Parents' Attitudes Toward Cultural Integration in a Navajo Language Immersion School

by

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ABSTRACT

Ultimately, the examples and foundation provided at home will impact the child as a student and lifelong learner. In Navajo society, there are some families who continue to instill the importance of heritage language and culture. And then there are those who choose not to, or who are not capable of doing so due to the lack of knowledge to share such teachings.

Diné language and culture are vital elements of who we are as *Diné*. They are what identify us as a people. Our language and culture separate us from the western society. As parents and educators, our attitudes affect our homes, schools, and children. Our way of thinking may inhibit or perpetuate cultural teachings. However, no one knows how parents' attitudes affect cultural integration at an immersion school.

This quantitative study examined parents' attitudes toward cultural integration in a Navajo language immersion school (*Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'* with the Window Rock Unified School District #8 in Fort Defiance, Arizona). Surveys were used to examine parents' attitudes about language and cultural integration. The survey asked about Navajo language and culture, about the extent to which it was practiced at home, and their opinions about how Navajo language and culture was being taught at school. The data were reported in basic descriptive statistics for the total group of respondents and then disaggregated by age, place of birth (on the reservation or off), gender, marital status, and highest grade completed in school.

The data has shown that overall parents are supportive of Navajo language and culture. Their attitudes may vary based on age, place of birth, gender, marital status, and education. In spite of this, Navajo language and culture are in the home. However, the degree to which it is spoken or practiced is not measured. Parents are supportive of the school teaching Navajo language and culture.

To the man who taught me how to drive stick shift,

who walked me down the aisle,

my father, the late Cecil Etsitty.

You have taught me the value of education.

I did it . . .

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF TABLES ix

CHAPTER

1 Introduction 1

- Statement of the Problem 5
- Purpose Statement 7
- Research Questions 7
- Significance of the Study 7
- Limitations 8
- Definition of Terms 8
- Organization of the Study 9

2 Review of the Literature 10

- The History of School Immersion Programs 10
- The Effects of English-Only Laws 14
- Attitudes Toward Language, Culture, and Traditional Practices 17
  - The Long Walk 18
  - The Boarding School Era 19
  - Attitudes Today 22
- Overview of the Origins of Navajo Culture 25
- Basic Beliefs and Values: Spiritually and the Role of Nature 27

CHAPTER Page

Foundations of Tradition: Sacred Mountains 28

Traditions 30

Ceremonies 30

Dwellings and Homes 32

Clothing 36

Navajo Livestock 37

Food and Plants 38

Clans, Kinship and K’é 40

Language 41

3 Methodology 47

Research Setting: Program Description 47

Mission and Vision Statements of Window Rock Unified School District 48

Research Question 49

Research Design 50

Population and Sample 50

Sampling Procedures/Instrumentation 51

Data Collection Procedures 51

Data Analysis 52

Limitations 52

CHAPTER Page

4 Findings.......... 53

Characteristics of Respondents.......... 53

Age.......... 54

Place of Birth.......... 54

Marital Status.......... 54

Gender.......... 54

Highest Grade Completed in School.......... 54

Research Questions by Parents' Demographics Characteristics.......... 56

Responses by All.......... 56

Age.......... 60

Place of Birth.......... 65

Marital Status.......... 70

Gender.......... 75

Highest Grade Completed in School.......... 80

5 Discussion and Recommendations.......... 89

Research Question 1.......... 90

Research Question 2.......... 93

Research Question 3.......... 94

Conclusions.......... 99

Limitations.......... 101

Recommendations.......... 101

Page

REFERENCES 102

APPENDIX

A. SURVEY QUESTIONS 108

B. ASU IRB 111

C. WRUSD..113

List of Tables

Table Page

1. Characteristics of Respondents 55

2. Responses of All Responses (In Percent; N = 176) 58

3. Responses by Parents' Age (Percent Agreement—A/SA) 63

4. Responses by Place of Birth (Percent Agreement—A/SA)............................ 68

5. Responses by Marital Status (Percent Agreement—A/SA)............................ 73

6. Responses by Gender (Percent Agreement—A/SA) 78

7. Responses by Grade Completed in School 85

Chapter One

Introduction

I am *Tódích'ii'nii* (Bitter Water clan), born of *Naakai Dine'é* (Mexican clan), adopted and raised by the *Ta'neeszahnii* (Tangle clan). My maternal grandfather's clan is *Tótsohnii* (Big Water), and my paternal grandfather's clan is *Honágháahnii* (One Who Walks Around). My name is Audra J. Platero. As a keeper, practitioner, and advocate of my *Diné* language, culture, and tradition, my primary purpose as an educator is to revitalize and maintain our values and teachings—the *Diné* way of life.

As a young child, I was fortunate to have been taught the importance of our *Diné* language, culture, and traditions by my late maternal grandfather and my mother. My grandfather's name was Totsoni Yázhí (Yazzie). He was a strong and beautiful man, a medicine man, a teacher, a father and mother, and my beloved "cheii" (maternal grandfather). Grandfather was a person who believed in the power of prayers, songs, and *"tádídíín"* (corn pollen). He rose in the early dawn to greet the Holy People.

Cheii use to say, "Do not sleep in late. If you sleep in late, the Holy People will pass over you." They might even say, "Look at our grandchild. She just likes to sleep. Maybe we will just let her sleep and won't bother to ever wake her up." Grandfather was a gray-haired man who went about his daily chores feeding his horses and cattle. During the winter, he would chase us out into the first snow, saying, "Bathe in the snow so you will be strong, and the cold will know you."

We had to herd sheep, clean the house, and learn how to make fry bread and potatoes. We were taught to offer coffee and bread when we had company. Grandfather used to say, “Never forget your language. Do not be ashamed of who we are and where we are coming from.” We were taught not to take life for granted, and that we all had a purpose in life. We were told to respect ourselves and all walks of life, from the newborn baby to the elderly man across the field, even the stink bug. Grandfather taught us to believe in our language, culture, and tradition, a teaching that he shared with his children and my mother.

My mother is *Tódích’íi’nii* (Bitter Water clan) and born of *Tótsohnii* (Big Water clan). My mother is a woman who carried on the teachings of my grandfather after he passed away. She is also a strong and beautiful person. She gave us life and love. My mother taught me to believe in myself. She would say, “Never let people walk all over you. If you know that something is not right, then speak up.” Through her teachings and guidance, we grew into responsible individuals. She would also say, “You girls will not stay children all your life. One day you will have your own families. Then, you will know what I am talking about.” We were told not to leave dirty dishes in the sink. If you do, the hunger people will eat off of it and you will go hungry. My mother also instilled the importance of our language, culture, and tradition, telling us that they would guide us through any obstacles of life. My mother is a very important person in my life. She taught me what it means to be a Navajo woman (a wife, mother, and teacher).

My grandfathers' and mother's teachings are one. I know that my culture is the carrier of my Navajo language. I know that in order for my heritage language and customs to thrive, I have to advocate its importance and purpose. It is my passion as an educator to continue to teach the significance of our *Diné* language, culture, and traditions.

As I look back on my childhood, I can clearly see how my grandfathers' beliefs and values about our *Diné* language, culture, and tradition shaped our lives. It was evident in everything that we did. Through these experiences, I cannot help but wonder about other parents and their attitudes about our language and culture.

According to Ernest Harry Begay (2005), in *Diné*, knowledge is gained through a "learning and teaching" process referred to as "*Íhoo'aah dóó na'nitin.*" Many rituals are performed throughout childhood to assist a child in his or her learning process. These milestones include the first laugh, the first word, the first step, puberty, and marriage. Throughout this whole process, the *Diné* language is consistently used through direct teachings, stories, songs, and prayers.

For instance, at the baby's first laugh, salt crystals are offered to relatives during the celebration to welcome the spirit of happiness into the baby's mind. Another tradition is conducted when the child speaks his or her first words. Sacred corn pollen is placed on the child's tongue (sacred development of the language), scalp (brain process), and on the ground with a forward motion toward the east (future). Then, children begin learning from other relatives.

Specific teachings based on the age of the child are taught from each relative (mother, father, maternal uncle, maternal aunt, maternal grandmother, maternal grandfather, etc.). This age-appropriate learning process is carefully built upon until completed at the point when the young adult is married. It is at this point that the young couple's learning becomes their teachings to their children. The young parents go through the same rituals at each stage in life just as their parents went through the stages of life. *Diné* elders observe this as an assessment method of parents as teachers. The way a child or young adult conducts themselves in society reflects how their parents have taught them.

This whole process is referred to as "*Íhoo'aah dóó na'nitin,*" "learning and teaching," in contrast to western education, where the process is usually referred to as "teaching and learning." As you can see, the richness of the cultural teachings is emphasized through the *Diné* language. If the cultural teachings are absent, then the language is not as meaningful and powerful.

This is how language and our ways of life are learned and taught. The concept of culture was always embedded in our language. As our Navajo society changes, so does our fundamental concept of "*Íhoo'aah dóó na'nitin,*" "learning and teaching," through our cultural practices. At our Navajo language immersion school, our parents and students are faced with the challenges of living and balancing our *Diné* way of life and the western way of life.

There are families who have successfully balanced both, and then there are those who struggle with living in two worlds. Unfortunately, the results of these struggles have lead many Navajo families to immerse themselves in western education and culture while abandoning their own in hopes of becoming successful in a dominant society.

Subsequently, the once culturally rich language has just become another language to be spoken and learned. Therefore, the goal to revitalize and maintain the *Diné* language among school age children within the communities of the Window Rock Unified School District has become stagnant.

Statement of the Problem

As first teachers, parents have the ability to mold their children's views and beliefs. It is these views and beliefs that will shape the child as he/she begins school. Ultimately, the examples and foundation provided at home will impact the child as a student and lifelong learner. In Navajo society, there are some families who continue to instill the importance of heritage language and culture. And then there are those who choose not to, or who are not capable of doing so, due to the lack of knowledge to share such teachings.

As a child starts school the responsibilities and rigor of the education system begins. In some cases, the education system will focus only on western education and academia. In other cases, the education system has included heritage language and culture either as a special area class or as an elective. In both instances, heritage language and culture are just small components in the overall educational system.

Since that is the case in many public schools across the Navajo Nation, many students are exposed to little or no Navajo language and culture in the schools and classrooms. For that reason, the importance of the Navajo language and culture is less likely to be emphasized and taught, leaving idle what was gained at home in terms of language and culture.

On the other hand, when the school is the only one exposing heritage language and culture through specialty classes or electives, then the student has the advantage of learning what is being offered at school. Along with special area classes and electives, there are schools that specialize in revitalizing heritage languages and cultures. These schools are referred to as immersion schools. Immersion schools teach in the target language or heritage language that is being learned or revived. Such schools exist in New Zealand (Maori), Hawaii (Pūnana Leo), Alaska (Yup'ik), and Arizona (*Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'*).

As an immersion teacher, during our first few years as a school, I could see and hear the majority of our students speaking the target language. They were proud of their ability to speak their language. Whether this was done in simple phrases and sentences as a new language speaker or a more detailed conversation as a capable speaker, the students were developing and utilizing the *Diné* language. However, since the years have passed, I have noticed that our students have shied away from speaking the *Diné* language at school. I cannot help but wonder what has caused this alarming language shift. The decrease in *Diné* language acquisition has prompted me to examine parents' attitudes toward cultural integration at our Navajo language immersion school. Do their attitudes and perspectives perpetuate or inhibit cultural integration at school that hinders the process of learning and speaking the *Diné* language?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to examine parents' attitudes toward cultural integration in a Navajo language immersion school.

Research Questions

Parents' attitudes toward cultural integration in a Navajo language immersion school were examined through the following questions:

1. To what extent do parents believe Navajo should be the sole language used in the school?
2. Are there differences in parents' attitudes as to the use of the Navajo language in the home?
3. Are there differences in parents' attitudes as to the use and practice of cultural traditions (i.e., consultation of medicine men/women, belief in cultural values and teachings, or practice of rituals related to milestones in life)?
4. Are there differences in parents' attitudes toward cultural integration at a certain child's grade level; in other words, is there a difference in parental support as to their attitudes towards cultural integration from the time their child starts elementary school to the time their child is in middle school?

Significance of the Study

Diné language and culture are vital elements of who we are as *Diné*. They are what identify us as a people. Our language and culture separate us from the western society. As parents and educators, our attitudes affect our homes, schools, and children. Our way of thinking may inhibit or perpetuate cultural teachings.

However, no one knows how parents' attitudes affect cultural integration at an immersion school because this type of study has not been conducted. Furthermore, there is only one Navajo language immersion public school on the Navajo Nation. This study is needed to help understand parents' perspectives as to implementing Navajo culture not only in an immersion school but all schools across the Navajo Nation.

Limitations

1. There is only one Navajo language immersion public school on the Navajo Nation.
2. This study was only conducted at one school.
3. The data collection instrument was given to only parents at the Navajo language immersion school. Only parents with students who were currently enrolled during the 2010–2011 school year were allowed to participate.

Definition of Terms

Diné: The Navajo word meaning "The People." This term is used by the Navajos to refer to themselves (Iverson & Porter, 1990). *Diné* also means "Child of the Holy People" (p. 118, Aronilth, 1994).

Íhoo'aah dóó Na'nitin: Learning and teaching.

Immersion–Diné medium program: The students are immersed in the *Diné* language.

Target language: The target language is the heritage Navajo language. It is the language of instruction.

Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta': The Navajo School at the Meadow Between the Rocks or the Navajo immersion school.

Organization of the Study

This study consists of five chapters: Chapter 1, titled Introduction, contains the following sections: Statement of the Problem, Purpose Statement, Research Questions, Significance of the Study, Limitations, Definition of Terms, Organization of the Study, and this section, Summary. Chapter 2, Literature Review, contains scholarly research related to the topic of study. Chapter 3, titled Methodology, describes the research setting; reviews the mission and vision statements; and lists the research questions. As to the research design, the population and sample, sampling procedures, instrumentation, and data collection procedures are reviewed. Data analysis and limitations end the chapter. Chapter 4, titled Findings, discusses parents' attitudes toward cultural integration in reference to the Navajo language immersion school. Chapter 5, titled Discussion and Recommendations, summarizes the findings of this study and provides recommendations for further educational research.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

The History of School Immersion Programs

The term *immersion* is used with reference to schools; when students are taught in a particular language, they are being immersed in that language (Anonby, 1999, p. 40). The concept of immersion and teaching in a target language in the formal education system began almost 50 years ago in Canada. According to Genesee (1984), parents were concerned in the early 1960s that their children were becoming isolated from the social and economic norms of Quebec. These concerns led to the beginning of the St. Lambert French immersion program in 1965 in Quebec, Canada (Genesee, 1984). As stated by Genesee it was social and cultural changes that gave rise to the French immersion programs in Canada.

The immersion model is used to teach in the native language while integrating academics so that students are acquiring the target language while learning the content. They are not taught separately. Genesee (1994) explained in his lessons that second language instruction that is immersed into academic or other content matter is more effective. This integration allows students to acquire the language in a more meaningful manner. In the case of Canadian French immersion programs, the teachers were high status members of the target language. Their lessons were engaged with instructional materials that reflected the target culture as well (Genesee & Gandara, 1999). As such, many immersion programs and schools have done so with very successful outcomes.

There are many indigenous people implementing immersion programs and schools that are striving to revitalize and maintain their heritage languages. These include the Maori of New Zealand, Native Hawaiians, Alaskan Natives, and other Native American tribes such as the Navajo Nation. The Maori's success in New Zealand was accredited to their "language nest" (Kirkness, 1998; Mclvor, 2005). Language nests are early childhood and preschool language programs that immerse babies, toddlers, and children in the traditional heritage language. In this fashion, babies/children are exposed to their heritage language embedded in the culture even before they start any type of formal education.

The Maoris established their "language nest" in the early 1980s. Reyhner and Tennant (1995) as cited by Fleras (1989) stated that when these programs began, it was the Maori grandparents who volunteered at child care facilities. It was in these informal childcare settings that preschoolers were immersed in the Maori language and culture (Fleras, 1989; Reyhner & Tennant, 1995). The successes of the language nests or the *kohanga reo* led to Maori medium primary and secondary educational systems in Mario, New Zealand (Hornberger, 2004).

While using the same concept as a guide, Native Hawaiians implemented language nests of their own in their efforts to revitalize and maintain their indigenous language. Just as the Maoris did, the Hawaiians also established their own preschools. These immersion preschools are called *Aha Punana Leo*. According to McCarty (2003) who cited the cofounders of the Aha Punana Leo Hawaiian Language Preschool (Wilson & Kamana, 2001, p. 149), *Aha Punana Leo* means "language nest gathering."

These preschools were established in the 1983 by a group of parents and educators. The purpose of the programs was not just for academic purposes. The goal of the *Aha Punana Leo* Hawaiian Language Preschool was to establish a sense of identity, self, and a people as a whole. McCarty (2003) stated that according to Wilson and Kamana (2001) the school was "designed to strengthen the Hawaiian culture, worldviews, spirituality, morality, social relations" (p. 161). The goal was and is to educate the entire child through the strengths of the heritage language using the assets of the language and culture to develop the whole child. Again, just as the Maoris of New Zealand did, so did the Hawaiians. The immersion preschool expanded into public elementary schools and high schools. McCarty (2003) stated that "the programme has served as a model and a catalyst for Indigenous language reclamation efforts throughout the USA" (p. 154).

Thus, an idea that began with the French Canadians expanded to the Maoris of New Zealand who also implemented language nests. Immersion and language nests continued to expand to the Native Hawaiians and the Alaskan Natives. Many Native American tribes have implemented immersion programs and language nests within their own communities across the United States as well, including those in the Navajo Nation.

The Navajo Nation includes 25, 000 square miles and expands into three states: Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. As stated by Hale (2001), the Navajo language is of the Athabaskan family. The *Diné* /Navajo language is mainly spoken on the Navajo reservation. Even though Navajo is reported as being the top Native American language being spoken (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), there are immersion programs and schools being implemented to continue its revitalization and maintenance. Although the approach and extent has depended on the individual site and community, such programs and schools exist in Rock Point (Rock Point Community School), Rough Rock (Rough Rock Community School), and Fort Defiance (*Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'*), Arizona.

Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta', The Navajo Immersion/Diné Language School began as immersion program in 1986 at Fort Defiance Elementary School. According to Marie Arviso, former Principal of Fort Defiance Elementary, and Wayne Holm, Educational Specialist with the Division of *Diné* Education, it was agreed upon that "something like the Maori immersion programs might be the only type of program with some chance of success" (Arviso & Holm, 2001, p. 205). The focus of the first immersion program at Fort Defiance Elementary was not on academics, but to have "the children come to identify and value themselves as Navajos." The intent was to "help these children experience success in school through Navajo" (Arviso & Holm, 2001, p. 205).

According to Johnson and Legatz (2006), by becoming a school in 2004, "this created a more ideal situation for *Diné* language revitalization/maintenance" (p. 26). *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'* was able to provide a controlled environment as did the Maoris of New Zealand and the Native Hawaiians. This allowed for the programs, language nests, and schools to decide how and to what extent the target language would be taught. As Johnson and Legatz stated (2006), "Greater control evolved," *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'* developed and implemented a culturally appropriate curriculum, created an environment rich in the *Diné* language, managed the English language exposure and instruction, "unified belief of *Diné* language revitalization (for families with no speakers of *Diné*) and maintenance among school age children," and provided "training for parents and teachers" (p. 26).

These are just some examples of what immersion programs and schools have done to ensure the heritage language revitalization, maintenance, and survival; the goals and efforts are common among the programs and schools. The language of a people is not just a language. As Leanne Hinton (2001a) stated, language, and the "loss of language is part of the loss of whole cultures and knowledge systems, including philosophical systems, oral literary and musical traditions, environmental knowledge system, medical knowledge, and important cultural practices and artistic skills" (p. 5). Heritage languages are more than just languages, they are the ways and livelihood of its people. Their very existence and identity are at stake, the very heart of heritage languages. Existence and identity are the focus of immersion programs, language nests, and schools.

The Effects of English-Only Laws

With indigenous identities at stake, as the heritage language is connected to its people, culture, teachings, traditions, and ways of life, efforts to revitalize and maintain heritage languages are being hindered and threatened by states that implement English-only laws. Such laws have been passed and implemented in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts.

According to Collier and Thomas (2009), the English-only referendum known as Proposition 227 was approved in 1998 by the voters of California. Proposition 227 states that "students who are not proficient in English should be placed in a one year program to learn intensive English" (Collier & Thomas, 2009, p. 58). The purpose of the law is to teach students only in the English language with no instruction in the student's first language. Proposition 227 did not address how these students who were segregated from mainstream English instruction would be taught the other components of the curriculum (Collier & Thomas, 2009).

A similar referendum was passed in 2000 in Arizona by its voters, and in 2003 in Massachusetts by its voters. The 2000 English-only legislation in Arizona, also known as Proposition 203, was fully supported by state educational leaders. According to Wright (2007), with the full support of state educational leaders, "strict enforcement was a top priority" as to Proposition 203 (Wright, 2007, p. 8). Only the English language would be taught in Arizona public schools. Just as in California, waivers were granted. However, the process was more restrictive. The students already had to know English, be ten years old or older, or have special needs (Stritikus & Garcia, 2005). Each condition had its own stipulation that was not easily attainable. According to Stritikus & Garcia (2005) who cited Wright (2005), students who already knew English had to pass an oral assessment, and those with special needs had to have proper documentation for individual needs that would remain in their educational records.

This meant that students who were English Language Learner's (ELLs) would have to be taught English in English. The bilingual programs that assisted such learners were no longer supported due to Proposition 203. Native American language programs were also at risk under Proposition 203. Tribal leaders opposed the legislation from the very beginning as they were aware of the negative impact that Proposition 203 would have on their languages and recovery efforts. As soon as the law was passed, the Attorney General was asked if Proposition 203 applied to Native American tribes and their language programs. The opinion of the Attorney General stated that

> if a school is run by the tribe or the federal government, then the school is not subject to Proposition 203. State public schools, in contrast, are generally subject to Proposition 203, but the State law must be applied in a manner consistent with federal law, including principles of tribal sovereignty and the federally recognized right of Native Americans to express themselves through the use of Native American languages. Proposition 203 cannot prohibit a State public school located on the Reservation or elsewhere from teaching students Native American language and culture. (Napolitano, 2001, p. 1)

Wright (2007) who cited Donovan (2004) stated that educational leaders in Arizona did indicate that Proposition 203 did apply to Native American language programs (Wright, 2007). However, laws, such as those passed in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts that restricted language to English-only, hindered the existence of indigenous languages in the United States. Hinton (2001b) pointed out that, since language is associated with identity by minorities and a nation, it becomes a symbol of patriotism (Hinton, 2001, p. 40). Those who utilize the English language are considered patriotic; whereas, those who do not, are not. Hinton (2001b) further explained that language(s) can be seen as unifying or separating a people. These were a few reasons given in which governments develop and implement language policies that oppose minority languages.

However, there is legislation within the three sovereigns (federal, state, tribal/local) that protect indigenous languages. These systems of standards include an individual's civil rights—the Equal Education Opportunity Act in which all must have access to equal education and will not be discriminated based on ethnicity and gender. The Native American Language Act implies that the indigenous languages can be used as the language of instruction in education. In addition, the Indian Education Act includes the use of the heritage language, culture, and traditions as part of the education process to prevent the loss of language and culture, and the Navajo Sovereignty Act supports the preservation and survival of the Navajo Nation. Based on these statutes, laws, and acts, Native American languages and cultures are protected. Unfortunately, due to the historical treatment of Native Americans (assimilation and acculturation), legislation, laws, and policies are not fully enforced to ensure and sustain the Native language and cultures of indigenous tribes.

Attitudes Toward Language, Culture, and Traditional Practices

General attitudes among the people of the Navajo Nation vary when it comes to their heritage language, culture, and practices. There are people who believe that language and culture have no use in the 21st century, and then there are those who believe in and support the revitalization and maintenance efforts. Their attitudes reflect their experiences and that of their families. Our people have experienced many forms of genocide at the hands of the United States government that has had detrimental effects on heritage language, culture, and traditions. These forms of cruelty imposed on the Navajo included the Long Walk(s), Fort Sumner (eastern New Mexico), and the Boarding School era.

The Long Walk

The Long Walk and the Bosque Redondo at Fort Sumner in eastern New Mexico (*Hwééldi*) will "forever remain in the hearts and minds of the People" (Acrey, 1979, p. 45). This horrific time in Native American history has been referred to as the Navajo holocaust (McCarty, Eunice, & Zepeda, 2006). The Long Walk(s) began in 1863. During this time, hundreds and thousands of Navajos were forcibly removed from their homelands and marched hundreds of miles away to the Bosque Redondo Reservation. Many Navajo people endured and suffered for four long years while held at Bosque Redondo from 1864 to 1868 (Acrey, 1979). Even after they were allowed to return home after the signing of the Treaty of 1868, the Navajo people continued to undergo many hardships, which included limited or lack of rations that the people desperately depended on as the "forces of nature" for 10 years devastated their crops (Acrey, 1979, p. 80).

The Long Walk and Fort Sumner left "painful images and lingering effects" that would affect the Navajo people indefinitely (p. 38). It was referred to as the "Long Walk syndrome." People were frightened; they believed that they had to give up being Navajo, to adjust to society (McCarty, Eunice, & Zepeda, 2006, p. 38). The Long Walk will forever be ingrained in the hearts and minds of the Navajo people. It was a time in history that the Navajo people were nearly destroyed, physically, emotionally and mentally.

The Boarding School Era

The signing of the Treaty of 1868 (*Naaltsoos Sání*–the Old Paper) between the United States government and the Navajo people assured peace. They were "promised" that they would live traditionally in their homelands. Article VI of the Treaty of 1868 also guaranteed formal education (Acrey, 1979, p. 76). At that point in time, the Navajo people did not have any formal or westernized education and the Navajo children were not taught in classrooms. The "Navajo boys and girls were educated in the traditional way by their family or the extended family" (Acrey, 1979, p. 123). The *Diné* children were not taught, they learned while doing, while experiencing and living their daily lives, their traditional way of life. As cited by McCarty (2002, p. 32) who cited (Lave & Wenger, 1991), "learning was participation in the social world—involvement in communities of social practice." By doing so, the Navajo children, male and female, were "taught" their roles and expectations in the life they were going to lead by family members. John Collier, a Commissioner of Indian Affairs and a Native American advocate, stated,

> The life treasure of the Navajos lies in the family, the extended family, the local community, the religious functions, the healer singer and his many helpers, the deviner, the wondrous ceremonies, the union of faith and joy, the many cooperative commonwealth of souls. (p. 32)

Acrey (1979) confirmed Collier's statement:

> Here personality is formed, values and life attitudes are established, self-discipline and gallant buoyancy of spirit, that "radiancy" of the Navajo are communicated from man to man and from elder to the younger generation. Here the genius, the very existence of the Navajos is found. (p. 124)

The vast difference between traditional Navajo teaching and western education clashed. Children who were a part of "daily work, social life and ceremonies, who learned cultural values through everyday activities, stories, legends and ceremonies" were now separated from their livelihood and placed in a dominate Anglo society (Acrey, 1979, p. 123). As stated by Acrey (1979, p. 125) and Webb (2006, p. 197), the intention of the United States Government was to assimilate and acculturate, "civilize" and "Christianize" the Indian by means of the "white man's culture and society," through formal education.

Missionary schools, day schools, and boarding schools were all established in hopes to educate the Indian and "break up the Indian's allegiance to his people" (Acrey, 1979, p. 124). According to Webb (2006, p. 195), most of the schools utilized the 50/50 curriculum. The students spent 50% of their time on academics and "sponsored denomination" and the other 50% in "vocational and agricultural training." Missionary schools and day schools were not as successful in assimilating and acculturating the Navajos as the boarding schools, as the children were allowed to return home. The concept of boarding schools removed the children from their homes, their language, and their culture. As confirmed by Acrey (1979), the purpose of boarding schools was to "speed up the process of fitting the Indian into white society" (p. 125).

"Fitting the Indian into white society" in boarding schools was done at all costs. As mentioned by Webb (2006), new names were given to the students (Navajo/Indian names were too hard to pronounce; it was easier just to give the students English names); they were prohibited from speaking their heritage language; students wore uniforms; and the boys had to keep their hair short. The students were forced to follow a stringent routine that included “manual labor” and “strict and harsh discipline” (p.196). Navajo children who were once sheltered, nurtured and educated in their traditional ways were now frightened and alone in an unfamiliar setting.

The same sentiments were echoed in a study conducted by Metcalf (1979) three decades ago, in which Navajo children were removed from their homes, had the inability to communicate with needed individuals, their Native identity changed (hair and attire), and given a new name. In personal interviews conducted in Metcalf’s study, participants painfully recalled derogatory and unethical acts of assimilation that included

> mean ladies, pulled their hair while brushing it, getting yelled at, being pushed around, getting deloused, communal showers, checking of underwear, punished when Navajo was spoken, put on restriction or given extra chores, drinking water from the toilet tank (because they were not allowed to drink water after supper in fear of them wetting the bed), and standing on their knees with their arms out for speaking Navajo. (pp. 537-538).

When asked if they would want their children to go to school, the response was “No, it’s a heart breaking thing” (Metcalf, 1979, p. 539).

The introduction of boarding schools by the United States government as an effort to “Americanize” Indian children who were punished for speaking Navajo represented a devastating breach in the historical tradition of passing the language from one generation to the next. And the effects have been long lasting to the present. The trickle down effects of the language loss from generation to generation is apparent in today’s Navajo society. Each generation demonstrates the continued decline in the use of the *Diné* language and culture.

As echoed in his words of hope and prosperity for his people, Navajo Chief Manuelito declared:

> My grandchild, the whites have many things we Navajos need but cannot get. It is as though the Whites were in a grassy valley, with wagons, plows, and plenty of food, we Navajos up on a dry mesa. We can hear them talking, but we cannot get to them. My grandchild, school is the ladder. Tell our people this. (Acrey, 1979, p. 124)

The concept of education was supported by our great leader Chief Manuelito. It was through education that he envisioned a better life for his people. However, the separation of his people from their language and culture has had significant impact on their ability to maintain their cultural identity as he had desired.

> *“Shik’éí, Shidine’é, ałtah áásįįłgóó…háadida léí’ nihizaad, nihitsodizin , ádóone’é niidlínígíí dóó nihe’á’ál’į’ nihił ch’aawóle’ sha’áłchíní, hosidoolį́į’jį’…” Hastiin Ch’ilhaajiinée* (“My relatives, my people, among all, somewhere in the future, do not forget our language, our prayers, our clans and our culture (way of life) my children, however many you become. . .” (translated by Marilyn Demspey, 2012).

The experiences of the Navajo people during the Long Walk, their imprisonment at Fort Sumner, and the boarding school period has ultimately influenced attitudes about language, culture, traditions, education, and success. Having endured punishment for their traditional way of life by the United States government, the Navajo people were conformed in believing that their identity and way of life was wrong, and thereby brought shame.

Attitudes Today

In current times, some students claimed during an interview that the Navajo language and culture were “just the past, and that kids don’t care anymore

. . . they don’t want to be like their parents,” and that English was a “necessary business language” (McCarty, Eunice, & Zepeda, 2006, pp. 36, 40). Even an adult stated, “The world speaks English, I think children need more English because . . . when they go off the reservation, they get jobs off the reservation, . . . they will be more exposed to English type of culture” (McCarty, Eunice, & Zepeda, 2006, p. 40). An educator was quoted in an interview stating that the indigenous language was “dead” to her students, stating their rationale as, “We live in an English-speaking society. Why should we learn this? What are the benefits?” (McCarty, Romero-Little, Warhol, 2009, p. 301). In a study conducted by Tiffany Lee (2007, p. 26), students expressed that they wanted to be “modern and trendy” —that of mainstream America. Similar to McCarty, Eunice, and Zepeda’s 2006 study, the students in Lee’s (2007) study connected the Navajo language with the “past” and “older Navajo people” (p. 26).

In that same study, a student indicated that religious differences had impacted his position on his Navajo language. He was taught that “Navajo tradition was wrong and that you’re not supposed to do that.” He questioned why he was Navajo, if it was considered wrong? “Why didn’t God just make me white if being Navajo is wrong” (Lee, 2007, p. 27)?

Adults and peers also influenced how students perceived the Navajo language. Students in Lee’s (2007) study remember being “downgraded” by tribal leaders for not speaking Navajo. They felt “demeaned, embarrassed, and defensive” when they were teased by an “older relative or another adult” for not speaking, comprehending, or speaking the language correctly (pp. 20-21).

According to Lee (2007), peer taunting was also a factor in how students reacted and accepted their *Diné* language. Students remembered being called “johns,” an offensive term referring to a toilet, an “uneducated” Navajo with poor English, and families who “live under poverty or rural conditions” (p. 22). There were variable factors that swayed positions on Navajo language acquisition for the *Diné*.

Although *Diné* and Native Americans were given mixed messages about their language and culture, they do value and respect it. Heritage language and culture are a part of indigenous identity. This principle is shared by many Native American tribes, it speakers, and its people. As affirmed by Lucille Watahomigie (Hualapai), “It is said that when the languages were created, languages identified the people—who we are, where we came from, and where we are going” (McCarty, Eunice, & Zepeda, 2006, p. 28). Fred Bia assured that his Navajo language made him “unique,” and that is what makes him “Navajo”—“that’s what makes me who I am” (McCarty, Eunice, & Zepeda, 2006, p. 28). Not only are heritage languages key to identity, language shows its people how to live. Richard Littlebear, a Native Cheyenne, stated that “embedded in this language are the lessons that guide our daily lives. We cannot leave behind our essence of our being” (McCarty, Eunice, & Zepeda, 2006, p. 28).

Native American languages are important to its people and children. According to Lee and Cerecer (2010), students know that their heritage language is essential to their tradition. Even more so, they know it is linked to their families. They long to acquire it and speak it so that they can converse with their "grandparents or other elderly community members" (p. 202). Not only have our youth connected the Navajo language with our elders and with high regard, in spite of their ability or inability to speak their language, it has also been recognized as a "necessity for accessing their spiritual beliefs and practices" (Lee, 2009, p. 313).

When heritage languages are obtained, there is a strong sense of pride. This could be simple phrase, sentences, or conservations. The degree to which it is spoken and comprehended is cherished and celebrated. As quoted by Caroline Wagner in Lockard and De Groat's (2010) paper,

> Thank you for teaching my child Navajo. Yesterday my son wanted to feed the dogs some food that he didn't eat. He was actually calling to the dogs and telling them to come over and eat. He said it all in Navajo!" I was so amazed and almost started to cry. I was proud that the children were learning the Navajo language. (p. 1)

The thoughts of *Diné* language, culture, and customs differ from generation to generation, community to family, family to home, and home to children. It may be supported or not, shamed and ridiculed, valued and honored, nonetheless, in general, the Navajo people are aware that their language is at such a delicate state. They do recognize that they are Navajo and that it is their language.

Overview of the Origins of Navajo Culture

> Today, no matter who we are and how hard we try, we cannot achieve our full potential, unless we use our given-right philosophy that makes us unique people. Our hearts and minds are in the *Diné* way of learning, and its heart and mind lay within us: in our art work, beliefs, clan system, history, language, our native culture, and in our values. (Aronilth, 1994, p. 11)

Sąʼąh Naagháí Bikʼeh Hozhóón (SNBH) is “our given-right philosophy.” As stated by Dr. Aronilth (1994, p. 12), “It is the root and foundation of the teaching of our philosophy, beliefs, learning, lifestyle, language and values.” It is the essence of our livelihood as *Diné*. It is in everything that we do. According to McCarty, (2002, p. 175), who cited (House, 1996/97; Matlock, 1995), *Sąʼąh Naagháí Bikʼeh Hozhóón* is the “path of long-life happiness.” Furthermore, as stated by Griffin-Pierce (1995), *Sąʼąh Naagháí Bikʼeh Hozhóón* “relates directly to the earth and sky” (p. 188). We, the Navajo people, believe that everything has life and purpose. As such, the earth is our mother and the sky is our father. As *Diné*, our goal is to live a long and well balanced life with nature, while striving for excellence in harmony (*hózhǫ́*). This is the basis and origins of Navajo culture.

