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The Racialization of Dine (Youth) in Education

Vincent Werito

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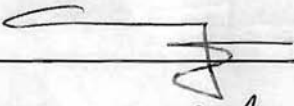
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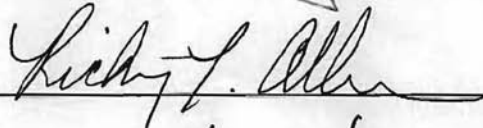
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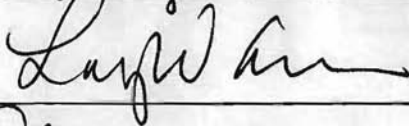
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THE RACIALIZATION OF DINE (YOUTH) IN EDUCATION

BY

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B.A., Liberal Arts, Fort Lewis College, 1997

B.A., Education, Fort Lewis College, 2000

M.A., Education, University of New Mexico , 2002

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

December 2010

**THE RACIALIZATION OF DINE (NAVAJO) YOUTH
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research study to future generations of Diné youth and teachers and to those who are now learning and teaching in schools now. The hope, dreams, and aspirations of Diné and other youth are the reasons that we must never forget to make learning and teaching a wonderful experience. Next, I would like to remember our ancestors or forebears, the many grandmothers and grandfathers, who struggled long and hard to find a place for our people to carry on their traditional ways and teachings so that we may live long and peacefully as Diné and to prosper within the four sacred mountains and homelands. Finally, I would like to honor and recognize my parents, grandparents, family members, extended and clan relatives, mentors, and great friends from whom I continue to draw much personal insight and commitment to inspire my vocation and my scholarship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge first and foremost the Holy People, the Diyin Dine'é.

Without the teachings and guidance of the Holy People, many of these ideas and concepts would not exist nor be relevant. Next, I would like to pay my respects to my ancestors, the many grandmothers and grandfathers who came before me and whom I follow in their footsteps. Also, I would like acknowledge my parents, grandparents, close family members, and many relatives for their unwavering support and love. It is through your loving support that I persevere and find the inner strength to remain true and honest to who I am. Next, I would like to acknowledge the commitment and support of my dissertation chair, colleague, and friend, Dr. Glenabah Martinez. Also, I would like to recognize my other dissertation chair members; Dr. Christine Sims, Dr. Ricky Lee Allen, Dr. Tiffany Lee, and Dr. Larry Emerson. You have always been very supportive and respectful to my work, my ideas, and my research. Ahé'hee' t'áá'iyyisíí nitsáágo.

Finally, I would like to recognize some very close friends, you know who you are, for all of your support and for the many times we have engaged in dialogue, laughed, and ponder the great mysteries of the world. Also, I would like to thank many other individuals, you also know who you are, for their wonderful help, insight, contributions to this work, and your kind support and words. Without all of your support it would have been a difficult journey. Finally, I would like to acknowledge other Indigenous and non Indigenous youth, teachers, and scholars who have helped me to reaffirm my dedication and commitment to the goals of Indigenous education and education for all.

The Racialization of Diné (Navajo) Youth in Education

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ABSTRACT

This critical qualitative research study examines the racialization of Diné (Navajo) youth in education. The study is based on a critical theoretical framework that draws on research from critical educational studies, Indigenous theory, and critical race theory. Using critical qualitative case study methods through personal interviews, this study highlights nine Diné (Navajo) students' counter narratives about their experiences with schooling and the ways they negotiate their racial and cultural identities within the historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural contexts of past and current educational policies. Particularly, an emphasis on the ways that Indigenous youth are racialized and Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge are marginalized in education implicate the need for more research that looks at the impact of white supremacy on the education of Diné youth.

The study was conducted at a major university in the southwestern region of the United States. Future implications of this study underscore the need for more critical and reflexive dialogue among Navajo (Diné) and non Navajo educators, parents, and researchers in surrounding Navajo communities to better understand the identity

formation of Diné (Navajo) youth and to redress the loss of Navajo (Diné) language and cultural knowledge at the individual and community levels. Finally, this study highlights the need for increased individual and collective agency among Indigenous scholars, activists, educators, and communities especially within the contexts of education to embrace, engage, and rearticulate an Indigenous pedagogy that is transformative and revolutionary. (Key words: Critical qualitative research, critical theory, racialization, racism, Critical Race Theory, Navajo education, Decolonization)

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Chapter One

Introduction

Personal background information. When my brothers and I were younger, our father bought us a horse. It was a two year old red roan. He led the horse up to us and said, “He is yours now so take good care of him because he will take you far.” I remember feeling very proud and happy. However, I also remember how he would scold us for not taking care of the horse. He would say, “If you want something good in life, you have to take care of it, nurture it, and take responsibility for it.” He said, “It is just like your education.” Although education has always been a big thing in my family even before this time, I did not understand what he meant by that at the time.

As far back as I can remember the concept of education and my schooling experiences have always had a big impact on my life because of the incongruence between the two concepts. For example I think back to when my parents first dropped me off at boarding school. I remember how they told me that it was for my own good as they walked away and left me there. I did not understand why they were taking me away from home and leaving me at a boarding school. I remember crying for a whole night. Before they left, they told me that everything was going to be okay then they walked out the front doors of the dormitory building where I was to spend much of my childhood days. I vividly remember the emotions that I felt as I was left alone in the cold dark room. School was a new environment that seemed very alien and foreboding to me. To this day, I still remember the feelings of being homesick and being out of place.

I grew up in a small rural Navajo community located in the eastern checkerboard area of the Navajo reservation called Torreon, New Mexico.¹ Torreon is a rural Navajo community in north western New Mexico that was settled after the return of the Diné to their homelands from Bosque Redondo.² After the signing of the Navajo Treaty of 1868 with the United States government, the Navajo were allowed to return to their homelands after being confined at Fort Sumner, New Mexico for four years (Denetdale, 2008). Many places like Torreon, New Mexico were resettled as the Navajo were allowed to return to their homelands.

I have three older brothers, one younger brother, and one adopted sister. In thinking back on my early childhood experiences, I want to highlight some fundamental beliefs which I believe have influenced my Diné (Navajo) cultural values and identity to this day.³ These fundamental beliefs are also at the core of my epistemology, my ontology, and my educational philosophy. The first idea is related to the primary language that was spoken in our home and community at the time and even presently, which is the Navajo language or *Diné bizaad*. During that time, I remember that although we heard some English from the radio or television, speaking or learning English did not feel right to us. Instead, speaking Navajo was more natural to us. For example, I remember playing outside in the summertime with my brothers. On some days, we would play with our cousins who lived nearby. Although we spoke some English, when we were all together we spoke mostly in Navajo. Often times, we would make fun of each other for saying

¹ Torreon is located in Sandoval County, New Mexico. It is 32 miles west of Cuba, New Mexico.

² Bosque Redondo is the name of the place where the Navajo were imprisoned for four years. See Jennifer Denetdale, *The Long Walk, the Forced Navajo Exile*.

³ In the Navajo language, Diné means the People. At times, I will use the terms Diné and Navajo interchangeably throughout the text. I use Navajo when referring to cultural and linguistic references as cited in research, quotes, or historical documents.

some words or sentences in English. We teased each other for trying to talk like a *bilagáana* or a white person. During that time, I am not sure if we had any idea that our language would be in strong contention with the dominant English language in schools and the larger society. We took our language for granted; unaware that it would become threatened in years to come. More so, we were unaware that our cultural values and identity would also become threatened and impacted by schooling via the white man's education.

Another fundamental belief involves learning the traditional Diné cultural knowledge. That is, as I learned about myself, my family, my community, and the world around me through the Navajo language, I also learned from my parents, my relatives, and my elders the significance of traditional Diné cultural knowledge which includes traditional Diné stories, ceremonies, prayers, songs, and social mores. On many occasions, I observed the way that my parents demonstrated their reverence for nature, that is, the land and cosmos through their early morning prayers with an offering of corn pollen to the Earth mother below their feet and the sky Father over head. Finally, through our family's participation in Navajo ceremonials or Native American Church prayer meetings I developed a strong faith in *Sá'ah Nagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) teachings. So naturally, these ideas or fundamental beliefs became essential to my cultural and spiritual identity as Diné and they have and continue to greatly influence my paradigm and understanding of the world around me. Furthermore, these fundamental beliefs honor the idea of *k'é* or the unique relationships I have with my family, my relatives, my kin, other Navajo people, and all other people in the world but most importantly with the natural, spiritual world.

Diné (Navajo) scholars Wilson Aronilth (1999) and Herbert Benally (1994) maintain that the Diné (Indigenous) philosophy of *Sá'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) and the concept of *k'é* are the foundation of our traditional and contemporary Diné (Indigenous) principles of identity, community, and education. *Sá'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* is difficult to define in Navajo and even more difficult to translate into English for others. Yet Navajo elders and scholars describe its significance to Diné education and life. *K'é* is an idea or concept that encapsulates the social responsibilities, roles, and relationships that an individual has with her natural surroundings and other people in her life. More so, *k'é* is also central to the Diné kinship or clan system by which individuals trace their maternal and paternal clan lineages.

In *An Introduction to Navajo Philosophy*, Wilson Aronilth (1999) articulates *Sá'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* as the essence of Diné educational philosophy or a Diné philosophy of living and learning. That is, as *Sá'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* informs our epistemology, ontology, and axiology as Diné, it becomes our paradigm and way of life. Consequently, this Diné philosophy informs our cognitive, intuitive, physiological, and psychological processes of learning and living a Diné way of life. Aronilth (1999) writes:

According to the teachings of our forefathers, Diné philosophy contains four important areas of learning about our body, feeling, mind, thinking, thoughts, and our whole life. We are born with these and grow with them from childhood to old age. Diné philosophy is about our art work, beliefs, feeling, identity, language, mind, self image, thinking, thoughts, values, moral laws, and our ways and custom, including all other capabilities acquired by our forefathers. The Diné way of learning is a way of feeling and talking about life. This type of learning is not limited, yet it has dos and

donts to control itself. We must follow its disciplines. We have dos and donts to control our feelings, our attitudes, and behaviors. (p. 45)

Also, Herbert Benally (1994) writes, “for Navajos, knowledge, learning, and life itself are sacred and interwoven parts of a whole” (p. 23). A fundamental premise in the SNBH paradigm is that knowledge is holistic, spiritual, and has harmonizing and opposing principles capable of harmonious or destructive outcomes. In Navajo philosophy, education or the seeking of knowledge is the process of learning and teaching. It is referred to as *na’nitin* and *óhoo’aah* (Aronilth, 1999). *Na’nitin* is the wisdom of teaching, whereas *óhoo’aah* is the knowledge attained or the outcome and fulfillment of the teaching. It is a dialectical process, and they exist as a duality or two mutually defining opposites. In Navajo philosophy, knowledge is power when it is attained therefore it should be sought only for harmonious outcomes. For example, I have heard Navajo elders say knowledge can be used to oppress or empower people. Thus, it is important to Diné elders that younger generations understand that knowledge should be sought and used to empower self for harmonious purposes. Thereby, by seeking knowledge one internalizes *hozhó*. *Hozhó* is often defined as beauty or a state of balance or harmony.⁴ However, there is more to this concept than the way that it has been simplified by non Navajo scholars. In Diné thought, through the internalization of *hozhó*, knowledge “becomes one’s life” and “the internalized knowledge immunizes one from destructive forces in the world” (Benally, 1994, p. 30). That is, through the process of learning and teaching, *na’nitin dóó ó’hoo’aah*, an individual truly owns the knowledge he or she has sought and uses that knowledge to live a long and harmonious life by being aware and

⁴ For information on how *hozhó* is defined by non Navajos, see Gary Witherspoon, *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe*.

conscious of destructive forces or obstacles in life and using the knowledge of *hozhó* to overcome them.

Subsequently, my Diné fundamental beliefs were also enriched by my mother and my father's stories and life experiences. For example, I remember how my mother would stand over a hot wood stove in our kitchen to prepare some food for us to eat. When she was done cooking, we would all sit down on the floor to eat. At certain times, she would share stories about sheepherding or visiting with Pueblo neighbors. Some stories that stand out for me relate how my mother and her parents would travel to the pueblo village of Jemez to exchange trade goods like mutton, bean, corn, and melons. She would vividly describe how a trip might take several days by wagon and horseback to reach the village of Jemez if there were no rains. My father would also share stories about how he grew up taking care of the family live stock or of the times he was attending boarding school in Riverside, California. Sometimes, his stories were about how he and his father would travel around to different homes in the area to conduct ceremonies for other families and relatives. As I reminisced on their stories, I imagined how it must have been a different time and place compared to my childhood experiences.

Later on in my life, I understood why my mother and father would tell us these stories about their lives and other stories from Diné oral traditions. In their stories about family, my parents helped me to appreciate the importance of *hane'* or Diné oral history. Moreover, they wanted us to reaffirm traditional Diné values about making personal sacrifices for others and the place of family and community in our culture. They wanted us to understand the importance of Diné family values, beliefs, and traditional ways of knowing which are based on *Sá'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón* teachings and the concept

of *k'é*. Many aspects of SNBH teachings are drawn from Diné emergence or origin stories like the Coyote tales.⁵ Coyote tales or *Mq'ii jooldlóshí* are only told in winter time to help shape the minds, thinking, and worldview of young Diné children so they may remember who they are as Diné and ultimately to help inform their identity in the future.

Since, the education of Diné (Indigenous) children ideally begins at the home with elders and parents passing on the traditional teachings and stories about their cultural heritage to their children, it is important to maintain the connections to Indigenous knowledge. Unfortunately, for many Diné youth today, these teachings may have little or no specific contextual meanings since they are often not included as an important part of their contemporary educational experiences in the home or schools. Therefore, many Navajo educators and parents are advocating the need to return to traditional Diné ways of knowing (knowledge) by reaffirming and validating the traditional cultural teachings and knowledge of the elders. For example, in a resource guide for family involvement in Diné education titled *Parent and School Leadership in Education* (2006), the authors write:

Elders were the libraries of knowledge, historians, and traditionalists. The traditional way of life was not explained, but lived and included a way of understanding the rest of the world by being engaged in activities. In the traditional way younger folks did not question the elders and over time learned what they needed to know through observation and listening. This is difficult in contemporary times because the needs and voices of youth are different than the era from which our elders gained their

⁵ For more information on Navajo origin stories. see Paul Zolbrod, *Diné Bahané*

wisdoms. (Division of Diné Education, Office of Diné Culture, Language and Community Services, p. 42)

In this statement, the idea that the needs of contemporary Diné are different is true yet the maintenance of Indigenous (Diné) knowledge is very important still because it defines who we are today. Therefore, it is important to underscore the reality that while traditional Diné knowledge encompasses the history, stories, and knowledge from our past, it is also important in the “here and now” (Yazzie-Mintz, 2008). Therefore, while there remain with us many Navajo elders today who possess the Diné language and cultural knowledge, it is important that younger generations reaffirm and reclaim this knowledge and make it work for them here and now. Furthermore, it is up to Diné communities and families to maintain and use the Diné language in their contemporary lives if our language is to survive into the next century. However, there are some Diné today who may resist or refuse to reaffirm the traditional Diné knowledge and language for many reasons, yet the fact is that this very same knowledge informs who they are as Diné people historically and in the contemporary contexts. That is, our ancestors have persevered and survived as an outcome of holding on to this knowledge. Thus, Diné language and cultural knowledge despite the many years of colonization and cultural genocide remains with us. Therefore, if we embrace this cultural identity and knowledge, I believe we will persevere into the next century as Diné. Based on this idea, I believe that affirming a Diné identity and validating the Diné language and cultural knowledge are very important to the education of Diné children today. Thus, the spiritual connection to the land, the knowledge of our elders, Diné livelihood and traditional values and

beliefs, and ways of knowing are needed more than ever in the contemporary contexts to reaffirm and rearticulate a Diné identity and sense of nationhood.

Personal schooling experiences. When I entered kindergarten at the local elementary school at the age of five, I began to understand that schooling or the white man's education, *Bilagáana yázhí bá'oltá'*, was very different to my education at home. For example, when I first went to boarding school I remember the stress of learning English. We were constantly encouraged to speak it and often reprimanded for talking Navajo. Since English is the language of the white man's school, it soon became apparent to me that although it was alright to speak Navajo in private it was looked down upon by the school. Also in boarding school, I remember the ways that the Navajo and white school staff would constantly enforce us to follow the school's established rules of proper behavior. I began to see that these rules were based on the white man's ways of thinking or behaviors and norms. Whether it was in the dormitories, in the cafeteria, on the playground, or in the classrooms, I remember the fear of being reprimanded for breaking school rules. For example, if we did not line up in a straight line in the kitchen and mind our table manners, we were scolded harshly and often reprimanded by the dorm staff. On one occasion, I remember some students who were forced to get on their knees and hold out their arms for a long period of time just because they were not in bed at the appropriate time.

Mainly, I remember how school was often not very fun or exciting for me. I felt that the most significant part of me which is my Diné cultural identity was always in conflict with what was expected of me. So, I had to make many compromises in terms of what was expected of me and who I was. As I reflect back on my childhood experiences with

schooling now, I believe that my first experiences with school involved experiencing alienation, marginalization, and racism. That is, it became evident to me through my schooling experiences that my Diné identity, language, and cultural knowledge were considered inferior or not good enough for the *bilagáana* or white man's type of education by the school staff, administrators, and society. Furthermore, my early experiences with schooling became an important focal point in my life because I began to see and experience how a racial and ethnic identity was imposed on me within the American school system. For example, I began to understand that I was a Navajo student attending an Indian boarding school. As such, I began to strategize ways to negotiate who I am and who I was expected to be in school. Later, in high school and beyond, I also discovered other ways to identify myself such as; Native, Indian, Native American or American Indian, or Indigenous. As these early experiences began to shape my thinking of myself and my place in the educational system, I began to understand that my place in school and society was that of a racialized "Other".⁶

Over time, I also became observant of many of the asymmetrical relations of power in schools that I felt had much to do with who I am, what I look like, and where I stand in relation to others and schools. That is, I began to experience (feel and see) firsthand the conflicts and tensions that arose between Navajo children, white and non white teachers and administrators, and other students at the schools I attended. More so, I began to see that I had a choice of either following the rules, behaviors, and expectations of the dominant white Anglo-Protestant language and culture or embracing my Diné language and cultural knowledge. In this way, I began to see that the knowledge of school was considered more important by teachers, administrators, and dominant society than what I

⁶ See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*.

brought to school and learned at home. As I reflect and think back on these experiences now, I believe that I was being assimilated to think that I needed to learn the white man's ways and their language if I wanted to fit into their schools and to achieve success in their society at the expense of losing my own.

In reflecting back on my early school experiences during the early to late 1980s, I have to state that my experiences with schooling were in no way similar to the early boarding school experiments of the late 1800s and early 1900s. David Wallace Adams (1995) in *Education for Extinction* describes how corporeal punishment at that time was “just one way of disciplining students”(p. 123). Adams (1995) states:

Although placing students in a school “jail” or “guardhouse” was officially discouraged in the late 1890s, this also remained a standard form of punishment. Actually school officials employed a variety of techniques to keep students in line. Boys might be forced to march back and forth for long periods in the school yard in girls' clothing. Girls, on the other hand, were directed to hold their arms out at length for achingly long periods, to cut the school grass with scissors, or to wear a sign saying, “I ran away”. For minor infractions in the classroom, teachers resorted to timeworn techniques for maintaining control: palm slapping, standing in the corner, and the dunce cap. Disobedience could also result in being assigned to extra chores like scrubbing the floors or cleaning up the school grounds. (p. 123)

Therefore, I believe my experiences with the Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools in the 1980s were certainly in many ways less traumatic and different compared to what other American Indian students experienced in early boarding schools. That is, I did not

experience the corporeal punishment that many of my relatives had to endure in the early boarding schools.

Nevertheless, based on my experiences with schooling and my newly informed current understanding of the modern educational system today as an Indigenous educator, in many ways I am very concerned about the impact of schooling on Native American (Indigenous) youth and other youth of color. I am very concerned for these youth because many of them are not starting on an equal playing field with white students. As I am more aware now of the politics of schooling, identity appropriation and representation, and knowledge production, I see how social and political processes of inclusion and exclusion continue to influence educational policies today that have detrimental effects for Indigenous youth. In an article titled, “Moments of social inclusion and exclusion”, Annette Laureau and Erin Horvat (1999) define moments of inclusion as “the coming together of various forces to provide an advantage to the child in his or her life trajectory” and moments of exclusion as including “placement in a low reading group, retention, placement in remedial groups, and the failure to complete college preparation requirements” (p. 48). In the case of Indigenous youth, often times their family and community’s cultural wealth and funds of knowledge are seen as a deficit to the school curriculum.⁷ That is, because many of these students do not have access to cultural and economic capital in school, many are losing out.⁸

For many Indigenous youth today, while they may not be punished physically anymore, their spirits are still wounded by cultural, institutional and structural racial discrimination and domination. Particularly, as I have witnessed in education, Indigenous

⁷ See Norma Gonzalez, Luis Moll and Cathy Amanti, *Funds of knowledge*.

⁸ See Pierre Bourdieu and John Passeron, *Reproduction in education, culture and society*

youth are racialized as Indian students based on their physical appearances or based on how they identify with their cultural and linguistic identity. According to Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown (2003) in *Racism*, racialization is about “those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities”(p. 101). That is, the concept refers to the categorization and classification of people into racial groups and the process by which people are represented as an “Other”. Furthermore, Miles and Brown (2003) state racialization is a process of signification, “ascribing real or imagined biological characteristics with meaning to define the Other”(p. 101).

In a chapter titled “Racializing Miami” in *How the United States Racializes Latinos*, Aranda, Chang, and Sabogal (2009) use Laura Gomez’s (2007) reference to racialization in *Manifest Destinies* as “how groups come to be identified and to identify themselves in racial terms and learn their place as deserving or undeserving in the racial category” (p. 152). Aranda, Chang, and Sabogal (2009) go on to state:

Racialization thus encompasses not only the physical outlook of racial groups but also impressions of how each group behaves. Contained within each racial category are expectations of behaviors attached to it. These sets of impressions and expectations are adopted as societal ideologies, creating a racial system of oppression that gives rise to myths regarding the inferiority and superiority of particular racial groups. (p.153)

Thus, instead of acknowledging and honoring Indigenous youth identities, which are informed largely by their language and culture, as fluid and multi-faceted, they are

racially ascribed or assigned an identity. That is, there are certain expectations of them to be someone else and they are expected to fit in with existing school educational programs. If they do not comply and resist, they are labeled as at-risk students or problem kids who need extra help with reading and math when their test scores are low or they are assigned to special education classes because they have emotional disorders.

Ironically, there is no acknowledgment on the part of many educators that schools maybe the cause of student failure as well. That is, there are very little discussions about how schooling impacts youth of color who bring different cultural knowledge and linguistic repertoires. There is very little understanding of schools operating as race making institutions that are hurting students of color. Instead, the practice of education goes on as if there are no problems within schools and school business moves along as usual protecting the status quo. Thus, getting an education for Indigenous youth is in many instances linked to negotiating the various competing economic, political, and social ideologies largely informed by white supremacist discourse and often determined by processes of social and cultural reproduction and racialization.⁹ That is, for many Indigenous youth, getting schooled maybe synonymous with playing a game and jumping through the hoops of the educational system when it best fits their intentions.

Since I have started my graduate course work in the field of education, I have been introduced to educational philosophies, theories, and studies that are critical of the status quo in education. As a result, I am beginning to recognize how schools assimilate and marginalize Indigenous youth but also I am able to articulate now how schools can and do racialize students who are from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For example, in studying critical race theory in education, I am now better

⁹ See Jesse Daniels, *White lies: Race, class, and gender in white supremacist discourse*.

equipped to observe the different ways that students of color are racialized in schools and society based on who they are, what they look like, and where they come from. Also based on my own experiences and through reading about internalized racism, I am able to see clearly how students of color begin to accept and internalize that who they are and what they bring to school is not important to schools and society in general. As a consequence, many youth of color internalize feelings of inferiority as racially stigmatized youth.¹⁰ Also, in examining theories of social and cultural reproduction using a critical theory framework, I am becoming more aware of how and why Navajo students like many other students of color are often treated and viewed as not being good enough for a college education or only good for menial low paying jobs. Thus, while these students may embrace the notion of getting a good education that would eventually lead to success, they also must navigate the messy terrain of hitting a glass ceiling in the job markets, facing institutional racism, and/or negating their own cultural and linguistic identity and heritage to succeed. That is, as students of color encounter overt or covert forms of racism in schools from teachers and administrators or at other institutions in the form of racist policies, practices and behaviors that undermine their efforts to succeed, they began to accept defeat, negotiate a middle ground, oppose in ways that are self defeating, or find other ways to resist. Inevitably, students of color learn unconsciously through white supremacist discourse that their languages and cultural knowledge are not important to their education or their success in life.

In addition to my graduate study, I have experienced and observed deeply entrenched racialized beliefs and practices about students of color operating in schools in my work as

¹⁰ Racially stigmatized is a term that refers to how students are stigmatized because of their racial and ethnic identity. See Nancy Lopez, *Hopeful Girl, Troubled Boys*.

a Navajo language resource teacher in the school district where I have worked for over 10 years. For example, I have often dealt with teachers and administrators, the majority of them white, who exhibit racist behaviors and attitudes about Navajo students and other students of color. Specifically, I have heard or heard of administrators and teachers who express outright their reservations about the need and importance of having Navajo language and culture classes for Navajo students. For example, on one occasion, a Navajo language teacher with whom I work relayed to me a story about a white home room teacher who unabashedly asked her Navajo students , “What is so important about your culture that you are late to class?” The students were several minutes late getting back to their home room class because they had been participating in a Navajo cultural activity in their Navajo class.

On a more subtle level, I have also observed colorblind racism when teachers say, “I don’t see race” or “I don’t see color”. This new type of racism is when and how whites try to minimize racism or naturalize racism as the way things are, thereby placing the blame or shame of always bringing up issues about race and racism on people of color. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) in *Racism with Racists* describes this new racial ideology as “a loose organized set of ideas, phrases, and stories that help whites justify contemporary white supremacy”(p. 178). As a result of these racializing practices, I have witnessed the frustration of Navajo parents whose children were labeled as culturally disadvantaged because of their language and cultural differences. Consequently, these racializing behaviors, discourse, and practices continue to maintain and sustain white supremacy within our “racialized society” and particularly in our racialized educational institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Thus, white supremacy is not just the actions and

propaganda of neo-Nazi skin heads or hate groups, but it lies at the foundation of a much larger white supremacist racial ideologies that could be described as a monolithic overarching hegemonic umbrella of racial, economic, and gender oppression (Daniels, 1997). Daniels (1997) states “by obfuscating the connections between white supremacist movements and the white supremacist context”, white supremacy remains unexamined within the academic and educational contexts (p.24).

To this day, I often wonder if our early Navajo (Diné) leaders like Chief Manuelito who survived confinement at Bosque Redondo at the hands of the white man and lived to sign the Treaty of 1868 would have agreed to let their children be educated in the white man’s schools if they knew that it would also be at the expense of losing their Diné identity, language and culture. Yet, I am also very aware that given the circumstances at the time, even if they knew, I believe the survival of the Diné people was a more pressing issue for the survival of the people as a whole. Ironically, although schools were part of the promise by the United States government to our early Navajo leaders in the Treaty of 1868 to make their lives better after being incarcerated for four years at Bosque Redondo, they have also become sites of struggle and contestation over the value of holding on to a Diné identity and the Diné language and cultural knowledge. Also, I often wonder if our parents were aware of the stakes that by sending us to schools we would be inculcated against our wills with the cultural values and beliefs of white stream thought and education.¹¹ Yet I am also aware that only by pursuing the dream and promise of self defined and self controlled education can Indigenous communities actively engage in determining their own education and to actively to work together and with others to

¹¹ See Sandy Grande, *Red Pedagogy*. White stream is described by Grande as white Anglo Protestant, euro-centric thought.

revitalize and reaffirm their Indigenous cultural knowledge. This is the promise of Indigenous education into the next century. This is the goal of this research study.

Background of the study

Since 1492, the encroachment of Euro-Western, Anglo, white Protestant civilization unto Indigenous lands in the Western hemisphere resulted in the decimation, destruction, and subjugation of much of the traditional, cultural knowledge systems and languages of Native (Indigenous) people who lived here.¹² In *American Education*, Joel Spring (2003) describes the impact of White Anglo-Protestant education, values, and beliefs on Native American languages and cultures since the late 1700s to the present. Spring (2003) states:

Whites considered conquered Indian tribes to be culturally and morally inferior.

Consequently, educational programs established by the federal government were designed to deculturalize the tribes and then “civilize” them. Deculturalization included attempts to destroy Native American cultures, languages, and religion.

Because federal leaders were concerned with winning the loyalty of those conquered people, deculturalization was accompanied by Americanization programs. (p. 190-191)

Often, these racist ethnocentric beliefs were wrapped up within white American notions or beliefs of the worth of a good education and democratic values.

Since the last twenty years, Indigenous and critical race theory scholars like Derrick Bell (1992), Philip Deloria (2004), Vine Deloria, Jr. (2001), Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001), Robert Williams, Jr. (1990) are putting forth new ideas and ways of

¹² While Native American is a racial category, I use the term interchangeably with the term Indigenous and Native where appropriate. Indigenous is a term that is used mainly as a politically defined category by Indigenous people around the world today, whereas Native is used to denote Native peoples or cultures of particular place.

talking about these social and historical events and issues that impact not only Blacks and Native Americans but other people of color. These ideas clearly describe the impact of colonization and the processes of racialization that have a significant impact on Indigenous people and other people of color and their cultural knowledge and languages. For example, Vine Deloria Jr.(2001) in *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* writes “for many centuries, whites scorned the knowledge of American Indians, regarding whatever the people said as gross, savage superstition, and insisting their own view of the world...was the highest intellectual achievement of our species” (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001, p.1).¹³ Not only do these scholars point to the ethno-centricism and cultural racism of whites, but they also highlight how whites constructed the idea of race to rationalize their notions of racial superiority over others. In response, some Indigenous scholars, like Mik'maq scholar, Marie Battiste (2000) and Maori scholar, Graham Smith (2002) have explicated how Eurocentric systems of knowledge or theory must be rejected since they are essentially manifestations of prevailing dominant white racial and cultural attitudes and beliefs or white supremacy about the inferiority of Indigenous and other people of color.

Consequently, in many instances, United States government policies were informed by white supremacist racial attitudes and beliefs that called for the complete extermination or genocide of Native people or were instrumental in the creation of federal and state government educational programs aimed at the assimilation of Native American tribes (Adams, 1995). Eventually, these racially informed assimilation policies created the impetus for the creation of on reservation and off reservation Indian boarding

¹³ American Indian is a term that refers to the U.S. federally recognized tribes in the lower 48 states. It is used synonymously with Native American and Indian in many scholarly publications.

schools in the late 1800s (Lomawaima, 1999; Adams, 1995). Adams (1995) states the primary purpose of Indian boarding schools was to “strip away all outward signs of the children’s identification with tribal life....to be instructed in the ideas, values, and behaviors of white civilization” (p. 100-101). That is, a white man’s education would make Native children forget their own cultural knowledge and languages and acquire a Western American education. Instead most Indian children received a haphazard type of education involving only vocational training.

What is the difference between education and schooling? An important question that needs to be addressed by Indigenous (Native) communities, scholars, and educators involves distinguishing traditional Indigenous education from the process of schooling. That is, the first, *education*, is very different from the process of *schooling*, because it is understood as a life-long process, while the latter is viewed as occurring for a short period of time. In *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person*, Levinson and Holland (1996) state “our definition of the ‘school’ is broad, yet specific: a state organized or regulated institution of intentional instruction.”(p.2). In contrast to this, Levinson and Holland (1996) state:

Education is even more broadly defined. We follow the usual anthropological practice of distinguishing education from schooling. Anthropologists have long recognized the existence of culturally specific and relative definitions of the educated person...although the degree for cultural training is formalized, situated as a remove from activities for which the training is intended, and provided on a mass scale may vary, anthropologists recognize all societies as providing some kind of training and some set of criteria by which members can be identified as more, or less,

knowledgeable. Distinct societies, as well as ethnic groups and micro cultures within these societies, elaborate the cultural practices by which particular sets of skills, knowledges, and discourses come to define the fully “educated” person. (p. 2)

In *To Remain An Indian*, K. Tsianiana Lomawaima and Teresa McCarty (2006) make an important distinction between Indian education, American Indian education, and schooling. They maintain that American Indian education is the colonial education that was imposed on Indian communities through the creation and implementation of Indian boarding schools. Also, they distinguish between Indian education and the process of schooling, where the latter is more concerned with what we see in schools, what happens in schools, and who operates schools. In contrast, Indian education is defined as the traditional epistemological, “ecological” knowledge, languages, world view, and social and cultural practices that are passed on from one generation to the next in Indigenous communities (Lomawaima and McCarty, 2006; Deloria and Wildcat, 2001; and Cajete, 1994).

Thus due to this incongruence of the terms schooling and education in many peoples’ minds, I argue that in the contemporary and historical educational contexts of schooling, the education of Native American (Indigenous) students is often framed and grossly misunderstood within larger competing social, cultural, economic, and political ideologies. Instead, Indian education is often defined against and within a white supremacist context that mainly works to undermine Indigenous communities through racializing educational policies, beliefs, and practices. For example, dominant economic and political ideologies whether they are conservative or liberal minded with respect to school curriculum, school

reform, and academic achievement are ultimately dictated by the forces of capitalism and white supremacy which have historically de-valued Indigenous cultural knowledge and languages. In *Race and Curriculum*, Cameron McCarthy (1990) describes the “division between mainstream frameworks” in education as “a tension between biological and cultural explanations of differential school performance” (p. 16 – 17). McCarthy (1990) adds “conservative educators generally locate minority school failure in the innate and biological capacities and characteristics of minority youth” and “Liberal educators...point instead to differential cultural resources at home”(p.17). Therefore, relative to the education of Diné (Indigenous) youth today, a prevalent mainstream ideology in education is primarily based on historical and socially constructed notions of race and cultural inferiority. Thus, it is no surprise that contemporary white racial ideologies in the media continue unabated to perpetuate the “Bloodthirsty Savage” and “Noble Savage” racial stereotypes in popular mainstream discourse which inevitably informs educational discourse (Williams Jr., 1990). At the extreme is the right wing conservative racial ideology that asserts that Native American students’ cultures and languages are not important to school learning and academic achievement therefore they do not need to be acknowledged or must be eradicated through education (Lomawaima and McCarty, 2006).

Thereby, as a result of underlying white supremacist racial ideologies Native American cultures and languages like the culture and language of other diverse ethnic groups are only minimally accepted as part of the pluralistic and multicultural democratic American society – that is, the melting pot of Western civilization; yet they are not important to school learning and success in the American way of life. Michael Fletcher

(2008) in *American Indian Education* makes a convincing argument about this point in regards to the popular slogan of “kill the Indian, save the man”. While this propaganda was used in the public media by many white liberals during the late 1800s to justify the removal of Indian children from their homes and off to reservation boarding schools, Fletcher (2008) reminds us that this slogan has been replaced by a more subtle message of doing a “better job educating Indian students, allowing Indian people and Indian tribes more access and participation in the process” (p. 5). This irony is also evident in the recurrent liberal left wing agenda that espouses cultural diversity or pluralism without recognizing cultural differences using instead rhetoric like equal opportunity and cultural sensitivity (McCarthy, 1990; Bhahba, 1997). In an interview titled “The Third Space” with Jonathan Rutherford, Homi Bhahba (1990) articulates this idea of acknowledging cultural diversity versus containing cultural difference very well. Bhahba (1990) states:

In fact the sign of the “cultured” or the “civilised” attitude is the ability to appreciate cultures in a kind of *musée imaginaire*; as though one should be able to collect and appreciate them... Following from this, you begin to see the way in which the endorsement of cultural diversity becomes a bedrock of multicultural education policy in this country. There are two problems with it: one is the very obvious one, that although there is always an entertainment and encouragement of cultural diversity, there is always also a corresponding containment of it. A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that “these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid”. This is what I mean by a creation of cultural diversity and a containment of cultural difference. (p. 208)

That is, much of the blatant racism that was directed towards people of color by white liberals has been rearticulated with a discourse about meritocracy and “abstract liberalism” through colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). This is apparent in modern educational discourse as espoused by white liberals and conservatives alike. However, this ideology has taken on a more subtle message of tolerance that suggests that Native American cultures are unique and different but that an American identity and set of core American values are more important for the good of American society. Spring (2001) writes “it is important to understand that for some Americans, racism and democracy are not conflicting beliefs but are part of a general system of American values”(p. 7). As a result, there is very little support from the nation-state apparatus, that is, the federal and state government, for Native American education, language preservation, and cultural revitalization efforts. Thus, the existing educational policies about acknowledging and honoring cultural diversity are but mere rhetoric that can be explained by “shifts in federal educational policies” or a “safety zone” paradigm (Lomawaima and McCarty, 2006). Somewhat similar to the interest convergence principle in critical race theory, Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) explain the notion of the safety zone as follows, “an area where dangerously different cultural expressions might be safely domesticated and neutralized”(p. xxii).

Consequently, these views have become central to the views of a “hegemonic bloc” of conservatives, neoliberals, and authoritarian populists that are centered on “marketized solutions”, “accountability”, a “return” to higher standards, and “preservation” of white selective traditions (Apple, 2001). Thus, although there is an acknowledgment that the culture and language of Native American students are important to maintaining cultural

pluralism, a *laissez faire* attitude in education and free markets are the main driving forces behind current educational reforms (Apple, 2001). Furthermore, these white racial ideologies about Native American languages and cultures state that language and cultural diversity should be preserved and maintained but kept in the home and community and not placed in schools.

Thus, these new racial ideologies essentially rearticulate the white racial ideology of the early 1900s that racial minorities like Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics need to get away or out from under social and economic welfare programs and move towards achieving the American dream by working harder. Thereby, white supremacy reinforces the myths of meritocracy and democracy in education (Omi and Winant, 1994; Leonardo, 2009). Thereby, the current main ideological position that stands unchallenged and unquestioned in education is that education is still a great equalizer because it leads to a prosperous citizenry and a good “just” society that can compete well within the world markets (Apple, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Based on these assumptions, I contend that Indigenous (Diné) educators and researchers must look at the ways in which past and current white supremacist educational ideologies and policies impact Indigenous youth and their cultural and linguistic heritage by situating them within a critical analysis of schooling.

The impact of white supremacy on Indigenous languages and cultural identity.

In addition to the inequities that exist in the schools, it is also very important to analyze why Indigenous languages like Navajo have undergone a dramatic language shift in use and acceptance from Navajo to English within Navajo communities and the family structure. Since the late 1980s, as an outcome of research on the status of Indigenous

languages like Navajo, many Native American language groups have become increasingly aware of language shift in their communities (House, 2002; McCarty, 2001; Crawford, 1995; Rehyner, 1990). For example, in some recent research studies, language scholars have attributed language loss to internal factors related to shame, language use and language attitudes within Indigenous communities (Lee, 1999; Benjamin, Pecos & Romero, 1996). For example, in the study of a Pueblo community in New Mexico, Benjamin et al (1998) describe an internal schism that evolved between those who wanted a “progressive” vs. “traditional” lifestyle thereby contributing to an ongoing debate about the loss of language in the larger community¹⁴. In this case, the progressives influenced many of the community members by promoting the advantages of learning English in order to succeed in society. Thus, I contend that Native American language shift and loss are largely a consequence of white supremacist ideologies and educational policies that are aimed at suppressing and subjugated Indigenous languages. This is evident in the lack of or minimal support from policy makers, school administrators, teachers, and parents for Native language and cultural knowledge which needs to be addressed at the personal, institutional, and societal levels by educational researchers. Lily Wong Fillmore (1991) also attributes the loss of home or primary language among some language minority groups to learning English as a second language¹⁵. Based on her research Fillmore (1991) contends that language shift occurs when the home or primary language is gradually replaced by another more dominant language through the process of bilingualism. Particularly, Fillmore’s study is primarily concerned with the impact of language shift on bilingual children and their families particularly if parents are no longer

¹⁴ Pueblo is a term used to refer to the Pueblo people of the Southwest in the past and currently.

¹⁵ Language minority is a term I use to refer to languages other than English such as Spanish, Navajo, or Vietnamese

able to communicate with their children. As a consequence, Fillmore (1991) states, “what is lost is no less than the means by which parents socialize their children: When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences”(p.343).

This is particularly important especially when looking at the treatment of Native American (Indigenous) language and culture in schools that serve large populations of Native (Indigenous) youth. For example, in the state of New Mexico, the inequitable distribution of Navajo course offerings, curriculum materials, and bilingual funding for Navajo language programs in schools serving large populations of Navajo students is suspect. In the state of New Mexico in 2003 only 11% of school districts in New Mexico with high populations of Navajo students offered any Navajo (heritage) language classes or courses (New Mexico Public Department of Education, 2003). Therefore, while many New Mexico schools may be complying with the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 in offering alternative language services for English language learners and/or bilingual programs for Spanish, many of these same schools are only partly offering and supporting Indigenous language students despite the passage of the Native American Languages Act of 1990.¹⁶ Thus, based on my own experience and observations as a Navajo language teacher, I contend that Navajo students are very much aware of the lack of acceptance and respect for the Navajo culture and language in schools and the larger mainstream society.

¹⁶ For more information on Bilingual Education in New Mexico, refer to <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/BilingualMulticultural/dl10/Article23-BilingualEducationLaw.pdf> and for more information on the Native American Languages Act of 1990, refer to <http://www.nabe.org/files/NALanguagesActs.pdf>

While some researchers have all underscored the importance of maintaining Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge in Indigenous communities to help maintain the well being of individuals in the community and the community itself, language loss and shift are still very much imminent (Lomawaima and McCarty, 2006; McCarty, 2001; and Hinton, 1994). Overall, these studies have identified a crucial need to reverse *language shift* (RLS) through legislation and community actions as a way to revitalize Indigenous languages. Yet despite the enactment of some recent legislation like the Native American Languages Act of 1990 or the Esther Martinez Language Act of 2005, personal testimonies from recent preliminary reports from the National Indian Education Association describe how other federal legislation like NCLB continue to undermine Native American language programs and thwart Native language revitalization efforts.¹⁷

In looking at the impact of English language particularly on Navajo communities, scholars like Teresa McCarty (2001) and Deborah House (2002) have implicated the intersection of language, power, and ideology in their research on Navajo language. For example, up until the late 1960s and early 1970s, Navajo was the primary spoken language in many homes on the Navajo reservation and many Navajo children came to school speaking only Navajo (McCarty, 2001; Holm and Holm, 1995). Prior to that time, the language as a whole was not yet threatened by the intrusion of English language. However, with the introduction of more day schools and local boarding schools from the mid 1960s to mid 1970s, many Navajo children and families who were mandated to attend white Anglo schools to get a five year special education and to learn the English

¹⁷ For more information on the Esther Martinez Act, refer to <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h109-4766>

language by using English more in their everyday language (McCarty, 2001; House, 2002).

In *A Place to be Navajo*, McCarty (2001) details the impact of Navajo language shift on one particular Navajo community. Based on her work on the Navajo reservation over the last two decades, McCarty (2001) states “we have observed an alarming shift in children’s use of and proficiency in Navajo....more and more children come to school each year with only passive knowledge of the community language” (p.15). McCarty (2001) adds “like other indigenous groups, the Navajo Nation is caught in a tidal wave of language shift, a situation in which there are fewer and fewer heritage speakers every generation”(p.179). Thus, according to recent studies on language shift more Navajo children are coming to school not speaking their languages, parents are not teaching their children, and much of this language shift has been attributed to increased internal and external factors which are tied up with language, ideology and power (Holm and Holm, 1995; Dick and McCarty, 1996; Lee and McLaughlin, 2001; and House, 2002),

While there are Navajo Nation educational policies that specifically state that “instruction in the Navajo language shall be made available for all grade levels in all schools serving the Navajo Nation”, Navajo is still severely threatened and there continues to be significant drops in the number of Navajo speakers who come to school (Division of Diné Education, 2003). For example, according to recent 1990 U.S. Census data, the number of school age Navajo speakers between the ages of 5 -17 has dramatically decreased from 48 percent to a little over 7 percent in a twenty year period (U.S. Census Bureau; as cited in Crawford, 1995). Also, since that time from 1990 to 2000, a period of ten years, the numbers have decreased even more. According to

American Community Survey reports on Language Use in the U.S. based on findings from the 2000 Census data, out of the entire population of 309,575 Navajo people reported, there were only 170,717 who were identified as being speakers of Navajo. More significantly, 0.3% of this number or 51,215 which included individuals who were age 5 and older were reported as being speaker of the language (American Community Survey Report, U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). That is, the number of Navajo language speakers while remaining strong in the older age groups is declining significantly among the younger generations. Further, in looking at the maintenance and survival of Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge, recent qualitative and quantitative studies on Indigenous communities have found that Indigenous languages continue to be severely threatened by outside influences or forces which are the ongoing legacy of colonization. Namely, these forces operate under the auspices of white supremacy, which is the overarching racial ideology that operates to maintain institutional racism, epistemological racism, and lingua-racism in schools.

