Nonabah B. Sam
Candidate

Educational Leadership (TEELP)
Department

This dissertation is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

Approved by the Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Shawn Secatero, Co-Chairperson

Dr. Allison M. Borden, Co-Chairperson

Dr. Vincent Werito

Dr. Nancy Mithlo

TEACHINGS FROM THE HOGAN FLOOR:

PRESERVING CULTURE AND LANGUAGE THROUGH MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

BY

NONABAH B. SAM

A.A., Museum Studies, Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, NM, 2000
B.A., Museum Studies, Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, NM, 2005
M.A., Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Studies, University of New Mexico, 2011

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Dedication

To the ancestors before me and to the spirits yet to be born – Your prayers are answered through me, your songs have carried me, and they will continue. Shí chei'sani yéé – Hastiin Biligaana – Ha'shí'nei – Ahé'he, ni'naachíi shí na'nish iish'lééh – Ni'tsodizíín dóó ni'yiin béé diyin góó, béé na'shá k'o tadidiin bi'ke'atiin góó be'naas adáání'tedóóléél.

To Tom Torlino, my great, great grandfather – Because of you, I work in the field I have chosen. Your prayers and songs are stronger as I walk with them on this corn pollen path you paved for us, and may it always stay with us.

To my daughter, Ymelda Erin Coriz, and my grandson, Soriz Kai Coriz – Thank you for your patience, your love, and your prayers – A'yóóniinshníí, shí yazhí dóó tsoí yazhi. I love you both, my loves, beyond the moon and stars. This is for you to carry forward, my dears. Continually remember who we are and where we come from.

Shí Ma'saní, who passed July 20, 2022, I wish you stayed long enough to see me accomplish this dream for the both of us – dóó Shí Mas' Roberta dóó Alberta dóó Lorenda – Thank you for loving me every day since the age of two; the three of you raised me to be who I am today. This doctoral journey could not have been possible without you. You pushed me with encouragement and support, and I am eternally grateful for the life you have provided me. Your guidance is immeasurable, as the women in my life, and your prayers and strength have brought me this far. I love you all so much.

To Yehawah, who passed October 13, 2022, we will always love you. Thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to be greater in all I do. Rest In Power.

To My Dad, who passed December 9, 2023, I'll always continue to make you proud, no matter where I go in life. I love you, and I know my work is important enough to continue doing what I need to do for the future of Indian arts, language, and culture.

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To my tiny circle of friends and supporters – Thank you for being trustworthy and loyal to our friendship and believing in me when I did not believe in myself, for checking in on me, making me laugh through tears, and reminding me that I am human. I love you and will always support you in your endeavors.

To the knowledge bearers of the Navajo Nation and the Village of Te Tsu Geh Oweenge: May we continue to be the warriors we are meant to be, and may our culture and language continue to flourish on this beautiful path for all our people. The future is bright for the next generations that follow.

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To the people of the Navajo Nation, it is with great pride and honor to do the work I do on behalf of our elders and children. May we move forward in beauty as we preserve our language and culture for the generations yet to be born.

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Nonabah B. Sam

A.A., MUSEUM STUDIES, INSTITUTE OF AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS, SANTA FE, NM, 2000
B.A., MUSEUM STUDIES, INSTITUTE OF AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS, SANTA FE, NM, 2005
M.A., LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND SOCIOCULTURAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, 2011
ED.D., EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO, 2024

ABSTRACT

In 2021, we faced the unexpected impacts of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, especially on the Navajo Nation. There were many things to realize, but one that hits hardest is the loss we suffered with many traditional practitioners passing from this illness. The purpose of this study was to examine linguistic and cultural contributions that Knowledge Keepers might consider making for the future of our Navajo Nation and Diné College. Drawing on my cultural teachings and knowledge, I conducted semi-structured interviews in Navajo and English with 10 participants, including leaders, alumni, staff, and traditional practitioners; I also utilized a circling back technique. Three themes emerged: education is a tool to strengthen tribal sovereignty, building community is decolonization, and sacred spaces and sacred places. The discussion considers cultural loss, cultural materials in museum collections, the possible impact of COVID-19, and where culture and language could be taught and practiced.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter One

Bi'tsii'ba' béé ditlool (Tying of the Hair)

I am Woman, a Diné Kis'áání Asdzaan. I weave my thoughts (Nistahakéés), my plans (Nahata), my life (Iína) and my reassurance (Si'hasin) together. I connect my teachings together, to walk in one world. I strive to keep our traditions strong. I live as I know who I am, and I create beauty from my fingertips. -Anonymous-

As a little girl, I remember walking alongside my Chó'saní (great-grandmother), herding our sheep to Chil'háá'jiní (Place of the Black Root Plants) to water them. I remember being afraid of insects, snakes, and lizards as they ran through the brush, crossing our path and frightening me, left and right. As I walked with her, she talked about many things that mattered. One thing I remember constantly being embedded in my soul was her words, "one day, my teachings will be your teachings. Our language and culture are more important than you will ever know. Keep that in your heart and let it carry you, throughout your lifetime" (Non'á'báá, 1896-1993).

As I grew into a young lady, I always conducted myself in a very modest and humble manner. Attending ceremonies with my grandmother was always something I looked forward to. The summer of my fourth-grade year, I remember coming home on Friday afternoon after school and my grandmother coming in frantic about having to take me to my great-grandfather's house for a meaningful ceremony. She told me, "He accepted the staff from this N'daa (Enemy Way) ceremony, and they want you to carry it for him." I had no clue what she was talking about, but I knew it was necessary because she was gathering my traditional clothes and jewelry, packing the truck with blankets, and telling me to hurry. We left and went to my cheí's house. There, I learned more in the few days of this ceremony than

I learned in school about myself and my ability to do what I had to do. Despite the fear of not knowing what to do, I was guided spiritually by many of the elders who surrounded me. It was an experience I have never forgotten.

My connection to the culture and language is embedded in my DNA. It is and always will be an inherent right. I am an Indigenous woman born in Gallup, New Mexico, and raised in the Navajo Nation. The blood that courses through my veins is that of my ancestors, and it is because of them that my fire continues to burn in my traditional home. Their teachings have become my teachings that I share as a mother and now a grandmother, a sister, an aunt, a professional museum curator, and an Indigenous educator. I am nowhere near perfection and still being taught every day. I will be a lifelong learner of traditional knowledge because no one person can know it all and possess every teaching of our natural elements. The science behind traditional teachings extends far beyond what the books can teach, and the masses of critical thinking maneuver you through the very embodiment of what it means to live a life of passion for who you are, for who I am, as a Navajo and Pueblo woman,

I attribute the characteristics of my life to the matriarchs in my family; without their love and compassion, I could not be where I am today. As matriarchs, we carry many responsibilities, and to do so, means living within understanding what it means to interweave our Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and academia. Interweaving these two creates designs and patterns, and as shaping takes place, we begin to understand ourselves, and the path created just for us.

In high school, I lacked consistency and discipline. I graduated at the bottom of my class with no real direction until I was introduced to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 signed into law by George H. W. Bush. I remember sitting in

math class, listening to the presenter at that time, and thinking to myself, “I could do this. This could be my mark on the world and something I could continue to do throughout my life. I could be someone important, doing this kind of work.” I asked questions, and the summer of my junior year in high school, I decided to seek work at the Navajo Nation Tribal Museum.

In 1998, I made the decision that forever changed my life. I started my undergraduate program at the Institute of American Indian Arts. I never imagined my life taking the shape that it did. I became an honor student and Student Government president. I even had the beautiful opportunity to “plant the seeds” for the groundbreaking event that took place at the campus’ current location. I believe in prayer, and my faith that day was the vision I saw over twenty years ago. My role as a young leader exemplified the direction I aim for today. The many professors I had at the time believed in a young “Rez Girl,” and I am continuing this journey in the name of some of the greatest and most accomplished in Indian Country. The museum field is still growing for many young professionals today, and some may say that it is a “calling” or the work that came to them in a dream, but I believe it was both for me. It was something meant to be, a career in the field that allows me to help others understand the importance of language and culture and why it must continue to be carried on and into the future.

Mr. Charles “Chuck” Dailey, a former professor and interim director of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), was influential in my career path in museum studies. Dr. Dailey established a unique museum studies program that was explicitly meant to produce American Indian museum professionals (Casey, 1996). This started as a two-year program and eventually grew into a four-year program. I studied with Dr. Dailey during my

undergraduate years. How he taught and the words he used to inspire many of us created a fire within me that still burns so bright to this day. The classes are geared toward tribal needs and beliefs, which makes this program different. It is designed to train people to help their nations (Dailey, 1996). It certainly prepared me for what I had to do to maintain a very culturally sensitive collection of the Navajo Nation. This collection represents who and what we are about, and we are fortunate to house this collection at Diné College.

Over the last ten years, I have found balance in recognizing the importance of the special collections encapsulated in museums around the country. My first visit to the Indian Arts Research Center, part of the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico, was eye-opening. It truly gave me a glimpse of working with textiles that one can only see in that specific collection. I was in love. My next journey carried me to an extraordinary place in Suitland, Maryland, the National Museum of the American Indian Cultural Resource Center. I walked carefully through the collection, knowing that the objects housed there, tainted with pesticides, yearned to be home where they could breathe the fresh air and hear the sacred songs and prayers uttered for their use. It was a bittersweet moment that brought tears to my eyes as I prayed for them quietly. Some collection items will never be returned to the earth because of the chemicals they are treated with, as they are harmful to the earth and our health. They can never be touched again, which breaks my heart.

In my career, I have had the pleasure of working with the main collection close to my heart, at Diné College. When I came to Diné College 12 years ago, I found ways to look at how important collections can be to teach about math, sciences, traditional healing and their significance and even critical thinking and skills that involve different forms of evolution, especially using our Navajo language because of how descriptive our words can be, when we

explain things, and their cultural perspective and meaning. Through this work, I began to understand the importance of having better knowledge of what the culture represents with our language because, without language, a culture cannot exist, and we cannot identify who we are as Diné.

I also learned about the importance of "cultural resilience," a term that has gained prominence in Indigenous studies literature over the past twenty years (Holtrof, 2018). According to Heavyrunner and Marshall (1997), cultural resiliency is a way of life and living because of what is intact within our ceremonies, language, relationships, music, and the arts. It is in our medicine and is medicine, as we have continued to be who we are. Cultural resilience is apparent in our stories and storytelling that have taught us what the expectations are; this teaching is done with love, support, and a caring nature. Knowing and understanding that this love, support, and caring nature entails balance has a way of helping us maintain our connection to our identity. The artifacts and objects that our museum collections hold for us require carefulness in handling practices and we nurture this relationship with each object so that the stories held by these objects can come to life. My relationship with museum collections has allowed me to understand what having a nurturing and caring heart can do when one works closely with each artifact in a collection. When I am among the collection with an open heart and mind, I can see how their stories come to life; I can remember songs and prayers uttered for them, and through their energy, I can relate to them in unimaginable ways.

In the development stages of the Tribal College and University (TCU) movement during the 1960s, tribal elders and leaders advocated for the establishment of museums as a part of Diné College so we could learn and understand the culture and living history of our

people. Diné College's mission and vision, which is rooted in the language and culture of the Diné people, supports post-secondary education with the vision of continuously advancing programs that exemplify greatness. Greatness meaning that the programs designed here at Diné College are created to grow our own that fit the needs of the tribe in economic development. Today, items significant to the Diné way of life are displayed in the college's permanent gallery. All tours of the college start with this collection because we believe that when we bring our children home into the ho'ghάán ná'mazíí (more commonly referred to as a hogan), they pick up and retain things better, like when one hears elders talking at the dining room table while eating. Sitting and listening, you swallow their words to retain the language and teachings.

Over time, I have realized that how we celebrate life traditionally allows for growth and ongoing learning. This journey tests all capacities of our mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical states of being. In every aspect of this journey, each state has been tested, and as Diné scholar Shawn Secatero (2009) explains:

> You are created as a seed that is rooted in our sacred Mother Earth to honor your purpose, mind, body, and relations. Expand your roots, grow your leaves of knowledge, stand strong as a cornstalk, and sprout your beautiful tassels to blossom for your people. Always remember who you are, where you are from, and where you are going. Create and continue your legacy by following the corn pollen path through education, well-being, and leadership. (p. 2)

We are genuinely rooted in culture with a beautiful language that captures the essence of who we are as Indigenous people, and it is part of the gifts we leave for the next seven generations that follow.

Secatero's (2009) Corn Pollen Model is used to break down the sixteen pillars intrinsic to the Diné way of life. In the spiritual well-being quadrant, the pillars are cultural, linguistic, and artistic. Each one of these pillars is described as: Cultural – who and how you identify yourself – As a Navajo woman, I use my clans to identify who I am; it is my bloodline. The linguistic pillar is the use of language in which we speak and use our voice to express ourselves. The artistic pillar is the gifts that we are blessed with. I also take the intellectual pillar from the mental well-being quadrant, which is understanding that intellect is essential, especially knowing and understanding what you are trying to achieve and bringing balance as a collective. All four pillars are included in this study as they represent who I am as an Indigenous woman, as a Diné Asdzaan (Navajo Woman), and as a Tewa Kweeyan (Tewa Woman). The cultural, linguistic, artistic, and intellectual pillars have become the foundation of the work that I do every day. However, I only recently became aware of the four pillars – cultural, linguistic, artistic, and intellectual, when I became part of the Native American Leadership in Education doctoral cohort at the University of New Mexico. Though I grew up around the arts, culture, and language, I did not understand the academic side of it until I was actually involved in scholarly pursuits. Diné scholars, Werito and Belone (2021) and Secatero (2009) explain how these pillars guide us in the process of who we become.

I have observed differences in leadership capacities among academics as well as community leaders, and how we inherit the uniqueness of our spiritual, cultural, linguistic, and artistic well-being(s). This has helped me to see the relevance of conducting research from a traditional perspective. I grew up in a home where understanding tradition was about making sure to sit and listen and observe. Being the observant child and asking my elders

why or how, is the way that I found answers to many questions. Today, this is what we continue to teach our children to listen and learn from the stories of our elders. Wilson (2008) stated it best, knowledge is not just relational, it is shared with all of creation and not the interpersonal relationships we have with each other, but also the relationships we have with other subjects like the animals and cosmos; it is the relationship that I share with reality.

My relationship with each of the archeological and ethnographic objects, including pottery, textiles, sand painting panels, drawings on paper, as well as jewelry, baskets, and northern plains items are housed in the collection here at Diné College where I am the curator, is an important part of the job I have because of the stories they hold, their significance, and their purpose. When the story of an object is told to me in our Native language, the context is much greater and the value of understanding is increased. The lessons from these stories are vast and require that we appreciate what is truly taking place through these stories.

As Indigenous people, our languages and our cultures are sacred. We strongly believe that everything is given life; no matter what elements they contain, every object is a living and breathing organism. As I began working with museum collections in my early undergraduate years, I realized that collections are precious beyond words. Working with many different types of media and pieces of artwork, it was the nature in which these pieces were created that caught my eye. As I grew more interested in the concept of these pieces, I also started to understand more about their nature, meaning where they derived from, what their purpose was or is, and how they are used, alongside their stories and even songs and prayers. I began to see art in the form of science, critical thinking, mathematics, and evolution.

Similarly, the way in which I designed and present this dissertation draws heavily upon my experiences as a Native woman, particularly those experiences involving ceremony like the Kin'áálda (Coming of Age) Ceremony for young Navajo girls. I chose to structure my dissertation this way, as my educational journey has been my ceremony for the last five years. My dreams and aspirations have been the silent prayers uttered in the morning dawn, as we do when we "tie the hair" of a young girl. The transformation that takes place over four days after the tying of hair and the days after is vital as her journey continues throughout her life. I use this ceremony as a metaphor for the ways in which I have been able to mold and create my own well-being during this dissertation journey. Similarly, Diné scholar Amanda Tachine (2015) uses the weaving loom and the creation of a rug as a metaphor for her work in higher education. As Diné women scholars, many of us have chosen similar metaphors, related to the cultural aspects of who we are and why it important to shed light on this, as Indigenous scholars working through academic boundaries, and creating a voice for ourselves to be understood and valid in our educational endeavors.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine linguistic and cultural contributions that Knowledge Keepers might consider making for the future of our Navajo Nation and our tribal college, located in Tsaile, Arizona. Since 1973, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium has provided support to 37 Tribal College and Universities, providing leadership, advocacy, and influencing federal policies to promote research and program initiatives that strengthen Indigenous languages, cultures, and communities (www.aihec.org/about-aihec/). The foundation of Diné College is tied directly to culture and language, as well as preservation and maintenance to revitalize programs that allow for stories, songs, prayers,

and teachings and our artifacts to be archived respectfully. As tribal colleges and universities strive to address and maintain their cultural and traditional roots, I hope that my research will help others design ways to collect necessary cultural knowledge and create a collection for their museums or cultural centers so that other practitioners, their apprentices, and those who will begin the process of learning, will have access to them in the future.

Research Questions

Indigenous Knowledge Systems are rooted in lived experiences (Jones Brayboy & Maughan, 2009) and are based on cultural stories and teachings, whether through prayers, dances, songs, traditional foods; they all encompass our traditional way of life, which bears Indigenous methods and care taking. The guiding questions for this study were based on how Diné communities around Diné College utilize Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Language learning centers, museums, or cultural centers are designed with integrity and committed to carrying the knowledge forward to future generations. Through our collection of unique artifacts and the development of an archival collection, we can house these artifacts properly for future use under the direction of apprentices and with guidance from our practitioners or knowledge bearers. My research examined how Diné College uses traditional knowledge to care for and interpret archives and museum collections. In doing so, I gathered experiences and stories through 10 interviews with Diné College leaders, alumni, and community Knowledge Keepers. In these interviews, I asked questions in regard to the importance of both traditional and non-traditional objects and items in the museum collection, including:

1. Why is it essential for our tribal college (Diné College) to collect and house cultural knowledge?

2. How can Diné College collaborate with tribal museums, cultural centers, knowledge bearers, and the community to revitalize language and culture?

Need and Significance of the Study

Over the years, a number of culturally important items have been stolen or collected by individuals who invaded Indian territory during the Battle of Wounded Knee, Little Big Horn, and for the Navajos, The Long Walk. Today, many of these items are considered rare antiques valued at millions of dollars and held in non-Native facilities (Lonetree, 2012). These items and collection of items, many of which are considered cultural patrimony, funerary objects, sacred items, and even human remains, have stories, songs and lives of their own attached to them. Songs and prays were rendered for them, and a breath of life was administered to them for their given purpose.

It was a very sensitive time when I decided to enter the field of museum studies. According to James Riding In (2005), the attitudes of museums were changing. What were once colonized institutions were now giving power back to the people from whom important cultural objects had been taken and allowing them to have a voice in what happened to their artifacts. This was due, in part, to the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990. Prior to the passage of this act, many cultural objects were looted from grave sites, pillaged, sold to collectors overseas, and used to turn a profit. In spite of this act, many cultural and sacred artifacts are still sold unethically through auction houses, many of which are unable to determine provenance (i.e., how these items were obtained) and do not reach out to tribes to allow them to claim these items. As a result, tribes are left with the burden of having to prove these item are stolen, and in the process are

being redefined with the constructs of museology and the terms of preservation (Watson, 2017, p. 171).

In addition to the theft of our cultural artifacts, the deconstruction of American Indian culture and language is a part of our past and present history. Unfortunately, Indigenous cultures and languages are not always taught in our school systems, and many Native children are losing their understanding of what it means be Native. Recent data showed that the use of Native languages has declined since 2012. The 2012 census indicated only twenty-seven percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives spoke a language other than English. According to Timothy Begay (traditional practitioner), resident of Tohatchi, New Mexico, and a citizen of the Navajo Nation, "Our language is what identifies who we are. Without [our Native] language, we cannot have a connection to the culture" (personal communication, March 2022). Mr. Begay has worked with the Navajo Nation Heritage and Historic Preservation Office in Window Rock, Arizona and has played an important role in the work I do today. Because of him, my journey began at such a young age. With his expertise as a knowledge bearer and traditional practitioner, his guidance on this path continues to help me create goals for our museum at Diné College.