Sąʼąh Naagháí Bikʼeh Hozhóón is the belief and value system of the Navajo people. As everything has life and purpose, the role of nature and spirituality are rooted in our daily lives. There is balance in the natural world and balance from spirituality. The Navajo people believe and are taught that the natural world is “divided into male and female beings” (Griffin-Pierce, 1995, p. 14). The purpose of this concept and distinction is to understand “that only through pairing can any entity be complete” (Griffin-Pierce, 1995, p. 14). This is not to say that one sex is superior or inferior to the other; again, the purpose of the male and female roles in the natural world of *Diné* is essential for “completion, wholeness, and balance” (Griffin-Pierce, 1995, p. 14).

Basic Beliefs and Values: Spiritually and the Role of Nature

To be in balance or in harmony is to have respect for everything. In the eyes of our forefathers and elders, spirituality was not a religion, but a way of life. Beliefs, values, language, culture, and traditional lifestyles of the Navajo people are not a religion. The beliefs and practices often referred to as religion by many is the process of achieving balance and *hózhǫ́.*

As described by Iverson and Porter (1990, p. 32), "*Hózhǫ́* is a combination of many ideas, including beauty, happiness, harmony and goodness." In addition, as asserted by, Griffin-Pierce (1995),

> The Navajo perceive the universe as an all-inclusive whole in which everything has its own place and unique and beneficial relationship to all other living things. Humans, animals, plants, and mountains are harmonic components of the whole. An orderly balance, based on the principle of reciprocity, governs the actions and thoughts of all living things, from the smallest creature to the most complex, including human beings and the enduring land on which they live. It is the responsibility of humans to maintain this balance. (p. 29)

As *Diné*, in the Navajo way of life, having reverence for all living things and abiding by our natural laws creates harmony. When out of balance, there are solutions within our "traditional philosophy and ceremonial system" that restores *hózhǫ́* (Griffin-Pierce, 1995, p. 29). As such, knowing and living the concept of *Są'ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hozhóón*, its values and beliefs, our forefathers and elders have achieved *hózhǫ́*. It is said that "Navajo cultural identity" which encompasses "values, beliefs, and lifestyle choices that protect Navajo individuals throughout their lives" (White, 1998, as cited by Rieckmann, Wadsworth, & Deyhle, 2004, p. 366).

Foundations of Tradition: Sacred Mountains

The practices of the Navajo people are significant to their livelihood as *Diné*. The essential customs ingrained into their daily lives begin with the sacred mountains. The sacred mountains are alive and symbolic to the Navajo people. It lies within their hearts and minds just as the language. As so eloquently stated by a Dr. Aronilth, “We consider these mountains as our home, the foundation of our Hogan and our life” (1994, p. 117).

The sacred mountains are Blanca Peak, Mount Taylor, San Francisco Peaks, Mt. Hesperus, Mt. Huerfano, and Gobernador Knob. They sit in cardinal directions that represent mental concepts, and phases of life. It is said that the “twelve Holy People (*Diyin Dine’é*) recreated the sacred mountains in the Fourth World [The Navajo believe that they emerged through a series of worlds]. Each mountain possesses its own negative and positive gravitational forces. The mountains are very powerful” (Aronilth, 1994, p. 117).

The sacred mountain to the east is *Sis Naajiní*, Blanca Peak. It is located in southern Colorado. According to Aronilth (1994) and Parsons-Yazzie and Speas (2007), *Sis Naajiní* symbolizes *Nitsáhákees*—thoughts (positive). Blanca Peak is fastened down to Mother Earth with a bolt of lightning. It is adorned with white shell, and the sacred color is white (dawn). The dawn signifies the spring season. In the cycle of life, *Sis Naajiní* represents infancy.

The sacred mountain to the south is *Tsoodził*, Mount Taylor. It is located in New Mexico. According to Aronilth (1994) and Parsons-Yazzie and Speas (2007), *Tsoodził* symbolizes *Nahat’á*—planning (to obtain knowledge). Mount

Taylor is fastened down to Mother Earth with a stone knife. It is adorned with turquoise, and the sacred color is blue (blue twilight). The blue twilight signifies the summer season. In the cycle of life, *Tsoodził* represents children.

The sacred mountain to the north is *Dook'o'oosłíid*, San Francisco Peaks. It is located in northern Arizona. According to Aronilth (1994) and Parsons-Yazzie and Speas (2007), *Dook'o'oosłíid* symbolizes *Iiná*—life. San Francisco Peaks is fastened down to Mother Earth with sun beam. It is adorned with abalone shell, and the sacred color is yellow (yellow evening twilight). The yellow evening twilight signifies the fall season. In the cycle of life, *Dook'o'oosłíid* represents adults.

The sacred mountain to the south is *Dibé Nitsaa*, Mt. Hesperus. It is located in Colorado. According to (Aronilth, 1994 and Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007), *Dibé Nitsaa*, symbolizes *Sih Hasin*—hope. Mt. Hesperus is fastened down to Mother Earth with a rainbow beam. It is adorned with black jet, and the sacred color is black (folding darkness). The folding darkness signifies the winter season. In the cycle of life, *Dibé Nitsaa*, represent elders.

The other two sacred mountains are Mt. Huerfano and Gobernador Knob. They are both located near Farmington, New Mexico. According to Aronilth (1994), *Dził Na'oodiłii*, Mt. Huerfano is the doorway to our Hogan, as the sacred mountains represents our home. *Dził Na'oodiłii* is adorned with soft goods. It represents faith. *Ch'óol'į́'í*, Gobernador Knob, is the chimney for our Hogan. *Ch'óol'į́'í* is adorned with hard goods. It represents love.

Just as the traditional philosophy of *Są'ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hozhóón*, the sacred mountains are our foundations as *Diné*. The sacred mountains are the core of "our thinking, our knowledge, our life, and our happiness of self awareness" (Aronilth, 1994, p. 117). They are connected to all aspects of the Navajo people. It is in everything that they do. It reflects in their ceremonies, their dwellings, their arts, their relationship with others, animals, plants, and traditional food.

> Our Navajo Laws are represented by the Sacred Mountains which surround us. These mountains and the land between them are the only things that keep us strong. From them, and because of them we prosper. It is because of them that we eat plants and good meat. We carry soil from the Sacred Mountains in a bundle that we call *dah nídiilyééh*. Because of this bundle we gain sheep, horses, and cattle. We gain possessions and things of value, turquoise, necklaces, and bracelets. With this we speak, with this we pray. This is where are prayers begin. (Arthur & Bingham, 1984, p. 2)

Traditions

From beginning of time, our elders have carried, protected, cherished, and loved our language, culture, and traditions. It is from their forefathers and elders that the *Diné* connected, lived, and learned of their customs. As affirmed by Parsons-Yazzie and Speas (2007, p. 266), "your elders are your heritage." It is through their experiences and lives that we learn of ours. As we observe and listen, we learn of our ceremonies, dwellings, arts, relationship with others, animals, plants, and traditional food.

Ceremonies

Traditional Navajo ceremonies are conducted to heal and restore balance and peace in an individual's mental, emotional, or physical being. There are Blessing Way ceremonies, and Protection Way ceremonies. Navajo ceremonies were, and are, very intricate and sacred. Due to respect and the delicate nature of these ceremonies, I do not elaborate on them. I only mention the Navajo Child Development Significant Milestones as presented to immersion parents at Window Rock Unified School District during a series of parenting from the traditional perspectives by Mr. Ernest Harry Begay (2005).

It is said that when a Navajo child is conceived and born, the Holy People (*Diyin Dine'é*) have blessed us with one of their grandchildren. As stated by E. H. Begay (2005), the Navajo people believe at six months of pregnancy that a Blessing Way ceremony is to be conducted for the mother and child. It is at this time, the Navajo people believe that all senses are developed, thus beginning Navajo language acquisition. When the baby is born, the cutting of the umbilical cord sets the goal for life.

Furthermore, during the child's first year and a half of life, ceremonies are held and offerings are made to celebrate the child's first laugh, step, and word. According to E. H. Begay (2005), when a child first laughs, spiritual food is offered for happiness. Traditional salt is given out for respect and generosity. When a child takes his or her first step, sacred corn pollen is placed at the first two steps to assure good posture and walking in beauty. When a child speaks his or her first word, sacred stones are offered to the nest of a bird (birds that produce beautiful sounds) to ensure good pronunciation and communication. As the child grows, the child is being prepared for life and future children by the men and women folk in his or her life. In addition, E. H. Begay stated that when puberty is reached, the physical and mental changes of the individual will be addressed.

Proper coming-of-age ceremonies will be conducted. When the individual is ready to marry, a traditional wedding ceremony will be conducted, thus beginning the process all over with newly born children. These practices are fundamental in *Diné* child rearing (Aronilth, 1994). They shape the child into becoming a well-rounded adult aware of his or her heritage, role, and home.

Dwellings and Homes

The home is a very sacred place to the Navajo people. It is where life begins, where prayers are spoken, songs are sung, food is prepared, and where one retreats. It is built with love, "precision and with a purpose" from Mother Earth (Legah & Benally, 1990, p. 8). There are different types of single-room homes that the Navajo people utilize. These dwellings include the Circular Stone Hogan (*Tsé Beehooghaní*), the Four Legged Hogan (*Hooghan Bijáád Dį́'į́'*), the Under Ground Hogan (*Łeeyi'hooghan*), the Summer Shelter (*Chaha'oh*), the Fork Stick Hogan (*Ałch'į' Adeez'áhí*), the Eight Sided Hogan (*Hooghan Nímazí*) and the Sweat House or Lodge (*Táchééh*).

It is said that the Navajo people were instructed by the Holy People on how to build their homes facing east (Aronilth, 1994). The Fork Stick Hogan, *Ałch'į' Adeez'áhí,* is a male Hogan. It was built only for "praying, and singing to make plans and for ceremonial purposes" (Aronilth, 1994, p. 106). The Forked Stick Hogan was not used for daily living. It was only used to heal the patient. Now days, the Forked Stick Hogan is seldom seen or utilized (Aronilth, 1994).

The Eight Sided Hogan, the *Hooghan Nímazí*, is a female Hogan. The *Hooghan Nímazí* was built for daily living: "It was a place to rest, a place to cook and eat, a place where children can grow and play" (Aronilth, 1994, p. 109). It usually measures 20 to 30 feet in diameter. Since it is a single-room home, all members of the family, young and old had "to be careful to pick up after themselves, keep their own possession in order, and observe and respect the needs of others" (Iverson & Porter, 1990, p. 28). The *Hooghan Nímazí*, the home is where traditional life teachings begin.

Mothers teach their daughters the necessity and values of life. They are taught with "great care" (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007, p. 47). These include sacred teachings of the fire, cooking, tending to one's bedding, and caring for their siblings and home. Navajo girls are taught that "female represents life," and as such, she should "conduct her life in a respectful manner at all times" (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007, p. 47). Just as mothers teach their daughters, so do fathers teach their sons.

According to Parsons-Yazzie and Speas (2007, "It is a father's responsibility to train his sons to become efficient hard workers." He is expected to care for the exterior part of the home as well as provide for his family. While doing this, he is "keeping the traditional home warm by hauling wood, maintaining the health of the family's livestock, and hunting for wild game" (p. 47). As Navajo children learn through observation, the boys are learning their roles and responsibility by watching their fathers. The men folk are responsible for the building of the Hogan, whether it be for a ceremonial purpose (Fork Stick Hogan, *Ałch'į' Adeez'áhí*; Eight Sided Hogan, *Hooghan Nímazí*), living purposes

(Eight Sided Hogan, *Hooghan Nímazí*; Summer Shelter, *Chaha'oh*) or for purification purposes (Sweat House or Lodge, *Táchééh*).

The Sweat House or Lodge, *Táchééh* is a male Hogan. According to Aronilth (1994), the Sweat House was "made to have several names" (p. 125). The *Táchééh* is a small coned shaped Hogan. It is made to fit about six people. The Sweat House in not made for daily living. It is used only for sweat baths. This is a process in which one is cleansed and purified, "to restore or refresh one's health" (Calaway & Witherspoon, 1974, p. 60). Just as with any ceremony, there are strict rules associated with the *Táchééh*. The most important one is that female and male cannot sweat bath together. Such actions will result in dire consequences as the *Táchééh* belongs to the Holy People (Aronilth, 1994).

To this day, only a few of the Navajo dwellings are utilized. The Circular Stone Hogan, the Four Legged Hogan, the Under Ground Hogan and the Forked Hogan are not as common as the Eight Sided Hogan, the Summer Shelter, and the Sweat House or Lodge. Contemporary homes are also common among the Navajo people. Regardless, the *Hooghan Nímazí* is special and sacred to the Navajo people. As expressed by Louis (1975, p. 3, cited by Griffin-Pierce, 1995, p. 94),

> The Hogan is built in the manner of this harmony. The roof is in the likeness of the sky. The walls are in the likeness of the Navajo's surroundings: the upward position of the mountains, hills, and trees. And the floor is ever in touch with "the earth mother."
>
> The Hogan is comprised of white shell, abalone, turquoise, and obsidian, bringing the home and sacred mountains into one sacred unit. The home is also adorned with the dawn, the blue sky, the twilight and the night—the sun in the center as the fire…
>
> The Hogan is a sacred dwelling. It is the shelter of the people of the earth, a protection, a home, and refuge. Because of the harmony in which the Hogan is built, the family can be together to endure hardships

> and grow as a part of harmony between the Sacred Mountains, under the care of "Mother Earth" and "Father Sky."

In our homes we are continuously taught of our arts, our food, the animals and plants, and the relationships we share with them and others. As cited by Iverson and Porter (1990), "Some attributes of the Navajo culture are easily perceived, such as the objects and animals the Navajo found to be of enduring value to them as a people. Other attributes are abstract and invisible but no less important" (p. 27). The Holy People, the universe, and the natural world are all a part of all that we do. They are thought of and are represented in our arts, traditional foods, the animals and plants, and the relationships we share and build.

This is evident in the Navajo basket and rugs woven by our people. The Navajo basket also known as the Navajo Wedding basket is called *ts'aa'*. As described by Hartley and Beaver (1989), the basket is a shallow coiled bowl made of sumac branches. The design on the Navajo basket is limited to only one design. It is also only limited to three colors, white, black, and brown/red. The Navajo basket is used for a variety of Navajo ceremonies, including a Navajo wedding. The basket represents an Eight Sided Hogan, the *Hooghan Nímazí,* with an opening to the east. It also symbolizes Mother Earth, and the "place of Emergence from the Underworld, and Sacred Mountains, Rainbows and Clouds" (Hartley & Beaver, 1989, p. 462).

Navajo rugs are just as representative as the Navajo basket. Although the art of weaving was a gift given to the Navajo people by Spider Woman (Navajo Community College, 1976), "Pueblos and traders brought a greater knowledge of weaving" to the Navajo people (Acrey, 1979, p. 118). According to Navajo legend, the loom represented the sky, earth, sunrays, rock crystal, and sheet lightening (Navajo Community College, 1976). The process of weaving is lengthy. It does not just require a loom; it involves a great deal more.

As explained in Navajo Community College (1975), you have to own and care for sheep: shear them annually, clean the wool, card the wool, spin the wool, and dye the wool using plants. After you have prepared your wool, you need to prepare your loom. Once this is completed, you may begin to weave. “You cannot learn to weave by reading a book. You have to learn by weaving a rug yourself” (Navajo Community College, 1975, p. VI II). As cited by Moore (2001), one weaver explains “just has to be you,” and another states “takes a lot of hard thinking” (p 24). Before Navajo women began selling their textiles, they wove “blankets and clothing for family use” and for “inter- and intra-tribal trade.” This is how “women contributed to the household economy” (Moore, 2001, p. 25).

Clothing

Traditional Navajo clothing is not what you see today. Before the 1600s, the clothing of the Navajo people was made from buckskin or deer hide (Yacowitz, 2003). Buckskin dresses and moccasins were worn by the women; whereas, buckskin shirts, leggings, and beech cloths were worn by the men (Bishop & Kalman, 2003). The Navajo women began making “their clothing from woven cloth” called mantas, or *biil éé’*, also known as the rug dress. The rug dress is “two blankets fastened over the shoulder” (Bishop & Kalman, 2003, p. 24).

It was not until the distribution of varied yard goods (fabric or cloth), needles, and threads to the Navajo people that they began intergrading “calico (woven cotton cloth) and other cloth goods" into their daily attire (Bailey & Bailey, 1986, p. 70). It was at this time that their traditional buckskin clothing and rug dresses became their clothing for "special occasions" (Bailey & Bailey, 1986, p. 70). The men were now wearing "pants and shirts made of woolen cloth and cotton goods"; whereas, the women "dressed in skirts and blouses" (Bailey & Bailey, 1986, p. 70). The Navajo people adorned themselves with

> silver ornaments; large silver earrings and heavy necklaces of coral, thin discs of white shell and turquoise, and string of globular silver breads . . . belts consisting of large heavy discs or oval plates of silver strung upon a strip of leather. (Bailey & Bailey, 1986, p. 70)

This is how Navajo clothing has changed throughout the years.

To date, the buckskin clothing for male (shirts and breech cloths) and female (dresses) are no longer worn. The rug dress is viewed as the ceremonial dress, a dress for special occasions; and the shirt, pants, and skirts are preferred. The buckskin moccasin is still worn, and the adornment of jewelry is still practiced. The hair is still "all drawn smoothly to the back of the head and done up into a compact club" (Bailey & Bailey, 1986, p. 70) know as a traditional hair knot. Traditional Navajo clothing to the Navajo people is not just clothing. Every article of clothing has significance, from the moccasins, to the jewelry, to the traditional hair tie. "We as Diné were given our traditional clothing to identify our existence in terms of what and who we are" (Aronilth, 1994, p. 84).

