Activating Indigenous Knowledge to Create Supportive Educational Environments by Rethinking Family, Community, and School Partnerships

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ABSTRACT: In this article, the author describes ways that indigenous knowledges can be activated through social justice philosophies and pedagogies that promote equitable and fair social-educational systems to support indigenous students. Specifically, she argues that when considering family-community-school partnerships, family and community are one and the same when viewed through the conceptual framework of k'é and that for indigenous communities, education and community are inseparable. She establishes k'é as a Diné philosophy of community that dictates ways of knowing and being that are rooted in traditional teachings and ceremonies meant to ensure survival of the people. She describes a qualitative study that employed an indigenous methodology in which she asks Diné youth how they define community. The findings of the study imply that to support the Diné youth holistically, educators must promote equity and fairness within schools serving indigenous communities by partaking in active and critical engagement that includes acquiring an understanding of the histories, contributing to the processes of healing relationships, and activating indigenous knowledges that focus on philosophies of community.

Introduction

Upon my completion of my Ph.D. program, my family, like most families, wanted to celebrate. On the day of the celebration, as I was honored with many gifts, kind words, and expressions of appreciation, my mother asked me to share a description of my dissertation. As I looked out to the many grandmothers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces, nephews, sons, daughters and friends, I gathered my thoughts, attempting to hold back my emotions and stated, "My dissertation was about exactly this. K'é." I went on to explain that I would not have been successful without the support of all who were present in addition to loved ones who have passed. I told them that I had a community of support that helped me understand who I was, how

to honor relationships, how to trust people, and how to be dependable and because of that, I was able to accomplish many things in order to contribute to the wellbeing of my family and friends. My family and friends thanked me for writing about k'é, but more importantly, I thanked them for being k'é.

K'é dictates how one should relate to other people and nature to maintain harmonious relationships that promote wellbeing and prosperity for all. K'é is often easily translated into the English language as meaning "family," but rather than simply replacing "family" with "k'é" or vice versa, k'é needs to be understood as a Diné philosophy of community that is built on familial responsibilities and relationships and aimed at survival. In this article, I argue that *family* and *community* are one and the same, because they are both extensions of ways that indigenous peoples view themselves in relation to the overall survival of the people. I describe a study in which I ask Diné[1] youth to articulate a definition of community to then be utilized to establish effective community and school partnerships as support systems. The Diné youth seek support systems that embody k'é. By this, I mean that when the Diné youth were asked to articulate a definition of community, they identified components that are inherent to the Diné philosophy of community known as k'é. The understanding that the youth seek support systems through the ways people relate to one another rather than through material - or service-oriented supports has important implications that specifically position indigenous knowledges such as k'é as the foundation to systematically build upon social-educational environments for students rather than in partnership with schools. Within systems of indigenous education, "school" and "community" are inseparable.

The implications for understanding and examining community through indigenous philosophies can inform multicultural education perspectives and teacher education programs that promote social justice philosophies and pedagogies. Brayboy and McCarty (2010) add to Nieto and Bode's (cited in Brayboy and McCarty, 2010) definition of social justice "as a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity and generosity" (p. 192). They add that social justice pedagogy is the "process of engaging in and creating a social-educational system that allows us to move toward equity and fairness for all" (p. 192). Such that "[a]t the heart of Indigenous ways of knowing and being are notions of community and communal survival" (p. 187), engaging social-educational systems that acknowledge and integrate indigenous philosophies of community could promote equitable systems that support indigenous youth holistically.

Context

This study stems from three large areas of research on indigenous educational theories with a focus on family-community-school partnerships. The first is literature on community and school partnerships, in which I discuss (see Kulago, 2012) the importance, complexities, and need for researching community and school partnerships that promote academic success for Diné youth. I outline Ward's (2005) claim that in the school community, children need to feel they have socially defined roles, relations, and structure within their school experiences. In addition, the existing literature on family-community-school partnerships states that common goals should be identified for student success and contribute in ways students require in order to serve the whole child (Epstein, 2001; Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Ward, 2005). Within Native American[2] communities, the whole child and community cannot be separated. Ward (2005) explains that "studies indicate that student relations to peers and adults within the school environment, as well

as their interaction within communities and social networks outside school, have important influences on individual school performance" (p. 26). Researchers claim that if parent or community goals are more oriented toward the schools' goals, the effects will be positive for students' academic outcomes (Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Ward, 2005). However, the point of this article is not to restate the importance of family-community-school partnerships but is to address the concerns that for indigenous communities, when family-community-school partnerships are discussed, community and family should not be discussed separately as two different entities. They should be viewed as a system of relationships between people and places with the goal of survival of the people, rooted in the indigenous ways of knowing and being that have sustained communal survival throughout history, and furthermore, are inseparable from the educational experiences.

