

Clanship – Who am I, what community do I represent and who gave me my name

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**Author's Note:**

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## Context

I am a Navajo/Dine' and I work at Wingate High School (WHS) with 9-12<sup>th</sup> graders in a rural community. WHS is 15 miles East of Gallup, New Mexico. Fort Wingate is a small community with a trailer park, residential housing, WHS and Wingate Elementary School (WES) staff housing, and a post office. Previously, we had a convenient store with a gas station, but it shut down about 11 years ago. In Navajo, Wingate is called Shash Bi'toh meaning Bear Springs. Originally, Bear Springs is up the road towards McGaffey, NM where the bears would migrate to drink water. Fort Wingate has a unique history including being a historical site of the military based used during the 1800's. This is where the Navajos were gathered for the Long Walk to Fort Sumner because of the fighting we did with our neighbors (Apache's, Utes, and Pueblos) for survival. Our Navajo ancestors were taken to Bosque Redondo near Fort Sumner along the Pecos River. The Navajos were in captive from 1864 to 1868. After the treaty agreement with the U.S. Government, we returned to Northwestern New Mexico and Northeastern Arizona (Lentz, S. Bullock N.Y. 1988).

WHS serves a wide range of communities and students. We serve students who are one third degree Native American Indians. Majority of our students are Navajo, and we have Pueblo, White Mountain Apache, Blackfeet, and a student who is half Navajo and he comes from Honduras but lives in Maryland. Up the road is WES, serving early childhood with the Family and Children Education (F.A.C.E.) program to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Majority of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students transition to Wingate High School.

I work as a License Substance Abuse Counselor Specialist. I work with the residential boys in the evenings, and I work with the day students who are involved with alcohol and drugs. The counselor technician and I engage with students through Google Meet, Zoom, Schoology Virtual Platform and in-person to facilitate/co-facilitate guidance lessons, support groups and individual counseling sessions. We provide virtual and/or in person parent training sessions once a month to the parents whose child has gotten into trouble with substance. The sessions are available to the community. Residential hall students who are involved in substance abuse incidents are mandated to complete their 100-hour club requirements. The students have schedule sessions, guidance lessons, grade checks, homework, extra detail, and assessments are required. Students must check in and remain in the residential hall throughout the evening with a 30-minute supper break. If a student gets caught again for substance abuse recommendation/referrals can be made to an inpatient residential treatment center. I do include outside resources, like the Navajo Nation Family Counseling Services to come once a week to work with the day students who get into trouble with substance use.

I am originally from Chinle, Arizona. I went to school in Chinle from 1<sup>st</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. I graduated May 1976. In 1989, I was working for the Navajo Nation Adolescent Treatment Center in Chinle, AZ. I came to work for WHS on March 5, 1990. My son in 1993 encouraged me to go back to school. I went to school at UNM-Branch in Gallup, New Mexico for my AA degree in Human Services. I continued my education online with Kaplan University for my BS in Psychology, and Northcentral University for my MA in Marriage and Family Therapy.

## **Rationale**

I selected “Clanship Who am I, what community do I represent and Who gave me my name.” as my curriculum focus. I have been working with Native students for 34 years. Throughout that time, I noticed the students being less fluent in Navajo. Our children are not taught at home to speak the Navajo language by the parents or guardians. We live in two worlds making it difficult to learn and practice our language, and our traditions. Parents are too busy making ends meet financially, especially for the single parents or the grandparents raising their grandchildren. We don’t practice family time as it was implemented in the early days. Long ago, Grandpa was the storyteller in the evening. He gathered all the grandchildren and told them stories before bedtime. We are forgetting our identity, who we are and where we come from. We have children taking care of one another without parental supervision. The parents are young, and they too don’t know their clans thus, making it harder for their children to know who they are. I am witnessing a two-generation loss of our language and culture. As Native people “culture identity” is important to know. Our identity includes who we are, who are our parents, and where we are from. Not only due to Covid-19, another concern, “Whiteness” continues to be the lens through which educational goals and initiatives are refracted.” (Leonardo & Grubb, 2018). For example, our children are taught U.S. government laws, and US history and not Navajo history like the Long Walk, or the Navajo Fundamental laws. Our children are exposed daily to technology, television, media, and magazine that highlight the dominant society enticing our Navajo children to fit in with the white culture.