The tribal museum field has grown immensely since the late 1990s. Very few tribal museums existed early on. Most museums present a very colonized view of what the American Indian is and how our life is portrayed because of colonization. The idea of recognizing what our life ways are about has been compromised. A common practice among colonial institutions is place names, "uncomfortable information can be hidden behind inappropriate subject headings" (Durate & Belarde-Lewis, 2015, p. 680); this could be determined with the English names and locations that are inappropriate to use by tribes or

aboriginal people, because colonization has determined what we are as Indigenous people or so it seems. Many professionals in the field have decided that some of the best practices come from reintroducing our own methodologies and theories to reconstruct exhibitions and create curriculums that are associated closely with ceremonial language and tied directly to our cultural ways of life. Indigenous curatorial techniques should not compromise integrity and value when it comes to museum practices because traditional methods can be incorporated and also help maximize and open the channels for communication and the exchange of information alongside professional practices (Kreps, 2008).

Although many tribal nations are considered sovereign entities with the right to govern themselves (Shrinkhal, 2021), sovereignty has not always protected tribes against federal policies aimed at erasing the cultures and languages of Native peoples. Even though we have fought to maintain what our ancestors established for us, our lands and resources were taken from us through treaties, yet the richness of our cultures is still alive in the songs we sing and the prayers we pray. Our stories are in our dances and the stories our Native speakers tell.

The Navajo language and culture thrive today because we can grow in the idea of what it means to have become re-culturalized from one generation to the next. The adaptations, in many ways, are just like the ancestors and how they positioned themselves to become natural at the evolution of our changing ways. When language is removed from the context of understanding, we are at a loss. The language and cultural ways of learning are our roots in the land (Adams, 2019). This resonated within me because I continue to find comfort in knowing that the journey we have embarked on is truly about creating ways for the future to hold on to who we are and how we will continue to identify ourselves.

Museum collections have become the lens through which we must be able to preserve our culture, language, and history despite colonization. Today, our stories of creation show the resilience of who we have become and where we will continue to go. Metaphorically, as told in our stories, giants once ruled the land, and it was the Hero Twins who defeated them. Today certain giants remain, and colonization is one of them. This giant, however, will be defeated because we have songs and prayers that have sustained who we are since time immemorial. Nayee'ye (A type of Giant) still walks among us today, but Hozho'jíí (The Beauty Way) is a balance created, thus the road of our education – conquering western educational systems while incorporating traditional and cultural values that surpass the history books. Our stories and values system are captured in the arts, and the true nature of what is embedded in our DNA brings our ceremonies to life. We are forever rooted in culture and language, and my study illustrates that we will remain who we are as long we have our songs and prayers, captured to help our future continuing moving forward.

Positionality

My name. is "Non'á'báá"– One Who Returns From War. I am a "Bah" (Woman Warrior), Shi eí Bithaníí nishlíí. Biligáánáá bashísh'chíín. Nii'nahóóbaníí da'shí Cheí. Tłoh'łiichiizhii' Kis'an´íí dine'h da' shí nali. I am of the Folded Arms people, born of German and Dutch descent on my father's side. My maternal grandfathers are of the Gray Streak Face clan, and my paternal grandfathers are of the Winter clan from Tesuque Pueblo. With a warm handshake, I extend my heart to you and call you k'e (family). The Diné concept of k'é means "kinship and … connection to our relatives" (personal communication, Marie D. Lewis, June 15, 1987). K'e is "at the basis of the relationships we have" (Montoya, 2021). The process of k'é connects us in an extended manner to our relatives outside of the

core family unit and reminds us that we are never without relations, especially when we are far away from our homeland and people.

On my maternal side, I have been fortunate enough to trace my family roots back three generations. Knowing and understanding where I come from adorns my life in the spirit of White Shell Woman and Changing Woman, a grandmother to who we are as Navajo women. I embody her holy being as we walk upon the corn pollen path on Mother Earth.

My passion for museum studies began at a very young age. Years later, I sat in an auditorium in Tulsa, Oklahoma, listening to Walter Echo-Hawk, an American Indian attorney, tribal judge, author, activist and lawyer (Center of the American Indian West, n.d.) give a welcome address. Near the end of his speech, his words, "You are the keepers of a sacred treasure," stayed with me. I did not quite understand what that meant, but I knew that his words would reverberate, and they have, time and time again, in my work with museum studies.

I have always loved art, our culture, language, and traditional way of life. During the annual conferences with the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, as I sit and listen to people in our field, I hear the same love echoed by many. Our work represents a rare specialty for many of us because it is what life is calling us to do. Our work is not just about art and displaying it to make our walls look pretty. The artifacts and art work is more about the thoughts that pass through our hearts and souls of what we will think about doing to impact many generations to come.

My approach is to be culturally aware of who I am today and who I will become in the future. By definition and story, this approach brings me an understanding of how to evolve at an equal level of where I am and how I will incorporate my teachings within my

personal life and professional career. In teaching my students about museum studies, my approach is to open their minds to what it means to preserve our linguistic and cultural heritage while approaching my teaching methods from a culturally relevant perspective. Some years back, a man by the name of Rore Stafford (Wakatu, New Zealand, 2009) once asked during our visit to the Land of the Long White Cloud, “if you can’t speak your language and practice your culture, then who are you?” In my professional career, the knowledge of my language and culture, and even traditional ways of life, leads me to know what I am capable of, not just in my work but also in different leadership capacities.

In my journey, I have developed ways to showcase my leadership qualities and how I intend to intrigue others through my creativity. One of the most important, thus far, is learning to speak with a stern, professional tone balanced by my compassion. This allows me to excel at what I need to get done but also shows others that I want us to work together as a team. This means being able to effectively communicate the needs and wants with few problems and reiterating that communication is critical in all that we do.

Being a Navajo and Pueblo woman in the museum field is not easy. There are many things I have learned regarding respect for others and how culturally sensitive I must be to complete specific tasks in a timely fashion. Every aspect of leadership is different; how we choose to be effective is also up to us as individuals. For years, I was told that a Navajo woman should never sit above a man regarding leadership. I used to see that as a means for maintaining a paternalistic pattern of keeping women from becoming who we are truly meant to be. According to Fowler (2016, p. 7), “traditionally, women are just not meant to be leaders, because it was the men who made decisions about hunting, farming, safety, and

where they would move their families." However, in our traditional stories, women had their responsibilities to take care of the homestead; we were woman warriors in our own right.

In our creation story, women were given specific tools to aid in the war against poverty and starvation. We are the keepers of our fires at home. Our tools are meant to grow our families healthily and holistically. As diné asdzáán or women, it is up to us to have the compassion to teach the next generation to know the importance of carrying a nation on our backs, to carry community in our hands and love our roots, for this is where the foundation lies. To carry love in the eyes and ears means to carry forward for the next seven generations and to bear the fruit of what Changing Woman created for us as Diné women. I hope that as a future leader in my community, in the tribal college where I work, and among Indigenous people, my success will set the bar for young women and men alike to say, "if she can do it, so can I." Most of all, I hope to promote an understanding of the balance between traditional and academic views, to not only gain an accomplished academic and professional career in higher education, but also to help museums preserve and tell the truth regarding our histories and cultures as Native people.

Key Assumptions of the Study

Many individuals believe that our culture is thriving, and in many ways, that is true. However, many of our ceremonies are no longer practiced because of the loss of knowledge bearers in our communities. Not all tribes in the United States have a heritage language anymore, and their culture is dependent on affiliations,"… a relationship of shared group identity which can be reasonably traced historically or prehistorically between a present day Indian tribe or Native Hawaiian organization and an identifiable earlier group" (NAGPRA,

1991, p. 3/sec. 3, 2c). Similarly, not every tribal college has a museum, cultural center, or archives to house collections. Some tribes are very limited in what they can capture.

Today, as Diné we identify ourselves with activities and events that other tribes have adapted, like powwows. Powwows are social gatherings where areas of culture are practiced, but they are also part of the re-culturalization process. We have adapted to sharing our northern and southern plains brothers' and sisters' ways. That is the beauty of culture, but as Diné people, we can continue to practice our culture and language by continuing our ways as well.

The elders talk among each other about the loss of tradition and practices; their sentiments contain the words of what they long for, and those thoughts are shared with much conviction (Archibald, 2008). As I think about what our elders think and talk about daily, I often look at the precious collections in our museum and reflect on how many different places I have visited in my young life. Most elders from around our community feel the same and are relatable to even some of my peers and colleagues in the field. One of my longtime colleagues, who is currently the director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Indian, stated, "the responses of Native people being in the presence of their ancestral collections for the first time varies and requires careful consideration and sensitivity. The experience can be akin to seeing one's ancestor and can be profound" (Chavez Lamar, 2019, p. 4). In a preservation project, I witnessed these feelings taking place. Here at Diné College, when our elders come to visit the collection, it is a profound and humbling feeling and it is also bittersweet. I see the sadness in them and the questions that surface in later conversations. Particular images are used to remember what an image looks like so that when this specific piece is used in a ceremony they know what it should look like

on the floor of the Hogan, where the image will be displayed for a very short period of time. Once the ceremony is done, the image is then destroyed.

The ceremonial imagery (sandpainting) collection we hold at Diné College is from the late 1920s and 1930s; some of these images have significantly changed over the years and with practitioners it is very sensitive. To see and hear that some of the images of particular ceremonies are no longer used or seen affects us differently. Working with knowledge bearers, I notice that they were very sensitive to the fact that there is no longer anyone around to perform such ceremonies.

The ceremonies that no longer exist are simply because no one took the time or interest to relearn them. Most often, a family member will follow with a practitioner to relearn and today, because we have made it a point to stress academics to our children, many choose not to relearn. Those who are following and showing interest may pay out of pocket to travel with their mentors in order to learn our traditional ways, songs, and prayers that accompany all the different types of ceremonies. This is all uniquely done through memorization, as we do not record the information that is shared with us. It brings about a somber feeling. When I sit while listening to our elders, artists, mentees, my students, and others express their feelings about the lack of information on our collection, this helps me understand that my work is vital to the Navajo Nation.

Aside from the sand painting panels that are housed in the Diné College collections, there are also many other items; we have both archeological and ethnographic items, as well a small jewelry collection of items made in the 1970s. We have a collection of textiles, paintings, and items from the northern and southern plains. We also have an archives

collection, which is comprised of other items like films, and audio recordings. A record of the inception of the college is also housed in the archives as well.

Other assumptions are that tribal culture and languages thrive when, realistically, not everyone is a speaker or understands their language. This is real on most reservations. Because of assimilation, many parents have chosen not to teach their children their language because of what they experienced in boarding schools. Some people admit that they know about the culture but do not participate. The example survey indicates that in many of our tribal museums and cultural centers across the country, we are all striving to help our communities stay closely involved with the culture and language in our respective communities. This survey was conducted across the country by tribal museum employees. I use this as a tool to reflect the importance of my work in the field, as not many people are familiar with the work happening among tribal museums and cultural centers in the United States, which is inclusive of very few tribal higher education institutions that do possess heritage collections for learning purposes. This survey found the following: 77 museums and cultural centers reported that 71% incorporated Native language into their exhibits; 66% percent make available Native language resources; 65% partner with tribal language programs; and 62% incorporate language into public programming. The primary roles of these museums and cultural centers had 90-93 respondents indicating that a “very important” aspect was preserving, perpetuating, and advancing culture. Supporting sovereignty by controlling and interpreting how knowledge and culture are presented is a concern for 92% of the institutions because of the sensitivity around protocols or lack thereof. Eighty-eight percent showed that they serve as a repository for cultural materials and resources (Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, 2021).

Importance of Language and Culture to this Study

I inherited cultural teachings from my grandparents. Growing up Navajo allowed me to become more passionate about being involved in our culture and tied to traditions my grandmother firmly believed in, but, more importantly, this allowed me to grow professionally in a field where I felt the need to make a difference. Drawing on my cultural teachings and knowledge, I conducted semistructured interviews in Navajo and English with 10 participants. Knowing my Native language is imperative to this study. Though I am not a fluent speaker, I can speak and use the language respectfully to engage my participants. Relationality, or K'e is interpreted as, "empathy, support, establishes a warm environment, with comfort" (Billie, 2019, p. 19). Many of our children do not understand when spoken to in Diné, what it means to be called forward with "shí yazhí or shéé awéé"(my little one or my baby), nearly as well as my generation does. An example of this is when a grandmother calls someone to do something or get something for her, she will say, "ha'goo shí yazhí" (come here, my little one), a term of endearment. This phrase evokes a different feeling that resonates within a person. Hearing this term gives you a sense of calmness, and the reaction is very much different than being called by your name. When a family elder passes and their voice is no longer heard, there is an emptiness and one longs to hear their voice. So, even when I speak to the museum collections I make sure to address them in the same manner of using k'e.

Having a cultural collection specifically speaking to what we have inherited at Diné College through a generous donation that relates to the culture sets the tone for what would essentially become a tool to help our students and community as learning resource that is of our culture. The traditional language used in ceremony is and can be cumbersome when

understanding terminology and how that might differ from every day conversational language that we are used to hearing. The basis of culture is language. Understanding that our language is vital to ceremony is where the impact of revitalizing culture starts.

Knowing our language is what reveres us as Diné. Dr. Clay Slate explains, “for describing objects, interests, and values of the Navajo world, no other language than Navajo will ever be adequate” (2019, p. 50). In more ways than this could ever be explained, I have to agree because in context, otherwise, our way of life cannot ever be explained. Preserving the language and culture of the Navajo, we must promote access to a rich life for Navajo on Navajo and that is the truth of it all, because on Navajo we should be more than able to just talk about celebrating who we are as people.

We are a living culture that has adapted to many shifts in the culture, but what remains intact are the songs, prayers and ceremonies that tie the tradition together. Like a sand painting, each one is a decision like a color being laid down with prayer. It is the way we maintain our viability as Navajos; through ceremonies, we maintain our cultural boundaries and that is our detachment from western society. It is our time to be Navajo in Navajo (p. 58). Cultural shifts have taken place, but that does not mean that we have let our culture go.

Today it is evident among our children, that culture is thriving even with the shifts that have occurred we remain and because we have collections in museums and cultural centers across America, we learn to adapt. Here at Diné College we have adapted to western academics but promote our language and culture and preserving what we have as living culture aids that re-culturalization process of learning and persevering on a daily basis, to keep who we are, pressing forward.

Factor Impacting my Research

It is imperative to know and understand that an unexpected pandemic (COVID-19, March 2020 to date) occurred as I was conducting my dissertation research. This pandemic created for me and others time to reflect on what we are doing to continue to carry knowledge into the future for the next seven generations.

Delimitation

I conducted this study at Diné College, the first tribally controlled college in the United States. I felt that this would best fit my dissertation topic, as I work directly with our museum collection, which benefits our students and our communities on Navajo land. This research can and will benefit the college for future purposes as well.

Definitions

The following terms were used throughout this study:

Assimilation – The process of adopting the language and culture of a dominant society.

Acculturation – Sharing and learning another group's cultural traits or social patterns.

Colonization – refers to both the formal and informal methods (behaviors, ideologies, institutions, policies, and economies) that maintain the subjugation or exploitation of Indigenous People, lands, and resources.

Cultural sensitivity – being aware of cultural differences and similarities without placing a value on them.

Decolonization – is the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands.

Knowledge Bearers – Elders or traditional practitioners who share their knowledge and experiences and provide guidance through spiritual connection and medicine ways.

NAGPRA – Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act – 1990.

Re-culturalization – adapting to an already existing culture that continues to evolve.

Sovereignty – is the power of a people to control their destiny.

Saah'naaghai Bik'eh Hozhó – is balance of duality (female and male roles).

K'e – Clanship relation and family, as it applies to the Diné clanship systems.

The four concepts of Navajo thought – the foundation and philosophy of Diné People, that include the following processes:

Nitsahakees – Thinking

Nahata' – Planning

Iina - Life

Siihasin – Reassurance

Summary

Through this study, I sought to explain how museum collections are vital to the continuation of Diné culture and language. Because of colonization, many Tribal nations have already lost their cultural ways and languages. However, our cultural practices are still thriving, with the Navajo Nation still having many speakers, including elders, adults, youth, knowledge bearers, and traditional practitioners. The Navajo Nation has educational programs that promote the acquisition and maintenance of language and culture. Through the passing of oral histories, stories, and ceremonies still practiced today, we can continue to keep tradition moving forward. The process begins with us individually. Our teachings within our ho'ghaan (home) stem from the floor of the hogan. As we touch the ground with prayer, we continue forward. Utilizing the collection of artifacts housed at Diné College, we can continue to maintain and revitalize our culture and language.

Chapter Two

Story Work, Cultural Knowledge, and the Review of the Literature

(Yéégo Nii'káás - Molding)

The Creator places a tiny piece of clay daily in your hands.

Mold the world as you see fit for our youth.

Our ancestor's prayers have molded you.

As I began this doctoral program, there were moments of very intimate and personal reflections on a journey that took place before me. My family's western education was imposed on them, intended to destroy the culture they knew, dating back to 1868, after the Navajo Treaty was signed. This experience helped to define my path and who I would become later in life. Looking closely at my family history, I decided to further my education for my great, great-grandfather, Tom Torlino, who was forced to attend Carlisle Indian Industrial School from 1882 to 1886. This imposition would forever change his life and, generations later, mine. My dissertation is for my ancestors, a tribute to their knowledge as well as a way of correcting some of the narratives that are told about us so that people can truly understand just how far we have come.

Family history is captivating, it is our foundation and what contributes to the development of the people we become. As I have observed historical trauma and genocide, I have made every effort not to think of it that way but to look closely at the advantage that was created, not only for myself and my family but for Indigenous people across Turtle Island. Treaties established many things that have fashioned our lives today, like educational opportunities with scholarships to help us succeed. Some might think this education comes freely, but it does not. The ethics behind a good education is still work hard to achieve the

same American dream we all invested in. These stories set boundaries, limits, and tones for the ways of life we embark on as our journey in life becomes evident in what we choose to do.

Although most dissertations follow western structures, the review of literature for this study may also include knowledge that is passed down from one person to another (Wilson, 2008). Using elements of traditional methodologies, I incorporated the passing of Indigenous knowledge and cultural teachings through oral traditions. *Indigenous Knowledge Systems* (IKS) (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Jones Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Smith, 2012) understand that our views of theory, pedagogy, and axiology are relevant in all that we do. Our stories, prayers, and songs are relevant and signals to newer generations that we are attaining the goals our ancestors believed we could. Traditional knowledge helped us build the nations we are today. These teachings, which are not written, are what we have established as our way of life and are relevant in helping me succeed in western academia.

Reminiscing on stories, opinions, many childhood experiences, and the perspectives I have gained over time, I find a powerful connection to what Haida scholar, Sara F. Davidson (2016) refers to-as the holistic and synergistic relevance that sets our views aside from other researchers. Traditional story work (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008) has been incorporated into research; it focuses on the importance of revealing what Indigenous people have referred to for generations. Story work has also connected me to the ethics of my research, and because of the holistic narrative I have chosen, it deepened my understanding of my descriptions (Davidson, 2016). In this dissertation, I use story work to reawaken memories with the ability to keep our oral traditions alive. The meaning making comes from what our elders share with us (Archibald 2008) as a metaphor because culture is what truly connects us

to a better understanding of our own medicine. It is the bundles that we each keep close to our hearts that are different for everyone even those going through the same process. Museum collections have stories within each of the artifacts. An artifact has a beginning story and an end, as they make their way into our holding spaces. The designs tell us a story of long ago, and even the ceremonial items, drawings, and sand paintings go beyond what we see with our eyes.

> Therefore, every indigenous object in the museum belongs to an ancestor or will belong to an ancestor after they leave this world. Musealization does not deprive indigenous objects of their nature, but we should acquire this knowledge when musealization takes place. This is not a matter of belief – what I believe or not believe – but of respecting indigenous knowledge. (Cury, 2019, p. 100)

The belief, for most Navajos, is that our traditional knowledge is passed orally through stories, especially when sitting in ceremony, listening to the prayers uttered, and the songs being sung. The outcomes of collecting Indigenous knowledge through recordings has become pivotal as we began to create an archive of what can essentially become a restricted collection for our nation, so that our children and grandchildren have the necessary resources and tools at their discretion.