A second area of research that sets the context of this study is that of multicultural education that re-theorizes education to include such issues as multiple identities and different approaches to understanding community and community partnerships (Nieto, Bode, Kang, & Raible, 2008). These multiplicities and different understandings of community render a more complex and problematic approach to creating partnerships between communities and schools because community is possibly understood differently by minority communities. More specifically, this study adds to the limited research and literature in the area of family-community-school partnerships that has a focus on Native American populations. Within multicultural education research, Tammy Turner-Vorbeck (2005) established that there are narrow societal definitions of what constitute a family, and Nieto et al. (2008) claimed that multicultural education has relied on narrow notions of community in its application of community. These scholars problematize the mainstream applications of these entities to non-mainstream communities and reveal the necessity to complicate the concepts of family and community for teacher education programs and, more specifically, for preservice teachers. The implications of this study for teacher education programs are situated generally in multicultural education programs but specifically geared towards preservice teachers who will work in schools that serve indigenous communities.

The third area of research that shapes this study is that of the historic and contemporary relationship between educational research and indigenous populations. The majority of the literature about research and indigenous communities begins by explaining the suspicion and mistrust of research for, about, or on indigenous peoples' knowledge, land, and culture generated from a long history of research by Western institutions as colonizing agents (Smith, 1999). Historically, educational research on indigenous peoples has characterized the indigenous peoples, cultures, and ways of knowing as problems that necessitated solutions as assimilationist goals dominated curricula (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). What is most detrimental to indigenous peoples is that there are functions that are carried out through a Western value system and continue to underpin theories of research in which categories have been identified as common sense (Deloria, 1969; Smith, 1999). The colonizing functions of Western research include functions that: allow researchers to characterize and classify societies into categories; condense complex images of other societies through a system of representation; provide a standard model of comparison; and provide criteria of evaluation against which other societies can be ranked (Hall, cited in Smith, 1999). Unfortunately, such theories have become so common that we as indigenous peoples have internalized them and are unable to speak about our own experiences without explaining our way out of the constructs. However, there are ways to speak of our experiences through indigenous ways of knowing and enacting our philosophies.

Indigenous researchers have found and created space in critical research methodologies to disrupt the colonizing processes of research and to steer it towards decolonizing, revitalizing, and sustaining research that centers indigenous knowledge within goals of self-determination and nation building (Brayboy, 2005; Grande, 2004; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Smith, 1999). To contribute to this process, I position a Diné philosophy of community as the conceptual framework through which I discuss the participants' responses. This is an important consideration because, like other concepts in educational research, community has previously been defined outside of the Diné context. I use a Diné philosophy because there are fundamental ontological and epistemological differences that render outside definitions insufficient. The basic difference between Western European and Indigenous paradigms is the focus on relationships and the belief that everything is interconnected and independent (Brayboy & McCarty, 2010; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Louis, 2007; Wilson, 2001). In other words, what we know and how we as indigenous peoples demonstrate our knowledge is through the recognition of and actions within relationships. The code that guides the Diné within this paradigm is what I establish as a Diné philosophy of community and what the Diné know as the concept of *k'é*.

K'é: A Diné Philosophy of Community

In this section, I provide an overview of the concept of k'é so as to describe the familial relationships that constitute the qualities of a traditional[3] Diné community. The concept of k'é speaks directly to the way relationships of respect and interdependence should exist between people and nature. In previous literature, k'é has been defined as kinship, clanship, peace, love, kindness, cooperation, thoughtfulness, friendliness, and respectful relations with nature and others (Lamphere, 1977; McCarty & Bia, 2002; McCloskey, 2007). In one publication, k'é was described as "good thinking" (Benally & Hedlund, as cited in McCloskey, 2007). As stated by a Diné grandmother, "Good thinking means teaching our children that we must know one another in the family. We must maintain harmonious relations. We must share with one another. We must be able to depend on one another" (McCloskey, 2007, p. 51). Joanne McCloskey (2007) claims that the previous statement made by the Diné grandmother embraces the enduring principle of k'é in which the relationships between family and others stem from feelings of love and loyalty.

For the purpose of this study, k'é has been established as a framework that is made up of four qualities. It is important to note that k'é is not a static concept but means all of the positive virtues previously described based on the context in which it is used. I describe k'é by the following qualities to make its understanding practical for this study and for the reader who does not have a previous understanding of k'é; it is not a formal definition that should undermine people's ideas who already understand k'é. The first quality of k'é is the basic knowledge of others in the family. Recognizing kinship through clans demonstrates knowledge of who you are, how you should relate to people, and how other people relate to you. Also, in nature, we recognize relationships with natural elements. Within this preliminary recognition of others is where you would also establish relationships. The second quality is that of maintaining harmonious relationships by expressing love, compassion, friendliness, kindness, and peacefulness as one would to family members. The third quality is sharing with one another and being generous, unselfish and thoughtful of others. The fourth quality is being able to depend on one another and being dependable oneself. With these qualities in mind, along with the responses from the participants, I was able to establish that k'é is a philosophy of community.

It is necessary at this point to note the history and goals of Western schooling and Indian boarding schools when considering, as Brayboy and McCarty (2010) claim, that for many Indigenous peoples, "community is at the core of existence" (p. 187). Indian boarding schools promoted individualism and opposed everything that k'é entails. Underlying this idea was Richard Henry Pratt's belief that the Native American should become individualized with individual wants: "He will say 'I' instead of 'We,' and 'This is mine,' instead of 'This is ours'" (Oberly, as cited in Adams, 1995, p. 23). Ultimately, the goal of Western schooling for Native Americans was to eradicate the culture of the Native American people. For the Native American people, survival of the community was more important than a single individual (Brayboy & McCarty, 2010), as were the values rooted within a communal way of living (Kulago, 2012).

