

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

An Indigenous Perspective on Self-Determination

KATHRYN MANUELITO

Throughout the world indigenous communities are at work to gain and establish recognition in societies that have colonized them for centuries. Indigenous people seek a role in societies that have marginalized them because of their small numbers, culture, language, and physical differences. They want to determine their own destiny, whether it is in the realm of education or economic development. Some indigenous people such as the Hawaiians (Wilson, 1999), Maori of New Zealand (Durie, 1999), Sami of Norway (Todal, 1999), Quechua (Hornberger and King, 1999), and American Indians (McCarty and Watahomigie, 1999) in the United States are enacting self-determination through community-based education. For American Indians, self-determination has been described as “an experiment of major significance. It is an effort to win for Indian communities the same rights of self-determination enjoyed by other American communities, while preserving a special, constitutionally sanctioned relationship with the federal government” (Gross, 1978, p. 1196). In this chapter, I will examine how one Indian tribal group, the Ramah Band of the Navajo Tribe, defines and practices self-determination.

The U.S. government encouraged self-governance for Indian people in the passage of the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act (Szasz, 1974). However, measures for self-governance through the Indian Reorganization Act were restrictive and did not include education and schooling of American Indian youth. With the passage of the 1975 Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act and the 1990 Native American Languages Act, the possibilities for appropriate

culturally sensitive education for American Indian children have become greater than ever before. Even so, among the dominant Euro-Western society, most politicians and educators do not actively support these two acts, which was evident in the 2001 passage of English Only legislation in Arizona, as well as in other states including California and, most recently, Massachusetts. Even today, formal education of Indian children is provided (in part) by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the most colonizing agency in the United States, where the priority is the development of citizenship in a Euro-Western, middle-class world, in a neoliberal world intolerant of differences and insensitive to the world of Indian communities.

Dialogue between indigenous people and the dominant society is essential for the implementation of self-determination by indigenous people and support of self-determination. Presently, prescriptions and descriptions of self-determination are one-sided from the dominant society. Assumptions that indigenous people agree with the dominant society's definitions of self-determination continue to prevent progress toward self-determination by indigenous people. Misunderstandings between the two groups abound without dialogue. Passage of legislation for self-determination in education is important, but even more important is communication between indigenous people and dominant society lawmakers and educators.

The operationalizing of self-determination is crucial for American Indians because it directly impacts the sovereignty of each tribal group as well as the appropriate education for American Indian youth. In 1975, the Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act granted American Indians governance of their schools. With the exception of a few nationally known community and tribally controlled schools, such as Rough Rock Demonstration School (known now as Rough Rock Community School), Rough Rock, Arizona, information about Indian controlled schools is scarce, even though there are presently 114 tribally controlled schools (Tippeconnic, 1999). Information on how Indian people themselves understand self-determination is even more scarce. I will describe a study that explored how the Ramah Band of the Navajo Tribe understands and has enacted self-determination. The study is important because it provides a Navajo voice and perspective on self-determination and appropriate education.

RAMAH NAVAJO COMMUNITY

The Ramah Navajo Community is located outside of the main Navajo reservation. It is seventy-five miles south of the main Navajo Reservation, borders the Zuni Indian Reservation to the west, borders federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land to the east, borders private ranches to

the south, and is fifteen miles south of the village of Ramah, a predominantly Euro-American Mormon settlement. Land of the Ramah Navajo Reservation covers 146,953 acres (Federal Appropriation Request of the Navajo Chapter, 2000). The Ramah Band of the Navajo Tribe is a satellite Navajo community in New Mexico with a population of 3000. Satellite communities are set apart by their great distance from the main Navajo Reservation, and are surrounded by non-Navajo and non-Indian lands.

Since the early 1900s children from the Ramah Navajo community have attended off-reservation government boarding schools in New Mexico and the neighboring states of Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and Oklahoma. In 1943, a government day school was built in the Ramah Navajo community in Mountain View. The school had one teacher for grades one to three. Enrollment was limited to thirty youth, and thus could not meet the needs of most of the children of the Ramah Navajo community.

