

THE CURRENT STATE OF DINÉ BIZAAD

by

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of

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in

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DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to the Diné (Navajo) people who speak their language with pride, to the Native American Studies Department at Montana State University, and to my mother for supporting her eccentric son.

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ABSTRACT

Diné Bizaad, also known as the Navajo language, is the most common Native American language in the United States. In his research for this thesis, Fox Chancellor Pearson seeks to ascertain for himself the current state of Diné Bizaad. Pearson combines his own observations, living and working both on and bordering the Navajo Nation, with input gathered during interviews with Diné people from diverse walks-of-life. Pearson concludes that Diné Bizaad is still alive and well among Diné elders, but it is in rapid decline among the younger generation.

## 1. MY STORY

When I chose to write about the current state of Diné Bizaad for my Master's Thesis, I chose a topic deeply personal to me. What follows is not simply an academic assignment devoid of soul, but rather, this is a chapter of my life and a window to my soul. Most, if not all, of my writing is guided by personal experiences that played a major role in shaping my life and making me the person that I am today. The current state of Diné Bizaad was a topic of interest and concern to me many years before I ever decided to write a Master's Thesis.

The preservation and revival of Indigenous languages has always been a topic of personal interest to me. Both sides of my family are from Oklahoma and includes Chata (Choctaw), Tsalagi (Cherokee), and Irish ancestry. During the Great Depression, my grandparents were part of the massive migration of agricultural laborers who left Oklahoma for California. I grew up in Central California and when school was out, my family would spend break time in Oklahoma's Pushmataha County visiting relatives, fishing, camping, playing with terrapins, visiting tribal museums, and going to pow wows. I grew up completely aware of my Native heritage and it has played a major role in shaping my life.

Growing up in "Central-Cali", I felt a strong and burning desire to leave as soon as I could. When I was old enough to leave, I returned to Oklahoma, where I studied the Tsalagi language at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah. While in Tahlequah, I observed how efforts to preserve and revitalize the Tsalagi language were being met with both hope and pessimism. My decision to move to Northern-Arizona changed everything.

In Arizona, I quickly found myself in an entirely different world. I made many Diné friends. After graduating from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, I found myself in a difficult situation involving factors beyond my control – factors that were in the hands of the gods. I had graduated in 2007, the American economy was in chaos, jobs were scarce, and the “second Great Depression” was upon us! I moved in with a Diné family in the Navajo Nation and got a job as a substitute teacher for the local school district.

The family that I joined included many fluent Diné Bizaad speakers. Often times, the elders of the family would sit together talking, joking, and laughing in Diné Bizaad. Hearing the sound of the elders’ laughter made me wish I was a fluent speaker also, so that I too could understand what they were saying, and join in the laughter. Living with my “Diné family”, I learned many Diné Bizaad words and phrases, especially the names of animals, places, mountains, and the things one regularly sees living on the “Rez”. At my new job, many of my Diné co-workers were older people who occasionally spoke Diné Bizaad; some were fluent speakers, while others spoke the mixed combination of English and Diné Bizaad jokingly known as “Rez English”. My job was stressful, but it paid the bills.

When I first began my new job on the “Rez”, I had little idea what to expect. Would I need Diné Bizaad language skills in order to teach effectively? Would certain students have difficulty speaking English? Would the students use Diné Bizaad to talk trash about their new substitute teacher?

What I discovered was that the overwhelming majority of young Diné now speak English as their primary, and often sole, language. Young Diné rarely, if ever, use Diné Bizaad to talk trash about non-Diné, because most Diné students lack the Diné Bizaad speaking skills to do so. Although few young Diné speak the language fluently, there are many who understand it because most, if not all, students come from families that include older Diné Bizaad speakers. Many Diné families include grandparents for whom Diné Bizaad is still their first language, and some have difficulty communicating in English.

How did Diné Bizaad suffer such rapid decimation in the span of only a few generations? How did high school students who are the grandchildren of fluent Diné elders end up speaking English as their primary language? Colonial education has played a major role in the decimation of the Diné Bizaad. Simply said, the colonial education system has accomplished its objective of promoting colonial language and culture.

My job as a substitute teacher enabled me to see first-hand the failure of the colonial school system in Indian country. Over the years, I worked for three different school districts, both on and near the Navajo Nation. In summary, what I observed was a failure to implement full Diné Bizaad immersion into the educational process. The overwhelming majority of classroom lecturing is done in English. Instead of having the opportunity to learn in their own Diné language, students are forced to learn everything in the language of White colonial domination, and teachers wonder why Indigenous students have the highest dropout rate in America!

I came away from my experience as a substitute teacher with profound knowledge that the colonial education taught to young Diné is not only failing them, but also harming them as well. Fluency in Diné Bizaad is critical to the identity and self-esteem of Diné people. What the Diné nation needs is a new generation of Diné educators with the vision and the courage to break the White colonial mold completely and begin educating its young people entirely in Diné Bizaad! The Diné nation is currently arriving at the darkest time in its history – a time when its young people, its most precious resource, are suffering from all kinds of issues, and many no longer speak their language.

In writing this Thesis, my goal is to determine the current state of Diné Bizaad. One of the most important questions I sought to answer is if Diné Bizaad is alive and well, or if it is dying. In an effort of accountability and accurately understanding of the current state of Diné Bizaad, I conducted interviews with Diné people of varying backgrounds. My goal was to hear what my interviewees had to say and compare it to what I have observed firsthand.

My research into the current state of Diné Bizaad began at a pivotal time in Diné political history. 2014 was an election year for the Navajo Nation, but this would not be any ordinary Navajo election, this would be a battle of gladiators – gladiators with names like Shirley, Tsosie, Deschene, and Whitethorne.

## 2. AN ANCIENT LANGUAGE

Why would a non-Navajo care if the Diné Bizaad lives or dies? Is Diné Bizaad still relevant in an increasingly English-speaking world? Has Diné Bizaad outlived its usefulness as a mode of communication? The questions are many.

In *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Shawn Wilson writes “the relationships that may be the easiest to describe are the ones that we share with other people” (Shawn Wilson, 84). Wilson writes that “While most people will recognize the importance of families, all forms of interpersonal relationships take on special significance within Indigenous communities” (Shawn Wilson, 84). Many of the opinions expressed in this chapter are simply my own opinions, based upon personal experience living and working in education with the Diné people. A nation’s language is vital to its national identity. What would the Diné nation be without its language? Frank Todacheeny writes that “Language loss results in a people who are dispossessed and disempowered” (Todacheeny, 21).

It is my opinion that, without its language, the already impoverished Diné nation would be reduced to a state abject cultural bankruptcy, with no future left but extinction. A future characterized by cultural bankruptcy is not a future that I wish to see. During my years in Diné Bikeyah (Navajo-land), I have made many Diné friends, co-workers, students, and extended family members. I want to see a strong Diné nation. No nation can ever be strong without its language or culture.

To see the inseparable nature of language and national identity, it is only necessary to look to the many nations of the globe who fiercely defend their national languages. So critical is language to national identity that many nations of the world have historically

made laws to enshrine and protect their national languages from foreign encroachment. The Diné nation is no less sovereign than any other nation of the world and its language is no less important. Without its language, the culture will die.

One of the leading scholars on global language loss is K. David Harrison. Harrison's writings include *When Languages Die: The Extinction of the Worlds' Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge* and *The Last Speakers: The Quest to Save the Worlds' Most Endangered Languages*. According to Harrison, forty percent of all languages on earth are endangered (Harrison, 7) and a language dies every ten days (Harrison, 4). "Even larger languages, such as Navajo with nearly 150,000 speakers may find themselves in jeopardy, suggesting that population size alone is no guarantee of security", Harrison argues (Harrison, 4).

Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine are the authors of *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*. According to Nettle and Romaine, ninety percent of the worlds' languages will likely die within the next hundred years. According to Nettle and Romaine, "the Navajo language is the only native language with more than 100,000 speakers" (Nettle & Romaine, 154), but they also note that it "continues to decline" (Nettle & Romaine, 174). Harrison, Nettle, and Romaine all paint an extremely bleak picture of Indigenous languages today. Diné Bizaad is one of the prestigious few Indigenous languages that stand any chance at survival.

The most well-known author on Diné history is Peter Iverson. In his book *Diné: A History of the Navajos*, Iverson describes the number of Diné Bizaad speakers as having

declined rapidly (Iverson, 6512). Iverson quotes prominent Diné author Evangeline Parsons Yazzie as saying “the white man’s language is contagious” (Iverson, 6621). It is hard to disagree with Yazzie’s statement when considering that English is now the primary language of most young Diné.

To my knowledge, the only scholar to have written a book entirely about the current state of Diné Bizaad is Deborah House, author of *Language Shift among the Navajo* (published in 2002). House describes how Diné Bizaad has suffered a massive decline since the 1980s, when the language was much more widely spoken than it is now (House, 2002). In her book, House delves very deeply into many issues related to Diné identity, experiences with colonialism, the boarding school era, and compulsory English education. House attempts to explain why Diné Bizaad continues to decline. “Why is Navajo language shift accelerating when the use of Navajo language is no longer is no longer opposed in schools and other settings?” House asks rhetorically (House, xii).

House cites many factors for the decline of Diné Bizaad: among them, the common desire of Diné parents for their children to speak English. In her book, House describes Diné people as being very confused, passive, and indecisive when it comes to preserving Diné Bizaad. According to House, many Diné people are deeply confused in regards to what should be the future of Diné Bizaad. *Language Shift among the Navajo* was published more than a decade ago, a lot has happened since then, which means the book is now dated. Most writings on the current state of Diné Bizaad have been limited to articles in newspapers, academic websites, and scholarly journals.

In an article entitled *Tuning in to Navajo: The Role of Radio in Native Language Maintenance*, (published in 1997) Leighton C. Peterson describes the role which emerging Diné Bizaad radio stations has had on the status of the language. Peterson describes how Diné Bizaad radio stations primarily cater to older people, because young people are far less likely to speak Diné Bizaad (Peterson, 2016). One of the most interesting issues, which Peterson mentions in his writing, is that there are many different dialects of Diné Bizaad, which vary according to region. Peterson describes how the plethora of dialects often leads to disagreements on how Diné Bizaad should be spoken on the radio. There is no standardized dialect of Diné Bizaad, an issue that is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. Peterson's writings on Diné Bizaad are very stimulating and thought provoking, but they are also heavily dated, having been published in 1997, and much has happened to the language since then.

In *Prospect for the Survival of the Navajo Language: A Reconsideration* (published in 2002), Bernard Spolsky attributes the decimation of Diné Bizaad to the colonial school system. Spolsky notes that systems of education have played a major role in the revitalization of ancient languages such as Welsh, Yiddish, Hebrew, Maori, and Irish, however, he notes that no such concerted effort has yet been made in regards to Diné Bizaad. Spolsky paints the current state of Diné Bizaad as that of a dying language, abandoned and unwanted by its people. "In the case of Navajo, it is the ideological base that appears to have been seriously weakened by external forces", Spolsky says. Spolsky does state that "it is not too late to reverse Navajo language shift", however, the prevailing theme of his writing is that of profound doom and gloom.