Colonization has had its impact on many things that we do and perform today. One particular photographer and author is Edward S. Curtis, who exposed what many tribes considered sacred. His photographs depicted some of our most sacred ceremonies, for example, the night ceremony. The Holy People that are depicted in this particular ceremony were photographed up closely, with no regard. We always refrain from photographing such events, as it takes the spirituality away from what is happening for the patient in this

ceremony. I will not go into detail about how this ceremony is conducted because of the cultural sensitivity behind it. What is meant to be held sacred will always be sacred because of how revered this ceremony is. This is not taught in our schools, as you cannot teach how to be Navajo, but here at Diné College, our students have an opportunity to learn about certain areas of cultural significance. Many institutions have challenged the way we look at collections today, and here at Diné College, the intent of keeping Navajo first is the forefront of our philosophy. Over the years, the college has certainly expanded on the academic side of this view point, but because of the degree and certificate programs in Diné Education, we know that decolonization has been taking place since the inception of the college because programs are based on language and culture first.

Over the years, as the shifting of re-culturalization has happened, we understand that our stories and connections to our way of life have been lost because of the colonization that took place. Today, we have an opportunity to regain and restore our culture with what we have left from our current Indigenous knowledge bearers, practitioners, and culture keepers. The opportunity to create a living collection of our oral traditions is available for us to maintain and again adapt to the continuation of relearning our language and moving the culture forward.

The context in which our stories are shared in our Native language is one that is easily lost when translating to English. Oral tradition "reflects the belief system and consciousness of a people. It is the tradition based upon spoken language, but it is more than that, too" (Archibald, 2008, p. 25). Finding that significance behind the meaning making takes the approach of how elders concentrate on how to interest the child so that they stay engaged in the context of what is being taught (p. 81). I agree that the blessings are more compelling

when something of this nature is shared in stories and songs, and even our prayers are reflective of the nature in balance and I believe that that is what we are reminded of in this beautiful passage. And while I continued singing and dancing, I learned more from my ancestors, who left their stories behind for me to hear and remember everything I could, (Whiteduck, 2013, p.80). The stories serve as a reminder that we even today, we continue to dance and sing, just as we were taught. This is a process of decolonization in practice, as it is part of the culture that keeps moving forward.

Stories shared in ceremonies are vivid as we sit next to the fire watching the imagery dance on the ho'ghάán na'mazí (hogan walls). I am reminded of a story that was told as we danced across the stage when I traveled with my brother Robert Mirabal from Taos Pueblo. The lyrics were the colors of the paint, and we were the paint to canvas, so when sitting in ceremony or even around the table, listening to the language and the context of the stories, there is a very different feeling. It calms the heart and brings balance to the soul. That is what makes the use of language very different. Story work in our language is more than context; it is a comfort one cannot describe in words, and the complexity of balance becomes the morals in which we learn.

Formal education was introduced to the original peoples of North America in a brutal way, and I think many of us can agree on this as we have all heard the stories. For the Navajo Nation, it was in Bosque Redondo when the Navajos were told that they would have the opportunity to receive an education because it was part of the establishment written into the treaty of 1868. Schools and education systems that were implemented became the tools used to assimilate our people into the dominant society. School officials enforced attendance, tribal languages were not allowed to be spoken, and traditions were labeled as an enemy of

progress thus making Indian people culturally unrecognizable (Eder & Reyhner, 1988). However, many people do not understand that the repercussions of these events would be felt for years to come. This was not the reason for writing this dissertation; instead, I felt the need to acknowledge these historical traumas and to heal and move forward. In order to do so, we have had to acknowledge these events to begin the healing process in order to move forward.

As Dr. Doreen Bird (2018), a Kewa'meh scholar wrote, "I believe we can incorporate land, language and Indigenous knowledges, including spirituality, into a culturally tailored research and educational systems. It is made specifically for indigenous populations that would benefit them for generations to come" (p. 18). Accordingly, museums in tribal colleges and cultural centers around the country have taken measures into their own hands to finally portray the truth of our own culture and how those collections of stories, language, and traditional knowledge will sustain the heritage of the people, from one nation to another.

This chapter covers the following topics:

1) education of American Indian children and youth,

2) the history of higher education of the Navajo Nation,

3) the birth of American Indian museums,

4) the history of tribal higher education institutions and the growth among tribes across America, as well as the

5) development of tribal museums and cultural centers, whose main focuses are on the revitalization of culture and language.

Many of the resources I used in this review are from books and journal articles from different repositories worldwide, and several dissertations by Indigenous scholars and museum professionals from the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Education of American Indian Children and Youth: A Snapshot

Richard Henry Pratt founded the Carlisle Indian Industrial School on November 1, 1879, intending to destroy the cultural foundation of Native America (Trafzer et al., 2006). The history of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School is one that many are still unfamiliar with and one that future generations will come to know better. According to Child (2000) "early in the era of forced assimilation, coercion was often used to gather Indian children to the far-away school" (p. 13).

Child (2014) writes that, "… boarding schools are the best monument to their history because of the cruelty of dispossession but with so much power to educate us about American Indian survival, past and present" (p. 238). Unfortunately, "most researchers will emphasize the intergenerational impacts, but never focus on the personal narratives" (White, 2018, p. 122) of those who attended and/or taught at Carlisle. Stories help us to understand the legacy and impact of Carlisle, but we must also be responsible for how those stories are shared. Keahone (2008) described Pratt's belief that "the Indian is born an inevitable savage; American Indians are born blank" (p. 6). Our culture is undeniably the most crucial part of our lives, and those very teachings are what have sustained us, even in moments of genocide and atrocities that have been committed against us.

According to the children of my late great, grandfather, Tom Torlino, when he arrived at Carlisle,

> They took photos of us, with a "biligaana" (White man). He was always around, watching us and listening. It was hard to speak their language at first. They took us into a room, and that was where they cut my hair. They made me wash up, but the brown skin did not come off. They put clothes on some of us, but they were big. I was

> a big man, so the clothes had to be fixed. We were herded to different areas. Some of the children tried to run away but were brought back. Some of them never came back. (Francis Tolino, 2011)

My great Grandfahter attended Carlisle, with 158 students graduating. One of the most shocking aspects of this boarding school was the use of an "outing system" (where students were), which made it easier for many students to become cheap labor for the White homes they entered and worked in (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). "Civilizing" Indian children was more manageable when they were farther away from tribal ways and their relatives until they finished their educational program (Child, 2000). Assimilation became the law of the land, as the federal government did not see our way of life as sustainable. Listening to these stories firsthand when I was growing up was always one of my favorite activities. I still often sit and imagine what it must have been like. My late, great grandfather, Francis Tolino, passed away a few years ago. I was lucky to record what I did while I was completing my master's degree (2009 to 2011).

Today, several Bureau of Indian schools operate on the Navajo Nation; however, in my case, I was forced to attend the Santa Fe Indian School for one year (1992). It was a decision my biological mother made, perhaps because she was sent to Chalaco Indian School in Oklahoma, where my grandmother also attended school. My mother thought attending a boarding school would instill a sense of independence in me, but it was not what I wanted. It allowed me to feel the sorrow and heartache of being away from my grandmother. I remember standing on the top of the metal staircase outside the back of the dorm, looking west – wishing I could be back inside the four sacred mountains. I was young and did not know that I would return to Santa Fe later to attain my first college degree.

Over the years, a number of government studies have described the condition of education for American Indians. In 1928, one of the most well-known studies, the *Meriam Report,* concluded that the Indian schools that were established on some of the reservations that Native students attended were of the poorest quality. It was reported to the U.S. Department of the Interior's Indian Office that there should be better protection against poverty in Indian Country (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Hoke Denetsoie, a Navajo man, reflected on his experience, which also is reflective of the experience of many other Native students in government-sponsored schools: "Conditions at the school were bad; they did not feed us enough, so we were always hungry or sick. It was cold in the wintertime, and they marched us around like we were in the military" (Reyhner & Eder, p. 168). It did not help that many children were losing their lives because of the epidemics they also faced in the schools.

Traditional Approaches to Educating American Indian Children

For many Navajo children, our first classroom is the ho'ghάán (hogan) floor, which is the earth itself. Our prayers and songs help us communicate with the natural elements that encompass our way of life and allow us to balance who we become. The knowledge we gain in Western institutions helps us to gain a better understanding of what we can learn and continue to help our children and grandchildren succeed. However, there is often an abrupt shift from traditional Navajo teachings and ways of learning to western schools and classrooms.

Most often, and especially these days, we are taught to use the English language first. In our homes, it is much different. Our native language comes first. We are taught very young to use our clans to distinguish who we are, we are taught to greet each other with k'e. Today, sadly, many of our children cannot speak to their clans, which is causing bigger

problems. Western schooling is much about what happens in a classroom and uses a standardized curriculum based on viewpoints that do not allow for traditional teachings to be incorporated, especially the language. Here at Diné College, I have found ways to implement both cultural teachings and language into what is taught in the museum internship class. It gives my students a better understanding of what this class is about from both perspectives of what happens behind the scenes of a museum and how to prepare for their exhibit, when the time comes.

Indigenous education and museums go hand in hand. The rich history of our people sadly lies dormant in museums around the world, but for those institutions that have collections, like Diné College, the rebirth of these items can begin now. Diné College, having been built on the philosophy of Ho'zhoo'jíí nanitiin (Beauty Way) and Na'yeh'jíí nanitiin (Protection Way), helps to balance our understanding of our holistic well-being and our emergence stories at Hajiinei (the birthplace) describe our oral accounts of evolution (Davidson, 2015, p. 38), and based upon that, it is how our Diné fundamental laws were constructed. Diné fundamental law is how our nation develops its laws, based on the following: traditional law, customary law, natural law, and common law.

The drawings and sand paintings, which fall under traditional law, are part of a significant collection housed at Diné College. This collection ties back to narratives of why we must capture their importance now more than ever. Navajo Community College was established with the belief that culture and language were at the forefront of its mission. The museum was created as part of Navajo Community College and opened in 1978.

The Birth of American Indian Museums

Museums have been and continue to be "harrowing places for Native peoples" (Lonetree, 2012, p. 1). We understand this, because of the way in which stories of Native people have been made to look like we were vanishing culture, when indeed that has been the opposite narrative, as most cultures are still kept alive because of the richness of what they have been able to preserve. However, with many changes within the development of tribal museums, many now seek community input, and work to create safe spaces for artifacts and objects and respect their tribal sovereignty. They also operate and share knowledge and history through Native lenses.

In the late 1930s, Mary Cabot Wheelwright founded the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe, New Mexico. In 1921, she was introduced to Hastiin Klah, who was a Navajo Medicine Man, by Arthur and Frances Newcomb, traders on the Navajo Nation. Hastiin Klah witnessed a time when children were taken away from their families and placed in boarding schools. He felt compelled to start a collection of traditional ceremonial sandpainting panels and tapestries that became permanent acquisitions stored within the Wheelwright Museum. The documentation of this collection was critical to him and Ms. Wheelwright and was more about their thoughts for the future and how the Diné people would benefit from it.

Today this collection is housed at Diné College. In 1977, in the effort to repatriate items of cultural patrimony and sacred objects (NAGPRA, 1992), the Wheelwright Museum embarked on an independent repatriation (voluntary basis) of the sand-painting panels and jísh (items of cultural patrimony and sacred objects) to Navajo Community College (Casey, p.5, 1996); here these items continue to be preserved and maintained. The Wheelwright

Museum augmented their standard policies and practices as a way of respecting Navajo ways of life, culture, and people. Today, these sand painting panels are still in existence and are used for preserving ceremonies and helping our practitioners to remember the use of imagery. The jísh, however, have been returned to the earth or shared with other practitioners who utilize them in their ceremonies.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) was passed in 1990. This gave American Indians and Native Hawaiians the right to obtain "human remains, items of cultural patrimony, sacred objects, and funerary objects" (section 3002). Furthermore,

> With this law, Congress sought to encourage a continuing dialogue between museums and Indian Tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations and to promote a greater understanding between the groups while at the same time recognizing the essential function museums serve in society by preserving the past. (U.S. Senate Report 101-473)

During the 1990s and 2000s, we have seen many new Indigenous professionals enter a career path that helps us identify clearly the stories of our artifacts and other sacred objects. Dr. Nancy Mithlo, who was one of my professors at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, decided to enter this unique field at an early age. Since then, she has witnessed a number of social changes and impacts. In response, Dr. Mithlo shared the words of the late Edmund J. Ladd from Zuni Pueblo, "To curate simply means to take care of" (2004, p. 745). The way we handle our sacred objects is different from the museum specialist who believes that these objects will last forever. Realistically, these objects will eventually "…disintegrate and deteriorate on their own" (p. 744). They will essentially reenter the

afterworld. As Navajo, we know that not everything lasts, and, traditionally, when we are done using what we use, we give it back to the earth because it has served its purpose.

Cultural centers serve a similar purpose by recognizing the importance of museum collections. Both museum and cultural centers serve with the purpose of revitalizing culture and language because this goes hand in hand with community members, practitioners, Knowledge Keepers, and teachers (Chavez Lamar, 2019). Combining the story keepers and collections makes way for our natural resources to continue living the life they need because, eventually, these pieces will, one day, make their way home. It is truly the evolution of what takes place naturally.

This natural connection, which becomes a part of our work with each piece, is what we as Indigenous museum professionals understand. Through these collections we have made way for connecting ourselves to each object. These experiences are unlike any other because of the "…prayer, song, touch, or another spiritual stewardslhip by a descendant's community member(s) and that care is tended to in a special manner" (Chavez Lamar, 2019, p. 4). As we understand, each piece represents a story and life of its own; in every carving, textile, painting, pottery, or sculpture, there is life, especially our objects of cultural patrimony, funerary objects, and even human remains. [However, it is important to …] keep in mind that not all tribes perceive human remains the same way. Early anthropologists might suggest that it was a propelled belief in "salvage anthropology" (Mithlo, 2004, p. 748); this allowed them to collect our material culture before they believed it could vanish.

In addition to tribal museums, many cultural centers are located within city limits (Fuller & Fabricius, 1992). However, the growth of these urban cultural centers across Indian Country is challenged by social and economic development. In contrast, on the Navajo

reservation, we have several museum locations because of the National Park Service and their involvement in Canyon de Chelly, Monument Valley, Navajo National Park, Navajo Nation Park Entrance, and the Lake Powell National Park. These parks have allowed jobs to be created on the Navajo Nation, and as part of economic growth, it sustains the people in these locations. National Parks have even allowed for entrepreneurial opportunities for the people, including many Navajo Tours offered by area families and individuals who know the stories of the place.

American Indian Higher Education and the Growth of Tribal College and Universities

In the 1960s, the self-determination era took place following the termination era in which the federal government tried to dismantle Indian people and their cultural ways. This movement included the family from Round Rock, Arizona and Robert Roessel, Jr., a non-Native who was the director of the Center for Indian Education at Arizona State University. The Roessel family was instrumental, along with then tribal officials and the Navajo Nation's Chairman, Rough Rock Demonstration School was established, followed by the establishment of Navajo Community College in 1968 in Many Farms, Arizona. The curriculum offered in the college was intended to help individuals become familiar with jobs that were being created on the Navajo Nation. Programs, including Animal Husbandry, Nursing Assistance, Clerical and Accounting studies, and Navajo Studies were all offered from a Navajo perspective, keeping language and culture as a significant part of the teachings. Today, Navajo Community College, now named Diné College, continues to be recognized as the root of the Tribal College and University (TCU) movement.

According to Harry Walters (1996), the first director, the Ned Hatathli Museum was opened at Navajo Community College in 1978. The museum was started by individual

collectors donating items to the museum to keep as part of the collection. Today, over 300 objects remain consisting of pottery, basketry, jewelry, sacred objects, and articles of cultural patrimony. Handling of items is kept to a minimum and foot traffic is carefully monitored. This helps to preserve and grow the collection.

As a Native American state senator from Jemez Pueblo, Benny Shendo (2021). once said, “Do not teach me about my culture but use my culture to teach me.” A similar perspective was offered by Ron His Horse Is Thunder, a former president of Sitting Bull College, during his commencement address at the Institute of American Indian Arts in 2005. His speech is one that I reflect upon, remembering how he told graduates, “You are all the next generation of storytellers.” Storytelling is a larger part of who we are. It is what sustains our culture and as we continue to grow into the future our stories will become relevant, just as our ancestors’ stories continue today.

Museums and Cultural Centers Among Tribes Continue to Grow

To date, there are 236 tribal museums in the United States (ATALM, 2021). For many years, Indigenous people have brought innovative ideas to the development of relationships and expertise in the museum field. It has been a rapidly changing movement since the 1990s. Alice Sadongei (2021), who worked with many Arizona tribal museums, explained, “the museum field can benefit from being aware of Indigenous ethics, particularly when collaborating with tribal communities regarding exhibition development, repatriation, and program development” (p. 2). This helps tribes share the understanding and knowledge of their locations and the local culture.

Unfortunately, many of the collections housed in museums have lost the context of their stories, but their lives are still very much precious to the work we do today to keep

language and culture as part of what we do in everyday life. Each individual item has a breath and was created for a purpose. The artwork we see and create embodies every aspect of learning as we do in the classroom. The only difference is that it cannot be read in a book, only felt in the spirit of your mind.

Tribal museums introduce our culturally responsive methods and processes, making connections to each of our artifacts, objects, and sacred items. Our connections are not just about the items, but also holistically connecting on a spiritual level, so that we listen to the objects and learn how to take care of them using culturally responsive methods and processes. When we understand what cultural responsiveness is from an Indigenous perspective, we know that our ethics must be expressed through our cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs that were manifested in our social epistemologies, which are inclusive of familial relationality, language, religion, community organization, and the phenomena of both the spiritual and natural world (Sadongei, 2021). Epistemologies and axiology go hand in hand as we begin to understand the responsibility we have in maintaining our collections and using them to educate, as well as to preserve and conserve our language and culture. This speaks to how we think about the past and its relationships to these collections as well as the relational accountability we have to our language and culture.

Much of the work we use to help identify objects requires language because of their names. The usage of each object may also require prayer or song before handling. Having knowledge of Native language is important because some objects have no English translations, therefore the use of the traditional name becomes an essential part of identifying the artifact properly. Nicholas (2010), a Hopi scholar, also reminds us, like Ortiz (1992), that language asserts one’s identity and the connection to culture and the transmission of cultural

values alongside ethics, and that knowing where we come is tied to our interactions, routines, and practices.

Language and Culture Reclamation

Language and culture reclamation is an act of decolonization. By keeping the connection to our identity, practicing our cultural teachings, and enacting our lives through stories, we reclaim our existence. As Hopi scholar Dr. Sheilah Nicolas (2019) describes, many Native peoples experience a "rude awakening" due to the language shifts they encounter. According to Dr. Nicholas (2019), "Although Hopilavayi was my first language, as a graduate student, I found myself unable to recall the language I had spoken with ease as a child. I had undergone language shift and evident cultural disconnect" (p. 145). As Chew et al. (2019) described, the ways in which Indigenous communities enact language and cultural continuance (page 137) is a complex process. As Freire (1999) argued,

> Hope as it happens, is so important for our existence, individual and social. We must take every care not to experience it in a mistaken form and thereby allow it to slip toward hopelessness and despair. They both are the consequence and cause of inaction and immobilism. (p. 9)

Nicholas' story resonates with me as I reflect on my experience moving home after the loss of my grandfather. It was difficult for me to find my Native language again. This made me feel disconnected from my culture and community. I spent ten years living in the city, away from the Navajo Nation. I did not have a use for the Navajo language after attaining my undergraduate degrees. I felt compelled to live in the city. I did not realize the impact of this decision until I came home and applied for a job with the Navajo Nation. I was hired at my local Chapter House because it was the only job I could find. I was disappointed

because I struggled daily with the language. I had to find my muscle memory, but digging deep was not as easy as I thought.

Like Nicolas, I asked myself, “where did my language go?” She explained that her professor at the time commented, “it had not gone anywhere, but simply was waiting to be resurfaced – to be spoken again and to become part of her living being” (Nicolas, 2019, p. 145). As I was reading this, it simply brought tears to my eyes because that is what happens. When I came to Diné College, something I had desired for so long was reawakened in me. I came back to not only what I love, but to what truly inspired me, to reconnect with my culture and my language. In January 2023, I celebrated 11 years in this role, and I can say that every day is truly an inspiration driven by my connections to our way of life.