By 1950, the White Mormon Ramah community had opened a public school, which some Ramah Navajo youth attended. The Ramah Public School was in the Gallup-McKinley County School District. This school, which was fifteen miles north of the Ramah Navajo community, had grades one through twelve. The Ramah Public School, like the Mountain View Day School, could not accommodate all the Ramah Navajo youth. Many Ramah Navajo children had to attend government boarding schools far from home. In 1968, the Gallup-McKinley County School Board condemned and closed the Ramah Public High School. Instead of enrolling to attend school elsewhere, many Ramah Navajo students simply dropped out. By 1968, formal education for most Ramah Navajo youth was neither accessible nor appropriate, and the outlook for the future of the Ramah Navajo Community was grim.

On February 10, 1970, the Ramah Navajo School Board was formally incorporated after two failed lawsuits by the Ramah Navajo Chapter to reopen the local Ramah Public High School. The newly formed school board, consisting of local Ramah Navajo people, requested funding for a new school from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) office in Washington, D.C. On March 25, 1970, funding was promised only after a frail but courageous elder, Bertha Lorenzo, blocked the entryway in the BIA building in Washington, D.C., and announced in the Navajo language "We have been waiting since 1920 [for a school]. We won't leave this building until we get a definite commitment of support from the BIA." Another school board member, Chavez Coho, also reminded the BIA about the Treaty of 1868, which promised a teacher for every thirty children (*Dine aa-Hani*, 1970, June-July). On April 21, 1970, funding was granted. Without outside support and guidance and only with sheer determination, Ramah Navajo people provided the opportunity for formal education in their community.

On June 4, 1970, the Ramah Navajo High School began its first session in brown army tents on the grounds of the aging Ramah Public High School in the non-Navajo community of Ramah. Unlike other Indian community-controlled schools that were supported and established by outside agencies, the Ramah Navajo High School was established exclusively through grassroots efforts. The courageous community leaders experienced numerous obstacles, but they have forged ahead for thirty years with total Navajo leadership. In 1975, the Ramah Navajo High School moved fifteen miles south to the Ramah Navajo community and changed its name to the Pine Hill School. Since that humble beginning in 1970, the Ramah Navajo School Board has developed a total educational system for infants to higher education.

Today, the Pine Hill School Campus is a multimillion dollar establishment consisting of a high school, middle school, elementary school, library, media center, early childhood complex, computer lab, cafeteria, gymnasium, clinic, social service offices, a teen center, a radio station, a post office, a bilingual materials center, administration offices, higher education offices, maintenance and facilities building, football field, swimming pool, and individual homes and duplexes for school staff. The Pine Hill School Campus, located in the high mountainous plateaus surrounded by Navajo homes, grazing sheep, piñon trees, and tall pines, is credited with bringing in electricity, running water, a paved road, and telecommunications into this Navajo community for the first time. From brown army tents to a school campus providing not only formal educational services, but health, social services, electricity, water, telephone service, and roads to the community, the Ramah Navajo School Board and Pine Hill School have impacted the total community. Today, Pine Hill School as a catalyst for self-determination is only one aspect of total community development and empowerment.

In addition to the establishment of a total educational program, Pine Hill School is noted for many "firsts" in Indian country throughout the United States. In 1972, the Ramah Navajo School Board became the first Indian group to have their own FM radio station that still broadcasts from the Pine Hill School. The Ramah Navajo School Board is also the first Indian group in the United States to contract their own health clinic complete with dental, optometry, and emergency (EMT) services for the community. Being remote and even unknown to residents of the greater Navajo Reservation (as related in interviews of the study) and the world, the Ramah community put itself on the map and into the consciousness of the greater Navajo community as well as greater Indian communities of the United States.

Grounded in their cultural values and beliefs, the Ramah Navajo School Board and the Pine Hill School has enacted self-determination **45**

they understand it. Thus, the question of how the Ramah Navajo School Board and community understand *self-determination* will be explored in this chapter. Before examining self-determination from the insider Navajo view, I will briefly reflect in the next section on the concept of self-determination as it applies to Indian communities both from outsider non-Indian views and by educators who are American Indian.