One of the most relevant secondary resources published about the current state of Diné Bizaad is *“If They Want Navajo to Be Learned, Then They Should Require It in All Schools”*: *Navajo Teenagers’ Experiences, Choices, and Demands regarding Navajo Language* by Tiffany S. Lee (published in 2007). Lee, a Diné woman, describes growing up during the 1980s when Diné Bizaad was the primary language of her classmates, then becoming a high school teacher to Diné students who spoke only English (Lee 1). Lee’s writings focus directly on the current state of Diné Bizaad among young Diné – where attention needs to be focused. Lee’s writings focus primarily on the young Diné who are the future (Lee, 2016). According to Lee, “Navajo language use in the home is the most important ingredient for language maintenance and revitalization, but it still competes with other societal influences” (Lee, 11) thus it must be taught in schools (Lee 12).

*The Effects of the No Child Left Behind Act on Language and Culture Education in Navajo Public Schools*, is an article published in the *Journal of American Indian Education* (published in 2009) by Allison Balter and Frank D. Grossman. “Over the past 30 years, Navajo has undergone a pronounced shift, making it an endangered and rapidly vanishing language” (Balter & Grossman, 20), Balter and Grossman write. According to Balter and Grossman, “Navajo language and culture are facing extinction”. The writings of Balter and Grossman detail how the No Child Left Behind Act has severely hindered the ability of Indigenous educators “to implement culturally and linguistically relevant instruction, specifically Native language instruction” (Balter & Grossman, 20).

In 2014, a Diné Doctoral student at Arizona State University named Frank Todacheeny published a dissertation entitled *Navajo Nation in Crisis: Analysis on the Extreme Loss of Navajo Language Amongst Youth*. Todacheeny's writing is the most recent on the current state of Diné Bizaad. According to Todacheeny, "we are at the crossroads of language renewal or extinction; there is only one option and our Navajo people need to know and understand that option" (Todacheeny 75).

"I am the first person to say that our Navajo language is not being used on a daily basis for our younger generation to be exposed to their Native language", Todacheeny writes. Todacheeny cites statistics stating that between 1969 and 1993, the estimated percentage of schoolchildren who spoke Diné Bizaad plummeted from 95% to 52% (Todacheeny 29). There is little data available on the current level of proficiency of Dine' speakers and what defines a fluent speaker. One clue comes from Dr. Todacheeny's dissertation and his own survey.

The Central Consolidated School District provided Todacheeny with the Navajo Language Proficiency Assessment test data from the school years 2004-2009 for each grade level in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades from Ojo, Kirtland, Ruth N. Bond, Nizhoni, Nataani Nez, Newcomb, and Naschitti Elementary Schools. Each school had a student population with similar demographic characteristics in relation to socio-economics. The test assessed proficiency at four levels: novice, intermediate, proficient, and advanced (Todacheeny 37). Todacheeny asserts that, over time, the five-year assessment data for the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grades show a gradual decline in proficient speakers so students who were proficient in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade gradually, over the course of study, became intermediate or novice level Diné Bizaad speakers. In contrast,

Todacheeny's independent survey regarding the value of Diné to the Navajo culture of 100 students, parents, and grandparents rate the importance of the Navajo language as very high.

Todacheeny explains the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade data saying that "there was a high percentage (46%) of students at the intermediate level. In the intermediate level, students were more receptive to their Navajo language than speaking, reading or writing, which was very limited in Navajo language usage. The next highest percentage was 40% of students were at the novice level. Being at the novice level meant you did not speak the Navajo language; used inappropriate word usage, phrases, and sentences, and had a hard time understanding the Navajo language. If you were functioning at the novice level, you actually lost your Native Tongue or Mother Language. Combining the intermediate and novice levels showed that nearly 90% of third graders were on the verge of losing their Navajo language. A mere 12% of third grade students were at the proficient level. These students could write, speak, and understand the full context of the Navajo language. Only 1% of all third grade students were at the advanced level. These students could write and speak their Navajo language fluently and could write a well-organized composition in their Navajo language" (Todacheeny 49). In summation, all leading secondary sources paint an extremely dark and tragic picture in regards to the current state of Diné Bizaad.

Why does a Chata or a Tsalagi care about the current state of Diné Bizaad? I have chosen to conduct this research into the current state of Diné Bizaad because during my years in Diné Bikeyah, I have forged many friendships and extended-family relations with Diné people, and I care about the future of the Diné Nation. The method of my research is to give voice to ordinary Diné people from diverse walks-of-life and ask them, "What is the current state of Diné Bizaad?" In conducting my interviews, I made a great

deal of effort to maintain a casual atmosphere so that my interviewees could relax and speak their minds. In my experience, Diné people are usually very casual and only rarely formal. While being interviewed, my interviewees used the extremely casual form of English common in Diné Bikeyah, occasionally interspersed with Navajo phrases. The English spoken is not perfect, but I have preserved my interviewees' words in as much of their original form as possible, revealing the strong element of validity, truth, time-in-place "real-ness", and authenticity of the interviews.

### 3. BATTLE OF THE GLADIATORS

The 2014 Presidential election was a volatile time for the Navajo Nation. The election began with a primary, which included seventeen different candidates, each of whom wanted power. Among the candidates who made it through the primary were Joe Shirley Jr., and Chris Deschene. Deschene was a distinguished lawyer, military man, and state representative from Arizona. Shirley was a distinguished educator and former Navajo Nation President of two terms.

At the time of the 2014 Presidential election, the Navajo Nation had an established tradition of requiring that Presidential candidates be fluent Diné Bizaad speakers, and each of the 2014 Presidential candidates had signed documents stating they were fluent speakers. In addition to Presidential candidates, applicants for many other tribal jobs were also required to speak Diné Bizaad. The 2014 election became particularly complicated when allegations emerged that Deschene was not a fluent Diné Bizaad speaker. Suddenly, Diné Bizaad became a political issue, and the subject of many heated arguments between tribal members (Ahtone, 2014)(Bitsoi, 2014)(Donovan, 2014)(Neely, 2015)(Reid, 2014)(Smith, 2014).

Two former candidates who had lost during the primary, Hank Whitethorne and Dale Tsosie, challenged Deschene's fluency as a Diné Bizaad speaker, and took their case to tribal court (Quintero, 2014). The Navajo Nation was quickly rocked by legal battles concerning Deschene's fluency (Bitsoi, 2014)(Donovan, 2014)(Quintero, 2014)(Reid, 2014)(Smith, 2014)(Yurth, 2014). Deschene was eventually challenged in court to prove his fluency, but he refused, claiming that such a standard had never been enforced before

(Quintero, 2014). Deschene was eventually disqualified, his name removed from the Presidential ballot, and he was ordered to pay the legal fees of Whitethorne and Tsosie (Bitsoi, 2014)(Donovan, 2014)(Fuller, 2014)(Quintero, 2014)(Yurth, 2014).

Supporters of Deschene reacted to his disqualification with a profound feeling that their votes were not being respected, and even attempted to enact new legislation abolishing the Diné Bizaad language fluency requirement for Presidential candidates (Bitsoi, 2014)(Fuller, 2014)(Neely, 2015)(Quintero, 2014). Lack of Diné Bizaad fluency had become a political issue for the first time in recorded Diné history, and it was while this chaos was taking place that I embarked on my quest to ascertain the current state of Diné Bizaad (Bitsoi, 2014)(Donovan, 2014)(Quintero, 2014)(Yurth, 2014).

## 4. A GRANDFATHER

Interviewee #1 is an extraordinarily friendly and outgoing person with extensive knowledge related to Diné Bizaad. In addition to his work at a museum, Interviewee #1 has also worked with the local school district. According to Interviewee #1, Diné Bizaad is “alive and well”. Interviewee #1 has a very optimistic opinion in regards to the current state of the Diné Bizaad, but says that more work needs to be done to “awaken the people who are not so awake to the idea that this (Diné Bizaad) is very, very essential as we continue our lives as human beings”.

Author: “Could you please take a moment to introduce yourself and say what you do here at the [REDACTED] museum?”

Interviewee #1:

“I work here under the [REDACTED]. I work for the [REDACTED], and the museum that's located here at [REDACTED], New Mexico, and the museum opened July 1995, and that tells you how many years I have been employed here at this wonderful job site and wonderful position where I get to interact with the tourists, the public, and the community, and array of individuals, and array of wonderful people that come by to visit with me like Mr. Fox himself. Welcome again.”

Author: “Ahéhee’ (thank you).”

Interviewee #1: “Aoo' (yes/you're welcome).”

Author: “What would you say is the current state of the Navajo language? Is the language dying or is it alive and well?”

Interviewee #1:

“For me personally, I think you need to ask almost every individual. For me, where I'm involved with a lot of my grandchildren's schooling, their classes, their teachers, and their curriculum (and) where I've worked, at the head

start program level, it's alive. I'm involved with the [REDACTED] program with the [REDACTED] schools and they are very, very proactive with this wonderful Diné language curriculum, the focus of it, the implementation of the different classwork and the activities that are ongoing. I just mentioned to Mr. Fox about the upcoming Diné celebration at the various schools and that's been advertised in the Gallup Independent newspaper, so it's alive and well, and I'm glad to be a part of it. Ahéhee' (thank you)."

Author: "Do you speak Navajo fluently?"

Interviewee #1: "Aoo' (yes), yes sir!"

Author: "Awesome! Do you listen to the radio in Navajo?"

Interviewee #1:

"Every day right here is the machine, KGAK, KYA, and the Window Rock station, and ya know what, a lot of times even KGLP or 91.7 FM station, they have sections where they are now introducing the Indian music program, and then they have the Indian forum outreach program that's been broadcast almost every other day, and I tune into those radio stations hoping to catch wind of what's current and what's going on."

Author: "Awesome! Which radio station do you like the most?"

Interviewee #1: "KGAK, Navajo all the time!"

Author: "Yeah, I like how I can listen to KTNN or even KNDN online up in Bozeman."

Interviewee #1: "They are excellent, yes."

Author: "Yeah, KNDN is pretty cool, I like that. So, would I be correct in saying that the Diné Bizaad language has a strong future?"

Interviewee #1:

"I believe so, the thing we need to do is to awaken the people who are not so awake to the idea that this is very, very essential as we continue our lives as human beings living a dual kind of life."

We live the Anglo, we live the Indian, we live the modern, and we live the traditional where we need that spirit and the livelihood of the language of our people – the Diné language. Any language, any culture, is preserved through that communication level ,.....we need it or it will die out and we will die out.”

Author: “What role do you think language plays in self-esteem and pride in self and being proud of one’s heritage? Do you think that it is very crucial, that the two things are very important?”