As the notion of Americanization emerged during the latter part of the 1900s due to increased immigration, the struggles for equality by people of color in the United States increased because languages and cultures are inherently bound to politics of schooling and ethnicity (Spring, 2003; Lopez, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Thus, in response to the increasing diversity of the American people, people of color who are viewed as being culturally and linguistically different were considered to be un-American especially if they did not conform to the ideals of dominant mainstream white society. By reframing this nexus of language, ideology, and power, Pierre Bourdieu (1999) states that language is in fact an ideology. That is, because language is a code and thus “a system of norms

regulating linguistic practices” it is “bound up with the state, both in its genesis and in its social uses” (Bourdieu, 1999, p.45).

Recently some critical scholars have implicated that language shift is directly related to the dynamics of language, power and ideology or hegemony. In looking at how and why minority and Indigenous languages and culture knowledge are being replaced by English through the processes of schooling, language socialization, and globalization, Macedo, Dendrino, and Gounari (2003) have articulated a “hegemony of English”. This has also been referred to as “linguo-racism” and linguicism (Skutnabb-Kangass, 1999; Phillipson, 1999). Tove Skutnabb-Kangass (1999), a leading scholar in sociolinguistics defines linguicism or “mono-lingualism as a reflection of ideology” (p.40). Thus, these critical scholars argue that the language rights of Indigenous and other linguistically and culturally diverse language groups are connected to power and ideology within a white supremacist context. Consequently, bilingual education has become and continues to be a topic of much debate and controversy in the United States because many Americans namely those from the conservative and neoliberal camps are not well informed about the issues or altogether ignore its benefits because of entrenched social, cultural, economic and political beliefs which are linked to racism, nationalism, and homogenization (Macedo, Dendrinos, and Gounari, 2003; Skutnabb-Kangass, 1988). For example, in looking specifically at English Only policies like Proposition 227, Stritikus (2002) states “by imposing the view that learning English as quickly as possible is essential to immigrant [and Native] students, Proposition 227 positions all other languages as having a marginal status” and present “a challenge to the notion that languages other than

English have a legitimate and valuable place in the education of diverse students” (p.10).

18

While there have been some significant research studies in Hispanic and Navajo bilingual education (e.g., Collier, 1992; Rosier and Holm, 1980) which clearly describes the positive effects of bilingualism on the academic performance of bilinguals, there remains strong opposition from the English Only movement (Crawford, 1992).¹⁹ In regards to this movement, Macedo et al (2003) state:

Both the rapid spread of English worldwide and the recent movements within the United States to outlaw instruction in languages other than English should be analyzed in tandem with a variety of contemporary race-related issues: vicious attacks on people of color, the demonization of immigrants, the dismantling of affirmative action, and the assault of welfare programs of the poor. These are all part and parcel of an unapologetic dominant ideology which was unleashed with the imposition of neoliberalism. (p. 61)

As a result, research data on the status of Indigenous languages here in the United States reveals that of the 155 Native languages including Navajo that are still spoken among an entire population, 87 are moribund or no longer being learned by children (Krauss, 1988; as cited in Crawford, 1995). Specifically, this data underpins the reality that more and more children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are not learning

¹⁸ Proposition 227 is also referred to as the Unz initiative. For a full text of the proposed law , visit <http://primary98.ss.ca.gov/VoterGuide/Propositions/227text.htm>

¹⁹ For more information, refer to Crawford (1992). Also you can visit <http://www.onenation.org/> (English For the Children website)

their heritage or primary language as a result of language shift and competing political agendas.

Statement of the problem

While there have been studies by Native American researchers and scholars (e.g., Lipka with Mohatt, and the Ciulistet Group, 1998; Demmert Jr., 2001; Cleary and Peacock, 1998) that highlight the significance of Native culture and language in the lives of Native (Indigenous) youth, more critical examinations are needed that look at the ways that Native American students are being impacted by the process of schooling. For example, by critically examining the ways that schools marginalize, racialize, and subjugate Indigenous youth, educational scholars can begin to understand why and how many Indigenous youth (not all) begin to accept and believe that their language, cultural beliefs, practices, and values are not important to their contemporary educational experiences and lives. Thus, future research on Indigenous youth must look to alternative ways of doing educational research and allow for competing paradigms in education that can help to explain the shifts in economic, political, and social policies in educational reform for Indigenous youth (Martinez, 2003).

Past studies on Navajo youth in education significantly underpin the impact that racism and ideology have on Navajo identity (House, 2002; Deyhle, 1995; Vadas, 1995). These studies strongly implicate the need to look at the myriad of reasons why students succeed academically or fail in school at the secondary and post secondary levels. In a longitudinal study of Navajo and Ute students, Donna Deyhle (1992, 1995) implicates “racial warfare” as a significant cause as to how and why some students fail. In her study, she describes the lack of acknowledgement of racism by school administrators and the

lack of support for Navajo language and culture in the schools by pointing to the cultural conflicts and racial tensions between white schools administrators, teachers, and students and the Native American communities. Most importantly, Deyhle (1995) makes a strong point in her study by pointing out how white administrators often referred to the cultural differences between the two groups as the cause of the problems while ignoring the concerns of Navajo students and parents about racial discrimination. Deyhle (1995) states:

Racism frames the stage and remains a barrier for all Navajo students regardless of their academic success or social compliance. Ironically, academic achievement under these conditions is questionable because of the watered down curriculum and the persistent discrimination in the job market. This suggests that school reform and changes in the job market must be connected in order to talk about educational success in a meaningful way. (p.438).

In analyzing this statement by Deyhle (1995) about the “watered down curriculum”, “school reform”, and “changes in the job market” being connected in a meaningful way, it is imperative that more critical studies are needed that address the cultural, economic, historical, and political contexts within education. That is, more research related to Indigenous education is needed that look at what is taught in schools, who is operating schools, what are the purpose of schools, how schools have operated in the past, and how are schools currently operating to meet the needs of Indigenous and other students of color.

While Deyhle’s research speaks to some general claims from John Ogbu’s explanations about voluntary and involuntary minorities, Deyhle (1995) states “Navajos,

in contrast, have never been an essential part of the White dominated economy”(p.407).

Deyhle (1995) goes on to state:

Whereas Ogbu views the cultures of caste like minorities as a reaction to the dominant white group, I believe that Navajo practices and culture represent a distinct and independent tradition. Navajo do occupy a caste-like, subordinate position in the larger social context. However, only a small part of Navajo cultural characteristics can appropriately be called “secondary” or “oppositional”. Navajos face and resist the domination of their Anglo neighbors from an intact cultural base that was not developed in reaction to Anglo domination. An oppositional description of Navajo culture ignores the integrity of Navajo culture and neglects the substantive value disagreements between Navajos and Anglos. (p. 407-408)

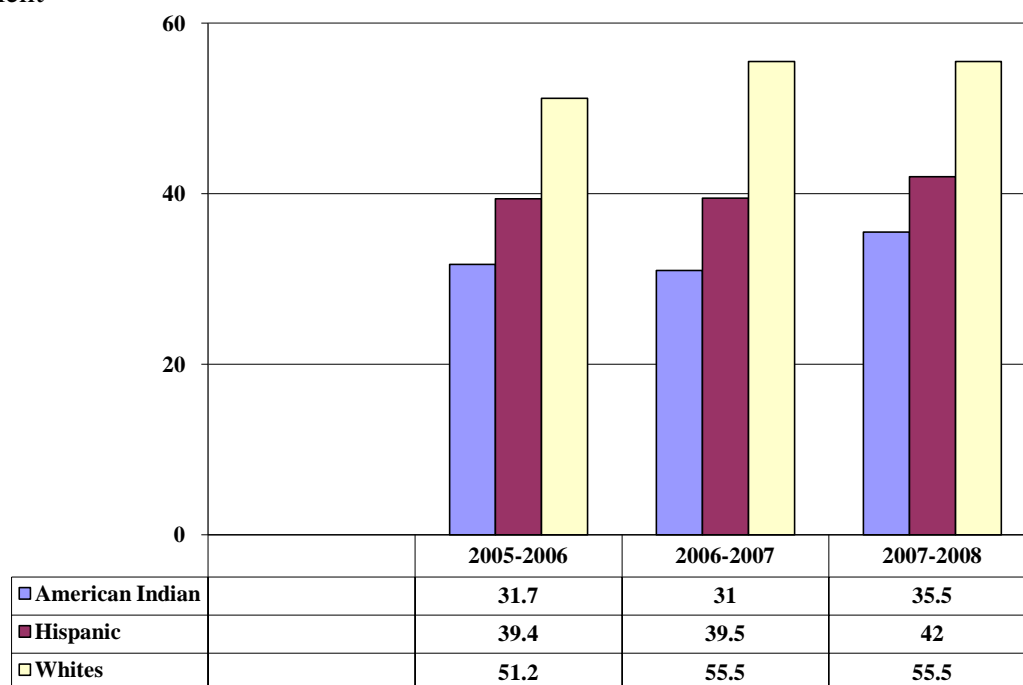
That is, Deyhle (1995) contends that Ogbu “does not see culture as a terrain of conflict, nor does he perceive the significance of race as contributing to racial warfare”(p. 409). Instead, her research supports my own assertion that “Navajo students’ experiences of racial and cultural warfare must be place at the center of an explanatory model of their education and work experiences” (Deyhle, 1995, p. 409). What Deyhle’s study implicates for me as an educator and scholar is that more research and different theoretical frameworks are needed that acknowledge and honor the perspectives of Indigenous youth about their hopes and dreams for success in education.

By drawing on critical race theory and critical educational studies to examine complex issues related to race, class, and gender, I believe that more questions instead of answers are revealed that underscore the ways that Diné (Navajo) and other Native American students are racialized by educational institutions. For example, in looking at

the data on the academic achievement of Native American (Indigenous) youth like Navajo students particularly in the areas of reading and math, the results reveals a rather bleak picture nationally and locally as a result of the marginalization and subjugation of Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge in schools. According to a National Indian Study Report on the Performance of American Indian and Alaskan Native students at Grade 4 and 8 on NAEP 2007 Reading and Math Assessments, American Indian/Alaska Native students generally scored lower than White and Asian/Pacific Islander students but not measurably different from Hispanic students (National Center for Education Statistics, National Indian Study, 2008).

Table 1

A Comparison of the Percentage of Native Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasian (white) students proficient in Reading from 2005 – 2008, New Mexico Standards Based Assessment



²⁰Source: New Mexico State Based Assessment Data, NMPED

²⁰ See New Mexico State Based Assessment Data, New Mexico Public Education Department
<http://www.ped.state.nm.us/AssessmentAccountability/AcademicGrowth/NMSBA.html>

In the area of math, the study reports that “AI/AN fourth- and eighth-graders scored higher than their Black peers and lower than their White and Asian/Pacific Islander peers in 2007. There was no significant difference in scores compared with their Hispanic peers at either grade” (National Center for Education Statistics, National Indian Study, 2008, p. 45).

Similarly, according to data from the New Mexico Public Education Department Standards Based Assessments, students meeting proficiency in Reading and Math from school years 2005 to 2008 also reveals stark differences between achievement rates for Native Americans compared to Caucasian and Hispanic students (See Table 1).

So the many question arise for me like why are whites disproportionately doing better on these tests than other students of color? Certainly, while there are some slight differences between AI/AN, Black and Hispanic students, the data reveals locally and nationally that whites students scored higher on standardized tests than students of color.

Thus, as I looked at and reviewed the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* to see how it addresses the needs of Native American youth, I noticed several things that raised some critical questions for me. While the law states:

It is the policy of the United States to fulfill the Federal Government’s unique and continuing trust relationship with and responsibility to the Indian people for the education of Indian children. The Federal Government will continue to work with local educational agencies, Indian tribes and organizations, postsecondary institutions, and other entities toward the goal of ensuring that programs that serve Indian children are of the highest quality and provide for not only the basic

elementary and secondary educational needs, but also the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of these children. (No Child Left Behind, 2008) ²¹

An immediate question that comes to mind is; can Indian children be afforded a high quality education if their language and cultural are not valued or honored? Also, how can Indian children succeed when schools are not held accountability for addressing their own flaws? That is, how have local educational agencies that are mandated by NCLB to meet the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of Native American children been able to do this when the act has been primarily focused on accountability and “high stakes testing” (Lipman, 2004). In *High Stakes Testing*, Pauline Lipman (2004) states:

NCLB crystallizes neoliberal, business-oriented education policy. Business rhetoric of efficiency, accountability, and performance standards and the redefinition of education to serve the labor market have become the common vocabulary of educational policies across the United States, and increasingly, globally. (p. 170)

Thus, as current educational reforms like No Child Left Behind highlight accountability, raising test scores, and closing achievement gaps between rich and poor and all racial groups, it ignores the structural inequities stemming from issues around race, class, and gender inequality in schools.

This is evident in recent national and state reports on closing the achievement gaps for all children. For example, a state report in New Mexico on closing the achievement gap points to: a focus only on clear and public standards for what students should learn at benchmark grade levels, implementing a challenging curriculum aligned with standards,

²¹ See No Child Left Behind and Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, U.S Department of Education website (www.ed.gov/index).

additional instruction, more time and support for some students, and good teaching (New Mexico First, 2009, p.14). Thus, upon critical examination, the focus on closing the achievement gap does not address important issues like curriculum bias, racial discrimination practices, and recognizing student differences. Thus, mainstream white liberal, neo-liberal, and conservative ideologies in education today as aforementioned continue to operate and maintain the status quo under the guise of economic and instrumental rationalism which continue to impact Indigenous communities and other communities of color with many detrimental results (Apple, 2002; McCarthy, 1999). Based on this, I see now how the promise of NCLB to close the achievement gap for all students is unrealistic especially for racially stigmatized and marginalized minority groups like Native American students. In a *2005 Preliminary Report on No Child Behind in Indian Country* by the National Indian Education Association, the report in regards to the impact of NCLB on Native American communities states:

- The statute is rigid and it tends to leave children behind.
- We need opportunity; we need resources to do that.
- (Any) Success has clearly been at the expense and diminishment of Native language and culture.
- The approach dictated by the law has created serious negative consequences.
- Schools are sending the message that, if our children would just work harder, they would succeed without recognizing their own system failures.
- Indian children are internalizing the (school) systems failures as their personal failure.
- Children have different needs.

- It does not provide for the level funding that we need.
- Music, art, social studies, languages- these areas are totally ignored by the law.

(p. 7-8)

Finally, it is also important to ask how education is equitable for all students when many educators and policy makers still hold on to covertly racist colorblind ideologies as espoused through cultural deficit discourse about the inferior status of Indigenous cultural knowledge and languages.

Thus, while NCLB continues to be the panacea for white neo-liberal and conservative lawmakers, school administrators, and teachers that promises educational reform for all, it also continues to perpetuate cultural deficiency models which places the blame for failure in education back on children and communities of color once more (Leonardo, 2009). Leonardo (2009) states:

When educators face punishments resulting from insufficient yearly progress, they are policed by an unspoken whiteness...Many affected schools and districts boast high numbers of students of color. When the white referent of NCLB is not discussed, these communities receive the impression that they are failing non-racialized academic standards. The upshot is that the fault is entirely theirs, a cornerstone of color-blind discourse that conveniently forgets about structural reasons for school failure. (p. 130).

Consequently, the structural inequalities are left unabated and unchanged. This has been my experience not only as a student but as an educator.

Furthermore, the voices of Indigenous youth themselves are almost never acknowledged to understand how schools alienate, marginalize, and racialize Native or

Diné (Indigenous) students, their language and cultural identity. As a result, there are still many pressing questions that need to be answered because they highlight the issues and concerns of Indigenous students, families, and communities. For example; how do socio-cultural, economic, and political factors impact and influence Native youth like in education to succeed or fail? In what ways does the process of schooling impact or influence contemporary Native racial and cultural identities? What is happening within Native cultures that are inhibiting many Native students and parents from learning and (re)-teaching traditional cultural values and language? Why, despite the desire of many Native students to learn their language are they still not learning it? Why are some Native people ashamed of speaking their Native languages? Why are some Native parents deliberately not teaching the language to their children? Finally, how do the processes of colonization and racialization impact academic success or failure in schools? Therefore, Indigenous (Diné) researchers must critically examine the values and beliefs that informed the creation of Indian schools (and contemporary educational agendas) which were (are) based on profound underlying white supremacist racial ideologies about the inferior status of Indigenous people by historically situating economic, social, and political movements and agendas (Spring, 2001).

Therefore many questions remain. They are: what about Navajo students who fail regardless of whether they were connected to strong cultural values or have assimilated well into white society? How do Navajo youth negotiate the politics of race and identity? How do Navajo youth navigate the school curriculum and the many competing forms of political, economic, and social agendas largely informed by white supremacy?

As educators serving Navajo youth continue to ignore or marginalize Navajo students' experiences with schooling, many underlying causes for school failure go unanswered. As a result, a false dichotomy of Navajo student achievement/failure is created that ignores the complexity of questions that underscore identity development and formation. Also, more research is needed that understands the dynamic processes related to social and cultural reproduction which are also bound up in issues around racism, classicism, sexism, and a politics of misrepresentation and misappropriation of Indigenous cultural knowledge. Therefore, by analyzing and reframing the politics of identity from students' voices to underscore the complexities of identity formation and representation, the voices of students do not go unheard and silenced within schools and the academy.

In addition to looking at student voice, more critical studies related to identity formation are needed that underscore the notions of border crossings, cultural differences, and hybridity to understand the fluidity of identity (Grande, 2004; Bhahba, 2001; Anzaldua, 1999). In *The location of culture*, Homi Bhahba (1994) asks the following questions in regards to cultural difference:

How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formatted in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation or discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual, and even incommensurable? (p. 2)

In a recent study of Indigenous high school youth, Taos/Diné scholar, Glenabah Martinez (2003) illustrates how Indigenous youths' voice can be heard in educational research. More so, Martinez's (2003) study reveals the complex nature of constructing and negotiating identity within the nexus of race, culture, class, gender, and language struggles.

For Indigenous educators and scholars engaged in educational research, it is important to acknowledge the identity formation of Indigenous youth within the educational context because identity is continually articulated and rearticulated. For example, in attempting to understand the process of racialization in regards to this study on Diné youth, I have to consider the ways that students construct and negotiate their racial, cultural, ethnic, and gender identities. That is, by reframing or re-theorizing the way that I look at schools now as race making institutions, I acknowledge race as a social, cultural, historical and political construct that operates to categorize and classify Indigenous bodies, cultural space, and territory in schools. Cheryl Harris (1995), an African American critical race scholar, reminds us that in looking at whiteness as property "Indians experienced the property laws of the colonizers and the emergent American nation as acts of violence perpetuated by the exercise of power and ratified through the rule of law"(p. 280). What is important about this point is that, she goes on to add these "laws were perceived as custom and common sense by the colonizers" (Harris, 1995, p.208).

By marginalizing, objectifying, and racializing Native or Indigenous peoples, white Europeans have made claims to, taken ownership of, and destroyed Native languages, bodies, territories, land, and knowledge . David Roedigger (2002) argues that Indian-

White relations are not only related to issues of land encroachment or the genocide of Indigenous groups but it involves bodies and territories. That is, in this insightful analysis of Indian White relations, Roedigger (2002) asserts that future studies should “concentrate on matters of importance in shaping property relations far beyond the confines of the shifting frontier” (2002, p. 133). In sum, by critically analyzing racial discourse and processes of racialization, critical race theory helps to explain how the language and cultural knowledge of Indigenous people, and some oppressed, diasporic groups such as Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, and women are kept mute within the larger structures or realms of academia and educational institutions as in the College of Education department where I took my graduate courses. (Schuerich and Young, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Therefore, as a critical scholar I must address how race, power, and ideology influence the minds of Navajo students to fit into, resist, or oppose mainstream cultural and social behaviors, identities, and norms at the risk of negating their own cultural identity and knowledge.

While it is true that education as a process of schooling may have positive outcomes for some Navajo students such as it has been for me such as in acquiring university degrees and credentials, I assert that may not be the case for many Navajo students. Thereby, in this study I will examine the ways in which schools *racialize* Navajo students and their cultural identity along with their language and culture. In *How the United States racializes Latinos*, Jose Cobas, Jorge Duany, and Joe Feagin (2009), state:

The racialization of Latinos refers to their definition as a “racial group” and the denigration of their alleged physical and cultural characteristics, such as phenotype, language, or number of children. Their racialization also entails their incorporation

into a white-created and white imposed racial hierarchy and continuum, now centuries old, with white Americans at the very top and black Americans at the very bottom. (p. 1)

Similarly, in looking at the racialization of Navajos, their racialization entails how they are physically and culturally viewed as being Indians but also it encompasses their connections to and identifications with their heritage language and culture.

Therefore, in trying to understand Navajo children's experiences with schooling it is very important for me to look at the process of schooling through a critical race theory lens to understand how racism operates at the personal, institutional, and structural levels. Furthermore, I believe that it is important to look at the ways that racialization impacts their contemporary lives and their cultural identities which are inextricably linked to their heritage language and culture. Thus, many important questions need to be addressed in light of what has transpired in regards to the history of Native American (Navajo) education and schooling. For example, in what ways is the purpose of getting a good education in school understood in Navajo communities? In what ways are education and schooling embraced, opposed, or resisted by Navajo students? Is a getting a good education equivalent to achieving success? If so, how then are schools serving the needs of Navajo students? And who is most privileged or rewarded in the process of schooling when there is greater diversity among the student populations? And finally whose knowledge, language, and cultural wealth are of most value or worth in schools?

A significant aspect of the current scholarship in Indian education by Indigenous educators and scholars has begun to focus primarily on decolonization, empowerment, and transformation. That is, Indigenous educational research is more than ever concerned

with critically analyzing the history of U.S. / White-Indian relations that have and continue to highlight the processes of colonization and decolonization (Smith, 1999). Furthermore, some Indigenous communities and scholars are creating Indigenous decolonization and transformative educational projects to find new possibilities within the educational contexts to counter colonization and the de-culturalization of Indigenous minds and bodies within existing educational structure (G. Smith, 2002; Benham and Cooper, 2000; Battiste, 2000). As such, Indigenous educational models can provide the knowledge and opportunities for challenging prevailing dominant white supremacist discourse, economic, and political ideologies as espoused by right wing conservatives and neoliberal white Americans towards Indigenous people and other people of color. Furthermore, the scholarship and work of Indigenous educators and other non-indigenous critical scholars like Ricky Lee Allen, Michael Apple, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Marie Battiste, Gregory Cajete, Larry Emerson, Henry Giroux, Sandy Grande, Glenabah Martinez, Zeus Leonardo, Linda and Graham Smith, and Michael Yellowbird continues to challenge the neo-liberal, white, racist educational agendas that continue to have a firm choke hold on Indigenous and other communities of color. Therefore, as Indigenous educators and scholars, our educational research agendas must include and highlight what Indigenous students have to say about their experiences with schooling and their perceptions about the value of their languages and culture to their contemporary lives. Yet, in order to better understand the experiences of Indigenous youth, Indigenous educators and researchers must be willing to address not only colonization and oppression but specifically to name racism and white supremacy within their respective communities and have the courage to talk about personal, institutional, and structural

racism and internalized oppression. Thus, in this study I ask critical questions about Diné youth in education like: What happens in schools that determine whether Navajo children fail or succeed? In what ways are issues of race, class, and gender talked about within schools that serve Navajo students? How do educators address these issues that are impacting Navajo students and their aspirations to succeed academically and their motivation to learn their heritage language and cultural knowledge? Finally, the most important question is, what are Navajo students saying about their experiences with schooling in regards to these critical issues?

Research question

My main research question asks, in what ways are Navajo youth racialized within the contexts of schooling? More specifically, in what ways does racialization impact Navajo youth and their racial, ethnic, and cultural identity within the contexts of education. In many ways, this study examines the ways that white supremacist ideology and discourse intersect with and inform dominant social, cultural, economic, and political ideologies about education and students of color (Williams, Jr., 2005; Darder and Torres, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2003; Goldberg, 1993; Van Dijk, 1993). By doing so, the study sheds light on the ways that white supremacy operates as an overarching hegemonic racist ideology that impacts Navajo students' identities and perceptions about their heritage language and culture. In addition to the main research question, I also include an analysis of how Navajo students construct and negotiate their identity within this white supremacist context.

My main research question(s) stem from issues and concerns raised by Navajo educators, parents, and communities (McCarty, Romero-Little, and Zepeda, 2006). Many of these questions are specific to school success and failure, such as:

1. How have schools historically addressed the cultural and linguistic differences that Navajo students bring to school and how do they presently address this question in the contemporary contexts?
2. How do teachers, administrators, and policy makers feel about the significance of Navajo language and culture in the education of Navajo youth?
3. How do educational policies or the lack thereof, regarding the acceptance and use of Navajo language and culture reflected in the school curriculum and environment and in the behaviors and practices of Navajo and non teachers and administrators?

Additionally, my research question was also informed by my own critical questions about students' identities that highlight race, race relations, and racism from the local and macro levels of analyses. For example,

1. In what ways are the issues of race, culture, language, and power addressed and talked about in education of Navajo youth?
2. In what ways do the issues of culture, language, race, class, and gender intersect in the lives of Navajo (Indigenous) youth that contribute to their success or failure?
3. What are some other factors that determine success and/or failure for Indigenous youth in and beyond schooling?

4. How are Indigenous communities addressing these issues and how are they talking about education for their youth?
5. In what instances or situations are Indigenous people and their languages and culture valued or not valued particularly within the educational context?

Based on these questions, I developed my main research question to address the need for research that highlights the planning and development of transformative Indigenous educational models that are informed by Indigenous scholarship and research to empower Indigenous communities as a desired outcome. Moreover, my research question is an attempt to provide a response and a challenge to existing white supremacist discourse, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs about the possibilities and promise of Indigenous and other communities of color to define and create their own educational agendas. As such, I hope that Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators alike will remember to listen not only to the youth but to their respective communities especially in regards to what they are saying about their experiences with schools, the purpose of schools and education, and their vision and hopes for education in the future. More importantly, I believe that these voices will become the catalyst for change and transformation in schools serving Indigenous (Navajo) populations as a starting point to address critical issues about the need for creating a transformative Indigenous education for future generations.

Purpose and significance of study

By drawing on key tenets and concepts from critical Indigenous theory and research, critical race theory (CRT), and critical educational studies (CES), the purpose of this critical qualitative study using a case study approach is to analyze the ways that Navajo (Diné) students are racialized in schools and society. More specifically, an important task

of this study is to highlight the ways that Navajo (Diné) students construct and negotiate their racial and cultural identities within the educational contexts. Moreover, this study also examines the ways that white American educational institutions and policies have and continue to operate by maintaining and sustaining white power and hegemony over other cultural, ethnic, and racial groups, bodies, epistemologies, and knowledge systems.

This study, informed by a critical Indigenous and critical race theoretical framework, is a challenge to white supremacy or the colonialist/settler mentality that European-derived cultures and white people and their knowledge are superior to Indigenous and other people of color. Therefore, the concepts of *race*, *racism*, *hegemony*, *racial ideology*, and *structural racism* are central to this analysis of *white supremacy* in education.

Particularly, the emphasis will center on how white supremacy is maintained, reproduced, and reinforced in schools and society through dominant cultural, economic, and political discourse and ideology. Therefore, a much larger focus of this study examines the relationship between the construction of knowledge via the school curriculum and ways that Indigenous (Diné) youth construct and negotiate their cultural and racial identities within the contexts of school. Also, another aspect of this research addresses how Indigenous communities deal with colonization and processes of racialization that underscore historical, socio-economic, cultural, and socio-political factors related to white supremacy that lead to the loss of language and cultural knowledge in Indigenous communities. Consequently, I posit that any type of Indigenous language and community revitalization work, in order to be more successful, must address the ways that Indigenous languages are marginalized and threatened by dominant mainstream white supremacist cultural, economic, political and social ideologies and discourse.

By looking at how Navajo (Diné) students perceive, negotiate, and think about issues related to language, culture, and education, the significance of this study is to better understand as educators and researchers why some students fail while others succeed. More so, this study addresses the need for creating critical theoretical frameworks that are based on Indigenous models of education and research that challenge and resist white supremacist models and ideologies of education and research. By drawing on and using the knowledge of Diné (Navajo) youth to explain the process of racialization and the impact of racialized discourse on their education, I acknowledge, honor, recognize, and validate their experiences. In doing so, I offer this theoretical framework in hopes of contributing to the growing literature in educational research aimed at developing critical Indigenous theoretical research frameworks that center the broader Indigenous agenda and research domain within educational research and Indigenous scholarship (L. Smith, 1999). Moreover, by using a critical research methodology that continues to ask critical questions like; what is the purpose of this research and who will it benefit, I give this research back to Navajo students and their respective communities to empower themselves. In this sense, I offer as a “gift” this critical theoretical framework and its’ major findings to other Indigenous educators and researchers that are interested in looking at ways that Indigenous communities’ can empower themselves by addressing some of the most crucial, essential, and relevant questions and issues in their communities. This is in response to larger social, economic, and political forces that continue to undermine Indigenous sovereignty and linguistic and human rights especially when it comes to how Indigenous communities want to define, empower, change, and transform their own communities.

In this manner, I assert that critical Indigenous researchers must be clear and assertive in naming ideas and concepts, in defining the issues that are relevant to their communities, in stating their position, and in proposing strategies for transformational change. In the end, I maintain that important debates and discussions in education must not be void of critical issues that centers race, ideology, hegemony, language, and power. That is, if educators do not acknowledge how racism operates through white racist discourse and practice to maintains the status quo to keep racial minorities in their place, many serious underlying questions about why many students of color continue to fail in schools will continue to go unanswered.

Overview of methodology

According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” and requires outcomes that will provide answers and possibly more questions as to the nature of that problem (1998, p. 15). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), critical qualitative research “represents inquiry done for explicit political, utopian purposes, a politics of liberation, a reflexive discourse constantly in search of an open-ended, subversive, multivoiced epistemology” (2008, p. 5). In terms of outcomes, critical qualitative research offers researchers insights to the ways in which individuals or groups make sense of their personal and/or collective experiences or particular phenomenon by acknowledging the important role of experiences. Therefore, I state that this research will be a critical qualitative study that uses case study methods to highlight the voice of Diné youth regarding their personal educational experiences with the processes of racialization in the school contexts. This case study method involved open-ended individual interviews

with Navajo college students. In addition, I also made reference to local, regional, and national data and statistics on Indian education along with an analysis of documents and other materials to develop my research questions. The study occurred over a two-year period. Most of the nine Navajo participants were interviewed two times. In the end, I use tenets from critical Indigenous and critical race methodologies to analyze all the data and to interpret the findings and to make implications for future research in the area of Indigenous education.

Limitations of study

This study looks at how Navajo (Diné) youth construct and negotiate, oppose, resist, and/or internalize cultural and social beliefs, values, and attitudes about their identity (ies) and cultural knowledge and about the status of their heritage language within the contexts of schooling. As in any qualitative case study, there are often limitations of the study related to the sampling and/or size of participants and the transferability of the research findings. As such, due to the qualitative case method approach of this study, the size or number of participants for this study was small. However, this was also purposive. Also, the sample size of research participants was limited to one geographical location/region and to one major university in the greater southwest region of the United States. Later research may do well to get larger sample sizes by finding participants from other universities or institutions in the state and drawing from a larger geographic region.

Another significant limitation of this study is that it focuses only on Navajo students. However, this was also purposely done since the emphasis was on Navajo youth. More so, this research does not analyze in depth how Indigenous communities and students are impacted at a societal level by racism and globalization. It was beyond the reach and

scope of such this study to include other Indigenous youth and language communities who impacted by the processes of schooling in relation to the value and worth of their respective languages and cultural knowledge. A later study might possibly be able to include a greater number of participants and Indigenous communities by utilizing a quantitative approach or by employing focus groups and/or using survey questionnaires. Clearly, a larger study that involves more textual and discourse analysis of the media and popular culture/ literature in addition to participant data may be needed to look at the larger picture. Also, such a study will require more time, more researchers, and a thorough consideration of what constitutes societal and institutional educational discourse. As such, more research is needed that addresses how other Indigenous youth and communities are dealing with similar issues. Thus, it is imperative that future researchers understand all the implications of such studies that look at the relationship between schools and Indigenous youth.

Another limitation of this research concerns the age range of the participants. That is, only one age group, 18 to 25, from a range of other possible age groups who are often represented in higher education is represented in this study. Also, since the focus of this study is on race and identity, this study is limited in looking in depth at other issues related to sexism, classism, and/or aspects of language socialization on a broader scale. Furthermore, I was limited in examining gender relations and issues in this study. Hopefully, future studies will make this an important factor of analysis. Thus, future research may do well to look more at the intersections of race, class, and gender in their research design and analyses. In addition, some important confounding factors like language attitudes and motivation, teacher ideologies, and individual student self esteem

were not thoroughly addressed in this qualitative study. For example, language attitudes and motivations are factors that involve a wide breath of analysis about language use among language communities which entails an analysis of where, when, and how language is used.

Definition of key terms

1. Ideology – Although, ideology generally implies ideas and beliefs about the world. Joe Feagin (2001) defines ideology as “a set of principles and views that embodies the basic interests of a particular social group” (Feagin, 2001, p.69).
2. Race – In *Racial Formation in the United States*, Howard Omi and Michael Winant (1994) assert that “the effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” therefore, they offer a definition of race as “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflict and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (p. 55). More so, they articulate that race is socially, historically, culturally, and politically constructed to give unearned power and privilege to whites within a racist culture.
3. Racism – In *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting in the Back of the Cafeteria*, Beverly Daniels Tatum (1997) acknowledges the definition of racism as a “system of advantage based on race”. Other critical race scholars define racism as a system or structure versus the prevailing notions of racism as individual acts of prejudice and discrimination (Feagin, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 1994). In this way, racism as a system or structure implies not only advantages but privilege

specifically to a dominant group, particularly whites (Allen, 2002b; Feagin, 2001; Bell, 1992).

4. Discourse - Discourse by itself simply implies the “spoken or written language” (Finegan, 1999). In sociolinguistics, discourse implies more than a way of talking to include attitudes, beliefs, feelings, practices, and worldview (Gee, 1995). Thus, a *critical* discourse involves a critical understanding of historical, social, and political processes related to language and ideology in order to unveil ideological assumptions that are hidden in words or texts (Fairclough, 1989).

Chapter Two

Review of literature

For this research, I drew upon theoretical and empirical literature from critical educational studies (CES), critical race theory (CRT), and Indigenous studies (and Indigenous knowledge) to analyze and frame some key theoretical concepts like colonization, hegemony, ideology, structural racism, and white supremacy in regards to the education of Diné youth. In this chapter, I briefly discuss and review these theoretical concepts by drawing on the work and scholarship of Indigenous and other scholars within their respective fields. In doing so, I develop an Indigenous (Diné) critical theoretical framework to counter the white supremacist/colonialist regime of truth in education and to honor transformative Indigenous (Diné) educational models. Specifically, I use this theoretical framework to analyze theoretical concepts like racism, racialization, social and cultural reproduction in education, the cultural politics of schooling, and structure and agency in education. My hope is that this framework will add to the growing literature and research in critical educational studies, critical race theory, and Indigenous education to continue analyzing and to further examine the process of racialization on Indigenous youth in education.

First, from Indigenous studies I discuss and highlight concepts like colonization, critical consciousness-raising, decolonization, indigenization, and transformation. A major part of my theoretical framework is based on this Indigenous scholarship. Next, from critical educational studies I discuss some significant concepts like cultural capital, hegemony, ideology, and selective traditions that are relative to the education of youth of color. Subsequently, I follow with an overview of concepts like race, racism, and race

relations to help explain the process(es) of racialization using critical race theory.

Specifically, I discuss the following tenets from critical race theory for their relevance to this study. These three tenets are; an acknowledgement of: 1) the centrality of racism as structural white supremacy, 2) understanding race as a social, cultural, historical, and political construct, 3) the centrality of experiential knowledge through the use of counter narrative story telling.

In this overview of Indigenous studies, CES, and CRT, I highlight some past research on youth of color in general to make connections relative to the education of Indigenous (Diné) youth. In doing so, in this research study I situate the experiences of Diné youth within the much broader white supremacist context using a relational analysis approach as a tool to implicate the ways that schools operate as race making institutions through racist discourse and practices for students of color. Finally the review of the literature for this qualitative study brings together some empirical research from American Indian /Navajo education that examines the education and schooling experiences of Navajo youth in education. In sum, by using a critical Indigenous theoretical framework that draws upon CES and CRT to examine the relationship between schooling and Indigenous (Diné) education, I underscore issues that are relevant and significant to Indigenous communities such as sovereignty, community and language revitalization, and nation building in Indigenous communities.

As an Indigenous person and a critical educator, I find that it is important for me to describe the contributions and significance of critical theories like critical educational studies, critical race theory, and critical Indigenous theory to my work, scholarship, and my commitment to research and education for Indigenous youth. For example, in critical

educational studies, I see that there are many issues for educators to consider besides the usual focus on classroom instructional methods or curriculum development to understand why there are asymmetrical power relations in education that negatively impact many children of color. Thus in order to address the myriad of social, cultural, historical, and political issues and processes that play out in schools every day, critical theory that employs tools like relational analysis can help critical scholars and educators underscore connections between the local and global contexts of education such as in looking at school reform or the politics of textbook production (Lipman, 2004; Apple, 1996). Furthermore, in looking to critical Indigenous research paradigms and decolonization theory, Indigenous and other educators can begin to articulate and explain why a return to Indigenous models of education are very much needed now in the contemporary contexts for Indigenous youth.

As mentioned in chapter one, prior to graduate school, I did not or may have had little knowledge that *critical* studies of education even existed. Like so many other educators, I was not well informed of a critical tradition of studies in education that looked at the relationship between unequal power and education. More so, although I have had many experiences with racial discrimination in general, I was unaware of the process of racialization in schools. Instead, my understanding of education at the time was relegated to focusing on meeting content standards and achieving high test scores. I believe that my academic success was a result of my going to school and doing my best while ignoring the fact that many of my peers were failing although they tried just as hard as I did. That is, I did not have a critical understanding of the social, cultural, historical, and political contexts in education that were connected to unequal relations of power in society.

Particularly, I was unaware (or chose to remain unconscious) of the issues related to race, class, and gender discrimination regardless of my experiences with racism or classism throughout my educational experiences. Instead, I assumed that achieving academic success in school was determined mainly by gaining individual merits and/or degrees in education. For a time, I began to believe that any individual (regardless of their race, class, or gender status) could become educated and successful in our democratic society. In contradistinction to this old paradigm, the following is a synoptic view of my current and ongoing understanding of critical Indigenous studies, critical theory, and critical race theory. Most importantly, I point to these bodies of knowledge informed by my own experiences and knowledge to explain how and why a *critical* approach to education is significant to my work with Indigenous youth.

Indigenous studies in education

Indigenous educational philosophies, epistemologies, or ways of knowing and understanding the natural world, are just as equally important to understanding the dialectical nature of seeking and finding knowledge for knowledge's sake as those found in Euro western educational bodies of knowledge (Benally, 1999; Aronilth, 1999; Cajete, 1999; Battiste, 2008). Mi'kmaq scholar, Marie Battiste (2008) states:

Indigenous knowledge needs to be treated as a distinct knowledge system that is equal to Western thinking, rather than being invisible to Eurocentric scholarship and knowledge, to its development theories, and to its global science. Indigenous knowledge comprises many diverse systems of knowledge, mostly unexplored by Euro-centricism and still being unraveled by Indigenous academics around the globe (p. 87).

In *Look to the Mountain*, Santa Clara Pueblo scholar, Gregory Cajete (1994) writes “it is essential that the relationship of Indigenous education to establishing and maintaining individual and community wholeness be seriously considered. Much of Indigenous education can be called endogenous education; it revolves around a transformational process of learning”(p. 208). For example, a central element of Indigenous perspectives in regards to the concept of education is that education is holistic. Thus, Indigenous perspectives remain cognizant of the fact that humans and human knowledge are not superior to nature but that they are a part of nature and the natural order. Cajete (1999) describes Indigenous science as “a process of understanding, a way of coming to know rightful relationships to the natural world that yields life”(p.80). Thereby, in relating Indigenous epistemologies to modern science education, in *Native Science*, Cajete (1999) underscores how Indigenous science keeps young Indigenous children in touch with their own language and cultures by facilitating an understanding about spiritual relationships with nature and by connecting students’ inner experiences with the larger world.

While there is a significant body of critical theory and research that examines how oppressive structures maintain and perpetuate only one kind of knowledge in education, it has been mostly presented and theorized in academia within the framework of a Western paradigm. Thereby, a concern of Indigenous scholars is that critical theory while *critical* can simultaneously give more power and validity to Euro centric western bodies of knowledge (Smith, 1998). As such, the possibilities of utilizing Indigenous philosophies within educational research have been largely under-utilized and under theorized. In response, in laying down a foundation for more theoretical groundwork in American Indian critical studies, Osage scholar, Robert Warrior (1995) advances the idea of

exercising “intellectual sovereignty” as a way of countering, resisting, and transforming dominant ideologies and practices that have marginalized American Indian literature and cultures. Most importantly, he proposes that this new and richer understanding of sovereignty and nation building be inclusive of contemporary American Indian experiences within education, research, and academia yet still be grounded on ancient tribal traditions.

In an overview of Indigenous scholarship past and present, I found that much of the existing Indigenous scholarship uses critical Indigenous lens to highlight, critique, and question the foundation and ideals of the white liberal order such equality theory or meritocracy and Enlightenment rationalism that derived from white Eurocentric paradigms and philosophy. For example, Santee Sioux scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (1996) and Standing Rock Sioux scholar Philip Deloria (2004) center race, racism, and race relations in addition to colonization in their writings. These scholars underpin the notion of de-centering and using the counter narratives of Indigenous people to debunk the master grand narrative of white supremacy. For example, in *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner*, Cook Lynn (1996) expresses her disdain for how contemporary Western literature romanticizes the America West as natural and free as promulgated by Stegner's writings. She writes:

The experiences of Stegner are those of a vast portion of the American public. His experiences, one supposes, are broadly accepted as the events and feelings known to second-, third-, and fourth-generation European immigrants to the land. As they did, Stegner simply claims indigenoussness and begins to set down the new myths and stories of those newcomers stepping off boats and, in the process, continues the

personalization of history and setting that is so dear to the hearts of so-called regional American writers. This personalization takes place in the imagination, thus the claim to identity needs only acclamation. (p.29 - 30)

In another essay about the moral dilemma of white Americans in their race relations with “Ameri-Indians”, Cook-Lynn (2001) argues that “the first thing we must agree on is that empire-building and the hating of Indigenous peoples have gone hand-in-hand in the making of America” (p.53). In other words, before white liberal and critical scholars can offer to help Indigenous communities with their theories and research, they must accept and acknowledge how they may have been and continue to be complicitous to the white racial order in education and academia. These scholars must learn to listen and learn from their Indigenous counterparts who are heavily invested and staked in their own communities.

This tense relationship between Indian and white is best captured by Phillip Deloria (2004), in *Indians in Unexpected Places* to explain the dichotomous relationship between representations and misrepresentations, objectivity and subjectivity, and “Other” bodies to- a White self. Specifically, Deloria (2004) maintains that within the dominant racializing discourse of whites, there remain the “cultural expectations” or the whites’ views of Indians as primitive, backward, violent, and/or stoic which operate to keep Indians in the mythic past by marginalizing them in the contemporary context. Additionally, he argues that as a consequence of past scientific (biological) and cultural claims and theories about Native people as savages, beasts, and infidels, white historians [and educators within the contexts of education] continue to try and justify and rationalize the dispossession of lands from American Indians in the name of science,

democracy, and Manifest Destiny (Deloria, 2004). Deloria's keen observation of white America's fascination and rejection of Indians in the modern context reveals how racial discourse and ideology remakes racial and racist understandings of who and what Native people should be in mainstream discourse (Deloria, 2004).

