

Diné Education from a *Hózhó* Perspective

by

Dmitriy Zoxjkie Neezzhoni

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Approved November 2010 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Mary Eunice Romero-Little, Chair
Teresa L. McCarty
Bryan Brayboy

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2010

ABSTRACT

Diné Education is equal and is as valid as this nation's mainstream education, yet it does not share the same ideas, processes or goals as its counterpart. It is more complicated because it is based on oral traditions and the philosophies of *Hózhó*, a construct that requires a learner to embrace one's surroundings, actions, interactions, and being. A central part of Diné education focuses on spirituality and self awareness which are intertwined with every dimension of this universe. In order to become educated in the Diné world a learner must first learn to "walk in beauty" and have a positive self image. Being Diné, this researcher sought to capture his own childhood memories, including the special teachings and teachers that have guided his learning, as a way to document the process of acquiring a Diné education. The methods of inquiry for this research included self-reflection documented in a journal and an extensive literature review. The literature review was guided by three research questions:

1. What is Diné Education?
2. How important is it to today's Diné people?
3. What are the future prospects for the existence of Diné education?

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my loving mother Virginia Nez for encouraging me to learn and who took the time to teach me. To my grandparents, elders, forefathers, and ancestors: If it was not for your resilience and strength, I, nor any of these beautiful and precious teachings would exist today. If it was not for the Creator and all of his creations, including his loving mother, Changing Woman, White Shell Woman, and the Holy People, I would not exist today.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 DINÉ LANDS, PEOPLE AND LANGUAGE	9
3 LIVING BY <i>HÓZHÓ</i>	13
4 IMAGE OF THE DINÉ	25
REFERENCES	32

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1.	Dmitriy Neezzhoni and Virginia Nez.....	6
2.	Map of the Navajo Nation.....	10
3.	Changing Woman Mother of the Diné.....	19
4.	Traditional <i>Ts'aa</i> (Basket) of the Diné	21
5.	Spirits of the Diné	25
6.	Education of the Diné	18

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My name is Dmitriy Neezzhoni. My surname is of Diné (Navajo) origin, it means “there will be beauty for a long time” or “much happiness” in the essence of time. I am Diné and I am also Athabaskan, ethnically. Athabaskans are found in the western territory of Diné country and are a tad linguistically different from the Diné in the east whom they are “related” to.

As a young child growing up nestled within the sacred mountains of the Diné people, I heard the Diné language spoken everywhere I went within Diné country. My grandparent’s told me when I was a young boy, “Before you were brought into this physical world you already heard Diné.” So growing up, I knew that even before I was born I was innately familiar with the language. In my home and community, I heard the Diné language spoken daily. I also heard the dialect of the Athabaskan language too. I understand both languages fluently; however I am more comfortable speaking Diné. That is because only a small number of Athabaskan people speak the Athabaskan language within the Navajo Nation. The majority of the population speaks Navajo. I do speak interchangeably the two languages amongst my relatives’ or at home.

As a child I also heard another language in my home, but rarely spoke it; it was English. Amongst my family, a few English words were spoken every once in a while but my grandparents made it clear to me that English was for school and when I am at home I was to speak my mother tongue, Diné.

Everyone in my family and clan spoke Diné, including the young children, youth, adults, elders and even visitors. We all spoke our language. My family spoke the language on a daily basis and conducted business in Diné with other Diné people. Once in awhile business was conducted with people from other tribes in English. But, in our daily lives, we had no need for English because we rarely left Diné country. We had no need to because we were pretty much self-sufficient. We relied on our own goods we produced. Obviously, we had to interact with English speaking Anglo-American people once in awhile. So on these occasions, when we went to the nearest town, someone in our family, usually a man, was designated to conduct business with Anglo-Americans. Typically the young kids and elders stayed behind at home.

I have so many fond memories of learning and speaking my language as a child. I remember in the fall traveling to the mountains with my grandparents and parents to pick pine nuts. On these trips, I learned all the names of the trees, plants, animals, and mountains in Diné. I heard stories associated with the mountains, rivers, canyons, and ranges in Diné. These spiritual stories still harbor in my mind today.

I remember my family playing tricks on me. One tricking event involved me discovering what soda was. As a young child I always want the sweet tasty drink called “soda” and I put up a fuss when my request for it was denied. My grandfather and father were easy for me to manipulate and I easily convinced them to buy me soda (or whatever I wanted). Maybe that’s why they left me home a lot with the elders—I always wanted things. I didn’t know how to say “soda”

and “candy” in my native language but at school I learned the English word for them. The clever adults used only the Diné words for these items so I wouldn’t understand what they were talking about. Being as clever as the adults though, I eventually connected the dots and memorized the words in Diné. Out of curiosity, I asked someone what those two words meant in Diné and the days of tricking me were over.

Another time I remember we were in the field harvesting peaches and, of course, being a naughty kid, someone in my family told me in Diné, “You better stop being naughty or the peach will get you.” I ran to my mother frightened, because I had no idea what the word for peach was in Diné. The word for peach is *Diidatsoo*. Not knowing this at the time, I associated the *tsoo* part of the word with a Giant or Monster. *Ts’o* in Diné means something is enormous or very large. I can’t remember how long that word haunted me, but I eventually found out that *Diidatsoo* means peach. I still find it amusing, but that is how I learned the word for peach in my native language. As a young child, I was developing my symbolic representation of my Diné world as I acquired the Diné language (Vygotsky 78).