REFLECTIONS ON SELF-DETERMINATION

The 1968 Bilingual Act supported and became a catalyst to Indian education by promoting bilingual program development, curriculum development, bilingual materials development, and bilingual teacher education. Indian community-controlled schools benefited immensely by the support of this legislation to develop community-based education. As mentioned previously, information about the 116 Indian-controlled schools is scarce. Successes have been documented in a few schools such as Rough Rock Demonstration School, Rock Point School (McCarty, 2000; McCarty and Watahomigie, 1999) and the Peach Springs School on the Hualapai Reservation (McCarty and Watahomigie, 1999). These schools on record have had the good fortune to have university academics interested in them, and thus were written about in academic circles. However, the many other Indian-controlled schools whose Indian leadership was totally involved in the trenches of daily operation of schools could not readily publish their accomplishments even if they wanted to do so. In addition, at the Pine Hill School, outsiders were not welcomed to record or investigate the school and community because the Ramah Navajo people have felt that they had been previously exploited by outside researchers. Blanchard concurs with the perception that the Ramah Navajo people have been overly researched and stated that the Ramah Navajo "are the most studied people in the world" (Blanchard, 1971, p.3). The Navajo value of modesty was also a major factor, thus publicity and attention was shunned. Because little is actually known about the majority of Indian-controlled schools, self-determination and self-governance in education still appear to remain, as Gross has noted, "an experiment of major significance" (Gross, 1978, p. 1196).

Since the 1975 Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act was passed, Indian communities have separately defined and operationalized self-determination. Many definitions of self-determination have evolved as a result. In many contexts, self-determination has become synonymous with self-governance. Self-governance has various operational definitions: tribal control, local control, community control, and Indian parent involvement. According to Tippeconnic, "The terms Indian parent involvement, community control, local control, and tribal control are used

interchangeably to denote aspects of Indian control of education. But these terms do not necessarily mean the same thing" (Tippeconnic, 1999, p. 39). Huff states, "The models of Indian-controlled schools are as diverse as Indian Country" (Huff, 1997, p. 174).

Among members of Indian communities, perspectives on the 1975 Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act are varied. Many distrust the implications and intent of this legislation and feel that this is the beginning of termination of Indian tribal government. This view is based on the experience of over 100 tribes who were terminated as federally recognized tribes in the 1950s. On becoming self-sufficient and self-determined, their sovereignty status was severed. The federal government unjustly ended their entitlements to health and educational benefits.

Another important reason for Indian people not wholly trusting governmental mandates is the vacillating treatment, the characteristic pendulum swing, demonstrated by the U.S. government in creating and administering federal policies. Like other federal policies, the Self-Determination and Educational Assistance Act can be annulled at any time with congressional action. Political climate can and does change in Congress.

In Indian education and in Indian communities, a critical problem exists because the concept of self-determination has not been defined. Deloria, a renowned American Indian educator and philosopher, comments, "Self-determination grew like topsy over the past three decades and it [self-determination] never was clearly defined at the onset of the era" (Deloria, 1994, p. 52). The question of what we, as Indian people, are supposed to determine has not been specified. As a result, many types of Indian-controlled schools have been established under the umbrella of self-determination. But we must ask ourselves: What is self-determination? What is it that we as selves and communities are determining? (Deloria, 1994, p. 56).

Thus, twenty-eight years after the self-determination legislation was passed, the question remains: What is self-determination and how do Indian people understand it?

A STUDY OF SELF-DETERMINATION IN THE RAMAH NAVAJO COMMUNITY

A study that I conducted examined the questions: What is self-determination? How is self-determination enacted in the Pine Hill School and the Ramah Navajo community? The qualitative study followed the inductive naturalistic paradigm. The study design was emergent and theory was thoroughly grounded in the data. The study was grounded and constructed around a Navajo context and with a view of other naturalistic methods. The study incorporated ethnographic techniques. Up until the present research,

studies about American Indians have been conducted mainly by outsiders. In this study, I, a Native researcher, was the main instrument in conducting research in a Navajo community. In qualitative studies, the main instrument of research is the researcher (Wolcott, 1975, p. 115).

I am Navajo and am both bilingual and biliterate in Navajo. I grew up in and around Navajo communities in the checkerboard area near Gallup, New Mexico. After receiving my Bachelors Degree, I taught in Ganado, Arizona, and later at the Ramah Navajo High School when it first opened in the 1970s. Not only was I a teacher and director of a Title VII Teacher Training Program on site, but my husband, a Navajo, was an executive director of the school in the 1970s. Since my employment with the Ramah Navajo School Board, I have worked in other Indian communities at both the local and national level. In my employment with Pine Hill School, I first became aware of community-based education and participated in the first efforts at Navajo curriculum and materials development in the early 1970s.