Interviewee #1:

“Excellent question! Oh, my gosh! You know what, before I entered the high school level here on the reservation in Tohatchi, New Mexico, we were told not to speak our Diné language, our Navajo language, our Indian tongue, we were kind of punished for it. We were told not, we were told to be ashamed of it, we were brainwashed in that spectrum that 'you're not supposed to speak this foreign language', 'this is an outlandish way of communication'. It's not outlandish, no!

It was instilled in us when we were elementary students, but as we got into the junior high level -- the high school level, we were told it's okay, it's prevalent, you need it more so now, so when I graduated I barely spoke Navajo cuz of that brainwashing of that time, of that era, where we weren't supposed to speak our Indian tongue, Indian language, our Diné language, and we were scolded if we did, but at home it was different.

We were made aware by my grandmother, my mom, they're very traditional in their ways and their spirit world, and their line of religion, and their beliefs, so that was an awareness that I must take pride in the Diné Indian language that we are born with and raised with. So, to this day, I am now sixty-one years of age, I think and I behold it as a gift from the creator, that he made that language to be spoken and we cannot just put a halt to it, we can't erase it.

Now it's being implemented where they are writing the Diné language, which I am partaking of also, and it is a struggle, yet we will learn! This portion of it, for my part, we need it so I can transmit it, relay it to the youngsters, the grandchildren, the visitors, to make them aware, to awaken their spirit, that this is vital in our livelihood as any people. All cultures need their distinct languages. Thank you, Ahéhee’.”

Author: “Are the young people doing enough to learn their language?”

Interviewee #1:

“Again, personal experience, personal environment, in my home, in our home, we do implement all of the language techniques, the verbalization, the correct way of speaking Navajo, and then explaining and giving the definition to the youngsters as a learning process.

They need to learn it, learn the language, and adhere to this dual language that we have in our lives, so it's prevalent, yes, in my home, our household. Each household is different, so in my household, we have an ongoing which is necessary for our youngsters' lives.”

\* Interview briefly interrupted \*

Interviewee #1:

“You know what, to be truthful what I have witnessed, what I've seen in the community in this area – the Gallup community and the Tohatchi area where I'm from, it's, again, it's a few of them, not all of them, a few are kinda shying away from it, kinda not wanting to speak it. They're doing that little shameful kinda characterization of not wanting to really explore the Diné language, to enhance it with their own spirit.

Maybe it's because they're told at home 'don't speak it anywhere, not here in this home, but when you get outta this home you can do whatever you wish after you're twenty-one', or whatever the age may be. I think again it's a personal opinion on my side.

Yes, it's very lax right now, but from what I've encountered with the head start program and with our own grandchildren, the spirit of the Diné language is still alive because a lot of the schools out there, out here in the McKinley County area are approaching this with good intentions and energy that's positive, and we need that for the students, cuz some learn more, I think, in Navajo than in English, so it's very appropriate when that's brought forth to them, when it's introduced to them in that kind of realm.

There's not only the Anglo kind of teaching, but the Indian kind of teaching, and a lot of them capitalize on the Diné language and absorbing it, and it's cemented more so in the mind, in the brain, and conceptualization of learning, and that teaching format.”

Author: “What is it like working in the Head Start program?”

Interviewee #1:

“For me it was awesome! I loved it. I wanna go back. I have so many ideas. I'm a very creative individual. I love to explore. I love to think out of the box. I like to use language – all, sign language, body language, verbiage, show-and-tell, I have that ready. And yes, it's a place to be if you're wanting

to teach and if you're wanting to approach the individuals with the mindset that learning is open, it's just not one-sided.

It's so many variables there, ready for the student, ready for the teacher, and I feel that I can do it. I know there are a lot of teachers out there and they're very creative. Some of the teachers that I've met they're very in tune with the language premise, even with the Diné language that we're talking about right now."

Author: "How is the language incorporated into the Head Start program? Is it full immersion? Is it partial immersion? How is it done?"

Interviewee #1:

"When I was there it was partial immersion because they're implementing the Anglo and the Navajo/ Diné and they're trying to slowly incorporate it into their daily schedules, activities, the lunch program, the outside program, everything's dual, so it's a mindset where the students will grasp onto either the Indian Diné language or the Anglo version of what's being taught."

Author: "What can ordinary Diné people, for example parents, do to preserve their language?"

Interviewee #1:

"You need to sit one-on-one with the young child. The young child, to me as all humans, we are a spirited being, and if you do the interaction on a one-on-one to open up to that spirit, that young spirit will open up to you. Positive energy will reach positive energy. If you have any negative energy, that innocent spirit child will feel it, and that's where the destruction of learning surfaces. He will not want to learn, he pushes it aside, he feels that energy, he doesn't want to do it, he won't go forth with it, but if it's met with a positive-spirited energy he will feel it because a child, an innocent child, three, four five, that's the head start age.

When you get them there they open up they're in tune to it with that positive energy, and right away they will sense that negative energy and then they put it down, they shut down, they revert to shyness, they block you out, they do selective hearing, that comes into play and a host of other elements in that time.

So, I think you need to capture them at that level – three, four, and five. And if that positive energy is continuous, it has to be consistent with the teacher, with the family, with the community, and there the Diné language will live, and thrive, and survive."

Author: “Just recently the movie Star Wars was translated into Diné Bizaad and now there are plans to translate the children’s cartoon Finding Nemo. Do you think that if there were more movies translated into Diné Bizaad that would help our young people?”

Interviewee #1:

“Again, that's a positive, positive, plus for each and every person who's doing this. Yes, anything that will enhance, that will just get the student to use their senses visually, verbally, auditorily, you're using those mechanisms and when that comes into play you're doing your job and the child will adhere to it again. Any, not just only the children, teenager, whatever, the audience, the people, they will focus in on that, and it compounds it, it impacts it even more so.

It's like 'wow, now I understand it!' The moving, the motion figurines are speaking my language so I must speak that too, and yes, it's empowering. I think it's great!”

Author:

“Right now we are in an election year and people are arguing over politics, so here comes the big question. This is an optional question; you do not have to answer this if you do not feel comfortable. If you don’t feel comfortable answering this question just say so.

The question is should a political candidate who does not speak Diné Bizaad fluently be allowed to hold or run for political office in the Navajo Nation?”

Interviewee #1:

“I would like to answer that. I feel most (whole)-heartedly that the individual needs to run, he is there for a purpose, he is there for a reason. The individual, he is, there's a bias going on, I don't know what it is, but they just focused on that (his lack of fluency) and I don't think it should, it needs to be the individual, his accomplishments, his background, his education, that needs to be brought forth even more so. And that was just recently that this happened (enforcement of the language fluency requirement), and there's, it's a, kinda a, like a dart that was thrown in there like 'oh, we need to get, or we need to have this person not run, let's find out what we can get on him!', and I think that was the whole ordeal, for me, that's my personal opinion, and they (Navajo politicians) shouldn't have.

Gosh! More power to an individual who has attained whatever education he attained thus far, he's reached it, he accomplished it, he EARNED IT, and

he just. He will learn, he's a learning individual, he will learn, or she will learn the language.”

Author: “I definitely think a Native Diné speaker has huge advantages in learning the language over a non-Diné such as myself. A person who at least comes from a family that has grandparents and what not, they can learn really fast.”

Interviewee #1: “Absolutely, yes sir-eee!”

Author: “What is it like working here at the museum?”

Interviewee #1:

“For me, I love the job, I love the interaction with the visitors, the tourists, the folks that come in. They have inquiring minds, and they come in, and when they leave the facility they're more enhanced by what they have witnessed, what they have viewed, what they have looked at, and the exchange of information, the sharing of information, I have given that individual, that group, that person a more complete look at the area's history, the story, the information that they might have been looking for, or in need of. Their inquisitive mind was quenched by my interpretation of relaying and sharing information, and that's where I feel I have done my work, I've done my deed, I've done my job. I've informed another human person with information that fulfilled their mind, that's my goodness that I've done.”

Author: “Do you have visitors from all over America and all over the world who come here?”

Interviewee #1: “Yes, absolutely, we were just touching on, um, all the..., hold on,..real quick,.. let me grab this. We did a newspaper interview with Mr. [REDACTED], he's from the Gallup Independent newspaper .....

Author: “How much do you think the educational system has changed so far since you were younger?”

Interviewee #1:

“Okay, what we're seeing now, what's more prevalent here by our little youngsters – they're experiencing bullying, they're experiencing rage, more so than we did, that's what I hear most of from the classes, the school room, lunch room activities, PE, hall room exchanging of classes, – the negative behavior is more prevalent.

And from when we were, I'm sixty-one, and when we were in elementary school we had to stand in line, wait for the teacher, we had to hold hands, we had to respect each other's space, now they're teaching it but a lot of the youngsters don't want to be corrected, don't want to stand in line, don't want to hold hands with the next person next to them.

I think it's brought in from outside sources, from the home, from their buddy buddies, from this other negativity that they're.....they're thriving on this negativity and then it shows up in the classrooms, like I said in the lunch rooms, in line, bathroom time, whatever it may be, so I'm hearing a lot of it now which we didn't have when I was in school.

The learning and the teaching in the classroom from the faculty, from the teachers, that's still ongoing, which is great, reading writing, math, science, creativity, that's all there but morale – the spirit of the individuals, the groups, negativity is clouding their little learning performances.

Their ability to go move forth is kinda stifled by the negativity of language, of physical touch, of that energy that should not be there. So, I think we need to re-teach the parents, the community, the counselors, everyone involved with the individual – the students, wherever they may be”

## 5. A MEMBER OF THE YOUNG GENERATION

When I embarked upon this quest to understand the current state of Diné Bizaad, I felt it was important to interview Diné people from all walks of life. Of all the interviews I conducted, my interview with Interviewee #2 was one of the most painful to hear, but I believe very strongly that that the voices of the younger generation people need to be heard. Interviewee #2 was the youngest of my interviewees and I believe her words provide valuable insight into the current state of Diné Bizaad among the younger generation. According to Interviewee #2, the Diné language is “dying”. Interviewee #2 went into extensive detail about how many young Diné grow up ashamed of their heritage, in part due to the high rate of alcoholism in the region.

Author: “Can you please introduce yourself?”

Interviewee #2: “I’m [REDACTED].”

Author: “Where are you from?”

Interviewee #2: “I live in [REDACTED], New Mexico.”

Author: “Where did you go to school?”

Interviewee #2: “Gallup High, ....in Gallup.”

Author: “How old are you?”

Interviewee #2: “I am 27 years old.”

Author: “Do you speak Diné Bizaad?”

Interviewee #2: “I do not.”

Author: “Do you want to learn Diné Bizaad?”

Interviewee #2: “Yes I do.”

Author: "About how long have you been learning Diné Bizaad?"

Interviewee #2: "Um,...well,...I guess every day is a learning experience, especially in the house where I grew up. When I was younger I didn't care about learning it (Navajo), but since I've gotten older, it's actually a requirement now because of the career I've chosen to get into. I know (some) words, as in 'hello', 'bye', animals."

