed the interview, it started to sprinkle outside. We both indicated it was a blessing and a good sign. I thanked her and ended the interview.

Hoskie is a male participant. He asked if I could meet him at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Albuquerque where his wife was having a meeting. She went to her meeting and we met in one of the small conference rooms for the interview. There were no interruptions. He drew some metaphors on a piece of paper, but I did not keep the drawings. His interview was mostly in *Diné*. Sometimes he stopped to ask me if I understood what he was saying. I told him that I understood, but if I had any questions after I finish the transcriptions, I would email it to him for review and make sure I was translating what he was saying in *Diné* correctly to English. He agreed. When we introduced our clans, right away he told me that we were cousins. I considered that a good sign too. Whenever I emailed him, I addressed him as “Cousin.” The interview went well and continued beyond 60 minutes.

Nanibah is a female participant. She asked me if she could meet me at my apartment in Albuquerque because it is close to UNM. Before we started the interview, she asked if we could say a prayer. I told her it was wonderful to start off this way. I brought a glass of water and set it on the table and we prayed. After the prayer, we drank the water and blessed ourselves with it. She said several words in *Diné* that were

meaningful; I learned a lot from her. She also mentioned to me that I was her daughter by our clans. Through this interview I gained a mother.

Yazzie is a male participant. He asked if we could meet in his office for the interview. This participant replaced a previous participant whom I had interviewed and withdrawn from the study. I was excited to meet this individual and was very glad he wanted to participate. I contacted him via email and sent him the study information, informed consent form, and advertisement. I explained the study to him again and asked if he had any questions. He said no. I had brought lunch with me, so we did the interview as we ate. I gave him the token gift and we began. I enjoyed the stories he shared. He was very interested in SNBH and spoke from the strong foundation he possessed. The whole experience was very powerful. When he was telling his story about his grandparents, I thought of my grandmother, how she cared for the sheep too. I felt that our elders and our ancestors were very close to all their animals, that they had held deep connections. I remembered our horses, cattle, sheep, and donkey, as well as all the dogs, cats, and chickens we cared for. Yazzie thanked me when we completed the interview. I too was grateful, but also exhausted due to the strong emotions that had arisen from the stories of SNBH.

Research Design

The study is qualitative in nature and uses a case study approach as seen through the lens of Indigenous epistemology. Indigenous research methodology via narrative inquiry was implemented to analyze the data for SNBH. Wilson (2008) says methodology is the theory of how knowledge is gained, or, in other words, the science of finding things out. In the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe

qualitative research as involving “an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).

I focused on *Diné* epistemology through personal storytelling, because it appears that many other Indigenous people have a close relationship with the universe (cosmology) and the environment (land). Farquhar (2009) explains that “Triangulation is an important concept in case study because an investigation of the phenomenon from different perspectives provide robust foundations for the findings and supports arguments for its contribution to knowledge” (p. 7). I developed SNBH paradigm to be the framework for my research design—*Diné* epistemology generates storytelling from generation-to-generation and forms the self, SNBH and Beauty Way philosophy.

I have conceptualized Aluli Meyer’s (Keyele, 2010) three-part Hawaiian knowledge system “Experienced Knowledge” or *Mana’oi’o*, “Floating Knowledge”, or *Mana’olana*, and “Service to Others” or *Aloha*” alongside the three-part *Diné* epistemology knowledge systems (Beauty Way (*Hózhóóji*), Protection Way (*Naayée’ k’egho*), and SNBH (*hózhó*) to provide a *Diné*-centered framework for the Pathway to SNBH. Along with Aluli Meyer’s Hawaiian epistemology and Chilisa’s IRM, I pondered how I might incorporate Diné College’s Educational Philosophy Model (Appendix A) after hearing the participants refer to the four concepts (*Nitsahakees*, *Nahata*, *Iina*, and *Siihasin*) of SNBH. I did not examine how Diné College uses the model, only the concepts therein, and the intent behind them since the school's inception. This study is not about Diné College. However, it should be noted that Diné College and Chinle School

District utilize an SNBH educational philosophy model at their schools. See Appendix B for information on the ways in which Chinle School District strives to promote *Diné* self-awareness, wellness, independence, and a balanced and harmonious life.

After careful consideration, I revised my interpretations of the four concepts (*Nitsahakees, Nahata, Iina, and Siihasin*) from Diné College to build a framework to represent the four cardinal directions. I felt the men who devised it were interpreting from a male perspective. Women, however, tend to look at all the gaps, and pause in between, to make sure nothing is left out. In *Diné* worldview, there are different levels to understanding. There are children who are just learning, and adolescents who have been taught, but are still tender. The girls and the boys receive different teachings. For example, boys are taught how to take care of horses and grow corn, how to hunt and the taboos that come along with it. They are taught their role in the ceremonies and how to help family and clans people at gatherings. Meanwhile, the girls are taught the dangers of hunting and the taboos, their responsibility of caring for the sheep and other livestock, and how to weave the wool from the sheep. They are taught how to care for the land, to grow corn, harvest it, and make pollen for ceremonies. They are taught how to feed the family and help clans people. The teachings for males and females overlap but are slightly different. The father can teach his daughters certain things, but it is not his role to teach her about becoming a woman—that is the mother and the mother's clan's responsibility. The father can teach his son about certain things, but it is also the mother who has the last word about who her son can marry and his role as family provider. The ceremonies, the ancestors followed, worked for them in their lifetime. My grandparents used SNBH and it helped them. I do not think my parents used SNBH; the link was

broken, and I had to learn on my own. Therefore, I was a beginner, but I learned along the way and gained insight. After careful consideration, through meditating on this topic, and listening, these are my interpretations of the four concepts and how they could be used to acquire knowledge of SNBH for the four cardinal points:

- ***Nitsahakees*** is *knowledge*. This is the first step toward SNBH—receiving knowledge. The growth of knowledge is our purpose in living a long life. To live a long life does not mean you get old and die happy. It means you gain knowledge through the different stages of life. In these stages, you use knowledge, share knowledge, experience knowledge, and become knowledge. To become knowledge, you have walked a long life full of understanding, awareness, love, joy, suffering that comes from the heart, mind, and spirit. This concept is represented in *Há'a'aaah* (east), *Sisnajiin* (Mt. Blanca), *Yoolgai* (white shell), *Hayoolkáal* (dawn), *Daan* (spring), and in infancy (you are at the beginning stage of life, your journey has just begun).
- ***Nahata*** is leadership. Leadership requires knowledge of the ancient teachings, knowledge of language, and stability. Planning is an action, but to be a leader, you must possess skills to lead. You must have intelligence of ancient teachings and the ability to interpret the teachings and speak on them for yourself, for family, and community. Then you can be present for others and create a pathway for Navajo youth who want to learn more about SNBH. Part of this pathway for the youth is instilling rites of passages and healing for loss of loved ones and return to balance and harmony. This concept is represented in *Shádi'ááh* (south), *Tsodzil* (Mt. Taylor), *Dootliizhii* (turquoise), and *Nihoodiitliizh* (day), *Shiigo* (summer),

and adolescence (you begin to develop character, find your voice, and your strengths).

- ***Iina*** is life. Life is journey. To build a life requires knowledge and leadership. Life comes with responsibility; it requires stability, love, compassion, and mindfulness. You do not play with life. Life is also caring for animals and learning to provide for yourself, the family, and your kinfolk. This concept is represented in *E'e'aah* (west), *Dook'o'ooshtid* (San Francisco Peaks), *Diichili* (abalone shell), *Nihootsoii* (evening), *Aak'eedgo* (fall), and adulthood (you have lived a long time and re-evaluate; by now you have gained understanding and provide warmth and wisdom).
- ***Siihasin*** is stability. Stability is a foundation to build on. In ceremony, the sacred circle, there is always a doorway to come in and to go out. The center is the fireplace—the fire for warmth, for nourishment, and healing. In *Dinétah*—we are surrounded by the sacred mountains. Each mountain represents teachings; within is stability, our foundation, our home. It is in this sacred place, that sacred herbs are gathered, sacred water flows, sacred animals live. Each clan and family have a sacred place they go to make offerings and pilgrimages of renewal. This concept is represented in *Náhook'os* (north), *Dibé Nitsaa* (Mt. Hesperus), *bááshzhinii* (black jet), *Nihodillhil* or *Cha'halheel* (night), *Haigo* (winter), and old age (you have acquired a life-long journey, and your journey is now going back to infancy).

After carefully looking at the four concepts, the next step is to enter the circle. In the circle, a variety of things may occur. For example, as a *Diné* woman, my articulation of the four concepts is from who I am, my lived experiences. I think that is how the

concepts are interpreted, as SNBH addresses both individual needs and the collective group—family units or even clan groups. The Pathway to SNBH is to direct a *Diné* individual to seek their own wisdom to change or to understand the meaning of life. The participant’s stories “are resurgent moments, which reclaim epistemic ground that was erased by colonialism...the stories lay a framework and foundation for the resurgence of Indigenous sovereignty and the reclamation of material ground” (Sium & Ritses, 2013).

Cajete (2015) explains that “A conceptual framework that works as an Indigenous educational philosophy must be devoted to establishing and maintaining wholeness for both individuals and the community” (p. 38). As I explained in Chapter 1, I took Aluli Meyer’s concept of Hawaiian epistemology and constructed a conception of *Diné* epistemology from my own personal experience. The goal is to create a Pathway to SNBH for everyday living. Cajete (2015) says, “Because transformation is a dynamic, creative process, it brings anything but peace of mind, tranquility, or harmony” (p. 38). SNBH is a process: it is not easy, but it works to individuals. To lay the framework for the Pathway to SNBH, I recommend Cajete’s “The Indigenous Stages of Developmental Learning” (ISDL). When we seek to develop our mind, body, and spirit, we cannot jump in and expect harmony and balance to consume us (at least this was not the case for me). To begin, you must be ready and commit. Furthermore, you must begin *somewhere*. I did not have a framework or a map to follow, so it took me a long time to establish a foundation on which I could firmly stand my ground. Therefore, Cajete’s ISDL is ideal, beginning with “basic learning” and culminating in “transformational understanding.” When I first went to Secatero’s retreat in 1991, I did not know anything about SNBH,

Diné history, or *Diné* epistemology. Cajete (2015) devised “The Indigenous Stages of Developmental Learning,” to form a creative continuum, a “life way”:

1. *Basic learning*: The process begins with a deep and abiding respect for the “spirit” of each child from before the moment of birth. The first stage ends as learners gain an orientation to place.
2. *Societal education*: Education in the second stage revolves around social learning: being introduced to tribal society and learning how to live in the natural environment. The second stage ends as learners gain a sense of tribal history and learn how to apply tribal knowledge in day-to-day living.
3. *Myth, ritual, and ceremony*: The third stage revolves around melding individual needs with group needs through the processes of initiation, learning the myths that guide the community, and participating in ritual and ceremony. This stage ends as learners develop a profound and deep connection to tradition.
4. *Integration with the culture of a People*: The fourth stage is a midpoint: the individual is at a certain level of empowerment, personal vitality, and maturity
5. *Visioning*: The fifth stage is a period of searching for a life vision. This stage concludes as learners develop a deep understanding of relationship and diversity.
6. *Individuation*: The sixth stage ushers in a period of major transformation, characterized by deep learning about the unconsciousness. The pain, wounding, and conflicts act as a bridge to seventh stage.
7. *Enlightenment and wisdom*: The seventh stage, deep healing occurs in which the self “mutualizes” with body, mind, and spirit. In this stage, learners grow into a deep understanding that brings enlightenment and wisdom.

8. *Transformational understanding*: This stage ends as learners attain a high level of spiritual understanding. Transformation takes hold, and the learner becomes “a complete man or woman.” (p. 39-41)

This is a starting point for an individual to see where they place themselves.

Recognition of self indicates to the novice where they should start. After looking at Diné College’s four concepts, I viewed the core principles of the four cardinal directions, and how *Diné* interrelate with nature’s elements and their representation in ceremonial teachings and practices. The three-part Knowledge System—Beauty Way (*Hózhóójíí*), Protection Way (*Naayée’ k’egho*), and *Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) embodies *Diné* worldview and cannot be manipulated. For the study, I added Aluli Meyer’s terms of her Hawaiian Epistemology of *experience*, *floating*, and *service to others* to initiate the Pathway to SNBH. To complete the circle for Figure 2, I added *Empirical Knowledge* as the fourth paradigm and *Storytelling Knowledge* as the fifth paradigm.

Next, I will explain the three-part *Diné* Knowledge System and connect it to the four concepts to represent the four cardinal points. I am not adding to SNBH teachings but learning how to use them for everyday living (home, work, and school). Because some of the *Diné* youth have not learned about SNBH, and may not know how to use it, they will need to familiarize themselves with a step-by-step approach to the different phases of knowing, understanding, and healing. The two additional components add a new dimension to obtain balance, understanding, and wisdom. It is important for *Diné* youth to view Cajete’s ISDL and customize their approach for Pathway to SNBH. The

goal is to reach the transformational understanding stage, to attain a high level of spiritual understanding of SNBH.

The following is my own conception of *Diné* Epistemology or Five-Fingered Knowledge System for Pathway to SNBH:

1. **Beauty Way (Hózhóójjii):** Beauty Way embodies an overall foundation that exemplifies female energy for lifelong teachings and provides compassion for youth to transition into adulthood. Beauty Way is experienced knowledge (ceremonies for beauty and harmony, earth elements, teachings for stability). Finding beauty within awakens the consciousness toward healing.
2. **Protection Way (Naayée' k'egho):** Protection Way embodies the warrior way of dealing with leadership and conflict (and its resolution) to protect the clan system, land, and all living things. Protection Way is floating knowledge (leadership, warrior, discipline, fire elements, teachings for reflection). Finding awareness to self-identity is to protect oneself from poisoning of the mind, body, and spirit.
3. **SNBH (Hózhó):** SNBH embodies hózhó which provides mindfulness of the present moment and fosters responsibility for self, language, thinking, wellness, and continual transformation. SNBH is service to others (teachings for life, planning, water, and air elements) and embodies intelligence to meet life. In finding one's true self, one is joyful and living with harmony and balance.
4. **Empirical Knowledge:** Empirical knowledge embodies experiential knowing for the individual, or collectively learned experience gained from lived experience.

(Nicholas, 2018)

5. **Storytelling Knowledge:** Storytelling embodies the self and holder of the Traditional Knowledge and Oral Traditions of sacred and ancient narratives, songs, prayers, ceremonies, and stories. (Nicholas, 2018)

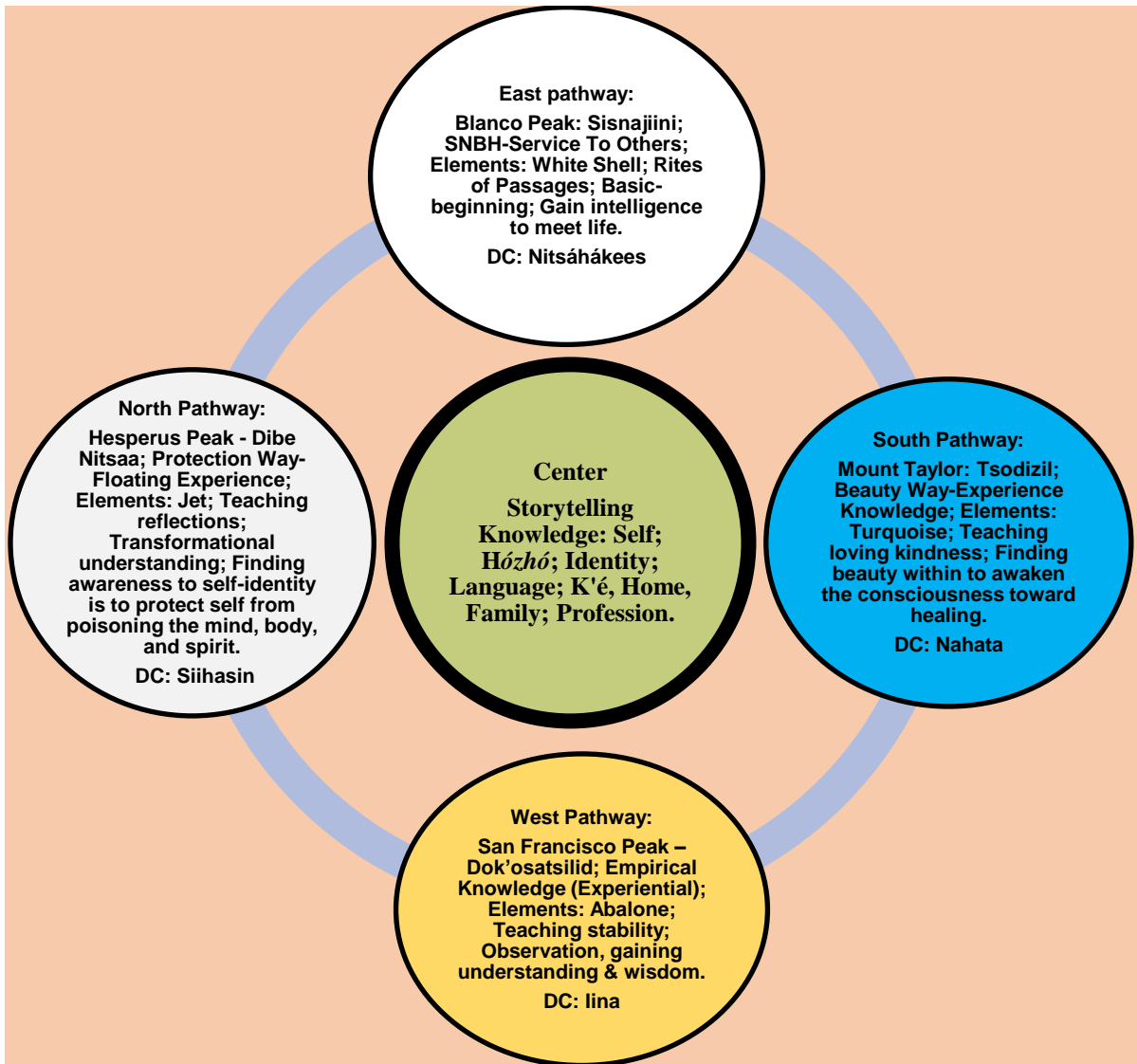
The three-parts of the *Diné* Knowledge System are intertwined and work together at every level to create *hózhó*. Empirical Knowledge and Storytelling Knowledge are added to stay true to Chilisa's fifth paradigm. Stories are critical to pass knowledge to the next generations and continue Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

Figure 2 shows the Five-Fingered Knowledge System for Pathway to SNBH. The four cardinal points and the center give guidance to where the mind, body, and spirit need to move towards healing. Within the four concepts *DC* indicates for Diné College's SNBH educational model. There is an interconnectedness for the Five Paradigms using the language and culture of SNBH teachings. The center is the Earth (green) and the universe (black band), representative of female/male duality. It is a continuum as life changes, circumstance change, environments change, knowledge changes, and self-changes. Nothing is set in stone; everything is impermanent, SNBH is the pathway to transformational understanding. I think sometimes we put too many restrictions on where we should be in life. What if someone does not receive a traditional upbringing until he/she is an adult? They can start learning from the time they have their Blessing Way ceremony, or when they start to think about life and want to know more about SNBH. The individual will go through a transformation to get to "self," and from there build experience knowledge that they can integrate into their plan for life. To gain a transformational understanding is to become mindful. Instead of ending there, your life's purpose has just begun. The two additional paradigms are Empirical Knowledge, or *Iina*

(life), for lifelong learning, placed in the west for observation and lived experiences.

Storytelling Knowledge is the fifth paradigm and is placed in the center for self. Passing the knowledge to the next generation begins with you.

Figure 2: Five-Fingered Knowledge System for Pathway to SNBH



[This pathway to SNBH can be manipulated accordingly to one’s personal goals. The path goes clockwise and does not reverse, only the center can go in either direction for learning and finding self. The center is always “you,” or home, for stability and identity. There are no rules where you should start, because sometimes we begin to search as adults. There is no barrier and you can start any time.]