During my research, I had established rapport with the Ramah Navajo community and, as a Navajo, was related through my matriarchal and patriarchal clans to members in the Ramah Navajo Community. In Navajo communities, clan associations are most important for establishing relationships and developing trust. Throughout the study, I maintained Navajo values and respect, known as "K'e" in the Navajo language. I upheld and practiced Navajo protocol at all times. I was continually aware of the context of the study, which was constructed around a Navajo framework and explicated in Euro-Western ideology.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

I used three data collection methods: participant observation, document collection, and interviews. Activities for participant observation were many and diverse. I attended school board meetings, chapter meetings, staff workshops, special events such as the Veteran's Day Celebration at the Ramah Navajo Chapter House, the 30th Anniversary Celebration, Staff Awards Banquet, and General Election Day Voting at the Ramah Navajo Chapter House. An important aspect in participation observation was tuning into KTDB-FM, the Pine Hill School Radio Station, for an update of community events, school announcements, commentaries, airing of the taping of actual events, and reports from health, education, and legal services in the community. I visited classrooms at the school, ate at the school cafeteria and at staff potluck luncheons, as well as visited other programs on campus such as the Family and Child Education (FACE) Program, Higher Education, Ramah Rug Weavers Program, Pine Hill Clinic, and the KTDB Radio Station. Since my focus was on perspectives from Navajo

community members, I spent the majority of my time in Navajo settings such as the Pine Hill Market, Chapter House, a sheep camp, and homes in the Ramah Navajo community.

Document collection included historical, demographic, and personal information from the Ramah Navajo perspective. I collected information from various sources. One source was written and recorded interviews and oral histories from the Ramah Navajo people recorded by Ramah Navajo high school students in a Foxfire Project in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000. I found many of these interviews in the *Tsa' Aszi'* magazine, a publication from the Pine Hill High School students. Many of the elders who were interviewed by the high school students are now deceased.

The earliest documented interview was by Many Beads's Son. (Many Bead's Son is the individual's real name in Navajo and is translated literally from the Navajo language.) Many Beads was the headman of the Ramah Navajo after *Hweeldi*/Long Walk, 1864–1868. This interview was recorded in 1930 and written in the Navajo language in 1954 by linguists Young and Morgan; it is included in the *Navajo Historical Publications, Historical Series #14*.

I collected written documents and reports from the Ramah Navajo School Board either as position statements, brochures, or required reports for private and /or federal funding. Newspapers, both local and national, and journal articles provided additional information. I found information about Pine Hill School's curriculum concerning Navajo language courses and Navajo culture classes in the Navajo Tribe's *Statistics on Navajo (Dine)* Education for the school years: 1992–1993–1994, 1994–1995, and 1998–1999. The school archivist shared materials so that I was able to review original documents from the school's early years and some monographs from the early Harvard Values Study.

I collected information from a non-Navajo perspective in Harvard University's "Harvard Values Study" and the Bureau of Indian Affairs' "Personality and Government Study." The Harvard Values Study, led by Clyde Kluckhohn, and the Ramah Project Study occurred during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. These studies focused on various topics about the Ramah Navajo people such as families, religion, veterans, sexuality, witchcraft, schoolchildren, and ethno-herbology, to name a few. Many of the studies were dissertations, and others became important monographs such as *The Navajo* (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1947) and *Navajo Witchcraft* (Kluckhohn, 1944).

Another study that I reviewed was conducted in the 1930s and 1940s about the Ramah Navajo community and two other Navajo communities. This study, *Personality and Government Study*, was funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It was conducted jointly by the Committee on Human Development of the University of Chicago and the United States Office of

Indian Affairs (Thompson, 1951). Some of the noted members of the research team included Clyde Kluckhohn, Margaret Mead, Erick Erickson, Robert Havighurst, Dorothea Leighton, and others. *Children of the People* (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1947) resulted from the study.