Study Design

Indigenous Methodology

This qualitative study employed an indigenous methodology and aligns with the goals of indigenous research. Generally, as stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2008), indigenous methodologies "resist the positivist and postpostitivist methodologies of Western science because these formations are too frequently used to validate colonizing knowledge about indigenous peoples" (p. 11). They go on to state that instead, indigenous researchers deploy "interpretive strategies and skills fitted to the needs, language and traditions of their respective indigenous community" (p. 11). Additionally, indigenous research includes goals of self-determination and self-education (Brayboy, 2005; Grande, 2004; Smith, 1999). Specifically for the purposes of this study, two strategies used to fit the needs, languages, and traditions of the Diné were to: 1) value subjectivities of all participants and members of the community, and 2) value our Diné philosophies.

First, in consideration of indigenous methodologies, like other critical theories, I worked to deconstruct hierarchical power relations by choosing subjectivity over objectivity to value lived experience (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Hermes, 1998; Rigney, 1999). Throughout the research process, "I identified my role in this research as a facilitator and collaborator… I valued subjectivities of the participants and questioned the authority I had throughout the research process" (Kulago, 2012, p. 63). When I first entered the community, my home community, as a researcher, I applied my own subjectivities to the process in order to create and maintain the relationships that I activated. By this I mean that to be able to recruit participants and partners within the community, I worked with people who I already knew and introduced myself as a member of the community through my previously established social and familial relations. I shared ideas and sought approval for my research questions and asked members of the Diné community for their input. I implicated myself within the research as to avoid an objective perspective of our people and knowledge. When I introduced myself to the participants, I shared with them my clans, experiences in, and social ties to the community. Knowing my place within the community led the participants to trust in my actions and goals so that they were able to share their ideas.

Second, to address the epistemological and ontological incongruencies of Western European non-indigenous paradigms that have been used to analyze and interpret indigenous experiences, I valued the knowledge, ideas, and voices of the community, participants, and Diné ways of knowing, which meant that collaboration was necessary at every step of the process because in many indigenous ways of knowing, the community comes before the individual (Brayboy & McCarty, 2010). I sought knowledge and philosophies from the Diné in order to

contribute to indigenous educational theories that functioned through a Diné paradigm. I employed a philosophy to create a framework that comes from the Diné. According to Brayboy (2005), the recognition of philosophies, beliefs, and ways of knowing of the people is vital to our self-education and self-determination, which is the underlying goal of indigenous research. The two focal points of the indigenous methodology I used steered the research process toward enacting *talking circles* as a method throughout the data collection, analysis, and interpretation phases and mandated the collaboration of the participants and the researcher throughout the entire process. Talking circles are later described in detail.

Participants and Site

This study was based in a rural town on the Navajo Reservation in Northeast Arizona. Sleepy Rock[4] contains one school district that is comprised of 98% Diné students (Arizona Department of Education, 2008). With the assistance of the staff members at the Navajo Nation Office of Youth Development[5] (OYD), I identified and recruited four Diné male participants ages 16 and 17 years old at the time of the study. The responses from the participants provided me an understanding of who the youth were and where they came from. I saw them as youth who did well in school and took the initiative to help others in their communities. Zandian was active in high school athletics and also claimed that he helped with the younger students in his mother's classroom. He also participated as a camp counselor as well as in various youth programs. He has ties to his Diné traditions and has mentioned participating in a ceremony. Duke did some public speaking for OYD and also participated in various youth programs. He claimed to be involved with "traditional stuff" at home. Carlito was an active member in his high school's student council and also participated in traditional events. These three participants were currently enrolled in college courses at various universities. Dean also participated in various youth programs and worked with younger children at the Boys and Girls Club. He was a senior in high school at the time of this study.

Guiding Questions

The guiding questions for this study were formulated after consultation with the Diné community about my preliminary ideas and finalized through a review of existing research that necessitated this investigation. Within the literature of multicultural education and family-community-school partnerships, the following guiding question addressed a vague description of community that existed in the current literature. The questions were: "If community is 'a designated space where people live and share some sense of belonging' (Sailor, 2004, p. 395), then how do Diné youth define community?" More specific questions followed and prompted the questions that were asked during the data collection phases that included, "What are the norms, values, rules, resources, and supports that make up their community(ies)?" These questions were asked so that effective community and school partnerships could be theorized to promote academic success for Diné students. Student academic success was generally perceived as higher grades, regular attendance, and positive attitudes and behaviors in school (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009).

Data Collection

During the data collection phase, which took place in January 2010, the participants were involved in two interview sessions. The first interview session took place between the researcher and the individual participants separately. Before the first interview, the participants were asked

to take photographs of their community or create drawings of "community" so that they would have prompts and visual representations to explain their community. Camera film was developed and the photographs returned to the participants. The participants were the photographers of their community and decided what they wanted to photograph and share during the interviews. They were instructed to select ten photos or drawings to share during our first interview session. The photographs and drawings were only used as prompts for the interviews and not included in the data. I chose to use photography and drawings to begin the discussion because they can be bridges of communication for strangers. In the semi-structured individual interviews, I used open-ended questions that aligned with the previously stated guiding questions. I interviewed each participant for approximately thirty minutes. I used an interview guide that allowed room for the participants to reflect specifically on the photographs and drawings that they created.