Historically, there has been a lack of validation for alternate worldviews in educational curricula and a failure to acknowledge the agency of Aboriginal peoples to participate and include themselves within the educational structures. The *Diné* perspective or approach should not be considered in competition with, or superior to, Western perspectives. In this study the *Diné* perspective is used to shed light on the origin, significance, and validity of SNBH, and to reaffirm the importance of the *Diné* paradigm for *Diné* and other Indigenous youths who wish to return to their ancestral ways of knowing.

One of the distinguishing features of qualitative study is that researchers must listen carefully, attentively, and analytically to descriptions of experience. Austin and Sutton (2015) state that it requires reflection on the part of researchers, both before and during the research process, to provide context and understanding for readers. When practicing reflexivity, researchers do not try to simply ignore or avoid their own biases (as this would likely be impossible); instead, reflexivity requires researchers to reflect upon and clearly articulate their position and subjectivities (worldview, perspectives, biases), so that readers can better understand the filters through which questions were asked, data was gathered and analyzed, and findings were reported. From this perspective, bias and subjectivity are not inherently negative, but they are unavoidable. As a result, it is best that they be articulated up-front in a manner that is clear and coherent for readers.

Qualitative interviewing involves opening yourself up to explore and be surprised by what you learn. It means taking on a position of respectful curiosity and prompting open sharing in such a way that you do not over-structure and direct the conversation, but

instead allow participants to tell their own stories in their own unique ways. This is remarkably difficult to do since often you must surrender control and a position of authority.

Instrumentation

Interviews were used to gain insight into participants' experience, how they acquired and understand SNBH, and how they use SNBH through storytelling. The interview questions were designed to obtain in-depth information about SNBH with the knowledge that not all the information needed on this topic could be provided within the bounds of the interviews. The participants gave as much information as they wanted in their answers; I did not feel that they were holding back answers and none of the participants chose to skip a question. Further questions were developed as the interview proceeded which encouraged participants to elaborate. They seemed happy to do so. Some of the interview questions overlapped and were therefore merged to narrow the response.

I conducted the interviews from June to October 2017. October is the beginning of the *Diné* calendar; however, preceding that, there was a significant solar eclipse on August 21, 2017, and fall equinox on September 22, 2017. October is the beginning of the Navajo *Yeibicheii* dances and winter ceremonies. *Ghaaji*, which mean to “move forward,” marks the time of renewal and reflection when earth and many animals hibernate. A new dimension in the *Diné* cosmology emerges, such as the winter constellations and the beginning of storytelling of the Hero Twins, the *Diné* Creation stories, and long winter ceremonies. I mention the time of these events because it affected the way I conducted my research. I waited for the change of the season and waited for the

signs to gather sacred information. It was done with utmost respect and a deep love for these ancient/sacred teachings. During this time too, Dr. Larry Emerson made his journey, and that was another moment where I set aside my research to pay my respects and visit his family and share stories with them. As Benally (1994) states, most of the sacred knowledge is only imparted in the winter.

A digital recorder was used during the interviews. After the interview, the data was downloaded to my personal laptop and stored in a folder labeled *dissertation*. I purchased a transcription kit with software downloaded to my personal laptop, as well as a foot pedal and earphones to make the transcribing easier. A non-Native woman from Utah transcribed four of the interviews at a turn-around time of four to six weeks. I worked on three interviews myself, one of which was mostly in *Diné* and very difficult to translate. This was the hardest interview to transcribe. I translated the interview, which was all in *Diné*, into English, leaving a few key words in *Diné* like SNBH, clanship, kinship, place names, and sacred words. After I received all the transcriptions, I reviewed each one and listened to it two to three times before transcribing it verbatim.

After this process was completed, I contacted a *Diné* interpreter referred to me by another doctoral student. When *Diné* words are translated into English, it is a long process. (Times New Roman is set specifically for the *Diné* language—the font must be downloaded to use the number keys (1 through 0) for *Diné* vowels and the square and squiggly brackets. If this font is not used, you will only see numbers, or the brackets and the words will not make sense.) I agreed to drive to the interpreter's residence where we sat down at her workstation and listened to the digital interviews from my laptop.

Each interview involved six hours of work. It was very difficult and time consuming with a heavy dependence on a *Diné* dictionary. I assisted in this process and then we spent another hour looking up *Diné* place names. I made copies of the audio recordings on a flash-drive with pseudonyms and gave her the data. It took her six days to complete five of the interviews. She returned the one in *Diné* untyped because she said it was too much work. I translated this interview myself into English.

After all the interviews were transcribed and translated into English, I emailed a copy of the transcribed data back to the participants to review, edit, delete, or add comments. The whole process was time intensive and entailed several follow-up emails. I received two edits right away, two took at least a month and a half, and two did not reply. To the non-responders, I sent another email to tell them that if I did not hear from them, I would use the initial interview transcribed.

In one instance, I was interviewing one of the participant (P5) at their workplace when I realized that I had forgotten to push the record button. We were on the third question when I began recording. After we finished the interview, I went back to ask her questions one through three. Unfortunately, the participant had to go to her meeting. I used my rough notes and emailed the transcription to the participant (P5) and added her response. This interview became the shortest interview and I decided not to use it as data. I also omitted another interview because I wanted to keep the participants gender equal (two males and two females) and make the analysis process simpler.

The interviews were all 60 to 90 minutes. One interview began with a prayer in *Diné*. As the participant was talking, she became emotional and we had to stop and take a break. During another interview with Yazzie, he said he had a lump in his throat, and I

too became teary eyed because he was talking about his grandparents which reminded me of my grandparents. He said that talking about it brought back a lot of memories. This was true for other participants as well as they spoke of their childhood and grandparents, or parents, to whom they were close. This felt akin to a ceremonial experience in its power. I was thankful that I had gifted them because their stories held such a depth of knowledge and wisdom. And I was glad they were thankful for the experience. I brought lunch to four participants and they were appreciative of that gesture as well. The participants all said they were grateful to work with *Diné* youth. After the dissertation is completed and defended, a copy of the dissertation will be offered to the participants via email and the audio recordings will be destroyed. The data, however, will be preserved for future research.

The interview is a fundamental tool in qualitative research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, cited in Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe the qualitative research interview as an “attempt to understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of the subject’s experiences, to uncover their lived world” (p.121). The qualitative research interview seeks to describe and find meaning in the central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kvale, 1996). The interviews used a guided approach. The guided approach is intended to ensure that the same general areas of information are collected from each interviewee. This provides more focus than the conversational approach, but still allows a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting the information from the interviewee (Kvale, 1996). The open-ended question approach

facilitates faster interviews that can be more easily analyzed and compared (Kvale, 1996).

The types of questions focused on the following:

1. Opinions/values – what and how the person thinks about SNBH.
2. Knowledge – what constitutes their knowledge of SNBH.
3. Transformation – how the process was for them and the lessons learned from this enlightened experience. How have they changed in their daily life or in their professional life?
4. Background/demographics – what is their education and language background, where are they are from, and from what clans.

Chilisa (2012) explains that the interviews are used as a “strategy for collecting data” and that “interviewees are invited to narrate their life experiences” (p. 148). The interviews also generated a dialogue of *Diné* history and stories of the Long Walk. It is important, therefore, to keep an open mind about unexpected subjects that surface.

Interview Questions

The interview questions were developed from personal experience of SNBH. An interview guide was created to direct the interview process from beginning to end and keep track of time. I used the interview guidelines to introduce certain topics related to the interview process, but most of the process was informal, to allow the participants to feel comfortable. I explained to the participants that I would monitor the time and use a digital audio recorder to record the interviews. This would enable me to capture details, but at the same time, ask questions and carry on a conversation. I assured them that every effort would be made to keep their comments confidential. Any quotes used from our

interview would be published without their name or any other information that might identify them.

There were no questions asked, so we started the interview. The first group of interview questions prompted them to share their story of SNBH and how they gained awareness and knowledge of SNBH. I included questions that asked when they gained awareness and knowledge of SNBH, how they used SNBH, what was their identity as a *Diné* person, what was their purpose in life or as an educator, and whether this role was fulfilling. The other questions were designed to gain knowledge about their language and culture—what language and culture loss meant to them, and what are they doing about it. I asked how they share SNBH knowledge with *Diné* youth and if they see the rites of passage as important. I asked where they were from and if the sacred mountains had significant meaning for them. The interview questions overlapped, and included queries that some of the participants had barely considered, such as: “Who am I?” One participant said he had not thought about this question in a long time, and that his clans are who he is through the kinship system. As mentioned, the interview questions were created to retrieve an in-depth story of SNBH. The interview questions were as follows:

1. Your Story: What is your story of SNBH? How did you come to know it? Would you be willing to share, or is this private? If private, what part of your life’s journey can you share?
2. Awareness/Knowledge: When you became aware and/or began to understand SNBH, was it an *aha* moment, or did you already know what you were experiencing? How significant is this for you?

3. SNBH Teachings: How do you use SNBH, or how would you use SNBH as an educational tool?
4. Identity: When you hear “Who am I?” What does this mean for you?
5. Purpose: What is your purpose outside of “educator”? Do you feel you are fulfilling your purpose?
6. Language and Culture: Do you believe that the *Diné* are losing their language and culture? What do you currently do, or what would you do to keep the language and culture?
7. *Diné* Youths: What would you like to share with *Diné* youths about SNBH? Do you think it is important for them to experience the rites of passages? Was this done for you? Why would SNBH be important for *Diné* youths?
8. Land: Where do you come from? Does this place have significance for you? What about the sacred mountains?
9. Do you have any further questions? Is there anything you would like to add?

The interview questions will be further discussed in the Findings chapter to draw out the answers from the participants.

Data Sources

Data for this study was collected from *Navajo Times* articles on Navajo education, language, and culture; books on American Indian history and Navajo history, Indigenous cultures, Indigenous languages, Hawaiian, *Diné* and First Nations philosophy; KTNN's *The Culture Hour* (radio program on the Navajo Nation); websites (Internet) devoted to American Indian education, Indigenous language and cultural teachings (NIEA, *Diné* College, and Navajo Technical University); peer reviewed articles and journals (*Journal*

of American Indian Higher Education, Sage Journals, JSTOR); lectures I attended on Indigenous education and/or research at The University of New Mexico and Northern Arizona University; personal communications with *Diné* elders, *Diné* relatives, and Pueblo elders; Dharma talks I attended for teachings from Buddhist teachers and guest speakers at the Albuquerque Insight Meditation Center and Kadampa Meditation Center of New Mexico, where I meditate and participate in meditation retreats; YouTube videos of TED talks, Indigenous elders' talks on storytelling, knowledge, and language, culture interviews with Navajo youth, and an interview with Dr. Manulani Aluli Meyer on Hawaiian epistemology; The Chopra Center for online 21-Day meditation series by Deepak Chopra and Oprah Winfrey, and teachings on aging by Deepak Chopra and Dr. Sheila Patel; Sounds True for the *Mindfulness and Meditation Summit* on teachings from a scientific point-of-view of mindfulness and how this correlates with Buddhist teachings on mindfulness; teachings by Gangaji; and teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet's website (Training the Mind: Verse 1-8).

I drew from these data sources to deepen my understanding of *Diné* and other Indigenous perspectives on traditional teachings and to re-educate myself on some teachings from the Buddhist paths. Meditation was an important practice throughout this project as I gathered information. Sometimes we do things out of habit without thinking about why we are doing them and forget the true meaning of our walk towards enlightenment and wholeness. Sometimes going back and listening to one's own story pulls out new information. The meditations also helped me become aware of my own thoughts and perspectives. Again, SNBH cannot be rushed, nor do I control it. In meditation I can listen to the spirits, connect with the light, the sounds, and see where I

need to made adjustments. In this way, I am not the one in control, but an instrument through which the teachings flow and grow, nurturing me and allowing me to help others. This is the process of listening to the elders speak and letting the stories be told, of allowing the *Diyin Dine'é* to enter so they can guide.

Data Analysis

The study examined what *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) is and how one acquires it and comes to understand it. Once one acquires it, what is its purpose and what is valid knowledge? How is the knowledge transferred, and how does the person experience transformation? Does the transformed person know how it happened for them? I believe these are valid questions to ask to gain knowledge about a complex system, even though one can never fully understand it. Simply talking about SNBH makes me tired. I must take breaks often because this is not the material of everyday conversation. It is delicate and must be treated with utmost respect. Here are the six research questions:

1. What is *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) for the individual?
2. Why is SNBH significant?
3. How does one acquire or come to understand SNBH?
4. What is its purpose and what constitutes valid knowledge?
5. How does one transfer SNBH knowledge and apply and utilize in everyday life?
6. How does one experience transformation of self once he/she has acquired SNBH?

The interview questions grew from the aforementioned eight themes. Participants could also share additional information as they wished. The only theme that was not fully addressed was transformation (personal or through initiation), but the assumption was

that they acquired SNBH when they had their *Kinaaldá* or as an adult. The other information that emerged from the eight themes was how they transfer knowledge and apply it to everyday life through planning (*Nahata*) and how they used the Diné College Educational Philosophy Model or a similar model for SNBH. The other assumption is when the participants go home to *Dinétaah*, they used SNBH more because there it surrounds them, and they do not have to act a certain way like in the city. The participants gave a detailed picture of who they are—their clans for identity and kinship are a huge part of their lives. The last interview theme was how the participants viewed their own position (role) at home, personal interaction with family members, school (work), and in the community. SNBH is broad but the participants narrowed it to its application in their own personal and professional lives.

I used deductive methods to look at the interview data and winnow it for coding. I selected prior themes expected to emerge based on my research questions. Deductive content analysis is used when the structure of analysis is operationalized based on previous knowledge. A deductive approach is useful if the general aim is to test a previous theory in a different situation or to compare categories at different time periods (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

I read the interviews informally at the beginning after the transcriptions were completed. Then I went back and re-read all of them to look for specific words and connect them. I found that most of the interviews were in English with some *Diné* words even though the participants were given the option to speak in *Diné* or English. Only one participant, Hoskie, spoke *Diné* throughout the interview with a few English words. I reviewed the transcriptions again and translated all the words in *Diné* to English with the

help of a *Diné* translator. After this process, the transcriptions were emailed to the participants to review and edit with the option to delete or add information. There were not many changes; they were all satisfied by what they read. The categorized themes were each coded deductively. There was no order in categorizing the themes; however, I kept the interviews in chronological order of the interview date and assigned an identification number, but later gave the participants a pseudo *Diné* name.

The data was arranged around the themes that emerged after the second coding, followed by another round to organize for a reflective analysis. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) define reflective analysis as "a process in which the researcher relies primarily on intuition and judgment to portray or evaluate the phenomenon being studied" (p. 459).

I came to this research with my own intuition and judgment, using the research questions and specific interview questions to formulate the themes in advance. Reviewing and re-reading the data allowed me to bring together the different kinds of knowledge, experience, beliefs, and upbringings of the participants, and to forge new meanings through the process of their narratives and interpretations of their stories. Some of them used metaphors that led me to believe that they possessed a deep-level understanding of SNBH. The participants demonstrated how they use SNBH in their daily life and in their profession. This process helped me look at the data from a place of mindfulness and spiritual inquiry. For example, I felt their sense of connection when they spoke about SNBH and were able to recall events in their lives as if they happened yesterday. Things that they had not thought of in a long time came back to them and carried a much deeper meaning.

The interview data from the four participants was used to triangulate sources. An interview protocol was implemented with common questions designed to gather information about the benefits of the use of SNBH in general by the participants, as well as how they use it with their students. I did not observe the participants in their professional setting (classroom), but I asked how they use SNBH with their students if they were teachers. Therefore, there are no observations to describe classroom contexts or other patterns of how SNBH in the classroom. However, one participant (Nizhoni) referred to using Secatero's "Wellbeing Model" (Secatero, 2009) and three participants (Nizhoni, Hoskie, and Nanibah) used Diné College SNBH Educational Philosophy Model to benefit students. The patterns of how they used SNBH in their early life, how they came to understand it, and how they use it in their life today, was documented, as well as the number of times they participated in certain activities (e.g., singing, ceremony, weaving, sheep, storytelling, childhood experiences) with family or alone. I think this amount of time to analyze the data was necessary to compare the outcomes and use methodology triangulation of the data across the interviews. Initially I used Atlas.ti 8 software to code, but found it was troublesome and required substantial training. I decided to code the data manually following Strauss and Corbin's methods (1990) in the following steps:

1. Open-Coding - "The process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p. 61).
2. Axial-Coding - "A set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. " (p. 96).

3. Selective Coding - "The process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development" (p. 116).

The data coding is a repetitive process that continues until a strong theoretical understanding of an event, setting, or occurrence has emerged. In this study, data was coded using the three levels of coding techniques—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Each of these open codes were recorded in Word tables, and then determined in relation to understanding and implementing SNBH (themes and categories). The core category was identified as the following: You must live SNBH to understand the benefits for positive changes. The use of SNBH in daily life and career, and how it is perceived through the sacred teachings, will be discussed in the Findings section.

The next section describes how narrative inquiry can be used as a tool for Indigenous research and to analyze Indigenous storytelling. In Chapter 1, I shared my personal narrative of how I came to know SNBH and how SNBH gave me a desire to know my language, culture, and myself. Sometimes an individual who is surrounded by a wealth of traditional knowledge and ceremonial practices can still not understand them; some elders and medicine people do not share sacred teachings. Narratives are powerful as they invoke identity.

Narrative Inquiry and Storytelling

Narrative inquiry was selected as the optimal method to analyze the interviews and honor the participants' stories. Narrative inquiry is a relatively new qualitative methodology and is the study of experience understood narratively. I chose narrative

inquiry to better understand the spiritual stories told me on a retreat with Spiritual Leader Leon Secatero. The power of the stories evoked a new emotion that came from a deep space I never knew existed within my being. I learned that day as I walked along the canyon floor, the power of my ancestors. They fought hard for their lives, for their children, for the land that embodies our sacred knowledge system, and the cosmology, the key to the universe back to the first light. I witnessed some incredible stories that were shared by the elders. One way to understand the meaning of all this is through metaphor or story (Nee-Benham, 2008).

Secatero's storytelling changed me. Therefore, I chose narrative inquiry to examine the stories from the participants. Storytelling is at the heart of narrative inquiry. It investigates how and why stories are told and how new knowledge and sacred teachings are transferred and manifested for the individual. The practical experiences suddenly turned into something more. As I mention in my narrative story, after returning home to Salt Lake City from a ceremony, while driving into Utah Valley, everything changed. The place no longer looked the same. I came home with different thinking and a different perspective. This experience roused me to move from Salt Lake City to find "my truth."

Narrative inquiry approach helped me define the meaning of SNBH for myself, as an individual being. I asked SNBH to help me understand what it means to be *Diné*. SNBH brought me back to, and then took me beyond, my identity. I asked why SNBH is significant and how one acquires SNBH. Nee-Benham calls this "a return to the source" (2008, p. 9). I sought wisdom from the ancestors. The stories bring back memories not only for us humans, but for the land, air, and all living things.

Today, when I think back, the experience was a paradigm shift after I asked SNBH to help me understand what it means to be *Diné*. I thought I was making a simple request when I said, “Please show me how to be a *Diné* woman, help me to speak my language and learn about my culture.” I asked too much. No wonder I am still learning today. But the truth is, the importance of my journey on earth became more purposeful and meaningful. I took the time to know my roots, to start a family genealogy, record some stories from my aunt Annie and her late husband, my *yazh* Tom. They told stories about my clans.

Mindfulness and the importance of oral expression arose as themes in my participants’ stories. Narrative inquiry approach includes mindfulness and oral skills. For example, the participants, developed mindfulness in the ceremonies when they were children, when they greeted the early morning in prayer and offered corn pollen, and when they were with their grandparents, who passed on the knowledge to them. From the interviews, I sensed genuine love and compassion from the participants for their family, the animals, and especially for the homeland—when they see the sacred mountains, they are home. To me, the participants’ stories that they remember and tell their children today is what will go to the next generation in beauty and harmony. Nanibah shared that when her parents came to visit her, they asked her to tell them what she learned. She was developing oral skills, trying to express herself with eloquence. The elders speak this way. I recall when everyone stopped conversing when my grandmother used to talk or to pray. Narrative inquiry also helped me define “SNBH knowledge” through storytelling.