Author: "Do you understand better than you speak?"

Interviewee #2: "Yeah."

Author: "Do you understand old people really well?"

Interviewee #2: "It depends on the conversation....but a little here and there...yeah."

Author: "Do you want your children to speak Navajo?"

Interviewee #2: "I don't know, maybe, it's a possibility... I can't really touch bases on children cuz I don't have any children but my nieces and nephews. I would strongly recommend it, but depending on the parents....it's just depending on who their parents are."

Author: "Earlier, you said that you went to school at Gallup High, were there lots of Navajo kids at Gallup High?"

Interviewee #2: "Yes, there was."

Author: "Did very many of them speak Navajo?"

Interviewee #2: "Um, not that I know of. One of my close friends, her name is [REDACTED], she speaks really great Navajo, she's one of the first people that I've actually known to speak Navajo, especially with her parents."

Author: "Were there any others? Did they talk in Navajo at school?"

Interviewee #2:

“No,.....no,.....well,.....my friend [REDACTED], she spoke with her cousins in Navajo, so they (her cousins) knew Navajo, but me personally, I didn't know anybody else that spoke Navajo. [REDACTED] knew I spoke English and she never spoke Navajo with me, but every time she talked to her cousins.....I understood what they were talking about.”

Author: “Do you think there are very many young people in this community of [REDACTED] who still speak Navajo?”

Interviewee #2: “No, not that I know of.”

Author: “Why is it do you think that English has become the primary language of our young people?”

Interviewee #2: “Um, ....me personally,.....I don't know, but I can only tell you my feeling about it, it's like (how) when I was growing up I was basically ashamed of my people and that's one of the reasons why I didn't wanna learn Navajo.”

Author: “What are some of the really big things that cause Navajo young people to be ashamed of their heritage growing up out here?”

Interviewee #2: “Mainly probably drinking, but that's just me personally.”

Author: “They see a lot of drunk people?”

Interviewee #2: “Yeah.”

Author: “Do you think it would be accurate to say they are used to seeing drunk people every day?”

Interviewee #2:

“Yeah.....in town,.....in families, I grew up with a family. One of my uncles actually drank so much that he used to trash my grandma's house, and I have a cousin that's on the verge of just going crazy from drinking and it's sad

because he's got kids, and my uncle has a kid, and they don't think about the children.... I think they just think about themselves, it's sad.”

Author: “Do you think that if there was less drinking more Navajo young people would be proud of their heritage and wanna learn their language?”

Interviewee #2:

“Maybe, I don't know. I can't speak for everybody. Depending on who they all grow up with, depending on if they're in a Navajo-speaking family...some (young Navajo) grow up in a good family, they have Navajo-speaking parents and they just don't pick it up,...just like me. My parents spoke Navajo but I never picked it up because my step-dad was more of English-speaking and my mom tried to teach him Navajo, just didn't go very well with him.”

Author: “In your opinion, what is the current state of the Navajo language today?

Is the language dying, is it being lost?”

Interviewee #2:

“It's both of those. They're both dying, because we are more of,...of,.....speaking English now, and I never spoke Navajo, never took a Navajo class, which I should of probably taken a Navajo class, ...Navajo courses..... From what I understand now, they're doing Navajo courses in schools, but I don't know if the little ones are gonna pick it up,.....but from what I see we are losing our culture,.....and we are dying.”

Author: “Are the Navajo young people doing enough to learn Navajo?”

Interviewee #2:

“Not at my age, no, ....because,....probably because they're ashamed.... My older brother took Navajo classes but I don't know if he learned anything, but he stayed with my grandpa for a while and he picked up on it and he speaks a little here and there, but I don't think in my time they (young Navajos) are trying to pick it up, but as for me personally I'm trying to pick it up because of the career I chose, and the career I am getting into you have to speak Navajo, you have to translate it, you have to write it, and you have to speak it.”

Author: “Earlier you talked about you cheii – your grandpa. Do your grandparents speak Navajo really well?”

Interviewee #2:

“Yes they do, especially my grandpa's wife .....she doesn't speak English,.....she speaks really fluently, she doesn't speak English at all, she understands English, but she doesn't speak it, she just speaks Navajo. But she, like if I tell her 'hello grandma', she understands that, she understands a little bit.

My grandpa, he understands both (languages), he speaks both, just when he's trying to explain something he.....tries to explain so much in English then goes to Navajo. Especially for my grandma, [REDACTED], she's really fluent in Navajo, she's a medicine lady.....so she's always speaking Navajo, she does all that, but she does understand and speaks English.”

Author: “Are there lots of fluent Navajo speakers in your family?”

Interviewee #2:

“Yeah, except for my generation. My generation, there's probably about twelve of us who don't speak Navajo... My older cousin, he speaks fluent Navajo but from what I understand he's still learning, but he speaks Navajo with my grandma [REDACTED].

My older brother, he speaks, just like I said, a little, understands, writes, and translates.....but in my generation me, my younger brother, my younger siblings, they don't speak Navajo. Especially my younger siblings – my three younger siblings, they don't understand and they don't speak Navajo, but my older brother, me, and my brother after me, I think we're more understanding (of Navajo) especially me and my older brother.

My younger brother after me, I don't know if he understands but he's married to a fluent Navajo woman.....I think she's teaching him a little here and there. And my cousins, they live near my grandpa, so they probably understand what he's talking about, but I don't think they speak Navajo, I think they understand it, but I don't know. I don't live close to them. My cousin is next door, I think she's.....I don't know if she speaks it (Navajo), but I think she understands it.”

Author: “Between your mother’s generation and your generation, what is do you think that changed which resulted in your generation not speaking Diné Bizaad? Was Diné Bizaad spoken in the home?”

Interviewee #2:

“Back in the early 90s my mom spoke a lot of Navajo because she was married to a fluent Navajo speaker...but when her and her first husband got divorced, her second husband didn't speak fluent Navajo, he wasn't fluent in Navajo, he was more speaking English.

So probably in (from) 95 (1995) to now we spoke more English, that's why my younger siblings don't really understand. My younger siblings, especially my brother after me, and they don't understand, they don't speak. My younger sister is taking (a) Navajo course, I don't know if she understands it, speaks it, I don't know what her side is.

But, in my family, after my mom got married for the second time it was all English cuz my step-dad didn't know Navajo, and from then on we just spoke English, until more recently my mom, she speaks more Navajo to us now. I don't know about my cousins; I don't know anything about that (situation).”

Author: “Many young Navajos do not speak Navajo when they are with their friends, why do you think that is?”

Interviewee #2: “Cuz they don't understand. Basically just like me, either they can't understand, or they can't speak it, they're ashamed, or they don't know if their other classmates can speak or understand it. Me, personally, when I was in school, I didn't care if I was Navajo, because that was just something I grew up growing – 'I'm Navajo, so what?'.”

Author: “Recently the movie Star Wars was translated into Navajo, if more American movies were translated into the Navajo language would you watch them?”

Interviewee #2: “No.”

Author: “Why not?”

Interviewee #2: “Because I don't, I'm just used to watching English movies. It's just it would be odd to me...I would rather watch all of my movies in English. Maybe if I know more and understand more then yeah probably, but I can't picture myself watching a movie in Navajo, that's just too awkward to me I guess.”

Author: “Do you think other Navajo young people your age would watch movies in Navajo?”

Interviewee #2: “Uh, probably not.”

Author: “Earlier you said you were learning Navajo. If more Navajo language-learning resources were available, would you use them?”

Interviewee #2: “Yes, actually I'm looking into the whole Rosetta Stone program,.....because, just like I said, it's required in my career.....now they (prospective employer) want people to speak and understand Navajo, and probably write Navajo, and read Navajo.”

Author: “Do you listen to the radio in Navajo?”

Interviewee #2: “I do not listen to the radio in Navajo, my mom does. Right now, I don't know if you can hear the music, the guy talking, but I don't (listen to the radio in Navajo).....but I do listen to peyote music.”

Author: “Here comes the big one. You can choose whether or not to answer this question. If you feel uncomfortable, answering this question simply say so and we will skip the question. In your opinion, should a political candidate who does not speak Diné Bizaad be allowed to run for political office?”

Interviewee #2: “I don't know,.....um,.....I can't answer that question because I'm not into politics. If they're gonna get into politics, it's politics. It's just like how we vote for a President – we don't got a say in it, because it's politics, and if the person won't speak Navajo they won't speak Navajo, I really can't say anything about it because I don't.”

Author: “Do you keep track of Navajo Nation politics?”

Interviewee #2:

“I do not, that’s one of the things I stay out of, especially for the U.S. politics, that’s not where I wanna be. If you were to ask me that when I was eighteen, (or) nineteen, (in) Government class, I would have been like ‘okay, this is how it looks like it’s gonna go, but I’m not that age anymore. I’m 27. It’s been almost ten years since I’ve been asked political questions, so I stay away from that.”

Author:

“Recently the Navajo Nation was having elections to determine who would be the next Navajo Nation President. One of the front runners, Christopher Deschene claimed that he was a fluent speaker but he was later disqualified when it was shown that he was not a fluent speaker and a lot of Diné people are arguing over that right now. Do you think it was fair for him to be disqualified?”

Interviewee #2:

“I don’t know, it’s just like I said, it’s just like the U.S. government – we don’t have a say in our votes. Well, that’s just from what I understand. We don’t have no say in our votes. Our votes are probably just one percent (of the American population),....but if they have a problem with it they should say,...I mean,....say that. It’s just,.....it’s,....I,....I don’t know, ....I can’t,....I can’t answer that question.”

## 6. A MOTHER

My interview with Interviewee #3 offers insight into what a school district in New Mexico is doing to incorporate Diné Bizaad into its curriculum. The school district has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Navajo Nation that Diné Bizaad will be incorporated into mandated curriculum, however, it is unclear whether or not the district has lived up to this Memorandum of Understanding. It appears to me that maintaining the vitality of Diné Bizaad is definitely a topic of concern to Diné parents whose children attend school in the district; however, I sadly have doubts about whether or not Diné classes currently taught in the district are extensive enough to produce fluent speakers. According to Interviewee #2, Diné Bizaad is alive and well: “I would say without a doubt it (Diné Bizaad) is alive and well, and I say alive and well because it is written, we have books written in our language, some of us still speak, and it's recorded, it's even on Rosetta Stone.”

Author: “Can you take a moment to introduce yourself?”

