

Hózhó and Me

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Author Note:

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Context

I am a school counselor at Kinsey Inquiry and Discovery School (often referred to as Kinsey Elementary), a Title I K-5 public school in Flagstaff, Arizona. Flagstaff is a small city of 74,000 people, nestled between the mountains and desert of Northern Arizona and bordering the Southwest Navajo Nation, the largest Native American reservation in the country. Kinsey is located near downtown Flagstaff, right next to Northern Arizona University among residential neighborhoods and Section 8 housing. Kinsey's boundary zone encompasses a portion of what is referred to as "West" Flagstaff and extends to the rural Munds Park community, but the majority of students live within 2 miles of the school, many of whom walk to school every day. The community of our school is approximately 290 students, with about 60% being Indigenous. Of this 60%, about 10% of the total population are Hopi and 50% are Navajo, or Diné. We also have a large population of Hispanic Latino students, 20%, with the remaining 10% being White, Black, Asian American, Pacific Islander and multiple races. Due to the proximity to the university, our school often serves students from international countries who are English language learners. The vast majority of our Navajo and Hopi students live in the urban setting surrounding the school, but frequently visit the Navajo Nation or Hopi Reservations on weekends and holidays. It is not uncommon to hear students talk about the Tuba City Fair, riding horses at their grandfather's ranch, or going to a ceremony on one of the five Hopi mesas or on Navajo Nation.

Our mission statement at Kinsey Elementary is "to provide an undeniable foundation for young learners, nurturing their curiosity, fostering a love for knowledge, and empowering them to make an undeniable impact in a rapidly changing world within a safe and inclusive environment" (Flagstaff Unified School District, 2024). A major part of empowering students is allowing them to be strong members of their community. I strive for our Social Emotional Learning program at Kinsey to align with this mission of empowerment in the community.

Being a school counselor, I teach all 290 students Social Emotional Learning (SEL), also known as "classroom guidance" classes on a rotation. My role is split, as though I am a half-time teacher and half-time school counselor. The teaching side of my position gives me the opportunity to know all the students at Kinsey, not just the ones who are referred to counseling. I see every class twice a month, every other week.

I am not from Flagstaff, so my knowledge of Indigenous culture was next to nothing before moving here. I grew up in the rural Willamette Valley, the ancestral land of the Kalapuya—including the Tualatin, Yamhill, Luckiamute, and Santiam people, where eighty to ninety percent of the local Indigenous peoples were killed by a malaria epidemic brought by Europeans in the 1840's (Pacific University Libraries, 2024). Native people were few and far between in my community, due to the tragic fact that most of them were killed over a century ago and the rest were pushed to small reservations. The only things I knew about local Indigenous culture while growing up in Oregon were that the few small reservations nearby were home to popular casinos, and that there was a school near my house in Salem called Chemawa Indian School. After doing more research, I now know that Chemawa Indian School was a major residential school, which in the early 1900s housed hundreds of Indigenous children from as far as Alaska (Chemawa Indian School, 2022). Sadly, Indigenous history and culture was not taught to me in school growing up. My family were Americans of European ancestry from the midwest who moved to

Oregon in the mid-1900s to establish dairy farms and Christian churches. My connection to Indigenous culture before moving to Arizona was about as sparse as it gets in the US.

Everything I know about the local cultures around Flagstaff I have learned over the past 5 years of living here, as a student at Northern Arizona University, employee of Flagstaff Unified School District, and member of the small community. When I arrived, I was surprised to live in a community where Indigenous people and culture are so prevalent, as it was a completely new experience for me. Over the years I have learned so much from my Indigenous friends and colleagues. FUSD has a Native American Education Support Program (NAESP) which has been a great support for me in consulting with the Native American academic advisors at the schools I have worked in, as well as providing professional development classes on cultural awareness. I have grown to deeply appreciate the local culture, and right when I think I know a lot, I am humbled to learn something new. I am often moved to tears at the beauty of the Navajo— called Diné by its people (meaning “people” in the Navajo language)-- culture and the resilience of the Diné community, from the family stories I am told, to attending my first Pow Wow, to watching my students dance and practice the Navajo language, Diné Bizaad. That being said, I believe I have only touched the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Navajo culture. All of the sources cited in this curriculum are not my own, because the Diné culture is not my culture. I am a White woman who works with Indigenous students, and this in itself holds a dynamic that cannot be ignored. The grandparents and great grandparents of my students attended residential schools run by White Americans, which are now infamous for abuse and inhumane conditions, as well as cultural erasure. Whether consciously or unconsciously, research shows that the trauma of those experiences can be passed down intergenerationally, and as a White educator I must remain cognizant of this in my practice. Humility and respect are essential to my work as a counselor and my research on this project.