Stories are personal and hold memories. The participants’ stories belong to them. The stories bring a connection to family, one’s homeland, ceremonies, stories of animals,

and experiences from our ancestors. The stories are powerful because they recollect the experiences. Narrative inquiry approach has allowed me to look carefully at the participants' stories, whose perspective they are, how they learned of SNBH—from the ceremony or from their grandparents—and the influence of their early western education. There was evidence of how they received traditional knowledge and counterpoints in their experiences at school or at church. I learned from the participants' stories that they use SNBH as an educational tool. For example, Nizhoni uses it in class to plan her curriculum, along with the four concepts from Diné College and Secatero's "Wellbeing Model" (2009). The stories and models developed from a Navajo person constitutes valid knowledge. The application of a model that reflects on *Diné* wellbeing with *Diné* perspectives fostered the transfer of SNBH knowledge to the participant's students and children.

The participants, all four, received guidance and knowledge from their parents, grandparents, and medicine practitioners who shared the ceremonies and administered rites of passage. From these transformative events grew the capacity to develop an intellect that helped the individual implement new acquired knowledge and make life-long decisions towards SNBH. The stories are *Diné* perspective and validate what we believe in. Respect and reciprocity are developed through transformation. I always imagined that respect was being kind to a person or place, but that is only a small piece. To respect something or someone is to acknowledge the life that is within that place, animal, or person. To respect is to give life to prayers and songs, and a voice to what we are acknowledging. To respect is to be mindful and, in mindfulness, there is a pause that we acknowledge before we utter the first sound. It is a place of power and love that

comes from the tip of our tongue, fingers, ears, feet, and head where the Holy Wind touches us—in those spaces we reconnect to these ancient ways.

Storytelling is used in a variety of ways. For children, it is used to teach a lesson, to help them behave, and to pass on everyday knowledge about animals, the food they eat, and cleanliness (such as how to wash their face). Stories are also used to preserve family genealogy and the natural laws around why certain ceremonies are done at certain time of the season. They serve to maintain harmony with everything around in daily life. Furthermore, the medicine people share stories about spirituality, the creation stories, and how the *Diné* people came here. The elders have many opportunities to share stories with their children and grandchildren. They could go into schools and tell stories to the children there. Storytelling keeps memories and dreams alive. They act as the foundation of the culture and language. Benham (2007) elaborates: “Stories have the power to explore people’s relationships, both public and private, with their environment and with one another. Stories illuminate knowledge in such a way that it connects to the roots of who we are as individuals and as a community” (p. 512).

Diné epistemology, ontology, and paradigm are still relatively new and lacking in the academy in the United States. Indigenous peoples throughout the world have their own set of knowledge systems, cosmology, sacred teachings, epistemology, and ontology. They have core values to guide them, give them stability, and connect them to the sacred teachings. Narrative styles are very different for Indigenous peoples.

SNBH has many different stories that are used in the ceremony and the songs. SNBH touches on distinct themes—connection to *K'é* (kinship), to land, and to language and culture. I learned about compassion through SNBH. When I was first seeking my

inner self, I found a book by His Holiness the Dalai Lama (HHDL), and from there a desire to learn drove me far, from east to south, to west and north. In this circular pathway, I reclaimed the ability to transform myself into a sentient being with the decision to return to my homeland. I went to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama (HHDL) in 2006 in Denver, Colorado. When I first saw him, I felt an enormous love and compassion for him. I cannot imagine being in exile, being away from *Dinétaah*, and all that embodies our holistic way of life. HHDL escaped through the Himalayas so he could continue to lead the Tibetan people. His people sing songs of him, of his loving smile and the profound imprint of kindness and love he has for all being. On the other side of the mountains, his people are waiting for his homecoming. I think, this must have been my ancestors when they were incarcerated at Bosque Redondo. My people, we were sent home to *Dinétaah*. Through narrative storytelling, *Diné* epistemology and SNBH paradigm have the potential to return the sacred knowledge system back to the Navajo people.

Summary

For the study, I set out to use Indigenous research methodology drawing from *Diné* epistemology. I explored the strategies of Indigenous research methodology and Indigenous epistemology to provide a more complete picture of the lack of Indigenous perspective in western education. I used deductive methods for coding to draw specific themes from the interview data. I tried to indigenize the procedures by examining how this could be discussed from a *Diné* perspective, and how one would use SNBH and *K'é* with the participants and the data. The stories are interconnected and weave a beautiful pattern in their personal and professional lives. The participants also included the

ancestors, and the foundational stories that are passed on in their families and communities.

Wilson (2008) explains that a “paradigm is a set of underlying beliefs that guide our actions. These beliefs include the way that we view reality (ontology), how we think about or know this reality (epistemology), our ethics and morals (axiology) and how we go about gaining more knowledge about reality (methodology)” (p.13). Indigenous research paradigm is made up of all these things. Again, Wilson (2008) says these beliefs "influence the tools we as researchers use in finding our more about the cosmos” (p.13). It is difficult to use *Diné* paradigm to explain SNBH practices. I described my position as the researcher and how my personal narrative frames my understanding of *Diné* epistemology. I recounted how I acquired the knowledge of SNBH with the help of other methods such as meditation.

The other lesson learned in this research is that Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous research methods, just like the stories and the ceremonies, cannot be rushed. It is a process. In this process, knowledge is shared, knowledge is processed, and knowledge is meditated upon. I re-read all the interviews (at least 5 times) and then started to code them. From the beginning, I wanted this study to help *Diné* youth discover their cultural values, their stories, ceremonies, and prayers, and through this, the power of SNBH. I am grateful for the stories I received.

The *Diné* College SNBH Educational Philosophy Model contains four concepts and SNBH symbolizes the process, the step-by-step process of *hózhó*. The steps take time and must be undertaken with careful consideration of how the teachings will affect your life, your mind, body, and spirit. Therefore, the teachings may not be entirely digested in

one sitting, but in time it will come again, and when the person is ready, they will receive and accept it. When you are a child, you hear about *hózhó* and maybe take part in some of the ceremony, but it is when you become an adult that you reflect on your life and what you have done. The ceremonies all have a purpose; they help restore harmony and balance back to the mind, body, and spirit, and bring you back from wherever you were into the circle of life, to family, to community, and to nature. Everything is restored.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter describe the study's research findings in the following areas: (1) Descriptions of Findings and Coding, (2) First Level: Participants' Narratives, (3) Nizhoni: The Teacher, (4) Hoskie: The Warrior, (5) Nanibah: The Butterfly, (6) Yazzie: The Navigator, (7) Findings: Participants' Narratives, (8) Second Level: Reclaiming Knowledge and Reclaiming Stories, (9) Final Level: Mindfulness.

Description of Findings and Coding

I began with a descriptive look at the overall pattern on SNBH storytelling. First the stories were collected and transcribed. I was hesitant to start analyzing early on because I did not want to start comparing one interview to the next. I wanted to work on them together, do the transcription, and send it back to the participants so they would have a chance to make changes, additions, or deletions.

In the beginning, I assigned an ID# (P1 through P7) to the participants. However, I then gave the participants pseudonyms for confidentiality and to make their stories more personal. Table 1 illustrates the participants' demographic information on gender, home state, UNM status, profession, and language. The participants all live in Albuquerque, New Mexico, but mentioned where they are originally from in *Dinétaah*, hence the inserted map of the Navajo Reservation Map (Figure 2).

The geographic findings add a diversity to the participants' home locations. The participants also indicated where their parents and relatives live and said that these areas have meaning to them. The participants identify with their home in *Dinétaah*. Some are in remote areas and some near townships, but the participants all have a strong connection to their homeland and cultural ties to SNBH.

The first two participants, Nizhoni and Hoskie (pseudonyms) responded quickly, within two weeks, upon receiving the invitation to participate. Rather than transcribing their interviews right away, I waited until they were all completed. But the interviews took longer than I estimated. To narrow the study, I looked at the data and created analytic questions to make sense of the narratives. I then started the coding process for each interview question theme. After looking at the data, my notes, and the comments I had written, the next step was bringing it all together. I consolidated and interpreted the participants' voices or narratives, and what I had read and observed up to that point.

As mentioned, the interview questions centered around eight themes from the start. I created the themes to guide the interview for the participants and allow them to formulate their pathway to SNBH. I will discuss each question to demonstrate the pattern of how the participants articulated their answers. I illustrated the eight themes and the themes emerged from each participant's story. The findings illustrated the lived experiences and how each participant perceived SNBH teachings.

The themes were then coded. I explain more for each level of the coding below. The first step in analyzing the data was *open-coding* which focuses and defines concepts and categories. I broke down interview question by each participant's answers to look for distinct concepts and categories that would form a new set of basic units. First level themes from the questions were concepts, which I assigned master headings. From here the second level of sub-themes, or categories, emerged and were given subheadings. Researchers often use color coding to distinguish concepts and categories. For example, the interviewees consistently talk about respect or respecting; each time an interviewee mentions respect, or something related to respect, I highlighted in the same color for

each. Respect would become a concept, and other things related would become categories –all highlighted the same color. I used different colored highlights to distinguish each broad concept and category. The same method was used for each interview question for the four participants. The next was the combined two levels of *axial-coding* to look more closely at the concepts and categories and the final level was *selective-coding* to select the final concept or core theme.

First Level: Participants' Narratives

The eight themes from the interview questions are the first level to open-coding. The narratives are driven by the questions I posed. It should be noted that sometimes the participants spoke in second and third person. When this occurs, Western academia does not acknowledge this or want to know why the individual is speaking this way. The Western style is to speak up and get to the point as soon as possible. For example, when I visited the participants, I was there for a purpose, so I was the one initiating the conversation. It was my responsibility to acknowledge what type of conversation we would be having. I gave the “nod” to begin, but it was the participant who decided when they finished. I could not tell them to stop. It was done with respect and honor. Often when an Indigenous person speaks in second and third person, it is chosen to convey respect, because the individual does not want to utter a sacred word, or because the person being talked about is deceased. In English we say *it* when we are referring to an object or person we cannot identify. The participants referred to SNBH many times as *it*, so I tried to indicate when the participants are referring to SNBH. Importantly too, I am translating these utterances that are sacred, and many times some *Diné* will not say the word(s) *SNBH*. There are certain terms or names of animals in *Diné*, such as *bear*, that

we do not say, because of the sacredness they possess and represent. Therefore, we must be careful how we say things. The participants took the time to articulate their answers for each interview question. Their stories focused on someone who was their caretaker and a person whom they were deeply connected to. This person (or persons) was able to articulate the teachings to a lived experienced and allowed them to be creative in the process. SNBH was lived for them in their daily life. There was a deep connection in mind, body, and spirit.

In the next section of the findings, I will re-tell the participants' stories from the interviews. Before I go into the eight themes (interview questions), I made one adjustment to introduce the participants' clans at the beginning. *Identity* was the fourth question, but it was important to introduce the clans before we heard their stories. The stories are in the order of the interviews with the participants. At the end, I will summarize the findings for the participants with additional literature. The participant's knowledge may contain *a priori* knowledge of SNBH. After the stories have been told, the next section will be a description of the next level of coding.

Nizhoni – The Teacher

Nizhoni invited me to her home for the interview. She introduced her clans in *Diné*: “*Shi ei Todich 'ii 'nii nishli, doo Tsenijikini ei bashishchiin, Totsohnii ei dashicheii doo Kinlichii 'nii dashinali.*” Nizhoni grew up in Arizona and attended school from Headstart to college. She said her purpose as a *Diné* woman, is a mother, a wife, and educator. She has three children and is very proud of them. She wants to protect her children, so people won't take advantage of them.

Nizhoni began by saying that she started a new position as a Navajo Language and Culture teacher in 2004 in Albuquerque. Prior to starting her new position, she was given a list of topics from the Navajo Nation and was instructed to take the exam and to be certified as a 520 Navajo Language and Culture teacher through the New Mexico Public Education Department in the Albuquerque Public Schools. She stated that she truly did not understand what SNBH was about and did not know how to teach *Diné* as a second language. She recalls that when she was growing up, she heard about SNBH in ceremony but did not question anything more. Nizhoni's mother-in-law helped her prepare for the oral examination. When they got to the part on SNBH, her mother-in-law told her that SBNH is a process and that *Diné* use SNBH to plan within their families. She instructed Nizhoni to utilize SNBH within her home because the teachings and blessings will take her far in life, with her children, her marriage, and everything to come.

Nizhoni in many ways, is very proud to be a *Diné* woman. She shared that she never considered her identity until she got to college and her professors asked for reflection essays on how she learned. One of the interview questions I asked was, "Who am I?" The question resurfaced various events in her life. She said this made her think and reflect on her identity. She recalled that in Navajo Head Start, she was taught to say her clans at an early age. But often one does not know the meaning of these things until later in life. As an adult, Nizhoni essentially understood how kinship functions, and said that the *Diné* clan system works because it defines who you are.

Starting out in her role as a Navajo Language and Culture teacher, she learned to teach *Diné* as a second language and build curricula for her K-8 students. She is very fond of her students, and sometimes refers to them as "her kids." She is given 45 minutes

a day to teach *Diné* in a pull-out program, a charge she finds challenging. She said she often over-plans activities and incorporates SNBH. She began to use SNBH as part of her planning to see where her students will go academically and assess for results at the end of each lesson. For example: Were her students capable of handling the assignments, and could they master the skills? NCLB was a large part of formal assessment, and now Common Core Standards. Nizhoni mentioned that she is not sure where the school is going because the policy assessments are continuously changing. However, she stated that SNBH will fall right into the planning, and she'll continue to prepare lessons and set them into action to assess her students later. She said she often reflects on the lessons to enhance her students' understanding.

Nizhoni talked about the students going through their own SNBH process. For example, for their spring project, they chose the Long Walk as their subject. The older students selected the topic and the younger students did a graffiti wall where they could write anything on the Long Walk. The project brought up numerous questions as they partnered to do research. Her students were very proud of themselves, and what they had learned about this pivotal event, when they presented to the school with their families in the audience. The students had learned a lot of stories about the ancestors and wanted to keep going. Nizhoni said that not all her students are fluent, but they want to continue learning the *Diné* language and culture. She considers herself to be a good resource to them. Some of the high school students take Navajo Language I and II, along with Navajo History and Government, so they can become eligible for the Chief Manuelito Scholarship to go to college.

Nizhoni is passionate about teaching *Diné* language and culture. She radiates when she speaks about her students and becomes emotional when talking about language and culture loss. She said: “Yes and no,” about *Diné* losing their language and culture: Yes, because she sees it being lost by *Diné* youths in Albuquerque who do not speak the language; and no, because it’s not being lost by *Diné* youths that live out on the reservation in families who make conscientious effort to teach their children these things.”

She stated that, even in Albuquerque, she has *Diné* friends who are fluent in *Diné*, and some friends who do not have an understanding of *Diné* language or culture. She notices that the ones who do not know the culture or language tend to be a little more lost, while those that do are more grounded. She is very much interested in this dynamic, and tries to share information with her *Diné* friends, especially if they do not understand the language and culture.

When we discussed ceremonies and rites of passage, Nizhoni stated that it is beneficial for *Diné* youth to have these rites. She shared that when she had her *Kinaaldá* (puberty ceremony for young girls coming of age), her clan women relatives came to talk to her during the ceremony. At the time, she was not ready to receive a lot of information. They (the medicine man, clan relatives, her parents, etc.) were presenting her because she was not mature enough to understand the complexities of the teachings. These experiences she had at a young age led Nizhoni to say that “We can expose SNBH to youth, but it really depends on their developmental capabilities of where they’re at. Can they ingest, or be ready to adopt SNBH?” However, Nizhoni thinks talking about SNBH, or being present when its talked about, will not hurt them. She said the youth have a right

to learn SNBH—SNBH is a part of them, and it is part of who they are. However only time will tell what happens, when they grow up and understand what SNBH is about.

Nizhoni shared that she learned proper etiquette for going to ceremonies to NAC and to traditional ceremonies. For example, the girls wore skirts and could not run around and play. Her role was to help prepare food, act lady-like, sit upright, and use proper manners during the ceremony. When she was at boarding school, she was told to select a religion and to attend its services, but her view of church (organized denominations) was playing and doing crafts (i.e., knitting, etc.). That was her early experience with church. But for *Diné* ceremonies, there were protocols to follow and things you could not do before or after ceremonies. She learned to speak *Diné* during the ceremonies and realized at a very young age that there was a big difference between church and going to a ceremony.

Nizhoni's son listened to a *Diné* elder who spoke about *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) at UNM. He thought SNBH was a very beautiful saying but didn't know what it was. He asked his mother. Nizhoni told him what her mother-in-law had told her about SNBH: SNBH is for all of life, and a process to accomplish goals.

Nizhoni believes that it is important for *Diné* youth to learn about SNBH because this knowledge is passed through generations. She believes it's entirely up to you (*t'aa ho ajit'eehgo t'eeya*) to accomplish goals using SNBH. SNBH is a foundation for young people. She does not know details of the students' lives, what is affecting them, but says, "If you are taught early about SNBH, you can go very far with that." She believes that through SNBH *Diné* youth will have stability and a foundation to stand on. She gave this example from her own experience: As soon as she goes home to Arizona, as soon as she

passes Grants, New Mexico, she senses she is home. Nizhoni views the sacred mountains as protectors. She grew up speaking only *Diné* in a remote rural area. All the children spoke only *Diné*. She said it was a comfort to have that.

Another comfort to Nizhoni is listening to *Hózhóójíí* (Beauty way) songs. There is a lot of singing about the mountains when you are in a ceremony, which reinforces how important the land is. Nizhoni mentioned that she does not know how *Diné* would live without the land. She said her students learned about the Treaty of 1868 and the people being released to come home. She told them about Mt. Taylor, how when the ancestors saw the mountain, the women started singing *Shiinasha*, and that is where the song originated. It is about walking back to our beautiful home in beauty. The songs interpret to, “I’m returning to my beautiful land.” Nizhoni shared that when her students heard the song, they understood, and some of the girls cried. She thinks a lot of her students were saddened to learn about the term, *Navajo enemy*, when our own people sided with the Calvary to help them round up the *Diné*. She reminded her students that the four sacred mountains outline our land, and that our ancestors reclaimed a lot of the land that we had prior to the Long Walk. She thinks this made them proud, and they see the symbolism on the Navajo Nation flag.

Hoskie – The Warrior

Hoskie introduced his clans in *Diné*: “*Shi ei Tse’nahabilnii nishli, doo Kinlichii’nii bashishchiin, Hooghanlani dashicheii doo dashinali. Hoteego Diné nishli.*”

Hoskie strongly believes that “*K’é* is the first thing we should acknowledge: “What are your clans?” We immediately established kinship based on our clans. Because

my paternal grandfather was *Bit'ahnii*, and Hoskie's mother is *Hooghanlani*—the kinship is linked there. He told me we were cousins.

His story of SNBH is quite fascinating. His father was brought up in a traditional home in Arizona where his relatives follow the Corn Pollen path. His father's clans are *Kinlichii'nii* and *Ashiihi yashchiin*. Hoskie says, "It's their belief, passed from generation-to-generation" on his father's side. He tells me that his father knows about SNBH too, and about *Diné* ceremonies, *Diné* beliefs, and *Diné* way of practice. On the other hand, his mother is from New Mexico; her clan is *Tsenahabilinii* and *Hooghanlani yashchiin*. He said that they are not so much into the Corn Pollen path, practice, and belief, but recalls they did practice SNBH only for *Kinaaldá*, the Beauty Way ceremonies. His mother's relatives practice Peyote ceremonies and that is where their belief is. He recalled that he "was aware of SNBH in the *Diné* ceremonies."