Navajo Livestock

The sheep, goats, horses, and cows are the livestock of the Navajo people. The Navajo people have respect and love for their animals. Navajo livestock, *Diné Bilį́į́'*, provides the necessities of a traditional life. They are essential to the Navajo people.

> The sheep herd occupies an important place in Navajo thought and social organization. It provides the Navajo with both a material and psychological sense of security, contributes to a Navajo's physical and mental health, and is the object of considerable affective investment and moral responsibility. (Witherspoon, 1973, p. 1441)

The sheep give the Navajo people meat for consumption, fleece for clothing, bedding, and weaving. It also teaches responsibility. Navajo children are given sheep at a very young age. It is their duty to take of their sheep (Witherspoon, 1973). Goats also provide meat, milk, and mohair. As mentioned by Parsons-Yazzie and Speas (2007), a horse is our transportation and cows "give us the means to purchase large expensive items" (p. 304). It is through Navajo livestock that children learn about work, patience, commitment, and compassion.

Food and Plants

The land provided(s) the people with enough food. Regardless of the dry conditions, there are several different types of plants and animals that sustain life for the Navajo people. They can gather, hunt, and plant to obtain traditional food. As mentioned by Parsons-Yazzie and Speas (2007), traditional Navajo foods include "squash, beans, pumpkins, corn, melons, peaches, apricots, sunflower seeds, pinons, wild berries, carrots, onions, and stew made with goat meat or mutton," "wild game animals include rabbit and deer" (p. 130).

During times of hardship, the Navajo people were known to gather "roots, nuts, fruits, bulbs, seeds, and leaves of wide variety" for survival (Bailey & Bailey, 1986, p. 49). Hunting was another means of food and survival for the

Navajo people. Their game included “rabbits, deer, mountain goats, and prairie dogs” (Bishop & Kalman, 2003, p. 18) and antelope and elk (Bailey & Bailey, 1986). Not only did the Navajo people gather and hunt, they also farmed. They planted such foods as corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, and varied melons (Bailey & Bailey, 1986). Peaches and apricots were also planted; unfortunately, it is said that the “orchards never returned to their former sizes” after the people returned from Fort Sumner (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007, p. 131).

When corn is planted, it is planted with heart and soul. It is used in the daily lives of the Navajo people for “food and as a symbol” (Iverson & Porter, 1990, p. 36). Corn is used for a variety of traditional corn foods such as corn mush, kneel down bread, steamed corn, sweet corn cake, and blue bread. It symbolizes growth and life of the Navajo people. According to stories, corn is associated with the Holy People, thus “linked with the Navajos’ origin” (Iverson & Porter, 1990, p. 36). The corn pollen, *tádidíín* is used in traditional ceremonies, “often to represent fertility or prosperity” (Iverson & Porter, 1990, p. 36). Corn is sacred to the *Diné*.

Traditional food and plants are not just for consumption. Many plants are used for medicinal purpose by the Navajo people. Some are used for ceremonial reasons, and others are taken based on need (Callaway & Witherspoon, 1974). The *Diné* are one of the few people who have extensive knowledge about medicinal herbs and their uses (Callaway & Witherspoon, 1974). Having such skill is a “valuable possession” (Callaway & Witherspoon, 1974, p. 77). It is said that a prayer and an offering of corn pollen be given to the plant before it is removed for use (Callaway & Witherspoon, 1974). It is the practice of the Navajo people to offer prayers and *tádídíín* in reverence for life. This could be for livestock, gathering and hunting, and planting. Traditional food, animals, and plants are of the Navajo people. It is of their land, their teachings, their bodies, their prayers, their songs, and ceremonies.

Clans, Kinship and K'é

The Navajo people have a unique method of identification. This system is referred to as the clan system. As *Diné*, we are born with four clans. These four clans tie us to our family. Our first clan is that of our mother's, the clan that we are born into, our maternal clan. Our second clan is our father's clan, the one we are born for, our paternal clan. And our last two clans are our maternal and paternal grandfathers' clans (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007).

As told in Navajo legends, Changing Woman, a Navajo Deity, created the four original clans from her body (Yazzie, 1971). According to Parsons-Yazzie and Speas (2007), there are 21 clan groups with nine main groups. Unfortunately, some clans have become extinct. It is said that the nine main clan groups have specific cane, protector, horse, and clan characteristics (Aronilth, 1994). Dr. Wilson Aronilth, Jr. (1991) stressed that

> our clan system is our belief that teaches us how we are born, grow and develop. It is a system of discipline that makes us understand our values, culture, beliefs, spiritual moral laws, family unity, family environment and social environment. Our clan system is the basis for what kind of individual we develop into. (p. 91)

Kinship and *k'é* is how one relates to family members, immediate or extended, based on the clan and the clan group; it is how one greets and connects with those individuals. *K'é* is a form of showing honor and love. It is "right and respectful relations with others and with nature" (McCarty, 2002, p. 36). For this reason, clan names may include "an animal, an element of the environment, or an American Indian nation" (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007, p. 36).

The concept of *k'é* encourages peace in the home and among families and clan members. Kinship and *k'é* is harmony, dependability, and a sense of belonging to "a family, a clan, and a social group" (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007, p. 70). It is personally and emotionally connecting you to all living things. You are of the universe, nature, animals and family; and they are of you, this is *k'é*.

Language

What is language, and who is responsible for the perpetuation of the Navajo language? As Hualpapai Educator Lucille Watahomigie proclaims, "The Native language is a Gift" (Watahomigie, 1998, p. 5, cited by McCarty, Eunice, & Zepeda, 2006, p. 28), who quoted, as understood by our forefathers, "our *Diné* language had a beginning, has a root and a foundation, and was created and developed by thought and sound" (Aronilth, 1994, p. 43). It has life and purpose.

The United States government tried to strip the Navajo People of their identity by forcefully marching them to the Bosque Redondo in Fort Sumner during the time of the Long Walk. They endured horrific treatment at the hands of the government. Many of our people never made it to Fort Sumner; many never made it home; they perished either in route to or at *Hwéeldi*.

Yet again, another attempt to assimilate and acculturate the Navajo people, the United States government thought it best to civilize these unworldly people by way of European education. It was in the best interest of the children to remove them from their home and board them in schools that shunned their heritage language and identity, and hold them in a setting that was foreign to them and at the same time enforcing means of corporal punishment.

Nonetheless, the Navajo people, men and women, who did not even have the right to vote, enlisted to defend their homelands, the sacred mountains, the United States and its government (Iverson & Roessel, 2002). The *Diné* language was used as an "effective code during the Pacific campaign" of World War II (Iverson & Roessel, 2002, p. 183). It has been acknowledged that the Code Talkers "played a key role at Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Peleiu, and Iwo Jima" (Iverson & Roessel, 2002, p. 185). As stated by Iverson and Roessel (2002), the "Code Talkers essentially worked as part of an assault team or as part of an intelligence team that would land, go behind enemy lines, and relay back vital information about Japanese fortifications and location of troops" (p. 185). Although key, this was not the only role that the Navajo people played during the war years. Still, at a critical time in history for the United States, a people and language that was considered uncivilized made a prominent contribution to a nation that tried to destroy them.

The *Diné* and their language have a history. It is not just a language spoken by a group of people. Nor is it useless and meaningless. As mentioned earlier, by Lucille Watahomigie, "the Native Language is a Gift" (Watahomigie

(1998, p. 5, cited by McCarty, Eunice, & Zepeda, 2006, p. 28). The Navajo and other Native American tribes consider their heritage languages as a gift from their Holy People. It was given to us "to identify ourselves and to identify our belief, values, and culture" (p. 53). "It is to be our thoughts, thinking, mind, heart and soul" (Aronilth, 1994, p. 44). This is why we, as a Native Americans fight for our languages. This is why we stress its importance and the need for it to be carried on by younger generations.

The concept of "learn while doing" was how *Diné* learned (Acrey, 1979, p. 123). The children learned of their roles and responsibilities from their parents, uncles, aunts, and grandparents. The girls learned from the women folk, and the boys learned from the men. They learned of their language, culture, and traditions by observing and participating in what was going on in their daily lives. They were expected to do so.

The Navajo language was an oral language. As all languages were, it was not until the last three centuries that some heritage languages were written (Littlebear, 1996, p. xi). Heritage languages were not taught; they were lived. And yet, we are trying to teach a language without living it. This is apparent, because it was said,

> "Let's get our languages into written form" and we did and still our Native American languages kept on dying.
>
> Then we said, "Let's make dictionaries for our languages" and we did and still the languages kept on dying.
>
> Then we said, "Let's get linguists trained in our own languages" and we did, and still the languages kept on dying.

> Then we said, “Let’s train our own people who speak our languages to become linguists” and we did and still our languages kept on dying.
>
> Then we said, “Let’s apply for a federal bilingual education grant” and we did and got a grant and still our languages kept on dying.
>
> Then we said, “Let’s let the schools teach the languages” and we did, and still the languages kept on dying.
>
> Then we said, “Let’s develop culturally relevant materials,” and we did and still our languages kept on dying.
>
> Then we said, “Let’s use language masters to teach our language” and we did, and still our languages kept on dying.
>
> Then we said, “Let’s tape-record the elders speaking our languages” and we did and still our languages kept on dying.
>
> Then we said, “Let’s video-tape our elders speaking and doing cultural activities” and we did and still our languages kept on dying.
>
> Then we said, “Let’s put our native language speakers on CD-ROM” and we did and still the languages kept dying.
>
> Finally, someone will say, “Let’s flash freeze the remaining speakers of our languages so when technology catches up these speakers can be thawed-out and revived and we will have ready-made Native American languages speakers” and we will do that and these thawed-out speakers will awake to a world in the distant future where they are the only speakers of their languages because all of the other speakers of their languages will be gone and no one will understand them. (Littlebear, 1996, pp. xi)

With that said who is responsible for the continuation of the Navajo language, schools or homes, teachers or parents? The language needs to be learned so that we have speakers. Which “social force” will revitalize and maintain the *Diné* language so that it is not obliterated (Crawford, 1995, p. 23)? Ultimately, if a language is destroyed, so is the “rooted identity” (Crawford, 1995, p. 34, as cited by Fishman, 1991, p. 4).

There is belief that schools can revitalize heritage languages. During the time of civilizing and Christianizing, the intent of schools was to blot out barbarous dialect (Lockard & De Groat, 2010). However, with immersion schools and programs in place, students are learning their heritage languages. Such programs and schools exist in Hawaii, New Zealand, and on Navajo land. Students want more emphasis placed on their Native language and history (Lee & Cerecer, 2010).

Jon Reyhner (2000) stated that according to research conducted by Donna Deyhle and Karen Swisher (1997) that traditional students did well or better than students who were more assimilated. Even with limited contact, it is possible for schools to perpetuate the Navajo language. This can be done; “with more thoughtful and comprehensive strategies, schools can have a larger and more meaningful impact” (Lee, 2007, p. 8). Providing a nurturing and guiding environment at school can positively impact students’ learning abilities. Lee confirmed that “a school’s philosophy, goals, and curriculum can have profound effects on students’ achievement and future plans. The school setting can shape the experiences students have with their heritage language as well, which in turn affects student language use” (2007, p. 12).

In spite of this, schools “cannot substitute for mother-tongue transmission in the family and home” (McCarty, 1998, p. 38). As mentioned before, the Navajo language is an oral language. It was acquired through daily living. The language associated with the daily living is not in the classroom, nor are the parents and extended families who play significant roles in language learning. The social forces needed for language acquisition is limited or absent in a school setting. In addition, as mentioned by McCarty (1998, p. 28) who referred to Krauss (1996) and Fishman (1991), schools “have been criticized because they transfer responsibility for mother-tongue transmission from its natural and necessary domain—the home and family—to a secondary or tertiary institution.” Furthermore, as stated by Genesee, “It is unlikely that second language learners would ever achieve total native –like mastery of the target language as long as their learning is restricted to a school setting” (1985, p. 546).

It is not just the responsibility of the school and home to revitalize and maintain the *Diné* language. It is up to each and every person to assure that we have a language for future generations. “Innovation and change do not occur without struggle or disappointment” (S. Begay, Estell, McCarty, & Sells, 1995, p 136); however, “every child should be able to identify positively with his or her mother tongue” (McCarty, 1998, p. 36):

> *Díí binahjį́ niha’áłchíní bilą́ąjį’ hózhǫ́ǫ doo, bikéé’dę́ę́’ hózhǫó doo, biyaa hózhǫ́ǫ doo, bikáá’dę́ę́’ hózhǫ́ǫ doo, dóó binaagóó hózhǫ́ǫ doo.”* (In beauty they will walk, in beauty they have walked, in beauty they will learn their Diné language and culture.) (Fullerup, cited by Reyhner, 2000, p. 31)

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this research was to examine parents' attitudes toward cultural integration in a Navajo Language Immersion school.

Research Setting: Program Description

The immersion program began in 1986 at Window Rock Unified School District. The immersion classrooms began at the Fort Defiance Elementary School with Kindergarten. Each year, a grade level was added, expanding to a Kindergarten through Fifth Grade program within the school. Fort Defiance Elementary School then became two schools. Tse Ho Tso Primary Learning Center served Kindergarten through Second grades, and Tse Ho Tso Intermediate Learning Center served Third through Fifth grades. The immersion classrooms became available at both schools, providing parents with the choice of Navajo as the language of instruction. Later, the Kindergarten through Fifth grades at Window Rock Elementary School became the third school to offer immersion classes as a program for their students (Window Rock Unified School District, 2009).

These classrooms gave way to the currently outdated name, the "Navajo Immersion Program." In 2003, all the Navajo Immersion Program classrooms throughout the Window Rock Unified School District schools united and became its own school. As a result, *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'* (TDB) was born. TDB came into existence by pulling all the immersion teachers and programs from the other schools within the districts into one general location. *Tséhootsooí Diné*

Bi'Ólta' means the Navajo School at the Meadow Between the Rocks. The place and name of TDB is historically significant and meaningful to the Navajo people. The school has been described as "At the base of the plateau in Fort Defiance, Arizona where descendants of the Long Walk originated sits an amazing school." The goal of unifying all the Navajo immersion students was to enrich the environment for Navajo language to ultimately increase oral *Diné* language proficiency. It was the community's wish that their children learn their Navajo language and culture while becoming proficient in the English language (Window Rock Unified School District, 2009). The school's goals are found in their Mission and Vision statements as follows:

Mission and Vision Statements of Window Rock Unified School District:

The mission statement for the Window Rock Unified School District states, *We exist to ensure relevant learning for all students to be successful in a multicultural society.* The vision statement reads: *We will be an exemplary student centered organization, reflecting the Diné values of life-long learning.*

The main goal of *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'* is to revitalize and maintain the *Diné* language among school age children within the communities the Window Rock Unified School District serves. Today, at Window Rock Unified School District in Fort Defiance, Arizona, *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'* (TDB), also known as the *Diné* Language Immersion School, serves approximately 273 students in grades Kindergarten through Eighth. Its location was originally located at the former Fort Defiance Elementary School, which was the former Tse Ho Tso Intermediate School, built in 1959, a structure later condemned for student use. The Window Rock Unified School District Governing Board approved plans to restructure the three schools in the Fort Defiance vicinity. Tse Ho Tso Primary School, Tse Ho Tso Intermediate School and Tse Ho Tso Middle School were restructured and moved to different sites (Window Rock Unified School District, 2009). As a result, *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta*"s student body was relocated to a newer school building that was previously occupied by Tse Ho Tso Intermediate School (one of the restructured schools).

At the time of the study, *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'* had nine *Diné* language teachers who provided instruction only in the Diné language, while five English language teachers provided instructions in the English language, allowing for the use of the *Diné* Language if necessary. At all grade levels, instruction was based upon the integration of the Navajo Nation's *Diné* Cultural content standards with the Arizona state academic standards in Reading, Writing, Math, and Foreign Language. This related to the district's vision of being "an exemplary student centered learning organization reflecting the *Diné* values of life-long learning."

Research Questions

Parents' attitudes toward cultural integration in a Navajo Language Immersion School will be examined through the following questions are as follows:

1. To what extent do parents believe Navajo should be the sole language used in the school?
2. Are there differences in parents' attitudes as to the use of the Navajo language in the home?

3. Are there differences in parents' attitudes as to the use and practice of cultural traditions (i.e., consultation of medicine men/women, belief in cultural values and teachings, or practice of rituals related to milestones in life)?
4. Are there differences in parents' attitudes toward cultural integration at a certain child's grade level; in other words, is there a difference in parental support as to their attitudes towards cultural integration from the time their child starts elementary school to the time their child is in middle school?

Research Design

To answer the research questions, quantitative data were gained through the administration of a survey to parents which asked about their attitudes toward cultural integration in the Navajo Language Immersion School (*Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'* in the Window Rock Unified School District #8 in Fort Defiance, Arizona).

Population and Sample

The Window Rock Unified School District (WRUSD) is a public school located on the Navajo Nation, in Fort Defiance, Arizona. Fort Defiance is situated on the northeastern part of the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation is the second largest American Indian Tribe in the United States of America (Wauneka, 2008). Window Rock Unified School District consists of seven schools: Window Rock Elementary School (K-5); Sawmill Elementary School (K-5); Tsehootsooi Elementary School (K-5); Tsehootsooi Dine Bi'olta' (K-8); Tsehootsooi Middle School (6-8); Window Rock High School (9-12); and Scouts Academy

(Alternative) that serves the chapters of Fort Defiance, Sawmill, Red Lake, St. Michaels, and Oak/Pine Springs. WRUSD serves approximately 2,567 students within a 65mile radius. Ninety-nine percent of the student population is Native American (mostly *Diné*) and 77% receive free or reduced lunches. The Window Rock Unified School District employs 457 individuals. Of the 457, 328 are certified teachers. Of the 328 certified teachers, 14 are from the Navajo Language Immersion School. The average teacher turnover rate for the school is 18%, which are about two to four teachers per year.

Sampling Procedures/Instrumentation

The subjects for this study were all the parents of 273 students at *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'*. The survey was sent home with all students with a request that their parents complete the survey and return it to the school.