I cannot imagine working anywhere else in Flagstaff; I love the closeness of the community at Kinsey Elementary. In previous years I had heard of the opportunity to develop a curriculum unit with the Indian Country School Counselors Institute at Northern Arizona University’s Institute for Native Serving Educators, but I hadn’t known anyone personally who took part in the Institute and was hesitant about the prospect of writing a curriculum. When I accepted a school counseling position at Kinsey in 2023, I learned that Kinsey has the largest population of Indigenous students out of all ten elementary schools in the district. This encouraged me to become more proficient in meeting students’ cultural needs, especially because I would be teaching social-emotional lessons everyday. Many teachers at Kinsey shared about being part of the Institute for Native Serving Educators (INE), which is a testament to the effort our staff put into making Kinsey a culturally responsive environment for the cultures it serves. Because of the positive feedback I’d heard regarding the INE, I decided to take the leap by joining the Institute in 2024 and developing the curriculum you see here as a school counseling social-emotional unit for my students.

Rationale

At the beginning of each school year, I email a teacher/staff assessment through Google forms to all Kinsey staff to gather insight on which social-emotional, academic and career topics our staff deem necessary to teach to our students for the upcoming year. This helps to build the

framework of my curriculum for the year. In the 2023-2024 school year, lesson topics included emotion regulation, self-control, integrity, friendship, appropriate speech, body boundaries, careers, finances, and responsible decision making. While some schools choose to adopt a social-emotional program, such as Sanford Harmony, Second Step or Character Strong, I have yet to find one that is truly engaging and responsive for the demographic Kinsey serves. For this reason, I choose to adapt my own lessons, often borrowing resources from books, school counseling blogs, Teachers Pay Teachers, and my colleagues across the school district.

The other data that I consult for lessons is from the Panorama Education Survey. Panorama Education is a platform that Flagstaff Unified School District adopted in the last 5 years to gather social-emotional data. Twice a year, students in grades 3-12 complete a social-emotional survey of over 40 questions, answering on a Likert scale. The survey includes questions such as, “During the past 30 days, how often did you follow directions in class?”, “How possible is it for you to change how easily you give up?” and “How often are you able to control your emotions when you need to?” (Panorama Education, 2024). For students in grades K-2, teachers complete the survey on behalf of their students. Due to Arizona state law, the school must gain permission for guardians before administering social-emotional surveys, so the results of our surveys are only representative of the students whose guardians signed for permission at the beginning of the school year. In the Spring of 2024, 99 students in grades 3-5 completed the survey.

When we administer the Panorama Education survey each year, the area that typically shows the highest need for improvement is emotion regulation. Our students have a strong need for improvement in regulating their emotions. In the Spring of 2024, 47% of students answered favorably to the questions regarding emotion regulation. This is one percentage lower than in the Fall of 2023, which had a 48% favorable score. The following data was gathered under the emotion regulation category in Spring 2024:

Question	Percent of students who answered favorably
How often are you able to pull yourself out of a bad mood?	37%
When everybody around you gets angry, how relaxed can you stay?	46%
How often are you able to control your emotions when you need to?	50%
Once you get upset, how often can you get yourself to relax?	53%
When things go wrong for you, how calm are you able to stay?	49%

When the emotion regulation data is averaged and sorted by race/ethnicity, the breakdown is as follows:

Race/Ethnicity	Percent of students who answered favorably
American Indian Alaska Native	50%
Hispanic/Latino	40%
White	46%
Other or two or more races	44%

It is worthwhile to note that although overall the largest need for improvement among Kinsey’s student population is the category of emotion regulation, our Native American students are the group that is the least in need in this area. The reason for this could be the cultural values that many Navajo students were raised with, or the spiritual practices that many of our Hopi students partake in. While it is of interest to speculate at why our Native students scored the highest, that would be a completely different study. All groups scored in the forty to fifty percent range and all could use improvement.

Emotion Regulation

Many, if not all, of the resources available for teaching emotion regulation to elementary school students do not teach the skill within a cultural lens. The most popular tool for teaching emotion regulation, and one that I have taught alongside all other schools in FUSD, is the Zones of Regulation (Kuypers, 2023). This framework uses four colors for students to identify their emotions and energy levels. The Blue Zone includes sad, tired, bored, and sick. The green zone includes happy, focused, calm, and proud. Yellow zone emotions are worried, frustrated, silly, and excited. The red zone includes high energy emotions such as elated, panicked, angry, and terrified. Once a student knows which zone they are in, they are taught to use corresponding tools to help get themselves back in the “green zone” (Kuypers, 2023). While the zones of regulation are useful, one must consider the population this tool was created for, and whether it is the best way to teach regulation to Indigenous students. Research has shown that for Indigenous populations, the entire concept of emotion regulation may be irrelevant.