Hoskie said he grew up in New Mexico where he learned everything and has his family roots. He thinks people will still recognize him there, since he went to high school in a rural area. He said he still has relatives who live out there; it is where his grandmother grew up, and his mother, and her grandmother, and great grandmother—two generations of grandmothers are there. His mother still lives there as well as his uncle, his aunt, and their sheep, horses, and cattle. His home there is important because of his relatives. I asked him, "What about the sacred mountains?" He stated that when you tell their stories, they adorn you, and the mountain soil, in sacred bundles. The following gems are tied together in the bundles: white shell, turquoise, abalone shell, and obsidian. He also added that SNBH is adorned for the home. For example, the logs from the mountain were made with these things, the earth as well, and he called it *dzil hooghan*—

made with the mountains. He said *hooghan* has everything—the teaching tools, beautiful teachings. He said this is how he thinks about the mountains.

Hoskie has been in Albuquerque for 20 years. He learned about SNBH from a medicine man, drawn to it because it was beautiful to him—its formation unfolded one at a time. He said the teachings were in steps, and at different levels. He “especially liked the teachings, the songs, and the prayers.” He called it a “beautiful package.” He thinks there are many ways to teach SNBH, such as using metaphors to explain things. Hoskie began to understand SNBH when SNBH was sung and recited in prayer. He said in the songs, they sing, “I am SNBH, I am a SNBH child, I am a SNBH grandchild.” He shared that SNBH are all different. He became aware of SNBH through songs and prayers, and started walking the path, and he is still on that path. This path is closely bound up with his family:

“Some of them say, this *Hózhóóji* (Beauty Way), it’s father, mother, paternal mother, paternal father. You tell them “Thank you.” Here’s our child you placed here for us, that’s our father, on the other side is your maternal grandparents, on the *Bik’eh Hózhóón* side. Our child, you are placed on earth, it’s our mother, our father. She gave me much love and that is what I am made of today. I think of identity that way through *K’é*.”

Hoskie is a Navajo Language and Culture instructor. He talks to his students about SNBH and takes it seriously. Some of the children and their grandparents do not speak *Diné*. This is a challenge for Hoskie and asks himself, ‘How will they learn?’” For the elementary aged children, he uses the four directions and the four colors. He said SNBH is a little bit more advanced, so he uses the basic stories. He tells them SNBH is

Diné people. Hoskie believes “The way you talk, words (*Saad*), your tongue, is very powerful. It is not easy to live by these teachings.” But, he said, “SNBH stories help in his teaching. Some of his students understand very well, but some are very fragile because they do not have a mother or a father.”

Hoskie told me that it was within the past five years or so that he came to some understanding of SNBH and being a Navajo Language and Culture Teacher. He started to “walk in a good way at a slow pace,” but he was not thinking about it before. He said he talks about SNBH, he teaches it, but on the other hand, he is also learning like a child. SNBH has its purpose. He explained that some people (in their profession) talk about SNBH, but they do not go to the ceremonies—the ceremonies are where you learn the most. He said that the main thing is your children, your life, your home—you should not be anywhere else—it has its purpose, to make them strong for the future.

Hoskie responded in an interesting way when I asked him about language loss: “We must be careful how we talk about the language. If I said it, would it [language loss] become real?” I told Hoskie that I am asking this question because of studies on Indigenous peoples losing their language. He went on to say, “Yes, when I think of it, why do you ask that? Why do you say that?” Is it for real? Is it going to happen? Is that why you are saying this?” Hoskie said that loss has made him take a positive turn and think about re-generation or revitalization, instead of language loss or cultural loss.

He believes that it is true, that *Diné* children are not speaking *Diné*, but even the adults--mature men and women—do not speak *Diné* and don’t know about the ceremonies. He said he is aware of the reasons and.

SNBH is a beautiful thing (*Joo nizhonigii ateeh*), it is to live a good

life. The ceremony, prayers, and songs, I make it a part of my work and I also teach from it. SNBH, is not way out there and when people talk about it, it is not something, it is here within you.

Hoskie also believes it is important to experience the rites of passages: “It is all good things and beautiful to have a good life—to go forward, and to have a long happy life and to go back into old age, that’s part of its purpose.” He said he respects the *Kinaaldá* ceremony and sweat lodge (*tácheeh*). “It depends how the youths think about it and how the medicine person teaches the children about it.” I asked him if he had a sweat lodge done for him and he replied, “A sweat lodge, yes, that was done for me,” But, he didn’t have the *Hózhóóji* until more recently. He remembers *Kinaaldá* done for his sisters and his relatives. I asked him, “Why is SNBH important for Navajo youth?” He answered, “To know yourself, it gives good energy, (makes you feel good), and it keeps you strong.”

Nanibah – The Butterfly

I interviewed Nanibah at my apartment. She introduced her clans in *Diné*: “*Shi ei adoodine’é nishli ei Dziltl’ahnii nishli, Ta’neezahnii doo Hashk’aa hadzohi, doo To’ahani ei iiyiisii dashik’ei, aadoo Bilaghaana ei bashishchiin, Ashiichi’ dashiicheii, aadoo Bilaghaana ei dashinali, akot’ao Diné asdzani nishli.*”

Nanibah comes from Arizona and lives in Albuquerque. Her journey of SNBH began when her parents met in Albuquerque. Her mother is *Diné* and her father is *Bilaghaana* (White man). When her parents decided to start a family, her father told her mother, “I’m non-native, I’m not *Diné*, but I want our child to be raised knowing *Diné* language first before she ever learns to speak English.”

When Nanibah was born, her parents cared for her and then they took her to her maternal grandparents to help raise her in a traditional upbringing while they worked. She said that from that moment on, she was placed in a cradle-board and raised in the traditional, ceremonial way. Her earliest memories were in a *hooghan* (a circular home) in Arizona with her maternal grandparents until she became of school age (six years old). Her first language is *Diné* and she has memories of her great-grandmother, who had sheep, and being in her *hooghan*.

She recalled that each morning she prayed with her grandparents and ran. She said her grandparents exemplified SNBH with the ceremonial way of life and with daily activities. She was immersed with her family in this way of life. Her parents visited on weekends until she was age six, then she lived in an urban area. She looks back and is grateful that she had this beautiful upbringing with her grandparents who enabled her to understand what it means to live in a traditional way of life.

SNBH was a part of each day in their morning prayer. She remembers hearing SNBH and said: "My maternal grandfather often talked about SNBH at night. He would always tell stories when we fell asleep and only in the winter time about the emergence stories (*Hajiinee dee hane'e*).

These stories have helped her in her life to this day. She said traditional stories are her medicine. She is teaching these traditional stories to her daughter and going to winter and summer ceremonies—whether they be NAC or Blessing Way, *Hózhóóji* ceremonies— to return to SNBH. SNBH has been a part of her path since she was born.

On the subject of her identity Nanibah said:

“*Who am I* means, who are my ancestors, where do I come from, what is my origin, what came before me to allow me to be here today, and if I continue to think along that same path of thinking. As a *Diné* woman, when I think about *Who am I*, I think about what my parents and my grandparents taught me that it is through *K’é* (kinship), it is through being the Five-Fingered ones (*bila’ashdlaa’*). As a human being, who I am comes from the teachings of the origin stories, of our holy ones, our animals, our birds, our insects. They helped me be who I am today because of their teachings. So, instead of just thinking about me as a human being, I think about me as an Earth Surface Being (*Nihookaa’ diyin dine’é*) along with all the other animals, the birds, the insects. I become a part of this cycle of life, I become a part of this holistic way of living; rather than just thinking about me. Through *K’é* (kinship), I then relay my clan, my lineage, how am I connected to others, how am I related to others, how do I care for myself and others, through that *K’é* way of life.”

Nanibah remembers several of her elders living into old age. One of the most important individuals in her life was her great-grandmother, who lived into her 80s. Nanibah remembers that when she visited her great-grandmother that she spent a lot of time taking care of the sheep, walking with her, and weaving rugs. It was during those moments when she sang songs of SNBH.

She recalled that when she attended ceremonies as a little girl, she would hear SNBH; it was always sung four times within a song. SNBH was not just a philosophy to her; it was part of a prayer; it was part of the sacred songs, and it became a part of how she lived. She heard her great grandmother saying, “We will live into old age, we will

walk in a sacred way into old age, we will return to a place of sacredness and blessedness, that is called SNBH, my little one, my grandchild.” Nanibah told me “I was always touched by those stories, especially when my great grandmother and my maternal grandparents would talk about The Long Walk (*Hweeldi*), a place of challenges and burden and struggle and genocide (*hoyee*).”

Nanibah said her grandmother would find joy and happiness in every day, and say, that too is SNBH— to celebrate life through your joy. Even as a little girl Nanibah was asked important questions and asked to talk about what she remembered from the stories. She stated that this was critical in her development to have these important conversations. She was told not to leave the *hooghan* to go outside to play, but to sit and listen, and recognize the importance of SNBH as a way of life. “When we say those words (SNBH), it helps us heal; when we say those words it’s a healing expression; to even take SNBH, it’s really about that—*Hózhó nahadleeh* (in beauty it is, in sacredness and blessedness it will be completed, it will grow).” She went on to share that when she attended more Blessing Way ceremonies, and when she had her *Kinaaldá*, she heard SNBH often in the prayers and songs. Nanibah explained her view of SNBH:

“SNBH is a way of life; it has a spirit. When it’s said, it evokes this medicine for us; it’s a healing medicine when these words are said. The words are a prayerful expression that connects us to, especially when it’s sung in a prayer song, it connects us to the element that that song is about – whether it’s a mountain way song, or if it’s a weaving song or food or nourishment song. SNBH is the words that bring together that song, the prayer; it blesses the words, it blesses the person saying it, it blesses the people hearing it. If SNBH were to be used as an

educational tool, it would bring forth this positive way of honoring oneself, positive way of expressing oneself, and it would then give them healing feelings and healing thoughts that would counter some of the hurtful thoughts that they are feeling inside. This educational tool using SNBH would be used in curricula, it could be used in oral teachings, storytelling, it could be used in healthy communication skill practice.”

Nanibah said her purposes is to raise her daughter with all those teachings, help her friends, volunteer at her school, as a parent and a community member, and to return home often to ceremonies. One of the most meaningful things she's learning now is how to weave a rug. She said this brings back memories of her grandmother and her great grandmother when they wove, and how weaving helped them have strong mental health and a strong loving heart.

Nanibah believes that *Diné* families have been forcibly acculturated through the colonizing policies of the U.S. government, which pushed the people away from a traditional way of life, their language, and cultural well-being. She said the most critical loss was having their traditional way of life and language beaten out of them. Her grandfather experienced boarding school at 12 years old. He described the school as a place that had no love, no *K'é* (kinship), and no family. His spirit was almost destroyed by the English-only teachers and he ran away often. Later in his life, he realized that it was hard to make a living without speaking English and so he began learning English to find a job.

Nanibah's family also learned from the traditional ceremonies and Native American Church, how to become a strong native person, and survive. She shared that it

was through her grandfather's teachings that she learned that there's this powerful tension in being a Native American. She said there's evidence of individuals learning *Diné*, whether at a tribal college, a dual immersion school, or programs that supports classrooms. Navajo people are returning to their language. She wants to think of the term *language loss as language growth* and to always shift it to a place of strength-based thinking, because she has seen children who were raised not speaking *Diné* now speaking *Diné*. She holds onto hope with excitement and enthusiasm because she has seen it and is able to personally help through her certification as a Navajo Language and Culture teacher via the New Mexico Public Education Department, and the Office of *Diné* Language and Culture for the Navajo Nation. She had to go through several rubrics to pass the Navajo language and culture exam for *Diné* fluency certification. She has been able to bring her skills to different non-native language schools and charter schools, to teach *Diné* language and culture. At home, she speaks *Diné* with her daughter, they pray in the morning, and she teaches her *Diné* songs. Her daughter attends *Diné* language class which is a critical part of language revitalization efforts.

Nanibah said she believes that it's critically important for *Diné* youth to learn about SNBH, that it will help in their physical and emotional development as a child into adolescence, that it is nourishment:

“To learn about SNBH is an essential part of their early phases of life and if they learn it, it will feel like they're eating a home-cooked meal made with love and nurturing. It's a feeling they will have when they learn SNBH—it's not just a philosophy that they're learning in school. It's not something that you memorize. It's SNBH. For the children, if they feel it, it will become a healing entity in their

life. It's like laughter. When they feel good about something, when they find happiness, that brings good medicine to them. SNBH is s feeling, an expression that sometimes there's no words to describe it. It's an emotion—when they feel a loving hug from a relative, a mentor that cares for them. SNBH contextualizes, this sense of belonging, this sense of identity, this sense of being Diné, the sense of feeling loved, and nurtured, and nourished. Words have medicine. Expressions in our prayer songs are medicine and so our youth need that, our youth yearn for that. When they're taught the process of a prayer and they internalize that prayer for themselves, it helps them grow, it helps them develop, it helps them to be strong.”

Nanibah brought up the point that you can still have a ceremony at any age to return to your roots. There are elements of *Kinaaldá* that can still be done that still bless and honor the participant at any age. A *Hózhóójií* ceremony can be done at any age, and there are different types of prayers that capture the essence of the coming-of-age ceremony. The *Kinaaldá* and sweat-lodge ceremonies focus on SNBH songs and prayers. Nanibah says the ceremonies help prepare the young person to live a long, full, strong life in spite of hardships of life.

Nanibah said she comes from a place known for its water. She said she is deeply rooted in the land she calls home because that is where her umbilical cord lies; that's where it was offered with prayer and with love. Here she returns to her family and land and connects to powerful memories. Nanibah shared when she is away from her homeland, she makes offerings through her prayers and she “thinks to the land” because the land needs to be provided for each day through her prayers. Even though she may not

be walking upon it at this moment, her heart and her mind are there. Her prayers go to those special places where she was raised, and she looks at *Diné bikeyah* (Navajo land), as her homeland, as sacred, as special, because there's healing plants that come from the mountains. She said the land must be protected.

Yazzie – The Navigator

Yazzie invited me to his office where I interviewed him. He introduced himself in *Diné*: “*Shi ei Kinyaa'aanii nishli adoo Totsohnii ei bashishchiin, Todich'ii'nii ei dashicheii* (maternal grandparents) *adoo Tachiinii ei dashinali* (paternal grandparents).”

Yazzie said growing up in Arizona, they would visit his grandmother's home. He named the place in *Diné* and said, "I don't know if it was our family or ancestors who named the place." There are some historical sites near there and they built a fence around to preserve it. He said they do not know how old it is, but the story happened when Kit Carson was rounding up *Diné* in the canyons on their way to *Hweeldi*. His grandfather would tell stories about the ancestors who experienced the Long Walk—they had SNBH in their heart because he remembers that story. Yazzie shared that SNBH is a practical way of living and a lifelong learning process. He explained: “Process is balance and harmony, harmony between family, the environment, you and the universe, and more importantly, as a human being, harmony within ourselves as *Diné* people.”

Yazzie's parents were raised in the boarding school system where they were forbidden to speak *Diné*. They chose not to teach their children *Diné* because it was ingrained in them that *Diné* language was “bad.” Yazzie said this was a direct consequence of the government policy and boarding school. He was not taught *Diné* until he moved in with his grandparents as a young boy. His grandparents spoke to him in

Diné, sang songs for him, and had ceremonies. They kept livestock and lived without electricity or running water. He said that it was his grandparents that taught him how to be a *Diné* person. Because of the forced assimilation, Yazzie faced some challenges after his grandparents passed on. This is what he said about his language loss:

“It’s hard for my generation to reconcile. I am in the process of relearning everything, the *Diné* language. Because everything else is there. Everything else is encoded in me. I know some songs. I know protocols. I know I have the knowledge, but the only key gap is, the communication of *Diné* knowledge is the language.”

He said he sees SNBH as “a capacity for learning, a capacity for both doing good and doing harm.” He believes that the lessons that his grandparents instilled had to do with their own relationship with livestock. His grandmother loved her sheep so much that she called them “her children.” He stated that growing up in her *hooghan*, she would take care of the little lambs in the winter time “just the same way she took care of us. She made sure we were fed, and the lambs were warm and in a safe environment. She took care of us in that fashion to respect life from her teachings.” He said his grandmother understood the relationship as *Diné* people: she relied on livestock, particularly sheep as her livelihood. This was something that gave her strength and that she loved deeply.

Yazzie's grandfather was a medicine man, a practitioner, but before Yazzie was born, he suffered a stroke and was paralyzed from the waist down. He could no longer take care of the livestock, but he still had the knowledge of the songs, the prayers, the protocol, and he would tell them how to live, how to respect nature, and be respectful of everything. His grandfather always told him that, "Thought proceeds action." When you

understand that concept of “thought proceeds action,” it means, “you have the ability and the autonomy to think for yourself, but process information for yourself and then act in a correct manner.”

Yazzie says, “But it was my grandmother who showed us how to be respectful.” Yazzie said he had both the knowledge and the practical application of SNBH growing up in this environment. But at 10 years old, his grandparents passed on, one year apart from each other. He recalled the effects of this loss:

“Everything I knew when I was a baby, all the way up until that moment, was suddenly gone. I was trying to look for that after they passed on. I couldn’t find it. My parents, both worked off the reservation. It was very hard to keep on with these teachings when there was no reinforcement from my grandparents because my parents were never home.”

He stayed with his sisters who were still going through the loss of their grandparents as well. The core teachings that he remembers is his grandfather telling him, “to wake up every morning before the sun came up, to run to the east, to pray, to call the Holy People to run with you, whether it was raining, snowing, or hot, to run for strength.” Yet at the same time, Yazzie said, “You’re also learning to ask for help and learn to develop as a person.” He said that routine stuck with him every morning. He has his own son now and wakes him up early. Even though they don’t have livestock to take care of, they walk toward the east, and sometimes he carries him. He still remembers the prayers his grandfather taught him, the songs he used to sing. It has been 24 years since his grandparents passed, but they are still with him. SNBH, for him, is “an essence of life in that way of process.”

In his profession, he said he “does a lot in western academic system that puts labels on you; whether it’s faculty, staff, librarian, graduate students, doctoral candidate, because they want to figure out how to interact with you.” But for him, he said, “I do away with these labels when I interact with the student, to build a relationship as I would with a family member.” He said that when you flip it around in *Diné K’é* system, everyone relates to each other based on relationships. This is honoring the other person’s energy. *Diné K’é* system, he said, “can treat everyone in the same manner with respect to Natives or non-Natives regardless of their background.” Yazzie shared about his experience as an educator in Albuquerque. He talked about how he approaches SNBH as an educational tool by looking at its core which is respecting a person’s energy, and the spaces and places where interaction of energy meets, like at grandmother’s *hooghan*, a shared place that everyone, multiple generations, multiple genders, can occupy at the same time. He utilizes two approaches for students he works with: 1) He acknowledges other people’s presence in that space and place with him and recognizes that they all share it together. He has no ownership over any of them. 2) Information, teaching, curriculum is interpreted personally, meaning everybody has their own background experience that interprets the information their own way. He said he understands how he can give the students information or teaching tools in a respectful way that can be applied across multiple generations. He does not pressure them to know everything. He lets them learn in their own way and has a lot of patience with that.

“That’s something my grandmother always instilled in us, is that you’ve got to have patience with livestock, and the sheep. You find that in sheep herding, either

you follow them, or you herd them into places you want them to go. It's patience process and like meditation."

Yazzie shared that when he understood SNBH, he saw it in different ways. He said, "I had to figure these things out by myself, without my grandparents there." He recalls after his grandparents passed on, he was responsible to care for the sheep and the horses. He became very careless on one occasion and lost the sheep. The sheep loved the canyon because there were some springs in there. This was around the time he joined basketball and football in high school and wanted to focus his attention on being good at sports. He stated that "Maybe my heart was moving away from sheep and I was trying to do something else, I wanted to do."

Yazzie said he set out to look for the sheep all night but could not find them. He spent the night on the mesa. He was still figuring out his new life without his grandparents. He said something incredible happened that night—he doesn't know if the sheep could sense where he was at (in life) or if fate came—the sheep found him underneath the juniper tree. He said, "At that moment, I kind of understood that the sheep had their own little community." He had not understood that, and thought they were property, but through his grandmother's eyes and to *Diné* people, he understood why the lambs are important; they are the future of the herd and family: He reflected on how his grandmother took great care for them and made sure the lambs were taken care of, saying, "they'll feed us later." He said he might have been 14 at the time and did not know about "sensitivity"; but one of the little goats his grandmother raised came up to him and he realized that the goat missed his grandmother too.