Interviewee #3:

“Hello. I am [REDACTED]. I am 50 years old. I am full blood Navajo, and I am the product of two Navajo. My parents are both full blood Navajo also, and they did not receive any formal form of education, where as I attended boarding school. I'm a boarding school child, all the way from beginner through high school, I was in boarding school all those years. And currently I have two daughters and one who is a freshman in high school that I represent. I represent the [REDACTED], and then my thirteen-year-old, she's in seventh grade, she's in middle school here in the city of [REDACTED]. Currently I am an [REDACTED] member [REDACTED] member with [REDACTED] School District. And I believe in adding to this project because language preservation I truly value. I am fluent in Navajo. I speak Navajo, I would say...real well. I can converse with anyone who speaks and understands Navajo at pretty much any age

level, and I'm working on medical terminology in Navajo, so it's in the health field, and I do my best as a parent to talk to my children in Navajo – mostly phrases. And, one of my children, it's interesting to me, she was told 'you are fluent in Navajo' by a Navajo language/culture teacher, and I looked at her and I said 'I wouldn't consider you fluent in Navajo' but she says 'yes, this teacher says I'm fluent in Navajo' and then she added 'even though I say I am strong in understanding the Navajo language, because I understand the Navajo language pretty well that qualifies me as fluent, ....so yeah, .....okay,....that's alright!'

That was new to me because it's, if that's another definition of fluency then so be it. So regardless of my personal interpretation of fluency.”

Author: “You said you were working with medical terminology?”

Interviewee #3: “Yes. I would like to better understand the names of human body parts in Navajo, external and internal; I know most of the major terms but not like 'cell'. Our Navajo word for 'cell' has changed from what it has been and, even though I say I'm fluent in Navajo, I forget what the terms are, so things along that rout, yes.”

Author: “What would you say is the current state of the Diné language right now?

Is the language dying or is it alive and well?”

Interviewee #3:

“I would say, without a doubt, it is alive and well. I say 'alive and well' because it is written, we have books written in our language, and some of us still speak the language, and it's recorded – it's even on Rosetta Stone, so there's no way to say it is dead. Now, I would say 'it's dead' if, um, if there were only a handful of people who actually spoke the language and were fluent and then it wasn't recorded in any form then I would say 'yes, there is that risk of our language dying', but I take it upon myself to teach it to my children also. And I'll ask them 'tell me something about over there, just anything over there' and they have to tell me anything they see –color, arrangement, and then just anything about that makes me happy. I don't expect for my children to carry on a conversation about the whole arrangement over there with me”

Author: “What advice would you give to other Diné people, for example Diné parents, ordinary Diné people with children, what are the things they can do to help preserve their language in the home?”

Interviewee #3:

“The parent, or whoever is the guardian, has to realize that he or she has to take it upon themselves and be consistent, weather it just be words – such thing as Navajo Word of the Day, or in what they're doing. In the morning, when we're getting ready, I say to my girls (a phrase) and I'll say to them 'okay, who got that?', 'is it singular or plural?', and they'll say 'plural because you're talking to both of us', and then sometimes I'll say (a phrase) and then I'll ask them 'come, singular or plural?' You're talking to just one of us'. So (a phrase) phrases like that. I'll usually do this (\*snapping fingers\*) to que with my girls 'okay, I want feedback' and then one of them or both of them will pipe up 'you're telling one of us to.....I'm not sure who.....but to brush our hair'. (\*a Navajo phrase\*) Just simple phrases and getting ready, or I'll call from the kitchen and they're in the bedroom or bathroom getting ready in the morning and I'll say (\*a Navajo phrase\*) and then they'll come. Just simple phrases, sometimes it's just a word or phrases throughout the day, or I'll tell them .....we're in a car .....we're traveling somewhere ..... I'll say 'okay bird TV girls tell me something about what you see out there' and then if they see horses grazing along the road they'll say (\*a phrase\*). Sometimes we make it a game like 'I spy' .....(\*a Navajo word\*), or 'I spy (\*a Navajo word\*) --the objective there is 'what is the Navajo name of that animal?', and then 'is it singular?', 'is there only one horse?', or two of any of the animals, and then if there's only one it's supposed to be (a phrase) or if there's more than two (\*a Navajo phrase\*) of (\*a Navajo phrase\*).”

Author: “Do you listen to the radio in Diné Bizaad?”

Interviewee #3:

“Oh yes! Every day I have that dial set to KGAK, which is here in Gallup, and then on the reservation I have it set to KTNN, and my girls listen to it so they know not to change. I'll ask them 'okay, what just got said on the radio?' or just 'what do you think is being talked about in Navajo?' whether it be an add or somebody talking on the radio, or even the DJ mentioning something. They're pretty good. I guess one is fluent.”

Author: “This next question is a little bit of a difficult question, you have a choice on whether or not to answer it. If you feel uncomfortable, you can simply skip this question. This question relates to politics of course. The question is should a political candidate be allowed to run for office if they do not speak Diné Bizaad?”

Interviewee #3:

“I believe the candidates should run for office because, um, what if this is the candidate we as Navajos desire because the educational background of this individual, the willingness of this individual to serve as our leader, and whatever qualifications, if those are there then I'm willing to overlook the fluency requirement if he or she truly feels that he or she can offer of him or herself to his or her people then that is great and because, along the way, this person will feel inclined to learn the language because he or she will realize 'hey, my audience out there, a lot of them are un-schooled and they understand better in Navajo.

This person could have an interpreter also, start out with one and then go in Navajo, where he or she can, but if he or she should struggle with needing interpretation then the person could do that. There are ways to work through it and that's key. Work with where you lack.

So, I believe what's going on with our current state of electing a Navajo President..... it's just.....it's unbelievable! And I'm surprised, as people – Diné, all that we say our values are, who we are, that we're, we're having to struggle – make it more of a struggle than it should be. It just, it just, it disappoints me.”

Author: “Do you feel that the [REDACTED] School District is doing enough to preserve and promote Diné Bizaad in the classrooms?”

Interviewee #3:

“Yes! I am grateful there is that memorandum of agreement between the Navajo Nation Department of Education and JUM, that translates into [REDACTED] School District schools and as I'm becoming aware of it, it's certain Principals who are, ...whatever their personal reasons are,...I understand it can be daunting because the content of it is probably immense and how, enforcing it if you will, how is that going to be? How will that be?

Because they're thinking ahead, they're thinking of the wholeness of it, and for some reasons it's not clicking for them. I'm sure that is an issue and if it

isn't the Principal having to wrestle with this issue, it's teachers, as I heard earlier during our meeting from [REDACTED] is teachers who just feel overwhelmed because there are those state requirements that have to be met in teaching our children, especially the Common Core which is courtesy of the government. But, I do believe (the) [REDACTED] School District is doing what it can with what it has, in the time allowed, and as finances allow for, and there's people who have the background finding those people – the resources, I believe they are doing what they can and will continue to. Yes, and the Navajo Nation I commend because they are adamant about keeping – getting this program visible and to keep it working.”

Author: “As we mentioned before, the Navajo Nation currently has radio stations and, more recently, there have been efforts to translate American movies into the Navajo language, such as Star Wars and Finding Nemo. If movies in the Navajo language became more popular, do you think you and your family would watch them?”

Interviewee #3:

“Oh yes, yes! For the entertainment value and then the language. I would enjoy listening to it because, for 'how would I have said it?', or 'would I say the same?', or how much does it take from delivering a dialogue in Navajo, how much does it take from the previous – the original film when it's in English. Does it take from it? Does it enhance it? What does it do to it? Is it more funny? How much does it give to it? So, I would watch it, with my children of course.”

Author: “Do you think there is possibly a marketing niche a Diné Bizaad television station one day?”

Interviewee #3: “Oh yes, yes. Why there isn't one today with all this emphasis on preserving our language .....politicians in Window Rock. Yes. They need to put that into fruition – being a reality.”

## 7. AN EDUCATOR

Interviewee#4 is an educator for the [REDACTED] School District in New Mexico. The school district is headquartered in a “border town” near the reservations boundary. This interview provides valuable insights into the failure of this particular school district to adequately promote Diné Bizaad. Sadly, the opinions expressed by Interviewee #4 do not bode well in regards to the future of Diné Bizaad in the school district.

Author: “Can you please take a few minutes to introduce yourself?”

Interviewee #4: “My name is [REDACTED]. I am a married mother of three. I am currently a [REDACTED] for [REDACTED] School District. I have been in the education field for over twelve years for elementary-age children.”

Author: “Do you speak Navajo?”

Interviewee #4:

“I’m a moderate Diné speaker. English was my first language. I was raised off the reservation. I can understand it (Diné) but cannot fluently speak it. Now I am trying to learn conversational Navajo. It is hard though, but since moving from Flagstaff and spending three years in Kayenta helped me develop my Diné because there was more use of the language. Older groups, especially when it was (conversation) in reference to students, the teachers relied on ‘code’ language to keep confidentiality when referring to students. My co-workers (are) over the age of thirty. The younger generation of workers, I’ve noticed co-workers in the twenties could not speak and their understanding was limited.”

Author: “Do students ever talk to each other in Navajo?”

Interviewee #4:

“Nope, I haven’t noticed that trend ever, not even when I went to school. Diné has been slowly phasing out for almost three decades. I think the 90s were the last few years I noticed peers conversations (in Diné Bizaad), however, funny thought, I know it isn’t completely gone because recently we had a problem here at the school where a teacher had a rowdy parent during parent-teacher conference.

She (the teacher) was explaining the situation to a co-worker in Navajo. The kids parent said this, and this is a naughty kid, etc.. Well, two girls cornered

the boy whose parents attacked the teacher, telling him he got the teacher in trouble, they basically beat him down to get vengeance for the teacher.

Well, he ended up bringing his parents in to complain that the teacher was complaining about him in front of the class. The teacher explained (later) that all this discussion was not in front of the class, instead it was in the hall and in Navajo, still they got the teacher in trouble, ...these were second-graders.

The two girls do come from a small house living with their grandma, (so) they apparently speak (Diné Bizaad) with grandma.”

Author: “Did your parents speak Navajo?”

Interviewee #4: “Yes, both of my parents did.”

Author: “My next question relates to a very sensitive political issue. You can choose to answer this or not. If you don’t feel comfortable, say you’d rather not answer. In your opinion, should a political candidate who does not speak Diné Bizaad fluently be allowed to run for political office?”

Interviewee #4:

“I think they should be able to, or amend the law soon. If the law is sustained, then in the future who can be elected? I believe that they should be able to because in the past it was a requirement to be able to converse and adequately represent the older demographic, but as they are dying and English is the primary language spoken at home, it stands to reason that they should be able to represent our culture in Western society.

The primary qualification should be in leadership and education, not on linguistics. Inevitably, they will have to amend the law or have a basic standards test, but our language has different dialects depending on where you’re from, so there is no standard from which accuracy can be judged.

So in the end, I believe it should not be a requirement more over more rules should be applied in areas that can be judged like education, experience, and leadership experience. I think that rule was brought out to disqualify one candidate who had exemplary qualifications otherwise.

Many other Diné council delegates were able to slip through the cracks and their Diné language familiarity was not challenged. There is a Council Delegate who is in office who cannot speak a lick of Navajo, he actually has an interpreter, he is half White.“

Author: “What would you say is the current state of the Navajo language? Is the language dying, or is it alive and well?”

Interviewee #4:

“I honestly have to believe it is dying. I work with elementary students and almost ninety percent of them don’t know the language (and) ninety percent of them don’t know their clans.