Further, some critical Indigenous scholars like Robert Williams Jr. argue that the ongoing colonization of the Americas and the racializing of Indigenous territories and bodies in American society (as in education) through racialized discourse is how white supremacy is legitimated through Eurocentric white cultural logic and legal assertions and constructs like the "doctrines of discovery" that justify the rule of law over others (Williams Jr., 2005). Thus, Williams Jr. (2005) asserts "the history of the American Indian in Western legal thought reveals that a will to empire proceeds most effectively under a rule of law (p. 324). In *Like A Loaded Weapon*, Williams Jr. (2005) writes:

A long-established language of racism that speaks of the American Indian as an uncivilized, lawless, and warlike savage can be found at work throughout the leading Indian law decisions of the nineteenth century U.S. Supreme Court. This judicial language of Indian savagery traces its origins and descent in the Western colonial imagination to Ancient Greek and Roman myths of warlike, barbarian tribes and biblical accounts of wild men cursed by God.(p. 33).

As such, these scholars underscore the need to address such discourse, actions, behaviors, and practices that maintain and perpetuate the marginalization, objectification, racialization, and subjugation of Indigenous (Native American) people in U.S. society.

Furthermore, I found that there are many instances and ways in which Indigenous scholars address colonization and oppression by drawing on critical perspectives

informed by critical traditions like critical theory, critical race theory, post colonial and post modernist studies. Recently, Indigenous scholar Brian Brayboy (2006) has advanced a Tribal Crit that borrows heavily from CRT and Indigenous studies and is “based on a series of traditions, ideas, thoughts, and epistemologies that are grounded in tribal histories thousands of years old”(p.442). With great insight, Brayboy (2006) writes:

Much of my academic career has been spent in search of an acceptable theoretical frame that allows me to analyze the problems encountered by American Indians in educational institutions and the programs that are in place to uniquely serve American Indian communities. In the past, I have relied on theorists like Bourdieu, Fordham, Giddens, and Willis, but I feel that my analyses have yet to be complete because these scholars do not explicitly address issues that are salient for and to American Indians. In this article, I intend to outline the central tenets of an emerging theory that I call Tribal Critical Race Theory (Tribal Crit) to more completely address the issues of Indigenous Peoples in the United States. I have constructed this theoretical framework because it allows me to address the complicated relationship between American Indians and the United States federal government and begin to make sense of American Indians’ liminality as both racial and legal/political groups and individuals. It is this liminal space that accounts for both the political/legal nature of our relationship with the U.S. government as American Indians and with our embodiment as racialized beings. (p. 426)

Yet, while it is reassuring to learn that scholars like Brayboy, Deloria, and Williams Jr. are advancing ideas like Tribal or Indigenous critical theory aside from and alongside Western frames, I believe that a more distinct Indigenous critical theory needs to be

theorized and utilized as a means to further understand the different processes of oppression in Indigenous communities. That is, while these critical theoretical traditions are significant to the work, scholarship, and research of critically informed Indigenous educators, these theoretical frameworks or paradigms must also draw from the voices and perspectives of traditional Indigenous elders, youth and community people.

There is a lot to say about the ways that Indigenous bodies of knowledge rightfully speak to who we are as Indigenous people and what is most important in our struggle to maintain face and heart in maintaining language, culture, and identity (Alfred, 1999; Cajete, 1994; Grande, 2004; G. Smith, 2002, L. Smith, 1991; Warrior, 1995). Indigenous (Osage) scholar Robert Warrior (1995) writes “if our struggle is anything, it is a way of life...a decision we make in our minds, in our hearts, and in our bodies – to be sovereign and to find out what that means in the process”(p.123). Other Indigenous scholars like Haudenoshonee scholar, Gerald Taiaiaike Alfred, and Maori scholar, Graham Smith have also rearticulated this struggle to maintain intellectual sovereignty and to find new strength and hope in Indigenous knowledge systems (Smith, 2002; Warrior, 1995; Alfred, 1999). That is, as Indigenous scholars we must not only contest and challenge the ongoing forms of oppression and colonization but we must name that oppression as white supremacy. Moreover, Emerson (2005) states that the process of indigenization is invested in the process of Indigenous self determination and makes special consideration to the development or evolvement of the critical lens or Critical Indigenous theory based on Indigenous knowledge. Only by doing so can we begin to look succinctly and clearly at the ways and possibilities in which critical Indigenous decolonization theories can inform contemporary Indigenous education, politics, research, and governance. In

looking at this important idea of speaking to who we are and naming our truth and naming our oppression and how that relates to our lives as Native, First Nations, or Indigenous peoples, I feel that important concepts like internalized racism, structural racism, and global white supremacy must be articulated and brought out into the open first before creating a theoretical framework from which to write or speak as Indigenous scholars. By doing so, Indigenous scholars like Larry Emerson, Marie Battiste, Sandy Grande, Angela Wilson Cavender, Michael Yellow bird, Gregory Cajete, Graham and Linda Smith have begun the work on which we can stand. That is, in their work these Indigenous scholars have reminded us to remember key concepts that involve processes like indigenization, decolonization, and critical conscientization. In this respect, I want to highlight here how my own perspectives and my theoretical framework are greatly informed and influenced by these Indigenous scholars.

In a working draft on Indigenization, Diné scholar Larry Emerson (2005) identifies Indigenization as a project that is most concerned with centering Indigenous politics and cultural action thereby privileging the Indigenous voice. Maori scholar Graham H. Smith (2002, 2000) also advocates a similar approach to colonization and decolonization that is less concerned de-centering white supremacy than on centering an Indigenous (Maori) research paradigm. That is, Graham H. Smith (2002) advocates for using a critical consciousness lens that is more proactive and not reactive. Thereby, he proffers a lens which serves as a learning tool to examine the world of dichotomies, contradictions, and contestations that affect and impact the lives of Indigenous people. Another Maori scholar, Linda Smith (2000) also states, a transformative or revolutionary Indigenous project is very different from decolonization – which is “a reactive notion” by putting

colonizer and the history of colonization back at the centre. By being reactive instead of proactive, Graham H. Smith (2002) states we are engaging and resisting in a politics of distraction which is “the colonizing process of being kept busy by the colonizer” (p.2). Instead, G. H. Smith (2002) writes “in moving towards transformative politics we need to understand the history of colonization but the bulk of our work and focus must be on what it is that we want, what it is that we are about and to imagine future”(p.3). This entails a “confrontation with the colonizer and a confrontation with our selves”- free ourselves before we free others (Smith, 2002, p.3).

An important aspect in this process of indigenization is the borrowing from other bodies of knowledge or theories like critical theory and feminist scholarship to acknowledge the intersection of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems and contemporary Indigenous contexts (Grande, 2004). In *Red Pedagogy*, Grande (2004) includes as elements of developing a critical Indigenous or Red pedagogy, the pre-colonized, traditional knowledge and methodology of Indigenous people while also remaining cognizant of other theories that highlight and address important factors like racism, classism, gender, identity, sexuality, hybridity, and nationality. That is, as I mentioned in the first chapter, by using ideas like hybridity in relation to culture and identity, my own research projects entailed borrowing from and merging different conceptual models or theories derived from post colonial studies and critical race theory to my own theoretical lens as a Diné scholar and researcher to focus on transforming the educational experiences of *Diné* youth in hopes of a harmonious outcome.

Diné scholar Larry Emerson (2005) along with Waziyatiwin and Michael Yellowbird (2005) also identify indigenization and decolonization theory as being grounded in

alternative worldviews and values that counter the misappropriation and misrepresentations and discourses of settler people about Indigenous people and is concerned not only with colonization dynamics but involve a project of transformation and healing that includes naming, action, reflection, and practice. In defining decolonization theory, Angela Wilson and Michael Yellowbird (2005) define decolonization as “the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, lands, and it is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation”(p. 5). The key ideas in their statement for me as an Indigenous scholar are the notion of a calculated and active resistance for overturning the colonial structure by using and drawing on Indigenous knowledge. Yellow bird (2005) writes

In order to decolonize in the most effective and efficient manner, we have to think. It is important to create and cultivate within our people, the willingness and skills to think and respond critically to the colonial and non colonial circumstances – including poverty, tribal infighting, substance abuse, uncritical compliance to oppressive rules and policies, and our perceived sense of powerlessness- that challenge our well being (p. 14- 15).

In a similar vein, Haudenoshonee scholar G. Taiaiake Alfred (1999) writes “ignorance and racism are the founding principles of the colonial state, and concepts of Indigenous sovereignty that do not challenge these principles in fact serve to perpetuate them”(p. 59). In other words, a transformative Indigenous education model derived from indigenization

and decolonization theory may very well entail moving from talking about decolonization to talking about conscientization or consciousness-raising from an Indigenous paradigm.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (2000) describes the ways in which dominant ideologies and practices in education (and generally in society) operated to keep oppressed certain people while giving power to others. While, Freire is most known for writing and theorizing about engaging self and others in action, dialogue, praxis, and reflection in order to reaffirm what it means to be human, his pedagogy of love and hope is also central to this understanding and way of achieving conscientization. Freire (2000) writes “dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity is stolen, but also those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming fully human”(p.65). Moreover, Freire (2000) describes this process or vocation of becoming human again as achieving *critical consciousness* by learning to perceive the world for what it truly is by examining the social, political, and economic contradictions that exist in real day to day life and to act upon them deliberately using a critical lens. That is, this paradigm shift involves getting out from under the influence of the reproductive forces of dominant society i.e. hegemony - to gain momentum towards change, i.e. “a freeing up” of indigenous imagination and thinking to yield information specific to local contexts and encompassing global issues to produce relevant knowledge and processes for Change and Transformation (G. Smith, 2002).

Social and cultural reproduction in education

A critical theory of education emphasizes the breaks, discontinuities, and tensions in history and education. Furthermore, it challenges existing structural inequities by highlighting the centrality of human agency and struggle. More so, a critical theory of

education analyzes the role that schools can play as agents of social and cultural reproduction. In *Theories of Reproduction and Resistance*, Henry Giroux (2000) states that a critique of instrumental reason or positivism offers a “historical analysis of and a penetrating philosophical view that indicts the wider culture of positivism”(p.11). Thus, Giroux (2001) adds, “a relational analysis of schools becomes meaningful only if is accompanied an understanding of how power and knowledge links schools to the inequalities produced in the large social order”(p.75).

Social reproduction theory has origins in Karl Marx’s idea of historical materialism which suggests that social conditions are reproduced by material conditions. In his work on historical materialism, Marx writes, “the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (Marx, 1911). That is, society and societal outcomes are primarily determined by economic conditions which reproduce humans and human conditions thereby explaining how the rich stay rich and the poor remain poor.

In “*Lenin and Philosophy*” and *Other Essays*, Louis Althusser (1971) re-articulates this idea with what he calls a “reproduction of the relations of production” that explains how the “proletariat” and the “bourgeois” are both reproduced in society along class lines through the powerful effects of a capitalist ideology and the power of state control. Althusser (1971) offered a theoretical framework that posits that there is a reciprocal relationship between the repressive state apparatus and an ideological apparatus. The repressive state apparatus, includes the government, the church, and the army; while an ideological state apparatus consists of hospitals, schools, and courts. That is, Althusser

(1971) states:

The Repressive State Apparatus functions by violence, whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses function by ideology.... the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic. (There is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus.) Thus Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to discipline not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. (p. 144- 145)

Thus, in Althusser's views, schools were viewed as one of three main institutions by which society is reproduced through the imparting of skills and knowledge. In other words,

In response, according to Thomas Popkewitz (1998), other critical theory scholars informed by post structuralism began to point out that there is much more to the process of schooling than class and power relations surrounding the issues of why certain students fail while others succeed. For example, in an Introduction to *The Foucault Reader* (1998), Paul Rabinow writes, "for Foucault, knowledge of all sorts is thoroughly enmeshed in the clash of petty dominations, as well as in the larger battles which constitute our world...and the will to knowledge in our culture is simultaneously part of the danger and a tool to combat that danger"(p.7). That is, Rabinow refers to Michel Foucault's notion of the "archaeology of knowledge" as a way in which post structuralism implicates knowledge and power as in education and other institutions through disciplinary technologies and control. Moreover, according to Rabinow, Michel Foucault's notion of the archaeology of knowledge in relation to concepts like discipline,

punishment, control, and sexuality highlights how knowledge and power are implicated in sociology, research, medicine, and education (Rabinow, 1998). Thus, as Foucault implicates knowledge and power relations in institutions, he theorizes that structures do not only permeate our thinking but is reflected within our discourse and politics. In other words, Foucault (as cited in Rabinow, 1998) maintains that the role of discourse again as found in schools has powerful material effects on the body and mind. Although the focus in Foucault's work evolves out of post structuralism which looks at how power and knowledge are maintained in society, Popkewitz (1995) suggests that "Foucault's work is illustrative of a move within critical traditions to focus on knowledge as a material element in social life...Foucault provides the methodological strategies for interpreting how the constitution of the self and individuality are the effects of power" (as cited in Torres & Mitchell, 1995, p. 48). That is, in looking at knowledge, it becomes clear that knowledge and discourse are about power. Furthermore, any knowledge can become oppressive or empowering.

The work of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976) was one of the first serious critiques of schooling and capitalism using a class based analysis to postulate a theory of social reproduction. Hence, it has been described as a great accomplishment and very influential to the field of educational studies because it highlighted the relation between schools and class domination/exploitation (Apple, 1979; Giroux, 2001). In *Ideology, Culture, and the Process of Schooling* (1981), Giroux argues that Bowles and Gintis' *correspondence principle* advanced a more realistic picture compared to Althusser's argument because it underscored the social relations of the school and classroom as a mirror to the social relations of the working place (pp. 57).

Particularly, Giroux states that Bowles' and Gintis' views of the correspondence principle- was that "the family and the schools play a major role in inculcating in the populace those values and dispositions conducive to the continual reproduction of the dominant relations of production"(1981, pp. 69).

Certainly the emphasis on class relations to schooling was significant for Bowles and Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America*, however despite its significant contribution to the scholarship, Apple (1998) posits that their work "underplayed the workings of culture and politics"(as cited in Cole, pp.112). Moreover, Cole (1998) describes their Marxist overtones as "essentially functionalist" and purporting a "passive view of humankind" which altogether dismissed important ideas like human agency, structure, race and gender (pp.9 - 10). In other words, students and teachers do not just comply with oppressive structures but that schools are contested sites and terrains in which humans as agents negotiate and resist dominating structures by their own agency (Giroux, 2001). More so, Giroux (1981) discusses important distinctions between social and cultural reproduction theory by referring to a "process of legitimation" which suggests that there is a special ambiguity of schools existing as vital to human society yet part of larger socio-economic power structures. For example, he argues that previous social reproduction arguments failed to make a distinction between 'what is taught' in the curriculum and 'what goes on in the schools' through a hidden curriculum that also contributes to reinforcing "dominant categories, values and social relationships necessary for the maintenance of the larger society"(Giroux, 1981, pp. 72). As a result, his major critique of the correspondence theory was that it did not engage human consciousness with structures. Instead, he addresses the notion of curriculum as discourse in that he argues that schools are where

students are reproduced through not only social class determinism but cultural processes of inculcating and imparting knowledge onto to others (Giroux, 1981, 2001).

In extending the debates beyond social reproduction to include the role of culture and politics, a new group of neo-Marxists added to the debate by pointing to other forces that operate in the process of schooling. Pierre Bourdieu offered a theory of cultural reproduction that involved a more comprehensive look at how schools reproduce students. In Bourdieu's (1999) theoretical discussions on the relationship between schools and society that implicates power and knowledge, he advanced the idea of "symbolic violence" as playing a significant role in reproductive processes through what he calls "cultural capital" and habitus. Bourdieu describes *cultural capital* as the high status cultural skills and knowledge of the ruling class (Bourdieu, 1999). Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital reveals how elite or dominant forms of cultural knowledge benefit those who are familiar with the habitus or dispositions and cultural rules of schools and society, thus gaining access to high social status (Giroux, 1981).

More recently, Michael Apple's work in *Official Knowledge* (2000), *Cultural Politics and Education* (1996), and in the third edition of *Ideology and Curriculum* (2001a) has added new insights in looking at the ways that ideology, power, and knowledge are implicated in education by underscoring the notion of *hegemony* within the process of schooling. Most profound in Apple's works are his discussions on hegemony as good and bad "common sense" borrowed from the works of Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams (Apple, 2001a). By employing this idea, Apple poses the crucial question of "whose knowledge is of most worth" (Apple, 2001a). Specifically, in *Official Knowledge*, Apple (2000) refers to "selective traditions" which he argues have much to

do with the idea that only certain ideological and politically sanctioned knowledge and cultural capital become the official knowledge. In *Cultural Politics and Education*, Apple (1996) writes:

Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone's selection, some groups visions of legitimate knowledge. (p. 22).

Similar to Giroux's work of looking at the politics of schooling, Apple (1999) offers some profound insights to the ongoing debate surrounding social and cultural reproduction theory in education by examining the notion of "what knowledge is of most worth" using a *relational analysis* approach. He argues a relational analysis is needed to look at "institutions and events in our daily lives...not in an isolated way –separate from the relations of domination and exploitation of the larger society – in ways that stress their interconnections with these relations"(Apple 1999, p. 10). Thus, he postulates that a relational analysis could eventually instantiate a need to examine *hegemony* because as he argues *hegemony* is embedded within our socio-cultural, political beliefs, norms, institutions, schools, and "total ways of knowing" by way of common sense (Apple, 1999).

In Gramscian terms, hegemony refers to the concepts of domination and consent. More specifically it could be viewed as "an equilibrium between leadership or direction based on consent, and domination based on coercion in the broadest sense" (Gramsci, 1971). That is, according to Raymond Williams (as cited in Apple, 2001a), hegemony is:

[A] whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of man and the world. It is the set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced [as a] reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of a society to move in most areas of their lives. But this is not, except in the operation of a moment of abstract analysis, a static system. On the contrary we can only understand an effective and dominant culture if we understand the real social process on which it depends: I mean the process of incorporation. The modes of incorporation are of great significance, and incidentally in our kind of society have considerable economic significance. The educational institutions are usually the main agencies of transmission of an effective dominant culture, and this is now a major economic as well as cultural activity; indeed it is both in the same moment. (p. 5)

In *Ideology and Curriculum*, Apple (2001a) draws a much clearer connection to what hegemony means within the contexts of education in stating:

Schools...do not only “process people; they “process knowledge” as well. They act as agents of cultural and ideological hegemony...as agents of selective tradition and of cultural “incorporation”. But as institutions they not only are one of the main agencies of distributing an effective dominant culture; among other institutions, and here some of the economic interpretations see quite potent, they help create people (with appropriate meanings and values) who see no other serious possibility to the economic and cultural assemblage now extant. (p. 5 – 6)

Therefore, as a consequence he argues education becomes a banking model by which students' heads are filled with irrelevant content knowledge and skills that they will supposedly need to become good citizens of a modern democratic nation-state (Apple, 2000; Freire, 2000). Unfortunately, this has been the educational experience of many students of color here in the U.S. and abroad.

In putting the theories of social and cultural reproduction to task, Annette Lareau (2000) in *Home Advantage* addressed some of these theoretical issues in a study on parent involvement. Particularly, she addressed how parental involvement in schools interfaced with their place or status in the communities. Her work was critical in that, her analysis of cultural capital in relation to this study revealed how parents and teachers view their children's success in school. That is, by examining how schools give "advantage" to students on the basis of their class standing, she makes a case for why and how only certain groups namely the poor and minority groups are the ones who most often end up on a one way track to failure (Laureau, 2000). However, although she looked at how class lines were created and divided in society and in schools, she did not address issues of race and gender. Instead, her study revealed how lower class groups are recreated by the process of schooling to fill their respective ranks as the underclass in society. This idea is further explored by Jeannie Oakes (1985) in her research on school tracking. In her study, she reveals how students particularly students of color and students from low socio-economic backgrounds are tracked into low-level vocational courses because of popular assumptions that tracking is the "natural order of things" (Oakes, 1985, p. 192). Ultimately, her study suggests how tracking is justified by notions of meritocracy, school efficiency, and grouping students by ability levels.

In many ways, Paul Willis (1977) in *Learning to Labor* proved to be an important contribution to the literature on social and cultural reproduction theory because it was critical of how past researchers understood the process of schooling as contested sites of political, social, and cultural struggle and how schools reproduce students. That is, Willis study of working class students included a more significant element to the social reproduction theory that revealed the dialectical relation between structure and human agency or consciousness. Particularly, Willis discussions of “penetrations” and “limitations” helped to clarify the notion of cultural submission or resistance as part of human agency (Willis, 1977). Willis (1977) writes:

The cultural does not simply mechanically mark, or in some simple sense live out wider social contradictions. It works upon them with its own resources to achieve partial resolutions, recombinations, limited transformations which are uncertain to be sure, but concrete specific to its own level and the basis for actions and decisions which are vitally important to that wider social order. (p. 124)

That is, students and teachers as social and cultural agents are as much implicated in shaping the life of the school as are structures, for example, ideology or discourse, as by either resisting or conforming to the oppressive nature of these very same structures.

Earlier, I discussed the significance of drawing on other critical bodies of knowledge as a Diné scholar to inform my scholarship and theoretical framework for Navajo education. Up to now, I have highlighted the word *critical* to underscore the *urgency and need* for Indigenous and other scholars to challenge existing dominant cultural, economic, and political ideologies that are informed by white supremacist discourse in education that vilify cultural differences and place the blame for poor achievement scores

on parents and children. In *Official Knowledge* (2000) and *Cultural Politics and Education* (1996), Michael Apple discusses how the focus in education on curriculum reform is currently being defined and redefined by a conservative, “post-modernist” agenda that is pushing marketization. Apple (2000) refers to this agenda as the ‘conservative restoration’ that is embraced by an overarching alliance of neo-liberals and conservatives alike who work together to compromise, contextualize, negotiate, and re-contextualize education as they see fit within the institutions of schooling. Apple (1999,2000, 2001b) describes this alliance as a “hegemonic bloc” or the “dominant economic and political elites intent on modernizing the economy, white working-class and middle-class groups concerned for security, the family, and traditional knowledge and values, and economic and cultural conservatives” (p.30).

Consequently, the work of scholars like Giroux and Apple work are very important to my current understanding of educational reform as an Indigenous scholar and educator. That is, critical educational studies makes clear for me the fact that there are many confounding factors within the process of schooling that highlight the complexity of power relations pertaining to the construction and production of knowledge, race, class, gender, and sexuality. For example, by analyzing the politics of education and official “knowledge” as reproduced within textbooks, academic institutions, and government policies, Apple(2000) states that schools are places of contestation because they are intrinsically tied to the social, economic, and political agenda of the conservative right. In *Educating the Right Way*, Apple (2001b) states:

Consequently, the objectives in education are the same as those which guide its economic and social welfare goals. They include the dramatic expansion of that

eloquent fiction, the free market; the drastic reduction of government responsibility for social needs; the reinforcement of intensely competitive structures of mobility both inside and outside of school; the lowering of people's expectations for economic security; the disciplining of culture and body; and the popularization of what is clearly a form of Social Darwinist thinking, as the recent popularity of *The Bell Curve*. (p. 65-66)

Thus, while the popular view regarding the academic achievement of Indigenous youth in the United States has been one that suggests that failure is a result of individual and/or group characteristics or traits such as learning styles, behaviors, cognitive maturity, and family/home environments, the research from CES suggests that structures of domination are also very important to the equation.

In more recent studies related to social and cultural reproduction, some critical scholars have strongly implicated not only class and gender as primary determinants for why many racial minority students are failing in schools. Instead, these critical scholars are centering race in their analyses (Apple, 1996; McLeod, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999). In *Ain't No Makin It*, Jay McLeod's (1995) study of working class boys reveals some important implications about the notion of social and cultural reproduction particularly for marginalized students (poor, working class, and/or Black) by highlighting not only class, but race and gender. His study was mainly concerned with how two groups of boys, the Hallway Hangers and the Brothers, were caught between the ideals, expectations, and promises of society and their social reality. McLeod (1995) writes "in the popular mind, school is the great equalizer: By providing a level playing field where the low and mighty compete on an equal basis, schooling renders social inequality superfluous" (p. 43). As

such, McLeod (1995) illustrates how the boys in the study, although seemingly aware of their situations, either played out their parts or assigned roles or reacted to their school and social environments in very ambiguous yet predictable ways. Yet it is important to note that McLeod also examined how the students in his study were influenced (or reproduced) by education and society particularly based on who they are, who they know, and what was granted them by privilege of their class, gender, and race. That is, by looking at how racism affects marginalized students of color like the Brothers more directly than the Hallway Hangers who are mostly white, McLeod (1995) at least acknowledges a structural view of race/racism.

Thus, critical race scholars point to McLeod's study as having a more thorough analysis of how social and cultural reproduction occurs that includes a structural view of racism in education than previous scholars who failed to acknowledge racism at all. That is, McLeod's study reveals that race was very telling in how it marginalized students of color like the Brothers who are Black more directly than the Hallway Hangers who are mostly white. Unfortunately, many educators today still do not acknowledge or chose to ignore the centrality of racism in education. Consequently, critical race scholars and researchers like Zeus Leonardo (2009) and Ricky Lee Allen (2002a) advocate for positioning race, or more specifically white supremacy, as central to any analysis in educational research as a means to explaining the asymmetrical relations of power in education and contradictory meanings about equal access, power, and schooling.

Critical race theory

According to Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001) and William Tate III (1997), critical race theory (CRT) evolved out of the critical legal studies movement

during the post civil rights era. In a historical overview of CRT, Tate (1997) relates how the need for legal remedies to solve racial injustice and the idea of using litigation to socially engineer civil rights by black scholars in the post-civil rights era laid the foundation for CRT. Moreover, Tate (1997) writes “many scholars and activists of this era noted the limitations of achieving justice using dominant concepts of race, racism, and equality”(p. 206). In examining the correlation between race and power within the legal and educational contexts, CRT scholars Derrick Bell (1992) and Tate (1997) maintain that critical legal studies and race theories offer important insights and questions as to why minority groups are still relegated to second class or inferior status despite the passage of legislation aimed at remedying race relations like the Civil Rights Act of 1968 or Brown vs. Board of Education decision. For example, as one of the leading scholars of CRT, Derrick Bell postulates an interest convergence principle which typifies how “the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites”(Bell, 1992, p. 22). Bell (1992) states:

Racial remedies may...be the outward manifestations of unspoken and perhaps subconscious judicial conclusions that the remedies, if granted, will secure, advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle- and upper-class whites. Racial justice- or its appearance- may, from time to time, be counted among the interests deemed important by the courts and by society's policy makers. (p.22)

In providing a general introduction and overview of critical race theory (CRT), Delgado and Stefancic (2001) highlight five basic tenets of CRT. Although these tenets are very often similar across disciplines like sociology and education, there tend to be

some differences in how they are stated. However, these main tenets as first purported by Delgado and Stefancic (2001) include recognizing that; 1) racism is ordinary, 2) racism as white supremacy operates to serve psychic and material purposes, 3) race is a social, historical, cultural and political construction, and acknowledging, 4) the inter-sectionality of race, class, and gender, and sexual orientations, and 5) the counter-narratives and experiences of people of color to speak to issues of race and racism. For the purpose of this study, I will to three tenets in education and which are pertinent to the education of Indigenous youth; particularly those of recognizing racism as structural white supremacy, understanding race as a social, cultural, historical, and political construct, and the counter-narrative storytelling of people of color.

In *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, Beverly Daniels Tatum (1997) acknowledges the definition of racism as a system of advantage based on race. What is important in this definition is the idea of racism as a system or structure versus the prevailing notions of racism as individual acts of prejudice and discrimination. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1996, 2003) posits that “when racism is regarded as a baseless ideology ultimately dependent on other real forces in society, the structure of the society itself is not classified as racist”(1996, p.469). Therefore, Bonilla-Silva (1996) articulates that racism is structural and ideological. In this new light, racism is understood to be linked to ideology and structure in meaning and interpretations (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Mills, 1997). Therefore, Bonilla-Silva (1996) argues for a structural theory of racism that is based on the notion of racial hierarchies. Bonilla Silva (1996) adds “if racism viewed as an ideology, were seen as possessing a structural foundation, it’s examination could be associated with racial practices rather than mere ideas”(p.470). Hence, when the terms

race and racism are used in reference to different groups of people interacting in a society that operates as a racial hierarchy, it is easier to see and understand how and why certain racial groups, particularly whites, are privileged while others are marginalized.

Thus, the idea of race is a complex one that evolved from earlier biological notions of race as *essence*- (i.e., concrete and fixed), to race as an illusion, and to race being a “social and political construction” (Omi and Winant, 1994). Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) in *Racial Formation in the United States* assert that “the effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle”, and they offer a definition of race as “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflict and interests by referring to different types of human bodies” (pp. 55). According to Bonilla-Silva (2003) while most social scientists will agree that race is socially constructed, there is little agreement about race as a social reality. That is, as the idea of “race – or class or gender- is created, it produces real effects on actors” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, pp. 9). Hence, race as a social construction is false but its consequences are very real.

Recently, critical race scholars like Charles Mills (1997), Ricky Lee Allen (2002a), Zeus Leonardo (2009) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) have strongly implicated ideology, hegemony, and power in critical examinations of race and racism. Still, other scholars have also advanced the idea that racism needs to be called what it is; which is, a racial hierarchy that gives unearned power and privilege to whites, thereby placing whites at the top of the hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Allen, 2002a; Feagin, 2001, 2006). Within this hierarchy, racism operates to maintain white supremacy through micro-

(local) and macro- (global) levels of subordination and subjugation (Omi and Winant, 1994; Mills, 1997).

In *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills (1997) states that white supremacy is manifested through an individual-nation-state-global system apparatus that works to give unearned power and privilege to white people while categorizing and oppressing people of color as the Other. Mills (1997) states:

The Racial Contract as a theory puts race where it belongs- at center stage- and demonstrates how the polity was in fact a racial one, a white supremacist state, for which differential white racial entitlement and nonwhite subordination were defining, thus inevitably molding white moral psychology and moral theorizing.(p. 57).

Furthermore, CRT scholars recognizes white supremacy as a construct of Euro-Western, white stream epistemologies and racial ideologies that are heavily invested in economic, political, and social agendas (or, racial projects) that work to maintain power and privilege for those of white color (e.g., Omi and Winant, 1994; Scheurich and Young, 1997). Particularly, Schuerich and Young (1997) posit the idea of race and racialized discourse as epistemological grounded in an over arching white supremacist ideology which informs the very foundations of our society and its institutions. That is, the epistemological roots of our American institutions help to foster and perpetuate this system of racialized hierarchy that privileges only people who are white, male, and upper middle class.

Therefore, an important tenet in the current scholarship from critical race theory (CRT) that is generally agreed upon is that racism as a system or structure is about white

supremacy which not gives advantages but “privilege” specifically to whites (Allen, 2002a Bell, 1992). For example, since colonial times white institutions like schools have imposed individual, group, and societal norms or cultural and social beliefs, values, and practices through which people of color were assimilated, deculturalized, naturalized, normalized, and socialized into American society (Spring, 2001; Omi and Winant, 1997; Allen, 2002a). The fact that Indigenous peoples and African slaves were thought of as savages and chattel makes the point clear that white supremacist racial ideologies created spaces and a racial divide between white people and people of color. In the contemporary contexts, mainstream white perceptions about Native Americans through the media such as in Walt Disney movies continue to operate from a white supremacist paradigm of portraying Indigenous peoples as inferior, child like, or savage.

Consequently, people of color who did not fit the dominant paradigms of normalcy were racialized and othered, and made out to be inferior to whites. As a result, people of color were socialized and naturalized into by white American society (Omi and Winant, 1994; Goldberg, 1993). Furthermore, as white supremacy is maintained white supremacist ideologies and discourse, it perpetuates notions of superiority and inferiority (Goldberg, 1993). That is, many people of color like Indigenous people who do not fit the dominant paradigms of normalcy are racially categorized and stigmatized through processes of racialization and given “racial assignments” to reinforce notions of inferiority and difference (Lopez, 2003; Lewis, 2002). Thus, people of color eventually begin to believe that racial inequality is just part of the way things are and ought to be without questioning how and why our society is structured along racial lines.

As a result of these processes of racialization, critical race scholars like Ricky Lee Allen (2002a) argue that people of color begin to internalize the oppressor's regime of truth. This notion of internalizing the oppressor's regime of truth reveals the *hegemonic* process of racism. In this way, racially oppressed groups begin to believe that white is right. Allen (2002b) describes this process as; achieving whiteness or the idea of achieving white, middle-class "success" by minority racial groups so that people of color begin to believe that white is right. Certainly, those who claim (or recognize) white identity inherently know the privileges and power invested in being labeled white. However, it is sad but no wonder to see that there are also non-whites who work to benefit whites that contribute to the racialization of their own groups.

Some recent ethnographic studies have described these processes of racialization within the educational contexts in regards to the education of Hispanic and African American students (Lewis, 2005; Lopez, 2003). Amanda Lewis' ethnographic account of three urban schools reveal that there are "mechanisms both inside and outside school that lead many children of color to have fundamentally different schooling experiences than their white peers" (2005, p. 154). In a similar study of Latino immigrant youth in urban high schools, Nancy Lopez (2003) also describes the "racialized and gendered experiences" of racially stigmatized youth in the process of education. Lopez (2003) writes "unveiling the social processes that create the power differentials among groups that are racialized as White, Black, Hispanic, and minorities represents a first step in debunking the naturalness of these taxonomies"(p. 165).

Another important tenet of CRT is the idea of presenting different interpretations of race by legitimating the counter-narratives and storytelling of people of color. In

describing the importance of CRT within the educational contexts, Tara Yosso (2002) writes, “critical race theory is unique because it challenges structures...accompanied by its approach to creating more equitable conditions... by drawing on the knowledge of people of color”(p.95). Moreover, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) state:

Coexisting in somewhat uneasy tension with anti-essentialism, the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, black, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know. (pp.9)

Finally, by examining the complexities of race, ideology, and power, CRT provides a framework for understanding the inter-sectionality of race, class, and gender. Thus another important tenet of CRT addresses the notion of inter-sectionality. Parker and Lynn (2002) write “although race and gender epistemologies have attempted to bifurcate and thereby essentialize identity into frozen fixed frames, an intersectional analysis forces us to see the relationship between sexism and racism (and I would add classism) as symbiotic” (2002, pp 12). In sum, educational scholars in critical race theory maintain that CRT can transform our understanding of the complex relationships between race, racism, race relations, power, and ideology in the realm of education by looking at gender and other forms of oppression (Delgado & Stefancic , 2001 and Ladson Billings 1999).

In conclusion, based on my experiences with schooling and more recently on my critical reflections as an Indigenous scholar about the purpose of getting a formalized Western education, I believe that further critical examinations of how, why, and the ways that white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism impact the lives and education of racial minority and other oppressed groups is much needed. This is essential

because as I illustrate through my own experiences and through the voices of Native American (Diné) youth in this study, schooling is in many ways about assimilation, colonization, and de-culturalization or explain in other ways, it is about racialization. That is, no matter what critical theory you use, schools are, for many Native American (Indigenous) and other racially stigmatized youth, contested sites of struggle between different bodies and often competing forms of knowledge. Furthermore, education vis a vis schooling for these youth is about the categorization and control of collective and individual racialized identities and bodies. This is very evident in the No Child Left Behind legislation. In *Race, Whiteness, and Education*, Zeus Leonardo (2009) states:

NCLB's hidden referent of whiteness makes a causal pass at racial explanation that sidesteps race as a causal explanation for educational disparities. In this sense, NCLB is an "act of whiteness" and perpetuates the innocence of whiteness as a system of privilege. It is a form of whiteness as policy. Its white common sense deems racial disparities as unfortunate outcomes of group competition, uneven social development, or worse, as stubborn cultural explanations of the inferiority of people of color. (p. 127)

As a consequence, education or schooling as it is carried out in many classrooms day to day is not about recognizing and validating cultural and linguistic differences. Instead, in many ways, the process of schooling only harms students of color because of who they are, where they come from, and what language they speak.

As I look back now on my educational history, what I see is that I lacked the knowledge and discourse to explain how these types of processes have led me to

believe in a system of meritocracy. Also, as a result of my ignorance I began to internalize the notion that my opportunities for education were equal. Furthermore, regardless of all the failures and constant struggles that I witnessed as a Navajo student and educator, I still believed education to be the great equalizer. Moreover, I began to believe that education is neutral and that our democratic society is truly equal so I never thought to critically examine and question how and why many Navajo students fail in school. Thereby, by developing, theorizing, and using a critical theoretical framework, it has helped me to analyze key concepts like identity formation, the politics of representation and appropriation, schooling, meritocracy, and racialization to unravel and unpack contested and controversial topics like structural racism, essentialism, and internalized racism. With this in mind, I discuss and highlight some important empirical studies and research within critical educational studies and Indian education that address these suppositions relative to my research question about identity, knowledge, and power in education.

Review of empirical research on Diné youth

In Indigenous communities throughout the U.S, there has been much written and researched about the process of assimilation and enculturation into mainstream dominant society that explores how the process of schooling impacts on the academic achievement and self esteem of Native American students (Demmert, 2001; Reyhner, 1990). While a large part of this research has re-affirmed and articulated the value of culturally relevant Indian curriculum and materials, it has not done much to address the complexity of issues around colonization, racism, identity, and power. More so, while much of this research (e.g., McCarty, 2001; Manuelito, 2005; Fox, 2000; Reyhner, 1990; Lipka, Mohatt, and

the Cuileset Group, 1998; and Cleary & Peacock, 1998) has attempted to describe the impact of mainstream dominant attitudes and beliefs on the education of Native youth, they have primarily focused only on academic achievement, teacher expectations, cultural differences, self esteem and family values thereby negating critical issues that create race, class, and gender inequities. Also, the research data from these empirical research studies on Indigenous (Navajo) have often only reiterated that the loss of cultural values, low self esteem, and language shift as possible reasons for low student achievements. Hence, in many ways these approaches to looking at the education of Indigenous youth have often perpetuated the cultural deficit paradigm that places the blame on students and families for holding on to cultural values and beliefs that are incompatible with mainstream and contemporary society.

In 1984, the Navajo Nation mandated all schools, specifically Head Start programs, on the Navajo reservation to include the instruction of Navajo language and culture in the school curriculum. In a study by Ann Batchelder (2000), she asked respondents to reflect on how language and cultural studies are treated in school instruction. Using a series of surveys and questionnaires that included questions about the beliefs, use, and values of the Navajo language in school settings, this two part study examined how targeted schools were responding to the mandate. At the core of the study is the concern of Navajo teachers and community members about the role of schools in fostering Navajo language and culture in the school setting. Forty eight participants, all teachers, teacher aides, parents, and community members were interviewed with such questions as: What aspect of Navajo culture should be taught? Who is responsible for teaching the language? and, How much should schools be involved? According to Batchelder (2000), the findings

from the study suggest that demographic and personal characteristics in terms of age, residence, school history, and location of community tended to shape respondents responses. In the end, the overriding conclusions seem to suggest that not all members of the Navajo Nation shared the same beliefs and attitudes about teaching the Navajo language and culture in the school setting. From the data presented, there were some who agreed that it is imperative that Navajo language and culture be taught while others at the other end of the spectrum had other ideas and beliefs which were detrimental to the preservation of the language. In conclusion, Batchelder's analysis points to the idea that community partnerships and community based revitalization efforts may be what are needed if the Navajo Nation wants to preserve its linguistic and cultural heritage.

Proponents of bilingual education for Native American students have argued that there is certainly a connection between language and culture. However, the main questions and concerns seem to revert back to why language and culture are important for students, who should be involved in the process of preserving language, and how the planning and implementations should be done. It is clear from this study that the focus seems to be on what is the responsibility and role of schools in the process of addressing these issues. From studies such as this, it is clear that the responsibility lies with members of particular language groups and communities to take action in preserving their languages. Beyond this, Indigenous researchers need to address social and political agendas that impact and are relative to local issues and concerns

In an ethnographic study by Charles Braithwaite (1995) to examine Navajo communication practices that are enacted in the college classrooms, Braithwaite's study reveals that using a curriculum that openly ascribes to Diné cultural beliefs and

perspectives will reinforce an awareness of working with Navajo students especially for teachers who work with them. By starting with the assumption that culture is pervasive in all contexts of communication, Braithwaite's objective was to see how every day, educational communication practices using Navajo were enacted at Diné College whose curriculum is based on the *Sá'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hozhóón* (SNBH) paradigm. Using extensive ethnographic data, 100 hours of participant observation field notes over a course of eight months, Braithwaite's study identified and examined four aspects of the colleges SHBH curriculum in relation to the use of language in the classroom and academic settings. His findings suggest that the four aspects of the SNBH paradigm: sense of place, duality of life, sense of Diné identity, and the rhetoric of enactment that were congruent with the colleges curriculum allowed for students to better understand their cultural identity in school and beyond.

This research was an attempt to explicate knowledge which was employed by students and instructors in a tribal college setting that was in line with the college's curriculum framework. In the education of Navajo students, research that looks at the importance of culture is very much needed especially at the secondary and post secondary levels. A previous study by Susan Philips (1992) with secondary students, using participant observations, also looked at the communicative competence strategies of Indian students in relation to their white Anglo teachers. Philips' work was very profound in highlighting some of the strategies that were used by the Warm Springs students. She found that the Warm Springs student's classroom behaviors were very much influenced by their cultural background. So, she proposes that educators need to be aware of students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Similarly, in Braithwaite's study,

she reveals that when the cultural aspects of communication practices are made overt and explicit across the entire college setting, students' reactions to and within the educational setting is enhanced. I believe that although Braithwaite (1995) very implicitly stated his position, it is somewhat problematic when outsiders have to be the ones who do the research if the study is to be given any credence. That is, why didn't Braithwaite work with some of the college students in doing this study? Surely, they would have had some unique perspectives to offer of their own in relation to this interesting study. Furthermore, his emphasis on culture certainly may have raised some concerns on the part of Navajo elders and instructors who may have been concerned about cultural exploitation and appropriation.

In a study that was taken from a larger study that was undertaken by Platero, Brandt, Wong, and Witherspoon (1986) in *Navajo Students At Risk*, Elizabeth Brandt's (1992) study was developed to address some fundamental questions about Navajo student dropout. The major objectives included finding information on the extent of the dropout problem, identifying reasons for dropouts, making recommendations to effectively address the needs of the dropouts and to better track the students. Although, (as noted by the author) there were many methodological flaws due to low response rates and lack of comparable data, the three phase study determined that there was an estimated overall dropout rate of 31 %. Using statistical analyses, the study began by compiling data on students such as test scores, dropout and attendance rates, and entrance and exit criteria. Next a complex school characteristics survey was used to gather data on BIA, public, charter, and private schools that served Navajo schools. The third and last phase of the study involved data analysis, recommendations, and a plan to curb the rate of dropout for

Navajo students. In the end, the findings from this study suggest that dropout phenomenon is complex, difficult to assess, and multi-causal. Some of the factors that were deemed attributable to why students drop out were academic and behavior problems, differences in perceptions as to why students dropout, transportation and absenteeism, and socioeconomic status.

Dubbed as the first large scale Indian dropout study, the Navajo study was a comprehensive analysis to determine some of the major factors that lead to Navajo students dropping out of school. However, the findings from this research indicate that this research may have been too extensive and complex. Research data from three different data bases were used to provide triangulation on the basic research questions. Furthermore, what seemed to hinder the researchers was an overwhelming lack of compliance by schools and school administrators. In other words, many limitations arose because of the duration of study, response rates, and amount of data that was analyzed. In the end, the researcher were able to determine that their findings were substantive enough to warrant some recommendations for educators and policy makers for whom much of this study was geared at particularly the Navajo Tribe. As I read over this study, I find that the perceptions that administrators, community members, and parents had as to the reasons for dropping out were very much in line with popular perceptions. That is, there perceptions were based on looking at the cultural deficit of students. Instead, future research needs to focus on issues and problems beyond the students and communities. Such research should analyze why some schools, community members, administrators, and policy makers are reluctant to give any information to research studies that implicate them.