The second interview session was collaborative, and I engaged *talking circles* (Graveline, 2000; Wilson, 2001). For the second interview, I asked the same questions that I asked in the individual interviews, but this time I allowed the participants to add comments or ask their own questions to each other or directly to me. I used *talking circles* as dialectic and interpretive processes with the Diné youth in order to access a holistic understanding of their ideas. In my decision to use *talking circles* for the group interview, I referred to indigenous scholars Shawn Wilson's (2001) and Faye Jean Graveline's (2000) description of *talking circles*. First, I chose *talking circles* because of their many purposes other than collecting, analyzing, or interpreting data. Wilson (2001) claims that a talking circle engages the act of building relationships and is not just an interview with more than one person. Graveline (2000) uses *circle as methodology* in which she enacts talking circles and claims that participants should be self-reflective, respectful listeners and that a talking circle should be a place for each participant to provide alternative lenses for people to see their realities. It should build community and promote healing. Within these circles, all who are involved share their understandings and comment on other's statements and questions (Graveline, 2000).

The second reason for using *talking circles* was because the concept aligned with an indigenous ontology and epistemology. Donald Fixico (2003) states that generally, in Native American thinking, a circular philosophy notes that all things within the circle are related and should be equally respected. With a fundamental understanding of the emphasis on relationships and respect in indigenous thinking, the talking circles became a dialectic process in which all participants in the circle shared their knowledge without judgment from the other participants or the researcher. From the creation of relationships within the circles, the participants and I were able to create knowledge about their communities in a positive way.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

After data collecting interviews, I returned the transcripts to the participants with sufficient time for them to read before the first analysis and interpretation phase, which was conducted in July 2010. In the analysis and interpretation phase, I again engaged the talking circle with the participants in a collaborative effort to analyze and interpret our discussions of community. We began an inductive analysis that involved finding patterns, themes, and categories within the focal points of the interview responses about values, rules, resources, supports, and norms. Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) claim that analyzing and interpreting data with participants allows the researcher to illustrate the range and variation in how events are interpreted for a more holistic picture. Also, they claim that the participants could give feedback and thoughts on what actions to take. We identified key themes and concepts within the data

such as respect for elders, and sharing with relatives that the participants emphasized as important. Then we interpreted the data by discussing the ways the identified themes and concepts meant *community*.

The talking circles that the youth and I engaged in became discussions of contradictions between what the youth have been told by the older generations and what the youth experience and witness in their lives. As we built relationships on trust and respect, we shared ideas of *community*, which were not compared or labeled right or wrong. Rather, the ideas were discussed in order to identify contradictions, reconciliations, and understandings of *community*.

Findings

In this section, I discuss the participants' perceptions of community and how they align with k'é. According to Dorothy H. Sailor (2004), the community influences on our children function through processes of socialization, social control, social participation, and mutual support. The participants' initial definitions of community aligned with the general definition given by Sailor (2004). They expressed their preliminary definition of community with comments such as "people looking out for each other," "people in an area… where they can connect together and they can help each other," "where people live and they share." The youth were very positive in their responses when they described their values, rules, resources, and supports during the first individual interviews.

During the first talking circle that included all participants and me, the perspective changed because at that point we were discussing the community outside of the functioning support system that the participants had through their families. At one point, the youth made the observation that they, themselves, had support systems in place and it could be difficult to fully know what their peers, who did not have those supports, needed. They shared experiences that made them feel bad and identified how such experiences could be resolved, alleviated, or avoided. There is a disconnect between what the youth were taught and the reality of their community.

Positive Communities and K'é

The following responses came from the first set of interviews, which included only the individual participants and researcher. As the youth shared their pictures and drawings, I asked them questions about the values, rules, norms, resources, and supports that made up their communities. In the following, I share their responses and describe how their responses align with the conceptual framework of k'é, but first I provide a brief overview of where k'é comes from and how it is passed down to new generations.

The roots of k'é can be found deep in the responses of the youth's perspectives. The concept of k'é is in the traditional teachings of many ceremonies that Diné continue to engage, especially the Kinaałdá[6] ceremony, which is considered a formal educational experience with the goal being survival of the community (Brayboy & McCarty, 2010; Kulago 2012). This ceremony was created by the Holy People[7] of the Diné for Changing Woman, who is the deity that represents the Earth and motherhood. She is identified with reproduction, sustenance, and nurturance (McCloskey, 2007). She had the first Kinaałdá performed by the Holy People to celebrate her ability to bear children and to mold her into the ideal woman and mother (Frisbie, 1967; McCloskey, 2007). After her Kinaałdá, Changing Woman became the mother of two sons to whom she taught to take responsibility, maintain a strong sense of identity, and be

independent, resourceful adults who ultimately made life on earth safe for human beings (Frisbie, 1967; McCloskey, 2007). As McCloskey (2007) states, "Motherhood is defined by the acts of giving and sustaining life to create strong bonds of solidarity. The strong and close mother-child bond serves as a model for the enduring relations of kinship" (p. 18). The mother was originally intended to be the sole transmitter of k'é, and the relationship between a mother and child is considered the prime example of how the children learn to relate to people and nature. The qualities of k'é promote the solidarity of humans and nature for the basic goal of survival. When the youth's responses to questions about the values, rules, and norms of their communities included statements of their traditions or culture, they were inadvertently identifying the concept of k'é as something they valued. Even if they did not specifically say it, k'é ultimately was a consistent thread in their responses.