The survey consisted of 31 questions that asked about Navajo language and culture, about the extent to which it was practiced at home and their opinions about how Navajo language and culture was being taught at school (see Appendix A). The survey also asked about respondents' demographic characteristics including their age, gender, education level, marital status, and place of birth—either on or off the reservation.

Data Collection Procedures

Students were asked to take the survey to their parents who were given a two-week window to return the surveys. As an incentive, a pizza party was promised to the class who returned all the surveys. One class reached this goal and was given the pizza party.

Data Analysis

When the surveys were returned, the researcher entered the data into the computer program, Survey Monkey, for data analysis. The data were reported in basic descriptive statistics for the total group of respondents and then disaggregated by age, place of birth (on the reservation or off), gender, marital status and highest grade completed in school.

Limitations

1. This study was only conducted at one school.
2. The data collection instrument was given to only parents at the Navajo Language Immersion School. Only parents with students who are currently enrolled were allowed to participate.
3. The two-week window for survey return may not have been sufficient time for some parents to complete the survey. Some students may have lost the surveys or have forgotten to have given it to their parents.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this research was to examine parents' attitudes toward cultural integration in a Navajo language immersion school. The following research questions guided this study:

1. To what extent do parents believe Navajo should be the sole language used in the school?
2. Are there differences in parents' attitudes as to the use of the Navajo language in the home?
3. Are there differences in parents' attitudes as to the use and practice of cultural traditions (i.e., consultation of medicine men/women, belief in cultural values and teachings, or practice of rituals related to milestones in life)?
4. Are there differences in parents' attitudes toward cultural integration at a certain child's grade level; in other words, is there a difference in parental support as to their attitudes towards cultural integration from the time their child starts elementary school to the time their child is in middle school?

Characteristics of Respondents

Two hundred and seventy three surveys were administered to the parents of students at *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'*, of which 176 were returned for a return rate of 64%. Some were filled out completely and others were not, so that calculations were made in accordance with responses to each of the survey items. In addition to the survey items, parents were asked to indicate certain demographic characteristics: age, place of birth, marital status, gender, and highest grade completed in school (see Table 1).

Age

Parents were asked to indicate their age within five ranges: 23 to 30, 31 to 37, 38 to 46, 47 to 55, and 56 and older. Half of the parents were under the age of 37 and nearly 90% were under the age of 46. Fewer were 47 to 55 years old (10.1%) and only one was 56 or over (presumably a grandparent; see Table 1).

Place of Birth

Respondents were asked to indicate their place of birth, whether on or off the Navajo Reservation. Over two-thirds (69.4%) were born on the Navajo Reservation and less than one-third (30.6%) were born off the Navajo Reservation (see Table 1).

Marital Status

Parents were asked to indicate whether they were single, married, separated, divorced, and widowed. Slightly over half (52%) of the parents were married and 39% were single. Only 2.5% were separated and about 7% were divorced (see Table 1).

Gender

Over three quarters (77%) of the participants who completed the survey were female (see Table 1).

Highest Grade Completed in School

Parents were asked to indicate their highest grade completed in school whether a sixth grade education or less, some high school, a high school graduate, some college, an associate degree, a college degree, or a graduate/professional degree. Responses indicated that parents represented the full spectrum of educational levels. That is, about one-third (30.2%) were high school graduates, had some college or an associate's degree (29%), or had college degrees or graduate degrees (31.5%). Few (9.4%) had less than a high school degree. Parents at this school were basically well educated (see Table 1).

Table 1

Characteristics of Respondents

	Number	Percentage
Age		
23-30	24	16.2
31-37	50	33.8
38-46	58	39.2
47-55	15	10.1
56+	1	0.7
Place of birth		
On the reservation	111	69.4
Off the reservation	49	30.6
Marital status		
Single	62	38.5
Married	83	51.6
Separated	4	2.5
Divorced	11	6.8
Widowed	1	0.6
Gender		
Male	39	23.1
Female	130	76.9

Table 1 (continued)

	Number	Percentage
Grade completed in school		
Sixth grade or Less	1	0.6
Some high school	14	8.8
High school graduate	48	30.2
Some college	39	24.5
Associate's agree	7	4.4
College degree	27	17.0
Graduate degree (MS, DR)	23	14.5

Research Questions by Parents' Demographic Characteristics

To answer the research questions of this study, items in the survey asked about various aspects of parents' beliefs about Navajo language and culture. The items are presented here and compare parents' responses by their demographic characteristics.

Responses by All

The survey consisted of 31 questions that asked about the Navajo language and culture, about the extent to which it was practiced at home and their opinions about how Navajo language and culture were being taught at school. The 31 questions were then categorized into three sections. There were parents' general attitudes (Questions 1–10, 20-21), parents' knowledge base of Navajo language and culture (Questions 11–19, 22), and parents' attitudes and opinions towards Navajo language and culture in the school (Questions 23-31).

Table 2 shows responses for all 176 respondents. There were few differences in parents' general attitudes in terms of the importance of the Navajo language and culture, self-respect/pride, and traditional prayers/ceremonies as the majority of the respondents (72.7% to 84.0%) strongly agreed about the importance of the Navajo language and culture. Over half (58.3%) of the respondents agreed that they were knowledgeable about their culture and agreed about culture (59.9%) and language (53.5%) used in the home.

Parents' knowledge base of the Navajo language and culture was limited. Almost half of the respondents (46.8%) strongly agreed with using culture as part of their child rearing practices. These practices included basketry, traditional dwellings, preparation of traditional foods (corn, berries, and meats), and animal husbandry. Although a little more than half of the respondents strongly agreed that using history and Navajo culture made significant contributions to worldviews, about one third (29.7%) agreed that it was difficult for them to reinforce cultural teachings at home.

Over three fourths (84.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that they supported their children learning Navajo at school and 81.1% strongly agreed that their children benefited from the Navajo culture that was being taught in the classroom. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents strongly agreed with teachers teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom; almost half strongly agreed that teachers were prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons; that the school provided cultural activities for their children and supported the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum.

Table 2

Responses of all Respondents (In Percent; N = 176)

Questions 1 – 31	SD	D	IDK	A	SA
1. Navajo culture and language are very important to my children and me.	1.7	0.6	0.6	13.1	84.0
2. I am very knowledgeable about my own culture.	1.1	8.0	6.3	58.3	26.3
3. There are specific things about my culture that I am very proud of.	1.1	0.6	2.3	23.3	72.7
4. I do not respect my culture and language.	81.8	13.6	0.6	1.1	2.8
5. Navajo culture is used in my home on a daily basis.	0.6	6.4	4.7	59.9	28.5
6. We speak Navajo in our home.	2.9	12.9	7.1	53.5	23.5
7. Navajo culture is only used for special occasions (ceremonies), baby's first laugh, puberty ceremony, marriage, etc.	11.4	29.1	26.7	4.7	22.1
8. To me, Navajo culture is:					
Traditional food	1.9	2.5	3.1	32.1	60.4
Traditional clothing/attire	2.5	1.9	2.5	31.0	62.0
Religion	2.5	2.5	1.3	27.5	66.3
Language	0.6	0.6	0.0	24.8	73.9
Stories	0.6	0.0	0.6	25.3	73.4
9. Traditional prayers/ceremonies are important aspects of Navajo culture	0.6	0.0	1.7	16.5	81.3
10. I believe in the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho.*	0.6	1.2	5.2	28.5	64.5
11. I use culture as part of my child rearing practices.	0.0	2.3	9.2	41.6	46.8
12. I use the Navajo basket and know of it significance and origin.	0.6	8.6	20.7	36.2	33.9
13. I am knowledgeable of traditional significances on various types of dwellings.	0.0	5.9	22.5	46.2	25.4
14. I can prepare a variety of traditional foods (corn foods, berries, meats).	1.1	10.9	17.2	43.7	27.0
15. I own and use livestock to teach my children about responsibilities.	8.4	18.6	11.4	32.9	28.7
16. I support the use of traditional medicinal plants and ceremonies in natural healing.	2.3	3.4	6.3	38.3	49.7

Table 2 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	SD	D	IDK	A	SA
17. I use history to inform my children of their cultural identity (events, people, places, Navajo tribal government).	0.6	3.4	7.4	33.1	55.4
18. The Navajo culture has made significant contributions to worldviews (World War II, Navajo Code Talkers, etc.).	0.6	0.6	2.9	28.7	67.2
19. I teach my children about kinship, clan customs (introduction, terminology).	0.0	0.6	4.0	29.7	65.7
20. I think marrying outside of your clan should no longer be practiced	49.1	17.4	18.0	8.4	7.2
21. Other cultures' influences have changed our traditional ways of life.	4.1	4.7	13.5	42.7	35.1
22. The Navajo culture is difficult for me to teach and reinforce at home.	22.7	26.2	11.6	29.7	9.9
23. I support my child learning in Navajo at school.	0.6	0.0	0.6	14.4	84.5
24. My children are benefiting from the Navajo culture that is being taught in the classroom.	0.6	0.6	1.1	16.6	81.1
25. The teachers are prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons	1.7	4.0	14.9	30.5	48.9
26. I agree with the teachers teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom.	0.6	0.6	3.5	17.3	78.0
27. My children understand the Navajo philosophy *of Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho* that is being taught at school.	0.6	5.9	13.5	29.4	50.6
28. The school provides cultural activities for the children.	1.7	2.3	10.5	38.4	47.1
29. I support and agree with the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum.	3.5	4.6	9.8	31.2	50.9
30. I know about the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school	4.6	20.8	38.7	34.7	
31. I understand the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	1.2	4.0	19.1	38.7	37.0

Note. Question #4 and #20 were asked negatively. SD = *strongly disagree;* D = *disagree;* IDK = *I don't know;* A = *agree;* SA = *strongly agree.*

Age

Parents were asked to indicate their age within five ranges: 23 to 30, 31 to 37, 38 to 46, and 47 to 55. Half of the parents were under the age of 37, and nearly 90% were under the age of 46. Fewer were 47 to 55 years old (10.1%). The one respondent that was 56 or over, presumably a grandparent, was not included in the data for Table 3.

Table 3 presents parents' general attitudes, parents' knowledge of Navajo language and culture; and parents' attitudes and opinions towards Navajo language and culture in the school by their age. Responses are presented by percentage agreement that compare responses by parents' ages. There were few differences in parents' general attitudes in terms of the importance of the Navajo language and culture, self respect/pride, and traditional prayers/ceremonies by age. They were in strong agreement.

The lowest percentage (78.0%) who agreed with being very knowledgeable about their culture were the parents in the 31 to 37 age range. The highest percentage, 87.5%, was the 23- to 30-year-olds. That same age group was the lowest to agree that Navajo culture was used in their home on a daily basis (78.3%) and speaking Navajo in the home (69.6%). Most (92.0%) of the 31- to 37-year-old parents agreed that Navajo culture was used in their home on a daily basis, and over three fourths (81.1%) of the parents in the 38 to 46 age group agreed that they spoke Navajo in their home. The youngest age group (23 to 30) had fewer (79.2%) who agreed that they believed in the Navajo philosophy of

Są’ąh Naagháí Bik’eh Hozhǫ́. Most of the other three age groups agreed, or 93.0% to 100.0%, that they believed the Navajo philosophy.

The majority of the oldest age group, 47 to 55, agreed with having a stronger knowledge base of the Navajo language and culture. Most (92.9% to 93.1%) of the parents in the two older age groups agreed with using culture as part of their child rearing practices. Less than three-fourths (68.2%) of the youngest age group, 23 to 30, agreed to using culture as part of their child rearing practices.

Again, of the older age group, 47 to 55, 78.6% to 85.7% agreed that traditional practices, such as basketry, traditional dwellings, and preparation of traditional foods (corn, berries and meats) were still followed. The percentages varied among the three younger age groups. Some had more knowledge than others in terms of basketry, traditional dwellings, and preparation of traditional foods. A little over half, but less than three fourths of the younger parents had a strong knowledge base of the Navajo culture. The percentage of agreement ranged from 54.1% to 68.4%.

A high percentage of all parents within all the age ranges did not agree on animal husbandry. Only two thirds of the 38- to 46-year-old parents agreed to owning and using livestock to teach children about responsibilities. Parents’ knowledge base of owning and using livestock was limited.

Most of the parents in all age ranges agreed that they supported the use of traditional medicinal plants and traditional ceremonies in natural healing; that they used history to inform their children of their cultural identity; that the Navajo culture has made significant contributions to worldviews; and that they taught their children about kinship and clan customs. Although the majority of the parents agreed that they supported such practices, almost half (46.0%) of the 31- to 37-year-olds and 42.9% of the 47- to 55-year-old parents agreed that the Navajo culture was difficult for them to teach and reinforce at home.

Almost 100% of the parents in all age ranges concurred that they supported their children learning Navajo at school and that their children benefited from the Navajo culture that was being taught in the classrooms. The majority of parents also agreed that teachers were prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons and that they were capable of teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom. Over three fourths (81.0% to 85.7%) of the three older age groups (31 to 37, 38 to 46 and 47 to 55) agreed that their children understand the Navajo philosophy of *Są'ąh Naagáí Bik'eh Hozhǫ́* that was taught at school. Only 66.6% of the parents in the 23 to 30 age group agreed with this concept.

In general, all parents, in all age groups, agreed that the school provided cultural activities for their children. Most of the parents (95.9% to 100.0%) from 23 to 30 and 47 to 55 supported and agreed with the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum.

Table 3

Responses by Parents' Age (Percent Agreement—A/SA)

Questions 1 – 31	23-30	31-37	38-46	47-55	56 +
1. Navajo culture and language are very important to my children and me.	100.0	98.0	94.8	100.0	
2. I am very knowledgeable about my own culture.	87.5	78.0	82.4	85.7	
3. There are specific things about my culture that I am very proud of.	95.9	98.0	93.1	100.0	
4. I do not respect my culture and language.	0.0	6.0	3.4	0.0	
5. Navajo culture is used in my home on a daily basis.	78.3	92.0	89.4	84.6	
6. We speak Navajo in our home.	69.6	73.5	81.1	78.5	
7. Navajo culture is only used for special occasions (ceremonies), baby's first laugh, puberty ceremony, marriage, etc.	41.6	30.0	45.6	28.6	
8. To me, Navajo culture is:					
Traditional food	95.5	90.9	96.3	69.3	
Traditional clothing/attire	100.0	88.6	94.4	84.6	
Religion	95.4	90.9	96.3	84.6	
Language	100.0	97.7	100.0	92.3	
Stories	95.2	100.0	100.0	92.3	
9. Traditional prayers/ceremonies are important aspects of Navajo culture.	91.7	98.0	98.3	100.0	
10. I believe in the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho.*	79.2	95.8	93.0	100.0	
11. I use culture as part of my child rearing practices.	68.2	86.0	93.1	92.9	
12. I use the Navajo basket and know of it significance and origin.	54.1	78.0	67.3	78.6	
13. I am knowledgeable of traditional significances on various types of dwellings.	77.3	64.6	68.4	85.8	
14. I can prepare a variety of traditional foods (corn foods, berries, meats).	79.1	58.0	68.4	85.7	
15. I own and use livestock to teach my children about responsibilities.	63.6	57.4	65.0	64.3	
16. I support the use of traditional medicinal plants and ceremonies in natural healing.	75.0	87.8	88.0	100.0	

Table 3 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	23-30	31-37	38-46	47-55	56 +
17. I use history to inform my children of their cultural identity (events, people, places, Navajo tribal government).	79.2	88.0	87.8	92.8	
18. The Navajo culture has made significant contributions to worldviews (World War II, Navajo Code Talkers, etc.).	90.9	98.0	94.8	100.0	
19. I teach my children about kinship, clan customs (introduction, terminology).	91.6	94.0	96.5	92.9	
20. I think marrying outside of your clan should no longer be practiced.	0.0	14.9	14.9	30.8	
21. Other cultures' influences have changed our traditional ways of life.	69.6	80.0	72.2	92.9	
22. The Navajo culture is difficult for me to teach and reinforce at home.	29.2	46.0	37.5	42.9	
23. I support my child learning in Navajo at school.	100.0	100.0	98.2	100.0	
24. My children are benefiting from the Navajo culture that is being taught in the classroom.	95.8	100.0	96.5	100.0	
25. The teachers are prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons.	83.3	80.0	80.7	78.6	
26. I agree with the teachers teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom.	91.6	97.9	94.8	100.0	
27. My children understand the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho* that is being taught at school.	66.6	83.0	81.0	85.7	
28. The school provides cultural activities for the children.	82.6	82.0	86.0	92.8	
29. I support and agree with the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum.	95.9	78.0	79.3	100.0	
30. I know about the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	50.0	72.0	89.5	78.6	

Table 3 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	23-30	31-37	38-46	47-55	56 +
31. I understand the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	54.2	76.0	86.0	85.7	

Note. Age 56+ was a grandparent and was not counted. Questions 4 and 20 were asked negatively.

Place of Birth

Respondents were asked to indicate their place of birth, whether on or off the Navajo Reservation. Over two-thirds (69.4%) were born on the Navajo Reservation and less than one-third (30.6%) were born off the Navajo Reservation.

Table 4 shows parents' general attitudes; parents' knowledge base of Navajo language and culture; and parents' attitudes and opinions towards Navajo language and culture in the school by their place of birth. There were few differences (less than 5%) in parents' general attitudes in terms of the importance of Navajo language and culture, being knowledgeable about their culture, and self-respect/pride. Most (89.6%) of the parents born off the Navajo Reservation/Navajo Nation agreed to being knowledgeable about their own culture. Most of the parents (91.8%) parents born off the Navajo reservation/Navajo Nation agreed Navajo culture was being used in their home on a daily basis. Nearly all (93.5%) of the parents who were born on the Navajo Reservation/Navajo Nation agreed in believing the Navajo philosophy of *Są'ąh Naagái Bik'eh Hozhǫ́*. The majority (81.2%) of the parents born off the Navajo

Reservation/Navajo Nation agreed that other cultures' influences had changed our traditional ways of life.