We teach culture and language, but not early or well enough for students to develop basic conversational Navajo speaking skills. What they do is a snapshot in their day and with skewed family priorities that don’t support Navajo language building there is no way for it to compete with popular culture.”

Author: “What can we do to fix this?”

Interviewee #4: “Not make it die. Well, get rid of all satellite television. Ban all Black movies.”

Author: “Is the Farmington Unified School District doing enough to preserve and promote Navajo in the classroom?”

Interviewee #4: “Well, I don’t think any school district is. They are caught up on meeting state curriculum standards, that’s the focal point of their daily lives. They just sprinkle in a little bit of culture, and with the diversity of their class population, they can’t spend a lot of time on any one culture.”

Author: “Do you think there is any possibility the [REDACTED] School District might one day choose to utilize Navajo immersion in the classroom?”

Interviewee #4: “Nope, it’s not realistic. The thinking is that our children need to express themselves in a language that they eventually will be able to successfully sustain employment to be contributing members of society. That is English. They have to master it enough to be able to communicate in the job market. Again, that’s English.”

Author: "Do you listen to the radio in Navajo?"

Interviewee #4: "I do, sometimes, but not a lot."

Author: "What is your favorite station?"

Interviewee #4: "Well, I use internet radio for Kiss FM in Phoenix".

Author: "Recently, the movies Star Wars and Finding Nemo have been translated into Navajo. If movies in the Navajo language became more popular, do you think that you and your family would watch them?"

Interviewee #4: "Hell yeah. We watched Finding Nemo! That was too funny in Navajo. There were kids there who seemed to understand what was said. I think that medium of translation helps gain interest in the young ones."

Author: "What advice would you give to other Navajo people, for example Navajo parents, what are the things they can do to preserve their language?"

Interviewee #4:

"Pass on as many simple phrases to your children to attempt to honor your elders so that our language never dies. Visit your parents or grandparents and learn as much as you can from those living resources as possible, and attempt to record or save these discussions for your family memorabilia. Our history has always been oral but we should drive to capture as many moments as we can."

Author: "Thank you for the interview."

## 8. A NATIVE PIONEER

The subject of my final interview is a distinguished pioneer in the field of Diné Bizaad preservation and revitalization who played a role in having the first big-budget American movie translated and re-dubbed in Diné Bizaad. The concept of popular American movies translated into Diné Bizaad is a very exciting one, because it opens the door to many possibilities in the future. Every Friday night, the movie theater in Gallup, New Mexico is packed with Diné of all ages who come to see the newest American movies, but until recently, none of these movies were translated into Diné Bizaad. The translation of the movie Star Wars into Diné Bizaad has signaled the beginning of an era for movies in Diné Bizaad.

Author: “What would you say is the current state of the Diné Bizaad language? Is the language dying or is it alive and well?”

Interviewee #5:

“I always describe Navajo language as being at a tipping point right now, and by that I mean I think it's on the verge of one or the other, and ya know, of it being lost or it um continuing and actually growing to where there's no question that it's gonna survive in the future.

I don't know if I'm being optimistic in saying that I feel it's definitely gonna survive, but I think there's plenty of things that need to be done to insure that it survives. There's enough people speaking, it's been documented enough that all we need is to show Navajo language some attention and it will survive.”

Author: “Are the young people today doing enough to learn their language?”

Interviewee #5:

“Well, are the young people doing enough today to make sure the language survives? I think, that's putting some responsibility on young people, for sure, yes, and all of us, not just young people we need to have some sort of

sense of responsibility to our language to make sure it survives, but I don't think it's necessarily, there's a lot of things going on and I think it started with my generation, and by that I mean, um, I'm not a fluent speaker and both of my parents speak Navajo, and I grew up here on the Rez, but the thing about it is that probably half or more of my friends that I grew up with around here, um, they're in the same boat, ya know, we just grew up not speaking Navajo.

I think the main thing that's at the core of that reason, it comes from a time when my parents were made to feel that Navajo language was not important and made to feel that, um, to succeed you had to speak English well, and ya know, unfortunately there's a little bit of truth to that one, and so um but that came at the price of not learning Navajo or Navajo not being spoken to me, so but I definitely don't hold that against my parents at all, that's coming from a different source. So when you ask, are kids doing enough today to speak Navajo, um, it's it's, I think there's a lot more deeper issues that we need to confront so that our kids feel some responsibility to speak Navajo. I wouldn't even say it's responsibility, do things that make kids want to speak Navajo.”

Author: “Do you think that pride is a part of that, like in promoting Native pride and sense of self?”

Interviewee #5:

“Absolutely, yes, without a question, having some sorts of pride in your language is very important to learn language. It's been my observation, and these are just my observations only, not academic research, but I've observed other tribes that have very little speakers left in their language and their young people are trying their best to preserve that and they're very proud of their language and they're very proud of their amount of their language that they've learned.

So ya know, I want that level of pride to be in our own Navajo youth..... so there's a sense of pride that needs to help get the momentum going, but at some level it just needs to be a natural form of communication for Navajo people again just like it was, ya know, I would say around 1940 and prior. It was just a natural form of communication for Navajo people, it needs to be at that level again.”

Author: “What can ordinary Diné people do to preserve their language today?”

Interviewee #5:

“You're asking these really simple questions but I think there's deeper things going on. I'll use myself as an example, and I feel that people probably people in my generation feel the same way, it's that there's an enormous pressure, um, about making a mistake when speaking Navajo.

Now, when I am around Navajo speakers I can comprehend 50% if not more of what they're saying but when they talk to me I always answer back in English, and that's because of that pressure of me making a mistake, and there is, to be honest, there is that ridicule by Navajo speakers, some Navajo speakers not all, of like when you talk Navajo it's just like you get ridiculed or you're reprimanded for speaking wrong so I think there's some of that going on.

So, um, the reason that as an example is because, um, I learned Spanish in college and when I speak Spanish, ya know, everybody's, well not everybody's, Spanish speakers they seem to be, um ..... appreciative that I'm speaking Spanish to them. And I've traveled into Mexico a few times, and when I use my Spanish with the Mexican people, ya know, you get a sense that they understand you're trying to connect with them. Now, when I'm trying to talk Navajo to Navajo people, um, ya know, sometimes.....maybe it's just all on me, maybe it's internal, but I don't think so.

I think there's a little bit of.....uh..... being very strict when talking Navajo. So when you're asking, going back to your original question, there's deeper issues going on than just wanting to talk Navajo, there's getting over, it's the pride issue, there's ....um... there's the parents and them being forbidden to speak Navajo, and then also them comprehending that for our children to be successful they needed to speak English well, and then there's the subconscious thing or conscious thing of wanting to talk Navajo correctly to other Navajos.

There's a lot going on, it's not that simple.”

Author: “I myself have experienced that same ridicule when trying to say something and being corrected, for example when I talk to an older person, such as my girlfriends' grandma, and I try to say something in Navajo, often she'll correct me. She'll say 'oh, no, you don't say it like that, you say it like this.’”

Interviewee #5:

“I think that's great and to be corrected to learn, that's good, but to be corrected and then to add a little bit of belittlement on top of that, ya know... So, I think it's really interesting how the tables have probably turned, ya

know, and by that I mean let's take a situation from the early 1960s, where a Navajo kid, or even the 1970s, where a Navajo kid was made fun of because they spoke Navajo well and then when they talked English their English was made fun of, and now how today it's flip-flopped.

So, it's like now I'm being made fun of because I can't speak Navajo well, ya know, by Navajo speakers. It's nothing I'm holding against anybody, I don't wanna put it out there like 'it's us against them', I think that's very detrimental. I think ultimately our language needs to be made available and to all that that want to learn it, and that's what will insure its survival.”

Author: “My next question is related to a very sensitive political issue. You can choose whether or not to answer this or not. If you don't feel comfortable with this, say you'd rather not answer. In your opinion, should a political candidate be allowed to run for office if they do not speak Diné Bizaad fluently?”

Interviewee #5:

“Now, my answer to that is ..... if it weren't a requirement and the people voted for that person, if a majority of the people voted and that person won, then that's politics, that's politics, ya know. So, ya know, the person you want to win in politics doesn't always win, in life basically!

When you're playing, when you enter into the realm of a winner and a loser, everybody doesn't win, that's a basic concept, so if this person entered and he or she won, and I think we all know who we're talking about, than that's how it goes, and I don't understand why, on one hand or the other, people won't let this person run.

Now, that being said, what if, let's take for an example, Johnny Depp, Johnny Depp wants to run for Navajo Nation President! Ya know. And then people will be like 'but he's not Navajo', but if that's all the people voted for Johnny Depp and Johnny Depp won, then they need to understand that that's how that works to, so..... it's, it's, it's a complicated issue but if the Navajo people choose their leader that's a basic right when it comes to politics.”

Author: “Earlier, one political candidate was made fun of in some social circles because he was saying in Navajo “I will work for you!” but it came out as something entirely different, he ended up saying “I will crawl” or “spy for you”, do you feel he deserves to be made fun of for that?”

Interviewee #5:

“I've totally been in that situation where I've said something and then people be like 'no, you're saying something else', or I've seen somebody say something, and I don't know they're not saying that, it has to come from a very fluent Navajo speaker who says 'she said this!', and, ya know, it sounds really funny and silly like 'she's hopping around for you', so it comes out really funny, so of course it's gonna be funny, ya feel sorry but on a basic level of comedy it's funny.

How could you not laugh? I'm not laughing at this person who's trying to learn Navajo, I'm laughing because what they said sounded funny. So, if it's being laughed at in a mean-spirited fashion then of course not, that's not funny, but if you're just laughing because of the way they said it, it sounded funny then it's funny.”

Author: “Do you believe I'd be correct to say that Navajo people love to laugh?”

Interviewee #5: “Yeah, you'd definitely be correct that Navajo people will love to laugh and experience things, culturally – from a cultural perspective, but who doesn't? What human race doesn't like to laugh? But it does seem like Navajos get a kick out of a lot of things.”

Author: “You recently played a big role in getting the major movie Star Wars translated into Navajo, can you tell me what that was like?”

Interviewee #5:

“It was a dream come true, and every day since I wonder if I'm dreaming or not. It was a huge thing that happened ... many people helped to create its success. The first person I definitely credit is my wife, [REDACTED]..., and it just stems from conversations of how do we get people learning Navajo, and one of the ideas that came forward was doing a movie in Navajo, then that eventually lead to another discussion.....Star Wars.

And that discussion and that attempt to get it made has been going on for over ten years, til finally somebody from Lucas Films responded to one of the requests. Ya know, one thing lead to another and now we have a DVD, but it's a lot of people that helped make it happen – a lot of organizations, a lot of Navajo tribal government groups that helped make it happen, a lot of private Hollywood industries that helped make it happen, then the Navajo people, ya know.”

Author: “About how many requests did you have to send to Lucas Films?”