I am including this here, in this section because I did not use the language for the ten years that I was away from home. It took me almost three years to finally reconnect to the language itself, to become a good speaker again. Today that is much different, as I have relearned but I no longer consider myself a fluent speaker. It’s important to understand this, because many of us who have chosen the road of becoming, often move away from home. This makes it difficult for some, but I consider myself blessed to be able to have moved home and started working with practitioners, which allows me to use the language more. As we move into the next chapters, you will begin to see the transitions I make, even as I work to preserve language and culture in my career field.

Summary

Academic rigor and traditional knowledge and stories go hand in hand. Many times as Indigenous people we are made to feel as if our own theories and stories do not matter; however, it is important to note that we cannot have one without the other. The reviews of

cultural knowledge are based on the teachings that are gathered through stories, during our ceremonies, which were my primary settings, as I grew up attending many of them with my late grandmothers. These stories included morals and teachings. Because of the songs and prayers that were offered we have the cultural knowledges we possess today. These are lessons I use today in my work as a museum curator. In this role, it is imperative for me to know and understand imagery based on ceremony, and to have a basic understanding of the uses of the ceremonies.

Chapter Three

Research Design

Corn Grinding Preparation (Alkáád be'adoolnilíí'gíí)

This chapter describes the use of Indigenous methodology as a reliable method to construct my research. Using cultural history and knowledge will show how tribal colleges and universities impact their respective nations as community resources or "baskets" as a means for holding and retaining collections that are precious to who we are as Indigenous people. Māori elders and knowledge holders believe that there are three baskets of knowledge, one specifically linked to the arts. "Te Kete Aronui is one of the three baskets of knowledge and pertains to love, peace and the arts and crafts. Furthermore, they are linked through whakapapa" (Taituha, 2014, p. 15). This concept is also tied to the oral narrative, aligned directly to story work, which captures our stories as Navajo people, because oral accounts speak to the creation stories, and like Māori people, we believe greatly in those narratives that interweave our knowledge systems with our culture and language.

My methodology is Indigenous story work (Archibald, 2008; Davidson, 2016), which was guided by collecting and recording stories and reiterating the importance of what cultural knowledge, alongside museum collections, contributes to a way of life and why it is essential for the retention of language and culture. The utilization of story work also allows me to conduct interviews, sharing circles, and a circling back process, especially for discussing the more culturally sensitive areas captured within interviews or stories about the Navajo way of life. Story work allows Indigenous researchers to gather information from Indigenous knowledge systems and acknowledges that our stories are as relevant as what is taught in western academia. There is an emotional connection to specific stories we remember first.

From there, other connections are made physically, intellectually, and spiritually (Archibald, 2008).

Dr. JoAnn Archibald's story work shows the intrinsic value of what is expected in understanding respect, responsibility, and reciprocity (Wilson, 2008). She is an Indigenous scholar at the University of British Columbia, born in Chilliwack, Canada. Wilson also includes respecting cultural protocols and acknowledging and reclaiming our own ways of doing traditional research, including through story. Unfortunately, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many traditional practitioners lost their lives and took an abundance of cultural knowledge, oral history, and stories of their way of life with them.

Traditionally, it is up to families to share knowledge among their clan and interested persons. As apprentices, they gain an understanding of special ceremonies conducted throughout the year and seasonally. Passing on oral histories and traditional teachings and moving our people forward is what we have done from one generation to the next. The traditional language and culture of the people must continue. Gathering stories related to the work of one tribal college museum will enhance understanding of this process and the role played by tribal colleges.

Research Questions

The following research questions that guided my study are critical to assisting others in understanding the importance of collecting museum artifacts, including ethnographic, archeological, cultural, and traditional objects. Along with archiving the stories of artifacts, I maintain the collection for future use by cultural practitioners, apprentices, and others wishing to learn the heritage and knowledge that has sustained our people well over seven generations. The questions that guide this study are:

1. Why is it essential for our tribal college (Diné College) to collect and house cultural knowledge?

2. How can Diné College collaborate with our local Navajo tribal museums, cultural centers, knowledge bearers, and our local communities to revitalize our language and culture?

Most tribal colleges or universities do not have museums, with the exception of cultural centers have been incorporated into a few campuses in the United States. Eight of these TCUs have existing collections within their cultural centers or museums. These centers were established to create cultural and linguistic programs for the purpose of revitalizing and, in essence, helping with "re-culturalization," meaning that over time, we continue to adapt to the evolution of our changing culture and tradition. It is also a practice among First Nations people in Canada, preparing as a next step for the conversations to be brought to the table to help form new policies, documentation, and strategies for the people (Siyám, 2021). For example, we have accepted changes that have been made to the way we speak and practice culture from one generation to the next. Variation in ceremonies and the way that they are conducted have also taken place. An example is the Night Way ceremony. Before the 1950s, men predominately participated in this ceremony with no regard to gender roles. Social impacts from the western viewpoint became evident as women began to play a bigger role in society. Therefore, women began helping with the dances in their original roles. Men no longer had to play the female in such a way because of a significant change in the gender identification of deities. This also includes the names by which females and two spirits can be identified.

Mode of Inquiry: Indigenous Qualitative Research

As Indigenous people, we have many ways of asking and seeking information that allow us to be respectful in the way in which we sit and listen. When I was growing up, my grandmother always told us stories about how important it was to sit and listen, especially in ceremonies. She reiterated:

> Put on your skirt, wear your hair in a tsí'yéél (traditional hair bun), and sit up straight. Listen closely to the stories and the songs that go together. That is how you should learn to pray because later in life, you will use it, too.

As I reflect on my life thus far, I am happy that I learned what I did from many of the elders I spent time with, whether it was making bread with them, cutting meat, preparing ceremonial foods, or just sitting with them and listening to them talk with my cheis (grandpas) and ma'sanís (grandmas). I like to think that it is because of them that I will be able to pass along their teachings, which have become mine today. This is reciprocity in motion and what weaves our basket of blessings together.

Tachine (2018) describes this methodology as skillfully being passed on through storytelling. Stories vary from one location to another on the Navajo Nation, which is organized into five agencies. What one might know and understand from Western agencies could differ from what another knows from Northern and Eastern agencies. The ways in which stories are told often give us insight and morals. Kovach (2009) reminded us that "stories are vessels for passing along teachings, medicines, and practices" (p. 95). Traditional knowledge systems and stories give way for morals to be understood and deepen the sense of learning.

Indigenous qualitative research is best described as situating oneself within the area in order to ground oneself, specifically when doing research through the lens of interconnectedness, using relationality among participants and ways of looking at the process of gathering data. It recognizes awareness using tribal methodologies, which appear consistently throughout my research. Indigenous inquiry involves "specific multilayered preparations particular to each researcher. There is no formula (nor could there be), but it counts if an elder should ask, 'Why did you do that research, and why did you do it that way?'" (Kovach, 2009, p. 109). "Gathering one's medicine" is a metaphor for helping our children to see the intrinsic light, for helping them understand their identity. In this learning process, it is through community and teaching, often through the story, that we have a better understanding of community sharing. The passing of knowledge across generations occurs because of the morals shared. LaDonna Harris introduced "what is your medicine" to me in 2008 when I became a member of the Americans for Indian Opportunity Ambassador program. I have since realized what this means to me. With what I have gathered in my traditional knowledge and western academic learning, it is what I often refer to as "my medicine." Knowledge that is passed on communally or among other Indigenous knowledge and epistemologies can be standardized since it is researcher-dependent on a much larger scale (Kovach, 2009, p. 56).

As Indigenous women, the narration of our stories has become a powerful stance in sharing who we are, what we are, and what connects us to a more incredible passage of our lifeways. This story work methodology aims to capture the essence of the morals behind the story to understand what brings collections together for the TCUs and what that represents to the individual learning how to maintain a culturally significant collection. The adaptation of

policies to house intricate knowledge systems as intellectual properties will help maintain restrictions that are culturally sensitive to the general public and will allow our institution to keep track of who has the privilege to utilize these precious collections. For many years, ceremonies and traditional artifacts have been deconstructed as works of art. Still, from a cultural standpoint, specific sensitivities cause ceremonial art to be destroyed when the ceremony has concluded. With Indigenous inquiry, we also know that there are limitations to what we deem sacred and that are for our eyes only.

Research Philosophy: Diné Value System and the Four Rs

As a Navajo/Pueblo woman, I firmly believe we walk in balance with the world around us. Part of the nurturing takes place in how we are guided by our matriarchs, the mothers in our societies. Our mothers hand down our clans. My first clan is who I am, and my second is who I am born for. I also recognize my maternal grandfather's and paternal grandfather's clan; this is where I identify myself in terms of kinship. Lynch (1987) and Hodge (1896) refer to the clan system as what is relationally important in how we identify ourselves and the kin who make up the relationship we have communally.

The Diné Value System is based on certain principles that include Nitsáhákees (Thinking), Nahat'á (Planning), Iiná (Life), and Siihasin (Wisdom). Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoo (the practice of duality and balance of gender roles) is the display that is brought together holistically in the Foundation of Diné Fundamental Law (1N.N.C. §§201-206). Diné Fundamental Law embodies traditional, customary, natural, and common law to the Navajo people. The fundamental values and principles are declared in this way of life through these laws.

Growing up with Diné values and having been raised traditionally, I strongly feel that in a time like today it is essential to use my Indigenous values, perspective, and knowledge in my dissertation. I strongly agree "… that inclusion of Indigenous research requires multiple strategies for reconsidering the existing system" (Kovach, 2009, p. 157). Today, amid a dynamic relationship between cultural concepts and academia, we stand on our ancestors' foundations, our true identity as Indigenous people.

Cultural identity and inclusion are important to my study because over the last twenty years more Indigenous theories, concepts, methods, and ideologies have been restored in how we practice the care for our precious collections. The reintroduction of cultural practices has become the prominent approach because we respect the ancestors and elders who created items that are now housed in museum collections worldwide. Approaches include spiritual ways of thinking and doing and connectedness to our artifacts, sacred objects, and cultural patrimony, especially for funerary objects.

Museum collections are the stories that connect us to a world beyond what is here today. Our culture and language are retained through these items. Therefore, it is only appropriate to maintain their stories so that our culture and language survive. This is an example of what Cajete (2015) describes as "coming back to our power" (p. 124) and exercising our true sovereignty. In academia, there was a time when it was difficult to express the importance of our culture and language. However, our Native philosophies have given us the power to become who we need to be and who we will continue to be as we participate in academic programs such as the Native American Leadership in Education (NALE) doctoral cohort at the University of New Mexico.

As a Navajo woman, I was raised with the foundation of knowing who I am and that everything around me has meaning and understanding. The three Rs - "respect, relationality, and reciprocity" – discussed by Wilson (2008) are similar to the values I learned from being an ambassador with Americans for Indian Opportunity (1993). However, the fourth R added is reflection. Each one of these values represents the continual cycle we live in. Respect is the homage we pay to one another in our relationships, and with that comes the reciprocation of the many blessings we come across in our daily endeavors. At the end of each day, season, and year, we reflect on our steps in gathering medicine for the next generations as our journey continues.

In reflecting on relationality, Manuelito-Kerkvliet (2015) reminds us of Diné values and integrity and how she incorporates these values into her work as an administrator. For her, everything starts from the bottom up as well as from the top down. Knowing and understanding relationality also includes everything around us, from the earth inside our ho'ghaan (Hogan) to the land, animals, and even the spirit of our material goods. We treat everything with respect. Respect is not just about protocols we have learned such as "may I, please, and thank you," but also about the recognition of the importance of sitting and listening and being mindful as elders share personal stories and morals.

In my research, I used k'e (Navajo extension of relationship) to express myself, extending a heartfelt handshake as a sign of respect in order to gain trust from the individuals I hoped to interview. As a researcher, I hope the relationships established allow me to develop further as a human being. Reciprocity is the demonstration of cause and effect as we strive for balance and is cyclical in understanding that all things are connected. In the museum field, this is an understanding that we learn, but more profoundly, as Indigenous

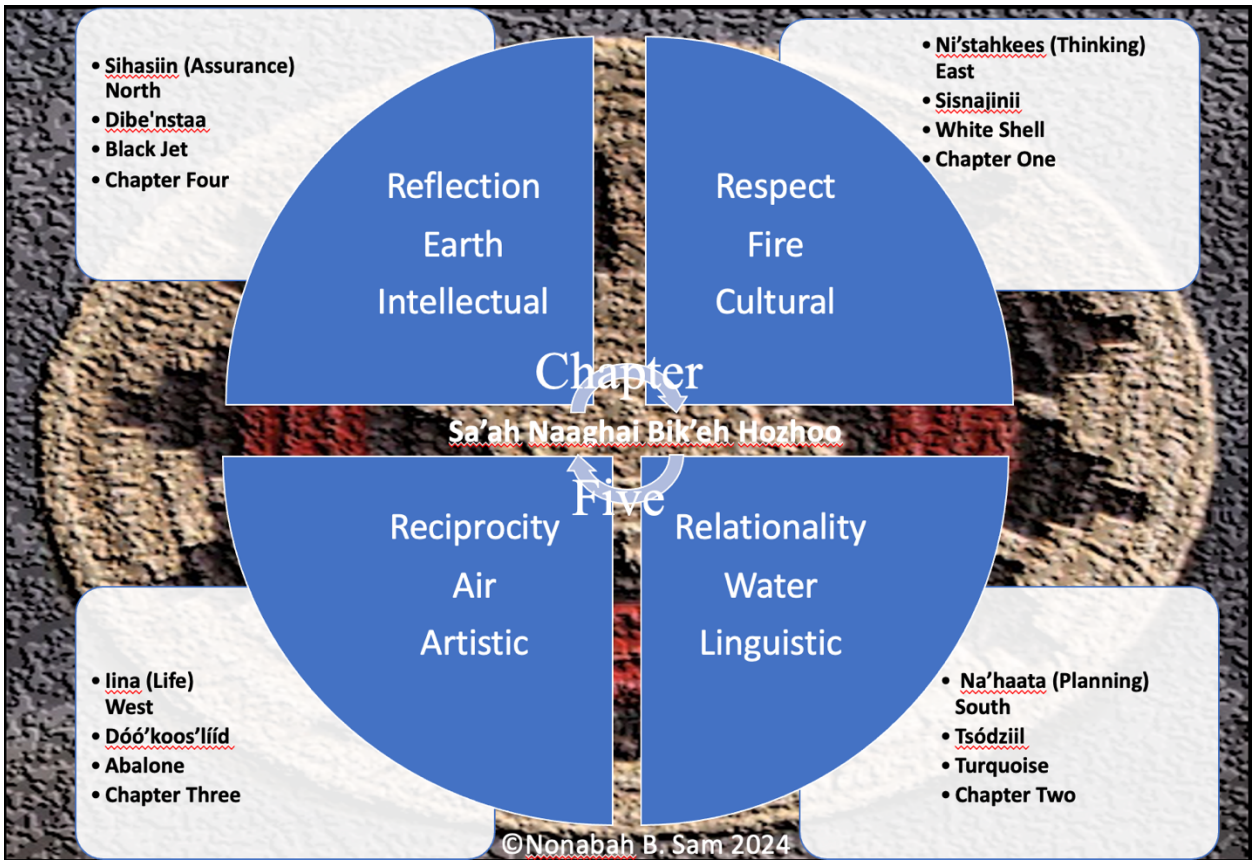
people, the connection is inherent. What we are taught is what we continue to teach. That balance is again demonstrated in Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoo (journeying to old age in beauty, could be the closest definition). It is also known as SNBH. As Wilson (2008) explained, "Indigenous scholars are making clear lists of criteria so that their research will be honored and respected by their own people" (p. 59). Over the last few years, Indigenous scholars have paved the way for individuals like me; because of this, I have observed more individuals in Indian Country attaining their degrees and honoring their Tribal Nations and communities.

This paradigm that I use in my research is based on the philosophy of the Diné. We move in a clockwise direction. Based on the knowledge gained over the last few years in my doctoral journey, I wanted to display a framework that consisted of my own thoughts and how I see my work as a researcher come to fruition. It is the culmination of thoughts and elements, combined with four pillars, which are Cultural, Linguistic, Artistic, and Intellectual, that are essential to Secatero's (2009) Well-Being Model. This model honors the way Diné think as traditionalists. It is also rooted in Diné Fundamental Law.
Similarly, Diné College's principles are based on ni'stahkees (thinking), na'haata (planning), iina (life), and sihasiin (assurance) and tied together with Sa'ah Naaghai Bik'eh Hozhoo (journeying to old age in beauty). SNBHs could be represented, in many ways, including state of being or existence or what we know as harmony or balance (Werito, 2014). Each of these, combined with elements, directions, and colors, brings my research paradigm together to better understand what occurs during the research process. This paradigm (see Figure 1) also has four Rs that tie this sacred bundle together. In the Diné way, a sacred bundle is comprised of many different instruments and elements that give it life. To talk about what it

all includes is not completely open due to the sensitivity and the prayers and songs that it also includes, but one important aspect of this bundle is how we can be inclusive of research from a Diné perspective, using traditional mannerisms to obtain and measure data. It is important to understand that we are very careful in our steps to create our bundles and how we carry them, even as Indigenous knowledge holders.

Figure 1

Research Paradigm



Site of Study

Because I work and reside on the Navajo Nation, this is where I conducted my study. Diné College, formerly known as Navajo Community College, started at Many Farms Boarding school, which is still there today. The doors opened in July of 1968 and then

transitioned to Tsaile, Arizona in 1972 where the late Charlie Benallie, a Navajo traditional practitioner, donated the land. In Chapter Two, I discussed the foundation of the college and how it began. The Ned Hatathli Museum opened in 1978 as part of the college and in 2013, opened the doors to their new Ruth and Bob Roessel Archive Building at the main campus. This is where the collections for both the archives and museum are currently housed and protected.

Diné College is "rooted in Diné language and culture; the mission of the college is to advance quality post-secondary student learning and development to ensure the well-being of the Diné People" (www.dinecollege.edu). One of the many reasons I have returned home to work with my people is to remain grounded in my culture and language and connected to history. It was never a hard choice for me to return to the nation over ten years ago, and today I strive to be a teacher and cultural knowledge bearer through my career and along the corn pollen path designed for me. Like my students, relationality connects us so they may learn our ways. My research is conducted for them and creates a path for others who want to follow; may this open the door for them to step through. The School of Diné Studies and Education is one component of the college that is heavily focused on culture and language. The school offers several associate and bachelor's degrees as well as classes in Navajo History, Leadership, Human Relations, Governance, Navajo Language, and Diné Studies, areas that are particularly important to my study. However, the college does not yet have a museum studies program. I hope to be able to develop a unique program dedicated to preserving our culture from a Diné perspective as we continue to build Indigenous concepts and ways of caring for our museum collections.

The Ned Hatathli Cultural Center is where the college's museum is located. This space is uniquely designed to give students direction and understanding of why staying closely connected to the culture and foundation of our heritage language is essential. The permanent gallery space is shaped like that of our ho'ghaan (hogan). In a space with soft earth tones, we display the items from our collections that discuss the importance of the male and female roles. This also encapsulates the functions of duality.

Celebrating 56 years in 2024, the college has grown in many different aspects, as this was the dream of the late Ruth Roessel. Today her son, Dr. Charles Monty Roessel, is the President of Diné College. He explained,

> Indian education runs deep in my family. My parents, Bob and Ruth Roessel, w[ere] pioneers during the Indian self-determination era. They started the first Indian community-controlled school at Rough Rock, Arizona, and in 1968, Navajo Community College (NCC) was the first tribal college. This triumph of educational self-determination appealed to the world because it was an act of resistance to the political might of the United States. This moment of transformation is personal. It impacted me. I tell people I didn't choose to follow in my parents' footsteps, but as I look back on the past two decades, I realize that I am only fooling myself. I grew up listening to tribal council meetings as the council debated starting Rough Rock Demonstration School and NCC. (Roessel, 2018, p. 178)

Dr. Roessel's support for his staff and faculty has been an inspiration from when we first met. The immense humbleness and compassion he speaks with only shows the college part of the purpose he came back to the Navajo Nation to fulfill for his family. As Diné, our

roots run deep, and the connection to relationality and reciprocity is a significant part of our culture.

