Looking from *Niłtsą bi' áád*: A Diné Perspective of Disability and Ontologies of Being

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Abstract

This work is rooted in a collection of narratives which give shape to a Diné perspective of disability. Utilizing Diné ancestral stories, land-based knowledge and personal narrative, I examine the relational nature of disability as a distinct *way of being*— an identity grounded in the principles of belonging, wellbeing, relationship and accountability. Engaging in Diné philosophy and oral histories of Diné peoples, this work advances the principles of care that emerge in the lifeways of *k'é* (positive relationships), *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) and the Diné concept of beauty. In upholding these principles as the foundation of accountability in Diné communities, this work argues for shifts in relational practices which impact approaches to disability policy and legal remedy. In advancing these narratives against the widespread structures of systemic ableism, the call to remake relational practices rooted in care and accountability emerge from the margins of many intersecting stories.

This work is dedicated to disability justice by promoting a deeper understanding of *belonging, inherent rights, and sovereignty* rather than the discourse of mere 'inclusion'. Tending to the inherent value of relational learning based on Diné intellectual traditions, I argue Diné narratives carry powerful teachings to influence wider understandings of 'disability'.

Dedication

For Tifa

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Part I: Beginnings

Chapter One: Introduction—*Níłtsą́ bi'áád* and Ontologies of Being

Shí ié Sandra Yellowhorse-Kapeli yínishíí. Kinyaa'aani nishłí adóó Bílligáana báshíchiin. Tachiinii dashichei adóó Kin'lichní dashináli. Nani'zhoozhí di shi'dizhchį́. Tāmaki Makaurau Aotearoa déé naasha. Kót'éego amá nishłi.

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Narratives: Articulations of *Being*

Our lives are built from story, and all stories impart meaning. This work is a culmination of stories, which I frame as *narratives.* There are philosophical narratives, personal narratives, legal and political narratives, and larger social narratives that influence how we construct an understanding of 'disability'. As a powerful force, narratives cradle the experiences, beliefs, values and perceptions that collide, blur, and influence one another. These narratives shape the spaces peoples with disabilities navigate through. Some narratives operate as counter-narratives and reshape the world in profound ways.

This work is grounded in my narrative, as a Diné mother who has journeyed beside my child who is on the Autism Spectrum. I bring together narratives of Diné people found in ancestral teachings and knowledge encased in Diné Educational Pedagogy, a distinct pedagogy of Diné learning based on land and non-human relations. I place these narratives in conversation with the wider canon of social and political narratives of disability to articulate a Diné perspective of 'disability'. Our ancestral narratives regarding 'disability' are cultivated by story. I use 'disability', and later, 'peoples with disabilities', as a placeholder in the context of Diné voice—my voice. The single quotation marks signal that I am speaking about what is socially understood as 'disability'. However, this term 'disability' from a Diné context may not equally translate how disability is commonly understood in the wider social discourse. The current language of disability is often understood as an identity formation that marks 'difference' of an individual person or frames certain legal criteria based on medical descriptions of

'impairment'. As I show throughout this work, Diné conceptualizations of 'disability' are relational and quite different from how we encounter the idea in typical disability discourse.

This distinct positionality moves me to examine the network of narratives that impact the cultural and socio-political spheres of peoples with disabilities. These spheres are underpinned by narratives that carry power to both enrich and marginalize. I speak from a place of intimacy, from my own experience as a Diné mother who has navigated these systems and pushed through and against the systemic marginalization my child experiences. I highlight the spaces of possibility that open points of departure for reimagining futures for my child and other Indigenous children with disabilities. I bring both our on-going struggle and moments of liberation into conversation with my own experience of learning about Diné philosophy and how it has transformed my own *being* in the world.

I engage Diné knowledge systems both to make sense of the disparities that have facilitated the systemic oppression of peoples with disabilities, and to generate possibilities predicated on Diné teachings. My purpose is to show that Diné knowledge produces different ways of thinking about diverse *ways of being.* Through this thinking, Diné knowledge creates systems of relationships, accountability, and support. These systems can give shape to the socio-political approaches for meeting the needs of those with disabilities. Indeed, this work moves beyond the discourse of *only* meeting needs. It aspires to cultivate the lives of peoples of disabilities. Part of this work is challenging the over-arching ways that disability is spoken about and reworking the knowledge production that shapes it. This in turn shifts social narratives regarding society's relationships to disability. More specifically, I consider how this narrative shift can influence education, policy, and law.

Diné perspectives articulate how Diné experience the world and how they make sense of that experience—*an ontology of being*. Ontology includes how Diné people develop and foster the values that sustain their greatest aspirations to live in beauty. A cornerstone philosophy of Diné people is to *Walk in Beauty* (Aroniłth, 1985). Such a *way of being* produces a counter-narrative that illuminates other ways of conceptualising 'disability' that are oriented by the principles of beauty, balance, harmony, relationship, and accountability. It is through story and narrative that we can reconceptualize other *ways of being* that carry with them a transformative power that extends beyond the individual subject to impact wider structures in society.

Beginnings and Níltsą Bi'áád

The day my daughter was born, there was *Níltsą bi'áád*, female rain. Female rain is gentle, steady and symphonic. And although it is gentle and calm, it carries its own remarkable power and gifts. These gifts are life sustaining and part of the Diné principle of *tó íina éi*, water is life. Water in the literal sense, is fundamental for life. However, in Diné thinking it has spiritual elements and values of being predicated on reciprocity. From this perspective, water and life can be understood through their multiple connections and relationships with (and impacts on) countless things, people, and places (Yazzie & Baldy, 2018). Water represents and embodies more than just it's Western reductive definition of a liquid that covers 71% of the Earth (The Water Science School, 2019).

Figure 1.1 Níltsą bi'áád, Gilmore Scott, (n.d.), Diné

In Diné epistemology, not only is water precious and sacred, but it has personhood and demonstrates dimensions of being that exist outside Western ontology. Water has character, such as the distinction of 'female rain'. Water is more than just water just as *Níltsą bi'áád***,** is more than just rain. One could say that the way I came to know my daughter was influenced from my understanding of *Níltsą bi'áád.* She embodies more than how Western thinking would know her. Just like the rain, she brought me to knowledge, and I came to know her through a set of values in the way I see as a Diné person. My daughter was blessed to be born into female rain and in acknowledgement of this blessing, I named her after the rain that day.

Figure 1.2 Female and Main Rain, Gilmore Scott, (n.d), Diné

Diné stories narrate multiple realities of embodiment and *being*. The stories of things we know are stories of multiple ways of being known. The world we came to know in the years that followed her birth were chaotic and difficult. They attempted to force us into a world of singularity predicated on worldviews that did not always match our own. It was a world with a prevailing view of disability that held only the experience of struggle, burden and survival. Through it all, I still looked back on teachings of the rain. I hold dear the lessons of *Níłtsą bi'áád.*

Diné philosophy gave me the knowledge to make meaning of my life, to know who I am and how I can live. Because of this, my daughter and female rain are related and are teachers. They both showed me how to know other realities. They both showed me a different way of knowing, and a new understanding *of being* in the world. However, this understanding *of being* collided with the world in which we have negotiated and maneuvered the last 10 years. The world of disability.

When my daughter was 3 years old, after a long series of assessments and interviews with a slew of medical professionals and educators, she was diagnosed as a child on the Autism

Spectrum. I remember thumbing through reports that quantified her behavior and engagement. All of the language used to describe her was read through 'normative' medical speculation backed by 'evidence-based' practices and research methods of assessment that presumed complete knowability. The reports that followed presented an analysis of behavior that alleged authority to represent her thoughts, her voice, and her meaning-making in the world. Every movement and gesture were recorded, analyzed and compared to a scale. These diagrams and scales measured with assured resolution a fixed representation of who my child was, and what she was capable of. More importantly, it focused on the many things she was presumed 'incapable' of.

In this world of reports and assessment, I learned to rely on them for visibility and access to services. Otherwise, we were left without resources or accommodations for my daughter's needs. We were brought into a world of singularity, where one prevailing understanding of disability dominated law, educational policy, and the widespread social attitudes towards those with Autism. It is a world predicated on Western scientific practices of knowing. It was a world underwritten with narratives that had power to create systems that cultivate life but also the power to deny resources to thrive. To have legal protections we had to become recognizable to this schema.

The absorption into this deficit model held the reward of survival above our heads. If we complied with this vision of knowing, this compartmentalization of personhood and *being*, we would be rewarded with the resources necessary to make life liveable. We would get legal status for inclusion in educational apparatuses. We would receive funding for speech and occupational therapy through social services. We would also be eligible for additional support and parent-training services. We required recognition under the rubrics of diagnosis, and we went through the hardships of those processes in order to be given help and a piece of paper that would advocate for some social understanding. We were locked within a system that disciplined our compliance in order to give us what I felt we already inherently deserved: compassion, understanding and support. The world that my daughter was placed in didn't see her through the lens through which I saw her. She was more than the narratives imposed on her. She was more than the scales which weighed her abilities. She was more than the rubrics that presumed to recognize who she was and who she would become.

She is sacred and complex, just like the rain.

Figure 1.3 Female Rain, Gilmore Scott (n.d)., Diné

Figure 1.4 Tifa Rain, Diné

Her life and subsequently my life, produces ontologies of their own. Our precious ontologies pave a way for us to live well and pursue what Diné call *Sa ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH), the Pathway to Beauty or the Corn Pollen Path to Old Age (Aronilth, 1985).

The Concept of Beauty and SNBH

This work begins and ends with the story of *beauty*. The story of beauty is one of origins and purpose. Its origins are our Diné ancestral threads that weave new possibilities for the present. These are the ancestral teachings that speak life into the concept of beauty and ground it in every aspect of Diné culture. The philosophical concept of beauty is not just an idea. It is a life way—*a way of being*— and a powerful mechanism encapsulated in *Diné ontology*—the nature of existing and *being* in the world drawn from a Diné lens.

The next few sections introduce Diné key concepts that I engage with throughout this work. The first is the concept of *Sa ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH)[1], which I introduce as the 'The Pathway to Beauty' to give the reader a conceptual sense of this complex term. However, the work of explaining this term extends throughout the work. I often use the term 'beauty' or "Beauty Way' to relate to this concept of SNBH. Beauty emerges from the epistemic framework of *Sa ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH), sometimes translated to generally mean The Pathway to Beauty or The Corn Pollen Path to Old Age (Lee, 2014). SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty)[2] is part of the aspiration to live in a way that supports the achievement of *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) in one's life and community. It is important to understand that the concept of beauty is not equivalent to Western notions of aesthetic. Beauty is not referring to appearance, but rather a process and state *of being* in which we live and are aware. This awareness includes understanding our values as they play out in our lives. Some describe this as *being in a good way*: acknowledging that hardship does exist, and that to know peace and love, we also have to know hardship and challenges (Jim, 2022e). Being in a good way is fostering this awareness of reality.

SNBH relates to another concept prevalent in this work, *hozhó*. Diné educator and scholar Vincent Werito (2014) describes the principle of *hozhó*, as part of "a deeper, humble belief that I am part of a larger and more complex spiritual and natural world…advocating for self and others in the spirit of peace and justice…having hope, faith, respect, and reverence for life" (pp. 34–35). *Hozhó* is about contributing to the wellbeing and harmony of ourselves and our communities through kindness, reciprocity, care, accountability, and love. SNBH (The

[1] This term is considered a sacred term, and Diné do not use it lightly (Lee, 2015). In fact, we are taught not to say it too many times and without care for the implications of what it means to say it. Therefore, it is abbreviated throughout this paper.

Pathway to Beauty) and *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) share a relationship. They contribute to what I see as a process, a journey, and a *way of being*—a space of continual possibility, aspiration and growth. They are known and made known through one another. They are relational concepts.

Sa ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón (SNBH)is not easily translated in English and there are wide understandings of what this phrase means (Lee, 2014). Because of this, numerous Diné scholars often taken a subjective approach to describing what SNBH means and how they write about it in academic spaces. I use the general understanding of 'The Pathway to Beauty' to talk about SNBH in this study for ease of writing. Several Diné scholars such as Lloyd Lee (2014) argue that there is not a concrete meaning of SNBH. SNBH will mean different things to different people. This is evidenced by writings such as *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought,* an anthology edited by Dr. Lloyd Lee, and *The Diné Reader: An Anthology of Navajo Literature,* in which narratives, stories and interviews share how each Diné person makes meaning of Diné concepts, including SNBH. This specific body of literature is foundational to this work. Diné scholarship regarding SNBH and the life experiences of Diné people grounds my theoretical and methodological approaches to unraveling SNBH in conversation with 'disability'.

The spectrum of meanings regarding SNBH and *hozhó* denoted by Diné scholars are part of the wider range of Diné perspectives. It is important to note that there is no one, singular Diné perspective (Lee, 2014). My offering of a Diné perspective about disability only accounts for my voice and interpretation of the collective work I engage in. It is not the complete representation of Diné knowledge or people. The use of Diné literature gives shape to a general understanding of how SNBH is conceptualized by Diné people. According to Diné scholar Lloyd Lee (2014), "one meaning of SNBH in the English translation is long life and happiness. SNBH represents a foundational principle embodied in the way Diné peoples live their lives." (p. 5). SNBH is also a sacred term which embodies the teachings that were passed on to Diné people from the *Diyiin Dine'é* (The Holy People). Teachings of *hozhó* and SNBH inform the social protocols, laws, and spiritual knowledge that Diné follow in order to pursue a life of "wellness, happiness and quality" (Lee, 2014, p. 5). Diné leader and poet Rex Lee Jim refers to SNBH as "the beauty of life realized through application of teachings", or ancestral wisdom (as cited in Lee, 2014, p. 7). Similarly, Diné educator Vincent Werito (2014) refers to SNBH

as a "lifelong journey striving to live a long and harmonious life" (p. 26). I see SNBH as a journey, an aspiration, and an active pursuit towards achieving *hozhó.*

Hozhó (harmonious outcomes) is what I conceptualize as a state of beauty. It is both an action and a way *of being* that is connected to SNBH. To be *hozhó* is to be continually aspiring to the teachings and values found within our stories and knowledge systems. In relation to disability, I view *hozhó* as also being free to be who we are, and to be free to receive the blessings of happiness and completeness. This way of existing in the world is made manifest through a system of relationship. The relationship is realized through numerous and overlapping spheres: relationship with ourselves, the natural world, our thoughts and aspirations, our past, our origins, and our relationships with one another. Having balanced relationships in all aspects of our lives contributes to a system that makes possible a good life of peace, balance, and self-understanding (Aroniłth, 1985). *Hozhó* is a state *of being*, and also the lens through which to achieve wholeness in one's life. From self-understanding comes the safety and support to explore who we are, what values guide our lives and how our perceptions influence our interaction with the world. *Hozhó* emerges from a process of relationality which speaks to the system of wholeness. *I* see *hozhó* as a method to guide our lives to understand how we are part of a greater whole.

SNBH is grounded in ancestral teachings and realized through our individual life journeys (Werito, 2014). I understand SNBH as inherently part of every Diné person's life. Every person has the potential for SNBH. The aspiration for SNBH has a genealogy passed down in our ancestral teachings and carries a way forward cultivated in Diné knowledge. Some Diné people may not realize or know what SNBH is, but this doesn't change that our ancestors placed these aspirations of beauty in our worldviews and entrenched them in our lifeways grounded in the natural world, our language, songs and stories. These systems of relationship and relational ways of knowing form the basis for this work through narrative, story and experience.

Ours is a story of beauty and the pursuit to live in beauty. Through the years, I have sought to understand what beauty meant for my child. What does it mean for us to follow the pursuits of SNBH, The Pathway to Beauty? The story of beauty as expressed in our lives, unravelled my understanding of the countless relationships that either built our lives up or hindered us from our aspirations to live well. I understand beauty as both a journey and a way *of being*. It is both the point of reference (our ancestral wisdom and values) and the movement (our responsible actions) created through experience and knowledge. Beauty is the thread that binds the desires

of imagining of a good life through the realities of our histories and human experience of *being* in the world. This relational nature of existing underpins my framing of 'disability'. I conceptualize 'disability' based on my understanding of Diné knowledge, within the larger context of aspiring to Walk in Beauty as a Diné person.

Completeness

Another key Diné concept I return to throughout this work is the concept of completeness. The idea of completeness is an important aspect found in teachings of SNBH, The Pathway to Beauty (Denny, 2022b). This sense of completeness is a framework for human flourishing. Human flourishing is understood as the journey for Diné to achieve wholeness in their lives through the pursuit of *hozhó.* Wholeness and completeness are continually discussed throughout this work, and there are many parts to it. There isn't a simple explanation to define the profound meaning of *wholeness*. The 'completeness' I aspire towards is focused specifically on the aspect of accountability based on the principles of *relationships.* To be complete is to consider the many elements that make us whole. Therefore, I argue that relational principles embodied through reciprocity, good relations, responsible actions, accountability, and care are the foundation to socio-political approaches for supporting peoples with disabilities. I see the potential of SNBH in sustaining these values as a system of completeness vital in understanding Diné practices of caretaking.

This sense of completeness in disability discourse includes questions that explore wider societies' knowledge production, social discussions and education regarding disability. Exploring the tensions between the idea of completeness and wider society's current understandings of disabilities illuminates the different principles that underpin both of them. The questions that compelled my interest in the importance of Diné perspectives in disability discourse were: What are the principles currently at play in the structures that govern systems of care for peoples with disabilities? Are they relational and accountable? Or are they based on survivalist practices? Is wholeness only considered in terms of ableist constructions which are deficit-oriented, or mind/body-focused? I found that these marginalizing principles created marginalizing structures and institutions where people had to fight to be included and recognized. Such a system is an unequal power relation. This study conveyed an ontology of relationship which 'goes both ways' and is inherently oriented towards harmonious outcomes.

Relationships: Part of a Greater Whole

K'é is the fourth key concept of this work. When I speak of relationships and relationality, I am speaking of a specific understanding of relationships. I use the Diné practice of *k'é*, which sometimes translates to "positive relationships" (L. Lee, 2020). *K'é* is often described as a relational mechanism that manifests through clans or kinship networks (Ashley, 2015). There are also other definitions that uphold *k'é* as a lifeway. According to Beeshłigai (2021b) "*K'é* is an all-encompassing word for the Diné way of life…that involves everything in life from language to spirituality to love…it recognizes relations are part of life…you have to have relationships in order to exist" (p. 31). *K'é* is integral to wider understandings of what it means to live and exist and it is formalized into Diné governing bodies. According to Title VII of the Navajo Nation Government, "*K'é* is a word, yet a symbolic tool, *k'é bił naazt'i'go*, or the fundamental guiding force, nature, and principle of integrity and loyalty to all laws and Diné love, kindness, and life ways. *K'é* is a law providing security, continuance, and balance of unity and harmony for Diné life wellbeing" (Navajo Nation Courts, n.d.). *K'é* as lifeway is a principle of how to relate and be accountable in sustaining beauty, love, and unity with all our relations. This is an *ontology of being* that posits that relationships already exist, and we need them to survive and know ourselves. These relationships are filled with the values that perpetuate a life of *hozhó*.

K'é differs from the Western approach of conceptualizing relationships. Often relationships in Western constructs of education or social justice are discussed in the context of 'relationship-building' or mandating relationships and accountability through policy. Diné leader and scholar Moroni Benally identifies this difference stating that Western ontology "builds or creates relations; [whereas] Diné acknowledge and recognize relations that always and already exist" (personal communication, November 19, 2021). With this in mind, our task as people is first to know there is already a relationship. To recognize those relationships inherently sets the conditions for accountability, care, respect, love and reciprocity towards those relationships. Those conditions aren't something that are acknowledged because of a diagnosis, or paperwork that pleads for needs, or based on available funding and resources. Those conditions aren't based on a categorical way of knowing—in systems of devaluation that see people only through their 'limits', traits, and expressions. Inherent relationships as a lifeway reframes the starting point of how we collectively rebuild structures based on the belief that we all have relationships

we are born with and that they come with inherent demands for accountability. This is a lifeway. This is an *ontology of being*.

The intervention Diné epistemology can offer the wider discourse of disability is that relational *ways of being* honor the knowledge that *all* people already have relationships that they were born with. Yet we are living with a set of conditions and structures that work in opposition to this worldview. People with disabilities are constantly fighting for their visibility, rights and humanity (McBride, 2020). We are living and fighting within a system built on unequal, hierarchal power relations predicated on the survivalist gaze. Elders, children, peoples with disabilities, racialized and incarcerated, along with everyone else who continues to be marginalized through this system are left to build a relationship with the structure that devalues their lives. Strengthening the value of relationality as a foundational starting point for rethinking disability, and how it in turn reshapes power structures, is a tenet of this work. I explore the value of relationality throughout this work by upholding ancestral stories and advocating for the socio-political practice of *k'é* (positive relationships) grounded in Diné knowledge systems and life.

Transforming disability through a relational lens and orientation—includes radically shifting our political and social institutions, as well as society's knowledge production within the spectrum of disability discourse. The process of ontologically transforming disability includes privileging narratives that have been widely excluded in the construction of the structures that serve peoples with disabilities. Transformation starts with placing marginalized voices front and center of our movements. Disability scholar Alison Kafer (2013) pushes us to view "disability as political/relational" (p. 7) by understanding how "disabled people act in politics and engage in world building" (Hamraie, 2021, 21:41) to effect other ways of doing, being and knowing. Additionally, Indigenous peoples also need to articulate what these systems mean from their own perspectives and within their own contexts to avoid the homogenizing forces of knowing and doing. Completeness in this sense is more than recognizing Diné ontology in services that are supposed to serve us. This representation matters, but the context in which it emerges also matters. Diné practices of relationships challenge set power relations to transform systems rather than merely diversify them. The political understanding and enactment of relationships and care must resist the pull into structures of harm under ambitions of diversification. Such an absorption by way of inclusion is decontextualized from wider of Diné life.

Similarly, *k'é* is a distinct, cultural lifeway of relating and care based on Diné values. *K'é* can resonate with the current dialogue surrounding "politics of care". According to Bartos (2012) as "a political concept, care brings attention to interdependences, connections and relationships that are essential to our individual and collective survival" (p. 157). I have seen the terminology of politics of care used in social discourse in ways that fail to call for the restructuring of the worlds we are rebuilding. They become implanted buzz words that operate as a checkmark of inclusion without systemically shifting power relations and building movements towards the reconstruction of systems. We must move beyond efforts to conscientize and create awareness (although important), while breaking down structures and rebuilding them anew. Marginalized voices must be at the fore of reimaging structures that contribute to the concept of completeness—predicated on our terms. Such a system operates with the intentions to create thriving life, not diversifying perspectives to include rhetoric of relationship without the structural change it demands. A main argument throughout this work is that relations are powerful and they can change structures.

The relationality that a person has with structures of power is premised on the social relations between people who create those structures. People matter. As scholar Shay-Akil McLean (2021) reminds us "when we speak of structures, systems and institutions, we are still speaking of people—collectively organized in a way that is based on a particular set of rules and relations" (37:02). These relations to violent and marginalizing apparatuses aren't the only relations peoples with disabilities have. This is an example of the incompleteness that occupies the world because there are other relationships, and therefore, other rules and principles that can give shape to the wider concepts of wholeness predicated on relational practices. These possibilities carry with them values and principles that uphold the rubrics of care that provide for living well in more complete ways beyond mere survival. People can change structures and our understanding of relationships should enact change.

Throughout this work, I move through six categories that convey the concept of completeness on a structural level.

- There is *social completeness*— belonging beyond inclusion; having a place to *be,* valuing the gifts, talents, perspectives, needs and preferences of others; widening worldviews and customs that shape systems and structures; awareness of the lifeways of non-human relatives; and having opportunities to be nurtured in our environments and thrive.

- There is *political completeness*— respect of one's inherent sovereignty; having access to sustain the things that support social completeness, legal remedy, inherent rights, consent, accountability, and representation; and protections of our lands and waters. Political completeness is also structural change, and rebuilding towards just futures.
- There is *cultural completeness*— to have access to our culture, to live in our cultural identities and according to our value systems; to have our culture be accounted for and the basis of how we engage in the systems that serve us; to use the tools of our ancestors and the innovation of our peoples to live a beautiful life, and to define what these all mean on *our terms through our own lens.*
- There is *spiritual completeness*— resources and supports for people to be who they truly are; the right for people to cultivate their journey based on their connections and growing relationships; honoring the unique experiences of others and acknowledging the diversity of mind, body and spirit; taking care of our world and nurturing our inner selves.
- Then there is *individual completeness*— having needs met; opportunities to recognize and choose one's own pathways based on their interests and aspirations; time to play, explore, create and rest; and to live in beauty.
- Finally, on a larger scale is *community completeness*— the culmination of communities working towards all of these aspects. It is a sense of collective solidarity, movement building and support frameworks for caretaking.

If we can work on the narratives and movements that foster these approaches towards completeness that are based on relational ways of knowing and doing, we have a starting point for imagining human flourishing beyond just having one's needs met. We have a starting point for remaking structures and rethinking how our lens impacts the systems we engage in.

Some people may say that such an orientation is purely aspirational and fanciful in its pursuits. This belief serves to preserve and support the current system. Stories are the evidence that what is deemed 'aspirational' can exist and has existed. Diné knowledge sharer Lorenzo Jim identifies Diné "traditional" knowledge, as "proven, time-honored…established and ancestral" (Jim, 2022e, personal communication). Ancestral knowledge has worked for our communities since time immemorial. There is a place for it in the context of our lives now, because relationships never ceased. Relationships are still there whether we recognize them or not. The narratives implanted from colonialism and assimilation devalues relationship as an inherent

system already within the world. Relationship within Western constructs conceptualizes connections as something to create or build if we want. This mindset can change. Relationships will always exist beyond us. The holistic scope of relationships and these layers of completeness are accounted for in Diné ancestral teachings and through story where the natural world, humans and the non-human live and are known in relational ways.

Blessing Way Stories

The Diné stories I share in this work are considered Blessing Way Stories. They are stories that carry the values and teachings of how to live in SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty). The ancestral teachings formed by the *Diyiin Diné* (The Holy People) encase these values Diné hold dear. Diné stories sustain this holistic concept of completeness. Blessing Way stories are just one particular set of stories and there are many other types of stories for different purposes. However, Blessing Way stories are the key mechanism for sustaining the lessons of SNBH and pursuing *hozhó*. They teach morals and values that form the heart of Diné epistemology (Aroniłth, 1985).

A key feature of Diné stories, particularly Blessing Way stories, is that SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty) teaches us to realize relationships exist everywhere. These relationships are taught in the context of the natural world and through land-based education, such as Diné Educational Pedagogy. I have heard this pedagogy called many different things by different people—one resonating description is "Earth-thinking" pedagogy (Jim, 2022e). According to Diné scholars Farina King (2018) and Tammy Yonnie (2016), these connections to Diné thinking and land are made known through Diné storytelling where the lifeways oriented towards the teachings of SNBH are embedded in references to the natural world. Land operates like a 'compass'. This compass is multi-layered and dimensional and gives orientation to understanding the world of relationality encased in the natural world.

In most stories, you will see the references anchored in our traditional territories to the four sacred mountains that outline the boundaries of *Nihi kéyah* (homelands), the cardinal directions, the colors that are associated with directions, the phases of the day, the phases of growth and learning and many more (Aroniłth, 1985; Klopfenstein, 2021a; Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007). This pedagogy and orientation already presume an infinite set of connections and relationality to understand what it means to think of *completeness*—the many pieces that contribute to a whole. We are constantly surrounded by the teachings of completeness in our

natural environments and through our knowledge of them and their distinct *ways of being*. Because of this orientation, the blessings and lessons of completeness are available to us all, and we are all immersed in this concept through the very act of living.

This concept of completeness encompasses two key principles. The first principle is that individuals are always understood in relation to the community and environment. This relational way of knowing is a Diné *ontology of being*. It is to know and be known through relationship. Through relationship we can understand ourselves, our values, our place in the world, the scope of our relations, our impacts on them, and our purpose. These principles shape inherent accountability to all land and life. This understanding restores the foundational belief that relationships exist everywhere in the world. Many Indigenous knowledge systems operate from a relational ontology that fosters reciprocity and care (Cajete, 2015; Wildcat et al., 2014). I understand this principle of inherent relationality as *coming to know*, as this foundation of both Diné Educational Pedagogy and *k'é.* Jim (2022e) refers to *k'é* as "relationships, connections, collaborations and reliance" (personal communication). This extends beyond social relations to think about our broader relations to the natural world which we depend on for survival.

The second principle that relates to completeness, is that SNBH sustains how the completeness of one's life impacts the wholeness of a community. This is crucial to understanding my call to shift disability from solely an individual deficit-oriented issue to a collective understanding of care. Yet, it is important that we don't ignore the reality of need or impairment of peoples. Critiques of the social models of disability focus on the reality that need and impairment, and that they should not be ignored nor treated as needs don't carry an impact on the lives of people with disabilities (Hamraie, 2021). I am not advocating that we don't acknowledge impairment, or real-life struggles that impact the day to day living of people with disabilities. I am arguing that we can still acknowledge need and support while upholding relational principles. Diné stories show us how to do that. There is a relationship between diverse *ways of being* and the wider community. When we caretake each individual, we are building a strong community and to build a strong community, we must account for each person. Such mutual interdependency is called upon by proponents of the disability justice movement (Hamraie, 2021) and resonates with aspects of Diné lifeways. It is vital to present other ways of viewing disability beyond identity formations or functionalist bio-medical conditions. Diné knowledge can guide an understanding focused on a relational *way of being*, ingrained in principles of interdependence

and reciprocity. Such a shift conveys that cyclic systems of care produce cyclic systems of belonging and support.

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy

This work is based on a story I heard several years ago, the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. This story is considered a Blessing Way story—a story that encases the values of Diné life. Over the years, I have asked countless relatives and elders about their knowledge of traditional Diné stories of 'disability'. The responses have varied and more often than not, people did not know any. I wondered, would 'disability' even mean the same thing in our Diné cultural views? Surely there had to be a story that could reflect this diverse way of being and surely there had to be a social protocol based on Diné values. When I finally came across the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy —a story about the teachings of 'disability' through relationality, it helped me understand the pathway forward for my own life as a mother and Diné person.

Through the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, I realized that Diné knowledge had social and political mechanisms that respond to the conditions many people with disabilities face. Diné people are not exempt from actions of harm towards people with disabilities. There are struggles and biases within our community. The story recognized that people enact prejudice, ignorance, and disavowal of relatives with disabilities. Our Diné community was not different in this sense. Just because a story is a Blessing Way story, doesn't mean it only contains 'positive' aspects. The stories I share in this work speak of hardship, of imbalanced relationships, and steps of how to restore them. This is where our values are implanted, in the remedial responses to hardship. Stories are a means to understand some of the most significant issues that arise in life. Stories are a way to make sense of difficult questions that engage human behavior and perceptions, but that also narrate a world of possibility. Stories extend beyond merely restoring imbalanced human relations. Stories are restorative on larger levels to sustain prevailing principles that caretake the planet and non-human relations.

The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy illustrates that disability is not a fragmented, separated thing that is the 'misfortune' of only certain individuals. The reality is that difference isn't about individual ability or inability at all. Rather, it is a relational understanding that has many parts. Diné teachings of 'disability' are teachings of community and belonging. I view them as part of the wider teachings of accountability upheld in Diné value systems. Not only does this story provide a counter-narrative that wider social discourse so desperately needs, but it is also

a story that articulates 'disability' based on the Diné world. It is part of the larger arc of Diné knowledge and history. Story frames restorative action aimed at balance, as part of the larger journey of SNBH, The Pathway to Beauty. The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy propels teachings that encourage us to become who we are by affirming our identities through relationships. The story instigates social narratives that remake power relations that embrace belonging and fight discrimination in our communities. The story has present-day relevance in the structures that govern the care of our relatives with disabilities such as law, medicine, education, and policy.

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is an example of the expression of SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty) through a young boy's life journey. He helps us to understand SNBH as a *relational* process. This process helps Diné address complex issues in their lives through exploring Diné epistemic knowledge embedded in our oral traditions of storytelling. The teachings of Early Twilight Dawn Boy draw out ontological elements of how we come to know disability relationally, as a *way of being*. I am interested in how the wider aspirations of SNBH instills relational understandings that unhinge Western identity formations, such as "disability" or "disabled" as categorical identity formations attached to individual minds and bodies. The need for a relational approach is needed in the wider social conversation of disability justice.

Story adds to the collective conversation of disability justice. I share these stories The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, because I believe Diné people must have access to this knowledge to sustain them. We need representation in the structures that serve Diné people. I felt it was imperative that this story should be shared with Diné people to contribute to their efforts for the caretaking of our relatives with disability. I wanted to see the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy help others, and to show that our ancestors carefully considered our epistemic framing to sustain belonging through relationship.

In this way, this story belongs to Diné people. The story's purpose is for Diné people and futurity. The protocols and considerations I took in remaining ethically accountable are elaborated in my Methodology chapter. The internal heartwork (Winder, 2019) that took place in order to share the story more widely, and considerations for my auto-ethnographic approach through narrative, are shared in the article *My Tongue is a Mountain* (Yellowhorse, 2020b). The consideration of Early Twilight Dawn Boy's story and its presence in this work comes from my own journey towards SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty). As a relational practice, my journey can help others pursue SNBH also.

Colliding Narratives: My Journey

This works presents layers of colliding narratives. I draw attention to the foundations of narratives to point out their irreconcilability, while also simultaneously positing them as spaces of possible intervention. Since our understanding of SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty) emerges through one's life journey, it is best approached through stories and narrative. My own narrative in this work is part of my journey towards SNBH and how these teachings have shaped my life as a mother, advocate, and human being. My story highlights how I have experienced disability discourse. I view the knowledge production within structures as a totalizing force reflected in wider systems that care for peoples with disabilities. This next section is my story. I share it to illuminate the incongruity of current frameworks and my own position as a Diné person. I aim to show how these violent structures need to be reshaped by greater accountability through relationship. I also share how my journey can support conditions of people like me on this journey. I show how stories matter for those seeking others' representations of how the world can be.

Counter Narratives in the Face of Structural Narratives

I remember the day I received a referral to see a specialist for my child. I felt as if our story was already written. Most of the stories of disability I encountered in medical and educational spaces were always framed as tragic and based on a sense of profound loss. My early encounters with specialists and education providers were no different. The administrative side of navigating this world was oriented to managing and coping with a sense of loss. I filled out countless forms and documents and they were always the same. We re-lived this deficit-oriented narrative every time I was a handed a clipboard. Parents and peoples seeking diagnoses should never encounter a situation that forecloses on what the rest of their lives will be. I came to realize that this was primarily a reflection of a failing system and I remember the resounding words spoken by many professional over the years—"it's a long, difficult road ahead". This is how the entry into this system is. This is the structural narrative that shapes how we understand our place in the world. It is saturated in narratives of loss and suffering.

Living in a narrative of loss permeates the past, present and future. This is the debilitating nature of wider social narratives of disability—it forecloses possibility. Structures often argue that things have to be the way they are; that this is the reality and there is unavoidable hardship. Yet, hardship doesn't equate to individual loss, but rather, collective failure. These narratives

poured onto us are *only one* reality built on the rules of systems of devaluation. It doesn't have to be this way. There had to be way forward whereby having a 'good life' was *the way of the world*—a clear departure from the defeatist narratives that surrounded us in those early years.

It was a difficult and isolating time in the space between then and now. Now, there is so much headway in activating narratives and stories of peoples with disabilities (Wong, 2020). Paired with their allies, these narratives reshape the constructs of 'disability', but bind it in union with the demands of social justice against structural violence. However, in those early years, there were hardly any stories that resonated with the reality in which I found myself as an Indigenous parent of a child with autism. I was a Diné person, who came with my own unique subjectivity and array of social-political conditions that were already invisible or marginalized in the larger social narratives. Yet, both my daughter and I also came with origins that carried prayers and aspirations dreamed by our ancestors. Little did I know that those blessings held us during that time. Although I knew there was something deeply missing in our situation, it wasn't until later that I realized the incredible injustice of the invisibility of our culture in the institutions we encountered.

I didn't come across any disability resource material in those earlier years which reflected my history and current positionality. Where could I find work on racism, Indigeneity and navigating the disability sector? Where could I find work on Indigenous stories of disability? What were the teachings from my community? I am encouraged to say that so much work has manifested in the last decade to illuminate these intersectional spaces, spearheaded by People of Color with disabilities (Wong, 2020) and by Indigenous peoples around the globe (Bevan-Brown 2015; Vining, 2022; Yazzie, 2021). These stories have impacted the disability sector with such a profound force. It is my belief, that they will be relentless in articulating multidimensional *ways of being*, countless identities, and vast representation of the socio-political subjectivities of peoples with disabilities and communities. These are stories that give us life, and I am grateful to have them.

Living predominantly without stories that resonated with my worldview in those early years reflected how my perspectives of disability were different from many of the educators and service providers I encountered. I discuss this in *Chapter Nine: Narratives of Law*, where I not only had to battle against oppressive structural policies, but with oppressive people. I found this true within general society including some of my close social relations; autism was both foreign and completely stigmatized. Often fear of speaking about disability is tied to the very

idea of stigma. People are afraid that by bringing up difference or diversity, they are placing a target for stigma and marginalization. However, not talking about disability also contributes to stigma. It contributes to the idea that it is hard to talk about. There are ways to talk about disability that aren't rooted in shame or discomfort. I have found that more often than not, people just don't know how. The education system and our social conditioning leads us to believe that disability is something that should be kept hidden. This is true for 'special education' classrooms, where learners are not even part of the wider school community. They are literally kept away. I learned quickly that people are not socialized to talk about disability.

I know from my own experience as a parent that schools don't have a plan on how to include discussions of disability as part of the wider school dialogues about human diversity. Even as more training has emerged over the years to discuss, for example, consideration of LBGTQ2 learners, the cross-over to include discussions of disability have been markedly absent. I see this intersectional space as a hopeful place to intervene. Abolitionist lawyer and educator Talila Lewis (2020) reminds us that in the context of injustice and marginalization, each "individuals group's liberation is inextricably linked to the other" (p. 32). Disability dialogue must have a place in wider discourse and it should come from the stories and narratives of peoples with disabilities as they speak for themselves.

We should be privileging the *narratives* of peoples with disabilities to counter the reproduction of stigma-induced *narratives*, to propel representation, and to imagine new ways of doing, thinking and *being*. Yet, even in scholarly dialogue, panels, marches, and radical movements, disability is continually marginalized (Harriet Tubman Collective, 2020). It is time to listen and to bring these narratives to the fore. This doesn't mean we solicit the disability community to do more free labor in educating their oppressors, but rather, that we make it a priority to utilize other counter-narratives that expel normative-frameworks. We must make it a priority to have this dialogue not just as a superficial gesture towards 'diversity and inclusion', but rather a radical shift of our political orientation that carries power to change societal structures that enact oppression. Lakota scholar Kim TallBear (2021) contests the stale language of 'inclusion and diversity' within movements for liberation. She argues that collective action must be oriented beyond "diversifying the settler nation-state with its capitalistic…terrain" (3:12). To engage in worldbuilding is to move into these creative spaces of new systems with "time-honored practices" (Jim, 2022e).

The school systems are just one small 'world' where we must challenge both society's discomfort and ignorance about disability, as well as the hierarchal systems that marginalize peoples with disabilities. There are countless other worlds in which stigma extends to encompass a person's life. The health sector is another key place where stigma is entrenched. This discomfort is no more apparent than in the first encounters that parents have with medical specialists. Looking back to the time I was pregnant; I was tested to determine if I had a 'healthy' fetus. What is *health* in this context and how does it respond to the diverse *ways of being* that are disability? These fear-based approaches to diversity are on full display well before we welcome our children in the world. They are often based on singular narratives that mask themselves under the benevolent language regarding caring about the quality of life of peoples with disabilities. However, "the presence of absence of disability doesn't predict the quality of life" (Mc Bryde, 2020, p. 9); structures, systems and the people who build and operate them do. By shifting the gaze from the 'person-as-the-problem', to what TallBear (2021) refers to as "hierarchies of life" (3:26), we begin to recognize systems of harm and the *narratives* that guide them.

The day medical professionals shared the diagnosis of autism, I didn't share the prevailing narrative that disability was tragedy and loss. The news was only hard because I soon realized that there were astoundingly inadequate systems in place to provide for us *on our terms*. That was the tragedy, and that is what I see as the prevailing issue in our society when it comes to the structures of care and support for peoples with disabilities. The narrative shouldn't be that disability is a tragedy, but that our inadequate structures are designed to fail people with disabilities because they are based on irredeemable belief systems fuelled by 'normative' and dominating narratives. It is a tragedy to not have support, especially since it is *absolutely possible* to build and fund structures of support. It doesn't have to be this way.

These dominating narratives continued to play out in our lives throughout the years. I remember feeling ill as I completed assessment forms. I was raised to see people as people, and not as symptoms. Where were the assessments that didn't pathologize people? I wanted one of those for my child, and it felt wrong to complete those forms on numerous occasions. I wanted to share how funny she was, how much her energy electrified our home, and how I struggled with what I felt was my own inadequacy as a parent, without blaming her.

Where were the stories that pulled me out of the place of struggle and into the place of hope? Where were the stories and social narratives that didn't just teach us how to navigate systems

that had no intention of changing, but that showed possibilities and movements for structural change that made possible a *good way* to live? Where were the community stories that unified society towards a greater sense of accountability and foster belonging? Where were the news stories where disability funding was not a battle with a slim chance of securing a win, but a continual win with fully funded services for learners with disabilities? Such success stories are always treated as aspirational deviations— an imagined 'feel good' moment—rather than a collective movement of systemic change reverberating across numerous communities.

I felt like there were so few stories that could convey a sense of wellness and social care for peoples with disabilities and their families. Through those early years, I desperately sought to find allies with whom to build community. We were fortunate to have strong relationships with certain people—key people, who nurtured our lives when we needed it the most. *Relationships matter*. Although there weren't overarching stories that could pave a way forward out of the blackhole of this system, we found people who could reduce the harm for a moment throughout our lives. Some resonated with the values and aspirations I had for my child, or at the very least, heard us and respected them, even if they didn't share them.

We found pockets of allyship in supportive educators and service providers who also shared a disdain for the ways disability was continually narrated, though there was little they could do to structurally change it. Their individual support and love are part of the collective story of blessings that have grown us. They are part of my story that isn't only defined as a tragedy—a story of loss, oppression, and marginalization. It is also a story with jumping points for growth and potential.

This acknowledgement of the community I was blessed to establish shouldn't be confused with dominant *narratives of choice*— where people's choices are presumed to create their conditions and struggles. Dominant *narratives of choice* presume that if people made better choices, their lives would be different. This prevailing narrative does nothing to unhinge unequal power relations in the world and blames the person rather than the structures of inequality. The narrative of choice is both a weapon and burden for parents who struggle with access. As disability advocate Harriet McBryde Johnson (2020) has stated, "choice is illusory in a context of pervasive inequality…Choices are structured by oppression" (p. 20). Conversations regarding access should dispel these assumptions of choice, as a foundational starting point. These structures can and should change. It is up to the collective movements of people to make change, not the burden of those who remain marginalized to make 'better choices'. These are

part of the wider social narratives, entrenched in structural political narratives, that make movement building on the wider scale so challenging.

This is the part of my story that illuminates the power of relationships. This story matters much more than the stories of oppression I experienced on this journey. This story of relationships is empowering because it shows the spaces of possibilities. It moves beyond mere critique of structures and systems. It gives us a starting point to think *how* the road looks ahead. Relationships matter, and it is people who make structures. Our prevailing social narratives can change. So can our structures.

Intersectionality

My interest in intersectionality (Hickey, 2015; Yazzie & Baldy, 2018) emerges from my narratives as a Diné woman navigating through the disability sector, but also occupying several margins that overlap. I am also interested in my movement through academia as a process that helped confront unequal power relations (in some fields) although not necessarily resolve them. After entering academia, I had resources and greater access than before. I also had help in finding the people who could support us. Access is part of pervasive inequality that I am deeply aware of and one that I return to again and again; because people with disabilities and Indigenous peoples more broadly are disproportionately impacted by disparities of access and resources (Deerinwater, 2020). Many people in general don't have adequate knowledge about the disability, the Disability Rights Movement, or disability justice without access to higher education (Hernandez Legorreta, 2020)

It was in academia that I finally gained access—the unending resources of access to scholarly material, the classes to develop my speaking and writing skills, and eventually, the rage that finds someone when hegemony is made sense of. I learned about disability justice and gained access to the research that shaped the field of Critical Disability Studies. Here, the conversation expanded to engage Critical Race Theory in disability (Annamma et al., 2013), feminism (Hall, 2011; Kim, 2017), settler colonialism, decolonization, biopolitics and political economy (Foucault, 1972; Imada, 2017; Ineese-Nash, 2020; Kim, 2017; Presley, 2019; Puar, 2017), and environmental racism in relation to disability (Jaffe & John, 2018; Ray, 2013). It was here that I learned about intersections of feminism, queer politics, incarceration, Indigenous histories, colonization and Indigenous methodologies. A light went on. And, although I was not specifically reading about disability in many of these literatures, I began to make links and

connections to my own life. These works spoke to the world of disability in which I was journeying.

The critical literature I was reading was at odds with the literature I encountered in the parent education training and advocacy services I attended. I was being fed resources on *how to survive*—how to fight for rights, how to navigate the health sector, how to understand disability law, how to advocate for accommodations in the schools, and sometimes how to take care of my mental health. These are all important. However, they miss the mark when we are speaking in the context of pervasive inequality. I do not accept these conditions as the given way of the world. Marginalized and oppressed peoples don't just want to survive; we want conditions where all people can thrive. The recommended resources I received from the disability services were never on how to find a collective way forward and build alternative futures. They were never on how to build disabled/LBGTQ2/Indigenous solidarities. This is another gap that was clear to me, that the ways providers and educators engage in wider disability justice discourse is limited and often absent. Movement building requires us all—allies, teachers, providers and parents. There is a hopeful space here.

Story is a method to find a way to link groups who often don't communicate with one another. When we share our stories we are engaging in political work, and when we apply story, we can map a past, and speak imagined desires for the future into *being*. We create new *ontologies of being*. This is especially true for academia. The wide gap in academic discourse in knowledges that took up these intersectional spaces of disability and Indigeneity fail to communicate in productive ways (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2015).

The Language of Possibility

Cree social worker Amber Dion (2021) discusses the importance of centering the 'language of possibility' when addressing Indigenous disparities and hardships (57:28). The generative possibilities for storytelling have material and political utility. This is why I ground my work in storytelling, the various narratives of people and the land, and ancestral teachings. According to Diné scholar Jerome Clark, "Storytelling has the potential to create possibilities and create futures where there seems like there aren't any" (as cited in Carman, 2020, para. 8). In a world where possibilities for people with disabilities seem to be imploding, amplified by the on-going pandemic, it has never been more important for story to stand courageously in the face of these systems of violence.

Storytelling as counter-narrative isn't merely a mechanism that reflects worldviews and practices of people. Stories reproduce values and conceptions *of being*, the realities of people that articulate a unique understanding of the world. Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2019) further asserts that stories provide "new insights and show new directions in knowledge making" (as cited in Archibald et al., 2019, p. xi). My work comes at a time where representation of Indigenous perspectives of 'disability' in mainstream spaces continue to be highly limited, if not completely invisible (Hickey, 2015; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2015; Velarde, 2018). New insights of addressing disability are crucial as current perspectives of disability as a socio-political identity remain inadequate for the numerous ways Indigenous peoples view human diversity and how they orient themselves to the world of 'disability' (Velarde, 2018). In this sense, the counter-narratives that rise to meet structural narratives within all institutions— health, education, law, academia, and social services—has never been more needed.

Positionality

The more I learned about Diné knowledge in the early years of my college education, the more I realized that we had stories of belonging and accountability that could engage the struggles of peoples with disabilities. Story could change the way Indigenous peoples enacted systems of care within their own tribal communities. Story also had political utility to push counter-narratives to the fore of wider disability discourse and propel Diné ancestral teachings towards cultural revitalization (Baldy, 2015).

This work aims to call on two needs. The first is the need for Diné to realign their social relations to peoples with disabilities by reclaiming their systems of knowledge and traditional practices. We need this knowledge to build our structures in our own communities. The second is to revitalize these knowledges that also have suffered profound marginalization. In a larger sense, this work is caretaking the Diné worlds and is fundamentally oriented towards Diné life in the midst of larger settler-relations.

I know what it means to exist on numerous margins of story. I know the history of Diné oppression. I have watched it unravel in my community in our small border-town and grew up surrounded by anti-Indian racism documented by Diné people (Estes et al., 2021). As I became an adult, I begin to learn more about Diné ancestral wisdom and customs. I didn't grow up with these teachings. However, when I begin to learn in my late teens about Diné knowledge, it

helped cultivate me in other areas of my life—spiritually and philosophically. It also helped me towards the long journey of healing. Diné knowledge taught me to persevere, to be proactive, and to live compassionately with the spirit of generosity and love. This beautiful way of being has so much potential for Diné people. I know this as someone who didn't have access to it at one point, although it always surrounded me. Knowing how Diné wisdom shaped my adult life to think in positive ways, I knew it could respond to the hardships entrenched in the world of disability.

Our oral histories are full of stories that gave light and meaning to the world. What did it mean to think about disability as a Diné person? Were there stories that could help us make sense of who my daughter and I were as Diné women in the world of disability? What stories could pave the way forward to live in beauty? These are the internal reflections I carry to guide the purpose of this work. This work is deeply intimate to me, and this research has been an integral part of my healing journey as a Diné woman and parent.

This work is the narrative I needed when I was a new mother. I hope it can guide the way for Diné people who are working in the sectors of disability, education, and community empowerment. This work is both an encouragement and a refusal. It is an encouragement to illuminate another narrative grounded in love, relationship, and beauty which includes places where there are nuanced approaches to disability justice. It is a refusal to accept the conditions of the world as they are and to dream another future. I have this individual perspective of this knowledge of what it means to be Diné navigating multiple intersectional spaces. I aim to connect Diné teachings I have learned and attach them to my lived experience in the world of disability.

Research Overview

There are prevalent themes surrounding the principles of Diné lifeway emergent in SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty), *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes), and *k'é* (positive relationships) that continue to resurface throughout this work. It is important to note that although these principles are revisited many times throughout this work, they emerge in countless, unexpected contexts through stories. Simply stated, although stories are diverse, I view them as returning to the same conclusion over and over again. The stories return to the foundational principles of SNBH, *hozhó* and *k'é.* As relational ontologies, these three principles shape understandings of accountability in profound ways. The journey to these conclusions is different, which speaks

to the overall understanding of diversity in this work. There are many ways to understand relationships, and there are many contexts that can illuminate how we learn about relationships and accountability in Diné stories. The resounding focus on SNBH, *hozhó* and *k'é,* as ever-present concepts and conclusions within stories, reflects these three principles as the foundations of Diné lifeways. Diné teachings are continually reoriented towards these principles and *they give meaning to Diné life*.

I don't decode the multiple definitions of disability in this work. Nor do I focus on how they vary from western and non-western ways of thinking about disability. I am trying to unravel the Diné thought process that knows through relation. It doesn't mean that I devalue the ways disability is expressed, or lump disability into a generalized understanding that is vague or homogenizing in its scope because of a lack of specificity. Rather, I am trying to express how Diné living in the world— our knowing through relationships—provides a way to view disability as a relational *way of being*. I also present relational ways of living to unhinge structures. These lifeways may be illegible or difficult to apply to a concrete definition of disability justice. However, I am trying to point towards the aspiration as the journey, as the process, and as the *way of being*. This is how I view disability as a Diné person on my own journey with Diné knowledge. These differences in thought matter. The time has come to turn to Indigenous voices and experiences to approach some of the most difficult challenges in Indigenous life. Our stories help us achieve this.

Chapter Outlines

The foundational research question that guides this work is: What is disability from a Diné perspective? Each chapter of this work has its own set of research questions that guide the specific context for that chapter. These are the overarching questions of each section, as each chapter responds to the overall prevailing question of unraveling how Diné knowledge makes sense of disability through narratives and stories.

This work is segmented into four parts. The first is *Part I. Beginnings, Origins and Purpose.* This ***Introduction (Chapter One)*** is about *who* I am. I have strived to introduce my story as a Diné mother and my relationship to Diné ontology. In sharing my narrative, I have attempted to draw out the conditions I have experienced and to speak from my own perspective as a Diné person. I have introduced key concepts that create the overarching theoretical framework of relationality through the practice and philosophies of SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty), *hozhó'*

(harmonious relationships) *and 'k'é* (positive relationships). Laying this foundation allows me to move forward in the following chapters with a strong point of reference to the guiding principles I theorize with.

Chapter Two is my ***Methodology***. This chapter focuses on my methodological approach using narrative, story and textual analysis. I discuss *what* key concepts I use as both theory and method (such as *k'é*) and *how* these narratives are a way of knowing and engaging with my research questions in this work. In this chapter, I share over-arching research questions. This chapter does not include a wide literature review because that literature is engaged throughout textual analysis within the larger work. Diné literature is discussed throughout this work. I use already published works by Diné authors to make sense of the larger arguments and theorisations I am making. My methodology explains my use of storytelling and the structuring of various narrative— land, ancestral, personal, legal and societal— to convey a larger colliding dialogue of disability discourse. Story anchors my voice and positionality as a Diné person within this collision.

Part II. Diné Relational Teachings contains two chapters. The first is ***Chapter Three*: *Diné Educational Pedagogy and The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy*** which is framed within the wider of context Diné Educational Pedagogy. I unravel how disability can be seen as a relational concept. This story is told through my own voice and perspective based on a story that was passed to me by my friend and colleague, Chad Pfeiffer. In this chapter I bring forward the philosophical underpinnings that become the guiding cultural narratives interwoven throughout other subsequent chapters. Explaining Diné Educational Pedagogy in detail helps form the foundation of understanding land-based knowledge found in the following chapters. Sharing the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy also becomes the theoretical tool I use to frame relative understandings of disability that are the focus of subsequent chapters. I take phrases from the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and use them as a starting point to think through relational conditions of one's life—such as land, spiritual intelligence, ancestral knowledge, law, and restoration.

Chapter Four is titled ***Narratives of Land.*** Here I examine how story is encased in the natural world and how the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is specifically written into the natural world. I expand upon Diné Educational Pedagogy to further examine land-based knowledge and relationships. As Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (2015) argues, "wisdom is born from nature" (p. 15). From nature we understand the interdependency of relationships to all life.

Land is the basis for knowing. Land in this way tells its own stories and is always part of the larger stories of who we are as human beings. This chapter responds to the questions of what land teaches Diné people about relationality and why land is important in how I understand disability. This chapter solidifies the theoretical framing of knowledge encased in land which is revisited in the next chapters. By grounding an understanding of how land is associated with ancestral teachings, the following stories I share are read against the rubrics of knowledge presented in this land-based paradigm.