Other studies about the Ramah Navajo Community from non-Navajo perspectives were *The People of Rimrock* (Vogt and Alber, 1966) and *The Economics of Sainthood*, (Blanchard, 1977). I also reviewed *Ernst Albert Tietjen* (Tientjen, 1992), a book written by a descendant of the first Mormon settler to Ramah.

The historical, anthropological, and ethnographical perspectives from previous publications on the Ramah Navajo were written about colonized people by colonizers from their frame of reference (Fixico, 1998; Sheridan, 1988; Smith, 1999; Spicer, 1962). The numerous studies about the Ramah Navajo from outsider perspectives were not congruent with the Ramah Navajo people's perspectives. Yet, these Euro-Western based documents are regarded as facts, while indigenous accounts are disregarded.

Biased reports from outsiders have created prejudice and hardships for the Ramah Navajo. For example, several outsider accounts strongly imply that the Ramah Navajos were a marginal, drifting people. Kluckhohn and Leighton in *Children of the People* (1947) stated: "After release from captivity, a few related families drifted into this region instead of settling on the Reservation" (Kluckhohn and Leighton, 1947, p. 131). Vogt and Alber in *People of Rimrock* (1966) stated that the Ramah Navajo people like other settlers in the area: "are local manifestations of cultures whose centers of power and influence are elsewhere . . . are geographically and in some respects culturally at some distance from the main body of Navajo society" (Vogt and Alder, 1966, pp. 24–25). Outsiders and Euro-Western researchers seem to believe that the arbitrary boundary designating the Navajo Reservation, which changed several times according to Presidential Executive Orders, was the absolute designation of land for the Navajos. Navajo opinion on land ownership did not seem to matter.

With the sacred mountain, *Tsoodzil* or Mount Taylor to the east of them, Ramah Navajos have always known that they were in the boundaries of Navajo land as prescribed in Navajo Creation Stories. They did not drift into this region after the Long Walk, but, indeed, returned to their homeland. They lived their culturally rich lives like other Navajos across the great expanse of Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico. Regional differences exist due to historical, social, and economical influences, but certainly Ramah Navajos were not "in some respects culturally at some distance from the main body of Navajo society," as stated by Vogt and Alber (1966).

Throughout the history of the Ramah Navajo people, they have had to struggle for survival on their own apart from the greater Navajo Nation

and mostly without the support of the Navajo Nation. Representing similar sentiments from other Navajos from the greater Navajo Reservation, one individual stated, "I guess . . . when you're distantly located from Window Rock or the bigger Navajo Reservation, and you're like in your own turf . . . you try harder to fend for yourselves, to think, plan, how you're going to survive. I think they see that and they strive harder . . . at least I see them [Ramah Navajo] that way. (Participant N)

Comments about their identity differ greatly from outsider Euro-Western researchers. The Ramah Navajo identify themselves as a separate Navajo people, the Ramah Navajo Band of the Navajo Nation. One Ramah Navajo stated: "I'm proud and glad that I belong to the Ramah Navajo Community, because we're so unique and . . . the Navajo Nation, they look at us as a role model. We might have been isolated from the Navajo Nation and they might not have really wanted to provide us much assistance, but a lot of the things that we've done, we've done with our uneducated people (Participant Q). The Ramah Navajo people identity is defined by their collective experiences since *Hweeldi*/Long Walk, and their survival was assured by their sheer efforts of self-determination as they understand it.

The third method that I utilized for data collection was interviews. Most of the participants of the study were Navajo, who gave interviews in both Navajo and English, often code-switching. Of the thirty-nine participants, four were non-Navajo. The four outsider non-Navajo participants spent ten years or more working in the Ramah Navajo community. As I started interviewing participants, I found the two research questions being given explanations from a historical perspective. In order to comprehend, translate, and interpret the experiences of the Ramah Navajo community I included historical research of the Ramah Navajo community as part of the research design.

Ramah Navajo history became an important aspect of the study because "To understand a phenomenon, you need to know its history" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 53). I divided historical information into four periods: (1) Pre and Post *Hweeldi*/The Long Walk, 1860–1899, (2) Boarding School Days, 1900–1967, (3) Ramah Navajo School Board, 1968–1970, and (4) Community Building, 1971–2001. I examined political, social, and economic forces in each of the time periods. Unlike most history written about American Indians, the historical view in this study was presented from an American Indian perspective. From this historical analysis, I discovered that self-determination is not just a Euro-Western political and/or economical concept. Self-determination is a Navajo concept that was enacted throughout the four periods of history of the Ramah Navajo people.