Today, self-regulation is a popular social-emotional skill being taught in elementary public schools. A simple search for “self regulation” on Teachers Pay Teachers, the most popular online marketplace for educational resources, brings up more than 8,900 results, including a “self-control bootcamp”, “self-regulation social stories” and “mindfulness activities for self-regulation” (Teachers Pay Teachers, 2024). In Flagstaff and its surrounding Navajo Nation and rural schools, Flagstaff Unified School District has placed a major emphasis on teaching Social Emotional Learning. Part of this initiative includes administering a social-emotional survey to students by Panorama Education, in which two major categories include “self-management” and “emotion regulation”. However, the cultural implications of “self-management” and “emotion regulation,” or self-regulation, are almost never talked about. The focus of the “self” as such a

key to Social Emotional Learning shows the Eurocentric bias of Social Emotional Learning itself.

Relevance of Emotion Regulation to Native Communities

In the article, “Reflections on the Relevance of “Self- Regulation” for Native Communities” Tsethlikai, Murray, Meyer, and Sparrow (2018) write,

In considering the relevance and appropriateness of the Euro-American construct of self-regulation to Native peoples, the development of self-regulation might need to be more clearly defined as a relational process to better fit the collective rather than individualistic focus of many Indigenous cultures, in which individual existence is understood as inseparable from social groups such as family and community. (p. 3)

Furthermore:

Traditional child-rearing practices of Native people include many cultural activities that require physical fitness, the ability to adapt quickly to change, encourage perseverance, and the ability to focus and learn from watching closely and imitating the actions of elders, which may all contribute to the development of self-regulation... Native tribes across North America teach different traditional ways of life, but the overarching value themes according to Native scholars are that of respect, beauty, balance and harmony. (p. 4)

When children are brought up in the traditional way of life, they naturally pick up on these values, through language, stories, ceremonies, and everyday routines. They mirror the actions they see in their elders, and learn to mimic the self-regulating behaviors that they see around them.

From this research, one may consider that teaching self-regulation from an individualistic lens in a school where Native American students make up the majority of the population is culturally irrelevant. The question we are better off asking is: what values can be reinforced at school to support the overall emotional wellbeing of Native students?

There is little research on what teachings most contribute to mental and emotional wellness among Native American youth in North America. However, one study conducted among one hundred and eighty-three Native American adolescents in the Great Plains region showed that, unlike among non-Native populations, Native American students who have report traditional values tend to have significantly lower depressive symptoms and higher wellbeing than Native American students who do not hold traditional values (Mousseau et al., 2014, p. 431). With this information, one can presume that the knowledge of traditional Native values is beneficial for Native children’s overall wellbeing and mental health.

School Counseling Multicultural Standards

Another note that one must keep in mind is the importance of honoring culture in counseling. As a school counselor, I am not only teaching students, but guiding them through counseling interventions. The guidance lessons that I teach are all considered tier one counseling interventions, and are intended to support all students, especially those who are not necessarily in

the highest need of individual or group counseling. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) provides ethical standards that school counselors must meet when working with students. Standards include the following: “[School counselors] provide culturally responsive instruction and appraisal and advisement to students,” “maintain the highest respect for student cultural identities and worldviews,” “Facilitate culturally sustaining groups from the framework of evidence-based or research-based practices,” and “Promote equity and inclusion through culturally affirming and sustaining practices honoring the diversity of families” (American School Counselor Association, 2022). Providing culturally relevant social-emotional lessons to Native students is not merely a good practice, it is an ethical standard of the profession.

Another article published in *National Association of School Psychologists* states that school psychologists, like school counselors, can only address the multicultural needs of students when diversity is foundational to their practice: “If a school psychologist truly applies diversity in development and learning as a foundational principle of practice, then all decisions and actions by the school psychologist will address the multicultural needs of the changing population” (Jones, 2014, pp. 1-2). While school psychologists are not the same as school counselors, their spheres often intersect and this principle can easily be applied to school counselors. School counselors must include diversity as foundational to their practice, lest they forego students’ needs.

Most modern Social Emotional Learning is Eurocentric. Eurocentrism, according to the International Encyclopedia of Human Geography, is defined as “an attitude, conceptual apparatus, or set of empirical beliefs that frame Europe as the primary engine and architect of world history, the bearer of universal values and reason, and the pinnacle and therefore model of progress and development” (Sundberg, 2009, p. 638). The principles of psychology that Social Emotional Learning grew from are those of Freud, Jung, Rogers and other Western psychologists. These psychologists created their theories from a Western lens, without any consideration or research on Indigenous populations. More must be done to properly teach emotion regulation to Native students at a school where the population is majority Native students.