Although there were few differences in parents' general attitudes in terms of the importance of Navajo language, culture, and self-respect/pride, there were lower percentages of agreement in speaking Navajo in the home and the use of Navajo culture. The majority of the parents who were born on the Navajo Reservation agreed they spoke Navajo at home (79.7%), compared to only 64.6% of the parents born off the Navajo reservation. Less than half (40.4%) of the parents born off the Navajo reservation, and only 36.7% of the parents born on the Navajo reservation, agreed that Navajo culture was only used for special occasions (ceremonies, baby's first laugh, puberty ceremony, marriage, etc.). About 20% (16.7% and 15.6%) of the parents born on and off the Navajo Reservation agreed that marrying outside your clan should no longer be practiced. Eighty one percent (81.2%) of parents born on the reservation and three fourths (75.9%) born off the Navajo reservation agreed that other cultures' influences have changed our traditional ways of life. There was only a 5% difference in their responses.

Almost 100% of parents who were born on and off the Navajo reservation (99.0% and 97.9%) strongly agreed that they supported their children learning Navajo at school. Over 95% of parents (98.2% born on the reservation and 96.0% born off the reservation) strongly agreed that their children benefited from the Navajo culture that was being taught in the classroom.

There was about a 10% difference in how parents responded to teachers being prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons. The majority (82.7%) of the parents born on the Navajo reservation agreed that teachers were prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons. Seventy-three percent (73.5%) of the parents born off the reservation agreed that teachers were prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons.

Most of parents strongly agreed (94.6% on and 95.7% off) with teachers teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom. Almost 88% (87.7%) of the parents born off the Navajo reservation agreed that the school provided cultural activities for their children. Over 85% (86.4%) of the parents born on the Navajo reservation agreed that they supported the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum. Only 69.4% of the parents born off the reservation agreed to the same question.

Although the majority of the parents had positive attitudes and opinions towards Navajo language and culture in the school, regardless of where they were born, both groups were in agreement that their children understood the Navajo philosophy of *Są'ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hozhǫ́* that was being taught at school. Seventy nine percent (79.2%) of the parents born on the Navajo reservation agreed and 79.6% of the parents born off the Navajo reservation agreed.

Table 4

Responses by Place of Birth (Percent Agreement —A/SA)

Questions 1 – 31	On the reservation	Off the reservation
1. Navajo culture and language are very important to my children and me.	99.0	93.9
2. I am very knowledgeable about my own culture.	83.8	89.6
3. There are specific things about my culture that I am very proud of.	97.3	93.9
4. I do not respect my culture and language.	1.8	2.0
5. Navajo culture is used in my home on a daily basis.	86.9	91.8
6. We speak Navajo in our home.	79.7	64.6
7. Navajo culture is only used for special occasions (ceremonies), baby's first laugh, puberty ceremony, marriage, etc.	36.7	40.4
8. To me, Navajo culture is:		
Traditional food	91.1	95.3
Traditional clothing/attire	94.0	88.4
Religion	94.1	90.9
Language	98.0	100.0
Stories	97.9	100.0
9. Traditional prayers/ceremonies are important aspects of Navajo culture.	97.3	97.9
10. I believe in the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho.*	93.5	89.8
11. I use culture as part of my child rearing practices.	86.1	93.9
12. I use the Navajo basket and know of it significance and origin.	71.6	63.3
13. I am knowledgeable of traditional significances on various types of dwellings.	72.1	71.4
14. I can prepare a variety of traditional foods (corn foods, berries, meats).	75.2	59.2
15. I own and use livestock to teach my children about responsibilities.	66.0	53.1
16. I support the use of traditional medicinal plants and ceremonies in natural healing.	88.2	85.7

Table 4 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	On the reservation	Off the reservation
17. I use history to inform my children of their cultural identity (events, people, places, Navajo tribal government).	85.5	93.8
18. The Navajo culture has made significant contributions to worldviews (World War II, Navajo Code Talkers, etc.).	96.3	95.9
19. I teach my children about kinship, clan customs (introduction, terminology).	94.6	97.9
20. I think marrying outside of your clan should no longer be practiced.	16.7	15.6
21. Other cultures' influences have changed our traditional ways of life.	75.9	81.2
22. The Navajo culture is difficult for me to teach and reinforce at home.	38.3	48.9
23. I support my child learning in Navajo at school.	99.0	97.9
24. My children are benefiting from the Navajo culture that is being taught in the classroom.	98.2	96.0
25. The teachers are prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons.	82.7	73.5
26. I agree with the teachers teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom.	94.6	95.7
27. My children understand the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho* that is being taught at school.	79.2	79.6
28. The school provides cultural activities for the children.	85.0	87.7
29. I support and agree with the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum.	86.4	69.4
30. I know about the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	65.5	91.8
31. I understand the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	71.8	83.7

Note. Questions 4 and 20 were asked negatively.

Marital Status

Parents were asked to indicate whether they were single, married, separated, divorced, and widowed. Slightly over half, fifty-two percent (52%) of the parents were married and 39 percent were single. Only 2.5% were separated and about 7% were divorced. One respondent was a widower. This respondent is not included in the explanation for Table 5.

Table 5 shows parents' general attitudes, parents' knowledge base of Navajo language and culture; and parents' attitudes and opinions towards the Navajo language and culture in the school by their marital status. There were few differences in parents' general attitudes in terms of the importance of Navajo culture and language; self-respect/pride; their definition of Navajo culture; their use of traditional food and clothing; their beliefs toward religion, language, and stories; and the importance of traditional prayers/ceremonies. They were in strong agreement across the marital status categories.

Most of the married (81.5%), single (82.7%), and divorced (90.9%) parents agreed that they were very knowledgeable about their culture. The single parents (84.0%), married parents (88.6%), and the divorced parents (100.0%) agreed that Navajo culture was used in their homes on a daily basis. Only three quarters (75.0%) of the separated parents agreed to the same question. Most (90.9%) of the divorced parents agreed to speaking Navajo in their home, compared to a little over three quarters (76.0%) of the married parents. None of the separated parents agreed that they spoke Navajo in their homes.

Slightly over half (54.6%) of the divorced parents agreed that Navajo culture is only used for special occasions such as ceremonies, baby's first laugh, puberty ceremonies, and marriages. This was the highest percentage of agreement for this question. Only one quarter of the separated parents agreed that Navajo culture was used for special occasions.

All (100.0%) of the divorced parents, and most of (92.2% and 92.9%) the single and married parents strongly agreed that they believed in the Navajo philosophy of *Są'ąh Naagáí Bik'eh Hozhǫ́*. Only three fourths (75.0%) of the separated parents agreed that they believed in the Navajo philosophy. Almost 82% (81.8%) of the divorced parents agreed that other cultures' influences have changed our traditional way of life.

Only about 6% (5.7%) of the single parents and about 3% (2.8%) of the married parents agreed that they did not respect their culture and language. The separated and divorced parents did not agree at all. A little over a quarter (27.3%) of the divorced parents agreed that marrying outside of your clan should no longer be practiced. Just above 10% of the single parents (16.0%) and married parents (10.6%) agreed that marrying outside of your clan should no longer be practiced. Divorced parents agreed to a higher percentage. None of the separated parents agreed with this statement.

Although there were few differences in parents' general attitudes about Navajo language and culture, their responses varied. Over three fourths of the single parents (86.6%), married parents (88.4%), and divorced parents (90.9%) strongly agreed with using culture as part of their child rearing practices. These practices included basketry, traditional dwellings, preparation of traditional foods (corn, berries and meats), and animal husbandry.

About three fourths of the single, married, and separated parents agreed that they knew about Navajo basketry and traditional dwellings. Almost half of the divorced parents agreed they knew about Navajo basketry and traditional dwellings. There was a 20% difference in response based on marital status. Slightly over three fourths of the married parents (70.4%) and single parents (73.1%) agreed that they can prepare traditional foods. The separated parents did not agree at all, and 40.0% of the divorced parents agreed. Almost two thirds of the single parents (64.0%), married parents (63.2%), and divorced parents (60.0%) agreed that animal husbandry was part of their practices. Again, none of the separated parents agreed.

The majority of the parents in all marital status categories agreed that they used history to inform their children of their cultural identity, that Navajo culture has made significant contributions to worldviews, and that they teach their children about kinship and clan customs. All parents, regardless of their marital status, strongly agreed that they supported their children learning Navajo at school, and that their children benefited from the Navajo culture that was being taught in the classroom. Over three fourths (84.6%) of the married parents agreed and a little less than three fourths (72.7%) of the divorced parents agreed that teachers were prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons. Most of the single (96.1%), married (97.1%), and divorced (90.9%) parents agreed with teachers teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom. All of the separated parents (100.0%) strongly agreed that their children understood the Navajo philosophy of *Są’ąh Naagáí Bik’eh Hozhǫ́*, but they did not agree at all that the school provides cultural activities for their children. The single (88.5%), married (85.7%), and divorced (100.0%) parents concurred that the school provided cultural activities for their children. A significant proportion of the single (88.5%) and married (85.7%) parents agreed that they supported the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum. None of the separated parents agreed, and only 63.7% of divorced parents shared the same opinion.

Table 5

Responses by Marital Status (Percent Agreement —A/SA)

Questions 1 – 31	S	M	SP	D	W
1. Navajo culture and language are very important to my children and me.	100.0	94.4	100.0	100.0	100.0
2. I am very knowledgeable about my own culture.	82.7	81.5	75.0	90.9	100.0
3. There are specific things about my culture that I am very proud of.	100.0	94.3	100.0	90.9	100.0
4. I do not respect my culture and language.	5.7	2.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
5. Navajo culture is used in my home on a daily basis.	84.0	88.6	75.0	100.0	100.0
6. We speak Navajo in our home.	78.0	76.0	0.0	90.9	100.0
7. Navajo culture is only used for special occasions (ceremonies), baby’s first laugh, puberty ceremony, marriage, etc.	48.1	30.0	25.0	54.6	0.0
8. To me, Navajo culture is:					
Traditional food	95.7	90.9	75.0	100.0	100.0
Traditional clothing/attire	97.8	93.8	0.0	100.0	100.0
Religion	95.6	90.9	100.0	100.0	100.0
Language	97.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Stories	97.8	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 5 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	S	M	SP	D	W
9. Traditional prayers/ceremonies are important aspects of Navajo culture.	98.1	95.8	100.0	100.0	100.0
10. I believe in the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho.*	92.2	92.9	75.0	100.0	100.0
11. I use culture as part of my child rearing practices.	86.6	88.4	75.0	90.9	100.0
12. I use the Navajo basket and know of it significance and origin.	71.1	70.4	75.0	45.5	100.0
13. I am knowledgeable of traditional significances on various types of dwellings.	70.0	72.5	75.0	50.0	100.0
14. I can prepare a variety of traditional foods (corn foods, berries, meats).	73.1	70.4	0.0	40.0	100.0
15. I own and use livestock to teach my children about responsibilities.	64.0	63.2	0.0	60.0	100.0
16. I support the use of traditional medicinal plants and ceremonies in natural healing.	88.3	84.5	75.0	100.0	100.0
17. I use history to inform my children of their cultural identity (events, people, places, Navajo tribal government).	84.6	90.1	100.0	90.0	100.0
18. The Navajo culture has made significant contributions to worldviews (World War II, Navajo Code Talkers, etc.).	94.2	97.1	75.0	100.0	100.0
19. I teach my children about kinship, clan customs (introduction, terminology).	94.2	95.8	75.0	90.0	100.0
20. I think marrying outside of your clan should no longer be practiced.	16.0	10.6	0.0	27.3	0.0
21. Other cultures' influences have changed our traditional ways of life.	75.1	76.0	75.0	81.8	100.0
22. The Navajo culture is difficult for me to teach and reinforce at home.	41.1	35.3	75.0	60.0	0.0
23. I support my child learning in Navajo at school.	100.0	98.5	100.0	100.0	100.0
24. My children are benefiting from the Navajo culture that is being taught in the classroom.	100.0	95.8	100.0	100.0	100.0
25. The teachers are prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons.	78.5	84.6	75.0	72.7	0.0
26. I agree with the teachers teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom.	96.1	97.1	75.0	90.9	100.0

Table 5 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	S	M	SP	D	W
27. My children understand the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho* that is being taught at school.	78.0	77.2	100.0	72.8	100.0
28. The school provides cultural activities for the children.	88.5	85.7	0.0	100.0	100.0
29. I support and agree with the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum.	86.5	88.8	0.0	63.7	100.0
30. I know about the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	64.8	81.7	100.0	100.0	100.0
31. I understand the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	64.7	83.1	100.0	90.9	100.0

Note. Question #4 and #20 were asked negatively. S = *single;* M = *married;* SP = *separated;* D = *divorced;* W = *widowed*

Gender

Parents were asked to indicate whether they were male or female. Over three quarters (77%) of the participants who completed the survey were female. Table 6 presents parents' general attitudes, parents' knowledge base of the Navajo language and culture; and parents' attitudes and opinions towards Navajo language and culture in the school by their gender. There were few differences in parents' general attitudes in regard to the importance of the Navajo culture and language, self-respect/pride, and traditional prayers and ceremonies by gender. Parents were in strong agreement.

One hundred percent of the male parents and almost all (96.5%) of the female parents strongly agreed about the importance of the Navajo culture and language. A significant proportion of both male (82.1%) and female (81.9%)

parents agreed that they were knowledgeable about their culture. Ninety one percent (91.3%) of the females agreed about culture and language used in the home and less than three quarters (74.0%) of the males agreed about culture and language used in the home.

About 40% of both male (39.3%) and females (37.9%) agreed that Navajo culture was only used for special occasions such as baby's first laugh, puberty ceremonies, and marriage. There were few differences in parents' general definition of what Navajo culture was. Both male and female parents strongly agreed as to traditional clothing/attire, religion, language, and stories. However, on the item regarding traditional foods there were differences between the responses of males (77.8%) and females (95.3%). Almost 15% of both male (14.8%) and female (13.6%) parents agreed that marrying outside of your clan should no longer be practiced. Three quarters of the male (75.0%) and female parents (76.8%) agreed that other cultures' influences have changed our traditional way of life.

Even though most of the parents, male (81.4%) and female (87.9%), agreed with using culture as part of their child rearing practices, the percentages varied or decreased in regard to the tools of cultural child rearing and the ideas and concepts of Navajo culture. The percentages for cultural tools (basketry, traditional dwellings, preparation of traditional foods, and animal husbandry) needed for child rearing was low compared to the cultural ideas and concepts (medicinal plants and ceremonies, history, Navajo culture and worldviews, and teaching clan customs). Less than three fourths of the male and female parents agreed that they knew of and used the cultural tools of traditional child rearing.

Seventy one percent (71.4%) of the male parents used the Navajo basket and knew of its origin. Seventy four percent (74.0%) of the male parents were knowledgeable of traditional significances on various types of dwellings; whereas, nearly three fourths (70.7%) of the female parents agreed that they were able to prepare a variety of traditional foods such as corn foods, berries, and meats. Less than two thirds (64.6%) of the female parents agreed that they owned and used livestock to teach their children about responsibilities; almost 15% (14.6%) more than the male parents. The female parents were more knowledgeable in the preparation of traditional foods and animal husbandry.

A substantial percentage of both male and female parents strongly agreed on the ideas and concepts of cultural child rearing. These ideas and concepts included the support and use of traditional plants/ceremonies, the use of history and Navajo culture making significant contributions to worldviews, and kinship/clan customs. Eighty-eight percent of female parents agreed with the use of medicinal plants/ceremonies and 96.5% of them also agreed on teaching their children about kinship and clan customs. Ninety two percent (92.8%) of the male parents agreed with history and that Navajo culture has made significant contributions to worldviews. More than one third (35.7%) of the male parents, and about two fifths (40.0%) of the female parents agreed that the Navajo culture was difficult for them to teach and reinforce at home.

Most of the parents, male and female, strongly agreed that they supported their children learning Navajo at school; that their children benefited from the Navajo culture that was being taught at school, and agreed with teachers teaching the Navajo culture in the classroom. The majority of male parents agreed that the teachers were prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons; that their children understood the Navajo philosophy of *Są'ąh Naagáí Bik'eh Hozhǫ́*, and that they supported and agreed with the Arizona State Standards bring taught with the Navajo culture curriculum. The highest percentage of agreement for the female parents was that the school provided cultural activities for their children. In general, parents, male and female, supported and had positive attitudes and opinions towards Navajo language in the school.

Table 6

Responses by Gender (Percent Agreement —A/SA)

Questions 1 – 31	Male	Female
1. Navajo culture and language are very important to my children and me.	100.0	96.5
2. I am very knowledgeable about my own culture.	82.1	81.9
3. There are specific things about my culture that I am very proud of	100.0	94.8
4. I do not respect my culture and language.	7.1	2.6
5. Navajo culture is used in my home on a daily basis.	74.0	91.3
6. We speak Navajo in our home.	67.9	79.2
7. Navajo culture is only used for special occasions (ceremonies), baby's first laugh, puberty ceremony, marriage, etc.	39.3	37.9

Table 6 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	Male	Female
8. To me, Navajo culture is:		
Traditional food	77.8	95.3
Traditional clothing/attire	92.3	92.4
Religion	88.9	94.3
Language	96.3	99.1
Stories	100.0	98.1
9. Traditional prayers/ceremonies are important aspects of Navajo culture.	100.0	96.6
10. I believe in the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho*.	89.2	93.0
11. I use culture as part of my child rearing practices.	81.4	87.9
12. I use the Navajo basket and know of it significance and origin.	71.4	69.3
13. I am knowledgeable of traditional significances on various types of dwellings.	74.0	69.0
14. I can prepare a variety of traditional foods (corn foods, berries, meats).	60.7	70.7
15. I own and use livestock to teach my children about responsibilities.	50.0	64.6
16. I support the use of traditional medicinal plants and ceremonies in natural healing.	82.2	88.0
17. I use history to inform my children of their cultural identity (events, people, places, Navajo tribal government).	92.8	85.3
18. The Navajo culture has made significant contributions to worldviews (World War II, Navajo Code Talkers, etc.).	100.0	94.8
19. I teach my children about kinship, clan customs (introduction, terminology).	85.7	96.5
20. I think marrying outside of your clan should no longer be practiced.	14.8	13.6
21. Other cultures' influences have changed our traditional ways of life.	75.0	76.8
22. The Navajo culture is difficult for me to teach and reinforce at home.	35.7	40.0
23. I support my child learning in Navajo at school.	100.0	99.2

Table 6 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	Male	Female
24. My children are benefiting from the Navajo culture that is being taught in the classroom.	100.0	97.4
25. The teachers are prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons.	85.7	79.3
26. I agree with the teachers teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom.	96.4	95.7
27. My children understand the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho* that is being taught at school.	82.1	78.0
28. The school provides cultural activities for the children.	82.1	86.1
29. I support and agree with the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum.	89.3	82.9
30. I know about the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	67.9	78.5
31. I understand the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	67.8	80.2

Note. Questions 4 and 20 were asked negatively.