From that experience, he said he understood why sheep are important—they feed the family, they are companions. After that he never considered them property but as family. Living in Albuquerque, brought new perspectives for him, but he still thinks about the goats and the sheep back home. He went on to say that this encounter with the sheep, was one of the biggest moment for him—he understood the actual process of SNBH, “what it looks like.” He had to experience it. He said that SNBH is one of those things you must experience. You can’t talk to someone about it. It’s referenced in songs, it’s referenced in ceremonies, but you must experience it to really understand what it looks like.

Another "aha moment" he shared came from raising his son. He stated that when his son was born, he was in graduate school for a long time. He said, “When you’re in graduate school you must be selfish. You think, ‘I’ve got to do this, I can’t go home this weekend because I must read, write, focus on this and get money for myself to get these things, and make sure I’m living first, be the best graduate student.’” He said that when his son came into his life, he figured things out—that he doesn’t have to live selfishly—he must focus on him, like how his grandmother took care of the lambs and the sheep. He said, “Having a child is very different, he is a part of you and it’s different.” He wants to instill SNBH and wants his son to experience SNBH when he takes him home. Yazzie said, “When I took my son home, the biggest thing I did was not to take him to ceremonies, but I took him straight to the sheep corral to interact with the lambs.” He concluded that he wants his son to understand how he cared for the sheep, that you must take care of the livestock, like your own family.

He knows he will be a good father, a good grandfather, and when he leaves this world, he knows that he will leave good teachings behind because he hopes that he maintained balance and harmony in life stages he went through. He stated that when he looks at what SNBH does and how it's applied, he thinks of his grandmother. She applied SNBH in a way that always kept her smiling. She treated people with respect and had a lot of passion for her family. He said his grandmother, "took it upon herself, that if somebody put her family in a difficult position, or she had personal turmoil within the family, or with others, she still treated everyone with respect and never made anyone feel less." Yazzie views SNBH as a life's process that you must navigate through *hózhó* as it changes when you grow older.

Yazzie thinks SNBH holds a lot of importance to Navajo Nation. He said a lot of community issues and personal development could all be solved through SNBH. He believes that he grew up in SNBH knowing it and experiencing it as a daily life-long process; it helped navigate some traumatic times in his life. He stated that it helped him process "the biggest of all—death."

"My grandparents they left me, there was no answers. When they were gone, I internalized all of that. Those negative emotions when they left, for the longest time, I could not figure out what was going on with me psychologically, emotionally, socially. But then through my experiences and relearning what SNBH is on my own, it really helped me develop to make positive choices like go to college—going to school. Leading this program, helping other students, becoming a better father."

He said that he grew to understand that it is a lifelong learning process; you get better as life goes on because you learn as each day goes on. SNBH has a tremendous capacity to do a lot of good with what is going on with the community issues on the reservation. He mentions that some *Diné* men feel helpless and useless, because they do not understand their role in their *Diné* society today. Some are homeless, or alcoholics, or criminals, or physically or sexually abuse other people. He said he wonders if you took that person who did these acts and put them in an environment of lifelong learning through an SNBH program, what would that person look like today? Would that person, be a productive citizen? Or would that person just understand himself in this place, in this world? Because, he continued, that is what SNBH does, “It helps you understand how to navigate in this world and in multiple stages of your life. It is not just, 'Oh, I got a degree, I am doing great; no, I do not need to know SNBH anymore.' NO! You do it multiple times in your life and calibrate multiple times in your life.” For lifelong learning, he said he always thinks about that. He said that if the people in his community grew up with sheep, they would understand a lot of hard work, life maintenance, and life process. And with that understanding, they would know how to be responsible, how to care for another being that relies on you for water and security. He stated that having sheep gives you the understanding of the process of life to move to the next cycle, more than having a K-12 education.

Place is like a reminder of SNBH. For his family, the place or the site where the ancestor stopped on their way to *Hweeldi*, is a representation of SNBH. The people in his family and the community preserved that place. He said when he was a boy they used to play there, but now, they understand its importance and its significance, as does everyone

who lives around that area. The sacred mountains were always referenced in the songs and things.

He said he understands the *Diné* universe is a lot larger than his home. When you are in a ceremony, you hear these songs, a place of reference. He compared the mind to a mental television—you think about these places and picture them in your mind—but when you see them physically, it “adds to that.” He said the places are important: “My umbilical cord was buried next to the sheep corral. It is something that always draws me home.”

He continued: “I always loved San Francisco Peak, it’s very pretty because when you drive there, you go north to Grand Canyon, and when you go south, it’s a forest area.” His grandfather used to go to each mountain to get specific herbs and medicine for the ceremonies and for the family. He would talk about it while he sat under the tree. He remembers his grandfather never said bad things about another group of people or another culture because, through his lifelong learning experience of SNBH, he did not feel the need. He understood that these people had their own autonomy and he respected that autonomy.

Findings: Participant Narratives

Initially I began with eight themes in the interview questions. After I transcribed the interview data, the participants’ stories began to form a beautiful pattern. I explained the similarities I saw of the participants’ lived experiences of SNBH. Some of the participant’s experiences overlapped, and some of their experiences were new to me—for example, having a beautiful family, parents, grandparents, and great-grandparent to teach you about SNBH. It was very poignant to pull this theme into the next level of coding.

Throughout this process, I kept an ongoing log and notes of what the participants were saying in their stories. They have a strong connection to being *Diné*. For example, the participants used the SNBH process of thinking about what they are going to do, planning their goals and/or activity, and then setting it into motion. No matter how challenging, they engaged in the process, and then they reflected on their experience. They also recognized the experiences to be both positive and negative. This part is most impressive to me because they mentioned that to live SNBH is not always easy, that sometimes you go through hardships to receive the lesson and/or blessings. Negative energy was dealt with and not swept under the carpet. They were able to find the balance through SNBH.

The participants all had a good foundation growing up even when a loved one died. In death, they were able to discover the ancestors and honor the people they lost. It was as if these people never quite left and helped them discover more of the teaching. The songs and prayers were still strong and alive. I saw two dimensions of now and then—the "now" of adulthood and the "then" of childhood. When they were children (then), they had their elders by their side and there seemed to be a presence of a medicine person or a mentor to groom them, even when they were not aware that the process was happening. As adults, they recognize this now.

The concept of *K'é* is deeply embodied in one's life. I did not go into detail about the clan system in Chapter 1 or in my personal narrative other than to say that clan introduction is customary. But it is important to understand why *Diné* introduce their clans. It is not only who your relatives are, but bears meaning in your family. Sometimes your family tests you on what they have taught you. They ask questions in which you

must explain where you come from, what your four clans are, and who your grandparents are. Relatives, or even strangers, ask about clans and where you come from. If you know all of it, and tell it in *Diné*, most elders light up and smile and give a nod of approval.

Clans are passed down through the mothers; your clan is your mother's clan. Clans identify your place within the *Diné* structure of *K'é*. Your father's clan is who you are born for and forms your other half, the duality of male and female. The male takes on his mother's clan but his children (offspring) will take their mother's clan. I find the clan system very confusing.

My clans are: I am (nishli) *Tachiinii* born for (*bashishchiin*) *Ta'neezahnii*, *Naakai Dine'é* are my maternal grandparents (*dashicheii*), and *Bit'ahnii*, my paternal grandparents (*dashinali*). It is very important to identify your clans. Clans are also factors for choosing a husband or wife; it is forbidden to marry anyone from your parents' or maternal grandparents' clan. I have heard that it is acceptable to marry someone from your paternal grandparents' clan since they are not your mother's clan, but this should be discussed for each family, as some forbid your paternal grandparents' clan to marry. Navajo people are very strict about their clan, and that is the first thing they will ask you: What are your clans; where are you from; where are your people from. Each clan has unique characteristics.

The poster called "Clanship: *Diné Doone'é Danilinigii Nijaa*" (n.d.) from Navajo Studies Program, Rough Rock Community School shows the *Diné* clanship for curriculum as an educational tool. The four main clans are: (1) *Kinyaa'aanii Dine'é*, (2) *Honaghaahnii Dine'é*, (3) *Todich'ii'nii Dine'é*, and (4) *Hashtl'ishnii Dine'é*.

Dine'é means the people or a group of people—here we are using it referring to groups of clans. For example, my clan is *Tachiinii* or I can add *Dine'é* to indicate group. The group that are related to *Tachiinii*, or in the same clanship, are: *Tachiinii Nat'oh Dine'é, Ye'ii Dine'é, Naaneesht'ezhi, Dolii Dine'é, Biih Dine'é, Gah Dine'é, Naada'i Dine'é, Tliizi Daalchi'i, and Oozei Tachiinii.*

From my clan, I would greet this group of people from these clans as close relatives—an older woman could be my mother, and others could be older or younger brothers, and older or younger sisters.

My father's clan, *Ta'neezahnii*, is linked to *Honaghaahnii Dine'é*, one of the four original clans. That group for *Ta'neezahnii* includes: *To'ahani, Hashk'aa Hadzohi, Dzilna'oodilnii, Dziltl'ahnii, Nihoobaanii, Ts'ah Yish'idnii.*

My paternal grandfather's clan, *Bit'ahnii* is linked to *Kinyaa'aanii Dine'é*, one of the four main clans and grouped with six other clans. I was instructed too that some of the newer clans are adopted clans through intermarriages.

The four original clans came from Changing Woman, or White Shell Woman, who gave them to the people. She took different elements and made the clans. These stories are in the *Diné* creation stories told during winter months. Relationships with family and with ancestors are powerful.

Some of the participants immediately went into telling me how they heard about SNBH and where they come from. The participants talked about how they came to know SNBH and how they are walking in it today.

The participants spoke about their journey and telling their stories in walking. Louise Lamphere, a professor emeritus of anthropology from The University of New

Mexico, wrote *Weaving Women's Lives: Three Generations in a Navajo Family* (2007) based on her dissertation fieldwork in 1965 with a *Diné* family in Sheep Springs, New Mexico. Lamphere interviewed Eva Price, the matriarch who wanted to pass her teachings to her children. Price also talks about her lived experience as a young Navajo girl and becoming a woman, and gives a detailed narrative storytelling of her relations, the ceremonies, and of the land she called home. Lamphere captures this statement so well of how Eva is talking about herself—how she used “I walked this way” or in Navajo, we say, “*naashaa*,” interpreting how you walked through life as you recall your past and how you will walk forward, “into the future.” Lamphere (2007) says, “Motion is one of the most central components of Navajo language and thought” (p. 39). A new cycle begins, and for that reason, Navajo people say they walk (*naashaa*) in a sacred way and are always walking toward SNBH, to old age. Their desire is to acquire this knowledge and be in harmony with the Holy People, to appease the deities, and honor, respect, and love them always.

The participants shared that they found SNBH beautiful and once they started to understand the words and the teachings, it began to grow for them. "Growing for you" means that when you open your heart and mind, SNBH teachings begin to show you good things, and will help you recognize when you are thinking negatively or doing things out of balance. No one said, SNBH will abandon you or send you to hell. The teachings in the emergence stories tell us that we are made of the stars' and earth's elements and for that reason, *Diné* calls themselves, the *Five-Fingered Ones*, or *Nohookai Diyin Dine'é*—meaning the *Earth Surface Holy Being* or *People*.

The participants talked about respect and identity. They said to experience SNBH, it is important to speak *Diné*, so you can understand the songs and prayers in the ceremonies and communicate with everyone who speaks the language. If language is properly maintained, it will benefit them throughout their lives. Wong Filmore (1991) states that children at the age of three or four are in language-learning mode. They learn whatever language or languages they hear, if the conditions for language learning are present. When the children do not get reinforcement in *Diné* at home, because their parents do not speak the language, a lot of *Diné* youth will lose what they have. Therefore, it is important when children go to school, that parents and teachers explain to the children the importance of why they need to know about being *Diné* and speaking *Diné*. It is important also to explain where the difference is when they are speaking English and *Diné* and that ample time is given for Navajo Language and Culture class. I believe too, that it is *not* the school's responsibility to teach and maintain fluency of the primary language; this is the family's, parents', grandparents', relatives', community, and the nation's responsibility.

Nanibah mentioned "nourishment," not in the sense of food or eating, but the desire to feed the mind, body, and spirit. This means applying good habits such as adequate sleep and meditation for the body to recover and heal, build mental acuity, and find the balance within. *Diné* scholars mentioned running and praying in the mornings and evenings to connect with the physical being and maintain a strong body and mind that withstand hardships. The participants Nanibah and Yazzie mentioned the work of farming and ranching, taking care of the sheep, and all the participants participated in ceremonies to maintain their present quality of life. To have strong wellbeing, you are

also providing nourishment to the mind, body, and spirit. When these elements are balanced and harmoniously connected, there is room to do deeper discovery of self. This experience contributes to a positive self-concept.

The participants shared what SNBH is to them from the portion of their knowledge they were willing to share. I enjoy deep conversation because it brings me into the present. The participants' belief systems are intact with deep connection to where they come from, and those who instilled these teachings and wisdom for them. When I asked them these questions, it was not about religion or how this belief system works for them, but what they know about SNBH. The scholars on SNBH all kept coming back to the phrase "harmony and balance." When we become aware, we separate the thoughts from the situation. For example, the scholars, in their own words, discussed what SNBH means to them and where the stories or the teachings came from. There was always a connection leading back to how it was passed on and how they perceived it. I was told that I am a "Five-Fingered Earth Surface spiritual being" (Werito, 2014, p. 26). That is the fact. Instead of making up stories, one must stay with the facts and not limit oneself because from SNBH only facts are told.

Awareness comes in different forms when it comes to spiritual wellbeing, as it does in research. The participants shared stories of their burgeoning awareness of SNBH. They each related their "aha moment," or turning point, when they realized the value of the meaning. One can retain a lot of information, but it's after the aha moment that one can act on a revelation. In response to the interview question, the participants were able to reconstruct their knowledge and remember the moment a deeper meaning in the words

or ceremonies that others had shared with them was revealed. The aha moments were usually specific and related to their early childhood experience.

Diné children are raised by their entire clan—aunts, uncles, grandparents, even brothers and sisters. The traditional families rise before the sun is up; the children are taught to look to the east to greet the morning. In this action they look to the Holy People for strength, to live a lifelong journey of SNBH blessings. Home is where stories are shared and SNBH is at the core of this. Knowledge is ‘*Nitsahakees*’ and it represents the east.

Knowledge is sacred. Life is sacred. *Hózhó* is walking patiently, *hazho ’o* is to not rush, to take care of what is present because SNBH will take care of you in the future and will help you take action and plan for life. One of the most important ceremonies is the Blessing Way, which is performed to mark special events like marriage, puberty, or coming-of-age for young girls. It begins at sundown with chants and prayers and ends the next morning. Highly trained medicine people perform the Blessing Way ceremony and stories are told about the Navajo creation story, how the people and animals lived in unison, the emergence of the people to this world, the stories of the Coyote, the chaos he caused, and the lessons that come from the stories. The stories cannot be told in one night, but the people who attend will hear some of the them.

The teachings bring awareness and new knowledge of what it means to be *Diné*, to be a woman, a man, and a good compassionate person that cares for all living things. The sheep, horses, cattle, and donkeys are sacred animals; they take care of us, and bring us teachings, and in return, it is our responsibility to care for them. They were brought to the *Diné* people for a purpose. That connection with the Holy People is still there and the

people still live vicariously through the Holy People. SNBH contains teachings at every level. Everyone comes to it with a child-like mind. If a child is raised with it, they grow up knowing it, and at some point, they will begin to understand it, and live by it, and return the teachings back to their offspring.

SNBH teachings are sacred ancient teachings passed from generation to generation. The Long Walk was a disruption in *Diné* history. After that disruptions came schooling—children were sent to boarding school and policies such as No Child Left Behind and Common Core Standards were imposed. In the face of these changes, the *Diné* people learned to adapt and return to SNBH.

The participants say that teaching the students *Diné* is a challenge, but they can use SNBH to prepare the lessons. One of the ways they do this is through the four concepts: thinking, planning, life, and reflection. This process helps them develop curriculum and activities to learn about the Long Walk, food, land, songs, stories, and the Navajo Nation flag. Students take pride in the knowledge they gain and present to their families. They forge a better understanding of what the ancestors sacrificed, and they come to respect the depth of their history and culture. Hoskie mentioned that the home has a story built into it—the *hooghan* is female. There's another space/place that is the same as our home – the land. The *Diné* people live inside where the sacred mountains surround us.

SNBH teachings are stories about the animals, plants, and colors. Some come in the form of prayers and songs. SNBH teaches about *K'é* (kinship); it begins with you. SNBH is the *Diné* people. Hoskie mentioned that when he teaches, he does so delicately with the little children because they are fragile. SNBH can be too advanced, so you must

come with it gently. Some will get it, but for others it takes time to understand. You must create a place inside the *hooghan* to teach them about SNBH. This can start in the classroom.

SNBH is a way of life; it has a spirit. When it's said, it evokes this medicine for us. Nanibah said that when SNBH is recited, sung in a prayer song, it connects us to the elements, an interdependent relationship between the sacred mountains. All the elements are connected through SNBH. SNBH provides a way of knowing because you must experience it first. To know it, you become it. The participants believed that SNBH is sacred and alive, and they move or walk with it.

SNBH is flexible and can be used as an educational tool. For example, it can be integrated into a curriculum that includes traditional plants, how to gather them, and how they are used for medicinal purposes, traditional rituals, and ceremonies. Simple thinking gives way to a much more complex thought through SNBH. Learning short stories and songs helps with development of deeper level thinking for the self in the present or for the future. The participants became aware of their identity, and that you come back to yourself and unite these ways. These teachings are versatile and can be used as an educational tool at home, or at school, with the animals, or just in simple things. They can be applied for any type of development, even to develop the mind and take care of one's health and well-being. SNBH can be used in suicide prevention in school curricula, storytelling, and for healthy communication skill practice.

Nizhoni and Hoskie talked about parents who withdrew their children from the Navajo Language and Culture classes because, when *Diné* culture is taught with its

mention of SNBH, the sacred mountains, and creation stories, the parents automatically draw conclusions that the teacher is teaching religious beliefs.

Another important finding was the participants' connectedness to the ceremonies. The participants discussed the significance of different ceremonies and their origins. The other reason parents take their children out of Navajo Language and Culture class is the *Diné* family has converted to Christianity, or another faith, and no longer identifies with *Diné* spirituality or SNBH thought process. Nizhoni's, Hoskie's, and Nanibah's families attended Native American Church ceremonies. They spoke of the differences of the ceremonial teachings and how SNBH was not used in NAC ceremonies. However, they found the balance between the two, applying what was good from both to their lives. All of the participants spoke about the Blessing Way ceremonies, which embody SNBH as its core teachings and recalled the different songs for different stages and use. The participants mentioned "protocols": both NAC and Blessing Way have their own protocols regarding how the ceremonies are conducted and who officiates the ceremony. Both ceremonies are conducted at night and finish in early morning the next day. Nizhoni spoke about religion and ceremony as an entirely different experience. She mentioned that church (religion) was a time to play and make crafts, while ceremony (whether it was NAC or Blessing Way) was serious—she had to dress appropriately, play a certain role, and be on her best behavior. Ceremonies have their own seasons as well, some are only performed in the spring, summer, fall, and winter.

In the ceremonies, the rites of passages are performed. The female participants, Nizhoni and Nanibah, both received their rites of passage and were certain that it helped them. Of the male participants, only Hoskie said he had his Blessing Way ceremony (but

not the sweat-lodge). Yazzie did not mention it, but stated the ceremony was important for *Diné* youths. Even though young Nizhoni and Nanibah did not understand the significance of the ceremony, they still went through it, and say that it has made a huge difference in their lives. When they were sharing their stories, they recalled their experiences and now utilize the teachings with their children. This validates the hope that the next generation is receiving the teachings and beginning to ask questions. The ceremonies have grounded them and given them purpose and a meaningful life. For example, the sacred mountains have their own set of core teachings and purposes. The participants recognize each mountain, and, within its boundary, the participants know where they belong and where their umbilical cord is buried. This is a sacred connection and provides a space and a place to return to. The participants also believed that the ancestors left a place/space for them and because of that, they can use the history in their curriculum for their current students.