Interviewee #4: “About ten years worth of requesting.”

Author: “What steps did you go through to get the movie translated? Did you encounter difficulty? How did you finance your project?”

Interviewee #5:

“So financing the project, that came from [REDACTED]..... they're one of the groups that helped, the Navajo Nation government groups, that helped make it happen, so I always kinda throw that in there because as much bashing our Navajo Nation takes from the Navajo people, they kinda really give it to the Navajo government.

That's an example of doing something good that will outlive me. That movie will be around long after I'm gone, so that has an impact on Navajo culture. So, Navajo Parks and Rec helped pay for it, the Hollywood groups, Lucas Films, Fox, they donated the rights to get this movie done, so there's a lot of help coming from a lot of different areas.”

Author: “If another tribe, decides to translate movies into their language, what steps do you think they should follow?”

Interviewee #5:

“Well, first of all, to do it legally, and I highly encourage you to do it legally, is you've got to get the permission from the, you know, whoever made the movie, so you need their permission first, and then there sometimes may or may not be a cost associated with that, then you get ahold of the script, and you sit down with, depending on how good your translators are, you may need one, you may need two, you may need five, so depending on how good your translators are, then you go that route, then you ... hold some auditions, and the movie studios are usually the ones that will choose who gets to be the voice of whoever, but on your end you go through all the auditions and with fluent Navajo speakers.

We used Navajo translators on our side and they would just go all the way through and just rank how a person did in terms of their fluency and then all the ones that were in the top group then they get forwarded on to the movie studios, then the movie studios get to say 'I like this person for this voice', 'I like this person for that voice', and then it's, um, it's about three to six weeks of recording and then they get mixed into the movie and depending if you're gonna have a screening in a theater or it's just gonna come out on DVD, then

that's what happens. I've simplified it greatly, but it's very complicated, it's more complicated than that.”

Author: “Was it difficult finding voice actors of all ages to perform the dialogue, in particular I'm asking was it difficult to find young people to perform dialogue?”

Interviewee #5:

“Well, if you're talking about Navajo Star Wars, there's not much, or Navajo Star Wars Episode 4 dubbed in Navajo, that's the official title of it, a lot of people around here call it Navajo Star Wars..... there's no kids in there, but we're working on Finding Nemo right now and there's a lot of kids in there. For Finding Nemo, we had over a hundred auditions, out of that I think eight were kids, and we need way more than eight kids, ya know, and of the eight only one was fluent, so .....BUT at least the kids who tried out, if you coached them they spoke, so that's good, because I think you as a non-Navajo know even the pronunciation of Navajo is very difficult, with the glottals, and high tones, and nasal tones, so it's a complex language but on top of that it's difficult for people who didn't grow up around here to kinda get the tongue for it.

So, but that was the good part, was that every one of them including a little four-year-old kid, five-year-old kid, like when you said 'say this', 'say that', 'say this', it's like this kid just repeated it right off the bat, ya know, so we're not sunk yet, we're still in a good position to help all these kids speak Navajo, and when I say 'these kids', I'm including myself with them cuz that's one of my life-long dreams to speak Navajo fluently.”

Author: “Yes, I definitely agree it's definitely easier for a Navajo to learn Navajo than a non-Navajo, like I think even a person who doesn't speak Navajo fluently such as Christopher Deschene, I think that he has a huge advantage in learning the language compared to a non-Navajo.”

Interviewee #5: “Johnny Depp!”

Author: “Exactly! I think that's the precise reason why it was used as a military code during World War II, cuz it's so hard for a foreigner to learn. Was it difficult adding Native voices to the movie while preserving the sound effects in the background?”

Interviewee #5:

“No, because we had professionals working with us, we had a group called [REDACTED] and they dubbed hundreds, probably, of languages to all different movies, so they know how to do it. And when you make a movie, the voice track and then the music and effects track, they're usually separate. So that part, they knew what they were doing, so that part wasn't difficult. We didn't do that, we, all we did was find the talent and help record the voices, and then they put the movie together.”

Author: “What is it like working in a sound studio?”

Interviewee #5:

“It's intense, it's intense work. Um, for Star Wars, I think Star Wars was two weeks, it was like two weeks of twelve-hour days, ya know, and that was probably six-day work weeks if not one week where we worked seven days. So, it was a lot of hard work, it's interesting, it's an environment that I've never been a part of, so, but it's cool. I mean, once the talent comes in, whoever, the voice of whoever comes in, ya know, they start acting out their lines, then you can just start to see the movie just evolve right there in front of your eyes.”

Author: “Was it made on the Rez, or was it made in a studio off the Rez?”

Interviewee #5: “It was made in, most of it was made in Gallup, New Mexico. I would say ninety-five percent of it was recorded in Gallup, New Mexico, and then some of it – the bits and parts that didn't happen here they were done in Burbank, California.”

Author: “Wow, that's really awesome.”

Interviewee #5: “Yeah, that's the part that really proved to me that it's do-able, it's a reality, not just with Star Wars, but we can do any movie.... that we can do any movie in Navajo. I'd love to see more tribes wanting in on this process, and there have been some tribes, tribes that have approached me asking how we did it and to advise them.”

Author: “Do you think that in the future, we could see possibly a future where there are hundreds of American movies translated into Navajo?”

Interviewee #5: “Yeah, that's my vision of the future.”

Author: “What advice would you give to people from other tribes who are thinking of translating movies into their tribal languages?”

Interviewee #5:

“I would say hurry up and do it because there's a lot of benefits to be had by it, and number one – you're making an attempt to save your language which saves your culture.

Number two – you're saying to your tribe that you believe in saving the language so much you're going to actually put forth some funding to pay for it, and then number 3 – you're saying to all your young people 'okay, this is something for you guys now' .....those are just three examples.

Those are just three examples, there's, ya know, a lot of examples of why to do something like this.”

Author: “So when you go about contacting a Producer, how do you do it?”

Interviewee #5:

“Now that's the hard part, that's the hard part, because I was knocking on Lucas Film's door for ten years. You've gotta contact someone at the studio, and that's the hard part, like where do you begin?

Ya know, there's hundreds if not thousands of people that work there.....that's the part where we finally got an opportunity and the opportunity paid off for us. We moved on the opportunity and it paid off for us.”

Author: “Did you contact several film makers at the same time to see who would reply first?”

Interviewee #5: “No, it was just Star Wars, and I mean I'm not a fanatic about Star Wars, I think I've become a fan now since working on the project, but initially, I just thought that was the right movie for a lot of reasons. There was a movie that a five-year-old kid could watch with his fifty-five-year-old grandfather, and they would both like the movie.”

Author: “Do you think the other parts of the trilogy will be translated into Navajo also?”

Interviewee #5: "I would say chances are good of that happening, but there's no official word yet."

Author: "So basically, the movies you're interested in translating are family-oriented children type movies?"

Interviewee #5: "No, I'm interested in every type of movie that's out there to be put into Navajo."

Author: "Awesome! Well, that completes all of my questions, I can't think of any more."

Interviewee #5: "Okay, cool. Thanks for the interview and, um, if you ever see a Navajo movie out there go see it....they'll be more,.....and I hope other tribes make movies in their languages as well."

## 9. RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING NAVAJO

During the course of my thesis, I embarked on a mission to study Diné Bizaad for myself. My goal was to determine what resources and learning opportunities exist for people wishing to learn Diné Bizaad. I first began learning Diné Bizaad from a textbook entitled *Conversational Navajo Workbook: An Introductory Course for non-Native Speakers* by Garth A. Wilson (Wilson, 1995). I recommend *Conversational Navajo Workbook* to anyone who does not have prior experience with Diné Bizaad pronunciation. *Conversational Navajo Workbook* comes with two cassette tapes and is very affordable. Correct pronunciation is critical when speaking Diné Bizaad, and *Conversational Navajo Workbook* focuses on this. At the time of this writing, *Conversational Navajo Workbook* can be purchased online from Barnes & Noble for \$36.45.

I am fortunate in that I have had the opportunity to live and work with Diné people who spoke Diné Bizaad regularly. I learned a lot of Diné Bizaad words and phrases from hearing them spoken by Diné friends, family, and co-workers. Sometimes, Diné people speak to each other in a broken combination of Diné Bizaad and English; this provides a valuable learning opportunity for an English speaker learning Diné Bizaad. When surrounded by fluent Diné Bizaad speakers, such as elders, who sometimes speak entirely in Diné Bizaad, learning Diné Bizaad may appear daunting, but do not allow yourself to feel intimidated, instead view it as an opportunity. Even if you cannot understand the words of fluent speakers, listening in on their conversations is a great learning tool. Listening to the radio in Diné Bizaad is an excellent learning tool.

Radio is an extremely powerful tool for learning Diné Bizaad. Popular Diné Bizaad radio stations include KTNN, KNDN, and KGAK. Both KTNN and KNDN are available online, which means that anyone with a decent internet connection can listen to the radio in Diné Bizaad from anywhere in the world! For years, I listened to KTNN every day as I was driving to and from work. As a result of hearing Diné Bizaad conversations regularly and listening to the radio every day, I ended up with many Diné Bizaad words stored inside my subconscious mind with no knowledge of their meaning. It was not until I acquired *Diné Bizaad: Speak, Read, Write Navajo* by Irvy W. Goosen that I began to discover the meanings behind many of the words and faculty of the language in my head. (Goosen, 1995).

*Diné Bizaad: Speak, Read, Write Navajo* is a great program for learning to construct sentences in Diné Bizaad. Prior to acquiring *Diné Bizaad*, I knew many Diné Bizaad words but did not know how to use them in a sentence. *Diné Bizaad* is an excellent resource, but I do not recommend it to any beginning learner until they have first mastered correct pronunciation. *Diné Bizaad* is very in-depth and includes six compact disks. It is important to note that the textbook and compact disk packet are sold separately from each other. At the time of this writing, the textbook and compact disk packet can be purchased online from Salina Bookshelf for \$60 and \$65 each.

My most expensive acquisition in regards to Diné Bizaad learning resources was the Navajo edition of *Rosetta Stone*. *Rosetta Stone* received a great deal of fanfare when it first released its Diné Bizaad edition, so I was very anxious to determine for myself if

the fanfare was deserved (Bittenger, 2010). When you purchase *Rosetta Stone*, you receive a computer program and a headset which plugs into the computer. *Rosetta Stone* teaches using pictures, so that the learner associates words and phrases with a picture, in much the same way that humans naturally learn language.

The headset enables you to practice speaking words and phrases. If you speak incorrectly, the computer program will tell you to try again until you get it right. *Rosetta Stone* is without a doubt the most advanced language learning resource available for Diné Bizaad, and it is also expensive. At the time of this writing, the Diné Bizaad edition of *Rosetta Stone* can be purchased online from Salina Bookshelf for \$200. Is the *Rosetta Stone* program worth \$200? My answer is yes. Sadly, the high price of *Rosetta Stone* places it well beyond what most Diné young people can afford.