Student enrollment at the college continues to grow; however, during the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment fluctuated because the students on Navajo Nation are not and were not prepared for something like this to happen. The nation lacks in many areas needed infrastructure. Today, many still live in the desolate regions of the Navajo Nation. Students sometimes drive a few hours to make it to class on time and then drive home. Some lack water, electricity, and internet. The Navajo Nation is roughly the size of West Virginia. The thirteen grocery stores and hospitals on the reservation are few and far between, and we have very few tribal police officers to protect the Navajo Nation daily, which covers 27,000 square miles.

Diné College has several sites on the Navajo Nation and, in the COVID-19 pandemic, opened two more locations for Learning Center sites with CARES Act Funding. According to Roessel, "I don't think any family on the reservation has not been impacted directly [by the pandemic]. And I mean, absolutely directly … Going forward, this isn't going to stop. We have many students who lost either their parents or grandparents or their aunts or their uncles" (News et al., 2020, p. 3). I add this relevant information to my dissertation because one of the more prominent aspects of the loss of Navajo people has been the loss of knowledge bearers and traditional practitioners. The sadness that this loss brings is beyond the feelings I can express. This is why I thought more about our collections and the traditions they hold and how they are bonded with our language. In Chapter Two, I discussed this within our Fundamental Laws that were created for us by our Holy Divinities.

Currently, I am the only staff member in the museum, so I am everything from a director, curator, preparator, collections manager, and adjunct faculty in the School of Arts and Humanities. As the museum curator, my work is vital, specifically in a tribal museum or cultural center. Often, because funding can be a significant issue, most institutions do not have a large staff and many, like me, do much of this work alone. Maintaining budgetary responsibilities, being a preparator, planning and designing exhibits, and preparing for the show's opening can be very demanding. The museum is funded primarily by the college, which the Navajo Nation and the Federal Government mainly finance. Harry Walters, the former Director of the Museum, said in a *Tribal College Journal* interview, "this museum was created to foster the traditional language, culture, and arts. Money is always short of supply" (Casey, 1996, p. 4). He faced this obstacle then, and I still face it today. Not many people understand that the care of cultural items is expensive. All materials are acid-free. We wear protective garments and gloves to protect these items from the natural oils on our hands, which are detrimental to any piece. Everything is handled with great care and love. These precious items in our collections, especially items of cultural patrimony and sacred objects, are priceless. When something is destroyed, it is gone forever, just like our knowledge bearers. If our language and culture disappear, who will we be?

For this study, I chose to focus on one institution in order to bring understanding as to what TCUs are doing to revitalize language and culture. The vision and mission statement of the college were the reason behind selecting this institution and individuals who work here. Most TCUs have indicated that they are rooted in cultural foundations, tradition, and language, and as the American Indian Higher Education Consortium states on its homepage. it "promotes and strengthens Indigenous languages, cultures, communities, lands, and tribal

nations, through its unique position" (https://www.aihec.org) as a national organization representing TCUs.

The Navajo Nation is vast in its natural resources. Many of the traditional events that happen on Navajo are specifically meant to occur within the four sacred mountains. This, again, stems from what we consider Diné traditional law. This law states that "the various spiritual healings through worship, song, and prayer (Nahaghá) must be preserved, taught, maintained, and performed in their original forms" (§3. 1 N.N.C § 203). Many of our origin stories take place on Navajo land, and because of the location of certain events, it is best to talk about these places and to know cultural significance of these places.

The Navajo Nation is over 27,000 square miles, equal to seventeen million acres of land in northwestern New Mexico, northeastern Arizona, and southeastern Utah, making it the largest reservation in the United States. The current governing body of the Navajo Nation is an adaptation under Title II, which gives law making authority to the tribal council. In 1989 the Navajo Nation adopted a three-branch governing system: executive, legislative, and judicial, which help with the separation of powers, and grant the Tribal Council to change operations, using tribal resolutions to make changes to policies that are already instituted. In 1991, the tribe transitioned from having a chairmanship to a presidential seat with a vice president. The first President was Peterson Zah, and alongside him was Vice President Marshall Plummer, who is from the same community I represent.

This dissertation recognizes the importance of language and culture and what we do as a nation to hold onto our language and culture. Unfortunately, many of our young people do not know the Navajo language and culture. During the 2014 Navajo tribal elections, a young man decided to run for the presidential seat; however, this was a long and

cumbersome journey because he lacked the Navajo language. The board of election supervisors, the Navajo Nation, and the Navajo Nation's Supreme Court all played a significant role in the decision to disqualify him as a tribal presidential candidate. Since then, the language fluency bill, which requires tribal leadership to be fluent in the Navajo language, has been vetoed twice. In the Navajo way, we are taught that leaders should not only understand but also know how to speak Navajo fluently. Today, the tribal council is divided almost in half about what they deem essential. They have become accustomed to a very western sense of establishing resolutions for creating critical policies. Still, most of the decision making is done in English when deliberating these resolutions. Navajo was once the primary language spoken by all council members; however, today there are several council members who do not speak the language. This has taken away from what our fundamental laws are. The written law states:

> These laws provide the foundation of Diné bi nahat'á (providing leadership through developing and administering policies and plans utilizing these laws as guiding principles) and Diné sovereignty. Our elders and our medicine people, the teachers of traditional laws, values, and principles, must be respected and honored if the people and the government are to persevere and thrive; the teachings of the elders and medicine people, their participation in government and their contributions of the traditional values and principles of Diné life way will ensure the growth of the Navajo Nation; and from time to time, the elders and medicine people must be requested to provide the cleansing, protection prayers, and blessing ceremonies necessary for securing healthy leadership and the operation of the government in harmony with traditional law. (§3. 1 N.N.C. §203 G.)

These fundamental laws should be a contributing factor in what makes our language and culture vital to the Navajo people.

Participants

I selected ten participants to take part in my study: one female and one male practitioner; three faculty (at least some who regularly include the museum in their work with students or their scholarship); two students and/or alumni, who are required to take the museum internship class; and three tribal college administrators/presidents. I identified participants to help me capture the importance of the work happening at Diné College. All of the participants are from the surrounding communities, who either work for or attend(ed) school here in Tsaile. Due to the restrictions of the Diné College IRB, my study was limited to conducting it within the college, only.

Traditional practitioners were the backbone and part of the focus of my study. They are also the knowledge bearers for the Navajo Nation. They are familiar with what traditional collections are, how to maintain them, what they are used for, and how this information relates to the stories and oral histories that define who we are as Indigenous People and help to maintain the revitalization and re-culturization of our heritage and mother tongue. collections.

A student and alumnus in the museum internship class and faculty were also included, as they provided the perspective from the teaching and learning sides of what it means to be part of the revitalization process, how that knowledge adds to what they know, how they incorporate this information into their daily life, and what they learn from the methods of caring for and understanding collections.

College administrators have different opinions about the purpose of having a museum or cultural center at their college. I felt it was important to include their views as well because very few tribal colleges have museum collections. Nevertheless, they are currently working innovatively to help create the best in culturally knowledge-based programming and curriculum to aid in language and cultural teachings.

Method(s) of Data Collection and Sampling

Methods

I used semi-structured individual interviews that included ten questions (see Appendix A).

The second set of questions for the objects and artifacts included:

1. Please introduce yourself and tell me a little bit about yourself.

   Haash'yinil'yeh dóó adóóne'e niiliin'iigii ei' haiish'iinliih.

2. Describe the object and its purpose, please.

   Dii ei hatiish'atee.

3. What is the story behind this object?

   Hei'tao ba'hanee hólóó.

4. What is the significance of the object you picked?

   Ha'atii bininaah iindiinlah, iindiintlsoozh,

5. How does it benefit us to keep our language and culture moving forward?

   Hei'teehgóó ni'hiizáád dóó ni'hii o'ohl'íil dóó'baa'daa'di'yiika'dah, dóó be'naas'dei'niikaah'doléél.

6. How should we protect information about objects and artifacts to keep them sacred?

Ba'haane ei hei'tao taa'nihii diné niigliin'iiyigii báá dol'yeel dóó béé'ho'diisiin doo, doleel.

7. Is there anything else you want to add or leave with me as part of this interview?

   Na'iidikiid'iish nei'hoolo ei dóó'da'góó ei'ya diilah ha'tao baansiinkéés.

I also conducted two small sharing circles, which consisted of three questions about the artifacts:

1. Do you know what the origin story of this piece is?

   Ba'hanéé' eí' he'taoo nihlbe'ho'ziin?

2. Are you familiar with the story in Navajo or English?

   Bili'gaana kee'jhii nilbe'ho'ziin'ish, eí dóó'da'góó taash' dine'kééh'jiih?

3. Please share with us some of the stories shared with you about this particular piece.

The circle-back process with our practitioners was to ensure that I did not share culturally sensitive information. Each method was vital to this study to gather cultural oral histories and stories. It was essential to understand the importance of language in capturing how culture affects what we do in the museum field, especially on the Navajo Nation and within Navajo culture and other Indigenous cultures. Museums contain extensive collections with significant amounts of cultural patrimony and sacred objects, some of which largely depend on tribes, not only in identifying their objects' purpose but also allowing them to utilize their tribes' ways to handle and care for objects. Because of the sensitivity behind each of these objects – some carry certain songs and prayers – cultural language was key to not only understanding but also being able to speak about these objects. I purposefully

captured traditional storytelling as it is said that morals and guidance are created through ceremony, and some of the sacred bundles, which contain important objects and symbolisms, that represent our prayers and songs, hold the essence to whom it may belong. These traditional teachings are also aligned with everyday living.

Secatero's (2009) wellness model, using the corn stalk, helps to describe these teachings. Because of the leadership component of my doctoral program I tried to connect my research to leadership using the pillars within the Corn Pollen model (Secatero, 2009): Spiritual, Linguistic, Cultural, and Artistic. These pillars help build and become part of our leadership skills, which we also develop as museum managers and professionals. This is part of the importance of language and culture being captured through shared stories and how the story work process is incorporated into my study.

According to Secatero (2015), leadership

> begins with a seed of knowledge often buried in Mother Earth, to grow with love and nourishment. Leadership is also part of a ceremonial process; it includes linguistics because of the nature of speaking in the language you are raised with, and that also includes your cultural well-being; This will eventually become your tool as you become a leader, as well. (pp. 111-126)

In Chapters Four and Five, I use Secatero's well-being model to speak to leadership skills developed in the Native American Leadership in Education (NALE) cohort to help me define how language and culture assist those in leadership roles.

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

I conducted semi-structured individual interviews with each participant with some similar and some different questions for each participant group (see Appendix A for

interview questions). Semi-structured interviews directed to each type of participant assisted me in gathering knowledge on certain artifacts with stories and clarifications. This allowed me to explore the knowledge shared by participants.

Sharing Circles

As Indigenous people, we believe that everything is circular in motion. Our creation story tells us that everything begins with birth and moves from east to north. From birth to adolescence to adulthood and into old age, we come full circle with time. This research explored the process of continuing in a circle and the Indigenous views of how it would be incorporated, into the research, Hanna (2020) explained,

> Going circular is about understanding differences between disparate worldviews, shifting from the Western logic, which is also described as a very linear view, as opposed to the understanding of being in and moving through the world. consisting of cyclical patterns (seasonal rounds, renewable harvests, reciprocal relationships). (p. 675)

Indigenous scholars like Brayboy (2005), Secatero (2009), Tachine (2015), and Billie (2023) have begun looking at the circular concept, which means to move in a circular motion, as a holistic approach that is incorporated into the Indigenous ways of researching. Indigenous researchers are truly defining ourselves in ways that we did not think could ever be possible in academia. Today, we incorporate our value systems and processes and bring innovative research methods together. I looked closely at tribal critical race theory (Brayboy, 2005) as I thought about this dissertation and as I was writing it. It truly opened my mind to what I felt was important to share when looking at different approaches in how to conduct such research. I particularly looked at the concepts of cultural knowledge and how to capture

them using an Indigenous lens, looking at the philosophies, traditions and customs especially in the relationship to adaptability, and how our Indigenous stories are not separate from theory (Brayboy, 2005). It resonates with me, because this dissertation is related to all these concepts, from where tradition is in the storytelling that comes to life, in ceremony and even in the classroom.

I included small sharing circles in this study to facilitate important discussions. According to the Diné value system, I started by respectfully asking my participants for permission to interview them. An offering with food, tobacco, or white corn meal (that I ground myself), was given to the participants. Using relationality, I addressed participants accordingly and by clan, as it is my responsibility to do so as my grandmother and mother taught me. My approach was to capture these conversations through recording software to help me in the data analysis process. I planned for two to three sharing circles, which would take less than an hour. Lavallée (2009), who is of Anishinaabe/Metis descent, shares with us,

> Healing circles and learning or sharing circles are used as part of the ceremony and as a way of healing (Stevenson, 1999), and in these contemporary times, are increasingly used by Indigenous researchers (Baskin, 2005; Restoule, 2004). In a research setting, although the focus group and the sharing circle are concerned with gaining knowledge through discussion, the principles behind a sharing circle are quite different. (p. 29)

This is especially true as we look at objects and items within and about essential museum artifacts and collections. For each type of participant, I focused on aspects most close to them; for example, with practitioners, I gave them a choice to focus on the meaning

of one museum artifact or item of cultural patrimony that helps in defining their role as a preservationist or contributor to collections.

The questions I asked included: what is it about this piece that we should know, and how does the story help us to remember the language and what it does for our culture? I chose these questions because we, as Navajos, believe that objects and items in the collection have a spirit of their own. According to Lavallée (2009), "symbols are considered sacred, they go beyond words, and when we describe things, not in our language, it does lose the translation" (p. 30).

Circling Back as a Method for Deeper Meaning-Making by Participants

I used one additional method as a form of data collection and to ensure the protection of Diné knowledge. Circling back is described by Muniz (2022) as maintaining integrity, ensuring truths, and respect for narratives by these individuals, which deepens the connection to the culture, language, and tradition. Circling back brings to light the holism and balance of the markers for traditional truths in tradition, beliefs, and practices. Storytellers help to illustrate how these storytelling practices sustain the culture and communities of Indigenous people, and these epistemologies nurture the sharing of knowledge through relationships (Martinez, 2021). This process was used with a few selected participants, one from each type of participant, to review my findings and further discuss their meaning concerning the importance of the Diné College Museum to cultural and language preservation and re-culturalization among the Diné People.

I scheduled 60-minute interviews, presented findings, and facilitated a discussion using interview questions using a talking circle technique. I kept this process as open-ended and unstructured as possible to allow participants to make meaning of the findings. This type

of processing by participants is vital to Indigenous research methods in order to deepen the meaning-making of stories and other knowledge collected, especially for our Diné People because the stories behind the objects and items housed in our collection belong to us and are meant for us. This is also consistent with an Indigenous research philosophy as it creates a more community-based understanding of the knowledge gathered.

Again, I applied Diné values of respect and relationality at the forefront of data collection. I used the Diné College Museum and Archives and their collections for my study. Finally, I transcribed all data collected for analysis using transcribing software, then later, deidentified the transcripts by removing any identifying names and information to protect the identity of the participants in this study.

Sampling

I purposefully recruited a diversity of individuals within each of the participant types across gender, clan, academic and practitioner areas of focus:

Two practitioners – one female and one male.

Two students/alumni of the Museum Internship Class – one female and one male.

Three faculty of Diné Language and Diné Studies and Arts.

Three tribal college administrators and presidents.

Data Analysis

In Diné way of life, we use many analogies and metaphors to describe and learn from each story's morals. Looking closely at Tachine's (2018) work, I, too, believe that metaphors are integral to our research as we awaken the "imagination and ancient wisdom" (p. 66). Growing up, I remember how shí ma'saní (grandmother) would sit and talk with other elderly women during ceremonies and make us listen and learn. I still enjoy the stories

interwoven into my life as I use the same method to talk to young women I am mentoring during a kin'áál'dá (coming-of-age ceremony). This helped me to separate traditional teachings while balancing western academia. In doing so, information becomes more transparent and easier to sift through. As with Tachine (2018), "writing as metaphors provided a space to visualize and connect difficult thought processes and assert Navajo way of life" (p. 66). This is how I embodied dissertation writing. I applied metaphoric forms, which are best described by Davidson (2018) who writes that as Diné, we recognize our modalities of learning are bundled together, fundamentally, as we work in the beauty way to inform our methodology. I also applied thematic forms, as Commodore described (2018), "Data and wisdom are collected reciprocally and is used to provide a reflective value" (p. 68). These Indigenous insights set the tone for how we see data being compiled through traditional knowledge.

One form of data gathering in a traditional manner can be compared to how a traditional sand painting is used to diagnose, heal, and then destroyed when the ceremony is completed. At the heart of Navajos' metaphoric analysis, we return to the beauty of balance. A researcher must understand that "Diné learning modalities are not simply heuristic and methodical tools: We, in fact, attend to their work, for we are their tools to restore order to the world" (Davidson, 2015, p. 43). This helped me gain a better outlook on how I want to tie the sacred together as I looked at the collection's maintenance in a holistic way that connects us to the revitalization of culture and language moving forward. Culture and language bearers have a sense of continuing to bring medicine together through what is sacred. They also understand the importance of circling back and reminding us that there are some things we

keep very deep within our hearts. The prominence of that information is shared for reasons only they felt were necessary.

Data Analysis Process

It was imperative that I acknowledge the sources of knowledge and information about which I was writing. Obtaining information, observing protocols, and transmitting that information is essential to how I continue to tell my story (Wilson, 2008), which is of utmost importance. The way we internalize the knowledge from our practitioners and reciprocate that to the reader is essential (Wilson, 2008), which is why I agree that making sure our stories, songs, and prayers are shared with respect for my culture is important in determining what is shared with the public.

The analysis process was carefully considered because I knew much of the information about the museum objects would be somewhat sensitive. I continued using the story-work technique to tell the stories captured via recordings. The themes of the stories drove the process in helping to identify values, methods of teaching language and culture from a cultural perspective, and what is critical to our identity.

I also compared the stories gathered to find ways of making conversations comfortable for the younger generation to speak with the elderly in a manner that allows for learning to happen. The theoretical framework influenced the sense made of the data collected. This study's findings affect constructs, concepts, language, models, and theories that structured the study in the first place (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell, "a study's findings are almost always discussed concerning existing knowledge (some of which is a theory) demonstrating how the present study contributes to expanding the knowledge base" (p. 89).

Traditional phenomena and theory have always co-existed; this co-existence brings our cultural stories to life with spoken language. The prayers and songs within museum collections have a life of their own and co-exist in the environment in which they live, on shelves, and in groups worldwide. This is why repatriation is essential and why we return things when they can be returned to their rightful places, because the phenomena behind these objects is meant for us to care for the objects in a manner that allows for re-use (unless noted otherwise by practitioners), to connect to our children while showing them and teaching them the use, along with songs and prayers, which remain within the culture.

Lastly, through these discussions, I collectively and collaboratively analyzed my data a second time, using the circling back process to ensure that I did not cross any traditional boundaries in discussing what might be considered highly sensitive to our culture. Each recording defined the stories about how each person felt about why our collections are essential for preserving and conserving our culture, language, and identity.

Cultural Integrity and Ethics

As a Diné Asdzaan, a Navajo woman, I always conduct myself respectfully during any ceremony. Most often, especially when looked upon to "Tie Hair for Kin'aalda," it is because one carries cultural integrity, forward-thinking, and stern teachings combined with compassion and love to speak to the young girl as she transitions in her Womanhood Ceremony. We are praying and preparing her for what is ahead and the expectations she will fulfill. This is done ethically and respectfully. I designed, conducted, analyzed, prepared, and presented my data and research the same way.

The ontology and axiology of my study are essential, and, in this study I fully incorporate the four Rs; Respect, Relationality Reciprocity, and Reflection. Relationality was

the first step in this study, using K'e to honor the relations that surrounded me. I greeted the students as "shí yazhí or shí awéé" (my little one or my child) and I addressed the others according to the relation of our clans, whether it be "shí ma, shí ma'saní, shí chei, shí nali, shí yazh" (mom or aunty, grandma, grandpa, paternal acknowledgment of grandparents, uncle). This is our common ground for acknowledging our extended relations beyond the core family unit.