In a seven year ethnographic study of Navajo and Ute students, Donna Deyhle (1992) examined why Navajo and Ute students leave school by examining issues of racism, academic achievement, and cultural change. The extent of the study was based on information from interviews, observations, questionnaires, and a data base tracked over a ten year period on 1,489 students which included information on student's attendance, grades, test scores, socioeconomic status, and location. The research sites were two high schools in a border town community located near the Navajo and Ute reservations. Deyhle's extensive research highlights the cultural, socioeconomic, and structural factors that restrict opportunities for these students which inevitable led to failure for many. For example, by correlating her study to past research on Indian student dropout, she contends that race and economic relations in the community, social and cultural patterns in the home, and cultural integrity and resistance are important to understanding why Navajo and Ute students fail in school.

Deyhle (1992) maintains that schools such as those in her study perpetuate institutionalized racism and contribute to the way that schools treat Navajo students whether intentionally or inadvertently. Much of what she describes relates to how much of a difference there is in Navajo and Ute society as compared to Anglo society as far as values and beliefs about success. For example, she indicates that Navajo and Ute culture values emphasize family, group success, and group continuity whereas Anglo culture values individual success, individual worth, and material culture. More specifically, she discusses how language, cultural and social differences have a tremendous impact on the lives of Navajo and Ute students. Deyhle (1992) writes "The decision to leave school is complex...As I found out, when youth revealed the feelings they had of being pushed out

of schools and pulled into their own Indian community, one must look beyond individual failure as pivotal reasons for leaving school”(1992, p.14).

Teresa McCarty’s work with the Rough Rock community spans several decades of ethnographic research. In *A Place to be Navajo*, McCarty (2001) describes the continuous struggle for self-determination by the Rough Rock community to advance Navajo bilingual education. From this study, Teresa McCarty discusses how an indigenous school struggled to determine their own course of action in midst of adverse cultural changes. She describes her study as more than an ethnography but a critical life history and an inquiry into Indigenous schooling. By asking questions like what is Indigenous schooling and what should it look like?, she describes the unique relationship between people and place at Rough Rock, Arizona as more than a physical or mental connection but a spiritual one. From this study she looked at how this school, funded by the federal government in the 1960s during the midst of the Civil Rights movement as a demonstration project, served as model or vehicle for others i.e. people of color in developing local leadership, education, and economy. However, much of the focus of this research was too listen to the voice of the community people using qualitative research methods such as interviews, observations, and empirical data on the schools performance in relation to state and national standards.

The Rough Rock Demonstration School started operation in 1966 with an all Navajo governing board to teach Navajo language and culture extensively within a Anglo dominant educational paradigm. She writes “ the fact that communities such as Rough Rock were able to gain a foothold in the system, seizing the moment of opportunity for self-empowerment, is a tribute to their ingenuity and resolve to realize the promise of

local, Indigenous education control.” Furthermore, she adds, “schools such as Rough Rock are critical, if contentious, resources in this struggle. Because community schools are such dominating economic and therefore political institutions, the politics, language and culture of the school can be assets for heightening collective consciousness and mobilizing community action.” In the end, she posits the issue and question of how Indigenous schools can really be a place to be Indigenous people.

As I read *A Place to Be Navajo*, I was reminded of the importance of giving voice to others, particularly to those whom you write about in your research. Beyond that, her work is a testament to the continuous struggle by Indigenous communities to find a place that becomes a place of empowerment. While, there may have been times when her credibility was questioned due to the fact that she is non – Native, however, the extent of her work reveals that she is very committed to give voice to others through her writing. What is different from what she is doing and from what others have done in the past is that she is actually producing results that have many implications for future researchers and scholars. Furthermore, by placing her work before us, she is asking us to step forward and do something. Maybe it is time that we listen.

In a research by Robert Vadas (1995), he explores the relationship between Navajo students’ degree of acculturation into mainstream Anglo society and their academic achievement levels. Levels of achievement were measured by using ITBS and CTBS scores for eleventh and seventh grade students as an indicator of students’ achievement levels which fell well below national standards as grade levels increased. Using this data, his research was to determine if cultural incompatibility with Anglo school curriculum, as identified by previous researchers like Deyhle (1984), was in fact one of the main

variables in academic achievement levels. A Cultural Assessment Survey (CAS) was designed as a survey questionnaire to assess student attachment to specific Navajo cultural characteristics related to students' attachment to specific Navajo characteristics like home and family influence, daily life, cultural beliefs, and language. Thereby, he interviewed over 200 Navajo students from four school districts across the Navajo reservation. Furthermore, his research question on the relationship between achievement scores from standardized tests and degree of acculturation took into consideration gender variables. Achieving an astounding 88.9% response rate, Vadas was able to assess the relationship between academic achievement and degree of acculturation which revealed that Navajo students were for the most part slowly being acculturated into Anglo society. The findings from the study clearly show that Navajo children are continually being forced into an Anglo mainstream, industrialized culture, however there were strong indications that there was a strong retention of strong Navajo values. Overall, the data findings suggest that Navajo students do indeed possess the cultural characteristics, such as language, that had been suggested to be the cause of incompatibility with Anglo school curriculum and instruction.

Based on such research data, many of the factors and causes of native language loss and cultural change are more or less attributable to and a consequence of larger socio-economic, cultural, and political referendums i.e. motives that oppose cultural diversity in America. Vadas' work is an attempt to validate previous claims and contentions that cultural compatibility is a key issue of concern in the schooling of Native children. Vadas (1995) writes, "Navajo traditionalists and learning style advocates believe that Navajo culture is incompatible with Anglo schooling. They feel that reservation schools should

be Navajo controlled with curriculum and teaching methodology centered around Navajo student cultural characteristics or learning styles”(p.17).

Although I found this study to be worthwhile and important, I found one thing that seemed to pose a serious question. Vadas use of the term degree of acculturation was very problematic for me because I think it goes back to the idea of asking Native people: How Indian are you? I believe that although his study was very important in assessing the relationship between Navajo language and culture and student achievement, I find that the issues of race and ethnicity were more or less avoided. For example, in his study he uses the term attachment to Navajo language somehow maybe suggesting that the students were reverting back to something that is not valued in society. In his analysis, he states that the students’ grades and scores on standardized tests were the reasons why he wanted to explore the notion of cultural compatibility in the first place. With that, as critical researchers I believe that it is imperative that we look to other causes and consequences that go beyond students in any research study. In other word, why didn’t Vadas also focus on how the tests may have been biased or the schools as contributing to student failure. Consequently, the voices of Indigenous youth continue to be silenced by and within the processes of schooling because serious attempts to critique the nature of schooling and racism are lacking.

Despite, these studies on Navajo student achievement, there is very little research that critically examines the impact of racism on Navajo as an Indigenous language community. Also, while significant studies on Indigenous language communities have clearly identified important causes as to why Indigenous languages are threatened by external forces like government policies and internal forces like language attitudes, there

are very few discussions about the ways that racism and racist policies impact on Indigenous education and language communities. For example, Evangeline Parsons-Yazzie (1997) notes that in the past, the Navajo language was passed on in the homes from parent to children in an extended family setting that reveals the importance of language socialization and intergenerational language use. However, she does not explicitly explain how and why Navajo language loss continues to escalate, instead her analysis only highlights how language attitudes have changed as a result of changes in lifestyle and life choices. In her analysis, the burden of proof is seemingly placed on the backs of Navajo parents and elders while disregarding important social, economic, and political causes that have been described by other researchers like Tiffany Lee (1999) and Deborah House (2004).

In Tiffany Lee's study of language attitudes, Lee (1999) does more to attribute how Navajo language shift is linked to not only internal factors like shame, language attitudes, and language use but links them to other socio-economic and political factors. Specifically in T. Lee's study (1999) she looked particularly at the influences on language attitudes and behaviors. By looking at influences and socialization, her research reveals the multidimensional nature of language attitudes and language use that are significant to shaping attitudes. As such her study looks at the socialization experiences of Navajo youth that are influenced by current language attitudes among Navajo teenagers, the roles of family and home, the value of the language within the school context, and the content and type of instruction. All of these internal and external factors are a consequence of imposed language ideologies and policies. In terms of language use, she states "the school, home and religion all play important roles in predicting

Navajo language use among Navajo teenagers”(Lee, 1999, p.178). In sum, Lee (1999) states:

Navajo teenagers today recognize the importance of Navajo language. However, they are ambivalent about its connection to Navajo youth. They have limited abilities in speaking Navajo and are very sensitive to judgment by other peers and adults for their abilities. The most important implication of my results is that families and schools can be active in creating positive learning attitudes and in promoting Navajo language use among Navajo teenagers. Both families and schools influence language attitudes and along with traditional religion, these based institutions in society all influence language use.(p.183).

Finally, in a study describing the impact of language policies on Indigenous languages, McCarty, Romero-Little, and Zepeda (2003) illustrate how Indigenous students develop their identities amidst complex interstices of race, class, and gender issues related to language and identity.

Despite these studies that offer some insight to reverse Navajo language shift, the questions remain as to why students are not learning the language even as Indigenous language revitalization efforts have increased. Therefore, I raise the critical question of; in what ways is Native language and culture loss an outcome of the impact of racism? What are the connections between language, education, and internalized oppression? That is, how does racism impact on Native students in the process of schooling and how do power and ideology play out in Native communities? Finally, should Indigenous scholars focus more on the marginalization and subjugation of Indigenous languages by looking at socio-economic, cultural, and political

referendums and motives that oppose cultural and language diversity in America like the English Only movement?

Recently, some Indigenous scholars like Sandy Grande (2004) and, Taos/Diné scholar, Glenabah Martinez (2003) have begun to look closely at the politics of culture and the politics of identity and representation in the education of Indigenous youth as informed by the research found in critical educational studies here in the United States and abroad. By examining the complex relationships between racism, colonization, culture, identity, and power within the education of Indigenous youth and by drawing on the previous work of critical scholars like Apple (2001a) and Giroux (2001), these critical Indigenous educators discuss and reveal the possibilities of addressing the inequities in schooling by engaging in critical theory and a “new politics of hope” while retaining an Indigenous agenda (Grande, 2004). In a more recent study on Indigenous urban youth, Martinez (2003) identified several key factors that highlight the ways that students construct, negotiate, and rearticulate a new transformed cultural and racial identity - through processes of resistance and assimilation- within the larger processes of social, economic, and political spaces. In predating her discussion upon Cameron McCarthy’s non synchronous relations of power and Apples’ relational analysis approach, she underscores how shifts of economic, social and political power operate through hegemony to maintain social order and to control the construction of knowledge (Martinez, 2003). That is, by drawing on the empirical evidence and theories of social and cultural reproduction and the politics of culture and education, Martinez underscores how class, gender, ideology, power, and race intersect in the lives of Indigenous youth. Moreover, Martinez underscores how Indigenous youth navigate the contested terrain of

education and rearticulate the notion of an educated person. Thus, Martinez' study (2003) reveals that despite the many U.S. government policies aimed at the assimilation and deculturalization of Native Americans, Indigenous youth are empowering themselves to resist and counter oppressive racial attitudes, behaviors, and practices in their own ways. This research has added much new breadth to the empirical research that examines how schools are sites of struggle and responsible in many ways for the inequities in education. Moreover, these types of research are charting new possibilities of engaging critical theory whilst engaging with the issues that are pertinent to Indigenous agendas.

Thus, instead of stopping short of rearticulating theories of reproduction, scholars like Martinez (2003), Grande (2004), Smith (2002), and hooks (1994)) are discussing and engaging theories of resistance, Indigenous research paradigms, and transformational pedagogy to acknowledge the dialectical and dialogical relationships between existing structures and human agency within the process of schooling. Also, while there are increasingly more compelling research studies by other scholars that underscore the impact of race, class, and gender on the education of minority students, there are still too few studies that describe the impact of racism on Native American students in particular. Hence, studies that highlight race and racism and the process of racialization in regards to Native American youth are still uncharted and there is great need to study the impact of racism whether as institutional racism, racialized discourse, and/or epistemological racism on Native American youth (Lomawaima and McCarty, 2006).

Chapter Three

Research methodology

According to Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (2008) in an introduction to the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, it is often assumed by researchers from the positivistic paradigm that qualitative research methods are too subjective, unscientific, and biased. These unwarranted assumptions suggest that qualitative research methodologies produce information only in the particular cases which are studied and any more general conclusions are only hypotheses – or informed guesses. In response, John Creswell (1998) in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, states qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” and requires outcomes that will provide answers and possibly more questions as to the nature of that problem (1998, p. 15). In the first edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Guba and Lincoln (1994) have also described qualitative research as being “more sensitive” and adaptable to dealing with multiple realities because of the nature of the methodology. Elsewhere, in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.), Lincoln and Guba (1985) write:

Inquiry methodology can no longer be treated as a set of universally applicable rules or abstractions. Methodology is inevitably interwoven with and emerges from the nature of particular disciplines...Consequently, to argue that it is paradigms that are in contention is probably less useful than to probe where and how paradigms exhibit confluence and where and how they exhibit differences, controversies, and contradictions.(p. 254).

Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that qualitative research involves looking at and recognizing “competing paradigms” in research with respect to key ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions (p.105-117).

Before I continue describing my research position and methodology, I will briefly review some of the axioms and characteristics of naturalistic inquiry and qualitative research because they lend insight and credence to the effectiveness of qualitative and naturalistic inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define axioms as “the set of undemonstrated and undemonstrated basic beliefs accepted by convention or established by practice as the building blocks of some conceptual or theoretical structure or system” (p.33). More loosely, Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe axioms as assumptions however arbitrary and bizarre they may be by which we engage in inquiry or research. In other words, whenever researchers set out to engage in research, they begin with a basic set of beliefs based on assumptions and personal beliefs that help guide their research in terms of the type of methodology that they will use in a study. Also, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify several axioms as being crucial to an understanding of how and why research is done and in this case in the naturalistic paradigm. They are the nature of reality, relationship of knower to known, the possibility of generalizations, and causal linkages. Therefore, it is important to state a research position within this methodological tradition. In other words, qualitative research in its design and methodology must acknowledge important aspects of research like natural setting, multiple realities, and trustworthiness gained through an in-depth understanding of varied contexts, communities, groups or individuals in order to make meaning of experiences.

In looking further at these axioms, Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe fourteen characteristics of the naturalistic inquiry paradigm. For example, one of the primary facets of this type of research involves utilizing tacit knowledge, purposive sampling, and inductive analysis. Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe tacit knowledge as the set of

understandings that cannot be defined yet by way of that paradox, new understandings are made. For example, in this research, I came into it knowing what I knew as an educator working with Diné youth yet also expecting some things to come from it through the research process that I may have been unaware of in my own thinking. Finally, by using an inductive analysis which is preferential to naturalistic inquiry methods, Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain how research designs in naturalistic inquiry must emerge rather than be constructed or preconceived ahead of time.

For this study, since I address a complexity of issues and debates that arise from talking about race and identity in regards to the educational experiences of Indigenous youth, the task of acknowledging Indigenous students' voices and perspectives in my research agenda was very significant for me. In this respect, I use a critical qualitative case study research methodology that honors and recognizes the voices and perspectives of participants as they share their stories and personal experiences with the processes of racialization within the contexts of schools. Furthermore, I use tenets of critical race theory to explain and interpret themes that emerged from the participants' stories as they talked about the ways that racialization impacts their identity development.

Lincoln and Denzin (2000) state critical qualitative research methodologies must be aware of "competing theoretical paradigms and interpretive perspectives, research strategies, and the role of the researcher" (p. 30). In this way, they argue qualitative interpretations are constructed collaboratively and not imposed. By looking at research through this way of knowing and understanding, I posit that while there may be paradoxes within competing paradigms in terms of method and processes, the dialogical and dialectical nature of critical research must still be acknowledged and engaged

especially by those wanting to do research for harmonious outcomes. These were (and will continue to be) important ideas for me to think about in my research with Navajo students.

In describing my research methodology and my role as a researcher, I would like to reiterate here that as an Indigenous person, my worldview (ontology, epistemology and axiology) is defined and informed by an Indigenous (Diné) philosophy. That is, a significant aspect of my research paradigm particularly in regards to my engagement with others and my methodology is guided and informed by the Diné philosophy of *Sq'áh Naghéi Bik'eh Hózhón*. Therefore, as I developed my theoretical framework for this research I had to think about research through a new set of lens. A critical lens based on how I look at the world as a Diné (Indigenous) educator and scholar who is also informed by critical race and Indigenous decolonization theory. Specifically, I draw upon Critical Race Theory (CRT) for my data analysis, since CRT places race as the center of analysis and it explores the transformations and relationships among race, racism, and power (Bell, 1992; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001).

Critical race theory has five tenets: the permanence of racism (which explains how racism is implemented and maintained in society), whiteness as property (which addresses the value placed on being white), interest convergence (which considers how people of color advance only when Whites can benefit), the critique of liberalism (which discusses the issues surrounding the slow progression of racial equality), and counter story-telling (which allows the voices of people of color to be heard (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). As mentioned before, I highlight three of the tenets of CRT, one of which is counter story-telling as a means to underscore my

participants' voices in relation to questions about race, identity, and power in schools. I use the other two tenets as an acknowledgement of: 1) the centrality of racism and to, 2) challenges dominant ideologies which are premised on meritocracy and colorblindness. In defining an anti-racist research methodology based on CRT, George Sefa Dei (2005) writes anti-racist research "places the minoritized at the center of analysis by focusing on their lived experiences" and "sees race as central to how we claim, occupy, and defend spaces"(Sefa Dei and Johal, 2005, p. 2-3). Furthermore, he states anti-racist research "must problematize colonial practices" which is very much similar to the Indigenous research agenda (2005, p.4). In the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Christopher Dunbar Jr. (2008) states,

Indigenous scholars and critical race theorists reject the notion of one truth. They argue that there are multiple ways of knowing, depending on whose lens is used. The notion of objectivity as evidence of truth is deemed invalid. They challenge the immorality of subjugation and the concept that a "racelessness" society can exist. They contend that where there is a void in morality, justice cannot exist. The dominant culture framework that espouses truth and objectivity is at the center of untruth and subjectivity. Indigenous scholars argue they have their "own way of doing things"- their own set of what constitutes knowledge. They argue that the dominant cultural model continues to marginalize the Indigenous knowledge systems model. (p. 96)

Since an important tenet of critical race theory and critical Indigenous methodology is presenting different interpretations and legitimating the counter-narratives or story telling

of people of color, this methodology acknowledges, affirms, honors, and validates the voices of those who have been historically marginalized and oppressed.

Defining a critical Indigenous research methodology. Since the beginning of European expansion into new territories, Indigenous and other colonized peoples have resisted the many ways that they have been portrayed as the “Other” in the relation to the white “Self” or the European image of self as Man (Fanon, 1967; Said, 1993). In response, Indigenous scholars like Linda Smith (1999) have constantly urged Indigenous researchers to challenge and critically deconstruct and decolonize research paradigms informed by Euro-Western constructs and to offer alternative paradigms.²² In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Maori scholar Linda Smith (1999) proclaims that research has become a dirty word for Indigenous people. By elaborating in depth on the history of and impact of positivistic research paradigms on Indigenous communities, she explains the reasons for angst in Indigenous communities towards western research paradigms. More precisely, Smith explains the ways that white researchers of the past exploited and colonized Indigenous life ways and knowledge. Smith (1991) states the following:

The nexus between cultural ways of knowing, scientific discoveries, economic impulses and imperial power enabled the West to make ideological claims to having a superior civilization. The idea of the West became a reality when it was re-presented back to indigenous nations through colonialism. (p. 64).

Thus, as I define a critical / Indigenous research methodology with respect to my research, I highlight some critical perspectives that address doing research for and in Indigenous communities which are borrowed from the work of Linda Smith, Manulani Aluli-Meyer, and Shawn Wilson. These Indigenous scholars offer some profound

²² Paradigm refers to a set of beliefs, principles, and/or worldview. See Guba and Lincoln (1994).

explanations using Indigenous paradigms about the purpose of research and the role of researchers. As such, Indigenous research methodologies always forefronts who the research is for and what the research will bring to those being researched. Vine Deloria Jr. (2001) states this idea best as he writes, “my original complaint against researchers was that they seem to derive all the benefit’s and bear no responsibilities for the way in which their findings are used.”(p. 459). However, while this statement was in reference to white researchers doing bad research or repetitive or rehashed research in Indigenous communities, I believe it certainly stands true for Indigenous researchers doing research in their own communities. Therefore, Indigenous scholars remain mindful that research by Indigenous people must look, feel, and be used differently for the sake of reclaiming our humanity.

Linda Smith’s (1999) powerful arguments against doing research in Western paradigms have encouraged Indigenous researchers to critically deconstruct important aspects of a research methodology. For example, some important questions are: What is research? Who defines research? Who can do research in Indigenous communities? How do cultural, political, social, and economic factors influence research? How have the historical relations among people, communities and nations shaped research? What are the ethical and moral obligations of researchers towards those being researched? What are the assumptions that a researcher brings or comes with into a research? What is the purpose of Indigenous research? Who will it benefit? Who is the center of the research? How will this research be interpreted? Furthermore, in describing how to best achieve this type of research by recognizing aspects of decolonization, In a chapter titled “On Tricky Ground”, Smith (2004) states,

I would emphasize the importance of retaining the connections between the academy of researchers, the diverse indigenous communities, and the larger political struggle of decolonization because the disconnection of that relationship reinforces the colonial approach to education as divisive and destructive. (p. 88)

Consequently, in her work with the Kaupapa Maori to indigenize their educational models, Linda Smith (2000) implicates that by moving away from Western ways of doing research, Indigenous critical researchers need to give a voice back to others outside the academy and value what they have to say and share.

In *Ho'oulu: Our Time of Becoming*, Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2003) reaffirms this notion of challenging mainstream philosophical assumptions and universal principles in regards to research in her scholarship by rearticulating empiricism, epistemology, and hermeneutics from a Hawaiian paradigm. In defining an Indigenous (Hawaiian) paradigm of research based on Hawaiian epistemology, Meyer (2003) states "Research for us is not simply about asking burning questions we want resolved, but rather, we are answering a call to be of use"(p. 60). In other words, by asking "what are the needs we must address within ourselves, our family, our community, and within our distinct and evolving cultures", Meyer (2003) places the emphasis back on what is our research good for within the work and research at hand (p.60). Hence, Meyer (2003) states "the focus that weaves within our research at this pivotal time in history is a dialectical one that holds the potential to liberate us" and "we must get on to the wholeness we believe in and this must reflect in our work, in our writing, in our deepest dreams" (p. 60).

In *Research is Ceremony*, Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) also explains ways that Indigenous researchers can redefine existing research paradigms by rearticulating

Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and thinking (epistemology, ontology, axiology and methodology) to their work and research. Thereby, drawing on his work with other Indigenous research scholars, he offers a theoretical model that essentially reconfigures notions of what is knowledge, how do we get to knowledge, and how do we interpret knowledge. For example, two significant ideas evolved from his research related to an Indigenous epistemology, relations and relational accountability. Wilson (2008) writes,

[An] Indigenous epistemology has systems of knowledge built upon relationships between things, rather than the things themselves. Indigenous knowledge is more than merely a way of knowing. It is important to recognize that the epistemology includes entire systems of knowledge and relationships. These relationships are with the cosmos around us, as well as with concepts. They thus include interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships, and relationships with ideas. Indigenous epistemology is our cultures, our worldviews, our times, our language, our histories, our spiritualities, and our places in the cosmos. Indigenous epistemology is our systems of knowledge in their context, or in relationship. (p. 74)

In looking at the work of these scholars, I am reminded of one of the comments made by one of my dissertation committee members during my dissertation proposal. In reference to some similar questions about what could be some key questions and/or ideas in doing Indigenous research, Dr. Larry Emerson pointed out that doing Indigenous research should be for harmonious outcomes. This was very profound for me in developing my research methodology. That is, this comment allowed to me to think of my research as a spiritual event or ceremony as described by Shawn Wilson. That is, when engaging in a search of knowledge to find *hozhó* or a state or place of balance and peace, we are taught

as Diné to find someone who will and can diagnose the problems or issues to be resolved. Thus, a Diné diagnostician or elder was consulted to examine the life of the individual or individuals and to determine the best outcomes. From that particular point on, a ceremony was underway. Thus, in my research, I wanted to think of my work as being as such, a ceremony. That is, it should be critical, intuitive, reflexive, and re-affirming of my Indigenous assertions of self, community, people and the knowledge base upon which it is based. This was the basis of my research design. Moreover, this research paradigm did not fall into any modern perceptions of time, space, ethics, or metaphysics. That is, the research paradigm was allowed to take its own course. Once it is boxed in or too many procedures are piled on it, it will lose its purpose and its life energy just as it will in a ceremony.

Consequently from the work of these scholars and other Indigenous researchers, I formed my research paradigm to help explain the relevance for using critical theories of education in my research and work. That is, this critical aspect of my theoretical research paradigm helps me as an Indigenous person especially within the contexts of my research and work to name, reflect on, and act upon or articulate an informed counter intuitive discourse that challenges white supremacy that would have otherwise been illusive for me. Therefore, in looking at the world through a critical Indigenous paradigm or lenses, I believe that a critical way of looking at the world requires a thorough understanding of how knowledge is constructed, why it is constructed, and for whose benefit it serves. As such, my position-ality is very much defined not only by my cultural background as a young Indigenous Navajo/Diné scholar, educator, and researcher but by the traditions of critical theory.

Role of the researcher

By recognizing that there are competing paradigms in research and thus multiple ways of knowing, a researcher must accept that there are and must be multiple subjectivities or perspectives. Therefore, crucial to this process of understanding is ultimately the role of the researcher within the process of research itself. That is, the researcher must acknowledge multiple subjectivities in regards to key questions about the purpose and outcomes of research like; why do I want to do this research, for whose benefit, and to what end. Thus, research especially qualitative research is ultimately about knowledge construction and production involving real people. Thereby, in my research, I had to remember that I am doing and engaging in research with my own people who maybe relatives and other Navajo people's children. More so, since my research involves looking at and recognizing dual and/or contradictory forms of knowledge production and representation within the contexts of education, I was very aware of the propensity for negative outcomes. Thus, I had to be cognizant of my own humility and humanness in this process and search for knowledge by returning to these questions often.

So what is the importance of this study? What do I hope to learn from it and more importantly what do I hope to give back? As I stated before, I believe that these are also important questions in terms of looking at the implications of doing research and its outcomes. In terms of how and why research is done, I believe that it is important that researchers not only state their position but engage their participants and their research using a well informed theoretical framework. For example, what would be different if I do not address issues of race, class, and gender in this particular study? Also, how could

or can this study contribute anything to future research? How and more importantly what will my research participants and other stakeholders gain from this research? Finally, again what will be the outcomes?

Consequently because of these critical questions that beset me from the beginning of the research project, throughout the whole process of the research I had to be ever cognizant about my status as an insider/outsider to the research participants. Michele Foster (1994) articulates this insider/outsider dilemma very well by elaborating on how an insider may not always be the right person just because they know people or know the community very well. For example, while I may have been perceived to be an outsider to some of my participants initially, my insider perspective as a Diné scholar certainly helped to offset this image because of my attention to understanding their lives. Furthermore, I worked hard to avoid the risk of making assumptions about my participants' roles and my own role as a Diné researcher. For example, I was careful not to assume that they were not aware of their cultural traditions or unaware of racism and racial discrimination in their lives. By doing this, I saw that once they began to know me and understand my research interests, many of my participants began to feel more at ease and comfortable with the process. Additionally, because I remained cognizant of my role as a researcher throughout the entire research process, I worked hard to establish and maintain rapport and trustworthiness by building and maintaining a caring relationship with the participants. Mainly, I did this by getting familiar with my participants' backgrounds, recognizing their different cultural perspectives, and language abilities. Furthermore, I also remained mindful that there may be different cultural nuances that I may be unfamiliar with regardless of the fact that I am Navajo myself. More so, I

remained cognizant that many of these students were new incoming college students who were coming from many different places and were at different places in their understanding of the issues and questions that I posed to them. Furthermore, I worked with their busy schedules to get the interviews done and I also reminded them of their choice to continue participating in this research. In this way, not only did I give them choice and options but I honored their unique cultural differences.

Research design

This research is a qualitative research design that uses a case study approach. A case study is often an in-depth investigation or research method that involves looking at individuals, groups, or events to explore causation or causes that point to or highlight some underlying issues relative to the investigation. It is a methodology that is commonly used in social sciences to provide a systematic way of looking at events or cases over a long period of time. Creswell (1998) writes, “a case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed data collection”(p. 61). So rather than using hypotheses and following a rigid protocol (strict set of rules) to examine a set of variables, case studies provide a systematic way of looking at events, experiences and perceptions by collecting data, analyzing the data, and reporting the results. As a result the researcher gains a better understanding of why some events happened as they do or what experiences are very telling of a phenomena and what might become important to look at more extensively in future research. Case studies lend themselves to generating more questions than answers in some studies. In this way, a case study could be seen as a research strategy, an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within real-life contexts. Case studies should not be confused with

qualitative research and they can be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Critical qualitative research methodologies allows researchers an opportunity to engage in a critical analysis of real social or human problems that need to be explored and it provides for the voices of individuals and groups to be heard. Moreover, qualitative research allows for individuals or groups to be studied within a natural setting. Thus, by employing a qualitative research design that employs a case study approach to studying educational issues, critical researcher such as myself not only gain an richer understanding for the multiple realities that are interwoven with the data but they also construct new knowledge (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Overall, the use of qualitative methods in addition to quantitative data may also help any research gain a more realistic interpretation of the phenomena being studied from the participants' points of view.

In speaking to issues of research representation and responsibility, Fine, Weis, Wessen, and Wong (1998) highlight significant issues that deal with informed consent, neutrality, reflexivity, and representations. They write “there has long been a tendency to view the self of the social science observer as a potential contaminant, something to be separated out, neutralized, minimized, standardized, and controlled...our informants are then left carrying the burden of representations as we hide behind the cloak of alleged neutrality” (Fine et al, 1998, p. 169). Therefore, the issues of neutrality, reflexivity, and representation are certainly important ideas to consider as well. In doing this, I stated up front in my first chapter my position as an Indigenous Diné researcher with an insider/outsider perspective. Most importantly, I am a Diné researcher who is coming to this research with a particular theoretical framework or lens to conduct the research so

that primary stakeholders, who are the Diné community, will benefit in the end.

Significantly, I use my particular theoretical lenses to better understand how much of an impact my research will have on the lives of my participants and the communities they represent. Furthermore, in doing so, I hope to gain a better understanding of how research can be done in Indigenous communities which will be imperative to the field of educational research and to my own future research in education. Finally, by giving part of the research work to my participants to help explain and examine the process of schooling and education in relation to their Navajo cultural identity, I am also giving the research back to the communities they represent.

In the past, studies on Navajo youth and Navajo communities related to Navajo language have been done mostly by white outsiders. As white researchers, Teresa McCarty (2001) and Donna Deyhle (1995) have both done similar types of studies in which they discuss issues of trustworthiness and sensitivity related to doing work in Indigenous communities that highlight the need to give some voice and responsibility to the local communities. For example, in her study, although McCarty's position as a non-Navajo white outsider did not compromise her work too much because of the way she worked with the community as a community advocate over a significant period of time. However, there will always be a question as to why and who she is doing it this study for. Similarly, in her work, Deyhle (1995) mentions how she had to contend with her role as a insider-outsider researcher who advocated for her research communities that often resulted in her being ostracized by members of her own ethnic or racial group and those in the community for being a trouble maker. Although, her insider status came as a result of her being accepted by the communities she worked with for over 10 years of her study

yet she states that she was also still seen pretty much as an outsider in other communities where she was not well known. Similarly I may find myself in these situations because although I may be seen as an insider in one community, I will always be an outsider in other communities.

Finally, there are still questions that we must like; what do we mean by informed consent or representations when doing ethnographic work? What can we do as outsiders and how can we get informed consent? Clifford Christians (2003) in *The Landscape of Qualitative Research* also discusses a code of ethics as consisting of informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality and accuracy. These are crucial elements of any qualitative research that need to be thoroughly thought out and addressed (Fine et al, 1998). For example, in the *Ethnographic Interview*, James Spradley (1979) describes rapport as “a harmonious relationship between ethnographer and informant” which “means that a basic sense of trust has developed that allows for the free flow of information”(p. 78). While any researcher whether as an insider or outsider must start from a good place, a good researcher will go to great care to maintain the relationship. That is, in order to establish rapport and to maintain a harmonious relationship with participants, I needed to work on that relationship by being truthful, honest, and respectful to my participants. I did not want to impose, push my ideas, or work just around my time schedule. But most importantly, I wanted to give voice and power back to the research participants because inevitably they will be the ones to either benefit or lose from the research. In other words, I asked myself these questions; why am I doing this research? Is it going to benefit the local community or other communities? Who will gain from this research?

I believe that the main point here is that I remained upfront and honest about why I am doing the study and how that will benefit the participants. As such, it was imperative to address issues and questions dealing with cultural-sensitivity, neutrality, and reflexivity before jumping into a study even as I am a Diné person myself. More so, cultural sensitivity deals with ethical and moral issues such as following culturally appropriate research methods or asking the right questions. Finally, all participants' experiences and knowledge need to be valued and not misconstrued. In this way, the idea of doing good ethnographic research is built upon having trusting relationships, networks, and partnerships that last a lifetime.

In thinking about to these types of issues and questions, as a first time researcher, I realize that the notion of research is contested and controversial in some places. Some pertinent questions then become how am I going to approach this process of doing research? What does it mean to do research and what does it look like? Thus, for this research, I wanted to ask questions that I felt would be true to these student's experiences as they were mine. Many of the interview questions were based on ideas that I know are important to Indigenous communities based on my own research and work within these communities. Thus, my questions did not just come from reading about Indigenous (Diné) youth in education but from my own experiences as a Diné youth and my work as a Diné educator. They are real, uncompromising, and powerful questions to think about especially for Indigenous researchers because they address real issues about what is happening to Indigenous youth in schools today. Also, these types of research questions can bring about new meanings and understandings to those who are engage in and those who are being researched. In other words, critical Indigenous research must have real,

practical reasons and ends because all research and the knowledge it produces is powerful and entrenched in political and economic issues, and they are socially and historically situated. Therefore, Vine Deloria Jr. (2001) writes “Indians and scholars must now perceive themselves to be members of a higher moral order that is truly seeking knowledge in order to succeed.” (p. 467). I believe that he makes this statement in regards to some of the ethical issues related to doing research with Indigenous communities. That is, Indian scholars must continue to establish their research agenda in a way that has real meaning and purpose in terms of outcomes for the community at large by eliminating useless or repetitive research. One way to do this is to focus on actual community needs and to link Indigenous research and communities not only to the larger academic world but the Indigenous agenda within the local and global contexts. However, I believe that all of these ideas require more thought and insights especially when engaging in critical research methodology. This is because research is not only a project but a real human social interaction that involves peoples’ rights, beliefs, and values.

Selection of participants and setting

In qualitative research, participant selection is an important facet of the research and must be done properly in order to substantiate and validate the research process. For selection of participants, I employed a selective or purposive sampling method to identify a number of participants who would be ideal research participants for this study. The selection of the participants was an arduous task. Over a period of twelve months, I worked to identify, communicate with personally, or through others, and via email, and to identify research participants based on their race, ethnicity, cultural, and linguistic

background or identity as Navajo students. Particularly, I pursued Navajo college students/ participant who had recently entered college, who still may have fresh in their minds their experiences with school, and who were willing to talk and dialogue about the purpose of this research.

The nine research participants for this study were all Navajo students who came from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, school settings and communities. Since, I recognized that even with a particular racial/ethnic group there are bound to be many differences, it was not imperative for me that I sought out students who spoke their heritage language or were traditional in the sense of being strongly connected to Navajo traditional cultural knowledge like being able to tell stories or sing traditional songs. Moreover, I was not concerned that students were full Navajo in terms of the information from their census enrollment which uses a blood quantum measures. In the case of Navajo, a 4/4 designation connotes full blood and that both parents are Navajo. To reiterate, I overlooked this designation to acknowledge that many Navajo students are multiethnic or multiracial. For this study, I selected my participants from a large university setting. While many of the students were from the rural reservations communities, there were several who could be considered as urban Navajos particularly in the sense of having been born or lived for a time in a city. Also, there were students who also migrated back and forth from urban to the reservation setting over a period of years.

After the first set of interviews, I found that the majority of the students while not fluent in Navajo were able to understand some Navajo. Two of the participants were nearing proficient based on my own observations as a language teacher. In addition,

many of the students stated their awareness of and connection to some Navajo traditional practices like seasonal cultural and social events and/or ceremonial activities. Most of the students were first generation traditional students who resided in the dormitories at the university where I conducted the interviews. Finally, it is worth noting that the most of the individuals also have access to other people like family and relatives who speak Navajo and mentioned the importance of returning to or driving out to their home communities on the reservation. This is very significant to the study because it reveals the importance of maintaining a close connection to home communities and in many aspects, the strong ties to Navajo cultural practices. Most of the Navajo students and their families originally came from and still live on the Navajo reservation at large which includes the surrounding locales or communities in New Mexico and from other parts of the Navajo reservation which extends into the states of Utah and Arizona. However, only two of the participants who have family and relatives on the reservation grew up and are currently living off the reservation.

I conducted all of my student participant interviews and follow interviews within the general locality of the university setting because all or most of students either lived on campus or off campus within the city of Encino.²³ The setting for this study is located in a large metropolitan area of the southwestern region of the United States called Encino. According to 2000 U.S. Census data, Encino has an estimated population of about 448,607 people from various diverse ethnic and racial groups. The American Indian or Indigenous population is about 17,440 or 3.9% of the entire population. This is in sharp

²³ The name of the city where this study occurred is a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of the local school district and university.

contrast to the predominantly larger Hispanic population of about 179,075 or 39.90%.²⁴

Interestingly for many outsiders, the state has often been referred to as a minority-majority state because of this demographic. Furthermore, the state and city are often recognized for their large Native American population and close proximity to several Native American tribal land bases.

While, this urban metropolitan community and surrounding suburban areas are located intermittingly and/or are in close proximity to several Pueblo nations with large populations, the Navajo population in the city is by far the largest. This is also true within the local school district. Within the local public schools, the Native American student population is less than 5 % of the entire student population and of this total population of Native Americans, Navajo students make up about half of the population.²⁵ In addition to the university where the study occurred, there are also several institutions of higher learning including several community colleges and a technical institute for Native Americans. Aside from the technical college for Indigenous youth, the other institutions including the research site serve a large population of white and Hispanic students and an ever increasing population of Asian, African American, and Native American students respectively. The university has a good reputation for serving to the needs of the Hispanic community. However, according to the university demographic data, with the exception of the Hispanic student population, other students of color are often underrepresented in the institution.

Data collection and analysis

²⁴ For more information on demographics, refer to <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0108479.html>

²⁵ Refer to www.aps.edu

This critical qualitative research study employed a case study research methodology. As mentioned before, I conducted my research at the university where my research participants attended over a period of sixteen months. The method of data collection for this study relied primarily on in-depth interviews and some follow up interviews. Also, there was a review of educational documents from national, state, and tribal departments such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2005, state and private educational reports, and tribal legislative documents related to Native American/Indian/ Navajo language and educational policies. Moreover, I reviewed a number of internet and newspaper articles that highlighted Navajo people within the region. Finally, I kept a journal/log which I used to record my thoughts and ideas that emerged from the research process. All taped interviews and journal notes were kept confidential and were destroyed upon completion of this study unless they were requested by research participants for their own keepsake.

The specific methods of data collection consisted of formal, and in many ways informal interviews, that lasted 1 to 2 hours and follow up interviews which lasted about an hour or less with research participants. Since it was difficult to schedule the times to meet, for two of the participants, the interviews were completed in one meeting. Throughout the interviewing process, I noticed in listening back to the taped interviews that I kept stating that my intent was to have a dialogue like a conversation with my participants. This was informed by my critical research methodology of not only taking but giving back information to subjects. Andrew Okolie (2005) refers to this research process as *interventive in-depth interviewing*. Okolie (2005) states:

This refers to deep probing interviews in which the researcher goes beyond mere collection of facts or stories and narratives. Rather the researcher, in addition,

intervenes in order to get at the subjects interpretations of their experiences, tries to interpret those interpretations, puts them in their wider socio historical and political context, and feeds them back to the subjects as information arranged and presented in a theoretically framed manner. It is a dialectical process in which the giving back of information to the subjects is embedded in the researcher's questions...that can best be done when the researchers interview their own people, people with whom the researchers share one or more of such identities as race, ethnicity, country of origin, class or gender. (p. 242)

This process is an important component of anti-racist research because of the way that it acknowledges participants' voices. More so, this process of interviewing allows for the researcher to make connections with their participants who share similar experiences about issues dealing with race, class, or gender, thereby situating the research experience within appropriate cultural, socio-historical, and political contexts. Although I was not sure what to expect in doing this, it was reassuring to know that my participants were receptive of this simple gesture.

The first set of interviews was conducted to get familiar with the students as they talked about their childhood experiences at home and their experiences with school. These first set of questions related to students' experiences with schooling, learning the Navajo language, and understanding their understanding of their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. (Appendix A) This was followed by specific questions related to the use of the Navajo language in the home, school, or community. Finally, other questions were in relation to how students' perceived themselves and how others perceive them within the contexts of schools and in the community. In most cases, follow up interviews

were done within a week or so of the first interviews. However, in some cases, due to several students' schedules it was harder to find the time to do follow up interviews. In three cases, the follow up interviews did not occur until several months after the first interview. However, this provided time to do other interviews and some transcribing of the data before commencing the interviews. As evident in my interview questions, I essentially already had a predetermined set of important themes that included looking at the educational experiences of students, the influence of family and community on Indigenous identity, and the influences of discourse and ideology on schools in general. These a priori themes evolved from my personal and professional experiences with schools, from my course work and readings pertinent to the education of Indigenous youth, and from relevant issues as discussed in the empirical research from chapter two.

Once these key questions were discussed during the first interviews or in follow up interviews, I moved to another set of more open-ended grand tour questions that focused on the participants' understanding of the relationships between identity, language, and race in schools, in their respective communities, and in American society as a whole. The intent of using the grand tour type questions was to lead the interviewees in a direction that would provide more details and responses about a general theme like participants experiences with schooling and then on to mini tour questions which were more specific about topics like the support of Navajo language in school (Spradley, 1979). Throughout the interviewing process, I listened back to the interviews to identify possible questions from the interviews. These questions in some cases were brought up as part of the follow up interviews.

At the end of every interview, I would review the taped recordings to get a sense of how things were going and to record notes in my journal log. Also I began the long task of transcribing the data. As I did this, I began an initial coding of the data by highlighting key words or phrases to identify some common categories. More specifically, once all the data had been recorded, separated, and classified, I sorted the data sets into a system or series of categories that fit into themes based on the research study design and plan. From these categories, some broad themes from the research data emerged which would eventually inform my overall data analysis. The four major themes that I identified and later used in my analysis were Family and Community, Schools, Diné Identity and Diné worldview. As new data emerged in the transcription data from the interviews or from document analysis, significant categories that were closely related were re-classified or re-categorized once again under the broader themes. From this point on, in addition to the categories, some sub categories began to emerge. Most importantly, all of the categories and subcategories were developed based on the recurring patterns of information as seen in the transcription record. For example, many of the participants' responses to my questions on their educational experiences revolved around personal and family values and beliefs, teacher's behaviors and perceptions of them as Native American students, and the many different ways that students negotiated and navigated the school system.

Once the data collection and transcription of data was nearing completion, I analyzed the data once again based on the common themes that arose from the study. From this point on and even earlier, the specific methods of data analyses I utilized involved cross sectional indexing and contextual data analysis. Mason (2002) describes cross sectional indexing as categorical indexing because it uses classificatory categories to establish an

index which is used to analyze and sort the data. However, an important limitation of this method is that no single category may address a myriad of topics and issues. Therefore, a contextual analysis is used to understand the interwoven sets of data (Mason, 2002). In doing this, I began to identify and categorize the data into more contextualized data. In sum, in looking at my whole set of interview data after transcription was completed from all of my participants' responses and other viable data from educational documents, I was able to identify not only categories but to highlight some of the contextual data as well. This allowed for an easier interpretation of the data as I was able not only to see the larger picture but to pinpoint important ideas that emerged from the data.