  Values. When asked to identify their values, the participants' responses included such statements as: "helping all my relatives," "my family… and friends when they are headed in a positive direction," "our traditional way of life and our language… our elders and to respect them," and "friendship, giving and forgiving, and respect." Based on the participants' responses, the maintenance of their relationships was something they valued. The participants' values focused on promoting positive feelings and support towards others without expecting any form of payment. When describing their values, the participants identified more than recognizing their family and friends; they also identified it as wanting good things for their family and friends and to be helpful. Within the conceptual framework of k'é, having a basic knowledge of others in the family and recognizing kinship demonstrates knowledge of how you should relate to people. The participants had their family at the forefront of their descriptions. That aligns with the second quality of k'é which is that of maintaining harmonious relationships by expressing love, compassion, friendliness, kindness, and peacefulness. Stating that they valued their family and by describing ways to interact with them positively, the youth reflected a system of k'é that is intact. They all at some point mentioned a traditional way of life or their culture as something they valued, which is inclusive of teachings such as k'é.

  Rules. The participants stated that respecting their elders was the most common rule in their communities. The respect that should be given to grandparents should be given to all elders. This rule derives from the perspective that all elderly people are grandparents and should be treated as such. In addition to that rule, other rules described by the participants included: "Overall respect for anyone… respect from me and for myself"; "To be… doing my part"; "To respect others and to be the best you can be and to live life to the fullest"; and "Don't disrespect someone else's property… Care for your surroundings. Care for yourself, care for other people." Although an existence of an ideology of individualism and ownership of property, rooted in a Western European epistemology and goals of Indian boarding schools, persists as exhibited by the response from a participant when they mention "someone else's property," the participants strongly focused on the concept of "respect." They talked about respect in terms of knowing people, taking care of themselves and others, and feeling the need to help and contribute to their community. The rules that the participants stated aligned with the third quality of k'é, which is sharing with one another and being generous, unselfish, and thoughtful of others. By being thoughtful of themselves and others, they saw themselves as being respectful. Additionally, they included that their surroundings were important to respect. As stated previously, k'é is a code of conduct for the way Diné should interact with nature in addition to people. In terms of the youth stating that they wanted to do their part, they wanted to be dependable people, which is a part of the fourth quality in the framework of k'é.

Resources and supports. The participants were positive in their descriptions of where they went for support. They mentioned that they were able to talk to their parents, other family members, school counselors, teachers, athletic coaches, friends, and staff at the Office of Youth Development (OYD). Their resources included places where they had positive influences, including the school, the chapter house, OYD, the Boys and Girls Club, or any place where they could socialize. Many of the photographs they shared in the individual interviews were of the buildings in the community. Although I noted the lack of people in their photographs, the participants' descriptions of these places implied that the buildings represented the activities and relationships that happen within. Their supports and resources included places where they felt comfortable and had positive relationships with other people. They knew that they could go to the people in these places for support. In alignment with the fourth quality of k'é, the youth described people that they were able to depend on and trust.

Norms. The participants had a difficult time describing their norms. When asked, "What are the norms of your community?" I followed up with an explanation. I explained that the question was asking, "What is normal to you in your everyday lives? What are you used to seeing?" Some of their responses included "the school system," "the weather," "sports," "different stores" and "traditional ceremonies." The participants also stated that it was normal to value the Diné culture. The cultural aspects they were referring to were the ways the youth were taught to respect their elders and ancestors and to be helpful. In the responses to the question of norms, they circled back to their values, as in valuing culture. The values they described were to know their family, relatives and friends, and to maintain harmonious relationships.

As the youth shared their perspectives of their communities in the first interviews that included only the researcher and individual participant, it was interesting that, up to that point, they only spoke of their personal families and what was expected of them within their families. For the responses thus far, the participants referred to the teachings of their parents and grandparents more than once when they described their rules and values. One participant began his response to a question by stating, "It goes back to what my grandma usually tells me" and explained his rules. Another participant said the rules he described were made by his mother and father. Sailor (2004) refers to the community as an influencing factor in the processes of socialization, social control, social participation, and mutual support; however, the family also functions in the same way and is the first socializing institution for children. What one learns from the family and how it functions will in turn prescribe how others are viewed outside of the family. When the youth participants and I began the discussions within the talking circles as a whole group, many contradictions emerged between their previous ideas of community in their individual responses and the reality of their everyday experiences in their collective responses.