Culturally Responsive Assessment

It is easy to make the argument that education needs to be culturally responsive, but harder to assess exactly how culturally responsive a given curriculum is. The Culturally Responsive Assessment of Indigenous Schooling (CRAIS) tool, created in Flagstaff by Castagno, Joseph, and Dass (2021), provides a framework for assessing curriculum that I am able to use when creating my curriculum unit. The tool contains 23 different principles that should be met when determining if a schooling method is appropriately responsive. The principles are sorted into 5 categories. Some of these principles include the following:

- Encourages students to understand themselves within broader communities
- Traditional and/or cultural knowledge is included
- Local Indigenous language is valued [and] integrated
- Recognition of Native Nations as governmental agencies
- Students are encouraged to exercise self-determination and agency

Indigenous people are represented as contemporary (not only historical)
Stereotypes of Indigenous people and/or communities are addressed
Diverse narratives and perspectives are integrated (Castagno et al., 2021)

Because of this collective evidence in support of culturally relevant school counseling, a more meaningful and beneficial topic to teach in Social Emotional Learning than the Eurocentric “self-regulation,” could be a concept of wellness from the local culture. While there are four different Native tribes represented at Kinsey Elementary, and every tribe has its own set of values and traditions, I will focus on the Navajo tradition because fifty percent of Kinsey’s students are part of this tribe. This will also provide a local framework for students who are not Navajo to understand the culture of the land they live on. Non-Native students will be given the opportunity to compare and contrast the Navajo values with that of their own community and culture.

Topic Summary

Hózhó

Through my research on Navajo wellness, I frequently came across the concept of Hózhó. Although the word is often translated into English as “beauty”, Hózhó is a complex concept. According to Diné elders, “the Hozh’o’ way of living is what sustained the Diné people through their historical hardships,” and is even considered to be the “purpose in life” according to Diné philosopher Wilson Aronolith Jr (Kahn-John, 2010, p. 115). Hózhó is difficult to explain in English because the concept is so intimately intertwined with the Navajo traditions and its language, Diné Bizaad. In her 2010 article “Concept Analysis of Diné Hózhó”, the Navajo Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner Michelle Kahn-John gives the following definitions of Hózhó: “beauty, balance, peace, wellness, and harmony,” and “the path to harmony and old age” (pp. 114, 116). She also cites the following two definitions of Hózhó, which are too complex and important to summarize:

Our religion—Hózhó—or Beauty—demands balance, which holds my extended family like a tight weave in a Navajo rug. This faith, embedded like stone into our young Navajo hearts, minds, and souls, protects us. Iiná, life, we were told by our elders, is full of bad and evil. And to fend off the bad, Hózhó helped us to think positive. (Benally, as cited in Kahn-John, 2010, p. 113)

Kahn-John continues with the following definition of Hózhó from Pitts (2007):

This Diné term which, while encompassing and often explained as harmony, delivers so much more than that when you plumb the true depth of its meaning. Hózhó cannot be adequately translated into a single English word. It is the essence of the Navajo way of being, a sense of elemental rightness that is core to their way of living—a way of being that we could do worse than to strive for in our own lives. Hózhó is a word of depth and layers, meaning at once harmony and beauty, truth and balance. To be in Hózhó is to be at one with and a part of your environment and the world around you in such a way that the notes of your life complement and resonate with the symphony of life all around you. That is Hózhó, and I wish you the ability to find it and live it in your life. (Pitts, 2007, as cited in Kahn-John, 2010, pp. 116-117)

Kahn-John argues that there are six attributes to Hózhó that help define it: thinking, spirituality, relationship, reciprocity, respect and discipline (Kahn-John p. 115). I will be using these six attributes to teach the concept of Hózhó to our students, because they are tangible attributes that can be explained in elementary terms. First, each attribute of Hózhó must be understood, in order to comprehend the concept as a whole and then teach it to elementary students. I will share the definitions and explore each further on.

Another important cultural piece to note is that Hózhó is commonly referenced in Navajo ceremonies and prayers. Navajo ceremonies are often sacred and many are not shared with those outside of the community. Because of this, my outside understanding of ceremonies and prayers is very limited. For the sake of cultural respect, I will not attempt to explain them here. However, it is known that the Navajo people have a prayer about Hózhó, called the Beautyway prayer in English. Some of my students may be familiar with this prayer, or may have heard it in a ceremony. Many online sources have varying translations of the Beautyway prayer, and it was difficult to choose which one to use here. I decided to share the most common version of the prayer I could find online, from PBS.org, in English and Diné Bizaad:

In beauty I walk
With beauty before me I walk
With beauty behind me I walk
With beauty above me I walk
With beauty around me I walk
It has become beauty again
It has become beauty again
It has become beauty again
It has become beauty again
[In Diné Bizaad]:
Hózhóogo naasháa doo
Shitsijí' Hózhóogo naasháa doo
Shikéédéé Hózhóogo naasháa doo
Shideigi Hózhóogo naasháa doo
T'áá altso shinaagóó Hózhóogo naasháa doo
Hózhó náhásdlíí'
Hózhó náhásdlíí'
Hózhó náhásdlíí'
Hózhó náhásdlíí' (Bingham, 2016)