Diné clans are very fundamental method of teaching for Diné people. I remember my mother teaching the Diné clans to me when I was a child. I had all my clans in order and remembered which clans are my relatives (this is core knowledge for Diné people). I had a little pronunciation problem with my third clan. My third clan is *TLizi Lani*, the Many Goats People. That is also the clan of my maternal grandfather. I said my third clan correctly, except for the *Lani* part

of the word. Instead, I was pronouncing it as *Sani*, so I was saying *TLizi Sani* not *TLizi Lani*. What I was really saying was the *Old* Goat People are my paternal grandfather not the *Many* Goats People. This was very funny to Diné speakers. So this is how I also acquired proficiency in the Diné language. As a young child, I was being guided and assisted by “the experts,” my grandparents and parents, as I learned the intricacies of my language and specifics of my culture (Schieffelin and Ochs 16).

I have many wonderful memories while learning my native language. I also am very happy my family unselfishly blessed me with my language. Without it I would not be complete as an individual. “Being complete” includes having the supernatural world recognize and know who I am as a Diné person (Aronilth 14). Having the knowledge of my language also allows me to view the world in a completely different lens. I feel that being taught my native language gave me the opportunity to bond with my nuclear family. Whether it was being next to my mother as she was weaving, helping my grandma cook and clean, sitting with my grandfather in a ceremony, being out in the wilderness with my uncles and father, playing with my cousins, or helping my aunt. Whatever the scene was, language was used and brought us together.

I speak both of my native languages when I am with my family or with my fellow Diné. When I go back to the Navajo Nation, I only speak in my native language, because I am at home and it is the language of the land and the language of my heart.

My native language is very important to me. “Important” is a weak word for expressing its significance. My language is me, I am it. I cannot separate myself from my language, it is the language that my Holy People understand, the language my spirit understands, the language my ancestors understand, my language is my existence. It’s difficult to say how I feel about my language. English has no words equivalent to express its importance to me.

I realize that the Diné language is endangered because fewer children are speaking it a first language (Spolsky & Holm 170). My nieces and nephew, who do not speak fluent Diné, only hear me speak to them in Diné. My hopes are that they will learn the sacred and innate language of their people. My observations of Diné children and youth reflect what research has found: Today’s Diné children and youth prefer and often speak only one language, English. In light of this linguistic situation, I decided early on that I will raise my children speaking Diné first because I want them to become fluent in the language and I want them to view the world from the eyes of a Diné person. English is everywhere, so they will do just fine learning it as a second language (Romero-Little 398).



Figure 1. Dmitriy Neezhoni and Virginia Nez.

Hozhooji Iina (Living by Hozho).

A section dedicated to my mother's teachings of *Hózhó*

My mother (see Figure 1) Virginia Nez, is a Diné woman who exemplifies the teachings of *Hózhó*, she is the ideal Diné woman, mother, teacher, and representation of life itself. My mother acquired her teachings from her great-grandmother *Zhonii* (Grandma Fannie) an expert in Diné education, philosophies, prayers, songs, and ceremonies. People from faraway places and throughout Diné country would visit *Zhonii* to learn about her knowledge of the Diné. She was also the teacher to many highly regarded Diné Priests, Shamans, Scholars, and

Herbalists. Whenever my mother was assisting others with her knowledge she'd always make references to her great-grandmother who was her main teacher.

My mother always said to me, “*Shi yazhi, hozhoogo naana, Hozhoogo yanLti, Nizhonigo Hininaa, Hozhoogo intsinkees, Yeego int'eh. Ayoo inishni shi yazhi, shi na'aa* (My little one, walk in beauty, take care of yourself, speak words of beauty, live beautifully, have thoughts of beauty, be strong as a person. I love you my little one, my precious and cherished one).”

My mother's words of *hózhó* encouraged me; they have been with me and will remain with me throughout my life. A few of her teachings of *Hózhó* are:

- Get up before the sun; dawn has many blessings for you.
- Share your wealth and don't be greedy, but if you choose to be greedy.
The blessings will stop.
- Keep your home clean, especially your kitchen. And, always have food to feed your visitors.
- Always have *K'e* (kinship) in your heart *shi yazhi* (little one). This means to always acknowledge your family and be open to making new relations, because you never know a person might not have family.
- Don't be lazy *shi yazhi*, work hard! Have a strong mind, heart and spirit.
Be strong in your faith.
- Be happy, laugh and joke.

These are just a few examples of her *Hozhooji* teachings. There are many of her teachings that are harsh as well. I did not fully understand these *Nayaaji* (caution) teachings until I became an adult. Because, childhood experiences are a

lot different from adulthood experiences, life situations are not always kind to us as we get older. I spent most of my days with my mother; she was also my best friend.

My mother recently made her journey on to the next world. I am very fortunate and blessed to call her my mother; she took the time to teach me according to *Hózhó*. If I was not taught these things or if I choose not to live by them I don't know where I would be in life. According to Diné teachings, only a person with true compassion and love will teach and talk to their children or another person in this manner. At times teenagers tend to think that they are being targeted by their parents or elders, but that is not so. Even as adults we are defensive of ridicule of our actions, even though we know we've done wrong. My mother always told me you are Diné and you will remain Diné in this life and beyond. I have no choice but to acknowledge and embrace my Diné teachings. As well, I must not be clouded with western thought of independence. It is my sibling's and my responsibility to teach these teachings of *Hózhó* to the next generation, our children, and the next generation of *Ashiihi* (Salt clan people). This is *Hózhó*.