In addition to the historical perspective, I included the development of a conceptual framework of self-determination. The development of the

framework was based on the Navajo paradigm of the building of a Hogan from the Beauty Way Prayer. I selected the building of the Hogan as a metaphor to represent the construction of self-determination. The Hogan metaphor was chosen because an elder stated that the founding school board members had insisted the new Pine Hill School be built on the principals of the Hogan from the Beauty Way Prayer.

Translation and interpretation of social experiences within a culture are clearly difficult, but the difficulty is much greater when translation and interpretation occur between a Western culture and non-Western culture. Translation and interpretation of social experiences and concepts between the Navajo worldview and the Euro-Western worldview are facilitated by the metaphor of the construction of the Navajo Hogan. The Navajo Hogan is truly significant in the Navajo worldview and is loaded with concepts both social and religious.

For Navajo people, the Hogan has far greater significance beyond being simply a structural dwelling. The Hogan is first mentioned in Navajo Creation Stories where the construction is directed by the Holy People. The Hogan mentioned in the Beauty Way Prayer has sacred and mystical characteristics. "The description of the *hooghans* [hogans] in the Underworld gives mystical images and power to an ordinary *hooghans* [Hogan] and knowing these stories provides the very meaning of what a *hooghans* [Hogan] is" (Beck, Walters, and Francisco, 1977). This traditional dwelling has sacred significance with teachings, songs, and prayers. The male and female Hogan have their own functions. The Hogan is a sacred place and is a living entity. "The Navaho Hogan is not just a place to sleep and eat; it truly is a home and also a temple. It is a 'being', which must be fed and kept, strong and good" (Callaway, Witherspoon, et al., 1974, p. 56).

From topical and conceptual coding of data, I found four patterns that ultimately became the four posts of the metaphoric Hogan. The patterns and their relationship became clear from the historical view and from interviews. The patterns are themes, which I decided to refer to as processes, because processes connote living and non-static entities. These processes appear to be the basic elements of self-determination that are occurring in the Ramah Navajo community. The processes are: community-based planning, maintaining self-awareness, being proactive, and persevering. These processes construct a metaphoric Hogan, which is self-determination in the Pine Hill School.

FINDINGS

Findings are categorized according to (1) historical analysis and (2) conceptual framework of self-determination.

3. The processes of self-determination do not specify formal education and American schools as foundational elements of self-determination. The processes represent the construction of empowerment of a Navajo individual and/or community. Formal education and schooling have always been foreign to the Navajo society. Historically, the federal government's Indian policy became "educate" and "civilization" (Kickingbird and Charleston, 1991, p. 6). Formal education was utilized through the Civilization Act of 1819 to transform the Indian child from his or her "Indianness" (De Jong, 1993; Huff, 1997; Reyhner, 1992; Spring, 1996; Szasz, 1974).

In the Ramah Navajo community, formal education and schooling are *not* the focal point of self-determination but catalysts for community development. The multimillion-dollar school establishment is just as important as other aspects of the community, such as the clinic, radio station, social services, the Ramah Navajo Ring Weavers Association, and their Pine Hill Market. The Ramah Navajo people have demonstrated self-determination by their dynamic accomplishments seen not only in the school but also throughout the total community.

Self-determination, as the Ramah Navajo people have perceived it since 1864, is not dependent on economics and formal education, but on a holistic construction of an entity, an individual, or a community. The construction comes from within. It is based on the mystical and powerful construction of the metaphoric Hogan of the Beauty Way Prayer.

CONCLUSIONS

Self-determination is an important concept and an inherent attribute of Navajo society and life, defined and operationalized in its own context, and is unlike the Euro-Western concept of self-determination. Self-determination from the Navajo perspective is functional and rational in a Navajo framework. It is not based on a Euro-Western understanding or on federal guidelines and criteria. The concept of self-determination is embedded in the Beauty Way and Pollen Road, and accounts for the Ramah Navajos' strong sense of survival.