Thinking

The first of 6 parts of Hózhó, according to Kahn-John's research, is thinking. Thinking, or in Diné Bizaad, Ntséskees, is foundational before reaching the other parts of Hózhó; "everything begins with thought... thoughts are the basis of all actions" (Kahn-John, 2010, p. 117). In my research, I learned that there is a common Navajo phrase often used by parents or elders toward younger Diné children: T'áá hó'ájitéégóó. This phrase means "it is up to you," or "you decide what will happen" (Navajowotd.com, 2021). This phrase encourages children to think before they act, the foundation of Hózhó.

The Navajo historian Wally Brown shares on his YouTube channel that among the Diné, it is taught that everyone has the ability to think. “You can think in two different ways,” he says, “you can think to construct something or you can think to destroy” (Navajo Traditional Teachings, 2020). He compares this constructive/destructive dichotomy to the modern concept of positive/negative thinking. Brown continues later in the video: “you think about good things, you plan for good things, and you try to live a life of goodness.”

Spirituality

The second of the six parts of Hózhó is spirituality. Spirituality, or Hozhd’ılzin, is impossible to separate from the Diné way of life because it is “intricately woven into every dimension of Diné existence...It is the constant recognition of the sacredness of nature and self” (Kahn-John, 2010, p. 117). For the Navajo people, spirituality includes taking part in ceremonies and rituals. Ceremonies are usually done in an attempt to restore or maintain natural harmony (Kahn-John, 2010, p. 118). The incredible importance of spirituality to the Navajo way of life is a reminder of the value that spirituality adds to anyone’s life, whether Indigenous or not. Abundant research shows that people who engage in spirituality have greater happiness than non-religious people. According to the Pew Research Center, in more than half of the 26 countries studied, actively religious people are more likely than inactively religious (religious but not practicing regularly) and non-religious people to describe themselves as “very happy” (Pew Research Center, 2019, p. 7).

Relationship

The third part of Diné Hózhó is K’e. K’e, best translated in English as “relationship,” is the relationship and connection between oneself and self, people, space, nature, and geography (Kahn-John, 2010, p. 118). At Kinsey, one of our character traits that we teach is friendship. The concept of friendship for students can be easily transferred to the concept of relationship. Kahn-John writes about K’e: “relationship with self, family, and community is a central attribute of H’ozh’o. Individuals often value the entire family more than they do themselves as individual beings. The Diné hold family in such high regard as ‘to be without relatives is to be really poor’” (Kahn-John, 2010, p. 118). The importance of K’e is evident in many aspects of Diné life, but the most overtly evident way I have seen as an outsider is the custom of introducing oneself by the clan system. In the curriculum unit “Clanship – Who am I, what community do I represent and who gave me my name” school counselor Alta Mitchell writes,

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. (Mitchell, 2023).

To say their clans, a person would follow the following structure, according to Mitchell (2023):
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 way of introducing oneself reminds oneself and others that their identity comes from their community, their K'é. Hózhó would be nothing without K'é, the relationship among all things.

Respect

The fourth value in the concept of Hózhó is respect. In Diné, respect, or Ho'íí, means respect for all things in the universe, understanding that maintaining health is living in harmony with the surrounding world (Kahn-John, 2010, p. 119). At Kinsey, we teach four “character traits,” in our daily pledge: Friendship, Integrity, Respect and Empathy (F. I. R. E.). Within this character trait framework, we define showing respect as taking care of all people, places and things. “Caring for all people, places and things” is a simple definition that can be borrowed from my school’s language to teach respect as part of Hózhó.

Discipline

The next part of Hózhó is discipline, or Adił jidli. According to Kahn-John (2010), Adił jidli can be translated into English as “to have strong reverence of the self through discipline” (p. 119). In the video “Time to Hózhó” by HOKA TV, Brandon Dugi, a Navajo man and Ultra runner, speaks to the discipline aspect of Hózhó: “you want to be up when the sun is rising, showing the creator that you're not laying down, you're not being lazy” (HOKA TV, 2021). The video goes on to show Dugi rising at dawn and running. He speaks about his discipline coming from the motivation that his ancestors ran before him, along with the hope that future generations will maintain the Navajo lifestyle (HOKA TV, 2021). In order to maintain the other five parts of Hózhó— thinking, spirituality, relationship, respect and reciprocity— one must maintain self-discipline. Running as discipline isn't only applicable to Navajo men. When a Navajo girl starts puberty with her first menstruation, she takes part in a ceremony called the Kinaaldá. When girls undergo the Kinaaldá ceremony, they show discipline and reverence by running, a custom that originated with the story of Changing Woman. It is believed that the girl becomes a “well-developed, giving person after going through the ritual. She will be protected and strong for adversities later in life” (Kawano, R. 2021). Discipline is also required as part of many ceremonies and prayer customs. It is needed to endure the other facets of Hózhó without failure.