It’s important for our children to know who they are, what community they represent and be proud of their names. Our ancestors did not suffer the Long Walk to be forgotten. The Long Walk was when our ancestors were removed from “Dinetah” their homeland and taken to Fort Sumner from 1864-1868. Our ancestors scarified a lot to make sure we do not forget the sacrifice they made and the importance of identity and language. Our children need to know about our ancestors. Our language was forbidden to be spoken during the boarding school era. The children were punished harshly for using their Native language. Our tradition and culture were taken away from the children when they arrived and forced to attend boarding school. The white man’s motive was “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” I remember when I was about eight years old, I had a clan sister who went to boarding school and after many years she returned home. Someone had to interpret for her in Navajo to her grandparents. She told the family she forgot her Navajo language and could not speak it anymore.

Before the pandemic, I provided guidance lessons on the clanship with the students who got into trouble with substance use. I would inform them that we were going to learn who they are, how we are related through the clan system, where they come from and who gave them their name. I had students who did not know their clans, and some knew at least two of their clans. I assigned student homework to ask their parents or grandparents for their clans. If the students did not complete the assignment, I followed up with a phone call to the parents/guardians and asked them for the information. This is how I found out that the young parents did not know their clans either. I recall a grandmother shared with me her grandson got involved with a girl at school and they had a child. It turned out that they both had the same clans. Grandmother said there was

nothing to do because it was too late. Grandmother was a Christian and she was asked to bless the grandchild at the baby shower. On other occasions, some of the students would tell me they come from the city or town. I would respond to the student that there are no chapter houses in the city or town. I tell them that there are 110 chapters on the reservation and grandmother comes from one of them. The chapter house is the community tribal government which have elected officials to run the chapter houses. Some students understood the importance of identifying where a person comes from. I also asked the students who named them at birth and what is special about their name. Some were excited to talk about their name and some students did not know how they got their name. The students not only learn their clans, but they also learned important information that affirms one's cultural identity as stated in RESPECTFUL model (Ivey et al., 2012) it talks about multicultural issues like religion/spirituality, economic class, identity, physical characteristics, language, and location of residence. This model and curriculum are to encourages cultural identity of the students to learn who they are and where they are coming from. The goal of my curriculum is to build the student's cultural identity and bring cultural awareness to my students.

### **Topic Summary**

With my Topic Summary paper, I want to find research to support my current initiatives of building cultural identity and building the Navajo language by culturally responsive, cultural relevant activities, and revitalizing culture and language. Culturally responsive intervention for our children in the school setting to learn their culture and language. Cultural relevant activities by practicing our clans and speaking our language. Revitalizing our culture and language brought back into the school system will allow our children learn who they are and where they are coming from.

We talk about Ke' and Hozho Iina. "Ke" is clan relatives. While Diné are related through clans we are not biologically brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, they are clan brothers, clan sisters, clan mothers, and clan fathers (Lee, 2020). As Diné we identify with four clans. The four clans come from our parents, and the maternal and paternal grandparents. The Diné culture is matrilineal, so the child inherits the mother's clan as the first clan, next is the father's clan for the second clan, followed by the maternal grandfather, and the paternal grandfather for the third and fourth clan.

Hozho Iina pertains to the Four Directional Teaching. Nitsahakees is thinking, Nataha is planning, Iina is living, and Siih Hasin is Appreciation of Life (Jackson, 1985). As Navajos we must balance life and in live in harmony so we can reach the age of 102 years. As Navajo's we go through four cycles of life. When we are born, we are taken care of by our parents, as well as aunts, uncles, grandparents on both side of the family to make sure we strive. When we reach adolescent age, we are still been taken care of all family members and extended families. When we reach adulthood, we are much on our own with our own family, but family and relatives continue to help and encourage us about life. As we reach old age, we are taken care of by our children, grandchildren, and relatives. It is a cycle we go through in our lives from generation to generation.