Regardless of the horrific wrongs committed in the past, the participants focused on the prayers and songs that brought some of the ancestor's home. Nizhoni and Yazzie mentioned historical trauma, and when they spoke of language and culture, it was uttered with truth that the United States government used tactics to dismantle the family unit and disrupt the language and culture of the children. Children were colonized and enculturated into the western ways of knowing using boarding school that removed them from the home and organized religion that took away their spirituality and significant ways of knowing. Policies and laws drew boundaries and borders to make the *Diné* stay put.

Yazzie said that his parents were products of the BIA school system and still did not teach their children to speak the language. Nanibah's grandfather endured hardship at the BIA school where he was punished for speaking *Diné* and ran away. Later in his life he learned to speak English to find employment. The reality is, education was used to take away *Diné* language and culture, and many of our own people, hired by BIA, used these harsh tactics to punish *Diné* boys and girls. The BIA schools on the Navajo reservation at that time employed a lot of *Diné* men and women. It is my understanding through listening to stories in my community, that local *Diné* people worked at the school and inflicted physical and mental pain on the children in the dormitories. That is the historical trauma that is often swept under the carpet; instead most people blame the bureaucratic system from the white man. Our people oppressing their own is something we still must process and heal from. This is not how we treat our own relatives and our neighbor's children.

I believe that education was a different experience for each individual *Diné* person. Some *Diné* only got a small taste of it before their parents pulled them out of school and hid them; and they wish they had gone to school. Each generation, I believe, needs healing. They need to hear the good things about being a *Diné*. That is the lifelong teachings of SNBH that participants refer to. SNBH teaches you to stay physically healthy, mentally alert, and spiritually healthy. It teaches you to have a foundation to stand on, to speak the language and have *hózhó*.

Diné is not a written language. The older *Diné* whose first language is *Diné* did not learn by reading and writing. They learned in the womb. Their parents, grandparents, siblings, and relatives talked to them (even me) in *Diné* when we came into the world.

They spoke and communicated with the deities in the *Diné* language. They spoke to the animals in *Diné* and the animals understood. They spoke to the land and it understood.

Basso (1996) states, “Even in societies where writing and other devices for preserving the past are absent or devalued, historical knowledge is produced and reproduced” (p. 7). In the *Diné* world the medicine people and community leaders were the story keepers. Images were revealed in ceremonies on sand-paintings. Historical images were carved on the cliffs. The images our ancestors drew depict events from certain times. These images have a story. Some of the participants were a bit skeptical discussing Navajo language and culture loss. Hoskie said, “We should be careful how we use the term loss.” This section is to show that linguists have seen a decline in Indigenous languages throughout the world. For example, Krauss (1992), compares languages to endangered biological species to categorize languages in some Indigenous communities. He defines the following three categories of languages:

1. “*Moribund*: languages no longer being learned as mother-tongue by children.” (p. 4)
2. “*Endangered*: languages which, though now still being learned by children, will—if the present conditions continue—cease to be learned by children during the coming century.” (p. 6)
3. “*Safe*: languages with official state support and very large numbers of speakers.” (p. 7)

Joshua Fishman was an American linguist perhaps best known for the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) to evaluating endangerment of languages. Fishman (1991) says, “Language shift is often a slow and cumulative process overtime,

thereby, making ‘before v. after’ data hard to come by” (p. 40). The participants expressed that parents of *Diné* children do not speak *Diné*; therefore, the children cannot learn their language from their parents, leaving little possibility that they in turn will be able to pass the language on to their children.

The reason I asked the participants about language and culture was because some of the participants are Navajo Language and Culture teachers. They felt the urban *Diné* youth are the ones who are not speaking the language, and that when you go back into the greater Navajo Nation, there students still speak the language. All participants interviewed described their families as hierarchically organized, their grandparents highly authoritative. They respected them with immense love and caring. The grandparents were the ones who taught the participants about language and culture; therefore, they used the skills of connected knowing to view the world through their grandparents' eyes, with the hope of understanding in his or her own terms. Maybe it did not happen when they were young, but the lived experience occurred during the times they lived with their grandparents. After the grandparents passed, or they no longer lived with them, the participants could now enter the perspective of their grandparents and truly see what their grandparents were teaching them at the time about language and culture, about life, and passing on the teachings, about caring for self, for others, for the animals, and the land. They focused their attentions on the strengths of their grandparents' teachings and mirrored what they saw so that now they can celebrate the strong points and become the woman or man they were meant to be.

Language and culture revitalization and/or sustaining and maintaining the language will continue. I think the Navajo Nation DODE have begun to realize that more

effort should be made to support the Navajo Language and Culture teachers, and that there should be a better assessment to measure fluency as a speaker. *Diné* youth also have a responsibility to speak up and demand more class time for language and culture classes. The 520 Language and Culture teachers should also get out of the public schools, go back to the community, and let the tribal leaders and community members support the students. It is our responsibility to return to the sacred circle and allow SNBH to be a part of these teachings of language and culture. Language reflects our worldview.

Being a child can be hard sometimes, but there are also nurturing experiences. Adolescence can be awkward and difficult for some, while some thrive and have a wonderful experience. What is adolescence like today? What are the problems they are facing and their contributions to society? Let us not forget that we were at this awkward age at one point. The process of changing from a child to an adult is not easy to define (Dacey & Kenny, 1997).

Indigenous communities view adolescence differently—it is a time of transition and honoring the child to adulthood. This could also be viewed negatively because in the past, adolescence was the time for a girl to become available for marriage even at a very young age. Arranged marriage were often performed and sometimes young girls were given to older men. This sort of arranged marriage is no longer typical. Today a young girl's family celebrates her coming of age by arranging a two-day or four-day ceremony.

The *Diné* female pubertal coming-of-age or *Kinaaldá* has been mentioned by the participants in the interviews. An identity is ascribed to the young girl that connects her and transforms her to Changing Woman (*Asdza'a' Na'dleehe'*), the most important of *Diyin Dine'é* in the ceremony. Participants spoke of its beauty. The Blessing Way

ceremony, *Hózhóóji*, as mentioned, is a ceremony that celebrates all forms of goodness and reinforces *hózhó*. The Blessing Way is a significant ceremony for key transitional phases of the life cycle. The women gather to instill lifelong teachings and adorn the young girl with jewelry, medicine bundles, baskets, and preparation of a pit for cake. Songs and prayers are sung and recited through the process, and the girl is anointed with corn pollen, white corn meal, and yucca to wash her hair. She runs to the east and calls for the Holy People to join her. She is tested for strength, endurance, weaknesses, compassion, and kindness all to bring awareness and understanding of SNBH teachings. She performs a giveaway to show gratitude and pay respect to her relatives who came to help her transform and be her witness. The ceremony is beautiful. The songs and prayers are beautiful. It is a Blessing Way ceremony, of *hózhó*, of love and compassion, and lifelong teachings of SNBH.

The self has been of major interest in this study because of my focus on *Diné* youth. Dacey and Kenny (1997) present William James' model of the self:

Self-understanding consists of a person's beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts about the self. Self-concepts are beliefs about how one changes over time yet remains the same individual, how one is different from others, and how one can act independently. This set of beliefs is important to the development of personal identity (p.165)

We learn many things from SNBH about finding self and drawing strength from relatives and our place between the sacred mountains. It is good to know that some *Diné* youths grew up in a good home. But I want to also remember the *Diné* youth who have lost parents, who are depressed, who do not have a home, who are abusing drugs/alcohol,

or have health and mental problems. Yazzie talked about his grandparents' death, how he did not have that foundation anymore after he lost them. He said he felt lost and there was no one to talk to or turn to. This is the time to especially bring healing to the youth when they lose someone very close to them. There needs to be grieving and later traditional ceremonies to restore the mind, body, and spirit.

Western influence is part of the problem, but also broken families, abuse, neglect, and a ruptured or disrespected clan system. That is why it is imperative to bring these types of reality into this section, to show that *Diné* youth face many challenges and that not all *Diné* youth are in despair. As stated, some are growing up with loving parents, grandparents, and relatives who are there to support them. It is our responsibility as teachers, educators, researchers, tribal leaders, community members, and healers, to honor and respect the youth, to provide encouragement, offer support, spend a day with them, ask for their thoughts, their ideas, invite them to the ceremonies, and tell them that we are proud of them. The participants offer *K'é* and SNBH to the youths. Yazzie stated that "Your story is a powerful teaching tool." The piece is how SNBH should be used in the communities and at the tribal government level. Yazzie brought this up during the interview because he works with Native youths who sometimes need guidance. Some of the youths need SNBH. He also stated that once we have our degrees, education does not stop there. We still must think about the traditional teachings and apply them to future decisions. I believe that when the youth start planning and applying SNBH, they will make great contributions to their communities and even the family gatherings.

The participants talked about the link to land and spirituality, which connects them to their culture and language. It is the land that gives strength for the people. There

is a uniqueness that is constantly occurring, a motion, a movement from city to home, the dynamic shift that occurs each time. There is a deep connection to the land. There is also the trauma of the ancestors going to *Hweeldi*. The participants spoke about this and how we need to revisit that trauma and heal. In the interviews, two of the participants stated that their umbilical cords are buried on their land. These places are where their family dwells and their ancestors laid roots for them. The land resonates with a strong sense of belonging and keeps them grounded. The land not only provides for them, but also forms the basis for their spiritual life as well as family and social structure. When I drive back home, as soon as I drive over Continental Divide and I see *Dibé Nitsaa*, I feel peaceful. I know I am home. I say my prayers as I pass Huerfano Peak (*Dzil Na'oodilii*) and acknowledge *Dibé Nitsaa*, the northern sacred mountain.

Cajete (2015) says, “All Indigenous Peoples have a similar type of guiding myth—an origin story...it serves as a frame of reference. The guiding myth show us where our thoughts and self-perspectives begin and ultimately end” (p. 84). The land, therefore, forms the baseline for oral narrative, as stories have a relationship with the landmarks, where the people come from, and create an identity and connection to place. When you hear the creation stories, the people went everywhere; they traveled with certain animals, and the people they encountered, always coming home to the sacred mountains. The land is the spiritual home to our ancestors, and the spirits of our ancestors are still a part of the land, they are still a part of the stories. When we sing and recite the prayers, they come alive and remind us where we belong. Reconciliation with the environment, cleansing and ceremony for balance and harmony, transformation to walk in beauty—SNBH teaches this.

Second Level: Reclaiming Knowledge and Reclaiming Stories

In the next level of coding, I looked more closely at the concepts and categories of the text to: (1) confirm that the concepts and categories accurately represent the interview responses, (2) explore how the concepts and categories are related, and (3) to code the final concepts and categories into a data table. I believe axial-coding is merely a more direct approach to look at the data, to help ensure that I identified all important characteristics. I highlighted each term and looked for revisions and additions. I listed the major categories, then explained each after the table. I found the steps to be an effective way to organize the results for discussion. The steps were long and challenging. There were many times I was not sure if some terms should be in the same category or if they needed a subheading. One of the things I learned in the coding process is the need to be patient. I wanted a quick process; but it was long and detailed oriented. I did not think I would be satisfied with the coding procedures, but after review, revisions, and additions, I was finally ready to send my work to my committee to promote validity.

The second level of axial-coding themes that emerged were *Knowledge* and *Stories*. Strauss Corbin (1990) explained the process of choosing one category to be the core category and relating all other categories to that category. The essential idea is to develop a single storyline around which everything is arranged to come together to create a belief that such a core concept exists. The next section is entitled "Reclaiming Knowledge." As I began to understand how the participants were creating a discourse of reclaiming their connections to their grandparents or parents, I realized that the important people who transmitted the knowledge to them were not all gone—the love, the teachings, and the person they became is still very much alive. They left knowledge for them and now they are passing that to their children and to their students.

Reclaiming Knowledge

Reclaiming knowledge is the process of coming to understand SNBH. When the participants were children, they heard about SNBH and were told to sit and listen and to behave in ceremonies; but they did not question why and did not ask what SNBH was. They were children and so they behaved and did the things they were told. The two female participants, Nizhoni and Nanibah had their *Kinaaldá* and went through the motions, and the women took care of them and talked to them. Nizhoni said she was too young to understand. Wilson (2008) states, “I do not think we should let the listeners draw their own conclusions to stories, but we need to develop some system of showing how we came to our final product” (p. 123). We, *Diné* people (or Indigenous peoples), we need to stand up for what we believe in and stand with the truth. Wilson (2008) says, “The framework of the research paradigm is this outside string—containing and providing boundaries for the research, while being used to pull it all together. What we need is a way of describing this net to other people” (p. 123).

Epistemology inquiries into the nature of knowledge and truth (Chilisa, 2012, p. 21). Aluli Meyer (2016) writes, “My purpose for attempting to understand philosophical concepts of knowledge is to strengthen our identity as Kanaka ‘Oiwī (Native Hawaiians) so that we can better direct our educational future in these changing times” (p. xvi). Discussing *Diné* epistemology in hopes of transforming *Diné* youth is to start the thought process of how they view their education at home, school, and places they go. The time has come for the change and new knowledge.

When we reconstruct the pathways to these sacred teachings, to traditional ways of knowing, we are reclaiming our connections to *Diyin Dine’é* (Holy People), for they

are the carrier of these ancient ways. In *Diné* ways of knowing, we first acknowledge the universe, our Father, and earth, our Mother. When David Begay in an interview on “Indigenous Ways of Knowing” by Mary Elaine Tucker for Coursera from Yale University (n.d.), Begay said:

“Navajo knowledge carries a different universe from the western and when we speak of our ways of knowing in English, it is with utmost difficulties to express. The Blessing Way songs, there is connections in the mountain songs, the songs are sung in unison, the elders tell us we connect with the universe through the mountains; therefore, we need to acknowledge the mountains, when that acknowledgement is made—we say we are going to sing your song to bring about restoration and harmony to the people, and the energy is from the mountains, it is not thought about, it is felt, it is experience and the emotions come with the songs. The songs are sung with these deep feelings, the spirits come in and bring forth these ways of knowing and new understandings—it is beyond words. This process is felt as we listen. SNBH brings forth this consciousness in the ceremonies, we come together or unite with the cosmology, the universe, we are of the stars, we are universe. It is hard to explain because some people do not understand the background or the experience of these ways.” (Coursera, n.d.)

The participants talked about the songs they sang as children with their grandparents and sometimes the grandparents sang to them. They were going back in time, describing the connectedness they felt to their grandparents, parents, land, animals, the *hooghan*, water, cosmology, the earth, universe, and *Diyin Dine'é*. This is SNBH in its sacredness—the energy that some of the participants mentioned, the feeling of love

and connectedness to a powerful energy. In my personal narrative, the experience with Leon Secatero, there were some experiences I could not explain or share—those experiences were only for me to know. In the video, David Begay commented, “We have not yet learned to understand or experience that yet. The ancestors, however, were connected to this way of knowing, and lived it every day, in tune with nature.” Moreover, I believe that the participants knew more than they could share with me; I saw it in their eyes, their expressions, as they told their stories. That faraway look seemed distant, but it is here; we are in the moment, reclaiming knowledge. SNBH teachings are still here and the ancestors are still with us—the mountains are here, and the ceremonies are still here. The emotion is deep and powerful.

The process of coming to this way of knowledge was unique to me, as it is to everyone—it was gifted to the *Diné* people from the Holy People. I am grateful for the gift. Some of the teachings are only for me, but I can share a small piece of my knowledge as a gift to the youth, and from there they will find their own gifts and reconnect with the Holy People to receive these ancient teachings. It is sad that some of the elders are leaving, and my generation and the generation behind me have not heard the stories or experienced the ceremonies. But youth are resilient and have a yearning to learn the ways of knowing, to keep the stories alive, and use them to stand up for themselves.

Reclaiming Stories

Reclaiming the stories of the ancient ones is an awakening experience and a process. I mentioned that the stories are only told in the winter. As winter comes to an end, the winter constellations move into another time and space. A new season has

arrived and along with it, whole new constellations have arrived. It is a time of renewal and when we look to the horizon, a new light has come.

The participants shared their stories and appreciate that they are alive. A *Diné* audience would better relate to the storytellers because they can identify with the lived experiences. The lived experiences may be unrecognizable to Western ways of knowing, because it has always been non-Indigenous people telling our stories, interpreting from their point of view. More troubling yet is that historical events have all been seen through non-Indigenous lens. The narratives are misinterpreted and misinformed (through film and other media) yet this is what the academy and educational system continue to use as they design curricula, mandate policies, and test the youth. Absolon (2011) writes, “The stories are limited in their presentations because so much time has to be spent countering Euro-western hegemony...Indigenous scholars are expected to meet two standards; that of the university and that of their communities, and inevitably, at times they conflict” (p. 101).

Kaylynn Sullivan TwoTrees, a Lakota storyteller who works to help Indigenous peoples re-orient back into their Indigenous mind and regenerate their essential relationship with Earth’s wisdom, states that stories have three properties: time, place, and mind:

1. A time: You tell stories at a certain time of the year, a season, or time of the day.

There are fall and spring time stories.

2. A place: You recount stories at this place, and places have their own stories.

3. A mind: Every creation, even a story, has a life of its own. We create a story and it has a life. The stories have origins. You must tell a story with permission. (cited by Boje in 1997, p. 55)

For the *Diné*, the stories are living embodiments of reality, living dramas, a language that creates reality, not the reverse (Toelken, 1996, p. 56 cited by Boje, Alvarez, and Schooling, 2001, p. 133). Their stories are hidden and protected because colonialism tried to kill it. The *Diné* language was never a written language because the stories, the ceremonies, and the songs are only transferred narratively. It was never meant to be hidden between pages and placed on a shelf or locked away in cabinets. The time, place, and mind are present. SNBH continues to live within each of us. The lived experiences were there all along.

Through the process of reclaiming stories, the participants reclaimed their identity, their connectedness to home, relatives, animals, and to the ancient ones. Enacting their lived experiences is respectful to their cultural ways. The *Diné* scholars also reflected a holistic relation to the Holy People. They expressed that a lifelong journey is a spiritual process to self, *hózhóogo* teaches life lessons for happiness and success, and *hózhó* teaches how to find harmony and beauty within. *T'áá hwe'ájit'ée* teaches that it is entirely up to you to nurture and honor the spirits to walk a sacred pathway. The stories are from the Holy People and we are the descendants of these spirits.

Pewewardy in an interview discusses, “Native people are now coming back to empower themselves by reviving culture and language or their ways of knowing... this is *re-traditionalization*.” He also adds “the language serves as a knowledge base for Native

teachers wishing to integrate into the schools...and that Native people have been miseducated; therefore, we must re-educate ourselves” (Spirit & Council, 2011).

Indigenous peoples must empower themselves to re-educate themselves to their cultural ways of knowing. The participants recognize this and spoke of purpose—to be a parent, to care for their children, and make sure they are healthy in mind, body, and spirit. One participant said, “We long for good medicine people, someone to do a good deed when doing a ceremony for us and someone who will talk in a good way with good teachings, with *K'é* (kinship) and someone who respects you with *K'é*.”

In ceremonies, people sit in a circle, a place where interconnectedness is maintained and has been forgotten. The Holy People fashioned the *hooghan* for the *Diné* people, the sweat lodge, and created the mountains adorned with teachings.

The ceremonies help us climb the mountain and at the top of the mountain we begin to see ourselves. We follow in the footsteps of the ancient ones, the Holy People. We sing songs of a good long life for a purpose, as these sacred songs are prayers and sung in *Hózhóóji* ceremonies. In our creation stories, the *Diné* people say these deities, White Shell Woman and her older sister, Changing Woman, *Haashch'eelti'i* or Talking God, *Haashch'eoghan* or Growling God, amongst others still come and check on their children. *Diné* people were given tasks, responsibilities, leadership, ceremonies, songs, prayers, cornfields, medicine bundles, sacred mountains—so many gifts to be thankful for. Maintaining the relationships is simply forgotten by some. By maintaining healthy relationships, we achieve harmony and balance, and collectivity is maintained in the community, in the home, and in families. The circle and SNBH guide the human journey.