Secondly, I respected those who have heard, seen, and read this dissertation and its related presentation. Care commonly comes with everything, from how we conduct ourselves to the interactions we display in all that we do. Respect is more than just asking with a please and thank you (Wilson, 2008); it is also an extension of how we treat people, places, time, and energy. To be respected, one must offer a hug or firm handshake and a detailed explanation of what will occur and how many times the conversations will happen. I arranged meeting times with leaders and practitioners at their convenience, as I recognized that their time is precious due to the nature of conducting ceremonies or because they are busy with hectic schedules within their regular eight-to-five careers.

Reciprocity was the "giveaway" that took place after the study was conducted. The information that was shared and the discussion helped to determine where the investigation went. As Archibald (2008) explains, "I return the teaching that the elders helped me to understand through my reflection on what they had to tell me" (p. 142); their information becomes part of that medicine bundle I discussed early on in this chapter. To a certain extent and always with precautions, the objective of one's medicine is now mine to share. Educating the mind, heart, body, and spirit is where the reflection becomes one in the whole process. It

is essential to understand that, like a ceremony, the information shared becomes prayers for a better future in using our collections to preserve who we are in our language and culture.

Cultural Protections and Privacy

I used Circling Back to define what is considered sacred, kept that within the research, and only shared what was necessary because the museum field can be very sensitive. Some items in collections are considered sacred, and the use of these items may be limited due to cultural patrimony. I gathered specific elders and practitioners to review and discuss my findings once I had analyzed data and compiled these data to determine what knowledge gathered in my study should be kept among the Diné People and what could be shared in my dissertation and other publications and presentations.

Within any Indigenous culture, we know that culturally sensitive information exists, so it should be kept as such. Not all information the participants shared was written in this dissertation, as what was sacred should be held sacred. Gone, as cited in Windchief and Cummins (2021), explained that postcolonial ethics and academia have identified challenges in keeping community knowledge sacred. Dr. Gone describes his work as drawing upon the diversities of Indigenous communities and expressing the need to protect endangered traditions. Today, these statements are more critical than ever.

Human Protections

With my focus primarily on Diné culture and language, I applied to Diné College's, Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received approval. Understanding that process took considerable time. I began applying for research approval ahead of time, considering the requirements of the University of New Mexico's IRB. Both approaches had applications to submit and considerable documentation to be reviewed before conducting any research. This

allowed me to gather my participants and discuss why I would lead this study. It also gave me time to find another person to help me translate. Although I can speak the Diné language, I am not as fluent as I wish to be. This study also helped me increase the use of the Diné language, which I looked forward to. I first secured approval from the Diné College (see Appendix B); with that approval, the UNM IRB approval process was expedited (see Appendix C). Because of the approval at Diné College, I did not have to apply to the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board (NNHRRB).

Summary

Each of us uniquely has a different way of relating to the Rs – Respect, Relationality, Reciprocity, and Reflection. However, the other R I do not mention is Responsibility, which is a common factor among many Indigenous people and that is instilled in us. The responsibility I have in this research is to make sure that participants are protected, because of the nature of this study and because of the use of collections that we house at Diné College. Working closely with practitioners is a privilege and because of the culturally sensitive information that was shared, I also have a responsibility to that information and how it is shared in confidence. I cannot jeopardize my relationship, the k'e that has been extended to me, therefore, anything deeply rooted in cultural information is not discussed because of the circle back process I included in this research. Stories or songs that are exclusively traditional and shared with me were not translated, transcribed, or mentioned in this dissertation.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis - Bijíí

(Main Day and Night)

As we commence upon the final day and night of this research ceremony, this is where everything comes together. In this chapter, I bring together important narratives from my participants and I clarify how I theorized the 5 Rs presented in Chapter Three. Similarly to the Kin'aalda ceremony, this is where my transformation as a young researcher takes place, and my role changes as I become a seasoned woman/scholar.

The goal of this chapter is to present the knowledge that was shared with me through stories and experiences through the lens of my participants. Traditionally, as we prepare our young girls for what is to come in the Kin'aalda ceremony, we share our experiences as mothers, aunties, grandmothers, and mentors, as these experiences are about what life is. Our duties as women in this world are to make sure that we carry nourishment, compassion, and unconditional love; carry our families on our backs and see them through the many obstacles that we will endure in life. We seek to understand stories, spiritual beliefs, ceremonies, and the responsibility that they entail as we explain traditional teachings (Archibald, 2008).

The results I present in this chapter explain why a TCU needs to honor and provide access to materials that reinvest in the importance of capturing our traditional ecological knowledge. I used cumulative data to also help with describing my findings to help generate and demonstrate the important use of our collections, artifacts, and objects, and how these resources can serve to strengthen our tribal sovereignty and community engagement. These findings also demonstrate the knowledge gaps that exist when museums do not provide

connections to objects and the oral history that collections may hold, like what we have at Diné College, which for our people are very tribally centric.

We talk through stories, and in this chapter I present my findings using story work by introducing my participants. This will give insight to where my participants are from and why they think it is important to have Diné College in the community doing the important work that it does. Utilizing a collection of artifacts housed in the museum's Main Gallery, I also share their experiences and knowledge of items housed in the museum collection.

To protect the identity of the participants in this study, I used pseudonyms and did not include their clans as is customary as Navajo (Diné) people (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Role	Age	Diné Speaker
Carson	Male Practitioner	40-50	Y
Jennifer	Alumni	20-30	Y
Joe	Alumni	30-40	Y
Lita	Female Practitioner	40-50	Y
Mae	Administrator	50-60	Y
Mike	Staff	30-40	Y
Sara Ann	Administrator	40-50	N
Sue	Faculty	40-50	Y
Tom	Faculty	40-50	N
Tony	Administrator	50-60	N

Carson's Story

Carson is very shy, so imagine my surprise when he accepted an interview with me. He is the kind of person who is quiet around most people, but as you get to know him and spend more time with him, he becomes a little more relaxed and starts to open up a little more. When talking with him, I noticed his very gentle demeanor. He was very careful about how he conducted himself and was careful in how he responded to the questions. He sat towards me, mindful not to look at me too much. He has been a practitioner most of his life and began practicing at a very young age. He talked about all the different ceremonies he has practiced over time and said that this is his life. He never attended college because, since his youth, he was responsible for conducting ceremonies. He carefully told me about the object before him and was very direct and to the point. He explained it all in the Navajo language. He was mindful of how important it was to understand what the object was about.

He truly supports the goal of obtaining higher education and encourages others to do so, but his main interest is making sure that our children and our people also understand what it means to know our culture and language, in addition to what is being taught in the hogan.

Jennifer's Story

Jennifer grew up in Red Town, living on a farm, and was the artist in the family. She loved making art and working with artists and even traveled to art shows with friends from time to time. She was a tough girl, knew her responsibilities, and was always so proud of her upbringing with animals; this was her way of life. She was very well mannered, dressed her best, and was a runner. As we sat and talked, she was very mindful of how she introduced herself and made sure to use her clans as part of her introduction. She joked and giggled from time to time, making sure that humor was always part of our conversation. She remained

humble, brushing the hair off her face and pushing it behind her ears. Her demeanor was relaxed, and she smiled for the most of our conversation.

Joe's Story

Joe grew up near the base of the mountain in his home community. He still wore his mask, being super cognizant of his surroundings, because we are still in the post pandemic of COVID-19. He kept his mask on for the duration of the interview. He was raised on a ranch and understands two different cultures. He was raised with the understanding that there are many sensitivities that we should be addressing when it comes to knowing who we are and what we are about. The strict teachings are evident as he describes what his life was like growing up close to both cultures with which he identifies. I can relate in many ways because, like him, I was raised in two cultures, but sometimes it felt like three. I would like to think of him as an artist, but he reminded me that he was more focused on one area these days and not completely focused on his passion as much as he felt he should be. We went back and forth on what it is like to come from two culturally sensitive groups of people. I became very interested in the language he used to describe certain areas of how he felt about cultural teachings. His interpretation of how we should be more concerned about the idea of reinvesting in language and culture and not using revitalization because culture and language are already vital and a critical part of who we are.

Lita's story

Lita's humor is infectious as she enters any room. Always smiling and quick to make jokes, she is easy to get along with. Wearing her favorite pullover, she brought in snacks and drinks and reminded me to eat something, even as we got the interview underway. We talked a bit about what it means to practice medicine from a cultural perspective and how long it

took her to become ordained. The interesting thing about her is that it was not too long ago that she finally decided to learn from her mentor and learn the language. Her investment has always been in education, and though that is her vision for the youth, especially in her family, she also very much wants to see the youth become more interested in learning the ways of our people, as well. There was a seriousness that overcame her for a moment, and then she talked a little more in depth about what her journey has been like. I sat and listened carefully, and sometimes, I became a little emotional because I know and understand her position as a healer.

Mae's story

I have probably known Mae for the longest time. She is one of my favorite people and when we became work colleagues years ago, I began to notice that she has always been one of the biggest contributors to and supporters of elevating women on the Navajo Nation. Her leadership positions have varied from one place to another and I admire her for the way that she utilizes the language in every aspect of conversation. She uses k'e (relationality) and expresses interest by doing so. I think that is another area of mentorship that we look for as young ladies, wanting to emulate that same trait. She came in laughing and greeting me with a hug, sat down and was quick to say thank you for this opportunity. I know how busy she is, so I quickly jumped at the opportunity to sit down with her and converse.

I love how she used descriptive words to set the tone for what we were embarking on. Her encouragement came in the form of traditional extensions and expressions. "Shi yazhí," is one extension I am learning, one that I long to hear, especially since my grandmother's passing. It is a very different feeling of longing for a special bond or relationship between mother and child, in my case, as a granddaughter longing to hear those words. It makes me

emotional in more ways than I can express. Mae's voice was comforting, and a sense of compassion rang through. I was reminded of how the clan system brings about certain characteristics in individuals. At the same time, as she began to share her story with me, I was automatically drawn in.

She began by discussing how everything has a spirit and that we must ensure that we are responsible for what happens because there are consequences for the things that we ignore. "Ba'haas'tíih" can be used in a different context, and how we use it determines what we might deem sacred because of the spirit. I have always understood that everything must have a spirit to live, but within these living things are also things we must be careful with. I was reminded that within Mother Earth is uranium that has consequences for our health when it is extracted. Father Sky is above us, but because of pollution from harmful chemicals, some places in the world are greatly affected with bad air. This sets the tone for "ba'haas'tíih". It is now used in the context of be careful. I am reminded of how I would sit carefully and listen to my shí'masaní, as she talked to me, once before.

Mike's Story

Mike walked into the office, his long braid followed as he shrugged his shoulders and made note to hug and greet me with k'e. This is a responsibility we have to each other and that is something he has also been taught. Cracking a little joke to ease the moment, I was reminded that I do not have to always be so serious. Mike is originally from the southwest agency and made sure to acknowledge this in his introduction. He leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms in front of him, stretched out his leg and then continued to talk a little bit about his upbringing near Canyon DeChelly. He adjusted his glasses and then looked at me and cracked another joke. He laughed out loud and then situated himself to get serious

again. He ran his hands over his head and hair, and then proceeded to answer in a way that gives him an opportunity to give insight as a young individual who has been blessed to perform a particular ceremony. He is a graduate of a TCU and is reminded of what it means to be a product of that environment. I sat and agreed with him because it is certainly a unique feeling to know the opportunities that it gives you.

Sara Ann's Story

Sara Ann sat near the office's wall where I conducted the interview. We teased and laughed a little as if we were breaking the ice for the first time meeting each other. Previous to her current position, she was a writer for the local paper in the town she lived in and then applied to Diné College as an instructor and then later became an administrator. She familiarized herself with the local culture and ensuring her staff and students were her priority. Although very reserved, she continued to sit with a smile and stayed comfortable. She giggled from time to time, reminding me that she had never really been immersed in the culture and that she was not familiar with too many things. I reassured her that none of this is an exam, and we laughed a little bit more.

Sue's Story

Sue grew up down the road from the local TCU. The rocks in her homeland are beautiful and the sunset in that area of the Nation cannot be described. I have driven through there many times and always noticed its vibrant beauty and the sun rays that bounce off the rocks and create a colorful masterpiece in the sky, leading me to wonder if it is God's country. Sue moved away from home years ago, going to school in several different places both on and off the Nation. I could hear the excitement in her voice as she talked about being

back on the Nation and doing the work she is doing now. She shifted herself and chuckle as she showed me her skirt and told me about it, after introducing herself.

Sue has children and she made sure to give her husband credit for all that he has done for them and for allowing her to be who she is and what she has been doing, on what she refers to as a "spiritual journey." I can relate with her on different levels of our conversations because of how passionate she is about her work and her initiative to keep language as her priority. She loves the language and to be able to work with her students. She is loving where she is and what she is now doing here at home. She remained gentle spoken and she partially hid her face from time to time. She reminded me of an elderly woman.

Tom's Story

Tom grew up locally but left to pursue his dream of becoming an artist. He traveled countless miles for different shows and won many awards for his work. As we sat there talking, he reminded me of what it is like to see things through an artist's lens. Because of my background in the arts, we connected on a different level. As we were deeply engaged in the conversation, he scooted closer to the table and began talking about his experience with how far he has come and how he has become more engaged with the college and the students. Our conversation ranged from traditional ways to what is currently happening in this modern shift. We talked about the shifts in language and culture that have impacted the art scene and how people interpret collections from the artist-to-collector standpoint. There was a point in our conversation where we also covered a bit about the perspectives on the urgency we both feel for our children to retain the culture and language, but also how those perspectives of young people are not aligned as it was with us when we were young. We both understand change and how time has manifested other interests in our people. His demeanor changed

with each topic; every now and then, he chuckled and then was quick to get back to the seriousness of the conversation. He shifted outwardly and inwardly depending on where we were while covering the questions I asked him.

Tony's Story

Tony is a strong leader. Growing up in a community nearby, he is no stranger to hard work, and his relationship with the culture and language has remained, no matter how far he has traveled to work on behalf of his people. He came in and greeted me with a warm smile, and then sat down. His voice was almost stern, like himself, as I observed him throughout our conversation. He sat with his arms crossed most of the time, legs stretched before him. Interestingly, he grew a little more relaxed and excited as we conversed. He voiced concerns, and emotions arose in his voice as if he were willing to share a little bit more about his interests as to why he chose to go down the career path he chose. He comes from a family that prides itself on having a good education and why Indigenous people must continue to find their path to obtain a good education. I sat and listened intently because he was very long-winded, which made for great insight.

From the first day of the Kin'aalda, there is a person responsible for tying the hair, the way the girl carries herself, what she has accomplished in life, and for her vision of her own future and what that might entail. As I have had the honor of tying hair, I am reminded of my late mentor, a Navajo Medicine Man, who showed me how to prepare the basket for the young lady. From the bottom of her feet to tying her hair, everything is placed in a certain manner. The story begins from the East, childhood to adolescence, to adulthood, and then into old age. Each one is representative of a cycle we will all face. My research paradigm reflects this and helped guide the themes that emerged in my analysis.

Emergent Themes

Through this process, I was reminded of what it means to "sit and listen" (Archibald, 2008, p. 47). Growing up, it seems like we were told to listen more often, especially during ceremonies. We learned over time that this is a discipline our elders ingrained in us. We are taught and disciplined to watch, listen, and learn (Fowler, 2016). Today, I find myself doing this more often, especially as we sit and listen to our practitioners and the participants of this study that I had the honor of interviewing.

Much of the Kin'aalda ceremony is about listening and doing as you are told. The story of Kin'aalda goes back to the time of Creation. White Shell Woman was given this puberty right by the Holy People. She was told to listen to First Woman who guided her on her path into womanhood. As a Holy Divinity, she was raised with teachings and certain disciplines to help her become the woman she would become for the Navajo People. It was important consider what guided my study as I thought about how my research would take place.

In Chapter Three I discussed the four Rs that helped me apply my research paradigm. It is important for readers to know and understand that these four Rs represented my study as I created my paradigm for this particular study. As the chapter was tied together, as a bundle, I added a fifth R, which is responsibility. Having served as a former ambassador with Americans for Indian Opportunity, it is a responsibility to share what it means from our perspective and include this as part of growing into a leadership role when this doctoral journey is completed. This also helped me develop themes for this study in order to answer the main questions guiding my study. The three main themes that emerged from the data analysis were:

1. Using education to strengthen tribal sovereignty. We all have the opportunity to strengthen tribal sovereignty through the use and incorporation of our language and culture.
2. Building community through decolonization, which is why I have been able to build community on different levels with different people. I have my practitioner community, my artist's community, and I am even creating a dialog outside of the college to give me insight into what we could also do for our youth in the community.
3. Sacred places and sacred spaces that we can create for our communities so that they can contribute to the hope we have for our Tribal nation.

Education is a Tool to Strengthen Tribal Sovereignty

In my experience, the most significant point about the TCUs that are available to our people to help strengthen where we come from is that they are primarily situated on Tribal lands. This has allowed us to exercise sovereignty in order to graduate and grow our own people into the professionals they want to become. Strengthening tribal sovereignty also allows us the opportunity to practice our culture and language in a safe space, which we can incorporate into our curricula. As we move forward, these conversations become more evident through respect for one another.

Within respect lies identity. We must understand how and why we identify ourselves with our clans. This was important for all of us in this study as we expressed k'e through clanship and extended a handshake and hug as participants entered the room. Most people might think this is an extension of relationality, but in most cases, respect comes first. After identifying ourselves, we proceeded with the first topic that focused on why it is essential for

our tribal college (Diné College) and tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) to collect and house cultural knowledge.

Participants Tony and Sara Ann both asked, “If we are not doing it, who will?” Neither one of them had seen the questions beforehand, so I was a little shocked to hear this, but at the same time, their lengthy answers intrigued me.

> Tony: If we don't do it, who will? I think the capacity and mission of most colleges, especially tribal colleges, are aligned with identity. That's what I always use as the central focus. And I think we've gone beyond just collecting identity in terms of the different, you know, not just knowledge, but artifacts, if you will. I think we're coming into a new phase where we're talking about how you articulate that and, in those instances, is primarily collected for the purpose of saving. But I think what makes tribal colleges different is that you collect this knowledge, you collect these artifacts, you collect these, you know, cultural ways of knowing and doing so that it can be practiced so it can actually be used and not just locked up on the door.

Similarly, as Sara Ann walked in, she smiled and reminded me that she felt like this was a test to see just how much she understood about our way of life. We both giggled and she answered with,

> Well, the easy answer is that if tribal colleges aren't doing it, then who is it, right? I guess the way that I look at it is that tribal colleges should be the keepers of knowledge and like all knowledge, not just western knowledge which is clearly important but that's everywhere. To really preserve that then it's the duty of the tribal college and I've noticed that in some sense a lot of tribal colleges and universities pride themselves on language revitalization, culture revitalization and so to me it's

> like if that is an essential part of what tribal colleges and universities are about, why is there not such a bigger demand for language classes and cultural classes being integrated into degree programs.

Sue's insight resonated with me because of her willingness to come down to the museum. She was excited because she had never visited the museum floor. As we expressed our excitement, we quickly transitioned back to the main reason for coming together. The seriousness in her voice conveyed what she saw as essential:

> I think it is essential because I think engagement is like a foundational principle from learning for knowledge acquisition, for language acquisition, for identity acquisition, you know you need to be able to reflect something in the space or you're learning, so something needs to reflect who you are in that space. Then it's like you have something familiar to tie yourself to, to root yourself, and to feel safe. Like I said, you know it's a nesting ground where you know you're welcomed, you're seeing a reflection of yourself. When you have a professor talking to you in your language and being able to feel safe because it is about our culture. You know, it is such a safe environment to do that. It helps us to grow, it helps us to feel free to innovate, to feel free to create, for you to be risk takers, and also it helps with the confident sector.