Everyday experiences

As previously stated, Neito et al. (2008) critique narrow notions of community that have been applied to multicultural education's application of community in various aspects of education. This critique suggests that we should resist the assumption that all the Diné youth come from the same positive community the participants identified. Additionally, the community should not be reduced to something static that could lead researchers or educators to a focus on specific strategies when working with the community. Interestingly, toward the beginning of our first talking circle, Dean shared a thought that illuminated another side of the participants' community. Dean said he had "a funny thought" when thinking about community and the type of photograph he could have shared in his individual interview. He described it by stating, "It was

like, part of the community? Well, this is where the drug dealer sells his stuff [*laughs*] take a picture of that. That would be stupid though." I asked him if he considered that a part of his community, and he stated, "No, not a positive side. I don't want to take a picture of the negative side." I asked him, "Even though it's not positive, is it still a part of your community?" He replied, "Unfortunately." His joke about photographing a drug dealer resulted in his admitting that something negative was an unfortunate part of his community. The other participants agreed that they left certain things out of their photographs. One participant stated that he did not want certain people to be in his picture because they would ruin it. Further into the talking circles, the participants disclosed everyday experiences that were not as positive as what they wanted to portray.

Many of the responses about the everyday experiences of the youth were critiques of how people in the community behaved and treated each other. Dean described a teacher who he thought mistreated the students which he claimed made the students "feel bad" and "not care." About that same teacher, Duke said, "It kind of bothered me that we have teachers like that." The participants also mentioned many examples of how people judged others based on their appearance, including an elderly woman scolding Dean for reasons unknown to him, other than the way he was dressed. Another incident was described as an encounter between some youth described as "gangsters" and "emos"[8] that "wasn't very good," according to Zandian. The participants' concerns about the community made it difficult for them to define what their community was. Duke was trying to explain what the community needed. As he worked through his explanation, the other participants contributed to his idea that the community needed to become more "positive and functional" in the way the people interacted with one another in order to support the youth. Their definition of community became what community *should be*, rather than what it currently *was*. The participants' emphasis on the relationships between the people within the community demonstrated how the participants valued relationships and positive interactions between people. The more they discussed negative parts of the community, the more they described what they wished it could be so that youth could feel good about themselves and supported. Two significant types of relationships that concerned the participants most, included intergenerational relationships and peer-to-peer relationships. By viewing the participants' responses through the framework of k'é, it became apparent that they sensed a lack of k'é in the community.

The language, ceremonies, and teachings that emphasize k'é persist in the Diné community despite efforts of the Indian boarding schools to eradicate such knowledge. The existence of these knowledges and teachings are evident in the responses of the participants when they discuss the values, norms, and rules of their community. The participant do come from healthy homes; however, they also understand that their everyday experiences in the greater community were not as "positive and functional." Brayboy and McCarty (2010) state that indigenous knowledge is rooted in community, and that a "healthy community is both the purpose and litmus test of knowledge" (p. 188). Some goals of the Indian boarding schools were achieved and continue to manifest in ways that represent an interruption between the teachings of k'é and the lived practices of the people as expressed through the concerns of the youth. This particular instance implores action to revitalize the explicit and conscious teaching, learning, and practicing of k'é as a way of knowing and being Diné.

Intergenerational concerns. Many of the concerns discussed by the participants revolved around the negative relationships between the older generations and the youth due to misunderstandings and lack of communication, which again demonstrates achieved goals of

Indian boarding schools to eradicate native languages. The older generations included their elders, their teachers, parents, and other adults within the community that they were in contact with on a daily basis. The stories told by the participants about being judged by the older people concluded in one of two ways—either it made the youth feel bad or it made them not care. Neither of these results is positive for the youth. The participants' asked for the older generations to respect the youth and to extend positive acknowledgement toward them. The youth claimed that they do in fact respect their elders, but they wished they could connect with them. In reference to k'é, the youth want the older people not only to recognize them but also to show compassion and be mindful of their feelings. Most importantly, the youth want to be able to depend on the older generation to teach and help them, without judgment. The youth seek lessons about their culture, their history, and ways to be contemporary Diné. They not only seek "respect" from the older generations, but also the need for k'é to exist, in which the relationships between family and others stem from feelings of love and loyalty. In addition to their concerns about the negative relationships they have with the older generations, the participants described concerns about their peer-to-peer relationships.

Peer-to-peer concerns. Another concern that the participants continually addressed were their peer-to-peer relationships. The participants described how young people in their community got harassed by other young people. The participants mentioned that there are many subgroups within their community. The different styles and likes of the various subgroups often were the cause of conflict between the groups. As an example of how youth viewed their peers, two of the participants reflected on their own impressions of other participants prior to our meetings. Dean described his impression of Duke by saying, "I thought he was a weird dude." Zandian claimed that he had a "different point of view towards [Dean]" before he got to know him and then stated, "He's a good guy." Once they began talking to each other, they realized that they had more in common than they expected. They appreciated the space of the talking circles to get to know each other.