Part III: Ancestral Narratives contains three chapters that speak to relational ways of being that emerge from the teachings of disability. This section focuses on teachings from the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and introduces two more Diné stories that take up 'disability': The Story of Turkey and the Story of Locust. ***Chapter Five: Narratives of Spiritual Intelligence*** explores the concepts of SNBH, and the pursuit of *hozhó* taken from the concept of being "spiritually blessed" in the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. I ask, how does spiritual intelligence relate to the principles of SNBH from the life of Early Twilight Dawn Boy? ***Chapter Six: Narratives of Leadership*** asks what is leadership as a relational teaching of 'disability' taken from Diné stories? I examine important figures taken from these stories to illuminate how our non-human relatives carry teachings of disability. These teachings are framed through relationship and diverse *ways of being* to associate the concept of disability with other characteristics and traits that define both Turkey and Locust. This chapter links these identities to teachings of leadership. I examine notions of ability and strength within the story of Locust, to think about how the telling of his story reframes disability in terms of qualities leadership and bravery. This chapter also shares The Story of Turkey. I include the transcripts of the story of Turkey as told by elder Ernest Begay, and relate this story to the teachings of relationship, love, and perception. These teachings are exemplified by the concept of *k'é.* In this chapter, I also connect the over-arching teachings of the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy to speak about leadership as a prevailing identity formation. In doing so, I demonstrate the relational understandings of disability which opens space for understanding how relational *ways of being* inherently include relational values, such as reciprocal accountability. This dialogue leads into the next chapter of thinking about care and responsibility.

The last chapter of this section is ***Chapter Seven: Narratives of Sovereignty.*** The guiding questions for this chapter are: what are the expressions of sovereignty in relation to 'disability' from a Diné perspective? And, what do these expressions teach us about Diné teachings

regarding the inherent ways of being in the care for all our relations? I combine the teachings of all the prior chapters to present an understanding of sovereignty that informs the concept of inherent rights that I explore throughout Part IV. The narratives of sovereignty advance the over-arching argument that holds this work together: relational ways of knowing, being and doing establish the requirement of accountability to all our relations. In the Diné conceptualisation of accountability there is sovereignty, freedom, and the inherent principles of *k'é* and *hozhó* to embrace who one truly is. These are part of the intricate process of SNBH, The Pathway to Beauty.

The final part of this work is *Part IV: Structural Narratives.* This part contains four chapters that seek to convey wider social narratives regarding disability. By placing Diné perspectives of disability from story and land-based knowledge at the fore of this work, turning examining currents structures illuminates the collisions of worldview and subsequent resounding divide. Diné values relationship and reciprocal accountability described in this work are absent in dominant systems outlined in the part of this work.

The focus of this section is on legal remedy and the questions of *how* change happens. I do not explore specific rulings or individual case studies, nor do I deeply examine interpretations of law nor its reading. This analysis does not rely on surveys or data collection to gauge or prove any arguments I make. I rely on the personal narrative I shared in *Chapter Eight* and utilize principles from Diné ontologies shared from previous chapters, such as *SNBH, hozhó and k'é.* All of these principles present a way to advance Diné knowledge systems and Diné understandings of inherent rights to guide the practice of ethical accountability and produce another understanding of *legal remedy* and discourse of *rights.* Attention to philosophical approaches requires we think deeply of the beliefs and ideologies that influence which philosophical direction we pursue and why it matters. Therefore, *Part IV* is a response to how the teachings of relationships and accountability argued through the prior three sections of this work play out in socio-political relations in law.

The beginning of this section is ***Chapter Eight: Personal Narrative.*** I focus on my narrative as a parent and advocate within the U.S. legal system. I draw out the importance of relationships in this chapter and how it relates to not only the quality of life, but the possibility of life. This section is concerned with the material consequences of what imbalanced relationships produce. This chapter contains self-reflective questions regarding why services were hard to secure and why pathways to follow protections from law were obscured. These self-reflections provoke

questions within the following chapters; particularly as they relate to the concept of sovereignty laid out in Chapter Seven and inherent rights discourse in Chapter Nine. In ***Chapter Nine: Legal Narratives,*** I complicate the promise of legal remedy which is often the only channel of change offered to peoples with disabilities. I argue how wider social narratives such as systemic ableism and racism are engrained in oppressive legal systems in which people are expected to gain remedy. I explore the philosophical underpinning of U.S. rights discourse and mark its incommensurability with inherent rights evident in Diné Fundamental Law which I introduce in the last chapter of *Part IV.* I respond to the questions: 1.) What are the kinds of narratives that both create systemic ableism and turn to law as remedy, 2.) How are those perceptions subsequently impeded by law, 3.) What happens when we disrupt current processes of legal remedy and instead approach rights as inherent and already existing through Diné knowledge and relationality? These questions produce dialogue that is in tension with the conversations of sovereignty and pursuits to SNBH that I have outlined in Part II. and Part III. of this work.

This leads to my last chapter in this section, ***Chapter Ten: Narratives of Restoration***. This chapter stems from the idea that Diné people have their own understanding of accountability that is shaped by Diné natural law and ancestral teachings found in *k'é as lifeway.* This chapter asks, what are the Diné concepts of restoration and peacemaking? And, why do they matter as practices of remedy? This leads to a final question, how are these teachings embedded in Diné communities? I conclude with analysis that addresses how the teachings of Diné Fundamental Law contribute to the sustenance of accountability through relationship in our communities. Here, I explore the concrete differences between 'accountability' taken from a distinctly Diné perspective in relation to the larger concepts I have advanced throughout all the chapters. This final chapter acts as a reflection of the prior three sections, and also as the place where restorative actions can take place. This is the place where we can reimagine a new starting point. ***Chapter 11: Reflections*** is the concluding chapter of this work. It takes us back to the beginning and to the reasons why this work exists. It takes me back to my child, and the teachings I have learned from her as the powerful force that drives this work. These reflections are reflections of the heart.

Chapter Two: Methodology

My research is centered on Diné philosophies and is situated within the broader scope of Indigenous Studies as they intersect with Disability Studies. This work is not solely a critique of Western constructions of disability, or concrete definitions of disability. Although I engage with how disability is framed in Western institutions, this work is oriented towards Diné understandings of disability based on Diné subjectivity (my experience) in conversation with Diné ancestral knowledge. The heart of this work is my articulation of thinking about disability as a Diné mother. I am interested in how Diné thought provides us other ways of thinking about disability beyond the constructed 'norms' evident in institutions that espouse to serve us. More importantly, I am interested in the spaces of growth that emerge from the relational concept of disability. Advancing relationship as a framework of disability, radiates outward to examine the theoretical underpinnings of difference and how they have deeply political roots. These roots reshape understandings of ethical accountability through law, policy and education serving peoples with disability.

This chapter overviews my approaches to how I treat the terminology of disability. I find this vital, as Diné understandings of disability vary from the common ways that disability is often discussed in wider social and political discourse. By examining terminology and explaining my reasoning for how I approach the language used within this work, I outline the various models of disability found in common works on disability and disability justice. Next, I explain how I treat cultural knowledge and stories. Since I am working with oral histories and stories that have not been widely circulated, special considerations were taken into account. I then conclude this chapter with an overview of the various research elements that contributed to my methodology.

Defining Disability

This section outlines the reasons why I refuse to ascribe concrete definitions of disability throughout this work. Although I relate my experience to what is known as autism, my focus is on wider disability discourse. I don't define what those disabilities are. I also don't engage in a deep analysis of how models of disability compare to my Diné perspective. When speaking from my own Diné perspective, I use 'disability', and later, 'peoples with disabilities', as a placeholder. The quotation marks signal that I am speaking about what is socially understood

as ‘disability’ but that it does not translate the same normative understandings of disability from my perspective as a Diné person. When I speak of ‘disability’ from a Diné context I am conceptualizing it within my own worldview. It is entangled with the cultural teachings that shape socio-political Diné identities based on relationships. I try to explain what this understanding is throughout my work. There isn’t one definable term or understanding of ‘disability’ from my own perspective. When I use disability without the single quotation marks, I am signalling the dominant discourse of how society typically discusses disability such as disability rights, disability identities, and disability policy.

Disability Studies scholarship is also trying to move away from the prescriptive ways that disability is discussed within disability discourse. I want to acknowledge DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013) and its use of dis/ability with a slash between ‘dis’ and ‘ability’. This way of writing disability draws attention to the subjective nature of disability discourse. Annamma et al. (2013) argue that within the social model of disability, it is the interpretations and responses to difference to the ‘normed’ body that often define what disability is. This argument follows the social model of disability which argues that the term ‘disabled’ is socially constructed (Shakespeare, 2006). Using ‘dis/ability’ in this ways gives context to ways definitions of dis/ability change over time as the deliberate slash within dis/ability “disrupts misleading understandings of disability” (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 24). Although I don’t use this approach in this work, I want to acknowledge other ways of working with disability discourse in non-confining ways.

It is important to note that people writing in the field of disability should uphold how peoples with disabilities self-identify and choose to discuss disability. Honoring how people self-describe themselves is part of being a good relative in the context of Indigenous relations. I practice this in my life when someone, for example, self-identifies as ‘Autistic’; I use the same terminology/ language with them in discussion. The rules that apply to respecting one another’s pronouns also apply to how we talk about disability. As a principle, it is important we approach language with care, and understand the political and social consequences of language. Respecting people’s self-identity requires us to be considerate in how we use language.

In this work, I frame ‘disability’ as person-first. For example, I say *person* or *peoples with Autism,* instead of *Autistic.* I also say, *person* or *people with disabilities* instead of *disabled.* The former is called “person-first” approaches to disability. The latter, (i.e., Autistic) are considered identity-first approaches. (Hammond, 2021). I use the words disabled and disability

when used in the context of the resources I cite. My use of a person-first language of disability is important and is explained in the next section.

I am aware that people may or may not identify or agree with the language I use to describe disability. It may not match their own views. With respect, I acknowledge these concerns and I stand in solidarity with the peoples who fight the oppression of language as it informs larger structures and belief systems in society. The consequences of language are elaborated by Autistic author, advocate and writer Lyric Holmans (2018). They state:

> when you say a person *with* autism, it really does make it sound like Autism is like a separate piece…here's so and so and here is their autism. It's like something you can take away and remove…. Even if Autism was something that could just be removed, which it isn't…I wouldn't be the same person... I wouldn't have the same perspective that I have had because it impacts how I interpret the world... I say Autistic…. That said, you should ask the person in front of you how they prefer to be referred to...language is important because there are parents out there who think Autism can be cured… trying to get the Autism out of their Autistic loved ones and trying to cure their Autistic loved ones and this ruins people's lives. (0:39)

The use of 'person with autism' is linked to wider social discourse about curing. Person-first approaches view autism as sperate from people. As Holmans (2018) said, "here's so and so, and here is their autism" (0:30) presumes that autism doesn't impact how that person lives are exists in the world. Holmans (2018) shares that their identity is deeply impacted by their autism—they wouldn't be the same person without it— which is why they chose to use identity-first language such as 'Autistic'. Although I don't explore the violence of the notion of 'curing' in this work, I absolutely see it as part of larger socio-political underpinning of the totalizing force of systemic ableism that must be eradicated. I see language as a contributing factor to systemic ableism. I agree that shifting language is part of the wider project of rethinking what disability is outside of the normative, dominant constructs.

With this fundamental knowledge of how language can harm and sustain harmful beliefs, I defend my use person-first language because that is how Diné ways of relating operate. They operate through *k'é* — a system of positive relationships. I argued in my master's thesis that in Diné relational lifeways people are relatives first before they fall into any other identity category (Yellowhorse, 2018a). For me, using person-first language is a relative *way of being* because Diné teachings recognize one another as *Nihokaa Dine'h bilaa' ishdlaii* —Five

Fingered Earth Surface People (Ayzie, 2021b). This is an example of Diné ways of relating as *ways of being*. Within relational understandings, to *know* begins with the person and who they are based on their wider connections to genealogy, kinship, land, and the natural world. They are a person first who lives in a system of relationality. The focus is on the wider relations to the individual. To *know* doesn't entail that we tell people who they are based on individualistic characteristics or diagnoses, such as disabled or Autistic. They are a relative first and a person first. They are *Nihokaa Dine'h bilaa' ishdlaii*—Five Fingered Earth Surface People— who carry sacred breath and exist within a system of cascading relations.

I believe that people still have their unique identities in the person-first framework within a Diné context. They are still understood as individuals and completely distinct. Yet, this relational way of knowing connects me to them in fundamental, life changing ways. I see my child first and foremost as a descendant and powerful *Kiinyaa'aani* person. She has an identity that is ancient. It comes from the first clan ever created from the breast of our most precious deity, Changing Woman (Chinle Curriculum Center, n.d.; Jim, 2022d). The importance of our lineage marked by the family networks in our clan system grounds the ways we make ourselves known—via formal introductions—through relationship. When I was taught to introduce myself, I was taught to say *Shi éi Kiinya'aannii yinishyé,* **I am Towering House People**. Not, 'I belong to the Towering House People clan', or 'my clan is Towering House People'. *I am Towering House People.* I am the extension of my ancestors. I am everything Towering House People relates to. I come with relations that have existed beyond my own human knowledge. This is who I am. In our matrilineal society, this is our identity regardless of what other *ways of being* we may carry. In this way, we are a relative. In this way, our relations are vast. *In this way, we are known through relationship.*

I understand part of disability justice includes challenging person-first language (Douglas et al., 2021; Hammond, 2021; Holmans, 2022). I acknowledge that this lens of knowing does not match Diné epistemic knowledge that teaches me that people are people first, relatives first, and part of a long genealogy of Diné intelligence and beauty. As part of my critical intervention into the field of Disability Studies as a Diné person, I assert that academics and wider social audiences must be careful when dealing with Indigenous responses to Western structures. We must use an Indigenous lens to understand Indigenous analysis. We can't read Indigenous philosophy with a non-Indigenous lens even if we presume that it appears to initially fall into current critiques of those systems (such as person-first vs. identity-first discourse). This could

result in conflating Diné person-first language with presumed oppressive systems. The person-first language utilized by therapy institutions, who often use controversial approaches such as Applied Behavior Analysis (A.B.A), has been widely critiqued by the disability justice movement (Douglas et al., 2021; Hammond, 2021). Ignoring the cultural positioning that uses person-first language assimilates a fundamentally different context, underwritten by different values into rigid and singular analyses. This could result in associating the use of person-first language by both Diné and therapeutic industries as both presumably operating under the same philosophical logic. The complexity of identity then collapses into definitive binaries such as, 'person-first equals' oppressive language, and 'identity-first' equals non-oppressive language.

Operating from within Western structures, regardless of how 'progressive' they may seem, still carries the potential to impose a Western lens on Indigenous views. These views can still propel assimilating narratives that frame the motive and use of 'person-first' language as harmful across all cultural contexts. This is not the case. Solidarity between Indigenous peoples with disabilities and wider communities need to be aware of these differences. These important differences need to be at fore when discussing the complexity of identity. People in dialogue over the use of person-first language particularly need to be conscious of the potential of removing person-first preferences from the rich context and communities where they emerge. It is vital to note the diversity between Indigenous peoples themselves (Velarde, 2018) as all have their own unique stories, customs, and language that informs identity and disability.

In the context and values of my community I see 'person-first' language as a means to liberation from oppression in many forms. I am speaking into a space where I understand how language has either potential to build or potential to destroy. I also understand that scholars will develop more ways of talking about disability that critically consider these tensions as time goes on and as more representation of Diné narrative enters these spaces of disability discourse. Right now, intervening into this space to make room for Diné teachings is a first step to what I hope is a long dialogue ahead. Entering disability discourse as Diné, proposes unique challenges of its own in entering this space with little understanding or visibility of Diné epistemic approaches to disability in wider discourse. This also includes the ways Diné people try to work through talking about disability within their own contexts.

This current political moment carries great potential as wider conversations of expressing disability identity continue to challenge the social discourse of what disability is. There are

person-first and fluid descriptions of disability emerging as part of the wider representation of disability narrative. Disability activist and scholar Alice Wong (2020) states:

> disabled people have always existed, whether the word *disability* is used or not. To me, disability is not monolith, nor is it a clear-cut binary of disabled and non-disabled. Disability is mutable and ever-evolving. Disability is both apparent and non-apparent. Disability is pain, struggle, brilliance, abundance, and joy. (p. xxii)

In the end, my child defines what autism is for her. It is up to her to decide how I speak of autism beyond this work and in the years to come. I am in a space of forever learning, and for the purposes of the study, at this time and place, this is my language choice. I acknowledge all the individuals who articulate what autism and disability is for themselves and respect those expressions as part of the wide spectrum of *being* in relation to autism or disability.

Models of Disability

In moving away from focusing on categorical and definitive explanations of disability, I am trying to assert a more relational understanding based on my experience of my own cultural knowledge. This doesn't mean that I intend to over-simplify the narratives of disability or generalize it in a way that erases how peoples with disabilities define their *way of being* for themselves. I am not arguing that disability isn't complex and that Diné philosophy is complex. My deep attention towards Diné knowledge with lesser attention to deeper analysis of disability discourse, doesn't mean that I devalue the depth of vast representations and *definitions* of disability. Disability is complex. Relational lifeways are also complex.

I spend a long time focusing on narratives of relationality rooted in Diné philosophy because that knowledge isn't at the fore of disability discourse. I spend more time on Diné teachings and lifeways because they are not accounted for or found in practices in the institutions I have encountered as a parent. There is a large body of scholarship written on disability and the various models and discourse over identify-first, person-first, body-centric, mind-centric, socially constructed and so forth (Annamma et al., 2013; Hickey, 2015; Invalid, 2019; Wong, 2020). Although I engage with these in passing throughout this work, my intention isn't to focus specifically on those discourses. Rather, I focus on the ways disability is socially *narrated* into structures. I focus on how disability emerges in my narrative and through the work I have done as a parent and scholar. The focus of this work is placing my own view of disability as a Diné person at the fore.

My experience is the primary source of how I am working through the gaps of what is written about disability, institutions, and structures, and how I live as a Diné mother in these spaces. This work doesn't define disability by comparing definitions nor give an absolute definition of disability within a Diné context. Rather, I am examining the stories, teachings and lessons that are drawn from the knowledge of 'disability'. The narratives of disability are extensive and relational. Talking about my experiences and how I understand Diné teachings are part of the important relational ontologies of this work.

Disability Justice

Disability justice has different definitions depending on who you are asking and is ever-evolving (Invalid, 2019). In alignment with Diné ontology explored throughout this work, I define disability justice as the proliferation of being free to exist as oneself, to be free from harm, to *belong* and be valued as a sacred being. Part of that is the 'justice' is articulating 'disability' from a Diné lens for Diné peoples with disabilities, which affirms and cultivates the inherent right for individuals to be themselves and pursue a life that affirms their being as *Bila' Ashdla'ii*—a Five Fingered Earth Surface Person (Ayzie, 2021b). We are reminded by Diné knowledge sharer Donovan Ayzie (2021b) in his essay *Nihookáá Diyin Dine'é*, that "we are created in an exceptional manner… our lives are considered so valuable…never forget that" (p. 10). That is a Diné perspective of 'value' and the heart of relationality. That is my Diné perspective of disability justice. It is a different set of values that govern the protections read-as-collective-actions of those we consider most vulnerable and inherently deserving of our care.

Social narratives matter. People matter. Relationships matter. Disability justice from my perspective is having Diné knowledge of 'disability' accounted for and a space to exist. Disability justice is having the stories of Diné ancestors and lands as the framework for remedying imbalance. Disability justice is working through systems of relationships to restore and repair as a holistic, collective movement. It is not being forced into the structures and systems to prove or disapprove based on their rules and narratives. As I will demonstrate throughout this work, value systems, ideologies, perspective, and relationship can make or break the world(s) of those on its margins. From Diné stories that uphold *k'é as lifeway,* disability justice for our communities starts with focusing on caretaking relationships. That has to do with all our relations. It starts with us, which I address in *Chapter Seven* on sovereignty. It starts with our 'inner worlds' with compassion and vulnerability in affirmation that we are people who are perpetually learning. We can do better as a collective society. Disability writer

and activist Alice Wong (2020) reminds us " we are living in a time where disabled people are more visible than ever" (p. xxi). While representation of disabled voices is exciting and important, the resounding call from the disability community is that "We should expect more. We all deserve more" (Wong, 2020, p. xxi). It is time for us as a society to listen and learn and do better.

Cultural Knowledge

This work is centered on Diné cultural knowledge and ancestral teachings. What I present is what/how I was taught, and it will vary from what other Diné people know. There are differences in Diné stories, language dialect, and protocol throughout Diné communities (Belin, E. et al., 2021). I explore this deeply when I examine my methodology of matrix and storytelling. I engaged in consultation regarding some of the work that is represented as personal communication, and I also sought professional translations for recordings in Diné bizaad (Navajo language) recorded in public spaces. Parts of this work were read over and given feedback on by other Diné people. I received feedback on the figure presented in the work by *Saad K'idilyé,* a Diné language nest program.

Knowledges I draw on came from a culmination of literary work, anthologies, personal discussion, class dialogue, conferences, community dialogue on social media pages, Diné-led podcasts, and recordings on the Navajo Nation Department of Behavioural Health social media. I only use knowledge that is already written about, shared in public forums or conferences, or recorded. These are the sources I use to engage in literary analysis in conversation with my personal experience. I have lineage to this knowledge, and relationship to it, which is why I use it. I frame a majority of what I know from my individual perspective and experience. I do not include ceremonial or esoteric knowledge, or knowledge that was shared under the pretext of ceremony, even if that was a public forum such as a webinar. I did not conduct interviews or surveys. I have tried to only use some of the sources from webinars oriented towards cultural revitalization as supporting source material on general Diné teachings. With the global COVID-19 restrictions, I noticed a large movement of cultural webinars begin surfacing digitally to provide access. The unexpected result of moving towards virtual platforms opened a space for me to continue to develop my understanding of Diné knowledge.

My intention is to keep most of the teachings safe within our own circles. With that said, there are things I intentionally don't share. As an Indigenous researcher, I don't see this consideration

of withholding as an infringement on a scholarly convention which requires that I divulge all for the sake of proving something exists or doesn't exist. I understand academic traditions assimilate Indigenous peoples into a system which often works against their own principles of caretaking Indigenous knowledge. By intentionally withholding some information I acknowledge it can result in ambiguity. However, I believe refusal to divulge everything for the sake of academic appetites upholds accountability to our communities and nation. Many times, the pressure to *say more* often works against the interest of Indigenous peoples. Our knowledge and stories end up outside of our communities and are misused through commodification. My audience for this work is Diné people. When I say we, ours, and us —I am directly talking to Diné people. What I share is intended for Diné readers and scholars as part of the work that accounts for our cultural identity in archives, which we produce ourselves.

Methodology

The methodology I use to answer my research question, 'What is disability from a Diné perspective?' is story, narrative, oral history, theory, and textual analysis. The 'data' used to answer my research question more broadly are the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, The Story of Turkey and Locust, personal narrative, and various archives (bodies of knowledge) that contribute to discussions of disability, either directly or indirectly. These archives include recorded interviews housed within the Center of Southwest Research, at University of New Mexico, as part of the Native American Oral History Project. The Native American Oral History Project collected interviews of Indigenous educators, activists and planners across the U.S. I accessed these archives as part of my fellowship with the Research Center during my master's program at the University of New Mexico.

I rely heavily on published works from Diné scholars ranging from *Foundations of Navajo Culture,* by elder Wilson Aronilth Jr. (1985) to various anthologies. The work on the Diné sacred teaching of *Sa ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH) are taken from works that have already been published about this concept, particularly *Diné Perspectives: Revitalizing and Reclaiming Navajo Thought* (Lee, 2014). Although I have come to learn more about SNBH during the last several years, I attempt to only share what has already been recorded and written by Diné people.

I use textual analysis to flesh out the complex interpretations of Diné ontology and place them in conversation with narrative and storytelling. I also draw from various theories from

interdisciplinary fields to answer my research questions through conversation of all these different pieces of 'data'. I read all these bodies of work together— story, narrative, theory, literature of Diné and Indigenous philosophy— to approach and explore my research questions.

Narratives

Narrative is a central part of my methodology. I frame chapters according to narratives—my personal narrative, Diné ancestral narratives (teachings, stories), narratives of the land (land-based pedagogy), and structural narratives that influence law and understandings of rights discourse. Narrative describes the experiences found in stories (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) and the ontological interpretation I draw from them. Framing each chapter as a form of narrative attempts to draw the importance of experience and *voice* throughout this work. I argue that there are colliding narratives that make up the worlds of disability. A key feature of this work is focusing on these narratives and engaging in story and textual analysis to dig deep into how those narratives are formed, and how they give shape to wider social knowledge.

Narrative helps me guide my readers from theory to the lived realities of people within the intersectional spaces I speak of: Indigeneity and disability. I am not only focused on responding to oppressive systems but imagining how other narratives can inform our understanding of disability. Narrative as methodology is not merely an opinion piece that is autobiographical. It is intended to extend the limitations of current literature and theory of works that discuss *ways of being* in normalized constructs. For example, narratives of the land upholds that our Diné teachings convey that land has voice, agency, lineage, and a place in our relational understandings of how we come to know as Diné. My own narrative in this work operates to contest the gap of what is written about us, as Indigenous women who are impacted by disability discourse, and what we have to say about these things ourselves. I put myself into those realms where I am not just theorizing a topic outside myself. I am theorizing my lived experience as a Diné mother of a child with autism.

Personal Narrative

Personal narrative in this work had two primary functions. The first was to place myself in this research and use my positionality to tell a story that was unique and part of unrepresented discourse. I wanted this work to be relevant to me and my life. I also wanted to contribute to my community in helpful ways as they build the structures to support our Diné children. I

wanted wider social providers and institutions to finally listen to me. So often, parents' concerns are disregarded; and we are pointed towards support groups to lament, rather than to committees or boards that will partner with us to create systemic change. I wanted Diné providers and educators to have access to Diné materials in their research. I wanted our relatives with disabilities to see they are represented in our stories and to know that there is a system of *k'é*—an ancient relation which is intended to guide our people towards caretaking and cultivating a life for all of us. There is plan in place that considered our relations. There are teachings that demonstrate how our communities are to value them for who they are with the most beautiful unconditional love. I wanted other Diné mothers to find my story and know they are not alone.

It is because I have struggled, that I tell this story. It is because I experienced these power relations, that I assert myself as an authority of this topic. I do this work, because it is our life and this is part of my healing journey in working towards disability justice. There were moments of writing this work where I relived traumatic hardships. I was forced to encounter moments again that I had placed behind me. I continued writing about them, because I know Diné children and Diné mothers deserve so much better. I do this because I can imagine a future of possibility for my child. I will do everything I can to cultivate that potential and grow a world where she is celebrated, belongs, and is free to be who she is.

I do this work because I believe that our ancestors embraced the Beauty Way and have given us the blueprints to realize that *relationships are there, they have always been there*. Our collective movement towards restoration takes our participation to unite. It requires the restoration of relationships as lifeway to support all our community members who have been severed from Diné knowledge. This work is breathing life into what already is. This was the second function of narrative, to dictate a new possibilities forward as I drew on lifeways that have existed since time immemorial.

This work offers a starting point that strives to be honest and forthcoming about the challenges we have lived through. I have done my best not to present an idealistic model of thinking and planning that has no connection to the realities that families and people with disabilities face. I also remained aware not to tip over into narratives of disability that strengthen the very structures I am critiquing. There must be a way of talking about need, hardship and support without the negative stigmas that always attach to them.

This narrative also takes up the delicate matter of discussing my child. I did my best throughout this work to do everything I could to not tell her story for her. I did my best to talk about myself and my experience as I journeyed with her. This work is my love letter to her, so that she would know that I believed in a better world for all peoples with disabilities. I wanted her to know that I was with her and by her side, and will be there until the day I die. *I wanted to rewrite the social narrative of disability for my child, born from our cultural wisdom, as a gift and promise, that our Diné ancestors love her unconditionally and in completeness*. Our ancestors were meticulous in their planning for all our children who come to us in their own *ways of being*. Our ancestors placed the stories of those teachings all around us and in the natural world to remind us how to live in relationship. The focus on relational ways of knowing matters. It has always mattered.

This work stemmed from the commitment to honor my child's *way of being* that extends beyond what anyone can ever capture in words. I wrote this narrative of my daughter to share what she has taught me as my teacher. She taught me to re-encounter the world and brought me to another way of knowing that I would never have experienced without her. For this, I am forever humbled and grateful.

In this way, my methodology of utilizing her as part of this work takes into account aspects of her privacy and future self. I wrote as if she would read this one day; and draw from it the beauty of our knowledge and an affirmed sense that our ancestral teachings hold the way forward for us. I have left some aspects of our lives vague and have included her through partnership in this work with the use of her artwork as part of the retelling of stories found in the appendices of this work. I also received her consent to use photographs of her and us together. I did this as part of the commitment to convey that what I have to say is not just theoretical work on a page. What I am talking about is about people's lives and lived experience. It is about their dignity to live in a world free from harm and to be who they are. Bringing the humanity of both of us, and our journey to this work is vulnerable and a precious act. It is done with reverence and the spirit of love.

Personal Narrative and Ontology

I also use personal narrative to further the interpretation of Diné ontology. When I use narrative, I am placing myself as the person who is reiterating the meaning-making from cultural concepts. I do this, as part of the ethical accountability in this work. Diné scholar and educator

Vincent Werito (2014) also utilized a similar methodology in his own work in discussing the sacred nature of SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty). He applied the teachings from his childhood to discuss the multi-directional ways in which SNBH became evident throughout his life journey. By using my own experience, I am not collapsing one Diné worldview or translation of Diné knowledge to speak for all Diné people. In placing myself in this work, I show the potential for growth that Diné knowledge offers as it works in my life and also the highly subjective nature of Diné knowledge as something that is made known through the actual living in the world (Lee, 2014; Werito, 2014). We make sense of these concepts when we live them.

Diné knowledge gives us other ways to understand the nature of *being*, *personhood and belonging* in relation to disability. My story is just one thread, but it guides us and nurtures the construction of this work. Moving beyond critique of the materiality of current disability politics, the stories of *Níłtsą bi'áád* (Female Rain) and the stories of Early Twilight Dawn Boy (Chapter Three), Locust (Chapter Six) and Turkey (Chapter Six), point towards new orientations of ontologies *of being*. That is the aspiration of this work, to show that there are other ways of being known.

Ancestral Stories

Story is one form of (ancestral) narrative I use throughout this work. Storytelling is a collective form of narrative that describes the experiences of people and ancestors. I focus on three distinct stories in this work: The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, The Story of Turkey and The Story of Locust. The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy has its own methodological considerations which I dedicate the next heading to. The stories of Turkey and Locust were part of a recorded session from the Utah Navajo Health System told by Diné traditional practitioner Ernest Begay.

I use these traditional stories because Diné perspectives of *being* are made known through storytelling. Stories contain ancestral values and narratives of diversity paired with social mechanisms for caretaking and accountability. Stories are transmitters of lineage, values, and perspectives. They also contribute to self-reflection in attaining self-knowledge. This is a key process in how one self-identifies—how one comes into relations (Archibald et al., 2019). These forms of identity are defined through relationships produced by epistemic frameworks within our own ontologies *of being*. According to Sto:lo First Nation scholar Joann Archibald (2019), “stories were part of articulating our world, understanding our knowledge systems,

naming our experiences, guiding our relationships and most importantly, identifying ourselves" (p. 5). It matters how we identify ourselves in the larger scope of how we are identified by outward structures. Stories disrupt how we as Indigenous people are externally categorized or are expected to conform to outside identity formations that do not match our ontological understandings of ourselves as Indigenous peoples, nor account for our experiences in the world.

Story as methodology moves beyond the notion of storytelling as "the simplistic re-telling of a story" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 145). Archibald (2019) refers to story as "holistic meaning making" (p. 4) that unifies the mind, body, spirit, and heart. This resonates with the idea of completeness that I argued in the Introduction of this work in relation to SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty). The purpose of story is to invoke deep reflection and a realization of the inter-relatedness of all things (Archibald et al., 2019; Belin, 2021b). Story teaches Indigenous peoples through their own worldviews, place (Baldy, 2015), and often encapsulates more abstract knowledge which relies on the individual worldview of each person (Lee, 2014). Storytelling relates to personal narrative and experience because it reproduces values and conceptions *of being* that articulate a unique understanding of the world. The methodological utility of storytelling provides for the individualized lens of interpretation and the centring of each person within their conceptions of the world as the storyteller. Storytelling seen as a form of narrative honors the unique *ways of being* and experiencing the world through the life and influences of the storyteller. This is why story and songs can share similarities and still be distinct (Manson, 2021).

Story is also what kept our societies together by cultivating how we came to *relate* and make connections between our thoughts, feelings and the physical and spiritual worlds (Cajete, 2017). Storytelling, therefore, makes each individual the expert of their human experience (Cajete, 1994). Story is a form of narrative that helps translate these individual, complex ontologies of *being* in accessible ways. Disability scholar and activist Alice Wong highlights this in her anthology *Disability Visibility* (2020), arguing that stories "show disabled people simply *being*, in our own words, by our own account…[and] are part of a larger arc in my own story as a human being" (p. xv). The stories I engage in throughout this work are not merely here for theoretical analysis. They are here to assert the vast spectrum of ontologies *of being*. This serves both Indigenous peoples and peoples with disabilities in numerous ways. Storytelling provides for imagination, solidarity, hope, and transformation.

Story both explains and creates complex connections between our thoughts and the human experience. In short, "story is Indigenous theory" (Baldy, 2015, p. 8). According to Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, use of story is "not just about the power of stories, but about the power of working with stories as a means to draw insights and possibilities to Indigenous experiences and knowledge" (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 5). They are a means to enact structural change and shape the materiality of everyday life. From my story paired with the resonating features of the story in Diné teachings, I learned to see the world through relationship because of story. I begin to see both the harmful relationships which fuelled oppressive systems and the relationships that could be strengthened. I privilege the focus on relational practices that can give root, rather than merely an analysis oriented at deconstruction of these harmful systems within this work. Therefore, my intention is not to only "speak back", but rather, speak forward. Cree social worker and scholar Amber Dion (2021) reminds us that efforts aimed towards dismantling foreign systems are also aimed at working from our own spaces of knowledge. Both efforts emerge from asserting and knowing Indigenous *ways of being*, which are part of the process of decolonization. In cultivating Indigenous knowledge and advancing it, she argues that we speak "the language of possibility" (57:28).

As a Diné academic writing this work, I was drawn to the question posed by Dion (2021) at an international Indigenous panel in 2021. She asked, "Indigenous people are researched to death; how are we going to research ourselves back to life?" (59:23). This has been at the fore of my thinking through both the challenges and possibilities of this work. This question is very much part of how I construct my methodological approach to this work. It took a great deal of personal inner work to move beyond the focus of always responding to oppressive systems. As a researcher encouraged by the strong mentorship I have received here in Aotearoa by *mana wāhine*, it was much more difficult to imagine what the future could look like. By upholding the principles of sovereignty and relational accountability, we cement the values of community care. This is the first step in what I hope is a long journey of rebuilding ahead.

The immediate aspects of *how* to do research on this topic and in this space—included questions of how to move beyond how Diné knowledge has been written about in the archives to produce something more meaningful to Diné people themselves. How is this work part of my own healing journey, as something that speaks life into the future for my family and community? There are generative possibilities that open up when we focus our attention to not

only producing counter-narratives or counter-forces, but start from a distinct Diné view and unravel the extent of its possibilities.

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy

This work uses a Diné story, the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. I use this story to engage in multiple theoretical questions throughout this work ranging from relationality to spiritual intelligence, to peacemaking and legal remedy.

I heard this story in 2018, told by Chad and Jana Pfeiffer during a family visit at our home in New Mexico. The Pfeiffer's are well-regarded Diné community members. Jana is a regarded advocate for Indigenous women's rights and Chad is a counsellor who has worked in numerous capacities throughout Diné and Indigenous institutions. The Pfeiffer family have long been tremendously supportive and live the values of *k'é* as friends, colleagues, and relatives. I hold their insights and generosity in sharing this story, and all good things, in the highest regard.

The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy was gifted to us by the Pfeiffer family as encouragement and as something that could give us hope. When I informed the Pfeiffer's that I was interested in sharing this story in my PhD work, they were supportive and said it was up to me to decide what to do with the story. I would have to determine how I would be responsible with it. With this great honor and accountability, I wanted to share aspects of the story and bring it into conversation with already published works on elements found within the story to explain how I understood the teachings of 'disability'.

There were quite a few considerations in taking this story and writing about it in this work. The first was that I have never seen this story written. It exists as part of an oral tradition. A similar story was told at the Diné Early Childhood Summit in 2021 by elder Dr. Herman Cody. Dr. Cody's presentation was conducted in Diné bizaad, Navajo language. This is a common practice for Diné speakers in order to keep the story safe and within the community of Diné people. This may not have been his intention, but often some Diné people will share stories or teachings in our language when discussing ancestral knowledge. This practice typically happens on public platforms. Many speakers are careful since much of our knowledge has been exploited by non-Diné people (Yellowhorse, 2020b). The third person I heard a similar story from is Diné knowledge sharer Lorenzo Jim (2022a). In his presentation on wellness, he shared teachings of children associated with each mountain of *Nihi Kéyah* (homelands). Early Twilight Dawn Boy was associated with the teachings of the *Sis Najiníí*, the mountain to the East.

Since this Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is part of a delicate situation, I don't use the transcripts from Dr. Cody's presentation, nor Lorenzo Jim's. Nor do I use the exact story that was shared with me from Chad Pfeiffer, except for a direct quote of his towards the end of the story. Although this story is extensive and branches out into other stories, I keep the focus specific to Early Twilight Dawn Boy and the children in the story. I tell this story with my own creative expression, and with my own voice. In doing so, I have intentionally left key things out and have tried to only share the information that I could connect back to things that have already been written about in Diné scholarship. I have only shared what could be explained through textual analysis already evident in archival bodies that examine Diné philosophy and educational pedagogy (land-based knowledge). This was part of the ethical accountability I took to heart when writing about this and it is vital to understand these considerations.

Diné stories are sacred (Denny, 2022b). The relational nature of these stories has roots that sprout into ceremonial practices (Chad Pfeiffer, January 17, 2021, personal communication). With continued consultation regarding this story, I also realize that certain names have developed out of these stories. Ceremonies came from this story and aspects of the story are related to items that would be used later in ceremonial contexts. I don't identify those nor discuss them. What I will mention is that certain protocols took place in the telling of the story. In consultation with Pfeiffer (2021b), he communicated that he visited a specific site and that prayers and an offering were made. Diné practitioner and elder Avery Denny (2021) outlines this practice as *bilyeel*, which honors the principles that "you have to give to receive" (p. 3) as a mutual tenant of reciprocity and inter-dependency written in the natural world. Denny (2021) continues, "things are not just there for the taking...they are sacred…they give us life" (p. 4). To enter into these spaces is to enter a space of relationships. In that space, there is accountability. These practices are important as Diné lifeways as reciprocal and rooted in care. They are part of the process of storytelling as a lifeway. I dedicated my heart and intention to these truths as a lifeway in writing this work. I did my best, to be responsible and reverent with our stories as a Diné person.

These stories are not merely stories. *Hané* (stories) "are the foundation" according to Chad Pfeiffer (January 17, 2021, personal communication), and I realize that the articulation of these stories and concepts is a respectful act. I try to glean only the surface aspects of the stories I share, to focus on the *relational ways* of knowing found in our intellectual traditions. It is not my intention to go further, because I view that as over-stepping my place. I want to give the

stories the fullness of what they deserve. I hope to share that in a more meaningful way directly with my community one day.

There were also some significant differences in the stories when I heard from both Pfeiffer, Jim and Dr. Cody. Story changes often depend on the context and who is telling the story. This is certainly true as parts of the story have been elaborated on or shortened in my retelling. As a methodological aspect of this work, I utilize this story as part of my own expression and authority as a storyteller. Therefore, Dr. Cody's, Jim's and Pfeiffer's story are supplemental. A majority of the conversations that took place regarding this story came from personal discussions with Pfeiffer and in 'conversation' with other stories and knowledge from Diné intellectual traditions.

This story is part of my own learning journey, and part of my own way of making sense of how Diné knowledge operates across all the mediums I have encountered. This story is one piece of many. It has grounded my relationships found in teachings of 'disability' to Diné principles of compassion, care, reciprocity, love and *k'é.* This work is the internal dialogue of *how I came to know* as a *Kiinya'aanii* woman. It is personal and it is precious.

I share these stories for the same reasons I share my own personal narrative. I share because Diné knowledge and stories helped me find peace and hope in my journey as a mother. I know it can do that for others. Our stories are deeply sophisticated mechanisms that are inherently diverse and represent a spectrum *of being* in the world. I share this story because I know that our ancestors had a lesson to teach us about relationships and care. I share it as a call to action, to remind other Diné people, that we have a framework and a safeguard for the protection of our Diné children—*all of them*. We are community, and we are accountable, and we have the tools alive with us to change the futures for our children with 'disabilities'.

Matrix

My methodology considered the collective understanding that there is no singular Diné worldview or identity (Lee, 2014). To assert that there is, would only replicate the troublesome model I am contesting in this work: a singular mode of knowing 'disability' that speaks for the lived experience of others. Because of this, I employ the use of "Matrix" or, a web, as articulated by Cordova et al. (2007) in *How It Was: The Native American Philosophy of V.T. Cordova* and utilized by numerous Diné scholars including Lee (2014), to express multiple

perspectives and ways of approaching Diné epistemological knowledge. Diné scholars, such as Lloyd Lee (2014), have privileged this methodology rather than replicating assumptions that there is a singular Diné 'philosophy'. According to Lee (2014), "More than three hundred thousand people self-identify as Diné, and each person has his or her own individual outlook on how to approach and live life, what to believe in, what to aspire to be…" (p. 4). All of these experiences comprise what Cordova articulated as a "matrix" (p. 4).

Pursuing this methodological tool will uphold the basis for my argument that ontologies *of being* and of being known, are highly subjective. They are encapsulated in the unique experience and positionality of the individual. This methodology reflects the importance I give narratives within this work. It prizes an understanding that there are not only vast interpretations of theoretical approaches to knowledge but these diverse and distinct approaches uphold the power of narrative and storytelling as articulations of Diné philosophical thought.

In placing myself within the matrix of Diné perspectives, I must reinforce my prior comments on my positionality. In retelling of Blessing Way stories, I recognize there are matters of protocol (Werito, 2014) and also a slew of identity politics that come with storytelling (Lee, 2007). Who has authority to speak about Diné ontology? I assert my authority to speak as a Diné woman because I draw on *k'é* (positive relationships) as the philosophical and political anchor of my positionality. Through *k'é* —the recognition and belonging to my clans, lands and people—I claim and am claimed in return. I also recognize the precarious situation I am in trying to make connections between knowledge that has been severed from myself and my limited command of the Diné language. I simultaneously acknowledge myself compassionately, as a product of the legacy of colonialism and U.S. assimilation. I also hold space for myself as someone who wants to reconnect with my ancestral knowledge. I live by my unequivocal commitment to be accountable to my community and Diné people. That is the reciprocal nature of *k'é.*

Drawing on my own principles, *k'é* is why I tell this story. It is my accountability to my daughter and myself to tell our stories and advocate for change. It is my obligation to teach other Diné people and share our knowledge for our future as Diné. The politics of speaking are powerful. But, my voice is powerful too. I use my voice with accountability and in the spirit of love in the hope that substantial change will come. I do this in the hope that our collective relationships will continue to hold our Diné children with 'disabilities' in paving the way

forward. The stakes are high, and that is why I include my own narrative in this work. My voice is one in a sea of many Diné perspectives, and my voice matters.

Diné Theory

The 'concepts' I explore in relation to disability are actually part of our lifeways. As lifeways, they are philosophical concepts and methodologies of their own. These concepts include *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes), *k'é* (positive relationships) and *SNBH* which I initially refer to generally as The Pathway to Beauty for ease of readership but develop a more complex understanding as I progress through this work. These concepts resurface through each chapter in this work. Both theoretical and methodological approaches to my analysis of relationality return to these concepts. Therefore, *hozhó, k'é* and *SNBH* reoccur throughout this work. They are the basis for *knowing*, understanding reciprocal accountability and learning how to achieve wellbeing. However, the pathway to them, *the journey*, is different for each context. This indicates the wonderful diversity that is bound by the ontological framing of these principles. Ultimately, I am interested in how these lifeways address the relational nature of disability; as relationship, as *being.* I am interested in how these alter the ways society perceives and understands the multiple relationships that either make or marginalize a person's life. These concepts are not just theories but are also a methodology of how to live a life of completeness within the Diné lifeways. All of these concepts are interrelated and reinforce one another. Although distinct, they all collectively work toward living a life of peace, wholeness and self-understanding.

Hozhó is an integral part of my approach to writing about disability. *Hozhó* is an understanding of the hardships, challenges, and harms evident in our world. It is also a recognition of the spaces of potential in which community, kinship and love have strong roots. I am aware of how Diné concepts could be read out of context or appear to present what academics might view as 'utopian' idealisms. *Hozhó,* could easily be read as a fanciful notion of harmony. I find it more useful to consider this word to mean *balance*. The approach to *hozhó*, signals the balancing of fundamental aspects of the world: both hardship and beauty. *Hozhó* is not a lofty, abstract concept. When I speak of rebalancing or restoration in this work, I am speaking about the concept of *hozhó* as a deeply influential force that enacts change. This understanding and writing about *hozhó* aims to not present a romanticized notion of its political power. Dr. Vincent Werito explores his own interpretations of SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty) in his chapter in *Diné Perspectives* (2014). He carefully approaches Diné knowledge with the

intention to avoid "essentializing Navajo thought…and romanticizing Indigenous forms of knowledge" (p. 36). I try to mirror this practice by sharing and linking to the utility of this knowledge as it relates to my life and not some fanciful pondering of what can be. These concepts are lifeways, and they are shown to have deep political and communal impacts in our stories.

K'é (positive relationships) is the main concept I use to discuss disability. Centralizing relationality, encapsulated in the Diné principle of *k'é,* brings the focus of this work in direct engagement with Diné Fundamental Law found in *Chapter 11*. *K'é is* a powerful social mechanism. It also has legal and political power in Diné communities. According to Title VII of the Navajo Nation Government, "*K'é* is a law providing security, continuance, and balance of unity and harmony for Diné life wellbeing" (Navajo Nation Courts, n.d.). *K'é* situates accountability through relationships as a key feature of its political utility. *K'é,* is a vital concept in this work because it is a methodological orientated toward SNBH and carries an entire system of recognition and belonging, as well as values that provide accountability to cultivate our communities.

The stories shared in this work all focus on this key lifeway of *k'é. K'é* as theory, as philosophy and as methodology are vital. *K'é* provides orientation and perspective of the multiple ways' things are interwoven and reciprocal. It is a vehicle of expressing their relationality. *K'é* is pedagogy.

Theoretical Foundations

Several other key theories emerge from the latter part of this work. The first is found in my own narratives. The notion of survival is a key concept I engage in my narrative. I draw from biopolitical theory and social death, which are theoretical approaches utilized by Diné scholar and activist Melanie Yazzie (2016), and Latinx American Studies scholar Lisa Marie Cacho (2012). These scholars theorize the links between knowledge and institutional power. Their attention to relationships of power that make subjugation across intersecting identities is of interest to this work. Subjects of violence largely include racialized populations, the working class (Cacho, 2012; Moreton-Robinson, 2021; Yazzie, 2016), and the disabled. Close attention to these intersecting identities demonstrates how some populations become expendable through the knowledge and discourse produced about them. This form of subjugation shows the power of knowledge to enhance structures of support or deny resources to thrive. I use this framework

to discuss questions of power, structural authority, and knowledge without explicit elaboration of biopolitical theory (Foucault, 1982) or its genealogy.

The next theoretical underpinning I draw from is Indigenous feminism. I utilize Diné scholar Melanie Yazzie's co-written article with Hupa, Yurok and Karuk scholar Chuska Risling Baldy (2018). I focus on what they call "radical relationality" as a nexus for understanding the scope of what it means to live well and through relationship (p. 2). Yazzie and Baldy's (2018) theoretical lens of *radical relationality* "brings together multiple strands of materiality, kinship, corporeality, affect, land/body connection and multidimensional connectivity coming primarily from Indigenous feminists" (p. 2). Such a methodological orientation attempts to both draw important links between the multiple strands of existing *and being*. This approach also contests essentializing tendencies towards identities of Indigeneity which can be conflated with a romanticized *way of being* in a state of nature. This is important as I draw on theorization of meaning-making through the natural world. This work seeks to engage the world of relationships with distinct attention to the ways *of being* that exist in both the human and non-human worlds. More importantly, this work focuses on the *agency* of both the human and non-human, with the underlying commitment to the principles of self-determination and the freedom to be who oneself.

Finally, Diné feminist Melanie Yazzie has been foundational in the positioning of my personal narrative in highlighting anti-capitalist critiques of normative politics found in disability. Yazzie (2014) has placed historical rendering of Indigenous dispossession and death at the forefront of her analysis of state power and structural violence. Yazzie's (2014) contribution to the field of Diné studies has compelled it to "go beyond conventional celebrations or lamentations of Diné traditions to dig deeper into how ordinary Diné life confronts, comingles with and negotiates modern power, producing polymorphus registers of influence that pressure and haunt us, empower and invigorate us" (p. 91). Yazzie contends that both movement and the resistance found in 'ordinary' life of Diné people constitute their own form of power that pushes against larger, over-arching power. Yazzie's analysis of the collisions of power, both structural and ordinary, play out in analysis of personal narrative. Indeed, the everyday narrations of which she speaks of, play out throughout this work to show how my teachings found in Diné ancestral knowledge produces power as a counterforce. It is the ordinary narrations of everyday life and struggle—my life shared through narrative—that seeks to dislodge these totalizing forces.

Methodology Conclusion

This methodology brings multiple perspectives together to draw meaning from the ways that 'disability' can be understood from a Diné perspective. My use of these perspectives aims to rewrite the narrative of disability and autism. By framing narratives from my life, ancestors, land, story, and theory, I attempt to pull the concept of disability from the spaces that disability is typically discussed. I decenter dialogue from the realm of Disability Studies and disability discourse and place it on the periphery. Rather, I focus on the narratives of Diné people by centering the teachings, knowledge and love found within Diné life. This is the starting point and the enduring point of reference within this work. Within a Diné ontological lens, my methodology privileges Diné ways of seeing, doing, and thinking that exist at the fore.

Exploring relational ways of knowing and the foundation of *k'é* in this work, my methodology reflects this process. I am articulating the relationship between the archives and resources I draw from. I also enact relationality with this work by placing myself and community within this dialogue. My methodology of narrative allows me to *lead* the reader within the larger story and share the journey alongside them. The sources I use are not merely texts and literature—they are voices that I am in dialogue with. This work is a conversation, and it is a story.

My methodology embodies my self-determination to engage discussions of disability within my own ontological lens and with my own choice of tools. In refusing the popular and theoretical framing of disability discourse, I am committed to Diné knowledges and *voice*. My intention is to stay true to this work as a Diné person; to tell a story as a means to teach. This was the methodology of my ancestors. I follow in their footsteps.

Part II: Diné Relational Narratives

Part I of this work focused on my story to frame a reconceptualization of ‘disability’ from my own experience and worldview. This next part turns towards relational teachings found within land and mapped by story. Relational ontologies found within Diné land and knowledge, also work towards a reconceptualization of ‘disability’. Expanding on relational teachings draws out Diné principles of care, reciprocity, and desires for harmonious outcomes. From these foundational principles, I set the ontological context for Part III, which examines ancestral stories more closely to read them against the land-based and philosophical knowledges I present in Part II of this work.

Chapter Three: Diné Educational Pedagogy and The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy

This chapter shares the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. I place this story in conversation with land-based knowledge found in Diné Educational Pedagogy—a distinct model of *knowing* based on Diné lifeway. Placed together, I argue that Diné ancestral stories and Diné Educational Pedagogy convey relational ways of knowing that work towards a reconceptualization of 'disability' within a Diné context. Focusing on epistemes of *relating, knowing,* and *being* modelled through Diné ancestral lands and the stories tied to these places, I illuminate how these teachings deeply influence belonging, identity, relationship and mechanisms for accountability in caretaking all life. I argue that these are the teachings of 'disability' which are rooted in Diné Educational Pedagogy and transmitted by story. These teachings implant values that are foundational for both creating community that protects and sustains conditions to thrive. Diné intellectual engagement teaches us that story is everywhere, and through story we learn about the world in transformative ways (Belin, 2021b; Denny, 2022b). Story is part of the wider web of Indigenous community—an ontology *of being* that people can make sense of through land and the natural world. This ontology of being reshapes an understanding of 'disability'.

This chapter first discusses foundational principles and purposes of *Hané* (stories) as the transmitter of Diné Educational Pedagogy. This distinct pedagogy is a tool to understand the teachings within the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. Diné Educational Pedagogy is constructed of relational teachings housed in the natural world. After I share the story, I then *relate* key Diné principles of *SNBH, hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) and *k'é* (positive relationships) to both the story and the pedagogy. *K'é* supports my engagement with a relational context of diverse *ways of being* to unpack the subsequent lessons within the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. *K'é* is foundational in my arguments for reciprocal accountability and relationship because it operates as both theory and method that underpins relational ontologies.

Relational Ways of Being

Diné knowledge is relational. To know and be known occurs through relationship (Skeets, 2021). This relational system teaches Diné people to establish connections and relationships

beyond the categorical ways that exist in western society. To approach the world through relating, impacts how identities are formed within Diné life. This shifts the understandings of identity that are commonly assigned or imposed upon someone. Diné understandings of *ways of being* advance that there isn't a 'category' in which one fits. One is always in relationship, and therefore part of a greater whole. As such, where there is relationship, there are values engrained there to sustain the relationships. Therefore, where there is relationship, there is accountability.

Although Early Twilight Dawn Boy is described as someone who is disabled, the story's focus is not entirely centered on his ability or inability. In fact, the concept of 'disability' in this story is not necessarily located to one definable thing or person. From the story, the concept of disability is a *relational concept.* Many things can embody the teachings of 'disability'. These lessons are associated with their relational nature rather than the condition, or presumed limitations of a singular person. This also is reflected in Diné language, as over the years I have heard many terms for disability without a universal term associated to this concept. As a descriptive language, each person will describe disability differently, depending on their own worldview, perspective, and style of communicating.