Reciprocity

The last part of Hózhó that Kahn-John shares is reciprocity. The Diné Bizaad word that corresponds with reciprocity is Há áhwiiníti, or “generosity and kindness” (p. 119). Kahn-John describes reciprocity as “the constant respectful give and take between people, the environment, and the Holy Ones” (Kahn-John, 2010, p. 119). This involves generosity, offering gems to Mother Earth and the elements to ensure harmony, and generously giving to one’s family in

ceremonies and gatherings (Kahn-John, 2010, p. 119). One story that demonstrates the principle of reciprocity is the story of the Three Sisters. Many North American tribes have a story about the Three Sisters: corn, beans and squash. According to an article published by the USDA, the Three Sisters are “crops planted together in a shared space: maize, beans, and squash.... Developed through Indigenous agricultural practices, these three plants protect and nourish each other in different ways as they grow and provide a solid diet for their cultivators” (Jacobs-Young, as cited in Marsh, n. d.). The tradition of the Three Sisters planting method spread across the Americas through many generations before Europeans colonized the continent (Marsh, n. d.). Reciprocity is shown in the Three Sisters story as each crop offers a resource to one another that each needs. The corn provides a bean pole for the beans to climb, while the beans provide nitrogen to the soil. The squash provides leaves that give shade to the ground, leaving it moist and free of weeds for the other plants to thrive. The tall corn gives shade to the squash (Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 2018). This is a simple visual and engaging story that children can learn to remember the principle of reciprocity in a culturally engaging manner.

Student Engagement

Through the research and abundant reading I completed in the Indian Country School Counselors Institute, I learned so much about Hózhó that my curriculum plan practically wrote itself. I had a clear idea of the six parts and how to explain them to elementary students. Through collaboration with my peers and advisor, I now understand how I can teach my Indigenous students in a way that is culturally responsive and relevant to them.

I have created a 5-lesson curriculum unit for Social Emotional Learning with the goal of teaching values using Hózhó. This unit is intended to be taught in my counseling guidance class with 4th and 5th grade classes. Because I teach every class twice a month, the unit will span over a period of three months. This unit is aligned with both the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Mindsets and Behaviors Standards and the Navajo Nation Government Diné Character Building Standards for 4th-6th grade. With my guidance, students will engage in a variety of activities including traditional storytelling, art, firsthand accounts from local Diné community members, language learning, goal setting and community circles. By the end of the unit, all 4th and 5th graders at Kinsey will know the parts of Hózhó, new words in Diné Bizaad and what their own cultural values are. Below is a chart showing the learning objectives of each lesson and the Diné Character Building standards and ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors standards that each aligns with.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will define Hózhó and explain the following parts: thinking, relationship, respect and discipline.
2. Students will identify their own values.
3. Students will understand how their values can help them cope with challenges.
4. Students will practice traditional Navajo values including positive thinking, relationship, respect and discipline.

Learning Objective	Diné Character Building Standards	ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors Standards
1. Students will define Hózhó and explain the following parts: thinking, relationship, respect and discipline.	Concept 2 PO 1. I will listen to and apply Diné teachings.	B-SS 10. Cultural awareness, sensitivity and responsiveness
2. Students will identify their own values.	Concept 2 PO 2. I will develop wise things in my personal life.	M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being, B-SMS 1. Responsibility for self and actions
3. Students will understand how their values can help them cope with challenges.	Concept 2 PO 4. I will explain good judgments that I use to guide me.	B-SMS 7. Effective coping skills
4. Students will practice traditional Navajo values including positive thinking, relationship, respect and discipline.	Concept 2 PO 1. I will listen to and apply Diné teachings.	B-SS 10. Cultural awareness, sensitivity and responsiveness

Before the first lesson, students will complete a pre-assessment with questions to assess their current knowledge of Hózhó and values. The pre-assessment is shared in the following section.

As of the time I write this, I have completed the first lesson of the unit with six different 4th and 5th grade classes. My first lesson is approximately 40 minutes long, and is titled “What is Hózhó?” The learning objective for this lesson is: Students will define Hózhó and explain its parts. The materials needed for this specific lesson include a laptop, a projector, internet access, Large poster paper (5 posters), markers, pencils and crayons.

In my class, we almost always begin with a community circle. This involves students sitting with the teacher in a circle on a large rug, so we can share and listen to one another eye to eye. The teacher poses a question and students are welcome to share their thoughts and insights on the question.