The participants stated that when youth helped other youth, it was more effective in working towards positive outcomes. In the stories the participants shared about their involvement in various youth programs, they often reflected on the programs positively because they brought youth together in a respectful way. The participants, however, critiqued those programs because after only one meeting, nothing would follow, and the relationships were not upheld. The promotion of k'é could facilitate a positive worldview based on respectful relationships between one another based on familial-like ties, rather than being seen as a "program" with one meeting. The critique of the programs that do not last was something Dean was used to. Many of the programs described by the youth did have positive influences on the few youth who participated; the participants of this study, however, seemed to want something or someone that was permanent. They wanted lasting positive relationships and someone they could depend on.

Based on the way the participants discussed relationships with their peers, instilling a sense of k'é as a way of relating to each other is crucial because k'é emphasizes keeping relationships harmonious and having somebody to depend on and share with. Duke claimed that most people have "a positive outlook underneath their exterior" and that there needs to be a way to access that. Zandian and Carlito identified spirituality as a way of promoting a positive outlook. Duke, however, stated that "when it comes down to Earth," it was still more comforting to know that "someone else like you can help you." Duke agreed that spirituality was helpful but his statement addressed the reality of the everyday lives of the youth. The youth claimed that their peers needed relationships so they would not feel left alone. They claimed that these

relationships needed to be built on trust because of the responses they received when the youth sought help from adults in the community; previous responses from adults in the community included making the problems worse, a lack of confidentiality, and the absence of follow-through.

The participants theorized a way to promote a positive network of relationships that could support the youth. They theorized that for a community to be supportive, there needs to be respectful and trusting relationships. Interestingly, the goals of the support systems had very little to do with academic success, and focused more on helping youth feel good about themselves and to help them go in positive directions. They also identified the school as the place where learning to be a supportive community should begin. These statements represent the need to heal relationships that have been systematically damaged throughout history. The relationships to be healed are people-to-people within the community; between goals of academic success and the health of the whole child; and between the school and community. This holds implications for teacher education programs, multicultural education, and research methodologies.

Implications

Most of the literature used to describe and provide insight into the relationships between Native American families, communities, and schools state that "extended family" should be included; the histories should be considered; knowledge and input from the families should be included; and logistical concerns should be addressed (Demmert, McCardle, Mele-McCarthy & Leos, 2006; Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Taylor & Whittaker, 2009; Ward, 2005). Those findings are important but are generalized to other diverse communities and families. When theorizing partnerships that will benefit the Diné youth in ways important to them, community and family need to be seen as inseparable when viewed through k'é, the philosophy of community. Additionally, if family-community-school partnerships are defined as support systems for the youth, there is a need for them to be reorganized for the Diné. They should not be seen as partners, but as integral layers that make up a social-educational system.

Furthermore, Brayboy and McCarty (2010) state that Indigenous knowledges and social justice do not exist in isolation but must be active and critical engagements in the world. For implications of this study, promoting equity and fairness within indigenous communities is to partake in active and critical engagement that includes acquiring an understanding of the histories, contributing to the processes of healing relationships and activating indigenous knowledges that focuses on philosophies of community. The implications for the information presented in this article are more specific to the Diné because the conceptual framework comes directly from a Diné philosophy that the youth and families respect and are complicated due to the assimilative goals that targeted the communal ways of living. In terms of other indigenous communities, they too have experienced assimilative histories and have their own philosophies for the way relationships are valued.

Teacher Education Programs

In teacher education programs, preservice teachers are often taught that when working with minority and diverse communities, teachers should work to include elders and other significant community members in their classrooms, including curriculum and pedagogy, so as to demonstrate that local knowledge is valued (Taylor & Whittaker, 2009; Freng, Freng, & Moore, 2007). I declare that not only should preservice teachers be encouraged to include family and

community members in their classrooms, but preservice teachers should also be encouraged, if not required during fieldwork, to learn the local philosophies of community, family, and/or relationships within Native American communities that can inform their culturally responsive pedagogies. This is important because if the teachers know how to relate through this framework, they would demonstrate a deeper knowledge and respect for the culture because relationships are a way of knowing in an indigenous worldview. This could inform preservice teachers of a localized protocol when working within indigenous communities. Demmert et al. (2007) suggest that "general multicultural education may need to be supplemented with training augmented by the tribal community" (p. 54) for teachers working in Native American communities. They state that multicultural education training might be seen as "burdensome, confusing, intrusive and frustrating" by preservice teachers and could result in over generalizations of cultural inclusion that is shallow and perpetuates stereotypes. Education or training specific to the local tribes could include the history that needs to be known in order to understand the importance of healing relationships between various entities that make up schools and communities. Furthermore, they can contribute to promoting a healthy community.

Multicultural Education

For teachers to understand that a worldview rooted within a philosophy of relationships such as k'é exists in indigenous communities, they would know what it means to be a "good" or "educated" person in the indigenous community and understand how the youth need to be valued. As many teacher education courses are grounded in caring, an important differentiation for teachers working with indigenous communities is that by understanding and incorporating philosophies such as k'é, teachers can enact social justice pedagogy by activating indigenous ways of knowing. Teachers can contribute to the healing processes necessary by explicitly integrating k'é into the teaching, learning and practicing of k'é in the classrooms. Additionally, if a teacher comes into the community as an outsider, knowing that a framework such as the one described as k'é exists, she/he might be more culturally responsive in knowing that many youth value healthy relationships and communal success over other things such as individual success tied to economic wealth or competition.