CHAPTER 2

DINÉ LANDS, PEOPLE AND LANGUAGE

The Diné, also referred to as “Navajo,” are a beautiful people. There are approximately 300,000 Navajo living in the U.S. today. Roughly 175,000 people live within the boundaries of the Nation. As you will see when you visit the Navajo Nation, this results in a low population density of only about 6 persons per square mile (seirraserviceproject.org). They call their country *Diné tah* (Diné land) which is nestled within the six sacred mountains of the Diné world (see Figure 2). Mount Blanca is the eastern sacred mountain located near Alamosa, Colorado; Mount Taylor is the southern sacred mountain located near Grants, New Mexico; the San Francisco Peaks are the western sacred mountains located near, Flagstaff, Arizona; and, Hesperus Peak is the northern sacred mountain located near Durango, Colorado. Some traditional Diné scholars believe Pikes Peak west of Colorado Springs, Colorado, is the northern sacred mountain. And, there are two additional mountains aside from the four cardinal direction mountains that are considered sacred to the Diné people. In northwestern New Mexico, Huerfano peak is considered the “lungs” of Diné tah (see Figure 2) and Gobernador Knob is considered the “heart” of Diné tah. Diné tah was given to the Diné people by the Creator and the Holy People, the land is spread throughout what is known today as the Colorado Plateau and on the edge of the Southern Rocky Mountains. Diné tah is filled with beautiful landscape although it is not without harsh winters and hot summers. This land is fertile with rivers, meadow filled valleys, multicolored mesas, and beautiful mountains towering over the

sagebrush and snakeweed covered high desert. In addition, many kaleidoscopic colors such as the Painted Desert, amazing rock formations in Monument Valley, and the famous Grand Canyon are embedded within Diné tah. The Navajo Nation covers 27,000 square miles in the states of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. In land mass, this area is larger than 10 of the fifty states in the United States.

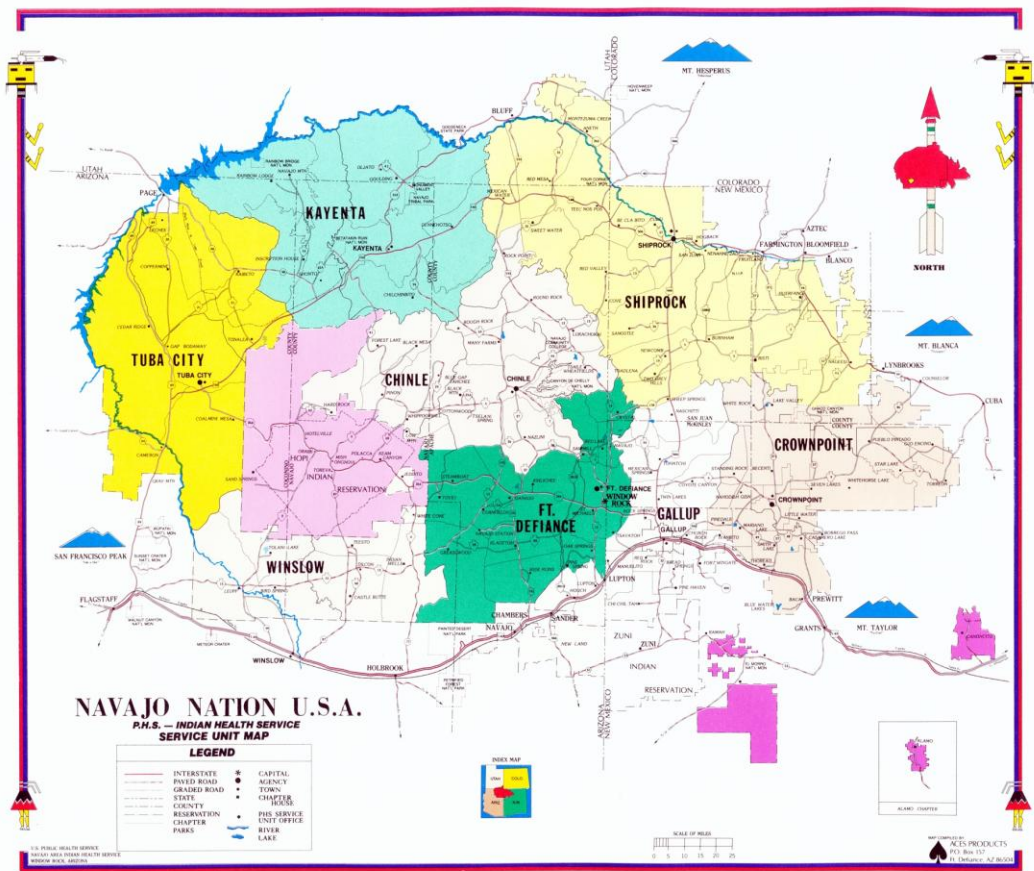


Figure 2. Navajo Nation Map

In Diné ontology, the Diné people are considered the children of Changing Woman (see Figure 3), White Shell Woman, Father Sun, and the Holy People (Spiritual Beings). In the beginning the Diné people came from three previous