Eventually, I also began the process of triangulation by drawing on participants' overall responses and the data from other material resources like educational documents and newspaper articles. Later, as I began to identify significant sub categories from the contextual data which became the central basis for my data interpretation, I began to see some specific ideas in words or phrases that emerge which connected back to my initial questions and theoretical framework. For example, the participants' responses to how they understood their different identities (racial, ethnic, and cultural) burgeoned into a complex web of issues related to citizenship and sovereignty and to issues about cultural appropriation and misrepresentation. Also, in looking at the participants' responses to questions about the acceptance of the language and cultural background in the home and school, I noticed a connection to school curriculum and content and to the behaviors of teachers and parents in the community. Finally, in looking back across the themes that emerged from this study, I began to see how family, community, and schools remained

constant in influencing identity formation as it has in many other research studies on Indigenous youth.

In summary, after data collection, I identified several key categories from the themes that emerged from the data which were: acknowledge and defining a Diné worldview, the influence of family, home, and community cultural values on students; educational success, the cultural politics of schools and curriculum, and the impact of white supremacy on Native Americans. Throughout the length of the study, an on-going data analysis was done to inform the direction of the research. Towards the end of the data collection, I conducted member checking with the participants in order to allow for any additional input into the analysis. That is, I emailed the transcripts notes (data) to each participant for their review and input and sent the full manuscript for their review. In some cases, data was reviewed during the second interviews to provide an opportunity to discuss some key points.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research establishing trustworthiness is a vital part of the research process from the beginning to end. In *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss trustworthiness in qualitative research as consisting of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirm-ability. Therefore, they maintain that important steps must be taken prior to carrying out the research in order to establish trust between the participants and the researcher. Thereby, for this study, I began by identifying prospective Navajo students for my research with the assistance of several university faculty members that had Navajo students enrolled in their courses. Later, I contacted these prospective students again through email. There upon, I submitted to them a more in depth

description of my research by referring to key aspects of my dissertation proposal like my research questions and purpose. Upon their consent, I worked immediately to establish a rapport with the participants. Since many of the students were university student it was easy to meet or communicate with them to set up some interviews. Later in the actual interviews, I went back to enhancing the relationship between myself as the researcher and the participants by further inquiring about basic personal information and questions related to their race/ethnicity, language spoken, their program of study, and clan affiliation. Subsequently, the first series of questions focused on my gaining a better understanding of the students' backgrounds and recollections of early childhood and experiences with and in schools. I believe this enhance the relational aspects of my research which informed the axioms of my research methodology in terms of trustworthiness and responsibility.

Thus, an important step in building trustworthiness is by explaining in detail the purpose of the study and the process involved. That is, it was essential to me that all participants involved understand the exact and intended purpose of the research and the process of the research study. For example, in my consent form, while I note that there are minimal or no psychological costs ensuing from the study, I also reminded students that the nature of talking about issues around race and racism could be uncomfortable. Also, by recognizing that these students were possibly related to me through clan lineages, I took every opportunity to be up front and honest with them. Out of respect for established relationships which come from knowing clan relatives, it was important that I made a lasting and trusting relationship with my participants. Therefore, trustworthiness for me as an Indigenous researcher was not only about getting consent, as outlined by

Institutional Review Board procedures, by having participants agree to being interviewed by signing a consent form allowing for their participation in the research study. Beyond that, the process involved making the research process or directives known so that participants are given a choice through the option of terminating their participation in the study anytime during the duration of it. In this case, I wasn't sure if this would happen especially as the interview questions slowly transpired into more value laden questions about their identity, socioeconomic status, and questions about the value of Navajo in the home and in the schools. Instead, it turned out that all of my participants were seemingly eager and willing based on my observations to engage in a critical dialogue about the questions and issues presented about their experiences with education. That is, I believe that by being up front, honest, and humble about my research goals, I was successful in getting students to talk. More so, I was able to have meaningful and engaging dialogue with them.

Another important aspect of trustworthiness deals with the sharing of the data with participants on a constant basis, thereby establishing credibility and dependability on the part of the researcher. Therefore, throughout the duration of the study I scheduled time and opportunities for member checking and shared transcripts with each of the participants in order to assure that everything said by them is transcribed correctly. However, as mentioned earlier this process became more difficult as time went on especially because of the students' schedules. Throughout the process of my member checking, I asked if there was anything on the transcripts that they decided they did not want so I would delete them from the data. Therefore, anything that the participants chose not to be included in the research study was honored. And I also gave an option of

retracting statements or adding more to an already stated idea. This process continued until the end.

As mentioned before, a method for maintaining trustworthiness also involves triangulating your data. Lincoln & Guba (1985) state that triangulation improves “the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible” (p. 305). Hence, for the purpose of this study I used interviews and research journal notes and the data from documents i.e. reports and statistical data record to triangulate and interpret the data. That is, I used the data from all of these sources to make sure that there were no inconsistencies and/or incomplete forms of data. Moreover, the triangulation of data ensures that data is valid and confirmable. Thereby with a process of triangulation, I established confirm-ability by going back to research participants for member checking, going back over field notes, audio recordings, and by reviewing statistical data namely from reports on the status of Indian education. In conclusion, by being honest and humble to the research and open and straightforward with my research participants by sharing data, dialogue, and ideas with them I establish rapport, respect, and trust. In sum, all of these ideas were gained through and understanding of respect, honesty, and humility from an Indigenous paradigm or worldview.

In past research in Native or indigenous communities, I believe that Euro-centric Western epistemologies, methodologies, and theory have greatly impacted and influenced the knowledge base of our academic institutions. They have been centered on gathering as much information as possible from indigenous communities and environments without any moral or ethical obligations and responsibilities to the people, land, and/or resources from which it takes. This predatory nature of empiricism in the form of academic and

scientific studies and research are too find, uncover, and measure data based on existing knowledge and assumptions from Euro-centric constructs and notions of knowledge. This form of subjectivism has created a lot of controversy in the fields of anthropology and the social sciences such that academic communities or circles have been looked down upon as unprofessional or unmoral. Over the past twenty years or so with the trend in academia to move towards a better understanding of the impact of the social sciences in education, there has been an understanding between researchers and the researched to allow for dialogue and compromises to change past practices in research methodologies. In particular, these types of discussions have allowed for such issues to come to the surface of what is important in any kind of research that takes place especially if it involves people. In summary, it is reassuring to know that some researchers are finally taking on their roles and responsibilities as moral, ethical people in the process of finding knowledge to share knowledge. I believe that it is vital for those who are researched to have a voice and for their rights to be acknowledged. In the end, the roles and responsibilities of researchers and the rights of people who are researched are important if proper and respectable research is to continue in education. I think these issues are a lot of times overlooked in the field of academia.

Chapter Four

Karen: My great grandma said that I needed to learn Navajo and she told my mom that you know, “you can’t, you can’t steal it from her. Because she’s Navajo and just because you didn’t have that...you shouldn’t steal it from her.” This grandma she always told me, “it’s okay if you do not know Navajo.” And then she said that I should always try and learn it though. But she said, “it’s okay that I’m not fluent.” She said, “Just as long as you can understand me and why I’m singing for you or why we’re singing.”...Or you know stuff like that ...She said, “that’s more important”.

Until recently, American Indian and Alaska Native parents and communities have not held the power to define what education is or should be for their children. For many generations, they have not been allowed to influence, let alone determine, educational goals, policies and practices within the schools that their children have been required to attend (K. Tsianina Lomawaima, In Villegas, Neugebauer, and Venegas, 2008, p. 183).

Participant narratives

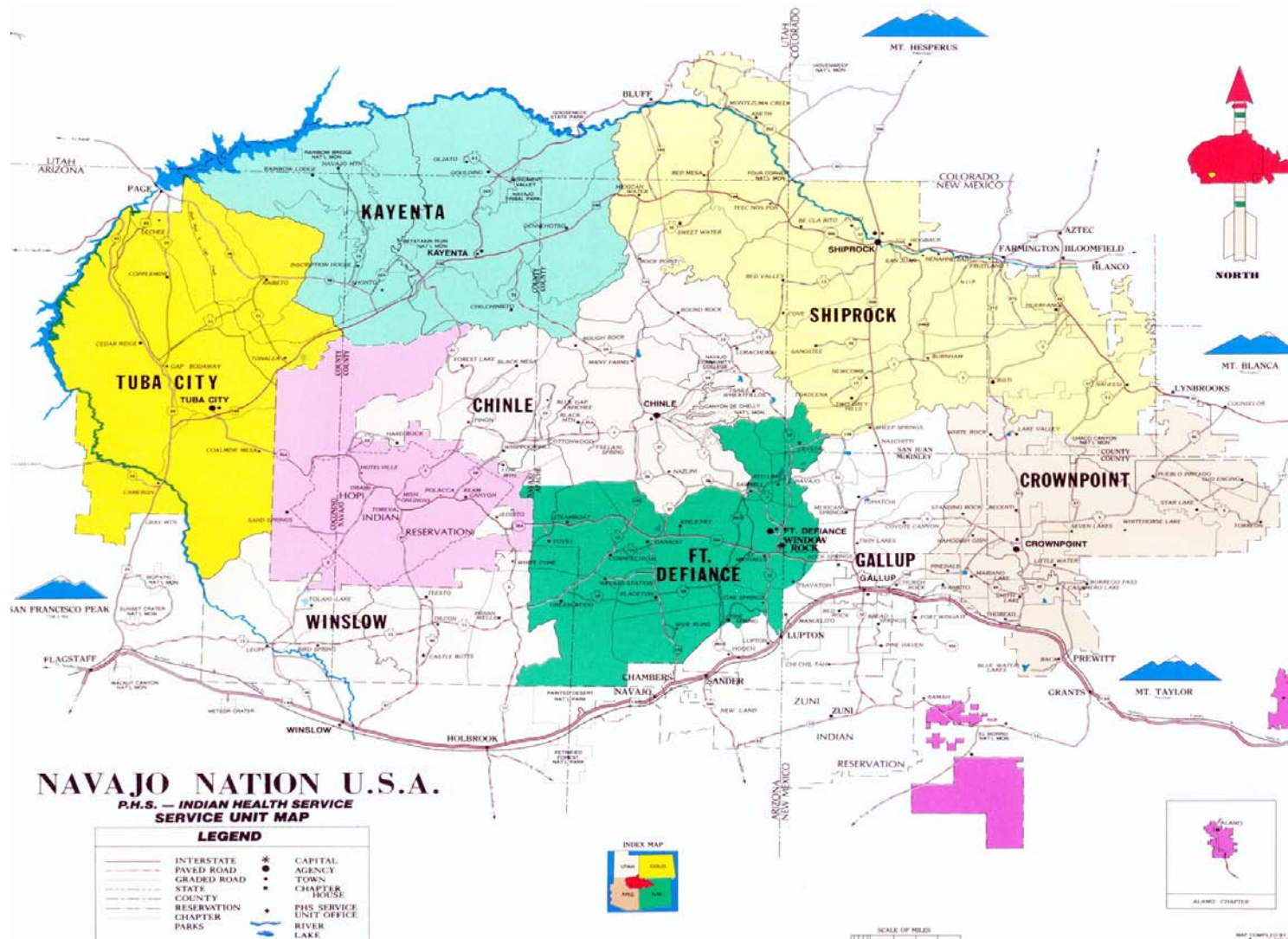
I open this chapter using the quotes from Karen, one of the nine participants in this study, and K. Tsianina Lomawaima to highlight the significance and influence of Diné family values and support to the identity formation and educational experiences of Indigenous (Diné) youth. The nine research participants in this study come from very diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. All are successful Navajo college students who are aware of, to varying degrees, the significance of the Diné language and culture to their identity development. While not all are able to speak the Navajo language fluently or understand the particulars of Diné traditional cultural knowledge, they all point out that the Diné language and culture are important to their self identity. In addition, while all students identified as being Navajo, several of the students also mentioned their mixed ethnic and racial background. Most of the participants live or come from the reservation or live in close proximity to the Navajo reservation in a border town. (See Figure 1- Map of Navajo lands). Also, several of the students were also born and/or lived off the reservation.

In this chapter, I share the stories of these Diné / Navajo youth as they talk about their early life experiences at home and school. First, it would only be appropriate for me to introduce them in the Diné Way of Introduction by indicating their clan affiliations, places of origin, their goals and aspirations in life which is inextricably linked to the personal and cultural identity. Secondly, I will share significant parts of their life stories as they talk about their memories of home life and school based on the information they were comfortable in sharing at the time of data collection. As I do so, I highlight the influence of their families, parents, and other key influential people on their lives and education. Specifically, I discuss the ways that family and community values and beliefs supported and informed their overall identity and well being as Diné youth.

Sharon Olson. Sharon is a twenty one year old female senior.²⁶ She is from the Kinlichiiní and Táchiiní clans respectively.²⁷ Her paternal grandparents are Tsinaajíní. She is majoring in Native American studies with a minor in Navajo linguistics and Community Regional planning. Sharon is one of many students who are majoring in the newly created Bachelors of Arts degree in Native American studies. She grew up and lived in Gallup most of her life. According to her response, she speaks mostly English and can understand some Navajo. In questions related to her early childhood and schooling experiences, Sharon at first reflected on her schooling experiences in positive ways. For example, she states how she remembers “being excited to go to school.”

²⁶ All names of participants and other persons mentioned in interviews are pseudonyms. However, I did not change the names of places on Navajo reservation to give a real life context of the communities from which these students come from.

²⁷ Traditionally in Navajo culture, the mother’s clan is mentioned first followed by the father’s clan.



²⁸ Figure 1 – Map of Navajo land

²⁹ Permission to use and adapt granted by Indian Health Services.

²⁸ Retrieved March 21, 2010 from <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/93/Navajo-Nation-Map-PHS.jpg>

²⁹ Permission to use and adapt map granted by Area Office of Indian Health Services, Fort Defiance, Arizona.

However, upon further questioning, she also shared some of her experiences that point to some challenges she had as an “at risk” Navajo student which impacted her education. For example, she refers to some challenges that underscore socio-economic conditions like “growing up without water or electricity” and family mobility like travelling with her family to various parts of the country to sell jewelry with her parents. Yet, she also remembers how her mother was very assertive in her schooling experiences by making sure that she had good teachers.

Sharon: Every year, my mom would sit in all the classrooms to choose my teachers. I told her not to tell me because I wanted it to be a surprise because you first walk into the school there'd be a wall with names and the teacher that you go to. So, I'd always get excited when I'd be like “Oh, who's my teacher this year?” But she had picked them out.

An important aspect of schooling experiences for many children always involves some very influential people such as parents who are very supportive which underscores the significance of positive support systems and motivational factors that students need to achieve. For example, in response to questions about what kept her motivated to keep going to school Sharon stated the following.

Sharon: Who knows? It was just something that was always expected. I do not know if that's a motivator, maybe it is. It was just always expected that I would go to college. It was just a question of where. I guess my mother supported by before the beginning of the school year my mom would have a medicine man come in for us and go through little smoke ceremonies where you do prayer and she always told me to make sure my prayers were you want good things for you, your family, your

education. She always included education. And your health. She said, “you keep praying like that and make sure things are going good with that” and at the beginning of the school year a medicine man will come over and do a prayer for us and well all pray together. I think that’s how we are culturally steady and if we lose our way... we find someone to go to, to get it back.

In addition to her parent’s involvement in her education, in the case of Sharon, her family’s strong beliefs and connection to traditional Indigenous knowledge may very well have been a significant aspect of her personal intrinsic motivation. That is, in seeing her parents spend money and resources to secure a “ceremony” or prayer for their children, while Sharon may have been partly obliged to do well based on this, she was motivated nonetheless to do well.

Selena Salaybe. Selena is a nineteen year old mixed race female freshman. Her mother is Navajo and her father is Hispanic. She grew up near Gallup and attended school in various places including Virginia, Los Lunas, and Albuquerque. She is also majoring in Native American studies. The only language she speaks is English. For a short time, she attended elementary school in Virginia and then later at Los Lunas when her family moved there. Then, she eventually started attending high school in Albuquerque. Selena’s early recollections of school include observing the stark differences between schools she attended in Virginia to schools in New Mexico. She states:

Selena: The only thing about elementary that stands out the most was. Just like because it was really diverse. There were people from different cultures. It was

mostly non Native it was just like Anglo students. It seemed like the first time....it was really uncomfortable because it didn't feel like we belonged to there.

What is interesting in this response is how Selena states that her school was diverse but mainly composed of Anglo students. More significantly, although she is making reference here to attending a predominately white school, her discomfort of schools as places where she didn't belong or where she didn't feel accepted is warranted especially as a Latina/Navajo. This is very pervasive particularly for students of color and mixed race backgrounds. In *The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism*, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) write,

In our study we see that children are learning from cumulative experiences with racism, color coding, and racial-ethnic identities. Negative and positives experiences accumulate over time and in elaborate interactions, eventually, with a wide variety of other. This makes such experiences longitudinal and significant as social phenomena. How children come to know themselves in racial-ethnic terms arises in part from their grounding in a racist society and in part from their own daily interaction with other children and adults. (p. 90)

In the case of Selena, while she may not recall experiencing any racial discrimination at this particular school, she certainly recalls its impact in later years. More so, throughout our interviews she also mentions repeatedly her discomfort of not being able to fit into either one of her cultural backgrounds.

Similar to Sharon, Selena also highlights the influence of her mom to do well in school. Specifically, she focuses on her mom's resilience to do better in spite of many challenges. When I asked her who was very influential in her life she states:

Selena: Ahmm... I think the main person would be my mom. I mean just because we went from living in a little trailer... really poor. Like where we are now... I mean I do give credit to my dad but she was the one that made us move. She took chances and she didn't have to. She wanted to keep going. She wanted to keep doing all these things... like ...She never graduated from college. She ahmm she dropped out in her sophomore year. She went through freshman year but got pregnant with my sister. So she dropped out and ahmm... She started with the BIA right away. And the... Getting from that point to all the way where she is now is amazing. And we went through struggles and her marriage with my dad wasn't easy, just raising me and my sister... I think that is who like....that's who really... that's the person who was trying hard...for us... it was her.

VW: How do you think your mother influenced your learning about your values, your beliefs, and your language?

Selena: I do not think like culturally she like didn't really like you know... She moved us away, I do not know why she did that. She didn't want us to be raised around like the ... she didn't want to raise us on the reservation because she wanted us to get a better education. I guess culturally, if we would have stayed where we were we would been...I would have been more aware of our culture and stuff... Overall she taught us how to respect people. She never really tolerated like...ahm like bad attitudes and stuff. Just things like that...Also my grandparents, on my mom's side. There definitely big part ... of they tell me how to respect my elders and even if you like see your elders doing something wrong you still respect like that. I think being a part of the church helps you with values and stuff too.

In these statements, Selena alludes to her mom's resilience to keep going despite many challenges she faced in her life. Moreover, it is interesting how Selena also mentions her mother's reason for moving her away from the reservation to get a better education. Yet while her mother's reasoning may have much to do with her low expectations of schools on the reservation, Selena also states that she still respected her parents and elders decisions to do what is right for her. This highlights the fact that there are many reasons why parents make choices for their children's education which may be informed by their own cultural beliefs and values about education. Moreover, it may also point to the quality or lack of therefore of education in certain schools on the reservation particularly in the minds of many Navajo parents.

Theresa Dennison. Theresa is a nineteen year old female freshman. She is originally from Fort Defiance, Arizona. She indicates that she is interested in a Nursing degree and career. Interestingly, she mentions that she speaks English, some Spanish and some Navajo. During an interview, she mentioned that she understands more Navajo than she can speak. She went on to say "it's important to me because I do not want to lose my Navajo language and I want to learn it and teach it to my kids". Theresa attended Window Rock elementary, then middle school at Ft. Defiance, Arizona until she moved to Farmington, New Mexico to attend high school at Twin Peaks Preparatory School.³⁰

In response to who was most influential to her life, she also states that it was her mom because she is "such a strong woman". She goes on to add, "We've been through a lot... like it's only me and her within a family of men. And I guess like me and her are really close and she told ...like she's the one whose always pushed me to like take it further".

³⁰ Twin Peaks Preparatory School is a college preparatory school located in Farmington, New Mexico.

VW: *How do you think....how do you think your mother influenced you? In terms of who you are, how your values, beliefs came to be? Even like the language you speak?*

Theresa: Ahh....hmmm....I think...it's mostly cause she's been....like I would say...really positive. Like she never like drank or anything...she never smoked. And she mostly been working and taking care of us throughout her life. And ahh...not sure about this part... one night when we were younger ...when we use to live in Window Rock our dad used to be abusive to her and to us. We would always use to wonder why she never left and...she would tell us it's because of you guys. Because of my kids. I ...I do not want to take you away from... like your father... I do not want to just walk away.

In this statement, Theresa also highlights the resilience of her mother to stay positive regardless of the challenges and obstacles that beset her family. Moreover, her mom's statement of staying positive for her kids reveals once again the cultural resilience of Navajo women to challenge oppressive and abusive behaviors even those that are directed at them from within.

Based on her high school experiences, Theresa also recalls another significant aspect of the supports that she got from others besides her family. For example, she highlights the ways that the school she attended recognized her Navajo cultural values and belief system. I asked her why this stands out the most from her experiences.

Theresa: It stands out ...cause...it was kind of like...we were kinda like a family there cause we were a small school. You know like when you go to like elementary in Window Rock and middle school in Fort... there was like so many kids... but that the

little school...everyone knows everyone and everyone gets along with everyone. It's pretty easy to conduct.... traditional ...ahh....traditional events.

Furthermore, she goes on to say that it was certain influential people like teachers who also stood out for her in affirming her pride in her language and culture.

VW: How did they support the Navajo language and culture?

Theresa: Emm...

VW: Even if you can think of one event?

Theresa: Oh...we had this one teacher... I can't remember...he was the one who use to do all the prayers and stuff. Mr. Goldtooth...he passed away a year ago I think. He was the one who was conducting everything....John Goldtooth that's what his name was?

VW: Do you think that was important for Navajo students?

Theresa: To have teachers like...do some of those stuff?

VW: Yeah or just supporting the language maybe?

Theresa: Yeah.

VW: How do you think that helped you?

Theresa: I think it was kinda...ahm...I think I was influenced by John Goldtooth cause well he did all school assemblies and everytime he use to like or whenever we use have those assemblies he use to talk Navajo to us Even though I can't understand, I can understand a little. It's like what he says is so powerful, by listening to his tone and stuff like that. And like after he passed away the school was just...schools traditions kinda went off..like a lower level.

Many of the students who attend Twin Peaks Preparatory reside there for the length of the school year. The school is known to many as the Navajo school for well prepared students. In this response, she is describing how Navajo language and culture were recognized in the school. Yet upon further questioning it became clear that there were also other factors at work that created a conflict for students like Theresa in regards to the climate of this particular school and the surrounding community. Particularly, a main component of this conflict stemmed from how many of people (Navajo and white alike) perceived the students at this Navajo school. These factors will be addressed in later chapters.

Mark Aaron. Mark is a twenty four year male junior. He is from the Hashtłishnii and Tódichííníí clans respectively. Mark is also studying Native American studies. His maternal grandparents are Táneeszhahnii (my mother's clan) and his paternal grandparents are Tłaashchíínii. Mark reported that he speaks English and some Navajo but can understand a lot more than he can speak it. Originally from Torreon, New Mexico, his family lived in Wyoming for a time until they moved back to New Mexico. This is what he had to say about his experiences with schools.

Mark: So like from K-12 I've been in New Mexico the whole time. But like growing up, they didn't value...so they didn't value the Native perspective. I think they start instituting like a ...maybe a...like a Navajo system. I went to BIA school and they have like a...basically a white time and Navajo time. They'd split it up into I guess a bilingual time.

VW: *Where did you go to school?*

Torreon Day school. For like half a year. My mom didn't like it. Remember I had...I guess we should start...our focus on that was... one side was structured in Navajo and I didn't really... didn't really know anything. And I couldn't interact with the teacher and I just felt like deficient because I couldn't...interact you know like. They were teaching us...I remember learning in Diné...learning you know shapes and colors. And I did really good on the English side. And the teachers there I was working with them and... I was high in math. I came in half a school year and then just surpassed almost everybody and...on some kind of modules they had. And that's how the BIA school was.

Also, part of Mark's early recollections of going to school at this school involved interactions with his peers that underscore important issues like internalized racism and oppression which will be analyzed in later chapters. Yet, he also highlights some positive experiences that involve the influence of his mother and extended relatives in his life. When I asked him, "Who are some important people who influenced you", he stated the following.

Mark: My mom. My mom and my dad. And they're...my mom and dad are key...even though she'd laugh at me when I speak Navajo but she still encouraged me... when I asked and they wouldn't shy away but that's the only one...the only one that's been there. And you know...transmitting the cultural knowledge...so like I can say that... I was like... my grandfather and my grandmother would say ...like the deep conservative values the Navajo values and I'm always going back and seeing what her opinion is. Cause my chéiyáá was a hataalii and that's...that's... she knew a lot because she use to always talk with them...she is the oldest daughter... so he held

her in...he held her I guess in his most confidence. So I always go back to her and seeing what to expect. The values and stuff and she's always been there...she's always been there through like school and stuff.

Mark's comments about his parents suggest that not only do they support his education in the schools but that his relatives also want him to learn the Diné cultural knowledge which they have passed down from one generation to the next.

Alyssa Martin. Alyssa is an eighteen year old female freshman. She is from the Kinyaaáanii and Haltsoí Dinéé clans respectively. Her maternal grandparents are Táchiinii and her paternal grandparents are Tódichiinii. Her college major is Law with her career interest also in law. Alyssa indicates that she speaks English and that she understands a lot of Navajo because of her grandmother's influence at an early age.

Alyssa: Every day after school I would go to her house and that's where I mainly learned how to speak the language or Navajo and know about the culture and stuff and the teachings that go along with Navajo culture.

While I am not dismissing her point that she does speak Navajo, I was not able to tell for sure just based on my observations. That is, although she mentions that she speaks Navajo, I would not be able to determine if she is more or less fluent than her peers by simply observing her use of simple Navajo statements. Thus, while a Navajo language assessment might have revealed a far clearer picture my research purpose was not focused on language abilities. Instead, it is focused on how Navajo language is or was supported in Navajo schools. In this case, Alyssa states that she learned through interacting with her grandmother. However, I was not able to determine if she learned

the language to communicate with her grandparents or if she was already learning it and just used it more with her grandmother.

Alyssa was born and grew up in Gallup all of her life. She attended Head Start in Window Rock then eventually attended elementary, middle and high school in Gallup, New Mexico. Her initial response to the question of what stood out the most from her schooling experiences was that she never “experienced any racism” and the “mixture of different cultures”. In contrast to the experiences of Mark, Alyssa makes that point early on in the interviews. However, towards the end of the second interview with, she eventually began to talk about her experiences with racism. I believe that this is partly indicative of how many people are hesitant to talk about issues around race for fear of discomfort or attack. In Alyssa’s case, I would also venture to say that race and racism were not topics of much discussion in her home, schools, and community since the city of Gallup is considered a border town. That is, Gallup, like other border towns with different racial and ethnic populations, has a long history of racial oppression between white and Navajo.

Sarah Nez. Sarah is an eighteen year old female freshman. Sarah is from the Naakai Diné’é (my father’s clan) and Taneesáhnii clans (my mother’s clan) respectively. So she is my cousin (shizeedí) through both of my first clans. Her paternal grandparents are Tábaqahá. Sarah is also interested in becoming a Nurse practitioner. Similar to the other students, she mentioned that in addition to speaking English, she speaks some Navajo but is still learning it. For example, in response to me asking her if she understands the language, this is what she had to say:

Sarah: I do understand it, not fully, but I understand... the whole intonation in your voice...the way that things are said...I can tell if my grandma is laughing or if she's making a joke...I can tell if she is serious...I can tell if she wants me to do something...it's not...it may not be just her emotions...she might like... point over there and say get me that...my back could be turned to her and I know what she is saying...and I might not know exactly what she is saying but I know...so like yea...I think I understand...in that sense, totally.

VW: *So you're...you are learning the language?*

Sarah: Ah huh...I know that they always say..."Oh, I will drop you off at grandmas in the mountains for four weeks and you'll come back speaking Navajo" and it's like "Ah ok..." (laughs).

What is significant in this exchange with Sarah is how Sarah is acknowledging that she is and does want to learn Navajo. Although, she might be limited in her expressive skills in Navajo, she is confident that she understands and is still learning. Also, it is important to note here how her parents and others know that learning Navajo requires a lot of time and immersion into the language when they say they will drop her off with her grandmother for a length of time to learn the language. Also, this speaks to the fact that some parents understand the value of learning the language.

Sarah was born and lived in Phoenix, Arizona where she lived with her family for a while during her early childhood. Her immediate recollection of school was about an event in her elementary school in Phoenix.

Sarah: Ahm... ..like I said...there's not...ah..like many Natives. I...I ...They really kept us away from the...from the older kids...like I would only see my sister every so

often. I remember sometimes in class, we'd be reading history books. It was my 3rd grade class, my teacher was German. And we were reading books and we got to the Southwest Indian. It says Southwest Indians and she started...I remember she started reading it and she's... they started talking about Navajos and it said *hogans*... they live in *hogans* and she pronounced it, she's like "HO-GAN" and I kind of giggled, I was the only Native in class. I was just giggling. And then she looked at me and she's like "Did I say it wrong?" She goes "I'm sorry" and she apologized cause she's German, so I guess some people would do that with her, she use to try and teach us German words too... but she's like "How do you say it?" And then...and then... I'd be proud like I knew what...what it was...And I was like "It's hooghan" and she'd kinda of get it down...so stuff like that I remember.

In this event, based on her response Sarah recalls her interactions with a white/German teacher. While Sarah mentions that this teacher was very accepting of her culture by trying to understand her cultural background, it also reveals the ways racial discourse operates in schools. In this case, not only does this exchange reveal the ignorance of white school teachers of Native cultures, but it is indicative of the ways that whites force their privilege unto others. That is, whites expect to be either excused for their ignorance or applauded for their sensitivity to others. It also highlights how some white teachers continue to perceive Native American people and their cultural background. More significantly, it speaks to how Indian or Native American cultures have been cultural appropriated, misrepresented, marginalized, and Other-ed within the educational and public discourse. Later, during her early teen years, as her family moved back to Winslow, Arizona, Sarah began to attend mid school and high school in Winslow which

was in many ways different of her early experiences. But none the less, these later experiences are also very important since they highlight other significant aspects of race relations between whites and Natives.

Karen Smith. Karen is an eighteen year female freshman of mixed race and ethnicity from Carson, New Mexico. She is Bilagáana (white) and Ojibwe and from the Táchiiníí clan respectively. Her maternal grandparents are Tódichiiníí and her paternal grandparents are Tó'aheedliiníí. Her mother is part Navajo, part Ojibwe and part White. She is majoring in Elementary education with an interest in teaching. As most of her peers, she also stated that in addition to speaking English, she also speaks and understands a little Navajo. When I asked her if she thought speaking Navajo is important to her, she gave the following response.

Karen: Ahm...I know Navajo. Like I have my grandparents, my parents speak it fluently too. But ahm my mom and dad didn't want me to learn. And they'd make sure you know somehow I wouldn't learn until I got to school and then they couldn't really fight it. Like you can't learn because ahm...I think for a while I just listened to everything they said. And they said no, Navajo is no good, you're not going to get very far you know... you're just going to end up being on the rez and stuff like that. It's just a setback. And that is what my dad said and he knew Navajo really good. And it kind of confused me because growing up it's like this isn't bad, this isn't a setback or anything. He didn't talk to me in Navajo. He didn't want me... speaking it or if I did he would make fun of it. And when I was little...like Kindergarten that stuff you know...I was already learning and talking Navajo, like little stuff. And then once I was talking like that, they told me..."You do not need to learn it." Then there was

that time I was having trouble in school, already with how I was talking and they said I had like a speech impediment or something. Like I'd talk really slow and then talk really fast all of sudden and that... you know this stuff, then somehow my dad was like "Oh it's probably because you are trying to learn Navajo at the same time too. You know Navajo is not important, English is more important." And ahm... It was confusing because when we go to the fields in Shiprock, everyone speaks Navajo and it's ok. So that was the only Navajo that I knew, it was just what I could hear. But he wouldn't let me speak it, he would get mad at me. He was like "What are you talking Navajo for, it's not like you live in Shiprock" and stuff like that. And my grandma, before she passed away...my grandma was really upset that my dad was telling me "you can't speak Navajo". She thought it was important because she was traditional. Like even though I would know what this plant is for, I didn't know the word for it...like I knew what this and this and this is... I would say the plant but I didn't know the Navajo word for it. So she thought that if I didn't know the Navajo word then I do not know it. And so...it was really confusing...then on my mom's side, my great grandma, she...she'll talk Navajo but then she just kind of stopped altogether with ahm...I guess my generation, me and my cousins. Because most of us were talking English all the time... that she didn't want to waste her time speaking Navajo because we would say "what?" We'd be like what'd she say...and so she just kind of gave up. And so she would only say little words to us or you know make up words for us... Navajo/English mixed together and we would still get the idea and we'd still get the same stuff done. And ahm...She was okay with it but the other grandma wasn't okay with it. Then she passed away and then when I was having my Kinaalda. And ahm...

my great grandma said that I needed to learn Navajo and she told my mom that you know... "you can't...you can't steal it from her. Because she's Navajo and just because you didn't have that...you shouldn't steal it from her." Because my mom's mom is half Ojibwe, half Danish and then my mom's dad is Navajo but he was a glonnie (drunk). So she was embarrassed...she always felt left out when she came home so she never really knew Navajo but now she speaks fluently. But my grandma got after her and said *you shouldn't steal that from her*. And so later on, after my ceremony, they...they really started to teach me Navajo again. And then I kinda...it was kind of hard because I really wanted to... all these other times and they shot me down and now they say when I'm older, "Ok now you can learn." For me it's a little embarrassing because I can do all these.... things that are good...you know traditionally that are more important and you know...after my other grandma was gone, this grandma she always told me it's okay if you do not know Navajo. And then she said that...I should always try and learn it though...but she said it's okay that I'm not fluent she said "Just as long as you can understand me and why I'm singing for you or why were singing" or you know stuff like thatshe said, " that's more important."

In the statement, "you shouldn't steal the language from her" Karen highlights how her grandmother viewed the connection between her language and her identity. In many ways, this long statement reflects the situation of many Diné youth who are often not afforded the opportunity to learn their language. Much of the resistance or ambivalence on the part of Navajo parents to teach Navajo to their children is indicative of the status of the Indigenous languages in contemporary society. That is, if people are told over and

over that their language and culture are not good enough then they may soon begin to believe it. This is what has occurred in many of the early Indian boarding schools where the parents and grandparents of this participants have internalized the notion of ‘inferiority’ in regards to the status of the Navajo language and culture in relation to the more dominant English language and knowledge that is taught in schools and society. This will be a major focus in subsequent chapters that reveal how racialization processes are not only occurring in schools but elsewhere in communities, in towns, cities, and through the mainstream media. More so, it highlights how white supremacy through racializing processes and discourse maintains domination over other forms of cultural knowledge, identities and ways of knowing.

Similar to some of the other students in this study, Karen’s parents moved around a lot when she was younger. Her family has lived in Wisconsin, Cortez, Colorado, and Albuquerque, New Mexico before moving to the small Navajo community of Carson south of Bloomfield, New Mexico. She attended Bloomfield schools all of her life. One important event that she recalls involved the way that she was treated by other students.

Karen: And so, when I went to first grade at Cedar Tree...ahm...I was like the only Navajo girl. Or basically the only Navajo or Native. And...the rest of them were all white except for this ah....Spanish girl. And me and her hung out with each other all of the time. Because everyone just excluded us and...people...I remember ah...I had a hearing problem, too. They didn’t know about it until 2nd grade. And I guess....I, they thought I was hard of hearing on this side, but later on they found out that I was completely deaf in this ear. So I got teased a lot. And I guess when the teasing starts, is when the teacher said, “Maybe she needs a hearing test”. And I guess they used to

say I was dumb or stupid or “Indians are like that...they could...they do not know...or they can’t hear.” And it was never like that.

In this response, Karen’s experiences are very poignant because even at this early age she is aware of the racial and ethnic differences of her peers in the school. Particularly, it is distressing to hear how she describes being perceived by her peers and teachers as being “dumb or stupid” and as the only “Indian”. While it is important to examine why such things are said between students, teachers, and administrators, it is also extremely important to look at why these interactions and/or behaviors or practices continue within the context of schooling even though we as a nation have several decades of racial progress. That is, by looking not only at how these interactions occur but why they continue, racializing practices or the process of racialization are given a face or a name. That is, it is easier to see racializing processes as real outcomes have real consequences in terms of what it is, who is doing it, who it is happening to, and why it is happening. Within the contexts of the United States, it becomes apparent as to why and how these racializing practices operate to keep the status quo by perpetuating and maintaining white supremacy through racist acts, discourse, behaviors, and policies. Moreover, as will be discussed further in later chapters, the process of racialization occurs not only through the actions of others such as the racist behaviors or language of individuals but through a larger over arching societal discourse that informs institutional school policies and practices.

Stanley Chee. Stanley is an eighteen year old freshman male of mixed race background. He indicates that his father who is of the Ashjilí clan is originally from Window Rock, Arizona and his mother is white. Stanley was born and lived with his

family in Chandler, Arizona when he was a young child. Later, his family moved to Greeley, Colorado. He has lived most of his life in Greeley, Colorado and attended schools there. His major is in Fine Arts with a career interest in photography. For Stanley, one thing that stood out in his memory of schooling involved doing sports.

Stanley: I'm really active in sports. I remember playing soccer and basketball as a little kid. We had a pool in our back yard at our house in Chandler and we would go swimming for most of the summer. That's where I learned to rollerblade and ride a bike. Most of my life has just been occupied by sports. I played soccer since preschool. Basketball since kindergarten. I played football in junior high and roller hockey when I was in middle school and baseball through junior high and my last years of high school.

Furthermore, Stanley also mentions some teachers who were very important and influential to forging his beliefs and values about school and achieving success. For example, he states:

Stanley: Last year I had a teacher in my bible class that challenged me to make sure that what I believed wasn't just phony to me it was actually a personal belief and no matter what happened the beliefs wouldn't change. The teachers and principal were always trying to keep me on the right track. Head down the good path, keep your mind and thoughts pure.

VW: *So in addition to your parents your teachers were very influential?*

Stanley: Yeah. My basketball coach was, too. His dad died before the start of school. His dad was a preacher. He would just go off saying how good we have it, how blessed we are to be able to talk to our parents, to have them around to make us

realize that basketball is just a part of life, it's going to be done in a few years for most of us. So enjoy it while you can but realize there's more out there for you.

In addition to these experiences, Stanley also recalls positive things about school like being “welcomed” in the schools he attended which were pre-dominantly white. Also, he recalls his group of friends that “stuck together since first grade.” He adds, “We’ve known each other a really long time. It was always different though. Me, my brother, and sister were the only Native Americans there. There were a couple Asians, but no real diversity.” Similar to Selena and Sarah, Stanley mentions either being the only “Native Americans” at a school or makes reference to the lack of or presence of cultural and racial diversity. While it is good to hear Stanley and others like Alyssa and Sarah make note of the diversity of their schools or the recognition of their cultural background, it is also unsettling in the way that it masks racism. That is, by not talking or ignoring racism, schools are instilling instead a different discourse or mindset of say no evil and think no evil paradigm about racism. More significantly, it allows racism to go unchecked and what were explicit acts now become harder to identify and counter. In *Racism without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva (2003) states “a new powerful ideology has emerged to defend the contemporary racial order: the ideology of color-blind racism” (p. 25). Essentially, this discourse or no discourse about racism only strengthens already deeply entrenched racial beliefs

Elbert Holiman. Elbert is an eighteen year old male freshman student. His mother is originally from Nageezi, New Mexico but his family now lives in Counselors, New Mexico. He is majoring in Civil Engineering. Based on my initial interaction with Elbert, I observed that he speaks English and is fairly fluent in Navajo compared to the other

research participants based on my own conversations with him prior to the interviews. When I asked him if Navajo was important to his identity, Elbert responded this way.

VW: Do you think speaking the Navajo language is important to your identity? And why do you believe this to be true or not true?

Elbert: Yeah, I think it's important. A lot of people say I'm Native American, I'm Navajo, but speaking the language is really a way to prove this is who you are.

Through that you can communicate with others, say your clan. Later on, in generations, you do not lose that. You can pass it on to your kids and teach them.

VW: What about speaking English? Do you think that's important to who you are?

Elbert: Yeah. Now a days, to be in school and get through college and higher education you have to be able to speak English and communicate. You can translate for your grandpas and grandmas. It's like understanding both sides

Based on this response, Elbert is very aware of the importance of Navajo to his life and identity because of its significance to learning traditional knowledge and for communication with his elders. Moreover, he also highlights the importance of English for school and a higher education.

Elbert has lived most of his life in Counselors and attended the schools nearby in Lybrook, New Mexico and Cuba, New Mexico. Like the other participants in this study, for Elbert, his parents and family were also very influential in pushing him to do well in his life whether it was in school or outside of school because he didn't want to let them down. Particularly, he mentions how his parents didn't get very far in school thus motivating him to do well.

VW: You mentioned your dad as a teacher. How is he important to your life?

Elbert: My dad always pushed me to go to school and do my best in school. He only went to the 7th grade so he was really on me and my sisters and my brothers to go to school and make sure we finished high school. Knowing who my dad is and what he's been through, I never wanted to let him down. I always tried my best and listened to what he had to say and all of his teachings. I used that to get this far in life.

VW: *What about your mom?*

Elbert: My mom went up to first grade. She hardly ever speaks English. Growing up, when I was one or two years old, my mother didn't raise me. My mother wasn't there. I was mostly raised by my sisters. I grew up not learning how to speak Navajo. When I actually had to live with my mom I learned how to communicate with her. She taught me a lot, not necessarily as much as my dad did, but she always kept pushing me to go to school and making sure everything was prepared for me to go to school.

In these responses, Elbert talks about how his parents "pushed" him or motivated him to do well in school. Just as with all the other participants before, Elbert's comments about listening to and doing what was expected of him by parents and other family members highlights the influence and support of parents to their educational success. More so, it underscores these participants' awareness to connect to with Diné identity for their well being.

In response to the question of what stands out the most from school, Elbert says "being in school with a bunch of other Navajos...Kids my age, growing up and having teachers that know where I come from and Navajo culture."

VW: *You mention that you remember teachers who knew who you were. What do you mean by that?*

Elbert: My kindergarten teacher was Navajo, she knew the kind of person I was and she knows my family. She treated me almost like I was her own child...Teaching everything that I need to learn. Even when I went to the other teacher she knew the kids there and all of us were Navajo. She understood some had trouble learning, the background of the families.

In the two preceding narratives, one from Stanley's life and the other from Elbert's life, both recall the influence of their teachers to the education. Also, it is obvious from their responses the differences in the context of the schools in terms of the diversity of their schools. While Stanley recalls attending a predominately white school, Elbert recalls "being in school with a bunch of Navajos". Interestingly, both of them as well as Theresa mention the positive experiences of being welcomed or accepted by their schools. In the responses from Theresa, Elbert, and Stanley, in addition to the support from family, they also acknowledge the influence of their teachers on their lives. For example, Elbert mentions the ways that her mother and father pushed him to go to school. Also, all three of them mention Navajo teachers and non-Native teachers who understood where they were coming from, or teachers who shared common cultural or religious beliefs. Thus, in all these situations, it is evident that parent and teacher support in these students' lives and those teachers are crucial to their success. Mainly, I believe this is evident in the ways that parents and in some cases teacher acknowledge, honor, recognize and validate these students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, these individuals whether as parents or teachers know what is at stake in their child's success. That is, these individuals are aware that their children will be the ones who will continue to carry on and maintain the cultural beliefs and values of their respective communities.

In conclusion, in thinking back to the interviews, I remember how all the research participants spoke with courage, wisdom, and sincerity but also how they laughed, joked, and cried as we talked about what they think is important for the education of Navajo youth. More so, they spoke to those coming behind them as they spoke about what they think is important for Navajo educators, parents, and fellow Navajo students to know in regards to achieving success in school. In a follow up interview with Selena, she states her thoughts about what she would like to offer as an advice to other coming behind her in school:

VW: What could you say to a young Navajo student that's in school right now? What kind of things do you think you could try to share with them to help them get where you're at? Based on all we've talked about.