To contextualize ways that teachers can incorporate indigenous knowledges to promote equity and fairness, classroom management philosophies and plans can be a place to begin. Classroom management can be considered a socializing component of the classroom that sets the tone of the learning environment. Classroom management philosophies and plans should be aligned with local philosophies of community with similar epistemologies and ontologies, which would ultimately align the values and goals of the classroom to those of the community. Creating a classroom environment based on k'é would suggest a goal of the management plan be that the students feel safe, supported, and are viewed as "good" from the perspective of k'é. This is not meant to be another classroom management plan, but by activating indigenous philosophies and knowledges such as k'é to reorganize ways classrooms function, teachers can be culturally responsive to the needs of the students socially as well as educationally, and systematically promote academic success through equitable and fair means. Classroom management becomes a space to layer *family-community* goals, values, and philosophies onto the educational domain of school.

To address the material and service oriented supports available within the greater community, schools can help youth access organizations and institutions outside of the school, through liaisons whom the youth trust. As the participants stated, schools can be the place where

teaching, learning, and practicing how to be a functional and positive community can begin. They theorized that if it starts with the youth in schools, "the outside community might catch on." Rather than relying on narrow notions of community by assuming that it is static and positively functional, perceiving community supports through building relationships would be more effective in the ways that youth need to be supported.

Research Methodologies and Researchers

On the matter of research and methodologies, this study demonstrates how indigenous knowledge should be centered within the act of research. A Diné philosophy of community, k'é, is not only a conceptual framework that I use to frame the participants' perspectives, but is also a way to interact with the community and participants throughout the entire process. This study identifies and uses Diné knowledge to develop greater comprehension of the needs of Diné youth through research. Many indigenous families, communities, and educators do know what their youth need and how to support them, but as research-based initiatives and policy drive decisions for our youth, then more studies and literature rooted in indigenous knowledges, theories, and philosophies are necessary to reclaim and rename our own experiences (Smith, 1999) and to work towards self-education, self-determination (Brayboy, 2005, Grande, 2004), and processes of healing the interruptions from history that persist today. In addition, indigenous knowledges, including theories and philosophies, should be respected and employed with permission of the researched community to which the knowledge belongs.

The implications stated above are geared towards promoting social justice pedagogy when considering the social-educational system in which our students are educated. When thinking about ways to support our youth, we should understand that the child cannot be separated from the community (Ward, 2005), and the community cannot be separated from an individual (Brayboy & McCarty, 2010); thus, family and community are one and the same.

Conclusion

One of the most interesting conclusions of the study was that participants moved the purposes of family-community-school partnerships goal of academic success to the backseat and brought forth the importance of helping the youth feel respected and supported for who they are and helping youth feel positive about their indigenous identities. This revelation points to the fact that for schools serving indigenous communities, there is more to consider in terms of healing the damage of a history of Western schooling than merely seeking community partnerships that provide material or service oriented supports. The concerns that youth shared about the lack of a functional and positive community indicated a need to heal as a community to help youth grow in holistic and positive ways. The participants seek understanding about what it means to be Diné, which is linked to questions about how to survive as Diné. If the survival of the people is rooted in the health of the community, then the activation of k'é in schools through a systematic approach is crucial. The goal of k'é is to acknowledge and maintain harmonious relationships because we want to promote success for all of our relatives holistically. The family members and friends who I acknowledge as my community are the people who taught me about k'é, not formally, but by modeling it through everyday experiences. I recognize that not all Diné have that or perceive supports in the same way. To address this issue, Diné youth need to be engaged in learning and practicing k'é not only through ceremonies and other traditional teachings, but explicitly through schools that serve them and by teachers who understand this. The relationship

between school and community needs to begin within k'é as a philosophy of community so that ways of knowing and being lead to similar values and goals for the youth.

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Notes

[1] Diné- Native American tribe located in the Southwestern United States also known as the Navajo. I use the term Diné because that is how we identify ourselves as a people. I only use the term *Navajo* when I am quoting or referencing another researcher's work in which they use *Navajo*. I include myself within the researched community of the Diné by using phrases such as, *our youth,* or *our ways of knowing,* etc. I do not take an objective position in the research because I am Diné and from the community.
[2] Native American – Also known as American Indian, I use this term to identify the indigenous peoples within the United States of America.
[3] By traditional, I mean as in a pre-contact existence that has been formalized and recorded throughout history in Diné stories, songs and prayers.
[4] Sleepy Rock is a Pseudonym as well as the names of the participants.
[5] The Navajo Nation Office of Youth Development (OYD) reaches out to the youth through specially created community events. OYD enrolls the youth (14-21 years of age) in programs and tracks records of services utilized. The youth gain experience and receive incentives such as certificates and money.
[6] A puberty ceremony for females to induct her to womanhood through various teachings emotionally, physically, spiritually and mentally.
[7] The Holy People, known as "Diyin Diné'é," refers to the many deities of the Diné.

[8] *Emo* refers to a person whose personal style is characteristic of *emotional rock*. *Emo (n.d.)* short for *Emotional rock* is defined as a type of music combining traditional hard rock with personal and emotional lyrics.