worlds and emerged into the fourth world or the “Glittering World,” the physical world that the Diné people live in today (Reichard 19). The Creator with the assistance of the Diné Holy People, made order in the universe then created mankind. With the intelligence of several Holy People the Diné language was formed overtime with holiness, prayer, meditation, thought, sound, and through that process came forth the *Yoolgai Saad* or the White Shell language. *Yoolgai Saad* is the representation of Early Dawn, the East, reflected by good thought, strong planning and organization abilities. *Dootl’izhii Saad* or the Turquoise language is the representation of the Blue sky, the South, reflected by strong thinking abilities, mental stability and having a strong mind. *Diichilii Saad* or the Abalone language is the representation of Evening, the West, life and all that life has to offer the good and bad, including how to make sense of life. *Baashzhinii Saad* or the Jet language is the representation of the Night, the North, reflected by hope and protection. *Tadaadiin Ashkii Saad* or the Forever language is associated with masculinity, is the language of the Corn Pollen Boy, reflected by kindness, humor, thoughtfulness, ceremonial doing and all that is associated with ceremonial life. And, finally *Taniltanii Ateed Saad* or the Happiness language associated with femininity, is the language of the Corn Beetle Girl, a reflection of happiness, love, emotions and expression of feelings, humility, generosity, prayer and sacred songs within the realm of traditional ceremonial life.

The Diné language has complex rules and sophisticated organization. This is the way the Diné Holy People organized the language. The Diné language and culture or existence is reflected in all parts of Diné life; they are one. Culture is

an ordered way of thinking and is a way of life, thus language is utilized daily and cannot be separated from culture and life, since they work side-by-side one must know language in order to know and comprehend the culture of the Diné people and society. In the eyes of a Diné person who is educated in Diné education, the Diné language has a foundation and roots. They will recognize the language as a being or a person, a lady. One will also say it has breath and thoughts of its own. She (Diné language) is represented in the form of a sacred prayer feather.

As my paternal grandfather use to say “*Diné Bizaad Diyin, beedahonoosin, bee nahodolzindo, bee tsodidilzii, bee achaaha diizdi* (The Diné language is sacred, speak it and know it, you are known by your language [meaning having an identity], pray with it, and protect yourself with it [meaning language].” I can recall and remember him and his words as thou they were said yesterday.

CHAPTER 3

LIVING BY *HÓZHÓ*

The Diné believe the land is *Hózhó* and *Nizhoni*. *Hózhó* refers to the environment as a whole and the universal dimensions of beauty, harmony, balance, peaceful energy, a sacred perfect rhythm, and well-being (Chalufour & Borden 18). *Nizhoni* refers to a particular item; time, space, or a being that is nice, attractive or beautiful. The difference in these two terms is in the prefixes *ho – ni*. *Ho* refers to the general as opposed to the specific, the whole as opposed to the part, the abstract as opposed to the concrete, the indefinite as opposed to the definite, and the infinite as opposed to the finite. The Diné metaphor envisions a universe where the primary orientation is directed toward the maintenance or the restoration of *Hózhó*. Most people think *Hózhó* means beauty which is just one definition, but the term means much more. In the Diné view, *Hózhó* is understood as a multidimensional intellectual construct of balance, order, the emotional, mental, physical health, and spiritual happiness, the kind and moral acts of goodness. The Diné do not seek *Hózhó*; they are engulfed in *Hózhó* with every breath they take and are surrounded by it every day and night.

When *Hózhó* is disrupted, it must be restored; when it is destroyed or diminished, it is renewed; and, when *Hózhó* is present it's acknowledged in a sacred manner. For example the Diné express *Hózhó* with *ShiL* (I) with “me” there is *Hózhó*, *NiL* (you) with “you” there is *Hózhó*, *BiL* (them two people) with “them” there is *Hózhó*, *DanihiL* (with more than two people) with “them” there is *Hózhó*. As part of *ShiL* (I) there is *Shii*, which if used this means that there is

Hózhó “within” me, and the same goes for *shaa* meaning *Hózhó* “radiates from” me. The Diné express *Hózhó* in every dimension of their lives, including their prayer and communication, songs, dance, creation story, ceremonies, art, and daily activities. *Hózhó*, is not separated from science, philosophy, history, psychology, mathematics, political science or theology, but is a part of the Diné world. This connection is expressed more clearly in the Diné *Hozhooji* prayer:

From here where I stand upon mother earth may there be *Hózhó* (Beauty).

And, may there be beauty from my sky the father.

From the East may there be beauty for me.

From the South may there be beauty for me.

From the West may there be beauty for me.

From the North may there be beauty for me.

From the Zenith in the sky may there be beauty.

From the nadir of the Earth may there be beauty.

And, where I stand in the Center of it all, may there be beauty in all my existence, thoughts, and voice.

From *Sisnaajinii* (Mt. Blanco) the sacred white shell mountain may there be beauty for me.

From *Tsoodzil* (Mt Taylor) the sacred turquoise mountain may there be beauty for me.

From *Dooko’o’sliid* (San Francisco Peaks) the sacred abalone mountain may there be beauty for me.

From *Dibe' Ntsaa* (Hesperus Peak) the sacred jet mountain may there be beauty for me.

From *DziL Na'oodiLii* (Huerfano Mountain) the sacred soft goods mountain may there be beauty for me.