Selena: Well, gosh, well, I would say that like, whether they're close to their culture or not, I think that like that, if you know all your stories or dances that's really great and I think that benefit's a lot of students. At least I think that helps get students through cause it gives them those values that they need to succeed.

And, so, that's really important but then even if their family, like mine isn't very traditional to begin with they kind of moved more towards Christianity, I guess assimilating. Then to just, I do not know, I think, gosh it's hard to say what got me to this point and what I would say to a student. I know a lot of it is just helping and being close with your family. Really, like, it's hard too cause all families vary...but, just to care for your family more than your friends, more than whatever. I think my success comes from seeing the successes of my family and the failures and understanding what got them through the situations. You know, learning that. (Sigh)

but yeah, that's all that's really got me here is my family and like really observing what's going on around me and trying to figure out how I can help them. I guess the best way I think that I can help them at this point is to get my education and to do that. Yeah, if any student or child has a family willing to teach them and instill those values and lessons, you know, totally be willing and appreciate that. I think that's what I'd say right now.

Summary

Diné families, cultural values, and communities as personal motivation for the success of Diné youth in schools. In a study on Navajo youth, Deyhle (1995) discussed the notion of cultural integrity which she attributes to the ways in which students connect to the values and beliefs of their parents and in maintaining aspects of Navajo culture and language. Also, she identifies how Navajo youth do well with their parents' support and involvement in schools and in the ways that the students navigated the racial hierarchal system regardless of the obstacles or challenges they faced. As such, there were also many instances from my participants' narratives that highlight the significance of Diné cultural and language to their lives. More so, there is also the factor of the resiliency and unwavering support of their parents to overcome obstacles and to take chances for the sake of their children as well as the influence of key people like teachers and other relatives. So while, it is obvious in these responses that there were many challenges and obstacles for parents and their children alike related to socio-economic status or racializing practices like the lack of support for Navajo students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds or racial discrimination, and high mobility rates, many persevered regardless. While there have been a great deal of studies in American Indian Education

that point to the resilience of students in education, not much has been reported on the resiliency and effort of parents to give their children the support, motivation, and to attend to their basic needs.

Thus, in order to better understand a great deal about Navajo students' experiences with schooling, it is important to recognize how they understand their place and relationship to schools and their families and communities. That is, it is very important to know where students come from, who they are, and where they want to go in life by understanding students' cultural background to benefit their educational experiences or academic achievement (Gay, 2000). In summary, some important factors that were identified by students from their early childhood experiences that motivated or inspired them to succeed in school were parent support and involvement, students' and parents' cultural resilience, and cultural integrity.

Furthermore, intrinsic to a sense of Indigenous identity and belonging are the ideas of family and the home, as representing a place or space of rootedness, memories, stories, and worldview which informs an individual and collective paradigms and cultural outlooks on life (Cajete, 1994). That is, through family and community, Indigenous youth have a sense of place; where they come from, where they want to go in relation to that place, and where they are now that informs their personal identity. Cajete (1994) writes "our sense of being and our perception through community evolves over time. They mature through time in sync with the changes in our lives. In this way they form a foundation for personal history" (p. 171). The latter idea which is specific to a Diné world view will be further discussed in relation to identity formation in subsequent chapters.

In this chapter, I presented the voices of the Navajo youth who shared in this research journey with me and who continue to share in the responsibility and possibilities of defining a much larger Indigenous research agenda. It is important to understand that the voices of these Navajo (Diné) youth come from their own places yet they also come from within their respective communities and encompass in many ways the voices of their ancestors, their elders, grandparents, parents, and relatives. Since they are the inheritors of traditional Diné cultural knowledge, stories, songs, language, and a worldview that is informed by the many generations before them, they are Diné in the spiritual (intuitive) sense of the word- embodying Diné values and beliefs and connected through the complex web of interrelationships with their natural surroundings. That is, they are the children and grandchildren of the Holy People, of common ancestors, grandparents and parents, and relatives with whom I share common lineage through clan affiliations. In that way, they are my relatives through clan affiliations and relationships. They are my sisters, my brothers, my nieces, my nephews, my relatives, and now a part of my voice.

Therefore, with much humility, I shared their voices, their insights and wisdom to all who are willing to listen and learn to begin to look for new meanings and possibilities about the purpose, goals, and hope of Indigenous education. More so, their voices will hopefully serve as a catalyst within Indigenous (Native) and Diné (Navajo) communities to begin engaging in critical dialogue by rearticulating the democratic goals of Indigenous education using localized critical Indigenous models of education ultimately for positive harmonious outcomes. Since much has been lost in the preceding generations as a result of on-going attempts by the U.S. nation state to assimilate Indian tribes, communities, and people through neo-colonial, neoliberal, and white supremacist

agendas, it is up to the new generation of Indigenous youth and scholars to reaffirm the critical need for reclaiming and/or maintaining Indigenous cultural knowledge (Grande, 2004; Alfred, 1999 Warrior, 1995).

Chapter Five

VW: *What is your racial, cultural, gender background? How would you answer that?*

Mark: I guess...Diné. *Diné nishli*. Say that first, and then say...say in English... you know I'm Diné. They are all like, ahhh...then...I'm Navajo. "What's that!?"

Indigenous People of America...that is Indigenous... we used to be called American Indians. (pause) I do not like the term Native Americans, were not really American. (pause). *Forced citizenship*.

The oppression of indigenous peoples, then, involved the stripping away of the fundamental markers of our identities – sovereignty, ancestral lands, language, and cultural knowledge. An essential determinant of the social and economic well-being of any group is its connectedness. When a group is connected, it flourishes. Conversely, when the shared meanings, values, and beliefs that identify group membership are broken down, so too, does the group break down. (M. Maaka, *Educational Perspectives*, 37, 2004, p. 3)

The politics of identity in the education of Diné youth

I begin this chapter by quoting one of the participants named Mark and Margaret Maaka, a Maori scholar, to make the connections between identity, knowledge, and power. That is, in the comments “forced citizenship” and the “stripping away” of sovereignty, lands, language and cultural knowledge, there is an acknowledgement of the “politicized” nature of identity formation and its connection to cultural, historical and social processes of assimilation, colonization, and racialization. Additionally, just as Maaka succinctly describes the oppression of Indigenous people as involving the stripping away of the fundamental markers of Indigenous identity like sovereignty, ties to ancestral lands, language, and cultural knowledge, she also states that a group's well being is related to their connectedness to each other, other people, and the natural world.

In the previous chapter, I shared the stories of Diné youth as they talked about important factors that were integral to their success in school. These factors were related to the concepts of relationships and connectedness which were very significant to their

childhood experiences at home, at school, and within their respective communities. Specifically I identified these factors as; the influence of extended family and community/family beliefs and values to self identity and notions of success, students' and parents' cultural resiliency to persevere against formidable odds, and Diné cultural integrity. Also, I shared the stories of my participants' lives to describe who they are, what defines their cultural values and beliefs, and what is important to their lives in regards to achieving success in education and beyond.

In this chapter, I discuss some important aspects from the research data related to issues of identity based on the research participants' responses to questions about their racial, cultural, ethnic, and gender background. By doing so, I address varying biological, cultural, legal, and personal definitions of Native American or Indian identity and explain their implications to the identity formation of Diné (Navajo) youth using a critical race theory lens. Particularly I focus on how students' construct a self ascribed identity and how they negotiate an ascribed identity. I also share students' responses about what it means to be a Diné or Navajo person within the contexts of schooling in school, in their communities, and in society. Using their voices, I interpret their understandings of what it means to be Navajo living in the modern world and frame it within a critical Indigenous theoretical framework that highlights the concepts of sovereignty and nationhood. Finally, from these findings, I provide an overview of why a critical analysis of Indigenous Diné identity development and formation are needed to understand the complexity of issues in regards to the ways that Diné youth construct and negotiate an identity in education.

For this research, as stated before, I purposively selected young Navajo college students who are (were) still in their late adolescent stage of life, or more appropriately students who are *tsilkeí dóó chikeí*. In Navajo oral traditions, identity is central to the “spiritual image of our clans” (Aronilth, 1994, p. 59). Aronilth (1994) states:

According to the teachings of our forefathers, introduction by clan is very important.

The wealth and health of our people depends on our clan introduction. We are part of the clan. We must understand the source and uniqueness of our clans. Good understanding of Diné clan operation and knowledge is gained through positive mental attitude, and positive behavior, and clan ‘know how’. (p. 19)

Specifically, according to Diné oral stories about Changing Woman and the Hero Twins, a Diné identity is formed beginning in early adolescence. This idea was shared to me through a story of the Hero Twins’ journey to their father, the Sun bearer. In undertaking the journey to their father, the Twins fulfill their purpose and goals in life and their roles and responsibilities to others by destroying the world of terrible monsters to make a life for future generations of Diné people, thus affirming their identity.

Similarly, in the fields of anthropology, psychology, and sociology, the stage of adolescence is also considered a crucial period for identity formation/development (Cross, 1991; Tatum, 1997). Identity has become one of the main concepts in social science thinking. According to Tatum (1997), a process of identity formation involves asking the questions, “Who am I at present?”, “Who was I in the past?” and “Who will I become in the future?” According to Verkuyten (2005), “The term is used frequently, in different circumstances and for different reasons” (p. 39). That is, according to Verkuyten (2005), trying to articulate or define identity entails looking at how “people make their

own lives, negotiate meanings” and in defining identity, a process of understanding is needed that “forms a link between the individual and society” (p. 16).

In this next section, I share the students responses to the question of; “how do you define your background?” or “how do you define yourself?” Based on the theory of identity formation and development as described earlier, I created some interview questions asking students to describe their racial, ethnic, cultural, and gender identities. (See Appendix B) In doing so, I wanted students to discuss at length their understandings of and to distinguish between different kinds of identities based on of race, ethnicity, and culture. As such, in response to the questions on identity all of the young Navajo college students seemed to elicit varied responses that reveal the complexities of defining an identity.

Sharon -

VW: What is your racial, cultural, ethnic, gender background...that is, if someone asks you... How would you define yourself? Or identify yourself?

Sharon: Diné. Navajo. Native American. And if they actually had knowledge of Navajo I'd probably break it down to the clans.

VW: How would you describe your racial identity?

Sharon: My racial identity? I hate that word. ((laughs))...

VW: ...Is your racial identity different than your cultural identity? Explain why you believe this to be true?

Sharon: Long (pause).....Yeah. yeah it's definitely different.

VW: In what ways do you think they're different?

Sharon: Race is more driven by what people like make science to be, I guess. People do science or use science to confirm race which is really a social way of thinking. I want to say maybe ahh... a social classification of identity. More driven by the physique of people, whereas, culture is not. It's more of who you are rather than how you look.

Based on her responses, for Sharon, it is important that her identity starts with Diné followed by Navajo and then Native American. Then she follows by stating that if other people have knowledge of Navajo clan lineages then she would break it down by clans. She also states that she doesn't like the word racial because it is "driven by" science and the "physique of people". Clearly, she is aware of biological racism as a social system of categorizing and classifying people by phenotype and physical differences. She goes on to talk about her understanding of a cultural identity as consisting of who you are rather than "how you look".

In Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America, Garrouette (2003) explores the legal, biological, cultural, and personal (self identification) definitions of American Indian identity that are used in various ways historically and in the contemporary contexts. In doing so, she raise some critical issues and questions that highlight the ambiguities, complexities, conflicts, and tensions involved in articulating, claiming, and/or defining an identity at the individual and collective level. That is, Garrouette (2003) explicates how legal definitions, similar to biological and cultural ones, of "Indian-ness" operate on an individual and collective level in comparison to personal ones (p. 15). Furthermore, identity is wrapped up in the cultural, social, economic, and political aspects of how to define and assert an identity at an individual and collective

level. Thus, what it means to be anything or anyone by selection also involves how others ascribe an identity unto an individual or group. Hilary Weaver (2001) writes, “identity exists, not solely within an individual or category of individuals but through difference in relationship to others” (p. 242).

In looking at racial identity, Tatum (1997) describes a racial identity development model as an examination of an individual and a racial group’s shared cultural, social, political, and economic experiences. The five stages of the model; the pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization/commitment stages, illustrate African Americans responses to asserting and embracing a Black identity (Cross, 1991). In other words, African American racial identity development can be described as the attitudes and beliefs that an African American has about his or her belonging to the African American race or ethnic group, about the African American race (and community) collectively, and about other racial groups. In “Waiting for the Call: The Moral Activist Role of Critical Race Theory and Scholarship”, Ladson- Billings and Donnor (2008) state:

What each of these groups (i.e. African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans) has in common is the experience of a racialized identity. Each group is constituted of a myriad of other national and ancestral origins, but the dominant ideology of the Euro-American epistemology forced them into an essentialized and totalized unit that is perceive to have little or no internal variation....Identification with the racialized labels means an acknowledgement of some of the common experiences group members have had as outsiders and others. (p. 66)

Thus, racial identity development models offer a socio-psychological model for understanding the stages of identity development for African Americans and whites. Furthermore, these definitions and models help to address and raise some important questions and issues related to racial identification.

In a follow up interview with Sharon, we returned to talking about the difference between a racial and ethnic identity again to further clarify her ideas. In this second interview, her responses were as such.

Sharon: Gosh, I think *race looks at the person's skin color and ethnicity looks at the cultural heritage*. I think, I do not know. I didn't study race theory or anything. I think it's relevant because in the general discourse amongst people they will tell you that race is about black, etc....They say I do not see color. It's not necessarily a color but their cultural background. A person may look Native American and you can't just dispel it and say, "Oh you're just a person, a human being." In an ideal world we should think like that. Unfortunately I think when we have things that are already categorized for certain purposes, people start to see color.

In looking at her response related to the difference between a racial and ethnic identity, Sharon is again demonstrating her awareness of race as social construction used to classify people by their features. It is important to note that for many students of color like Sharon, they are aware of race and racism. That is, although they may not have "studied" race theory their understanding is based on their own individual experiences and how they observe the world around them. Thus, for many people of color their understanding of race and racism comes from everyday interactions, observations and experiences with racial discrimination. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) state:

[Children], as relatively new members of social institutions, are engaged in a highly interactive, socially regulating process as they monitor and shape their own behavior and that of other children and adults in regards to racial matters. They not only learn and use ideas about race and ethnicity but also embed in their everyday language and practice the understood identities of who is white, Black, Latino or Asian. These and (other) identities and associated privileges and disadvantages are made concrete and are thus normalized. They are normalized, moreover, not only in performances of “roles” and “scripts”, but also in the deeper psyches and subconscious understandings of children and adults. The children perpetuate and re-create the structures of race and ethnicity not only in society, but also in their social minds and psyches. (p. 33)

More so, Sharon’s recognition of certain aspects of colorblind racism and the black-white dichotomy in race relations underscores how Indigenous youth are dealing with and thinking about issues of race and racism which demonstrates the different ways that Diné youth are constructing and negotiating their identities. For example, for Sharon, her identity is clearly defined by traditional ways of knowing. Also, although she is also very aware that her identity is not defined by a racial category, yet she is aware that there is also the possibility that others will assign or ascribed one for her. More importantly, she is gaining an understanding that while a racial identity is not real, its consequences and outcomes can be dangerous.

Selena –

In the case of Selena, her responses were in some ways different from Sharon in regards to the question of what is your racial/cultural/ethnic/gender background. That is, Selena states, “I guess my racial background, I would tell them I’m half Navajo, half

Hispanic.” In this response, Selena acknowledges that her racial identity is one that is defined legally on paper which is premised on the biological basis of blood quantum identification. It is possible that Selena may have seen documents like a Certificate of Indian Blood which designates her as being part Indian or Navajo. For many, legal/biological definitions of identity assume the “centrality of an individual’s genetic relationship to other tribal members” (Garrouette, 2003, p. 39). Thus, legal definitions may in fact be more salient for people of mixed ethnic and racial identities because there are no doubts or questions about belonging to a group.

VW: Do you think your racial identity is different than your cultural identity?

Selena: Um... yeah I guess ... Because it’s like down on paper. But culturally I guess I understand it....like well I see it and I watch it and I see like the culture but I do not really understand it. *So it’s one thing to be something but another thing to really be a part of it.*

On the other hand, for Selena, not knowing or understanding the cultures and language of her mixed cultural heritage as Navajo and Hispanic was very significant. For example, she mentions the feelings of being disconnected because she wasn’t well informed or connected with either cultural group even though she knew that her racial/ethnic and cultural heritage was Navajo and Hispanic. Later in the interview she stated that although she knew about the history and the culture of her Navajo and Hispanic background, she says “I know the culture, I know the history but I do not really participate in either”. She goes on to say “*I guess the main thing is not knowing the language so ... things like that just make you feel like disconnected.*” Hence, in the case of Selena, it is difficult for her to negotiate her racial, ethnic and cultural identities

because she is not quite sure where she belongs. Her responses underscore how cultural identities are often harder to assume because they require measuring up to certain “cultural standards” (Garrouette, 2003). That is, in her statement about being not really being a part of either cultural group, it was difficult for her to negotiate this paradox of fitting or not fitting in. For many mixed race students, it is a difficult process because learning about one’s cultural identity requires acceptance from others in the group who may have more “legitimate” claims of authenticity and/or access to available resources (Garrouette, 2003).

Theresa -

VW: How do you identify yourself? What’s your racial, cultural, ethnic and gender background?

Theresa: I think that the first thing I would tell them is I’m a girl. (laughs).. just kidding ...Ahh...That I’m a Native American first and then afterwards I would tell them that I’m Navajo and then...that’s about it...and if they want to know more I would tell them clans or something.

VW: What about your racial identity? How would you define that?

Theresa: Race?...ahmm...I never really knew race...or the difference between race and ethnicity...to kinda of like...I do not know.

VW: What about... how would you define your ethnic identity?

Theresa: I would say I’m Navajo. Full Navajo.

VW: Full Navajo?

Theresa: I know... that were not full Navajo but... (laughs)

VW: So, if someone asks you “full Navajo?” How would you answer that?

Theresa: I would just say both my parents are Navajo.

In contrast to Sharon and Selena, Theresa mentions that she identifies with Native American first followed by Navajo. Yet, she follows by saying that she is unaware of race which is interesting because Native American is often categorized as a racial group. Furthermore, when I asked her to define her ethnic identity, she states that she is “full Navajo”. This is a common response among many Native Americans because as Theresa indicates it suggests that both of your parents are from one tribal group. Moreover, in legal/biological definitions that use blood quantum to determine citizenship, “full” suggests that an individual is without doubt Native American from a federally recognized group. As Garrouette (2003) states, “ The most common tribal requirement for determining citizenship concerns ‘blood quantum’, or degree of Indian ancestry”(p. 15). Thus, Garrouette (2003) adds, “ biological ancestry...overwhelms all other considerations of identity, especially when it is constructed as ‘pure’ ” (2004, p. 41). Based on Sharon, Selena, and Theresa’s statements, they are aware of the biological aspects of a racial identity but in different ways. For Sharon, racial identity as a social construction based on how people of color were categorized into races. In the case of Selena, she is aware based on her experiences but also by her connectedness or lack of thereof between two racial groups. More so, she points out as Theresa does that notion of blood quantum in her references to being half Navajo and half Hispanic.

Mark-

VW: What is your racial, cultural, gender background? How would you answer?

Mark: I guess...Diné. *Diné nishli*. Say that first, and then say...say in English... you know I’m Diné. They are all like, ahhh...then...I’m Navajo. “What’s that?”

Indigenous People of America...that is Indigenous... we used to be called American Indians. (pause) I do not like the term Native Americans, were not really American. (pause) *Forced citizenship.*

VW: *So you prefer American Indian or Native American?*

Mark: OR.... no...Neither but that's... like for ignorant people.

VW: *So if someone asks you what racial group are you?*

Mark: Indigenous American or Indigenous people of America. So then...some say Indians, some say Natives but I guess with me...I guess it'd be Indigenous.

VW: *Yeah, that's.... a pretty tough... thing to figure out.*

Mark: Politicized.

As discussed at the outset of this chapter, Mark's reference to a "forced citizenship" highlights his understanding of identity being a politicized act. His response is recognition of government imposed legal/biological definitions of Indian identity that make referents to being "American". That is, the term American is a contentious one for Indigenous people who resist being defined under the auspices of a white American nation. This is evident in his response to the question of his racial, ethnic, and cultural background when he chooses to identify as Indigenous instead of Native American. For many younger generations of Indigenous youth, the term Indigenous is one that they identify more with because it is a conscious and political act or way of asserting sovereignty and maintaining sovereign rights as a people prior to colonization.

Karen-

VW: *How do you identify yourself to other people? What is your racial, cultural, ethnic, gender background? Like if some asked you who are you?*

Karen: What am I? I'd say I'm Navajo and... depending on the person I would say Navajo but if it seems like someone who is not really going to judge me depending on how they are... then I would say Navajo, white and Ojibwe. And...I guess even though if I'm only just an eighth like Ojibwe, you know, I do go up there and sometimes we visit there a lot.

VW: *So...that's the Ojibwe part of you...so but you also mentioned Navajo and being White?*

Karen: Yeah, mainly I'll just say Navajo.

VW: *And your father is half Navajo?*

Karen: He is full.

VW: *Oh and your mom is half right?*

Karen: Yea, my mom is half.

VW: *So, your mother is also one quarter Ojibwe?*

Karen: Yeah.

VW: *Ok.*

Karen: So I'm three quarters Navajo.

VW: *How do you define your racial identity?*

Karen: Racial? Ahm...meaning?....What am I of? What color?

VW: *That could be...You could look at it like that.*

Karen: Navajo.

VW: *What about if you're asked to...and I am sure maybe you have done this before...maybe you have taken the SAT or ACT test and on the application you were told to mark.... ?*

Karen: Native American. Indigenous.

VW: *That's what you mark.*

Karen: Yea.

In these responses from Karen, it is important to note that similar to Theresa she is confounding the terms of racial and ethnic. That is, she refers to her racial identity as Navajo which is often understood to an ethnic or cultural identity. But at the same time, she also mentions that on applications which usually ask for a racial category designation, she marks Native American. What becomes confusing is how she also uses that term synonymously with the term Indigenous which suggests her unfamiliarity with the terms. This unfamiliarity of terms was evident in Theresa's responses as well when she states that she is Native American but then goes on to state that she doesn't know race or is unaware of Native American being a racial category.

Finally, similar to Sharon, Theresa and Karen both state that if other people they'd just met wanted to know more or were sincere in knowing about them that they would tell them about clans or identify all of their racial and ethnic backgrounds. Often times, for Navajo people, depending on who they meet and are talking to, clan affiliations always seem to be key to establishing a relationship with others and in assuming or taking on a role. This taking on a role is very different from an ascribed racial identity. In contrast to the traditional research on social roles and status, Deborah Van Ausdale and Joe Feagin (2001) state that it is more sufficient to look at identities as roles versus ascribed identities. They explain that social roles are socially defined positions like teacher, student, or doctor, whereas "ascribed roles – such as racial and gender roles – stay with people in all situations for their entire lives" (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001, p. 32). That

is, ascribed racial identities are based on outsiders' expectations and require complex processes of negotiation across many situations and institutions because they involve status and identity. In other words, roles can change depending on where you are but ascribed racial identities do not disappear for racialized groups when they pass from home, school, or the community. Furthermore, as will be addressed later, clan identity is very different from other types of identity.

Later, when I asked Karen to clarify her understanding of the Certificate of Indian Blood, she responds:

Karen: Ah....Certificate of Indian Blood, you know. I guess like the government, ah...that just proves like, you know, you're this much Indian according to whatever your mom or dad was, according to what their parents were, blah, blah, blah. It's just the government's way of tracking you down as whatever Indian you are. And then...without my CIB... If I didn't have my CIB I'd still be...I'd still be Navajo. I'd still learn all these things. But it can be taken away if it had to be. But you know, it's just...it's just something for me to get benefit I'd have to say...cause CIB, you know...Do you have it, at the chapter house, do you have it at IHS, do you have it for when you go to college, applying for Navajo scholarship, FAFSA, stuff like that...CIB, it's all that it's really used for.

VW: But that's how the government...

Karen: The government looks at it that way...but I do not really care about what the government thinks, you know what I mean. Because they're not out there, you know, doing what I have to do. Like before I came here, that last week of May, I got put to work and I had to work out in the fields and help everyone plant corn and all this

stuff, you know....we had a big butcher for me. You know, you can't take that away, what I've learned, what I have grown up with. And they can take my benefit away but....that's...it's just paper and words.

In reviewing these statements again, once again it became apparent and obvious for me that these students' understandings of the different types or forms of identity are multiple and varied. In the case of Theresa and Karen, they highlight how being "full Navajo" meant having both parents who are Navajo. Yet they also highlight how being Navajo is more than being recognized as Navajo on paper but that it entails knowing your culture and language. This idea of culture and language being integral to a cultural identity is also shared by Elbert in the following responses.

Elbert –

VW: How would you describe...identify yourself?

Elbert: That I was a Native American, Navajo young man, I guess.

VW: More specifically, how would you describe your racial identity then?

Elbert: Being Navajo.

VW: How do you think that differs from being Native American? How is being Navajo different than being Native American?

Elbert: You mean like being another tribe? I guess the language, traditions of the tribe and the lifestyles of the people.

VW: Can you be a Native American and have all of this, language, tradition, lifestyle, do you have to have these to be Native American?

Elbert: To say that you're Native American? I think you would have to. I would have to know my language and traditions. Where I come from, to say I'm Native American.

In these responses from Elbert, it is obvious that while he understands that he is Navajo and Native American, he also conflates and blurs the lines between race, culture and ethnicity by referring to his racial identity as Navajo. In the following passages, it will become evident as well in Stanley's responses. Hence, some questions arise; do young Navajo students know the difference between these different identity categories? Does it matter if they do? Similarly, Karen and Theresa's statements also reveals their misunderstandings or blurring of the terms between a racial, ethnic, and cultural identity which suggests possibly that they do not really understand the terms or the terms do not really mean anything.

Stanley -

VW: Do you often tell people you're Navajo?

Stanley: Well, I'll say I'm Native American. They'll say what tribe and I'll say Navajo

VW: How do you define your ethnic identity?

Stanley: Half Native American, half white.

VW: Is it important to tell people that you're half white and half Navajo?

Stanley: Sometimes it is because they do not actually believe that I can be part white and part Navajo. They give me that look that says you can't be that based on what we've seen or heard.

VW: Do the people that you're around, do they ask you a lot about who you were?

Stanley: No, just what ethnicity am I, or their parents would ask me and sometimes they would want to know more like if we play on the reservation but that's about it.

VW: How is your racial identity different from your ethnic identity?

Stanley: Racial, it just feels, inside of me, I'm Navajo. Even though I'm ethnically half white and half Navajo, I feel more Navajo than being a white. Because it sets me apart from other people in that way. Being different is a challenge for me.

VW: Which of these identities do you think is most important for you in how you want other people to know you... racial, ethnic and cultural and gender?

Stanley: I would say racial, the Navajo. It sets me apart from everyone else. The whole world is based on statistics. If I can be a better part and help the Native cause than I'd rather be that than just be a regular white person. There's just so much more history behind the Navajo than the white person. You have to go so far back because they were all immigrants at one time and you know exactly what the Navajo culture is, it's always been there and most likely stay there for a while. They can't just move the whole reservation off it, the largest one in America. It would be hard to do that. That is set in stone, you know what happened.

In the preceding responses, Stanley states that "being different is a challenge for me".

Also, he states being Navajo "sets him apart from everyone else". This is an interesting point because as I think about how Stanley can be perceived as being white based on his physical appearance of having a lighter complexion than most Navajos. This is important facet to understand especially for mixed race students because it may become more challenging to accept an ascribed identity especially one that is primarily based on what you look like. Further, it could be more of a challenge to know who you are yet to have to

deal with how the outside world sees you. More so, for someone like Stanley, it is difficult to be called white when most of your life you have worked to affirm and recognize your self-ascribed identity.

Clearly the implications are very different for students who are “full” compared to mixed race or mixed ethnic students. This is evident in their responses, such as Theresa stating that both of her parents are legally identified as Native, compared to what it means to be mixed raced or mixed ethnic like Selena, Stanley, and Karen. Hence, as Garrouette (2001) states, the question of “is it enough” arises. In the case of students who are mixed race or mixed ethnic, it may be that as long as one parent is Indian, they could be considered as Indian as well if they so choose. Thus, Garrouette (2001) writes:

Legal definitions provide tangible, external proof of a personal racial identification.

And once established, legal definitions also have the virtue of being easily verifiable: to determine whether a person satisfies a legal definition, a shuffling of papers is generally sufficient. (p. 31)

However, the case of mixed ethnic or mixed tribal students may present a far more challenging dilemma, particularly for students who from different tribal groups that have different criteria for membership. That is, it becomes harder for these students because some enrollment requirements of particular tribal groups may be stricter than others. Clearly, connected to notions of tribal differences in regards to who could be considered members are the ideas of citizenship, sovereignty, and tribal nationhood.

Sarah-

VW: who are you, how do you identify yourself?

Sarah: I would just plain out say Diné. What's Diné?... Navajo. What's Navajo? And this is the part where I kind of get lost. People say Indian, yet I don't claim...or some people say American Indian. And it's like No. Native American, I am like...ah...I...it is still like...sometimes I will let it go... but it seems like... deep down I'd rather say Indigenous. That is what I would claim... So like...Navajo , Indigenous... Diné, Navajo, and then Indigenous. I don't know if it is just the way I am starting to think now.

VW: Where did you hear that term, Indigenous?

Sarah: Indigenous...first? Oh gosh, it has to been from way back. I don't even remember...I just know...

VW: Is that a word you learned in school, from your family or... ?

Sarah: I think it was more family And then I started reading more, when I started getting older, and I started seeing that there were Native American magazines and there's like all these different programs...and that's where I started seeing it more and more...even though a lot of them still say Native American...I saw the whole like Columbus thing, the Indians and then the Native American thing. I think my ancestors were here long before it became America. So I don't understand the whole 'Native' American.

In Sarah's remarks, which are similar to Mark in claiming an Indigenous identity, she states "it is just the way I am starting to think now". Later on, she makes a reference to the "Columbus" thing which suggests her growing understanding of the historical contexts and political constructions of being "Indian" or "Native American" vis a vis asserting an Indigenous identity. Thus, for many Indigenous youth, asserting or

constructing an identity begins with and continues by negotiating the multiple and contested terrain of identity.

In *Red Pedagogy*, Sandy Grande (2004) refers to this phenomenon as an “identity paradox” in which Indian identity is wrapped up in a myriad of complex issues and competing ideologies. In “American Indian Intellectualism”, Grande (2004) responds to this “paradox” by affirming a more open yet critical approach to the construction of identity. Grande (2004) states:

[At] the same time the relentless cadence of colonialist forces necessitates American Indians to retain closed or “essentialist” constructions of Indian-ness, the challenges of their own “burgeoning multiculturalism” requires the construction of more open, fluid, and “transgressive” definitions of Indian-ness. (p. 95).

Thus, it is obvious that identity formation for Indigenous youth can be very complex and unclear, yet what is becoming clearer for some like Mark, Sharon, Karen, and Sarah is that identities are partly imposed as well. Therefore, claiming an identity for Indigenous youth entails recognizing self as being part of one or several at the same time. More so, it is also about recognizing competing cultural and social constructions of identity that are heavily informed by white supremacist ideology.

Here I return to Marks’ comments about his identity in the opening part of this chapter to reiterate the fluid, dynamic and shifting nature of identity construction. For example, in that response from Mark, an interesting thing to note is that he states his racial identity as Indigenous although he is able to distinguish a racial identity as being fixed categorizations. Moreover, for Mark, while at the same time he is asserting an Indigenous identity, he is also claiming a Diné identity. Similarly, Sarah also mentions an

Indigenous identity along with a Diné identity. That is, for both Mark and Sarah and others who refer to an Indigenous and/or Diné identity as being a significant aspect of their identity highlights the importance of Indigenous youth's recognition and connection to land, their family, and people. This is clearly articulated by Sharon, Theresa, and Sarah in their understandings of and recognition of the Diné clan system as informing their identity rather than her identity being defined by a racial/ethnic term of Native American. That is, in these student's responses based on their understanding of the term Indigenous, I posit that they are using the terms Indigenous and/or Diné not only in the political and cultural sense but also in relation to their spiritual and physical connection and ties with the land and their family and relatives.

The importance of talking about identity from an Indigenous perspective is significant especially in regards to the goals of Indigenous education because of the unique status of Indigenous and Native people to nation-states. Also, it is important in regards to the education of Indigenous youth in that students bring with them the individual and collective memories, histories, songs, and stories of their people and that their cultural background or wealth are wound up with their identities. Thus, as American Indians try to reclaim, re-define, and re-articulate a closed but strategic "essentialist" construction of Indian-ness, there are many challenges that face American Indian communities that require the construction of open, fluid, and transgressive definitions. In *Indigenous Knowledge and Education: Sites of Struggle, Strength, and Survivance*, Sandy Grande (2008) states this idea very well.

While contemporary life requires most Indians to negotiate or "transgress" between a multitude of subject positions....such movement remains historically embedded and

geographically placed. Moreover, the various and competing subjectivities remain tied through memory, ceremony, ritual, and obligation to a traditional identity type that operates not as a measure of authenticity, but rather of cultural continuity and survival...the struggle for American Indian subjectivity is, in part, a struggle to protect this essence and the right of Indigenous peoples to live in accordance with their traditional ways (In Villegas, Neugebauer, and Venegas, 2008, p. 232 - 233). Furthermore, in an article title, “Indigenous Identity: What Is it, Who Really Has It?” Weaver (2001) writes “Native identity has often been defined from a nonnative perspective. This raises critical questions about authenticity: Who decides who is an indigenous person, Natives or non natives?” (p. 246). Therefore, defining an Indian, Native, Native American, or Indigenous identity is very important to Indigenous communities because it addresses the complexity of issues involved in identity formation that underscore various aspects of identity development; like personal, social, and cultural beliefs about identity, the impact of racism and racialized discourse on Indigenous people, the imposition of legal and biological definitions of identity, and the strategic ways that Indigenous people are reclaiming notions of identity formation (Garrouette, 2003; Weaver, 2001).

In the following passages, I share some of my participants’ responses to questions like; what does it mean for you to be Navajo, how would you describe to someone else what it means to be Navajo and what defines you as Navajo. In a study of Navajo youth and their cultural identity in the modern context titled *21st Century Diné Identity*, Lloyd Lee (2004) highlights four cultural features that he posits resemble historical Navajo cultural identity. They are worldview, language, and kinship along with a “pride in being

Navajo” (Lee, 2004). From this study, Lee (2004) states the following about his research participants:

The participants’ conceptualizations of present day Diné cultural identity are new, in that Diné people who are practicing these concepts are young and developing their own Diné culture, but, they do make a connection to the past. The past has not been forgotten. Twenty first century Diné cultural identity among the interviewees is rich in the traditional concepts of Diné identity. (p. 161)

In much the same way, many of my research participants also identified some traditional “intangible” and “tangible” ideas or concepts like land, worldview, the language and culture of their ancestors by which they referred to define and explain their understanding of what it means to be Navajo. Certainly, while the responses varied according to students’ individual experiences and cultural background, connection to family and community, and their understanding of what constitutes a Navajo identity like speaking the language, kinship ties, and worldview, there was also a commonality that linked their experiences.

VW: How do they know that you’re Diné or Navajo?

Sharon: First of all I come from an area surrounded by other Diné people, my family, my mother, my ancestors have the world view of being Diné. And it’s... It’s a world view that’s been passed down. I see it as something that connects us to the people, I guess. The world view that ahh... people with the same language, people with similar ancestral background share.

Sharon: Because it all goes back to the nonmaterial things. Like ah... some things... The ties to the land, ties to the language, ties to the Navajo philosophy, waking up every morning and throwing your, *tádííín* [*corn pollen*] and saying your prayers.

Selena-

VW: In terms of your cultural identity, what are some tangible things that you think might explain your cultural identity?

Selena: I do not know... just like... things that explain it...well for me like when I feel like most like... I guess... this sounds weird like when I feel most Navajo I guess is when I'm with my family like on the reservation, when we go to ceremonies or go to a *yéibichéís* or like when we butcher and stuff like that ...those are things when I am there...that's when I feel close like ... like most Navajo. But when I am like I guess you could say here in Albuquerque like learning about it and people are like oh so you're Native oh but well but it feels like it's from an outside perspective.

VW: Do you think speaking Do you think that is important to being a Navajo?

Selena: I think so...I mean like out of all the things that like....bother me about feeling disconnected is not knowing the language. You're not able to communicate properly. They will say something... Sometimes when we have the family over they'll joke around in Navajo and everyone's laughing and I'm like hmm, I do not understand what you're saying. My grandpa sometimes uses Navajo in his conversation and I get lost.

Mark -

VW: So who is a Diné then?

Mark: It's... what it says on your CIB. (laughs)... there are times when you know who you are...Or who knows what Navajo you are? You know...the older you are you understand SNBH...what that means, and thinking back...you know sitting there. Then some of your earlier memories...like in my childhood...it was like Hozhóqíí and some of those other stuff...and all that tells...that's...if you come from that world view of knowing...of knowing...listening to those stories and those songs...that is ...that original worldview...if your lines come from that even if you've been removed since the first relocation period of 1950s...when they sent everybody Chicago and L.A., that's like three generations of quote unquote urban Indians and you're still part of that. You're created from those songs, or you are created from the land itself. I think that...that's.... who people who are Diné are.

VW: So if you just know or understand that idea... that that makes you Diné?

Mark: No it's...you... you're defined by the community as a...a group of people are defined by different... the same cultural values...you know in Navajo, a lot of clans are different, different groups of people.

Sarah -

VW: How do we really know who we are?

Sarah: Without the government telling us, kind of deal?

VW: Yea.

Sarah: I think that it all comes from oral tradition. Yea. My grandparents said Diné, that's Diné.

VW: So we talked about identity, the idea of you know...how do you describe yourself...we talked about that and I think I sort of touched on this question. So how

you would describe to another person who is not Navajo or doesn't know much about Navajo people, how would you describe what a Navajo person is to that person?

Sarah: How to describe Navajo to someone who doesn't...who wouldn't know?

Ok...Ahm..I think first of all...I would probably... say Navajo is just like our language, our homeland, I'd tell them...We're Diné, this is...and our language...Athabaskan. We are...we come from this region of the southwest. And just...I...Oh gosh...That's a really broad question and probably just start going off about...and then I'd probably start go off about where I am from to and then...I'd probably. Oh gosh, it's hard to tell someone what's Navajo and who's Navajo and that kind of stuff. Ahmm the stuff we do...ah...our land, our sheep, jewelry, clothes. Maybe a little bit of the government system, that we are Indigenous people.

Stanley –

VW: Based on your particular life experience as a mixed race person and your education and your own personal perspectives as a Navajo person, how would you describe what it means to be a Navajo person to someone who doesn't know?

Stanley: I would say it's a very different way of living because most of the Navajo nation is just like open land kind of space. As far as you can there's not much to see. A lot of people just wander around and the flea markets are always there. It's like getting to know different people through different trades. It's a different way of living but it's their own way of living and they're used to it so it's not a big deal to them.

Alyssa –

VW: I guess I kind of addressed this question...ah...how would you describe to someone else who is not Navajo what it means to be Navajo?

Alyssa: Hmm...what it means to be Navajo...I would say...I think I did a paper on this back in high school....And I said is...What it means to be Navajo is when you know who you are, how you identify yourself, what your clans is, if you know...ahm...(pause). Just how you identify yourself and...

VW: Well, I think that...that's a really important aspect I think of that discussion about ...who...of what it means to be Navajo because it's tied to history, in terms of your clan history, it's tied to your kinship, your relatives, your community,...it's also related to how your community, your relatives try to carry on the language, your cultural traditions...

Alyssa: That's what I said in my paper. (laughs).

VW: So...if that is... important, so you could be a Navajo person that doesn't have to wear jewelry...

Alyssa: Uh huh.

VW: Doesn't really have to have Navajo values, Navajo belief, but they are still Navajo right?

Alyssa: Yea

VW: Ok let me ask you this other question... What are some intangible things...

Alyssa: Yea.

VW: Like abstract ideas.

Alyssa: Uh huh...

VW: That explain who you are? That helps people understand who you are. Or that explains to you... who you are?

Alyssa: What do you mean like...just

VW: *Earlier you said something about Kinaaldá?....*

Alyssa: Uh huh

VW: *That could be like an abstract idea...cause it's not really... I guess the ceremony itself might seen as authentic Navajo...but the idea of what it is...is not really culturally specific...I guess in some ways it would but...I guess another way to look at it...you introduced yourself through your clans right?*

Alyssa: Ah huh

VW: *You can't put a material value to it...*

Alyssa: Ah huh

VW: *Is that important to your identity? In what ways is that important?*

Alyssa: The four clans...?

VW: *Just...I'm just...I'm just kinda of using that as an example of what intangible things might be...Are there other things besides your clans that tell people who you are?*

Alyssa: I think your beliefs.

VW: *Like what kinds of beliefs?*

Alyssa: Like what you believe in. For example, your beliefs... and religion, your culture.

VW: *Navajo religion or Christian religion?*

Alyssa: Christian. Either way. That makes you Navajo

Theresa –

VW: *What are some intangible...like abstract ideas...concepts... that you think might help explain your identity?*

Theresa: Emm...my clans. Where I grew up like...growing up on the reservation. Just my experiences and stuff.

VW: Wow that's a lot of things. Why do you think that is so?

Theresa: Like what?

VW: Like how does a clan help you explain your identity?

Theresa: Well clans are kinda like...like a...group? I guess you'd say...like cause like I'm Tábááhá.. I am born for the Naneesht'ezhi Táchíinii clan.. And that identifies me from like everyone else...

VW: Which of those two things do you think explain more of who you are, so the intangible or the tangible?

Theresa: Emm...I think...intangible. Cause when anyone can just dress up and say I'm Navajo. And you know you can't like color your skin or something...but then...like not to really like identify someone... to go deep into like identity...identities and say like where you from, what's your clans, who you born for? Things like that.

Elbert -

VW: What are some intangible things that help you explain who you are?

Elbert: My beliefs.

VW: What is one belief that you can share that can answer who you are?

Elbert: The Native American church. Maybe my parents values and teachings and their ideologies.

VW: Do you think speaking the Navajo language is important to your identity? And why do you believe this to be true or not true?

Elbert: Yeah, I think it's important. A lot of people say I'm Native American, I'm Navajo, but speaking the language is really a way to prove this is who you are. Through that you can communicate with others, say your clan. Later on, in generations, you do not lose that. You can pass it on to your kids and teach them.

In a journal article titled "Navajo Cultural Identity", Lloyd Lee (2006) states how certain "cultural features point to the fact that historical Navajo cultural identity continues and that the younger generation recognizes the need to practice worldview, language, and kinship" (p.92). For example, in most of the responses from my research participants, they indicated a connection to land and/or livestock such as sheep, traditional attire and jewelry as significant markers or signifiers of being Navajo. More so, these tangibles in addition to the intangibles like language and world view were significant because they signify the forms of traditional and borrowed or adopted forms of cultural production of the people from the historical to contemporary contexts. That is, the art, the music, the life style, the clothing, food, and other aesthetic items of Navajo life have a meaning to the lives of youth because they represent through their symbolic qualities the history and story of the Navajo people.

Karen-

Karen: When I told her one time why I was mad...you know because my cousins were teasing me because I'm from Bloomfield, and Bloomfield is like the white Navajos or whatever. And so they were asking me about that and I got really mad and upset. And she got after me and she told me "Nobody knows what it means to be Navajo." And so she said "What you know you hold onto it." And she said "You hold onto it you do not really have to say anything about it, about being Navajo." And that

is being Navajo. And she said, whereas if somebody says “You’re not Navajo, that’s their opinion.” But you know as long you can hold onto to what you have... it’s like...because of growing up Navajo, you are Navajo. And that kind of reminds me of what you just said.