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn is a story about a young boy and children. Yet, the who they were was not bound to only an identifying attribute of able or disabled. Early Twilight Dawn Boy was equally described as a leader, caretaker, and artist. More importantly, he was a teacher as his life and story embodied the Diné pursuit and lifeway of *Sa ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH). As a "vital foundational paradigm in Diné thought", SNBH is a sacred term and Diné scholars insist that it can't be reduced to individual meanings of the words (Lee, 2014; Werito, 2014). Entire books and dissertations have been written about what this concept means, and many Diné scholars argue that there isn't a comprehensive, definitive answer (Lee, 2014; Nez, 2018). Rather, it is easier to explain how SNBH manifests in one's life journey rather than to try to explain what it is exactly (Lee, 2014; Werito, 2014). Due to the complexity of its meaning and how it expresses itself differently in everyone's life, narrative and storytelling are treasured conduits for the exploration of SNBH. The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy draws meaning from this foundational principle and maps how it is manifested in the story. Therefore, both SNBH and 'disability' can be understood as relational concepts known through story, rather than as definable, concrete things.

SNBH is the aspiration that underwrites all Diné teachings. Diné scholar Vincent Werito (2014) describes SNBH as "who we are…what we strive for, what we hope for and pray for because we believe that its essence and meaning lie at the base of our language and cultural identity and traditional cultural knowledge and teachings (p. 26). Similarly, Diné leader and scholar Rex Lee Jim offers a basic conceptual understanding of SNBH as "the beauty in life realized through application of teachings that work" (Lee, 2014, p. 7) However, SNBH isn't merely an abstract concept. SNBH is central to Diné ceremonial knowledge and is the basis for Diné Educational Pedagogy (Lee, 2014; Werito, 2014).

Diné Educational Pedagogy is the tool that makes sense of the relational teachings that embody the concept of SNBH. Stories read through this land-based paradigm illuminate the relational teachings that support peoples towards SNBH. The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy focuses on how the people in the story lived their lives with both the cultivation of SNBH and the absence of it. The teachings found in the story were not necessarily to define what disability was or wasn't. Rather, the teachings were oriented towards how relational accountability operates as a mechanism for restoration and a life of SNBH. Lee (2014) affirms this wider essence of learning about SNBH, as it works to guide "a person and the community to completeness, whereby balance and harmony are the norm and not the exception" (p. 6). Because of this, the aspiration of SNBH and the teachings of 'disability' are about how communities can build, restore, and flourish.

Another way to further understand SNBH comes from taking apart the word SNBH to focus on the specific concept, *hózhó*. Werito (2014) contends that this word *hozhó* also lacks a concrete definition. Werito (2014) links this term to the aspirations for "harmonious outcomes" (p. 26) or living in a harmonious "way that is in line with the life force of nature" (p. 33). This concept is grounded in *Hózhóójí* (Blessing Way) teachings which is an integral part of Diné lifeway (Werito, 2014) and are also rooted in Diné Educational Pedagogy. Throughout different stories, particularly Diné Blessing Way stories, the concepts of SNBH and *hozhó* are embedded in numerous representations found in the natural world, all of which operates like a 'compass' that maps teachings onto Diné ancestral lands (King, 2018; Yonnie, 2016). Therefore, the teachings surround Diné people in daily life. Teachings carried with stories encased in land are pointed towards the pursuit of *hozhó*. According to Diné poets Rex Lee Jim and Mitchell Blackhorse, the utility of story is to "make one think, to reflect, and that such a reflection should motivate one to proper behaviour" (Belin et al., 2021, p. 12). Furthermore,

teachings are intended to "create boundaries, teach responsibilities and how *to care for one another*, about how to build trust and guard that trust…through responsibility and helping one another" (Belin, 2021a, personal communication). The 'compass' of land-based knowledge is to create a home, a place for the teachings to live. They find meaning through story and heart through community practice.

These teachings are also called Sun Wise Path Teachings (Werito, 2014) or A Journey of Wellness…by the Journey of the Sun (Begay, 2017) because of their orientation to the natural world. Werito (2014) contends that such a system seeks to guide "how an individual lives and develops respect and/or reverence for self, his or her relatives and the natural world" (p. 27). The relational nature of knowing through SNBH is a catalyst for looking inward and outward from oneself to develop a sense of connection and responsibility within the wider world and community. It is a system of profound connection. Such a value system is realized through the actual living, learning, and reflecting of oneself in a constant stream of relationship.

Diné Educational Pedagogy is land-based knowledge aimed to teach Diné people SNBH and *hozhó*—to learn of oneself, be creative, overcome life's challenges, and understand our expansive relationships. These in turn cultivates a sense of belonging, to find "hope, faith, respect and reverence for life" (Werito, 2014. p. 34). Our stories and principles are inscribed into our lands, and into the traditional territories of Diné people. Diné Educational Pedagogy is about our identity as Diné people, and our identity is predicated on relational understandings of *being* in the world. Diné people are in a constant place of learning through living this land-based pedagogy where engagement with our connections in the world around us become the medium for learning the cascading teachings oriented towards harmonious outcomes. It is through story Diné learn what it means to live a life of SNBH, and we learn what it is through relationship.

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy

Many years ago, there was a child whose name was Early Twilight Dawn Boy. He was a thoughtful child and showed care and concern for others. He was also a person who could not walk, and in today's thinking, would be considered 'disabled'. He lived in an area that was kept away from the village along with other children like him. Together, they existed on the margins of this community, and were excluded from all the others because people considered them as in *the way*. However, each day the family of Early Twilight Dawn Boy would bring

food and water to the children, and each day, it was Early Twilight Dawn Boy who took responsibility to share with the others.

Figure 3.1 Early Twilight Dawn Boy, Rain (2021a)

One day, Early Twilight Dawn Boy had an idea to venture out beyond where they lived. Having never left their home, he got up one morning and waved to other children to follow him.

Early Twilight Dawn Boy led the way and took turns helping all the others. Together he scooted along, and he tended to the others, so they all went forward together. They would go a little way, and then he would turn back to help the others who were behind come forward. He went back and forth each time, to ensure everyone stayed together.

That morning, the children went to *Ha'a'aah* (East). They were gone all day, and in the evening, they returned covered in white mud. Early Twilight Dawn Boy, as always, continued his commitment of care to the others even though he was very tired from the journey.

The next morning, the children went out again, but this time, toward *Shá'di'ááh* (South). Just like the day before, they were gone all day long. When they returned, they were covered in blue mud and their hands were caked in blue. Again, Early Twilight Dawn Boy led the way and went back and forth helping the others along as they slowly moved away from the community and then back again over the horizon. When they returned again that evening, Early Twilight Dawn Boy, just as the night before, continued with his practice of care.

This continued on the next day as well. However, this time toward *'E'e'aah* (West). This time upon their return, they were covered in yellow mud and their hands and bodies blended in with

the setting sun and the light upon the rocks. Early Twilight Dawn Boy again, after a long journey, helped the others and did not complain about it. He carried on, just as he had always done.

At this time, it was noticed that each day the children left the community. The first couple of days had passed with little care from the others. One older man contemplated the reason for their departure each day. At first, he thought that the children were just headed out of the village to roll in the mud in the hills. “They are just making a mess”, he thought to himself. “Just let them do it.” And he decided not to think on it further.

However, it was on the third day, he realized they returned covered with mud in an unusual way. He became determined to follow them the next day to see what they were doing. Sure enough, as the sun rose the next day, Early Twilight Dawn Boy led the way, and as the older man had predicted, this time the children headed to *Náhookǫs* (North).

As he trailed behind, he watched Early Twilight Dawn Boy continue to lead and support the children, and he was amazed by their perseverance.

He finally came upon a valley and looked over the ledge to see the children below. They were again covered in mud, but this time it was black mud. They were playing in the light of the sun. Surrounding them, were pieces of pottery they had made from the mud. They laughed and smiled at their creations, and their hands and arms were coated in black mud.

Their happiness and joy overwhelmed the man, and in that moment, he realized something he had never noticed before, that they were *“healthy in all ways*”. He saw their joy and it filled the valley. Their joy was manifested in their art.

Early Twilight Dawn Boy, noticing that they had been followed, acknowledged the man and went towards him. The man, who was simultaneously overcome with both happiness and sadness, walked towards Early Twilight Dawn Boy.

“What are you doing here?” said the older man said.

Figure 3.2 Cheii & Early Twilight Dawn Boy, Rain (2021b)

Early Twilight Dawn Boy paused and looked out to the valley and children. He replied, “We are happy here. We are enjoying ourselves. Go back to the people and tell everyone what you saw here”. The man stared in confusion as Early Twilight Dawn Boy continued, “we have been treated like a burden our whole lives and mistreated. We are not coming home”.

The man did not know what to say because he knew this was true.

He looked up to see the children playing within the brightest light of the warmth of the sun. They were suddenly wrapped within a sunbeam, pouring over them and lighting up the valley below. A rainbow touched the ground under which they stood. In an instant, they all took flight, as birds: beautiful birds of every color and shape and they flew away into the light of the rainbow.

The man looked down and Early Twilight Dawn Boy was gone too.

The man stood in disbelief. He was alone in the valley with the pottery that lined grass where the children had played. He tried to think about what he had just seen when he was overcome with grief. He realized the loss of his relatives, and when he returned to the people, they were remorseful in their actions.

Figure 3.3 Flight into the Rainbow, Rain (2021c)

According to Chad Pfeiffer (2018) in this way, the teachings of Early Twilight Dawn Boy speak to us this day. They remind us of the accountability embedded in relationships and the rules of *k'é*, that organize our responsibility to all life and people.

> They speak to the accountability of care and compassion, to live in the spirit of love, and kinship with one another. They also point to the ways that Early Twilight Dawn Boy becomes the point of reference, in achieving the unbelievable. He is the one who illustrates that he is always there to help. He demonstrated leadership and the embodiment of *k'é* and teachings of compassion, care, and the principles of enjoying life. He was spiritually blessed to lead the path of others and pursue the life of being healthy in all ways (Pfeiffer, March 15, 2018, personal communication).

Disability as Relationality from the Teachings of Early Twilight Dawn Boy

There is an entire worldview and philosophy of Diné ontology encapsulated in the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. Of importance is the ways relationality is manifested in Diné Educational Pedagogy to teach the principles of *k'é* (positive relationships), and SNBH. These principles aid in my argument that the concept of 'disability' is a relational concept when read through this four-part paradigm and teachings within the story.

Identifying physical *references and orientation* within the story describe the things, places, directions, and phenomena in this story. They also carry the teachings and lessons associated with them. These references to actual mountains and directions, sunbeams, and color, are treated as *significant relations* fundamentally part of *k'é* and are integral to our teachings and making sense of who Diné are in the world. These references are teachers of complex

knowledge systems that *are the way of the world*, for Diné people. They create a Diné universe oriented towards SNBH.

The clearest way to understand this process of relationality within storytelling could be to consider, who is the story about? Although the story is situated around one-person, Early Twilight Dawn Boy, the story is about multiple things and people. The story is about a lifeways that are rooted in connections. These connections are part of the wider understanding of *hozhó.*

The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is a story of relationality which has many parts to it: community, land, nature, actions, emotions, perceptions, leadership, compassion, natural phenomena and elements, the sacred, and spiritual dimensions *of being* of not only people, but of the non-human world. Therefore, in the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy read through Diné Educational Pedagogy conveys that the concept of 'disability' is not relegated to solely one person and their attributes. Many things can embody the teachings of 'disability', and those teachings can be found everywhere in the natural world and in everyday experience.

These physical references found in Diné pedagogy: the four directions, colors, natural elements and so forth, are part of the wider expressions of SNBH—a life journey which Diné scholar Lloyd Lee (2014) discusses as sometimes being called the "Corn-Pollen Path", or "SNBH Trail" (p. 5). The teachings within aspects of the story points towards both imbalance of SNBH—with the community's treatment of the children but also the model of what living SNBH looks like through the actions of the children in living the teachings. The references to the natural world in story operate like a 'compass' (King, 2018; Yonnie, 2016) to guide individuals to a greater understanding of relational teachings that link the "mind, body and spirit" (Werito, 2014, p. 33) through the cascading lessons associated with movement within the story.

Relating Story to Land

Examining the relational teachings within the land will help clarify the importance of reference to the natural world within the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. Doing so, will also help build an understanding how teachings of 'disability' are also relational. Diné traditional territories are referred to as *Nihi Kéyah* (homelands) and sometimes *Dinétah* according to older oral traditions (Lee, 2022). They are marked by four sacred mountains that create our ancestral boundaries that we were born and given to as Diné people (Aroniłth, 1985; Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007). There are teachings for countless places, directions, and stories of these places

(Belin, 2020). Teachings are also embedded in tangible items, such as tools, rocks, and plants. Teachings always include reference to the four cardinal directions and sacred mountains found in each of those directions. This 'orientation' or 'reference' to the natural world evident in Diné Educational Pedagogy gives shape to Diné ontology.

Ancestral teachings were made to reflect the world around us and could be found anywhere in Diné life. This reflection in the natural world was also reflected within the individual and the internal worlds of Diné people, in their own journey to make sense of the world and their actions in it. Therefore, critical thinking and self-realization of inter-relatedness (Aroniłth, 1985) are foundational lessons within Diné Educational Pedagogy which are also linked to the concept of *hozhó*. Through relationality and interdependence, Werito (2014) contends that "the principles of *hozhó* as they exist in Diné thought are inherently a form of critical thinking" (p. 30) made from a lifelong process of "naming the world, actions and reflection that results in transformation" (p. 32). It is a reciprocal process. The approach to learning through this pedagogy relies on understanding the world through the lens of relationship and making those connections between numerous things and through countless intersections which "sets the Diné universe" (Skeets, 2021, 7:00). Therefore, Diné Educational Pedagogy cultivates *hozhó* as a strong piece of the foundations of SNBH —a layered philosophy that is "the embodiment of living through all things" (Skeets, 2021, 7:04). Within the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, this system of relationality was evident by the movement in the story as the children journey in all four directions over the course of four days. There was a purpose in this reference and it was to *relate* to the teachings within this system. With the completion of their journey, they gave shape to concept of SNBH as an inter-related system of infinite relations comprised of countless teachings.

Although SNBH is intangible (Werito, 2014) it is integral to the four cardinal directions: *Ha'a'aah* (East), *Shádi'ááh* (South), '*E'e'aah* (West) and *Náhookǫs* (North) and is connected to the four scared mountains that create the boundary of Dinétah. Those mountains are *Sis Najiní, Tsoodził, Dook'o'oosłiid,* and *Dibé Nitsaa* (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007). SNBH is connected to the four phases of the day: early twilight dawn, blue twilight, yellow evening twilight, and folding darkness (Aroniłth, 1985). It also connected to phases of human life: infancy, childhood, adulthood, and old age (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007). It embodies stages of growth and learning: thoughts/critical thinking represented through the East, planning through the South, reasoning through application in life through the West, and

creativity/assurance/reflection through the North (Yonnie, 2016). SNBH is also tied to inner development of the person: the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions that make a person whole (Werito, 2014). All of these dimensions are considered vital in thinking of the wellness of a person throughout their life and contributes to the sense of completeness conceptualized through SNBH. The process of making connections and understanding the relational *ways of being* through various dimensions matter when conceptualizing what it means to be complete and what it means to find *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) in daily living.

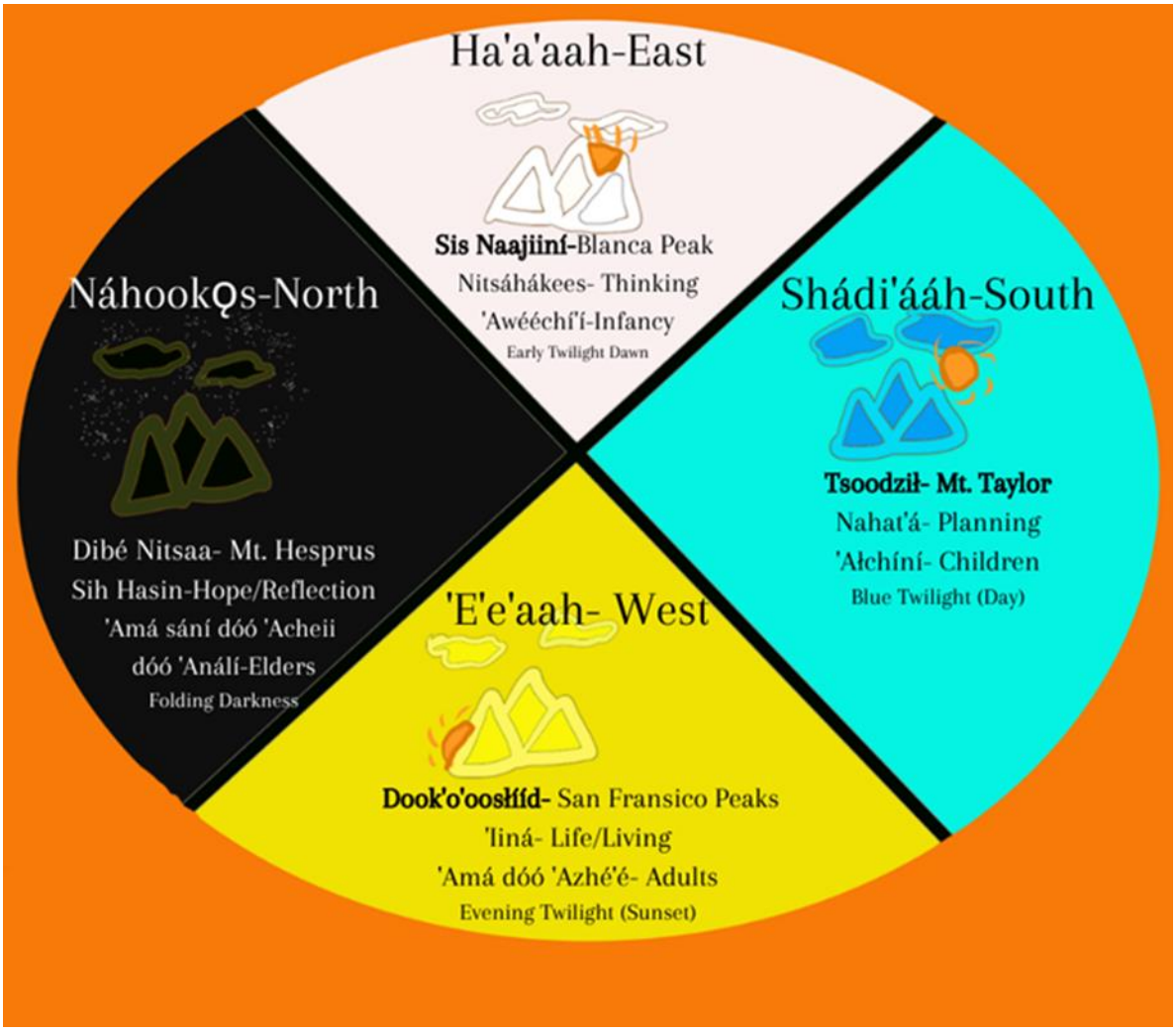

Figure 3.4 Diné Relational Teachings, Rain (2022)

These are most basic frameworks of Diné teachings and are reflected in the chart above (see figure 3.4, Tifa Rain, 2022). The things entwined through SNBH uphold a value system and presents a visual, personal, and spiritual compass to understand the aspects of a human being in relationship to the world.

This system establishes connections to others and relates to the multiple aspects of their inner self. Understanding the scope of these interconnections and dimensions of life aid in the pursuit to live a life of completeness, wholeness, and self-understanding—they lead to an understanding of *hozhó* and SNBH (Aroniłth, 1985; Lee, 2014). All these dimensions within our lifeways are relational and create wholeness in synchronizing all parts of a person's life as both directions, mountains, phases of the day link to the human life cycle (Aroniłth, 1985). They demonstrate that Diné life and philosophical thinking are predicated on interrelationships and the numerous connections we experience in the world through our physical (material, tangible), spiritual (feelings, heart knowledge, connection), ancestral (memory, land, art), cultural (ceremony, philosophy, language), and mental (critical thinking, perceptions, compassion) selves. This wholeness in conceptualizing the *world in relation* to oneself and visa-versa, is an important methodological feature of Diné Educational Pedagogy. It is a sacred *way of being*—an ontology. Therefore, the aspirations entwined in this pedagogy lead Diné people to a life of balance, harmony, peace and reciprocity. They lead us, to live SNBH (Aroniłth, 1985). The children demonstrated the embodiment of wholeness. They demonstrated the continual wisdom predicated on interrelationship, the cultivation of their self-knowledge, love and respect for themselves and one another. In doing so, they built community and were the teachers of how to live the aspirations of *hozhó.*

The children followed the paradigm towards *hozhó* not only in their movement in all physical directions, but because of the teachings they embodied throughout that movement. According to Werito (2014), *hozhó* can be made known through the teachings of the four-directions paradigm. The first direction is *thinking,* which is related to the sacred mountain of the East in order to "understand we are a piece of a greater whole" (Werito, 2014, p. 34). Early Twilight Dawn Boy did as he demonstrated the relational self— thinking for oneself and following one's heart. He didn't accept the wider beliefs about who he was or how things should be. The teachings of second sacred mountain to the South according to Werito (2014) is concerned with planning and internationalization of one's thoughts "to realize who we are and what our values are" (p. 34). Early Twilight Dawn Boy also accomplished this as he nurtured himself by believing in himself, his own self-determination and sovereignty. This led to *knowing* himself. He internalized his right to pursue his strengths and creative nature, and to live in relationships with the children and the natural world. Because of this, he could recognize these things in others. Werito (2014) identifies the third sacred mountain to the West associated with living the principles, "in advocating for self and others" (p. 34). Early Twilight Dawn Boy's journey

impacted the smaller community of the children in profound ways on their own journeys towards SNBH. His actualization of his values and principles propelled his planning and manifested in his actions to do what he believed and to advocate for others. He built community on the principles of care, respect, and love. Finally, Werito (2014) defines the teachings of reflection associated with the sacred mountain to the North which are "having hope, faith, respect and reverence for life" (p. 34). Early Twilight Dawn Boy came to a place where the fruits of his journey to find hope, respect, and acceptance of himself was complete and he shared it with the other children. In doing so, I believe that their flight into the rainbow was the signal of the epitome of these teachings. To me, it was that they lived in completeness, in relationship, in *SNBH* and left in the light of the rainbow. Their responsible actions brought beauty into the world and built a community amongst themselves on the collective teachings of SNBH. Their lives are the model and point of reference for living *hozhó* and following the Corn Pollen Path.

Elder Wilson Aroniłth Jr. (1985) reminds us that SNBH both cultivates collective life and directs individuals to become empowered in who they are. The children built a world for themselves and were the exemplars of how to caretake one another—to enact *k'é (*positive relationships) towards *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes). *The story is transformational because the children's ability or inability had nothing to do with their achievement of SNBH.* Therefore, SNBH cultivates an understanding of diverse *ways of being* and uses these diverse expressions as the medium for teaching its principles. From the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, the lessons taken away are not necessarily to define a Diné perspective of what 'disability' is or isn't, but that point towards the teachings that advance the relational framework of SNBH and how it is upheld. In doing so, the relational teachings serve as cascading system of grounding principles of relationship and cultivating a system of accountability and reciprocity that sustain SNBH in a holistic system.

Relational Ontologies of Being

Focusing on constellations of relationality, the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy introduces ontologies *of being* that consider non-human relationships. These non-human references are important as they propel more teachings that contribute to an understanding of relationality that informs my argument that 'disability' is a relational concept within ancestral stories. When this story was shared with me, Pfeiffer (March 15, 2018, personal communication) told me that whenever I saw a rainbow, or birds, I would be reminded about this story; that it would be with

me wherever I went. I realized that the use of reference placed the concept of 'disability' everywhere. The teachings were embedded in nature and in the everyday moments of my life. 'Disability' as a concept was not reduced to a specific *way of being* that was predicated on sole aspects of ability relevant to only one person. 'Disability' was a multi-layered concept that placed a value system of relational teachings into the world that impacted everyone. 'In Diné ontology, these connections functioned in situating the order and importance of these beliefs as central to community life and living. They placed these teachings into the community and into the natural world. Through reference and land, through relationality, the values associated with these references were grounded everywhere in Diné life.

The lessons are both represented and manifest in the natural world, where objects, natural occurrences, plants, animals, and places become the carriers of the story. By articulating the complex web of interconnections as pedagogy for understanding the lifeway of SNBH and *hozhó,* the vast scope of interconnections become evident everywhere we go, in everything we see. There is power in placing stories in the natural world, whereby our existence and relationships becomes a pedagogy and medium for learning how to live the concepts of Diné ontology. That is why SNBH is often explained through story and narrative of actual experience of living in the world. Affirming Werito's (2014) commitment to not define these concepts of SNBH and *hozhó*, he maintains that "hozhó is more significant when the meaning is conceptualized, actualized, lived and reflected on in a person level" (p. 29). To experience them is to realize them. Through story, we can experience a deeper understanding of these teachings and draw meaning from undefinable concepts such as *hozhó, SNBH* and 'disability'. Rather, we come to understand them through a relational lens—to know these indiscernible concepts is to know the teachings that live in relationship with them.

The teachings of 'disability' as a conceptual framework, are everywhere in the world. It is through relationships, that I see how these teachings are applied to my life and wider community. Placement in the world through material reference and orientation makes this pedagogy and teachings available to everyone. They are constant reminders that the lessons tied to this story, the teachings associated with 'disability' are everywhere. From the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, I realize that many things embody the concept and teachings of disability and through the teachings, we realize we all have relationship, and therefore, accountability to all life and people.

Relational Understandings of *K'é* and SNBH within Diné Educational Pedagogy

I conclude this chapter with some focused analysis to relational ontologies of the relational practice of *k'é* to draw out my argument for relationship and reciprocal accountability. The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy illustrates complex dimensions of relationality with specific focus to the principle of *k'é* (positive relationships) as a catalyst for accountability. *K'é* is about relationship with oneself as much as it is about relationships with the wider world and community. *K'é* extends beyond merely recognizing relationships, but rather the intentions of why relationships underpin a balanced and flourishing life. According to Diné scholar Lloyd Lee (2020), *k'é* "reinforces respect, kindness, cooperation, friendliness, reciprocity and love" (p. 70). For example, *k'ei* (Diné clan systems) are grounded in the practice of *k'é* – the instilling of positive values and relations predicated on responsibility, respect, and accountability in how we conduct ourselves as Diné people (L. Lee, 2020) This process starts with *k'é* with oneself—also linked to the four directions paradigm. The teachings of the East focus on one's motivations and perceptions. Teaching to the South focus on one's learning and planning. The teachings to the West are concerned with one's actions. Finally, the North's relationship to oneself is about reflection. A person is reminded about *k'é* evident in their personal life through the phases of the day as we live through each day, and through the phases of a lifetime as we grow from infants to old age. In this way, we live in a system of perpetual *k'é —a system of never-ending relationships.* These relationships compel how we conduct ourselves both internally with our thoughts and externally with our actions. This means tending to ourselves and internal worlds towards SNBH, so that our responsible actions create the conditions for SNBH for our wider relations. Such is a holistic paradigm of wellbeing and wholeness that lives within the power of relationship. Within that relationship is reciprocity. To be accountable for oneself within this system, propels accountability towards others. This is the relational nature of reciprocal accountability when all people are working towards the aspirations of SNBH and the strengthening of *k'é* as a lifeway.

As a relational framework, the completeness of one's life impacts the wholeness of a community (Lee, 2014). Understanding that everything in life is connected still provides for autonomy within the safety of unity towards harmonious outcomes. The individual is still seen as themselves but in relationship to others. This becomes the foundation of reciprocal accountability to be responsible for oneself, but also responsible to our communities. It is a reciprocal process that still honors the unique *ways of being* and choices of individuals but

frames them in the context of the wider community (Klopfenstein, 2021b). Through *k'é*, I am blessed with both a place (belonging), but also accountability (relations). I am compelled to live well and in balance, with the intention to contribute for others to live well and in balance, through reciprocity. *K'é* requires one to respect and honor the balance and inherent rights of others as they pursue SNBH in their own lives through their own relations and processes. This is a foundational teaching gleaned from the lessons of SNBH in relation to *k'é*, from the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy.

To honor one's own journey to SNBH is to also work towards the inherent rights for others to pursue their journey towards SNBH in return. In interrelatedness, there is reciprocity. According to Parsons-Yazzie and Speas (2007) "the traditional teachings about *k'é* show the Navajo people how to maintain self-control and social control" to caretake our communities towards proper living and care (p. 70). Stories are examples of how to uphold our accountability to the multi-relations we have: to people, the natural world our inner selves, our actions, and our lifelong journey through our distinct practices of *k'é* (positive relationships).

Finally, as a community practice, uniting our aspirations to move toward the teachings of SNBH benefits us all (Emerson, 2014). Many aspects in the story represent various layers of Diné epistemology linked by land, people, and phenomenon, are woven together. When the teachings are placed altogether, we see how various dimensions of Diné thinking link together a broad scope of how Diné thought teaches us to see *the bigger picture* of our world, and how we are endlessly connected to it. Each teaching can be very distinct but is made *known* through a series of relational processes, which cascade into even more teachings and lessons that lead to continual processes of growth. Diné educator Kevin Belin (2021c) calls this cyclic form of knowledge as "stories within stories", one which is in a state of constant expanse and growth (personal communication). The stories I share in Part III. and in the following chapter build upon this relational foundational. This is the power of Diné teachings to continually foster and cultivate in multi-directional and multi-layered ways—an ontology of *being* that is forever rooted and nurtured in a constellation of relationships.

Chapter Four: Narratives from the Land

> "The man looked up to see the children playing within the brightest light of the warmth of the sun. They were suddenly wrapped within a sunbeam, pouring over them and lighting up the valley below. A rainbow touched the ground under which they stood. In an instant, they all took flight, as birds, beautiful birds of every color and shape and they flew away into the light of the rainbow."
>
> (Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, retold by Sandra Yellowhorse from a version told by Chad Pfeiffer, 2018)

Introduction

This chapter engages land-based knowledges found within the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy in *Chapter Three*. I refer to this as narratives of the land. I expand my analysis from the previous chapter to focus on *reference and orientation* encased in land and the non-human relations found within the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy to include relational knowledge to phases of the days, mountains and the significance of mud. Building upon the foundation of Diné Educational Pedagogy and the 'compass' written into the natural world, I focus on how ancestral teachings are illustrated through Diné pedagogy in the four-directions model I introduced in *Chapter Three*. Teachings are embodied in material and tangible ways within the natural world. Greater focus on the importance of the non-human world in relation to the larger discussion of *ontologies of being* from a Diné perspective are foundational to understand the principles of multi-faceted relationships as they inform the concept of 'disability'. Linking the concept of 'disability' to land-based knowledge dislodges the normative way that disability is discussed in often deficit terms or that assigns identities based on language of limitations. Connecting the concept of 'disability' to land-based knowledge directs people towards of the ancestral teachings of care and inherent relationships that produce accountable lifeways.

Relationships matter. Diné principles of relationship found in *k'é* (positive relationships) are distinct forms of relationality, and are distinct methodologies found in Diné lifeways (Yazzie, 2021). This form of relationality is foundational to understanding the larger arguments I make throughout this work. In my prior chapter I argued how inherent relationships form the basis for reciprocal accountability and how ontological systems which establish *hozhó*—the pursuit for harmonious outcomes. *Hozhó* cements the belief that relationships already exist beyond us as individuals. We don't make them. We realize them. Though acknowledgement that these

relationships already exist in the world without us as individuals, ancestral teachings affirm that relationships are to be recognized, honored and respected. According to Diné political leader Moroni Benally (2021):

> I have struggled with the meaning of relationality in Indigenous (i.e. Diné) perspectives…reading through my papa's work and in conversation with Diné knowledge holders, I am settling on the idea that western "builds" "creates" relations; Diné acknowledge recognize relations that_always and already_ exist [sic]. (Facebook post)

As a medium of knowing, land becomes the first teacher in establishing this idea of the universe of relationships. Diné knowledge demonstrates that relationships can be experienced physically and materially by being rooted in the natural world. The natural world operates as our collective 'classroom' and was the original medium for learning (Jim, 2022c). Therefore, narratives of land have much to teach us about the concept of relationality. If we can recognize how these relationships already surround us as people in our everyday lives, we can integrate this knowledge to other spaces, specifically in conceptualizing of 'disability'. The heart of this chapter argues that learning about disability comes from learning about the natural world. The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy teaches us about relationships and disability through the natural world and non-human relations.

Dislocation and #LandBack

It is important to address the challenges of discussing land-based knowledge in the context of wider histories of colonialism. There is displacement from land bases due to ethnic cleansing (Denetdale, 2016) sanctioned by a slew of federal policies aimed at forced removal which resulted in the atrocities such as the "Trail of Tears" in which four thousand people died along the journey (Wilkins, 2016, p. 106). Federal policy also catapulted the "civilizing" project of assimilation through forced attendance to boarding schools, missionization, and practices of land allotment (Wilkins, 2016, p. 107). This went on for centuries and was still prevalent in recent legislation such as the Indian Relocation Act of 1956, which incentivized the relocation of Indigenous peoples from their lands and moved them into larger metropolitan hubs (Wilkins, 2016). There are other conditions in which people have either willingly or unwillingly left their ancestral homelands. How do they gain access to this knowledge and what does it mean to live displaced from the 'classroom' of our ancestral homelands?

I believe that this knowledge does belong to displaced and alienated individuals who, for whatever reason, are distanced from lands of their ancestors. My work as a Diné person will always seek to reconnect our relatives in the diaspora to their home. I also call for other Native peoples to understand the complexity of access and systemic barriers that have emerged with the long violent histories of dislocation, dispossession, and genocide. Allyship matters in these spaces, and it is our collective responsibility as Indigenous peoples to acknowledge these disconnected communities when we talk about the complexity of land-based knowledge grounded in historical contexts.

I encourage Indigenous people of the diaspora to know that the land is always there to teach them, wherever they are. There is a story of the land wherever we go and I encourage us as Indigenous peoples, to support, honor and uphold the stories of the lands we occupy and learn about the Indigenous peoples who are the ancestral caretakers and guardians of those lands. Engaging in the active protection of land rights for Indigenous peoples is Indigenous allyship rooted in the teachings of relationships upheld through land. Land-based knowledge requires that in order to respect the cultural knowledge of Indigenous peoples, greater society must also respect and preserve the land in which knowledge is encapsulated. This includes supporting wider movements towards Indigenous sovereignty, treaty rights and the repatriation of lands. Part of this wider dialogue is found in the #LandBack Movement. Drawing on the foundational elements of identity, knowledge, rights, and belonging, the Land Back Editorial Collective (Longman et al., 2020) state:

> When we say "LandBack" we aren't asking for just ground, or for a piece of paper that allows us to tear up and pollute the earth. We want the system that is land to live so that it can perpetuate itself and perpetuate us as an extension of itself. (para. 2).

There is urgency in calling for protection of Indigenous knowledges attached to land and the stories that exist within them as they reflect the lives, knowledge, history and culture of the Indigenous peoples who have lived in relationship with these lands since time immemorial.

The work of Indigenous peoples writing, creating, teaching, and sharing stories of the land in ethical ways, is vital to larger projects of decolonization and social justice. There must be space for the belonging of the Indigenous diaspora or those who seek to reconnect to their ancestral communities and knowledge. Indigenous peoples must actively make equitable pathways for accessibility in the light of the on-going ripple effects of colonialization. One such way that

emerged in my Diné community occurred during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Movement to virtual spaces created virtual hubs with teach-ins, sharing circles and virtual language nests spearheaded by organizations such as *Saad K'idilyé*, the Navajo Nation Department of Behavioral and Health, and *Iina Bihoo'aah*. The important work done in these spaces reached Diné people across the globe. Access to reorient our gaze home, to learn about our ancestral home and lands, are part of the revitalization and perpetuation of Diné value systems.

Chapter Overview

I begin this discussion within the context of narratives of the land as part of the overarching discussion of this work —*ontologies of being*. Land teaches us about the reality of existing and being in the world (Baldy, 2015). Then I move into why and how I use the concept of 'narratives of the land' and elaborate on my methodological and theoretical approach for this chapter. Next, I examine how land is engaged through Diné Blessing Way stories, and how it relates to the larger context of Diné Educational Pedagogy. This sets up a focused analysis and engagement with the *references* and *orientations* found within the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. I relate how narratives of land ground deeper understandings of *hozhó*, which Diné scholar Vincent Werito (2014) defines as the "life force behind SNBH" (p. 32). As discussed in the preceding chapter, SNBH is not a concrete, definable *thing*, but rather an aspiration, and essence of "ever-lasting happiness" engrained with a Diné sense of beauty, justice, and harmony according to Werito (2014, p. 32). The means to explore these outcomes rests upon the foundations of focusing on inherent relationality along with accountability entwined with it. I conclude with final reflections of how land relates to 'disability' and steps the reader can take based on Diné Education, to reflect and apply these teachings to their life.

Land is instrumental in this process of knowledge through relationships, as the natural world continually engages us in relationship whether we recognize it or not. Our material goods, food, shelter, and everything we need comes from the Earth (Beeshłigai, 2021a). From a pragmatic sense, in caring for the land, we care for ourselves. However, this relational lens applies to wider discussions of how Diné land-based knowledge supports movements of care and responsibility on other levels, such as caring for our elders, children and relatives with 'disabilities'. Land-based knowledge teaches the framework of relationality and provides the teachings of care that support all life with their abundant, diverse ways *of being*.

Land and Ontologies *of Being*

The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is not merely a story of a boy. It is a story of the community, the land, and the non-human worlds. It is a story of relationality that has many parts to it. The non-human aspects of the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, such as birds, rainbow, and mud, *narrate*[3] and carry the teachings of our lifeways through story. I refer to these as *references* or *orientations* rather than' symbolism'. Reference refers to tangible elements within the story such as the mud, rainbows, and sunbeams. Orientation refers to the phases of the days, the four cardinal directions and the cascading teachings associated with them. Using the terms 'reference and orientation' rather than 'symbolism' aims to highlight the relational nature because things, places, objects, and creatures that convey deeper meanings beyond merely metaphors or symbols (Baldy, 2015). Understanding reference is therefore predicated on an established understanding of relationship. *We come to know through relationship* (Dion, 2021; Yellowhorse, 2020b) and this is a foundational *ontology of being*.

Examining narratives of the land gives shape to the wider discussion of Diné ontology. There are multiple narratives that make sense of the world, and the human narrative is not the only narrative. Observing numerous narratives in conversation— the narratives of the community, ancestors, and land— brings forward a spherical understanding of the vast scope of *how* I have learned to conceptualize the world as a Diné person. As a methodology, this layered pedagogy of various 'narratives' brings to the fore the immense, over-arching framework of Diné Educational Pedagogy—the four-directions paradigm that reflects our land and epistemic knowledge. In essence, this paradigm is a model of relationality that connects land, life and people in a non-linear frame of time. The four-directions paradigm is a foundational feature in the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and has countless branches and layers some of which I explore in this chapter.

Although only skimming the surface, the non-human references I engage in this chapter bring forward stories that encapsulate numerous, cascading lessons embedded in the natural world. There are extended knowledge systems rooted beyond the pieces I focus on. There are songs, prayers, and ceremonial stories for each of these (Pfeiffer, 2021a). However, I want to focus on the over-arching values found in the basic model of Diné Educational Pedagogy, which I

[3] See Yellowhorse (2020b) When I utilize the terms voice, language, words and speech in this essay, I am referring to that array of expressions that are linked but different for each person. The term *speech* and *voice* shouldn't be collapsed into only verbalized speaking. There are many ways voice, and speaking are expressed.

established in *Chapter Three*. As a relational system of knowledge, there is always more to learn, and room for growth in these spaces as the "natural world and the spiritual world are always there to teach us" (Martinez, 2021, p. 2). Diné ontology does not foreclose the possibilities for achieving a good life and, from my own perspective, meets people where they are at. Someone who understands the basics of Diné Educational Pedagogy, can draw out fundamental meanings when they apply that framework to other stories they encounter. Whether you are new to Diné teachings or are well established with the basis of Diné Educational Pedagogy, there is always something more to learn and take away from the teachings. I believe this is a distinct inclusive feature of Diné Educational Pedagogy. It's utility for establishing the basis of relational teachings are immense. The expanse of such a process, indeed, appears never-ending (Belin, 2021b; Martinez, 2021).

The ancestral teachings and aspects of the story I focus on are only small pieces of a much larger story. The deeper spiritual and ceremonial connotations to these discussions are intentionally left out. I do this purposefully, as I am not an expert on these, nor do I place myself as an expert on the full scope of these references and ancestral teachings. My focus is on the basic values and principles of these teachings and how they *relate*. I am trying to highlight a comprehensive approach to the relationality I recognize in Diné teachings to draw an understanding that supports my wider theorization of 'disability' as a relative *way of being.* I aim to draw attention to this utilizing the methodology of *k'é* (positive relationships), which manifests the guiding principles for care, and accountability central to my larger arguments for disability justice. Establishing an accessible body of knowledge that illustrates how the framework of Diné Educational Pedagogy engages Diné story is a key methodological tool in this work. I am illustrating how the pedagogy applies to teachings, and how it surfaces in story. Land is always part of Diné story. Therefore, land is always part of the knowledge of 'disability'.

Land as Narrative

Diné stories are powerful narratives that emerge from the land itself and made tangible from life on the land (Jim, 2022b). Land as narrative accomplishes two important things. The first is that it reinforces teachings found within story and roots them from the philosophical world to the material world for direct engagement. The second is that we reframe the land within the context of *ontologies of being*, a force that makes known and makes sense of the world. When we see the land and the non-human through narrative, we affirm their personhood as alive and

vibrant (Baldy, 2015; Cajete, 2015). This uproots the engrained foreign doctrine of land as merely property, rightless, voiceless, and dead. Moving from this engrained doctrine set as *the only* social narrative interrupts a historical articulation *of being,* as it has replicated in vast modalities of oppression imposed upon marginalized people everywhere. How the land is treated, is often a reflection of how we as a society treat people.

In Diné practices, land has personhood as a teacher (Martinez, 2021). This view enlivens another form of reciprocal interdependence. It instils the principles that where there is relationship, there is always accountability— a key argument I make throughout this work. Narratives of the land can be seen as part of discussions of 'disability' as I continually reach for the principle of care and belonging through relationship.

The ancestral teachings embedded in land have relational outcomes. How Diné care for ourselves and one another, was constructed from a mirrored commitment of how we were to care for the land as it was part of the necessity of life (Beeshłigai, 2021b), but also part of our spiritual journey to find joy, meaning and completeness in our lives. The conceptualization of "oneness with the universe comes from the responsibility to live as the *Diyin Dine'é* live, to treat one's fellow creatures on the planet with the same respect they would treat one's self (Klopfenstein, 2021b , p. 8) This philosophy is part of the journey to pursue SNBH towards our "inherent human quality for making sense of our lives and striving for harmony, peace and justice" (Werito, 2014, p. 27). Such reciprocal interdependence is interwoven in wider Indigenous paradigms of knowing, caretaking, and inclusion. They are often encased in land-based knowledge as widely expressed by multiple Indigenous communities (Radu et al., 2014; TallBear, 2016; Wildcat et al., 2014; Wilson, 2009; Yazzie & Baldy, 2018).

It is both the blessing and requirement for all people to exercise accountability within this system of reciprocal interdependence —something that I see as a principle fundamentally written into the natural world expressed by Diné teachings. As Diné values are found everywhere in the land, they are available to everyone and are a constant reminder of the value system we as Diné hold dear (Hoskie, 2020). Through relationship with the land, we honor the voice of the land and simultaneously, the voices of our ancestors and ontological treasures encased within the land. Land is the context in which we learn to caretake and relate.

Caretaking Relations: Mechanisms of *K'é & Radical Relationality*

Caring for the land sets the precedence for caretaking life to realize our relationships in multi-dimensional ways. The distinct practice of *k'é* (positive relationships) helps to achieve this. This section is concerned with the methodological approach of how meaning is derived, and action is prompted simultaneously through the lifeway of *k'é*. The importance of *k'é* provides the foundation for Diné understandings of relating (Beeshłigai, 2021b). *K'é* requires the principle that "you have to have relationships in order to exist…*K'é iina'bitsi' silá, K'é* is ahead of life… it is always just there" (Beeshłigai, 2021b, p. 31). Such a belief maintains that there are relations already at play outside of people as individuals and their singular experience. *K'é* as philosophy also places forward the principles that relationships are something we already are born with—not something we construct (Benally, 2021). Relations also come with key values that already underpin them. According to Diné knowledge sharer Hastiin Beeshłigai (2021b), to live through *k'é,* means to "to never mistreat… to be caring, and loving with everything you connect with. It means to be kind and compassionate, something highly valued by our ancestors" (p. 31). It is both a means to relate and also a principle that establishes the relationship to enact the process of care. This care extends beyond *life,* to foster respect with the non-human, inanimate worlds to ground the symbiotic flow of relationship and reciprocal accountability.

K'é is a lifeway, an ontology of relating beyond the human. Discussions of *k'é* inherently are discussions of the non-human world as well. According to Diné knowledge sharer Adair Klopfenstein (2021b), "*k'é* with people is not the only kind of *k'é*. *K'é* with Nature [sic] is just as important as any other relationship you have" (p. 9). Relationship as the roots of care is part of Indigenous philosophies globally as Cree knowledge holder Eddie Pash states, "If you respect nature, you have to respect each other too, and you have to respect yourself" (Radu et al., 2014, p. 94). Relationships conceptualized as interventions for liberation foster cyclic systems of caretaking because they influence how we realize that everything has a place, a purpose, and a sense of belonging as part of a greater whole. Relationships are part of the overall social and political power relations that establish communities that enable peace, freedom and balance. I see liberation as the right to be free from harm, to have a place, to have a *way of being* that is honored and valued exactly as it is. Liberation is to be free to be who you are. This resonates with the deeply political essence of *k'é,* to make visible how relations shift power dynamics. If people recognize such a system of relationality as 'the way of the world',

it effects all our relationships. Relationality then becomes part of the larger social narrative. It becomes a way of life—an ontology of its own. This is how *k'é* operates.

It is important to think about the duality of outcomes for *k'é* as well—both the impact of its presence and absence. I often define *k'é* as positive relationships in line with Diné scholar Lloyd Lee's (2020) definition of *k'é*. It is 'positive' because I understand it in line with the aspiration and intention of *hozhó*— harmonious outcomes that stem from our beautiful actions in the world and the knowledge applied to how we live. However, there are lessons about the absence of *k'é*, and examples of what happens when we live without this foundational way of relating. Hardship, marginalization, unbalanced or absent relations, stigma and neglect are all facets of the absence of *k'é.*

Diné story is not just about beauty but also the reality of struggle, hardship and oppression (Denny, 2022b). From my engagement with story, I learned the consequences of *imbalanced* relationships or failures to relate. Hardship was demonstrated clearly in the oppression articulated through the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. The children were marginalized and neglected. The duality of *k'é* is the aspiration for positive relationality, and also the harms of failing to relate and therefore caretake. There is both a lesson from this duality and a remedy. Through *k'é* we understand what it means to have imbalance, but also the means through *k'é* to reorient ourselves to live in relationship. *K'é* offers a self-reflective critical lens, a methodological means towards restoration and an understanding of justice. *K'é* is multi-faceted in its utility.

Land as narrative is a useful way to think through relationality when discussing active movements towards inclusion and justice from a Diné perspective. Diné scholar Melanie Yazzie & Hupa, Yurok and Karuk scholar Chuska Risling Baldy (2018) identify a distinct practice, which they call "radical relationality" (p. 2). They both refer to radical relationality as "a relationality from which all life and history derives meaning and shape…and also in the sense of a dramatic and revolutionary change" (p. 2). To relate is not merely to know of relation. To relate compels action. To Yazzie and Baldy (2018) relationship operates as a profound catalyst that comes from processes of relationality and its subsequent effects on structural change. Relationality matters! Relationships convey the socio-political utility of lifeways which operate through relationality beyond mere philosophy, 'concepts', or awareness. Relationality in action formidably changes power relations. Applied to current day challenges engulfing our planet, movements of 'radical relationality' propel action aimed to "rebalance

our worlds" (p. 1). Yazzie and Baldy (2018) remind us that "multi-directional, multispatial, multi-temporal and multispecies theory of relationships and connections forms the terrain of decolonized knowledge production [sic]" (p. 1). To decolonize is more than the invocation of relational knowledge to the fore, it is the movement that comes from it that re-shifts power relations. Such conversations and invocation of a relational lens as a framework for both interrogation and remedy, are part of the profound utility of Indigenous knowledge systems in enacting structural change.

The narratives found within the non-human references in the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy; such as birds, rainbows, mud and sunbeam, highlight how Diné approaches to knowing are deeply interwoven and layered—an example of 'radical relationality', that can dynamically deconstruct relations of marginalization and oppression. These narratives are highly relational and connects waves of other teachings which collectively advance philosophical understandings of wholeness and completeness. The interconnectedness of how these knowledge systems link together provide for a vast pedagogical approach to knowledge. There is not only a linear, one-way route to approach teachings encased in narratives of land. We encounter these teachings in multiple contexts and subjectivities: through story, through ceremony, through song, and through community (Jim, 2022c; Pfeiffer, 2021a). The beauty of it is that knowledge encased in land continues to ground life to land, and community to land. In doing so, land *narrates*, and tells us the stories of how to achieve SNBH, and *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) for ourselves and for our communities. Land teaches us how to live in balance in the world and *all our relations*. The stories of the non-human world are indeed, stories of us, and the foundation of how to live in relationship.

Relationality influences my overarching arguments of disability based on Diné story and ancestral teachings. I argue that *disability is not a categorical thing but a relational way of knowing.* There are many ways to understand the teachings of disability based on the relational framework taught through Diné Educational Pedagogy encased in land, and our practices of *k'é* convey this through land. By unhinging categorical approaches to knowing, I also argue that the non-human world is not comprised of mere *things*. To *be* is much more complex when applied to relational understandings. Our land teaches us about disability and carries with it a powerful ontological modality of learning through living in the world. The teachings of disability are written everywhere in the natural world and this chapter lays a starting point for connecting those teachings to the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy.

Land and Blessing Way Stories

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is considered a Diné Blessing Way Story (Chad Pfeiffer, January 17, 2021, personal communication). Although some analysis was given in my Introduction and *Chapter Three* of this work on Blessing Way Stories and their relationship to the values aimed at *Sa ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón,* SNBH, I want to highlight some specific foundations about land and its relationships to Blessing Ways Stories.

Blessing Way Stories and land share reflective qualities. According to Diné knowledge sharer Anderson Hoskie, "in our Blessing Way songs, everything was made out of natural elements" (2020, p. 4). In turn, the land and natural elements encase the things we Diné hold dear and are integral to our spiritual lives. Our relationships to the "divine", the spiritual world, are approached through land (Jim, 2022c) and skies (Denny, 2022b). Similarly, Klopfenstein (2021a) states that "In the Blessingway Ceremony [sic]…movement mirrors the movement of Nature from the rising sun to nightfall" (p. 30), this is the Early Dawn, Blue Twilight (day), Evening Twilight (sunset) and Folding Darkness (night) (Aroniłth, 1985). The importance of land as a teacher and the medium for mediating our vast modalities of relations is articulated through the teachings of Blessing Way Stories. Therefore, as stories, they are foundational to Diné Educational Pedagogy in propelling land-based knowledge. Blessing Way stories paired with *k'é* as a tool to relate proposes a framework of learning aimed towards inherent belonging in tandem with the spiritual aspiration to live well and in completeness. Blessing Way as a lifeway orients itself towards balance, completeness and affirmation of foundations of relationships. These are all inter-related teachings to the larger, undefinable essence of SNBH. They are all part of *hozhó*— pursuing harmonious outcomes through our teachings that work (R. Jim, as cited in Lee, 2014).

It is important to see Blessing Way Stories as not merely collections of stories, nor an articulation of values that contribute to a plan or practice. Blessing Way Stories are powerful lifeways— part of how our knowledge was formed and Diné identity in articulating who we are, where we came from and who we wish to be as Diné people (Aroniłth, 1985). From these lifeways sprout the fruits of inherent belonging, purpose, self-determination, and sovereignty narrated through story. These are all aspects of *hozhó,* and in finding what SNBH is in one's life. Land is the conduit for these teachings and a reflection of SNBH in the natural world.

Land is integral to the teachings of larger aspirations of SNBH. According to Diné scholar Lloyd Lee (2014), "SNBH is spiritual, multidimensional, and comprehensive. It is part of the identity of a person and a people… and is demonstrated in the Blessing Way ceremony (pp. 5–6). This is often referred to as *Hozhooji*, or "the good way", which "also means the Blessing Way" (Aroniłth, 1985, p. 236). A 'good way' can also be seen as 'living well' according to numerous Indigenous scholars who include foundational tenants of cultural identity (Cajete, 2015; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2015), interdependency, respect (Beeshłigai, 2021a; Yazzie & Baldy, 2018) and belonging (Cajete, 2015). Mayan scholar Arcia Tecun (2022) similarly described this concept of living well as not "the idea of how to live materially well but rather how do we live a life of dignity" (20:47). To live with dignity has many parts to it, and all of them are carry profound socio-political weight enacted through relational practices. For example, the principle of belonging extends beyond the simplistic practice of inclusion. Inclusion simply means to be included or present (Morton & Guerin, 2017). It doesn't mean to have a sense of belonging within such spaces. Belonging entails knowledge of oneself in order to relate to others, to create space, foster understanding and root one in connection. Intervening beyond the niche of systems and language such as 'Inclusive Education', 'inclusive practices' or 'diversity, equity and inclusion', is this enduring, powerful, political concept of belonging. Belonging is entwined with the concept of living well. Both are reflected in Blessing Way Stories. They are lifeways underpinned by a system of relationship.

Blessing Way was not given to just a few people. It was given to all Diné people and upheld the aspirations for *Diyiin Dine'é* (Holy People) for the Diné people to pursue SNBH. In essence, it relied on the relational perspective in order to achieve its teachings. Therefore, SNBH and *hozhó,* are teachings of beauty which are always understood in the context of community and land (Aroniłth, 1985; Werito, 2014). We are taught that SNBH is evident in the natural world found in the teaching that there is *beauty* all around us derived from our prayers. The well-being of those we establish relationship with is foundational to understanding the scope of what *hozhó* embodies—a harmonious outcomes is all of us collectively thriving, being true to who we are, having trust, hope and security in our inherent belonging (Lee, 2014; Werito, 2014). It is a system that is inherently inclusive. Most importantly, our relationships and relational ways of knowing reinforce these beliefs that completeness and 'good living' can be achieved. Ultimately, it is through relationships that we know ourselves. We also began to see the world of interconnections that breathe life into the aspirations of beauty—into SNBH.