Self-determination from the Navajo perspective cannot be truly expressed in the non-Navajo institution of public American education, whose main goal is assimilation of all youth into the white, middle-class society. In 1868, after four years of incarceration, Manuelito, the famous Navajo leader, in his well-known entreaty to his people at the signing of the treaty between the United States and the Navajos stated, "My grandchild, the whites have many things we Navajos need but cannot get. . . . We can hear them talking, but we cannot get to them. My grandchild, school is the ladder. Tell our people this" (Acrey, 1979, p. 124). Manuelito's entreaty has

Figure 14.1. Self-Determination

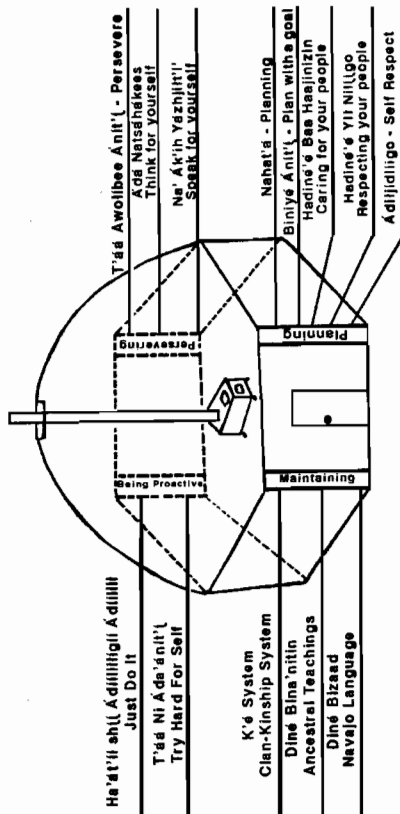


Figure 15. Self-Determination (with Navajo terms)

(Aronilth, 1994) and as found in the Beauty Way Prayer mentioned by a Ramah elder as the principles chosen by the founders of the Ramah High School, a precious gem or stone is placed under each of the four foundational posts of the Hogan. Like the precious stones placed under each of the foundation Hogan posts, each process is a precious or important part of what self-determination is in the Ramah Navajo community. Interpretation of self-determination, from the Navajo perception, is provided by the Hogan metaphor. The metaphor, the construction of a Hogan, provides a connection between the Navajo perspective and the Western perspective about the concept, self-determination.

been interpreted by historians, politicians, and educators to mean that formal education is the ladder to success. I don't profess to know what Manuelito meant but I do think that having been humiliated and made powerless by the U.S. Cavalry and government, but remaining proud, Manuelito would not have encouraged his people to become like their conquerors and be assimilated into their society through the assimilationist framework of formal education.

My own interpretation of Manuelito's entreaty to his people is that he wanted not only material goods for immediate survival but also the same rights of self-determination enjoyed by other American communities, mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. I also believe that the "ladder" was also meant to provide a two-way process. This "ladder" was to be a process of dialogue between the dominant society and the Navajo society. I believe formal education, which is sensitive to and based on Indian life ways, can promote dialogue, yet there are tremendous obstacles to surmount, insidious obstacles that come from within Indian communities.

Indian people obstruct dialogue through their own internalized colonization. Often formally educated Indian leaders and educators forget that their own Indian communities have perspectives on concepts such as self-determination, as portrayed in the definitions of self-determination by the Ramah Navajo people. The concepts from the Euro-Western worldview don't match the Navajo understanding of those concepts. In present day society, these Euro-Western definitions and criteria have become the evaluative guidelines for Indian people. Furthermore, Indian people usually give decision-making responsibilities to "outside experts" who don't understand the Indian culture and the community's history. As a result, tribal governments and even tribal schools, relying on outside expert opinion, have contributed to their subjugation and colonization.

Dialogue between indigenous people and the dominant society is the beginning of self-determination for Indian people. As long as Indian people do not share or are not permitted to share their understanding of concepts such as self-determination and education and as long as Indian people do not throw off their shackles of internalized colonization, they will continue to support the implementation of self-determination in the Euro-Western sense, which defies their own existence. Dialogue and the decolonization of our own minds as Indian people are vital for equity and survival of not only the Ramah Navajo people, but also all American Indians.

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