From *DziL Chooli* (Gobenodor Knob) the sacred hard goods mountain may there be beauty for me.

Haashjay YaLti'i (Oratory Divinity) and *Haashjay ghaan* (Hogan Divinity) my grandfather's may you both teach me to recognize beauty and live it.

My mother *Asdzaa Nadleehi* (Changing Woman) and *YoLgai Asdzaa* (White Shell Woman) may you be with me and protect me in all of my activities and may you be with me in beauty.

With beauty before me, I walk.

With beauty behind me, I walk.

With beauty below me, I walk.

With beauty above me, I walk.

With beauty all around me, I walk.

With my word being of beauty, I walk.

I am now *Saah Anaaghai* (male) *Bik'eh Hozho* (female) (Forever Boy and Eternal Happiness Girl).

I am child of all that is seen holy and sacred again, I am also their grandchild.

It has been restored to beauty.

It has been restored to beauty.

It has been restored to beauty.

It has been restored to beauty.

Hózhó is the most important word among the Diné; it is expressed within Diné daily activities. When a Diné person is not in the state of *Hózhó* he/she is prescribed the *Hozhooji* (Beauty way) ceremony. The word *ji* in the Diné language means the side of, along its path, the way of, or that way. *Hozhooji* is believed to be the foundation of the Diné belief system and ceremonies, and the existence of the Diné People (Haile 57). There is no word or equivalent in the English language that could grasp the full Diné concept. Thus, to the non- Diné and to a Diné person who doesn't speak the language nor practice their innate belief, it appears to be just a mere idea.

Along with giving a western explanation of *Hózhó* there is also the breaking down of the word *Ho*, meaning an area, and, *Zho* meaning perfection, nature and natural. Also some use a flower metaphor to explain *zho* as something similar to a flower opening its petals.

The first word uttered in the Diné language was *Nizhoni* (Levy 18). The closest translation of the word broken apart is *ni* refers to the surface of the earth, *zho* refers to an absolute, the closest translation would be "From the surface of the earth and everything in-between into the heavens is *Hózhó*" or "beautiful." Diné history and theology teaches that the word/expression/feeling of *Nizhoni* came to life one day when a Diné holy person named *Hashjee YaLti* went outside to greet the dawn and the first white rays of the horizon. He stood there observing the dawn and became overwhelmed with a feeling of absolute joy and emotions that the only word that he could utter to describe this feeling was "*Nizhoni*."

That same day another holy person named *Hashjee Haaghoon* went to greet the evening twilight and he also was overcome by an absolute feeling of joy. It was a feeling he never felt before and the only way that he could describe this feeling was by uttering, “*Ya’ah’teeh*.” This became the second word of the Diné language, the closest translation is “from the heavens above my father *Ya’* to the surface of the earth is *Hózhó*.” Today, it is used as the Diné greeting upon encountering another Diné person; however the person must truly feel or acknowledge kinship with the other person.

	Spiritual Image – Oratory Divinity Dawn Boy and Dawn Girl East – Dawn – Spring <i>Ntsaahakes</i> - Mt. Blanca Love-White Birth – Childhood - Mother	
Physical Image – Hogan Divinity Folding Darkness Boy and Folding Darkness Girl North – Night – Winter <i>Siihasin</i> - Hesperus Peaks Charity -Black Old age – Paternal Grandparents		Common Image – Oratory Divinity Blue Twilight Boy and Blue Twilight Girl South – Day – Summer <i>Naahat'aa</i> - Mt. Taylor Hope - Blue Teenager – Father
	Social Image – Hogan Divinity Yellow Evening Boy and Yellow Evening Girl West – Evening – Fall <i>Iina</i> - San Francisco Peaks Faith - Yellow Adulthood – Maternal Grandparents	

Figure 6. Education of the Diné

Hózhó is not just a word, but a way of life. For this reason *Hózhóji* Education became the foundation of Diné Education. This is the education that all young Diné people embark on in their journey into the Diné intellectual world. It is a life-long learning process that one can never fully learn, but must live according to *Hózhó*. *Hózhó* being the first intellectual process and the second is

Naayeeji. *Naayeeji* is having knowledge of caution and protection. *Haatalji* is the third intellectual process integrating great depths of ceremonial and medicinal training with education in chemistry, memory, science, and sacred knowledge. *Diyinji* sacred knowledge of the Diné people is the final intellectual process. It is important to understand these educational processes of the Diné are not secular.



Figure 3. Changing Woman, Mother of the Diné People.

Changing Woman is the principle deity of the Diné; she is credited for most of the teachings and philosophies of *Hózhó* and the *Hozhooji* ceremony. Also, Changing Woman, White Shell Woman and all the other important Deities play a significant role with *Hózhó*. *YooLgai* (White Shell), *DootL'izhii* (Turquoise), *DiichiLhii* (Abalone), *Baash Zhinii* (Jet), *Yodi* (Soft Materialistic Goods), and *NitL'iz* (Hard Valuable Goods) are elements, but also have

philosophies and teachings. Changing Woman is *Hózhó*; she is the embodiment of the earth, the seasons, the light soft rain storms, the flesh and mother of the Diné people, she is the backbone of the Diné belief system, she is the Diné lady, and she is the sacred mountain item and songs of the Diné *Hoozhoji* ceremony (Wheelwright 46).