Orientation and Reference

Narratives of land sustain our relationships to land as fundamental tenants of Diné language and identity. Narratives of the land are also narratives of our ancestors. The first Blessing Way ceremony was conducted by the *Diyiin Dine'é*, the Holy People, "before they left the Diné people and went into the natural world to inhabit rocks, mountains, hills and waters "(Aroniłth, 1985, p. 235). Our deities are housed throughout the natural world, and each place is significant as part of the genealogy of the sacred. Each place has its own identity and *ways of being* within their own prayers, songs, stories and ceremonies that are part of them (Jim, 2022c). Blessing Way and *hozhó* are part of the story of land, and it is through the *narratives of land* we are continually fed the teachings and lessons of our ancestors. The relationships our ancestors had are alive today in the mountains and waters, and natural phenomenon.

Orientations and *references* to land and the non-human signify them as carriers, which are the embodiment of the ancestral teachings. Returning to the previous chapter, when I was told the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, I was told that every time I saw a rainbow, mud or birds, I would be reminded of the story (Pfeiffer, 2018). These teachings would follow me wherever I went. This is true for all our stories. As we build on the relational knowledges encapsulated in the natural world, we learn about the ever-growing extent of their vast ontologies *of being* in our everyday contexts. We also are given the lens to examine deeper within ourselves to understand how we as people fit into the larger system where we are constantly aware and learning. We develop this enveloping understanding and reverence for all parts of life and how we are intricately connected to it (Denny, 2022b; Werito, 2014). Such pedagogical features secure relationship to land and the non-human as a way to make sense of ourselves as human beings through relationality to teach us about ourselves as people. According to Diné scholar Tammy Yonnie (2016):

> At the core of the traditional Navajo teachings is the concept of life….Diné believed this way of knowing placed human life in harmony with the rest of the world. For generations, the stories, songs, and prayers carried the teachings regarding life. (p. 50)

Diné are continually oriented throughout life to land and the sacred *ways of being* of the land. The land models inherent diversity in the natural world. When I speak of land, I am simultaneously speaking broadly of the wider natural world to include things such as rocks,

animals, trees, and seasons, for example. All of these have relationship with land and are part of the wider connective network of Diné ontology.

The following section of this chapter is compiled of subheadings of the non-human elements encased in narratives of the land found in the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. I stay away from absolute processes of categorizations, such as, a 'rainbow represents this, or sunbeam means that'. I am more concerned with the *relational* ways these teachings connect to reference. The non-human references found within the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy that I focus on are: The Early Dawn, the phases of the human life cycle, the four sacred mountains of *Nihi Kéyah*, and the importance of mud.

Early Twilight Dawn

The name of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is significant. According to Diné elder Wilson Aroniłth Jr., (1985), both a "person's name and shadow" are an important part of a person's identity (p. 117). It all began in the First World, the place Diné call the Black World (Aroniłth, 1985). According to creation stories, Diné prevailed through numerous worlds to live in the world we do today; the Fourth World, the Glittering World (Aroniłth, 1985; Morris, 1997).

Early Twilight Dawn is the origin of orientation to the first cardinal direction: the East, as light came into the world (Denny, 2022a). According to Aroniłth (1985), "Early Twilight Dawn came into creation in the Black World. This Early Twilight Dawn became the east direction and also became the Early Dawn Boy" (p. 117). The East is where Diné orient their spiritual and material lives. The East is the starting point for Diné Educational Pedagogy (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007). This is shown on the four-directions model, where East is referenced at the top and the philosophical starting place of our thinking (Belin, 2021c). The pedagogy of Diné life and epistemology are physically organized through the four sacred mountains of *Nihi Kéyah* and it always begins with *Sis Nanjiní* (Mt. Blanca), the mountain of the East (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007). The entire compass always begins with the East where light first touched the world: where the Sun first touches the Earth.

Diné family and home life are also always oriented toward the eastern direction. So much so, that it is the direction where the door of the *hogan*, our traditional homes, always faces (Aroniłth, 1985). This philosophy of the intimate home within the hogan, was modelled after how the four mountains were placed according to our origin stories. According to Diné elder

Nixon Martinez (2021) after the Emergence of Diné into this world "First Man placed the sacred mountains that we know today. They were placed as if [sic] *Diné Bikéyah* were a Hogan, *Sisnaajiní* to the East, *Tsodził* to the South, *Dook'o'oosłiid* to the West, *Dibé Nitsaa* to the North, *Dził Na'oodiłii* and *Ch'ool'i'í* to the doorway and *Naatsis'áán* to the back corner of the hoagn" (p. 4). Therefore, the East is an important point of reference, and a focal point of everyday Diné life made tangible through daily life in the home. According to Begay (2017), the six sacred mountains "represent the cosmic Hogan…the cornerstone of Navajo life and teachings…formed in the image of the sacred mountains" (p. 62). The concept of belonging starts with the hogan, a place of inherent belonging and love. This is the basis that reflects the rest of the world. Diné psychiatrist Mary Roessel (2021) discusses this vital role of the hogan as the place that grounds individuals and exemplifies the warmth of being loved unconditionally. She states that the hogan reinforced the conditions that treasured individuals as the children of the Holy People. In this sense, the hogan was place where one was "nurtured, given unconditional positive regard of validation and acceptance with deep respect of who someone was and what they wanted to become in life" (Roessel, 2021). This sense of safety honors people as individuals (Roessel, 2021). It honors them as part of a larger whole. There was always a place of belonging within the hogan. Within the teachings of the hogan, there is self-acceptance and love (Roessel, 2021).

The family is always pointed eastward when they leave the home to venture into the world. Diné doula Mariah Holiday (2021) affirms that "the hooghan is like the 'womb' of life…the doorway is the scared representation of where the child will enter the glittering world [sic] (p. 9) This is a reminder of the profound orientation to remember the philosophical origins of our histories as Diné people and are placed at starting point of our teachings in our daily living. We carry teachings with us and continually reorient ourselves to them with every time we leave the home and orient ourselves perpetually to the East.

Early Twilight Dawn Boy's name positions him as a point of reference. He is the example of how to live, persistently directed Eastward towards these teachings. He is named in a way that suggests that the teachings that related to him are the beginning and point of origin for thinking how to live in relationship with the world. As Pfeiffer (2018) stated, as the point of reference he demonstrates what leadership embodies and how to live the most foundational principles of *k'é* and how to pursue a life of *hozhó*—harmonious outcomes.

Both Early Twilight Dawn Boy's name and placement in this paradigm are significant. His identity is inextricably linked to the most important time of the sun cycle. His name is not bound to temporality, as it extends to the origins of our collective memory. His name and reference extend to the First World, the Black World, where light entered the world. This orientation seems to me, an esteemed place of reverence. *It is not by chance that a child with disabilities became the frame of reference to teach Diné people about the importance of relationship and the unconditional love that binds community.* According to Lorenzo Jim (2022b), these are the teachings of compassion and resilience. They are paired with the affirmation of Diné elder Anderson Hoskie (2021), who states that the "most important things to remember is that you are unconditionally loved…" (p. 4). Early Twilight Dawn Boy, a child with disability is the person who embodies these values.

Early Twilight Dawn is sacred and Early Twilight Dawn Boy is sacred too. In connecting the ancestral understandings of Early Twilight Dawn to link them to the history of Diné memory through the various worlds we have traversed from the Black World to the Glittering World, to the life cycle of the sun, into the *hoghan* (home), and then outwards to the sacred mountains of *Nihi Kéyah* conveys the relationality of *knowing* through orientation and relationship from a Diné perspective.

Sacred Mountains and Their Teachings

This section examines the importance of directions and the teachings of the four sacred mountains that mark the boundaries of *Nihi Kéyah*. As we recall, in the story, Early Twilight Dawn Boy and the children set off on their journey to *Ha'a'aah* (East), and then clockwise, to *Shá'di'ááh* (South), *'E'e'aah* (West), and finally *Náhookǫs* (North). Their movement in this manner corresponds to the four-directions model of Diné Pedagogy I introduced in *Chapter Three*—the traditional land-based model of education. There are countless teachings associated with each direction (see figure 4.1 below). Foundational to the importance of directions, is that each direction is associated with a sacred mountain. The mountains are *Sis Najiní* to the East,

Tsoodził to the South, *Dook'o'oosłiid* to the West, and *Dibé Nitsaa* to the South (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007). The directions and mountains correspond to a learning cycle, and also the life cycle of both people and the natural world. Each mountain has its own teachings, deities, colors, sacred stones and cultivated foods that are associated with it (Aronilth, 1985). The model represents a relational way of knowing that links human to non-human life and land.

Examining this model, we see that an individual day through the sun cycle, and a lifetime through the human life cycle both are represented in this paradigm. This is a Diné relational model of time which connects the movement of the sun and every aspect of Diné life, as many pieces of a larger whole. Therefore, this system is often referred to as Earth-Way or Life Way Thinking (Jim, 2022e). *What we know is guided and in relationship with the natural world.* The scope of such an ontological process sets the Diné universe (Skeets, 2021).

Figure 4.1. Diné Relational Teachings, Rain (2022)

To direct this analysis, I expand the understanding of *hozhó*— (harmonious outcomes), with the awareness that this concept means more than just harmonious outcomes. If the purpose of Diné Educational Pedagogy is orientated towards *hozhó*, the sacred mountains of *Nihi Kéyah* carry forward teachings to aide in the achievement of *hozhó*. According to Werito's (2014) description of *hozhó*, this concept aligns with each direction. There is a visual and material model that conveys what and how this concept manifests through relationship with land as it is mapped onto human life.

Werito (2014) starts with the East and elaborates on the role of *Nitsáhákees* (thinking) in his own life. In forming his own internalized world within his heart and mind, Werito (2014) states that "this principle helps to define who I am ontologically and metaphysically as *Ni' hokáá Diyiin Dinée,* or Earth surface spiritual being" (p. 34). This is done through relationship as Werito continues to describe how he orients himself through the most basic principle that "I

am from and of my mother, Earth, and that I walk with the guidance and protection of my father, the sky" (p. 34). This paired knowledge of orientating oneself through *Nitsáhákees* (thinking), is directly reflected to an orientation in the natural world. What is most important is that the orientation is intimate. It describes the most important relationship of family—our parents who nurture, teach, guide, and love us—the Earth our mother and the Sky our father. The natural world teaches us, and cares for us as a parent would. Both our parents and the natural world form our orientation of who we are as Diné.

The second step Werito (2014) describes is "self-actualization" (p. 35). This principle emerges from *Nahat'á* (planning) associated with the South. This concept of self-actualization "reinforces the value of my Diné language, philosophy and pedagogy", which in turn establish who we are and internalize what is dear to us (p. 35). The value of Diné pedagogy helps people towards their potential and upholds the importance of our methodologies rooted in land, such as the four-directions model. The third step Werito describes is 'action'. Action is manifested through *Iiná* (living) associated with the West. This is the *doing* part of knowledge, with an intention for self as it impacts the wider community. Werito (2014) states that "this principle helps to remind me about the different ways to advocate for my people, my community…in helping others" (p. 35). The relational self in this sense is the cultivation of oneself, to make one the best one possibly can aspire towards with the intention to share it and assist others. This resonates with Yonnie's (2016) concept of life. This relational way of knowing connects to a relational way of *being* through reciprocity and interdependence.

The final phase of defining *hozhó* from Werito's (2014) analysis is 'reflection'. This mirrors the teachings associated with the North, taught through the teachings of *Sin Hasin* (hope). Werito (2014) describes this final phase as "faith, respect and reverence for life…as I continue walking on the path of SNBH, or long life and happiness" (p. 35). The teachings of this direction and mountain are the teachings of having "love for self, others and the natural world" (p. 35). Each day as the sun rises and the night falls expresses the life of these principles only to be reborn again throughout every day of our lives (Jim, 2022c). Mountains and the directions are part of our daily living, and part of our life process of *knowing* and *being* who we are as Diné. The natural world and life cycle are inextricable to Diné thinking, knowing and *being*.

The significance of Werito's (2014) analysis resonates with the framework found within story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. The movement through this directional, ontological framework in the story is significant. The children became the teachers of how to live as they journeyed

through all these phases with reference to each mountain which embodies the teachings of each phase. They exhibited the scope of relationships and life of *hozhó* through their own thinking, *planning*, living and hope. I expand this dialogue further by relating this to the phases of life within the human life cycle. This informs the cascading teachings of human development and growth. It is vital to note how these are based on knowledge of self in relationship exemplified by the achievement of *hozhó.* Diné notions of achievement aren't 'benchmarks' of ability or inability. Diné pedagogy marks 'achievement' through happiness and beauty—through living *hozhó.* Such a view of the 'concept of disability' radically shifts the narratives from individual abled/disabled bodies and minds, to understanding relational systems and the teachings associated with them.

'Disability' in the context of land-based knowledge, is about the perpetuation of knowledge in the land as it relates to *k'é* and achieving *hozhó.* The children become the teachers of how to live these principles, so who they are redefined through this lens. They are not merely disabled peoples, but creators, leaders, and teachers to the wider community. The wider community is also reframed to shift back into relation and direct accountability to enact *k'é* to all their relations and called upon to create conditions that honor the inherent pursuit of *hozhó* for all people.

Life Cycles

The human life cycle aligns with the four-directions and mountains. East is for infancy, South is for childhood, West is for adulthood and North is designated for our elders. Early Twilight Dawn Boy's life stage aligned with East and South as the story designates them as children. The East and South are also phases associated with *Nitsáhákees* (thinking) and *Nahat'á* (planning) in their lives. According to Diné teachings, thinking extends beyond critical thinking and reasoning. Thinking encapsulates the practice of self-talk and a positive mindset (Jim, 2022c). Similarly, planning is more just organisation. Planning is viewed as the space where the 'internal meets the external' (Davis, 2013), such as the ways that we come to see ourselves in relations with others that provide direction. These two phases associated with children, the East and South, are the phases that emphasize the beginning of knowledge and implementation of understanding of how we relate and engage with the world.

Although the children were in the early phases of this paradigm, Early Twilight Dawn Boy's actions, planning and creativity embodied the fullness of the process of the four-directions

model. He embodied the skills and knowledge of the manifestation of SNBH well beyond his years. If we return to Diné leader Rex Lee Jim's basic understanding of SNBH — "the beauty of life realized through the application of teachings that work" (Lee, 2014, p. 7), we see that enduring point of self-understanding, community, love, creativity, joy, and *beauty* were realized in the life of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and the children. Even though their life phase aligned in the East and South, they held understanding that encompassed the fullness of the teachings at the status and knowledge of elders. The children exercised self-understanding and belief in themselves to pursue a pathway to wholeness and cultivation of their thoughts through action guided by the teachings encased in land.

It was the adults in the story, who were in the life phases of West and North. They were expected to carry the principles of these life stages with a commitment to knowledge, planning and action in their pursuit of SNBH. Yet, they were without all those traits in the story and their marginalization of their children illustrated the limited extent to which *k'é and hozhó* had manifested in the adults' lives and actions.

The adults were still on their journey to exercise self-understanding—the reasoning which drove their perceptions into action. Their realization only occurred after the children took flight as birds. The adults failed to account for their children nor recognize the spiritual giftedness of the children who lived in beauty with one another. Where the adults failed in cultivating community, the children succeeded. The children continued to build relationships in their inner and outer worlds, and from that came the fruits of *SNBH.*

The significance of age within the story of Early Twilight Boy prompts questions of perception as it relates to questions to ability. These questions are raised through two aspects of the story: the age of the children, and their presumed inability as 'disabled' people. The role of children as teachers is amplified. It is not an accident that Early Twilight Dawn Boy was a child in this story. Throughout this story it was the children who enacted the pedagogy to SNBH according to the four-directions model embedded in land. They were the epitome of the teachings of *hozhó* through their relational practices in rebuilding a world of beauty on their terms. They exercised the principles of enjoyment in making a life for themselves in the face of hardship and mistreatment. The teaching I draw from this is that children teach us to know beyond our engrained perceptions. Children continually reorient us back to what it means to be innocent (Pfeiffer, 2021a) and to understand the world as it is. Children always "reconnect us back to ourselves" and our own process of learning (Jim, 2022a). These unapologetic, uncensored ways

of being, tell us something important about the nature of change and growth (Jim, 2022a). Ultimately, children reflect who we are (Pfeiffer, 2022) and teach us where we need growth.

The second question regarding the age of the children has to do with their presumed 'inability'. Not only was this characterized in their treatment in being kept away, but it was also touched upon in relation to their engagement with mud. Yet, these ways *of being* throughout the story read as illegible to other people. For example, the old man in the story presumed the children were only making a mess with mud. He never imagined they were great artists who brought pottery into the world of Diné people. The community presumed the worse of the children as burdens and kept them out of the way. Yet, the children continually found a way to cultivate and build relationship with the world around them. The relationships they were denied within the community, they made through the land and their gifts of creativity and love for one another.

How often don't we recognize the relationships of our children with 'disabilities'? What do these relationships tell us about ability? I contend that these relationships are deep expressions of agency, self-determination and the profound gifts of living a life oriented towards *hozhó*. These fundamental aspects *of being* inherently exist on their own. No one gave the children agency. This is a Diné perspective of sovereignty described by Diné elder Chili Yazzie, that it is not ratified by any "earthy power", but rather, simply self-possessed (Emerson, 2017, p. 163). These children are sovereign beings with inherent rights who have extensive relationships that exist beyond people and their perceptions of them.

Mud: The Union of Water and Earth

In the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, the children set off each day and return covered in mud. The mud corresponds to the colors associated with each direction and mountain: white to East, blue to the South, yellow to West and black to the North. Every night, the children fall asleep with mud covering their hands and bodies. It was on the final day that the children are discovered playing next to a stream. From black mud they created pottery.

Within the story, the community and elder who later followed the children on their final journey presumed the children were merely rolling in the mud and making a mess. The reduction of both the actions of the children and the significance of mud itself are worthy of two main points I want to draw attention to. The first point has to do with the story of mud itself, and its

importance as a teaching mechanism of larger relations which exist beyond the human. The second point is the relationality with the non-human world. Where the children were denied relationship with the wider community, they made relationship with the natural world. Cajete (2015) reminds us that "art is the creative process that trains the mind, spirit and perception" (p. 5). Through their creative vision, the children reached in their inner worlds to connect with their outer worlds, to recognize the spiritual dimensions they shared in relationship. In doing so, they brought pottery into the world through caretaking non-human relations.

Mud is a form of soil and soil in Diné teachings is part of the four foundational elements in the world. According to Hastiin Beeshłigai (2021b), "Grandfather taught there are four elements for everything that grows: fire, air, water and soil" (p. 31). These four sacred elements are part of human life (Willie, 2017). Diné *hataałii* Avery Denny (2020) and Eric Willie (2017) have both elaborated how all these elements are equal and were placed in the four chambers of the human heart by the *Diyin Dine'é,* the Holy People. Mud by way of the significance of soil, is part of who we are as human beings (Beeshłigai, 2021a). The children's relationship to mud demonstrates a profound love and connection to all life. For me, it signifies an important relationship that expands to the foundations of life. *It is a relationship that makes possible all other relationships.* Furthermore, soil is alive and has its own way *of being* and genealogy. According to Beeshłigai (2021a):

> Life begins in the Dark World. Spirit Beings existed then. Like everything else, soil was a Spirit Being then. The Spirit Beings got together and created plants to hold the soil together. The roots of the plants helped keep the soil together. When the Wind came and dried up more water, more soil appeared. People started making life with help from the plants… (pp. 2–3).

To talk about mud is to talk about the systems mud comes with and the relationships to plants, and plants relationships to people. The items Diné people required ceremonially and physically relied on the soil as the basis of life (Beeshłigai, 2021a, p. 3). There are other stories with multiple recounts of how pottery made its way into Diné life, such as Beaver who taught people to dry mud so that it could contain water (Beeshłigai, 2021a, p. 3). However, the children's engagement with mud is advancing a teaching about the worlds of relationships that exist temporally, multi-dimensionally and internally.

Soil is also said to have "spiritual identity… It was known as Mother Earth, *Nohosdzáán Shimá.* (Beeshłigai, 2021a, p. 3). The children in the story engaged with soil and the soil had a larger meaning beyond merely the means of survival to build homes, containers, and structures. Soil

is Mother Earth and Mother Earth "is also a mother to all humans, and she is also a mother to all the birds and animals" (Beeshłigai, 2021b, p. 32). This foundational relationship is wrapped in the concept of nurturing, care, love and respect to all land and life (Beeshłigai, 2021b). In this sense, Mother Earth is both the means and methodology of knowing relationality. Mother Earth teaches the principles of care and reciprocity.

The second point I wish to make regarding the importance of mud extends upon the first point. The children's relationality with the non-human world stemmed from a process of deep self-reflection and knowledge. This was demonstrated by the teachings of the *Náhookǫs,* the North and the values of hope and reflection. Early Twilight Dawn Boy reflected throughout his journey with awareness in his actions, words, thinking and engagement. Throughout the story, he carefully considered the extent of his continual engagement and caretaking with people, and the natural world. His creative engagement with mud brought the world of pottery to Diné people. His commitment to this relationships, in the face of disregard brought forward something precious to assist his people. He was a leader through his knowledge and commitment to his artistic talents. Diné educator Shawn Secatero (2022) researches Diné expressions of leadership. Secatero (2022) conceptualizes art as a form of well-being, which honors:

> the past, present and future through the creative expression of giftedness. In the art of leadership, artistic well-being can be root to an individual who is a powerful influence on others' personalities, [and] belief systems. (p. 115).

Early Twilight Dawn Boy's self-reflection was enacted in numerous ways and produced wellness among the children in fostering their life-giving connections to the wider world. His reflection propelled into action understanding of the scope of interconnections for all of them. Those connections already existed. Our relationships with the natural world are always there. Yet, for the children in the story, these relations were denied because the children were kept away. Early Twilight Dawn Boy's self-reflection embodied relationship rooted in compassion, with recognition that the relationships beyond the home to those that existed in the natural world were where those connections could produce unknown possibilities. The relationships to the natural world supported his gifts to share and find joy, purpose and meaning within. These connections resulted in mud, shaped the ceremonial worlds of Diné people as these items would later be used such as the ceremonial pipe made of clay (Pfeiffer, 2021b). These items would shape Diné life and philosophy in profound ways.

These gifts came from the creative knowledge of these children naturalized the connection to nature as a reflection of themselves. In connecting to the natural world, the children materially formed relationships beyond the humans who had devalued and misunderstood them. Through self-refection Early Twilight Dawn Boy unlocked an understanding of relationship that both enriched the non-human relationships of the children. He also built a bridge to connect their way *of being* to the larger community through creativity and innovation. Non-human relations did not judge or predetermine the capacity of the children. It was up to the children to decide who they were meant to be and what life they wanted for themselves beyond what the community sustained for them. According to Diné artist Donovan Ayzie (2020):

> We are spiritual beings who respect all living things and honor Mother Earth and Father Sky…the deities proclaimed that we are the ones to determine who and what we are, placing us in the world to experience many opportunities to learn so we can grow…the true understanding of Native art is based on experiencing Nature directly, and then instilling this in your mind, heart and hands. (p. 14)

The internalization of life of the non-human is part of the deep creative potential in cultivating relationships with the natural world. The children's creativity and relationships to the non-human world illuminated the prevailing principle encapsulated in Indigenous land-based pedagogies that "humans learn from and with non-humans" and that we as people "don't just produce knowledge of them" (TallBear, 2020, 15:18). Not only do the children learn from the mud, but they also learned about themselves which resulted in a liberation beyond what they imagined.

The relational teachings within the non-human signifiers in the story: mud, birds, rainbow, and sunbeam are universes of their own with countless relational teachings and life-sustaining gifts. The children's relationships to these non-human aspects of the story illustrate how Diné ontology exists and operates within a world of community-building, where love, respect, generosity, and care can reflect everywhere in the natural world. Their understanding and creativity through these non-human relationships demonstrated a commitment to give to the community in the spirit of love and *k'é* with the gifts of pottery to the people and the lessons of how to live in beauty in following the SNBH trail. The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy calls on us to remember the right and dignity of all people to belong and participate in community life (Klopfenstein, 2021b).

The children lived in completeness on their own terms. They found meaning and purpose through *k'é,* the cultivation of relationships. These children had relationship with the world around them through their physical relations with mud and one another. This mirrored their relationships with the 'larger picture'—their relationships to Sun Wise Path Teachings (Werito, 2014) or A Journey of Wellness…by the journey of the Sun (Begay, 2017). These teachings contain the values and principles that lead one towards an understanding of SNBH and *hozhó*. The children's relationships to the cycle of the sun, the mountains, the union of earth and water were not mere engagements with the natural world. They were signifiers of these principles lived through the children.

K'é: The Basis for Human and Non-human Relations

All relationships carry powerful lessons to teach us something significant about the world. Early Twilight Dawn Boy and the children exercised responsible actions and *k'é* towards one another. *K'é,* is the *first formation of identity* woven throughout Diné ontology to make sense of the world, others, and ourselves (Parsons-Yazzie, 2000). The identity of the children is first a relative, a relation to the wider world; not a 'disabled person' through this relational framework.

Their relations with the natural world did not impede them or make their 'disabilities'. Their engagement with the mud to create topples the notion of 'ability' as the wider community sustained the conditions of marginalization. The children within the story pursued a life of *hozhó,* assisting one another to their greatest aspirations. The notion of inability collapses in this sense and is flattened within the rubrics of access, accountability, and freedom—the freedom to be who they wished to be. What is 'disability' in this light? Notions of ability and the perceptions that drove them, stemmed from outside the children to be projected on to them. However, it is important to note that impairment of their physical bodies is not romanticized within the story. The children still had needs and required assistance. The point I find the most important in this story is that access, support and belonging grounded in relational practices produced a community of care. In this community of care, collective collaboration amongst the children cultivated creative possibilities by the children who were view as 'unable' of anything.

K'é—positive relationships as enacted by the children, are at the heart of transformational change. It is something I see as part of the 'radical relationality' (Yazzie & Baldy, 2018) discussed earlier in this chapter. It is at the heart of recalibrating relational practices that make

a ‘good life’ which we can see is possible. *K’é* fosters the important idea that people and the non-human world are relatives first. *K’é* is a self-sustaining system (Emerson, 2014). Relationships are therefore always understood through reciprocal accountability. One does not merely see others as relatives. *Being a relative means being accountable to them*. The children as teachers foreground that our treatment of others and perception are sites for critical self-reflection to interrogate the extent in which we live by the principles of *k’é*. They are the catalyst for critical self-reflection of our own perceptions and beliefs about the world and people in terms of ableist narratives and how those narratives can be remade.

Lessons of Disability Through Land

Focusing on relationality in the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy reframes the concept of disability through a multi-directional lens. Just like the ‘compass’ (King, 2018; Yonnie, 2016) of SNBH is multi-layered, so is the understanding of ‘disability’. Both the concept of ‘disability’ and SNH are multi-layered and complex. I contend that story teaches us the scope of connections and grounds the demands of reciprocal accountability through relationship as a fundamental condition *of being*. Learning about ‘disability’ through the foundations of *k’é* and *hozhó* guides people back to the roots of relationship and the inherent accountability intwined with it.

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy places the concept of disability in direct engagement with Diné practices and theorizations of *k’é* to be read through continual references found in the natural world. The journey of the children according to the four-directs paradigm is an invocation of the cascading teachings associated with each direction, each phase of day, phase of life and sacred mountain associated with these directions. Each mountain has its own stories and teachings of deities, medicine, and genealogy associated to them. To speak of ontologies of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is to also speak of ontologies of the non-human world. The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy demonstrates how shifts in ontologies in the way that we understand the nature *of being*, changes the starting point of how we come to live through relationship. We must start from a place where relationality is a catalyst to making sense of who we are and what values guide and connect us.

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy put forward another ontology *of being* to convey that ‘disability’ embodies many things. Disability embodies the flowing principles of *k’é,* to recognize relationships in all aspects of life. In relationship, there are countless lessons that

direct people to live in balance, reciprocity, and accountability. 'Disability' is carried by signifiers in the story through reference to land and through the lifeways (relationships), which direct people towards *hozhó* and life of SNBH. What does it mean to reframe disability in such a way that refuses to see 'disability' as a limitation, condition, or identity someone carries? What does it mean to look at something: a rainbow, a sunbeam, mud, or the setting sun and be reminded of disability? This orientation makes it impossible to isolate the concept of disability from outside ourselves. It becomes impossible for us to divorce the fundamental aspect of reciprocal accountability and our actions from the concept of disability. They are relational. Who we are and how we navigate the world shifts when we see ourselves as part of the larger story. Our stories inherently connect to the worlds of 'disability' and the concept of disability connects to the natural world. There is no separation.

How does the paradigm that I have discussed throughout this chapter aide in the conversation of systemic ableism combated through current disability justice? Returning to the four-directions model, I offer some relational teachings and questions guided by this paradigm to help readers reflect and work towards connecting their internal worlds to the teachings of 'disability'. Starting in the East with *Nitsáhákees* (thinking): Who am I? What are my beliefs about disability? How do I define disability? Moving to the South with *Nahat'á* (planning, self-actualization): What do my definitions about disability say about my life values? What are the themes in my thought process when I consider disability? What makes a good relative? To the West with *Iiná* (living): What can I do to be a good relative? How can I work on myself and my beliefs to cultivate a 'good life' for all my relations? And finally, the North with Sin *Hasin* (hope/ reflection): How has this knowledge impacted me? What other areas of my life are touched by this knowledge of relational outcomes? Although these are basic questions, they are starting points for thinking how the four-direction model rooted in land can produce more pathways for critical self-reflection to tackle the socio-political conditions that impact our relatives with disabilities.

Land re-makes identity formations and has transformative lessons. Land teaches us about inherent diversity in the world. Although all the elements of nature have their own *way of being* and unique expressions: such as the dawn, darkness, East, West, sunlight, water, earth—they all are related and are known to one another through relationships. This doesn't mean that they become synonymous with one another. Rather, these diverse parts become understood as part of a larger whole underpinned by the principles of *k'é, hozhó* and SNBH. Land houses us and

teaches us the first principle of belonging and belonging is rooted in these principles. Land teaches us unconditional love. Anyone can engage in land, and everyone in some way engages in the world around them. In this way, both the land and the pedagogy of Diné education are inclusive concepts and structures. The teachings and relationships are inherently bestowed upon Diné people through our knowledge systems engrained in the world around us as a reminder, that we are not alone. We are never alone. As Diné community member Tyler Manson stated, "I am related to everything in the Universe…I should never feel unwanted" (p. 10). In the larger scope of relational teachings is the enduring heartbeat of belonging. Land is life and the mechanism to teach us relational transformation. Land teaches us through story, reference, and love to perpetually orient us and guide us towards beauty.

Part III: Ancestral Narratives

Through Part II of this work, I explained the relational foundations of Diné Educational Pedagogy through land-based knowledge and the vast scopes of relations. In building upon the argument of 'disability' as a relative concept that is embodied many ways within the natural world, I expand on the four-directions paradigm to illuminate how other teachings build upon this framework. In the last chapter I referred to 'cascading teachings' of the non-human world. These cascading teachings are relational. Therefore, attention to other relational lessons found within aspects of the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy deserve further attention.

Returning to non-human relations found within the story, I highlight relational *ways of being* that can be found in the connective teachings within the story. As we are reminded, Diné relational knowledge produces "stories within stories" (Belin, 2021c) and that those stories all have root in SNBH, which sets the "Diné universe" (Skeets, 2021, 7:04). They form an *ontology of being* that exists in relationship. The following chapters are concerned with three characteristics I argue are relational teachings of 'disability': spiritual intelligence, leadership and sovereignty. If coming to *know* emerges through relationship, then the principles of who the children are considers the wider relations and teachings encased in those relations. Examining the *ontologies of being*: spiritual intelligence, leadership and sovereignty, I continue to shift the discussion of disability beyond categories of abled or disabled.

Chapter Five: Spiritual Intelligence

> "The teachings of Early Twilight Dawn Boy speak to us this day. They remind us of the accountability embedded in relationships and the rules of *k'é*, that organize our responsibility to all life and people. They speak to the accountability of care and compassion, to live in the spirit of love, and kinship with one another. They also point to the ways that Early Twilight Dawn Boy becomes the point of reference in achieving the unbelievable. He is the one who illustrates that he is always there to help. He demonstrated leadership and the embodiment of *k'é* and teachings of compassion, care, and the principles of enjoying life. He was 'spiritually blessed' to lead the path of others and pursue the life of "being healthy in all ways"."
>
> (Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, retold by Sandra Yellowhorse from a version told by Chad Pfeiffer, 2018)

This chapter focuses on the concept of being "spiritually blessed", taken from the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy told in *Chapter Three*. I approach the concept of being 'spiritually blessed' framed within an ontological orientation—a *way of being*—that expresses spiritual intelligence in multiple and sometimes non-legible ways. These expressions of *being* are valued, even if they can't be easily described, assessed, or 'understood'. Focus on spiritual intelligence is important in conversations regarding the concept of disability as a distinct *way of being* because it sheds light on aspects of a person that are often overlooked. The focus on a spiritual self is often strictly kept from mainstream educational institutions within the U.S. (Foley, 2022; Graham, 2022). The concept of spiritual intelligence has been widely taken up in various discourses from religious to gnostic and new age contexts (Adams et al., 2008). Many of these understandings would contrast with one another depending on the cultural, historical, and political context in which they are invoked.

This chapter is informed by distinctly Diné ontology and is my own subjective understanding of spiritual intelligence. I believe these discussions bring forward other ways of thinking about a person, the greater community, and the larger goals of living a quality life from my perspective as a Diné person. Spiritual intelligence matters in the context of this collection because of its focus in the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. He is the one who provides reference to the importance of spiritual intelligence. He demonstrates how Diné can conceptualize and apply the teachings related to being spiritually blessed in their life journey. My internalization of these lessons leads me to embrace spiritual intelligence as a gift, and important dimension *of being* vital to community life. Furthermore, the concept of spiritual

intelligence destabilizes current discourse of intelligence. Spiritual intelligence relies on relationships, connections, belonging, love, and self-knowledge as fundamental aspects of the concept of ability (Velarde, 2018). Diné ontology reshapes the points of power within such a dynamic, to challenge wide-spread narratives of physical, cognitive, or behavioural 'ability'. I view spiritual intelligence in this context as largely disregarded by wider social narratives.

At its core, the focus of spiritual intelligence in this chapter seeks to unravel these narrow social narratives, to bring the inseparability of the spiritual within Diné teachings into this larger conversation. The discussion of spiritual intelligence contributes to the overarching question of this work: What are the teachings of disability from a Diné perspective? The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy places spiritual intelligence directly in those teachings.

First, I articulate how I conceptualize spiritual intelligence predicated on Diné literature of the 'spirit'. I discuss my methodological approach to this concept with the analysis building on the analysis of previous chapters. I give distinct attention to Diné Educational Pedagogy with the four-directions model to give shape to these concepts. I then elaborate on my central argument, that spiritual intelligence is intimately linked to the manifestation of SNBH and SNBH produces a uniquely Diné conception of 'disability'. I analyze and engage aspects of the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy to convey these manifestations of SNBH, (also referred to as the Corn *Pollen Path to Old Age or Pathway to Beauty*) (Lee, 2014), with a focus on the teachings of birds. I conclude with the centrality of *k'é* (positive relationships) emergent from this analysis and thoughts on how Diné story teaches Diné the concept of spiritual intelligence.

By framing spiritual intelligence as part of the continued discussion of Diné *ontologies of being* in relation disability, this approach positions me to explore the following questions in this chapter: What is the conceptualization of spiritual intelligence as a dimension of SNBH? How does spiritual intelligence relate to concepts of 'disability' in Diné ontology through the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy? How can story teach us to recognize it? Ultimately, I am interested to know how these discussions of spiritual intelligence help us extend the discussion of 'disability' from a Diné lens.

What is Spiritual Intelligence?

I frame spiritual intelligence specifically through Diné Educational Pedagogy, and within the broader context of various Indigenous worldviews. I am engaging with spiritual intelligence

on a surface level for Diné people who are trying to make these first connections within story. According to Diné practitioner and elder Avery Denny (2021), the "spiritual essence of life is found in *Nilch'ih* ", which I understand as wind, air, or breath (p. 2). Denny elaborates that this "air divinity" is "sacred, holy and "alive", and that "*Nilch'ih* is everywhere" (p. 2). Therefore, spirit is everywhere. The foundations of *Nilch'ih* express themselves in countless relational ways, embodied through Diné language, ceremony and prayer. (Denny, 2021). Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (1994) similarly explains that breath "represents the most tangible expression of the spirit because it contains the power to move people and to express human thought and feeling" (p. 42). All life is connected through air (Cajete, 1994). *Nilch'ih* (breath, wind, and air) exist everywhere and with relations that are immense.

My methodological approach to engaging discussions of spiritual intelligence is based on the principle Denny (2022b) describes as the "divine nature of life" (43:13). According to Diné knowledge sharer Anderson Hoskie (2021), "all life has spirit. (p. 6) Spirit is in everything, and therefore, available to everyone. Denny (2022a) defines intelligence as "having a spiritual mind" which he described as having reason to live, being purposeful, and being a teacher among other things (1:04:50). My understanding is that a spiritual mind conveys reverence for life, and commitment to the teachings that "Our lives are considered so valuable, "*iina baa hozhóogo silá*" (Ayzie, 2021b, p. 10). According to Diné knowledge sharer Donovan Ayzie (2021b), "In this journey of life, everything matters" (p. 14). Following this foundation, I maintain that this discussion of spiritual intelligence is in alignment with a relational pedagogy. This alignment provides for focus on *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) and the relational ways of knowing that I see as distinct qualities of spiritual intelligence. I intentionally move away from more esoteric ways of discussing spirituality. I also refuse discussion already found in the archives of Diné cultural studies which are often produced by non-Diné anthropologists with little ethical regard to halt the essentializing tendencies within mainstream discussions of Indigeneity and spiritually.

Rather, I uphold the teachings found in Diné Educational Pedagogy and the four-directions framework which are fundamentally important to Diné conceptions of the spiritual. I do not divulge or explore these deep intricacies in this chapter but instead use this broader lens of Diné pedagogy of inter-relationships to engage philosophically in the ways spiritual intelligence is expressed and realized. I strive to offer a guiding framework of spiritual intelligence drawn from story. This methodological approach uncovers numerous ways of

thinking about this *way of being* that doesn't collapse into a distinct 'spirit' world that is separate from our physical world (Cajete, 1994; Deloria, 2006). Doing so conveys a layered way of thinking about spiritual intelligence integral to the broader scope of how individuals exist within the world and through their environments. I note these environments as: one's personal environment of their own thoughts, actions, and desires; their community environment of family and kin relations; and their larger environment that includes the natural world and non-human relatives. This layered approach positions the spirit as not severed from the presence of everyday life.

Furthermore, this conversation of spiritual intelligence is distinct from discussions of "spirituality" in a secular sense and avoids content regarding ceremonial knowledge for Diné or any other Indigenous peoples. I am interested in the philosophical understanding of spiritual intelligence as a lifeway expressed through Diné philosophy embedded in pedagogy, and through *k'é* that are the political and social anchors of our lives as Diné people. I treat *k'é* as a form of spiritual knowledge in its capacity to formulate relations and *be* in the world through relations.

Although one could argue that this methodological approach severs the very nature of spiritual intelligence by separating discussion of it through only philosophical understandings of pedagogy and relationality, I maintain it is not for me to discuss spirituality in a deeper sense of ceremony. That belongs to the Diné people. What I share is an analysis of the existing documented philosophies produced by Diné people with a reading of it through the lens of the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. What follows is the understandings and connections I have made on my journey with Diné relational knowledge systems.

Considering ethical considerations in writing this chapter, I concluded that there had to be a way to engage this concept of 'spiritual intelligence' without producing a definition of 'spirituality' within a Diné context. Although I broadly start from the place of breath, air, and wind as something that gives and manifests all life (Cajete, 1994), I contend that spirituality is something very distinct for people and predicated on their life journey. In essence, spiritual intelligence doesn't need to be confined to a tangible thing that is knowable to understand how it impacts our lives. I am reminded by Māori scholar Karl Mika (2015), that

> the possibility that the thing cannot be conceived of in its totality…emerging as it does from an origin that is unknowable but affective. The thing itself, despite not being cognitively

> graspable, is still hugely important for the self and self's orientation towards things in the world (p. 1139).

It was also important for me not to conflate romanticized notions of Indigenous spirituality with the popular imagination of what Native spirituality should look like. Such harmful practices have removed the representation of lifeways of Indigenous spiritual discourse into generic models of wellbeing, holistic practices for profit, new age healing cults, or appropriation of Indigenous views of spirituality for social consumption. Furthermore, I contend that spiritual intelligence can be conceptualized without collapsing into reductive ways of thinking of spirituality as conflated with religion, the secular, or a universally recognized form of 'Indigenous' spirituality.

As we see from engagement in the story, the concept of spiritual intelligence has distinct manifestations and indicators that stem from the teachings of *hozhó* and one's life journey that encompasses knowledge of self in relationship to the world. For me, the nature of spirituality is like the journey of SNBH. It is deeply personal and part of the story of each person. Spiritual intelligence in this sense is about understanding multi—directional connections which also accounts for one's thinking, aspirations, relationships, drive, self-reflection, agency, self-determination, and *sense of being*. It is having confidence and belief in oneself through relationship. The relational compass I have discussed in prior chapters plays a role in this analysis. The connections I speak of in terms of the relational self, land and community are all integral to the concept of spiritual intelligence within this analysis. All these dimensions are continued expressions of SNBH, and the journey towards *hozhó*. Fleshing through these layers of relationality helps us understand how spiritual intelligence is subjective and experiential. I argue that because of this phenomenon of unknowability, the individual experience and the framework for SNBH is a suitable means to illustrate its complex expression. It is through story that SNBH comes to life, and everyone has a story.

In sum, there is no one monolithic spirituality in Indigenous thought (Cajete, 2015; Deloria, 2006) or in Diné thought for that matter. Rather, there are countless expressions that speak to the concept of spiritual intelligence which rely on philosophical orientations of "how the self is located in the world" (Mika, 2015, p. 1137). Spiritual intelligence is approached through the lens of relationship and connection which balances both the self and outer world(s).

Spiritual Intelligence as a Dimension of SNBH

The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is a story of how to achieve *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) and gives shape to an understanding of *Sa ąh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón* (SNBH). Building on this point of departure, this section addresses my first question in this chapter: What is the conceptual framework of spiritual intelligence as a dimension of SNBH? Engaging with the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, I argue spiritual intelligence could be viewed as the courage and perspective to live in and through SNBH. It could be understood as a commitment to find balance and understanding of the self through relationship in perpetual pursuit of SNBH as a lifeway. In this sense, spiritual intelligence would mean to meet life through relationship.

Handed down by the *Diyiin Dine'é*, The Holy People (Aroniłth, 1985) the laws, or teachings of SNBH were intended to give us a blueprint to follow to achieve a life of wellness, happiness, and quality (Lee, 2014, p. 5). According to Diné scholar Vangee Nez (2018) the "SNBH paradigm [or way of knowing] holds the principle to live in beauty and harmony at its core…as a way of life [sic]" (p. 27). SNBH is the epitome of human flourishing and a balanced life in a world that is complete and thrives. As the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boys gives us examples of profound imbalance, it underscores the importance of SNBH as something to aspire towards in the project of restoration, which I discuss in *Chapter 10*. However, the point I want to draw attention to is that SNBH operates based on the inherent right to pursue a life of wholeness for all life. Teachings of the spirit are teachings of its reverence, and all life is reverent (Denny, 2021).

Diné principles and values are continually articulated through numerous Diné stories (Belin, 2020) that teach how SNBH becomes manifest in an individual's life. SNBH in practice upholds its promise as something that can be achieved. Diné scholars continually argue that SNBH is not a describable *thing* (Lee, 2014; Nez, 2018, Werito, 2014). According to Diné scholar Lloyd Lee (2014) "One meaning of SNBH in the English translation is long life and happiness" (p. 5). Happiness in this sense is characterized by a cultivated sense of a relational self. This is the foundation that we know ourselves through our relationships (Dion, 2021).

In the context of spiritual intelligence, the relational self is important. Happiness within the self, according to the teachings of *hozhó,* could be healthy self-esteem developed by internal self-knowledge and supportive relationships. It could be self-development through cultivation

of one's gifts and in turn, self-motivation in sharing those gifts to form reciprocity that serves as validation from those gifts. Happiness could be self-value and love through the rubrics of belonging, and creative learning so that all can contribute and share those interests with others (Aroniłth, as cited in Nez, 2018). From these descriptions, the self is always in relationship to the larger community and environment. Pursuing these aspects of self through one's life journey is to understand the nature of the world around us and understand who we are in relation to the world. This mirrors how SNBH is formatted as the foundation of Diné ontology expressed in the four-direction model. This paradigm applies to everything in our life. The process of how to understand SNBH relies on the countless relationships and orientations found within Diné ontology tangible to us through the four-directions model. This paradigm encapsulates and breathes from a universe of relationships to radiate both outwards and inwards.

I see Diné Educational Pedagogy within this model as a producer of an orientation which already presumes a relational understanding of the self to the rest of the world, which is spiritually rooted (Jim, 2022e). This orientation forms an understanding of what it means to *be in the world,* and the numerous dimensions of relationships that encapsulated that belief system. Learning as a lifeway is a spiritual journey of the *self in relationship* to the world. It is knowing oneself through relationship and the countless relationships which shape and guide our lives. The way that Diné people were led to live their lives were orchestrated by the "great Holy People", our deities, who established from the beginning of creation a "pattern of education, belief, values, rules, laws and lifestyles…" (Aroniłth, 1985, p. 26). These were tools that were intended to help "Diné understand their own knowledge…[and] the patterns of interaction with their own kind, other people, divine nature, and with the Holy People" (Aroniłth, 1985, p. 25). The aspiration of journeying through and within SNBH, was the continual recognition of inter-relatedness, connection and therefore, balance of the endless *ways of being* that comprised the universe. The awareness of the expanse of such inter-relatedness, and in turn, the intention to find balance within that expanse, was indeed a concept of *spiritual being*. To live and express this way of being is an expression of spiritual intelligence.

The relevance of knowing oneself is the process of knowing the Holy People (Aroniłth, 1985). The "Spiritual Image" in Diné teachings has to do with the recognition of "the force and laws of the Holy People, the laws of Nature… Spirit, mind and body is like having the power of the Holy People" (Aroniłth, 1985, p. 49). One can think of the spiritual image as the "light of

life…in the ways that we think about ourselves" (Aroniłth, 1985, p. 49). The "spiritual image" could be read as understanding of the relational foundation that sustains natural laws oriented toward living in balance, and reciprocity. A recognition politic (Coulthard, 2014, Simpson 2014) of under what rubrics and legibility one can be recognized, shifts the focus from how identities are imposed to instead what relational *ontologies* underpin how we view ourselves and others. Through relationship there is kinship, security, acceptance, and accountability. This also relies on an understanding of the "spiritual image" as fundamentally something special about the self, in considering one as holy and sacred. The reverence we are expected to show ourselves and others, is also the same reverence we could expect to show the Holy People (Aroniłth, 1985). In doing so, we recognize the spiritual nature of all life and land as a reverent act through this reflective way of knowing.

Spiritual Intelligence: Being an Example in the Face of Hardship

I have argued that spiritual intelligence is part of the essence of *hozhó*. In speaking of harmonious outcomes, we must also understand that blessings and strengths, hardship, and lessons, are continually developed through this understanding of expansiveness. It is a reality that both joy and suffering have a relationship through the concept of *hozhó* in their need to be balanced. Both are part of the human experience (Jim, 2022b). Through recognition of these relationships, aspects of both blessings and hardship are intended to contribute to a life of self-understanding, refocusing on relatedness, and the pursuit of balance of the vast dimensions *of being* within the world (Jim, 2022e; Werito, 2014). *Hozhó* is not just a point on the horizon which one achieves. It is not just something that encapsulates only positive things. It is indeed a journey that blesses us, teaches us, humbles us, and moulds us so that the Diné people can pursue SNBH. I see SNBH as an active process of living, journeying and *being in the world* with perpetual aspiration to achieve balance.

In acknowledging these challenging aspects in the pursuit to cultivate one's life, SNBH is also oriented towards the understanding of restoration and rebalancing characterized as being "the female version of *Hózhóójii* teachings (Beauty Way)" …countered by the "male version of *Naayée'k'egho Na'nitin* (Protection Way)" (Nez, 2018, p. 17). Both these fundamental aspects of living in the world format the aspirations to achieve *hozhó,* in the face of both hardship and joy. Nez's (2018) analysis of Diné elder Wilson Aroniłth's writings and subsequent personal correspondence illustrates that "SNBH reinforces the reality that life is not always easy, life is not always a Blessing Way, but can be harsh, and a Diné person needs to know how to protect

themselves from this reality" (p. 30). It is through the empowerment of knowing oneself, knowing who we are and the sense of our worth that we contribute to this active process of protection. As knowledge sharer Anderson Hoskie (2021) reminds us, "When your spirit tells you something, trust it…your spirit loves you. It is there to protect and guide you. It is the most important part of your being." (p. 6).

It is all the strong relational networks— the community comprised of both human and non-human worlds, that help guide us to know ourselves. It is also recognising the inherent value of Diné knowledge systems, —these systems point us towards *hozhó*. It is recognising the importance of our community, beliefs, lands, and values, that we pursue the aspirations to live well and in happiness in the face of hardship (Aroniłth, as cited in Nez, 2018). Most importantly, it is a reciprocal process which requires our communities and people to enact the principles of *k'é*. Diné historian Jennifer Denetdale (2021b) refers to *k'é as* a "sophisticated code of ethics" in how "one cares for one's relatives… the land and how we relate to the universe" (para. 7). Such a relative process remains central to understandings of *hozhó* to foster protection and collectively pursue SNBH in rebalancing our worlds.

Knowing Who We Truly Are: Agency

SNBH in relation to the spirit, is identified by Aroniłth (as cited in Nez, 2018), as something "that is inside you, it refers to the spirit and soul that is the real you" (p. 31). Diné knowledge sharer Anderson Hoskie (2021), states that "your spirit is so important because it is the very essence of your life" (p. 5). Similarly, in his video interviews for the Native American Oral History Project, Anslem Davis Jr. (2013) echoed this understanding of the spiritual self in relation to prayer. As someone who grew up listening to prayers, he understood the need to balance the "internal universe with the external universe" (Davis, 2013, 20:00), which speaks to the concept of *hozhó*. His reflection on the need for a healthy "internal universe" was vital for individuals to embrace their own agency to the "degree to which we can do that", to lead one to deep self-reflection to understanding who they truly were (Davis, 2013, 20:30). For Davis (2013), the personal journey in engaging with one's internal universe was available to everyone and wasn't only deemed possible for certain individuals. Davis (2013) therefore, describes a Diné perspective of agency in direct relation to the concept of the spiritual self.

The spiritual self, according to Davis Jr. "is who you really are" (Davis, 2013, 24:28). Davis (2013) contends that the importance of letting children "explore their internal universe" as part

of the pedagogy for Diné Education speaks to the fundamental value of spiritual growth (45:00). Diné scholar Vincent Werito (2014) also puts forward the principle of agency in achieving *hozhó* by stating that it is up the individual "to manifest the principles of thinking for yourself, to live life in a delicate manner with the universe; and lastly, to come into knowing who you are" (as cited in Nez, 2018, p. 37). Our journey and development to believe in ourselves, to trust ourselves, and to know ourselves, is a spiritual act and a *spiritual way of being*. This approach to thinking of oneself and coming to know who you are, is central in my analysis of spiritual intelligence in the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy.

From this analysis with Diné elders and knowledge sharers, the concept of SNBH fundamentally considers the spirit as an inextricable dimension of personal growth. In fact, it is a spiritual journey. Anderson Hoskie (2021) states "we Diné seek to live a long life of *hozhó*, of peace good health and happiness. Use your spirit to put Diné wisdom together with your emotions and sense to reach *hozhó* "(p. 6). Spiritual intelligence through SNBH is vital as a means to achieve *hozhó*. SNBH embodies the forces of the internal universe and external universe as a unique *way of being* in the world. Such a pursuit embodies a sense of relational self and the universe that is spiritual, or as identified in Nez's (2018) work, a pursuit that leads to "spiritual transformation" (p. 1) *of being* in the world as one's true self.

Early Twilight Dawn Boy: Teachings of Spiritual Intelligence through SNBH

I have summarized a number of main points which illuminate how the conceptualization of spiritual intelligence emerges as a dimension of SNBH. Early Twilight Dawn Boy demonstrated the means in which to achieve SNBH. He is an example of how to balance the "internal and external worlds" that Davis (2013, 45:00) discussed. He balanced the worlds of harm, neglect, and hardship with the worlds of hope, self-understanding, and pursuit of enjoyment. He pursued the life of happiness in being who he was. His self-belief despite the beliefs of others, paved the way for the children to also believe in themselves and have faith in what they were doing. From Early Twilight Dawn Boy's story, we journey with him and the children to learn how to pursue a life of SNBH. In doing so, they become of the point of reference for others on their own journeys.

How does spiritual intelligence relate to concepts of 'disability' in Diné ontology through the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy? SNBH is a *sacred way of being*. Early Twilight Dawn Boy

demonstrates the dimensions to these sacred ways of being as a Diné child with 'disability'. Therefore, 'disability' in this story, is tied to the materialization of SNBH from my understanding of the teachings within this story. Both SNBH and the concept of 'disability' are *sacred ways of being* and are integral to one another from my own perspective. Therefore, I see both SNBH and 'disability' understood through the framework of *hozhó*, a state of being where one lives these principles and lives their journey through the teachings of SNBH. These principles are modelled through the natural world and the journey of the children mark the movement towards this great aspiration for beauty.

In *Chapter Three,* I argued that disability is a relational understanding. Spiritual intelligence is relational also. The analysis I have engaged in throughout this chapter conveys that spiritual intelligence comes from relationships, connections, belonging, love, and self-knowledge - all the things that Early Twilight Dawn Boy and the children carried in their lifeways. They were the teachers to communities who felt that they had nothing to contribute. If we recall Denny's (2021) definition of intelligence, it is about being a teacher. In being presumed to be burden or difficult to encounter, the story of these children brings forward the praxis of another mode of value— the value of spiritual intelligence in knowing how to live in beauty. Early Twilight Dawn Boy was spiritually blessed to embody a life that upheld the principles of SNBH and that is the relational teaching I take away from this story, and the teachings of disability.

The Spiritual Nature of Birds

In the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, the children were discovered in the North on the fourth day by an old man who followed them from their community. Upon approaching the elder, Early Twilight Dawn Boy states that they are happy and enjoying themselves. They will not return home. As the man looks out to the children below, sunlight pours over them and they take flight as birds into the rainbow.