In this response, Karen describes how her grandmother responded to how her cousins’ perceptions and other Navajo student perceive her as not being Navajo. That is, her grandmother is acknowledging how being Navajo is just as complex and varied as assuming an Indigenous identity as discussed previously. That is, not only is recognizing and re-affirming a Diné identity that is based on historical and traditional descriptors important but it is dire to the survival of the Navajo way of life in the contemporary contexts. Tara Jean Yazzie-Mintz (2008) states:

In contemporary society, it is rare to witness discourse in which indigenous ways of knowing are referenced as occurring in the here and now. Often references to Native peoples and ways of being are articulated or expressed as events or rituals of the past. The expectations for our Native societies are so low that there are few expressions of expectations beyond extinction. Perhaps these examples demonstrate the ways in which non-Native and Native peoples operate with a one-dimensional definition of Native culture that keeps us from imagining the possibility of cultural representation being truly dynamic and alive in the here and now (p. 17).

Summary

Affirming a Diné Identity in Education. In the *Seventh Generation*, Bergstrom, Cleary and Peacock (2003) state that “identity development from an Indigenous perspective has less to do with striving for individualism and more to do with establishing

connections and understanding ourselves in relationship to all things around us”(p. 26). They go on to add “listening to stories from this perspective allows the students’ voices...to be heard clearly. Their stories tell about their growing understanding of who they are as Native persons- in other words, their identity development”(p. 27). A central theme that emerged from the lived experiences of the participants in this study focused on affirming and reclaiming a Diné identity. More so, as I listened to my participants talk about what it means to be Diné or Navajo from their perspectives, it was clear to that how they viewed their world based on a contemporary and traditional Diné worldview informed much of their understanding. Weaver (2001) states:

Indigenous identity is connected to a sense of people hood inseparably linked to sacred traditions, traditional homelands, and a shared history as indigenous people. A person must be integrated into a society, not simply stand along as an individual, in order to be fully human. (p.245)

In looking back at students’ responses to what identifies who they are, Karen along with several others stated that depending on “who they are...then I would say Navajo”. Based on this statement, it is obvious that because of her previous experiences and interactions with people, she knows what to say to certain individuals and what not to say to others. It is obvious that she is aware of the politics involved in sharing your racial, ethnic, and cultural background with others. This sharing of only “enough and not more” resonates with many people of color who do not feel the need to share more than is necessary. More so, she is also aware of the legal and cultural definitions of Indian blood which only affords a status that is not significant to her life overall. This is apparent when

she raises some interesting points about the benefits she would get or lose from being labeled Navajo as on paper.

Still, other students responded by indicating Navajo, Diné, or Native American. For example, in Theresa's response, she says "I'm a Native American first and then afterwards I would tell them that I'm Navajo", but she goes on to say "...and if they want to know more I would tell them clans or something". Alyssa also responded in much the same way saying "I usually say that I'm Native American, I'm Navajo. And if they're Navajo then I introduce them with my culture...err...in my clans". In Theresa and Alyssa's responses, it is clear that similar to Karen's statement of depending on who they are, they mention that they would go in more detail about their clan affiliations if they were responding to another Navajo. This speaks to the notion of Navajo youth understanding that their identity is defined by clan affiliations which is more in line with the Diné cultural views of identity. Sharon also mentions that idea of elaborating or breaking it down by clans if she was talking to another Navajo. Sharon and Sarah also start off similarly to Mark (in the opening quote) by stating that they are Diné first when asked how they identified themselves to others.

Thus, for Diné youth asserting a self ascribed community oriented kinship based identity is very important to their experiences and understanding of who they are regardless of how much they feel they are connected or removed from it. More so, for these Diné youth, the different kinds of identities (racial, ethnic, or gender) may in many ways seem insignificant to them. Yet in their discourse (as evident in their responses) they are aware of and recognize competing ideologies of identity formation which are heavily influenced by white supremacist ideology. Thus, articulating and defining an

Indigenous identity is very difficult and complex as evident in Mark and Sarah's responses because it involves being aware of dichotomous views of identity, the difference between individual and collective group rights, culturally, socially and politically sanctioned cultural traditions, geographical places, and the categorization of racial/cultural bodies and territories. For Native American tribes, there exists a "difference" of "tribal identity" that points to notions of sovereignty vs. democracy, treaty rights, dual citizenship, federal recognition, and economic dependency (Grande, 2004). For example, Grande (2004) writes,

[In] a democratic society, human subjectivity – and therefore emancipation- is conceived of as inherently a rights-based as opposed to land based project. While indigenous scholars embrace the anticolonial aspects of mestizaje, they require a construct that is both geographically rooted and historically placed....Gross misunderstanding of this connection between American Indian subjectivity and place, and more important, between sovereignty and land has been the source of myriad ethnocentric policies and injustices in Indian Country (p. 116).

That is, just as other racialized groups or people of color provide counter narrative arguments that assert their own constructions of identity such as those largely informed by critical race theory and postmodernism, Indigenous agendas regarding identity and representation include claims to sovereignty and collective Indigenous/ human rights (Grande, 2004).

In conclusion, as the findings from this chapter sheds some much needed light on the complex processes of identity formation and development in the lives of Diné youth today in education today, it will also provide some new insight into their schooling

experiences. In order to understand the ways that schools operate as racializing or race making institutions that can negatively impact the identity formation, development, and lives of Indigenous youth, it is important to understand the ways that Diné (Navajo) students construct and negotiate an identity. Before I begin to discuss students' racialized experiences with schooling in the next chapter, I would like to underscore that more analysis of Indigenous youth identity development and formation are needed that underscore the concepts of race, race relations, racism, and structural/institutional racism, and white supremacy. This is important because the processes of racialization in the schooling context have everything to do with the ways that students are racially assigned, categorized, labeled, institutionalized, and marginalized according to dominant white stream social, economic, historical, and political constructions of race, class, and gender in society. Therefore, it is important to understand the ways that Indigenous youth are dealing with these myriad of issues related to culture, identity, language, and education. More so, it is important to listen to their voices as they talk about compelling issues like what and how is identity constructed in the Indigenous context or what constitutes authenticity of Indian-ness. More so, for Indigenous youth, the repeated attacks on the sovereign rights of Indigenous people which are rooted in colonization, white supremacy, and globalization have everything to do with their educational experiences. Yet, while they may not be able to theorize or articulate these processes of marginalization, subjectification, and racialization as well as they would like now, the issues still weigh heavily on their minds in terms of what it means to them to be Diné, Indigenous, or Native within the process of schooling.

Chapter Six

VW: *Do you think that it [the school curriculum] reflected Navajo language and culture?*

Sarah: Ahm...No.

VW: *Meaning like....Let's say in your....English class, did you read books by Navajo authors? In math, did you do anything with Navajo math?*

Sarah: No. nothing like that.

The notion of cultural relevance moves beyond language to include other aspects of student and school culture. Thus culturally relevant teaching uses student culture in order to maintain it and *to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture*. The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one's history, culture, or background represented in the textbooks or curriculum or by seeing that history, culture, or background distorted (G. Ladson Billings, 1994, p. 17).

The Racialization of Diné Youth

As discussed in chapter four, I asked students what they remembered the most from the schools they attended to engage in a conversation about the impact of schooling on their racial and cultural identities. As I listened to them and analyzed their responses, I began to see that there were many things that they were bringing to light from their recollections of schooling that highlight the ways that schools racialize Indigenous youth. First, it was important to see and understand how these students understood their place as racialized youth within the existing school systems. Secondly, the ways in which these students' racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds were either supported or not was also very significant. Finally, the different ways in which the school curriculum excluded, marginalized, and racialized their experiences, identities, and their language and culture underscores the questions of; what knowledge is of most worth and whose knowledge is most important in the process of schooling. Thus, these ideas point to the processes of

racialization and what it means to get a good education despite the many challenges that schooling presents for Diné/Indigenous youth.

In the last chapter, I shared students' response to questions like what is your racial, cultural, and ethnic background to gain a sense of these students' own understanding of their identities. In this chapter, I highlight some significant issues and questions related to race, racism, and race relations. Specifically, I examined how Diné youth perceive themselves, how Diné youth perceive one another, and how they are perceived by other non- Native and non- Navajo students, teachers, and people within their respective schools, communities, and in society. In the following passages, I focus on the experiences of these Diné (Navajo) youth within the context of schools. That is, I examine how they perceive their place in the schools, how other students, teachers, and community people perceive them as Diné youth. Specifically, I describe the different ways that these Diné students negotiated their racial and cultural identities within the school context through their interactions with their peers and other non-Native students and teachers.

Research from recent sociological studies and literature on the education of students of color make strong distinctions between “self ascribed” versus “ascribed” identities that highlight the notion of agency and structure particularly in the ways that students of color negotiated racialized “color lines” (Lewis, 2005; Lewis, Chesler, and Forman, 2000; Lopez, 2003). This process of ascribing racial categories as signifiers is referred to as racial signification. In *Race in the Schoolyard* Amanda Lewis (2005) describes racial signification as “the way race comes to affect our understandings of ourselves and others and how, as part of that process, it simultaneously shapes our interactions and

opportunities” (p. 128). For example, in the next scenarios, Stanley, Mark, and Karen discuss how they were perceived by other students in which race affected and shaped perceptions and interactions.

Stanley: When people first look at me they think I’m Mexican because of the dark skin and I play soccer. I do not speak a word of Spanish. That’s what they portray me as, Mexican.

VW: Can you think back to the last time that happened? Where, how it happened?

Stanley: We play away games and they were taunting us. It was the guy I was marking, he was white. We were down in Bloomfield. It’s not like it’s been said directly to me but they will ask my friend if I’m Mexican because of my color.

VW: There were some Hispanics/Mexicans on your team?

Stanley: Yes, our school was known as being predominantly Hispanic so about half of our team was Mexican/South American, a transfer student from Brazil. There’s four high schools in the area, the others are predominantly white but there are Hispanics.

VW: Were the South Americans/Mexicans on your team noticeably different or darker? What were those other people attributing to thinking you were Mexican?

Stanley: Well, I went to the high school that was predominantly known as being a Hispanic/Mexican team. I played soccer which most people do not really think of as being an American sport. I’m darker skinned than most people are. It’s kind of like a medium between the Caucasians and the Hispanics.

Interestingly, Stanley talks about being mistaken for being Mexican and being perceived as having dark skin. As I had mentioned before, in comparison to other Navajos or Mexicans, Stanley would not be mistaken for being dark skinned because of his lighter

complexion which highlights how pigmentocracy is very prevalent in areas with racial and ethnic groups who have shades of difference from light to dark skin.³¹ However, this is not to suggest people's own perceptions of being dark and light skinned are wrong but that it may change due their location and the ethnic/racial makeup of a community. For instance, in mostly white neighborhoods in Colorado, Stanley could be seen as Hispanic while in other places like New Mexico, he could pass for white. In *Manifest destiny: The making of the Mexican American race*, Laura Gomez (2008) discusses these problematic aspects of how race is perceived in the American southwest. More so, Stanley mentions how his school was perceived as being predominantly Hispanic because there were some students from Mexico and South America and because they played soccer. From her study of three different schools with students from different racial backgrounds, Lewis (2005) states "the way people get categorized varies from setting to setting...And the meaning of particular labels,...as well as the experiential aspects of group membership varies from place to place" (p. 143).

Mark-

VW: Going back to your childhood, when you were called white by your own community, how did that make you feel?

Mark: Bewildered. And then my mom was telling me a story...can't remember when but she says both of us said... look at all those Indians in that school...you know...I didn't know we were at the BIA school or somewhere and she says that my other brother...said it "You're Indian", "No, I'm not". You know... I mean like I'm not Indian...but I remember being bewildered like, "Am I half white, what am I?"

³¹ Pigmentocracy is a group social hierarchy in which some societies use skin color to judge others regardless of ethnic origin or class. See Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "The Latin Americanization of U.S. Race Relations"

because of the way I talked. I guess kids...you can't really take kids...you know kids are just being kids. Like the community...community defines you by.... knowing where you're coming from. Like that's why I say who are you and you say "yá'á't'ééh". And then this is who the clans I am and then you say this is my grandparents and I'm from this area. And I can say those because that is exactly the truth where I am from...and that is from knowing that...that you as...you and the whole community understand the world that you're living in. And it defines who you are. The government doesn't have to tell you that...and you know...you know that you will do your very best to protect everybody. That's...that's when you know that you're part of a group of people.

In Mark's response, he describes an aspect of internalized racism in which people of color, in this case other Navajo students, assign racial categorizations on each other when they are not sure about an individual's background, as when the other Navajo kids identified Mark as white because of his lighter skin. That is, internalized racism is usually directed not only at self but others in their communities who may not seem to fit into existing perceived racial/ethnic categories. Thus, light skinned Natives may become the target of discrimination or racial prejudice for not fitting into the community's criteria for being Navajo. As such, Mark mentions his confusion of beginning to question whether if he was in fact "white" because of how he was perceived by other Navajo youth.

In a follow up interview with Mark, I ask him to clarify some ideas from a previous interview. In the previous interview, he mentioned that "we didn't see race until we got to New Mexico".

VW: What did you mean by we didn't see race until we got to New Mexico?

Mark: I didn't notice a difference between peoples, they were just people. All my friends from that period of time were just my friends, they were just kids that we played with. We didn't really start becoming racialized until we were down here. "You're not Indian", or stuff like that. We were brought up thinking we were just Americans.

VW: My other question is how did you know certain students were white and others were Hispanic? What was that based on?

Mark: I think it was when we would talk the language. Down where we lived they still talked the language. This lady was white and it was a 50/50 bilingual education and I couldn't really understand what was going on in the Navajo instructions. I had a half a year at the BIA school and that's when they said "You can't say this, you're not Navajo." Going to the public school they talked Spanish there. Some of the teachers would talk to the students in Spanish, saying things to Spanish-ize the language. I didn't know what that was. Mainly the people that would do that were the white teachers...One of my observations is that... like at the elementary, younger age it's not that they do not see race things working. In their head, they're taught that it doesn't really mean much. I think in the middle school age it starts forming. Going to Wyoming there's no Indians...and you couldn't feel like they were putting you down. It just wasn't there. The racial things were really subtle.

What is most interesting is the way that Mark mentions how younger children learn race but that they are taught in their heads that it doesn't really mean much. Therefore, when race is made "subtle" or minimized and rationalized as being nonexistent, students,

teachers, and parents internalize that it is not okay to talk about it. On the contrary, Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) write:

The reality of everyday life in the United States dramatically shows such denials of the persistence of racism. Racial discrimination and segregation are still central organizing factors in contemporary U.S. society. The impact of racial discrimination is readily apparent, and even a causal observation of American social organization will reveal its continuing presence. For the most part, whites and Blacks do not live in the same neighborhoods, attend the same schools at all educational levels, enter into close friendships or other intimate relationships with one another, or share comparable opinions on a wide variety of political matters...Generally speaking, whites and people of color do not occupy the same social space or social status, and this very visible fact in American life does not go unnoticed by children. (p.29)

Moreover, in observing how adults talk about race and/or seeing through mainstream media the discourse (i.e., images and representations) that centers white supremacy while ossifying people of color as inferior, students and parents of color began to believe that maybe their failures in school have much to do with their own innate, cognitive facilities or their family's cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Lewis, 2005; Leonardo, 2009).

Sharon: I remember a lot from school, mainly school. Um, there was a Mrs. Frank for second grade. She gave points. The books we read, we'd gain points for reading them and those points would add up to win a book at the end of the year. And I remember I came in second place so I was really close but first place was this Naakai [*Hispanic*] boy and I think he was bilingual and he won. And 3rd grade was, I really do not remember 3rd grade too much. I remember I got kicked-(laughs) and there was a big

ol' bruise on my leg. My mom took that up to the principal and then it went up to like, I do not remember, but I remember we had to go to a courthouse or something. I do not know if he was Diné or Naakai. He kicked me and there was a big ole bruise.

In this instance, Sharon is recalling several specific events and individuals. She mentions several times throughout our interview as in this passage the ethnicity or race of her peers and her teachers. Also, while seemingly innocent she also points to how teachers employed specific strategies to promote individual achievement that is merit based. The popular choice of teachers to reward students for reading is to give points when students read many books and they receive an award for the most books read, yet often times a more thorough analysis of this type of strategy also reveals that the selection of books is often very limited. Consequently, this type of reward system provides the impetus for embracing the myth of meritocracy.

Selena -

VW: What has been your own personal experience?

Selena: Ahmm...with teachers it's been pretty good...I got along with all of my teachers really well. There were some teacher I really didn't like....like the French teacher, like the foreign teachers just cause....it was just frustrating... but the most part ...I got along with my teacher very well...like even like... all teachers.... its not just I got along with you know the Native American staff more. It was just like... pretty much like all the teacher were just very... but like all through my school that was just like high school here at Valley... like I know like in Virginia I have teachers who were just like, they judged me the moment I walked in their door...I was...they thought I was like Mexican.... they already had their attitudes picked out against me...

like I remember I wrote a paper is Gina's class that was...I was talking about like racism..... how you have experienced it ...one was like in art class I sat at a table with ...I guess like three Anglo students and then we had a new student and she was ahm...she was Anglo as well and like all of a sudden like she was... like there was an empty seat... with like just like mixed students...like there was Korean, one was like... I guess I don't know if they were Hispanics or whatever but if they were like you know colored I guess...But like she made me move instead of having that girl sit in the empty seat and then she made me move to their table. And like I don't really think if she meant to be you know or if it was something that just happened that she probably I don't know if she meant that to be anything or if I took if like if I misunderstood it. But that really like it really bothered me and it affected me too... I went home and like I was really like upset just like cause I was like why would she do that and my mom knew I was upset and she talked to her. Then she was like you can have your seat back and I was like I don't want that seat... you know stuff like that.

VW: The white teacher made you move?

Selena: From a seat with all white students to a seat with colored students.

VW: To allow another white student to sit with them?

Selena: Yeah to my seat... I didn't know if that was intentional...

VW: Were you ...it bothered you that you had to move away from the other whites or that you had to sit with the others?

Selena: Ahmm, it wasn't that it was I had to sit with the other student...it just bothered me that of all the other people it was that she picked me to move, I guess just to like I

felt like she was separating the class on what she felt like on who she felt it would work best with...

VW: Sounds to me like she did it to accommodate the other whites and the new white student?

Selena: Yeah and I think that she probably you know intentionally felt that....that would help me to... be at a place where I was more comfortable... I mean maybe she....I really don't understand like... but I just remember... just being picked out that day and then being like Ok you can move there and take that seat and I was like What?? When there was an empty seat there... I don't know...

Out of all the points I think I felt like...I never really felt like any you know... I guess like racism or ...like being separated until that like that point.

I just ...I really didn't like art class...

Sarah -

VW: Going back to like... When you were talking about the high school and the Navajo kids that you noticed were shy....but then said maybe they were uncomfortable, what was that uncomfortableness, do you think?

Sarah: The...a lot...I think it was because a lot of the white and Hispanic kids were more just outgoing and they knew...they could. They talked to the teachers. Like even our teachers, I do not think a lot of the Native Americans like in class...it first starts off in class...cause you're in class and then you do not want to say much, you just sit in the back and you just want to see what everyone else thinks. Even if you want to talk, your voice is so low....you just kind of get overpowered and then that

kind of loses your relationship with the teacher. And with the teachers being majority of non Natives, you just kind of feel less... connected with the school, itself.

In looking back at these conversations, it is obvious how students and teachers, even from within one racial or ethnic group, assign racial categories upon each other and label each other different because of their outward phenol-typical markers like skin color, or their language ability, or by their behaviors and actions. In these instances, we see how racialization operates in schools through everyday interactions. Amanda Lewis (2005) states:

These processes describe the ways racial identities are assigned to individuals and how racial categories are mapped unto groups. These ascriptive processes work primarily through interpersonal interactions in which we attempt to assess what we know about another person, first through the instantaneous reading or interpreting of available clues (e.g., visible cues such as skin color or facial features, auditory cues such as accent, spatial cues as neighborhood), and second through rereading or reinterpreting initial assumptions as additional information becomes available.

(p.151)

Moreover, when students of color began to see themselves as racial bodies, they become situated or take their place in the racialized hierarchy of white supremacy. In these instances, the processes of racialization occur through implicit and explicit racist behaviors and practices just as well as through the dominant white supremacist discourse and ideology.

Theresa-

VW: So do you think that Indians are shy then?

Theresa: Ahmm... no! ...when you are around Natives. (laughs)... Not when you are around... everyone you know...

VW: So why do you think then... that they are shy when they are around White people?

Theresa: Emm... maybe because they have never really been exposed to it before... I mean Indians you can like make jokes and stuff like that....and it gives you kinda like a conversational piece... but with white people it is like “Oh how is your day?” and you are like “good” then it’s ok...you are quiet.

VW: So it is something to do with their cultural background?

Theresa: Em hmm...

VW: So do you think that this thing that we are talking about...like with racism... has anything to do with that?

Theresa: I think it does.

VW: So are we left with “Indians are just shy” then?

Theresa: Some of them I think.

VW: What about white people? Are some of them shy?

Theresa: Ahh...me I really think that most of them are outspoken... but you know..

VW: Most of them?

Theresa: That is what I think... I do not know... I mean ...and the Mexicans. Well the white people I know... they’re usually very talkative..

VW: What about African Americans?

Theresa: I have never really been around...them much

VW: What about Hispanics?

Theresa: What do I think...about their personality? Is that?...hmmm... I do not know... I do not have much experience with them either.

Based on Sarah and Theresa's comments about how many of their Navajo peers were "too quiet" reveals how the silent Indian stereotyped is very pervasive in education even amongst Native children themselves (Foley, 1998). These conversations came as a response to a question about how teachers and other students viewed Navajo students at her high school. More so, as Theresa made comments about some of her Navajo peers as being quiet, she also mentions how this was different to other groups like whites or Blacks. In addition, as I pressed her to talk more about these interactions, she mentions that although she did know white students, she didn't really have much experience with Blacks or Hispanics.

In an overview of media coverage and newspaper articles on Navajo people from the local area, representations of Native Americans or Indians still present the racist and stereotypical discourse and images of Native Americans as living in the past. Also, there are still the typical misappropriation of Native cultural motifs and misrepresentation of Native people that perpetuate the stereotypes of the Bloodthirsty or Noble Savage (Stedman, 1982; Pewewardy, 1991). More recently, the stereotype of the drunken and casino Indians has taken center stage especially in the local media as evident in a review of the newspaper articles. (See Appendix C) Therefore, I will discuss these perceptions in relation to my research participants' experiences in schooling to highlight the impact of racialized discourse and practices within their respective communities.

In these following responses, both Sharon and Alyssa highlight some of these perceptions in different ways. That is, Sharon talks about how people in mainstream

society and the media view Native Americans as rich casino owning tribes or poor welfare citizens. In the case of Alyssa, the conversation came as a result of a follow up question about her experiences with racism.

VW: So do you believe that.... Do you think that people in mainstream America out there... do you think they have positive views about Native people?

Sharon; No

VW: Can you elaborate on that ... ahm based on something you heard or seen?

Sharon: Either they think we are too rich or too poor...Some think that we have casinos and that everything is free to us...or everything is provided to us or everything is handed to us on a silver platter and there is the other side where they think were too poor that that the government gives us too much and we do not have enough of this or that... I do not know....that's just the way I see it.

Alyssa -

VW: Can you give an example, a little detail, a story or anything? What happened? How it happened? How you think it happened?

Alyssa: Ok...ah...we were in Denny's one time, I forgot where it was...I think it was in Las Vegas. There was these two white people and they saw us come in. And as soon.....cause they just got... their food.

VW: Who is this?

Alyssa: Me, my mom and my dad. And we sat down. And ahm...those...the white people that were sitting next to us, they just looked at us and then they left... even though they just got their food. Cause they saw us coming and they...yea...

VW: They didn't say anything?

Alyssa: They didn't say anything, they just left...

VW: *They weren't just in a hurry to go somewhere else?*

Alyssa: Ah ahhn... they just saw us and I know they saw us...

VW: *So did you see it...in their posture?*

Alyssa: Yea...They just looked at each other and gave each other a weird look and just left.

Early on in my interviews with Alyssa, she kept mentioning that she didn't experience any racism. However, over the course of the interviews, it becomes clear that there were times when she was being racially discriminated. In the previous scenario, it is apparent in the way that the white patrons behaved at the sight or presence of people of color. While it could be argued by some that maybe it is was not an act of discrimination, yet it is important to remember that people of color know when they are discriminated against. That is, as Alyssa states "they saw us and I know they saw us" indicates that she has experienced similar types of behavior before whether in school or elsewhere. In some of Sharon's later responses, just as she describes how mainstream media continues to influence prevailing racialized notions of Indian-ness, she also makes mentions, similar to Alyssa, how others (particularly whites) situate, perceive, and view Native American communities. In this way, it is evident how negative images or stereotypes about Native Americans in the public discourse through the media largely inform how young children internalize race or race thinking into their lives. More so, there are very few to no positive images or portrayals of contemporary Native people in the media that give a different perspective of Native people and their life ways.

VW: From your experience, based on your opinion do you think most people... have positive views about Native Americans in general?

Theresa: Ahm...I think the people who have been like...who like live around the reservation and stuff they probably do not. But then other people like in Maine or something probably do because... all they know is what they read in books.

VW: Which are what?

Theresa: Like were good runners or something like that...(laughs).

VW: So why do you think that the ones that live around the reservation have negative views?

Theresa: Well it's because ahh... they experience us firsthand, I mean they know...kinda know what were all about some of us on the reservation and they see like a whole bunch of ...hitch hikers...like when they are off to Gallup or something. I mean like all around like the border and stuff and then they see drunks and stuff. And they always.. I betcha like... You know...ahh...that alcohol place between Gallup and Window Rock ?.... can't remember what it was called...A Black...or something..

VW: Is it a bar?

Theresa: Yea. I think...like when other people look at it they probably think ahh... must be Natives there. Yea...it's probably true but yea.

VW: So if you drive around and see a bar where it's mostly our people, do people still say that?

Theresa: Emm... I probably would... (laughs) I do not know.

Karen:

Karen: And, I just couldn't really have fun. And like...there...the really "rez" kids, they'd only want to party and do that stuff all the time. I...I guess the way I was brought up, I just didn't want to associate with them. I mean it was bad enough, it felt like the high school people already...stereotype you...into thinking that you're just...some partygoer, you're dumb and stupid...

VW: *What about your middle school? What was that like?*

Karen: Ah...Middle school...I think that is when I got into trouble a little bit. Because my...my mom...because we lived in her community and stuff. All...all my cousins they all dropped out. None of them... I'm the first...I'm the first one in my family to graduate. That was it...Most of them either get GEDs after like a couple of years, after they quit and stuff like that. But most...all of them they just drop out or they just do not care...and ahm...I guess they were...They're into partying and drinking and that happened all the time even at my grandma's house, they'd still do that...Like just a bunch of alcoholics and *glonniis* (*drunks*) and stuff.

In these previous passages from Karen and Theresa, they are discussing aspects of internalized racism that is largely created by the perceptions of non-Native people about Native people. For example, in response to a question about how they thought the white people around their area thought of Navajos, both referred to the negative stereotypes of Natives as drunks and dropouts. For example, in the case of Karen, she talks about her own perceptions of her cousins as drunks. That is, as she was describing how she reacted against being stereotyped as a "partygoer" and "dumb or stupid", she reversed that perception unto her own cousins. She based her perception of her own cousins based on the negative racial stereotypes of the drunken Indian. This was also evident in Theresa's

statement when she says “they experience us firsthand” and they “know what were all about, some of us on the reservation and they see like a whole bunch of ...hitch hikers...like when they are off to Gallup or something. I mean like all around like the border and stuff and then they see drunks.” In these situations, for Karen and Theresa, they both express their perceptions of other Navajos as destitute and drunks which are based on racial signification of Navajos as backwards and drunken. That is, these stereotypes lump all Navajo people into one fixed racial/cultural group exhibiting similar characteristics and traits. In this way, negative portrayals of people of color are perpetuated. In this dominant ideology, there is no room for differences in a group and there are usually no exceptions to the case. That is, these stereotypes about people of color perpetuate the racial ideology that the Other are all the same and inferior to the dominant group.

For students like Karen, Sharon, and Theresa from the previous scenarios who mention the word “rez”, “rez” is home in the physical and social sense. For some tribes like the Diné, they were fortunate that even after their removal to Bosque Redondo for a period of time, they were able to return to the land of their forebears. Thus, the “rez” is home in the spiritual sense as that is where their sacred mountains are located along with their traditional homelands. However, according to Karen and Sharon, in the minds of non-Natives and non-Navajo people, the word “rez” or reservation is often attributed to the usual stereotypical images of Indians as a conquered people who were removed to reservation lands and who currently live there asking for “hand outs” from the government or are inclined to running casinos. On the other, there are also the usual and seemingly innocent but romanticized images of Natives that perpetuate the stoic Noble

Savage stereotype. In some situations, these popular images lead to the cultural misappropriation of Native images, artifacts and beliefs by non-Natives. For example, in looking back to questions about who could be considered a Native or Navajo person, I asked Karen the following question of, if someone who doesn't believe in the Navajo worldview, if they could be considered Navajo. Sharon responded in the affirmative but goes on to add, but if it's just some random person who is not Navajo wearing things to look Navajo, then no. Similarly, I asked Karen what her thoughts would be about people who assume Indian-ness based on the appropriation of cultural things.

Karen: Ahm...That's okay with me because. I've been asked this question before...they are just making an ass of themselves. If they want to identify themselves as being Navajo then let them. I do not see any problem with that but if they want to put it in somebody's face like accept me as a Navajo person, I do not know if I could do that. I could...I could accept them by respecting the fact that they respect the culture that I grew up with.... but to me it doesn't really matter because I do not have a meter for how... your Navajo-ness or anything.

From the discussion that started about who is Navajo, I return to Karen's comments about her interactions with some of her peers who came from the reservation. She mentions how the Navajo border town kids were "made fun of" by students who came from the reservation because of the way they talked or behaved. On the other, she also discusses how the processes of racialization operated the other way around as well.

Karen -

VW: Who makes fun of them?

Karen: Like you know...The border town kids. And I guess I'm one of those kids because... I do not really make fun of them because I have cousins like that... family like that. But I guess...I am going with labeling I guess. But were really easy to make fun of too... Like you do not know your language, you're just a white kid, too.

VW: In all of that,...who and to what can we attribute those problems? Without putting blame on someone in particular, what causes us as people to do that?

Karen: I think because of...where we live... and the way were brought up. And because we're not...a real nation...we are not our own country. We are a sovereign nation but we live in a much much bigger nation. And you know, there's not much on the rez... and if you want to actually succeed in life you gotta get off of it. And I think that's what is causing the problems is... you know. There's not much to offer back home I guess. And you do not hear of a lot of opportunities. And there is that problem with the government. Like the whole system is messed up, kind of.

Since, Karen perceives herself as not being either a "town" kid or a "rez" kid, it is interesting to hear her talk about some of the ways that Navajos label other Navajos as being backwards or different. When I asked her to comment on why she thought these types of behaviors occurred, she attributed it to colonization. That is, she mentions that even as the Navajo Nation tries to assert its sovereignty status as a nation, they were still under the auspices of the larger U.S. society. She highlights how colonization continues to negatively impact our rights to assert sovereignty to define ourselves. More so, she is describing how colonization impacts our lives so much that we begin to internalize it and see each other as inferior or not good enough to dominant society. In *Peace, Power, and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, T. Alfred (1999) writes, "the goals that flow

from our traditions demand an approach based on undermining the intellectual and moral foundations of colonialism and exposing the internal contradictions of states and societies that promise justice and practice oppression”(p.144). Within this understanding, there is also the insistence that only by reclaiming and using Indigenous knowledge and acknowledging the existence of racism, Indigenous communities can progress to counter the racialized acts of controlling and subjugating people of color. More so, Indigenous notions of sovereignty should come from traditional understandings of what constitutes nationhood, people hood, and nation-to-nation status. That is, these ideas should be about the inherent right of any people to proclaim their beliefs, knowledge, language, and spirituality as integral to how they define themselves in relation others and their surroundings.

In the following section, as I asked Stanley to share his comments about being a mixed race student, he described another aspect of how Diné youth are perceived by others from the outside, by themselves on the inside, and their place within the two spaces.

VW: What I'm trying to get at is in what ways for you being mixed race and to whatever degree you understand Navajo culture, how would you talk about that?

Stanley: I'd say I do not get down there much but through what I have experienced it is kind of back to what everyone is used to. There's not a lot of rushing around, kind of laid back. When I'm in town it's always we have to get here, here and here in a certain period of time and always trying to get the lights to turn. On the reservation it's more like you just drive and spend as much time as you want and nobody is in

much of a rush. There's kind of more like a free lance time thing. Just enjoy going wherever.

VW: That's interesting. Kind of reminds me of that two world paradigm. Is that what you think you're describing?

Stanley: A little bit. It kind of really is two worlds. There are so many different populations. Economic resources, industries and supplies and resources, exporting and importing. Everyone's just going to rush into the city thinking they'll be the next person in line or try to be the best. I think it's like the two hour thing: it's more rushed and on the reservation it's more relaxed, not as much always trying to be the best. They're all a community and you can see that.

VW: Would you say that it's a difference in cultural mindset?

Stanley: Yeah. On the reservation they know their culture and they know what it is. In a lot of hometowns and towns in Colorado it's a white mixture and they kind of know who they are. It could be a mixture of northern Europe mixed with Asian families. They do not really know what to do they'd just kind of conform to that society, whatever is popular at the time in society.

Here, Stanley mentions "economic resources, industries and supplies and resources, exporting and importing" when talking about living in the city versus living on the reservation. He is making inferences to how the "rez" is different from a city in regards to access to resources, chances for economic mobility, and preserving cultural life ways. For this reason, I raised the question about the *two worlds* paradigm to get his perspective on the topic. The two world paradigm has been used often in Native American studies to highlight the differences between a modern versus pre-modern time. Consequently, this

idea of living in two worlds overlooks the multiple identities and realities of Native life. In *Reservation X*, Gerald McMaster (1995) asks the questions of “What is Reservation X?”, and gives some commentary as to how some Indigenous artists (people) struggle and appropriate the meaning of coming from and being a part of the “rez”. He describes how Reservation X could mean somewhere in and between in place and thought yet it could also be about something that we do not understand. McMaster (1995) writes, “the mystery of Indian territories is like the impermeability of a certain subject; although we see it, we do not understand it”(p.21). However, on the other hand, the reservation is also home and place where many Natives return to find meaning and direction or reassurance of being themselves and knowing their true place in the natural spiritual world.

In each case, the significance of all of these students’ experiences expresses the notion of having and maintaining a different “mindset” to navigate the terrain between white and Navajo culture (space) or the reservation and urban living. While some may argue that I am really only talking about cultural racism and no one is at fault because these issues are only really about the differences in cultural mindsets. This is very problematic because cultural racism arguments dismiss the structural aspect of racism as white supremacy. Instead, cultural racism places the blame back on people of color and their cultural differences. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) states that this “blaming the victim” frame is part of the way that whites try to explain racial inequality by pointing to minorities’ “lack of effort, loose family organization, and inappropriate values”(p. 40). On the contrary, based on the definition of racism as white supremacy, whether racism is directed at the culture of a people or an individual or a collective group, its consequences are the same and very real. That is, experiences of students of color like these Diné youth

highlight not only how they students are racialized by others based on how they are perceived but based on how they see themselves within the contexts of school and by navigating what that means in the contemporary context. But moreover, the data shows how these students are aware of those acts of racialization which clearly goes counter to their own understandings of who they are and what they want to achieve in their personal lives. Sandy Grande (2005) writes “the discourse of ‘authenticity’ is underwritten by ‘essentialist’ theories of identity. That is, theories of identity that treat race ...as a stable and homogeneous construct”(p. 92). Grande (2005) adds:

The relationship between American Indian communities and the surrounding (white) border towns not only shapes the ways Indians perceive and construct the white stream but also their views of themselves. Thus, while reservation borders exist as vestiges of forced removal, colonialist domination, and white stream greed, they are also understood as marking the defense perimeters between cultural integrity and wholesale appropriation. They are the literal dividing line between “us” and “them”.
(p. 110)

Consequently, as I return to looking at the questions about how Diné youth construct and negotiates multiple identities, there were clear indications that identity formation and development are linked not only to individual self definitions but are derived from imposed or ascribed definitions as discussed earlier which have dire political, economic, and cultural ramifications.

In this next section, I share my participants’ responses to the specific questions about the purpose of education and the differences between schooling and education. Also, I present their responses to questions like; what is the difference between going to school

to learn and getting an education in the home and the ways that schools validate different language and cultural backgrounds.

Sharon -

VW: Is there a difference between going to school to learn or/and is there a difference between that and getting an education in the home?

Sharon: Yeah.

VW: What is that difference?

Sharon: One is formalized and one comes natural.

VW: Can you give me an example of formalized?

Sharon: You have a class period from this time to this time and you have to go to school from this time to this time. Like, sure all day you're going to learn this, this, and this here take notes on this. Whereas the home structure is learning through communication, observation, doing. Big difference.

Selena-

Selena: Yea. It's like at school you learn... ahm...you learn like math and English and stuff. But then at home you learn you know kinda more about values and learn about who you are. And the person you want to be, things like that. I think that's kinda of...what ah... what I get out when I get home...it kinda kinda... it helps me get direction. And like school is just like the way to get there. You know what I mean... it's like all these things you need to know to get to that point. But like you find out where you want to go... just by spending time with people who have... like... The point when I knew I wanted to know about like Native American studies....I wanted to help was like ...When I met my grandma's stepmom she's like a really old lady.

But just her living conditions and stuff like that and also my aunt her living conditions and... that's like ...that's when I knew I wanted to do something like relaying to like...Native Americans and helping. Ahm....But you know like obviouslya lot of things has to happen in a place like this I think...to like to get to that point.

Theresa-

VW: Do you think there is a difference between going to school...(like going to a school house) and getting educated at home? Is there even education in the home?

Theresa: Emm...I think there's education in the home. But I think...going to school and doing all that stuff is better than going to school at home. It's because you get to interact with different people and get to meet different people, do different things instead of staying at home and being isolated from other people.

VW: Do you think one is more important than the other?

Theresa: Like what are you talking about?...Ahh... because at school... you get to learn about...like math stuff, science stuff and stuff that will be good for you future but then you can also learn stuff at home that can help you in the future like butchering sheep...it's good

Stanley -

VW: That's a good point, I think. Is there a difference, if so, in what ways is there a difference between going to school for an education and getting an education in the home?

Stanley: I think there's a big difference. When you're educated in school you just learn what everyone else is being taught. When you're being taught at home it leads to the person you're going to become. Your parents are instilling values into your life

at a young age and that's pretty much what you're going to be going off of. Those values are what is inside of you and you can't really forget them. It's like a family tradition to how you want your kids to turn out. So far, it's never been too bad for me, I haven't done anything too bad. At school they teach you do not do this and they give you a bunch of facts that are really boring. At home there's always a fun interaction with family members and it keeps the learning process fun.

Selena states that at home you learn "more about values and learn about who you are". Similarly, Stanley as mentions, "when you're being taught at home it leads to the person you're going to become." In these statements, these students are asserting that the knowledge of their parents is important in defining who they are, whereas the knowledge attained in school is more about learning skills and specific content knowledge like math or science. Similarly, in her statement, Sharon comments that school knowledge is formalized versus the natural learning that occurs at home. Interestingly, in Theresa's comments, it is obvious that she is giving more worth and value to the formalized school knowledge. On the other hand, for both Selena and Stanley the kind of knowledge attained in the home compared to the other is clearly stated, thus implicating the question of what type of knowledge is deemed more important in schools. In their views, schools do not very often reflect students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. That is, based on their responses, these students are aware of the differences in what they brought from home and what was recognized and taken for granted within the schooling context.

In addition, as discussed in chapter two, critical educational researchers and scholars (Apple, 2001a, Giroux, 1981; Spring, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2000) position ideology and hegemony as central to an analysis of power, race, class, and gender in these relations

between students of color and education to highlight the tenet that curriculum is bound up in politics of knowledge production and selective traditions. Therefore, other important questions that are very significant to this type of analysis of schooling hinges on the question of what is education. This question also brings out other ideas or questions like what is the purpose of education and again, what is knowledge and whose knowledge is of most worth. In *Ideology and Education*, Apple (2001a) underscores this point by advancing the notion of hegemony- as good and bad common sense- which is taken from the work of Antonio Gramsci. Apple (2001a) drawing on the work of Raymond Williams writes:

Hegemony acts to saturate our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic and social world we and interact with, and the commonsense interpretations we put on it, becomes the tout world, the only world. Hence, hegemony refers not to congeries of meanings that reside at an abstract level somewhere at the roof of our brain. Rather it refers to an organized assemblage of meanings and practices, the central, effective and dominant system of meanings, values and actions which are lived. It needs to be understood on a different level than mere opinion. (p. 5)

Apple's (1979, 2000) critical examinations of the meaning of "what knowledge is" and "whose knowledge is of most worth" is very significant to these types of examinations because they highlight the interplay of culture, knowledge and power. Therefore, as a key component of education, curriculum should also be critically analyzed and reflected upon by educators in order to acknowledge and validate the experiences, values, and philosophies of others. That is, the questions that arise are; what is taught and what is not. More so, are students' cultural and linguistic knowledge included in the curriculum?

Also, whose knowledge seems to be included most often? In the end, it is clear that the issues of identity and power are important to consider and this is evident in relation to what is included in curriculum in education and society today. In looking at these students responses, their voices tell of how they are aware that schools are not neutral in the ways that their cultural language and heritage are marginalized.

In this final section, I ask questions about how the schools these students attended either supported or accepted the Navajo language and cultural knowledge. Specifically, I asked about whether they saw, heard, or felt if their teachers or administrators accepted the Navajo language and culture in the school or in the classrooms. More so, I asked how their cultural and linguistic backgrounds were included in the school curriculum.

Sharon -

VW: The bottom line is that you do not think you saw it, in terms of support from the teachers, maybe teachers and administrators in general.?

Sharon: Explicitly, no. But if there were like, hmmm...can't remember that far back. (pause)... I remember I was having some trouble in my government class and the bilagáana [*white*] guy, he kind of told me that I should, I was having family trouble at the time so he told me I should probably go into the lower division government class. This was an AP teacher, advanced placement. He told me to go to the regular one, it might be easier because he said he gave the book to the students a month before and they had all that time to read up on the first eight chapters. Cause they were required to read a big old chunk of the reading before they even entered class, which was surprising because I'd never heard of anything like that. I was like wow. So I did, I moved to the lower class for a while but it was really mediocre and I couldn't handle

it. It was like coloring maps and labeling the states. It was really stupid. I felt dumb at that point and I was like, “Okay, I promise to catch up on the reading, I’ll do this, just let me in this class.” He was like, “Okay”. So, I ended up passing that class with like a C, I didn’t do so well as I thought. I explained to him afterwards, I think I was near failing with maybe a D or an F and I spoke with him sometime during the semester after class and I explained to him my situation.

Mark -

VW: Going back... how did you see Navajo language and culture reflected at the schools? Like in the curriculum?

Mark: In elementary, there...there was none. Ahm...it was the stereotypical one week of Indians and Pilgrims, Thanksgiving. Not even a week...they didn’t even talk about...they didn’t even talk.. Maybe they had like a special...special presenter... this Lakota guy came and he talked about the flute. Where it came from...and he talked about...you know...ah...things...like Lok’áá... you know for the smoke. I didn’t know what they call it in their language he just talked about it...and this is...you see this thing...you smoke it ..it’s not tobacco...and kids watching it and he presented it and stuff...And then... we had like a Jicarilla lady come in...she was a weaver... she come in and we did like our own little cook...she showed us that...but that was it... it was...it all came...to our elementary long time ago. But... other than that, there was nothing like in the... Maybe at little bit like...maybe at most ten hours during the school year was...like collectively where they actually sat down and talked with non Natives and the number system in Navajo and the colors like the ten colors and the

numbers. Ahm...It was more in school but other than... Middle school they had like different Navajo classes like one class period just one hour...one full hour.

VW: It was just in that class?

Mark: Just in that class...and they taught the alphabet and taught us to sound it out...I really like it...I remember it was all the letters and stuff. Then in high school they have like a bilingual...after so many years of misuse of maybe bilingual funds they finally implemented it ahmm....It was never there until I was like a... junior or senior in high school...but it...they had ah...supposedly they getting all this money for this bilingual program but they never...implemented the curriculum for it...or created one for it...they just misused...misuse of federal funds I think...It finally got there and now the high school now is...the middle school in Cuba is winning awards for you know expository writing speech, you know poetry and singing in Navajo language and they're a border-town school. But that's...but that was...toward the end of it... That's in the schools and...that was it. Most of the time it was just...the same old...for three hours all in English, English books...the...skipping like 500 years of American Indian history in a paragraph. Not even knowing your ...anything about.