Highest Grade Completed in School

Parents were asked to indicate their highest grade completed in school whether a sixth grade education or less, some high school, a high school graduate, some college, an associate degree, a college degree, or a graduate/professional degree. Responses indicated that parents represented the full spectrum of educational levels. That is, about one-third (30.2%) were high school graduates, had some college or an associate's degree (29%), or had college degrees or graduate degrees (31.5%). Few (9.4%) had less than a high school degree. Parents at this school were basically well educated.

Table 7 presents parents' general attitudes, parents' knowledge base of the Navajo language and culture; and parents' attitudes and opinions towards Navajo language and culture in the school by their education level. There were few differences in parents' general attitudes in regard to the importance of the Navajo culture and language, self-respect/pride, and traditional prayers and ceremonies by education level. Parents were in strong agreement.

The lowest percentage (70.0%) who agreed with being very knowledgeable about their culture was the parents who were college graduates. The highest percentage, 90.9%, was the parents who had graduate degrees. The largest groups to agree were parents who had some high school, high school graduates, some college, and parents with associate degrees. The lowest proportion to agree to Navajo culture being used in the home on a daily basis was the parents who were high school graduates. A little over a three-quarters (76.3%) of them agreed; whereas, all (100.0%) of the parents who had graduate degrees agreed. The parents who were college graduates (61.1%) were the smallest group who agreed as to speaking Navajo in the home. All of the parents who had associate degrees (100.0%) agreed as to speaking Navajo in the home. The lowest percentile of groups who agreed that Navajo culture was used only for special occasions such as ceremonies, baby's first laugh, puberty ceremonies, and marriage was the parents with some high school (25.0%) and parents with associate degrees (28.6%). About one third of the parents who had some college (30.5%) and high school graduates (33.3%) agreed that Navajo culture was used for special occasions. A little more than half of parents who had graduate degrees (54.5%) and college graduates (55.0%) agreed to same question.

There were few differences in parents’ general definition of Navajo culture. Although there was strong agreement on language and stories, there were noticeable differences in their views of traditional food, traditional clothing/attire, and religion. The majority of the parents with college degrees (84.2%) and associate degrees (85.7%) were in less agreement in regard to traditional food. Most of the parents who were college graduates (89.5%), some high school (90.0%), and some college (90.3%) agreed that traditional clothing/attire were defined as culture. The majority of the parents with graduate degrees (82.6%) agreed that religion was a part of culture. Only three-quarters (75.0%) of the parents who had some high school agreed to believing in the Navajo philosophy *of Są’ąh Naagáí Bik’eh Hozhǫ́*, compared to all of the parents with some college (100.0%) and parents with associate degrees (100.0%). About one fifth of the parents with graduate degrees (19.0%) and high school graduates (22.2%) agreed that marrying outside your clan should no longer be practiced. Almost 100% of the parents with graduate degrees (95.6%) agreed; whereas, only a little over two fifths (42.9%) of parents with associate degrees agreed that other cultures’ influences have changed our traditional way of life.

All of the parents with graduate degrees (100.0%), associate degrees (100.0%), and most of parents with college degrees (95.0%) strongly agreed and only 66% (66.7%) of parents with some high school agreed that they use culture as part of their child rearing practices. The parents with a formal education agreed more than parents with some high school education that they used culture as part of their child rearing practices. Although most of the parents with post-secondary education agreed with using culture at part of their child rearing practices, the percentages varied among education levels in regard to the tools of cultural child rearing and the ideas and concepts of Navajo culture. The percentages for cultural tools (basketry, traditional dwellings, preparation of traditional foods, and animal husbandry) needed for child rearing was low compared to the cultural ideas and concepts (medicinal plants and ceremonies, history, Navajo culture and worldviews, and teaching clan customs).

Almost two-thirds of parents with college (65.0%) and graduate (65.2%) degrees agreed to the use of the Navajo basket; whereas, over three fourths (85.7%) of parents with associate degrees agreed to the same question. There was a 20% difference in agreement. The majority of the parents who were high school graduates (82.1%) agreed to have knowledge about traditional dwellings, compared to only 63% (63.8%) of parents with some college education. The majority of the parents with some high school education (81.8%) and all of the parents with associate degrees strongly agreed that they were able to prepare a variety of traditional foods. The lowest to agree were parents who were high school graduates. Only three-quarters (76.3%) of them agreed. Animal husbandry was the lowest cultural tool, a part of child rearing practices, that was agreed upon. A little over three fourths of the parents with college degrees (73.7%) were the highest to agree that they own and use livestock to teach their children about responsibilities. Less than half of the parents with associate (42.9%) and graduate (43.4%) degrees agreed to the same question.

Although the percentages varied among the parents in regard to the cultural tools of cultural child rearing, most were supportive. Again, these ideas and concepts included the support and use of traditional plants/ceremonies, the use of history and Navajo culture making significant contributions to worldviews, and kinship/clan customs. Parents with some high school education and those who were high school graduates were highly receptive; whereas, nearly all of the parents with post-secondary education strongly agreed that they supported the ideas and concepts of cultural child rearing. Most of the parents who were high school graduates (96.2%) strongly agreed that the Navajo culture was difficult for them to reinforce at home. Less than one third (27.8%) of parents who had some college education and only 10% of parents with some high school agreed to the same question.

A substantial percentage, nearly all of the parents, regardless of their educational level strongly agreed that they supported their children learning Navajo at school; that their children benefited from the Navajo culture that was being taught at school and agreed with teachers teaching the Navajo culture in the classroom. Three quarters of the parents with some college (75.0%) and almost 73% (72.8%) of parents with some high school education, and over three fourths of the parents who were high school graduates (89.8%) and parents with associate degrees (85.7%) agreed that teachers are prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons. Parents who were high school graduates (84.2%), parents with some college education (86.1%), and parents with associate degrees (83.4%) strongly agreed that their children understood the Navajo philosophy of *Są'ąh Naagáí Bik'eh Hozhǫ́* that was being taught at school, compared to less than three fourths (69.5%) of those with graduate degrees. Although all of the other parents strongly agreed that the school provided cultural activities for their children, only 57% (57.2%) of the parents with associate degrees concurred. Almost all of the parents who were high school graduates and all of the parents who have associate degrees strongly agreed that they support/agree with the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum. Whereas, less than half (47.8%) of the parents with graduate degrees agreed.

Table 7

Responses by Grade Completed in School (Percent Agreement)

Questions 1 – 31	SHS	HSG	SC	AS	CG	GD
1. Navajo culture and language are very important to my children and me.	100.0	97.5	94.5	100.0	100.0	95.7
2. I am very knowledgeable about my own culture.	83.3	82.0	86.1	85.7	70.0	90.9
3. There are specific things about my culture that I am very proud of.	91.7	97.5	91.6	100.0	100.0	95.6
4. I do not respect my culture and language.	0.0	2.6	2.8	0.0	10.0	4.3
5. Navajo culture is used in my home on a daily basis.	90.9	76.3	94.3	85.7	85.0	100.0
6. We speak Navajo in our home.	83.3	74.3	75.0	100.0	61.1	73.9
7. Navajo culture is only used for special occasions (ceremonies), baby's first laugh, puberty ceremony, marriage, etc.	25.0	33.3	30.5	28.6	55.0	54.5

Table 7 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	SHS	HSG	SC	AS	CG	GD
8. To me, Navajo culture is:						
Traditional food	90.0	94.3	100.0	85.7	84.2	95.6
Traditional clothing/attire	90.0	94.1	90.3	100.0	89.5	95.7
Religion	100.0	91.4	96.9	100.0	100.0	82.6
Language	100.0	97.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Stories	100.0	97.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
9. Traditional prayers/ceremonies are important aspects of Navajo culture.	91.7	97.5	97.2	100.0	100.0	95.6
10. I believe in the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho*.	75.0	89.5	100.0	100.0	90.0	95.7
11. I use culture as part of my child rearing practices	66.7	79.5	86.1	100.0	95.0	100.0
12. I use the Navajo basket and know of it significance and origin.	66.7	69.3	72.2	85.7	65.0	65.2
13. I am knowledgeable of traditional significances on various types of dwellings.	72.8	82.1	63.8	71.4	77.7	65.2
14. I can prepare a variety of traditional foods (corn foods, berries, meats).	81.8	71.8	63.9	100.0	55.0	56.5
15. I own and use livestock to teach my children about responsibilities.	63.7	71.0	62.9	42.9	73.7	43.4
16. I support the use of traditional medicinal plants and ceremonies in natural healing.	91.7	73.7	88.9	100.0	90.0	95.6
17. I use history to inform my children of their cultural identity (events, people, places, Navajo tribal government).	72.7	84.7	91.6	85.7	95.0	91.3
18. The Navajo culture has made significant contributions to worldviews (World War II, Navajo Code Talkers, etc.).	83.4	97.5	97.2	100.0	95.0	95.6

Table 7 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	SHS	HSG	SC	AS	CG	GD
19. I teach my children about kinship, clan customs (introduction, terminology).	100.0	89.7	94.4	100.0	95.0	100.0
20. I think marrying outside of your clan should no longer be practiced.	8.3	22.2	14.7	14.3	5.0	19.0
21. Other cultures' influences have changed our traditional ways of life.	66.7	65.8	80.5	42.9	85.0	95.6
22. The Navajo culture is difficult for me to teach and reinforce at home.	10.0	96.2	27.8	42.9	35.0	65.2
23. I support my child learning in Navajo at school.	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	95.6
24. My children are benefiting from the Navajo culture that is being taught in the classroom.	91.7	100.0	97.3	100.0	100.0	95.7
25. The teachers are prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons.	72.8	89.8	75.0	85.7	80.0	78.2
26. I agree with the teachers teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom.	91.7	94.9	97.3	100.0	95.0	95.2
27. My children understand the Navajo philosophy of *Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho* that is being taught at school.	75.0	84.2	86.1	83.4	79.0	69.5
28. The school provides cultural activities for the children.	90.0	84.6	86.1	57.2	90.0	95.7
29. I support and agree with the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum.	83.3	94.8	83.3	100.0	90.0	47.8
30. I know about the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	72.8	64.1	83.4	71.5	90.0	82.6

Table 7 (continued)

Questions 1 – 31	SHS	HSG	SC	AS	CG	GD
31. I understand the school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.	63.7	71.8	77.8	100.0	90.0	87.0

Note. Question #4 and #20 were asked negatively. SHS = *some high school*; HSG = *high school graduate;* SC = *some college;* AS = *Associates Degree;* CG = *college graduate;* GD = *graduate degree*

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' attitudes toward cultural integration in a Navajo language immersion school. Parents' attitudes were examined through the following questions:

1. To what extent do parents believe Navajo should be the sole language used in the school?
2. Are there differences in parents' attitudes as to the use of the Navajo language in the home?
3. Are there differences in parents' attitudes as to the use and practice of cultural traditions (i.e., consultation of medicine men/women, belief in cultural values and teachings, or practice of rituals related to milestones in life)?
4. Are there differences in parents' attitudes toward cultural integration at a certain child's grade level; in other words, is there a difference in parental support as to their attitudes towards cultural integration from the time their child starts elementary school to the time their child is in middle school?

This chapter summarizes the findings, answers the research questions that guided the study, and discusses the implications of those answers. Recommendations for further study are provided.

Surveys were administered to the parents of students at *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'*. Some were filled out completely and others were not, so that calculations were made in accordance with responses to each of the survey items.

In addition to the survey items, parents were asked to indicate certain demographic characteristics: age, place of birth, marital status, gender, and highest grade completed in school.

The survey consisted of 31 questions that asked about the Navajo language and culture, about the extent to which it was practiced at home, and their opinions about how Navajo language and culture were being taught at school. The 31 questions were then categorized into three sections. There were parents' general attitudes (Questions 1–10, 20-21), parents' knowledge base of Navajo language and culture (Questions 11–19, 22), and parents' attitudes and opinions towards Navajo language and culture in the school (Questions 23-31).

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, *To what extent do parents believe Navajo should be the sole language used in the school?* The majority of the parents strongly agreed that the Navajo culture and language was important to them and their children. However, parents' knowledge base of the Navajo language and culture was limited. A significant number of the respondents strongly agreed that they supported their children learning Navajo at school and that their children benefited from the Navajo culture that was being taught in the classroom. Seventy eight percent of the respondents strongly agreed with teachers teaching the cultural aspects as well.

In addition, the data were categorized based on parents' characteristics of age, place of birth, marital status, gender and level of education. The parents in the 23 to 30 year olds strongly agreed to being very knowledgeable about their culture. Most of the 31- to 37-year-old parents agreed that Navajo culture was used in their home on a daily basis. Parents from 38 to 46 year olds agreed that they spoke Navajo in their home. Almost all of those in the three older age groups agreed they believed in the Navajo philosophy. The majority of the oldest age group agreed with having a stronger knowledge base of the Navajo language and culture.

In terms of birth place, a large number of the parents born off the Navajo Reservation/Navajo Nation agreed to being knowledgeable about their own culture. Most of the parents born off the Navajo Reservation/Navajo Nation agreed that Navajo culture was being used in their home on a daily basis. Nearly all of the parents who were born on the Navajo Reservation/Navajo Nation agreed in believing the Navajo philosophy of *Sąʼąh Naagáí Bikʼeh Hozhǫ́.* The majority of parents born on the Navajo reservation agreed to speaking Navajo at home, compared to only a little over half of the parents born off of the Navajo reservation. Almost all of parents who were born on and off the Navajo reservation strongly agreed that they supported their children learning Navajo at school.

Another characteristic was based on marital status. Most of the parents, regardless of their marital status strongly agreed that they were very knowledgeable about their culture and that the Navajo culture was used in the home. The majority of all parents believed in the Navajo philosophy of *Sąʼąh NaagháíBikʼeh Hozhǫ́.* Although there were few differences in marital status, again, the responses varied in the knowledge base of the Navajo culture.

Another attribute was gender. All of the male, and most all of the female parents, strongly agreed about the importance of the Navajo culture and language. A significant amount of both male and female parents agreed that they were knowledgeable about their culture. Most of the parents, male and female, strongly agreed that they supported their children learning Navajo at school.

The last trait that was examined was the educational levels of parents. The parents who had graduate degrees strongly agreed that they were very knowledgeable about their culture. All of the parents who had graduate degrees agreed to Navajo culture being used in the home on a daily basis. Again, parents who had graduate degrees agreed to speaking Navajo at home. More than half of the parents who had some high school education agreed to believing in the Navajo philosophy *of Są’ąh Naagháí Bik’eh Hozhǫ́*, compared to all of the parents with some college and parents with associate degrees. Nearly all of the parents, regardless of their education level, strongly agreed that they supported their children learning Navajo at school.

Based on the following data, it is presumed that a majority of the parents believe that Navajo should be the sole language used in the school. In that regard, the Navajo culture and language are taught simultaneously. They are not taught in isolation, but rather complement each other. Although the survey did not specifically ask whether the parents believed that Navajo should be the sole language used in the school, neither did they disagree with Navajo and culture being taught as part of the school’s academic curriculum.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, *Are there differences in parents' attitudes by the extent use of Navajo language in the home?* A little over three quarters (77.0%) of all the respondents strongly agreed they spoke Navajo in the home. Most of the parents age 38-46 (81.1%) agreed they spoke Navajo in the home, while less than three quarters (69.6%) of the 23-30 year olds agreed. A little over three quarters (79.7%) of the parents born on the reservation agreed they spoke Navajo in the home. The majority of the divorced parents (90.9%) agreed, whereas none of the separated parents agreed they spoke Navajo in the home. Most (79.2%) of the female respondents agreed they spoke Navajo in the home. All of the parents with associate degrees agreed they spoke Navajo in the home; whereas, a little over half (61.1%) of the parents who were college graduates agreed.

In review of the data, a majority of all the respondents spoke Navajo in the home. Clearly, Navajo is being spoken in the home, but to what extent are they demanding that their children respond in return using the Navajo language? Are the conversations meaningful, or are they just basic phrases or commands? Regardless of age differences or marital status there is an attempt as to speaking Navajo in the home.

The Navajo taught at school is different from what is spoken at home. The school immerses the child in academic language where no English language is used at all for the primary levels. There is a difference in social Navajo language and academic Navajo language. Based on these findings, the children are exposed to both the social and academic Navajo language.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, *Are there differences in parents' attitudes by their use and practice of cultural traditions* (i.e. consultation of medicine men/women, belief in cultural values and teachings, practice of rituals related to milestones in life)?

Most of the parents agreed about the importance of the Navajo language and culture, however, just about half of them agreed to being knowledgeable and using it in the home. This indicates that parents' knowledge base of the Navajo language and culture was limited. This was supported by less than half of the parents who strongly agreed to using culture as part of their child rearing practices. These practices included basketry, knowledge and use of traditional dwellings, preparation of traditional foods (corn, berries, and meats), and animal husbandry.

In addition, about one third of them agreed that it was difficult for them to reinforce culture at home. Parents do use history to inform children about their cultural identity. They were aware that culture has made significant contributions to worldviews, and they do teach their children about kinship and clans. On the other hand, not very many parents own and used livestock to teach their children about responsibilities.