When students enter the classroom, they will sit in a circle. The teacher will use the question prompt: What are values? Students are invited to engage in conversation about what values are, with the teacher facilitating and gently correcting. Then a follow up question will be posed: what are some values that your family has? This will provide a segue to the topic of Navajo values, specifically Hózhó. I shared with the students that even if they are not Navajo— like myself— or are not traditional, they can still learn about Hózhó and consider how it is similar and different to their own cultural values.

After the circle, the teacher will ask if any of the students have heard the word Hózhó. When doing this with my classes, I had just a few students share that they had heard the word before, that they knew it was Navajo, but didn't know what it meant. I had one student in particular who knew that Hózhó means peace. The teacher will then share the definition of Hózhó with the students while projecting it to the projector screen to read aloud: “Hózhó: a Navajo word that means harmony, peace, and balance. It is the Navajo way of life” (Kahn-John, 2010). Students will engage in learning this definition with choral response, reading it aloud together two to three times as instructed by the teacher.

Next, the six parts of Hózhó are introduced: thinking, spirituality, relationship, reciprocity, respect, and discipline. These are projected onto the screen, and students will be instructed to share what they believe the definitions of each word is. The teacher will give examples of each of the six parts.

To check for understanding and engage the whole class in movement, I created a game. Students will stand up and a word will be shared on the screen. Students who believe this word is one of the parts of Hózhó will walk to the right side of the room, while students who believe it is not will walk to the left. I included some silly words, like “tacos”, and some words that were similar to certain parts of Hózhó, like “friendship”. When I conducted this lesson, all of my students were engaged in the activity and about eighty percent got all of the words correct. Students enthusiastically cheered when they found out they were on the correct side of the room.

Next, the teacher will share the short 4-minute video *Time to Hózhó* by HOKA TV. The video shows the Navajo distance runner Brandon Dugi, who lives on the Navajo Nation, explaining why he runs and the importance of running to the Diné people. In the video, Dugi introduced himself in Navajo. When I shared this video with my classes, one of my 4th grade students came up to me and asked if she could introduce herself in Navajo in front of the class. I said, “of course!” She shared her name, age and one of her clans. It was beautiful to see a student volunteer to share that part of herself after being inspired by the video. After watching *Time to Hózhó*, students will be instructed to discuss with a peer near them which Hózhó values they saw in the video.

The last activity of this first lesson is a poster making project. Students will have 15 minutes to work in groups and create a poster about one of the parts of Hózhó. For the sake of simplicity, I only assigned four of the six parts of Hózhó for the posters. The following definitions will be provided for students:

Thinking: practicing positive thoughts

Relationship (k'e): belonging to a community or a family.
Respect: taking care of all people, places and things.
Discipline: physical and mental strength.

When teaching this lesson, I created groups of 3-4 students and asked each group to choose which part of Hózhó their poster would be about. Students created the posters with the words and definitions, and many created beautiful artwork on their posters as well. One of my favorite posters showed a boy running through a canyon that looked like the Painted Desert, with "discipline" written at the top. Once they are completed, the posters will be put up around the 4th and 5th grade hallways as daily reminders of Hózhó.

I have provided a brief lesson plan outlines of the other four lessons below.

Lesson 2: First part of Hózhó: thinking (40 minutes)

Learning Objective: I can practice positive thinking.

Materials: Laptop, projector, internet access for youtube, 30 worksheets with comic strip boxes, markers and crayons for class.

First: review the definition and parts of Hózhó together.

Introduce the phrase: T'áá hó'ájitéégóó. This phrase means "it is up to you," or "you decide what will happen" - you make the choice of how you act, your thoughts determine your behaviors.

Ntséskees is the Diné word meaning "to think." (Kahn-John, 2010).

Close your eyes and think positive thoughts while you listen to the Navajo prayer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fbCTeqIbd8> or

Positive thinking: "I am stupid" vs. "I am smart"

The Navajo Blessingway ceremony [Hózhójí]. Tell the story of changing woman, read aloud:

<https://courts.navajo-nsn.gov/AspectsDineTeaching/whiteshellwoman.pdf>

Fortune teller about Changing Woman

Students will create a comic strip with the story of Changing Woman.

Lesson 3: Relationships

Learning objectives:

I can define K'e.

I can describe the community I belong to and its values.

Materials: Laptop and projector.

What is k'e? Belonging to a family or community.

Clans: for Navajo people, it is important to know your clans. Hopi people have clans too. Even people from other parts of the world can learn how to introduce themselves in Navajo. Does anyone know their clans, or where their family came from?

"You belong" activity: Diversity circle

Today we are going to get to know each other on a deeper level

Expectations:

Do not gesture at someone else to join the circle if they are not comfortable stepping in.