These teachings were once known to all Diné people, and the generations that followed, but today they are not being passed down as they should be and could be. The knowledge and philosophies of Diné people and their ancestors teaches that a man (male) and a woman (female) should be aware of their roles within Diné society and within the world around them. *Hózhó* teaches that in order to be recognized as a Diné person, an individual must know their true identity through the education of *Doone'e* (Clan) and the *K'e* (Kinship) systems, belief system, and morals of the Diné people. Diné people are to possess positive thoughts like their elders and ancestors. This enables them to have a clearer understanding of themselves. They are able to utilize this and do things in the right way with honesty and humility. The role in life as a Diné person is to have love, hope, faith, compassion, organization, well ordered thoughts, recognition for life, and charity (to be giving). If a Diné person utilizes these attributes in their daily lives then they will have contributed to or have created *Hózhó*.

Diné people are created from all that is holy, sacred, natural, and pure in this world/universe. Being a part of these creations enables them to communicate in a sacred, special and effective way with these sacred entities and elements with the utilization of intellectual thoughts, sacred voice and sacred movements.

Oratory Divinity, Hogan Divinity, Changing Woman, White Shall

Woman, Corn Pollen Boy, and Corn Beetle Girl are said to have left this teaching:

To know ones self-image and being able to respect one's self is very important, and to be accepting of other peoples' beliefs and religions. The role in life as male and female is to understand the definition of Diné Education which deals with behavior and the way that one thinks about her as well as others' life. The Diné have viewpoints and beliefs that originated with their ancestors. Their wisdom helps them with understanding and defining what education is for a Diné person.



Figure 4. Traditional *Ts'aa* (Basket) of the Diné.

The Diné traditional basket (see Figure 4) is an example of Diné *hózhó* education and art combined. The traditional Diné basket is used in many Diné

ceremonies. Many Diné people also keep these baskets as tokens. The baskets are fabricated from sumac. The traditional basket includes only three colors: white, black and red. The basket is round and woven in coils into a bowl shape. Its shape and designs are symbolic of the Diné universe, as well as the relationship between the Diné, mother earth and father sky.

The baskets are used in several types of Diné ceremonies including weddings, womanhood passage, baby's first laugh, fire dance, and the Beauty way. In the traditional Diné Basket *Hózhó* is also captured and expressed in every design and stitch of the basket. The ceremonial basket is necessary item for use in Diné ceremonies that are intended to restore balance to a person's life. Ceremonies occur if a person has been ill, passing through a period of change, or needs success in life, and restoration of *Hózhó*. Baskets are used in ceremonies to wash away the "bad", in order to restore harmony and beauty to a person's life. The Diné traditional basket is the alter to *hózhó*, it is the universe and it is the Diné world.

A pathway leads from the center of the basket to the edge. This is "the way out," or the doorway of the basket, also called the "ceremonial break." It represents the emergence of the people and the birth canal of Changing Woman, the principle female deity. Many weavers believe in the importance of including a pathway in each basket. Some weavers believe, in accordance with Diné tradition, that creating a pathway allows their creativity to continue beyond the basket and allows healing to occur when used in a ceremony. The pathway is

aligned to the East during a ceremony. Weavers believe that if they do not include a pathway, their minds will be shut and they will no longer be able to create.

To retain *hózhó*, the Diné have continually had to adapt in order to survive and preserve their way of life. In their creation story, the people moved from one world to another as each world was gradually upset by evil, lust, or greed, thereby disturbing *hózhó*. According to Diné theology, *hózhó* could only exist on Earth, the Fourth World, and the Diné also believe in their version of a “heaven” or “spirit world”.

If a weaver is lacking in *hózhó*, it reflects in her art. If a weaver was passing through a difficult period in her life, her baskets are crooked and uneven, and do not reflect beauty. Only when the weaver regains balance in her personal life does her work become beautiful and balanced once more.

1. In the center of the basket represents emergence, the opening for the first Holy People who came from the third world through Hajiine'e, into the fourth world or "Glittering World."
2. The white portion of the basket represents dawn and water.
3. The black design in the center symbolizes the sacred mountains of the Diné people. The typical basket contains four or six of these designs. If four appear, they represent the sacred mountains of the east, south, west and north. If the basket has six designs, Huerfano Mountain represents the doorway and Gobernador Knob the opening of sunlight. There are sacred songs and prayers for these sacred mountains. The prayers protect the

Diné from harm, enabling them to give thanks, and direct them in the right direction or path of life.

4. The opening represents the doorway to the thinking and the thoughts of the Diné. It represents the east; Diné prayers and songs are always directed toward the east.
5. The red bands represent sunshine that help Diné people lead balanced lives that flourish in health and stability, as well as mentally, physically, socially, emotionally, commonly and spiritually. This is also known as *hózhó* (beauty) in life.
6. The outer black designs represent darkness, black clouds for rain, and snow for folding darkness, which Diné people use to rest their bodies and minds so that they may continue to grow and develop.
7. The lacing around the edge of the basket represents Diné roots, tying the people to all that are natural in life. It symbolizes the holy circle in which the Diné sit to say prayers.
8. The weave of the basket represents the complexity and apparentness of life arranged. It is crafted in a careful manner to depict well-being. The weaving is also never perfect because life is not perfect.
9. The coil starts at the center, representing birth. The mid-red coils symbolize adulthood; the outer black-and-white coils symbolize old age. The coil ends back at the east, or the doorway—life is a continuing cycle.