Language-learning programs such as *Conversational Navajo Workbook*, *Diné Bizaad: Speak, Read, Write Navajo*, and *Rosetta Stone* are all powerful learning tools, but no language program will turn you into a fluent speaker by itself. To become a fluent Diné Bizaad speaker, you must practice speaking and interacting with fluent speakers. The best place to find fluent Diné Bizaad speakers is on the reservation. If you are a Diné young person who is learning Diné Bizaad, my advice to you is visit your elders and spend quality time with them. The reservation is filled with lonely and neglected elders who need love. I personally know of several young people who learned Diné Bizaad by living with their elders. If you are shy about spending time with your elders, then I advise you to slap yourself! Life is short, so cherish your elders while they are still here.

During the course of this writing, I undertook a seven-hundred mile drive to practice speaking Diné Bizaad. Upon arrival at my destination in the Navajo Nation, I visited with friends and got to spend time talking to them in Diné Bizaad. One of the friends I visited is a Diné elder who speaks fluently. Although I am not a fluent Diné Bizaad speaker, I was able to practice speaking some of the Diné Bizaad I do know.

In my personal experience, Diné elders are always happy to meet a young person who is learning their language. Often, when a younger person speaks in Diné Bizaad, an elder will correct them by saying the word or phrase back to them, and some young people get their feelings hurt by this. My advice to a person learning Diné Bizaad is that if you are speaking Diné Bizaad to an elder and they correct you, do not take it personal, they are simply trying to help you learn.

One good place to encounter fluent Diné Bizaad speakers in person, and to hear Diné Bizaad spoken, is at the local Chapter House. The Navajo Nation is divided into Chapters and each Chapter has its own Chapter House where community meetings and events are regularly held. In today's modern world of rampant addiction to computers, cellphones, and Facebook, we humans no longer practice healthy interaction with each other. To learn Diné Bizaad, it is imperative that you overcome any social anxiety you may have and begin talking to people face-to-face, even if they are strangers. To learn Diné Bizaad, you must step outside your comfort zone and learn how to talk face-to-face with other humans.

For people who enjoy text messaging or social media networks such as Facebook, there is the new app created by Native Innovation Inc. which enables you to text and

write in Diné Bizaad. Diné Bizaad can be used for text messaging and writing on social media, but I strongly believe there is greater value in face-to-face communication. It is very important to note that many fluent Diné, especially elders, are not literate in Diné Bizaad, for this reason, I feel there is no substitute for face-to-face interaction. Many Diné elders are confused by modern technology and might not even know what Facebook is.

Living in the modern world, many Diné often find themselves forced to live hundreds or even thousands of miles from their homeland. Employment, military service, and attending university are just a few of the factors that often result in young Diné leaving their homeland. For young Diné who have left their homeland, access to a fluent Diné Bizaad speaker may be difficult to come by, but there is still hope. Communication via telephone or Skype are two methods that can be used to practice speaking Diné Bizaad if you live in a geographic location far from the Diné homeland.

In undertaking this writing, my goal was to determine what resources and learning opportunities exist for people wishing to learn Diné Bizaad. During the course of my research, I came across three different language-learning programs which are all effective and which I highly recommend. The existence of language-learning programs means that almost anyone can begin learning Diné Bizaad, regardless of their current location. Numerous opportunities exist for language-learners to hear Diné Bizaad spoken and I have explained how doing so is as simple as turning on the radio, either in your vehicle, or over the internet.

The Diné Nation has been blessed with a strong population of precious elders who speak Diné Bizaad as their first language. To any young Diné reading this chapter, I suggest you cherish your elders and visit them often. Sadly, many of the elders are becoming old and passing away. The future of the Diné Bizaad currently rests in the hands of those young Diné who possess the courage, desire, and determination to learn it.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Each of the interviews conducted were unique, with each interviewee coming from a unique background, and their opinions reflected this. Interviewee #1 was the oldest of the interviewees, at sixty-one years of age, he was a fluent Diné Bizaad speaker, and this likely played a role in shaping his opinion that Diné Bizaad is “alive and well”. At fifty years of age, Interviewee #3 was a little bit younger than Interviewee #1, but was also a Diné Bizaad speaker with the opinion that “without a doubt, it (Diné Bizaad) is alive and well”. As the interviewees got younger in age, a trend emerged. Younger interviewees were less likely than their older counterparts to be fluent Diné Bizaad speakers.

Interviewee #5 described Diné Bizaad as being as a “at a tipping point right now”, meaning that it could either die or survive depending upon the actions and decisions of Diné people, but he also stated he was “optimistic”, expressing his opinion that “there's enough people speaking, it's been documented enough that all we need is to show Navajo language some attention and it will survive”. Interviewee #2 and Interviewee #4 were the youngest of the interviewees, and their pessimistic opinions were a reflection of this. As a person who cares very deeply about the future of the Diné nation, people, and language, I found the words of Interviewee #2 and Interviewee #4 to be soul crushing in their pessimism, but their opinions are valid and highly relevant. It is my hope that Diné people who read this thesis will feel motivated to fight for their language rather than embracing pessimistic gloom and doom predictions. The words of Interviewee #5, Interviewee #1, and Interviewee #3 prove there is still hope for Diné Bizaad, but the time to act is now.

Balter and Grossman were correct when they wrote, “Navajo language and culture are facing extinction” (Balter & Grossman, 20). The information collected during the course of my interviews seems confirm the assertion made by Peterson that Diné Bizaad radio stations primarily cadre to older people, because young people are far less likely to speak Diné Bizaad (Peterson, 2016). *In Tuning in to Navajo*, Peterson mentioned the fact that multiple dialects of Diné Bizaad exist, and Interviewee #4 raised this issue when she said, “Our language has different dialects depending on where you’re from, so there is no standard from which accuracy can be judged”. The existence of multiple dialects within Diné Bizaad reflects the fact that geographically Diné Bikeyah is a very large country. For Diné Bizaad to continue its natural evolution as a living, modern language, it must first be spoken and written in a modern setting, only then can the issue of dialectal diversity to be resolved. If Diné Bizaad is not allowed to evolve by being spoken in facets of modern life such as business, commerce, politics, entertainment, administration, then the language will die.

In *Prospect for the Survival of the Navajo Language: A Reconsideration*, Spolsky wrote, “In the case of Navajo, it is the ideological base that appears to have been seriously weakened by external forces”, this is definitely true, and the time has come for Diné people reclaim their ideological base. Diné author Evangeline Parsons Yazzie once said, “The white man’s language is contagious.” (Iverson, 6621). The real question faced by advocates of Diné Bizaad today is how to make Diné Bizaad contagious. The translation of American movies into Diné Bizaad has opened a vast new frontier for Diné Bizaad cinema making Diné Bizaad contagious in ways that most people never previously

imagined. Even the deeply pessimistic Interviewee #4 found herself contagioned by the Diné Bizaad translation of *Finding Nemo*.

This thesis' research confirms those of older writings, however, there are differences. Notably, other writings are older and thus reflect a time when the decimation of Diné Bizaad was not yet as severe among young Diné as it is today. To put it simply, things have gotten much worse since previous writings were published, but there have also been positive recent developments, notably the advent of Diné Bizaad cinema discussed by Interviewee #5. Diné people must not allow themselves to fall into the bottomless pit of gloom and doom pessimism as anything is possible, even a catching a movie in Dine Bizaad.

Based upon my research, and what I have personally seen, I must conclude that Diné Bizaad is alive and well among the older generations; however, not enough is being done to pass the language on to the younger generation. Many elders and older-generation Diné still speak Diné Bizaad fluently, and hearing it spoken is as easy as turning on the radio, but true fluency must be promoted among the younger generations or Diné Bizaad, will be lost completely. Hope is not lost, but for Diné Bizaad to survive, the Diné people and their tribal government must act immediately, because it is their future at stake. The most effective way in which the tribal government can preserve Diné Bizaad is through the establishment of immersion schools.

Diné Bizaad is a vital and inseparable aspect of Diné culture, if it is lost, then so too will be the ability to say prayers, sing sacred songs, and perform sacred ceremonies. With-

out their language, the Diné people will no longer be linguistically distinct from their foreign colonizers, and further loss of culture will be accelerated, culminating in complete cultural extinction of the Diné people.

The Navajo Nation tribal government exists for the preservation and promotion of Diné culture. It is only logical that the tribal government should take action to preserve Diné Bizaad. In the words of former Navajo Nation President Peterson Zah, “It is priority of the Navajo Nation President and a dream of the Navajo Division of Diné Education to someday take control of their own education. It is the mission of the Division of Education to assure that all Navajo people have the opportunity to be educated, and to be able to carry on the work of building the Navajo Nation. Navajo young people need to be proud that they are Navajo and hold respect for the heritage, land, and people to which they belong. They need to be able to build strength from their culture, language, and history, and have faith in their own potential” (Begay 121-139)(Todacheeny 29). Diné Bizaad belongs to the Diné people, and it is they who will decide if it survives. It is my belief that the coming years will witness amazing new developments which will play a major role in shaping the future of Diné Bizaad.

Simply taking a Diné Bizaad language class at school is not enough to create a fluent speaker in and of itself. Many schools offer Diné Bizaad language classes, but language classes cannot, by themselves, produce fluent speakers. Speaking Diné Bizaad in the home and in daily life is a much more powerful tool for achieving fluency than simply taking a class.

I must conclude that the colonial school system bears the bulk of responsibility for the decimation of Diné Bizaad, but parents must also accept responsibility for what goes on at home. Survival of Diné Bizaad is closely tied to the health and stability of Diné families. Any disruption of a family unit, whether it be alcoholism, divorce, abuse, domestic violence, or abandonment has profound consequences for language learning and cultural continuity.

According to linguist Joshua Fishman it is crucial that parents and young children be involved in the language revitalization process. Fishman's position is reiterated by John Reyhner and Edward Tennant, stating: "the intergenerational transmission of native languages in the home is the key to native-language survival. To the extent that there is a genetic predisposition to language, which may well include personal or cultural traits (shyness, for example), this predisposition can be strengthened both pre- and post-natally, primarily by the mother talking and singing often to the child in the native language, by exposing the child pre- and post-natally to frequent conversations held with others in the native language, and by participating as often as possible in community gatherings where the child can experience ethnic activities" (Reyhner & Tennant, 1995).

Parents who speak Diné Bizaad fluently bear the cultural responsibility of passing the language on to their children. Simply sending one's children to school and assuming that the school will teach them their language or culture is unrealistic and misguided. For the language to survive as a living language, it must be spoken in the home by parents and their children.

To preserve the Diné Bizaad, three things are required. 1) Diné parents must make a point of speaking only in Diné Bizaad whenever they are with their children and family members. 2) Parents must increase pressure on school district administrators to create Diné Bizaad immersion schools where Diné students will have the opportunity to learn entirely in their own language. 3) The Navajo Nation tribal government, educators, and ordinary Diné people must work to make Diné Bizaad contagious.

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