Judgment-free zone

Do not ask people who are in the circle about the experience

We will have a conversation after the activity and then you may respond

Potential prompts- Move into the circle if...

You were born in Flagstaff
You were born somewhere else
You go to the rez sometimes
You've ever lost a loved one
If you have two parents in the same home
You live with an auntie or uncle at your home
You feel like you have to work harder than your peers at school
Most of your teachers are the same skin color as you.
It's challenging to get school work done because you have a lot of responsibilities at home
If you have to babysit a younger sibling
If your family has strong cultural traditions celebrated at home
If you get to see your extended family (cousins, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) often
If you get a lunch packed every day
If your family goes to church or has a religious beliefs
If your caregiver(s) works more than 1 job
If you've danced in a pow wow
If you've ever felt like you don't belong
I like to by myself a lot.
I like to be with people a lot.
Your parent went to college
If you can speak more than one language
Connections: Pass around the talking piece and allow students to make connections that they noticed.
Sentence starters " I wonder..." "I connect with..." "I was surprised by..."

Lesson 4: Respect and Discipline

Learning objective:

I can define respect.

I can define discipline.

I can practice discipline by making a discipline plan.

Materials: Laptop, projector, 30 worksheets.

Review the Kinsey definition of Respect: taking care of all people, places and things.

Brainstorm how we can take care of others and the environment. Hózhó: not killing or interfering with other animals!

Discipline: Physical and mental strength

Talk about Kina'alda ceremony for girls. Running is an important part of the Navajo culture and it allows us to be disciplined and healthy, like Brandon Dugi the runner.

Show the VICE video of the Apache girls coming of age ceremony (link):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1Cx_9YDQEc

Discussion in a circle: What similarities are there between the Apache ceremony and Navajo Kinaalda? What other coming of age ceremonies do different cultures celebrate? (Sweat lodge, quinceanera, Bar/Bat Mitzvah).

Worksheet: taking care of myself and my community.

Lesson 5 (Final Lesson):

Review the 5 parts of Hózhó.

Circle: What did you learn?

Students will complete the Google Form to assess their knowledge of the unit.

Student Assessment

It is vital when teaching a new unit to assess whether it is effective in its goal. This allows for better implementation with future implementation of the unit. My goal with this curriculum is to improve the wellbeing of all students through understanding of Hózhó, in alignment with ASCA and Diné Character Building standards. While all 4th and 5th grade students will engage in the lessons, I am choosing two classes of students, 4th and 5th graders, to complete a pre- and post-assessment via Google Form on their school iPads before and after the unit to assess their knowledge of Hózhó and their perception of meeting the learning objectives. I will additionally use a talking circle to gather qualitative data about students' learning and experience with the unit, for those who are less inclined to typing out their answers on an iPad, as well as use projects and activities throughout the unit to put their knowledge to action and demonstrate understanding. I created the Google Form pre- and post assessments in a Likert scale format. They appear as follows:

	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Yes	Absolutely!
1. I know what Hózhó means.					
2. I can explain the values that are important to me in my community.					
3. I can explain the parts of Hózhó.					
4. My values help me cope with challenges.					
5. The Hózhó lessons helped me understand more about Navajo values.					
6. What was the most interesting thing you learned from the Hózhó unit?	(open answer question)				

Other ways that I will assess student learning will be during the lessons, through evaluation of student classwork and engagement. Some examples of this include the Hózhó posters created in lesson one, Changing Woman comic strip in lesson two, the clanship and family history discussion in lesson three and follow up afterward, and discipline plans in lesson four.

To determine the long-term benefits of this curriculum, I will have to collect data from the Panorama social-emotional survey. This survey was completed in October of 2024, and will be conducted again in Spring 2025. Once the October 4th and 5th grade data is released to my school, I will look at it and use it as a baseline for emotion regulation in 4th and 5th grade. My

hope with this curriculum is that all students benefit in their ability to emotionally regulate from learning Hózhó, and show improvement in their Panorama scores. I will compare the data from the Fall survey to the Spring 2025 survey and determine if students gained, maintained, or lost emotion regulation skills. My goal is that all 4th and 5th grade students will improve by at least 5% overall in the area of emotion regulation, and that the specific demographic of Indigenous students will improve by 5% also.

Additionally, I must assess the cultural relevance of my curriculum. I plan to meet with several students individually after the end of the unit to gather their knowledge of the stories discussed and the Navajo words learned, such as Changing Woman and the words for thinking, respect, discipline and relationship. I have also used the Culturally Responsive Assessment of Indigenous Schooling (CRAIS) tool to analyze the Hózhó curriculum. I scored my curriculum using the CRAIS too as objectively as possible, and the Hózhó curriculum scored an average of 2.3 on a scale of -3 to 3. This indicates medium-high culturally responsiveness of the unit.

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