We talk about what part of the Navajo reservation we come from, as well, as other tribal affiliations and the reservations they come from. We talk about our beautiful Navajo land. Some of our children do not know where they come from, especially those who are raised in the city or border towns. I tell the students that we have 110-chapter houses on the reservation and grandmother came from one of them. Grandma was not born in the city or town. I share with them we are a matrilineal society. Our clan comes from our grandmother shared with the mother and given to each child as the first clan, and this helps to create our identity. As a female our first clan continues from generation to generation. Compared to a male, his first clan becomes the second clan of the child when he becomes a father. The father's clan cycle out after two generation (NavajoWOTD.com). Cultural identity for the Diné is about where you come from and what's unique about your community.

Even though our children are struggling with their culture/religion's identity, Covid-19 took a major toll on the people, the reservation, and the world. Late 2019, the city of Wuhan in China people was experiencing a pneumonia like sickness. The first case was identified in Washington State on January 21, 2020 (CDC, 2023). Numbers started growing in the United States. March 13, 2020, President Trump's administration declared a national state of emergency on Covid-19. I remember how we tried to keep our minds on education with our children. On March 16, 2020, the intercom came on in the hallways and announced to dismiss the students and have them go home. The residential hall students packed their belongings and got on the bus or parents were called to pick up their children. We had to get our students home who lived out of State too. It was scary to think about what was going to happen to our children's education. Since we operated 24/7 as a residential hall, we had to make new plans how we were going to work with our children. We were not prepared with the internet services. Some of our students lived in remote areas of the reservation even a hotspot or broadband would not work. We were at loss. We have overcrowded homes, no electricity, no running water, and no place to go to class or study. Some of our children embarrassed of living situations. They did not want their teachers to see where they were attending class from, so they didn't want to turn on their laptop cameras. The rest of the school year and schoolwork was all online.

As things got worse on the reservation we could not go anywhere as a family due to the Navajo Nation Covid-19 restrictions. We could not visit family, relatives, and friends. Only one person was allowed to go grocery shopping, do the laundry, and get supplies for the livestock. "The Navajo Nation established a 57-hour weekend lockdown from Friday evening to Monday morning as well as nightly curfews beginning at 8:00pm or 9:00pm to 5:00am." (Navajo Times, 2020). Families lost loved ones, relatives, and friends.

My grandma talked about the Spanish flu that happened in 1920. It was like Covid-19, but they did not have the medication to help the people to survive. My grandma talked about how a whole family would go to bed at night and be found all dead the next morning. People were dying left and right, and people were trying to keep up with the burial. Families and relatives helped one another dig holes to bury the deceased. At the boarding school, a tractor was used to dig a hole and put the children wrapped in a blanket in the hole and cover them. My grandma said her father made sure the families and relatives they travel around with moved closer to one

another. My grandfather checked on everyone everyday riding his horse. He started killing his horses to use the meat to eat and drink the broth. They mixed the horse fat with red orchard and herbs to make it into a paste to put on their body. My grandma caught the flu and she almost died but survived. My grandma lived to be 103 years old (Frisbee, 1978).

I believe Covid-19 has made things worse now for our children to know their clans. We lost touch with our families, relatives, and friends. We miss hugging, laughing, joking, and talking among one another. We lost elders who were the Navajo language teachers to their children and grandchildren. It took away our Ke' and Hozho Iina in some sense. Even though the federal Covid-19 Public Health Emergency Declaration (PHED) ended on May 11, 2023 (CDC, 2023) we are still cautious about our health.