CHAPTER 4

IMAGE OF THE DINÉ

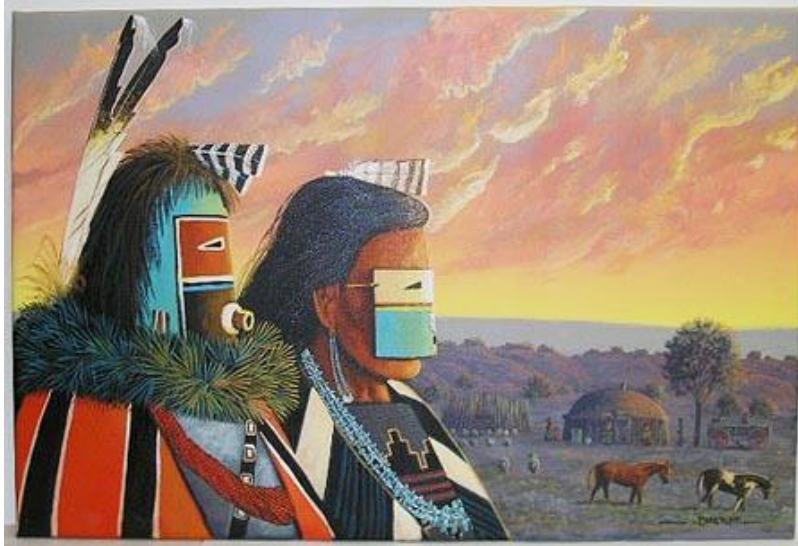


Figure 5. Spirits of the Diné

The Image of a Diné

Almost all things in the Diné world consist in the number four. This holds true with bringing ones Diné image into existence. These four images associated with the Diné existence explains ones speech, spiritual beliefs, attitude, behavior, and the way one expresses these attributes.

The teachings of self-image are highly regarded in Diné culture. Thus, in order for one to understand their Diné Image, the *Diyin Diné e* (Holy People) that created the images and other associated images must first be mentioned. All this knowledge and teachings come from the *Diyin Diné e* (see Figure 5). None were created in the thought of the Diné who walk the earth, the earth-surface-people, or humans. This holds true only to Diné people, because many of the other Indian Nations have their ways, not to confuse their traditions or the Diné traditions.

Spiritual Image

Spiritual Image is represented by Dawn Boy and Dawn Girl. Every Diné person has a spiritual image. It is the power that lays within each of us, in our mind, heart, body, and soul. It is the spirit that radiates from us on a daily basis. For example if a person is down or sad as another human being we can feel that “energy” or “spirit”. And, vice versa if a person is happy and cheerful we can feel that positive rhythm. Spiritual image is also the guiding force that lets us experience the innate power of our morals, the cosmic order of law, and laws of the animal and plant kingdoms. Our spiritual image lets us comprehend and accept that we are intuitive with the ability to conceive happiness and unhappy feelings. We have the power to control this image. The Holy People’s powers are felt in the heart, mind, spirit, and body. When one has a good spiritual image it can lead the individual in a positive direction.

Common Image

Common Image is represented by Blue Sky Boy and Blue Sky Girl. Our common image is represented in the way we feel and act on a daily basis, including our attitude, appearance and behavior. Much of our common image is attributed to the way our parents raised us and the people that surrounded us in our adolescence years, including their beliefs, lifestyle, speech, attitude, and our environment. We may have a healthy or unhealthy common image, but we also have the ability to change our image in a negative or positive way.

Social Image

Social Image is represented by Yellow Evening Boy and Yellow Evening Girl. Our social image has to do greatly with our mentality, our interactions with all of creation, including all people, the understanding of our personality, motivations, our beliefs and morals, opinions, and the different things we learn in life.

The Diné clan system plays a major role in Diné social image, including how we interact with our clan family, adopted “Indian” family, relatives, and our immediate family. Changing Woman created the teachings and disciplines that are associated with the Diné *K’e* (Kin) system.

In daily life one can change his social image depending on a situation and association with a certain group of people. We are at a time that is constantly changing and at times is moving at a steady pace of learning about our common image. This is not to say that common image is unorganized or scattered, but we must recognize the Diné teachings to keep our common image tame.

Physical Image

Physical Image is represented by Folding Darkness Boy and Folding Darkness Girl. The reason for that growth and development of the body takes place within darkness. Physical Image is responsible for our physical appearance and the way our physical bodies look and how it all fits together. Our physical being is not within our control or the control of another person, there is nothing we can do about the way we look, so we must embrace and accept our unique physical image.

The other three images: spiritual, common, and social images need more attention. These three images can be changed and improved, and this is displayed on our outer physical image. Our physical image could be abused by poor thought and poor self worth. And, on the other hand one can maintain their physical image in a healthy and beautiful manner.

FINAL REMARKS

For today's generation, the definition of Diné Education is quite different. This difference has to do with the presence and influence of a scientific western mindset. For example, mainstream usage tends to associate education with degrees, individualism, competition, literacy (in English), subjects such as psychology, philosophy, music and art, and much more. The western education is just one system of thought and intellect, even though it is considered the one and only. Diné education is another system of thought and intellect that has validity for the Diné people, education is the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgment and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life (dictionary.com). As Diné scholar explained Diné Education like this:

According to our forefathers, our cultural education was designed to use and follow. Foundation of Navajo culture can mature and our mind, our attitude and our behavior. It is the concept, the roots and the foundation of our values, beliefs, our language, and our life style. This cultural education and teachings are beautiful. They can take care of you and protect you

throughout your life. Always remember that our forefathers as well as us, learned abstract education first, and then concrete education second.