I sat and reflected about all the conversations with each of the participants. So many ideas came to mind as I listened to the statements about the importance of the themes of culture, identity, and sovereignty. I tend to think that these words are often overused. Still, it is a reminder of their importance when we think about where we are headed and the future of Indian country and our tribal colleges and universities. A couple of other participants helped

me better understand this with their responses and clarifications about what it means to be in a position to move our institutions forward. Tom explained,

> When we take the Navajo way of life, way of living and thinking, being who you are, and apply yourself to nature, to the world, and bringing in Western education and its formula becomes systematical ideas and therefore becomes more of a force, like trying to force a square peg into a round hole. Our practices are so much different that. That why when we talk about cultural sensitivity, they (non-Natives) do not know what that means. They think that they rule over us, because they have no values or rather, their values are very different. Where is the sovereignty in that?
>
> Joe sat and readjusted as he seemed a little anxious and then answered,
>
> Sovereignty and decolonization – the two words that get us going, but in what direction? I think we need to think about how we need to reinvest in our own people, culture, and language. Reinvest in our knowledge holders and reinforce those teaching that they have for us. This is a critical part of who we are; it's always been. It never left.

Tony hardly smiled, and as he answered he tucked his hands under his arms which were crossed in front of him, stating,

> My simple answer is that we need to exercise our sovereignty. We have an inherent authority to oversee our schools. It's our responsibility to oversee that because language is important, and so is culture, but the people are not willing to sacrifice to save it. Let's stop saying we will do something and end up doing nothing.

Finally, Mae's voice was passionate. She always comes from a leadership perspective and finds a way to tie it back to the culture. She said, "It's really important that we carry that cultural knowledge forward. It is part of our sovereign right. "

Identity helps shape who we are as a people, and it is because of our identity that we can understand that our culture, knowledge, and language are placed at the forefront of what we stand for as a people. These subthemes: culture, identity, and sovereignty help in understanding that oral traditions are critical elements of the transmission of cultural knowledge and language for our Indigenous communities, especially in the Southwest United States. These experiences employ oral traditions with important forms of pedagogy and practice and form the basis for culture and language learning (Sims, 2019). Tribal colleges and universities have been providing this since their inception in 1968, with Navajo Community College leading the way and focusing on culture and language first. This was an expression of sovereignty during the self-determination era.

Building Community is Decolonization

We come to understand that relationality takes many different forms, depending on how we interpret it. The connections we make can be personal, both subjectively and objectively. In describing the themes that emerged in this study, I was subjected to our relationship with each other - person to person, person to artifact, and person to community. I addressed k'e (clanship) and collaboration/ nation-building**.** The conversations with the participants came from what it means to be a community and to build upon the cultural knowledge that each of them grew up with and the understanding of what it means to be engaged. I asked the participants to explain how our TCU can collaborate with tribal

museums, cultural centers, knowledge bearers, and the community to revitalize language and culture. Mike told me:

> We are very spiritual people as Diné, as Navajos. We have many ways of coming together and being together, to help with many things that come up on the nation. We have spiritual doings, like our ceremonies and dances, and we come together to for community events. We need each other, especially within TCUs, we need to learn to collaborate more with each and not compete with one another. We can bring stronger activities and events to the people in our communities. Conferences, workshops, traditional games and storytelling. This is the example we should be providing for the younger generation, so that they stay interested in the culture and language, it's like that you know.

Tom reflected on the creation of community:

> We have to create communities within our communities to help the process of engaging that traditional learning style. We have our language, and it is strong, but it takes a community to raise each other and our children. My grandfather always talked about the daily practice if you wanted to be good at something. Today our leaders do not understand that. Our nation is still in the same position when it comes to that extension of trying to build itself. We forget that nation-building is important when it comes to the people. Yes, we have our clans, but imagine the power that clans possessed a long time ago, because we worked together. That's how this is going to work even in our TCUs. We have to be stronger together using both k'e, which is our clans and our abilities to lead, because we need to continue to build our nation, as a whole.

The context of this idea of relationality from a Diné perspective is that k'e goes hand in hand with nation-building. Within our communities, we have to understand that our clan system is largely all about family. We have the extension of relatives around us who hold us accountable. According to Wilson (2008), "relational accountability is putting things into action" (p. 99), even in terms of research, while modifying Indigenous methodologies, as we see that many of our Indigenous scholars have produced different paradigms to guide their research when working directly with community members, and being careful with the relationships we build with our participants.

Sacred Places and Sacred Spaces

As Indigenous people, we have always practiced and appreciated what it means to exchange and learn from one another. It is no wonder we bartered among the different cultural groups long before colonization occurred. Today, we still practice exchange in many ways, and through traditional teachings we see how education, formal and informal, and curriculum continue to be sharing points, especially when we come together for community events.

Formal education is more about the curriculum in K-12 schools. We understand that this formalized curriculum does not allow our children and youth to learn much about our culture or our language and that we cannot depend on school systems to teach our children how to be Navajo. Related to this, participants acknowledged that many of us learned about our culture in informal settings. For example, Tom emphasized the role of being sacred every day:

> If we taught more about what it means to be sacred every day, I think that would resonate more with a lot of our people. If we taught them from the perspective that

> our classrooms are a sacred space, that our college is a sacred place, that learning is sacred, our outcomes for success might be very different. Archives and collections spaces are sacred places, just as well and people need to understand that if we don't collect information now, we could possibly lose it, one day. I know that now, our children learn very differently and that's detrimental to who we are, as Diné. Our formal classrooms don't allow us to teach the ways we were taught, growing up outside. My grandfather was a medicine man and because of that I exposed to things very differently, and then when I came to school, it changed a lot of things. Now I understand what the elders were talking about. We are evolving and adapting to a very foreign American culture and that is very strong, but not what our children need.

Relatedly, Joe's expressions were always a keen reminder to be careful of how one asks questions. As Pueblo women, we are not supposed to ask about certain things. As I sat with Joe, I was mindful about how we convey messages. He shifted his body forward and leaned on the table, adjusted his cap, and began to respond,

> Growing up in two cultures, I had to learn how to balance my responsibilities and that came from ceremonies. One culture is a little stricter than the other, and I had to learn early on. This here is where the real knowledge is because, you know, I think people forget. Take a look back at the founding of the tribal colleges. It wasn't necessarily to reinforce our way of life. Our college was built and really kind of put in place to give us a fighting chance to survive in this changing world. We have that here and we're able to do that to really reinforce our skills and build our brains differently, while still being able to go down the road to tend the ceremonial and be around our relatives, to learn that old school education. And so I think that's the, that's the key there is to

> really kind of provide us, kind of, the two kinds of education, we still use across the board, because both traditional and non-traditional. Everything is considered sacred, we both know this, because as you and I have had to balance our life, in this way, on both our Diné side and Pueblo side.

Mae's smile said it all. She is proud of what we have. I could not help but see the light in her eyes as she explained,

> I don't like when people say, 'our language is dying'. It's not. To my understanding, it is really essential to know that your cultural knowledge is really about your upbringing. So down the road you can teach your children, your grandchildren, and where they teach their children and their grandchildren to wear their knowledge. It will make an impact within their daily lives. What our ancestors have taught us and what we can carry through. This is how we are sacred already, and we have to hold on to that.

As Diné people, we find favor with the modern world, which has helped with our subsistence. It is important to note that Diné people do not always agree with what is modern. I think this is because of the secular demand promoted by colonialism for Diné people to abandon the sacred. Visitors to Navajo buy into the Beauty Way but leave perplexed because they also see poverty and what our lives really look like (Emerson, 2014). The views of our own people are different because we live and conquer life here every day. It is our way. It is the Beauty Way, the way in which we live holistically and balanced with everything in nature, that we remember above all else.

Interestingly, these views about how our education has varied and what some still deem important are examined from the lens of both formal and informal education settings. I

agree to some extent because my views of being trained with traditional teachings is what I use and incorporate today, as a professor, a mom, a grandma, and as an Indigenous intellectual who can best serve our nations. It is about recovering the traditions that have almost become extinct (Wilson & Cavender, 2004) and that is what my work entails, as a preservationist, conservationist, and revitalizer as we adapt to re-culturalization once again. This gives me hope and as I sat down one day to see one of my students doing their part on the ground of the hogan floor, it gave me a sense of peace, but was also screaming urgency at the same time. There is so much work to be done and I am reminded where it must come from.

Over the years and throughout my own travels, I have born witness to how sovereignty can manifest. In 2009, I had the unique opportunity to travel to New Zealand. This educational endeavor truly began as a dream. There was a spiritual connection to the Māori people and for the 13 days I was there, I got to experience the power of sovereignty. They have taken the time to create a powerful government that is about their people and that serves the people.

"By the late 20th century, Native American bilingual/bicultural education programs had been in operation for more than three decades" (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 135) and if this is what allowed them to remain who they are, then we know that it is certainly possible for us to continue using the methods of decolonization and sovereignty to its fullest. We are in a time where we should be able to know and understand what is working for us and to use this information to help continue striving for better resources to create better policies for our Navajo people, to collect and house cultural knowledge, and find ways to

create a collections system for recording our Knowledge Keepers, in order to sustain our culture into the future.

Indigenous people bring with them an ancient knowledge system that serves both to demonstrate their distinctive form of knowledge and its dynamics; its ability to recreate itself in modern settings is testimony to its resiliency (Sam, 2011, p. 15). Tribal colleges and universities continue to stand on this knowledge without hesitation.

Cumulative Data

To better the understand and interpret the participants' responses, I prepared cumulative data for topics that I believe contributed to deeper analysis. These topics included cultural loss, cultural materials in museum collections, the possible impact of COVID-19, and where culture and language could be taught and practiced.

An important finding is that all ten participants expressed that they realized that our culture is slowly fading because of the lack of interest in wanting to learn the language and low participation in cultural settings especially traditional ceremonies.

Seven of the ten participants expressed concern for the loss of culture and language due to colonization and how we are not taught specifics when it comes to learning about the true history of where we come from as Diné. Five of the ten participants realized the positive impact of what our college collection holds and believed that the collection is a valuable tool for the institution in its efforts to contribute to reinvesting in our culture and language. The same five had a better understanding of what it means to become re-culturalized as we shift with each generation, while still holding onto what has been placed for us to help guide us in keeping our traditional ways intact.

As COVID-19 raged through the Navajo Nation during the time our Nation was shut down like the rest of the country, the number of practitioners that lost their lives to this pandemic also became very apparent. It is hard to believe that so many were lost in a year. When you lose a practitioner, you lose their knowledge, language, and part of the culture, as well. That information is invaluable and when it leaves, no one can replace that person and what they take with them.

Many of the participants expressed that they learn things in different ways, from cultural teachings to farming, to participating in family events and making art. The significance of this is that culture and language is universal, no matter where and how it is taught. As Indigenous people, we understand and realize that no matter how precious the teachings are, at some point they can be lost if we are not responsible for what we inherit from our elders, knowledge bearers, and our traditional practitioners. The same goes, for instructors in our institutions, because all knowledge is valuable.

Story Map of Objects/Artifacts

In our Diné way of life, many things are shared with us as we become adults. Though I understand that not all of us are given the privilege to hear and witness traditional ceremonies and storytelling, we pick it up somewhere along the way. These teachings come from relatives, friends, and our practitioners who are willing to share, which makes our Diné culture special. Since I was a little girl, I have believed in the beauty of our ceremonies and enjoyed listening to songs and prayers that my late grandmother uttered. I remember sitting in ceremonies with her well into adulthood and taking her with me when asked to attend by our community and relatives.

These songs painted vivid images of the flames of the fire dancing with the smell of smoke filling the air. I listened carefully to the stories being told because I knew one day I would become the culture bearer in my family. As I sat and listened carefully once again to each of my participants, I was reminded of what it meant to "listen carefully" and what was being shared with me. Each participant had their own version of what had been shared with them from their family about the objects they picked individually. Please note that all stories will vary from family to family and from one region of the nation to the other. I cannot share everything I heard as part of the interview process because I have a responsibility to the participant to protect the sensitive teachings they shared.

Participants could select one of the following artifacts as part of the interview process:

1. Horse Bridle – Azah'tih.
2. Quiver – Ka'yéél
3. Painting of the Mountain Top Way Ceremony – Dzil'kih'jíí ha'taal
4. Arrow – Kah'
5. Stirring Sticks – Ii'diis'tíín
6. Planting Can/Fire Poker – Gish (picked by two participants)
7. Abalone Shell – Díi'chil'ii
8. Shield – Yii'cha'nalyéé or na'gééh
9. Moccasins – Keel'chíí

Here I write about the three artifacts that aligned with the questions I asked of these participants: Carson, Lita, and Mae. I chose these objects specifically for my dissertation

because of the cultural knowledge they hold and because that knowledge could be shared publicly by the participant.

One of the artifacts that was selected was a painting depicting a winter ceremony. At the time of the interview, I was able to obtain unique information about this specific ceremony by going with the practitioners to witness this event take place. We later returned to the office and saw this same painting. This story is based on seasons and can only be shared during that time of the year.

The second artifact selected was the quiver. This story was also told with conviction and with great care as it was told during storytelling season. The last object selected was the stirring sticks. These sticks are a tool that all Navajo women should have in their homes. This piece was talked about from a very personal perspective through a beautiful story of why they exist.

Circling Back

I am happy to share what I am allowed to share from the Circling Back method I discussed in the previous chapter. What I enjoyed most about these interviews was learning about the knowledge related to each artifact that continues to move forward from one generation to the next. Knowledge of the artifacts represented a vital part of my interviews.

Of the ten participants, only three were able to provide answers to the questions I asked about the importance and origin of these objects. The objective behind these questions was to see who could tell the origin stories of the artifacts they picked. Three participants could tell me information their artifacts; however, although the other seven found ways to relate to their objects, they did not have traditional knowledge about the artifacts. I hoped for a better outcome with this step in the data collection process because, as my findings show,

we are losing our stories at a notable rate. This is a critical issue for a TCU whose foundation is built on culture and language revitalization.

Part of the process for relearning is to capture the stories and songs; on the campus of Diné College we have many opportunities to do that. In the winter time, we tell stories based on creation and this is a good time to use the collections areas and permanent gallery to do so. Based on the participants of this research, we have those that know the stories, who are willing to share in these spaces, that are willing to be recorded, to start a new archive of resources, for students and the Navajo communities. We can all embrace the idea of relearning and adapting to our culture, today. This new generation is very different, but if we make these resources available to them, they can continue to embrace our traditional teachings for their future. My hope with these findings indicated in this research is that faculty and staff might become a little more cognizant of what we have in our collection and become aware of how they can use the collections for the Navajo language classes that are already offered at the college. I am also hopeful that this will engage our tribal leaders to implement language and culture classes among our schools on the Nation to become a bigger part of their curriculums on a larger scale. Having a culturally significant collection is especially useful for our young apprentices who follow practitioners to learn our ceremonies, therefore this is a critical part of relearning the language.

Lita's Object

Lita walked into the gallery space and took a look around. She is familiar with the space and knew what she wanted to talk about, as she had seen the painting from afar. She was quickly drawn to it. It is one of her favorite ceremonies to watch and participate in when she can. Her story behind the Mountain Top Way painting was delicately described. It is one

of our longest winter ceremonies. Several different types of ceremonies will coincide with a Mountain Top Way—this particular one could possibly be Shooting Way or Red Ant Way, depending on the patient in the ceremony. Lita explained, “This ceremony, like many others we have in our culture, is all about making medicine for the patient. To help bring them back into balance and harmony with nature.”

She picked this particular piece because as a female who practices ceremonies it is important for her to know,

> What I am treating and the patients who need this ceremony done. I was drawn to it, because of my interest, since I had this ceremony done, a very long time ago. It helped me and today I want to help those in need as well.

She continued to explain the significance behind this ceremony and then proceeded to talk about how it will benefit our own culture and language moving forward. Our culture is very delicate and when you observe such a ceremony, you begin to think about the future and the generations that follow behind us. She told me,

> It isn’t just something to sit and observe; it is about understanding the value of having this kind of ceremony in place for us. You do not have to speak or understand Navajo because the songs are easy to catch on to and sing. They get stuck in your head, and you will want to continue singing them.

Sitting with Lita, I asked, “How do you think we should protect information like this?” She replied, “Watch it and learn it.” Lita did not recommend recording it except for writing things down, which is very different. Recording things and listening to them repeatedly can be emotionally and mentally harmful. Today, people record these songs and sell them to make money, not realizing that we need to protect what we have. More

importantly we need to teach our youth to have respect and learn to do ceremonies the right way. When I asked Lita if there is anything she wanted to leave with me, she replied,

> Preservation of ceremonies today is about the interest that our own people have to have in our culture. We need to encourage our younger generation to gain interest because there are very few medicine men and women left. Many ceremonies are fading because of the lack of interest that our people have. We are Navajo, and it is up to us to preserve who we are.

Carson's Artifact

Carson walked around the gallery space and carefully looked through the items. He decided as he came back around to come to the quiver with its arrows. "This is called Ka'yéél," he stated and then continued,

> The story of this particular item goes back to the time of the Creation Story. The story is about the twins, Na'yei'neizhaani dóó To'baa'jiish'chiin. What we call Ha'taah'bazhni'aazh (Monster Slayer and Child Born of Water and their journey to see their father, the Sun).

This has always been one of my favorite winter stories. I was glad to hear some of it again as it related to the artifact. At the beginning of time, Changing Woman was blessed to receive and bear twins. The twins were sent to the Sun to find a remedy for taking care of the giants that roamed the earth. They were eating and killing off many of the people. After enduring several tests by the elements, the Sun accepted his children and gave them arrows to kill the giants. Carson continued, "There are many variations of this story, but this is how it was told to me, so I share just this tiny bit with you."

In this short version of the story, he covered most of the object's significance. Then he proceeded to tell me that these are tools that were given to us to use for nourishment when we secure food for our family, to keep us protected, and today that is still what they are used for. It provided many things for our people; however, “today a lot has changed, so now you see it hung up like this, and now it has become an artifact.” I can almost sense his sadness as he looks at it hanging behind the plexiglass.

I asked Carson, “How does it benefit us to keep our language and culture moving forward?” His answer was straight to the point, “Ni’hizhaad béé’diyin góó neel’yah (Our language is sacred). The quiver and arrows are our protection; they stand against the enemy.”

Just like the way the quiver and arrows protect us, we need to make sure that we protect who we are. We need to carefully take care of the songs and stories that have been given to us. They are purposeful and not something to be played with. By doing this, we can carry them into the future for our people.

Mae’s Artifact

Mae looked around the gallery and said, “I’ll choose this one. The ii’diistíín (Stirring Sticks).” She walked up, and I immediately saw her connection to it. “Ii’diistiin wol’yéé (traditional stirring sticks) shí che’eí - dii nihi’ asdzaan dóó sanii daa’nigliiniigi eí ho’ghaan go’nee ei yii’ha’diteeh, be’niho’holnii (These sticks are called ii’diistíín, my daughter. As women and elderly women, we have them in our home, and it is where they belong. These are our responsibility). She discussed what they represent and how they are a very sacred element. Then, she talked about the seven prayers that are captured within the sticks. She explained,

> As we prepare our traditional foods when we use this item, they are cleaned a certain way, with prayer for bountiful goodness for all that a family represents. Women are responsible for making ii'diis'tiin. Al'kééh whi'taóo ni'niil—Everything is tied in a clockwise direction, never counterclockwise, and always ni'nijéé́h, sha'da'jígóó eí dóó'dáá, always keeping Ni'asdzaan dóó Ya'dil'hil in mind. These are made early in the morning. Should it ever come apart, it is telling you something. You need to have a prayer done or an overnight prayer and singing done.

These are teachings we are taught, and I was lucky to have captured such a beautiful story from Mae. I got emotional listening to her and my eyes begin to fill with tears. I used to love hearing stories of such things from my grandmother and all the old ladies I would sit and listen to at the different ceremonies as I was going up. I think back and reminisce how lucky I was to have heard the women in my life share and talk story about items like this one.

"It's going to benefit us from the home teachings of not only is it called the artifact, but also the ii'diil'yíín teaching from home," Mae said, as we continued discussing the benefits of moving our culture and language forward. She stated,

> It comes with great responsibility to know what it means to have such a spiritual connection to this item. This is the only way to pray to gain our knowledge and wisdom from here. We keep these items sacred by continuing to share the songs and prayers together for such items. We cannot record and store them, but we can share them with our younger generation to learn. We bring our elderly women, young women, and girls together and show them. We have to be willing to teach the younger generation how to prepare and keep them in order to keep them sacred.