We talk about our names. Who gave us our names, why was it given to us, and what is the significant meaning about our names. Sometimes a warrior name is given to a child during a sacred ceremony been conducted like an Enemy Way ceremony or when a young man goes through the sweat lodge when he reaches puberty. I asked the students to learn how to address their family and relatives in the Navajo names instead of their English names. We don't acknowledge each other in our Navajo identity anymore. We use only the English names. However, when you visit or hear the elders greet one another they still use the cultural form of greeting to properly establish a connection and honor the cultural identity. Before the government invaded us our grandparents all had Navajo names. When the government couldn't pronounce the Navajo name, they gave English names. For example, Nez (tall), Yazzie (small) and Tso (large) (Woods, 2002). Everyone called one another by Navajo names to identify family members Shima' (mom), Shi'zhe'e (dad), Shadi' (older sister), Shi'deezhi' (little sister), Shi'naai (older brother), Shi'tsili' (little brother), Shima' Sani'(grandma), Shi'cheii'(grandpa). On our paternal grandparents Navajo names were also identified through family members Shi'nali Azdaa' (paternal grandma), Shi'nali Hastiin' (paternal grandpa), Shi'zhe'e yazhi (dad's brother), and Shi'bizhi (dad's sister). There is more when you extend into the family (James, 2001). My name was given to me by my father's sister Rose Ann (Shi'bizhi). Because I was born in March my mother wanted to name me Margie, but Shi'bizhi wanted to call me Alta. She told my parents we have an Etta in our family, so I want to call her Alta. My parents agreed. My mother's Navajo name was Asdzaan' Tulli' (Woman with Light Complexion), my father's Navajo name was Ashi'(Boy), My grandma's name was Asdzaa Nez (Tall Woman), My grandpa's name was Olta' Tso'(Big School Boy), my paternal grandma's name was Elthnabah (She who came with greetings), and my paternal grandpa's name was Tachine Yazhi (Small Red Orchard on Forehead man). I was given my paternal grandma's sister name Asdzaa Bitalii' (Donkey Lady). I didn't like the name when I was growing up, but now it's an honor to have my Shi'nali Azdaa Navajo name.

Our Clans and Hozho Iina remind us that we are not alone. We can find clan relatives wherever we go even beyond the four sacred mountains. We can survive because we are resilient people just like our ancestors who return from the Long Walk.

The purpose of my curriculum on Clanship-Who am I and What's my story is to help the non-indigenous school personnel to understand the importance of the Diné/Navajo history of family,

community, language, culture, and tradition. As Diné people we are spiritual human beings (Na'hooka Diyin Diné). We are connected to everything in life. In the article RESPECTFUL framework (D'Andrea, M. & Daniels, J., 2001) it talks about the whole person from birth to old age just like our Hozho Iina philosophy. Hozho Iina is our circle of life from birth to old age. It has religious/spiritual identity, economic class background, sexual identity, psychological maturity, ethnic/racial identity, chronological/developmental challenges, trauma and threats to well-being, family background and history, unique physical characteristics, and location of residence and language differences. I want our children at school to know their cultural identity. Culture identity is our clans, our songs, chants, ceremonies, and our language. When our parents or elders talk to us in our Navajo language especially using the words Shi'yazhi (my precious child) or Shi'awee (my baby) it melts the heart.

All educators have an obligation to work towards mitigating and/or ending racism and bias (ASCA 2020). School counselors are the students advocate to change racism and biases so our indigenous children can have equal opportunities to academic, college, career readiness and social skills. The United States Education system contributes oppression through racism, policies, practices, and negative guidelines especially towards Indigenous and Black students who has been affected by white supremacy in the U.S. (Steward, 2019).

As a non-indigenous person, they need to look at their culturally responsive teaching. Culturally Responsive according to (Jones, 2008), is to explore their own culture, beliefs, and values. Can they work with different race or ethnicity? Are they willing to explore the cultural, tradition, and language of the child without been bias or racist? I believe that non-Indigenous people need to explore their own culture, belief, and values to understand the different ethnicity they will be working with and are they willing to understand the child, parents, and community they will be serving. Sue and Sue (2007) indicated the importance of been aware of assumptions, values, and biases toward others. It can relate to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic, family status, and sexual identity. Non-indigenous person needs to build cultural self-awareness and strength cultural literacy. For example, the non-indigenous person needs to become aware of their biases. Those who are aware of their biases are willing to challenge themselves to help the community. Strength Cultural Literacy is when the non-indigenous person is willing to accept that they need to learn about the culture they will be working with or ask for help. How we communicate with our children, parents, and the community we are serving is important. When we work together, we create a better relationship within the school setting. The non-indigenous person using their experience, cultural knowledge, and how they interact with the student population can make a great impact on the student. I am sure they will feel they live in two worlds like the Indigenous people.

## **Student Engagement**

Example of Lesson: Unit 1

Facilitator will:

Write the objectives and vocabulary on the board or anchor chart for the students to see what they will be working on as a group. Give the students the pre-assessment form, “the clan worksheet,” Navajo vocabulary word sheet and a pencil.