Final Level: Mindfulness

I wanted to look at the participants as a collective group, all of whom are *Diné*. They described different upbringings; however, there were some similarities, especially how they came to know SNBH. The participants saw mindfulness as SNBH. The lived experience and mindfulness are both a process—becoming aware of something. I did not start over in the coding process because in the second coding level, the concepts had emerged from the raw data, and when I included mindfulness, it emerged as the core concept to build a descriptive multi-dimensional framework and ensure the validity of the work for SNBH. In the next section are some descriptions of the multi-dimensional framework for bringing the themes together.

The core concept that surfaced was *Mindfulness*. It was intentional that I did not include mindfulness in the interview questions because I wanted to see where it would emerge in the stories from the participants. When I was transcribing and coding, the core concept was the lived experiences of the participants in coming to know SNBH. I later contacted the participants via email to ask them what their thoughts were on mindfulness and told them that I did not ask them about mindfulness during the interview, but now that the story has unfolded in front of me, I wanted to know what their thoughts were on this idea. Their responses were closely connected to SNBH. Strauss and Corbin (1990) consider paying attention to processes vital and emphasize the importance of describing and coding everything that is dynamic—changing, moving, or occurring over time—in the research setting.

Participants as a Group

The four participants vary in age. I did not ask about their age because that was not important for the study. As a group I wanted to compare their knowledge of SNBH and the relationship(s) they formed, and to see how they are using SNBH in their personal and professional life. In some of their answers, they refer to SNBH as an educational tool because that is how I posed the question. The participants are educators and use SNBH as an educational tool, but they also talked about how they use SNBH in their personal and professional life.

Three of the participants, Nizhoni, Hoskie, and Nanibah, are certified to be Navajo Language and Culture teachers with the Navajo Nation and New Mexico Public Education Department for the State of New Mexico. Nizhoni and Hoskie are the two of the four participants who are currently teaching at a local school and have students ranging from grades K to 8. They use SNBH in their curriculum and use basic *Diné* language and culture for the young children. They allow their students to get creative and implement SNBH to do research on *Diné* history, for example, while learning about the Long Walk or about the *Diné* flag and current government. They also use basic colors and the four directions to gain information about the significance of the four directions and what each represent. Another interesting find is that they use *Diné* songs in class and explain the meaning of the words to allow the students to think creatively about what the ancestors might have been thinking as they sang these songs.

The two participants, Nanibah and Yazzie work with older students, some of whom are *Diné*. Their main responsibilities are to acknowledge their individuality, and respect them, and treat them as though they were family. All the participants described

how they treat their students as individuals, allowing them to have a voice and be a part of decision-making, respecting their energy, and giving them space. Yazzie mentioned several times that he does not like to give labels or put students in a box; this demonstrates how the *Diné* elders taught. They let the children watch and observe as they gave instructions for certain tasks and/or told stories in ceremonies. The children were then asked what they witnessed and had to retell the stories from their perspective to demonstrate that they were listening. They were asked what the next steps are in the task. Children were given trust and responsibility to perform the task on their own or with adult supervision. *Diné* scholars mentioned their parents or grandparents showing them how to pray in the morning and sharing stories that build character and strength of the mind, body, and spirit. The participants told stories of the person who had taken the time to teach them with patience, loving kindness, and humility. The people they talked about had an enormous amount of love, caring, and compassion. They celebrated life and were always going the extra mile to help other people, their family, and the participants.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the core theme for the Final Level: Selective-Coding. Mindfulness brings all the themes together in one's study of SNBH. In my narrative, I specifically stated that as I started to learn more about meditation, I discovered how to be mindful and compassionate, how to know my identity and learn about self-love. This transformed my thought process to SNBH. The hopelessness I felt during my depression, and when I felt unloved, lead to changes in my cognitive thought process as I began to understand who I am. The process began, and my lived experienced toward SNBH is still growing and changing. To me, transformation is mindfulness. Transformation was difficult; I did not

want to let go of my bad behaviors, and my self-doubt overshadowed many things. It was when I let go, that the transformation started to evolve for me. Transformation is one of the most rewarding experience you can have, although it is unseen from the outside. You are the only one who knows it and feels it. And so, I believe individuals who may feel that they are no longer a part of their culture or belong to anything, can learn new ways to recover from major depression, or any type of setback, and begin to move toward beauty and harmony.

I do not think we should disbelieve anything we hear about mindfulness, because everyone experiences mindfulness in their own way. The practice of mindfulness has come largely from Buddhist philosophy, but the same concept is experienced in many other cultures. SNBH practice is to live in the moment, to be mindful, to be compassionate, akin to the Buddhist way of knowing. The following paragraphs present the participants' final comments on mindfulness.

Nizhoni expressed that she prays in the morning for guidance, understanding, patience, and wisdom for her daily tasks (with this in mind: thinking, planning, life, and reflection). She states that she has become cognizant and mindful of SNBH. Even in her prayer, she concentrates on clear thinking to make long-term plans that will benefit her family and her students. Nizhoni explained that at night she reflects on her day for closure and to get the needed rest to continue the SNBH cycle. She reminds us that SNBH is a part of *Diné* life given to us from the Holy People.

Nanibah shared that for her, ““Mindfulness conveys important feelings and purposeful sense of presence.” She experienced mindfulness through her family upbringing in action of the everyday rituals, roles and responsibilities of relatives. She

reflected on her childhood and remembered the special moments when mindfulness was activated, for example, when her grandmother brushed her hair and made her *tsiyeel*, when she swept the *hooghan*'s dirt floor, when she and her grandfather made their morning offering to the dawn with *nadaa ligai doo tsodizin*, when her grandmother listened to her great-grandmother and communicated together, when her grandmother built the fire and prepared the meal, and many other moments such as these that remain with her today. As she continues experiencing mindfulness in this manner, she integrates this practice of being present with loving feelings for self and others, and appreciates the serenity of the feelings, though there may be stress or challenging moments.

Yazzie believes mindfulness is essential to SNBH. At its core, SNBH is processing information, critically analyzing it and then proceeding on the correct course of action. His grandfather always said, "Thought proceeds action." Mindfulness is deeply important as Yazzie navigates through a maze to process information. Experience serves to help him navigate through familiar places and to use caution in unknown places. The stories from his ancestors are reminders of their traveling through different worlds, events, and monsters, which instills a sense of strength, and hope to continue. Mindfulness is a core element of SNBH.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the following areas: (1) Contributions of the Study, (2) Justification of My Approach: Pathway to SNBH, (3) Mindfulness, (4) Critical Evaluation: Indigenous Epistemology and Indigenous Research Methodology, and (5) Revisiting My Personal Narrative.

Contributions of the Study

The study is meant to benefit *Diné* youth and other Indigenous youth. I started by asking the following six research questions to inquire about SNBH:

1. What is *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) for the individual?
2. Why is SNBH significant?
3. How does one acquire or come to understand SNBH?
4. What is its purpose and what constitutes valid knowledge?
5. How does one transfer SNBH knowledge, apply, and utilize it in everyday life?
6. How does one experience transformation of self once he/she has acquired SNBH?

SNBH implementation is based on teachings from ancient storytelling, myths, and ceremonies. In the western world, it is based on how Indigenous research methodology and Indigenous epistemology function. The study reveals that it is possible to use storytelling to inquire where these stories came from and what they mean. The stories are real—they paint a picture of lived experiences. This lived experience is evidenced in the rock art, petroglyphs, and carvings on the canyon walls. The pictographs reveal that these images are not invented—images were transposed for us to see and integrate into our ceremonies. The stories teach us to recognize ourselves. By enabling the medicine people, practitioners, healers, and spiritual leaders, we begin to unleash a

transfer of energy and a restorative embrace for the whole being. In other words, SNBH permitted the work for me (us) to return to self. At the same time, SNBH enables us, to modify according to our needs. SNBH is kind, loving, nurturing, and designed only for what we want to achieve when we are true to self and in synergy with the cosmic connection.

The participants explained how they came to know SNBH and how they utilized the teachings in their personal and professional life. They said SNBH is significant and important. They were exposed to and learned about SNBH at an early age. The two female participants, Nizhoni and Nanibah, went through their *Kinaaldá* ceremony and heard the prayers and songs, but they did not question what SNBH is. They understood what the protocols were and acted and behaved accordingly—to be respectful and reverent around the ceremonies and the elders. As adults, they learned how SNBH reveals knowledge and purpose—by singing the Blessing Way songs, by praying at a certain time of the day, by calling the deities by name and acknowledging them. They gave offerings and asked for guidance, understanding, and patience to walk in beauty and be harmonious toward all living things. When the participants felt they understood SNBH, they shared it with their children, especially when their children questioned them. As the participants acquired deeper knowledge, they received more responsibilities to assist in the ceremonies and eventually established their own medicine bundles for their immediate family. For example, as individuals mature, they gather gems, arrowheads, and other sacred items or things gifted to them or passed down through generations that will go into their medicine bundles which are used in Blessing Way and Protection Way ceremonies. The bundles stay in the family and are not on display but kept in a safe place. In contrast,

the medicine man's medicine bundles are used in ceremonies after years of apprenticeship filled with things they acquired for a specific ceremony they learned. Not only did the participants learn to apply SNBH in their daily lives, but also in their professional lives. They used it as a curriculum and foundation to move from basic to more advanced knowledge with their students. The two male participants, Hoskie and Yazzie, were almost the opposite of each other. For example, Hoskie grew up in a tight Navajo family and both sides of his family went to traditional *Diné* ceremonies (on his father's side) and NAC on his mother's side. His family made a conscious decision to learn the Beauty Way ceremonies and to instill this as the foundation for the family. Through this action, their understanding of the *Diné* language was gratified, as the children and grandchildren could speak the language and take part in the ceremonial rituals. Yazzie's parents worked in an urban area, but he spent ten years of his life living with his grandparents who instilled core cultural values that he embodies today. During the times he spent with his grandparents, he learned about his ancestors and the interconnectedness and relationships with the animals and his family. He has a child now and wants to transmit some of the things he has learned to his son. All the participants have strong ties to where they come from. The human umbilical cord identifies the mother who provided life while in the womb and secures the connection to home, cultural values, ceremonies, SNBH, and the ancestors and relatives.

The participants' identities lie in the clans they belong to and their ancestors. This was humbling to learn—that wherever they went, they acknowledged the ancestors, from emergence stories, to *Hweeldí* and *K'é*, in accordance with the family dynamic. This concept solidified each one's identity as a *Diné* person or, more importantly, a *Diné*

individual. The transformation is a gradual process that occurs and changes over time. It never stays the same—we are constantly evolving moment by moment. However, the interrelations and interconnectedness are different for each as we receive the teachings of SNBH, land, home, family, and self. Achieving a lifelong journey does not mean you will live to be 102 years old, but rather that you have achieved a quality life and provided unique pathways for others, so that they too can live with abundance in *hózhó*. The contributions from *Diné* scholars is significant for this study. I learned about why these teachings are important and why it is critical to speak *Diné* and to learn the stories. In learning the stories, our youth have a better chance to learn and understand what they need to do.

Yes, I firmly believe that *Diné* people must change within their *hooghan*. The home is the most sacred place. While we might have modern conveniences and everything we want in front of us—what makes us unique, and the beauty of SNBH, is missing. The time has come to learn *how* to take the next step, start exercising what these teachings mean, and get ready for the next 500 years. *Diné* must come to mindfulness to protect *Diné* epistemology—mindfulness not to sit and be still or listen, but to act. Mindfulness can change the thought process and calm the spirit to allow SNBH to be understood on a deeper level within. The current challenges that continue to affect *Diné* youth do not get resolved, but are pushed into new policies, and assigned new labels with the same underlying message. Indigenous scholars are now speaking out, including prophecies and warnings of climate change. If Indigenous peoples do not take responsibility especially in the home, what good can we be to the outside world? What good can we be if we cannot offer a prayer in our language (*Diné*), and what good can we

be if we cannot visit the sacred places and spaces to make offerings to the past, present, and future? It is my great hope that this study will contribute to an awakening for individuals who are ready to pledge to a greater destiny.

The contributions by Indigenous authors, and the copious literature I collected, were essential to the study. In the United States, over the past few years, more Indigenous research has emerged in the educational research arena to better understand Indigenous framework. Indigenous methodologies are necessary to examine and investigate Indigenous ways of knowing. Moreover, Indigenous scholars convey a purposeful presence. Their literature and scholarly work are needed for further research in every field in the academy. The scholarly research is not meant to compete with the Western philosophy of education, but to act for ourselves as Indigenous peoples. The attempts to educate Indigenous children using their philosophy is not working. Meanwhile, “miseducation” (Pewewardy, 2011) for Indigenous youths continue.

In this study, I tried to stay true to Indigenous researchers, especially from the perspectives of *Diné* scholars. Some of the most important topics for this study were: Storywork (Absolon, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Lamphere, 2007; Bastien, 2004); self-determination (Manuelito, 2009); Indigenous epistemology, knowledge, worldview, paradigm, and ways of knowing (Aluli Meyer, 2016; Werito, 2014; Chilisa, 2012; Absolon, 2011; Battiste, 2008; Bastien, 2004; Wilson, 2008; Benally, 1994; Aronilth, 1992); Indigenous research methodology (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Lamphere, 2007; Smith, 1999); and Indigenous learning and transformation (Cajete, 2015). These are the few I mention, but there is much other Indigenous research literature that could support this study. In my research, I found only a

few from Indigenous perspectives. Hawaiian epistemology articulates a relationship with the ancestral knowledge, ancient knowledge, and shows an interconnectedness with family and land. Porsanger (2004) comments, “Indigenous epistemology shows ways of knowing, especially with reference to the limits and validity of knowledge, is indeed one of the most essential basic elements of Indigenous methodologies” (p. 111). Indigenous research literature also touched on language shift (House, 2002) and American Indian education (Miller Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) to bring awareness to the challenges faced by *Diné* and Indigenous youths. I used non-Indigenous literature to build upon the relationships of Indigenous perspectives for educational research of theories, methods, and narrative inquiry, and to show how the various approaches of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars can work collaboratively. I included literature on gifted Navajo children to highlight that some students in these remote areas are indeed brilliant and should be honored and celebrated.

Justification of My Approach: Pathway to SNBH

When I talk about the pathway to SNBH—the intention is to make a layered impact for *Diné* youth. The oral stories of our ancestors are organized into events. When these stories are told, they interpret how *Diné* got here. In the study, the source of knowledge was examined by questioning the participants about how they acquired, understand, and validate this knowledge, and the significance of where it came from.

SNBH was not pulled out of thin air. The stories we carry today are the energy of our ancestors. This concept is very powerful because, we, as *Diné* are still carrying a lot of unresolved matter from *Hweeldi* and the loss of relatives that have gone before us. *Hweeldi* was a place of suffering and a place *Diné* do not want to return to. However, the

knowledge of the ancestors who endured and survived is here to provide strength. *Diné* youth must build upon that created space and pick up where the ancestors left off. Our history holds a huge disruption: Invasion, colonization, assimilation, termination, miseducation, and language and culture loss, boarding schools, and historical traumas are still upon us, despite our status as a sovereign nation. No one has taken the responsibility to bring love and *hózhó* back to our being, to restore and reclaim SNBH as our core value and knowledge system. Looking back at the past, we have a lot of work ahead of us.

We must heal, make ceremonies and offer prayers and songs. I believe that the four concepts, *Nitsahakees*, *Nahata*, *Iiná* and *Siihasin*, should not be set in stone. The concepts can be interrelated and used for different seasons to interconnect knowledge creation, share thought and language, and keep the SNBH paradigm alive. The context of the four concepts creates a framework for education that exemplifies a well-balanced *Diné* individual in the world. *Diné* acknowledge the sacred mountains as they move in and out of the present Navajo Nation.

The process of the ceremonies connects the individual to SNBH. The ceremonies reify the abstract deities and their meaning in the form of a sand-painting, or other visual, so the person forms an instructive symbolic image to bring harmony and balance to self. In traditional education, grandparents and parents taught children to pray at dawn and dusk and to have respect for nature and all living things; to not harm ants nor throw rocks, nor hit a tree with a stick.

Finally, the stories must continue. The participants' stories provided strong connection to their beliefs and the knowledge they gained from SNBH. The knowledge contained wisdom living that is applicable for the next generation. The participants are

still strongly connected to the Holy People and to the ancestors who went to *Hweeldi*. They still spoke of the ancestors before *Hweeldi*—the ones who came with the sacred bundles, the ones who carried the sacred knowledge in the ceremonies, the storytellers, the ones who knew the plants and the animals— all the way back to the Holy People. Each generation has a responsibility to listen to the stories of SNBH, consider how they apply to their life, and become the next carrier of these sacred teachings.

Mindfulness

An Indigenous approach to mindfulness is already in practice. In ceremonies, the participants expressed the intentional formal practice of mindfulness for different roles, activities, and events. The formal practice of mindfulness leads to *moments* of mindfulness that improve the thought process and break unhealthy behaviors. As one continues this practice, higher levels of mindfulness are achieved that lead to better conscious decision about self, lifestyle, friends, career, and school. This is critically important because mindfulness also helps to lay a path towards self-love and compassion for all living things.

The *Diné* people could adhere to SNBH principles and reclaim *hózhó* at every level. But how do we do this in the face of resistance and criticism? We must be compelled by the need for change and healing. It will be a gradual process towards mindfulness. The participants reflected on what does and does not work for them when they described how they learned to use SNBH daily.

Reflective methods are essential to developing mindfulness with SNBH practices. Cajete (2015) writes that “transformational understanding is where the learner attains a high level of spiritual understanding” (p. 41). This is not the final key to ultimate

understanding, but the individual becomes aware of true self and “the learner becomes complete” (p. 41). Each step achieved offers different views or perspective for the individual. Each step reveals a slightly different explanation to benefit the individual. But first, one must commit to acquiring knowledge that expands their capacity to change and live with honor, respect, and the principles of SNBH. The following are guideposts in looking at SNBH for mindfulness. SNBH begins with you.

- SNBH begins from a different life time and was brought into this world by the ancestors. Learning about the history and background of SNBH will enhance your understanding.
- SNBH will guide you and bring awareness when you are ready. It does not happen overnight; it may take a life-time. But when you come to know SNBH, it will take care of you, just as you will be responsible to nurture and practice it.
- SNBH is considered personal and only you will know and experience your transformation. You can keep a personal journal to write down your reflections and your experiences toward change.
- SNBH becomes your life. Now that you have some understanding and are mindful of the teachings, you can set goals in areas of your life, profession, or other areas in which you wish to improve.
- SNBH has multiple dimensions and must be respected. Prayer, chants, and offerings coincide to continue the learning process.

It is most important that we do not impose these practices on Navajo children who are not ready, and that we check with the parents before activating this path. SNBH is not

a religious practice. These practices allow for the mind to develop with love, without judgment; to gain knowledge of SNBH for self-identity and clearer understanding; and to liberate the mind, body, and spirit.

I came to mindfulness by reading His Holiness the Dalai Lama's work to heal the mind, body, and spirit. In Buddhism, Buddha's mindfulness has one purpose—to end suffering (Moffitt, 2017). Today, secular mindfulness has erupted in the Western world. People can go to dharma talks and begin a meditation practice or take classes on developing their minds to walk a harmonious life in happiness.

I go to Albuquerque Insight Meditation Center for dharma talks, retreats, ceremonies, and meditation sits. There is more than one way to practice mindfulness, but the common goal is to achieve a state of alert, focused relaxation by deliberately paying attention to thoughts and sensations without judgment. This practice allows the mind to refocus on the present moment. All mindfulness techniques are a form of meditation. Mindfulness practice and sitting in a ceremony have similarities. The most important aspect of mindfulness is that you allow all thoughts and experiences, even ones that are painful, sad, disturbing, or frustrating, to come to you. You acknowledge them, embrace them, and let them go. This is even true of thoughts of happiness. Buddha teaches impermanence, meaning that “All that exists is impermanent: nothing lasts. Therefore, nothing can be grasped or held onto” (Fischer, 2012).