Additionally, the data were categorized based on characteristics of age, place of birth, marital status, gender, and degree of education. The majority of the oldest age group, 47 to 55, agreed with having a stronger knowledge base of the Navajo language and culture. Most of the parents in the two older age groups agreed with using culture as part of their child rearing practices. Again, of the older age group, 47 to 55 agreed that traditional practices, such as basketry, traditional dwellings, and preparation of traditional foods (corn, berries, and meats) were still followed.

Animal husbandry was not agreed on by a high percentage of all parents in all age ranges. Parents' knowledge base of owning and using livestock was limited. Most of the parents in all age ranges agreed that they supported the use of traditional medicinal plants and traditional ceremonies in natural healing; that they used history to inform their children of their cultural identity; that the Navajo culture has made significant contributions to worldviews; and that they taught their children about kinship and clan customs.

In regards to place of birth, although there were few differences in parents' general attitudes in terms of importance of Navajo language and culture, and self-respect/pride, there were lower percentages of agreement in speaking Navajo in the home and the use of Navajo culture. Less than half (40.4%) of the parents born off the Navajo reservation, and only 36.7% of the parents born on the Navajo Reservation, agreed that Navajo culture was only used for special occasions (ceremonies, baby's first laugh, puberty ceremony, marriage, etc.).

The marital status of parents was also categorized and examined. Most of the married, single, and divorced parents agreed that they were very knowledgeable about their culture. All most all of the single parents, married parents, and the divorced parents agreed that Navajo culture was used in their homes on a daily basis. Slightly over half of the divorced parents agreed that Navajo culture is only used for special occasions such as ceremonies, baby's first laugh, puberty ceremonies, and marriages.

Although there were few differences in parents' general attitudes about Navajo language and culture, their responses varied for knowledge base. Over three fourths of the single parents, married parents, and divorced parents strongly agreed with using culture as part of their child rearing practices. These practices included basketry, traditional dwellings, preparation of traditional foods (corn, berries, and meats), and animal husbandry.

About three fourths of the single, married, and separated parents agreed that they knew about Navajo basketry and traditional dwellings. Slightly over three fourths of the married parents and single parents agreed that they can prepare traditional foods. Almost two thirds of the single parents, married parents, and divorced parents agreed that animal husbandry was part of their practices.

Parents' response by gender was also looked at. There were few differences in parents' general attitudes in regard to the importance of the Navajo culture and language, self-respect/pride, and traditional prayers and ceremonies by gender. Parents were in strong agreement. About 40% of both male (39.3%) and females (37.9%) agreed that Navajo culture was only used for special occasions such as baby's first laugh, puberty ceremonies, and marriage.

Even though most of the parents, male and female, agreed with using culture as part of their child rearing practices, the percentages varied or decreased in regard to the tools of cultural child rearing and the ideas and concepts of Navajo culture. The percentages for cultural tools (basketry, traditional dwellings, preparation of traditional foods, and animal husbandry) needed for child rearing was low compared to the cultural ideas and concepts (medicinal plants and ceremonies, history, Navajo culture and worldviews, and teaching clan customs).

Seventy one percent (71.4%) of the male parents used the Navajo basket and knew of its origin. Seventy four percent (74.0%) of the male parents were knowledgeable of traditional significances on various types of dwellings; whereas, nearly three fourths (70.7%) of the female parents agreed that they were able to prepare a variety of traditional foods such as corn foods, berries, and meats. Less than two thirds (64.6%) of the female parents agreed that they owned and used livestock to teach their children about responsibilities; almost 15% (14.6%) more than the male parents. The female parents were more knowledgeable in the preparation of traditional foods and animal husbandry.

A substantial percentage of both male and female parents strongly agreed on the ideas and concepts of cultural child rearing. These ideas and concepts included the support and use of traditional plants/ceremonies, the use of history and Navajo culture making significant contributions to worldviews and kinship/clan customs. Nearly all of female parents agreed with the use of medicinal plants/ceremonies and also agreed on teaching their children about kinship and clan.

In terms of parents’ education, a little more than half of parents who had graduate degrees and college graduates agreed that Navajo culture was used for special occasions. Most of the parents who were college graduates, some high school education, and some college education agreed that traditional clothing and attire were defined as culture. All of the parents with some college education and parents with associate degrees agreed to belief in the Navajo philosophy of *Są'ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hozhǫ́*. The parents with a formal education agreed more than parents with some high school education that they used culture as part of their child rearing practices.

The percentages for cultural tools (basketry, traditional dwellings, preparation of traditional foods, and animal husbandry) needed for child rearing was low compared to the cultural ideas and concepts (medicinal plants and ceremonies, history, Navajo culture and worldviews, and teaching clan customs). Majority of the parents who were high school graduates agreed to have knowledge about traditional dwellings. Majority of the parents with some high school education and all of the parents with associate degrees strongly agreed that they are able to prepare a variety of traditional foods. It was agreed upon that animal husbandry was the lowest cultural tool that was part of child rearing. A little over three fourths of the parents with college degrees were the highest to agree that they owned and used livestock to teach their children about responsibilities. Nearly all of the parents with post-secondary education levels strongly agreed that they supported the ideas and concepts of cultural child rearing.

Based on the data, all parents regardless of age, place of birth, marital status, gender and level of education, believe that the Navajo culture and practices are important. Parents use cultural tradition as means to educate their children and to ensure that that they are well balanced according to the Navajo philosophy of *Są'ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hozhǫ́*. However, there are varying differences between the age groups.

The older parents have more knowledge and practice the traditions more than the younger parents. This could be based on experience and interaction with traditional elders. Whereas, the younger parents are less active with their elders causing disconnect. The younger parents are more in tuned with worldviews and the norms of modern society through media and other influences.

The findings have shown that there is culture in the home; however, the use of the culture and to what extent it is practiced is partially due to the probable factors of modern society. The findings have also shown that owning livestock and teaching responsibilities through the care of animals common to the Navajo people such as sheep, goats, cows, and horses was limited. The lack of animal husbandry could be due to tremendous responsibilities and finances associated with owning and caring for such animals. The modern Navajo no longer has the time to own livestock.

Conclusions

From my perspective as a teacher in the *Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'Ólta'* for eight years, and two years prior to that in an immersion program site within the district, when students were first enrolled in the program, there was, and continued to be, excitement on the part of the parents, with both parents and students participating in most of the culturally relevant school activities. They were very supportive of their children in language and culture at the elementary levels. However, as the student progressed into the middle school levels, you could see parents and students were not as excited about what was going on. Was the Navajo language and culture no longer considered of interest or important?

As reiterated, ultimately, the examples and foundation provided at home will impact the child as a student and lifelong learner. In Navajo society, there are some families who continue to instill the importance of heritage language and culture. And then there are those who choose not to, or who are not capable of doing so due to the lack of knowledge to share such teachings. If and when the Navajo language and culture are given value, reinforced, and practiced at home by all stakeholders on a daily basis, then it will sustain life.

As mentioned before, the Navajo language, culture, and traditions are taught as one. They are a way of life that the Navajo people live by. Many generations have fought to protect it. It is up to all members of the Navajo Nation to ensure its survival. The responsibility to revitalize and maintain the *Diné* way, our way of life, as a collective effort by all, including politicians (local, tribal, state, and federal). Parents and homes have to live it on a daily basis. Schools that wish to implement *Diné* immersion programs have to do so according to models set forth by other successful and thriving programs and schools like that of New Zealand and Hawaii.

Immersion models, programs and schools have to be protected and advocated for. All stakeholders, need to be aware of it goals and purpose. It needs to be a shared mission and vision. It is essential for all involved at a school to carry the weight of such a task. We cannot afford to wait, as research has shown that the language shifts rapidly each year. We as *Diné* need to unite to promote our Navajo language and culture. It is our identity as a unique people. This is what separates us from Anglo society.

Limitations

The survey was limited. I did not ask parents to explain their beliefs of language and culture as described in the review of the literature. My understanding of language and culture may have been completely different from theirs. There was no soliciting of comments from parents. There were no open-ended questions. Parents were not given the opportunity to explain their opinions and thoughts.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research are as follows:

- Through qualitative research methods, parents could be asked to explain the meaning of cultural components they were asked about on the survey. The instrument should include opened-ended questions that allow parents to elaborate on their interpretation of what is being asked.
- Further research should be conducted to compare elementary and middle school students' attitudes toward the immersion program to better understand what changes may occur in their attitudes as they progress through the grades.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

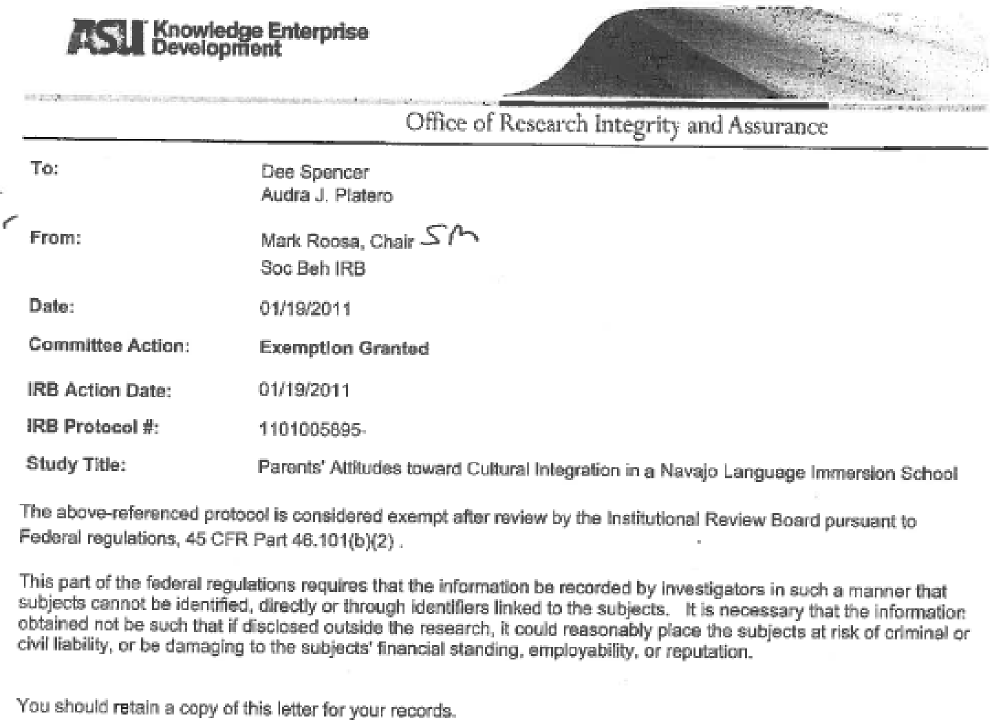
Questions 1 - 31

1. Navajo culture and language are very important to my children and me.
2. I am very knowledgeable about my own culture.
3. There are specific things about my culture that I am very proud of.
4. I do not respect my culture and language.
5. Navajo culture is used in my home on a daily basis.
6. We speak Navajo in our home.
7. Navajo culture is only used for special occasions (ceremonies), baby's first laugh, puberty ceremony, marriage, etc.
8. To me, Navajo culture is:
    - Traditional food
    - Traditional clothing/attire
    - Religion
    - Language
    - Stories
9. Traditional prayers/ceremonies are important aspects of Navajo culture.
10. I believe in the Navajo philosophy of Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho.
11. I use culture as part of my child rearing practices.
12. I use the Navajo basket and know of it significance and origin.
13. I am knowledgeable of traditional significances on various types of dwellings.
14. I can prepare a variety of traditional foods (corn foods, berries, meats).
15. I own and use livestock to teach my children about responsibilities.
16. I support the use of traditional medicinal plants and ceremonies in natural healing.
17. I use history to inform my children of their cultural identity (events, people, places, Navajo tribal government).
18. The Navajo culture has m significant contributions to worldviews (World War II, Navajo Code Talkers, etc.).
19. I teach my children about kinship, clan customs (introduction, terminology).
20. I think marrying outside of your clan should no longer be practiced.
21. Other cultures' influences have changed our traditional ways of life.
22. The Navajo culture is difficult for me to teach and reinforce at home.
23. I support my child learning in Navajo at school.
24. My children are benefiting from the Navajo culture that is being taught in the classroom.
25. The teachers are prepared and ready to deliver culturally relevant lessons.
26. I agree with the teachers teaching the Navajo cultural aspects in the classroom.
27. My children understand the Navajo philosophy of Sa'ah Naagai Bik'eh Hozho that is being taught at school.
28. The school provides cultural activities for the children.
29. I support and agree with the Arizona State Standards being taught with the Navajo culture curriculum.

30. I know about the school’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school. 1.2
31. I understand the school’s Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and Arizona Learns requirements as a public school, despite it being an immersion school.

APPENDIX B

ASU IRB APPROVAL



ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Dee Spencer
Audra J. Platero

for **From:** Mark Roosa, Chair SM
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 01/19/2011

Committee Action: **Exemption Granted**

IRB Action Date: 01/19/2011

IRB Protocol #: 1101005895

Study Title: Parents' Attitudes toward Cultural Integration in a Navajo Language Immersion School

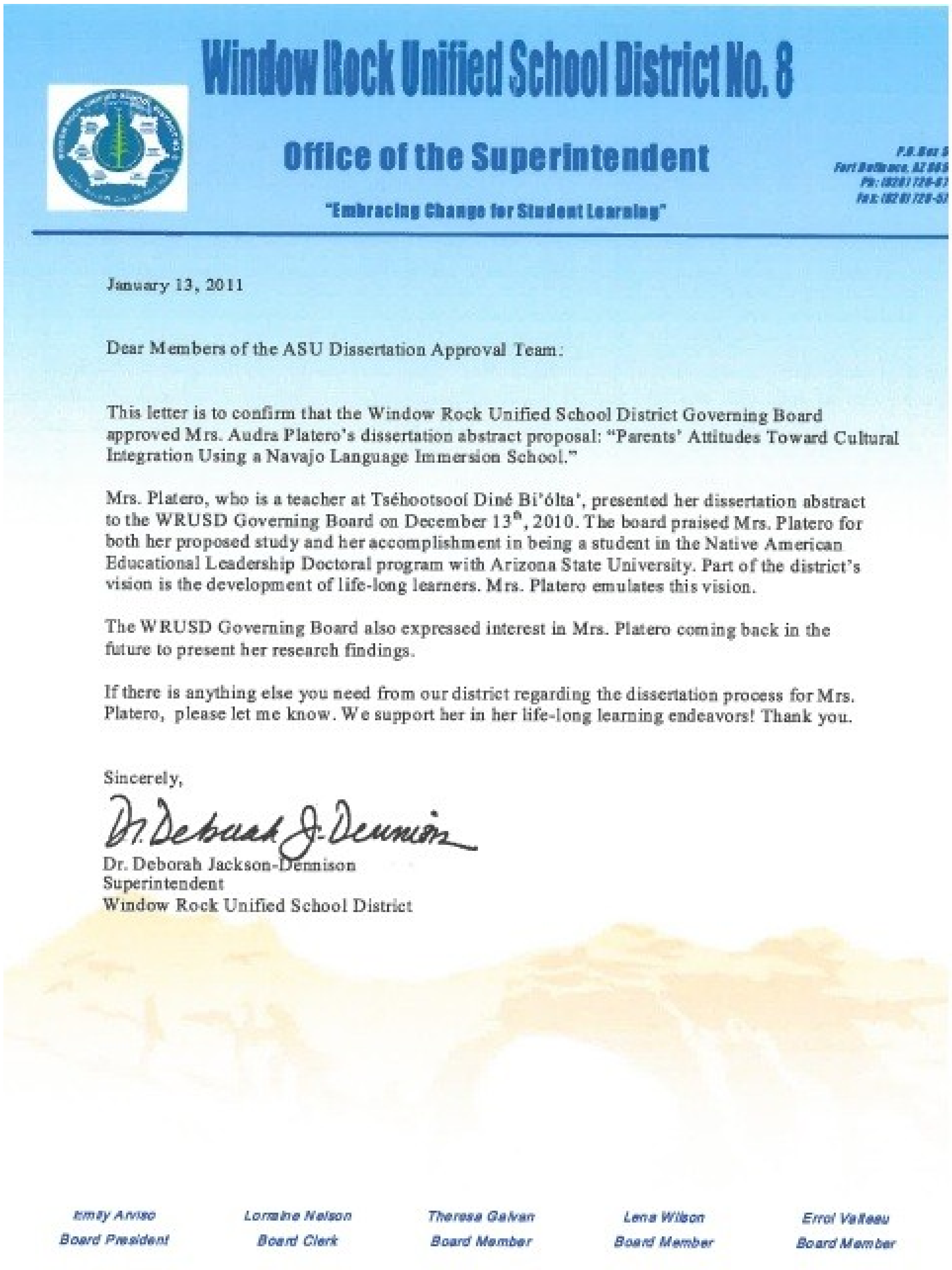
The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX C

WRUSD APPROVAL



Window Rock Unified School District No. 8

Office of the Superintendent

"Embracing Change for Student Learning"

P.O. Box 5
Fort Defiance, AZ 865
Ph: (928) 729-67
Fax: (928) 729-57

January 13, 2011

Dear Members of the ASU Dissertation Approval Team:

This letter is to confirm that the Window Rock Unified School District Governing Board approved Mrs. Audra Platero's dissertation abstract proposal: "Parents' Attitudes Toward Cultural Integration Using a Navajo Language Immersion School."

Mrs. Platero, who is a teacher at Tséhootsooí Diné Bi'ólta', presented her dissertation abstract to the WRUSD Governing Board on December 13th, 2010. The board praised Mrs. Platero for both her proposed study and her accomplishment in being a student in the Native American Educational Leadership Doctoral program with Arizona State University. Part of the district's vision is the development of life-long learners. Mrs. Platero emulates this vision.

The WRUSD Governing Board also expressed interest in Mrs. Platero coming back in the future to present her research findings.

If there is anything else you need from our district regarding the dissertation process for Mrs. Platero, please let me know. We support her in her life-long learning endeavors! Thank you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Deborah J. Dennison

Dr. Deborah Jackson-Dennison
Superintendent
Window Rock Unified School District

Emmy Arviso
Board President

Lorraine Nelson
Board Clerk

Theresa Galvan
Board Member

Lena Wilson
Board Member

Errol Valleau
Board Member