Tears continued to fill my eyes, as I looked to her and just listened. I think about how much I miss ceremony and the teaching moments that come from within. I asked her my last question and I loved that she responded with a motherly tone, and she used our language to express herself. Unfortunately, I cannot share the words from the interview because we both felt that the words came from a more spiritual place and were meant only for our discussion.

Cultural sensitivity in our teachings sometimes calls for things only meant for the listener to hear. In my case, with everything that I have endured on the journey through my doctoral program, her words were like a prayer being uttered for myself and my family. After the tremendous loss we suffered, these words give me hope again, my spiritual faith was restored within this teaching. I put my breath on that, inhaling her words and sympathy with both my hands, and accepted her teachings in this very moment.

Summary

There is a power felt when witnessing the passing of cultural knowledge as it happens in front of you. I had the privilege of seeing this happen as I was finishing this dissertation. It was humbling moment and an emotional one as well. Students gathered to work with a well-known Night Way chanter to learn the ethics and protocols of doing the traditional iikah (sand painting), at Diné College. To hear the lecture and watch closely as students engaged in the process gave me hope that what we are doing helps us move forward in preserving our traditional aesthetics and ceremonial language.

To understand how we can retain our cultural knowledge and language, we understand that it remains a vital part of who we are in our higher education institutions, which are purposefully dedicated to who we are in our respective communities. This study allowed me to see up front where we need to think about the importance of working with our

communities and knowledge bearers. The COVID-19 pandemic helped me witness just how important our ceremonies were when the world stood still for a couple of years, in a world where ceremonial artifacts, paintings, and ethnographic objects continue to be housed for safekeeping. The work has just begun to better understand the stories of cultural existence in order to continue carrying our culture into the future for the next seven generations.

Chapter Five

Reverence: What Comes Next

(Yodii dóó Ni'tliiz Altaas'ei)

Five years ago, I remember leaving home in the morning and arriving in Albuquerque at the University of New Mexico campus. I was excited and could not wait to see what would unfold. I shopped for my books, supplies, and even a new backpack (like a little girl), waiting for this dream to become a reality. On my drive, I could not help but reflect on my life, and the many things I had accomplished, and the many places I have seen. I remember praying and singing a mountain song as we drove past Mount Taylor. Even at that moment, it took me back to a time when I would ask my great grandpa to utter prayers on my behalf for anything that I had set my mind to, whether it was with school, work, or leaving on a trip somewhere. Coming from a spiritually faith-based family, it was my late grandmother who always taught me that prayer was important and that we should remain grounded in our traditional faith.

Participating in ceremonies as a young child and even into adulthood taught me how to be gentle in this career field. I remember being asked why and my reply in the back of my mind: " If not you, then who?" It has become somewhat of a mantra, as I have seen myself through many trials and tribulations. In some of my hardest moments, I have continued to reflect. One day, while driving, I began to think about the period of reverence after the completion of a ceremony. We are told not to do certain things and to remain "reverent." That time is meant for reflection and continued prayer. "Stay holy," as my late mentor Johnny Perry would say. The directions were strict: no cutting with scissors or knives, no

playing with fire, no touching meat or anything with blood on it, and no going out at night or shaking hands with anyone. It was and is all for a greater purpose.

When the kin'aalda is near completion, we share these same teachings with the young woman. We take her hair and pull it all away from her face, as we have hid her from the sun for the last few days. Her hair is pulled back and made into a traditional tsí'yéél (hair bun) with her new hair tie. She is revealed to her family, as she transformed overnight from the little girl she was to being revered as a young woman. In beauty her ceremony is complete.

Today, I think about what has transpired, and all along the road are these blessings of soft goods and hard goods, what we call yodíí'altáás'eh dóó ni'tlíiz'altáás'eh. Both of these bring sustenance and some kind of nourishment. This is what I believe this journey has shed light upon for me while working in a tribal higher education institution that is founded on Diné principles and lifeways.

Native languages, as we all are aware, increasingly are becoming extinct as our elders pass, and when they do, their medicine goes with them. As a young leader and even as a new grandmother now, I have watched myself transform into a knowledge bearer. Coming through NALE (Native American Leadership in Education) at UNM, I have experienced what it means to see myself as a transformational leader and how my work has transformed my thought process and broadened my own expectations of what I envision for myself in the future. Like Ruth, and her vision to start Navajo Community College based on our culture and language, she had a dream for our people. Today, that dream can continue because we have found ways to reignite that torch and continue that fire our ancestors started, as we get ready to pass the next torch onto the next generation.

Findings Based on Literature Review and Review of Cultural Knowledge

When I interviewed participants about the artifacts in our collections, I should not have been surprised that most were unfamiliar with the origin stories of our objects. I honestly believe that we are all raised differently with different variations of what these stories hold, but for tribal colleges and universities, I understand now that we must do better to support the efforts of reinvesting in our language and culture. Our TCUs "have become a powerful force for educating AIAN students and preserving Tribal culture. Degrees awarded at TCUs include those focused on Indigenous culture, history, language, and art, as well as programs of Western disciplines taught from an Indigenous perspective" (Stull et al., 2013, p. 4).

However, it seems as though Western disciplines have overpowered our culture and language. I found from personal experience that our museum collections are often pushed aside because most people have no understanding of what it is we are trying to preserve.

"Identity is a human right" (Crazy Bull et al., 2019, p. 3) and Indigenous people are recognized for having artistic expression because of the deeply embedded cultural stories we have. These connections bring about many different characteristics that bring us back to how identity is inherent to who we are as people and places with a language and culture intact. Because of that, our preservation efforts need to be at the forefront of continuing to instill who we are as Indigenous people, more so as Navajo people on the Navajo Nation.

Through teaching our children and our people, we keep our language alive. However, it is also up to us to share the cultural knowledge we are blessed to know and have. We share what we know because that is what our ancestors passed on. When I am called upon to share knowledge, I acknowledge my great-grandmother and grandmother, my aunties, and the

many women in my community who contributed to this gift I have today. Much of that knowledge is not written, but it is prevalent through our traditional oral stories and ceremonies that are still practiced today. For us, we have drawings that prove how oral tradition, songs, and prayers evolved. That is not something you will find in any textbook or art history book.

As educational leaders in our institutions, tribal leaders, and even as curators we have the ability to create the conversation of how we intend to carry forward our mission and vision. Many of our own people have the degrees and capacities to teach in our institutions, and that is where we can start to put actions behind our words. As leaders, we also need to be more supportive of those individuals who are teaching the language and culture, because we insist on "growing our own," is a common phrase we use to grow our work force in the economy that exists here on Navajo Nation.

Our leaders talk about the importance of educating our youth about the language and culture in order for it to survive. The handful of language and culture curricula and programs on the Nation are not embedded in all of our schools, which is a critical component of practicing sovereignty. As a nation, and like many others, we talk about sovereignty, and part of that should be allowing tribes to implement language and cultural teaching in all schools. Our tribal college was designed especially for this and should be setting the example of what that means. There are many ways to look at the revitalization and reinvestment practices and those examples are out there for us to use and take advantage of. The process of re-culturalization is happening, the adaptation is evident in this new generation that follows. We can teach language and culture classes online, but by doing so " we are attempting to preserve our languages in a hostile environment, contemporary America. We must change

many of our teaching practices if we are to succeed" (Littlebear, 2019, p. 63). We can be a better example for the future in how we are working to revive who we continue to be by understanding that language and culture are every day practices that take place both in and out of the classroom space.

Decolonization is a process for us in our daily endeavors. What I have come to realize is that re-culturalization is an adaptation of who we are; it is what will take place as we continue to move our cultures forward. It will always be important for us to know who we are, where we come from, and where our roots are planted. "It's not just about acknowledging the local First Nations culture but respecting and accepting at face value" (Siyám, 2021, p. 6). The respect that we speak of is also about accepting and embracing our roles and responsibilities to sustain our traditional teachings by handing them down to the next generation. Part of the decolonization process and projects also includes bringing tribal museums out of the elitist sphere, moving them towards providing forums as part of community engagement (2012, p.6). We are the new grandmas and grandpas, aunties and uncles who can teach what we have. Using the land, water, prayers, songs, artifacts, and collections, we have an opportunity to share our riches in this way. Traditional knowledge bearers that are among us, can show us what it means to preserve more than just our stories. Everything about who we are as Indigenous people lies within our collections and decolonization begins when we use our collections to revitalize language and culture.

There were stories that objects housed in museums were most likely stolen items (Lonetree, 2012). Some of this is true to an extent because of how objects were taken from families, tribes, and the lands our people occupied. However, that is not necessarily the point because in order to repatriate items, they must have a history of how they were collected,

(Buijs, 2016). The College's museum has been acquiring much of their collections through major donations to the college. Working collaboratively with practitioners since I joined the college in 2012 has allowed me to bridge connections and create a community independently. It has allowed a one-on-one connection with practitioners and their apprentices and for us to have conversations about where and what should happen to our beautiful collection, which is mostly culturally sensitive to our people and to outsiders, as well.

These collections have become invaluable to the Hatathli community, especially here on Navajo. The knowledge, stories, songs, and prayers that they hold are sacred and it will continue to be our responsibility to help in maintaining the transfer of knowledge and intellectual properties to the right individuals who give up their time and life to continue performing these special ceremonies that bring healing to individuals and families. As a tribal people, and as a sovereign people, it is our inherent right to continue to maintain our identity.

Implications of this Study

Based on this study, I found that the utilization of culture and language is not always the priority of tribal colleges and universities. In addition, knowledge bearers and traditional practitioners are not as involved in teaching about culture and language as they should be or could be. Finally, the third finding is that the museum collection is underutilized and not always as appreciated or valued as it could be or should be.

I understand that we can talk about revitalizing our cultural heritage and languages as Indigenous people. Our heritage and languages are absolutely important to who we are and to the future, but if we are not engaging through daily conversation, greetings, extension of k'e (familial relations), we cannot expect our children to learn. The same is true if we are not providing programs and access to our museum collections and the knowledge bearers, then

we are losing opportunities to build on what is learned on the hogan floor. Our teachings both at home and in institutions of higher learning have always been an extension of our ancestors using what we have in our daily lives to promote education.

Education, especially with the use of cultural knowledge and language essentially begins in the home. This is our foundation and our roots are planted here first. As practitioners of language and culture, we can continue to use them in our classrooms as we talk with our children and show them, what it means to have a basic understanding of using language on a daily basis. To teach the language is to talk the language; to teach the culture is to live the culture. Today, even in our college settings the tools of colonization are evident, such as standardized testing and assessments, that are based on colonial perceptions of what it means to be educated and we need to think about this, especially in our tribal colleges and universities. We pride ourselves on what we want to see continued on our nations, but we have only come so far. Sovereignty on tribal lands is about sacrifice, discipline, dedication and persistence. As Indigenous people, those are all common values and foundational principles that can help in the process of creating a system that bridges our education systems, community resources, tribal museums, and cultural centers, to create stronger programming for everyone across the board.

For several years I have entertained the idea of one day devoting my time and heart to creating something specially centered on language and culture-based programming. Being a Native speaker and culture keeper, I have always felt compelled to show and share with others what we can do with our museum collections. That's where our stories are. We can create a community where we welcome our knowledge bearers to openly record without fear,

because we can create policies that show them that their knowledge will be stored for tribal members only. That their songs and prayers will not be misused for outsider purposes.

Growing young leaders in this field requires educating them along-side our practitioners and showing interest, by helping them and advocating for them, as much as we advocate for scholarships for our students attending higher education institutions. When our children and grandchildren show genuine interest in maintaining their cultural knowledge and need to learn ceremonies, we need to support their efforts in learning as well. This type of scholarship and education requires more knowledge than in an academic setting. These teaching are not written but shown time and time again and are all performed through memorization. This is something we need to hold on to and reward our young apprentices for as if it were an academic degree.

In addition to what I have learned, I feel the need to advance myself in other areas in terms of continuing to learn our language and staying closely connected to the culture keepers. My life these past few years has given me peace in understanding what it means to understand many more stories, songs and prayers, and how to utilize them in specific areas of our Diné life. As a young woman and leader, it is my responsibility to reiterate the genuineness of what compassion and unconditional love represent in our culture. We do that through our traditional teachings and living in these teaching every day.

As I am finishing this dissertation, I have been involved in some planning that gives me a greater opportunity to be closer to our practitioners and knowledge bearers. We have begun planning sessions to hold teaching sessions for protocols and ceremonies and what we can do to bridge conversations at each of our seven campus sites, that include talking and recording our elders in all regions of the Navajo Nation. This is about helping our people

understand the value of our ceremonies and how we intend to keep record of what is left, after a pandemic. By using what is in our collections, we can make a greater connection to our elders and even those apprenticing, as they will know what our collections can and will be used for. I would like to be able to convey the importance of the use of this particular collection, as it does relate to our language and culture specifically.

Future Research

Additional information gathered in this study could be used for creating better policies on how we can house and use information stored as our own intellectual property within our higher education institutions and tribal archives, and in creating stronger connections with community members who are interested in recording projects that can be stored for future use. Research will also show that we are invested in our future for the next seven generations that follow.

Conclusion

This study has provided me an opportunity to think about how far I have come in my journey in the museum field, a journey that started out as just a little girl's dream of trying her best to attain a cultural goal of being a fluent speaker and holding on to the gifts from women before her that blessed her life. This has never been a journey about only knowing art forms, but more of the essence behind where we come from as Diné people and the ancient art forms that exists within our collection here on our nation.

The research paradigm in my study was relevant to the way that I have been experiencing and learning in my life as a young leader. Like the kin'aalda ceremony, I have watched a transition occur right in front of me. The elements for this study included fire, water, air, and earth and with these I was able to create respect among participants, while

using relationality through k’e. Reciprocity was welcomed with the harmony of understanding that what is sacred must be kept sacred. This specific knowledge is shared for one to know and keep close to their heart and in the back of their mind, always. We redistribute the information we share when we create communities that we can trust, to gain and understand traditional living systems in our sacred spaces. Museum and archives are exactly that. They are sacred spaces where all of us to learn with the right direction of our knowledge holders. Again, we live in a culture that is going to continue, no matter how many different ways it shifts.

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APPENDIX A

Instrumentation

I used the semi-structured interview process to conduct my interviews with each participant. Each interview was conducted within the museum, and artifacts from the collection were selected in the main gallery to answer the questions about the cultural knowledge and traditional teachings behind each of the objects that each participant selected. The questions I posed were both in the Navajo and English language, depending on the participant. Each participant knows both languages, but some are more fluent in the Navajo language as we understand context differently.

The questions in this instrumentation were designed to seek knowledge of the objects in the collection, with two main research questions to provide guidance of the overall study; these questions included:

1. Why is it essential for our tribal college (Diné College) to collect and house cultural knowledge?
2. How can Diné College collaborate with tribal museums, cultural centers, knowledge bearers, and the community to revitalize language and culture?

The second set of questions for the objects and artifacts included:

1. Please introduce yourself and tell me a little bit about yourself.

   Haash'yinil'yeh dóó adóóne'e niiliin'iigii ei' haiish'iinliih.

2. Describe the object and its purpose, please.

   Dii ei hatiish'atee dóó.

3. What is the story behind this object?

   Hei'tao ba'hanee hólóó.

4. What is the significance of the object you picked?

   Ha'atii bininaah iindiinlah, iindiintlsoozh,

5. How does it benefit us to keep our language and culture moving forward?

   Hei'teehgóó ni'hiizáád dóó ni'hii o'ohl'íil dóó'baa'daa'di'yiika'dah, dóó be'naas'dei'niikaah'doléél.

6. How should we protect information about objects and artifacts to keep them sacred?

   Ba'haane ei hei'tao taa'nihii diné niigliin'iiyigii báá dol'yeel dóó béé'ho'diisiin doo, doleel.

7. Is there anything else you want to add or leave with me as part of this interview?

   Na'iidikiid'iish nei'hoolo ei dóó'da'góó ei'ya diilah ha'tao baansiinkéés.

The sharing circle questions I asked were similar to the previous questions:

1. Do you know what the origin story of this piece is?

   Ba'hanéé' eí' he'taoo nihlbe'ho'ziin?

2. Are you familiar with the story in Navajo or English?

   Bili'gaana kee'jhii nilbe'ho'ziin'ish, eí dóó'da'góó taash' dine'kééh'jiih?

4. Please share with us some of the stories shared with you about this particular piece.

   Ta'shóodii ba'hanéé eei he'taoo, ni'hil'chiiwhiidiaal?

I also used a Circling Back Process, so that I was able to make sure that I only used what I asked to use and kept certain parts of the sensitive information, to keep their message sacred.

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval from Diné College

DINÈ COLLEGE

THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION OF THE NAVAJO NATION SINCE 1968

Institutional Review Board

Date: October 31, 2023

Protocol Number: DC 231024,

To: Ms. Nonobah Sam

Dear Ms. Sam

Your proposal titled *Teachings from the hogan floor: Preserving culture and language through museum collections* was presented to the Diné College Institutional Review Board on October 24, 2023. At that meeting, the IRB approved your project pending two items: (a) Clarification on the proposal form that you will not be using students in your own classes as participants, and (b) Clarification as to whether the autoethnography method will be used.

These clarifications were received on 10/29/2023, and your proposal has been fully approved. You may begin your research.

Please note the following:

- This approval expires on Oct. 31, 2024. Any extensions beyond this date require additional approval via a continuation request
- A formal report will be due to the IRB by the expiration date.
- Any unexpected results, problems, or changes to this approved protocol must be reported to the IRB promptly.

Thank you for your time in presenting to our IRB and answering the questions of the IRB members.

Sincerely,

Dr. Suzanne L. Russ
Associate Professor of Psychology
Chair, Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX C

IRB Approval from the University of New Mexico

OFFICE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Date:	11/03/2023
Principal Investigator:	Shawn Secatero
Protocol Number:	2309082712
Protocol Title:	TEACHINGS FROM THE HOGAN FLOOR: PRESERVING CULTURE AND LANGUAGE THROUGH MUSEUM COLLECTIONS
Submission Type:	Initial
Committee Action:	**APPROVAL**
Approval Date:	11/08/2023
Expiration Date:	
Review Type:	Minimal Risk
Risk Level:	Minimal Risk
Project Status:	Active - Open to Enrollment

The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board has granted approval for the above referenced protocol. This approval is based on an acceptable risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks to participants have been minimized.**This project is not covered by UNM's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) and will not receive federal funding.**

This approval includes the following:

Recruitment Materials - 2 Nonabah Sam recruitment email v.09.12.23.docx

Recruitment Materials - 3 Nonabah Sam in person recruitment script v.09.08.23.docx

Questionnaire/Survey - 5 Nonabah Sam interview questions v.09.08.23.docx

Other - 6 Nonabah Sam translation certification form v.09.12.23.docx

CV/Resume - 7 Nonabah Sam CV v.09.08.23.docx

Scientific Review Form - Nonbah signed validity form.pdf

Protocol - 1 Nonabah Sam protocol v.10.11.23.docx

Informed Consent Document - 4 Nonabah Sam consent v.10.11.23.docx

OFFICE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Questionnaire/Survey - 9 Nonabah Sam Sharing Circle Questions v.10.31.23.docx

Other - Memo from PI to IRB v. 10.31.23.docx

Letter - 231024 Approval, NSam, Museum collections.pdf

The IRB made the following determinations:

Informed consent must be obtained and documentation of informed consent has been waived for this project. To obtain consent, use only approved consent document(s). Please note research activities cannot begin until an approval letter from the Navajo Nation Human Research Program is received.

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission and does not apply should any changes be made to this research. If changes are being considered, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to submit an amendment to this project and receive IRB approval prior to implementing the changes. A change in the research may disqualify this research from the current review category. **If federal funding will be sought for this project, an amendment must be submitted so that it can be reviewed under relevant federal regulations.**

All reportable events must be promptly reported to the UNM IRB, including: unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others, serious or unexpected adverse events, and noncompliance issues. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

If an expiration date is noted above, a continuing review or closure submission is due no later than 30 days before the expiration date. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to apply for continuing review or closure and receive approval for the duration of this protocol. If the IRB approval for this protocol expires, all research related activities must stop and further action will be required by the IRB.

Please use the appropriate reporting forms and procedures to request amendments, continuing review, closure, and reporting of events for this protocol. Refer to the OIRB website for forms and guidance on submissions.

Note that all IRB records must be retained for a minimum of three years after closure.