Students will learn the following objectives:

Learn about cultural identity through cultural awareness activities.

Learn about the four original clans Changing Woman gave to the people.

Learn how to acknowledge who is related through Kinship.

Learn how to use the Navajo terminology for clans by using the Navajo names.

Vocabulary: Changing Woman (Yoolgaa'i Asdzaa'n), Kinship (Ke') and Navajo Terminology for clans (Extended Ke' family).

First Activity: Have the student complete the Pre-Assessment worksheet on clans. No guidance will be given other than simple instructions to complete the form on how many of their clans they know.

Second Activity: I will provide information on the clanship (Ke') session and provide a resource handout with the clans listed in Navajo and English. I will provide a story about the origin of clans. Next, handout a blank clan sheet to be completed by the students. I will demonstrate how to recite clans using my own introduction.

Third Activity: The students will practice how to greet one another using the proper format for the clans in the Navajo language.

Homework: If the student do not know their clans, it will be given as homework. This will be completed with the assistance of parents/guardians when they go home at the end of the day or on the weekend.

I want the students to know who they are and who is related to them with their peers and staff.

### **Introduction in Navajo (Diné Bizaad)**

Ya'at'eeh (Hello)

Shi' ei (name) yinishye' (I am called...)

Nishli' (mother's clan)

Bashishchiin (father's clan)

Dashicheii (maternal grandfather's clan)

Dashinali' (paternal grandfather's clan)

This is who I am as a mother and grandmother woman. Thank you.

For example, I would introduce myself



Ya'at' eeh , Shi ei Alta Mitchell yinishé'. Kin'yaa'anii nishli, To'ahani bashischiin, To'ahedlininii dashicheii, Tachii'nii dashinali. Ama doo' Ama'sani nishi. Ahee'hee.

*Hello, my name is Alta Mitchell. I am Towering House clan born for Near Water clan. My maternal grandfather is Water that Flow Together clan, and my paternal grandfather is Red Orchard on Forehead clan. This is who I am as a Navajo mother and grandmother. Thank you.*

I close the introduction with who I am as a Navajo woman and say thank you (Ahee'hee) which translates to say I am grateful to introduce myself to you.

### **Student Assessment**

1. Students will be given the pre-assessment sheet "Introduction in Navajo (Diné Bizaad)" to fill out during the first session. Not much guidance will be given on how to complete the form. This will help me gather data on how many students know their clans. The pre-assessment data will be put into three categories: "no knowledge" of clans, "some knowledge" of clans or "fully aware" of clans.
2. Students will be given the same assessment as the post-assessment. The post-assessment can be delivered in one or two methods: written or recited orally. If the student can orally recite their clans confidently, the student data will fall into the category of "fully aware" of clans. I will categorize the data into the three categories and compare the data. I will be able to measure the success of the culturally identity curriculum.
3. Students will attend all sessions weekly, complete any homework assignments, and participate to learn from one another. Student attendance is important to learn and practice lessons.
4. Students will share cultural learning experiences with others to share the knowledge they know about.

I will know the students met the learning objectives by:

Learned their four-clan (Ke') membership. Navajos are matrilineal society which meant the mother's clan is always first. This also includes whatever the family possessed. The mother has all possessions. The male marries into the family and stays with the female family and is expected to help with all the possession the female has in the family. Learn to introduce themselves properly in the Navajo language using the handout with the clans listed in Navajo and English. This helps people to understand who you are. Learn about Changing Woman's origin of the clan's story. The origin of clans makes a historical background to see how close a relationship is and make connections with people. Learn to use the Navajo vocabulary who is related to them as a brother, sister, mother, father, maternal grandmother and grandfather, paternal grandmother, and paternal grandfather. This makes the clan relationship a strong bonding.

Learn what community their grandmother was raised in and if there are any great leaders in the community. They may have a close family member or extended relatives who is well-known in the community, nation, or society. Learn who gave them their name and what is unique about the name they have. This may help a person, or a relative recognize the name and make a prior generation of known name for connection. Especially, if it is a Navajo name.

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