Even before the creation of the Diné, as it was told by our forefathers, the foundation and roots of our education had already been established and developed by the Holy People. For, this reason, it is said, we are created in the seed of our cultural education. The value of our cultural education is what makes us different. We are the seed of our own education. We can say that we are born into the foundation of our cultural as a seed, with prayer and a song we grow. It is a natural process for us to learn about our philosophical background. This is the reason why our forefathers said we must have our own education in order to understand the purpose of our life.

The idea of Navajo culture education is very important. The idea of recognition, respecting, and especially following the direction and ideas of our forefathers, is very important. I contend that you have to learn how to know and understand your own identity as a Diné. You have to know how to identify yourself in terms of: nature and the elements, your prayer and songs, to whom you pray and sing, your identity with ceremonies and paraphernalia, your clan, language and values, your Hogan, fire, water, dish and food, sacred places, sacred mountains and rivers, sacred animals, birds and plants, four seasons, Navajo months and stars, sacred stories, history and goals of life (Aronilth 21).

Today, many Diné individuals, even those raised in a Diné community, are not raised as childhood speakers of Diné and have very little or no awareness of their identity and the cultural importance of the Diné cultural education. They are Diné only by skin color. Our Diné ways are like a fire poker stick (*Hooneshgish*) lit in darkness, with the fire poker stick lit, we can see in darkness. Being surrounded daily by western education and thought we tend to believe that is the only way to function and think. Diné ways were created for the Diné people and the western ways are for those whom brought it to our country. Diné people will always come back to their traditional ways, because it is innate within us; it's our instincts that will lead us back to it. However, the path may be notably different than our forefathers who had the Diné language to guide them. Today many Diné children and adults will learn the Diné language as a second language, a task that is difficult in a world that encourages and values the learning of only one language, English.

I also believe that Diné education and language could be stabilized, validated, honored, and revitalized by means of decision and policy makers of the Navajo Nation government, Diné language and culture must not have an absence in Navajo Nation schools, English needs to be taught as a second language in Navajo Nation schools, parents must be encouraged to participate in language and cultural education within the child's educational institution or within their respectful communities, and Navajo language and cultural materials must be made available in high-quality, colorful reproductions equal in merit to the English language materials available (Platero 97).

Even though the Diné people have suffered and been persecuted greatly at the hands of the United States government in the not so distant past, the Diné must erase from their minds the negative stigma that was falsely painted on their identity and world view—but the experience must not be forgotten—and continue striving to seek and strengthen the image of the Diné.

REFERENCES

- Aronilth, Wilson. *Diné Bi Bee Ohoo'aah Ba' Sila: An Introduction to Navajo Philosophy*. Many Farms, AZ: Diné Community College Press, 1994.Print.
- Dictionary.com/ Find the Meanings and Definitions of Words at Dictionary.com*. n.p., 2010. Web. 13 Oct. 2010.
- Frisbie, Charlotte. *KINAALDA*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967.Print.
- Haile, Father Berard. *Beautyway: A Navajo Ceremonial*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1957.Print.
- Holm, A. and W. Holm. "Navajo Language Education: Retrospect and Prospects." *Bilingual Research Journal* 19.1 (1995): 141-167. Print.
- Levy, Jerrold. *In the Beginning*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1988.Print.
- Navajo Nation Historical Preservation Department. *Navajo Studies*. Window Rock, AZ: Navajo Nation Preservation Department, 1993.Print.
- Platero, Paul. "Navajo Head Start Language Study." *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice* (2001): 87-97.Print.
- Reichard, Gladys. *Navajo Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1963.Print.
- Roessel, Ruth. *Navajo Studies at Navajo Community College*. Many Farms, AZ: Navajo Nation Community College Press, 1971.Print.

Romero-Little, M.E. "Learning Indigenous languages as Second Languages." *In Josué M. González (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Bilingual Education* (2008): 397-402.Print.

Seasons of a Navajo. Dir. Michel Chalufour and John Borden. PBS Video, 1988. Videocassette.

Schieffelin, B. B and Ochs, E. *Language Socialization Across Cultures*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986.Print.

File:Navajo-Nation-Map-PHS.jpg. Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia, 2006. Web. 28 Nov. 2010.

Spolsky, Bernard and Wayne Holm. "Bilingualism in the Six-Year-Old Child." *In W.F. Mackey & T. Andersson (eds.), Bilingualism in Early Childhood* (1977): 167-173.Print.

Vygotsky, L. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.Print.

Wheelwright, Mary. *Hail Chant and Water Chant*. Boston, U.S.A: The Mary Mount Press, 1946.Print.

---. *The Myth and Prayers of The Great Star Chant and The Myths of the Coyote Chant*. Germany J.J. Augutin, Gluckstadt: Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art, 1956.Print.

Wittenberg, Jonathan B. *Navajo Nation 1950: Traditional Life in Photographs*. New York, NY: Glitterati Press Incorporated, 2006.Print.