The significance of birds in the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is directly relatable to spiritual intelligence within the principles of *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes). Birds are often tied to the teachings of harmony (Hoskie & Manolsecu, 2021). Jim (2022c) notes that in the early morning dawn, the first sounds are birdsong. Returning to the four-directions model, the East is associated with beginnings, and the early morning dawn. The significance of birds' distinct relationship to this time of day is important. It is a spiritual time of day related to prayer. Prayers are associated with this direction to ignite *nitaskees* (thinking/thoughts) and the

intention we have for the day (Jim, 2022c). This early dawn is dedicated to how we wish to live our life (Jim, 2022c). This time of day is special as it is considered the time the Holy People occupy the Earth (Aronilth, 1985; Curley & Holyan, 2020; Jim, 2022d). Diné teachings call for *hayoołkáál bii na'adá,* to "practice wellness in the dawn light" by "praying for yourself that will have a positive outlook regardless of what's around you "(Curley & Holyan, 2020, 18:58). It is not a coincidence that birds are always present at this time of day. They are intricately connected to the teachings of dawn and part of that process of working towards *hozhó*. The teachings of dawn are about relationships and conceptualizing how we want to live and then placing that intention into action in the wider world.

Birds are also important because they exist in a state of beauty. According to Hoskie and Manolescu (2021), at the time when the world was silent, "songbirds were created to bring harmony to the world. They were also created to bring music and beauty into the world" (p. 5). Birds and their presence in the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy mark a profound reference that relates directly to the purpose and function of *hozhó.* With the children's journey towards SNBH, the flight of the children as birds translates to me, as the place where they found harmonious outcomes. The children lived life with deep knowledge of their internal worlds and their balance of the external worlds through the relationships they sustained with one another, the land, mountains, earth, and water. Their achievement to flourish is a manifestation of that balance in the face of hardship.

Hozhó in this sense also means to me, that we learn to recognize the value and the spirit of all life. There is a teaching in the hardship the community felt in light of their actions in marginalizing the children. They lost their children and recognized their relations only after the children flew away. According to Diné community member Delores Noble (2021), "mom used to say that the birds know when they are not wanted or respected. The same is true with herbs. If they feel neglected or abandoned, they relocate to where they are wanted and respected" (p. 6). This is what happened with the children, as Early Twilight Dawn Boy told the elder, they had been neglected and treated as burdens. In their flight, they took the fruits of their community they created, the restoration of their relationships with one another the land and Holy People and left their community. This moment in the story is both marked by incredible sadness but also incredible power. The power of this moment and subsequent transformation of children into birds relate to the larger concepts of spiritual intelligence to meet life with self-

knowledge and a knowledge of the expansive relationships that make the world. The children are the exemplars of *hozhó* in rebalancing and rebuilding worlds.

Birds offer a means to relate this spiritual intelligence —a way of knowing and balancing the worlds they occupy. According to Chad Pfeiffer (personal communication, January 17, 2021) "Birds are *Yáash Diné,* spiritual beings. They are Holy People. They are *Diyiin Diné*. They have their own uniqueness". Both the children and birds present an array of difference. They have something in common that speaks to the context of spirit as everything (Hoskie, 2021)—*as a way of being* that can live in multiple worlds. Just as birds bridge the world of the sky to the lands and waters below, they have perspective of the world which differs from the lens many people may experience. Birds, metaphorically, can see the larger picture beyond what humans can see. Such a correlation between the children and the birds in the story frames this uniqueness of difference along with the uniqueness of occupying multiple spaces of knowing. Indeed, another *perspective* that experiences the world in profound ways.

In the context of belonging, birds also bring into question aspects of community which are premised on *hozhó's* relational and interdependent positioning. Through the discussion of *hozhó* in this chapter, I have already argued that one could understand the transformation of the children as the materialization of *hozhó* towards SNBH. The teachings of birds and the lessons from the children in the story bring forward principles of balancing the worlds they occupied. They were continually cultivating, creating, and being themselves. Where the community failed to realize their inherent belonging, they recreated that world themselves to make space for one another to be who they were. They still bridged the world they created amongst themselves. They cultivated their internal worlds built on self-love and self-belief and they connected it to the wider world in which they lived.

The children and birds have lessons that tie belonging to the premise of foundational roles we all have in life. Birds teach about inherent diversity in community and the sustainability that comes from their relationships to cultivate life. The birds are a necessary part of a sustainable world. They have interdependent roles in which humans thrive and benefit from, such as pollinating trees. They have a direct relationship with humans in this sense and share knowledge of the world that we can learn from and apply to our own lives as well. This essence of birds is elaborated by Pfeiffer:

> "Each bird has its own purpose…Even the crow, they are scavengers, they clean up…Medicine men say, the birds make their own music. They are harmonious. They only go to places that are good, they don't go around danger. If you hear birds, you are in a good place (C. Pfeiffer, personal communication, January 17, 2021b).

This idea of purpose is important. This sense of purpose, related back to Denny (2021) as part of intelligence, is the recognition that all beings have a role as part of the greater whole. There is an inherent sense of belonging within this understanding of purpose. Yet, it is important to note that the scope of 'purpose' within Western contexts can be unintelligible or obscure. Within this context, humans, non-humans, and the natural world aren't required to have an obvious function or purpose, to be deserving of life (Yazzie, 2017). They are inherently deserving of protection and to be free from harm all people have a role to play in the scope of the larger workings of life (Yazzie, 2017). They all have something to contribute, to share, to teach us and to impact how we experience the world.

The sense of diversity among the children in story teaches us, that although they are different particularly in their relationships to land and the non-human world, they had a fundamental role in the larger sense of community. They are part of the complete whole regardless of the actions of the wider community who lived in denial of this foundational principle. Treating Diné Educational Pedagogy as education and the means to achieve *hozhó* all point towards this principle of inextricable belonging and place. According to Cajete (2015), "finding our place as part of a greater life process" (p. 27) affirming that "education is an art of process, participation and making, and nurturing life-giving relationships. …it is a way of standing in the world" (p. 10). It is a *way of being.* Such a distinction is part of the "vitality of a people" who are "special, sacred and gifts from the Creator" (Cajete, 2015, p. 26). This paradigm of belonging, of having purpose and a place is a cornerstone for Indigenous conceptions of community (Cajete, 2015) and is a reciprocal process of well-being which is grounded in the concept of *hozhó* from my perspective.

I have argued that knowing who we are through relationship is foundational in the pursuit of *hozhó*. However, such knowledge of relationality requires more than mere awareness. It requires action and the remaking of relational practices. Space must be cultivated to belong; to be part of the community. This power of knowing who we are, has a purpose beyond just knowing it is there. The role of community is vital in this regard. Our community must reflect a space of belonging as an integral part of the relationality. Our sense of identity is formed

from community, what Cajete (2015) calls "finding face and finding heart" that through "community Indigenous people come to understand the nature of our personhood…" (p. 23). When the community in the story did not accept the children nor include them, the children rebuilt their own community where they learned about themselves through one another and other relationships with the natural world. The children's final act was to demonstrate how community is made and how it serves to honor the individual life expressions and *ways of being* of all those who contribute to the greater whole. The role of community is foundational as "the place where each person can, metaphorically speaking, become complete and express the fullness of his or her life" (Cajete, 2015, p. 23). The children demonstrated knowledge of this expansive network of community which has numerous parts from the human to non-human worlds. The birds' eye view is an expression of spiritual intelligence in linking the scope of these many aspects to know and uphold a more complete version of ourselves in the world.

The remaking and cultivation of community is vital (Wong, 2020). Community must substantially change its relational practices to foster the gifts of all those who inherently belong (TallBear, 2021). Our communities today require extensive rebalancing (K'é Infoshop, 2020, post). I see relationality as a means to achieve this. The conceptual nature of the birds in the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy offers a lens to understand the principles of community, belonging and *hozhó*. These teachings of birds are predicated on the principles of inherent purpose, diversity and indeed, spiritual intelligence encased in the numerous tenants of SNBH. Just as birds bring harmony into the world, the children who took flight signal a *way of being* which models *hozhó* and the balancing of worlds. Birds are the examples of relationality, as they live in *k'é* through many areas of their lives. They offer a wider lens to understand the pieces of a greater whole, and the orient people persistently towards the teachings of relationship.

K'é orients people towards *hozhó.* Therefore, *k'é* requires an understanding of the larger ripples of relationality to fostering respect (Lee, 2014), love (L. Lee, 2020), and reciprocal accountability (Denetdale, 2020; Yellowhorse, 2020a). When we realize we are connected, we realize our inherent accountability to serve, care, protect, and create pathways for others to achieve *hozhó* as well. This is spiritual intelligence from my view as a Diné learner.

K'é through relational ways of knowing are foundational teachings which illuminate concept of 'disability' as spiritual intelligence from a Diné perspective. They provide insight to the concepts of imbalance and relationality that demands accountability. *K'é* is another way to

answer the second research question of this chapter: how does the concept of spiritual intelligence relate to the concept of disability? The teachings of disability carry powerful narratives of *ways of being* that often are undervalued or unrecognized. If spiritual intelligence is often unaccounted for, such as the knowledge to live in SNBH and demonstrate a life of *hozhó*, how can one understand the completeness or other gifts of a person? We, as a society, often do not approach people in the context of their wider relationships. This can change. Acknowledging that all life has an infinite set of relationships beyond our perceptions of them, valuing the diverse expressions of *being* and place as part of the greater whole, is part of our individual journey to developing our own spiritual intelligence.

Recognition of Spiritual Intelligence

This last section addresses my final question for this chapter: How can story teach us to recognize spiritual intelligence? The engagement with Diné story gives us a lens to understand how relational concepts such as *k'é, hozhó* and SNBH are expressed in the lives of actual people. Yet, story doesn't fully define spiritual intelligence for us. The interpretative aspect of spiritual intelligence has to do more with our sense of orientation to the world around us, our community, our values, and indeed, the positionality of how we understand the concept and lifeway of *relationship*. Therefore, spiritual intelligence is not as much a *thing* that can be encapsulated in words and practices; rather, it is an individual orientation that is expressed through multiple *ways of being* and existing in the world just like the birds in the story.

These *ways of being* are subjective, just as my own conclusions to how I have come to view spiritual intelligence as a Diné person. I framed spiritual intelligence in this chapter as *a way of being* that demonstrates Diné pursuits of SNBH. Both individual and collective pursuits of SNBH are lifelong and are manifest though experience of *being*, and therefore relating, in the world. To be *spiritually blessed,* is to have a deep understanding of the ways in which SNBH is pursued, cultivated, and embraced. To be *spiritually blessed* is to come to know SNBH and apply it in our lives.

Story gives us examples of how larger concepts of relationality, self-determination, agency, perspective, inner worlds as they meet outer worlds, and accountability, can all be expressions of spiritual intelligence. Spiritual intelligence seeks to drive connection to find a face and place (Cajete, 2015) in the heart of the community. As we have learnt, community can be expressed in multiple ways. We were shown what a community can be through the applications of Diné

teachings or their absence. The children in the story conveyed the true essence of what it means to be a good relative. They exercised *k'é* with their continual actions of love, compassion, and trust in themselves. Even those who are marginalized by the negative perceptions of others, still have the aspirations to live well, in beauty and to be free from harm. Diné Educational Pedagogy provides for us all. It provides for our expressions of agency and self-determination to be honored and treasured. The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy upholds these principles, and processes of relationship, as a mechanism for living well.

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and forthcoming stories of Locust and Turkey in the next chapter, turns the current social discourse of 'disability' upside down. These stories all reframe a Diné understanding of *ability* to be something beyond what we are 'capable' of, or a set of diagnoses or conditions. Ability has to do with relations and love which expand on the dialogue from this chapter. These are things that make life and sustain life. The teachings of 'disability' through this reading of Diné story, land and knowledge destabilizes the identity formation of disability, and rather advances a series of teachings that work towards the cultivation and care of those who are most marginalized. The story does acknowledge the difference, bias and neglect of the children followed by the remorse of the people in their treatment of them. However, the lessons arise through the story—reminders that there are teachings and lessons all around us to fosters care, compassion and the spirit of love.

The teachings from the story, reference and orientation conveys that Diné knowledge affirms that there is a path for all of us: a path to flourish, help, ignore, or harm. The teachings of 'disability' from a Diné context calls for the centring of oneself and beliefs to critically examine them. Instead of projecting onto others: identities, bias, and rhetoric of burden so common within mainstream disability discourse, Diné teachings of 'disability' call us to look within ourselves to critically reflect on our thoughts, actions, and intentions towards others. A shift focuses from gazing at people to categorize them, to looking inward to understand what values and beliefs compel us to categorize to begin with. What are the intentions, and do they contribute to a life of balance and harmonious outcomes? I view catalyst of self-reflection root in Diné epistemology as a fundamental tool to combat systemic ableism. It shifts the dialogue of what is to be done with peoples with disabilities, to rather, what is to be done with ourselves and how can *we,* as a society, create conditions for all people to flourish in beauty.

This discussion of spiritual intelligence has sought to advance Diné processes of *knowing and being known,* to uphold the importance of relations that orient who we are, and what we wish

for in our lives as Diné people. In our daily engagement with others, we are taught to uphold these relations predicated on reciprocal accountability and deep connection to all life and people. As Tewa scholar and elder Gregory Cajete (2015) reminds us, “through story, humor, and ritual, people ‘remember to remember’ who they are, where they come from, and the spirit they share with all of creation” (p. 45). The intelligence to embody this, is within all people.

Chapter Six: Leadership

> … the mountain is my leadership.
>
> (Jim, 2022e)

This chapter turns to the principle of leadership as a relational teaching which emerges from the concept of 'disability'. The last chapter explored the principle of spiritual intelligence and laid the foundation I build upon for this chapter. As I argued, although Early Twilight Dawn Boy was described as disabled, his identity was not solely his inability to walk. He was also described as a leader. I expand on this perspective and share two Diné stories I view as vital to the body of Diné knowledge regarding 'disability' within the context of leadership. Although these stories contain reference to the concept of 'disability', the lessons advance the qualities of leadership. Disability is recognized, but the designation of leadership prevails as the focal *way of being* emergent from both stories. I was introduced to these stories well into my PhD writing during the winter of 2020. They are recorded by Diné elder and practitioner Ernest Begay as part of the storyteller series for the Utah Navajo Health System.

The first story I focus on is the Story of Locust. This story is meaningful to the larger discussion of Diné articulations of 'disability' because the language of ability is transformed within the story. Locust, a small creature, challenges the perceptions one may have in relation to ability. Prevailing societal views are often shaped by ableist beliefs tied to normative bodily and mind 'function' (Douglas et al., 2021) as the foundation of leadership capacity. In the story, Locust is chastised for his ability to lead as the people are confronted by challenges in the face of hardship. Yet, Locust reframes ability to be aligned with leadership through hope and faith in oneself which again, is a reoccurring principle of SNBH (Lee, 2014). Both stories in this chapter build upon dialogue from the teachings of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, as exemplars directed towards a life of SNBH and *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes). Early Twilight Dawn Boy was also described as a leader, who brought hope to others ignited from his belief in himself. The characteristics of faith, hope, self-belief and love for others are characteristics that are conveyed in relation to 'disability' found within the stories which speak to the quality of leadership.

The second story is The Story of Turkey. The Story of Turkey informs dialogue regarding social perceptions and treatment of peoples with disabilities. The story also conveys leadership

through service, sense of belonging, *k'é* (positive relationships) and the foundations of love as the enduring lessons taken from the teachings of disability.

The following stories contribute to the over-arching question of this work, what is 'disability' from a Diné perspective? In my analysis in this chapter, I am more interested in the qualities of these people who are described either as disabled, or 'incapable' by the communities from which they belong. I believe these qualities of leadership, faith and hope, teach us something about how Diné are taught to view all our relations. Although there is an acknowledgement and social perception of 'disability' articulated throughout these stories, there are also tensions regarding the focus on ability/inability. The morals found in the stories illustrate that ability/inabilty are not the defining features of the people. Although Turkey is said to be 'disabled' and Locust is presumed to be 'unable', neither of these designations become their identities. The focus in both stories is directed towards their leadership. From their leadership, both Turkey and Locust held the principles of relationship dear to their hearts. This includes the relationships with their communities as the point of reference for their thinking and planning. The modelled the principles of caretaking. It includes the cultivation of their internal relationships within themselves to nurture the belief in themselves—an expression of SNBH (Lee, 2014; Werito, 2014). I argue that both Turkey and Locust are exemplars of *k'é* (positive relationships) and the materialization of *hozhó* from their actions. They are known and remembered as great leaders and people who contributed to the existence of our ancestors.

The teachings of 'disability' from these ancestral narratives align with the arguments I have made in the proceeding chapters, that 'disability' is a relational concept. The prevailing teachings I have taken from these lessons, is that people are relatives first and foremost. The foundations of relationality in Diné ontology anchor our knowledge of one another to reshape socio-political conditions of those who are most marginalized in our world. These stories are part of the larger discussions of *ontologies of being* oriented towards social transformative change. It begins with us, and our relearning of relational practices, to have these teachings of ability and inability challenge our perceptions in a new but 'old' light.

Leadership

From the four-directions paradigm I introduced in Part II of this work, I have argued that Diné teachings are embedded in the four sacred mountains and the four directions. This framework is called Life Way Thinking (Jim, 2022e; Tachine, 2021) or Earth Way Thinking (Jim, 2022e).

Its teachings guide one towards the path of SNBH, which is described by Diné poet Jake Skeets (2021) as "the embodiment of living through all things" (7:04). From the teachings within the four-directions model are the teachings of leadership. The concept of leadership is found in stories of the land (Jim, 2022e). From my engagement with Diné stories over the years, they are filled with principles that reflect countless expressions of leadership. I see these expressions in both human and non-human *beings.* The stories of our non-human relations continue to inform our knowledge of ourselves through the recognition of our own agency demonstrated through Life Way Thinking.

In the prior chapter on spiritual intelligence, I offered a Diné perspective of agency articulated by Diné scholar Vincent Werito (2014), as the manifestation of "the principles of thinking for yourself, to live life in a delicate manner with the universe; and lastly, to come into knowing who you are" (Nez, 2018, p. 37). From this definition, both spiritual intelligence and agency are about the internal worlds as they meet the external (Davis, 2013). The teachings of thinking for oneself comes from the teachings of *Sis Najiníí,* the sacred mountain to the East of *Nihikéya* (homelands) and the principles of *Nitsáhaskéé* (thinking) (Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007). One could then say that *Sis Najiníí* is the basis for relational knowledge in coming to know oneself. From this perspective, it is said that the mountains are one's leadership (Jim, 2022e). The mountains teach, reflect and hold these teachings.

Within the stories that follow, both Locust and Turkey demonstrate qualities related to cultivating their thoughts towards creative thinking in directing their actions in a responsible way. They demonstrate the aspiration towards *hozhó,* through knowing who they are in the face of demeaning perceptions. From the teachings of the mountains, I introduced the basics principles in the four-directions paradigm in prior chapters. This paradigm holds the values of true learning, which Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete (1994) describes as "an expression of the soul and way of connecting people to their inner sources of life…seeing the whole through the parts…[and] building your self-confidence to coming to understand who you really are and living to your full potential" (pp. 30–31). Therefore, there is inherent agency framed within the context of the learning process intrinsic to SNBH materialized through understanding the 'whole' through the parts of this dynamic system.

Early Twilight Dawn Boy was not merely a leader because his journey mimicked the movement of the four-directions paradigm and embodiment of those teachings encased within it, but also because he lived through service and compassion for others. His role as a leader

contests social presumptions of what a leader requires. Even today, discussions of disability rarely include the relational quality of leadership within wider social discourse. Yet, the stories teach us that leadership is not made possible through only physical or cognitive 'abilities'. Leadership was possible because of the heart, love, and the scope of influence Early Twilight Dawn Boy advanced upon those around him—the power to impact others, a key component of leadership (Secatero, 2022). He impacted the children who lived and journeyed with him. His leadership impacted the wider community as his belief in himself, sense of hope and self-determination propelled him to follow his own creative thinking. This internal process transformed his beliefs about the world in terms of how he lived in it. He lived on his own terms. He was a leader by working towards *hozhó* in the face of hardship. Because of this, Early Twilight Dawn Boy was determined as someone who "was spiritually blessed to lead the pathway for others", in becoming the example through leadership (Chad Pfeiffer, personal communication, March 15, 2018).

The qualities of Early Twilight Dawn Boy's life transform a current socio-political understanding of 'ability' to lead. He teaches us as he reframes the qualities of leadership as someone capable of great change. According to Pfeiffer (2018), Early Twilight Dawn Boy represents someone who "achieves the unbelievable" and reveals that these other *ways of being* have something to teach the community in the face of structural oppression. The treatment of the children was widespread and engrained in the community. The only allies they had were one another. These unique *ways of being* reinscribe the values that underscored their exceptional ways of living in the world and their commitment to unite towards change. Early Twilight Dawn Boy achieves this as someone who is known to be 'disabled'. Yet, disability is not the defining feature of who he is.

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy brings into question the challenges with perceptions and assumptions which view only certain qualities as the basis for leadership. Ultimately, such framing unsettles the larger social constructs that tie disability to systemic ableism and notions of social value which I discuss in the in Part IV of this work. Through various stories, the principles of compassion, service, and self-belief are entangled with expressions of resilience and bravery to rise and topple narratives that view these individuals as less *able* by others. The teaching moment in the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy addressed the consequences of negative *perception* for those commonly viewed as insignificant, undeserving, or unable. These stories contest current day rubrics of systemic ableism, which structurally, socially and

culturally privilege abled bodies and minds over disabled ones (Griffin et al., 2007). In calling out bias, *the story is a catalyst— a call to reflect on our own ways of perceiving others.* The continual directing towards challenging one's own belief systems to consider its orientation towards harm, is a pedagogy for unlearning bias and recalibrating our social relations. The teaching of *Hanáá'honó'ah*, do not be misled by your eyes, or be deceived (Curley & Holyan, 2020) resonates with this point, in that Diné are taught to live and understand from beyond our visual perception. Rather, these teachings remind us to think with our ancestral wisdom, our heart knowledge, and through our relationships.

Finally, discussions of agency need to also include how we use language. In a presentation on teachings of the horse, Mariah Shield Chief (2022), stated that "all persons have agency" (Institute of American Indian Education). Framing non-human relations in conversations of agency, sets the foundations for all life to live well and includes them within the relational scope of the SNBH paradigm—a system of completeness. All life has the right and the aspirations to live well. Approaching agency this way advances the belief that the people in these stories "are not just characters [they] are discourse and knowledge" (Baldy, 2015, p. 9). They are part of a wider system of making sense of who we are and what realities are possible (Baldy, 2015) which frames our collective understanding in profound ways. In this context, 'persons' include all human and non-human identities within this chapter. Cajete (1994) reminds us that "all life and Nature have a personhood, a sense of purpose and inherent meaning that is expressed in many ways and at all times" (p. 75). Therefore, I refer to both Locust and Turkey as people. To begin this analysis of leadership I start with Begay's (2020) narrative drawn from Diné creation stories beginning with Diné movement into the world we live in today, the Fourth World or the Glittering World. I summarize this story through my own voice with reference to Begay (2020) as the source of this story.

The Story of Locust

According to Diné elder Ernest Begay (2020), when the Third World was flooded because of Coyote's actions to steal the child of the Spirit of the Water, the Diné people fled. Through a bamboo reed, they climbed above the rising waters gnashing and swooshing in anger as the Spirit of the Water desperately searched for its child. It was traumatic fleeing the Third World, and the people were in the midst of great uncertainty. Once safe inside the bamboo reed, First Man called out for a volunteer amongst the people to go up and see where the bamboo reed

was growing toward. It kept growing and growing, shooting far up beyond what the people could see. All that was left below were the raging waters. Someone had to go.

First Man called upon the biggest, strongest, and most clever: Bear, Cougar, and Coyote (Begay, 2020). He asked them one by one to go see what was at the top of the reed. One by one, they refused, and the uncertainty of the people grew. Then, Locust came forward and said he would go. Locust was the smallest and most humble of creatures. Yet, he came forward in the moment of unimaginable turmoil. He volunteered to find what awaited at the top of the bamboo reed and the expansive unknown.

Bear, Cougar, and Coyote each responded sceptically. They were quick to offer negative commentary at the realization that Locust was finally chosen to go. How could Locust be chosen? Locust was so small, and so insignificant. What could he do? However, Locust was sure of himself. He responded, "I am going to go with reverence. Searching for a blessing. Searching with hope. Looking for something good. I will go with these" (Begay, 2020, 10:01). *These,* in this sense, are qualities of perspective, heart, and faith in oneself. They reflect a certain type of *perception* that is oriented towards humility and faith. As I have previously argued, spiritual intelligence could be understood as how one knows the self and the foundations of what makes them know who they are. This spiritual self is the intelligence to meet life with faith, belief, and courage to be who one truly is.

Locust's quality of balancing the outer worlds with the inner worlds of one's own being, with ones' intent, perspective, and positive thinking, characterizes what Diné elder Wilson Aroniłth Jr. (1985) refers to as having a "good mind" (p. 7). A 'good mind' is deeply intwined with the concept of intention, to be motivated "to respond on the outlook of life" (Aroniłth, 1985, p. 7). It tied to a variety of other qualities as expressed by Cajete (1994), including the principles of doing "for life's sake…to become complete, of good heart, of good thought, [and]with harmony" (p. 45). A positive orientation is an orientation towards *hozhó* from my perspective as a Diné learner. Begay (2020) states, "the old teaching was that those are good words to listen to in a leader" (10:31) —words oriented towards this concept of 'good' that extends to a much more complete meaning based on Cajete's description. Locust's affirmations elevate perspectives of hope which are teachings of the mountain associated with *Dibé Nitsaa* (Mt. Hesperus) and the North direction according to the four-directions paradigm. The aspirations for *hozhó* are again an important aspect of being *spiritually blessed,* and to be spirituality

blessed is a hallmark for leading others (Pfeiffer, 2018). The relative nature of these teachings continually lead us back to *hozhó* and direct Diné people towards SNBH perpetually.

The importance of the concepts of 'completeness' and 'good thinking' entangled with the teachings of intention found in the teachings of the mountains as they orient learners towards SNBH are contained in the stories of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, Locust, and the story of *Tazhíí* (Turkey). They all demonstrate the qualities of good thinking and aspirations which outline an understanding of Diné concepts for human flourishing based on the achievement of *hozhó*, discussed in *Chapter Four*. The concept of agency is directly linked to this aspiration in working towards 'good', living well, and *hozhó*. It begins in the self and radiates outwards, to be a gift to others. According to Diné knowledge sharer Donovan Ayzie (2021b) "In this journey of life, everything matters. This shows how your life is molded not only by the actions you take but also by the words you speak and believe in (p. 14). For Locust, it is self-belief, relational power, and call for good. The Story of Locust demonstrates aspirations towards wholeness and completeness, and above all, hope through action and service. He affirms this in every action he takes.

In the recording of this story, Begay (2020) begins to sing. Correlating the importance of singing in tandem with story, Begay (2020) explained that opening narrations of song serves as a call 'for good'. It places those intentions into the world as the internal extends to the external worlds. This models the teachings of prayer in the Early Dawn light, that I discussed in *Chapter Four*, in placing the intention for good into the world. There is power in these relations. Locust models this chant, which Begay (2020) explains as a "calling out to the Holy People, to the Divine Nature to listen. And the Holy People and the Divine Nature, they hear that" (11:11). Doing so, is both a call to place forward those desires of hope, but also affirmation of one's own being and relational power. According to Begay (2020), Locust sang "I walk with the power of lightening. Male and Female…" (11:55). This relational understanding of power requires an understanding of the *ways of being* personified and embodied in the natural world (Aronilth, 1985; Denny, 2022b; Jim, 2022b). The teachings of lightening reflect cascading lessons drawn from various practices as lightening is represented in the weaving loom (Bennet, 1997), and the cradleboard (Jim, 2022d) and more. The use of relationality embedded this way points towards a holistic knowledge— a *birds eye view*— an intelligence of the world of endless relationships.

The power of this knowledge is claimed by Locust within the story. Lightening is more than just lightning. It has essence. It has its own *way of being,* and distinctive expressions which are personified as either male or female predicated on its traits just as female rain as illustrated in *Chapter One*. This constant reminder in Diné story upholds principles of relationality which structures *how to know* the countless *ways of being* in the world. *Knowing* transits beyond the mere knowing oneself. It is always relational in Diné story and unfolds in countless ways. To know the *ways of being* of others and relate them to oneself within the wider scope of inter-connective webs is an act of power. It is a significant demonstration of relational power which I have learned is underwritten in all Diné teachings.

In the retelling of this story, Begay (2020) does not reduce Locust to merely an insect. He is a person. He has traits of a human: feelings, aspirations, direction, purpose, and part of the community of Diné people. He holds this relational knowledge and its power. He becomes an important figure in the perseverance and existence of Diné in the world we now inhabit. Furthermore, Locust draws his power and mindset through a relational web, demonstrated by his song, "I walk with the power of lightning…looking for a blessing" (Begay, 2020, 11:55). This relational gift of perspective reflects the distinction, and the personhood of entities found in the natural world. This is an important distinction of inherent *ways of being* that are vast, diverse, and exist in direct relationship to the self. They inform the self and give meaning to who we are. Ultimately, they direct us in our lives and teach us what is possible. They teach us to believe in ourselves and trust what we are doing. This is a relational understanding *of being* and a relational understanding of 'ability'. They are rooted in the journey of SNBH.

Locust is a leader. Leadership is a *way of being,* which Diné story teaches is demonstrated by one who is viewed as less, not as strong, not as big, not as clever as those who were initially chosen. It is the humble position of Locust and his belief in himself paired with affirmations of his words that reflect his leadership. He also demonstrates the achievement of *hozhó* and a life in line with SNBH. His leadership is the defining feature of who he is at his core, not how small or incapable he is. Who he is reshapes the understanding of what makes a leader. It has nothing to do with physical ability. His leadership comes from the teachings of the mountains and the mountains reflect the scope of relations materialized.

Teachings of Potential

The lessons from the Story of Locust compel me to view Diné teachings as always oriented towards the inherent potential of all things. The importance of fervent hope and positive perspectives continually rise within stories in the journey to rebalance worlds. We are reminded through story, that rebalancing requires the presence of suffering and hardship met with courage and self-understanding. The Story of Locust shapes the concept of agency to illuminate the concept of inherent potential. Through the stories, the distinct feature of aspiration is read as the invitation of *hozhó.* In tandem with relational power, I believe that we are born with the aspiration to achieve our potential as people which is ultimately the journey of *hozhó*.

Hozhó, as the model of human flourishing operates through narratives within stories about the difficulty of these aspirations in a world which constantly works against them. Yet, the commitment and desire to call for all things good, just as Locust did in the story, to perpetually search for a blessing, is an example of spiritual intelligence through leadership. We lead ourselves sometimes, from within our internal worlds through a process of constant relating. This signals to me, the translation of agency and more importantly the principle that *hozhó* and SNBH are within our complete control (Jim, as cited in Lee, 2014). According to Diné poet and leader Rex Lee Jim, there is already beauty within us (as cited in Lee, 2014). If there is already beauty within us, then all of us have inherent potential and all of us have power. Hope helps us to achieve what is already within us.

Early Twilight Dawn Boy also lived his potential. His agency reflected that he lived what he believed in. His desires touched others as he placed forward his beliefs that all the children had potential. He made space for the children to live their own ambitions and supported their freedom to fulfil their potential and be who they were. They collectively manifested their own world into existence. In doing so, they demonstrated the commitment to pursue their interests, talents, and relationships with the natural world. Their aspirations and devotion also demonstrated the desire to contribute back to the community by sharing their talents. Their intentions were to belong, be accepted and valued as an important part of the community. By prevailing through great hardship, we are shown the expressions of *spiritual intelligence as leadership* which lives in relationship to the wider community and natural world. It surfaces through hope and the materialization of the beauty that already exists within, as one's inherent potential.

I view hope as a form that emerges from this process of restoration that underwrites the basis for SNBH according to the relational teachings of the mountains. It is consideration of the larger community in which Early Twilight Dawn Boy and Locust both cultivate this essence of as potential and expressions of agency. By living a life that brought balance and self-understanding to themselves and others, they are leaders who teach others to realize their potential.

The Story of Tązhíí (Turkey)

This chapter's third story of disability that I have heard from a Diné perspective is the Story of *Tązhii,* Turkey. The story was recorded by the Utah Navajo Health System and was part of storytelling series by Diné elder Ernest Begay (2020) There are multiple parts to the story. However, for the purpose of this chapter, I focus on the beginning of his story. I decided to use the direct transcripts from this video recording. I am interested in how Turkey expresses leadership as a person with disabilities. It is important to note, that variations of this story exist. In my time writing this work, I encountered another published retelling of this story by Diné knowledge sharer Nixon Martinez (2021). There are differences in the retelling of this story according to these two storytellers. As I have previously argued, the importance of these stories relies on the teachings and principles drawn from them. Again, I am interested in the relational teachings which emerge. According to Begay (2020),

> Turkey is the part of the Navajo culture. They say that Turkey is a special person with disabilities. And, the Turkey was unwanted by its family. So, First Man and First Woman, they begin to take care of Turkey. The good thing was, that First Boy and First Girl were together with Turkey and they played together. The story goes, that once upon a time, they were out again and the Turkey heard a swooshing noise, like water flowing.
>
> He looked up and looked all around and he saw that there was a flood coming. He informed First Boy and First Girl, then they all took off for First Man's home, First Woman's home. They headed for home. They came in. First man went out and looked and sure enough, there was a flood coming.
>
> The Spirit of the Water, was looking for its baby that had been stolen and taken by the Coyote. So, in that way then, everyone was informed, and everyone went toward the East, to the mountain in the East.

They got up top, and the water was going way high. So, they went to Mt. Taylor, *Tsoodziił*, and they got on top, but the water was going way high. So then went to the sacred mountain *Dook'o'ooslííd*— on top. Same thing: water was way up high. So, then they quickly went over to the La Plata Peak, *Dibé Nitsa*, they went over there. They got on top and then all that water was coming up.

It just so happened that there was a Medicine Man who had some sacred minerals and what he did, he planted them. East to south; three. South to West; three. And the West to North; three. North to back to East; three. Twelve in all. These were gigantic bamboo reed seeds. And then the bamboo reed grew out and then it begin to grow together. This is where the people went. First Man and First Woman went, the People of this society. They all went in there. And then everybody just settled down. They had trauma. They were scared.

Then one of them said, "Turkey is still coming!"

And they all looked, and here he barely was going with the water right behind him. Some of the people said" Leave him be, he's no good for nothing. Let him be, he's not worth it."

But First Woman said, *"No, that's my baby".*

So, they waited, and then he came in huffing and puffing. They say that's where the Turkey's head, and neck went all red. That's what happened. So, he got in and there he was standing breathing in and out. Really breathing, huffing and puffing there, trying to catch his breath.

Then First Man said, "Okay now. Order. What did you all bring? What did you get? Did anyone get the ceremonial objects? The medicinal objects? Did you get them?"

"Yes."

[First Man] "Did you get some of the things we used to survive?"

"Yes."

[First Man] "Do we have everybody?"

"Yes."

The First Woman said "Did anybody get some food?"

And everybody was just quiet.

Food. Nobody had gotten it. And that's when First Man said, "What do we do now? We are going to starve. What's going to happen now?"

Then Turkey stood up. And then he stood toward the people. And it shook its wings, and out came seeds of corn; white corn, blue, yellow, black, red. It all came out and there was a big pile of corn there. Then Turkey turned around and he ruffled his feathers, shook its tail, that's where then, other seeds came out; beans squash, pumpkin, melons, they all came out. There was a big pile.

And First Woman says to First Man, "I told you. Our child is very smart."

Navajo People respect special people with disabilities because they have a special talent. Never talk or think of somebody as not worth anything, or just no good.

It's not our way.

Any breath of life is respected and held highly.

That's the teaching of First Man and First Woman.

(Ernest Begay, 2020)

Figure 6.1 Turkey, Rain (2021e)

The principle of love was the striking feature I identified when I first heard this story. This again brings to light the Diné principles of belonging through the practice of k'é (positive relationships). *K'é* demonstrates the claiming and being claimed through relationships. Begay's (2020, 7:58) final claim that "any breath of life is respected and held highly", also links to this concept of relationality. The concept of breath relates to wind, which is one of the four sacred elements in the world that I discussed in *Chapter Five* (Denny, 2020). According

to Diné knowledge sharer Adair Klopfenstein (2021c), "Holy Wind is our connection to all living things. The act of breathing is sacred… with the taking in of air, *Nilch'ih Diyinii* (Holy Wind) becomes part of the cycle of breathing in all of creation" (p.1). The wind is both the expression of all life, and the foundation of our spiritual lives as "song and prayer are inseparable from *Nilch'ih"* (Denny, 2021). According to Diné elder and practitioner Avery Denny (2021), "respecting this and our sacred elements means to be Diné" (p. 2). Therefore, our identity is both informed and interdependent with the concept of wind. And the concept of wind is reflected in our children. According to Diné knowledge sharer Chad Pfeiffer "Children are our prayers and songs. They create that for us. They are the reason we pray and sing" (personal communication, January 29, 2022). These teachings are foundational to who we are, and the principles of value emerge from this concept of life that connects all of us to the past and future. We are taught to hold all beings in high regard because of these relational teachings—they represent all life and all life represents our past and our aspiration for thriving futures.

Yet, in the story of Turkey and Early Twilight Dawn Boy, they were mistreated by their parents and families that were supposed to love them. In light of this, they built new relations—Early Twilight Dawn Boy with the children kept away with him and Turkey with First Man, First Woman and their children, First Boy and First Girl. Marginalization within these stories surfaces through the perception of worth. Notions of worth determined whether these individuals were wanted by their families and wider community. The value systems which inform what worth is, becomes a point of focus within these stories. The mistreatment in these stories do not the teaching of worth from the teachings of wind, and sacredness of all life. They don't reflect worth through leadership, or the roles Turkey, Locust and Early Twilight Dawn Boy had as teachers of SNBH. Concepts of worth that contribute towards marginalization, are not in line with our fundamental teachings of the wind, and sacred elements of all life.

What do we truly value in people in society? These stories are calling out the bias which exists when relational practices are disregarded. The centrality of *k'é* (positive relationships) here marks an intervention within both these contexts. *K'é* sets the foundations of inherent worth, predicated on the value of relations which cascade and entangle with wind, mountains, soil, waters, sun, thoughts, motivations, and all relations. In this system, the dawn relates to the mountains, and the mountains relate to thoughts, planning, actions, and reflection. Those in turn relate to the life cycle and the people in our communities past, present, and future: our

babies, our children, adults and our elders. They relate to heroes associated with each direction, sacred stones, and plants. The teachings of relationships are endless! They are all distinct but reflective. They are known to one another through one another. The principles that underpin all this: *hozhó, k'é,* and SNBH are persistently there as the means and methodology—they are the journey and the outcome. *We all live in relations and all relations matter.*

This is reiterated within the Life Way Thinking, through the teachings of the mountains (Jim, 2022e) and the teachings of wind (Denny, 2021). *K'é* as lifeway is an approach to destabilize imposed rubrics of value or identity which result in marginalization because *there is only marginalization if we as humans, as people, create it*. *K'é* sets the basis for belonging through these powerful systems that are relational. These relations are built from the reverence of life—the concept of life (Yonnie, 2016) and principles of reciprocal accountability is a fundamental part of that concept of life.

Disparaging conceptions of worth were negatively oriented toward Turkey within the story, as some of the people vocalized the desire to leave him behind to be taken by the Spirit of the Water. He was viewed as "good for nothing" within the story (Begay, 2020, 5:16). Yet, the claiming of Turkey by First Woman instils the teachings of inherent belonging and love through relationality. In fact, she claims Turkey as her baby. She recognizes Turkey as a close relation and through relation there is inherent value and a space of belonging. Through the lifeway of *k'é,* Turkey didn't have to be "useful" to be valuable. He was valuable because of the relational nature in which First Man and First Woman loved him as their own. They demonstrate the seeds of love that parents and relations should have. As Begay (2020) pointed out, these are the teachings of First Man and First Woman. They are teachings of unconditional love.

Through the principles of *k'é* as a lifeway, the lessons of accountability through being responsible to one another are woven throughout the Story of Turkey. Turkey understood himself in relation to the people and to his family. His final actions before the world was flooded was in service to the community who deemed him less. The same is true for Early Twilight Dawn Boy and children as they offered the gifts of pottery to the people before they flew away into the light of the rainbow. Both stories exemplify spiritual intelligence, the heart, the foundations that propel unconditional love into action. Their aspirations to live well and respect life is amplified by their deeds of service. They demonstrate how to world-build and establish community that thrives. Their mistreatment by the collective, is a teaching moment

of the people. It is a call to not relive actions which produce harm. These teaching moments are vital to prevent destruction of Diné people, world and Diné lifeways (Denny, 2022b).

This nature of interdependency fundamentally roots relationality for sustainability and life (Cajete, 1994). It was because of Turkey, that the people lived through great calamity. Turkey's gift to have foresight in remembering the seeds and thinking first about the people in the midst of his own mortality, is the epitome of service and love. Although Turkey was thought to be useless, he is the reason why corn, melons, squash and beans exist in the Glittering World, the Fourth World today (Begay, 2020). Similarly, the concept of time becomes interrelated to this understanding of purpose and service. Turkey is an example of how we should relate to the future, and how that relation paves the ways for Diné futurity. A multi-temporal approach to relationality teaches us and shapes the future of what is possible. When examined in this light, the role of Turkey is not only vital in the past. He shapes the future for Diné People in our care of relations with disabilities.

This story also illustrates the principle that everyone has a role. Cajete (2015) outlines the sense of belonging through community in contributing towards processes of learning, sharing, making art, and finding space to connect, and express feelings such as joy and grief. There is a role of for everyone within these rubrics and all people make a vital contribution to the greater whole (Cajete, 2015).

Everyone also plays a role in the restoration of bad relational practices. These teachings apply to individual and the wider community to understand that there is a duty of the community as a collective to make things whole. It is up to them, to initiate the restoration of their own individual lives first in order to create ripple effects in making communities whole again. Diné poet Laura Tohe (2021) affirms this, as she states, "when things happen, the community has to be put back together, to get restored" (40:35). Not only did Turkey, Locust and Early Twilight Dawn Boy create restoration, they placed the call for the community to restore themselves to make life for those on its margins. These leaders expose the imbalances and instigate a process of restoration. They lead people back to this system of renewal, even if they are the creators of unmeasurable hardship. However, this doesn't mean it's the duty of individuals like Turkey and Early Twilight Dawn Boy to carry the weight of righting these wrongs. As a community process, it is up to all of us to work collaboratively towards healing the wrongs of the mistreatment and marginalization of our relatives with disabilities. According to Diné educator Clayton Long (2021) "traditional healing in the Hogan didn't just come from the medicine

man. It also came from the family, clan, people who sang and those who made food. Everyone was needed" (p. 11). All people are needed to remake a sense of wholeness in the work of restorative practices.

My call to readers of this work is twofold. It is to self-reflect on the 'internal worlds' of oneself to examine how we harbor bias and contribute towards systems that sustain the conditions demonstrated within the stories of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, Locust, and Turkey. Cajete (1994) argues that "people must constantly be aware of their weaknesses and strive to become wise in the ways that they live their lives" (p. 45). Weakness here, is lack of relationality, and bias (Cajete, 1994). My second call is for community action through reciprocal accountability. As I argue in the next part of this work, everyone has a role to play in systemically changing the worlds of peoples with disabilities. If Diné people invoke the concept of SNBH through institutional platforms, this must innately consider the current conditions our relatives with disabilities occupy in our societies. The community is the place for transformative action, as Cajete (2015) argues: "the community is place where each person can, metaphorically speaking, become complete and express the fullness of his or her life" (p. 23). It is up the community to make our relations with disabilities a priority if there is ever going to be restoration for Diné people as a whole.

Principles of SNBH within Story

Returning to the four-mountain paradigm, we learn that Diné Educational Pedagogy is predicated on the resonating principles found within these stories; the inherent principles of agency and self-determination to follow the Corn Pollen Path to SNBH. SNBH is the foundation of having faith and trust in who we are, beyond what is perceived of oneself. The people throughout these stories modelled these principles to become teachers. Their *ways of being* influence how we can live the principles of SNBH in everyday living. All people have agency, the right to self-determination, and the potential to achieve SNBH in their lives. As reoccurring pathways, the journey to them is different for each person. However, these principles are important as we are continually pointed towards these conclusions found across countless stories. Relational ways of knowing matter. At their basis, is the transformative potential to root Diné communities entrenched in the values of our ancestors. In the next chapter I examine the principle of sovereignty. The concept of sovereignty is a powerful one and is also embedded in relational teachings found in the natural world. It too, is intimately intwined with the concept of SNBH.

The teachings of leadership are teachings of 'disability' because of the lessons implanted in the relational ways of knowing illuminate the pathway to achieving *hozhó.* To share this with others and live in relationship is to be a leader. The teachings of 'disability' root this principle in the relational ways of knowing found in the natural world and within the story. To start the conversation of sovereignty in relation to disability, I argue that Diné Education was built on the understanding that Diné people had the right and power to design their own lives, and that started with self-understanding and the pursuits to live in beauty (Lee, 2014, p. 8). According to Navajo poet and leader Rex Lee Jim, "Our responsible actions bring beauty into this world…SNBH is formulated within our complete control…the beauty comes from within us. *Hózhóón* then, is our inner self singing and dancing in the physical world" (as cited in L.Lee, 2020, p. 40).

Through the stories of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, Turkey, and Locust, we learn about SNBH, sovereignty, leadership and spiritual intelligence as people connected to the teachings of 'disability'. Their stories embody what these concepts are and how they are known by these and not their presumed 'limitations'. They all demonstrate the principles of *k'é,* applied to their lives and are a fundamental part of their own individual journeys and for the community's journey as well. When individuals uphold the laws of reciprocal accountability, we can see entire communities transform. Locust, Turkey and Early Twilight Dawn Boy exemplify this truth. This is part of the wholeness of SNBH in producing ripple-effects. It considers everyone and how we all impact one another. This upholds the fundamental tenet that the wellness of one contributes to the wellness of all. This is a relational ontology *of being* and part of the teachings of 'disability'.

Chapter Seven: Sovereignty

> He looked up to see the children playing within the brightest light of the warmth of the sun. They were suddenly wrapped within a sunbeam, pouring over them and lighting up the valley below. A rainbow touched the ground under which they stood. In an instant, they all took flight, as birds, beautiful birds of every color and shape and they flew away into the light of the rainbow.
>
> (Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, retold by Sandra Yellowhorse from a version told by Pfeiffer, 2018)

This chapter explores sovereignty as a relational concept that shape the teachings of 'disability'. I build upon the preceding chapters, as *Chapter Five on Spiritual Intelligence, and Chapter Six on Leadership* lay the groundwork for examining the teachings of sovereignty by examining the principles of SNBH and the teachings of the rainbow. Sovereignty, like the concept of SNBH, will often have a diverse expression of what it means (Lee, 2017). It is often discussed within the constructs of Native nation building, and self-determination within socio-political contexts. My approach to sovereignty is to draw upon story and textual analysis of Diné authors to link the teachings of sovereignty through the framework of SNBH, and the principles of relationship to enact reciprocal accountability that cultivate the journey of SNBH for all. I have argued in previous chapters, the links between *k'é* (positive relationships) and SNBH, require that in cultivating ourselves, we also cultivate the pathway for others in their journey towards SNBH. The right to this journey and the embodiment of living that right, is an act of sovereignty.

I utilize the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy as the main source for my arguments on relating sovereignty to SNBH. I focus on how sovereignty is a relational teaching that shapes the concept of 'disability'. I do this by returning to the four-directions paradigm at the heart of the principles of *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes), *k'é* (positive relationships) and SNBH described throughout this work. In framing these principles within this chapter, I argue that the teachings of 'disability' are teachings of sovereignty. Through a relational lens, I map this claim with analysis of how the story carries teachings of the rainbow. The rainbow's significance in Diné thought and life, translates as a powerful *being* which shapes our understanding of the world and manifests a distinct conception of sovereignty.

From the Story of Twilight Dawn Boy, I examine two distinct features of the story. The first feature of the story ties into the concept of 'reference' in *Chapter Four: Narratives of the Land.* I argue that the children's committed engagement in upholding aspirations to 'live well' (Cajete, 2015; Tecun, 2022) are foundational to the teachings of SNBH in making a life "in a good way" (Aroniłth, 1985, p. 50) towards *hozhó*. The journey of SNBH has reference and orientation signalled by the significance of the rainbow in the story.

The second feature is the children's flight as birds within the story. This action signals to me the continued *spiritual intelligence* to live in relationship regardless of everything they encountered in life. I argue that the teachings I draw from this act convey that the freedom to be yourself matters and is tied fundamentally to the concept of sovereignty. These children created their own community of acceptance and freedom. Through their sovereign pursuits, they found joy and completeness in one another and through their engagement with the natural world. Even the gifts they forged came from sovereign acts, the creative outlook to bridge the natural world to humanity.

The questions I respond to in this chapter are: What are the expressions of sovereignty in relation to disability from the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy? What do these expressions teach us about Diné perspectives of *inherent* ways of being in our care for all our relations?

Sovereignty from Relational Teachings

This chapter builds upon the land-based knowledge found in Diné Educational Pedagogy which I outlined as the basis for spiritual intelligence explored in *Chapter Five*. I argued that teachings of 'disability' were teachings of SNBH. To understand and live SNBH is a form of spiritual intelligence which was demonstrated by Early Twilight Dawn Boy, Turkey, and Locust. Similarly, I argue that teachings of 'disability' related to SNBH are also teachings of sovereignty. I examine SNBH as it is associated with the rainbow within Diné ontology (Lee, 2017). The rainbow was a key reference within the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. Examining the teachings of the rainbow help open space to explore the links between 'disability' and sovereignty.

The rainbow demonstrates "individuals living by the philosophical principle of *Są'áh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón (SNBH)"* (Lee, 2017, p. 5). Therefore, the rainbow can be understood to represent the dignity and freedom to live a life that is balanced and in happiness (Lee, 2014;

Lee, 2017). The journey towards SNBH envelops the relationships and essence found in Diné education which is land-based evidenced by the four directions paradigm. As we recall, it is a relational paradigm which contains countless teachings that exist in relationship to one another.

Building upon the foundations of the proceeding chapters, I have argued that the characteristics of leadership, spiritual intelligence and sovereignty all share relational teachings that tie directly to SNBH. According to Diné scholar and philosopher Benally (1992), "traditional Navajo wisdom recognizes spirituality as the foundation of all knowledge necessary for achieving harmony or hózh…, the Beauty Way of Life" (p. 1). Benally (1992) asserts that spiritual orientation with creation was put in place by the Holy People. This was achieved through the organization of our knowledge systems, life activities and Diné Education which is predicated on the four parts of the day and four parts of the cardinal directions (Benally, 1992, p. 1). The foundations of this organization chart (Curley, 2020), or compass (King, 2018; Yonnie, 2016) are the means to guide one's completeness, and manifestation of one's life on the path of SNBH. It is a life of wholeness and balance that works to restore one's *being in the world*, as a sovereign and sacred entity. One could say that Diné were literally given the blueprints in our philosophy through our land, our mountains, and our stories to live in beauty as a sovereign being. This *way of being* provides for Diné to be who they truly are, "and not what someone tells you." (Aronilth, 1985, p. 156). Although Early Twilight Dawn Boy, Turkey and Locust were all in some way poorly treated and told they were unworthy and incapable; they held the truth of who they were close to their hearts. This self-knowledge sets the basis for leadership in being true to oneself.

In the previous chapter on leadership, I explored the expressions of Early Twilight Dawn Boy's initiative in leadership, which led the children to embrace themselves. I argued that through leadership there is sovereignty demonstrated by how Early Twilight Dawn Boy teaches Diné how to nurture the relationships that make a good life from both a philosophical and material lens. The prevailing argument I make through this work is that relationships matter. Relationships are the foundation for perseverance and for the conditions to thrive. The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy conveys the outcomes of his leadership through self-knowledge as the catalyst to affirm the inherent sovereignty within himself. This affirmation ignited the internal worlds of the children, who went forward to live in their sovereign power, to create and pursue a life they desired for themselves. As we are reminded by Anslem Davis Jr. (2013), that exploring the internal worlds to unravel who one truly is, is agency and self-determination.

To recognize and hold space for this process in oneself also creates the potential to understand it in others. Such is a reciprocal understanding of sovereignty that lives in relationship under the principles of care which flows internally and externally to reach others.

Early Twilight Dawn Boy prevailed in his efforts and accounted for everyone along their physical journeys in each direction each day. He didn't leave anyone behind regardless of how many needs they had. The story emphasizes his commitment to *stay together, to go forward together*. He constructed the model of belonging from a system of disparity. Although the community had the ancestral knowledge to enact proper *k'é* relations as lifeway, they were influenced by their negative perceptions which fuelled their internal biases. The 'internal worlds' of the community were unwell and imbalanced. Early Dawn Boy teaches us also, what a community struggle looks like so that we can recognize where to rebuild our worlds. It starts with the internal worlds of people. Rebuilding more just worlds starts with ideas and their power into action (Ballard, 2013). Therefore, *k'é,* the lifeway of positives relationships to influence perception and action, are also a key element in the discussion of sovereignty.

We recall from the chapter on spiritual intelligence, that "*k'é* with people is not the only kind of *k'é* (Klopfentstein, 2021b, p. 9). There is also k'é with oneself; our thinking and internal worlds requires the nurturing of inner heart and spirit relationships of *k'é* as well. This is particularly true in the argument of how we come to know is through relationships. This cascading impact of self-knowledge started with the internal beliefs of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. Then, it translated to his actions of care and determination. His movement through the four-directions paradigm is aligns with the teachings of the mountains. It is both a physical and internal movement through the teachings—the heart knowledge of profound growth. The relational teachings are the teachings which simultaneously built and affirmed his internal worlds. His journey was a multi-dimensional journey that had many parts to it. It influenced a holistic journey of transformation for the children. Through it all, Early Twilight Dawn Boy grows the qualities of commitment to himself and beliefs. He believes and lives his life within the affirmation of right to live in SNBH. He knows how pursue *hozhó* and he knows that *hozhó* has always belonged to him. This inherent right has always belonged to the children also. In propelling his beliefs into practice, he affirms the sovereignty he has always had.

Rainbow

At the end of Early Twilight Dawn Boy's journey, he found himself in a valley with the children he travelled with. When he was met by the old man who had followed him from his village to the valley, they both talked as they gazed on the children. In the story, sun beams pour over the children, and a rainbow touches down in which the children all take flight as birds. Their story concludes as they fly into the light of the rainbow. The Diné word for rainbow is *náátsʼílid*, and it is also the word Diné use to describe sovereignty (Lee, 2017).