VW: Would you say that a lot of the stuff about Indian culture wasn't even really about Navajo culture?

Mark: No...it was about like...

VW: White man's image of the Indian?

Mark: Manifest destiny...that was it you know....

In this conversation with Mark, he is highlighting not only the lack of support or inclusion of Navajo cultural knowledge into the curriculum but the misappropriation and

misrepresentation of Native peoples and culture in the school curriculum. While he does mention that there were attempts to bring in some Native speakers or guests, overall he states that the way that it was done was very romanticized and based on the white man's image of the Indian.

Alyssa -

VW: Do you think they (schools) accepted and supported Navajo language and culture?

Alyssa: I think so.

VW: In what ways?

Alyssa: Cause if they didn't they would have tried to take out the Navajo classes and the Navajo government or anything supporting Navajo language or culture or teachings or anything like that.

VW: So, all the teachers did?

Alyssa: I do not know.

VW: Ah...like some of them?

Alyssa: Probably most of them.

VW: So if most of them accepted Navajo language or culture as being a part of the school, do you think they should have been teaching... Literature maybe about....having you read a lot about... maybe in World literature...making it relevant to Navajo history?

Alyssa: I do not think so because...like I said there is a lot of different....different people that went to school there, it wasn't mainly just Navajos.

VW: So what was taught then in the class?

Alyssa: Just...Regular literature.

VW: *... Was there Navajo language and culture integrated into those classes?*

Alyssa: No. it's just...cause they were taught by White teachers.

In this case, Alyssa states that she saw her school being supportive of the Navajo language and culture by not getting rid of the Navajo classes. However, when I pressed to see if she could name a class or teacher who integrated Navajo culture into their content area classes, she responds by saying that they shouldn't have to because there were other students represented. Furthermore, she mentions that it was regular literature that was taught and not Navajo in a predominantly Navajo school.

Sarah-

VW: *do you think that it reflected Navajo language and culture?*

Sarah: Ahm...No.

VW: *Meaning like....Lets say in your....English class, did you read books by Navajo authors? In math, did you do anything with Navajo math?*

No. nothing like that...and ahm...

VW: *So you do not think the school reflected the Navajo culture?*

Sarah: No. No. Especially not my senior...I do not ...the only thing that comes to mind is my senior year...cause all of my classes...it's still fresh...nothing in English class, Math, sciences....student council class....nothing.

In the preceding statements, students described some of the ways that their schools did not support the Navajo language and culture. For example, from the preceding statements except for Alyssa, all of the student maintain that there was no support for Navajo language and culture. In some cases, like Sharon and Alyssa, there is some mention of

how some teachers were supportive but overall there was no integration of other cultural knowledge into the main school curriculum especially Navajo in predominately Navajo schools. Also, it is clear in some responses that while there were some courses like Navajo language or Navajo government, often they were classes that had inexperienced teachers, no classroom materials, and/or curriculum to speak of. Mark was more vocal in that regards stating that there was a misuse of bilingual funds. Thus, in many cases it is apparent that not only was there no interest on the part of the schools to integrate Navajo culture and language into the school curriculum but that Navajo students were aware of the lack of support for these classes. Based on these comments, it is apparent to students that since their linguistic and cultural identity is not important to their learning experiences, there is no place for it in schools. In their eyes, these attitudes mimic what the larger society substantiates through a white supremacist ideology and discourse about the “inferior” status of Indigenous language and cultures.

Therefore, the implications are very clear that in order for schools who serve large populations of Navajo students to honor and validate these students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds, thus their identities, they must do more by providing more support in the way of course offerings, program support for language classes, recruiting Native teachers, and involving parents in their children’s education. As I have discussed, these factors are very important to these students’ success because students’ identities (whether they take on a racial, ethnic, or cultural meaning) are inextricably linked to their language, worldview, their kinship system, and their experiences as Diné. Moreover, these responses as constructed and reproduced via the school curriculum through ideological management underscore the ways that only one kind of knowledge is

perceived as dominant. Spring (1992) discusses the role of educational ideologies as justifying “methods for controlling educational institutions and educational practices”, thus it is important to understand how that happens (p. 2). Spring (1992) states:

Ideological management can be more specifically defined as the conscious exclusion or addition of information and ideas conveyed to the public by mass media. The purpose of this conscious exclusion or inclusion of material was...to shield the population from certain ideas and information or to teach particular moral, political, and social values. (p. 3-4)

More so, ideological management also reveals the political nature of schooling in addition to the suppression of certain knowledge. Spring (1992) writes:

Textbooks and standardized tests convey the idea that what is taught in schools is neutral and that all scholars agree about what kinds of knowledge are valuable. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. In every field of study, scholars disagree about content, interpretation, and methodology. In addition, most subject matter areas contain values and assumptions that conflict with the values and beliefs of some groups. Knowledge is not neutral, and the knowledge taught in schools is the result of political and economic decisions. (p. 125)

Finally, these last set of responses evolved from asking students about the types of supports that they received from home or school that motivated them to succeed regardless of the many barriers. I do this to highlight the point that not all is lost but that there is still a lot of hope and faith in our educational system to do good for all children. Also, I ended with this question to address the ways that students were negotiating, persevering, and strategizing for their own success. Finally, despite all that I have

discussed in relation to the racialization of Diné youth, I am hopeful that educators and policy makers will get some new insight and perspectives in addressing and looking at how schools impact the educational experiences of Diné youth. Also, from that I have faith that they can begin to see that only by transforming schools for the sake of all children can we hope to meet the needs of all students.

Sarah -

VW: What about...On the other hand, what...what do you think might be some support systems, maybe that you might have had...something that you feel comfortable talking about?

Sarah: I think...support systems...there were two groups. Family and friends. Ahm... friends was a big part. Cause I mean we all didn't like school, taking quizzes and tests like that but it was always going to school and seeing my friends that would...made me glad I was going to school. Looking forward to the fun times and laughs or whatever. Cause I know like once high school was over there was some people who were like, "I do not know how you do it but you're always happy every day" but it was really them that made me happy. And then when I came home, it was my mom, my grandma, my cheii, and my older sister when she was still living with us. It was us four. They were always supporting me. Like they didn't tell me...well they kind of just left me alone so I was able to do my stuff.

VW: What about the family? Did they provide physical forms of support, like if your school wanted something did they get it?

Sarah: Oh! Yeah. Like I was...I was in a lot of clubs...so it was like...and then when my mom came out, supported. There was organizations, like relatives they would

come out for an hour and help out. It was kind of funny but it was what kept my mom busy. Like she didn't want...she didn't have to do it...but she did it so now I'm trying to give her a break. I asked her and said you do not have to go if you do not want to and she said I'll go. And well go to like the Native American advisory meetings and that kind of stuff. And then also spiritually, I guess. You know if anything went wrong they always took out the medicine or sing some songs. And that kind of keeps me...

VW: Why do you think that was important for you?

Sarah: Like the spiritual...

VW: All of it?

Sarah: All of it. Why did I think it was important? Well, if they weren't as involved or as interested as they were I'd probably feel a little bit more lonely. Not like alone, but lonely. Kind of like I'm doing all this stuff by myself. I mean I could have handled it but I do not know...cause they supported me so I can't say really but...I just knew if they weren't there I would have been lonely, maybe I wouldn't have been as so outgoing. Cause they wouldn't have supported me that much...and then I would have just kind of...I...I would have probably over stimulated, over worked myself with a lot of stuff that I was doing. It would have been really hard, stressful, I guess.

Karen -

Karen: I guess what helps me is that, I just think about how...what I've done to get here. And I have a lot to lose, it's not like... I can't just say "Screw it." Cause it's like I'm going to lose a lot of things. So I have a lot to lose, I guess....So that's what I tell myself. And because I have a lot of scholarships...I just think of it as...my homework

is my job. You know these are people who are paying for me to go to school here, so you know I can't just do it like how these other people can. "Oh, I want to have fun now, I can take it next semester". I can't do it. I just tell myself you're getting paid by the hour each day to be here. Cause no one in my family is giving me money. So that's what I tell myself.

Thus, as all of these students shared their beliefs about what schools are, what schools have meant for them, and what schools should be, they also highlighted the ways that they have been able to succeed by remembering why they were in school, remembering and relying on the support of their families, and by re-asserting an Diné (Indigenous) identity. In this way, these students are also re-affirming the need for Indigenous knowledge in their education within the contexts of schools. As I think back to how this idea of drawing on Indigenous knowledge is reflected and relates to my own personal experience with education, I can see how conflicts can arise when one is unaware of the "politicized" nature of education. That is, whenever I was asked about why I became a teacher, my answer was to help children relearn their language and to reclaim their Indigenous forms of knowledge to empower themselves. However, I never really understood what that meant until I began to analyze the many perspectives and viewpoints of what education is and can be. Thus, based on that idea, I offer these students' voices to serve as a counter narrative to dominant white grand narratives about the purpose and goals of education based on their own experiences.

Summary

In summary, in this chapter I discussed the ways that students understood their place as Diné (Navajo) within the existing school systems. Secondly, I discuss the ways in

which these students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds were not supported. Finally, I described the ways in which schools excluded, marginalized and racialized their experiences, identities, and their language and culture to underscore the questions of whose knowledge is most important. This critical examination reveals how processes of racialization play out at the individual, group, and collective level when it comes to the education of Diné youth. Therefore, there is a strong need for critical educational studies that analyze the impact of white racial ideologies, discourse, and practices on Indigenous youth unless these racial ideologies in turn become hegemonic processes that reinforce white domination in education through processes of assimilation, representation, and signification of Indigenous identities and bodies.

In the 2008 Annual Report by the New Mexico Public Education Department titled *Making Schools Work High Expectations for All Students* (2008), the report mentions it's "commitment" to Indian Education by formally adopting a textbook for teaching the Navajo language. The report also highlights that the state is the first in the nation to do so. Also in the report, the authors' highlight the state's educational agenda that includes academic rigor and accountability, closing the achievement gap, school readiness, parent involvement, 21st century classrooms, college and workforce readiness, and high quality teachers are important to student success. Yet, in the end, they return to the neoliberal mantra of establishing "high expectations, clear standards, and accountability for student and teacher performance" (NMPED, 2008, p.21). In looking at back at the National Indian Education Association Preliminary Report on No Child Behind in Indian County (2005), several points come out in regards to the impact of state –federal mandates like NCLB. Particularly, this report states that school success is most important often at the

“expense and diminishment of Native language and culture” and it goes on to state that “schools are sending the message that, if our children would just work harder, they would succeed without recognizing their own system failures and finally that Indian children are internalizing the (school) systems failures as their personal failure” (p. 7-8).

While much of the current neo-liberal and conservative views about education continue to point only to the cultural differences of students as the underlying cause of low test scores, critical race scholars maintain that these cultural deficit theories in education are really a ploy to get around addressing the real problems of inequitable schooling in education that deal with race, class, and gender (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Apple, 2001a; and Gay; 2000). For example, Ladson-Billings (2006) relates how the idea of an educational achievement gap has gained much favor in education especially in the white neoliberal discourse even though there has been a gap for a long time between whites and their counterparts. In response, she challenges educators to start thinking about the achievement gap in terms of an “educational debt” that highlights how schools have short changed many students of color for a long time (Ladson-Billings, 2005). That is, as she states; while NCLB is perceived to be good legislation by many politicians and educators in meeting the needs of all children by disaggregating data to get a better picture of how all students are doing, it still fails to acknowledge how the emphasis on test scores and accountability ignores the crucial every day needs of many children who continue to deal with poor school conditions, lack of classroom resources, and racial discrimination. Thus, Ladson-Billings (2000) states an examination of Euro-American epistemological traditions through its construction(s) of race, gender, and class is very much needed to raise “important questions about the control and production of

knowledge-particularly knowledge about people and communities of color” (p. 272).

Otherwise, she states our current educational system will remain heavily invested in white supremacy particularly one that is based primarily on Western constructions of knowledge. Cameron McCarthy (1990) states,

Any critical theoretical work on racial inequality in schooling must therefore involve some sober reflection that the racial character of the production of curriculum research itself. But the issue of rethinking the racial order in American curriculum and school organization also leads us to the consideration of questions concerning pedagogical and political practice within education. Unless we focus on the issue of what can be done about racial inequality, given our critically informed analysis, we shall be left on the sidelines watching as the conservative restoration reconstruct education around its own principles of race, class, and gender domination. (p. 12)

Critical educational studies as previously discussed in the theoretical literature review addresses a myriad of social, political, and cultural issues that stem from unequal power relations in education. Therefore, there is a great value in using a critical analysis that looks at the cultural, economic, historical, political and social contexts that underpin the way that schools reproduce students. More specifically, a relational analysis approach is very significant in this respect because it highlights the relations between power and education. Taos/Diné scholar, Glenabah Martinez’s study (2005) of Indigenous urban youth explains why a relational analysis was critical to her study.

A relational analysis calls for questions that interrogate the historical and contemporary foundations of economic, social, and political processes that operate in our schools today. By asking questions that probe below the surface of what appears

to be a natural outcome, other issues emerge from the corridor of the isolated and marginalized parts of the school that strike fear in the hearts of those whose space has always been at the center of campus and at the center of the official curriculum. (p. 287-288)

That is, by looking at the relationships between concepts like identity formation and knowledge construction within the politics of schooling, a relational analysis approach helped me to look at the social, cultural, economic, and political ideologies that inform existing school policies and practices.

In summary, this critical qualitative study analyzed the racialization of Navajo students in education by acknowledging Diné (Navajo) students' stories about their experiences with schooling and how they negotiated their racial and cultural identities within the historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural contexts of past and current educational policies. Particularly, the emphasis on the impact of white supremacy, white racial ideology and discourse, on the education of Native American students raised many implications about the need for more research that looks at the ways that Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge are minimized and subjugated in education. Furthermore, the future implications of this study specifically highlight the need for more critical and reflexive dialogue among Navajo and non Navajo educators, parents, and researchers to redress and counter the loss of Navajo language and cultural values at the individual and community level. This analysis of the impact of white supremacy on the education of Indigenous students required a critical theoretical framework that drew on research from critical educational studies, critical race theory, and critical Indigenous theory. In the end, this study also highlights the need for increased individual and

collective agency among Indigenous scholars, activists, educators, and communities especially within the contexts of education to embrace, engage, and rearticulate an Indigenous pedagogy that is transformative and revolutionary.

Based on this, I offer in the next chapter implications for developing critical Indigenous education models. Particularly, I speak from an Indigenous educators' perspective that looks at issues that are important to Indigenous education. In the long run, I hope this will create the necessary dialogue within Indigenous educational circles to look to critical educational studies and Indigenous Knowledge systems to inform the goals of Indian education into the next century. In conclusion, I share this statement from one of the students about the power of honoring students' voices in education. In this statement, I asked Selena what would have been different for her if she would have come to some critical consciousness earlier in her schooling. She stated:

Selena: I think...I think if I was raised by like...by a traditional Navajo family and I learned about it and I went to school as well. Like I would have learned about ...like one side from my family and also like one side from here...and I would like early on I would have been able to see... you know...like I am sure ...but still growing up I would have questioned a lot of stuff that I learned about....Like what I did... it's just like... Oh I read something like ...wow he was a brave warrior or he was like a soldier... then you never knew about all the other stuff they did...then it's like....Oh wow!!! How brave were the pioneers or whatever who came here and... and you never hear about like the diseases... but it's like it's so bleak...it's like so small compared to what we've accomplished now. Just like... I never really questioned what I learned. Like I read it and I was like...oh well...that's cool or whatever... but

like at this point now...I think back to a lot of things *I've read and it's like well how come I never learned about that... you know what I mean??*. You know it's like there's always two sides and I never really learned...you know...the side.... that would have changed my thinking.

It is important to understand that this statement is made in reference to the fact that Selena has become aware of what is missing from her education. She is cognizant of how schools short changed her by not teaching her what is important to her. That is, when she says “how come I never learned about that” and “I never really learned the side... that would have changed my thinking”, I think about the ways that schools are teaching children and the ways that students’ see schools. Many times, students’ understand that school knowledge is all there is and never question it. These statements are a plea to us as educators, teachers and schools that some things are important to who students are, what they think is important, and what they want to learn. Thus, it is imperative for us as educators to make sure that we accept and affirm the cultural and linguistic knowledge that students bring to school, to class, and to us. Finally, it is also important to understand that Selena is still in a process of constructing and negotiating her Diné identity within the process of schooling.

Chapter Seven

First Man...planted the big Female Reed and it grew up to the vaulted roof...At this time there came another strange being. First Man asked him where he had been formed, and he told him that he had come from the Earth itself. This was the locust...

The locust made a headband of a little reed, and on his forehead he crossed two arrows. These arrows were dressed with yellow tail feathers. With this sacred headdress and the help of all the Holy Beings the locust climbed up.... He dug his way through the reed as he digs in the earth now. He then pushed through mud until he came to water. When he emerged he saw a black water bird...swimming toward him. He had arrows...crossed on the back of his head and big eyes.

The bird said: "What are you doing here? This is [no place for you]" And continuing, he told the locust that unless he could make magic he would not allow him to remain.

The black water bird drew an arrow from back of his head, and shoving it into his mouth drew it out his nether extremity. He inserted it underneath his body and drew it out of his mouth.

"That is nothing," said the locust. He took the arrows from his headband and pulled them both ways through his body, between his shell and his heart. The bird believed that the locust possessed great medicine, and he swam away to the East, taking the water with him...when the last water bird had gone he found himself sitting on land.

The locust returned to the lower world and told the people that the beings above had strong medicine, and that he had had great difficulty getting the best of them. (Aileen O'Bryan, Navajo oral tradition – from Emergence Myths, retrieved from <http://ftp.fortunaty.net/com/sacred-texts/nam/nav/omni/omni02.htm>)

Conclusion

In the story with which I started this chapter, the Locust is symbolic of a process of coming into being and/or a transformation according to Diné beliefs. Thus, by learning, acting, reflecting, and engaging with family, community, others and the natural and spiritual world, an individual is transformed. Thus, through a process of transformation I am continuing to learn how to embrace my identity and humanity. This understanding is premised on a humble yet noble idea that I am *Sa'ah Nagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón*, a child of

the earth and sky. Within the contexts or realm of academia I say that my ontology and epistemology are guided by the Diné educational philosophy of *Sá'ah Naghái Bik'eh Hózhóón*. Furthermore, SNBH continues to guide my lifelong learning, education, and vocation as a Native American or Indigenous educator, teacher, and scholar.

In the review of the literature, I briefly reviewed some important ideas based on Indigenous decolonization theory that underscore the notions of tribal sovereignty and nation building and their relationship and significance to education. Subsequently, I followed with an analysis of social and cultural reproduction in education relative to students of color that underscored ideas like hegemony, cultural capital, and selective traditions within the politics of schooling and culture that implicate social and cultural reproduction, knowledge production and identity formation. Furthermore, I referred to and interpreted some key tenets of critical race theory to explain their implications to my research methodology, data analysis, and central research question of examining the process(es) of racialization that impact Navajo youth and their racial, ethnic, and cultural identity within the contexts of schooling. These three tenets are; an acknowledgement of: 1) the centrality of racism as structural white supremacy, 2) understanding race as a social, cultural, historical, and political construct, 3) the centrality of experiential knowledge through the use of counter narrative story telling.

In chapter three, I explained the significance of using a critical research paradigm in my research methodology as way of addressing the complexity of issues and debates that arise from talking about race and identity in regards to the educational experiences of Indigenous youth. Thereby, I used a critical qualitative case study research methodology as a way of recognizing and honoring the voices and perspectives of Diné youth as they

shared their stories and personal experiences with the processes of racial-ization within the contexts of schools. Based on the interview data with my research participants, I highlighted six major categories which emerged from the data analysis. They are the Influence of Family and Community, Identity, Diné Worldview, Diné Identity, Schools as Racializing Institutions, and Discourse, Media, and Society. Eventually, these categories became the subcategories or topics of discussion as discussed in the last three chapters. These topics included; the importance of family and community support to children's personal motivation and success in education, the significance of Diné cultural knowledge, language, and the spiritual connection to place(s), the inter relationship of these attributes (language, worldview, and place) to Diné identity, Indigenous identity, competing definitions of Indian identity, identity appropriation and representations, understanding the role of schools as sites of cultural struggle and competing ideologies, the reproduction of racial inequality in schools, and the impact of a racialized discourse and practices on Diné (Indigenous) youth in education, through the media and society.

In chapters four through six, I presented the voices of the Navajo youth as a way to understand many of the complex issues and debates in relation to Diné identity and Diné education. Particularly, I point out key ideas that underscore students' negative experiences with schooling that relate to social and cultural reproduction and institutionalized racialization. Specifically, I highlight the ways that students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds were minimally supported in the schools and some factors they identified as barriers to their schooling that underscore the processes of racialization.

As voices representing their respective communities, elders, grandparents, parents, and relatives, these students' unique voices and perspectives provide new ways of

looking at the purpose, goals, and hope of Indigenous education. That is, in their voices we find new hope and possibilities to engage in critical dialogue about ourselves, our challenges and promise to transform education for Indigenous youth using localized critical Indigenous models of education. Finally, I returned to the transformative nature of this research to honor the students' voices as they talked about the many ways they negotiated the racial terrain and cultural divide of schools. That is, these Navajo youth were able to share their insights about ways or strategies to succeed and move beyond the marginalization, exclusion, and racializing practices of schooling. Thus, their responses elicited some significant issues that highlight the notion of agency in their resilience and motivation.

I find myself not only looking back but looking ahead not only for myself but for the many generations to come. As Indigenous people, we need to develop theoretical frameworks grounded in our own traditions, beliefs, and philosophies of education. Once we have theoretical frameworks from which to speak from, we then need to correlate them with other perspectives and beliefs about education to fit our models that will work for us. I believe this continues and will be an ongoing process for many Indigenous people who are engaged in decolonization projects that involve transformation and other ways of becoming. We are on a journey that only time will tell the outcome, but with our transportation clearly defined and known, that is defined by our own beliefs and values, the outcome will be *hozhó* or harmonious outcomes. Hence, my story returns to the beginning just as our journey begins anew as we begin taking responsibility of our education in the form of our transportation in the form of a horse.

Many Native American traditions like Navajo oral traditions speak of education as a journey, a process of evolving or becoming and as a mode of transformation (or transportation) to achieve and attain happiness and success in life. Also, many Native tribal traditions about knowledge (i.e. tribal practices, customs, and beliefs of education) consensually state that all children can learn in a variety of ways. Moreover, these traditions also state that the outcomes of those processes of learning must be purposively and clearly understood for attaining long life in happiness. In Diné traditions, the educational philosophy or philosophy of education is grounded within the larger framework of oral traditions that are based on the SNBH paradigm. In Diné oral traditions, the philosophy of education is understood in the metaphor of a horse. Thus, our educational path or journey as Diné can be observed as the footprints of the Blue and White horses streaked across the heavens at night (Aronilth, 1999). As such, our educational philosophy in the form of the horse is in the form of our transportation (or mode of transformation, of becoming, evolving to reach a destiny) to fulfill a life journey. However the rider must know his and her role and responsibility to his horse. In this case, an individual must know his role and responsibility (innately his spiritual identity) to self, family, relatives and oral traditions in relation to seeking knowledge. In respect of and in light of such traditional perspectives, our educational life philosophy or the attainment of knowledge is seen as a process of becoming for a purpose, thus a transformation. Therefore, an individual's life journey is about transformation when they realize this concept of fully becoming or evolving as a human being.

Future implications

Articulating an Indigenous Diné transformative education model. In this research study, nine Diné youth shared their beliefs about what schools are, what schools have meant for them, and what schools should be. This study also highlights the ways that Diné youth have been able to re-affirm an Indigenous identity and articulate the need for Indigenous knowledge in their education within the contexts of schools. Thus these students' voices serve as a counter narrative to dominant white grand narratives about the purpose and goals of education based on their experiences.

I posit that the implications of this study not only reveal the asymmetrical power relations in education for Navajo youth but help to illuminate how specific social, cultural, historical, and political processes play out within the process of schooling in relation to how Indigenous cultural knowledge and languages are marginalized. Therefore, I hope that future research will look to these critical theories and bodies of knowledge to critically examine the processes of racial-ization, colonization, and globalization. Because there is still a great need for more research that looks at experiences of Navajo and other Native American (Indigenous) within the contexts of education, I propose some recommendations later for educators that critical analyze the ways that students negotiate the messy political nature of schooling.

Therefore, the research brings attention to the fact that in order for Indigenous communities to better understand the ways that Indigenous youth construct and negotiate an identity within the process of schooling, it is important to examine the ways that schools as racializing or race making institutions impact their identity formation, development, and lives. Therefore, Indigenous educators must become more attuned to issues about the inter-sectionality of racism as much as the process of colonization and

globalization within the educational and schooling context. Because, they all have much to do with the ways that students are categorized and marginalized according to social constructions of race, class, and gender in society.

By extending the debate beyond social and cultural reproduction, a group of neo-Marxist scholars from critical educational studies have added to the debate that there are other forces that operate in the process of schooling that are in contestation i.e. oppositional to the prevailing forms of knowledge. These critical scholars in critical educational studies point out that there is much more to the process of schooling than class and power relations surrounding the issue of why certain students fail while others succeed (Apple, 2001a, 2000; Giroux, 2000). For example, Henry Giroux's work has been very influential to critical theorists and the field of critical pedagogy in the ways that he examines issues of knowledge, pedagogy, power, and resistance in education. Thus, as one of the few scholars in the new sociology of education he offers some unique ideas related to theories of reproduction in education that highlight the agency of humans as individuals and communities in their search for social justice.

Therefore, I refer to his work here to call upon Indigenous and non-indigenous educators alike to begin engaging theory and practice dialectically. Specifically, I underscore Giroux's idea of extending the political or politics of schooling into the realm of the public sphere. In doing so, Giroux (2000) advocates for radical, transformative, and emancipatory models of education or transcendence that affirm the "development of a new society, a democratic notion of individual and social possibilities" (p. 241). For example, Giroux describes this public sphere as "representing both an ideal and a referent

for critique and social transformation”(Giroux, 2000, p. 236). Giroux (2000) goes on to state:

As an ideal, it posits the need for the ideological and cultural conditions necessary for active citizenship. That is, it signifies the need for an enlightened citizenry able to rationalize power through the medium of public discussion under conditions free from domination. As a referent of critique, it calls into question the gap between the promise and the reality of the existing liberal public spheres... as a referent for social transformation, the public sphere provides new opportunities for reformulating the dialectical relationship between the sociocultural realms and the power manifested in the ideological battle for the appropriation of the state, the economy, and the transformation of everyday life (p. 236-237).

Paulo Freire’s (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is by far the most profound analysis of how individuals particularly educators can challenge dominant ideologies that operates to oppress and offering a pedagogy of hope. According to Freire (2000), critical pedagogy can only be achieved through critical theory, praxis, and transformative action for the purposes of liberatory, problem solving, or emancipatory education which exists in stark contrast to the banking concept of education. That is, Freire (2000) states that the banking concept of education “extends only as receiving, filing, and the deposits”(p.45). On the other hand, he advances that an emancipatory education, allows for people to regain their humanity and reclaim their voice in society. Freire (2000) writes “dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity is stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming fully human”(p.36) Therefore, he posits that marginalized or oppressed groups can by

working in collaboration with dominant or oppressor groups liberate themselves from overarching forms of oppression. Graham Smith (1998) states, a transformative or revolutionary Indigenous project is very different from decolonization – which is “a reactive notion” by putting colonizer and history of colonization back at the centre. Smith (1998) writes that “in moving towards transformative politics we need to understand the history of colonization but the bulk of our work and focus must be on what it is that we want, what it is that we are about and to imagine future”(p.3). This entails a “confrontation with the colonizer and a confrontation with our selves”- free ourselves before we free others (G. Smith, 1998).

As I have discussed previously, much of my philosophy of education is grounded in the teachings and discourse of my family and my social, political, and spiritual life as a Diné. That is, a lot of what I hold dear to my heart such as my beliefs and values in life and about education are based on my traditional upbringing based on Diné oral traditions. In the long run, I find that the Indigenous (Diné) traditional perspectives are the things that stand out most clearly in my life because they matter to me the most even to this day as I reflect back upon my schooling experience. I want to share this story of my educational experience as a narrative to my life’s experiences in relation to my future hopes and goals of education as described in previous paragraphs.

Finally, I would like to mention that I came away from this research with more questions than answers. One question deals with how to engage others about the purpose of advancing an Indigenous research and education agenda. More so, what are the implications of doing research in Indigenous education? Also, another important question for me is: what does research in Indigenous communities look like, how does it work, and

who can do such work? In the end, an important idea about research in education for me in regards to nation building is that research must involve community collaboration and learning. Otherwise, it would only be more of the same.

Recommendations

Early remembrances of our people talk about the philosophy of education as defined by the Holy People. According to Navajo oral traditions, the Holy People delegated Coyote to teach the children of the Diné while they went to work out in the cornfields. One day, Coyote came along when the people were arguing over who should be responsible for teaching their children while they were working their cornfields. Coyote volunteered when no one else would. He said, "I will do it. I know how to teach the children. I will bring them back knowing all the ways and knowledge of the Holy People." After the fourth request and much hesitation, everyone agreed to let him take the children back to his home to teach. Coyote went off with the children. However, he had other intentions in mind. The children remained with Coyote for four days. After four days, as the children returned to the people they were undisciplined, manipulative, and deceitful just like Coyote himself. In the end, after much trouble and interventions, it was clear that it was up to the people themselves to teach and re-teach their own children what they wanted them to learn. The people realized that it was their role and responsibility to teach their own children. So, with the intervention of Talking God, Pollen Boy, Pollen Girl, and the Tobacco people, the children were finally restored to harmony. Their unfortunate journey through a life dilemma resulted in the community coming to a realization to take responsibility of their own education. The moral of this story is obvious. It is up to students, parents, educators, and community members to take

responsibility of their own learning. I believe that this is one step to decolonizing our minds and to reclaiming Indigenous forms of education.

In this way, I want to take some responsibility for my research study and offer some ideas, suggestions, and concerns as a way to engage others based on what Diné youth have said and are saying about their educational experiences. Therefore, I offer some recommendations based on my research findings. I present these recommendations in the form of my own personal comments and questions instead of as a “to do list” or as if they were best practices. They come more as a way to actively engage in critical dialogue and to move towards reflection and action.

1. By addressing key concepts and questions that have far reaching implications particularly in Native or (Indigenous) communities, this research described the ways in which Diné (Indigenous) constructed and negotiated their identities within the contexts of education. Specifically, the motivation for looking at how racialized youth like Native American students construct and negotiate their identity(ies) within the processes of schooling is to create possibilities for critical dialogue and engagement in future research that address difficult issues and questions that arise within the politics of schooling and education.

2. Thus I hope that Native educators and parents will become more aware of underlying forces of oppression that perpetuate race, class, and gender inequities and to speak out against these inequities in schools and become more active in finding ways to talk about the need for transformational changes in education.

3. Here I would venture to say that as Indigenous communities and scholars, we need to be more specific in naming and identifying who is oppressing us and how we are

being oppressed. Although decolonization theory makes references to social, political, and historical issues that highlight how Natives and others are colonized, I argue that post-colonial and post modern writings do very little in naming who is responsible for creating the inequalities in education especially in regards to relations of competition, exploitation, domination, and cultural selection.

4. Although the notion of how to achieve this transformation by consciousness raising is important, more insight and research are needed to make it localized and contextual to specific Indigenous communities. That is, can transformation occur within a rigid system of colonization that works daily to consume our minds, our bodies, and even our spirit? Although Freire's ideas of emancipatory education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) are significant to oppressed people to regain their humanity and reclaim their voice in society, what does this mean for our reality as Indigenous people? More importantly how can Indigenous people engage in Nation building when everything seems to be slipping away with the onslaught of civilization, truth and reason, and technocratic ideals?

5. Another significant issue I believe deals with the dichotomy between traditional Indigenous worldviews and Euro-centric Western worldviews as discussed by some Indigenous scholars. But more significantly, I believe as Indigenous educators we need to look at the schism that has been created by colonization between the ideas of individualism and community. For example, ideally one could say that in traditional Indigenous societies, the individual was considered an important part of a community and that community was defined by their individuals. However, when these two ideas become in and of themselves as they are now in contemporary society, individuals do not

necessarily define a community and a community of people may have many individuals yet not a community per se. For example, in looking at traditional cultural values, beliefs, and practices of the past, individuals who made up a community were steeped in the traditional knowledge of the community. However, in contemporary society, community values, beliefs, and traditions are no longer important to many individuals who live in or are part of a community. So what does this mean for Indigenous scholars who advocate for and write about bringing back traditions and cultural values, beliefs, and practices? How does a community relearn what has been lost? Or more importantly how does a community unlearn the processes of colonization? Do Indigenous communities know that they are being colonized?

6. In *Red Pedagogy*, Sandy Grande (2004) asserts that Indigenous scholars need to reach out to critical theorists and vis-à-vis to center the American Indian education agenda. More so, she argues that the divide between the two groups must be forged by bringing together ideas from each side that speak to significant issues relevant to Indigenous communities today. I believe that these are important questions to consider especially for Indigenous scholars who are writing back to the colonial empire. More importantly, for those who engage in writing and research about the processes of decolonization, I ask what can we draw upon and how can we work to decolonize not only ourselves but those who do not know their own oppression. This is not to suggest that I am speaking from an enlightened position, instead I speak from a place that is dark, foreboding, and full of challenges and I humbly offer these ideas as dialogue and reflection. In the end, although I cannot speak for all of my relatives, my community or people I can talk to them about these ideas that stem from one another and point back to

one another in an intricate web called life. Therefore, we must begin to see and understand the myriad of complexities involved and that arise when doing this type of work because although no one said it was going to be easy no one can say that it is impossible.

7. Finally, I propose that what is needed are more Indigenous voices in the academy that not only speak to these important issues about Indigenous rights and claims to land, self-government, and community preservation but specifically to issues of race, race relations, racism, and ideology. Otherwise the Indigenous voice will become dismissed, obscured, and rebuked as mere assumptions and fallacy once again within the dominant white racist discourse/logic because that has been and continues to be the legacy of Indigenous peoples around the world in their relations with colonizing powers. Here I would like to return to a tenet from critical race theory that highlights white supremacist ideology as operating in education as the cause of unequal outcomes and to place the blame within the proper oppressor/oppressed paradigm. That is, CRT postulates that inequalities do not maintain themselves and that asymmetrical power relations that lead one group to oppress others is constituted by something and that something is in my mind an overarching racial ideology that is maintained by white bodies and racializes the minds and bodies of the Other i.e., people of color and the spaces they occupy i.e., territories, education, academia, and even the media. Hence the question is : Who is doing the colonizing? Who is being colonized? How is the process of colonization maintained?

Appendix A – Interview Questions

Early Childhood and Family

1. *What are some things you remember the most about where you grew up?*
2. *What are some things you remember the most about where you went to school(s)?*
Which of these people (your siblings, friends, parents, other relatives, or others)
were and are still very important to you and why?
3. *How do you think that these people influenced you as far as you learning about*
your
4. *self (that is, your values, beliefs, language you speak, etc...)?*
5. *Tell me about some of the supports (family, friends, etc...) you might have had in*
6. *school in up to now.*

Identity

7. *What is your racial/cultural/ethnic/gender background? (That is, how do you*
identify yourself to others?)
8. *How would you define your racial identity? Explain.*
9. *How would you define your ethnic identity? Explain.*
10. *Do you think that your racial identity different from your cultural identity?*
11. *Is racial identity different from an ethnic identity?*
12. *Which of these (your racial or ethnic or cultural) identities is more important to*
you in terms of how you want others to know who you are?
13. *Or is your gender identity important?*

Navajo Language and Culture

14. *Based on your life experience, education, and personal perspectives as a Navajo person, how would you describe what it means to be Navajo to someone who is not Navajo?*
15. *What are some tangible (material) things that you think might help to explain your identity? That is what is it that makes other aware of who you are?*
16. *What are some intangible (non material) things like abstract ideas and concepts that help to explain your identity?*
17. *Is Speaking the Navajo language important to who you are?*
18. *Do you understand and/or speak the Navajo language? Thinking back to your childhood what, why, or who do you think may helped or hindered you from knowing and/or speaking your language?*
19. *Does knowing or speaking the Navajo language and culture important to being a Navajo?*
20. *Do you believe that knowing or speaking your Native language (Navajo) helps you to achieve academic success in school?*
21. *In what ways do you think your parents and community accepts and support the Navajo language and culture?*

Schooling and Education

22. *Do you think there is a difference between going to school to get an education and getting an education at home?*
23. *In what ways did the schools that you attended accept and support your Navajo language and cultural background?*

24. In what ways were the Navajo language and culture reflected in the school curriculum?

25. In what ways do you think that the teachers and administrators at the schools you attended accept and support the Navajo language and culture?

Community Perceptions about Navajo language and culture

26. Do you believe that people who live near the Navajo reservation who are not Navajo have positive views about Navajo people?

27. Do you believe that most teachers and administrators who serve Navajo students have positive views about Navajo students?

28. Do you believe that most people in mainstream America who are not Native American have positive views about Native Americans like Navajo?

29. Do you believe that most people in mainstream America who are not Native American have positive views about learning and speaking Indigenous languages like Navajo?

30. Do you believe that most mainstream American educators and politicians value Indigenous languages?

Race, Racism and Schools

31. *How would you define racism?*

32. *Have you ever experienced racism?*

33. *Is there a connection between academic success or failure in school and racism?*

If you do not think so, how would you explain the inequities and disparities among racial groups in schools?

34. *Do you think that there is connection between why Navajo is not being spoken by many Navajo youth and racism?*
35. *Tell me about some of the barriers (things that may have hindered you or made it things difficult for you) you might have experienced or seen in school up to now.*

Appendix B – Overview of Diné youth participants

<p>Sharon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived and grew up in Gallup, New Mexico • Attended schools in Gallup • Native American Studies major 	<p>Mark</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived and attended school in Wyoming for a short period of time • Moved home and attended school at Torreon, New Mexico • Native American Studies major 	<p>Karen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed race and ethnicity - white, Ojibwe and Navajo • Lived in Wisconsin and then moved back to Carson, New Mexico • Elementary education major
<p>Selena</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed race – Navajo and Hispanic • Lived and attended schools in Virginia and Albuquerque, New Mexico • Native American Studies major 	<p>Alyssa</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived and attended schools in Gallup, New Mexico • Law major • States her understanding of Navajo as being good 	<p>Stanley</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lives and grew up in Colorado • Mixed race- white and Navajo • Attended religious schools • Fine Arts major • Very interested in sports
<p>Theresa</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived in Ft. Defiance, AZ • Attended high school in Farmington • Nursing major • States her understanding of Navajo as being good 	<p>Sarah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lived and attended schools in Phoenix and New Mexico • Native American Studies major • States her understanding of Navajo as evolving 	<p>Elbert</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluent speaker of Navajo • Lived and attended schools in New Mexico • Civil Engineering major

Appendix C – Newspaper Articles and Websites Related to Navajo

Authors	Title	Date	Source
Kristen Davenport	Hate crimes bill moving in Legislature	February 12, 2003	Gallup Independent
Larry Di Giovanni	Gang violence up in rez town; school heads in denial?	April 10, 2003	Gallup Independent
Jim Maniaci	Cops arrest 440 during Navajo Nation Fair	September 10, 2003	Gallup Independent
Pamela G. Dempsey	Kayenta seeks lawyer to get back control of school	October 13, 2003	Gallup Independent
Zsombor Peter	All over but the shouting for Smith Lake Elementary	April 16, 2004	Gallup Independent
Laura Banish	The Broken Circle: Indian rolling - myth or fact	April 23, 2004	Daily Times, The
Laura Banish	The Broken Circle - 30 Years Later	April 27, 2004	Daily Times, The
Laura Banish	Question: Is there racism in Farmington?	April 29, 2004	Daily Times, The
Jim Snyder	U.S. Commission on Civil Rights: Navajos cite alleged abuses of civil rights	May 1, 2004	Daily Times, The
Zsombor Peter	Navajo school principal denies drinking charges	Wednesday May 12, 2004	Gallup Independent
Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola	Pow-Wow Princess - Crownpoint teen represents freedom from addiction	Tuesday January 11, 2005	Gallup Independent
Stan Bindell	Personal stories illustrate effects of drugs, alcohol	April 8, 2005	Gallup Independent
Zsombor Peter	Pena not backing down Says mayor told him to monitor specific bars	Wednesday May 11, 2005	Gallup Independent
Deborah Bulkeley	Navajos turn sights on schools	Tuesday, Nov. 15, 2005	Deseret News archives Retrieved from
Zsombor Peter	City receives list of claimants	Wednesday, November 16, 2005	Gallup Independent
Pamela G. Dempsey	Richardson vows to improve Native education	Friday December 23, 2005	Gallup Independent
Ryan Hall	Report: Native arrests do not match demographic	March 22, 2006	Daily Times, The

Brian Hassler	Shut up means die Parents upset by school bus drivers alleged scolding	Tuesday May 16, 2006	Gallup Independent
Tribal Education Department	Navajo Nation to Request Partial Lifting of Head Start Suspension Head Start	April - June 2006	Diné Education Quarterly
Erny Zah	Navajo Nation Council addresses racism, violence in border towns	July 18, 2006	Daily Times, The
Tribal Education Department	Organizing a NN Department of Education	July - September 2006	Diné Education Quarterly
Cory Frolik	Walking a path to unity	September 2, 2006	Daily Times, The
Troy Turner	The real target of prejudice	September 20, 2006	Daily Times, The
Erny Zah	Border town hate crimes discussed	October 18, 2006	Daily Times, The
Delphina Warren	Resident says alcohol abuse bigger than racism	November 5, 2006	Daily Times, The
Staff Writer	Cortez holds meeting to alleviate racial tensions	January 11, 2007	Daily Times, The
Tribal Education Department	Preparation for NIEA Legislative Summit	January-March 2007	Diné Education Quarterly
Natasha Kaye Johnson	Alcohol sales protested Group rallies against liquor sales in Smith Lake	Thursday May 17, 2007	Gallup Independent
Andrea Koskey	City, Navajo Nation still seek bridges	June 23, 2007	Daily Times, The
Alysa Landry	American Indians organize Saturday walk in Cortez	August 30, 2007	Daily Times, The
Lindsay Whitehurst	A different kind of pageant: New Miss Navajo earns title through language, culture	September 15, 2007	Daily Times, The
Bill Donovan	Divine intervention? Kidnapping, Casuse killing recalled by Garcia	Friday October 26, 2007	Gallup Independent
Alysa Landry	Local officials: Border town briefing inconclusive	November 13, 2007	Daily Times, The
Lindsay Whitehurst	Community Relations Commission debate continues	November 15, 2007	Daily Times, The

Tribal Education Department	Board Opposes #0190-08, #0716-07	April 2008	Diné Education Quarterly
Staff writer	Shiprock teens discuss discrimination: Workshop focuses on undoing racism	July 18, 2008	Daily Times, The
Steve Lynn	City ready to roll against racism	September 14, 2008	Daily Times, The
Staff writer	Farmington is not a racist community	September 20, 2008	Daily Times, The
Staff writer	City, tribe must give racism woes more attention than this	September 24, 2008	Daily Times, The
Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola	Public forum examines casino pros, cons	Thursday November 6, 2008	Gallup Independent
Kathy Helms	Fire Rock to open Nov. 19 Delegate: Skinwalkers got scared, could not stop project	Friday November 14, 2008	Gallup Independent
Karen Francis	Rights panel: Border-town racism still alive	Friday December 19, 2008	Gallup Independent
Karen Francis	Coming home Re-enactment remembers Treaty Day	Thursday May 28, 2009	Gallup Independent
Kathy Helms	Sacred mountain Navajo Nation speaker unhappy with San Francisco Peaks decision	Wednesday June 10, 2009	Gallup Independent
Phil Stake	Death watch Violent acts on tribal lands reflect hopelessness of life on the rez	Weekend September 19-20, 2009	Gallup Independent

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