When I practice mindfulness, SNBH is always at the core of my practice, as it guides me to be kind and compassionate, to take care of myself, surround myself with good things and good people, and learn from mistakes. SNBH helps me put things in perspective according to my needs. If I have challenges, SNBH allows me to look at my

mistakes, acknowledge them and let them go, as they are now in the past. What matters now is that I am present with a mind, body, and spirit—toward *hózhó*.

Critical Evaluation: Indigenous Epistemology and Indigenous Research Methodology

The main aim of using Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous research methodologies was to ensure that research can be carried out in a more respectful, ethical, correct, useful and beneficial fashion, to reflect Indigenous peoples (Smith, 1999; Aluli Meyer, 2016; Battiste, 2008).

From the onset of the study, I leaned toward using Indigenous methodologies to honor the participants' contribution to this study. Looking at Indigenous epistemology was a life changing experience; to define what Indigenous epistemology was challenging. *Diné* perspectives have multiple dimensions. As I wrote about the clan system, it was brought to my attention that what Rough Rock Community School (formerly known as Rough Rock Demonstration School) developed on the clan system is derived from only one perspective. I was surprised because I thought there was only one clan system or structure of the four main clans. I was informed that it depends on the region you come from. From the far corners of Arizona, they have different four main clans aside from what I listed under "Findings for Identity."

Qualitative methods are extremely time consuming, and narrative inquiry was no exception. In this study, I wanted to give the participants a sense of ownership for their contributions by sharing their stories. In their professional lives, all the participants are educators in the community surrounding Albuquerque. The lack of support from tribal government and education departments is fragmented by political and personal turmoil. Common Core Standards and other assessments do not support Indigenous Knowledge

systems and the wealth of knowledge *Diné* youth bring to class is set aside. Indigenous knowledge framework and methodologies are missing in many *Diné* educational systems. I think it is talked about, but it has not been incorporated into the system yet. Reclaiming knowledge and stories are part of the process in understanding that *Diné* pedagogies from our ancient and sacred knowledge system work and must be restored. Indigenizing theories and concepts in reading and homework is not the way to problem-solve or meet our children's needs. Battiste (2008) also says Indigenous Knowledge "is typically embedded in the cumulative experiences and teachings of Indigenous peoples rather than in a library or in journals of applied research" (p. 87).

I argue that *Diné* youth are still marginalized, as they were in the early history of the education system. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2009), Schull writes about Paulo Freire's conviction that provided with the proper tools:

"The individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality; and deal critically with it." (p. 32).

Surely, Navajo Nation Department of *Diné* Education could radically transform the education system for all *Diné* students to regain their language and culture, especially the oral stories, prayers, and songs through SNBH. But this is also up to the people. Rekindling an understanding of SNBH will take time.

Revisiting My Personal Narrative

In my personal narrative, I shared my personal experience of how I came to know SNBH. My view of SNBH now is very different from the first time I began to hear SNBH in prayers and in songs.

Throughout this study, there was more Indigenous storytelling that I wanted to use and share. One thing that I kept reminding myself was not to tell all of my story. Other scholars write about this idea of not giving away our entire story. Louise Lamphere (2007), a distinguished anthropologist and emeriti professor of The University of New Mexico, wrote *Three Generations in a Navajo Family: Weaving Women's Lives* about Eva Price (mother and grandmother), her daughter Carol, and granddaughter Valerie. When she interviewed Eva Price, before the taping started, Eva said:

“I’m not going to tell you the main one. I’m just going to tell you a little bit [meaning the story of only one of the branches of her family]. In our tradition, you can’t tell the whole thing. You won’t last long if you tell everything...it’s the old traditional way” (p. 5). Carol (Eva’s daughter) says: “The whole secret of the old people is you can’t tell everything you know” (p. 5).

Lamphere (2007) states that Kluckhorn, Aberle, and other anthropologists have also recognized:

In Navajo culture, knowledge is power and is not to be given away. It must be imparted or told as part of a reciprocal relationship; there needs to be an exchange often of goods, in return for knowledge. For example, Navajo make payments to *hatali* (medicine person/singer) to perform ceremonies and the Holy People come to the ceremony and cure the patient when they are given the correct offerings (*‘yeel*). (p. 5)

Giving away your knowledge is something I was forewarned about. As I mentioned, I gifted the participants before we exchanged our knowledge. I believe this is important to keep the stories alive and prolong the teachings. I am not suggesting using

videotapes or recordings but telling stories orally to the youth, so they become familiar with them. At some point, they will be the ones telling the stories. Protocols are in place for a reason, to protect the knowledge carriers and what belongs to the people. Indigenous peoples have the right to protect their knowledge system, the stories, ceremonies, and their language and culture. Iseke (2013) states that story is a practice in Indigenous cultures to sustain communities and validate experiences and epistemologies. Storytelling can be personal, sacred, and mythical; storytelling is witnessing and remembering, and sharing stories of spirituality as sources of strength. For example, most elders will tell you a story that reflects on their life or an event that happened.

I have come to realize that thinking isolates a situation or an event and categorizes it as “good” or “bad,” but when I meditate on SNBH, it helps throw away these notions. Again, SNBH is complex, and for that reason, most people do not want to engage in in-depth discussion. Sometimes people label SNBH as a religion or a mythology, which renders the teachings incomprehensible. This notion limits people's potential to learn about SNBH. Zen monk, poet, and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh (2014) says that living mindfully and with concentration, we see a deeper reality and can witness impermanence without fear, anger, or despair. Nirvana is not a place to get to, it is something in the future that we are trying to reach, and Nirvana is available to us right now. SNBH is the same, we are living it now.

It is imperative that the *Diné* people move forward with their ways of knowing and start using their own epistemological paradigms and knowledge systems beginning with the home, the tribal government, the schools, and the chapter houses. “If Indigenous epistemologies are to survive, the use of native languages and the appropriate storied

philosophies is mandatory," says Bastien (2004, p. 100). Our language depends on how we, as a tribal nation can come together in mindfulness and create spaces and places to reconnect with the core teachings.

In the participants' narratives, they say that they were guided by SNBH in ceremonies since childhood and by their grandparents. The grandparents were guided by their ancestors. The ancestors left remnants behind as a reminder to the Navajo people for future generations that they were here and should not be forgotten. The ancestors received knowledge and wisdom from the Holy People who were constantly among them. They lived with SNBH teachings closely, acknowledging them and greeting them in the morning as they ran for strength and used corn pollen for offerings. This was not only done on certain days, it was a daily practice and something they did to build a foundation and add knowledge that they received in ceremonies. These pivotal moments are significant to the individual and not shared with the whole world. It belongs only to that person.

Each participant remembered the songs their grandparents sang and the prayers they shared. The participants, I believe, reconnected with the gifts they were given as children when I interviewed them. I do believe that they are connected deeply, but sometimes someone has to remind us of the things we carry that are gifts from the Holy People and from relatives or other individuals who have made an impact in our journey.

The *Diné* scholars shared that the pathway to SNBH was not easy, nor is it easy following the ceremonial way of life. As Hoskie stated, it takes you away from your family, but the Beauty Way ceremonies are a "beautiful package." I hope through my

story and the participants' that we have encouraged Navajo youth to take the pathway to SNBH.

The word *story* is sometimes too simple; storytelling comes in many forms and should not be demarcated. Indigenous stories are regenerating Indigenous knowledge, using Indigenous epistemology, relearning these ways, and transforming cultural structures. This resurgence has begun and is long overdue. Shawn Wilson's (2008) *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* helps us look at the similarities across Indigenous philosophy and knowledge to embark on ways of articulating Indigenous research for connecting with our true self, healing, and building the interrelationships and interconnectedness that we share with Indigenous peoples throughout the world. By telling our stories, Indigenous peoples will rewrite history books and decolonize research methodology.

Indigenous epistemology will always be challenged. This makes doing Indigenous research even more important. Of course, who does the storytelling is also important. Storytelling is personal and how much we want to share varies. This is the time I turn to the ceremonies, listen to the prayers and the chants, and meditate on the journey of the spirits. Still, the attempt to convey the message is beautiful. I am hopeful that there are *Diné* youth who will muster the courage to seek the *Diné* way of knowing.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter includes: (1) Conclusion: Where Do We Go Now? (2) Implications for Practice, and (3) Implications for Future Research.

Conclusion: Where Do We Go Now?

My interpretations and motivations for this study left me with more questions than I had developed. I believe we need to keep doing research to piece together the deficit our people have endured. Education must be acquired and earned. For Indigenous peoples and my people, *Diné*, there was already a knowledge system in place. Aluli Meyer (2016) says, “Research for us (Indigenous) is not simply about asking ‘burning questions’ we want to resolve, but rather, we are answering a call to be of use” (p. 60).

As *Diné* scholars, we need to find ways to educate our people on *Diné* knowledge, SNBH, and Navajo cosmology. Emerson (2014) said:

“Traditional knowledge is concerned with infinite time, sapient wisdom, perennial philosophy, and a respect for natural law” (p. 65). He advises us in *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought* (2014) that “It is important to make the distinction between Indigenous knowledge and traditional knowledge, because Indigenous knowledge encompasses the way modernity has either helped or hindered us” (p. 65).

Diné scholars remind us that it is entirely up to us to seek knowledge, ask for knowledge, and nurture knowledge. This is how intelligence is developed from the ancient teachings, which is traditional knowledge. The participants’ stories all indicated SNBH is alive; its embodiment lies within, in the land, the elements, all the way back to the ancient ones who left a huge imprint in our DNA. We cannot just let it disappear. We

must move forward for the youth. Reclaiming knowledge and stories, and becoming more mindful of the old ways, will open pathways for new knowledge. Indigenous peoples will use their epistemology to share their experiences and overcome future challenges. They will become the agents of change by becoming involved in future decisions with the youths. According to Emerson (2014), “we should always include and integrate Diné traditional knowledge into all that we do” (p. 65). I found oral stories to be a powerful tool to develop relationships with the people, place, and space where the ancestors exist. Aluli Meyer (2016) says, “Never apologize for what you bring to the table...It is no longer appropriate to belittle our own interpretation of the world. The truth is, it never was” (p.63). As a Diné scholar, we must know how to use SNBH for language immersion, literacy, personal character development, mindfulness, and relationship building for home and community. We cannot negatively criticize each other or control programs for self but provide service and leadership for future generation. The elders said SNBH was not easy, nor is life easy, but I think today life is much easier than it was for our ancestors. Returning home to an environment where we do not have modern facilities, we gaze upon it as “camping” rather than viewing it as a way of life. Returning home is a beautiful experience in the morning when the first light appears and at night when you can almost touch the stars of the Milky Way. I am hopeful that we can change our current thought process for the next generations to come, so they can have a place to call home.

Implications for Practice

My main aim in the study was to share my experiences of SNBH, seek how *Diné* educators acquired their knowledge of SNBH, and how they are utilizing SNBH in their

personal and professional life. The first major contribution of the study provided much needed empirical data on how SNBH was acquired from the *Diné* participants interviewed. The data acquired is important because I could not find any other comparable study with SNBH and mindfulness practice for *Diné* youths to return to traditional ways of knowing and transformation. The in-depth interviews provided practical implications to support present cultural and ancient practices considered important in the contemporary world for *Diné* youths and adults. For example, *Diné* scholars gave piece-by-piece information of how SNBH is formed and how they came to know it. The participants are all graduate students with advanced degrees. This indicated too that educated tribal members are very much connected to SNBH, no matter how far they are from *Dinétaah*. Navajo Nation should welcome these graduates and professionals to return home to rebuild their communities and be with family.

A second important implication of the study was derived from the findings about the significance of storytelling and *Diné* epistemology to *Diné* educators, *Diné* youth, and, I think, to all *Diné* people. My findings point to the family unit as the foundation for all *Diné* people, where core values and language are instilled. Home is at the center of *Diné* existence. The stories are generated by the family and in the home. The educators also talked about the importance of studying the suffering and history of *Hweeldi*, how some new food and wardrobe were adopted during these difficult years. Incorporating cultural history on *Diné* emergence story should be a part of the curriculums in the schools because it is a significant part of our identity as a *Diné*. Parents should not interfere no matter their religious affiliation.

Although I analyzed the data to identify and codify themes, the data goes beyond the final themes. For example, I could not put a lot of their sharing on SNBH into themes; but I relayed what they shared as best I could. I felt also that I had to withhold some sensitive information for their confidentiality. To induce healing, *Diné* youth need to hear about historical trauma and work on these psychological and spiritual wounds. Brave Heart (2011) states, “Historical trauma is a meaningful concept that resonates with Indigenous communities” (Accession No. 278880914). Boarding schools left a huge emotional darkness for boarding school alumni. I believe some of the youths carry this trauma without their knowledge. I do think that much more work needs to be done to bring more healing for the youth and give them tools they can use, rather than talking about it, and repeating research that identifies what the problems are. Mindfulness learning and teaching in the classrooms can initiate the healing process.

I mentioned that I did not grieve my mother’s death until I became an adult. Meditation centers are needed as a place of healing, where *Diné* youth can heal mind, body, and spirit, and find a sense of peace within. Spiritual men and women need to also be available to visit schools to teach the youth about love for self, for their environment, and animals, and to create a pathway to SNBH. I know that this is a new beginning, to create places of spirituality beyond the sites where only ceremonies are performed. As stated, I am only focusing on the Beauty Way teachings of SNBH. The brutal side of *Diné* life is where substance abuse, sexual violence, murder, suicide, domestic abuse, and generational abuse on the mind, body, and spirit exists in darkness.

The third implication is that we must reframe our way of thinking as *Diné* people. I say this with conviction because there are no more excuses for our children not

speaking *Diné* and being ignorant of SNBH. Going home to *Dinétaah* is currently viewed as merely visiting grandparents, helping at a ceremony, or attending a family graduation. We, *Diné*, must learn to nurture and support *Diné* epistemology and help the generations who were excluded or forced out, and the ones who are not at fault for their gaps in learning. The parents must not depend or entrust the school system to teach their children to speak *Diné* or learn about their culture. The most destructive technologies we have accumulated are television, movies, music, mobile phones, and Internet. They have disrupted the communication system across all members of the family and caused chaos within the family dynamic. Cultural knowledge, traditional knowledge, storytelling, singing, traditional cooking, gathering medicinal herbs, farming, hunting, and working with animals are not nurtured and supported within families, communities, and as a nation. My research suggests that some of these cultural and traditional knowledges have been abandoned and not passed to the next generation. Mindfulness practices is needed to learn about SNBH.

I created some ways for *Diné* youth to explore commencement of a journey toward SNBH (see Fig. 2). This framework also suggests that educational models should be flexible and used where we need help, or to assist us in gaining understanding and awareness. This is important because to create fluidity for stories to flow and teachings to grow, we must also make ourselves available when someone is asking about how they can learn about SNBH or any part of *Diné* teachings. More research is needed for Navajo parents and their children to communicate through SNBH and restore core values in their homes. The suggestions are for *Diné* youth to embrace, and extend beyond, what is available in *Diné* culture classes, to go even deeper into why speaking *Diné* is crucial.

Finally, the study has created pathways to SNBH and how to incorporate mindful practices for the mind, body, and spirit. The path I traveled was not easy. *Diné* individuals, traditional people, and medicine people were not easy to approach on the topic of SNBH. This made it difficult to acquire some answers. I believe SNBH teachings is needed and should not be labeled as *religion*. Religion has distorted the ancient and sacred teachings. *Religion* also puts a label on the ceremonies—suggesting we are worshipping “other” gods. Ceremonial practices for restoration of the mind, body, and spirit are no longer practiced and have caused a displacement of core values and purpose for rites of passages and transfer of knowledge.

I am not alone. Doors are often shut by our own people. Returning home is sometimes not warm and pleasant. Even finding a job is complicated. Many times, you are not hired because you have been away too long. Confronting these petty obstacles are minor compared to the future of the *Diné* language and culture slowly deteriorating. The bureaucratic injustices of our own tribal government need a serious overhaul. Educators, policymakers, departments, and programs must be audited and evaluated.

Implications for Future Research

This was a qualitative study that focused primarily on *Diné* epistemology (knowledge) and Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón (SNBH) paradigm through storytelling. More research is needed for future collaborative work to overcome the complexity and dependence on western systems and thought.

First, the process of transformation is a work in progress, and this will be the most challenging work that lies ahead. Mindfulness must be used to bring more information to *Diné* youth about their current thoughts on SNBH. The more we participate and the more

we open our minds and spirits to the universe, the more these ancient ways will surface. As Absolon (2011) points out, "creating a space opens possibilities to grow, heal, think, search, and write." My research suggests that mindfulness will provide benefits, positive outcomes, and feedback on SNBH. Therefore, more research is needed on mindfulness for Indigenous communities, schools, and for the individual. Integrating mindfulness into daily practices will bring stability, purpose, and an understanding of why cultural core values are valuable and must be respected.

Second, it is important to impart our basic principles to future generations as they continue to do research and incorporate the Indigenous knowledge system and storytelling into classrooms. Indigenous peoples have been using storytelling for thousands of years; today we call it methodology. Storytelling serves to "help our people tell their stories so they can leave their mark. These stories help us to not get lost" (Absolon, 2011, p. 137).

Third, Tribal colleges and universities must provide an opportunity for students to practice research, rather than just being researched themselves. *Diné* researchers must be encouraged to use SNBH paradigm to empower their work at the university and back on the reservation schools. This study offers the opportunity for *Diné* scholars to redefine the Navajo Education Code to mandate using *Diné* language at all tribal meetings, chapter meetings, *Diné* radio stations, all colleges and universities on the Navajo Nation, and require that all 520 Navajo Language and Culture teachers be fluent speakers and reject employment at public institutions unless dual language of 50/50 is enforced through immersion. *Diné* core standards should also be mandated and used for schools that have Navajo Language and Culture classes. All these tribal colleges and universities, grant

schools, BIE schools, and *Diné* controlled schools must use Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous research methodology to encompass holistic ideas of returning, restoring, and reclaiming important teachings of SNBH and other ancient teachings back into the classrooms.

Finally, as I discussed in Chapter 5, under “Contributions of the Study,” more literature and scholarly work by Indigenous scholars is needed for future research in every field in the academy. The scholarly research is not meant to compete with Western academia, but to precipitate change so we can educate our own using our Indigenous ways of knowing. Further research can thus shed light on *Diné* epistemology and *Sa’ah Naaghái Bik’eh Hózhóón*. My research could open new opportunities for *Diné* youths and their parents or families to take courses about *Diné* history and culture at Diné College or any higher institution that has *Diné* Studies to gather more evidence first-hand. This research could also open new discourse about mindfulness and overall wellness for the individual. Furthermore, *Diné* people must learn to handle their own affairs and be cognizant of their surroundings, offering prayers and songs to the *Diyin Dine’é* for *hózhó*. My journey to learn about SNBH humbled me, and through it, I have learned my role as a *Diné* woman. Everything ends with a prayer: *Hózhó Nahaasdlii*.

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APPENDIX A

DINÉ COLLEGE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The core of this philosophy is expressed in concepts and values associated with natural processes identified with the four cardinal directions, including such processes as the daily cycle of day and night and the annual cycle of the seasons. Diné College fulfills its mission by using the Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón principle as a framework to educate its students:

- Nitsahakees (Thinking), Nahat'a (Planning), Iiná (Living) and Sihasin (Assuring)
- Studying Diné language, history, and culture
- Preparing for further studies and employment in a multi-cultural and technological world
- Fostering social responsibility, community service and scholarly research that contribute to the social, economic and cultural well-being of the Navajo Nation.



APPENDIX B

CHINLE SCHOOL DISTRICT EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Chinle School District uses this educational model for Navajo knowledge and philosophy to promote Navajo sovereignty toward self-awareness and aligning a path for well-ness, independency, expectations, strengthening, learning, thinking, planning, living, and assuring from Navajo SNBH teachings to give guidance for a balanced and harmonious life.