The symbol of the rainbow is currently used by the Navajo Nation Council, the legislative body of the Navajo Nation, to symbolize "individuals living by the philosophical principle of *Sąʼáh Naagháí Bikʼeh Hózhóón (SNBH)"*, as codified through Diné Fundamental Laws (Lee, 2017, p. 5). According to Lee (2017) the symbolism of the rainbow expresses the collective desire for SNBH and can be seen on the Navajo Nation flag "where it arches over the nation and the sacred mountains…it is seen as protecting the land, environment, animals, plants, people and way of life" (p. 5). SNBH is philosophically connected to land and the sacred mountains of *Nihi kéyah* (homelands) which are inseparable to Diné life. It is conceptualized as always part of Diné life and thinking. In stretching over the mountains on the flag, it encapsulates the teachings upheld through the four-directions paradigm of Diné knowledge. Yet again, the rainbow is another indicator that the four directions concept, the land-based model or organizational chart (Curley, 2020) sustains the collective teachings held within it always orienting us towards the aspirations of beauty. In this way, "SNBH is a living paradigm" (Lee, 2017, p. 5) and available to all people (Jim, as cited in Lee, 2014). Since the rainbow encapsulates the concept of sovereignty understood through the teachings of SNBH, sovereignty mirrors the principles of SNBH through a relational lens. Therefore, sovereignty is also a living paradigm and inherent to all people.

This journey on the SNBH trail or the Corn Pollen Path is about understanding the breadth of relationships in union with the *aspirations and commitment* to orient our goals for a long life and happiness (Lee, 2014). Teachings of *Shá' bikʼehgo Asʼah Oodáál* (A Journey of Wellness and Healthy Lifestyle Guided by the Journey of the Sun) emphasize the principles of "nurturing a child into adulthood with all the blessings of, among others, good thinking, planning, independence, strength, knowledge, health, happiness and sense of hope…that enabled one to live to an old age as a strong and sovereign human being" (Begay, 2017, p. 60). These wishes to flourish, exist in direct relationship to the four-directions paradigm encased in the Journey

of the Sun. The foundation of Dine Educational Pedagogy upholds this principle of sovereignty though the culminations of these teachings encased in land. We are "reborn" through these teachings with every sunrise (Jim, 2022a) with our continual affirmation that we are all have worth, that there is a call for good for our life, and that we live in sovereign power.

These foundations of land-based wisdom acknowledges that the lessons learned along the way through the actual experiences of living in the world are in constant motion and change. The aspiration is to live in beauty, but that doesn't mean that the world is without conflict, and difficult decisions. Such truth is reflecting in the art of living. According to Diné educator Deborah House (2002), SNBH is a means and a methodology for addressing hardship and challenges in our actual lived experiences. Just as Rex Lee Jim describes SNBH as "formulated within our complete control" (Lee, 2014, p. 8), the responsible choices we make, and the invocation of the four-directions paradigm through *nitsáhákees* (thinking), *náhat'á* (planning), *iinà* (living) and *siihasin* (reflecting) are all part of the framework for living SNBH (Werito, 2014). These teachings are also examples of the enactment of sovereignty from an individual level but demonstrate that they are required on the larger community scale as well.

Throughout the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, the relational teachings of self-determination and agency towards aspiration to live well continue to resurface. His story is the manifestation of SNBH, and therefore, can be seen as the manifestation of sovereignty. He lives according to teachings that uphold awareness and responsible actions with an understanding of their relational nature. According to Lee (2017), "SNBH is also multidimensional ways and interconnected forces" (p. 6). Simply stated, it is a complex relational understanding. In the story, it is Early Twilight Dawn Boy who exemplifies this as he lives the values of the cascading teachings and exemplifies the principles of *k'é* and *hozhó.*

Throughout this work, I have tried to map those relational forces that connect, co-mingle and bind together, to convey a profound understanding of the relational nature of Diné ontology. In explaining those, I now come to the point where I uphold Early Twilight Dawn Boy within that matrix. He is the person who demonstrates the awareness, balancing, and honoring of all those relational forces. This teaches me to be aware of these forces, both positive and negative, to understand the choices I make are part of the enactment of sovereignty and the recognition of the inherent sovereignty of those around me.

In Diné teachings, the concept of choice is understood in relation to the community and broader context of Diné life. This is the cyclic nature of SNBH (Werito, 2014), Life Way thinking (Jim, 2022e; Tachine, 2021) and the four-directions paradigm. Early Twilight Dawn Boy advances the teaching found in the common phrase "*t'áá hó'ajít'éego t'éíyá* (it is all up to you)" (Werito, 2014, p. 27). This phrase is often related to sovereignty (Tachine, 2021), as Diné scholar Vincent Werito (2014) states, that in the philosophy of SNBH, people have the sovereignty to "internalize how they want their lives to be and what they must do to achieve SNBH" (p. 27). This doesn't mean it is the responsibility of marginalized people to foster their way out of oppressive dynamics. Or, that they are the ones burdened to remake worlds through educating others. It means that it is "up to each individual to pursue and live her or his life according to SNBH by recognizing how to live according to the principles of *hozhó"* (Werito, 2014, p. 27) or harmonious outcomes to whatever extent one can (Davis, 2013). The focus returns to the wider community to create conditions for others to thrive.The internalization of working through the inner worlds is part of the process of the journey of SNBH. It is a sovereign act. It sets the basis for a Diné understanding of sovereignty (Tachine, 2021). Each inner world expresses itself in its own unique way. All people, deserve the beauty to live well.

Sovereignty through *K'é*

The second way to understand sovereignty is through Early Twilight Dawn Boy's enactment of *k'é* (positive relationships). Diné poet Jake Skeets (2021) states that *k'é* is a "sense of community [and] respect for one another" (34:46). Both *k'é* and the self-belief I described are the foundations of a life in line with the teachings of SNBH concluded by various Diné authors (Aroniłth, 1985; Begay, 2017; Joe, 2020; Lee, 2014; Nez, 2018). Both the knowledge of self, and the knowledge of relationship demonstrated in the practice of *k'é*, work in tandem in the pursuance of SNBH. Early Twilight Dawn Boy had both of these qualities. I have argued that he enacted *k'é* with the continual care of the children, the natural world through the four directions model, through his relationship to the values encased in those teachings. He enacted *k'é* with the non-human; the mud, the land, the sunlight, the *Diiyin Dine'é*. He embodied the teachings our of ancestors with the acknowledgement for the future. This temporal understanding of *k'é* radiated in all his actions. He enacted *k'é* with himself with the continual rebalancing of his internal universe with the external universe. In the face of hardship, neglect, and marginalization, he found hope for himself and those who were kept away with him. With self-understanding and belief in himself, he was able to lead others to believe in themselves.

K'é operates within diverse *ways of being* in numerous environments. I have thought about how these environments could be understood in my own life. I understand that there are personal environment of thoughts, actions, desires, self-worth. There are community environments of family, ancestors, memory, stories, and kinship, and then the larger environment that includes the natural world, Diné lands and fauna, and non-human relatives. The concept of sovereignty in relation to *k'é* in these various environments is about the individual in relation to the community and the community in relation to the individual. It is the scope of cascading, reciprocal, and interdependant relationships which both grant security, love, freedom, and forges accountability. According to Diné historian Jennifer Denetdale (2017), "through the sharing of Diné teachings and the daily practice of k'é… we [are] …constantly recreating a sense of community…these sovereign spaces also are places of freedom and liberation, because they are places where *we are free to be who we are."* (p. ix). In his final comments to the old man Early Twilight Dawn Boy stated that they were happy as they were. The children embraced who they were in their own community they created among themselves. It was a community predicated on the principles of *k'é,* love, compassion, and reciprocity. The children embodied the teachings of being a *good relative* and how to live through the principles of Diné teachings in recreating a world to be free in who they were. Through marginalization and hardship, they pursued their own journey to SNBH and in turn taught their community about another *way of being*. They taught their community the significance of the various pathways to SNBH and how every person is accounted for in that journey.

The kinship in the world-building of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is through the act of love. Through relationality, the continuing cycle of care and reciprocal accountability the lives of Diné people for years to come. Despite all hardship, Early Twilight Dawn Boy held true to the practice and teachings of *k'é.*

Throughout this work, I have argued that the teachings of 'disability' drawn from the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy are relational. Many things can carry the teachings of 'disability'. The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy is a story about relationality which situates an understanding of 'disability' as also a story about sovereignty. It is a story with the moral call to live in "kinship and the spirit of love" (Pfeiffer, 2018). To live through kinship is to live *k'é.* It is to be free from harm and free *through relationship*. That is a teaching of both sovereignty and the concept of 'disability'.

Such a model of sovereignty honors the dignity, lifeway, and process of each individual with a lens of seeing how they belong within the larger collective. Furthermore, it is a broader lens of understanding their belonging in the wider scope of the natural world and their journeys of SNBH. These values taken from the teachings of disability protect us, our land, and our lifeway as Diné people. They are inherently inclusive, and the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy reminds us to account for everyone. We are all sovereign and we all have the sovereign choice to decide how we move individually and collectively towards completeness.

The rainbow in the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy points me towards these conclusions of sovereignty, as both a mutually dependant feature of community through *k'é* and the evidence of one's treasured journey of SNBH. My continual return to *k'é* throughout this work affirms that *k'é* is truly the heart of Diné knowledge and transformational change. In many ways it is the defining feature of aspects of our lives as Diné people based on our principles and how we live in the world.

Flight as Birds

The flight of the children into the rainbow signals the lifeway of SNBH—the epitome of a beautiful and complete life. The children literally became the essence of SNBH through this physical transformation, the symbol of ultimate sovereignty and hope for others. I believe that the rainbow represents the teachings that uphold the values and importance of sovereignty to live with dignity, to cherish one's self-image and self-worth as inherent aspects of *being* in the world.

Sovereignty is inherent. It is also collectively cultivated, nurtured, and grown. I see an element of responsibility attached to the concept of sovereignty, and it is rooted in relationship. When reflecting upon the story, Denetdale (personal communication, February 21, 2021) believed that embarrassment and the shunning of the children led them "to be taken by the Holy People" through the light of the rainbow. All Diné people are the children of Changing Woman (also known as White Shell Woman) the most beloved deity of Diné people, and one of the most treasured figures in our stories. According to knowledge sharer Eric Willie (2021) *Diyin Dine'é,* the Holy People "travelled by air, light, sunbeam, rainbow and mirage" (Willie, 2021, p. 2). Similarly, Travis Zah articulates that "our stories tell us that they travel in miraculous ways. They [Holy People] travel by sunlight, rain, clouds, rainbows, air and seasonal changes (Zah, 2021, p. 12). This is why the differing stories of how the children took flight either in

clouds or a rainbow, are all correct. The significance of this point rests in the importance of the profound love of the Holy People. According to Denetdale (personal communication, February 21, 2021), the children, regardless of *their ways of being* belong to Changing Woman. They belong to our Holy People. Diné practitioner Avery Denny, states that Changing Woman is the teacher of Diné people and she is the epitome of the philosopher and healer (Denny, 2022a,). She is significant as the one who would carry the children into the light of the rainbow. Such a thought upholds the high place of esteem and reverence Diné people hold for her as precious to our identities and spirit. From her actions and the actions of the children, we see a clear example of sovereign acts roots rooted in reciprocity and care. The importance of unconditional love is exemplified by her and her actions of care teach us about the values that underpin sovereignty.

Love is foundational to *k'é*, and in this sense—a mother's profound love. Changing Woman was the first mother to humans (Denny, 2022a). Love is the heart of our teachings and is written everywhere in Diné story from my engagement with it over the years. Love is a cornerstone of belonging and intelligence shared amongst many different Indigenous philosophies. James Youngblood Henderson speaks to this by stating, "that love through the workings of belonging and empathy generates justice…in Indigenous communities, the interrelations of deep love, belonging and empathy outlast conflict…until at last they feel deeply responsible for one another's fate (as cited in Cajete, 2015, p. x). This process in turn helps one not only recognize their own humanity but the humanity of others (Henderson, as cited in Cajete, 2015, p. x). In this context, it helps us recognize our sovereignty and therefore, the sovereignty of others.

Stories, such as the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, Turkey and Locust utilize the concept of belonging through strong familial love. This love reflects the foundations of inherent sovereignty we all carry. The articulation of reverence which these children are claimed, such as by Changing Woman in the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and then First Woman in the Story of Turkey, offers us the first model of ideal mothering. The first model of love is highlighted within these teachings. They are upheld by important figures like Changing Woman, who place forward the framework for child-raising in Diné society and grounds these expectations of care in the Diné world (Tapahonso, 2021). According to Denetdale, "as the ideal mother, the ideal woman, and ideal grandmother, she [Changing Woman] reflects the characteristics of our most benevolent Holy Person…someone we revere and respect" (Jennifer Denetdale, personal communication, February 21, 2021).

These children with ‘disabilities’ set the foundations that all Diné children belong and are deserving. Most importantly, they are deeply loved by our Holy People. This aspect of the story sets the example of inherent belonging that they are loved for who they truly are. Being claimed as a precious child, with all the blessings of “*t’áá’ajiłah ha áłchíní ayóó’ájóní:* to love our children *unconditionally*, by nurturing them and empowering them with the values embedded in our teachings since time immemorial” (Joe, 2020, 6:04) is a profound law of inherent belonging which reflects these teachings of SNBH to be oneself and to know oneself. This in turn carriers over into the teachings of sovereignty.

To live in SNBH, one lives with the security of belonging and the inherent promise of sovereignty. These teachings also relay the importance of speaking love and fostering the aspirations for *all* children, with recognition to their spirit, a sacred being. This love illuminates the foundations of sovereignty, and these foundations are written everywhere in our stories, engrained in our land and natural world. It is up to us to ensure our responsible actions affirm the inherent sovereignty of others, both human and non-human, in our efforts to live in beauty.

Part IV. Structural Narratives

This section shifts to examine three types of social narratives in conversation with one another. They include my personal narrative, legal narratives, and narratives of restoration. This section explores the current political moment of dominating structures and the impacts on everyday life for someone who lives in the intersectional spaces of Indigeneity and disability. This section also explores how Diné knowledge works in tension with these systems and continues to develop into wider policy on the Navajo Nation aimed at promoting the lifeways I have discussed through Part I and Part II.

I highlight the disparities of imbalanced relationships (the absence of *k'é*) in the educational and legal apparatuses charged with the care of peoples with disabilities. This sections also articulates the limits of current polices and systems built on western rights discourse upheld through law and policy. This final section illuminates a clear divide between how the Diné relational ontologies I have explored in proceeding chapters, operate within the actual structures Diné people navigate. My purpose in this section is to highlight the need for relational ontologies—the grounding of relationships and reciprocal accountability to foster wellbeing, belonging and push back against systemic ableism.

The first chapter is my narrative as a parent who worked through, and oftentimes against, U.S. Federal Disability Law. The story contained in this section is intended to articulate *my* experience as a parent navigating the socio-political realms of legal remedy for special education in the U.S. I acknowledge that although I frame my hardship as the focus in this section, that it is nothing compared to the hardship peoples with disabilities face and struggle through institutionally and socially across the globe. The purpose in sharing my narrative is to start a dialogue regarding the questions I raise in the subsequent chapters based on the lived experience of a parent.

The second chapter is interested in legal narratives with a focused analysis of wider social narratives which contribute to systemic ableism. I am interested in working through broader struggles of remedial action and their subsequent obscurement.

The final chapter returns to Diné philosophical approaches that offer meaningful steps towards remedial action in Diné institutions and a catalyst for working against systemic ableism in Diné communities. I refer to this as ‘law as lifeway’ to draw distinction from rule of law which refers to statute and codes. I highlight Diné conceptual approaches to restoration and peacemaking as powerful mechanisms to address current issues that Diné peoples with disabilities experience.

Chapter Eight: Personal Narrative

> We each have a story, and every story has a purpose.
>
> (Nez, 2018)

This chapter contains my narrative as a parent as it collides with the many narratives I have encountered over the years within the U.S. educational system. I use the term 'ideology' to refer to the collective narratives that inform wider structural apparatuses. Ideology, as defined by Strega (2005) is a worldview that informs those within society of what is possible, impossible, right, wrong, normal, deviant, and so forth (as cited in McLean, 2021). Ideology, therefore, manifests most visibility within the education sector where ideas of normalcy become the frame for knowing, engaging, and planning. Therefore, education draws upon ideology or normativity as it is collectively produced. As we are reminded by Annamma et al. (2013) "the very notion of difference relies on something else being normative" (p. 10). Therefore, normative understandings are not produced in a vacuum. They are constructed and maintained by people. It is their *ideas and beliefs* which translate into action to develop systems based on constructions of normativity. According to disability scholar Baynton (2001), rubrics of normativity spilled into "all aspects of modern life as a means of measuring, categorizing, and managing populations" (p. 35). Such a system creates a relationship between people and power upheld by collective narratives of what constitutes as 'normal', which in turn becomes ideology (Tremain, 2006) that underwrites structures.

Both the spheres of education and law highlight the 'power of ideas', particularly as they relate to understandings of normativity, deviance, and difference. These ideas inform policy and larger social structures (Ballard, 2013). I share my narrative to illuminate these emergent power relations and the collision of ideas— my knowledge as a Diné parent against the ideologies of educational and legal apparatuses. Examining these ideologies, I show how they contribute to larger social narratives which deeply shape structures of oppression, exclusion, denial of accommodations and obstruction of legal remedy. This section is auto-ethnographic, and I share it with the intention to draw emphasis on the power of 'internal worlds' as they meet the 'external worlds' (Davis, 2013). The duality of both one's perceptions, thoughts, and actions either has the power to bring good into the world and also the power for harm. Those teachings emerge through story and apply to the daily living of people—and they exist within my story.

The Structural Power of Narratives

Systemic Ableism and 'Walls'

In the early years of my daughter's education, I encountered a structure that I will metaphorically describe as a 'wall'. This 'wall' was neither physical nor tangible. Rather, it was an ideological wall. It was a structure that upheld social beliefs which advanced a powerful binary of ideas of 'normal' and 'not normal' built from a collection of beliefs funnelled into a prevailing social narrative that exercised profound power over our lives. This 'wall' might as well have been a physical wall. The collective beliefs as one narrative were saturated with negative notions that fuelled stigmas of autism that held real consequences throughout our lives. The 'wall' enclosed us, excluded us, and created barriers of harm. I felt the wall growing around us in every aspect of our daily lives, but none so over-powering than in the U.S. education system. There, it was not just one 'wall', but many. The beliefs that built these collective narratives produced a systemic structure of ableism. Ableism, as defined by Lewis (2022) is:

> A system that places value on people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence, and productivity. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, colonialism, and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily [re]produce, excel and "behave".

Ableism has a spatial and temporal dimension in its capacity for oppression in many forms. In short, the beliefs that built this metaphorical 'wall' manifested across time and space as it towered around and above us. It was a process that was not built over night. Those 'walls' obscured the presumed safety net of U.S. Disability Law— that *thing* which was meant to protect us and that lay just beyond reach. Yet, these 'walls' separated us from the *protections* of the law. Why was this? How could social narratives stall a powerful mechanism such as law? I came to realize that law transmits through the same overarching narratives that form the system of ableism. This horrible realization was my first encounter with the limits of U.S. Disability Law and its romanticized promise to protect, to include, and to care for those with disabilities. Though the laws were there, the pathways to them were cut off by blockading narratives. These 'walls' that blocked us appeared infinite at the time.

Recollections

The first year of my child's schooling, I lost count of how many times I was called to pick up her up from class. It was common practice for her not be included in the daily lesson and instead placed on a computer to sort through numerous windows of YouTube, which looped and sang the same repetitive song over and over again. When I asked for Picture Exchange Communication (PECS) visual cards to help her develop her verbal language, her educational team told me it was a cruel request because she didn't understand the concept. I was halted by the presumptions that she couldn't learn it. I was later told by several teachers that it was too time consuming and complicated. There was so much resistance to trailing these cards or offering consistent attempts to provide opportunities for learning them or engagement. Reasons quickly shifted from, "we can try", "it's unfeasible" to "teachers are busy", and finally, there are "too many other students who deserve *equal* attention". I was also treated as if I was being 'entitled' when I would make requests. Wilson (2020) discusses this widespread response as "the idea that we are acting as if someone owes us something rather than merely asking to be treated with respect and human dignity" (p. 210). This contributes the beliefs that we should just be "happy with whatever we get" (Wilson, 2020, p. 210).

Such responses could initially incite some form of understanding as many U.S. school systems face systemic underfunding, continual lack of teacher preparation training and documented struggles with efficacy of teachers to engage in accommodation for learners with disabilities (Lee et al., 2011). It also could have been understandable, as often there are clear "alignment" challenges between special education and general education teachers when attempting inclusive education (Van Boxtel, 2017, p. 60). These "alignment challenges" don't pedagogically orient teachers towards the same educational approaches, methods, or perspectives of what teaching learners with disabilities should look like. From my experience, students suffer from these mismatched, ununified approaches.

Months went by and things deteriorated further. I came to realize my child was being marginalized in the classroom. We were in a pattern where I would always be expected to pick her up early and not have her be part of the wider school community. We were in a pattern where the only solution was to place her on the computer to watch YouTube in order to keep her occupied for as long as they could. She was not a learner in her classroom, nor was she welcomed. Daily battles were fought over the requirement to wear shoes, as my child ran around barefoot, tortured by the sensory input of socks and shoes. At one of the student's

programs there was food on a table. During the program, my child ran to the watermelon, grabbed a slice and bit in. Her favorite food! It was a moment to share language: "Yum! W-A-T-E-R-M-E-L-O-N" and point to the fruit to facilitate identifying words to familiar objects as numerous Speech Language Therapists constantly reminded me. However, her teacher walked over, picked up the whole bowl and without a word, walked away with it. That was a common form of interaction I continually witnessed between them. The day her teacher stopped greeting her at drop off nor acknowledging me altogether, I felt the 'wall' collapsing on top of me. How could anyone leave their child in this rubble?

That year was my first experience with Individualized Education Plan (I.E.P) meetings. I.E.P's are required by U.S. Disability Law to document evaluations and assessments, needs, accommodations, and supports for special education learners in the classroom. The I.E.P. is a legally binding contract (Wright & Wright, 2006). Prior Written Notice (P.W.R.) is an important document that accompanies the I.E.P and operates as the paper trail that gives insight to an abbreviated transcript of what is said, requested and denied at these meetings. I would later learn that it is the P.W.R. that reflects if and when the school has outright denied requests for things that are guaranteed by law. How would parents who are new to this journey with the school system know this though? It is an overwhelming process and it took me years of experience and specialized trainings held by advocacy groups to learn the law and identify when the school was slipping around provisions made to protect and include my child.

I remember walking into those meetings as a young mother, newly pursuing my college education and working as a pizza delivery driver at that time. The seats were filled with professionals: speech therapists, the occupational therapist, the teacher, teacher's aides, the principal, the district representative for special education, and district leadership. I felt small as I approached the table. I was at a meeting with giants. These were people who were 'experts'. They were supposed to be the ones who knew what was best, or, so I thought.

These meetings are such a distant memory now, but I remember they were filled with negativity. They lasted for hours in what I believed could have been a test of endurance. I often thought that parents and caregivers get so run down and tired that they give up fighting for change. Perhaps they would agree to everything, because one fight in the educational arena is just one on many battles they would have faced. There were many other simultaneous battles in multiple other sectors that peoples with disabilities would encounter over their lifetime. The end of the struggle often seems far out of sight.

The great irony I have come to realize over the years is that many institutions would rather direct their energies in the fight against the disability community instead of building the pathway to remedy. The pathway to remedy is often difficult but not impossible. This is especially true as funding for special education remains substantially underfunded according to the 2020 Legislative Education Study Committee (Legislative Education Study Committee Hearing Brief, 2020). We know that U.S. law has been systemically unsuccessful in meeting the needs and rights of all its citizens with disabilities according to National Council of Disability's reports, stating that "NCD's findings reveal that while the Administration has consistently asserted its strong support for the civil rights of people with disabilities, the federal agencies charged with enforcement and policy development under ADA have, to varying degrees, been underfunded, overly cautious, reactive, and lacking any coherent and unifying national strategy" (NDA, 2000, para. 3). These reports reveal something profound about the role of individual beliefs that make wider narratives which inform a larger ideology of ableism.

Ableism underwrites both policy and funding apparatuses, and the trickle-down effects that influence teacher and administration perspectives on inclusion of *all* children. It impacts the 'internal worlds' of the people who are to care for our children. If policy makers and funding institutions don't 'value' students enough to properly fund them to have access to everything the law promises them, teachers and school leadership accept these conditions as the 'way of things' or worse, appropriate and translate beliefs into their practice. It becomes an ideological recycling of ambivalence that impacts learners with disabilities. When advocates and families pursue what is promised, they are often met with the difficult responses regarding lack of funding. There is not enough funding, enough time, or enough resources. This can be reality or a scapegoat. Either way, it is a 'wall' and what feels like a never-ending barrier. This barrier is a reflection of larger social attitudes.

Struggles to Maintain Relationships

The long, difficult discussions within these meetings fueled the conditions for bitterness and frustration on both ends. I remember I.E.P meetings would turn into monologues of grievances. My heart was broken many times, over and over again, hearing these reports of how 'difficult' my child was. I witnessed anger and frustration surface in people who I trusted to care and nurture my child. This is the first sign of failure to protect children with disabilities in the school system. Yet**,** *there is no distinct institutional framework to caretake the importance of relationship.* From my experience, there are usually several teacher allies within a given school

and they struggle to carry the entire weight of what should be a school community's, districts, and state's unified responsibility. If rapport crumbles because administration fails to support staff in their efforts from lack of funding, resources, expertise and so on, the child/teacher relationship is at risk. If this relationship suffers, prevailing narratives surrounding people morph into the harmful tropes and stigmas about people with disabilities, and particularly autism. These beliefs sound like: they are the problem, their 'behavior' is the problem. In our society, individuals are continually blamed instead of the structures that fail them. It is a vicious cycle that propels very harmful narratives that divide, marginalize, and stigmatize. It also further creates the conditions for exclusion that inherently work against the very laws in place to protect and provide for learners with disabilities. Social beliefs and relationships matter.

Communication: Contesting 'Finding Voice'

During this particular time, my child was still emerging with her verbal voice. She had a handful of verbal words, and many forms of expression to communicate. I have always viewed those array of expressions as *her voice.* She has always *had a voice.* As we are reminded by Annamma et al. (2013) "people with dis/abilities already have voice" (p. 14) and no one can give them 'voice'. Sadly, 'behavior' continues to be seen by many teachers as not part of someone's *voice,* or communication. Behavior is often cast as 'problematic' within institutional structures, rather than a medium to communicate. In fact, behavior often "communicates an unmet need" (Molly Strothkamp, personal communication, August 26, 2021).

Although modes of communicating were difficult at times, the difficulty of the needs continually being unmet were often not accounted for. My child was being denied access to Picture Exchange Communication, and the resistance to utilizing this assistive technology was a barrier that resulted in other modes of communication. These modes of 'behavior' were stigmatized. Although I do not wish to downplay the hardship of this time, it also is important to view this moment within a specific context. Those early years were challenging, but there was a reason which also provided the opportunity for remedy. This opportunity was continually obscured and missed. In discussing need, I am also aware of moving narratives of autism beyond the trope of victims or also captives within their own 'worlds' (Yergeau, 2018). It is helpful to understand behavior in this context as part of the naming and meaning-making of one's own experiences (Douglas et al., 2021). My child was communicating her uncomfortable experience because of unmet needs. These needs were very real and reflected a call for

understanding and support, not further marginalization. She was so young. I would cry thinking she must have felt so alone in those spaces and I empathized with her frustration.

She was always trying to communicate to those around her. Yet, she was often met with stark disapproval that judged and devalued her voice. It was hard supporting teachers during that time because they already had set ideas that she must communicate a certain way to receive the attention she deserved. Yet, she also wasn't given the tools to communicate in the way they expected. This is the cyclic nature of stigma. Returning to Lewis's (2022) definition of ableism as a "system", the concept of value was attached to if and how my child communicated, or behaved (Lewis, 2022). She was expected to do these in way that subscribed to prevailing narratives that carried a notion of 'normal' which held an excluding materiality of violence. To be treated as unworthy was an incredible pain on top of feeling unwelcomed.

"You do not have to be disabled to experience Ableism"

As a Diné mother, I also experienced a form of ableism as a low-economic, Native American mother who was in the early stages of seeking a college qualification. Lewis (2022) states, "you do not have to be disabled to experience ableism" (blog post). Returning to my memories, I recall times I was treated as 'incapable' and therefore, 'unworthy' of my own voice. In the early days of those long I.E.P meetings, my desperate requests were met with continual pushback. I was *that mom,* who had so many demands. I was also 'no one', with no experience, and treated as having no legitimate voice because I was not an expert. I was supposed to be the one listening. Yet, everything I heard did not represent all of who I knew my child was.

Peoples with disabilities have long decried the ways in which they are spoken of; often as a problem, being seen only as behavioral challenges, categorized by medical descriptors, viewed as having no skills, unable to learn, with nothing to contribute, and having no foreseeable future (Wong, 2020). I have encountered the belief that there's no reason to include learners with autism because people subscribe to the harmful trope that it doesn't matter to them if they are included or they 'don't want to be' included because they show no interest or they can't understand the feelings of others (Douglas et al., 2021). I have certainly been told these things. Yet, in acknowledging these experiences, I don't want them to become the focal narrative because they sustain violent ideas. Yet, I share them to demonstrate the harm of these narratives and how they were the basis of how people approached my child. Those narratives created an environment that is fundamentally unwelcoming and exclusionary. The 'power of ideas' to

create exclusion (Ballard, 2013) is a lived reality. Those unwelcome spaces are saturated in society and systemically rampant in our educational systems across the globe. These are the narratives that contribute towards systemic ableism.

Ignoring Provisions

For many U.S. learners, the only thing that holds an individuals' space and right in the world of education is a small sliver of a piece of law. That piece of law is the provision of Free Appropriate Public Education (F.A.P.E.) which provides all children who are eligible for special education with the right to attend public schools (Wright & Wright, 2006, p. 150). If it wasn't for that provision, we would not have even been there having a discussion. Without F.A.P.E. children with disabilities could easily be expelled and excluded with no hope of receiving an education from a public, tax-funded school.

Months later, as these I.E.P. meetings continued and my mental health deteriorated, I came upon some provisions I found online. Although I wasn't a researcher, I would spend time searching the internet for anything that could help our situation. One day, I found the *11 I.E.P. Considerations for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Developed in Texas, these guidelines were intended to give schools a more complete understanding of the areas of needs and services for learners with autism informed by parents who felt their children were lacking in their educational programs (Trott et al., 2015). These were initially introduced as only guidelines for schools. However, in July 2011 they were passed into New Mexico law (Trott et al., 2015). These laws were applicable to us. Yet, no one pointed out these laws to me. I had to find them myself and it was by pure chance.

These 'guidelines', which were now law, included sections on providing things like extended education for summer school, the use of daily schedules that aided active engagement and structured routines for learning. They included in-home and community-based training and parent and caregiver training. This was something I was already generously receiving at the time. The Parent Home Training Program taught me how to communicate with my daughter with the Picture Exchange Communication. They also taught me how to take her out into the community and go grocery shopping with her with visual support aids, timers, and visual lists. These were huge feats at the time, and a technology I have never taken for granted since. Other guidelines that I felt were imperative included *positive* approaches to support strategies, future planning, communication interventions, social skills support, and professional educator and

staff support for my child's school. The document outlined what each these sections were, how they could be facilitated and how they accounted for specialized aspects of teaching Autistic learners (Trott et al., 2015). It seemed like such a great idea and I couldn't wait to share it with the school.

At the next I.E.P. meeting I eagerly pulled the paper from my bag. I had only highlighted a couple of the sections to see if we could implement them. They were all refused and the guidelines were dismissed. It happened like that was the common way of things. It happened like they didn't have to consult that document, and that those suggestions were totally optional or part of just another ridiculous set of demands I was making. The school disregarded the guidelines, which were already law.

I was in cycle of crashing into the 'walls' over and over again like a nightmare. These narratives I kept encountering dictated: *we know best*, you know your place. We will solve *in-house*. It is up to us to decide if and when to let experts in our schools. These are the prevailing responses I heard over and over again. Such a stance is a common red flag of unstable conditions within any school. It is also a clear sign that the relationship is more about power than shared goals. This was our reality, even as well-regarded organizations and state research bodies offered professional support to train staff and provide some insight to teaching learners with autism.

I thought at the time, if the school district could just learn more and gain understandings of autism, they may change their minds. Perhaps they would adopt the requests I was asking for. This is the illusion of liberalism though. This view that these situations are merely "misunderstandings" and not part of a larger realm of "inequitable power relations" (May & Dam, 2021, p. 3). In many ways, autism advocacy is not just about trying to teach people about autism or convincing them to see the humanity in others, it is also the overwhelming task of fighting the structures that are built from collective narratives centered within systemic ableism. We are continually challenging the vast scope of collective attitudes, stigmas and stereotypes that enable those structures to oppress. I believe addressing this struggle starts with the 'internal worlds of people'—taken from the philosophy of Diné educator Anslem Davis Jr. (2013) which I explored in proceeding chapters on Diné ontology. It starts with challenging and changing the deeply seeded internal worlds and beliefs that individuals harbor that creates bias, discrimination, and marginalization. It is also allying and uniting with those who are doing the hard work of building their inner worlds to create unified movements in overturning unequal power relations.

Obstruction through Non-Alignment

It was such a hard time in my life. I worked independently with numerous disability organizations. They witnessed me struggling with the school system. However, they could not give me legal advice or intervene. All they could do was give me resources on parent support and advocacy groups and continue to help me learn about autism. The alignment between services, schools and the law is profoundly disjointed. In order to synthesize shared goals towards outcomes for learners with disabilities, this misalignment must be confronted. Misalignment showcases the tensions that legal remedy and policy, paired with failed structural support, can create when parents and caregivers are struggling to build sustainable relationships oriented towards change. The potential to unite school districts and services that have the capacity to improve the quality of life and right to education for individuals touched by disability, are continually compromised. Often, the obvious disagreements within administration, leadership and teachers on the ground is resounding. I witnessed this many times throughout I.E.P. meetings over the years. This is only one aspect of the challenge though.

By examining the influence of narratives which construct ideology (Strega, 2005), the realization that we have deeper, engrained challenges become clear. Challenging set notions and biases are a battle in and of themselves. This is a battle of colliding narratives. No one must account for Diné worldviews of autism or difference in these institutions even if they dynamically reshape the goals and aspirations for Diné children with disabilities. Diné knowledge, or simply family knowledge for that matter, always becomes secondary and something that is filtered to fill in the spaces where and if it fits. My views of my child, or the things I witnessed and learned from her, were rarely the point of discussion. This is the disparity I am trying to convey: that it matters whose voice and worldviews shapes the ethical accountability of how institutions work with learners with disabilities. As Diné people, we have the unique opportunity to make this happen in our own structures.

Furthermore, it is vital to bring Autistic voices into these spaces to rebuild new systems that support their needs and wishes as learners and as part of a larger community. As I have argued throughout this work, the cultural and direct knowledge of peoples with disabilities is foundational for social change. These peoples have the power to teach us, and also introduce the mechanism of *care as a lifeway and not mere provisions that exists only on paper.*

There were numerous times I wanted to walk away from this system entirely. I needed people though. I needed support as a young mother. I needed help and a large portion of the people I encountered during that time were active agents in fighting against what we needed. Klar argues that "support is a mutual collaboration rather than a hierarchal relation" (as cited in Douglas et al., 2021, p. 616). Why couldn't I have this kind of support? I will never know the whole story of why. What I do know is that from the responses I encountered, that wider narratives which form as ideologies regarding autism were completely different from my own, like many Indigenous peoples (Velarde, 2018). They had no idea who my child was. They had already pre-determined who she was. This belief was informed by the biomedical, functionalist descriptors evident in school assessments and reports (Douglas et al., 2021). It is a cyclic disaster in trying to detach the ableism that embedded in every aspect of how society or teachers *come to know* their learners with autism.

I desperately wanted these individuals to see that the child in front of them wasn't a tragedy or burden, but a *sacred being* that had a will, mind, and life of her own. She deserved respect, empathy, and care. She deserved *k'é,* the lifeway of positive relationships. She deserved the power of her inherent gifts as a sovereign being. From my point of view as a Diné person, the 'laws' that govern these aspects of care are born from relationship and bound to systems that are beyond the realm of human making. They exist in land. They are born from an ontological standpoint that recognizes someone as inherently worthy, deserving, and precious. They are born from a value system that sees a person beyond presumptions that categorizes them or compares them to other 'normative' attributes in people. It is to see a person as inherently deserving.

Pushed through the Cracks

I learned from this early experience, that U.S. Disability Law, or any laws for that matter, were only as good as the people who upheld them. They could be written in any format, and pushed through any supreme governing body, but if the people who are meant to uphold that law simply don't, or if there are so many structural barriers that these laws can't be honored, then there might as well not be a law. The number of loopholes and bureaucratic processes that stall, impede, and obscure legal recourse will be a book for another time. It will have many contributors, I am certain. However, what I will say, is that our trajectory changed as I invoked the formidable refusal to let my child be "pushed through the cracks" (Kapeli, 2020). Samoan social worker Andy Kapeli uses the phrase "pushed through the cracks" which counters the

mainstream discourse of ‘falling between the cracks’ (personal communication, April 25, 2020). The idea of falling between the cracks suggests a mere oversight rather than a structural condition of bias. The perspective of being intentionally pushed focuses on structures and conditions that purposefully and knowingly create, sustain, and contribute to conditions that exclude, marginalize, and harm based on systemic conditions already present in society. These systemic conditions include institutional racism, discrimination, and ableism (Andy Kapeli, personal communication, April 25, 2020).

Advocacy

Even through the hardship of this journey, I found the right allies and people who believed and pursued educational justice for learners with disabilities. They were not only experts on law, but they had something that made the difference between opportunity to flourish and continued marginalization. They had perspective. They had heart, and they had belief in the inherent worthiness of the children they taught and advocated for.

I eventually found a legal advocate to help me as I continued to struggle during the first year of this journey. She accompanied me to the meetings. When I first notified the school principal of my intention to bring someone, a skilled advocate, the school administration and district reacted, but not in the way I thought they would. They were going to ‘lawyer up’ as well (or they threatened at least). That was a classic institutional narrative that advances a defence entangled with power relations in order to attempt to remind me to *know my place,* and leave it to the experts, even though my child was struggling. However, I was growing in the face of giants.

I didn’t know the language or jargon of disability law. I didn’t have the skill to articulate how unjust this system was. I wanted to say so many things but lacked the confidence to do so. I broke down crying in my car so many times, angry at myself for not being able to speak, to stand up. I considered having an honest discussion with the school leadership regarding biases at one point since the topics of frustration were often very present. I thought perhaps we could just *talk about it,* but was afraid how the conversation would go, or if it would burn the bridge completely. I didn’t want to burn the bridge even as we were being pushed from it. I needed them because my child deserved the right to education. She deserved to socialize, make friends, learn from her peers, and share her gifts, talents, and skills with the others. She deserved to be seen, to be loved and be included.

Things in the classroom initially didn't change much even with the legal advocate. However, the tone in the meetings certainly changed and our advocate was a welcome support. She was loving and compassionate, highly skilled, and knowledgeable. I valued her care at such a pivotal time in our lives. I was also completely relieved to have someone accompany me to these meetings I usually attended alone. The situation was pacified bureaucratically. Papers were signed, documents copied and distributed. However, rapport with the teacher continued to crumble and I knew the classroom was an unwelcoming place.

At one point I thought about filing a formal state complaint that would investigate allegations the school district had violated the law in any way. However, the road was long, hard, and full of barriers. The fear was that things would get worse if we filed the formal complaint. It would ruin what little rapport I had left with district administration completely. It wasn't me but my child, who couldn't report back to me, that would face the effects of such a decision. Parents shouldn't have to ever face this reality. I decided it was better to keep trying to work with the school and district to try to find common ground, even if that ground meant we continued to be marginalized in the meantime. There was no promise that our complaint would return an investigation in our favor. I had so much to prove and had limited records of things I needed to help my case. Early on, I didn't realize how important the Prior Written Notice (P.W.R.) document was. It was supposed to document all requests and responses to those requests in the I.E.P. meetings.

The paper trail needed to be substantial. The American legal processes of evidentiary rules were complicated and vast. What is left out is usually what is often what is needed to prove failures. In the meanwhile, there was much more to lose, even if it was minuscule. I visited other schools and teachers declined to meet with me to discuss a transfer. In our small town, everyone knows one another. Situations like this not only make the schools and classrooms an unwelcome place, but the larger community as a whole becomes an unwelcome place. *Relationships matter.* The power of people and the narratives they contribute to the lager whole, matter.

I lamented the situation and fought off anxieties about all the paperwork I had and didn't have, as well as what I should do or not do. I also continued to immerse myself into the life of advocacy. It was not just about learning the law. I had to become an administrator, and someone who was an expert on reports, assessments, and both school and district policy. According to Wright & Wright (2006) in their popular textbook *From Emotions to Advocacy* written for

parents and guardians, I was taken back by the long lists of what advocates need to know. First, I had to learn about law, rights, and school policy. Then came the *how to* advocate part. I had to become an expert reading tests and assessment reports, documenting school management systems and their preparation. I had to know and keep documentation about the efficacy and completeness of *their* paperwork. I had to document if they all had access to my child's student file. This would help in case I needed to prove they had failed in some way or if the things we had agreed upon were being implemented by the teachers. All of this required written documentation to specific people. I became an expert at formatting correspondence by writing letters that stated the incident and remedial request to the situation. Copies of their responses had to then be organized and addressed. I both monitored *their* paperwork and *my* paperwork and files to ensure that everything was date-stamped. I had to have master-provider lists, copies of correspondence to and from the school, copies of my child's records, I.E.P.'s and assessments. I also had to spend time note-taking during meetings, writing minutes, and ensuring the things I asked for were all contained in the Prior Written Notice (P.W.N). I had to ensure this vital document, the P.W.N., reflected my understanding of the conversation.

Advocates simultaneously become experts, investigators, translators, general education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, reviewers, and a slew of other things on top of being parents/guardians and whatever other roles they carry. It is exhausting but the stakes are high. We do it because we love and believe in the people we are advocating for. But again, it doesn't have to be this way. What if advocacy and movements for justice for learners with disabilities, was a community endeavor? What if entire communities advocated, instead of the parents and guardians in the face of profound structural inequality? This is my call to communities across the globe. This can change.

Throughout the years, I don't know how many stories like ours I have heard. Stories of people trying to pursue remedial action under the law only to be faced with the same option over and over again: choose your loss. Unfortunately, there is never an immediate win the world of disability and educational justice. Sometimes the options are only: hard, harder, and maybe-less-hard but we won't know until we take that road. That doesn't sound like protection or rights to me.

The Importance of Perspective and Relationships

We later left that difficult school and community altogether. We moved from our home community to a new city so that my child could attend a well-regarded school. It was there, that I realized the difference law could make when it was followed. *Most importantly, the difference that perspectives make when they meet our children as they are.*

My child was welcomed. She was accepted as a person with autism. The I.E.P. was led with confidence and included all the provisions with attention to the laws. All *11 I.E.P. Considerations for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder* were addressed, applied to her I.E.P., and instituted daily in some way. I didn't even have to ask or bring out that paper from the pile of rubble of documentation that was left from our last school. We finally had a team. Her new teacher, who I believe is one of the most remarkable humans I ever met, *cared about my child*. She cared for her and built a relationship with her. She saw her for who she is and that made all the difference in the world. *Relationships matter.*

I believe it is people and not the law that finally gave us what we needed. The power of internal narratives matter. Although the law helped guide the expectations for ethical behavior to foster inclusion, it was the people and their willingness, care and perspective that made it possible. That particular school changed our lives and intervened at a time where we both needed it the most.

My child went on to learn Picture Exchange Communication. She went on to request, engage, refute, to make friends and have opportunities for shared enjoyment and engagement with other peers in the classroom. She was given the opportunity to thrive and was met with the support she needed to develop her way of relating and sharing it with others. There were still hardships, but they were always met with moments of triumph. I have been blessed with a life of joy in seeing her live in her power. To see her be herself is my great happiness and indeed, a sense of profound justice.

The hardship of educational law and bureaucracy has never left us throughout the years. There are good years and then years of total struggle where I feel like we have gone two steps forward and ten steps back. It depends on the teachers and the administration. The successful years, we had teachers with distinct perspectives. Their teaching practice reflected certain value systems

that viewed people as people, and not merely diagnoses to be managed. They cared and their care was a lifeline. Perception and relationship matter. They have always mattered.

If there is one thing I want readers to take away from this work, it is that both prevailing narratives and counter narratives inform value systems, perspective and relationships, which can either make or break the world(s) of those on its margins.

Although we continue to collide with 'walls' everywhere we go, I learned valuable lessons during those first years. I realized I couldn't rely on the law to give absolute protections. I couldn't rely on the law to teach people compassion or to make them care, or to include my child and meet us at the table with good intentions. The foundation of ideology —a collective narrative containing values and beliefs that drive people's perspectives to in turn become wider social narratives and perceptions, are central to the preceding chapters. The 'walls' we have encountered for years will be toppled one day. It is my hope that *lifeways* governed by relationships will rise to break away the harmful narratives that made the 'wall' possible to begin with. With the pieces, we can build new pathways forward.

Chapter Nine: Legal Narratives
Limits of the Law

> As disabled peoples, we are often both hyper-visible and invisible at the same time.
> (Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2020)

This chapter reflects on questions of ideology that arose from my personal narrative shared in the previous chapter. My aim in this chapter is to illuminate the importance of people and relationship in discussions of law. I address some foundational arguments regarding presumed remedial action in terms of law, specifically the theoretical promises of U.S. Federal Disability Law. I draw a distinction between individual and collective reciprocal accountability and the rule of law. From the Diné principles of *k'é* (positive relationships), I frame ethical accountability through relationship and care to reshape the socio-political approaches to law as remedy. Whereas, rule of law is action based on statute. It is also vital to distinguish that reciprocal accountability in this work be read through Diné epistemic and political frameworks such as *k'é,* which operate through interdependence and reciprocity, and not typical invocation of 'accountability' read through rule of law or wider public policy. Often when language of 'accountability' is invoked, it is contextualized in Western legal practices and models. I discuss this more in the next chapter, *Narratives of Restoration.*

In this chapter I trouble the idea of *law* as remedy in the remaking of more equitable solutions for peoples with disabilities within structures of marginalization. This analysis is based within the theoretical framework of systemic ableism I described through my experience in the prior chapter. From my narrative, I argued that although there was a route to legal remedy, it was frequently obstructed by numerous, overlapping collisions of *narratives* (and power) that contributed to a system, or social 'norm' rooted in systemic ableism—the valuation of abled 'normed' bodies over 'disabled' ones. The role of people and the narratives they carry to inform larger social discourse (ideology), is the place I see as vital for disability justice dialogue in Diné communities in placing those narratives against our ancestral values and stories.

In arguing for a relationality predicated on Diné wisdom throughout this work, I am arguing that larger society must remake relational practices with the disability community. I am also arguing that wider society remake relational practices within themselves in confronting bias and discrimination within their 'internal worlds' (Davis, 2013). This is one part of the

foundations of reciprocal accountability. Therefore, I see Diné principles as discussed throughout this work as powerful mechanisms that offer a way of knowing that can contribute towards transforming the struggles we encounter today.

There are two key points within this section. The first considers the role of people in contributing towards larger social structures. In my prior chapters, I have argued that within the context of *hozhó,* the importance of internal worlds as they meet external worlds is vital in considering how social relations are made. They are also important in shaping social attitudes and systems that evolve from those attitudes. The centrality of the relationship between people and power is a key focus of this chapter. Independent scholar Shay-Akil McLean (2021) argues that when we are talking about structures we are essentially talking "about people, collectively organized in a way that is based on a particular set of rules and relations" (37:02). To think of change within this context is to think of how we can fundamentally shift these "coordinated human actions" (McLean, 2021, 37:15). In arguing for better relational practices as part of a catalyst for change, the focus on people and their ontological orientations are examined in this chapter.

The second point has to do with the creation of structures that govern protections, with specific interrogation of rights-discourse in U.S. disability law. I theorize how rights-discourse conceals the ways that disability discourse sustains ableism and upholds ideologies of disability as it relates to biomedical, and functionalist *ways of being.* I frame this interrogation similarly to the Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2021), who argues "rights should not be understood as the establishment of legitimacy" (28:19)—that is, that law is absolute, and the best or only route towards social change. Instead, I examine how law can be a means of further marginalization and struggle—which Moreton-Robinson describes as "methods of subjugation" (28:19) through legal frameworks. In the context of systemic ableism outlined in the prior chapter, the focus on larger narratives paired with the promise of rights discourse, often obscures the foundational violence that is simultaneously harbored and narrated about peoples with disabilities and People of Color (POC). The intersectional violence that is entangled in notions of 'value' for both racialized people and peoples with disabilities are addressed in the next two chapters of this work.

The arguments in this section are philosophical. I am looking at larger social attitudes and constructed 'norms'—*ideologies*—whose applicability spread across multiple oppressed groups. This lens provides an opportunity to see rubrics of power as they are propelled by ideas

and thinking which are deeply embedded in our social fabrics (Ballard, 2013). As Baglieri and Knopf (2004) argue, the focus is not necessarily whether people "perceive difference, but rather, what *meaning* is brought to bear on those with personal differences" (p. 525). I draw upon arguments I advanced in *Chapter Five* on spiritual intelligence, *Chapter Six* on leadership, and *Chapter Seven* on sovereignty to argue Diné perspectives of protections exist in the principles of *k'é* (positive relationships), *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) and *Są'áh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón,* SNBH (The Corn Pollen Path to Old Age). The inherent rights drawn from these principles outline the rights to belonging, safety, care, a 'good life', balance, reciprocity the freedom to be oneself (Denetdale, 2017; Lee, 2014 Tecun, 2022; Werito, 2014). Ultimately, I am interested in how legal remedy is *approached* as something more about living ethically where *law is a lifeway, because relationship based on Diné principles is a lifeway.*

Barriers of Access and the Power of People

By sharing my narrative in the previous chapter, I attempted to draw attention to the power of *colliding narratives* and their material consequences in gaining access to legal remedy. I also highlighted the differing philosophical approaches to uphold the law intended to protect learners with disabilities. I conveyed the importance of people and their perspectives to meet our children as they are. From my experience, I know that we can have the best pedagogical approaches, funding, and well-articulated statutes, but if the people who are charged with carrying out these plans don't value our children, or treasure them, then it has a profound impact that often results in negative outcomes.

The next few sections respond to the following questions: What are the kinds of narratives to both create systemic ableism and point towards the law as remedy? How are those perceptions subsequently impeding law? From my experience, I encountered how thoughts and beliefs hindered access to educational rights protected by law. I have asked myself numerous times over the years if it was U.S. Disability Law, as a mechanism, that intervened to help us? Or, was it people who wielded the law? In many ways, the law operated as a divide in challenging circumstances. It didn't help me build stronger relationships or partnerships with the educational system when we encountered challenges. In fact, the law became a point of contention. It instilled a "them and us dichotomy" so prevalent in uneven power structures that Indigenous people already experience daily (Velarde, 2018, p. 7). From my experience, the changes in our lives were propelled by people. When we met people who carried with them an attitude that inherently valued my child, the law was easy to utilize as a guide. The framework

of law was a guideline and not the foundation. *People are the foundation.* It is people that can challenge and reproduce larger social narratives engrained in structures, including our laws.

Parents and caregivers continually rely on educators and school leadership to always do what was best for the child and not what was easiest for them. The willingness to care about my child matters. If people value my child, and they believe that my child is entitled to all the law promises them and more, then that impacts how they access and engage with the rubrics of law. I once heard someone say that people didn't have to care, they just had to follow the law. However, people must care because the law is not something that exists outside the power relations of people. It is something that can be controlled and wielded by people.

In my narrative, I tried to draw attention to the unequal power relations entangled with access to legal remedy. Those without specialized knowledge of the law are often without access to research tools or services to learn the basic rights in legal statutes. Such unequal playing fields are part of the larger disparities of structural inequity. Statutes rely on both interpretations and invocation. Teachers and school leadership are the first points of contact to filter through the law. This instils a fundamental power relation. Interpretations of law and need are formed through the subjectivity of those in power. Their 'internal worlds' and narratives shape how they evaluate the rubrics of care or if learners match those needs. This is where the role of 'internal' narratives and bias plays a significant part in the actual utility of legal remedy. The pathways to remedy are first mediated through the school's interpretation of needs and rights. This is not a straight-forward process.

Oftentimes parents like my myself don't know the extent of protections under disability law. We have to go through a lengthy process of learning. One is quickly introduced to this bureaucratic world of paperwork and paper trails and the translations of these rights with the extent of their applicability to their situation. If families and caregivers don't know these, legal counsel is often suggested, which presents its own sets of challenges in securing access because of wealth disparities impacting Native American families (Institute for Policy Research, 2020).

There is no doubt that access and remedy through law requires a particular set of circumstances, in addition to certain entitlements and privileges, for it to uphold some of the protections it promises. This is particularly true for Indian Country[4], and other small, racially diverse

4 I use the term Indian Country here to reflect the diverse land bases, but also sovereign rights of Indigenous peoples of North America. This extends to reservation areas, border towns, or urban epicenters.

communities across the U.S. that have wealth inequality, educational funding disparities and high rates of racialized criminalization (Estes et al., 2021). These disparities sustain conditions that work to replicate normative standards that have real investments in the projects of systemic racism and ableism engrained in the U.S. institutions and remedial frameworks, such as our judicial and legal systems.

For someone like myself, picking up a book to educate myself on law was another burden I had to take responsibility for. I was a single mother, working full-time, struggling with my child's school, who was poor, and overwhelmed with mental health struggles from the isolation and marginalization. I was stretched to my limits on all fronts. How do you ask people who are stretched for the precious resource of time, to find it? How can one ethically expect that those who are struggling day by day, to find the luxury of time, money, and access, to educate themselves so they can fight their oppression? Those who labor and carry the weight of numerous roles do not have time. I know this because I lived it. This is part of the structural inequality that is built into the promises of law to protect us. Such discourse works to help usher oppressed peoples into continued silence and compliance. If they don't have time, they don't have the vital means to fight or pursue. This perpetuates the modes of power that are written into the discourse of legal remedy and legal knowledge systems as something readily available for all people. I contest this promise, wholeheartedly.

Knowing the law is not enough. Knowing what is needed to use the law is something entirely different. It should not be up to the families of those in need to become experts of the law. Yet, in moments of profound struggle where law becomes recourse, we have to not only become expert administrators of vast scores of paperwork; we also have to become paralegals and advocates. We have *a side* to hold up, and the potential for unified partnership is effectively challenged through the very rubrics of legal procedure. When there is conflict, often schools buckle down on their stance. There is a profound divide when this occurs, as evident in my experience when the school wanted 'to lawyer up' once I notified them I wanted an advocate to help me understand and support me. This is part of the failures of the promise of disability law as remedy. The law does not promise that parties will work towards strengthening relationships to transpire into remedy. It does not offer the opportunity to eradicate the violence my child experienced because of systemic ableism or work towards her restoration. The law doesn't promise my child will be accepted and seen for who she is. It does not promise my child will be valued at school, or in the community. This makes these challenges of larger

narratives oriented towards systemic ableism and discrimination not merely the functionality of law.

The Lifeline of Relationship

I shared my narrative to point out the importance of relationship in this discussion of law. In attempting to invoke the law for remedial action, it required so many steps. In looking at rights, we had to look at papers. Instead of looking at relationships as a pathway for remedial action, we had to look for a paper trail lost in the past on the long road of bureaucracy. The law effectively made the struggle in those moments more difficult. Both sides were overwhelmed with the pursuit of collecting evidence, when in fact, we should have been investing in the mending of our relationship and building bridges forward.

U.S. Disability Law does not provide for a way to caretake relationships. Under the logics of U.S. Disability Law, there was no room for building meaningful partnerships between all the colliding sides. *There was only struggle in the burden of proof.* I had often wondered, what if, rather than reaching, grasping in all directions for paperwork and paper trails to prove and disprove that something happened or didn't happen, that we actually worked on building a pathway forward through cultivating relationships necessary for effective change? Building these relationships requires that we understand and inherently value the *being* of others. It requires that someone's belief system values peoples with disabilities.

When turning to U.S. Disability Law as recourse, the polarization of stances sinks in. To 'lawyer up', is indeed an example of digging one's heels in the ground, preparing to defend, *not to build stronger relationships or partnerships for remedy*. Mentioning legal recourse reinforces the line that there is one side, and another. There is no room for self-reflection, only self-protection for the defending side. There is no question to challenge one's own perceptions or bias within this framework because there is loss and consequence in admission. Invoking the law is no longer a question of morality, ethics, or values. It becomes a moment of 'proof'.

In securing people to help me understand legal provisions, I was required to tell my story over and over again, reliving the hardship. It wasn't a process to share my voice, or build relationships built on mutual respect, trust, and cooperative aspirations for the future of our children. It was a process to match our situation to a provision—a slew of words—that would determine if we deserved to be seen, heard, and forced to be supported. Even if we could secure

these things, *the law could not give us what I really wanted: for my child to be cherished, valued, and accepted for who she was.* This has to do with ideology and the larger narratives that are brought to meet our children as they are and how collective knowledge determines their belonging, treatment, and support in classrooms and in the wider community.

Ontologies of Being

There are two institutional uncertainties in the reality of my narrative. The first uncertainty is the unequal, and unstable current reliance on U.S. Federal Disability Law as a means to secure inclusion, acquire equitable treatment, enforce accommodations and support educational planning and learning engagement. The second is the limited alternatives beyond this. Most importantly, there is a lack of ethical infrastructure in place to even attempt to start dismantling this legal system that clearly has substantial limits.

To be clear, I am not calling for the end of federal U.S. Disability Law or any laws that govern the protections of the disability community. The history and creation of U.S. Disability Law were hard won and brought together analyses of other modes of oppression such as institutional racism and segregation (Lebrecht & Newnham, 2020). Uniting these analyses and movements for justice brings forward valuable discussions regarding power and value politics which intersect across multiple systemically marginalized groups (Harriet Tubman Collective, 2020). The culmination of these movements combats power structures that underwrites oppression in numerous areas: race, class, gender, and ability (Annamma et al., 2013; Velarde, 2018). For there to be systemic change, continued work across these areas must be sustained.

This next section is concerned with the concept of legibility for protections. I am interested in an intersectional approach that considers racism and ableism as variables that inform barriers to access of legal remedy and uphold the process of 'othering' foundational in institutional marginalization. The process of 'othering' is a process of categorization (Baynton, 2001). To talk about disability is indeed, to talk about history, race, class, and gender (Annamma et al., 2013). To talk about disability is to talk about multiple *ontologies of being* as they shift, blur, and merge across numerous identities and histories. This sustained focus on *ontologies of being* actively pushes back against the very structures that impose normative logics on all fronts. Strides made in one movement have potential to impact the next, because they illuminate something vital about the ideological underpinning of violence as it finds roots in vast modes of oppression felt across multiple identities and ways of being.

To end disability law, which provides some protections for peoples with disabilities, albeit often obscured, would be disastrous to those who wade in its wake. To remove U.S. Disability Law altogether would indeed offer up those who are pushed to the margins of society already. It would offer up those who are not viewed as 'valuable'. *Value politics* are how value is assigned to certain minds and bodies. As Talilia Lewis (2022) outlines in her definition on systemic ableism, value is "based on societally constructed ideas of normality, intelligence, excellence, desirable and productivity…rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, misogyny, colonialism, imperialism and capitalism" [blog post]. Systemic ableism is to 'other' people based on normative politics which results in their systemic marginalization and oppression. Value politics, is indeed a site of struggle and can mean life or death in the lives of countless people, particularly those with disabilities (Pulrang, 2020; Wong, 2020), and the poor and POC (Cacho, 2012).

There are things we should be asking ourselves when we interrogate our beliefs regarding notions of value: Do we truly value people? Or, do we value the economy of people—that is those who can 'produce', 'achieve', 'thrive', 'progress' or 'contribute' within systems of normativity? The latter labels are part of a larger, normalized political orientation that fails to recognize the humanity of those with disabilities (McBryde-Johnson, 2020). Peoples who often need more, or may not 'produce' in legible ways are often systemically devalued. Such systemic devaluation is written into every aspect of everyday life—from our schools to health care systems, social services to our communities (Deerinwater, 2020; Hickey, 2015; Mc Bryde, 2020; Wong, 2020). It is placed there by people and the collection of narratives as they inform movement and structures.

What I am arguing, is that formidable possibilities exist with the reframing of rights discourse and legal remedy aimed at rebalanced relational practices (TallBear, 2021). Both are a means to *know*, such as re-storying autism (Douglas et al., 2021), and a means of remedy. Often autism is *known* as a series of 'symptoms' upheld by medical and therapeutic institutions as the defining features of an individual *way of being.* To *re-story* autism, I believe that Indigenous and other perspectives of 'disability' unsettle "fixed" (p. 617) understandings of autism, as a "thing" (p. 609) to a relational ontology such as those found within the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy. A Diné perspective of *being* connected to rights through ancestral narratives and their relational entanglements with Diné law, can help sharpen understandings of what remedial action can be. This foundation sets up these next sections that explore how Diné thought and

law can offer us a way to understand how reciprocal accountability can be achieved. By doing so, we are changing approaches to how we conceptualize care and the idea of rights. We are strengthening vast strands of relationship oriented towards the promise of belonging and restoration of right relational practices.

As Diné people and educators, placing more effort and intention into strengthening our own commitment to our principles as Diné from within our own ethical systems (Denetdale, 2021) in turn strengthens our cultural knowledge and gives space for us to put it into practice as a lifeway. We need U.S. Disability Law at this current socio-political moment and will most likely always need it for institutional protections within larger structures. I find that although legal remedy is useful as guidelines, I argue that they don't change the conditions that address nor work towards the eradication of systemic ableism but rather reinforce it. As a Diné person, I view the end goal as reorienting and reinscribing Diné values through Diné laws as lifeways for Diné peoples. Diné people are reminded and reoriented back to the teachings of care and protections of those who are most marginalized in our societies through our ancestral teachings. Or stories remind us that all relations have fundamental inherent rights beyond the rights that are 'given' to them through statute. This, after all, is part of the aspirations of SNBH, and the principles of *hozhó* and *k'é.*

Mismatched Aspirations of Law

The narratives engrained in Disability Law have contrary forces within them. One is that they simultaneously uphold the rhetoric of care as a symbol of social progress, while continuing to feed into harmful stereotypes through language embedded in policy. Language is foundational in creating and propelling social perceptions that impact approaches to law. Language embedded in diagnoses, evaluations, assessments, in everything that caregivers are required to fill out is perpetually deficit-focused (Douglas et al., 2021).

Language marked the difference of my child, continually measured her against a standard, a 'norm' to inform deficit models. Meg Gibson, another parent in the *Re-storying Autism* collection (Douglas et al., 2021) draws attention to reconsidering "how the everyday documents we encounter effect actual people" (p. 614) in how they contribute to stereotypical tropes that are demeaning and harmful in their capacity to make wider social beliefs. I share this view as I contend that language embedded in reports and assessments have larger roles in sustaining wider narratives that inform systemic ableism cultivated within structures. For

example, the Individual's with Disability Education Act of 2004 (U.S. Congress) articulates the right of disabled people to lead "*productive* and independent" adult lives (Wright & Wright, 2006, p. 136). Little question is given to who determines what is productive and why the measure of success is conceptualized as *independence?* As Lewis (2022) reminds us, systemic ableism is built on notions of normalized notions of 'productivity'. These are often entrenched in the rubrics of capitalism (Yellowhorse, 2022). Similarly, the idea of independence as a 'set' aspiration for all individuals with disabilities draws attention to a site of contention. These concepts mean different things to different people.

Māori disability advocate Jonathan Tautari has troubled this notion of independence, particularly as it relates to Māori communities. He draws distinction between autonomy and independence (Jonathan Tautari, personal communication, February 26, 2020). According to Tautari, the definition of *independence* as it is commonly used may not match Indigenous worldviews of independence or the materiality of how family units live communally (personal communication, February 26, 2020). Within close family units such as Indigenous communities, households often contain extended family and older generations all under the same roof. This is certainly true for my community as well. Therefore, the goal may not necessarily be to one day move away and live alone as a sign of 'independence' (Hernandez Legorreta, 2020; Tautari, 2020). Rather, the goal may be for people to develop their sense of autonomy within supportive networks of relationships and supports.

Indigenous value systems tend to foster cooperation and a sense of family togetherness, including extended family and relationships (Cajete, 2015; L. Lee, 2020). Māori disability scholar Huhana Hickey (2015) describes this individualistic approach stating that "favoring independence over dependence" excludes the principles of interdependence (p. 73). The principle of interdependence is important, as it conveys a reciprocal, relational way *of being,* that is rooted in a concept of "harmony and balance" and all things (Cajete, 2015, p. xv). This is also the same concept of *hozhó* which Diné scholar Demitriry Neezhhoni (2010) describes as a "multidimensional intellectual construct of balance" (p. 13) which is holistic in accounting for the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of living.

I never imagined the end goal for my child's education was so that one day she could move out of my home and live a life completely independent of me. This is something I have been asked many times in assessments, in considering what the long-term goals are for us as family. Although I support her autonomy and cultivate her sense of choice, she is not expected to be

solely independent of me nor our community as a sign of 'achievement'. It is always a choice if she wants that. This would be true even if she wasn't on the autism spectrum. Therefore, the idea of independence, and the aspiration for this idea of independence as solely living and existing detached from family and community support, is not something that has resonated with me. It certainly has not constituted the reason that drives why my child deserves an education or therapeutic supports or schooling.

Ultimately, reflecting on goals for educational law, we need to focus on the unique identities of those with disabilities to consider who they wish to be and how they determine how they want to live their lives. That after all is the fundamental pursuit of SNBH that calls for people to design their lives (Lee, 2004), dictating how they choose to live in this world. It's time for us to listen (Douglas et al., 2021; Wong, 2020). It is definitely time for laws to be influenced by the people for whom they are for and the vast perspectives that come along with them (Hickey, 2015; Velarde, 2018).

Race and Disability

The structural skeleton that provided for both the implementation and *access* to the law, was not just a finicky, bureaucratic *thing*. It was *structure* that was part of a larger systemic process of designating 'value' to certain lives and bodies in tandem with the simultaneous devaluation of others (Invalid, 2019; Shepard, 2020). As a power relation, notions of value are instilled on people which become clear through discourse of disability (Yellowhorse, 2022).

In observing the language of value embedded in law, it is also important to understand the devaluation that occurs within legal processes particularly through systemic racism. Intersectional value politics, as described by Lewis (2022) examines "value placed on minds and bodies" through normative rubrics—often in the form of binaries such as abled/disabled, good/bad, normal/deviant. These binaries have deep roots in eugenics, anti-blackness, and colonialism (Lewis, 2022). Value politics that engage both race and disability demonstrate the spectrum of oppression felt across numerous communities of color. The value politics stemming from racism and ableism create challenges for those who seek rectification through institutions that inherently devalue them, i.e. the justice system (Cacho, 2012). Annamma et al. (2013) remind us that "racism and ableism often work in ways that are unspoken, yet racism validates and reinforces ableism and ableism validates and reinforces racism" (p. 6). In appearing 'normal' within social fabrics, both racism and ableism appear "natural to people"

in our society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 21) so they appear naturalized across institutions. Systems are saturated with engrained systemic racism and ableism which informs societal beliefs about who is considered deserving (Deerinwater, 2020) which in turn determines who is legible and recognized as human (McBryde, 2020). This is a large piece of the disparity POC with disabilities face when turning to law as a remedial possibility.

In the long history of Black and Indigenous resistance in the U.S., the vast scope of dehumanization continues to be felt across countless communities (Estes et al., 2021; Invalid, 2019). As Cacho (2012) argued in her work *Social Death: Racialized rightlessness and the criminalization of the unprotected*, structures of value and devaluation of "certain statuses and bodies work to assign, allocate and legitimate social entitlements" (p. 56). Additionally, these accompanying ideas of rights and protections "for U.S. citizens of color, are always unstable because they are framed as earned through assimilation, obedience, loyalty, and compliance, rather than simply self-possessed" (p. 53). The illegibility of being racialized and disabled, places individuals in a realm where they are twice 'othered' and marginalized for being POC and peoples with disabilities (Annamma et al., 2013). As Kathleen Collins states, "certain identity markers, which have been viewed as differences from normative cultural standards", in this case normative is the white, middle-class, cis-gendered, abled-body trope, "have allowed teachers, other school personnel and society to perceive particular students as deficient, lacking and inferior" (as cited in Annamma et al., 2013, p. 12). Critical disability scholar Baynton (2001) argues that this relationship to disability and race are historically rooted and are entrenched in laws, policies, and programs. They operate as naturalized events that are the normal way of things. An example of how systems and beliefs can be naturalized is the current, widespread 'treatment' of autism is aimed towards the discipline of normality which reinforces 'fixed' identities of deviance predicated on notions of deficiency, such as those found in practices of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Applied Behavior Analysis focuses on how human behavior can be changed—either "strengthened or weakened by its consequences…[which] need to be disciplined" (Tatom, 2021, para. 6). The 'treatment' of difference is a multi-million dollar industry (Douglas et al., 2021), aimed at intensive regimes of compliance. These regimes are widely decried as human rights violations by the Autistic community, as ABA places forwards abusive technologies of violence (Holmans, 2022) in order to subjugate difference into a framework of 'normal'. Such "therapeutic dominion to remediate bodily difference through corporal power" (Douglas et al., 2021, p. 616) harms both Autistic children and their parents. Autistic activist and writer Lyric Holmans (2022) states that

ABA "uses manipulation and coercion to scare parents into choosing it, telling them their kids will be harmed without it" (blog post). Rights and protections become more and more visible, the more one becomes recognizable as 'normal' through tactics of assimilation and compliance.

Such ideology of 'normativity' is upheld in therapeutic apparatuses. Annamma et al. (2013) say, such "evidence -based interventions reinforce similar race and ability hierarchies" (p. 15). The systems of devaluation—although cast as technologies of support— are entrenched in systemic ableism and racism. These systems carry with them the concealed intention and infrastructure to simultaneously discipline and profit, either by continual erasure of Indigenous people (Moreton-Robinson, 2021) and POC, or through the economic industry that profits from the accepted narrative and desire for normality (Douglas et al., 2021).

This notion of compliance and normativity leaks into the vast modes of legal infrastructure and educational policy. Educational and therapeutic fields which 'serve' Autistic people are often entrenched with this binding of autism to the belief it is a categorical 'thing' based on scientific measures of normality (Douglas et al., 2021). Because "autism is made a thing…[and] reduced to a single story" (Douglas et al., 2021, p. 609), such discourse created an entire economy which focused on the process of assimilation and compliance based on deficit-laden narratives made into institutions of violence. This 'therapeutic industry' is aimed at pursuing 'treatment' to discipline normative 'behaviors' (Douglas et al., 2021). These treatments become part of the 'autism industry" and commodification of 'human difference' which both contribute to hierarchies of devaluation and sustains a divide through systemic ableism and discrimination.

In creating a 'legible' subject, one creates a prevailing narrative. As Lesnik-Oberstein (2015) reminds us, "thinking about Disability is inhabited by a range of assumptions—essentialisms—that shape arguments and actions that are invoked in relation to it" (p. 1) Such assumptions are predicated on biomedical and functionalist views because they are the prevailing story of autism and disability within structures and their documentation. These singular stories are then reflected in understandings of 'remedy'. Douglas et al. (2021) points out that these kinds of views focus on "mere symptoms' rather than meaningful, albeit different *ways of being*…and relating" (p. 609). Approaching people through such a biomedical lens draws attention to the symptoms, and not the person themselves. Such approaches are the means of engagement with peoples with autism, in which they are continually understood through data *rather than relations.* This data becomes the definition of Autistic people in the eyes of structures which 'serve' them. In these institutional spaces their identities are forcefully fused with definitions

of these narratives to 'prove' that strategies 'work' in I.E.P.s, to prove that additional funding is deserved through needs assessments, to prove that progress is being made through report cards. People are robbed from there relational *ways of being* through these processes of institutional documentation grounded in structural systems.

This structure of assimilation reinforces the normative frameworks it imposes. It also consistently works in opposition to the right for Autistic people to be free to be who they are (Holmans, 2022; Walker & Raymarker, 2021; Wong, 2020). This results in what the Autistic community identifies as "masking" or "camouflaging" their Autistic traits through these types of normative conditioning (Holmans, 2020, para.3). Autistic artist, Raya Shield (as cited in Douglas et al., 2021), states that "my eyes take in a lot but yours fence me in" (p. 613). Shields is pointing towards the power of perception in feeding stereotypes that confine her *being* within prescriptive bounds rooted in stigmas (Douglas et al., 2021). Many individuals with autism, who are labeled as possessing *significant 'behaviors'*, often fall in this space of illegibility, and structural devaluation because they are consistently living and operating outsides these structured norms in documents. Yet, from the analysis in the proceeding chapter, I understand that behavior is communication that seeks to communicate an unmet need (Strothkamp, 2021). These unmet needs are proliferated through compounding effects of systemic racism and ableism.

Individuals with disabilities also can face "double experiences of otherness" (Douglas et al., 2021, p. 613). The intersection of race brings POC with disabilities to face multiple levels of marginalization due to their race first, and disability next. As a parent within this intersection of disability and Indigeneity, I understand the otherness that occurs with being Indigenous, and then within the world of disability. My child and I were not only unrecognizable because of our twice-otherness, we were treated as underserving through both spheres. We were living in a small town with a long-troubled history of Anti-Indian racism (Estes et al., 2021) that was systemically impoverished when it came to resources for those with disabilities (Legislative Education Study Committee Hearing Brief, 2020). At the time we lived in that small town, there was virtually no visibility of autism services or support networks. There were no therapy centers, medical centers to receive diagnosis, or adaptive playgrounds. There was an emerging movement of Autism Awareness, spearheaded by an incredible woman who would later become my closest friend and ally, Christine White. She was instrumental in the creation of community support networks for autism in our small border town. She was also deeply loved

by our community. As a light to many in a system with little visibility, understanding and support, people like her were dedicated to mobilizing systems of care from the ground up. Memory is a bittersweet thing, as I remember the power of solidarity but also the profound hardship of building within such systems of devaluation.

As a Diné person, the views I carried challenged these prevailing structures but not with desired results. My perspectives of autism didn't match the bio-medical definitions, goals, or *ways of knowing* autism engrained in systems I fought against. Because of that, we were further othered as I was not only deviant because of Indigeneity and socio-economic status, but also because of my views of disability because they openly challenged structures. I was labeled 'difficult' because of my dissention and my child was labelled 'difficult' for just being herself.

The weight for compliance was also reintroduced to me over and over again. In order to have 'value', to have recognition, and to have an easy pathway to the rights promised, I had to comply. I had to identify as 'underprivileged' according to our race and socio-economic background. I had to use those bio-medical descriptors to advocate for help and convince insurance agencies in reports that my child's needs were *significant* enough to receive therapy services. In this way, I was forced to become an active participant in continual social and ideological marginalization of my child. The rage and injustice that lives in the space is beyond words. This system forces parents and caregivers to perpetuate the ideological 'othering' of their children, to verbally mark their difference, to secure services through entitled rights protected by law. This is not rights. This is not ethical accountability. *This is what structural violence looks like, and how it erases the ways of knowing and valuing peoples with disabilities based on who they are and not what we make them through our language, documentation, and institutions.*

Because of these wider social narratives regarding autism and disability, conversation about legal structural failures is not enough. I have consistently argued in this chapter that we must give attention to the socio-political narratives as they underpin these structures. It's not enough to merely highlight how current systems are built upon systemic racism and embedded ableism. We must intervene and confront the ideological undercurrents that maintain the divide between 'normative' subjectivity and narratives that 'other'. In ushering people who are vulnerable in violent systems to be seen as "*other* rather than having any value" (Velarde, 2018, p. 3), I call for this close reading of how 'othering' happens in our social worlds, beginning with the internal worlds as they meet the external (Davis, 2013), which in turn trickles down into

educational spheres. These educational spaces reinforce the divides that are already in society. This foundation of *othering* illuminates the "structural power of ableism and racism by recognizing the historical, social, political and economic interests of limiting access to educational equity to students of color with disabilities" located in "social and institutional structures as well as personal attitudes" (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 7). This focus on personal attitudes in tandem with the structural violence can't be overstated enough. Recognizing both the structures and how *people* perpetuate the violence in these structures are vital to understanding notions of presumed legal remedy. The values and narratives that sustain such a system of devaluation are so prolific. We are operating in a system so severe that it has to create protections in the form of federal laws that overlay the inherent rights people already self-possess. A discussion of inherent rights, based in Diné life, is warranted to explore these tensions.

Rights Discourse: Given Rights and Inherent Rights

The prior sections have addressed the challenges of value politics and imposed 'norms' to illuminate the entangled difficulty of power relations bound up in the promises of law as remedy. I argue that these 'norms' are chronically reinforced through language of law, documentation and policy which are reflective of wider social discourse. This next section starts to explore what happens when we begin to reshape social narratives. I address the following research question in the follow sections: What happens when we disrupt current processes of legal remedy and instead approach rights as inherent and already existing through Diné knowledge of relationality through the principles of *hozhó* and *k'é?* I am interested in Diné perspectives that contest and remake ideological points of departure for rethinking collective movements for accountability. Whereas one approach to inherent rights discourse is embedded in the structure of colonization and war (Velarde, 2018), the other is embedded in the pursuit to live in relationship, balance, and spiritual wholeness through SNBH.

I challenge rights discourse which promotes 'law' as remedy to explore how oppression still has the capacity to exist in the establishment of *protections* through Disability Law. One such way is through the benevolent language of rights discourse. In challenging the liberalist language written into rights discourse, I am working towards reorienting readers back to the principles emergent throughout Diné knowledge upheld in this work. The principles of *k'é* (positive relationships), *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) and SNBH, inherently provide philosophical and material foundations for 'living well' (Aroniłth, 1985; Tecun, 2022). As we

are reminded, many Indigenous communities approach the concept of 'living well' or 'good living' defined as "in balance" which accounts for spirituality, wider social relations, and land (Velarde, 2018). This foundation also helps cultivate the means to achieve 'living well' though cultivating life-affirming relationships.

Law and *K'é*

This section is interested in how institutions view the concept of 'rights'. This is an important conversation for me as a parent because I was often ushered towards the rubrics of rights discourse, yet those rubrics did nothing to ease the horrific structural violence enabled by social narratives within systemic ableism.

I want to examine two aspects of rights. One I call, *rights as given*— those rights created by law and are court-made, such as U.S. federal laws. The other is *inherent rights*—those we inherently possess. Building upon inherent-rights discourse found in previous chapters on spiritual intelligence, leadership, and sovereignty, it is important to draw distinction between U.S. definitions of 'inalienable rights', and inherent rights from Diné teachings. U.S. definitions of 'inalienable rights' are grounded in the Declaration of Independence which upholds to "inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (National Archives, 2022). Such inalienable rights stem from the creation of the U.S. nation-state and are made possible through the process of colonialism (Benally, 2015). Whereas Diné concepts of rights are drawn from land and through the principles of *hozhó, k'é* and SNBH. Diné principles through story and land are articulations of inherent rights that are distinctly Diné. These inherent rights demand that people be free to be who they are (Aronilth, 1985).

I think that philosophical approaches to rights discourses helps push away some of the barriers in access to law as remedy, particularly when they start from a discussion of inherent rights discourse within Indigenous communities. Diné perspective matters in these spaces by helping advance remedial action through relationships rather than directed to law as remedy. I contend that understanding these colliding worldviews explored throughout this work opens pathways for deeper discussions about how Diné ontology informs understandings of 'disability' but also articulates goals, aspirations, and desired outcomes of the Indigenous disability communities. According to Douglas et al. (2021), to "restory embodied difference beyond individual problem bodies in need of fixing…[is] to open new possibilities for inclusive practices that foreground relational understandings of difference that are, for Autistic persons, potentially transformative

(p. 661). I believe Diné relational perspectives of 'disability' that include principles of relationships and reciprocal accountability change the starting points for re-thinking remedy. It also changes the context. People are no longer symptoms on a piece of paper, but rather, relations and part of an interconnected whole.

From Diné stories and teachings, rights for protections are *inherent rights*—that is, inherently self-possessed (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, §201). They cannot be 'given' to people. These are the rights of natural law. Diné natural laws—*Diyin Dine'é bi beehazáanii*— have "no loopholes" and even "the Deities follow this" (Denny, 2021, p. 4). They are found in the scope of Earth-Way Thinking that I discussed in relation to the four-directions paradigm mentioned throughout this work. These laws are written in stories regarding the origins of Diné people and inscribed in histories of the natural world (Aroniłth, 1985). Inherent rights are not something created through a nation-state, nor do they recognize only certain types of people or only *our citizens*. These inherent rights extend to all Five-fingered beings, and to our non-human relatives according to §1 *Diné Bi Beehaz'áanii Bitse Siléí*--Declaration of the Foundation of Diné Law 1 N.N.C. § 201 (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, § 201). They are simply part of natural law (Aroniłth, 1985). In this sense, rights are inherent and don't rely on a document or nation-state to confirm their existence. Formalized into Diné Fundamental Law and passed by resolution, as Article 1 states, that "upon our creation, these were instituted within us and we embody them" (para.1, line 24). Therefore, the rights that emerge from *k'é, hozhó* and *SNBH* are rights that are inherently self-possessed (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, § 201). Diné law upholds SNBH as a lifeway (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, §202) which I see as part of the larger relational teachings of disability, which signal a holistic system of relationships and inherent accountability bound up with those relationships.

In our epistemic universe, there are only relationships. I have argued throughout this work that the complex web of relations is a transformational *ontology of being*. It is a *way of being* in the world that makes the Diné universe (Skeets, 2021). Therefore, I recognize the ethical and spiritual accountability to those relationships and 'rights' that already exist. Through relationality, natural law inherently shapes our understanding of who we are as Diné people. It changes how we think about difference as it expresses itself through every aspect of our lives. From this perspective, both difference and 'divergence', a common designation claimed by Autistic individuals (Holmans, 2022), are relational *ways of being.*

In living in relationship, we live in accountability**.** I view Diné treatment of accountability as read through Diné scholar Lee's (2014) definition of SNBH—to live in balance and in the pursuit of completeness. This concept of completeness, as I have argued throughout this work, is built on the understanding of relationships. These relationships exist everywhere already (Benally, 2021). Such an orientation is reciprocal in nature, as we enact *k'é (*positive relationship), in every aspect of our lives. *This is 'law' as lifeway.* It is a system of perpetual relating and emergent care infused with responsibility that lives through this way of life. Living in relationship, in turn, is to live in reciprocal accountability as *an ontology of being*. From this point of departure, the question then becomes: What rights can anyone give us that we don't already have as Diné? We already exist in a complex system of relationships that ground belonging, love, care, and reciprocity. Our jobs as people are to honor the rights that already and have always existed.

From my perspective, acceptance of the rights-as-given framework brings one into the fold of a power structure and positions us within the framework of violent hierarchal systems. I relate this power as something that also subjugates people through U.S. disability legal remedy. Such a system fails to fundamentally shift power relations aimed at devaluation of Indigenous peoples with disabilities. Demographics convey that Native learners are overly represented in 'special education' (Brayboy, 2006; Fierros & Conroy, 2002), which deny rights to education through segregated classrooms (Holmans, 2022). The basis of systemic ableism through sanctioned segregation is upheld in legal frameworks which contribute towards hierarchal social relations.

Our current struggles with U.S. imposed federal law in our communities places our practices of relating, such as *k'é* for Diné, as secondary in this hierarchal structure. It has displaced Diné socio-political ways of relating within institutions as the main source of remedy. My goal is to argue for a shift in power relations, where our laws through *k'é* and *hozhó* becomes foundational for Diné engagement and reciprocal accountability with our relatives with disabilities. We can't keep placing our lifeway as subservient to imposed federal law particularly as it reproduces systemic ableism as I have argued throughout this chapter. Ableism upholds pathologized, deficit-oriented language about *our relatives*. Our relation are relations first and have a genealogy that is precious. *K'é* teaches us that our lifeways already show us how to relate, care and sustain systems of belonging. Those systems are infused with the principles of love and self-worth. Imposed federal laws work against these principles in

instilling foreign goals and outcomes to make people legible based on violent normative rubrics in order to *belong.*

This can change and the answer is right in front of us as Diné people. We are surrounded by the teachings of 'disability' encased in the natural world. This argument presents a framework of world-building with possible futures beyond our current trajectory. In this system, Diné knowledge is a powerful threat in its capacity to remedy unequal power relations but also reproduce other conceptions of 'value' and rights that radically shift socio-political relations.

In presenting provocation that U.S. federal law should become supplementary and used as a guideline for institutions, my hope is that Diné communities begin to view U.S. Disability law not as the defining 'rule' of care, nor the only pathway to legal remedy. Perhaps one day, U.S. federal law will no longer be necessary for Native Nations in the U.S. with revitalization of our knowledge systems and fierce invocation of our political sovereignty. As Baldy (2015) reminds us, "participating in a (re) vitalization that builds a future with past, shows how these epistemological foundations speak to a lasting legacy, that is both ancient and modern in their discourse that challenges settler colonialism" (p. 4). In revitalizing Indigenous relational practices, we begin the important work in the restoration of our community relationships.

From my narrative, I discussed the breakdown of relationships and the impact it had on our lives. Caregivers and guardians need the cooperation of those who work, teach, mentor, assess, provide services, and make policy if we are to make strides in the field of advancing movements of liberation for those with disabilities. The function of *k'é* is vital in this regard. After all, it is people who will enact reciprocal accountability and building relationship with our learners day in and day out. Having relationship is what propels these aspirations and maintains them.

Law, Hozhó & SNBH

The value systems that underwrite Diné understandings of inherent rights draws from an extensive system of relationality that upholds the concept of inherent *rights* as a fundamental condition *of being*. As a reciprocal process, upholding these rights becomes beneficial for us all as a collective in the larger process of *hozhó.* Through *hozhó* there is an active pursuit to cultivate SNBH for both one's life and in the lives of others. Therefore, acknowledging protections through inherent rights, grants us the security to pursue *hozhó* and SNBH for ourselves, as well as the inherent *right* for others to pursue it as well.

As a Diné person, I have learned that *hozhó* and *k'é* gives us a means to both understand others and ourselves. This understanding is a 'map' or 'compass' (King, 2018; Yonnie, 2016) aimed at restoration through the rebalancing of our world. I believe Indigenous knowledge systems can help give us a lens of how to do that. Stark comparisons between U.S. Disability Law contrast Diné concepts of inherent rights, which is aimed at balance, self-understanding, and pursuit of harmony through the framework of SNBH. The approach to legal remedy is different (Austin, 2009). The first steps of 'legal remedy' in the context of U.S. Disability Law is to determine which laws may or may not have been violated. For Diné, *law as lifeway* offers the first step as one of orientation, which ignites critical self-reflection. Who am I? What are my responsibilities? The relational self is an *ontology of being*— a way of orienting ourselves to know that through relationship there is remedy. Through relationship, we can consider how our actions impact others from the relational process of SNBH.

As a mother, I want my Diné community to begin the work of challenging the ideas of rights as something that is 'given' or created. I challenge the structures that claim 'given' rights as remedy, to defend itself against the arguments I have made throughout this work which has mapped how it operates from the devaluation of people and Diné lifeways. I call on Diné people to begin conversations recognising that inherent rights are valued and cultivated through relationship within our stories. These are not only ancestral stories, but our collective stories, as people, as parents, and as peoples with disabilities. They contribute a vital part to a greater whole.

Reflections

I have argued throughout Part III. that people matter. Relationships matter. Relationships are what provide for greater access to the law. It is important to note that it isn't simply that those with good perspectives or ideologies follow the law. Rather, understandings of relationships entwined with inherent accountability through relationship helps cultivate a deeper understanding of inherent rights of people. These inherent rights help value the person as they are and for who they are. The importance of inherent rights resurfaces through Diné stories as part of a guiding philosophy that operates without having a legal system from a hypocritical institutional apparatus that upholds the rights of someone it has structurally failed to protect to begin with.

I have argued throughout this chapter that people matter. Relationships matter. If law requires people to help access it, utilize it, and consult it for ethical guidance, then the focus must be on people. What people think, matters. The belief systems and narratives they affirm within themselves regarding personhood, belonging, and value shape their treatment of the law. The law is not something that takes movement on its own, it requires people to yield it. Law is a power relation (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). It is a power relation that invests, cultivates, and replicates larger social narratives. Law can be written with as much benevolent phrasing as it needs to, to pacify and reassure us that society is invested in the 'protection' of certain things. However, as I have argued, and tried to illustrate throughout my narrative, there is an entire world and system of devaluation that not only operates against the promises of law, but is actively encased within it.

There is considerable focus poured into the legal frameworks to protect peoples with disabilities. Yet there is no distinct framework to caretake the importance of relationship as a mechanism of rebalancing unequal power relations that result in subversive inequality**.** In a very broad sense, in the framework of U.S. law, it would appear strange to have a specific law oriented towards this concept of 'rebalancing' or towards caretaking relationships. However, in Diné fundamental law, which I explore in the next chapter, the whole philosophy of law is written with the foundations of *relationship*. It is a body of law that is indeed grounded, rooted and grown from lifeway of *k'é*, through relating in a way that protects the inherent rights of the countless ways of being that exist in the world. This is powerful.

Imagine what can change, when 'law as lifeway' is read as accountability through relationship, as illustrated from a Diné lens. Law is not something that sits on a shelf, in a book, in a hierarchy of statute, and enacted by people who may or may not have relationship. Diné law is theory, is method, and is relationship.

Diné value systems give shape to the importance of social narratives as they inform larger socio-political structures. I strived to draw attention to patterns of thoughts, beliefs and values that make and propel the social attitudes that are accepted as 'norms' in society. For Diné, stories bring us to the waters that sustain our values of inherent belonging and right to live in *hozhó* on our SNBH journey. Diné value systems convey how *ontologies of being*, of knowing, thinking, and existing say something about the collective socio-political narratives that can create conditions for life to thrive, and how they can also create conditions to destroy. This is

where *k'é* (positive relationships) and Diné Fundamental Laws help us understand the importance of our beliefs as they can rebalance or offer remedy towards harmonious outcomes.

Chapter Ten: Narratives for Restoration

> As a foundation, relationality is how the world is known, how we as people, entities, stories and more than human kin know ourselves and our responsibilities to one another.
>
> (Tynan, 2021, p. 600)

This chapter is dedicated to *Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii*—Diné Law. This body of law was codified by the Navajo Nation Council in 2002. Exploring Title 1 of this legislation helps demonstrate how relational teachings ground lifeways and in essence, becoming their own forms of law as a lifeway. I link the key principle of *k'é* (positive relationships), highlighted throughout this work, to the process of legal remedy found in peacemaking. This is a distinct Diné knowledge and approach to remedial action.

The Navajo Nation Council is the legislative body of the Navajo Nation and was built to mirror the American style of government as one of the three distinct branches of Navajo government. Although Diné Law was formalized within an institution that Diné scholars identify as foreign because of its American style, (Austin, 2009; Begay, 2017; Curley, 2014 Denetdale, 2014; Yazzie, 2016) the codifying of Diné [5]postulates came from teachings taken from Creation Scriptures and Journey Narratives. Now as statutory law, I believe they offer some important philosophical and ontological approaches that ground Diné custom as law. I understand the value in their relational approaches; particularly through the concept of restoration in rebalancing relationships when considering remedial processes within structures.

I am interested in a philosophical approach to law including rights discourse and mechanisms for reciprocal accountability. This chapter turns towards epistemic knowledge of Diné lifeways through the ancestral practice of Diné peacemaking. I believe this rubric of law can offer ways to think through the challenges of federal U.S. Disability Law as the primary and often only means to remedial action for Diné learners with disabilities. With this in mind, two guiding research questions shape the first part of this chapter. They are: What are Diné concepts of restoration and peacemaking? Why do they matter as practices of remedy? This leads to a discussion of why inherent rights discourse matters in efforts to change social attitudes

5 In this section, I move back and forth between the use of "Navajo" and "Diné". "Navajo" is often referred to within government initiatives framed within the apparatus of broader U.S. political inclusion. Whereas Diné is what the people call themselves when speaking of who they are. When Navajo is used in the chapter, it is because our bodies of government are still referred to as Navajo rather than Diné, and because supporting literature uses this term.

regarding peoples with disabilities and the laws that are intended to protect them. Finally, the second half of this chapter is interested in how the teachings of *Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii* contribute towards the sustenance of reciprocal accountability through relationship in Diné communities. The over-arching theme throughout *Part IV* of this work is that value systems, wider socio-political narratives, perspective, and *relationship* matter. I argue that these relations make or break the world for those with differences.

The conclusion I draw from the collection of these narratives throughout this work is that values encased in Diné law—both codified or found in Diné Educational Pedagogy— convey that individual action and accountability are a life practice that can benefit all people. Law *as a lifeway* demonstrates that there are social mechanisms for 'legal authority' written into Diné custom and philosophy. Everyone is part of a relational system whether they recognize it or not. Through relational understandings everyone can become an actor and benefactor of remedial action through the collective process of peacemaking with our relations with disabilities. Reshaping collective philosophical approaches to reciprocal accountability through the "restorying" (Douglas et al., 2021, p. 613) of 'disability' within a Diné context propels the principles that all people are already inherently deserving and have rights. The focus then turns towards how wider Diné society has collectively failed at upholding those inherent rights. It is not the sole duty of an institution to provide and govern those rights (although that is needed), but it is up to all of us to participate in honoring the inherent rights of all people, particularly our relations with disabilities.

First, I examine legislation from the Navajo Nation Council in conversation with important tenants from customary law and common law found within *Diné Bi Beenanhaz'aannii*: 1. N.N.C. §201-206 (Navajo Nation Council, 2002). Customary law is oriented towards the concepts of the *rights* of people. Along the same vein, common law is oriented towards the values, customs and traditions of Navajo people that uphold the customary rights of people (Austin, 2009, p. 44). Both of these include foundational concepts of Diné life including *k'é* (positive relationships), and *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes), oriented towards *Są'áh Naagháí Bik'eh Hózhóón,* SNBH (The Pathway to Beauty). These principles are the foundations for *law as a lifeway* (Austin, 2009). Although these principles are often discussed as three separate concepts, they have deep interrelated meanings and roots (Austin, 2009, p. xix). They all are situated in a reciprocal framework and operate to reinforce and strengthen one another. As they are relational concepts, they inform my engagement in the practical uses of Diné peacemaking.

I don't engage with the entire body of Diné law, but rather choose a couple clauses *from Diné Bi Beenahaz'áanii*, from the Declaration of the Foundation of Diné Law (Titles 1 & 2) and Diné Natural Law (Title 5) to illustrate the power of the expansive engagement of these laws as they interact with many aspects of Diné life. In showing the scope of its applicability as a lifeway, I argue that these laws also carry the power to help restore the lives of our relations with disabilities through fundamental tenants of reciprocal accountability and relationship found in these laws.

This chapter relies heavily on the important contributions from Diné Supreme Court Judge Honorable Raymond Austin in his book *Navajo Courts and Navajo Common Law* (2009). In relation to my focus on the importance relationship throughout these chapters on law, I draw upon Austin's (2009) foundational argument that customary laws cultivate cultural and political life of Diné people. Diné customary law also confronts injustice through prioritizing lifeways predicated on our *k'é* system and spiritual aspirations to pursue SNBH. This in turn situates Diné law to sustain our individual and collective growth and maintain "*right relations with all [our] relatives (all 'beings') in creation"* (Austin, 2009, p. xvii). The focus on relational ontologies is a key concept that I have argued throughout this work.

Austin's (2009) important contributions in his scholarship convey how cultural practices enact a form of law that are fundamentally "tools for healing relationships" (p. xxii). This echoes the argument I placed forward in my narrative and subsequent chapter that remedy must be include aims for restoration and caretaking relationships as part of achieving social change. This approach is oriented towards cultivating and actively engaging in beneficial relational practices, whereas legal remedy through U.S. Disability Law is responsive to disparities. A strengths-based approach should build in spaces where remedy is engaged in both times of turmoil and as part of an active life process aimed at nurturing all our relations.

Building upon the foundation of prior chapters, the relationships within ourselves require desperate attention to rebalance our inner worlds so that our outer worlds can benefit. I understand that no one wants to think that their views or beliefs are harmful. Yet, this critical self-reflection is a staple of Diné Educational Pedagogy that is oriented towards this necessary component of critical self-reflection. I see the proliferation of systemic ableism as a symptom of the profound imbalanced internal worlds of many people in society. Because of this imbalance of relationality, there is no widespread reciprocal accountability. There is no mechanism that demands or cultivates social accountability. Diné knowledge can offer us, both

as theory and method, a way to understand mechanisms for caretaking, enhancing and rooting relationships in our accountable actions, policies, interactions and belonging for peoples with disabilities.

Restoration and Relationship

My over-arching argument in this chapter calls for restoration but not in the sense that things should be restored to 'how they were' before harm. The call for restoration rests in understanding the concept of restoration through a Diné lens—the strengthening of Diné ways of relating as a catalyst for change. As TallBear (2021) states, through the advancement of Indigenous ontologies *of being*, we "challenge bad relational practices rooted in irredeemable hierarchies of life" (3:26). Restoration must be seen as its own political relational ontology.

Relationality extends beyond the notion that if we merely know how to relate, then that will change the violent conditions in society. Rather, returning to Yazzie and Baldy's (2018) theoretical framing of "radical relationality" in *Chapter Two*, relationality results in substantive political and institutional responses that are paired with social movement for change. In this movement it is also important to acknowledge how parents, caregivers, families, educators and advocates work within the system we have, with the tools, policies and laws that are currently in place. It is not ideal, but it is also where the struggle is and as such, has immediate material consequences. This deserves understanding the difficulty in navigating these violent spaces. I am considering how to work from where we are in this current socio-political context, with the acknowledgement that current legal apparatuses must not be viewed as the sole pathways for remedial action. What I offer in this chapter is a starting point for what I hope develops as a wider discussion in Diné communities working towards imagining better systems based on better ways of relating that can shift ideologies of harm rooted in our systems.

From my narrative shared in *Chapter Eight,* I wondered if I would have to forever endure the hardship of the journey to get something that I viewed as already inherently deserved. This leads me to consider an uncomfortable truth: What does Diné reliance on this system of legal remedy say about our own personal and collective biases which contributes towards systemic ableism in our society? I felt that this reflection revealed larger disparities that have divorced Diné understandings of reciprocal accountability from our daily practices of living. By sharing stories, and linking them to this discussion of peacemaking, I am calling for the strengthening

of communities as mechanisms to be accountable on the everyday, and through all aspects of a person's home, community, and personal life.

These mechanisms that form and enact relationship create systems of reciprocal accountability. Such a concept of restoration cultivates the well-being of all people and life. This is a Diné concept of life (Yonnie, 2016) evident in the recognition of cascading relationships in story, in reference and orientation, in land, in personal characteristics of our heroes and teachings from our ancestors. Relationship is written into every aspect of Diné understandings of the human and non-human worlds, and into the implementation of our *k'é* systems. *The teachings of relationship are everywhere.*

Relationship is a form of remedial action. This was demonstrated in my narrative. As I struggled through the legal system, the divides between the two sides grew further and further apart. The issue became about proof and only one side would 'win' in this context. Austin (2009) points out that such an "adversarial process is not a traditional Navajo method of dispute resolution" (p. 46) and that "traditional Diné justice, which values equality, talking things out, and free flowing-oral discourse" (p. 50), utilizes the principles of *k'é* and *hozhó* to aid in restoration of relationships. The focus is on healing and rebalancing people and communities (p. 44). We need supportive relationships. We also need a system that is *aimed at restoration, not adjudication* (Austin, 2009). Restoration and the opportunity for peacemaking should be a foundational precursor before Diné people are forced down the long, and often futile journey of seeking remedy through U.S. Disability Law.

Relationality starts from the place of the inherent value of all life. This reflects onto material outcomes, where we need people who are committed to belonging over the mere inclusion of our children in learning apparatuses. We need people who believe that our children have futures and that they have a life beyond the educational realm. It may seem like these needs are obvious. As a mother, I can tell you that these needs are consistently obstructed within educational realms. I have lived with the reality of these violent encounters. They are prolific. We need a holistic approach to the countless relationships throughout the life journey of individuals. This foresight considers the scope of immediate relationships for those impacted with disability and the extensive social relations that support the lives of impacted individuals. This is why remedial action must be more than just a *thing* one does, or a policy locked in a temporally located space and time. Remedial action through relationships must be a lifeway.

Reordering Remedy

I have tried to convey the limits of U.S. Disability Law and its' capacity to protect those it claims to. I view U.S. Disability Law and Western forms of adjudication as systems that don't work for Diné communities. I believe foreign frameworks should be supplementary to our own systems that are aimed at restoring our communities and peoples. I believe we can find some support in U.S. Federal Disability Law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004) as guidelines to implement support systems, such as the 11 Considerations of Autism, that I outlined in *Chapter Eight.* However, I believe that relationship and honoring the inherent rights of peoples with disabilities is the first step for true remedy through hardship by strengthening and educating Diné communities with the revitalization of our knowledge of 'disability'.

Austin (2009) similarly describes the limits of Western forms of adjudication in Navajo country by identifying four distinct failures (p. 39). The first is that litigation systems simply can't resolve many of the problems Navajo people face. A clear example of this would be land-rights and land-use issues which are impeded by "colonial regulation" (Diné Policy Institute, 2017, p. 6). There are larger social and political structural issues engrained through colonization which deeply impact Diné life today. The second is that the processes of adjudication are too costly and "time-consuming" (p. 39). This speaks to the vast disparities in the power relations that make up income inequality for Diné people (Estes et al., 2021). Not all Diné people have the luxury of money to pay for legal advice and aid. This was particularly true for my situation as a young mother in need of help. The third limit of Western adjudication is that the system is confusing (Austin, 2009). This points towards the arguments I made in *Chapter Eight* regarding the expertise I needed to navigate the law to resolve problems. Many people just give up, because of the specialized knowledge needed to work through the judiciary process. Finally, Western systems are extremely "confrontational" (Austin, 2009, p. 39). The unfavourable result of both parties lawyering up doesn't fair well for those who are truly seeking remedial action where all involved can find balanced resolve. Austin (2009) reminds us that the Navajo way of "talking things out" and finding "consensus to resolve disputes" reaffirms that Diné people have a method for resolve that is culturally in line with aspirations of SNBH—to find balance, contribute to the balance of others, and sustain community balance through the process of peacemaking (p. 39) and the powerful invocation of *k'é as lifeway*.

Restoration is part of the important work of nation-building. Austin (2009) states that "the nation-building process, in Navajo thinking, would always return to its power source (i.e.

culture, language, spirituality, and philosophy) inside the relational Navajo hogan to reenergize and develop new approaches to address new and unfinished challenges" (p. xx). The hogan, which I discussed in *Chapter Five*, is the point of reference for addressing challenges and providing unconditional love and opportunity for growth with the promise of belonging (Roessel, 2021). The strong foundation of problem solving starts in the home with the values of the home, and the teachings that wrap themselves around the family unit (Roessel, 2021). In strengthening laws and approaches to law as lifeway, we are really arguing for the regeneration of cultural knowledge, teachings, language, and philosophy finding root in the home again. This relational approach to thinking of law as lifeway starts with the intimate spaces of people. This relational approach signals the importance of the 'internal worlds' that require tending to in order to achieve outward change in society. This is tied to the regeneration of our knowledge systems and the importance of utilizing these systems as both remedy and continued movement towards wider structural change.

Peacemaking

Aspirations for restoration from a Diné epistemic framework are embedded in three principles that have continually emerged throughout this work: *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes), *k'é* (positive relationships) and *SNBH*, which can be described as the Corn Pollen Path or the Pathway to Beauty (Lee, 2014). The focus on these three principles in this chapter are not just to understand their use in broader legal frameworks found in Diné statutes but how they are also formally grounded in our distinct practice of *peacemaking* in our Diné justice system (Austin, 2009, xxii). Navajo peacemaking was formalized into the judiciary system in the 1980s (Austin, 2009). It is important to note that it more than just a 'restorative' approach but rather a system that propels relational practices aimed at social accountability.

Diné Traditional Peacemaking—*Hózhóji Naat'aah*—"begins at the place of chaos…between an individual or between human beings", with the intention of restoring harmony predicated on Diné identity and cultural knowledge systems (Navajo Nation Courts, para. 21). This is done through *k'é,* which the Navajo Nation Courts (n.d) define as "what binds human beings together in mutual respect" (para. 1) and open dialogue, which Austin (2009) defines simply as "talking things out" (p. 43) as part of learning. With facilitated engagement and education from the peacemaker, the goal is to educate, persuade and cultivate "individual or group readiness to open up, listen, share, and make decisions as a single unit using *k'é*" (Navajo Nation Court, para. 1). Peacemaking is relational ontology that can teach others in meaningful ways.

It is important to note, that the goal of peacemaking is to "restore relationship and harmony " (Nielsen & Zion, 2005, p. 4). It is important to note that peacemaking in my argument is about confronting knowledge production related to bias and stigma. It is not about restoring or mending 'harm' from violence but rather part of remaking relational practices rooted in *k'è* (positive relationships) oriented towards the aspiration of SNBH. In the context of my own experience, 'harmony' could have encompassed honoring my valuable perspectives and journey. It could be active partnership paired with an understanding that all involved were learning and working together towards outcomes. Peacemaking would have helped me feel heard and seen. My vulnerable self-reflection and openness also could have impacted the 'inner worlds' of others. Peacemaking would also have helped me have compassion towards others, especially for our teachers who dedicate their lives to their practice. It would have helped me understand that people were in a space of learning as well and that there was hope for change through the process of relationality. It would have helped me as a parent with the hopelessness and isolation that I had at the time because I knew others wanted to help but didn't know how. For me, peacemaking is about mutual understandings paired with the flattening of hierarchal power relations. It is also a space of trust and hope. Such a process opens space for multi-directional learning rooted in the desire for positives relationships and harmonious outcomes.

This aspiration for unity and collective movement towards the process of restoration through relationship and the power of *k'é* conveys both teachings (theory) and the method (practice) of Diné value systems. Peacemaking reclaims and recenters *k'é* as a fundamental feature of knowledge production and remedy through relational practices. By utilizing stories and teachings, the process of peacemaking works towards sharing knowledge in order to "guide the whole toward a cathartic understanding of *hozhó* that opens the door to transformative healing…or mutual mending" (Navajo Nation Courts, para. 20). Applied to knowledge production, this approach is hopeful. Since peacemaking is oriented towards harmonious outcomes, realization of the *truth* only occurs when the individual feelings are "fundamentally satisfied" (Navajo Nation Courts, para. 2). This approach is useful for those who have been marginalized by systemic because it offers space and time. There is resource to be seen, heard, and accounted for within a wider community. Such an approach offers the potential for unity, allyship and solidarity that doesn't happen in Western forms of adjudication. This is why I see peacemaking as an essential tool for intervening in the current challenges peoples with disabilities encounter within educational settings. Peacemaking is also generative to unite and

bring collective engagement beyond the movements for disability awareness, to include the pursuit of disability justice. It is having a place to belong, to *relate* and to be Diné.

The focus on peacemaking in relation to U.S. Disability Law offers an intervention into legal theory which has not yet situated this practice outside of Diné lands and communities. However, I argue that peacemaking should be a tool that is readily available for all Diné people and should find a place in the larger scope of remedial action options for Diné peoples with disabilities. Peacemaking needs to happen within current Indigenous social movements, within chapterhouse meetings, in the Department of Diné Education and throughout all institutions that are managed by Diné people. I think we can all agree that our relatives with disabilities throughout these spaces have not been cared for, either intentionally or unintentionally, by us as a collective people. This can change. Peacemaking offers us a chance to do better.

I view this advancement of peacemaking as a starting point for discussions that are long overdue. Diné communities must start making space to talk about disability as a community dialogue and not treat it as a hushed, private, family matter. I see disability justice through peacemaking as part of the movement of enacting *culturally sustaining* and *culturally informed* practices in educational realms because these processes are rooted in our ancestral wisdom. It is also part of the movement for Indigenous self-determination and demands for representation of our cultural practices in wider spaces (Werito, 2014). There is also potential to rethink the use of peacemaking as a mechanism for community resolution initiatives on all levels (not merely school and social institutions), in deepening relationships to acknowledge the harms society has enacted towards those most marginalized in their midst. All of us can enter the process of peacemaking to make right our complicity of systemic ableism that we may not even be aware of. Peacemaking offers collective action which is needed to address the disparities our relations with disabilities face.

Peacemaking can contribute towards social change. According to Austin (2009), the use of Navajo custom in the philosophy of customary law through peacemaking is aimed at moving beyond mere dispute resolution, but rather "touches every area of Navajo society, life, and lands" (xxiv). The context in which law is conceptualized and practiced relies on relationality of how it *creates conditions for balanced life* and strives to live in balance in other relationships found in the world. What we apply in one area impacts another. Such a positioning of relationality in law grounds the fundamental philosophies encased in our value systems to caretake land and other relations. It is a process and system that enriches, propels, and secures

our value systems across all aspects of Diné life. Peacemaking draws upon the principles of *k'é*, *hozhó* and SNBH, by advancing them and strengthening them. In this sense, the seeds to enact peacemaking have already been planted through the continuation of our cultural practices through multiple initiatives in revitalizing and sustaining our culture and stories. The concept of peacemaking is not new, but rather something that has been embedded in our teachings since the beginning.

Current revitalization efforts are mostly aimed at only language and ancestral teachings (Saad K'idilyé, 2022). I have not yet observed conversations about the restoration of healing relationships for our communities with disabilities, although, they are emergent (Jim, 2022b; Yazzie, 2021) as disability dialogue is entering these larger discussions and conferences. Yazzie and Baldy (2018) continue to inform this challenge with their theorization of 'radical relationality' that is interested in remaking relationality which then signals collective mobilization. We are at a time where I believe we are ready for these conversations on wider levels within our communities. I am calling on our relations that the time to help and intervene collectively as a people is now, because peoples with disabilities are continually ushered back towards the laws and legal frameworks imposed on them. From my experience, there was no intervention from my community or the Navajo Nation as an institution when we struggled. We were forced to rely on the imposed statutes that were continually obstructed. These kinds of disputes aren't falling on a collective process of restoration that considers the many pieces of a whole, but rather are individualized and separated. This compounds the sense of marginalization in being both pushed to margins in wider society and within our own Indigenous communities. The message in this space is resounding: Acquire an advocate. Go somewhere else. Acquire someone who is skilled in U.S. Disability Law. Yet, I believe the place for remedy is not there, but in the philosophies of our ancestors or our precious practices.

Deferment is a system that is unsustainable and does more harm. If our communities are not a place to find solidarity and collective momentum to have peace, then where will we find it? *If k'é doesn't give us a place to stand, a place to find allyship and remedy, where will we find it as Diné people?* For me, I believe *k'é* fosters belonging. If you are reading this, and you don't know how to help, help people like they are your relative, because they are. These are the teachings of *k'é* and why *k'é* is the heart of peacemaking practices and foundations for restoration. Any discussion of revitalization of Diné culture must be met with dialogue to restore peace in our communities; particularly of those most marginalized. Culture is not a

static thing that is separate from the materiality of our lives (Emerson, 2017; Lee, 2017; Yazzie & Baldy, 2018). In restoring relationships in our schools, we restore relationships in the broader context. This extends outward to the natural world as this cyclic process has cascading impacts. In the end, these principles are tools to combat the imposition of foreign laws and policy that systemically devalue Diné life, land, and Diné self-determination (Austin, 2009, xvii). This can be the starting point of a whole new system built on practices of caretaking as old as time immemorial.

Law as Lifeway: A Preface to the Declaration of the Foundation of Diné Law

A relational approach to law does not treat law merely as statutory, but rather as a lifeway. Furthermore, the spiritual nature of our lives, *of our being*, cannot be separated from the teachings these relational systems ignite. According to Diné teachings, we see our spiritual selves and our purpose as *Diyin Nohookáá Diné'é,* Holy Earth Surface People (Aroniłth, 1985; Ayzie, 2021b). Diné Law affirms our spiritual selves and journey with the inherent rights to be free, live with dignity and embrace all the blessings available to us as Holy Earth Surface People. In these sacred spaces, belonging and having inherent rights are a *fundamental condition of being.* It is through relationship that we cultivate our truest spiritual selves. This is a form of liberation and justice from a Diné perspective and it is entangled with the concept of *hozhó.*

Diné philosophy both helps Diné with disabilities and all of us collectively as human beings. Diné philosophy strengthens the collective pursuit of SNBH where we value *everyone's right to pursue the Corn Pollen Path.* When we acknowledge and honor the right to SNBH for all Diné people we are providing the opportunity to cultivate a world where that is achievable for those most marginalized. We are also enhancing our own personal journey towards SNBH as a human being and as a community.

This process of reframing accountability through relationship impacts more than just peoples with disabilities, it impacts all of us. This is the cyclic nature of SNBH that is sustaining and aimed at cultivating wholeness and wellness in communities. As Austin (2009) illustrates in his analysis of Diné Laws, "positive values sustain a condition called *hozhó*—a state where everything is properly situated and existing and functioning in harmonious relationship with everything else" (p. 40). This is an *ontology of being* that is written into the spiritual nature of law. Law is a lifeway aimed at achieving this balance. This argument by Austin (2009) also

conveys how there is a larger order of belonging that exists in a system of *balance* beyond humans. Everyone matters in the context of achieving wellness and wholeness. Everyone has a role to play in rebalancing our worlds as part of a greater whole.

Hozhó isn't only a system that addresses harms nor is it a clean-up solution to challenges. Its' dual nature is characterized by its potential to heal and restore, and also to cultivate and grow. H*ozhó* is predicated on perpetual renewal. If we have a collective pursuit of *hozhó*, we must understand that our journey must include our investment towards cultivating the conditions for others to journey there too. That is the reciprocal nature of our teachings. Austin (2009) explains "the state or condition is *hozhó [balance, harmony beauty]*…represents the animating norms, customs, and traditions (customary laws) that produce or maintain that state" (p. 41). It is a system that sustains itself. Once cultivated, it continually offers potential for continual growth. The teachings of *hozhó* in relation to SNBH deeply informs my understanding of disability justice through the promise of relationality.

We can pursue the active process of peacemaking based on *k'è* because this system promotes and fosters a space to belong. Yet, where are these conversations now? Educators and policy makers are so dictated by statute that they simply don't take initiative to make room for conversations to talk it out beyond the stagnate rubrics of the law. These conversations of collective disability justice aren't included in our chapterhouses or community spaces. Perhaps people simply don't talk about disability as a community because it doesn't impact them directly. People don't know *how* to talk about disability (McBryde, 2020). Collectively, it is easier to wait for another time to address disability and leave it to someone else. From my experience, people presume that disability requires 'experts' to discuss. *Yet, it doesn't take an expert of anything to love, to relate, or to care about someone.*

My intention in linking Diné knowledge to disability justice discourse is a call to consider *k'é* as a lifeway. I am calling for reciprocal accountability through the reconfiguration of relational practices. If Diné philosophy of law is to restore relationships, then the blueprints to achieve that are already there—in our lands, stories, and songs. People with disabilities and their families have been at the forefront of demanding justice, fighting institutional oppression (Deerinwater, 2020; Holmans, 2022), fighting for visibility (Wong, 2020), fighting for the right to have a place in the school system (Lebrecht & Newnham, 2020), in the work force and in the community. Peoples with disabilities are fighting for their humanity and life to be

recognized as valuable (Lewis, 2022; McBryde, 2020; Pulrang, 2020; Wong, 2020). Yet, it is largely one-sided because of the lack of reciprocal accountability.

The institutionalization of 'passing the buck' to someone else and believing that there is some separate body of infrastructure that 'deals' with disability stalls the process of restoring right relations oriented towards change. Again, obstruction occurs because there is no sense of the relational self to influence reciprocal accountability into action. I witnessed full-scale marginalization of my child. As a parent, I was tasked with battling this system but also challenged by trying to convince others of my perspective. I was trying to save relationships that were necessary, even as the law was creating a deeper divide of the we/them binary. Diné Law functions as a generative point of departure to tend to relationships in an active process. Law as lifeway can be known through story—the multiple stories I have shared in this work that teach us that rights and 'laws' are not something that are given or earned through compliance. Rather, these rights are already self-possessed and *inherent.* These inherent *ways of being*— entrenched as a lifeway works towards a recasting of law based on relationship. They honor diverse and distinct ways of *being* in the world.

Inherent Rights

I want to briefly revisit the concept of inherent rights I brought forward in *Chapter Nine: Legal Narratives.* To approach Diné Laws, one must understand the foundations of relationships to unravel the inherent rights encased in them. Austin (2009) brings forward a discussion of the Diné word for "law"—*beehaz'aannii*—which can be translated as "way at the top", or "something which is absolutely there" (p. 40). Although the term *beehaz'aannii* was formalized institutionally through statute, it still speaks to a Diné expression of inherent rights, or simply, self-possessed rights. Austin (2009) compares this to the Western/American concept of natural law, or laws that inherently exist. However, key differences exist between these two concepts. The first is that there is a spiritual dimension in the contexts in which Diné law emerges. They are culturally rooted and grown from Creation Scriptures and Journey Narratives (Austin, 2009; Begay, 2017). The second is that these laws are woven through story and oral traditions, and not formalized written codes (Austin, 2009). This contributes towards the larger understanding of how these are lifeways that are inherited and practiced through daily activities and philosophies in everyday Diné life and language.

1 N.N.C. § 201-206 Declaration to the Foundation of Diné Law Introduction

This next section examines excerpts from *Diné Bi' Beenahaz'áannii*— The Declaration of the Foundations of Diné Law (Navajo Nation Council, 2002). These laws were codified to "guide all aspects of government operations and interactions among government officials and the public" (Austin, 2009, p. 42). There is specific focus on the Declaration of the Foundation of Diné Law (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, §201) because of its philosophical approach to law which orients Diné ontologies and encapsulates them in our legal frameworks. Although these codes are designed for Navajo Nation government bodies, they reflect the teachings that are extended to all Diné people through our traditional teachings and stories. Some apply directly to the teachings I highlight from the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and the Story of Turkey. Some of the more direct laws found in statutes §202- 206 offer theoretical starting points for considering how Diné utilize our laws in response to other laws such as U.S. Disability Law, State Law, and local educational and school policies. I start with the philosophical approaches in the Declaration (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, §201) to highlight a shift towards relationship, accountability, and remedy from a distinctly Diné lens.

§ 1. Diné Bi Beehaz'áanii Bitse Siléí--Declaration of the Foundation of Diné Law (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, § 201)

> We, the Diné, the people of the Great Covenant, are the image of our ancestors and we are created in connection with all creation.
> *Diné Bi Beehaz'áanii Bitsi Siléí*
> *Diyin Dine'é*
> *Sin dóó sodizin*
> *Bee*
> *Nahasdzáán dóó yádiłhił nitsáhákees yił hadeidiilaa,*
> *Tó dóó dził diyinii nahat'á yił hadediilaa,*
> *Niłch'i dóó nanse' ałtaas'éí iiná yił hadediilaa,*
> *Ko', adinídíín dóó ntł'iz nááđahaniihjį' sihasin yił hadeidiilaa.*
> *Díí ts'ídá aláají nihi beehaz'áanii bitse siléí nihá' ályaa.*
> *Nitsáhákees éí nahat'á bitsé silá.*
> *Iiná éí sihasin bitsé silá.*
> *Hanihi' diilyaadi díí nihiihdaahya' dóó bee hadíníit'é.*
> *Binahji' nihéého'dílzingíí éíí:*
> *Nihízhi',*
> *Ádóone'é niidlíinii,*
> *Nihinéí',*
> *Nihee ó'ool íił,*
> *Nihi chaha'oh,*
> *Nihi kék'ehashchíín.*

Díí bik'ehgo Diyin Nohookáá Diné nihi'doo'niid.
Kodóó dah'adíníísá dóó dah'adiidéél.
Áko dííshjįįgi nitsáhákees, nahat'á, iiná, saad, oodlą',
Dóó beehaz'áanii ał'ąą ádaat'éego nihitah nihwiileeh,
Ndi nihi beehaz'áanii bitsé siléí nhá ndaahya'áá t'ahdii doo łahgo ánéehda.
Éí biniinaa t'áá nanihi'deelyáhąą doo nílch'i divin hinááh nihiihdaahya'ąą ge'át éigo,
T'áá Diné niidlįįgo náásgóó ahool'á.

The Holy People ordained,

Through songs and prayers,

That

Earth and universe embody thinking,

Water and the sacred mountains embody planning,

Air and variegated vegetation embody life,

Fire, light, and offering sites of variegated sacred stones embody wisdom.

These are the fundamental tenets established.

Thinking is the foundation of planning.

Life is the foundation of wisdom.

Upon our creation, these were instituted within us and we embody them.

Accordingly, we are identified by:

Our Diné name,

Our clan,

Our language,

Our life way,

Our shadow,

Our footprints.

Therefore, we were called the Holy Earth-Surface-People.

From here growth began and the journey proceeds.

Different thinking, planning, life ways, languages, beliefs, and laws appear among us,

But the fundamental laws placed by the Holy People remain unchanged.

Hence, as we were created with living soul, we remain Diné forever.

Teachings: Spirituality and Relationality

I want to draw attention to several important teachings contained within The Declaration of the Foundations of Diné Law. The first is that Clause 1, “The Holy People ordained through songs and prayers” (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, §201) speaks to the inextricability of spirituality embedded in law. Diné spirituality, life and law are all deeply connected (Denny, 2022b). According to Austin (2009),

> traditional Navajo's believe in the interconnectedness of all things, so they do not see law as a set of rules detached from daily life. Each day traditional Navajos live their laws with their spirituality…any attempt at distinguishing Diné law from spirituality is an improbable undertaking (p. 40).

In *Chapter Five* I examined spiritual intelligence and its connection to SNBH, as a *way of being.* The connection between spiritual intelligence and SNBH—as a journey— demonstrates this process is a lifeway. Therefore, law is a lifeway and is both spiritually and ontologically rooted. If law is related to SNBH, then it is also related to an understanding of *hozhó.*

Hozhó as a relational concept emerges in Clause 4, which states "Earth and Universe embody thinking, water and the sacred mountains embody planning" (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, § 201). This reference to *hozhó* emerges from the relational principles within the four-directions paradigm. It is a theoretical and material pedagogy where thought and philosophy are entwinned in the natural world. Therefore, land is also an expression of law (Jim, 2022e). Returning to the Story of Locust in *Chapter Six* and the teachings of leadership, the teachings of the mountains play a significant role in understanding both relationship and law. According to Diné educator Begay (2017), the history of law articulated by Supreme Court Justice Ray Austin illuminated that the six sacred mountains that outline the traditional land base of Diné Bikéyah are called "*Dził Naat'á"* (p. 62). This term is taken from a ceremonial context "which broadly encompasses authority, power, laws and leadership because the sacred mountains are blessed with supreme authority and power" (Begay, 2017, p. 62). The teachings of the mountains and the culmination of all the mountains together places forward a relational framework that teaches us what leadership, sovereignty, authority, and law are.

Throughout this work I have continually turned to the four-directions paradigm in linking the philosophies, histories, stories, and lands together in a relational web. The teachings of law—the teachings of power and authority—are literally written into the land. They are the teachings encased in land and the teachings are not separate from the things (mountains, directions, etc.) that they embody. These laws are continually available to us as people and we are surrounded by law by virtue of our experience in the world.

The people in the stories teach us what *hozhó* and SNBH are through their movement in the story. Therefore, they also demonstrate the concept of law in their movement. In the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, the children went in four different directions over four different days. They returned covered in mud associated with all the directions. In the Story of Turkey,

the world flooded. The people went to the sacred mountains of the East, then to the South, to the West and then to the North to try escape the rising waters. The significance of this movement isn't merely just focusing on the teachings that relate to each direction, such as the teachings of thinking, planning, living and reflection. The culmination of these teachings points towards a relational *whole* as a reminder to the people to maintain healthy relationships, to understand *k'é* as a form of law. The focus is on the inextricable relationships between all things.

In the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and the Story of Turkey, people failed to relate and also internalized a perspective of harm. The people left Turkey behind and said not to wait for him because he was viewed as worthless. The people did not treat him as a relative or as someone who was deserving of love and protection. If it wasn't for the love and *k'é* of First Woman who claimed Turkey as her own and modeled the lifeway of *k'é*, then the Diné people would have perished. It was Turkey who remembered the seeds to plant so that the community could survive. If it wasn't for the *k'é* of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and the children with their relationships to one another and the natural world, Diné people would not have had the gifts of pottery.

The Foundation of Diné Law lays the important framework for Diné identity rooted in *k'é***.** According to (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, §202). "Our Diné name, Our clan, Our language, Our life way, Our shadow, Our footprints. Therefore, we were called the Holy Earth-Surface-People". These are the things that make Diné identity. 'Disability' is not included as an identity formation. The physical attributes or cognitive 'ability' of a person doesn't constitute an identity in Diné foundational teachings. Rather, the *ways of being* known are all relational. They are known through interaction with our spiritual and cultural values. This is a *way of being* and knowing that is formed from relationship.

The recognition of diverse *ways of being*, thinking and doing are written into our laws. The final clauses of the Declaration state, "Different thinking, planning, life ways, languages, beliefs, and laws appear among us, But the fundamental laws placed by the Holy People remain unchanged. Hence, as we were created with living soul, we remain Diné forever." (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, §201). To be Diné is to have a place, to have *k'é,* and to have the treasures of SNBH that apply to all people. To be Diné, is to be seen and loved and known through these rubrics of ancestral narratives, kinship, and land. People are relatives first before they are any other identity formation. As relatives, they will always belong, and will always

have the foundations of Diné Law to affirm their place. These laws will always cement the reciprocal accountability we all have to one another as Diné people.

Perspective guides our direction. The principles of *k'é* and importance of perspective are also reflected in the language of the Foundations of Diné Law. Clause 9 and 10 of the Foundations of Diné Law states, "*Thinking is the foundation of planning. Life is the foundation of wisdom."* (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, § 201). Perspective matters! The stories of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and Turkey reflect the structural oppression and physical marginalization. They reflect the *thinking* that provided for those things to happen. *The stories teach about the significance of thoughts, and how thoughts enable actions.* These stories are about ideological positioning and the internal narratives that govern people's actions. However, there is hope written into law that people will learn.

Our stories are teaching mechanisms (Denny, 2022b) to avoid destruction. Our experience shows us that "life is foundation of wisdom" (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, § 201, Clause 10). Living in the world along with the vast scope of experiences, both difficult and beautiful, we learn. The stories act as a pedagogy for growth to convey that communities and people do make decisions that enact harm. Our stories convey that reality. Our stories also show us the way forward towards restoration.

Finally, through life, we find meaning in the things that are already within us: our thoughts, perspectives, actions, and experience. According to Clause 10, **"**Upon our creation, these were instituted within us, and we embody them." (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, § 201). I believe that the tools for remedy are also within us. They are not somewhere else in a mysterious place that we will one day find. Within us is the capacity for great harm but also great good. The journey to understand SNBH teaches me that there are places of thoughtful and deliberate thinking, planning, acting, and reflecting of how to live in the world in a beautiful way. The path towards 'good living' and thinking is within our direct control (Jim, as cited in Lee, 2014). Therefore, every person has potential to learn and grow. What is clear, is that to enter the world of relationships is to enter a space of inherent accountability that lives in mutual interdependence with relationship.

Common Law in the Everyday

Diné law is always in motion beyond the engagement of people. It is alive in our principles of *k'é, hozhó* and SNBH. The aspiration for Diné law in the everyday is evident in *Diyin Nohookáá Diné bi beenahaz'áanii*—Diné Common Law §206, which states that "the values and principles of Diné Common Law must be recognized, respected, honored and trusted as the motivation guidance for the people and leaders in order to cope with the complexities of a changing world" (Navajo Nation Council, 2002, Clause B). Furthermore, that "the values and principles of Diné Common Law must be used to harness and utilize the unlimited interwoven Diné knowledge… in exercising self-assurance, and self-reliance in enjoying the beauty of happiness and harmony" (§206, Clause C).

Just as SNBH is a journey, so are the understandings of law. Diné are actively self-determining. They are instituting common law with or without the formalized institution of statute written into their codes by the legislative body of the Navajo Nation Council. According to Austin (2009), such laws have been instituted by Navajo Nations judges for over a century (p. xxi), illustrating that Navajo common law "is alive and vibrant" (p. xxiii). It is happening around us and continues to find root and expression in our communities. It exists through our cultural practices and through our knowledge systems embedded in our lifeways.

The use of common law and the manifestation of *k'é* as lifeway within current cultural revitalization leads me to think that the need to codify *a law* or policy shouldn't be the first point of focus for Diné people in conceptualizing 'new' trajectories for 'disability law' on *Nihi Kéyah.* Rather, I think focus should be on strengthening the cultural knowledges and customary laws (traditions) written into our stories into our daily practices and life. Afterall, the continuation and use of Diné common law is still emerging in multiple contexts throughout our legal systems. It is emerging from the continuation of our traditional ways and not necessarily from formalized laws (Austin, 2009).

Again, the teachings of law begins in the home. Many authors (Aroniłth, 1985; Austin, 2009; Parsons-Yazzie & Speas, 2007; Roessel, 2021) have already designated the hogan as the first teaching site. It creates a place of belonging, security, and unconditional love for a person in the context of community. It is the place where Navajo common law first comes into existence: to respect who we are, to respect the natural world and understand that we have a place in the wider scope of existence, to know our identity, and that from this sacred place of inherent

belonging we are in a process of continual growth (Aroniłth, 1985; Navajo Nation Council, 2002, §201).

Diné people are keeping the practices of law alive everyday, and through our systems of *k'é*. *This is not lost to us.* We have the framework to institute law. We also have the framework that provides for all of us, to live and enact the tenants of customary law (tradition) in our direct living. We don't need a court system to live in relationship. It is always written as a lifeway through our teachings.

Nahasdzáán dóó Yádiłhił Bitsąądęę Beenahaz'áanii--Diné Natural Law§205

This final section turns to Diné Natural Law to examine two clauses. I relate these clauses to the concept of reciprocal accountability.

Diné Natural Law declares and teaches that:

> A. The four sacred elements of life, air, light/fire, water and earth/pollen in all their forms must be respected, honored and protected for they sustain life; and
>
> B. The six sacred mountains, *Sisnajini, Tsoodził, Dook'o'ooslíid, Dibé Nitsaa, Dził Na'oodiłii, Dził Ch'ool'í'í*, and all the attendant mountains must be respected, honored and protected for they, as leaders, are the foundation of the Navajo Nation: and
>
> C. All creation, from Mother Earth and Father Sky to the animals, those who live in water, those who fly and plant life have their own laws, and have rights and freedom to exist; and
>
> D. The Diné have a sacred obligation and duty to respect, preserve and protect all that was provided for we were designated as the steward of these relatives through our use of the sacred gifts of language and thinking, and
>
> E. Mother Earth and Father Sky is part of us as the Diné and the Diné is part of Mother Earth and Father Sky; The Diné must treat this sacred bond with love and respect without exerting dominance for we do not own our mother or father.

It is a fundamental right for all creation to exist (Clause C). It is also a given that all these elements of existence have their own inherent rights. These are the foundations of our teachings and the heart of Diné Law which comes from outside the realm of humans (Denny, 2022b). Furthermore, we are all called to protect as part of our "sacred obligation" according to Clause D. We are designated as caretakers, and we are placed *within relationship* through natural law.

This law does not designate the *things* we are supposed to caretake or protect. Rather, it distinctly says "relatives". A prevailing argument in this work is that the Diné world is built on relationality. To be a relative is an identity formation drawn into inherent reciprocal accountability. *This is the relational lens that makes or breaks the world, and those who live in the margins.* This is a powerful way to view and live in the world. This is a Diné ontology *of being.* These origins frame the prevailing argument throughout this work, that Diné understandings of relationship exists symbiotically with accountability. To live in relationship is to live in the sacred obligation to care and protect all our relations.

Yet, important distinctions have to be made between the use of accountability from a Diné context and how it is commonly invoked more broadly. Throughout this work, I frame accountability as a lifeway through relationship and care. I conceptualize and enact it along the same lines as *k'é*. It is not a *thing* someone does or makes. Nor is it merely a moment of action. It is a collective movement which acknowledges relations that are and already exist (Benally, 2021). It is cyclic process of living and *being* in the world. Within this cyclic process is reciprocity. When one enacts accountability within their thoughts and actions to see how those live in relations to the wider world, then accountability lives within the relations. This is one's relationship with self as it is fused with a reciprocal impact with relations with others. This constitutes reciprocal accountability.

This drastically contrasts to the idea of accountability often taken up in neoliberal discourse that is often predicated on procedural safeguards that protect the interests of the few and not the interests of the many. When I speak of accountability, it is with the intention to cultivate the collective wellbeing by honoring the dignity, agency, right to self-determination and inherent rights of the individuals who make up the collective. It is through relationship and genuine interests of care that foster the conceptual buttresses of accountability that I just covered in the Foundations of Diné Law.

Accountability, as it is commonly used in wider discourse is based on statute. Often when accountability is discussed, it is contextualized in Western legal practices and models. I am arguing that we move away from that understanding of accountability. Accountability is more than a slew of checkmarks or ethical safeguards to prevent legal consequences. Reciprocal accountability is love. It is a lifeway that values life.

Integrating this definition of reciprocal accountability in institutional apparatuses becomes a difficult process. Notions of accountability are spring-loaded with Western legal traditions that engage the treatment of accountability as a reaction, not as a fundamental condition *of being* that is part of a larger process of living in the world (Benally, 2021). This is also true of the complex nature of Diné statutory laws. We struggle to promote Diné values and customs in legal parameters which still are based and read through Western legal definitive power. For example, amendments to Title 10 of the Navajo Nation Code of the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act 2005 redefines educational and legal terminology for the Department of Diné Education. Accountability is defined as "being held responsible for any action, inaction, decision, or conduct which involves public trust or requires sound reasoning, good judgment and the ability to act, that is exercised by any individual in a position to render decisions or cause action or conduct to be made" (Navajo Nation Council, 2005, §3. Section A). The use of accountability is only addressed in the form of institutional power. This overlay seems completely irreconcilable when read against *Diné Bi Beenahaz'áannii*, which *approaches law holistically*, and with the founding principles that accountability is inherent with relationship. Reciprocal accountability relies on people thinking, planning, doing, and reflecting perpetually for themselves and together. Such is a relational ontology. It's a lifeway oriented collectively towards harmonious outcomes and restoration. *People are powerful.*

Throughout *Part IV* if this work, I have turned numerous times to McLean's (2021) quote of people as driving factors of structures. If we believe that people hold the power, then the accountability interwoven into our complex relational systems is powerful. This includes our clan systems and our familial systems that foreground the lifeway of accountability on the ground in the scope of broader Diné life. This is not an isolated project where only those in power are called to be accountable. Law as lifeways is a community effort and is a living, breathing force that underwrites the lifeway of Diné spiritual and political life.

Reflections

This chapter has argued for law as lifeway in highlighting current statutes of Diné law to see how they can push back against federal imposed law as the only available recourse of legal remedy for learners with disabilities. I illustrated how *ontologies of being* encased in Diné philosophical approaches to law aim for peace, harmony, and balance to restore healthy relationships. As part of the continuing project of nation-building, we must always be aware of the intrinsic distinction between self-determination and self-administration. As Manley Begay

(2017) reminds us, “there is a clear difference between actually governing and deciding how you are going to create your own future as opposed to managing and administering programs designed and managed by someone else” (p. 59). Creating and steering our own laws and policy will contribute to the vitality of our Native Nations, as “research has found that when Native peoples are in charge of their destiny, more successful development occurs than when outside governmental authorities are” (p. 58). We can do better and we must, if we want change for all our Diné peoples with disabilities.

In framing the focus of these chapters in *Part IV* of this work towards the importance of relationships and reciprocal accountability, I have argued for the need of restoration. However, we require restoration not just for ourselves as we fight as impacted individuals, parents, and caregivers. It is also calling for restoration for those who are marginalized by our collective actions. This is the moment to come together as a people, to realize our own individual contributions to a system of harm. That is the hard side of understanding the implications of seeing the world through relationships. Many of us have benefited as people without disabilities, and for that, we need to make things right. We all have a role to play in this process.

Finally, movement towards Diné Law is more than just the regeneration of cultural knowledge as lifeways. The political implications for Native Nations utilizing their own legal frameworks are indeed a deliberate act of sovereignty that has ripple effects in the on-going contestations for life, land and justice that is centuries overdue. By moving towards accountability as a lifeway, we also legitimize this practice as a distinct feature of Diné living and inherent sovereign right (Begay, 2017). Austin (2009) reminds us that movements towards self-determination are more than just empowerment. He states that this movement “ensures longevity of Indian nation sovereignty, fosters nation building and protects transmits, and perpetuates culture, language, spirituality and identity” (p. xx). These movements sustain who we are as Diné people.

People, as the vehicle to the promises of protection matter. It is people who cultivate life with their direct actions. This process of relating and acting through relationship is not a policy or statute. It is a lifeway. Diné philosophical approaches of law move with the intention to restore, find balance, harmony, and place as a human being in this world. The scope of relationships is indeed vast, which makes our work for restoration a project of infinite engagement. It is never too late to start.

Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

> *Nánitł'ah dóó biyáhoyee'nidii hózhóógo naashaa dooleeł diiní.*
> Although it is hard and difficult to aspirate to it, we want to live our lives in beauty. (Werito, 2014)

In this work, I shared a collection of narratives that inform the relational concept of 'disability' from a Diné perspective. I also advanced ancestral narratives found in Diné stories from the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, the Story of Turkey, and the Story of Locust. These stories point towards the teachings of 'disability' such as relationship and reciprocal accountability. I used these teachings to make an argument for relational understandings of 'disability' to inform practices of accountability that extend to the individual, community, and wider social spheres. In calling for accountability, I engaged in important discussions of rights discourse, the power of perspectives in cementing systems of marginalization paired with Diné approaches for restoration through *k'é as lifeway.* I believe these practices and lifeways contribute towards starting points for discussions as readers reframe their relationships to disability as a catalyst for collective action oriented towards disability justice.

I hope these discussions develop materially across Diné communities and contribute to what will one day be the archive of Critical Diné Disability Studies within academic spaces. My deepest wish is that our diverse children and relatives find a sense of representation, visibility, and a space of belonging within this work. Our ancestors love and have loved you so much. They were careful in considering how to place these mechanisms of care in the world around us to remind us, to always live in relationship and accountability as people and a collective community. This work is my first step towards opening a space of peacemaking that we as Diné all owe and have a sacred duty to enact towards our all relations with disabilities.

Relational Teachings of Disability and Ontologies of Being

This work sought to answer the question: What is disability from a Diné perspective? I have answered this form my own perspective and with my engagement with Diné knowledge. I compiled a collection of stories—my story as a Diné mother, stories of my ancestors, my lands, and finally, stories of living within structures of harm with hope of restoration to explore this

research question. I found that the teachings of care, reciprocal accountability, and the value of our relationships rests within the colliding spaces of these various stories.

I used the four-directions paradigm found in Diné lifeway to explore the teachings of 'disability' and Diné concepts of *k'é* (positive relationships), *SNBH,* (The Pathway to Beauty) and *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes) that underpin them. I have heard this paradigm called many things over the years: the 'compass' (King, 2018; Yonnie, 2016), 'organisational chart' (Curley 2020), Life Way Thinking, Earth Way Thinking (Jim, 2022e; Tachine, 2021) and Teachings of the Journey of the Sun (Begay, 2017; Werito, 2014). I have referred to these teachings broadly as Diné Educational Pedagogy. I advanced this pedagogy as a system to understand relational ontologies which are rooted in Diné values of care, love, compassion, and beauty which emerge though story.

My focal argument in relation to Diné Educational Pedagogy is that this relational system sets the foundation for relational teachings of 'disability'. Therefore, 'disability' is understood as a relational concept. Many things embody the teachings of 'disability'. The focus rests within the relational nature rather than the condition or presumed limitation of a singular person. These relational understandings can be found in the natural world. For example, The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy introduced *ontologies of being* in which teachings of 'disability' can be carried by countless references within the story. What does it mean to reframe 'disability' in a way where the lessons are embodied in the natural world? What does it mean to look at something: a rainbow, a sunbeam, mud, or the setting sun and be reminded of 'disability'? This orientation makes it impossible to isolate the concept of disability from outside ourselves. A key point I have argued is that because 'disability' is relational, it signals a system relationship entwined with inherent accountability. When one is in relationship it becomes impossible for us to divorce the fundamental aspect of accountability from our thoughts and our actions.

I also argued that teachings of 'disability' are teachings of *hozhó* (harmonious outcomes), which teach Diné how to live a harmonious and balanced life of completeness. The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy teaches others how to live a life of SNBH. His life and story provide a map to help Diné realize our greatest potential in finding harmony, peace, and self-understanding. Diné teachings of 'disability' are deeply personal, because it teaches us something about ourselves and aides us in our understanding of what SNBH is, and how to pursue it. Both 'disability' and SNBH are therefore deeply related. Early Twilight Dawn Boy's life and story are the point of reference of journeying towards SNBH and paving the way for

others to achieve SNBH as well. These lessons teach us that it is both our personal journeys and our journey as a community— as a people—that matters. This has helped me understand wellness and reciprocal accountability on my own journey on the Corn Pollen Path. These teachings give Diné a clearer understanding of what the reciprocal nature of accountability means. It has everything to do with one's orientation, values, perceptions, and how one's thinking guides one's actions and how those in turn create systems of wholeness rooted in connection and interdependence.

The system that helped frame my analysis of relationships came from the lifeway of *k'é* (positive relationships). *K'é* is a complex relational system which helps Diné understand how to relate and its positive outcomes, but also the outcomes of failure to relate. *K'é* is a powerful tool because when individuals uphold the laws of accountability through relationships, we have entire communities working toward aspirations of *hozhó.* The wellness of one contributes to the wellness of all. All people are inherently deserving of these blessings and *k'é* is a mechanism that cultivates the fullness of these blessings.

Hozhó is another key concept of this work. I used textual analysis from Diné scholar Vincent Werito's (2014) work in Parts I and II to explain *hozhó* using land-based pedagogy to illuminate relational teachings that underpin this concept. Mapping the principles of thinking, planning, doing, and reflecting to the cardinal directions connected these teachings to land and made them recognizable within the ancestral stories. There are powerful lessons of relationship and reciprocal accountability in the teachings of *hozhó*. The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, Turkey and Locust are stories that compel listeners to consider their own perceptions, formations of beliefs, treatment, and orientation to the world. The stories teach individuals how to self-reflect upon their own thinking that direct their orientations to others. These lessons are useful to understand how individual thoughts inform larger structures and social attitudes.

In working toward shifting social attitudes, the stories offer a way to reconceptualize identity and *being* through relational ontologies that disrupt the imposed, prevailing markers of the people in the stories. The teachings of 'disability' uphold the teaching that people are relations first and not identities we impose on them. The people in the stories of Early Twilight Dawn Boy, Turkey and Locust were not defined by their 'disabilities' but rather the vast relational ways of *being* that emerged from their thoughts and actions. Although the stories most certainly included the presence of impairment and disability, they are not the defining factors of people. Rather, the defining factors are relational— they were defined as leaders, teachers, artists,

heroes, and good relatives. The lessons advance the principles that all people are sovereign. All people have inherent rights. All people have the potential for leadership.

Although these concepts of *hozhó* and *SNBH* have been difficult to discuss, I want to acknowledge my own learning in trying to write about them as I unravel what these concepts mean in my life. It is important to see these beyond philosophy or theory. Werito (2014) reminds us, that "Although it is hard and difficult to aspirate to it, we want to live our lives in beauty" (p. 25). It is difficult to imagine how these systems of *hozhó* and *SNBH* look and feel like, particularly when Diné have been historically impacted by removal of our relationships to land, story and knowledge. I also acknowledge how it can be difficult to imagine how these systems can be applied to structures. However, the desire to live well, in peace and love is the driving factor for change. That internal desire is precious as the start of journeying the SNBH trail.

The discussion of *ontologies of being* were widespread throughout this work. This process of coming to know lives in framework embedded in SNBH which speaks to pursuing a life of peace, balance, and self-understanding (Lee, 2014). I tried to use story entwined with the principles of *k'é, hozhó* and *SNBH* to create space to discuss *ontologies of being* towards better relational practices of care and accountability. These discussions impact human-to-human relations rippling towards wider relations that make the world. Diné stories gives us another way to think about *ontologies of being* more broadly, with the de-centring of the human subject, and instead refocusing on the vast systems of relationships, such as those within the natural world, as the point of reference. *All beings, things, places, and phenomena in this story have a place, have a purpose, and have a relationship. They collectively make world(s) of relationships.* Such an approach is a Diné ontology *of being* (Klopfenstein, 2021a).

Relationality has everything to do with *ontologies of being.* The teachings of 'disability' are rooted in principles of relationship and reciprocal accountability, *alter the ways others perceive and understand the multiple relationships that either make or marginalize a person's life*. I contend that story teaches us the scope of connections and grounds the demands of accountability through relationship as a fundamental condition *of being*. The story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy demonstrates what happens when a shift in understanding the nature of *ontologies of being,* changes the starting point of how we come to know and live in relationship. As Disability scholar Marissa Deborne reminds us that "by focusing on relations instead of the objectification of bodies can we shift societal structures" (as cited in Hamarie, 2021, 209:29).

There is power in shifting social conditions based through relationality. Such shifts illuminate the vast web of other possibilities of *being* in the world. This in turn changes the way people recognize these ways of *being* (such as spiritual intelligence) and work towards better relational practices of accountability.

Teachings for Transformation

The ancestral stories in this work carried cascading lessons for community life that can transform the present. Our ancestors had powerful knowledge of how to *know* and teach others about the care and respect of all our relations in non-hierarchal ways. These ways valued all life as part of a greater whole. By focusing on people instead of their conditions, Diné stories opened space for learning the foundations of how to relate. These stories didn't remove the discussion of need either. Both need and difference are evident in the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy and Turkey, but they are discussed within the context of community life. The teachings from these stories advanced that these individuals were not seen as only the identities imposed on them based on their needs, but rather, they were relations and part of wider scope of relations within the natural world. To call them a relation is to call them *a relative.* To be a relative is to be in relationship, and relationship signals accountability. Relationality is not bound up with foreign formations of relating based on the process of othering certain peoples and categorizing them based on 'normative' rubrics outlined throughout Part IV *Social Narratives* of this work, although, that did happen in the stories. Rather, the teaching moments brought to the fore those who identified these people as relations first. From the Story of Turkey, we remember how First Woman claims Turkey as her baby when the community suggests he should be left behind. Similarly, Early Twilight Dawn Boy builds community as he exemplified how to relate to the children he lived with. He ensured they all went forward together on their journey, and nothing halted his efforts to live in continual relationship with them. These teachings advance powerful principles of identity and *being*, which move beyond the physical, psychological, and cognitive aspects of people so prevalent in disability discourse. Need and difference are grounded in the concept of relationship and community. Relationship is a process of knowing and coming to know, in order to relate through love, have compassion, and exercise *k'é.*

The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy presents not only a model of the community making mistakes and learning hard lessons from those mistakes. The teachings of 'disability' highlight the imbalance of relationality and teaches Diné people what happens when individuals do not

live in relationship and reciprocal accountability. The Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy acknowledges that even our great ancestors had hard lessons to learn regarding their perceptions, biases, and harmful actions. The community in the story demonstrated this imbalance and failure to honor the principles of *k'é*. Their mistreatment and marginalization of the children are the example of when a disparity of seeing others through relationship and accountability occurs. Yet, the failure to live in accountability and relationship also illuminates the potential for restoration, which is a foundational part of *hozhó* also (Aronilth, 1985; Werito, 2014). From the hard lessons learned from the loss of the children, we not only have the principles of how to move forward in the treatment of all our relatives, but also how to restore relationships through the practice of *k'é*. The stories also exemplify the teachings that one's actions should not harm or interfere with the journey of SNBH of others. If people can't honor each person and their journey toward SNBH, then there will always be an imbalance. Werito (2014) describes this as a dialectal feature in that our lives carry "potential for a harmonious (*hozhóójí*) or destructive (*naayee'íí*) path, depending on which path (or way) [sic] one seeks" (p. 33). Applied to today's context, the story offers the potential for restoration in healing from our actions, and negative perceptions. It gives us hope that we can change as a society, and that through *k'é,* there is way to achieve that.

Therefore, this work is hopeful. Story teaches us about difficult moments of personal bias, the power of a person's relationship to their thoughts and actions, and how those either make or hinder the worlds of others. The stories shared in this work are stories of harm and marginalization but also of resilience, critical reflection, and awareness. They offer many lessons. However, they are not framed within a sense of punishment but rather, growth. It is a story of hope that offers the listener the framework to learn the important lessons to caretake for all in our communities. These ancestral narratives are stories of caretaking and restoration.

The stories I have shared throughout this work calls Diné people, and our communities to acknowledge the reverence of all beings and all life with the intention to create systemic change. The purpose of this effort is to bring Diné people back into relationship with our diverse relations with disabilities. Being in relationship is the first step towards creating better systems and communities of care where all Diné people inherently belong and are loved unconditionally.

Diné educator Dawn Yazzie, in her presentation at the 2021 Diné Early Childhood Summit, focused on these principles of relationships and reflection as necessary in current struggles our

communities face. She argued that for change we need to be "looking at ourselves" as the starting point (Dawn Yazzie, personal communication, August 25, 2021). She also argued for outward reflection to engage in a relationality that connects to us as Diné people, to root us, and give us common purpose in restoration through the teachings of our ancestors— "we are all different, but we are also one people. We come from the same teachings and stories" (Dawn Yazzie, personal communication, August 25, 2021). Stories are a way to unite and *relate*. As disability scholar Harriet McBryde (2006) states, "stories are the closest we can come to a shared experience" (as cited in Wong, 2020, p. xv). It is way to recognize these deep connections in multi-dimensional and multi-temporal ways. Through story, we come to see the relationships between us and the inherent accountability which follows. Furthermore, the teaching, *Nahodi' neestáá igii bik'ehgo ádééjílniih* means to "live your elders' teachings…we were given them to sustain us" (Curley & Holyan, 2020, 21:04). Our teachings are powerful in the process of remaking relations to build the communities we know are possible.

My lessons that I have taken away from this research and engagement with Diné knowledge over many years is that we, as Diné people, can never live the principles of *hozhó*, if we do not account for all our Diné relatives with 'disabilities*'*. This argument is compelled by the questions: How are Diné communities enacting and cultivating themselves towards SNBH with consideration to all their relations? How does SNBH and *hozhó*—the pursuit of harmonious outcomes— foster and resolve the fundamental desire for belonging of some of our most marginalized and stigmatized relatives? According to Lee (2014),

> The passion to live and the desire to achieve the goals set forth by a person and the community are interwoven in SNBH…The Diyin Dine'é instructed the people to follow the SNBH path to ensure wellness, happiness, quality of life and sustainability. This path helps the people *believe in themselves* and have *trust in what they are doing.* (pp. 5–6).

The rights to live in balance, peace, with faith in oneself and trust in what we are doing, with affirmation that we belong, and are valued, is part of the communal movement of SNBH which is multi-directional, circular and all-inclusive. The question then becomes: How are those rights cultivated through reciprocity and accountability from our communities, educational apparatuses and policies that engage diverse learners?

This is the place where Diné teachings make profound interventions into our structures. Notions of 'inclusion' should not be a power dynamic in which we decide when and under what conditions someone can belong. Rather, we start from the place of knowing that all

children inherently belong. They have a series of relationships that they are born with, which extend beyond our knowledge of them. Those relationships dictate that they inherently have a place, connections, and the right to reciprocal accountability. The focus then turns to us as community members, educators, and planners. It is up to us to honor those inherent gifts and relationships our learners come to us with. It is up to us to uphold those relationships as the grounds for combating systemic ableism on all fronts and recognizing that we are *accountable through relationship, no matter what.*

Building Movements towards Better Relational Practices

The analysis and questions I engaged in throughout this work are part of a wider movement and is my own contribution towards disability justice. This work calls others to unite in our movements to end systemic ableism and racism in all our spaces. There is potential for allyship and building on these conversations. They are not conclusive in their extent, and they are definitely not the end of the story. There are more stories and I encourage others to share them because "stories, songs, dances, & languages are integral to the global mobilization and collective survival of indigenous peoples and our way of life" (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 8). I truly believe that Diné stories of 'disability' can change the lived conditions of many people and non-human life beyond *Nihi Kéyah.*

I also want to call out narratives that may respond that Diné are already doing enough in the revitalization of our knowledge systems and embedding them into current structures for Diné learners. I insist, that educators and policy makers reading this must know that there is 'no end' in terms of how we can do better. We should always strive to do better. After all, that is a foundational in principle of SNBH. It is a journey. I have been vulnerable in sharing the extent of harm of living in the intersections of racism and ableism, and how those are experienced in my own community. We should expect the best and this means moving beyond paperwork and paper trails which are concerned with bare minimum benchmarks for 'achievement'. We need to listen to people who are living in these systems.

This also includes final thoughts I have on legal remedy. The language of 'outcomes' suggest that there is a point where we don't need to move beyond. Yet, we can do better. I am speaking of a generative system —a journey, rather than assuming there is a singular point on the horizon in which we 'have made it'. I advocate for movements which cultivate systems that propel

structural change and reproduce transformative social narratives as part of an enduring commitment to end systemic violence.

My call to whoever is reading this, is that we push beyond only challenging social attitudes and arguing for greater relationality for those peoples with disability. Rather, it is about collective active engagement, community building and movement in dismantling these structures of oppression and rebuilding new ones. Discussions of ideology within social narratives go beyond simply challenging the 'consciousness' of people. As Yazzie and Baldy (2018) state, "a praxis centered on building vibrant alternative futures, rather than just confronting colonial violence, drives our commitment to decolonizing knowledge, building successful decolonizing movements and ultimately, decolonizing futures…[these] certainly point to this dual character struggle" in not only breaking systems down, but simultaneously building new ones (p. 12). It is active resistance in tandem with simultaneous construction of institutions, systems, policies, and services that align with the aspirations of those who live at the mercy of our current moment. Structural change must happen if there is to be true protections of those who are marginalized in society.

In our construction of new worlds and structures, we advance forward voices that are systemically silenced, such as those of Indigenous peoples and peoples with disabilities. We hold up these voices that articulate multiple *ontologies of being* to build community, accountability, and relationship throughout these sacred spaces. The labor must not rest on peoples with disability to unite in struggle. We *all* have an active role to play in disability justice.

Law as Lifeway

In this work I focused on the concepts of law as lifeway in pointing towards the everyday practice of accountability. I demonstrated that these lifeways are written into stories, into land, into our intellectual pedagogies and our spiritual knowledge. Law is a lifeway and not a statute on a shelf, or a thing in a book. The recognition of these laws as a living and breathing practice of existing in the world leads to balance and restoration in our lives, and in our collective existence as human beings.

I focused on the concept of 'good living' and to 'live well' (Aroniłth, 1985; Cajete, 2015; Tecun, 2022) throughout this work. To 'live well' is to live beyond mere survival. Current

systems of remedy are systems that propel survival in violent systems rather than a fundamental structural remedy to eradicate systemic ableism. I believe there is no 'indigenizing' U.S. Disability Law because it relies on completely opposing ideological anchors. U.S. Disability Law is about facts, actions, failures and evidence. Its aspirations are not part of a process or lifeway rooted in radical relationality (Yazzie & Baldy, 2018), or knowledge of how relationships either make or break the world.

The concept of belonging as a fundamental condition *of being* is also vital in this work. Moving dialogue towards a space of belonging rather than rhetoric of 'inclusion' is part of the conversations of relationality. When we start from the foundations of 'living well', we inherently include a sense of belonging that honors the diverse gifts and dignity of all our relations. The cascading potential to 'live well' for all our relations, including the natural world, becomes clear.

Belonging is having a place to be who you are, and to be loved and treasured as you are. These principles are part of human flourishing. There is language of 'acceptance' currently circulating in mainstream movements for inclusion. However, acceptance to me, reads as tolerance. I view tolerance as a system which provides for the ableist systems to continue unchecked. If we are to have true liberation and a grounded sense of belonging, we must move beyond these narratives of acceptance and toleration. Such a stance "moves the questions of how to include disordered individuals to a question of how we build relationships between us?" (Douglas et al., 2021, p. 618). In relationships there is liberation. The overall contribution of this work is to uphold Diné perspectives and theorize through Diné epistemic frameworks. Diné perspectives offer a lens, a tool to restory autism and disability. It is filled will love, belonging and the perpetual abundance of relations that make the world.

Reflections of the Heart

The writing of this work is my own journey towards SNBH. Through grappling with insecurity, doubts, and trauma that resurfaced through the retelling of my story from this autoethnographic work to the challenges of writing in the pandemic away from my home community, I learned. This work is my process of learning and my own healing journey. This work is affirmation to believe in myself and have faith in what I am doing. Writing this work and living through the teachings has humbled me.

In the early days of putting together this work, I came across this quote from Stol:lo scholar Joann Archibald (2019): "Storywork is of the moment—it is about the freedom of existence through story" (p. 12). In advocating for this idea of freedom, *as a way of being*, as sovereignty and relationships, it is only fitting that this work ends in story. I conclude with two stories. One is about the importance of orientation, and the power of diverse *narratives*. I want to share how a singular narrative can point you on a path and offer hope in the time of struggle. I then conclude with probably the most important teachings I have encountered on this journey. They are lessons I have learned from my child.

With a humble heart, I am grateful.

Orientation

The day I received my child's diagnosis of autism, we had spent the entire day through assessment. I loved her the same as when I first entered the room that morning. I believed she had a future, and that she would remain the center of my world for my entire life. Nothing changed, except now I had a piece of paper with a diagnosis to get the help we needed. They recommended I visit the in-house library full of materials and resources for parents. It was my first time looking for materials from a library on the topic of autism and this library was stocked full. The librarian offered some suggestions for people who had just received the diagnosis. These 'next step' books were filled with pages explaining legal rights, medical jargon, and processes, and of course, and self-care for parents in light of such of life-changing news. I took those books, but I also picked up one of my own.

I opened a book I found propped on a shelf. On the very first page, in the acknowledgements, it said "*Autism is a way of being*" (Stone, 2003, p. 9); not a condition, not a disability, or a deficit. Autism was a *way of being* which deserved the most profound unconditional love. I too, believe this and have come to understand what this truly means. I love all of my child, which also means I love her autism because that is part of who she is and it is her way of *being in the world*.

It is unconditional love that sees us through this journey. Not the onslaught of services to intervene, or the research of what autism is or what it is caused by or how to 'address it'. What our children need is unrelenting, and unconditional love. It's as true today as it was that first day, that the greatest support we have ever received was not the endless articles to *know* or *understand* autism, but the pure love that has held us, made space for us, and accepted us as a

family. It is love that saw my daughter for who she truly is. It is love she has shown me and taught me that have made our lives abundant.

"Doing things in my own way": *Being*, Freedom and Rebellious Joy

I never talked to my daughter about autism when she was a young child. We always just told her all the wonderful things she was. Tifa, you are so thoughtful, so clever, so creative, very determined, and very brave. You are a such a good gamer, a dancer, an artist! And indeed, she is all those things and more.

Years later, Tifa runs up to me one day and says, "Mom, what's autism mean?".

Speechless at her forwardness, I realized I never told her about autism. The discourse of autism as it existed in mainstream literature was harmful, hurtful, and didn't consider who she was beyond a diagnosis. In that moment, I chose my words carefully, aware that what I said could potentially define what autism was to her. How could I ever think to define something only she experiences? It was a profound moment.

The words flowed out, "I was hoping you could tell me. It is not up to me to tell you what autism is. Only you can do that."

She thought for less than two seconds and shot back "*Autism is doing things in my own way".*

There is so much we can learn when we listen and make space for the *ways of being* of others to reach us. I have learned a great deal not only about my child, but of the world in this regard. She is leader, she believes in herself and has faith in what she is doing. She is self-determined, sovereign and lives in the moment of each day—laughing and telling herself stories no matter where she is— giving life and nurturing her inner world. Her love for the world(s) of her inner self shines through her artwork, through her songs and in her stories. She sings in the sunlight, darts down hallways and twirls through fields of grass. If she feels like singing or dancing, she does, without any fear or regard. She has taught me much about freedom and the power to be oneself.

My journey of learning about SNBH and learning to recognize spiritual intelligence within others has helped me know myself. Within oneself is the essence of who we are. Who we really are is capable of great love. That calls me to continually acknowledge my own biases

and actively balance them with a prevailing sense of accountability wrapped in *k'é as a lifeway*. It is an aspiration and a lifelong journey to live in beauty.

In giving us perspective and insight into ways of doing, creating, living, and thinking, my child has always taught me the importance of relationship with all our relations. When she was young, she would dig critters out of the soil and cradle them in her hands. She has saved countless worms and dying insects, showing the greatest of care and concern. She has consistently forged relationships with the natural world—her adoration for the forest mountains, and wind, her love of flowers, mud, sand, stones, shells, and feathers. Her joy and connection to water and the movement of waves, the pouring of rain and swift passing of clouds teaches me that relationships matter.

One day she spent the whole hour at a birthday party laying flowers next to a dying bumble bee on the ground instead of playing with the other children. She sat with this bee and guarded it as she narrated stories. This presumed disinterest in other children and 'fixation' would be pathologized in other realms of our lives. Yet, this relationality was an act of world-building. Although she did not play with the other children or interact that day, she devoted her attention to another, smaller, relationship. The presence to caretake that which would have been overlooked by everyone else, was of the utmost importance. This kind of attention caused me to reflect on the kinds of relations beyond what we are socialized to value. In this relationship is the reflection of deep love, self-knowledge, and the essence of connecting oneself to the relationships in the wider world. It is recognizing the spirit in others; even those relations that are non-human, small or invisible to others.

Throughout this work, I have argued that relationships and the balancing of those relationships with the countless environments we encounter—the internal and external environments, the community, and natural world—are an expression of spiritual intelligence, leadership, sovereignty, *k'é* and *hozhó*. They are a continual expression of SNBH—The Corn Pollen Path. My child has taught me what that path is, and I have been blessed to see her continually follow it in her life.

What have the teachings of the story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy meant in our lives as Diné women? Tifa continues to refer to the Story of Early Twilight Dawn Boy as relative and a hero. He is someone who reminds her that she is a gift and precious. He is also someone she looks up to and calls upon for me to remember the principles of care, compassion and understanding.

From our teachings come the treasures that continue to guide our lives. They continue to influence my pursuit towards SNBH as a mother and a student of my beautiful *Kiinya'aanii* child. This lesson I may never have known without the gifts and heart of my daughter, who I am blessed to journey this life with.

Figure 11.1 Relations and Tifa Rain (2022)

May we all meet the dawn with the same open-heartedness and *knowledge* that Tifa does. May we meet it in relationship with memory, love, reciprocal accountability, freedom, and power.

Figure 1.1 *Níłtsą bi'áád*, Gilmore Scott (n.d.), Diné artist

Figure 1.2 Female and Male Rain, Gilmore Scott (n.d), Diné

Figure 1.3 Female Rain, Gilmore Scott (n.d.), Diné

Figure 1.4 Tifa Rain

Figure 3.1 Diné Relational Teachings, Rain (2022)

Figure 3.1 Early Twilight Dawn Boy (Rain, 2021a)

Figure 3.2 Cheii and Early Twilight Dawn Boy (Rain, 2021b)

Figure 3.3 Flight into the Rainbow (Rain, 2021c)

Figure 4.1 Diné Relational Teachings, (Rain, 2022)

Figure 6.1 Turkey and the Bamboo Reed, (Rain, 2021e)

Figure 7.1 Relations

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